

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT  
LOWER KING'S MILL,  
CULLOMPTON, DEVON**

**Prepared for  
The St Regis Paper Company Ltd**

by A.J. Passmore

**Exeter Archaeology**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by the St Regis Paper Company Ltd and presents the results of a standing building recording project undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in January and February 2008 at Lower King's Mill, Cullompton (NGR ST 0290 0795; Fig. 1). Two barns were recorded prior to partial demolition and repairs – a barn, and a derelict house at the rear of the currently-occupied Lower King's Mill House. An archaeological assessment of the proposed works was carried out by EA in advance of the recording (Collings 2002) that identified the derelict house as containing fabric of 16th- or 17th-century date. The house is listed Grade II (no. 95262), and the archaeological recording was undertaken as a condition of the grant of listed building consent (05/0033/LBC, Mid Devon District Council).

The site is located to the north-east of the town of Cullompton, and lies to the east of the M5 Motorway, adjacent to Junction 28. The buildings form part of a large former industrial and domestic complex (see section 5 below). The only building now inhabited is Lower King's Mill House that fronts King's Mill Road. The site straddles the River Culm, whose flow was formerly harnessed to drive water-powered mills.

## 2. AIMS

The aims of the project were twofold: Firstly, to prepare a record of the buildings prior to and during alteration, and secondly, to provide information on the former location of timbers already removed from the house. Information relating to the latter aim has been reported to the structural engineer and is not dealt with in this report.

## 3. METHOD

Standard EA methodology for building recording was employed, and consisted of:

- a drawn record (plans, profiles and detailed drawings) at scales of 1:50, 1:20 and 1:2);
- a written record; and
- a photographic record comprising black-and-white prints and use of a high-quality digital camera.

A record was made of both buildings prior to the start of demolition and repairs. A series of subsequent visits was made to the house during the course of the demolition process.

## 4. HISTORIC BACKGROUND (based on Collings 2002)

The name King's Mill is first recorded in 1291. However, there is some evidence that the manor of Moorhayes may have been associated with the earlier Bernardesmore, which in 1067 contained a mill valued at 5s. In 1569 the will of Simon Kellwaye, a merchant, describes his 'mansion-house'. A hundred years later, in 1674, a recovery deed describes the property as including 3 water mills, a fulling mill, and a paper mill. The reference to the paper mill appears to be the first for such an industry on the River Culm.

Both buildings recorded during the survey are depicted on late 18th- and early 19th-century maps. The present Lower King's Mill House, that fronts the road, is first depicted on the OS first edition map of 1889 as a single structure, connected at its north-east end to the now-derelict house to the north. This building replaced an earlier structure along the street

frontage, and was almost certainly the building described in 1875 as ‘a superior and most desirable convenient and pleasantly situated residence’. At this date, other buildings were described as offices, a coach house, and stables.

## 5. THE BARN (Pl. 1)

This is an 11-bay long building, measuring 31.4m by 7.6m externally. The building is orientated north-south at right angles to the road, with its north elevation forming a revetment to the river. The building is two-storied in height, but open to the roof with no structural indication of a first floor. However, much of the interior is whitewashed, which could obscure evidence of blocked joist sockets, and first floor windows in the east elevation suggest the presence of a former floor at this level.

The building is constructed of sandstone and gravelly pale-red cob. The lower half of the west elevation is constructed of stone with cob above, whereas the north and east elevations are almost entirely built of cob, probably indicating the building was constructed against and onto an earlier boundary wall. The top of the north and south gables have been rebuilt in concrete blocks, as has a small section of the west elevation.

There are single and double doors fronting a courtyard in the east elevation, with small-paned windows above (Pl. 1). There are further tall, narrow early-19th-century metal-framed windows at first floor level with slightly arched heads, which are almost certainly inserted into earlier loading doors. In the north elevation there is a small, high level, wooden-framed two-light window. The inner side of this window has been blocked in brick. In the west elevation is a large loading door, also blocked in brick.

The roof trusses comprise principal rafters rising from tie beams that rest on wooden pads set into the cob walls, with the rafters supported by king posts and diagonal struts, all fixed with iron bolts. There are no intermediate trusses. Attached to the rafters are a ridge purlin and two rows of back purlins that support a slate roof. At the south end of the building, the second truss from the end holds studs between the rafters. This corresponds with a series of eaves level sockets in the south gable wall for a removed floor, and indicates that the end two bays were enclosed to form a loft.

## 6. THE HOUSE (Figs 2-5; Pls 2-4)

The house is a 3-room and cross passage building located to the rear of the later Lower King’s Mill House. The building is orientated NE-SW parallel, and immediately adjacent, to the River Culm. The rear entrance of the cross passage would have opened onto the river and could have provided access to a bridge over the river, and perhaps a route to the sluice. The lower storey of the building is constructed of sandstone bonded in light yellow-brown fine gravelly soft lime mortar, with the upper storey built of light to mid red-brown gravelly cob. The upper storey over the cross passage and service room had collapsed (which had taken place before the 2002 assessment was prepared). The first floor was not accessible, and the cross passage and service room could only be entered following clearance and partial demolition.

### 6.1 *The ground floor* (Figs 2 and 5)

The cross passage is defined by opposing doorways, with a surviving screen on the upper side dividing the passage from the hall. The screen sits on a stone cill, and retains part of the upper

plate and posts, including two doorframes with ovolo mouldings facing the passage. The screen was originally infilled with daub supported on horizontal rods, some of which survive; elsewhere regularly-spaced rows of sockets for the rods are visible. The door in the screen has been removed and infilled with wattle and daub, and is covered by a coat of whitewashed plaster that has also been applied across the screen (Pl. 3). The screen on the lower side of the passage does not survive.

There is a second partition between the hall and the parlour. This has thin posts with applied lathe and plaster, and replaces an original screen. Mortice sockets for removed posts along with pegholes, and some wooden pegs, survive in the beam above. There is some evidence for an original stone cill, but most of this fabric was removed when later brick and concrete floors were laid.

Each room is divided into two bays by substantial timber beams with wide chamfers and large run-out stops. The upper sides of these beams contain sockets for the first-floor joists, many of which survived. Several of these beams have square sockets on their undersides at their ends where the beams slot into the walls. These could have supported upright timbers, but none were present in the current building. This must indicate that the beams have been reused from an earlier building.

In the south-east elevation, in addition to the cross passage entrance, there are further door openings into the hall and parlour. These appear to be original although this is an unusual layout. One of the doors into the parlour has been blocked. The surviving doors have thick wooden frames with ovolo mouldings. The doors themselves are made from planks with bottom and interior nailed batons. The western door has been altered with the addition of laths and a window opening covered with wire mesh. This alteration is probably contemporary with a concrete floor containing a drain in the adjacent room. In the hall is a splayed window with internal shutters (Pl. 4). The doors and the windows have T-shaped strap hinges and base plates, which generally date to between the second and third quarters of the 17th century (Alcock and Hall 1994, 24). There is a second (inserted) window in the south-east elevation, providing light to the service room. The south doorway of the cross passage has been moved to the east, with the insertion of a stone pier. This must predate the 19th-century alterations, since this was not executed in the brick used elsewhere in the house. The original door and its frame have been retained, and it is entered from its own lobby within a later extension.

Incorporated into the north-east elevation of the service wing is a large chimney stack serving a ground-floor splayed fireplace with a contemporary projecting semi-circular bread oven. The bread oven has a roof of tar-covered slate, and is lined with granite flagstones. Either side of the fireplace are recesses. Both the recess and the fireplace are surmounted by a large lintel that displays curved openings on its underside over the recesses, and supports the chimney stack at first floor level. Adjacent to the lintel is one of the chamfered beams supporting the first floor. This does not contain joist sockets on its east side, indicating the recesses were not covered at first floor level. The fireplace and the southern recess contain circular iron 'coppers' for heating water. These coppers are set into brick surrounds that incorporate fireboxes with cast-iron doors and grills into lower-level ash boxes.

The floor of the service room, including its fireplace, is laid in brick, and is probably contemporary with the insertion of the coppers. Internally, this service room has been divided into two by a timber partition cutting across the fireplace opening.

The north-west corner of the building has been partially rebuilt using concrete blocks. The fabric of the north elevation incorporates three windows lighting the hall and parlour.

### 6.2 *The first floor* (Fig. 3)

The layout of the first floor in its original format is not known. The beam above the surviving ground-floor screen contains mortices for a removed first-floor partition on the same alignment. No other evidence for any other original first floor partitions was observed.

At an unknown date prior to the 19th-century two lathe and plaster partitions were added – one on the line of the earlier partition, the second to the west – creating two rooms at the west end of the building. There were doors in the north sides of these partitions – one now blocked – probably indicating the location of a former corridor along the north side of the building, a typical position for a corridor in a cross-passage house. Following 19th-century alterations to the house complex (see below) the corridor serving the two rooms at the west end of the first floor was removed, and the room was entered via a new corridor from the extension to Lower King’s Mill House. A new door was inserted into the west partition, and the earlier door blocked.

The layout of the rooms to the east could not be established, since this part of the structure had collapsed. However, there was evidence for a (probably 19th- or 20th-century) weatherboard partition, with a large central opening. Due to the collapsed nature of the building, and removal of the chimney stack, it could not be established whether there was a first-floor fireplace within the stack. However, a cast-iron grate recovered by the contractors from the building is of a different design to those in the extension to Lower King’s Mill House, and must have come from a first-floor fireplace. The chimney stack above the first floor is constructed of brick.

### 6.3 *The roof* (Fig. 4)

The roof of the building was completely replaced in the 19th century. However, there are a pair of partially surviving wooden crucks built into the north and south elevations (Pl. 4). The cruck in the north wall rests on a pad. The upper sections of the crucks have been removed and their form cannot be reconstructed. The present roof is slate hung, supported on tie beam trusses with king posts and diagonal struts, fixed with both wooden pegs and iron bolts. The roof is contemporary with the roof of the extension to Lower king’s Mill House. On the eastern truss, which was extensively examined following removal, there are a series of carpenter’s marks ‘III’. Other than the crucks, there is no evidence of the original roof, but some of the purlins are scarf jointed and appear have been reused from an earlier structure.

### 6.4 *The 19th-century extension to Lower King’s Mill House*

In the second half of the 19th century an extension was added between Lower King’s Mill House and the earlier 3-room and cross passage house. The extension is two-storey in height and constructed of brick. The ground floor has no interior features. In the east elevation there is a door, window and a projecting lobby incorporating the door into the earlier cross passage building. The use of the ground floor is unknown, and it may simply have functioned as a covered and secure store. To the west of this area a small, single-storey parlour was added, again with windows, and a door into the room to the east. A door into the earlier house was (or had already been) blocked and was utilised as a larder. This room has a slate floor.

The first floor of the extension contains two bedrooms connected by a corridor on the west side of the building. The corridor connects the bedrooms with the main house, and the first-floor rooms in the cross-passage building. The bedrooms, which had been divided by a thin (now-removed) partition, have small fireplaces with cast-iron grates.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Documentary research (Collings 2002) has highlighted the early history of the site, along with the presence of Simon Kellwaye's mansion house in 1569, although, for the reasons given below, it seems unlikely that the present 3-room and cross passage house represents this mansion. The building may have originally been constructed towards the start of the 17th century when ovolo mouldings began to be used (Child 2001, 40). The construction of an integral chimney stack and the provision of a first floor from the outset are also indicative of a later date. The building is slightly unusual, in that the only chimney stack is located in the service room; a second stack to heat the hall would be expected. The provision of what appears to be original external doorways into the hall and parlour is also highly unusual.

The building continued to be at least partially occupied as a house until the 20th-century. By 1875 Lower King's Mill House had been constructed in a more fashionable and up-to-date style, and formed the main residence at the site. This house was later extended to the rear, connecting it with the earlier cross-passage house. By, and during, the 19th century, part of the ground floor of the earlier house had been turned over to agricultural use, possibly as stalls for cows or pigs (The first floor is too low to have accommodated stables for horses as described in 1875.) The east end of the building remained in domestic use and was upgraded, perhaps being used as a workers' cottage. The first floor contained at least two bedrooms connected to the main house.

The barn dates to the late 18th century, possibly a little earlier. The building may originally have been stables with a first floor hayloft above. In the early 19th century the loading doors to the hayloft were converted to windows and the first floor removed. This must have been in response to a change in industrial activity on the site, perhaps a need for storage of bulkier goods such as rags for paper manufacture or the storage of finished products.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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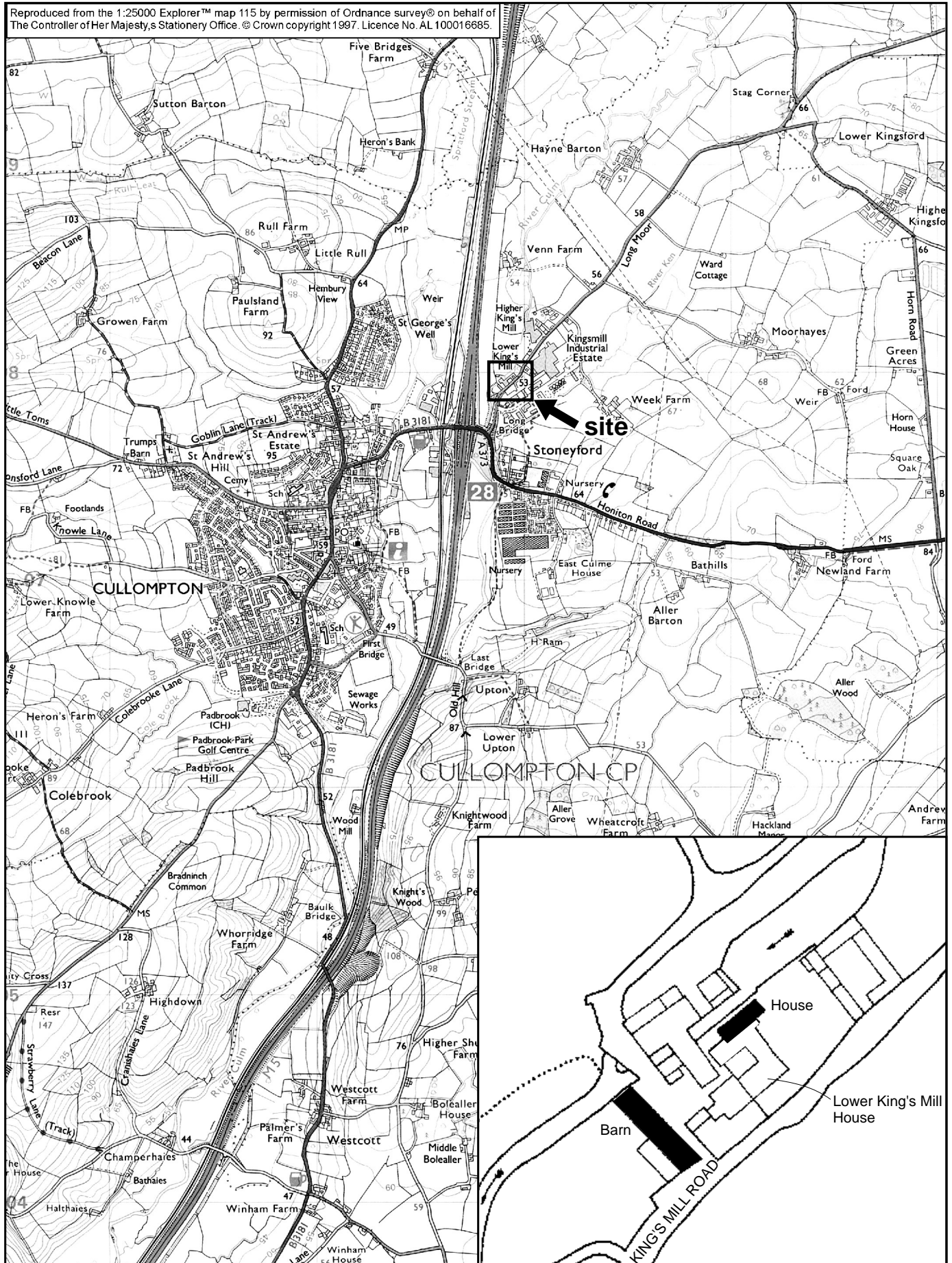


Fig. 1 Location of site.



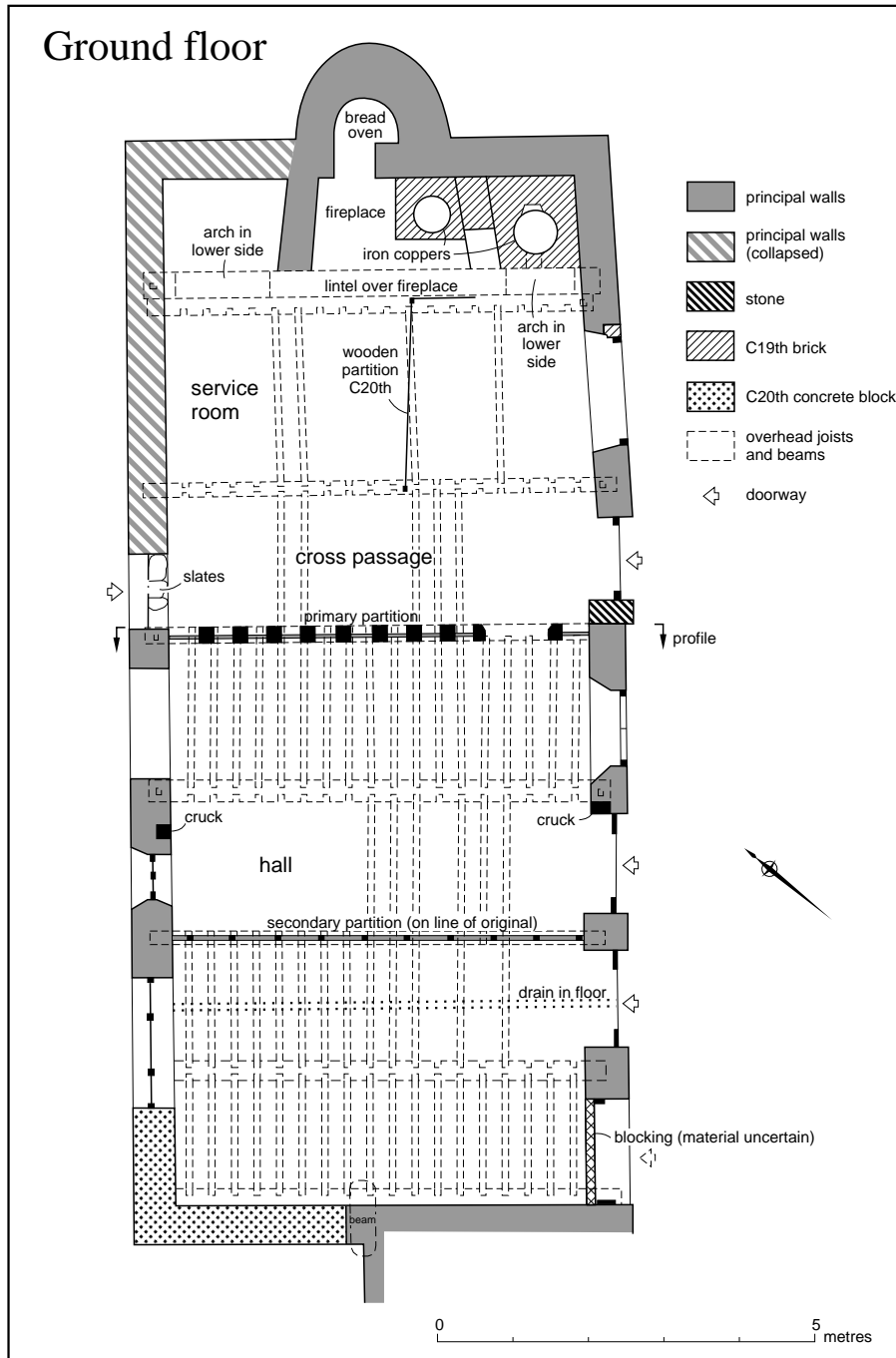


Fig. 2 The house, ground floor plan.

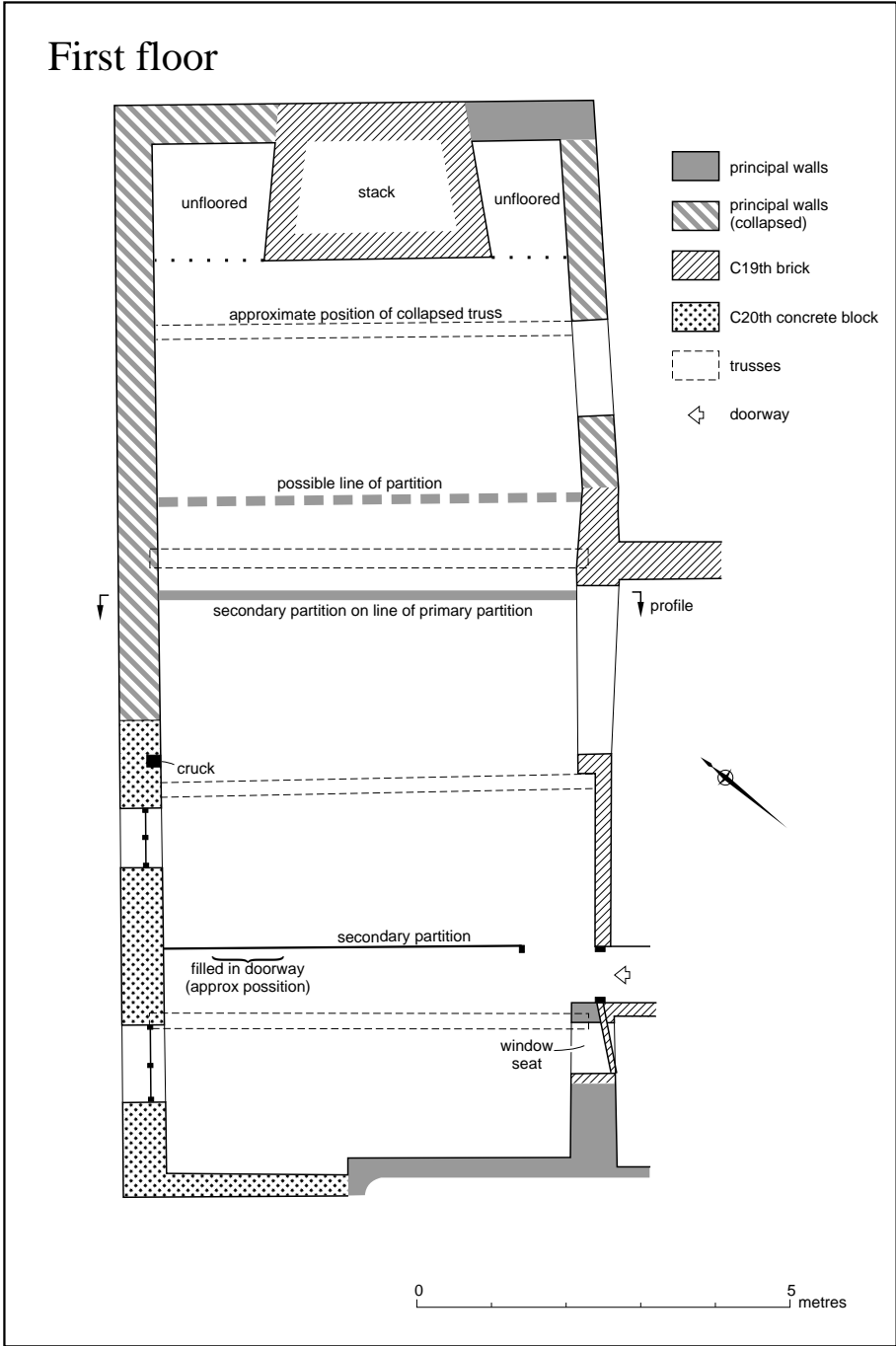


Fig. 3 The house, first floor plan.

# Profile

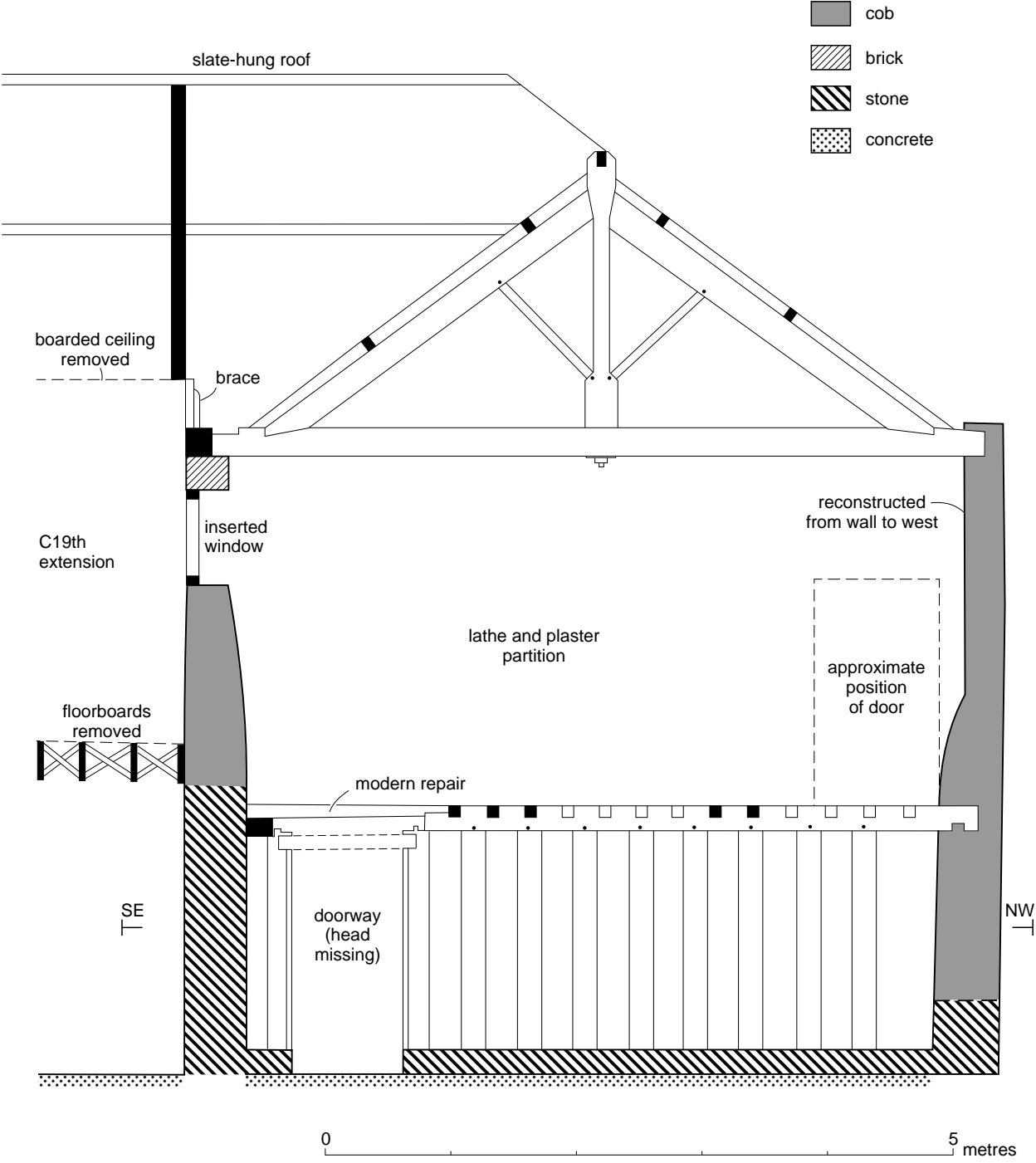


Fig. 4 Profile through the house.

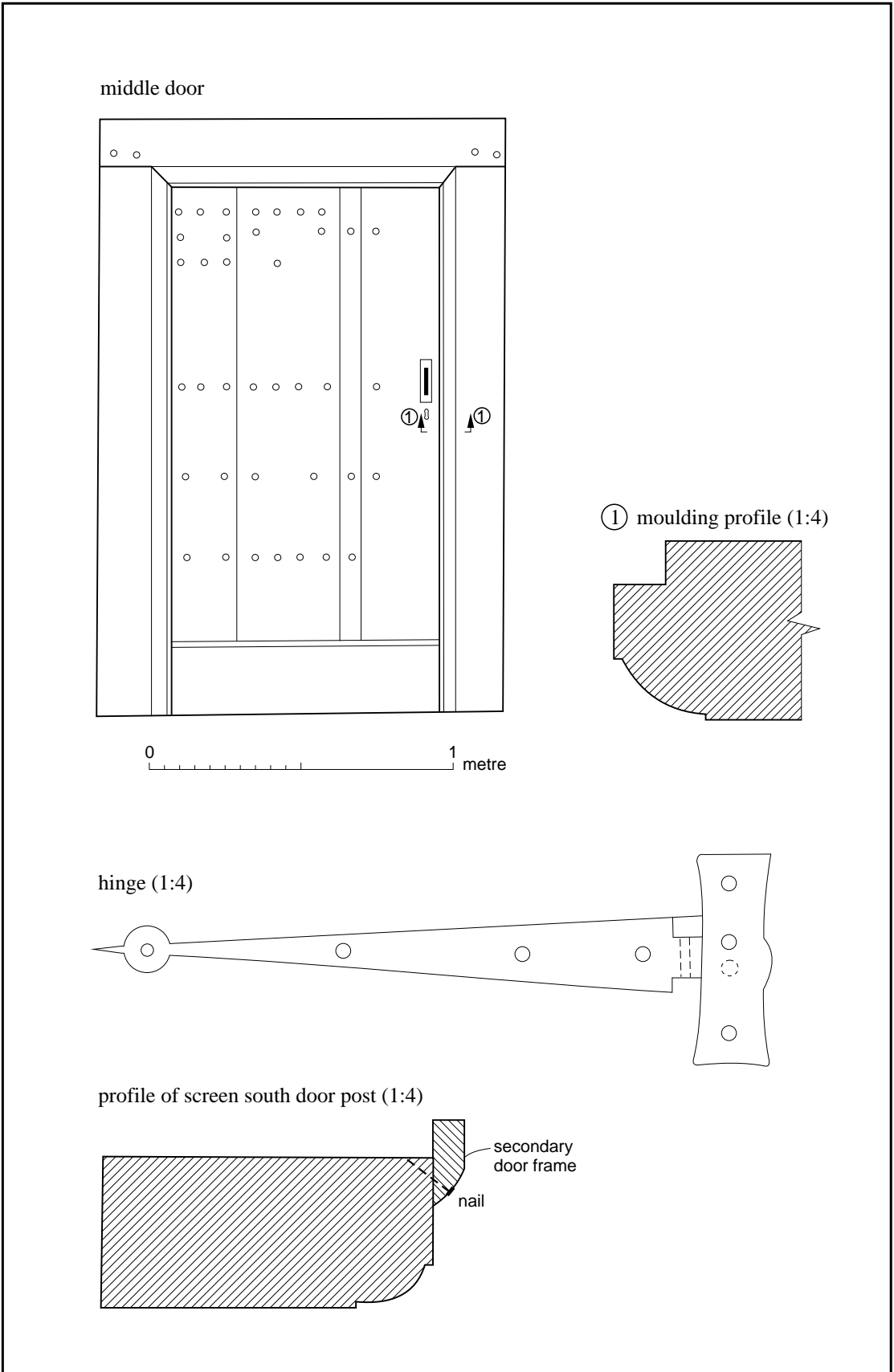


Fig. 5 Details of architectural features.



Plate 1 The north elevation of the barn, looking south-west.



Plate 2 The west end of the house, showing the bread oven (right), looking west. 1m scale.



Plate 3 Screen, showing infilled doorway, looking north.



Plate 4 East internal elevation of the house showing scar of screen, window shutter, and cruck, looking south-east. 1m scale.