

Report 2709



nps archaeology

**Historic Building Recording at  
East Week Farm, South Tawton, Devon.**

Prepared for  
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Venture House  
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<i>Issue 1</i>		

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## Contents

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<i>Summary</i> .....	1
1.0 Introduction .....	1
2.0 Historical Background .....	1
3.0 Methodology .....	3
4.0 Survey.....	6
4.1 First floor window in the east elevation.....	6
4.2 Cross passage screens .....	6
4.3 Staircase .....	11
4.4 Cross passage floor.....	14
4.5 Cobbled floor in the barn .....	14
5.0 Conclusions .....	15
6.0 Photographic Record .....	17
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	37
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	37

## Figures

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Plan of building
Figure 3	Internal and external elevations of window
Figure 4	North facing elevations of Southern Passage Screen
Figure 5	South facing elevations of Southern Passage Screen
Figure 6	North facing elevations of Northern Passage Screen
Figure 7	South facing elevations of Northern Passage Screen
Figure 8	North facing section through stairs
Figure 9	South facing section through stairs
Figure 10	East facing section through stairs
Figure 11	West facing section through stairs
Figure 12	Plans of stairs

## Plates

Plate 1	External view of window
Plate 2	External view of window, detail
Plate 3	Internal view of window, facing east
Plate 4	Internal view of window, facing east

Plate 5	Internal view of window from below
Plate 6	South passage screen, facing north
Plate 7	South screen, facing north
Plate 8	South screen, facing north
Plate 9	South screen, west end, facing north
Plate 10	Worn chamfer on south screen, south elevation
Plate 11	Chamfer on south screen, south elevation
Plate 12	South screen, south elevation, east end
Plate 13	Ceiling timber above south screen
Plate 14	South screen, north elevation
Plate 15	Cross-section through southern screen
Plate 16	Width of southern screen, facing west
Plate 17	North screen passage, south elevation
Plate 18	Staircase, facing south
Plate 19	Stairs facing west
Plate 20	Stairs facing south
Plate 21	Stairs from above, facing west
Plate 22	Stairs from above, facing north
Plate 23	Stairs facing north-east
Plate 24	Stairs from above, facing south
Plate 25	Below staircase, facing west
Plate 26	Below staircase, facing west
Plate 27	Cross passage from east door, facing west
Plate 28	Cobbled floor to west, facing east
Plate 29	Cobbled floor to east
Plate 30	Cobbled floor to west, detail
Plate 31	Cobbled floor to west
Plate 32	Cross passage facing west
Plate 33	Cobbled floor at east end
Plate 34	Cobbled floor at north end of barn
Plate 35	Cobbled floor at north end of barn
Plate 36	Cobbled floor at north end of barn, facing south
Plate 37	Cobbled floor at north end of barn, facing south-east

Location: East Week Farm, South Tawton, Devon  
District: West Devon  
Grid Ref: SX 665 919  
OASIS Ref.: 103813  
Client: NPS South West  
Dates of Fieldwork: 17-24 May 2011

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## **Summary**

*In May 2011 a targeted historic building survey was undertaken by NPS Archaeology of a barn at East Week Farm, South Tawton, Devon. The survey was targeted at specific structures and features within the barn to provide details on their condition and significance to inform plans for the redevelopment of the building. The survey concentrated on the cross passage screens, the staircase, a first floor window and areas of what appeared to be original cobbled floor.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In May 2011 a targeted historic building survey was undertaken of structures within a barn at East Week Farm, South Tawton, Devon (Fig. 1). The survey commissioned by NPS South West on behalf of Dartmoor National Park Authority forms part of a wider management plan designed to inform the redevelopment of the building.

The survey was designed to record details relating to the form, function, date, extent, phasing, character, status and significance of the cross passage screens, the staircase, a window and areas of original cobbled floor through a drawn, photographic and written record, the results of which are presented below.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and will be retained pending consultation regarding appropriate deposition.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The historic development of East Week Farm has been covered in detail elsewhere (Thorp and Horton 2009) and is not to be repeated here, beyond a summary to place the surveyed building in context.

East Week barn appears to have developed during the late medieval period as a typical Dartmoor longhouse, with livestock and people housed in the same building separated by the central cross passage (Fig. 2). The building underwent some significant internal remodelling in the later 17th century at a time when people began to want more comfort and privacy and similar improvements were common and widespread. It is from this remodelling phase that the key structures recorded in this survey date and as such they are significant features in the building's history.

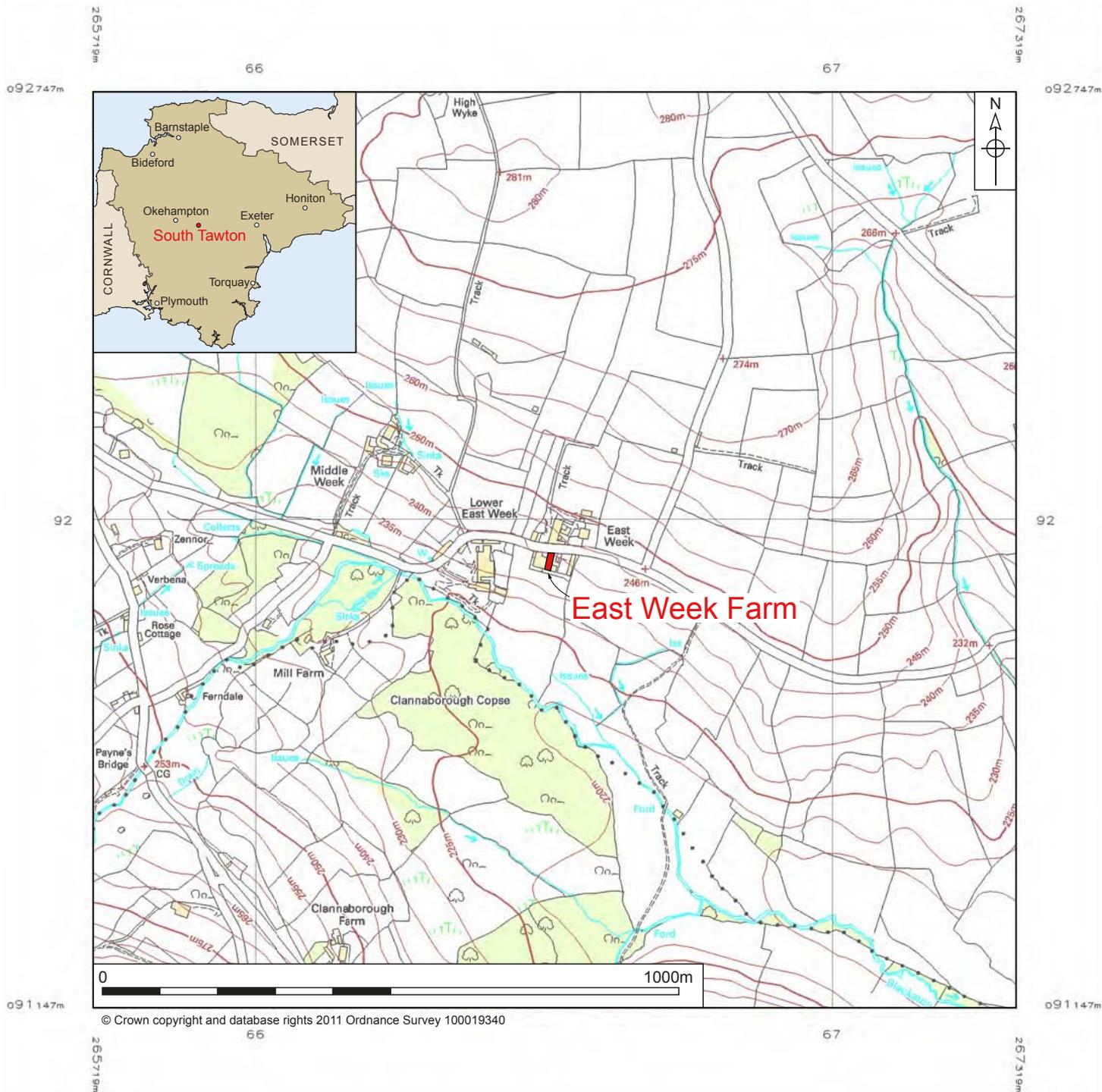


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this survey was to create a record of the identified structures that included the following three elements:

A black and white photographic record using 35mm film; digital photographs were also taken.

A drawn record, highlighting structurally significant features, fixtures and fittings

A summary written record

The work undertaken conforms to guidelines set out within *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good practice* (English Heritage 2006) Level 2 survey.

The structures surveyed in detail were the cross passage screens, the staircase and a first floor window. Notes were also made on the areas of possible original cobbled floor throughout the building.

The timbers in the cross passage screens and the staircase have been individually numbered to allow them to be dismantled and reused if necessary.

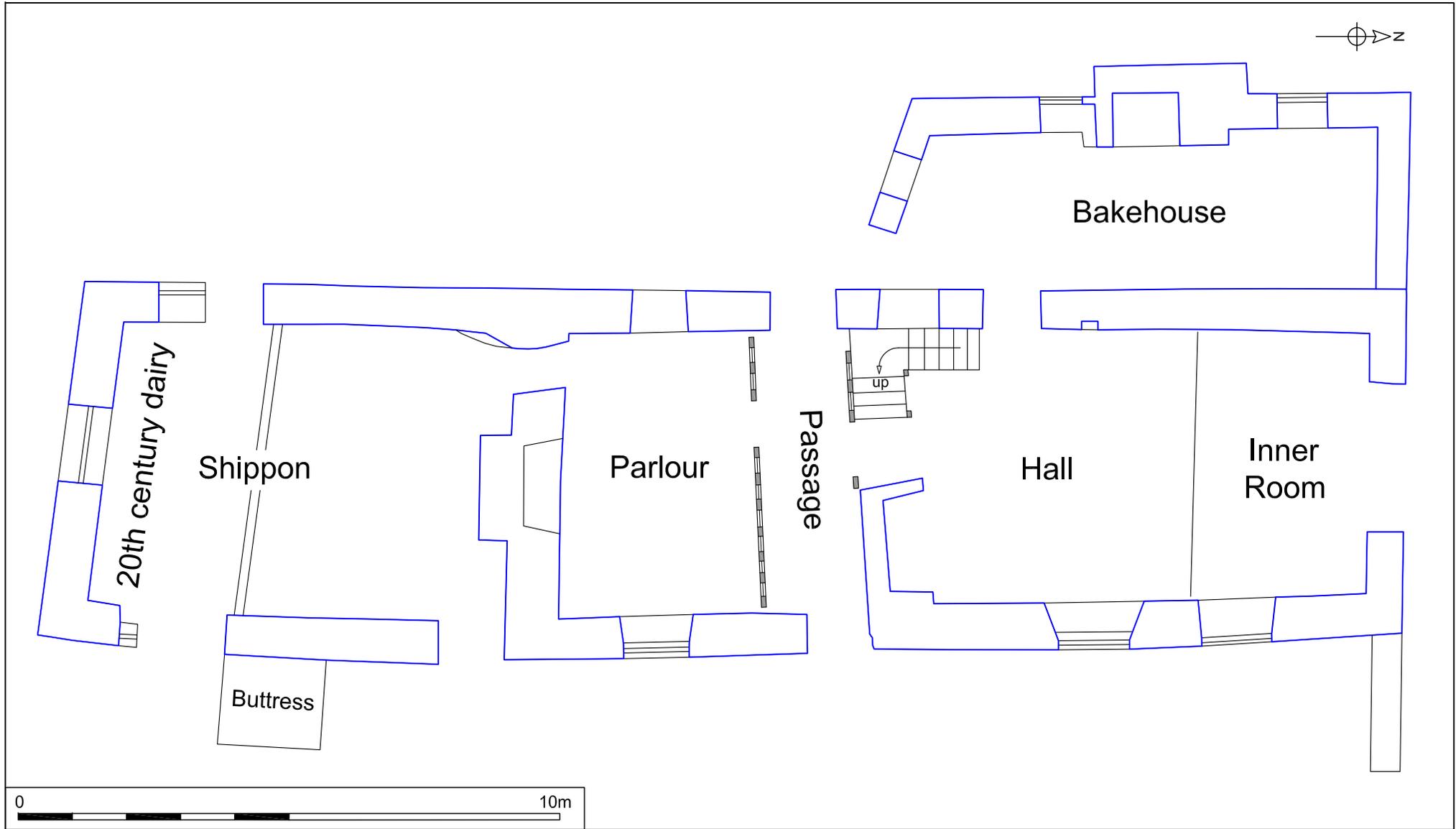
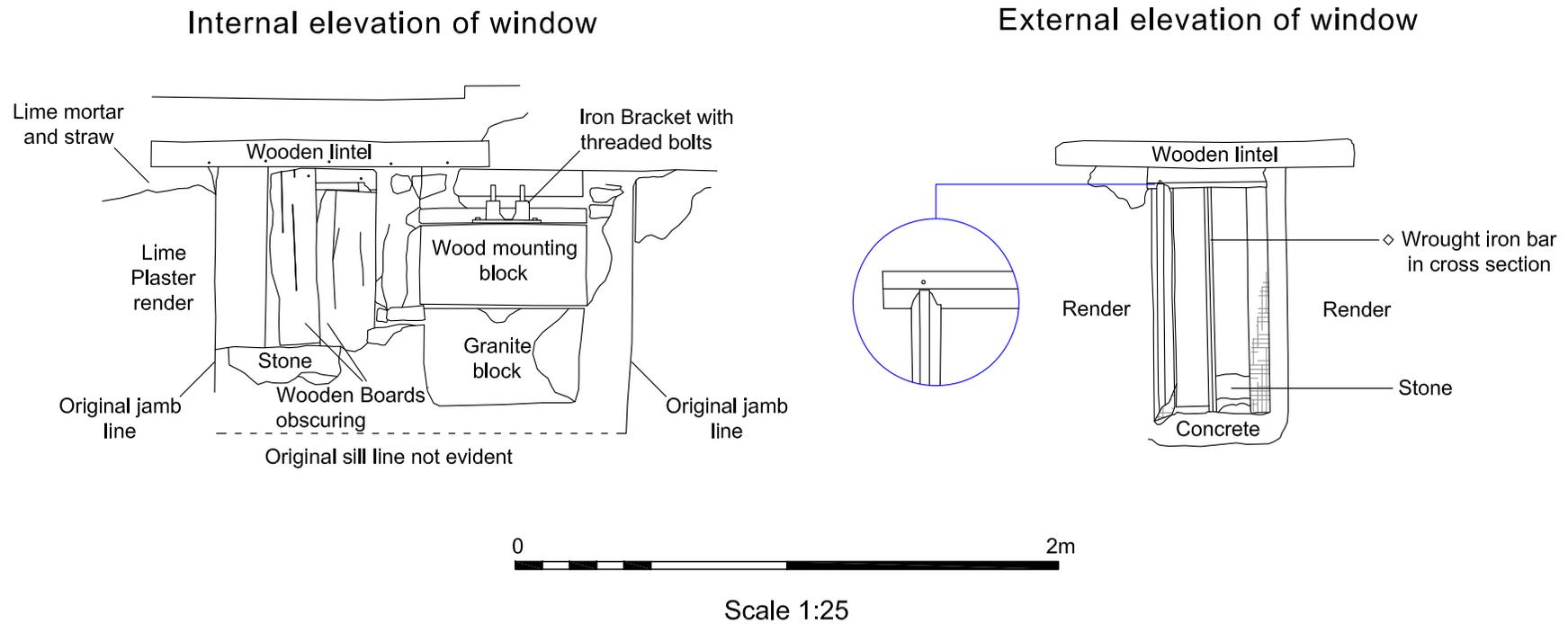


Figure 2. Plan of building. Scale 1:100



**Figure 3.** Internal and external elevations of window

## **4.0 SURVEY**

### **4.1 First floor window in the east elevation**

(Fig. 3; Plates 1-5)

Annotated elevations were drawn of the window at 1:10 and photographed. Further recording was not possible due to an active bees' nest in the wall next to the window.

The window was originally c.1.5m wide x c.1m high, but has since been reduced in width to c.0.4m by stone blocking of the southern section. The existing opening has a timber frame and central wrought iron mullion and it has been boarded up. The original southern jamb is visible as a line in the internal plaster. The northern edge of the window appears to be original and has a flared plastered reveal and it is interesting to note that the later southern reveal has also been flared to match the original north side. The timber lintel does not extend across the full width of the original window and appears to have been put in when the window was reduced in size.

The stone blocking has been externally rendered and internally lime washed. A large projecting granite block with a rounded end appears to have been incorporated into the blocking at some time and this supports a squared timber block with a large iron fitting, which appears to have been lined up with a hole and timber in the opposite wall. The timber block is secured in place by a concrete block. It is unclear if the granite block was put in to deliberately support the timber block or whether it was an existing feature. The original purpose of the timber block and iron fitting is uncertain, although it would have provided an incredibly secure anchor point.

The granite block has a notch carved in the top surface that does not seem to relate to its use as the support for the timber block and its size (c.0.35m thick) and projecting form do not seem consistent with its use as a sill in the original window. Therefore, it is most likely that it has been reused from elsewhere. It is possible that further details on the block may be revealed if it is removed during the renovation works.

In general the window is in relatively poor condition, with the timber frame being fairly rotten and the external and internal wall finishes needing attention. The presence of a nest of bees is also a consideration as it is likely to be in, or have created, a cavity in the wall, which may be of some size. Relocation of the colony rather than eradication may be recommended.

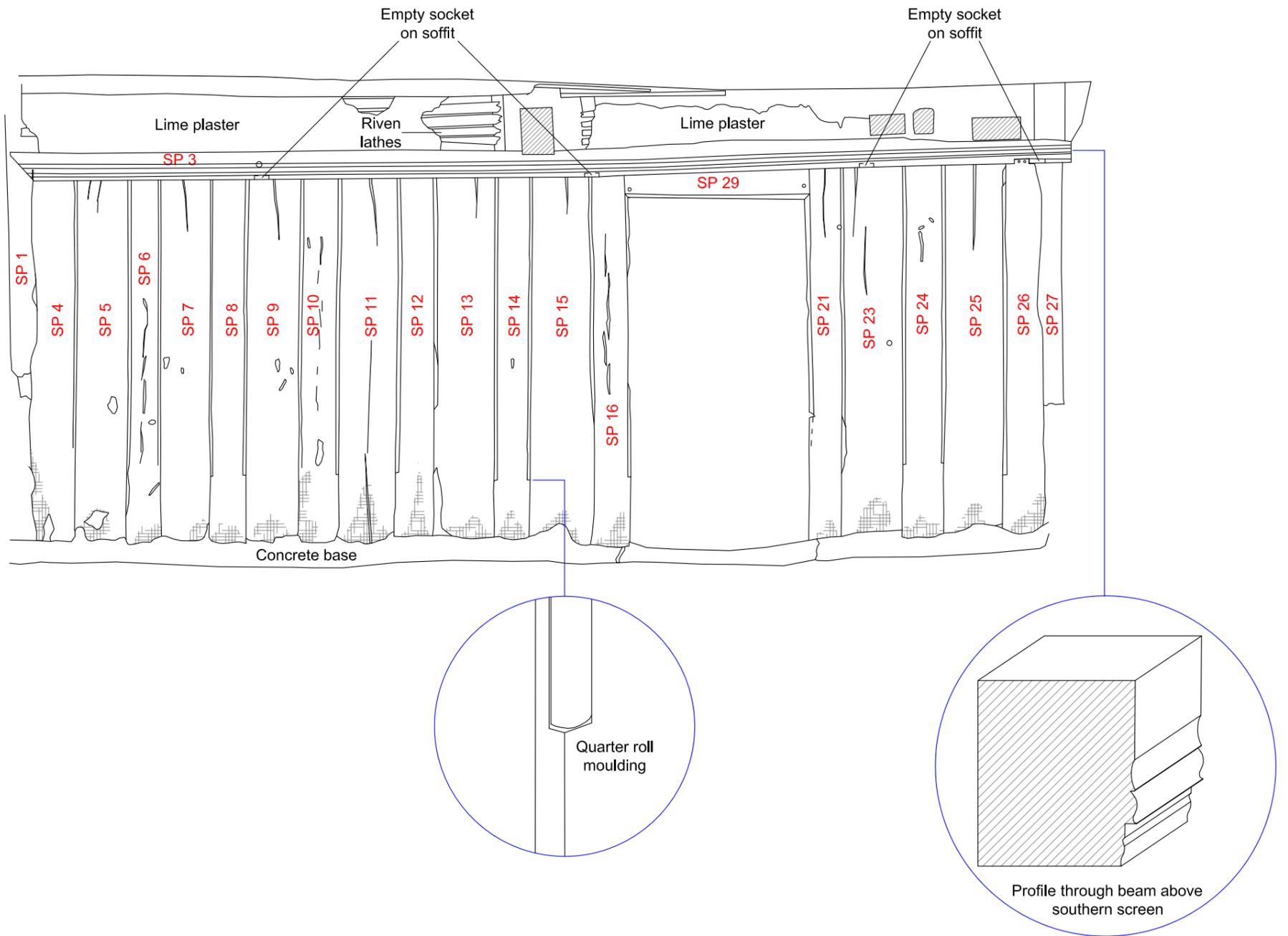
### **4.2 Cross passage screens**

(South screen: Figs 4-5 Plates 6-16; North screen: Figs 6-7, Plate 17)

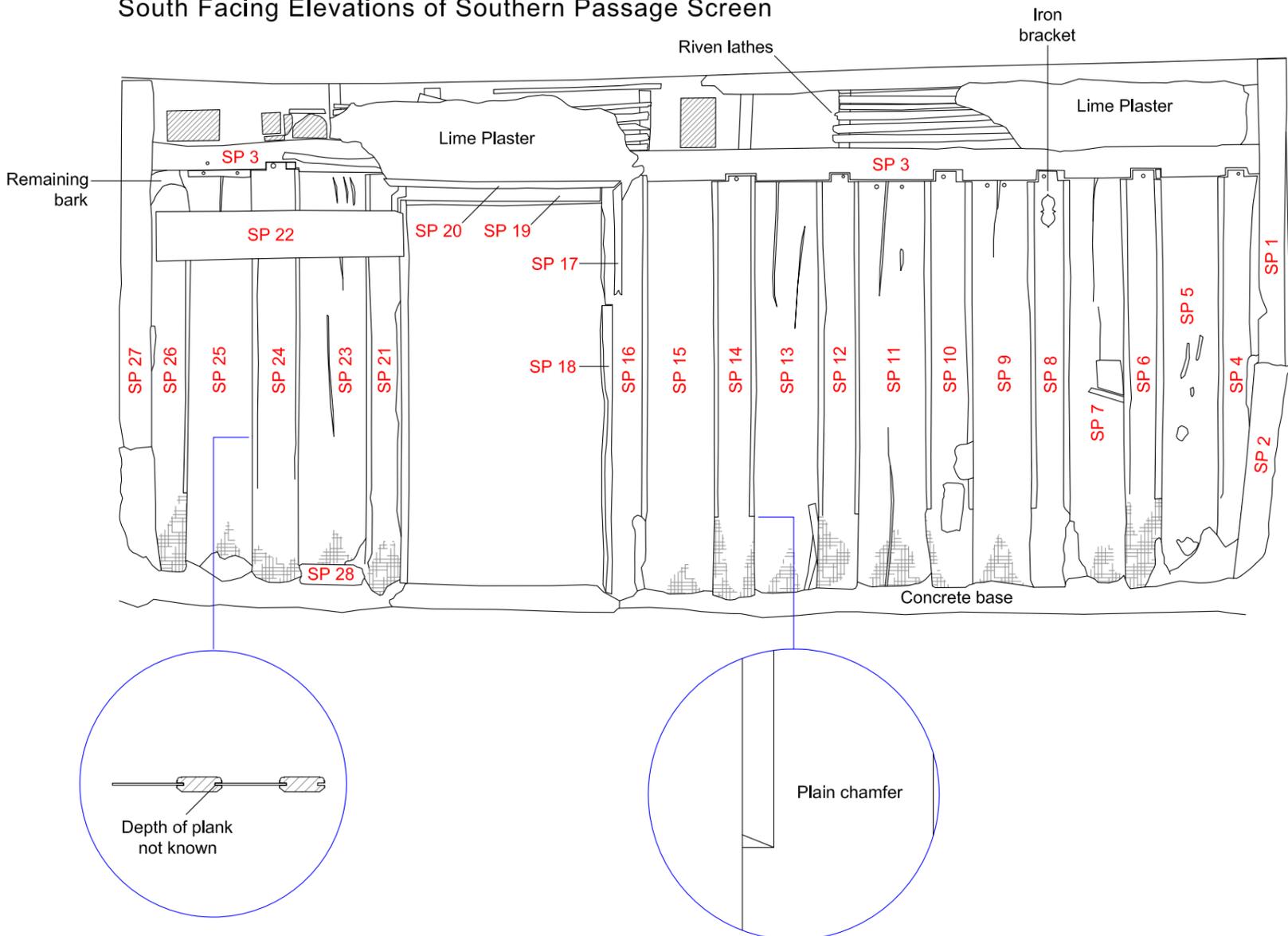
The cross passage screens have been described in detail elsewhere (Thorp and Horton 2009), so this section will concentrate on specific details of the screens and the issues surrounding their removal and possible reuse. The screens were drawn at 1:10 and all elevations were recorded.

There is no doubt that the cross passage is the principal feature of the building as it dictates how the building is entered and how it is perceived. The screens date

**Figure 4**  
North Facing Elevations of Southern Passage Screen

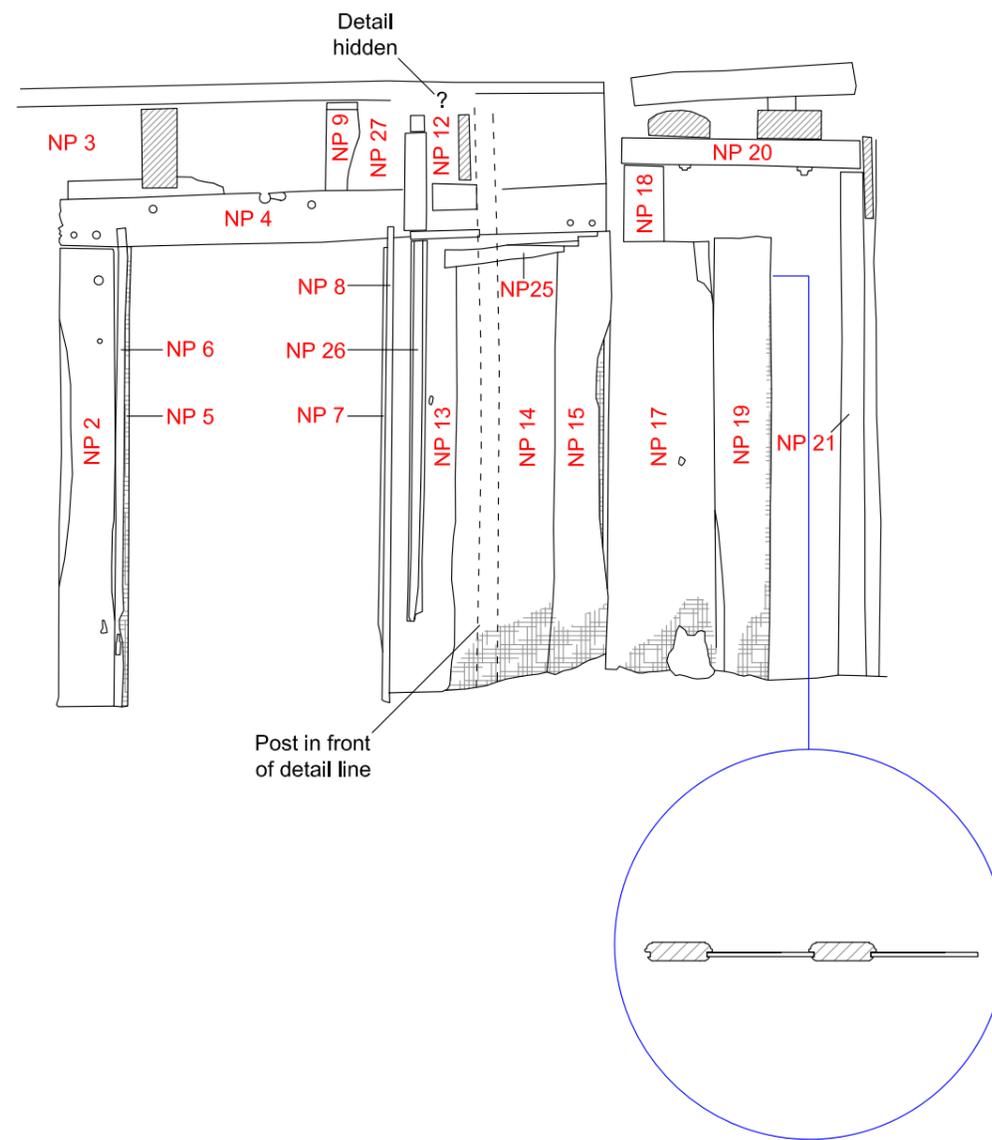


**Figure 5**  
South Facing Elevations of Southern Passage Screen

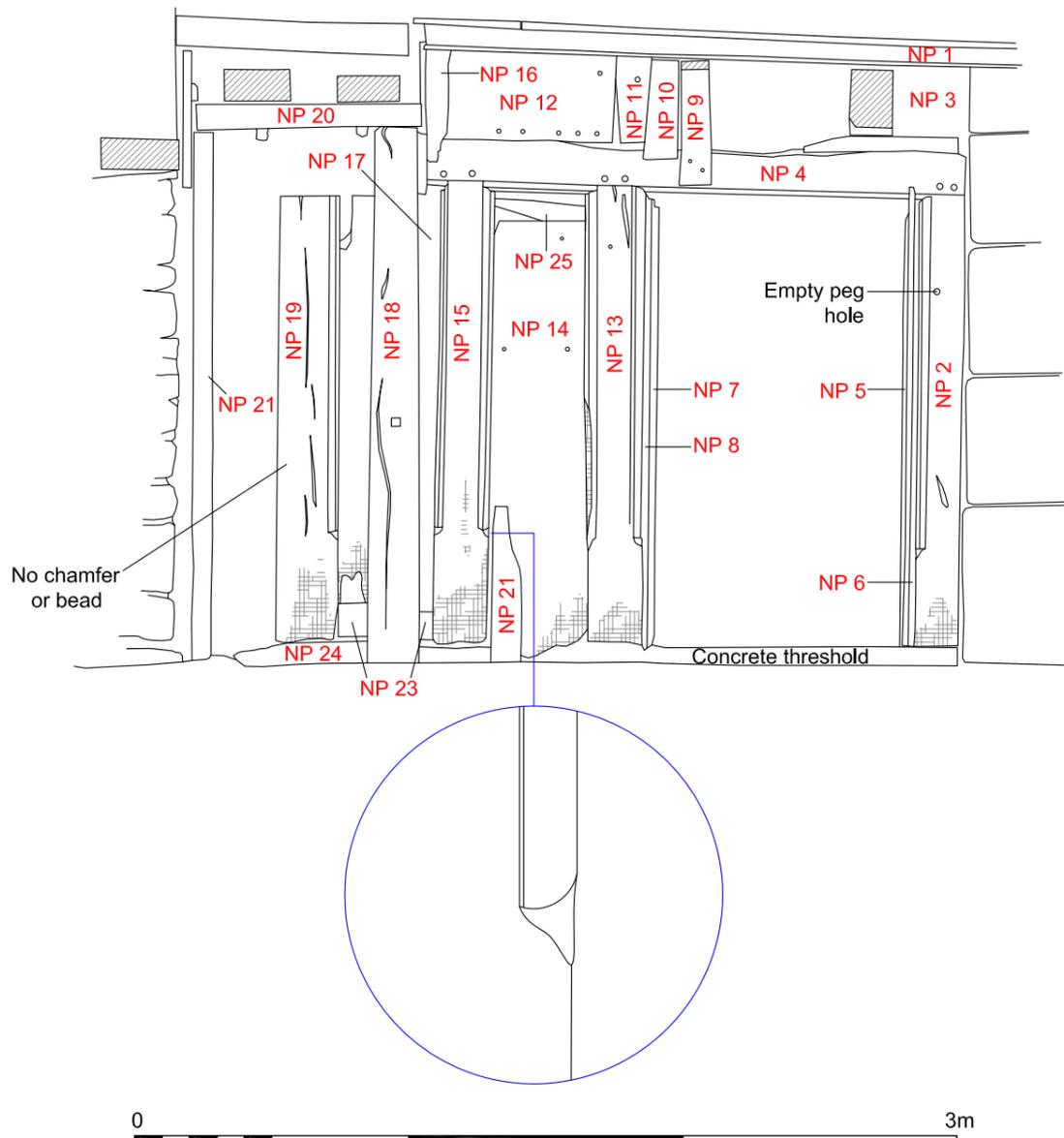




**Figure 6**  
North Facing Elevations of Northern Passage Screen



**Figure 7**  
South Facing Elevations of Northern Passage Screen



0 3m

Scale 1:25



from the 17th century and as such they are perhaps the most significant surviving structures within the building. The northern screen dates from the early 17th century and the southern screen from a remodelling of the interior carried out in the later 17th century.

The key elevations of the screens are those to the passage as this was the area seen by visitors and the first chance of the owners to make an impression. One of the timbers in the southern screen (SP26) even had bark surviving on the rear face highlighting the fact that it was the cross passage elevation that was the important aspect.

Overall the screens are in fairly poor condition, with large areas cracked and rotten, particularly along the bottom as the bases have been encased in concrete. There has inevitably been some movement in the screens as the timbers have degraded and the floor above has settled. None of the timbers can be reused in their current state and their removal for repair should take into account the different type of fixings used in the screens: the earlier northern screen has pegged mortise and tenon joints where it meets the head beam (NP4) and the later southern screen has been fixed using iron nails.

It is doubtful that any of the timbers will be completely reusable and many will need to be partially or completely replaced, so, given the significance of the screens, it may be desirable to identify the replaced areas somehow (by colour or material?) in order to highlight the important surviving sections.

It is recommended that as the screens are dismantled, details of their construction should be recorded and added to the existing survey drawings.

### **4.3 Staircase**

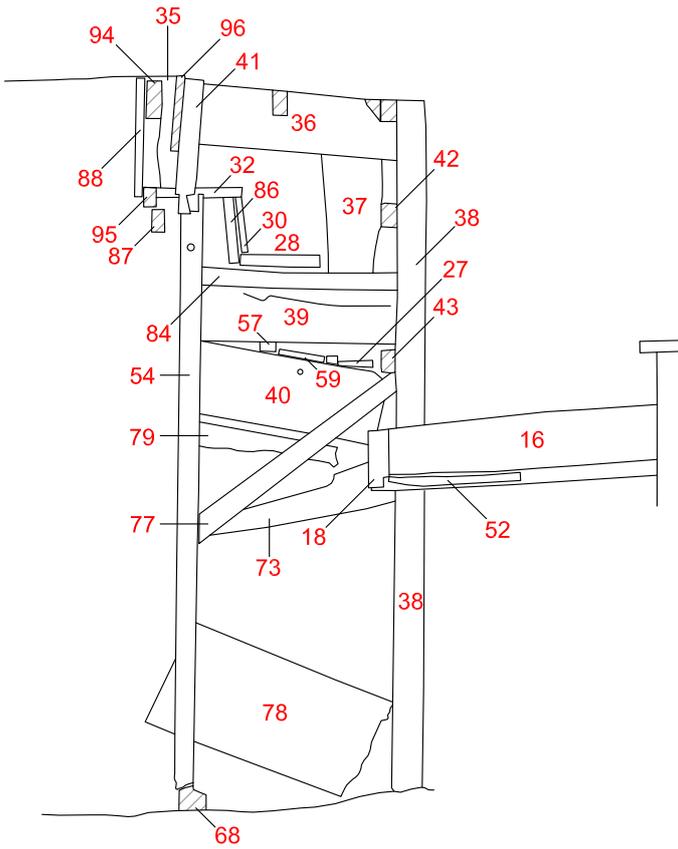
(Figs 8-12, Plates 18-26)

The staircase was originally thought to have been a 19th-century construction, but on a revisit has been tentatively identified as being of late 17th-century date (Thorp and Horton 2009, 17) and therefore was presumably part of the remodelling that took place at that time. There is no doubt that the stairs have been repaired over time and it is uncertain if the current arrangement reflects the original form. The stairs were drawn at 1:10 and elevations and plans were drawn.

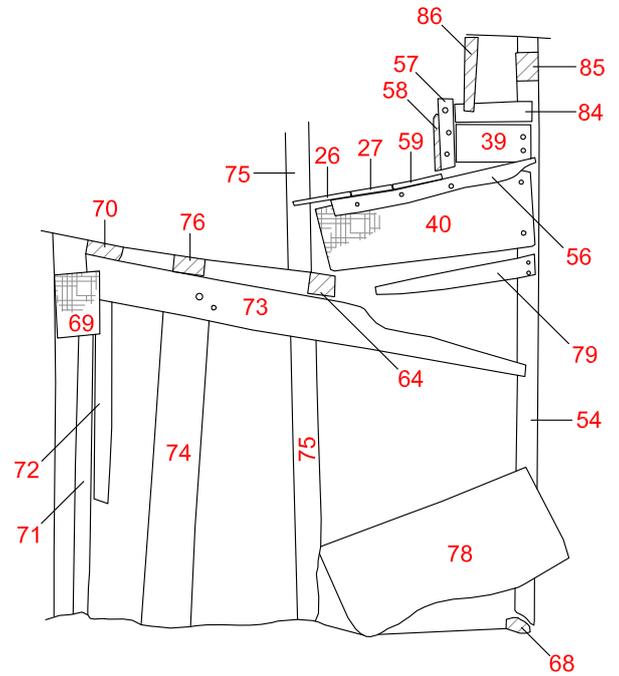
The construction of the stairs provides no securely dateable elements so a definitive date is not possible, but its position is fairly common of houses of this sort and provided access from the hall to a chamber above (Thorp and Horton 2009, 17). Removal of the stairs during the renovation works may reveal structural details that might provide a date for its construction, if not its current form.

There are no significant features on the surviving staircase and most of the timbers are rotten and will need replacing or substantial repair. Given the doubt over the dating of the stairs there does not seem any reason to rebuild the stairs like-for-like, but the location of the stairs is significant and should be maintained if at all possible within any redesign. If a like-for-like staircase is required the individual timbers in the structure have been numbered to allow their removal repair and reconstruction.

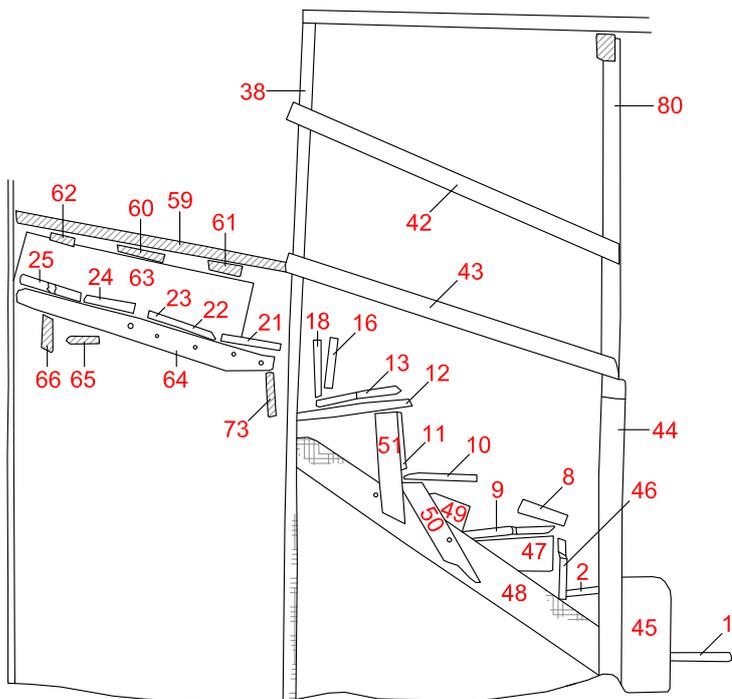
**Figure 8**  
North facing section through stairs



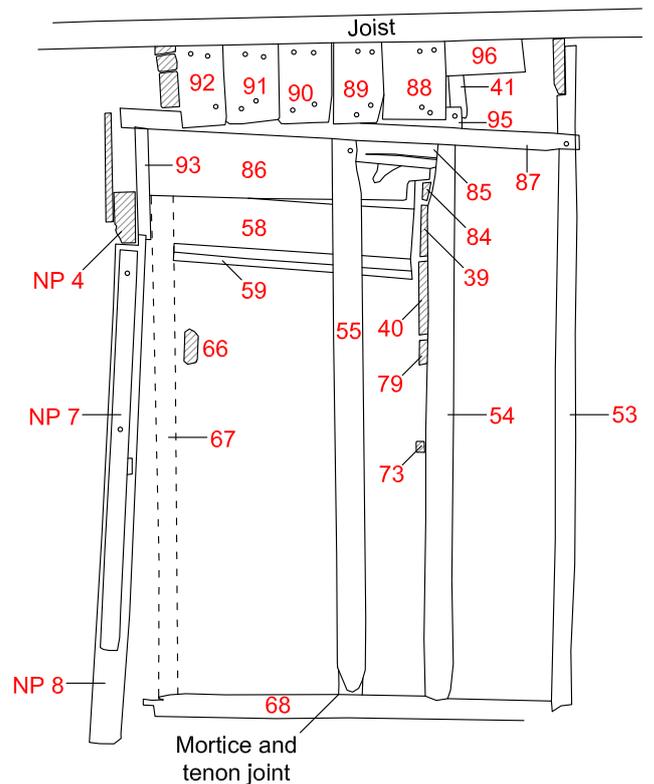
**Figure 9**  
South facing section through stairs



**Figure 10**  
East facing section through stairs



**Figure 11**  
West facing section through stairs

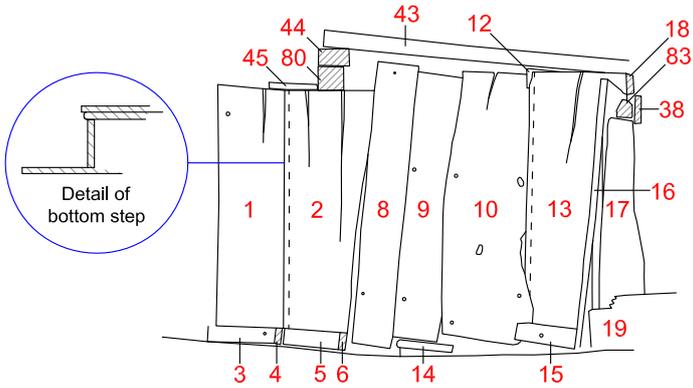


0  2m

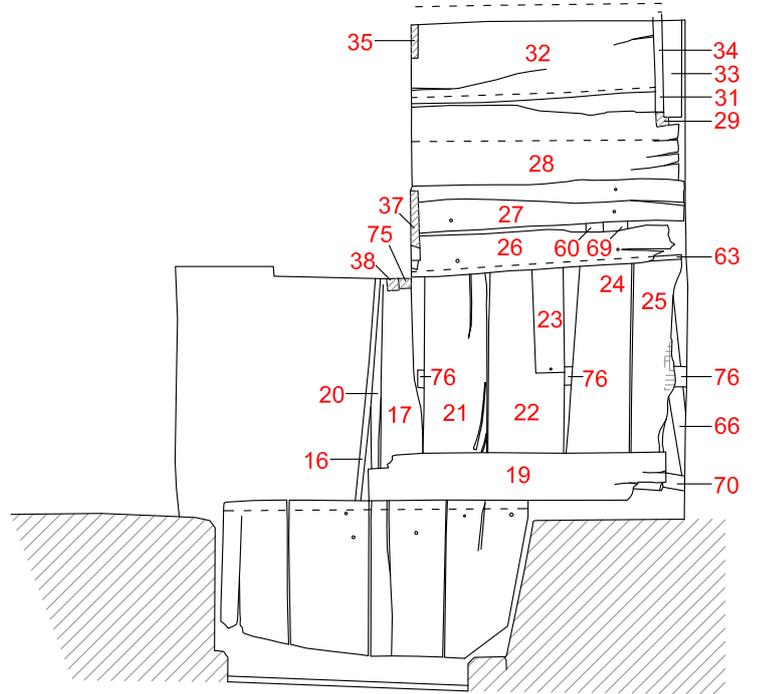
Scale 1:25

**Figure 12**  
Plans of stairs

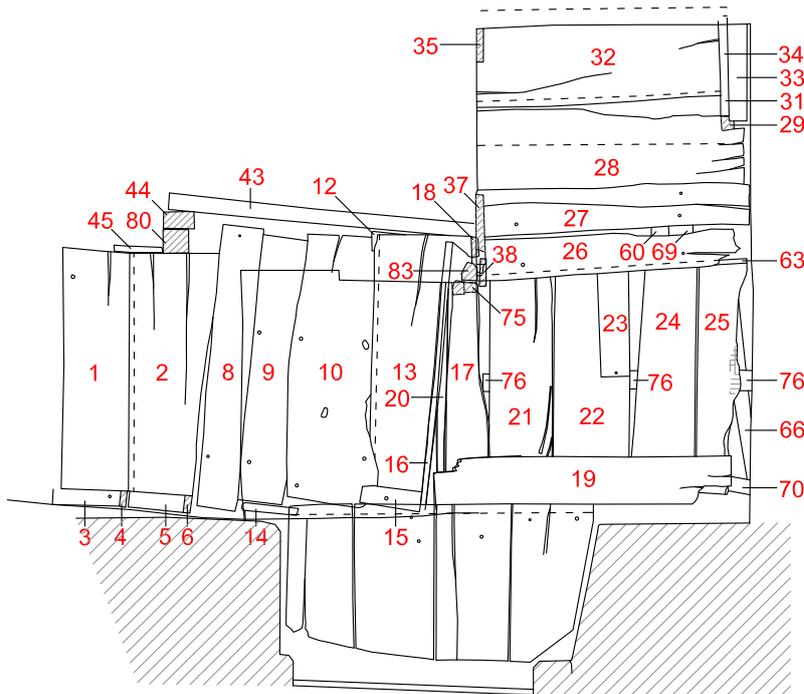
Plan of lower portion of stairs



Plan of upper portion of stairs



Combined Plan



0  2m

Scale 1:25

#### **4.4 Cross passage floor**

(Plates 27-33)

The cross passage floor dates from the 17th-century, possibly part of the late 17th-century remodelling, and consist of tightly packed pitched stones, with possible later repairs of loose-packed cobbles towards the east end. The floor is in fairly good condition and is to be retained in any refurbishment. It is currently covered by a layer of accumulated soil, dust and debris, which has probably protected it from recent damage.

There may be some areas of the floor that will require attention during the refurbishment, but it is felt that this will be minimal and largely superficial, so the character of the floor will be retained and it should be possible to emphasise the phases of construction.

#### **4.5 Cobbled floor in the barn**

(Plates 34-37)

This floor was not recorded in detail as part of this survey as it was felt that it would be more beneficial to carry out the recording during the clearance and removal of the concrete in the barn in order to fully understand the extent of the cobbles and any other floor layers covered by the concrete.

The floor is an important part of the structure, but unlike the passage screens, for example, it was built for convenience and not as a 'feature'. Therefore, even though it is to be lifted and re-laid it is not considered necessary to produce a detailed stone-by-stone record of the floor as using the same stones will retain the character of that part of the building. A photographic record of the floor after clearing and cleaning the floor and lifting the concrete that is present (if feasible) should provide an appropriate record of the floor.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This survey has recorded key structural elements – the blocked window, the cross passage screens and the staircase – within the building in enough detail to allow them to be removed, repaired and, if required, rebuilt. It is likely that there is further information to be revealed about these structures during the renovation works regarding the date and development of the building's interior. It is hoped that if further detail is uncovered during the renovation works it can be added to the existing survey drawings.

The northern cross passage screen dates from the early the early 17th century, while the southern screen and much of the passage floor date from the later 17th century, a time when the house was being remodelled in line with contemporary fashion. Although, the screens have suffered and are now in fairly poor condition, they survive well enough to show that they reflected the pretensions and ambitions of the owners to respond to changes in architectural styles and to improve the living conditions within the building. As such, they are central, physically and perceptually, to the building and are the most significant of the surviving structures within the building and they are worthy of retention in some form.

There is a substantial amount of remedial work to be done on the screens and they will have to be removed for repair and some parts will need to be replaced. The individual timbers have been numbered to aid their removal and reconstruction.

When reconstructing the screens it may be desirable to identify the replacement parts somehow in order to highlight the original sections.

The staircase is more problematic than the screens as it is not certain if it is part of the late-17th century rebuilding or if it is a 19th-century structure; it also contains many modern repairs. Either way in its current form it has little historic or architectural value and it is perhaps the location of the stairs rather than the stairs themselves that is significant. The stairs occupy a fairly typical location in this type of building and it is considered that the replacement of the stairs, using some of the existing timbers if they are suitable, would retain the way people moved through the interior and preserve the character of the building.

The timbers in the stairs have been individually numbered to allow their removal, repair and reconstruction if necessary.

Little is to be done to the first floor window and although it has clearly been partially blocked at some point it is not possible to date when that occurred, nor is it clear why it was blocked. A large granite block that now forms part of the blocking and supports a timber and iron fixing appears to have been reused from elsewhere and if work is carried out around the window it is possible that further details about the block and its previous use may be revealed. A nest of bees in a cavity by the window may be having an impact on the structural integrity of the wall around the window.

The cobbled floors in the passage way and the main barn are important elements of the building. It is considered that the one in the passage is the more significant of the two as it was part of the visible and public space of the building and, even though it was hard wearing and practical it was also quite decorative. It was

constructed from close-packed pitched stones and probably dates from the later 17th-century remodelling of the barn, although there is some later cobbling towards the east end of the passage. The cobbling in the main part of the barn is purely a practical solution and consists of large loose packed cobbles intended to be a hard wearing and functional floor only. Removing and relaying these cobbles should not have too much of an impact on the structure of the building, but it will retain its historic character. Recording during the early phases of floor renovation work will allow an appropriate level of record for the floor and the removal of the concrete may add new details about the floor itself and the interior of this part of the building.

The most important factor in the building is the way people moved through it and used it. Throughout the post-medieval period there was a widespread re-ordering of house interiors to reflect new ideas on privacy and comfort, which were filtering down through society. At East Week barn this is shown in the construction of the southern passage screen and the extra rooms capable of being heated that were created. It is possible that the stairs were also built at this time.

The original use of the cross passage layout was to separate livestock and living space and it is likely that this is how East Week barn developed from the later medieval period. The late 17th-century remodelling made the building more comfortable and allowed the creation of more rooms, but it maintained the basic patterns of movement of the cross passage house. Entrance was via the front or back door into the passage and from there access was determined by the screens. Progress into the hall, or other parts of the building were through doors in the passage screens, which meant that areas of the house were private and access was only possible with permission.

Therefore, as interesting (and in the case of the cross passage screens, significant) as the key structural elements within the building are, it is possibly the patterns of movement that should be maintained in order to preserve and enhance the character of the building and its history. Overall the structures recorded during this survey are in poor condition and will require substantial repair, replacement and reconstruction. In some cases, such as the staircase, it is questionable what historic value they have and whether any renovation should seek to retain the overall character of the building rather than individual features.

Mitigation of the impacts of the renovation will be required and it is considered that monitoring and recording during the early phases of work, particularly the removal of the passage screens, staircase, floor and wall coverings will be an appropriate method to record any further structural details exposed.

## **6.0 PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD**

First floor window in the east elevation	Plates 1-5
Cross passage screens (south screen)	Plates 6-16
Cross passage screens (north screen)	Plate 17
Staircase	Plates 18-26
Cross passage floor	Plates 27-33
Cobbled floor in the barn	Plates 34-37



Plate 1. External view of window, 0.5m scale

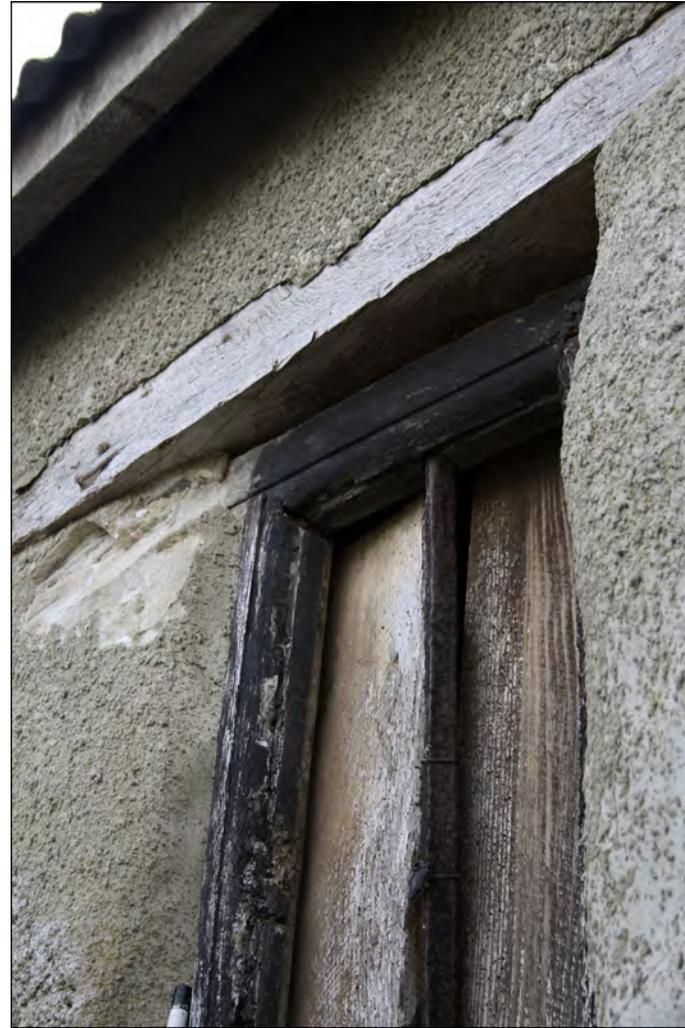


Plate 2. External view of window, detail



Plate 3. Internal view of window, facing east, 0.5m scale



Plate 4. Internal view of window, facing east, 0.5m scale



Plate 5. Internal view of window from below



Plate 6. South passage screen, facing north



Plate 7. South screen, facing north



Plate 8. South screen, facing north, 1m scale



Plate 9. South screen, west end, facing north

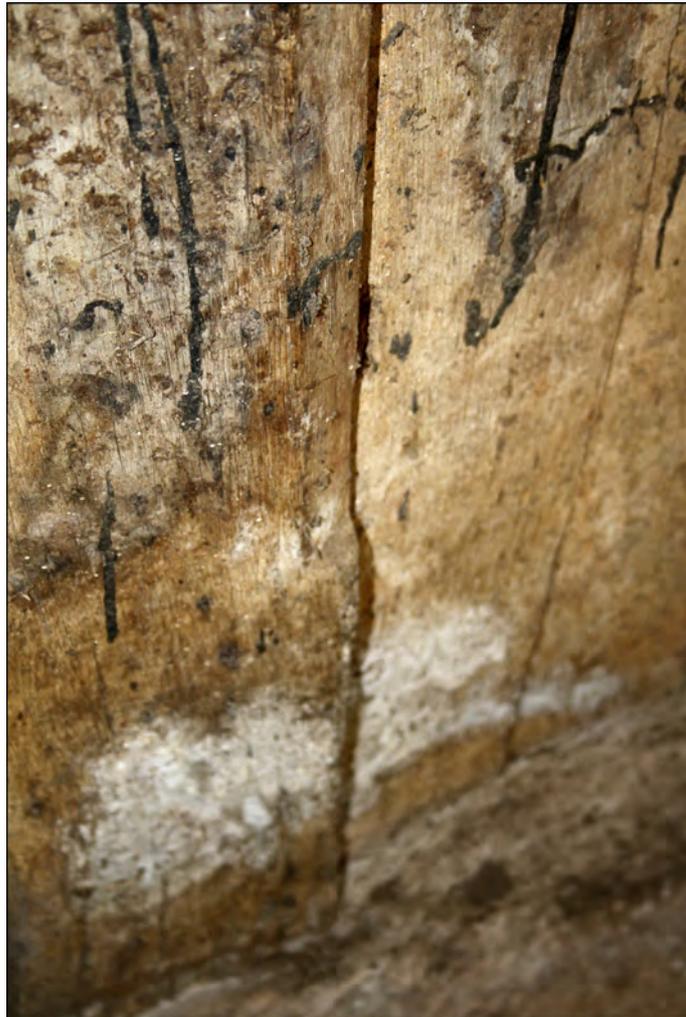


Plate 10. Worn chamfer on south screen, south elevation



Plate 11. Chamfer on south screen, south elevation



Plate 12. South screen, south elevation, east end



Plate 13. Ceiling timber above south screen



Plate 14. South screen, north elevation



Plate 15. Cross-section through southern screen



Plate 16. Width of southern screen, facing west



Plate 17. North screen passage, south elevation



Plate 18. Staircase, facing south, 0.5m scale



Plate 19. Stairs facing west, 1m scale



Plate 20. Stairs facing south, 1m scale



Plate 21. Stairs from above, facing west, 1m scale



Plate 22. Stairs from above, facing north, 1m scale



Plate 23. Stairs facing north-east



Plate 24. Stairs from above, facing south, 1m scale



Plate 25. Below staircase, facing west



Plate 26. Below staircase, facing west



Plate 27. Cross passage from east door, facing west



Plate 28. Cobbled floor to west, facing east



Plate 29. Cobbled floor to east



Plate 30. Cobbled floor to west, detail, 0.5m scale



Plate 31. Cobbled floor to west, 0.5m scale



Plate 32. Cross passage facing west



Plate 33. Cobbled floor at east end



Plate 34. Cobbled floor at north end of barn, 1m scale



Plate 35. Cobbled floor at north end of barn, 1m scale



Plate 36. Cobbled floor at north end of barn, facing south, 1m scale



Plate 37. Cobbled floor at north end of barn,  
facing south-east, 1m scale

## **Acknowledgements**

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The fieldwork was carried out by the author with illustrations by David Dobson and the author.

The project was overseen by Nigel Page with editing undertaken by Jayne Bown.

## **Bibliography**

- English Heritage 2006 *Understanding historic buildings: A guide to good recording practice.* London, English Heritage.
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