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Source No: WP

**Witley Court,**  
The Main Stair Tower  
Worcester

*Building recording.*

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**Witley Court**  
**The Main Stair Hall**  
**Worcester**  
**(NGR: SO 769 649)**

*Building recording.*

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**1. Summary.**

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*Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned to undertake a scheme of recording alongside the programme of restoration to the main stair hall at Witley Court. The work was funded by English Heritage.*

*The project involved detailed, hand drawing of the elevations and base plan of the main stair tower at a scale of 1:20, working in advance of repairs being done on the building.*

*A total of 13 complete wall elevations and two base plans were produced on site and are the main subject of this report.*

*From the analysis of the work it would appear that the area now referred to as the stair hall originally formed two long continuous rooms at ground and first floor levels into the south-west wing. It is proposed that the southern wall of what is now the stair hall was inserted and a lack of earlier openings in this wall at ground floor level, combined with the absence of holes for joists or rafters at first floor level supports this. Not least because there was no other primary entrance into the ground floor rooms in the south-west wing. These rooms would form part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century building.*

*In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the central part of the building was raised adjacent to the east wall of the stair hall and two square windows are contained within the wall that date from this phase. A door from the west staircase at the east end of the north wall at second floor level may have opened onto the original roof. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the south wall was added and the stair hall began to serve that function with stairs on its south side and a first floor landing linking the central block to the west wing in the north side of the space. The vaulted roof was also added to the cellar beneath the tower at this time.*

*The present layout and décor are a result of Dawkes in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stairs were then laid out in imperial style with a wide central flight at ground floor entered through a large central opening in the east wall and two flights flanking this up to the first floor landing against the north and south walls. New windows and doors were added to the west wall with similar archaied opening and recesses forming a symmetrical internal layout to the décor.*

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## 2. Introduction.

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In 1997-98, as part of their rolling programme of repair on the house, English Heritage consolidated the surviving walls of the former main staircase of Witley Court at the west end of the main central block. As had been the case in most previous areas since 1990, a programme of archaeological recording and analysis - taking advantage of the necessary scaffolding - was undertaken to ensure a record was made of the fabric prior to the necessary changes brought about by the repairs.

Earlier recording had been undertaken by the City of Hereford Archaeology Unit on the Medieval Undercroft (1990), the West Wing (1993), the South-west Wing (1994) and the Chapel Link Block (1995). In 1996 part of the stables were similarly recorded by the Hereford Unit in conjunction with Richard K Morriss & Associates of Shropshire. The recording of the stair hall was undertaken by the Hereford Unit's direct successors, Archaeological Investigations Ltd., again in conjunction with Richard K Morriss & Associates.

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## 2. Outline History.

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Witley Court is a ruined multi-period mansion, once one of the largest private houses in the country. It was accurately described by Pevsner as 'a palace, regal in size and grandeur...a supremely splendid shell' (Pevsner, 1968, 171; 173). Its immediate pre-fire appearance owed much to a radical refacing and extension in the 1850's but the building has a very long history.

There is a reference to Witlege in the Domesday Survey of 1086, and by the 13th century the manor appears to have been in the hands of the Cooksey family (Walker, 1990, 7). That there was a medieval building, presumably the manor house, on the site in the late-13th or early-14th century was recently established by the survey and reassessment of part of the extensive cellars. The two-bay quadripartite vaulted portion of the cellar, under the central part of the house, was tentatively identified as the undercroft of a solar block presumably once attached to a long-demolished hall (Morriss, 1990).

In 1498 Robert Russell of Strensham, a member of one of the county's most important families, came into the Cooksey estates - including Great Witley (Walker, 1990, 7). Although there is a reference to Great Witley Park in the late-16th century, the first reference to the Court does not occur until the first half of the 17th century when it was the home of Sir William Russell. High Sheriff and Governor of Worcester, he spent much of his wealth in support of the Crown (Gibbons, 1990, 15). Sir William gave his son, Thomas, Witley Court in 1654 but in the following year Thomas sold the 'imposing residence' to Thomas Foley, the iron master, then High Sheriff of the county (*ibid.*).

According to one authority, Thomas Harral in his 1824 book *Picturesque Views of the Severn*, Foley, despite his wealth, was content 'with the situation of the old house, repaired it, and made many additions'. Thomas Foley bought several other large estates in the region and he died in 1677, to be succeeded by his son, Thomas, a county MP and Sheriff who died in 1683. The estates passed in turn to his son, a third Thomas, also once Sheriff, and also an MP, who is credited with building the 'the fair new-built house' mentioned in Camden's *Britannia* of 1695 (Gibbons, 1990, 15).

Foley was one of the infamous Tory peers created by Queen Anne to retain that party's majority in the Lords in the turbulent sitting of 1711, but he died without an heir in 1733. He was responsible for rebuilding the parish church of Great Witley next to the Court; this was finished in 1735, after his death, and is often attributed to James Gibb. It contains fittings from Gibb's chapel at Lord Chandos' Middlesex mansion, Canons, purchased in 1747 by Foley's successor, another Thomas. He was the great-great-grandson of the first Thomas Foley through his son, Paul, who had been given the manor of Stoke Edith, Herefordshire. Thomas (V) was also an MP and in 1776, the year before he died, was the second Foley to be elevated to the peerage.

The next Thomas Foley was a Privy Councillor, Joint Postmaster General, and a notorious gambler; it was he that started the family's gradual decline (Walker, 1990, 10). He employed the then highly fashionable architect John Nash to remodel Witley Court in the early 1800's, the most notable feature of this being the Ionic portico. Foley's son and grandson, both Thomas', inherited in turn before the latter, saddled with debt and a huge house, sold the Witley estates in 1837 for £890,000 (ibid.).

The purchasers were the trustees of William Ward, then still a minor, who became the first Earl of Dudley in 1860. Until he came of age in 1846 the house was let and between 1843 and 1846 the tenant was the dowager Queen Adelaide, widow of William IV (ibid.). When Lord Dudley took possession of the estate he began an ambitious programme of works on both house and gardens and entertained on a lavish scale. The house was completely refaced in a vaguely Italianate style and extended by the architect Samuel Daukes, more noted for designing churches, railway stations and lunatic asylums. Lord Dudley's son and heir, another William, inherited in 1885 and for the rest of the century and into the Edwardian era Witley Court was one of the most fashionable private houses in the country, patronised by the rich and the royal.

After the First World War the general downturn in the economy and the tragic death of Lady Ward in 1920 led to the family selling the Witley estates. The house and grounds were bought by Sir Herbert Smith but was damaged by fire in 1937. The fire did not consume all of the house and the western half escaped virtually undamaged. However, the house was allowed to go to rack and ruin, suffering from the planned activities of demolition contractors and general vandalism.

By the start of the 1960's it was a roofless shell. A Building Preservation Order was made on the owner in 1964 but with no obvious improvements likely the Department of the Environment took the unusual step of taking the ruins of the house into compulsory guardianship in 1972. Since 1984 it has been in the care of the Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission - otherwise known as English Heritage - who have carried out a long-running and very comprehensive programme of major restoration and repair.

### 3. Witley Court

The development of Witley Court has inevitably been the subject of some debate, as has the dating of its various elements. The mid-19th century changes and extensions are relatively easy to identify, but earlier phases are not. Excluding the medieval undercroft the earliest parts of the building appear to date from the 17th century. Until recently the long northern wings were thought to have been later additions to a smaller house. The listing details consider the main core of the house to be of 17th century date with the wings added in the late-17th or early-18th century. Other writers have dated the wings as late as the 1730's (e.g. Gibbons, 1990, 15).

Recent archaeological analysis of the main part of Witley Court has established that the bulk of the house, including the northern wings, was built in one major 17th century phase. This grand two-storey brick house had cellars and attics and consisted of a central hall range with two long flanking wings to the north and stair towers in the extruded angles, and two shorter wings to the south. The footprint was not quite symmetrical but differences were fairly minor. The precise date of this build is still unresolved, but overall a date in the second quarter of the 17th century seems reasonable.

Subsequently, in the early 18th century, the area between the two short southern wings was infilled with a three storey block and Palladian pavilions were added on either side of the northern approach. These were removed in later changes, which also included the raising of the rest of the original build to three storeys and changes in fenestration and, more particularly, to the internal layout. Despite several major campaigns of remodelling the basic 17th century carcass remains fossilised within the fabric of the house.

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### **3. The Grand Stair Hall.**

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#### **3.1 General Introduction.**

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The grand stair hall occupied the western end of the main central block of the house and had been rebuilt as part of the mid 19th century alterations carried out by Samuel Daukes. It had been the main stairs in the 18th century as well, but the archaeological evidence suggests that the original stair access between floors was provided within the two angle stair towers built specifically for the purpose in the traditional manner.

Immediately to the north of the stair hall is the south gable wall of the west wing. Earlier archaeological studies have shown this to originally, and unusually, to have consisted of single uninterrupted spaces at both ground and first floor levels - effectively having long galleries on both levels (Morriss, 1993). Subsequently its ground floor was subdivided but the first floor remained a gallery until the fire of 1937.

The easternmost section of the north wall of the stair hall separates it from the western tower in the angle between the west wing and the central block, probably one of a pair of stair towers belonging to the 17th century house.

To the south of the stair hall is the south-west wing, one of the two short wings flanking the original south elevation. The brick cross wall between the stair hall and the wing is not an original element of the 17th century house (Morriss, 1994).

Overall the stair hall is approximately 7m square and is of three storeys over a basement, rising to a maximum height above ground level of approximately 12m. Abutting the southern third of the west elevation is a two-storey extension above a basement, part of a link block from the stairs to the mid-19th century quadrant block. Apart from the ground floor, which is supported by the vaulting of the basement, there are no surviving floor or stair structures within the stair hall and the roof is also missing.

All that survives, therefore, are the four walls, mainly brick-built but topped by later ashlar stonework. There is, however, sufficient evidence in the fabric and surviving decorative finishes of these walls to indicate the outline development of this part of the house.

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## **3.2 Methodology.**

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Before work commenced on the recording of the stair tower elevations, a plan of it was drawn at 1:20 scale. Following this, scaffolding was erected to afford the survey team a safe platform from which to work.

The tower was then strung with a grid of 1m squares set horizontal to vertical to aid accuracy in the drawings.

The grid was laid out following the same Datum lines used in previous survey work done at Witley Court by staff of Archaeological Investigations Ltd (formerly City of Hereford Archaeology Unit).

The survey work consisted of hand drawing at 1:20 scale.

The level of detail required included, construction breaks and structural cracks and the building materials to either side of them along the entire length, reveals, doorways, windows and other openings, moulding profiles, decorative paint, metalwork, areas covered in plaster and changes in the mortar types used. Cross sections of joining walls were also drawn.

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## **4. Description.**

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### **4.1 The West Wall.**

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The west wall is the only external wall of the stair ha, the other three being partition walls between it and the adjacent parts of the house. Abutting it to the south of centre and at right-angles is a 3-(11/2) brick wall forming the northern side of the two -storey corridor annexe built against the earlier extension to the south -west wing.

The bricks are mainly handmade and bright red in colour, laid in a soft off-white mortar. Much of the exterior is covered with the remains of a stucco finish, and the inner face has remnants of plaster decoration. This makes some assessment a little difficult. In general, the bricks are laid in a straightforward English Bond.

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#### **Exterior**

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At the foot of the wall the basement wall is exposed. This is partly the living bedrock, forming a crude plinth for the brickwork above. The bricks immediately on top of the rock are slightly different in character than those above. In the past this face of the wall has been limewashed at this level and formed one side of a basement corridor, the other being a brick wall continuing the line of the west elevation of the main west wing southwards to the wall of the corridor annexe. Most of this wall has since been demolished but the corridor annexe is still standing. On the stair hall wall, several of the joist sockets for the roof or ceiling of this basement passage are still evident. Roughly central to this elevation, and immediately to the north of the corridor annexe, is a blocked doorway through to the basement.

At ground floor level there is a small square-headed inserted window in the northern part of the elevation and the foot of a large stair window that rises to first floor level in the centre. Around the former opening the brickwork and coursing is disturbed and indicates a degree of rebuilding probably associated with the window. The precise nature of the phasing of this area is not clear. On the inside it has a steeply splayed sill and was evidently designed simply to provide light under the adjacent flight of stairs. The lintel and frame are both of timber.

The tall central stair light has a projecting stone sill and a semicircular head. It is just under 4.5m high, from its stone sill to the crown of the arch, and 1.5m wide and retains fragments of its timber frame and glazing bars. The northern jamb brickwork seems to be contemporary with the opening, but the southern jamb has an obvious construction break indicating a rebuilding or slight widening of the aperture when the window was inserted.

At the foot of the window, immediately below the stone sill, there is a second stone sill, dressed back to be flush with the brickwork prior to the wall face being stuccoed. This seems to be contemporary with the surrounding brickwork. The semicircular head is hidden on this face by the stucco but on the inside consists of two rings of headers. These fit untidily into the adjacent brickwork and seem to be contemporary with the thin slither of later brickwork on the southern jamb, suggesting that the arch is an alteration to an earlier opening that has been slightly widened.

The arch springs from the level of the flat-arched gauged brick heads of two former first-floor windows on either side of it. The best preserved of these is to the north. The parameters of this window are a little confused by brick-filled chases designed to take pipework and other services, but it was originally 2.1m tall and 1.2m wide. Like the main stair window, this has also retained its original cutback stone sill, despite being blocked. Only the top of the window to the south survives, as it occupies the position of the arched doorway from the stairhall into the corridor annexe to the west. Nevertheless, enough remains to indicate that it was probably identical in size to the window to the north and part of a symmetrical array of three - all having flat arched lintels at the same level but with the central window being slightly wider and much taller than the other two, rising as it does from ground-floor level. Embedded in the inner face of the wall are the remains of the timber lintels of the two flanking windows.

The doorway to the corridor annexe through the site of the southern first-floor window has a semicircular head consisting, structurally, of two rings of headers and matches the existing higher head of the central window. Immediately above the head of the earlier window is a shallow sloped weathering strip embedded in the wall of the stairhall and related to the flat roof over the first-floor of the corridor annexe.

At second-floor level in the main stair hall wall are three blocked windows; only the central one of these relates to the earlier pattern of three windows on the floor below, being directly above the central stair window. It is blocked in brick, the blocking being flush with the outer face of the wall. Originally it was just under 1.2m wide and approximately 0.7m from sill to the soffit of the head. The sill has been removed but the head remains. It is a flat arch of brick but not quite as well crafted as those of the first-floor windows. Internally, the structural head is of a single segmental ring of edge headers above a flat timber lintel. The window fits in with the adjacent brickwork and there are closers in the adjacent courses that indicate that it was a primary feature.

On either side of this blocked windows is another blocked window, although in these the new brick blocking is set back into the former opening and stuccoed. There are obvious construction breaks between the jambs of these windows and the rest of the brickwork to show that they are inserted.

Their present concrete lintels replaced timber ones. Although their stone sills are at the same height as the missing sill of the central window, both of these windows are wider (at 1.25m) than it - although of approximately the same width.

At the top of this wall are three courses of ashlar stone blocks capped by a moulded cornice and clearly later than the brickwork below it.

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## Interior

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Less of the internal face of the wall is visible because of the degree of surviving plaster finish and modern repairs. The main construction breaks and structural details relating to the openings have already been discussed (above). Above cellar level there are lines of joist sockets indicating the position of floors and landings.

A landing existed just below the sill of the central stair window but in the last phase of the stair this seems not to have run the whole length of the stairhall. Instead there must have been short flights at either end to corner quarter landings from which half flights ran up against the north and south walls up to the main first-floor level. There are no other visible signs of other floor levels until the clear line of the joists of the second floor, immediately above the crown of the main stair window.

At the base of the ashlar stone parapet are a series of joist sockets related to the last roof over this part of the building. The sockets either took the feet of the common rafters of this roof or short trimming timbers for a flat gutter between the parapet and the foot of the roof slope. Immediately above this line of joist sockets is the remnant of a lead weathering cut into a chase in the stonework.

Little decoration, other than plain plaster, has survived. Part of the general layout of the last phase can be seen, nevertheless. At first-floor level, for example, the tall central window light formed the middle of a tripartite design. It was flanked by the doorway to the corridor annexe on the south and by a matching arch-headed recess to the north, partly cut into the blocking of the earlier window. Each of these openings was given moulded plaster frames matching others in the vicinity, though little survives.

The overall impression of the brickwork and the manner in which the openings relate to it suggests that, with the exception of some of the lowest sections, the wall was completely rebuilt - probably in the early 18th century.

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## 4.2 The East Wall.

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The east wall of the stair hall separates it from the rest of the central hall range of the house and is mainly built of handmade red brick. On each face there are remains of decorative plasterwork that obscures some vital clues to its structural development.

On the ground floor little survives. The central section consists of modern brickwork flanking a central opening, all within an outline framework of steel consisting of posts carrying a lintel. Above the steel lintel is an earlier, but still inserted, timber one. The entire central section of the wall at this level had clearly been a very wide opening - though not a primary one. The steel frame's posts butt up against the remaining earlier brickwork sections on either side. Each of these has within it a blocked doorway with a semicircular head. The blocking is of brick with occasional timber trimmers and the size and character of the bricks in the blocking almost matches that of the brick jambs of the opening. The northern doorway is the best preserved; it was 1.2m wide and, from the sill to the springing of the arch, approximately 2.6m high.



At first floor level these end doorway openings were once repeated. The former first-floor doorways were immediately above those on the ground floor and of almost the same dimensions, being just 100mm or so lower. These were subsequently partially blocked in brick to create lower and slightly narrower doorways with square heads just below the level of the springing of the arches.

In between these doorways at this level is a wider central doorway, also with a semicircular head. The construction of this head, a single ring of edge headers, differs from the double ring of 'English Bond' type arches of the others and is also slightly higher. Unlike the heads of those other doorways, this one is clearly inserted into the surrounding brickwork. However, there are traces of the springing of an earlier brick arch on the north side that could suggest that this did once match the other two but has since been slightly raised and enlarged.

The crown of this central arch just cuts into a line of redundant tall joist sockets in the brickwork of the wall and the brickwork above the arch has clearly been rebuilt as part of the raising of the opening. The line of joist sockets thus seems to predate the enlarging of this central doorway. The sockets relate clearly to a second floor level; to the south, in the South-west wing, the continuation of this wall line was found to be of primary 17th century brickwork up until this level and the joists sockets in it related to the original attic floor that subsequently became a full second floor. The structural sequence of the brickwork in the stair hall is less clear.

At the present second floor level the symmetry of earlier features seen at ground and first-floor levels ceases. Instead there are two blocked openings. That to the north was a window 1.3m wide and 1.4m high with a cutback stone sill and a plain brick flat arch of stretchers. The blocking is of modern breeze block. The southern opening seems at first to have been a doorway and has lost its original head. Closer investigation shows it to have originally been a window identical in form to the other one that was subsequently converted into a doorway. Although the head has been lost, on the north side the adjacent bricks are cut back on an angle where the springing of the flat arch would have begun.

Immediately above the heads of these former windows there is a lead chase associated with a roof line, and above that, the brickwork is stuccoed and lined to resemble the genuine Bath stone ashlar on the adjacent parapets.

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### 4.3 The North Wall.

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The north wall of the stair hall continues the line of the north wall of the central hall block and in this area also forms part of the south gable wall of the west wing and part of the south wall of the western stair tower. Like the other walls it is of brick, has been considerably altered, and its details are partially obscured by decorative finishes.

The wall continues past the west wall of the stair hall to the south-west corner of the west wing. At this point the brickwork is decorated with flush sandstone quoins up to the second floor level - the original wall-plate level of the 17th century build.

Within the stair hall there are four blocked doorways at ground-floor level. The middle two of these are clearly inserted, and the surrounds of the western one have mostly been obliterated. Each of these is infilled in modern concrete blockwork. However, the eastern one, hard by the east wall of

the stair hall, may be primary. It has a flat timber lintel and is blocked in brick - some of which are laid in 'Rat-Trap' fashion; it used to lead into the west stair tower.

The two central openings both have the remains of segmental arched heads of two rings of brick laid 'English Bond' fashion; below these are flat timber lintels and in the gap between, an infill of brick. One replaced the earlier doorway into the former stair tower, whilst the other led into the ground floor of the west wing. At the base of the new door into the stair tower is a curious remnant just above ground floor level of what appears to be the springing of an arch across the opening. Below, in the cellar, there are construction breaks above a blocked entrance that could relate to such an arch, possibly suggesting that it was related to a stair within the stair tower leading down into the basement.

It is possible that the westernmost doorway, whose western jamb is very close to the junction between the north and west walls, is also primary. On the north face, within the west wing, the west jamb seems to be part of the primary brickwork and there is a trace of a set-back at the top that could have taken a flat timber lintel. Such a doorway, leading into the west wing, would have been expected and there are no traces of any other primary openings at this level.

Remains of elaborately plastered 'panelling' above these doorways shows the general slope of the flight of steps up against the wall from the quarter landing in the north-west corner to the proper first floor level. There is an inserted doorway from that quarter landing into the west wing, which would have necessitated a short flight of stairs within the wing to reach the true first floor level within it. This doorway is blocked with a continuation of the modern concrete blocks of the floor below.

Clearly inserted and, on the wing side, richly decorated with a plaster architrave, this doorway with its semicircular head is central to the end wall of the wing. It may, however, have replaced a primary doorway at the true first-floor level. There are construction breaks at the east end of the wall that could relate to another blocked primary doorway into the west stair tower, though one not directly above the blocked doorway at ground floor level.

There is a clear construction break in this wall on the second floor. The eastern third continues up to be part of the western stair tower and is evidently 17th century brickwork, albeit encased in Bath stone ashlar higher up. There is a blocked and probably primary doorway from the stairhall into the tower at this level. The western two-thirds of the stairhall wall was raised from an original lower, two-storey, height and much of it has since collapsed anyway. There are no openings or features within it of note.

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#### **4.4 The South Wall.**

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The south wall separates the stair hall from the former short South-west wing flanking the south elevation of the house - and is apparently inserted. The evidence for this lies mainly in the character of the brickwork on the south face and in the fact that to the south of the wall the axial beams supporting the attic stopped just short of the wall and must have been tenoned into the tie-beam of a roof truss immediately to the south of it - rather than, as would have been structurally more logical, being embedded in its brickwork (see Morriss, 1994). The first-floor cross-beams to the south are also oddly spaced in relation to this wall. Decorative finishes mean that the junctions between the cross-wall and the side walls are difficult to assess properly, so it is not possible to check if the bricks course through properly between the walls.

There are no openings through the wall at ground floor level. This also adds to the evidence for it being inserted. There were only two primary openings in the South-west wing to the south of the stairs - both windows in the east return wall. If this wall was primary, there would have been no means of getting into this wing at ground-floor level at all. It would have been unlikely for its ground-floor room to have been reached by stairs from an upper room, and there is no evidence in the floor structures for such a feature anyway.

On the stair side of the south wall the scars of the last flight of stairs between the quarter landing against the west wall and the first-floor landing are quite obvious. This wall is decorated with carton pierre panel decorations on the ground and first floors.

At the west end of the wall leading off the quarter landing is a tall shallow recess, its arched head level with the top of the first-floor 'panelling'. This recess has a semi-circular brick head and could be contemporary with the wall. At the opposite end of the wall at first-floor level is a primary square-headed doorway - its original timber lintel having been replaced by a concrete one in the recent repairs. The top of the wall has been rebuilt using old bricks in the recent past. It carries the ends of the three north-south beams.

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## **5. Discussion.**

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Without the benefits of a thorough examination of all of the adjacent sections of the Court it is difficult to properly assess the structural development of the stair hall and its relationship with the evolution of the internal layout of the building. However, it was clearly an integral element of the large two-storey half-H shaped 17th century brick mansion and reached from the central portion of it.

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### **5.1 Phase One.**

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This space lies between the central portion, which presumably contained both the hall and the great chamber above, and the west wing. This wing, unusually, originally contained long galleries on both first and ground-floor levels (Morriss, 1993). The area occupied by the stair hall was therefore part of the high status elements of the house. As such it would have been the logical location for a grand stair in the original layout; similarly sited stairs exist, for example, at Aston Hall (Warwks.) and Hatfield House (Herts.).

However, the structural evidence suggests that the present south wall of the stair hall is a later insertion into the fabric (see above). There are no obvious indications of an earlier wall on the same or approximate alignment. There is also no possibility of a primary timber-framed cross-frame either. The surviving members of the original roof structure were tenoned into a tie-beam just to the south of the present south wall. Had this formed the top of timber-framing, that frame could only have existed at first-floor level unless, at ground floor level, there was a very odd an asymmetrical alignment of the two surviving west-east bridging beams in the first-floor structure of the south-west wing immediately to the south. It is just possible that two differently aligned frames were used on this side of the stair hall at ground and first floor levels but that would have been unusual and there is no structural evidence in the fabric for it. In addition, the one known cross-wall in the central block was definitely of brick construction.

Given this evidence, it appears that the area now occupied by the stair hall and the South-west wing consisted of two long rooms on ground and first floor levels. Such rooms would have been of high status, given their respective positions within the house - perhaps a withdrawing room on the

ground floor and a best chamber on the first. Both had access to the western stair tower; there seem to have been two doorways at either end of the ground-floor section of the east wall, and another doorway at the western end of the north wall leading into the lower of the two long galleries in the west wing. The original fenestration of the west wall is not known.

The function of the upper room is complicated by the evidence of the three arched doorways in the surviving fabric of the stair hall section of the east wall. Further investigation of the hall side of the wall is needed before it can be demonstrated whether or not the brickwork of this wall has been rebuilt. Critically, it is important that the development of the hall is understood; was it originally floored at first-floor level or was it always two storeys high>

The second floor of the site of the stair hall was evidently useable attic space in this first phase, the evidence being in the locations of floor joists, etc., and in the recently replaced timber elements of the adjacent South-west wing. The cellars beneath the stair hall may, however, be a later addition, presumably contemporary with the construction of the south wall which, in turn, was probably contemporary with the first stairs.

The chronological development of Witley Court has been, and to a certain extent, still is subject to debate. Although the archaeological evidence now suggests that there was only one, large, early brick phase that resulted in the half-H shape house with stubby south wings, several different dates have been suggested for it. This has not been assisted by the unreliable and conflicting description of the 18th century in particular.

Stylistically, the combination of relative crude brickwork and a simple half-H plan (typical of the period from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 17th) with primary hipped roofs and quite sophisticated cross-mullioned windows with recessed mouldings instead of ovolos suggests a broad mid-17th century date. The building is, for example, more sophisticated in its detailing than Aston Hall (1618-35). On balance it seems easier to accept the view that when Foley bought it in 1655 he was content 'with the situation of the old house, repaired it, and made many additions' rather than it was 'a fair new-built house' in 1695. On balance, a build date in the second quarter of the 17th century is suggested.

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## 5.2 Phase Two.

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Witley Court was radically rebuilt in the early 18th century by the first Lord Foley and this was probably the time when the first stairs were added in this position, the cellars were created, and the partition wall between this section and the present South-west wing was built. At this time an infill block was built between the two short southern wings of the garden elevation. This was of three storeys rather than two and the adjacent middle, or hall, section of the older house was raised to match. In the stair hall section this meant that its east wall was raised and contained two windows lighting the added floor over the hall range. The original roof over the stair section was retained.

The creation of the stairs appears to have led to a radical, if not complete, rebuilding of the west, external, wall and to changes in the other walls mainly related to the new access arrangements that were now required. The new west wall had three windows at first-floor level with gauged brick flat arches and stone sills. This stair did not occupy the entire area of the existing stair hall, according to the sketchy details on an undated early 18th century plan of the chamber floor. Instead, it appears to have been a well stair offset slightly to the south to allow room for a first-floor landing along the northern wall which provided access from the main landing, along the east wall, to a central doorway into the long gallery of the west wing. The plan shows the three openings in the

east wall at this level, and the doorway through the inserted south wall. In the north wall a doorway at the eastern end of the wall led into the stair tower still, which now had a secondary stair in it.

This plan, which shows the adjacent chapel and link block and is thus of circa the 1730's, is not detailed when it comes to these stairs. The service stair in the western stair turret and an obviously grander stair in the east stair turret are shown in detail, as is a newel stair next to the northern stack of the east wing, a flight of stairs down to the cellars at the south-east corner, and a short single flight within the then newly built infill range between the two short southern wings. The layout of partitions in the stair hall itself can, however, be little else than a stair - so it is possible that at this time they were planning to move the main stairs to this position, or that they simply were not drawn in detail for some unknown reason.

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### 5.3 Phase Three.

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In the early 19th century Witley Court was radically modelled, and John Nash is known to have had some involvement with this. It is possible that the removal of the original roof and the raising of the former attic over the stairs into a full second floor occurred at this time, resulting in the blocking of one of the second floor windows in the east wall and the conversion of the second into a doorway. A new storey was also added to the other walls and a new roof added. It is not known if the stairs were altered at this time.

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### 5.4 Phase Four.

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The most radical change to Witley Court came in the mid 19th century under Daukes, and it was probably at this time that the most changes were made to the stairs. They now occupied the entire area of the stair hall. The new form was an Imperial type of stair, with a central first flight up from the ground floor to paired half landings from which secondary flights ran up the north and south walls to meet at a common first-floor landing along the east wall.

On the ground floor the middle section was removed to form a wide opening flanked by columns. The earlier doorways at either end of this wall were blocked. The hall, at this time, was two storeys high with first-floor galleries around it. The central arched doorway in the east wall of the stair hall was raised, but the flanking ones were shorn of their arches and lowered.

From the northern half-landing there was a large doorway leading into the west wing gallery; this was in the same position in plan as the earlier doorway but obviously with a much lower threshold. It was mirrored on the opposite wall of the stair hall by an arched recess. In the west wall the window pattern was altered; a central stair window, possibly repeating the earlier 18th century form. Internally, this was flanked by two arched recesses reached from the half landing; that on the north side was blind, that on the south contained the doorway leading into the new access corridor to the curving link block or 'Bachelor's Wing'.

Internally the remodelled stair hall was richly decorated with the carton pierre panelling seen elsewhere in the main rooms of the house. There are, however, very few detailed photographs that show the stairs in all their decorative glory between the c.1860 period and the fire that led to the abandonment of the house.

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**6. Site Archive.**

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1. 29 sheets of A3 and A3+ site drawings on perma trace.
2. 18 sheets of A4 site drawings on perma trace.
3. 1 A3 and 2 A4 sheets of mouldings and paint details.
4. Drawing register.
5. Site note book notes.
6. A copy of this report.

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**7. Bibliography.**

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Walker, R O, 1990. *Witley, Worcestershire*

## Key to Illustrations.

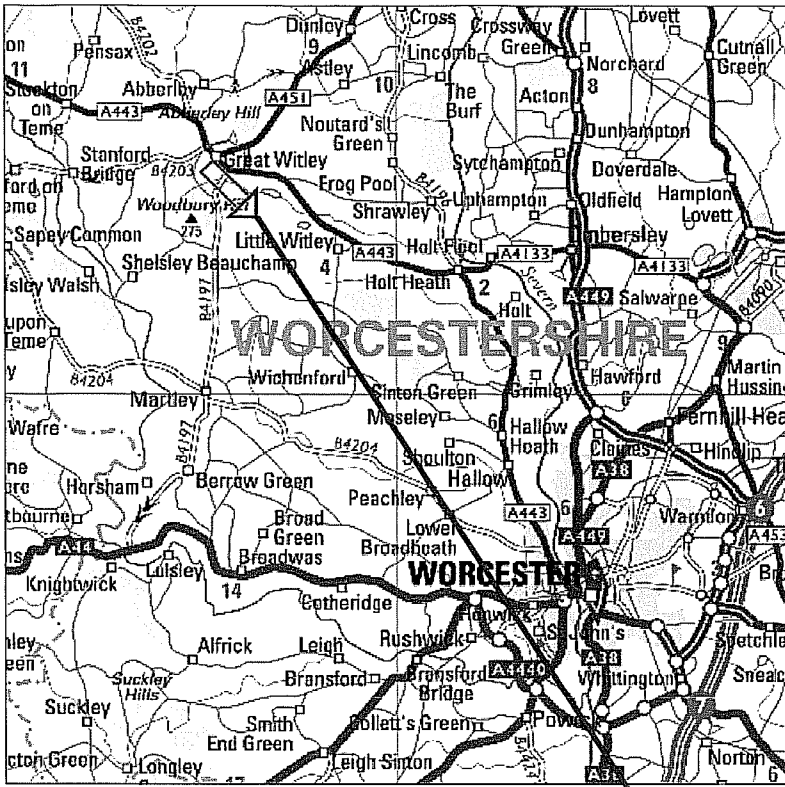
C/B = Construction Break

H = Hole through to the other face

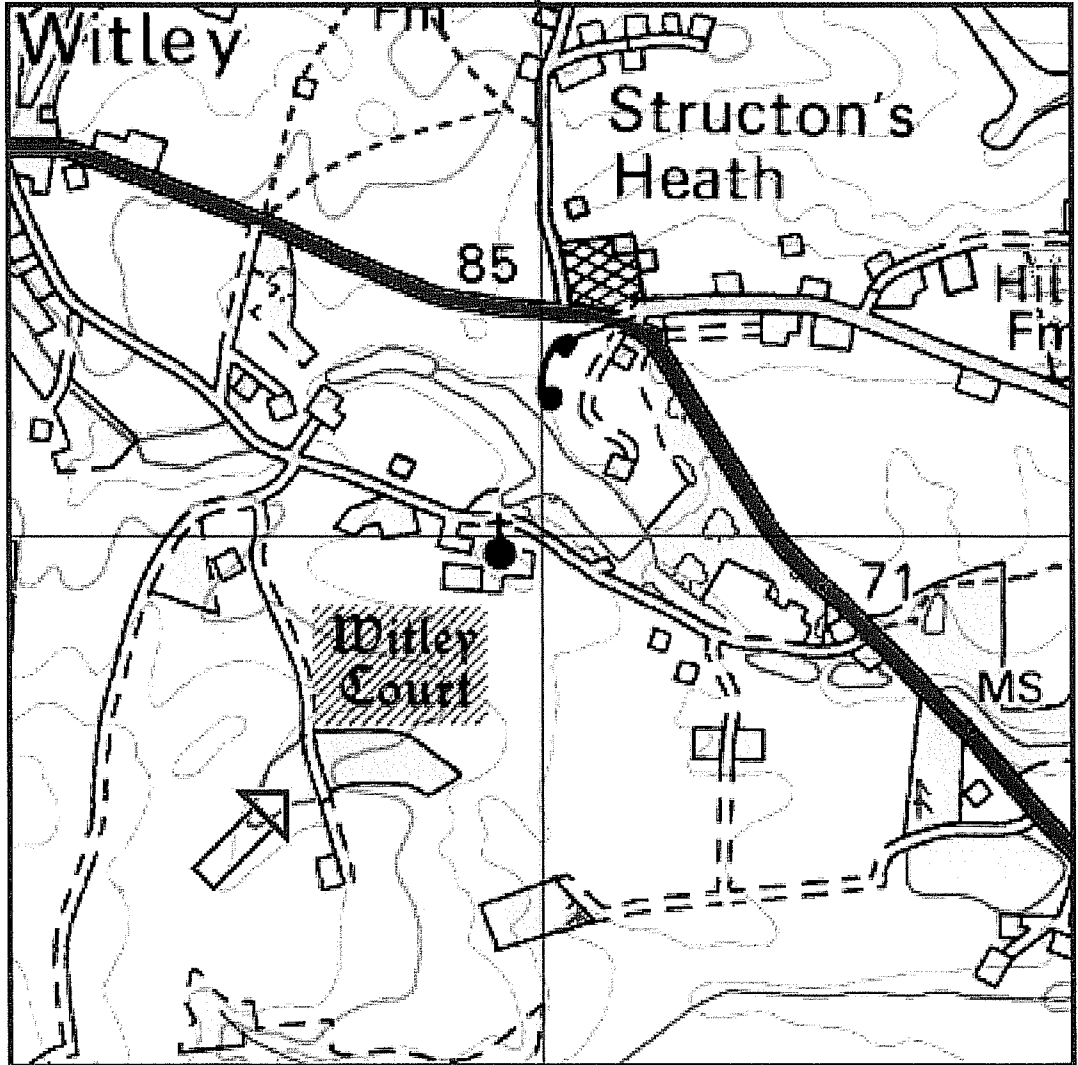
Fe = Iron object (brackets, lintels hooks etc)

Pb = lead pipe or sheet

St = Stone



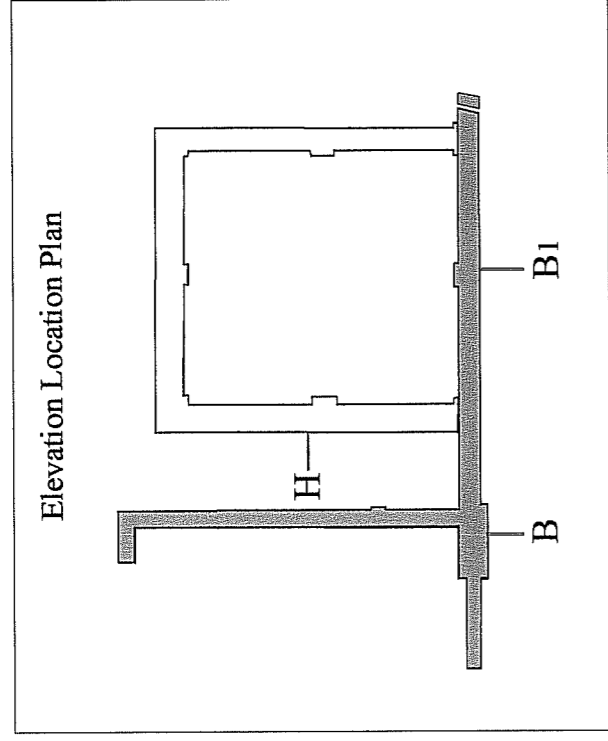
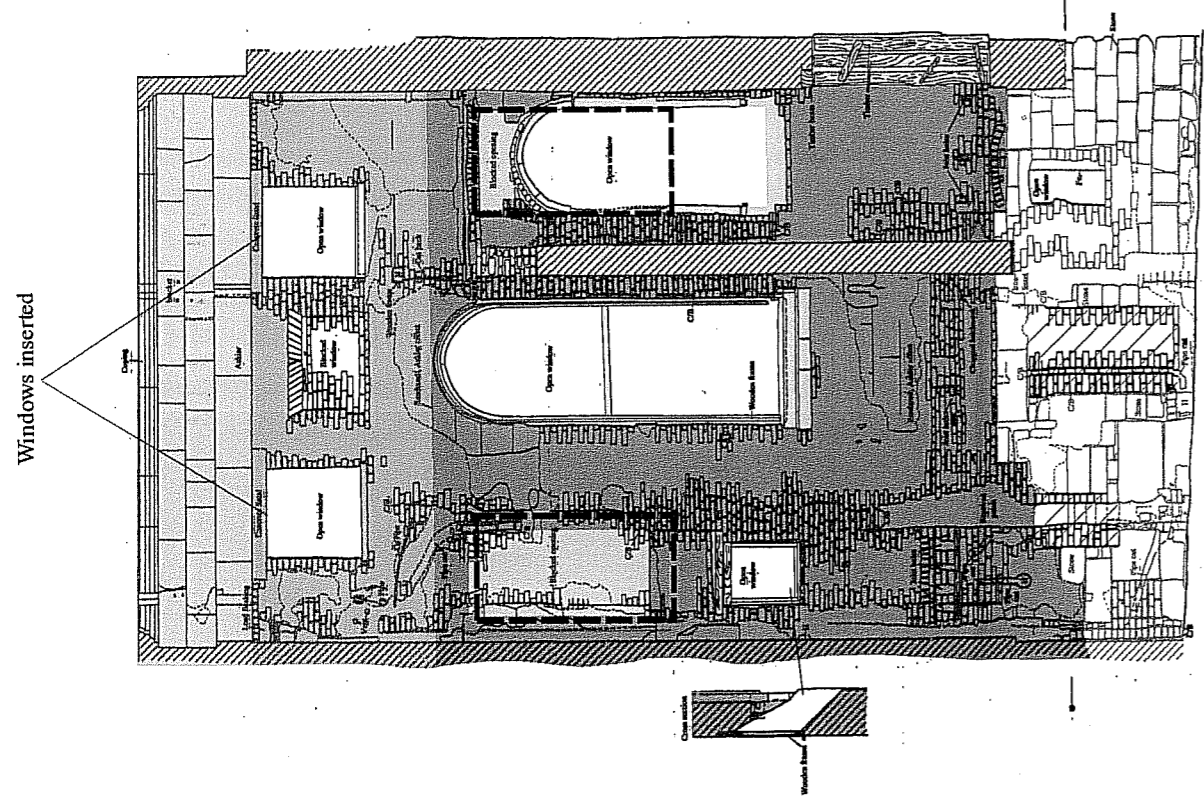
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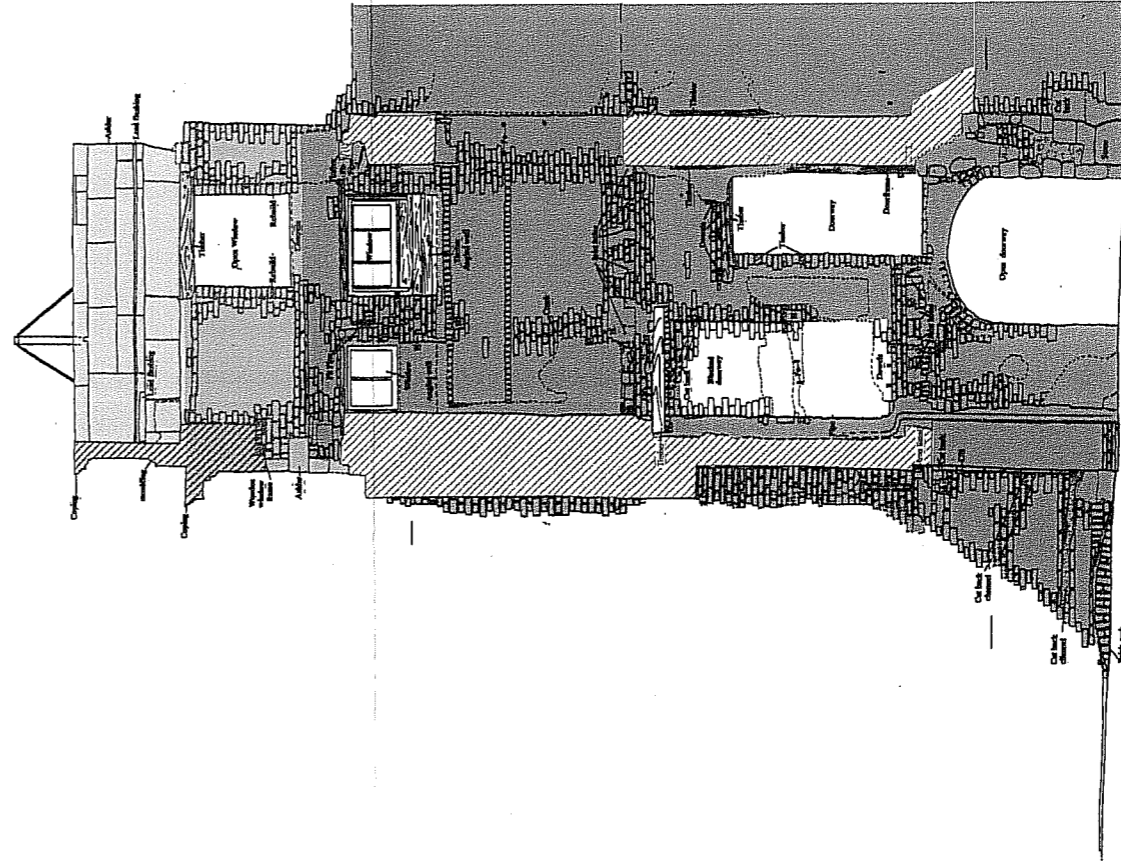
Witley Court Location Maps





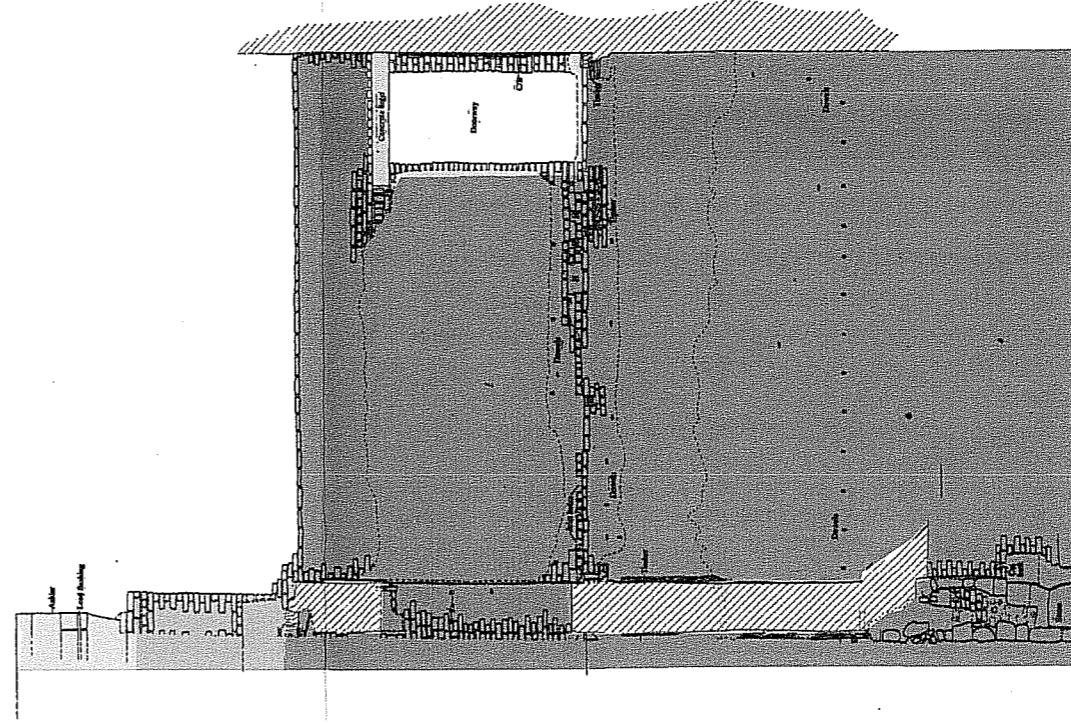


Elevation H



Elevation B

- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Phase 3
- Phase 4

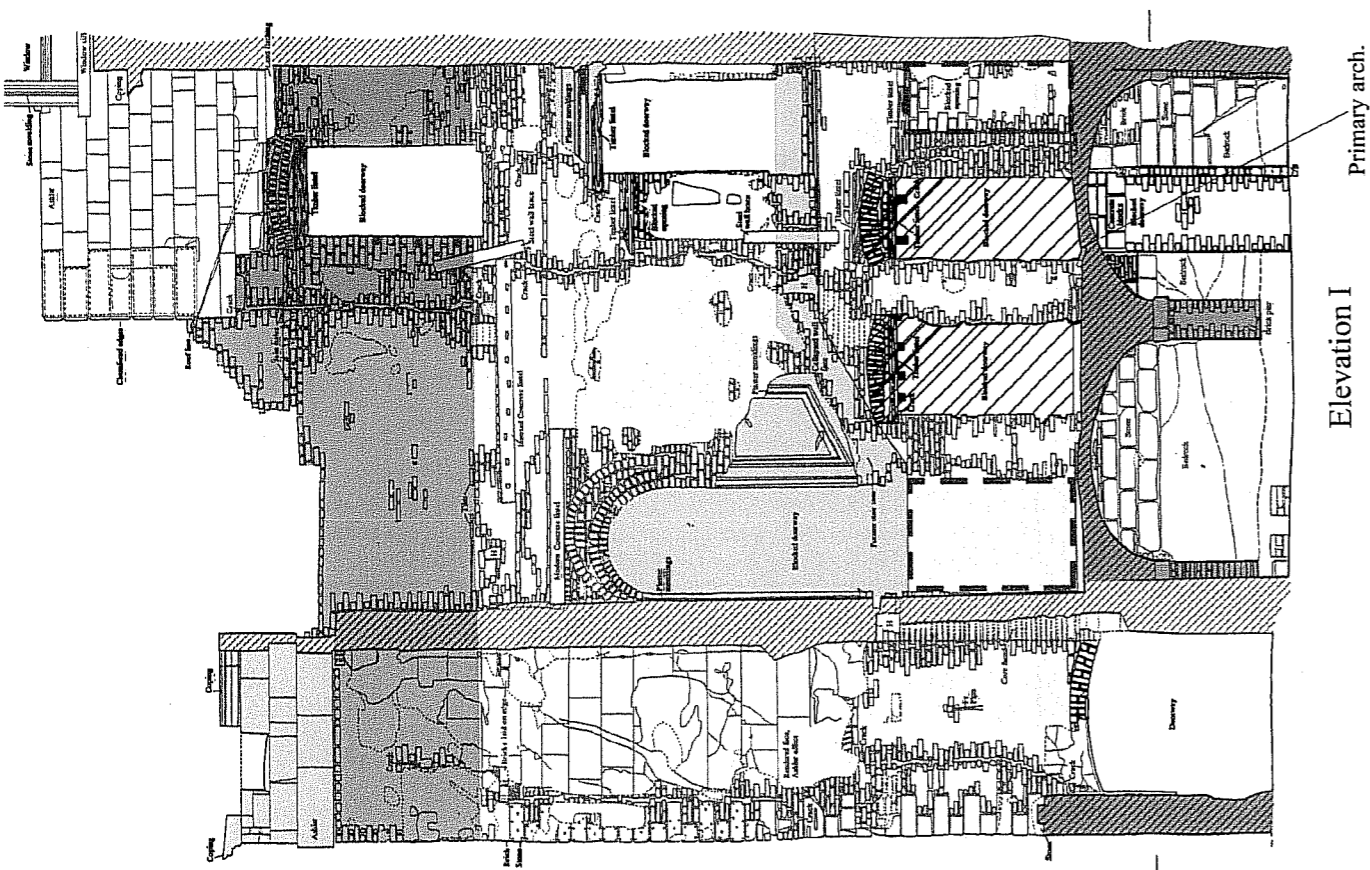


Elevation B1



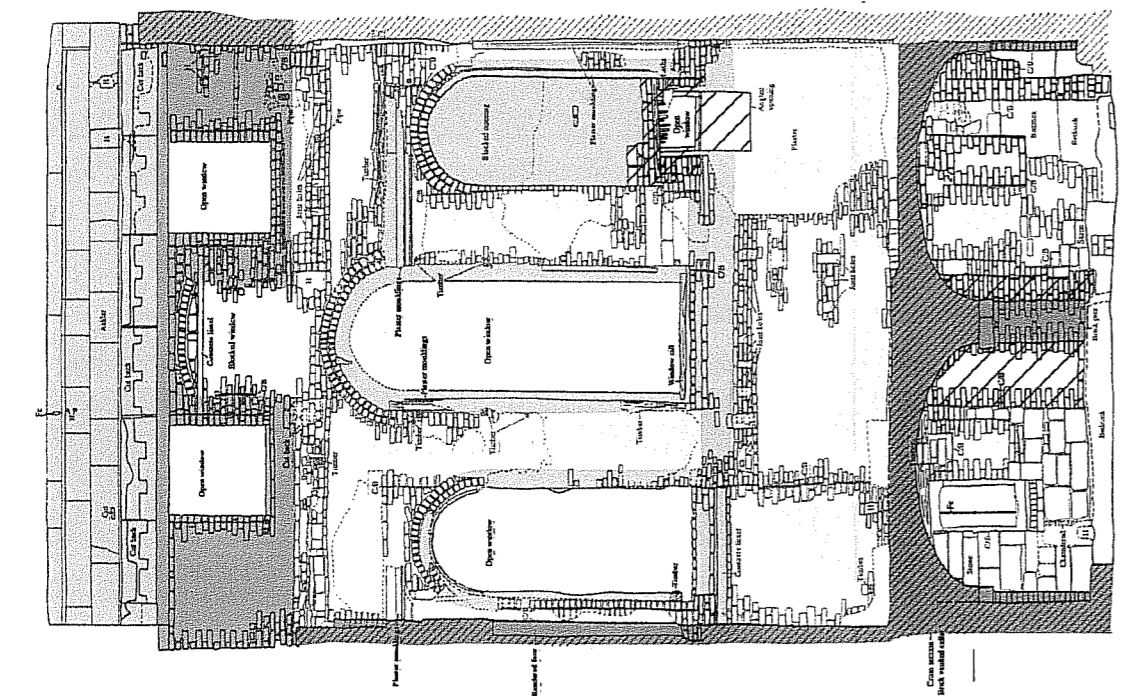
**Witley Court Stair Tower  
Phased Elevations**

Fig 3



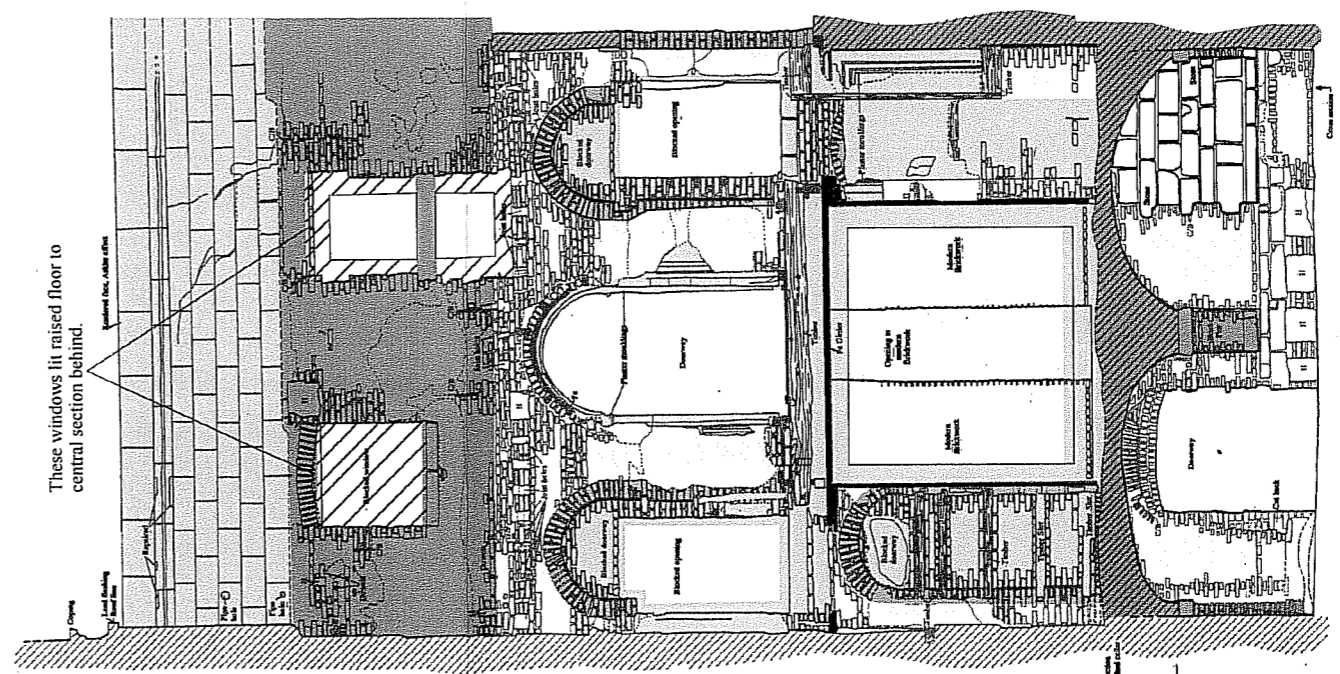
Elevation I

Primary arch.

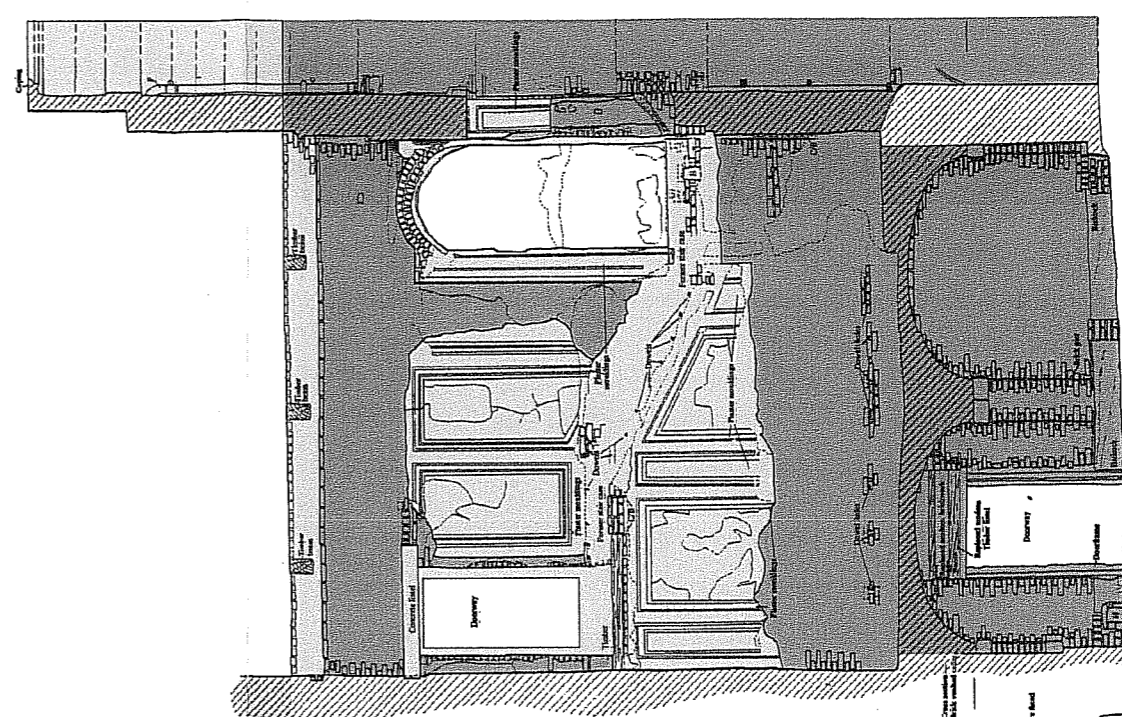


Elevation K

These windows fit raised floor to central section behind.









Elevation L



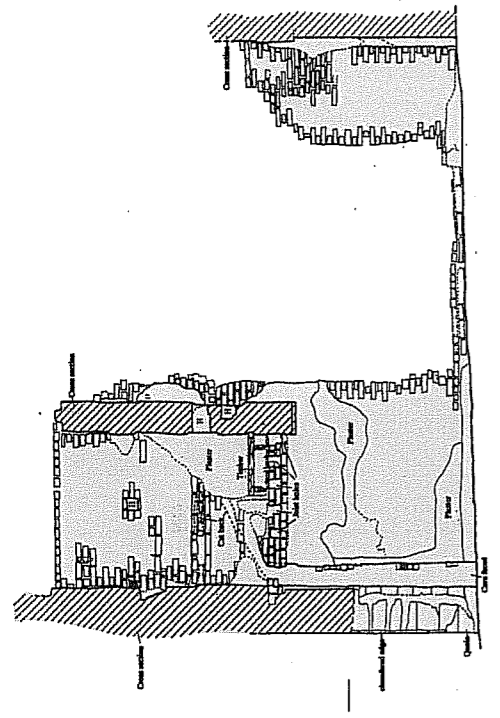
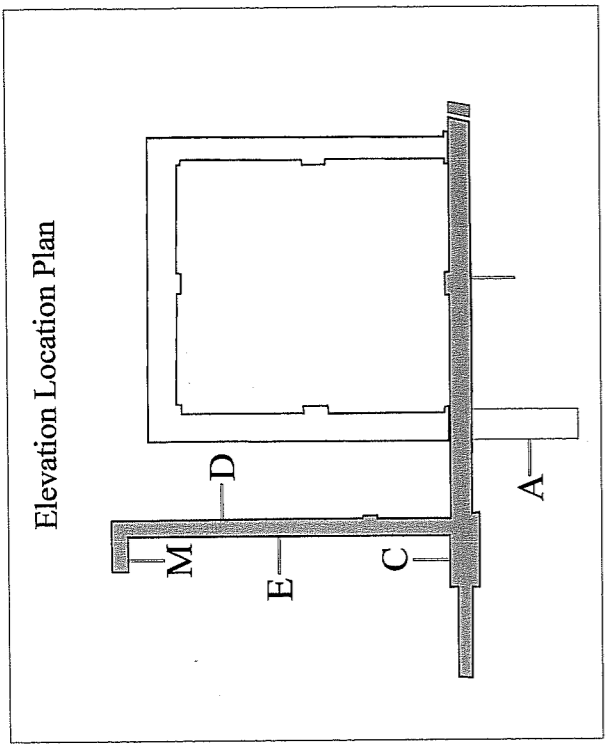
Elevation J



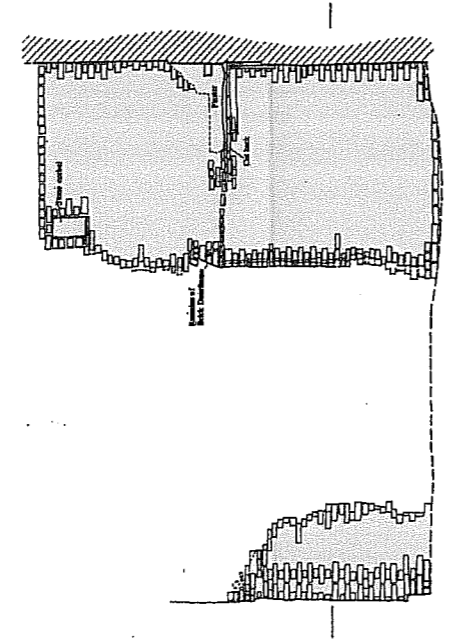
**Witley Court Stair Tower  
Phased Elevations  
Internal**

-  Primary
-  Phase 1
-  Phase 2
-  Phase 3
-  Phase 4
-  Modern blocking

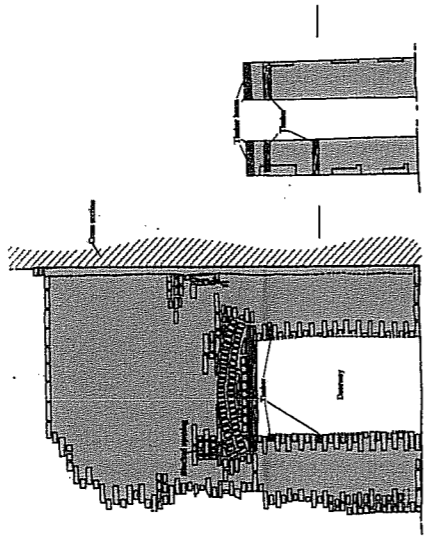




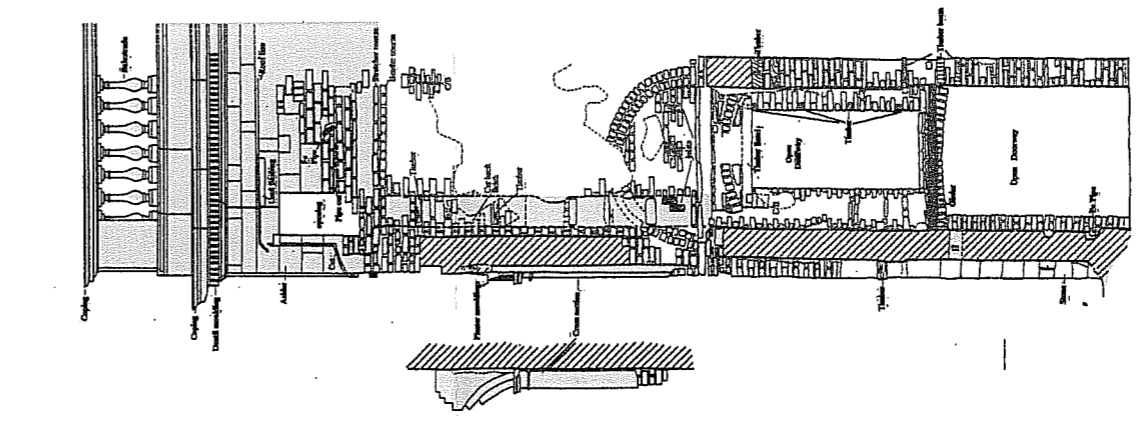
Elevation D



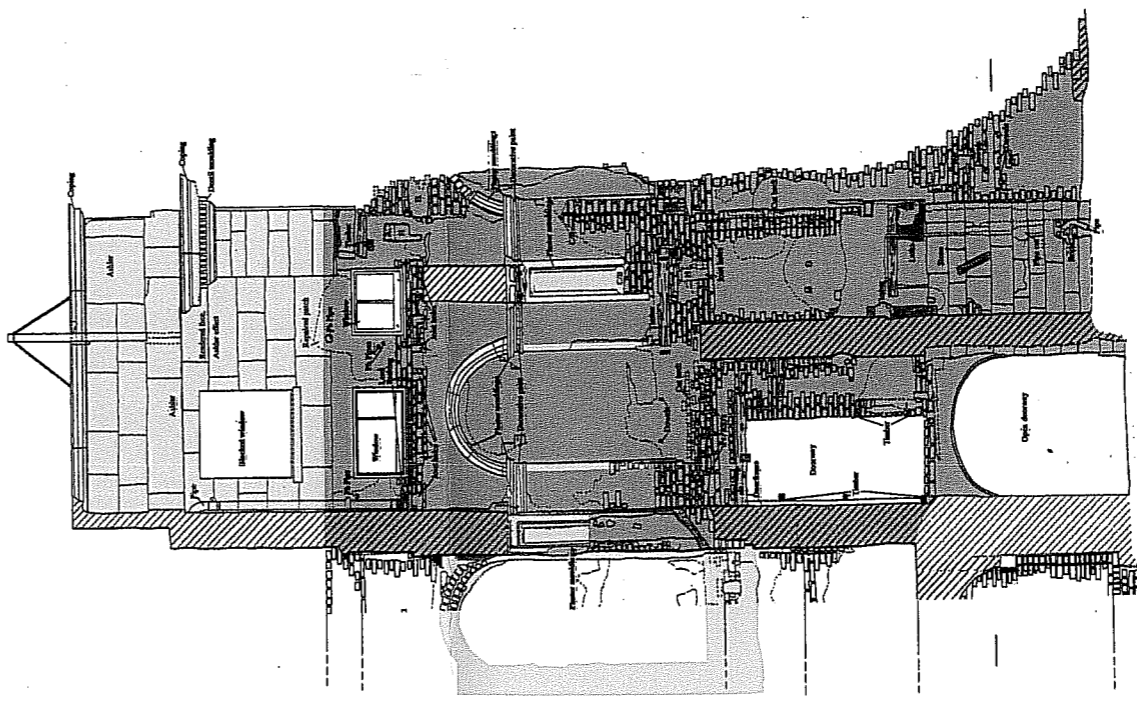
Elevation E



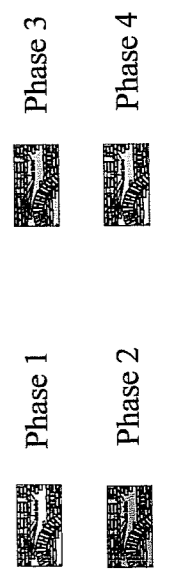
Elevation M



Elevation A

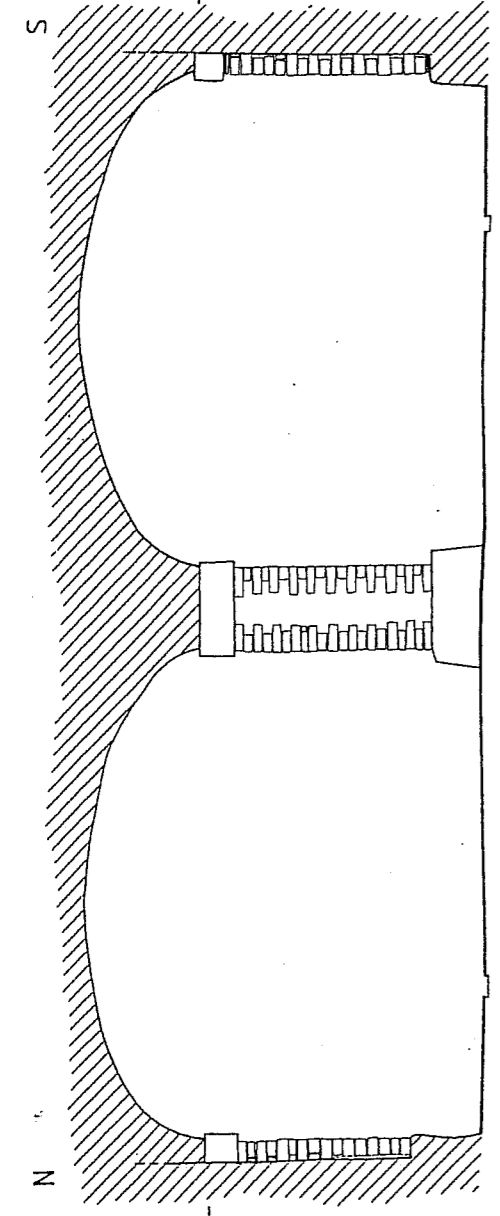


Elevation C

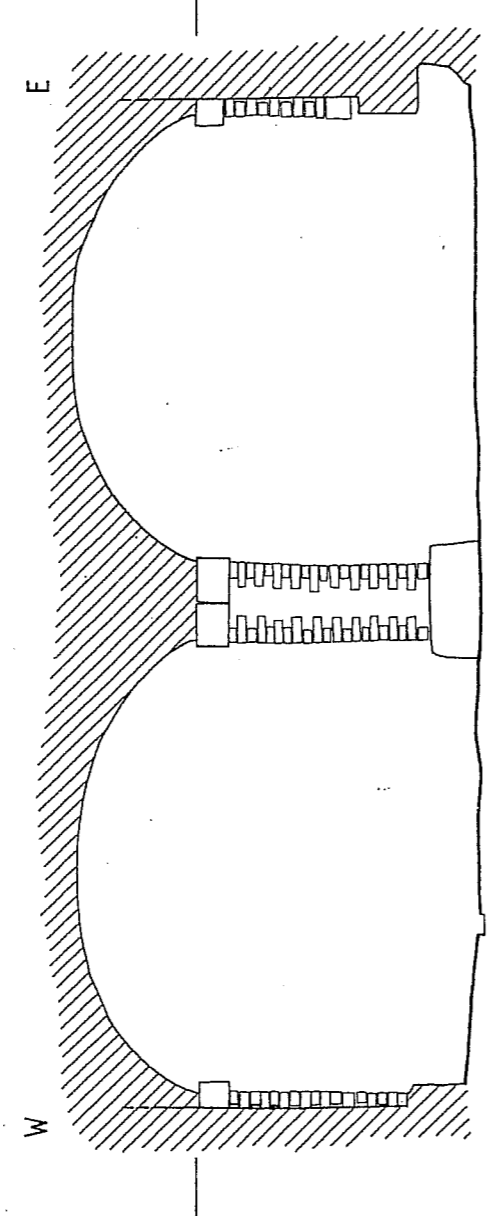


Witley Court Stair Tower  
Phased Elevations

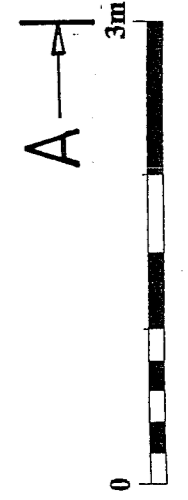
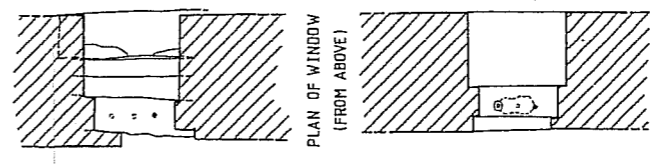
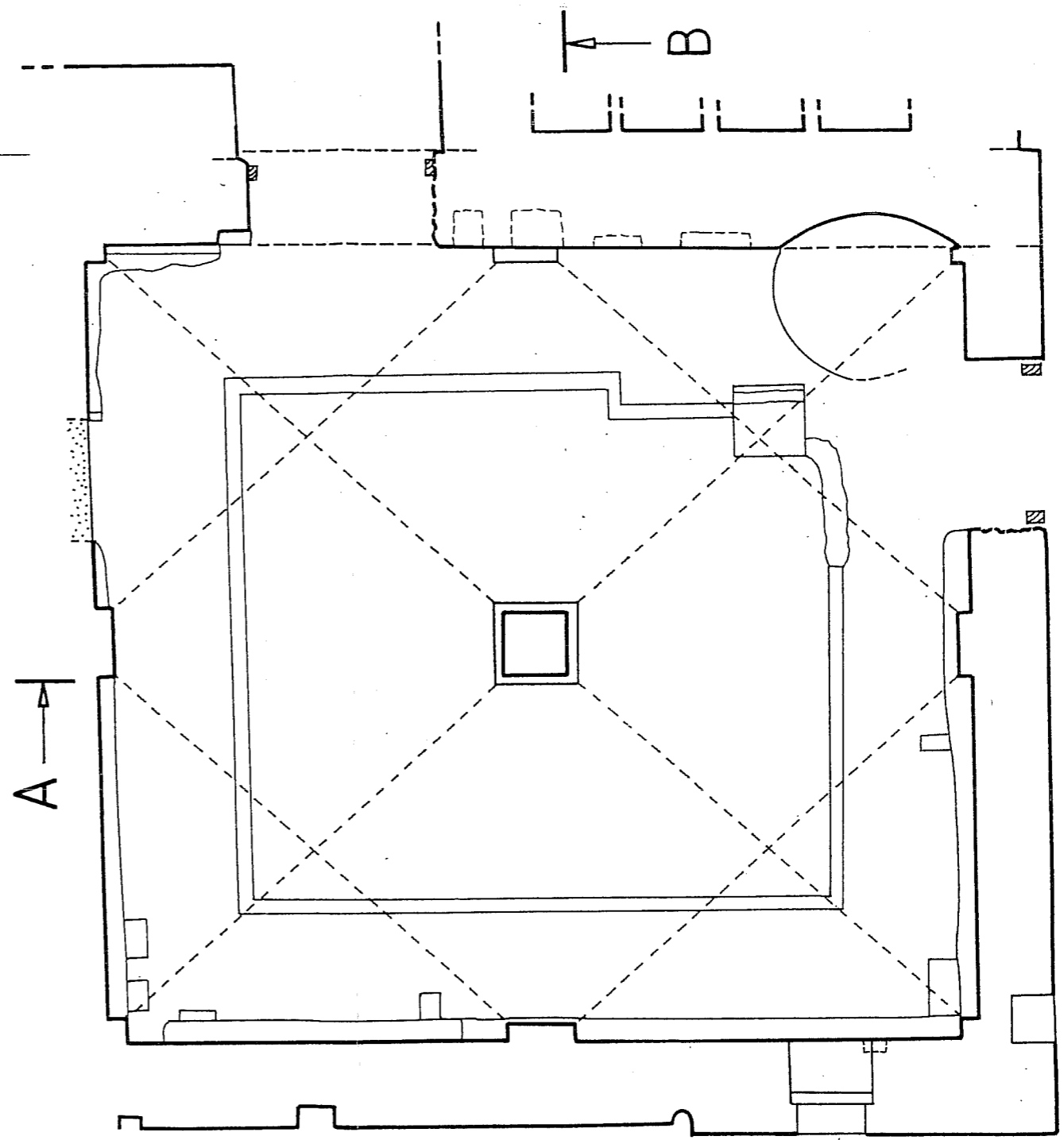
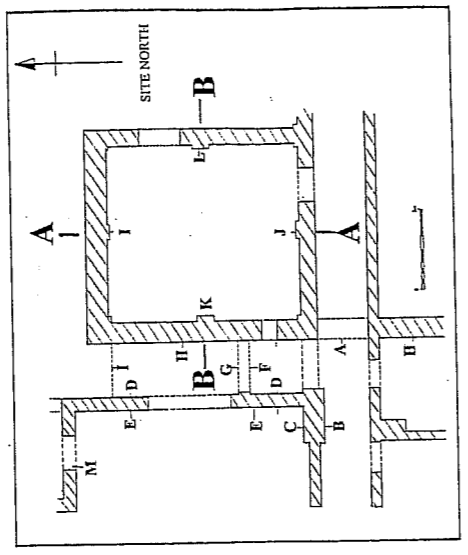
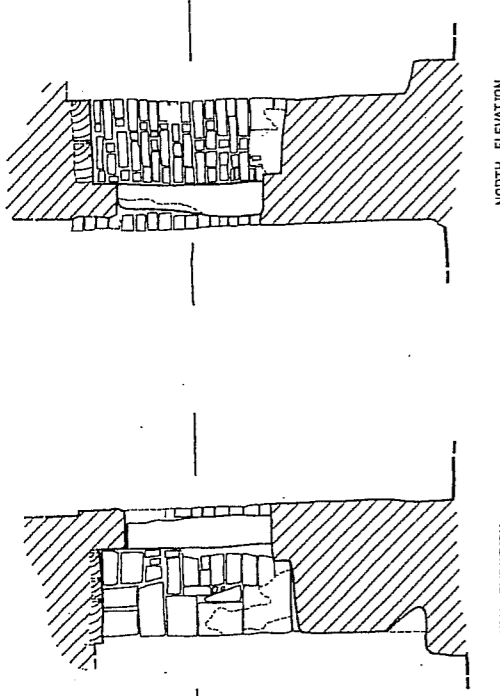
Fig 5

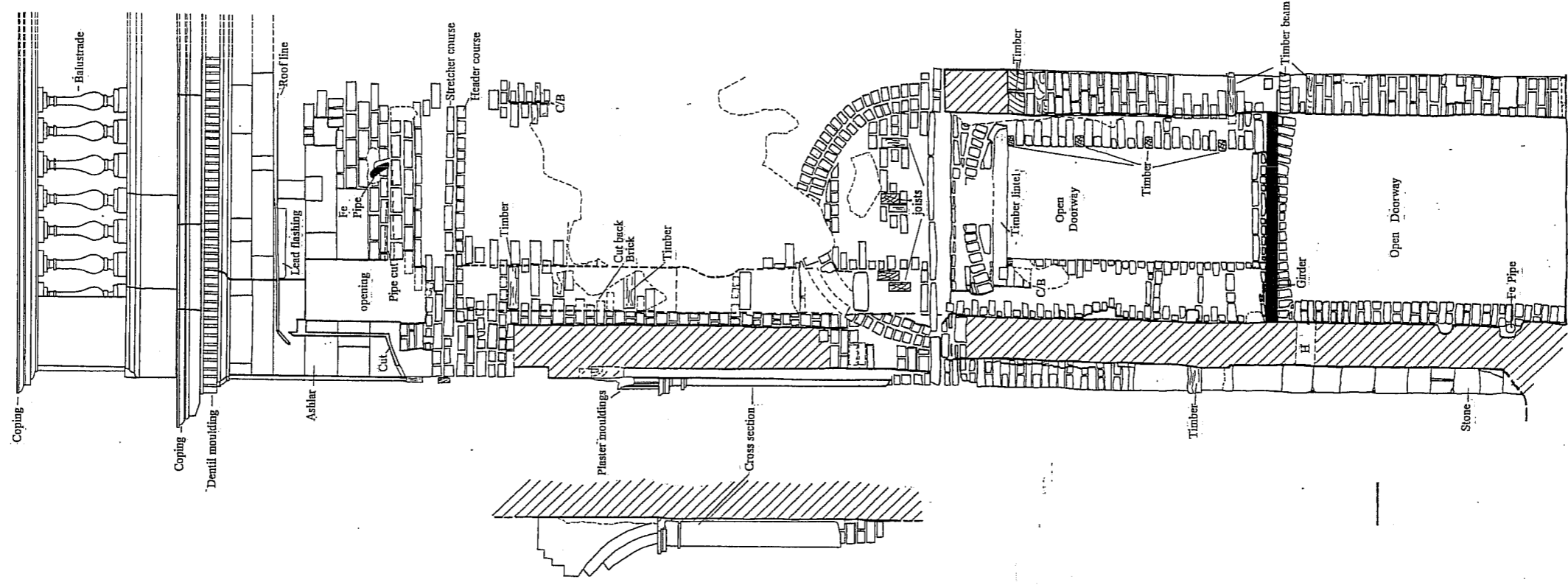
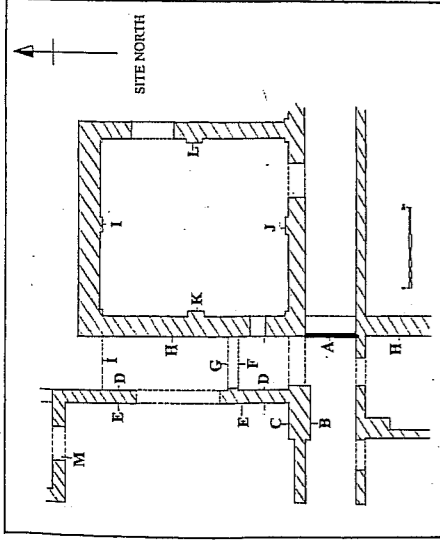


CROSS-SECTION A-A

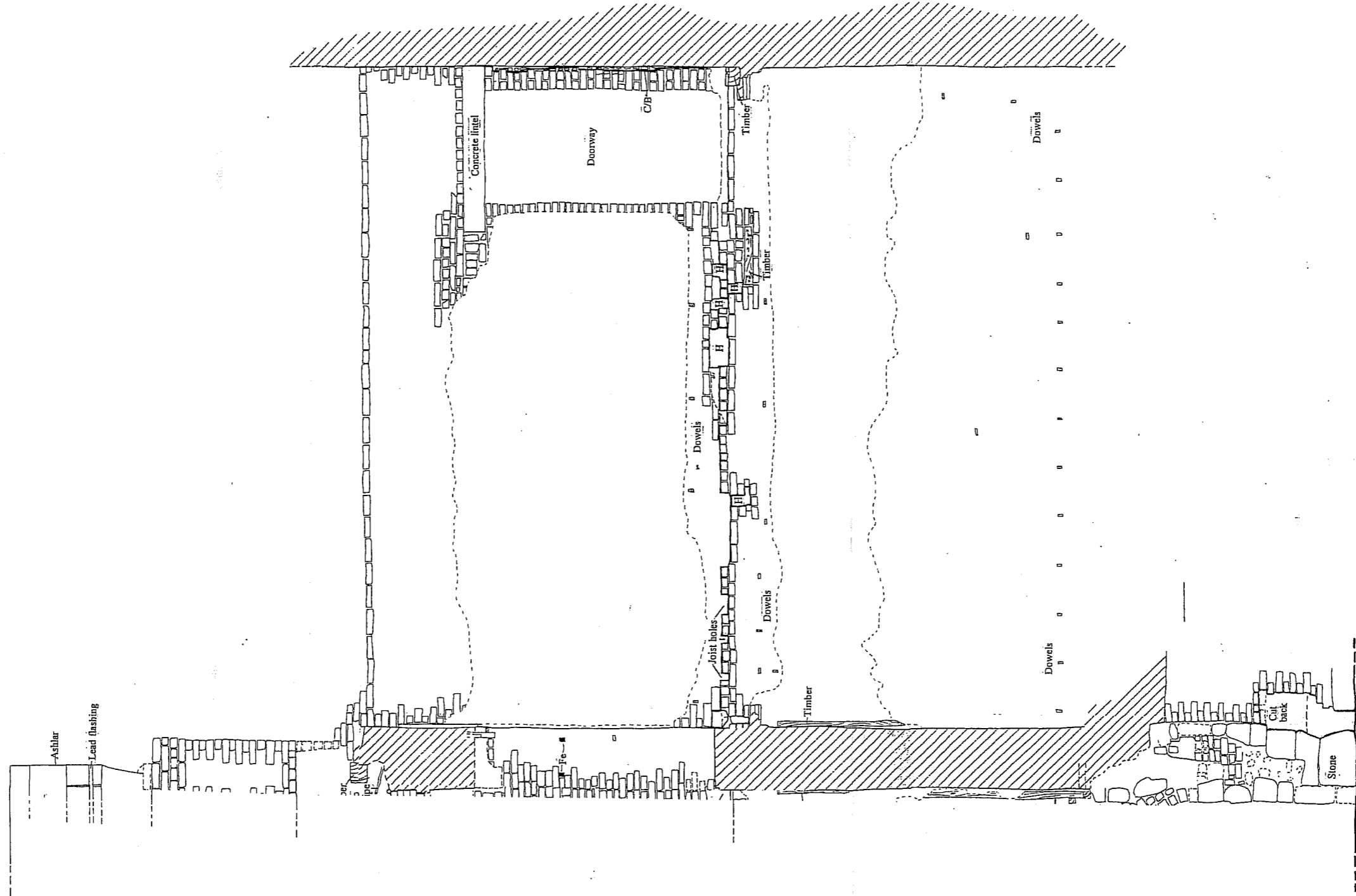
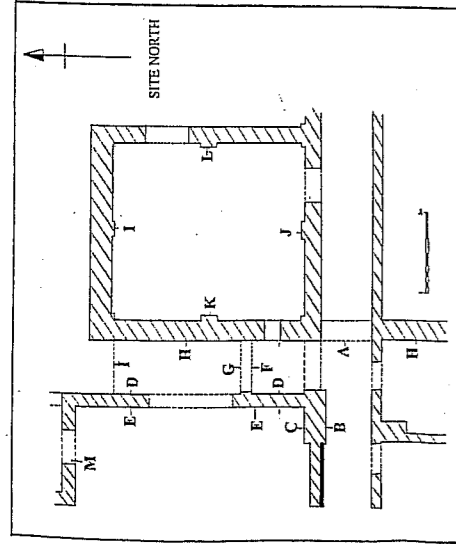


CROSS-SECTION B-B

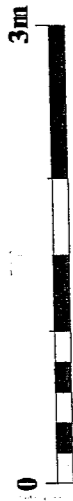
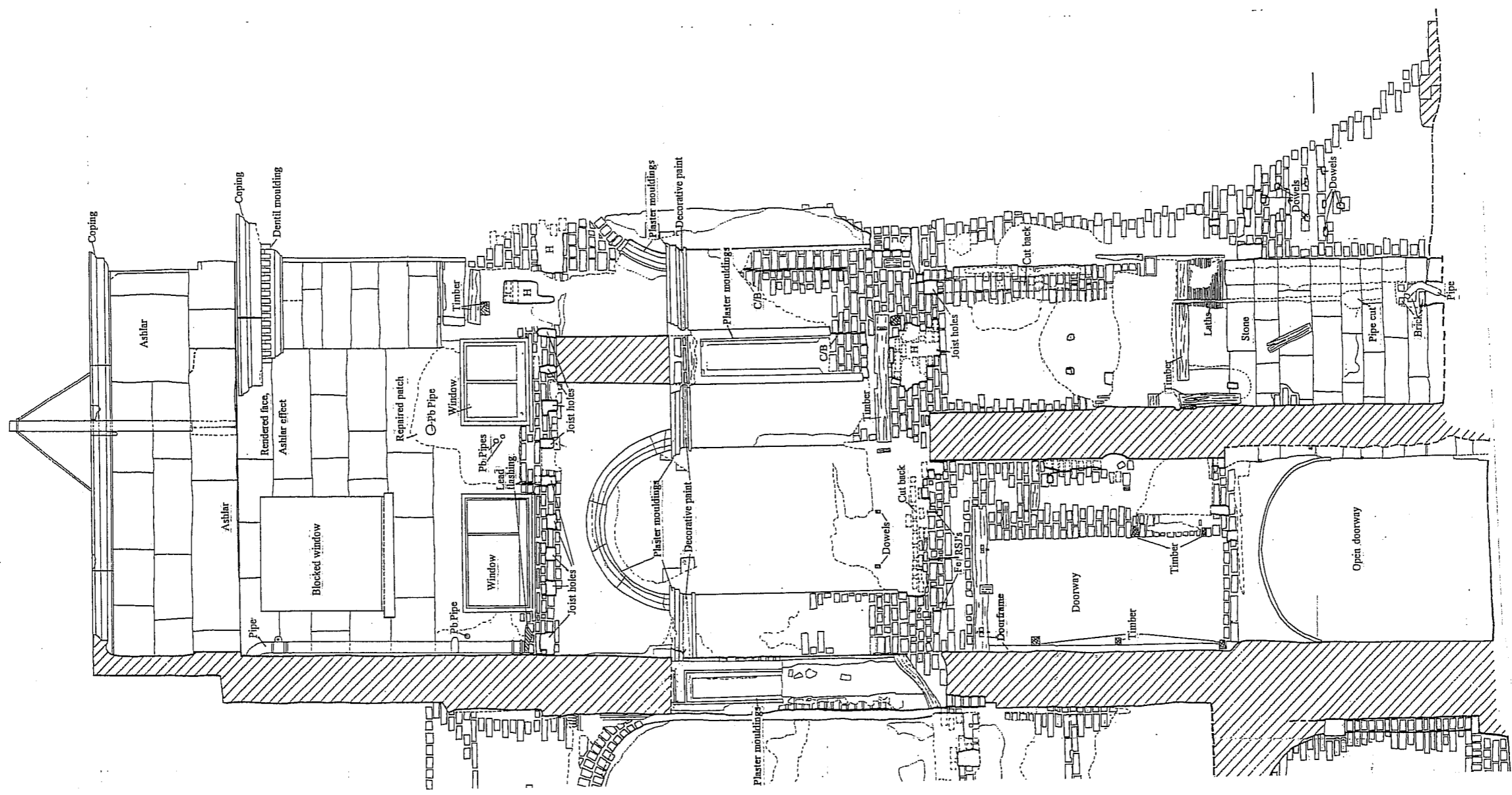
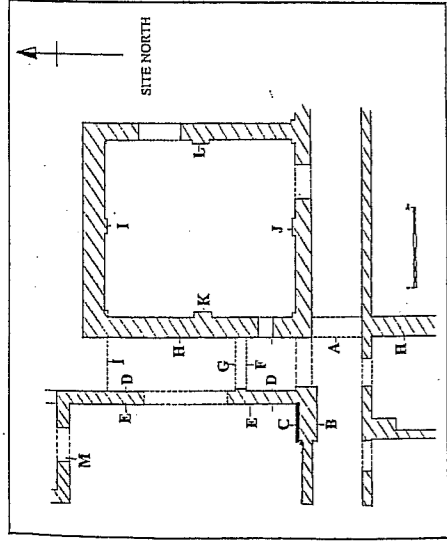




Elevation A, The West wall exterior.

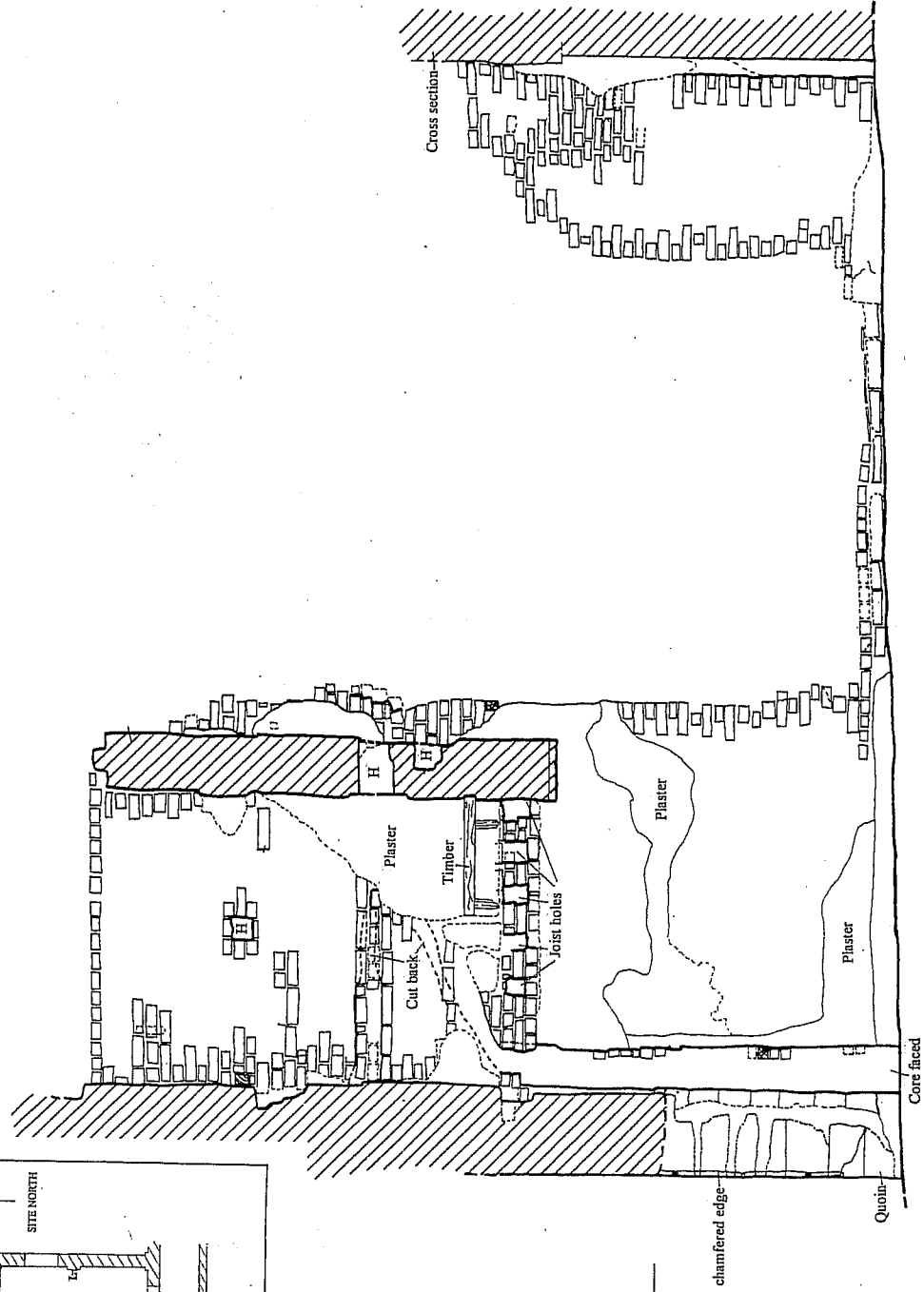
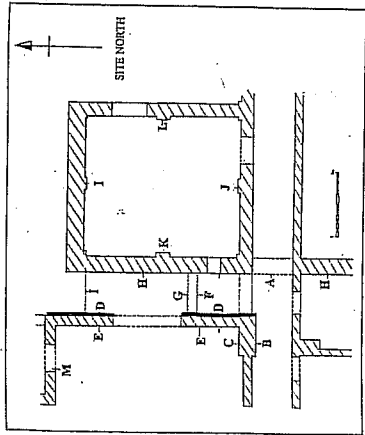


Elevation B, The South wall exterior.

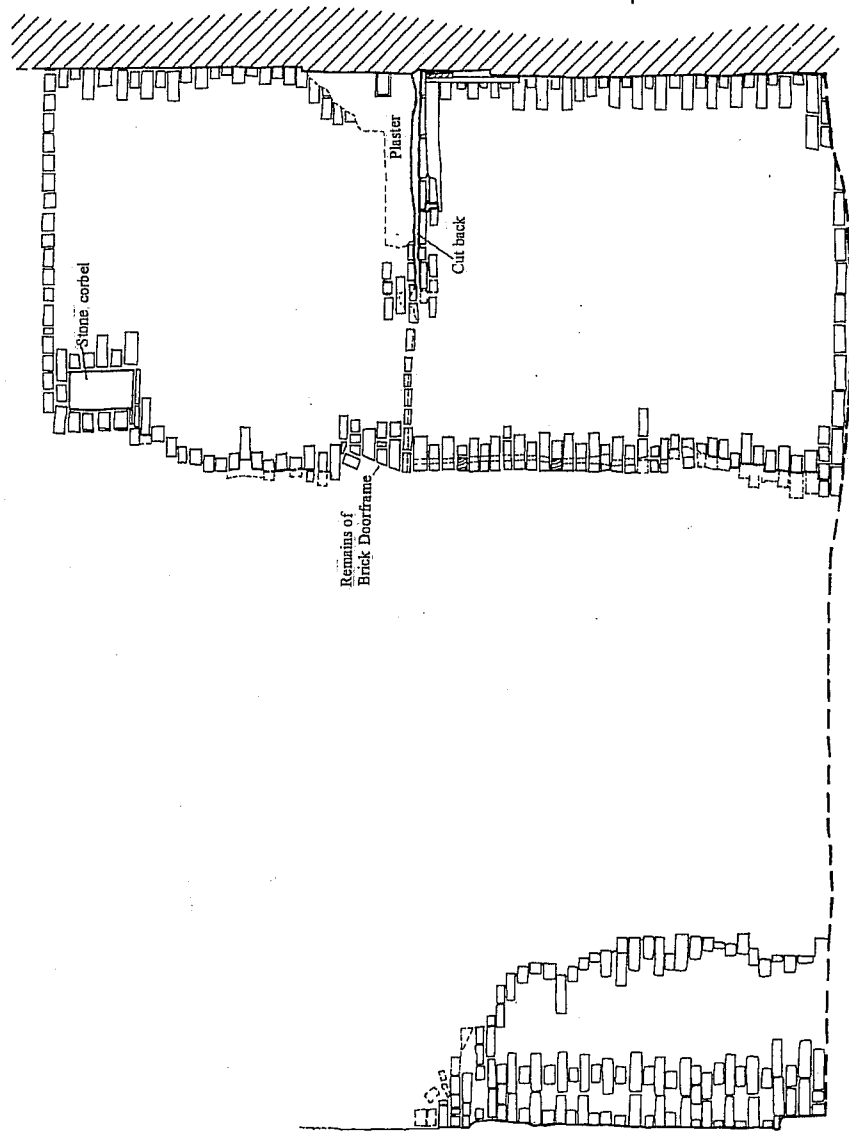
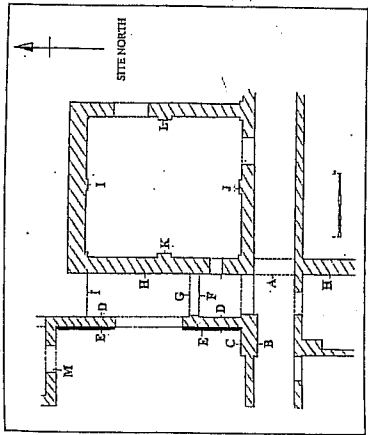


Elevation C, The South wall interior.

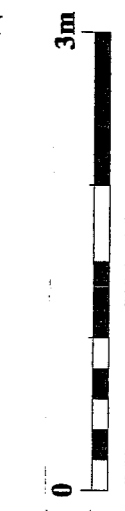
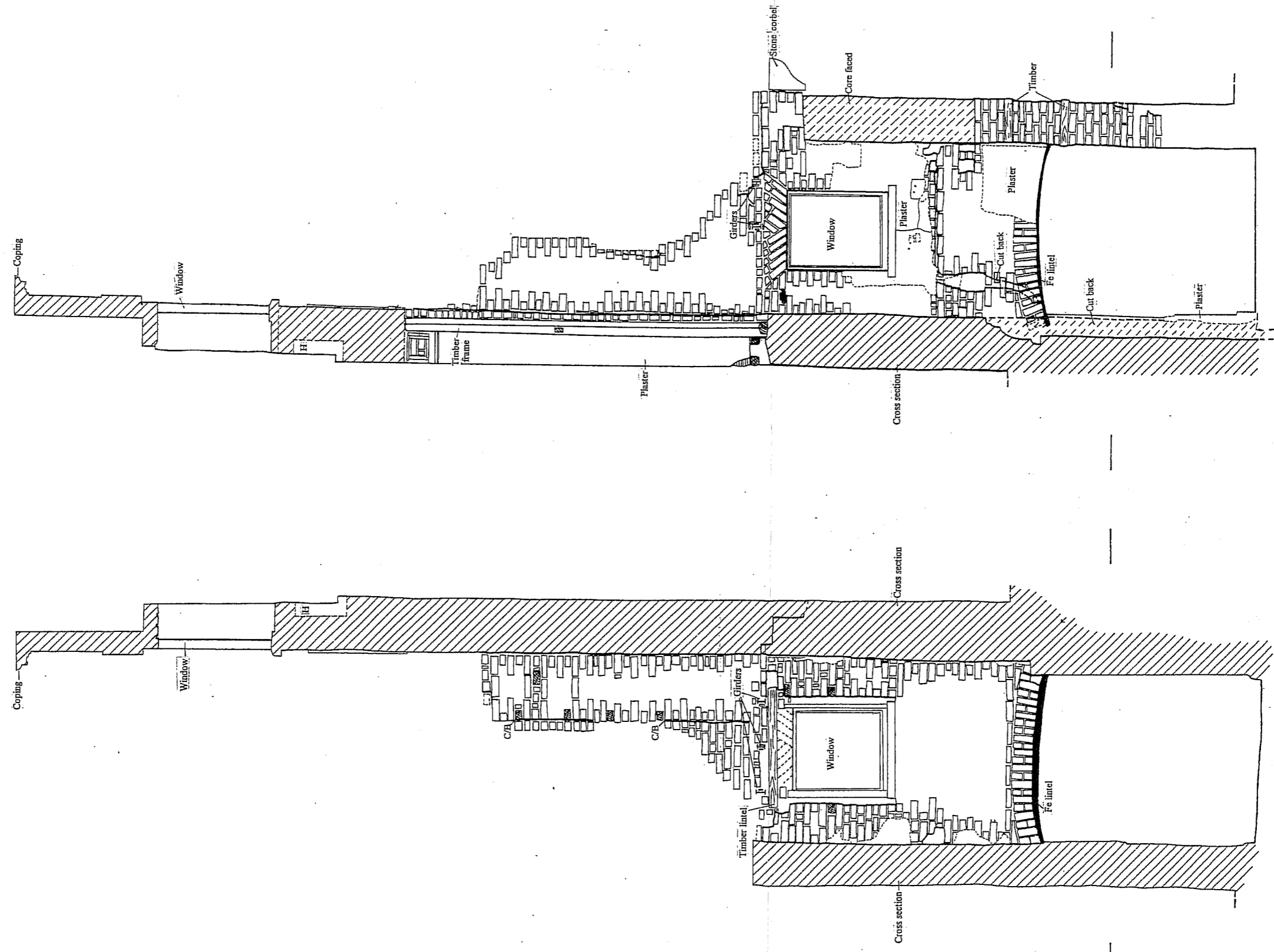
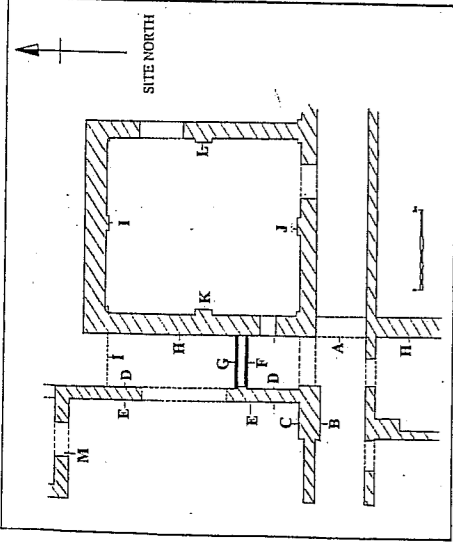




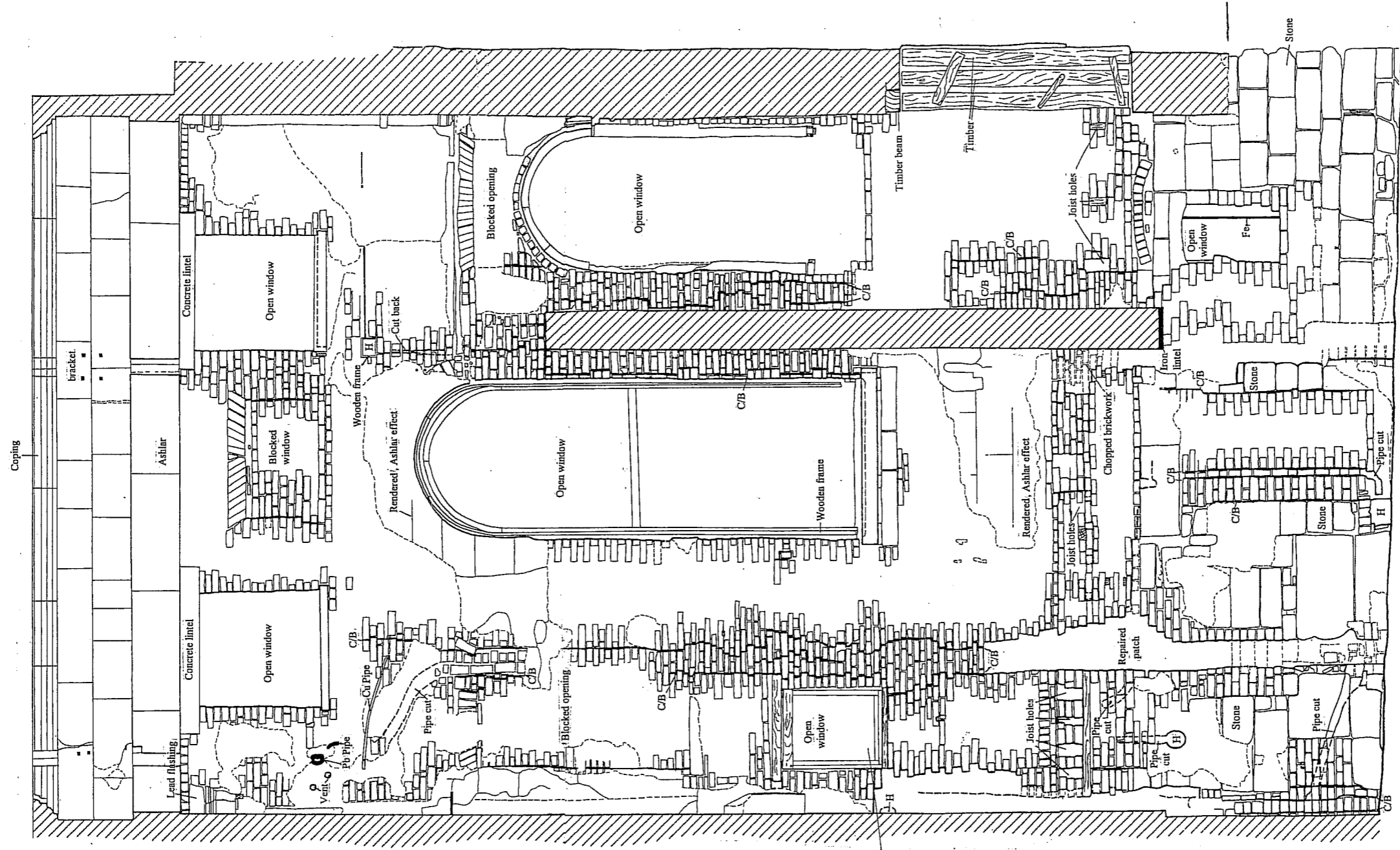
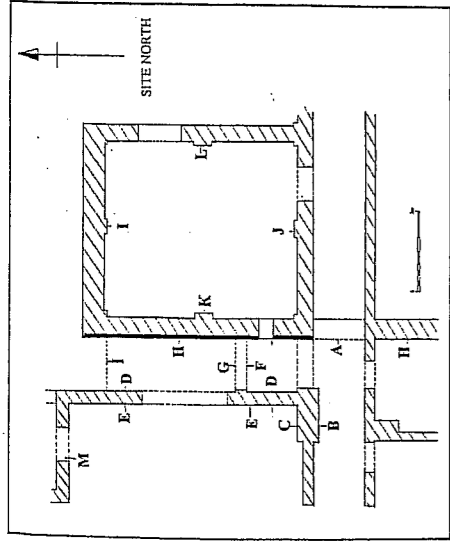
Elevation D, The East kitchen wall, exterior.



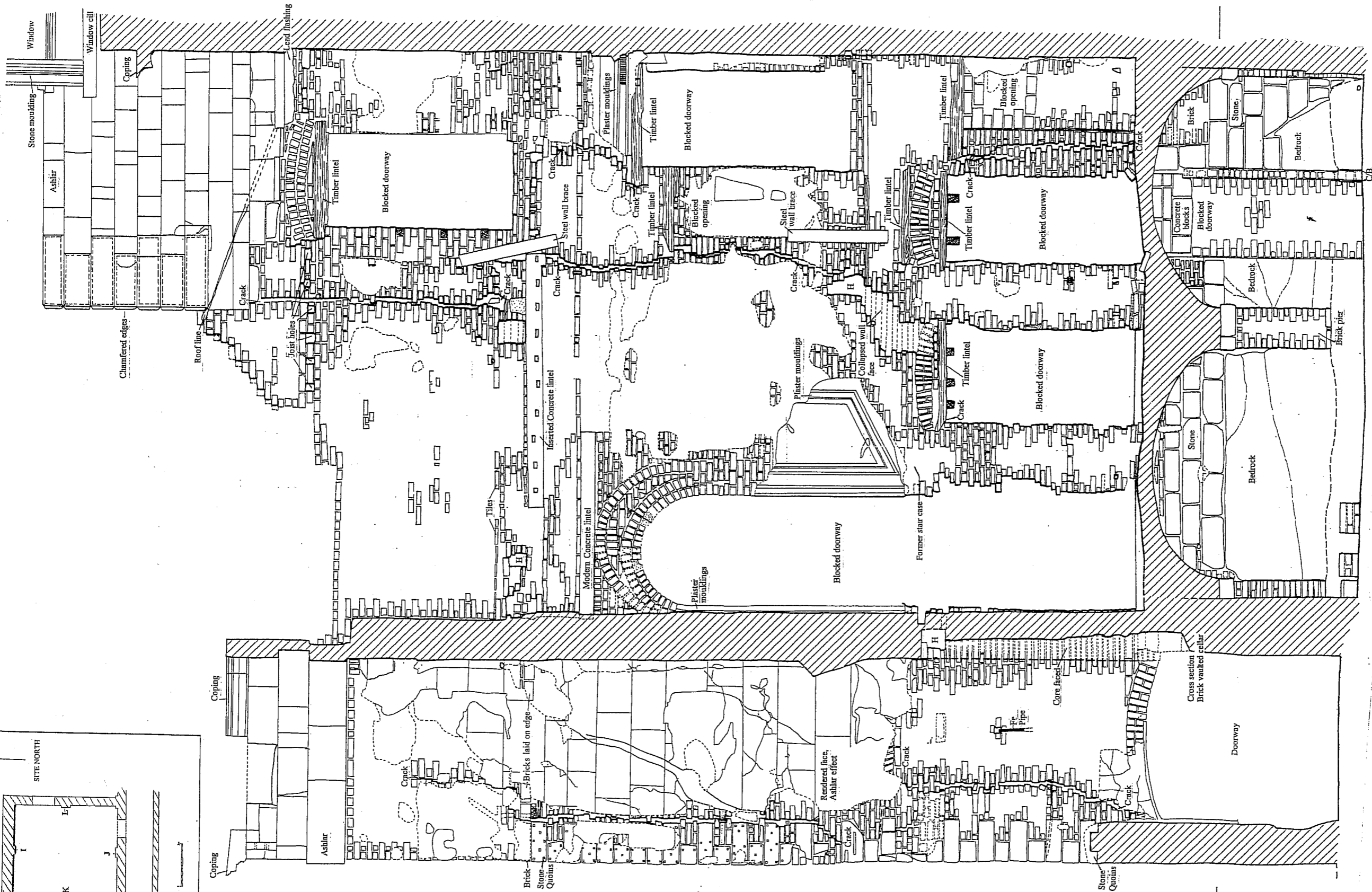
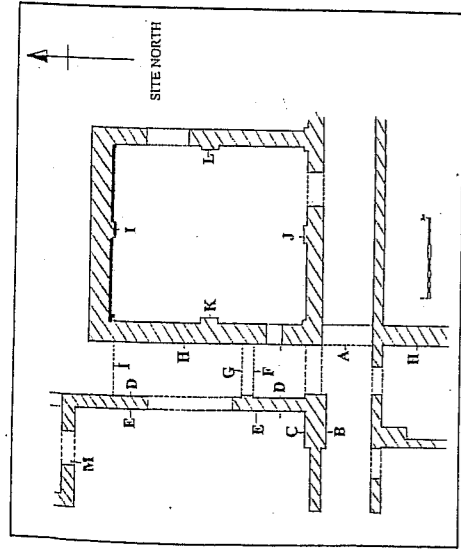
Elevation E, The East kitchen wall interior.



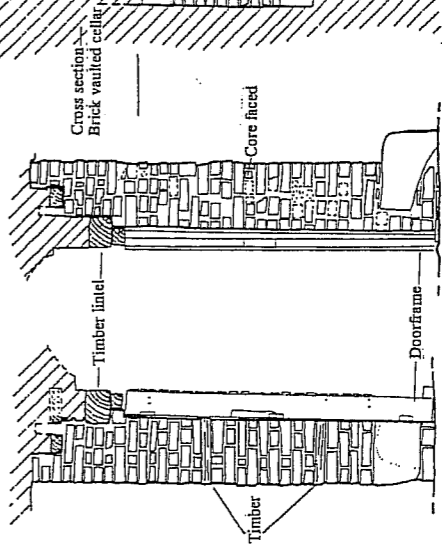
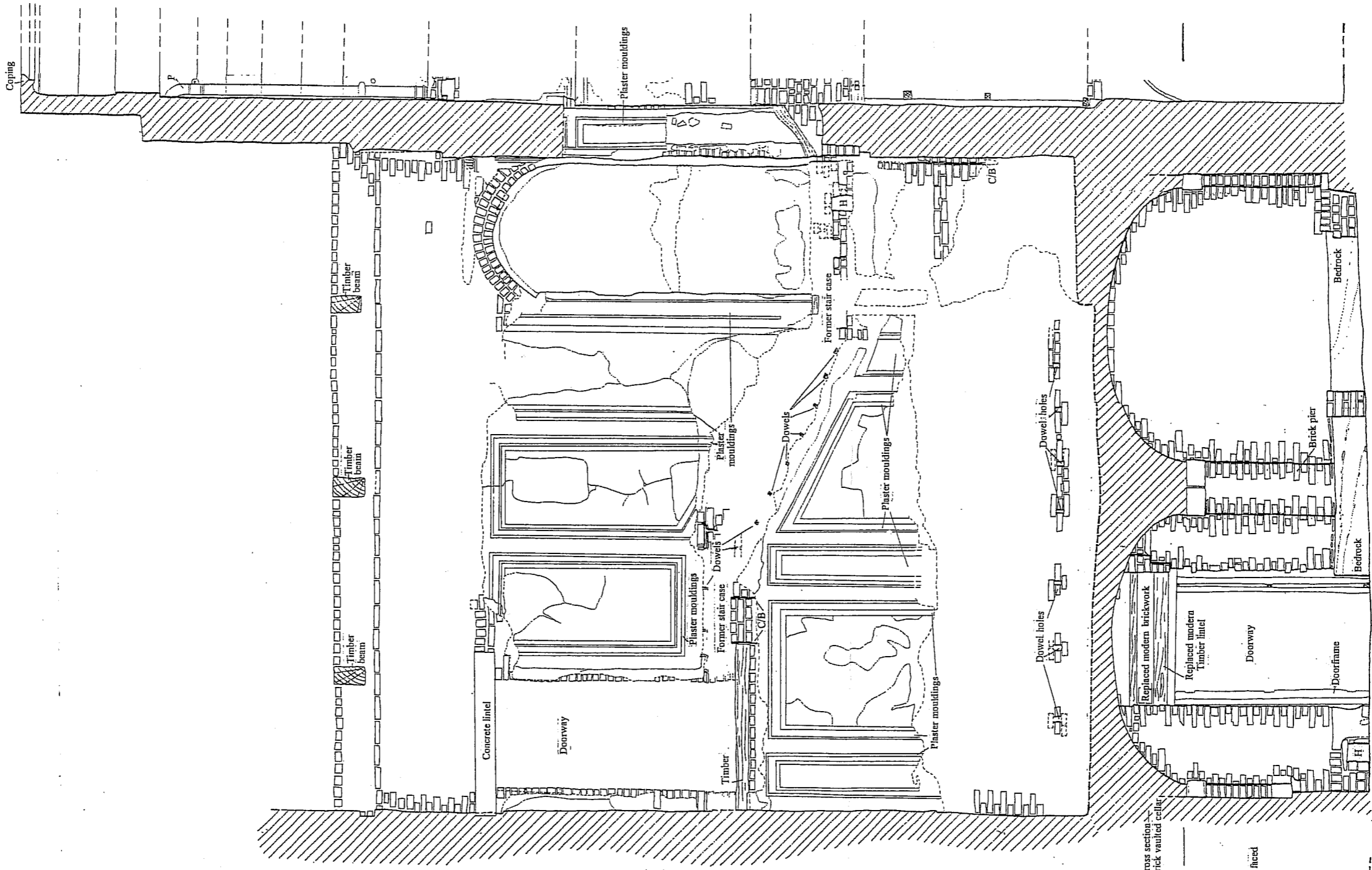
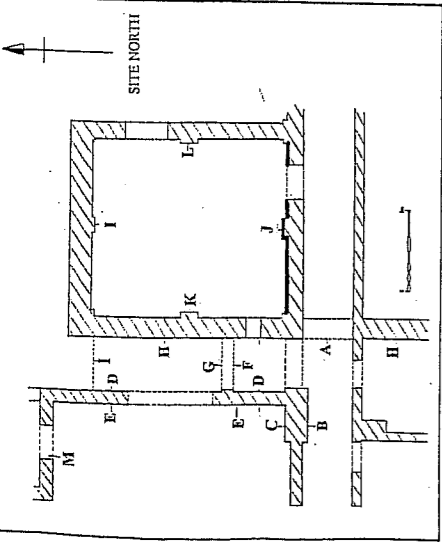
Elevations F and G, The North connecting wall.



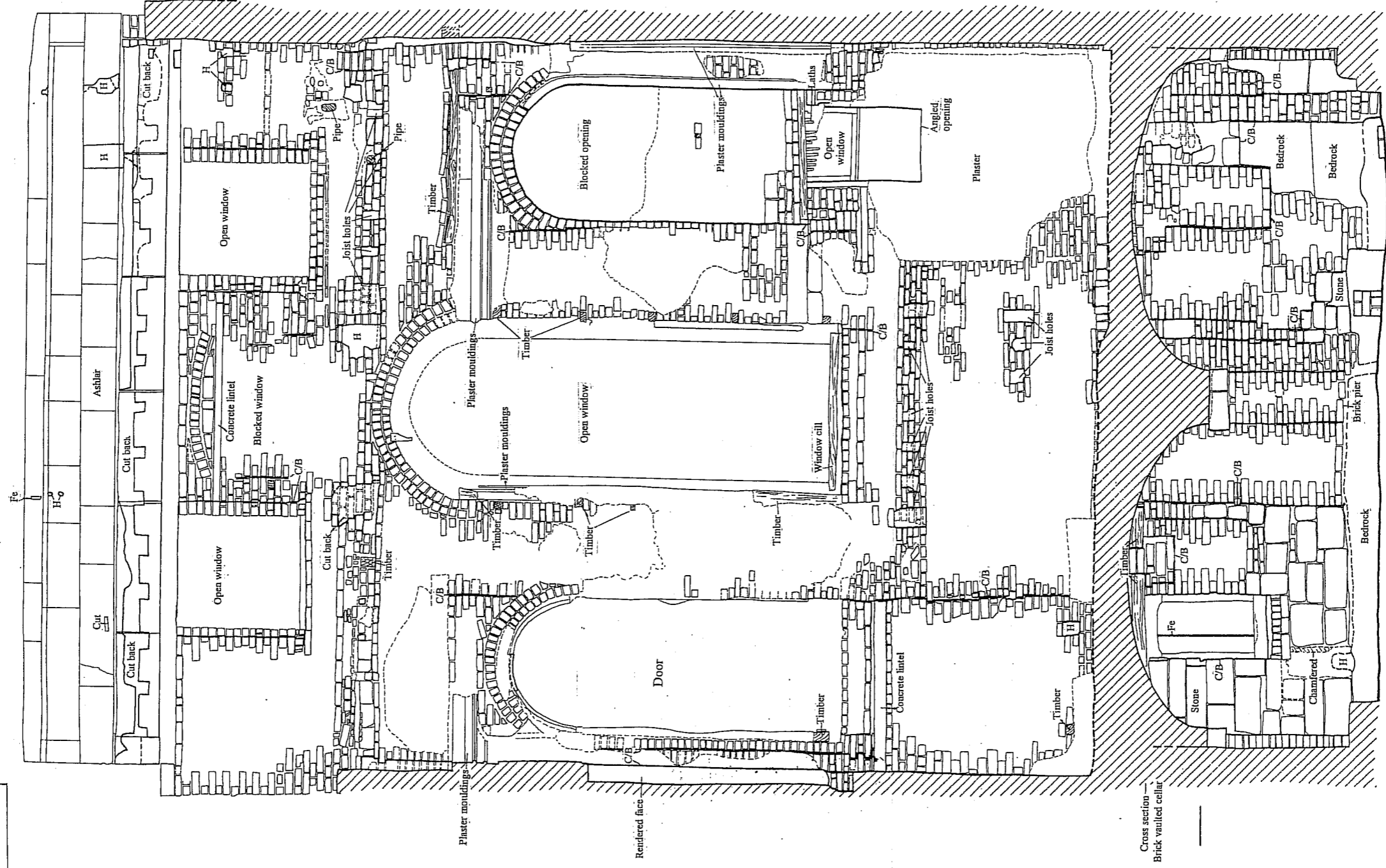
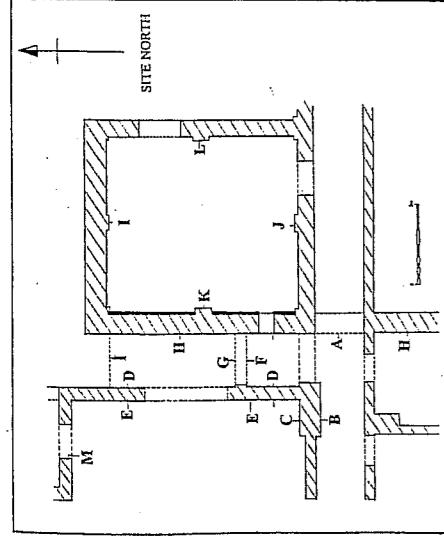
Elevation H, The West wall exterior.



Elevation I, The North wall interior.

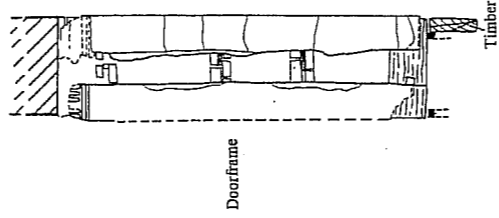
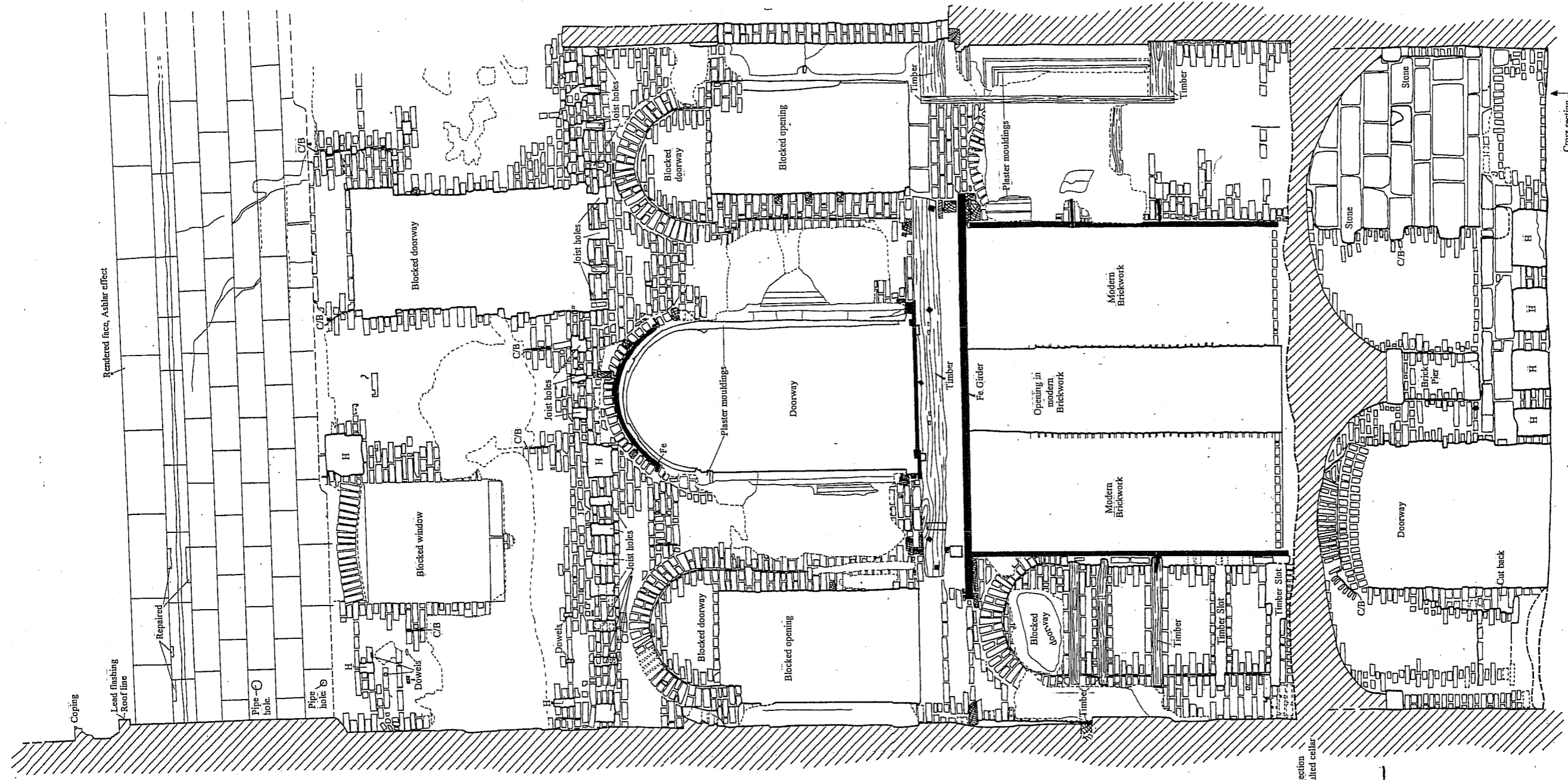
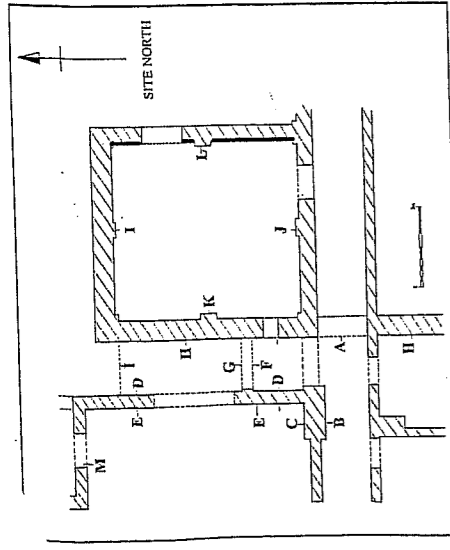


Elevation J, The South wall interior.

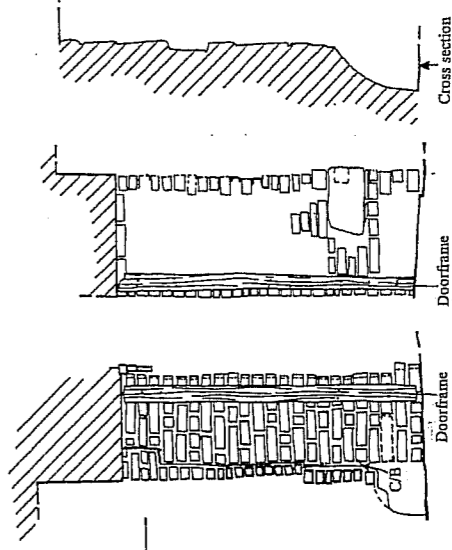


Cross section —  
Brick vaulted cellar

Elevation K, The West wall interior.

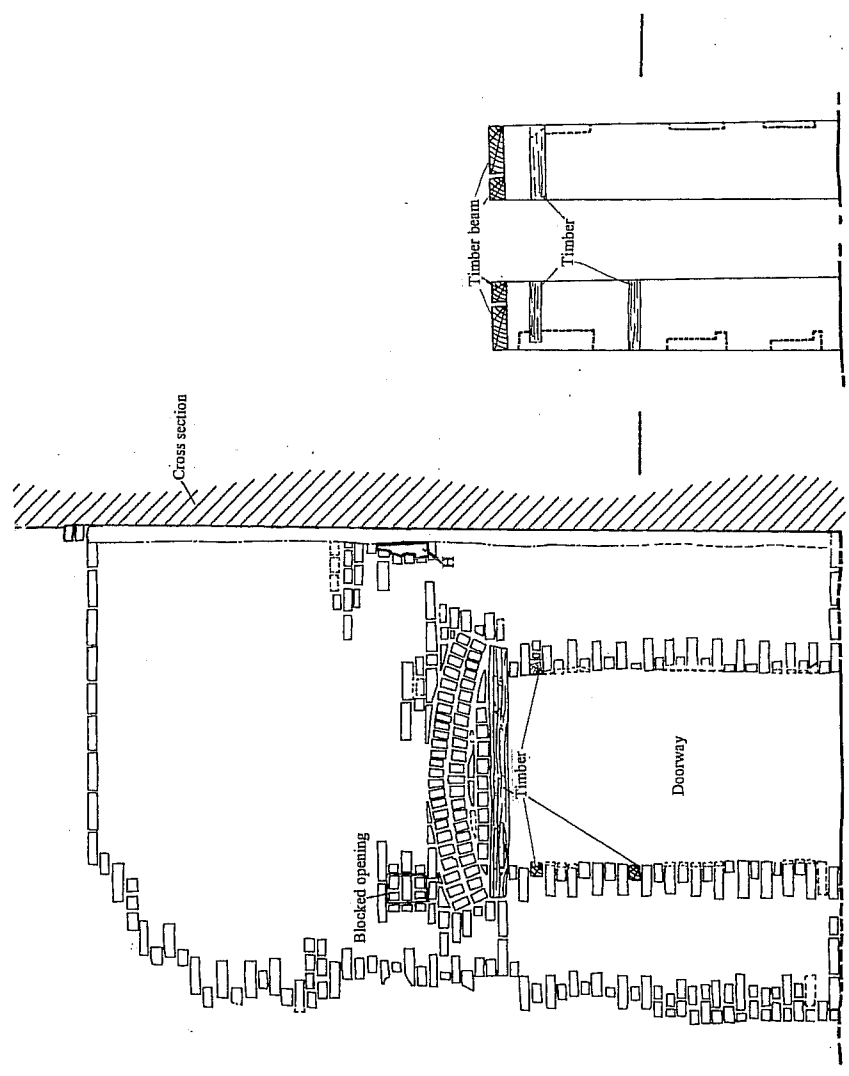
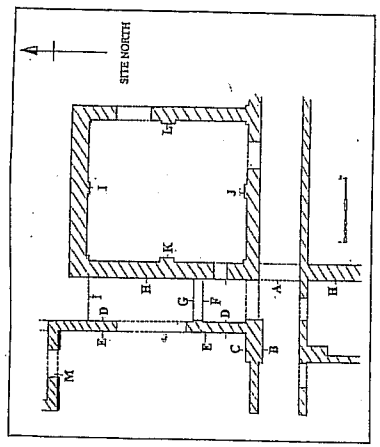


Doorway in cellar



Elevation L, The East wall interior.





Elevation M, The North kitchen wall interior.