

Wanstead Park, The Grotto.  
Assessment Phase 1.

Level III Assessment Report.

M. Beasley.

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Introduction.

The first phase of assessment on the Grotto, Wanstead Park, (Fig. 1.) was conducted by members of the Passmore Edwards Museum, between 22nd. March 1993, and 29th. March 1993. The work involved clearance of dense vegetation, mainly established ivy and bramble, from on and around the standing remains of the Grotto, and within the fenced area. This was followed by a photographic survey of the structure, and the preparation of a scale ground plan at 1:50. The work was funded by the Corporation of London.

After removing the vegetation from the surrounding area, felling saplings, and removing vegetation from the standing walls of the structure, the remains were examined to identify the walls of the original building.

Examination of the remains with a view to establishing a construction sequence proved more of a problem than originally anticipated. Due to the large number of re-builds of various periods it is difficult to say with certainty exactly which parts of the extant structure relate to the original build. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that substantial rendering and re-pointing during the 20th. century has disguised the obvious signs of rebuilding, as well as masking the construction sequence of the major components.

This is particularly true of the north facing elevation of the structure, which shows signs of substantial renovation. The 20th. century renovation of the elevation is obvious, but the chronology of other rebuilds is not apparent without detailed examination. Analysis of the data provided by of the photographic survey resulted in a schematic preliminary reconstruction of the builds.

It was noted that in various parts of the structure faced and worked stone has been integrated in the decorative cladding. Details were not recorded in the survey due to time constraints.

Structural Stability.

An architectural study of the structure was conducted to establish the structural integrity of the buildings, and to

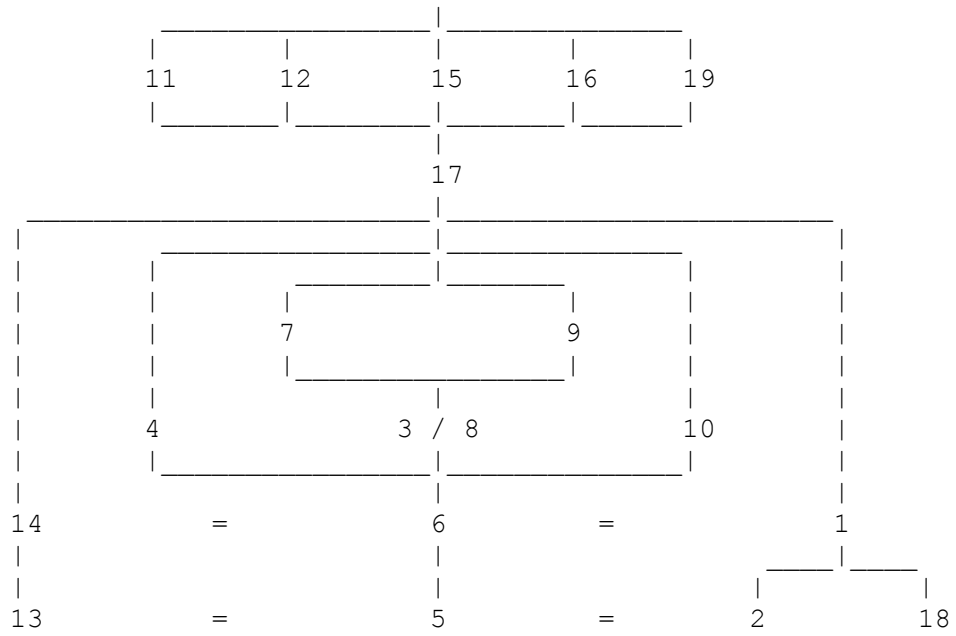
consider the safety aspects of any further archaeological work ["Structural Survey report. The Grotto. Wanstead Park, London E11." The Morton Partnership Ltd. Ref. PB/SC/4146.1].

The results of the report indicate that no immediate threat of collapse is present with the standing remains. Remedial work, in the form of regular vegetation clearance, as well as killing off ground cover around the walls, is recommended to prevent any further deterioration of the remains.

Longer term preservation measures limited deep re-pointing of the brick and stone work of the structures, with consideration of water pooling to prevent further erosion of the fabric, are deemed necessary.

The survey found no danger of collapse or instability relating to archaeological investigations of the foundations of the structure; notwithstanding that the foundation levels for test hole 5 be reported to the engineers for further safety consideration before test hole 4 is excavated.

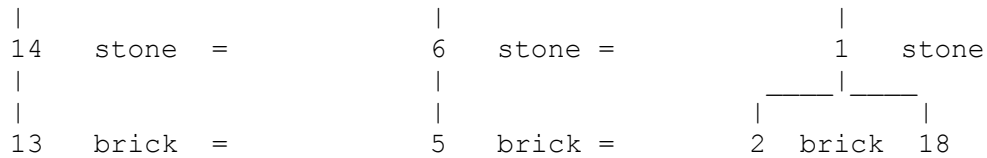
Flow Diagram of Construction Builds.



Construction Sequence.

Phase 1. Consists of units 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, 14, 18.

- 1 stone, random uncoursed.
- 2 brickwork, coursing obscured.
- 5 stone, random uncoursed.
- 6 brickwork, coursed, English bond.
- 13 brickwork, coursed, English bond.
- 14 stone, random uncoursed.
- 18 brickwork, coursed, English bond.

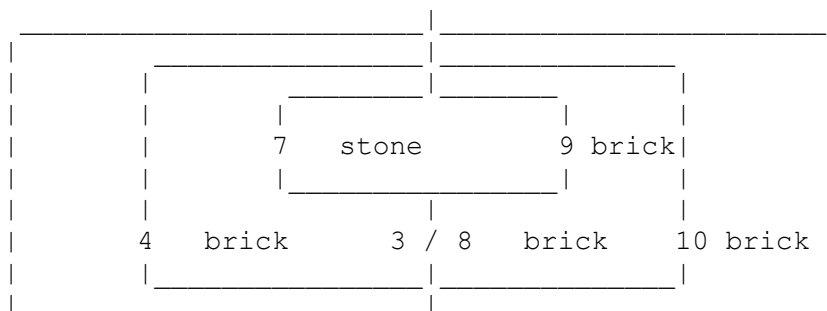


Brickwork with random stone facing. Constitutes probable first build of the grotto.

B/W: 2, 3, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 32, 34, 39, 43.

Phase 2. Consists of units 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10.

- 3 brickwork, random coursed.
- 4 brickwork, coursed, possible English bond.
- 7 stone, random coursed.
- 8 brickwork, coursed, English bond.
- 9 brickwork, coursed, English bond.
- 10 brickwork, coursed, English bond.



Brick walls and brick and stone roofing of tunnel and passageway. Constitutes possible second construction phase, bonded into the structures of Phase 1.

B/W: 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 34

Phase 3. Consists of unit 17.

- 17 brickwork, coursed, English bond.

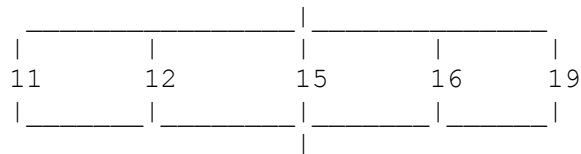
17 brick

Rebuild to south facing main facade of Phase 1.

B/W: 32

Phase 3. Consists of units 11, 12, 15, 16, 19.

- 11 stone, random uncoursed.
- 12 concrete.
- 15 concrete and stone.
- 16 brickwork, coursed, English bond.
- 19 stone random coursed, rough faced.



Consolidation and renovation work to Phases 1,2 and 3.

B/W: 7, 8, 9, 15, 22, 23, 32, 43.

#### Phasing Discussion.

Phase 1 consists of elements representing the possible original build of the structure. It appears that the brick walls of the basic structure were faced after construction by random unfaced stone and tufa. It is possible that this facing may have been bonded into the brickwork with stone supporting slabs (B/W 22.1,2,3). The phase includes not only the main facade and

boat channel, but the eastern and western flanks. It is suggested that these were part of the same, build and that the gaps between the flanks and the main facade represent collapsed doorways.

Phase 2 represents the west 'wing' of the structure, consisting of the tunnel and the passageway to the south. It is being considered as a separate phase as to the north of the tunnel the residual walls appear to be butting the walls of Phase 1. It is, however, possible that the phase is contemporary with Phase 1, and merely represents distinct phases of the original construction.

Phase 3 represents renovation work to Phase 1 of unknown date. The phase consists of reconstruction of the main door, and semi-circular arch in the main facade.

Phase 4 represents renovation and consolidation work to the entire structure. The major elements are the re-build of the top of the main facade with brickwork and stone. It also includes the construction of a doorway of random worked stone to the west of the passage. Photographs taken in 1976 show this reconstruction absent, dating the work post 1976.

#### Conclusions.

At this stage of the assessment four main phases of construction have been identified. These represent two possible phases of primary construction, and two further phases of renovation. Of the four phases it is only possible to precisely date Phase 4. Based on photographic evidence provided by the Wanstead Historical Society, the rebuilding work of Phase 4 dates to 1976 or later.

The scope of information gained from Phase 1 of the assessment is limited, due to the nature of the project brief.



For more definite information on the structure, detailed examination and recording is required, including scale elevations, brick and mortar analysis, and recording of the faced and worked stone in the structure. This should enable a more detailed construction sequence to be established for those parts of the structure above ground level. This will be complicated by 20th. century re-pointing.

It was noted that due to progressive destruction of the structures, and the build-up of soil over the site, some parts of the Grotto are hidden, and will remain so without some limited excavation, certainly of the topsoil. This makes a fuller interpretation of the chronology and internal relationships of the site impossible.

To establish definitive construction phases of the original structure excavation of the foundations will be necessary. This will also eliminate the confusing aspects of above-ground restoration, and enable identification of original brickwork over the rest of the structure.

Excavation of the newly disclosed walls to the north-east of the boat house will, in all probability, show expansion of the Grotto complex to the east; possibly a similar arrangement of structures as occurs on the west side of the boat channel. Excavation will also clarify chronological relationships with the boat-house itself.

Excavation in the area of the tunnel will establish more clearly the relationship between the present tunnel structure and the walls of the boat channel; indeed, will clarify whether the existing tunnel is part of the original structure, or a later addition. The excavation of this area will also have to include work in the passageway to the south to establish relationship between the three structures.

#### Acknowledgements.

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