

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT
30 COUNTESS WEAR ROAD, EXETER**

**Prepared for
Harriet Ziegler**

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Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

This report has been prepared at the request of Harriet Ziegler and presents the results of historic building recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology at the property formerly known as 30 Countess Wear Road and Exe View Cottage, Countess Wear, Exeter (SX 94062 90059; Fig. 1). The report presents the results of two phases of work: an appraisal of the site undertaken on 4 November 2008, and recording undertaken between September 2009 and February 2010. The latter was undertaken as a condition (no. 3) of the grant of Listed Building Consent (08/2452/07). The listed building description is presented in Appendix 1.

2. THE SITE

This property is a large, thatched house that stands near the eastern bank of the Exe at the junction of Countess Wear Road and Mill Road. The property has been subdivided into three dwellings, but appears originally to have been a medieval three-room-and-cross-passage house, to which large side and rear extensions have been added. The property now known as Exe View Cottage includes at least two thirds of the medieval house, plus two extensions to the north and a flying freehold over part of the rear buildings. The southern end of the medieval house is occupied by a separate dwelling, 'Willow Cottage', while the rear extensions, which include a remarkable thatched tower-like structure of uncertain function, are a separate dwelling known as No. 30 Countess Wear Road. The houses are Grade II Listed buildings. No. 30 Countess Wear Road has recently been acquired by the owners of Exe View Cottage with a view to amalgamating both properties into a single dwelling. This necessitated the creation of a linking doorway as well as extensive refurbishment of No. 30, which is in a very poor state of repair.

3. METHOD

Both phases of work were undertaken using the advice provided by Andrew Pye, Archaeology Officer, Exeter City Council. Guidance on the historic building recording was provided in an e-mail dated 1 May 2009. This guidance required monitoring and recording of:

- the opening up of the new doorway between the two properties whilst it is done; identifying any historic fabric and advising on its significance, and recording it appropriately
- the works to the roofs of the outbuildings, in case any medieval and post medieval fabric is revealed, particularly relating to the medieval building and the later "turret" structure, and recording it appropriately, and
- any other miscellaneous intrusive works that may be found to be necessary during the course of the building works where these are likely to affect or reveal historic fabric.

The above elements were achieved through the production of a written record of the works, accompanied by a photographic record prepared using black-and-white print film and a high-quality digital camera.

In line with the guidance this report incorporates the descriptive element of the 2008 appraisal report (section 4) and the results of the 2009-10 recording (section 5). A phased plan of the site based on both phases of archaeological recording is presented as Fig. 2.

4. THE 2008 APPRAISAL (Pls 1 and 2)

4.1 The medieval house

The medieval house presents a more-or-less symmetrical front towards the mill leat and river with a two-storey frontage dominated by a massive central chimney breast serving a lateral stack. The fenestration is irregular and has been modernised, the most unusual feature being a series of small square openings high up under the eaves to the north of the central stack. The property has clearly been extended to the north by a two-storey extension, perhaps in the 18th or 19th century, and a large, single-storey bow-fronted extension has been added to the north of this in the 20th century.

The present main entrance to the property lies in the modern extension, but an earlier entrance lies to the south of this, under a glazed porch. This opens into the northern room of the original medieval building and cannot represent the entrance to the cross passage, which must have lain to the south of the lateral stack within the adjacent property. No traces of the doorways to the passage are visible on either the front or rear of this house; however the wall dividing the properties retains a massive plank and muntin screen with a central doorway with a shouldered arched head, which springs from the southern jamb of the fireplace and seems certain to be associated with a cross passage (Pl. 1).

The central room presumably represents the 'hall' of the medieval house. This room is heated by the large fireplace and was formerly lit by an unglazed, three-light window in the rear wall, now blocked. The window has thick timber mullions, ogee heads to the lights and the remains of pintles for shutters. It may be a primary feature and probably dates from the 15th century; a relatively rare survival of such a window. In the south-eastern corner of the room is a blocked doorway in the rear wall, perhaps a modification of another early window. The partition with the northern room contains a further early doorway with a shouldered-headed arch, closed by a large plank door. It is uncertain whether or not this doorway also forms part of a timber screen.

The northern room of the medieval house has an entrance in the west wall and a curving newel staircase in the north-eastern corner which, bizarrely, curves in the opposite direction to that usual for such a staircase, curving out into the room from the base of the east wall and returning through the wall into the first floor of the rear extension. The staircase must be contemporary with the rear extension since it seems to rise from and curve back into that building. At the base of the staircase is a shallow recess, now fitted with shelving, which may be a blocked doorway. The unusual form of the staircase seems to demand an opening in this position linking the rooms in the rear extension with this room and with the first floor above. The roof of the building again shows evidence of medieval origins. The roof over the 'hall' in the central section of the house is the only early part to survive in this property (the southern parts could not be inspected). This is supported by 'A'-frame trusses with side-pegged jointed crucks, cambered collar beams and a large, diagonally set square ridge tree. The purlins are trenched into the tops of the principal rafters; some of the purlins appear to have been removed or reset, leaving vacant sockets in the trusses. The remaining purlins are massive, rectangular timbers of very large scantling reflecting their very large span. Where joints were visible these were diagonal scarf joints, secured with wooden pegs. No traces of windbraces were visible and only the eastern slope of the roof over the hall retained any common rafters. All the early timbers were heavily smoke-blackened, showing that the hall was originally open to the roof and heated by an open hearth. No early thatch was observed; this was probably removed when the present roof was erected a few feet above the early roof.

The partition dividing the hall from the northern room projected into the roof space and was smoke-blackened on both sides, showing that the northern room was also heated by an open hearth. The apex of the truss was infilled with a plaster panel supported upon vertical studs interwoven with wattle. The timbers and the plaster have been whitewashed right up to the ridge, showing that the open hearth went out of use before this room was ceiled, perhaps when a first floor, or a fireplace, was inserted.

Although at least one of the medieval purlins remains *in situ*, visible above the present staircase, the northern part of the building has been entirely re-roofed when the first of the northern extensions was added, perhaps in the 18th or 19th century. Surviving features of interest in the northern part of the building include the strange square windows beneath the eaves in a first-floor room, which seem designed for some specific purpose, and meat hooks in the ceiling of the ground-floor room in the northern extension. The chimney serving this part of the building is also unusually sited, parallel with, but not aligned on, the ridge of the roof.

4.2 The rear extension

The earliest part of the rear extension of the building takes the form of a long range lying parallel with the rear wall, under a double-pitched slated roof. This range does not extend the full length of the medieval house, which may perhaps have already been divided, but ends at a gable against which a low lean-to structure has been constructed to fill the gap between the main house and the turret. The rear extension is constructed largely of timber framing, with narrow vertical studs braced with diagonal struts. The scantling of the timbers is slight and the constructional technique suggests a date in the 18th or early 19th century.

In the ground-floor room in this range most historic features are obscured by modern finishes; however the rear of the staircase is visible in the form of timber structures built into the wall. No trace of the presumed doorway was visible in this wall and a small investigative opening aimed at finding the lintel was unsuccessful due to uncertainty about the levels on different sides of the wall. A larger area of plaster would have to be removed to establish the nature of the doorway and any blocking within it.

Within the southern part of this building no trace was visible of the blocked medieval window, which must be obscured by the plaster cladding of the rear wall. Further south, within the small lean-to against the gable of this range, part of a splayed opening is revealed which must relate to the blocked doorway alongside this window. Unfortunately the south wall of the lean-to cuts directly across the middle of this opening, the remaining part of which must lie within a glazed porch built onto the front of the lean to. The doorway appears to have been blocked in brick, perhaps in the 19th century, and converted into a cupboard.

4.3 Later rear extensions

A low, single-storey rear extension extends from the east wall of the range previously described, on a curving plan behind the north wall of the thatched 'turret', to meet a stone wall bounding Countess Wear Road. This building has an extremely low-pitched roof in two sections, covered with slate; the pitch of both roofs is so inadequate that they leak. One of these roofs appears to be a modern replacement with a slightly steeper pitch, extending to form a kind of open 'pergola' on the northern front of the extension. Parts of the walls appear to be constructed of stone rubble but all the existing windows are modern. Some of the openings in the north wall have old timber lintels, but the prevalence of architectural salvage

in this part of the building suggests that these may be reclaimed timbers. Among the obvious architectural salvage are a number of coloured glass panels and a large Victorian Gothic door.

The eastern and southern walls of this building are formed by the stone wall bounding Countess Wear Road. This wall is constructed of large, grey limestone blocks, with a slate coping following the pitch of the shallow, sloping roofs behind. To the south the wall turns at a 45 degree angle to run beneath the north wall of the turret, i.e. forming the lower part of its north wall. The wall is pierced by a doorway closed by an attractive plank door, decorated externally with applied fillets, and probably of 19th-century date. Part of the southern jamb has been rebuilt in late 19th or 20th-century bricks and the lintel is of concrete.

Although these buildings may originate as 19th-century outbuildings or sheds connected with the house, it is evident that they have been considerably reconstructed in recent years and few features of any historic significance or interest remain.

4.5 The ‘turret’

The small two-storey turret is constructed in the same manner as the rear range, with thin vertical studs and diagonal braces. The lower part of the north wall appears to be of stone construction, as previously described, but the eastern, southern and western walls, together with the upper parts of the northern wall are all timber framed and seem to have been clad with horizontal boarding, now hidden by external render. Against the north wall is a brick fireplace contracting into a narrow vertical flue which rises through the first-floor room and through the roof. There was formerly a doorway in the east wall, opening into Countess Wear Road. All the windows are modern replacements.

In the north-eastern corner of the building is a small, narrow staircase with a crude handrail, leading to the first floor. A hatch is visible in the north-western corner of the first-floor structure, and this opening appears to be integral with the first-floor frame. At first-floor level is a small, unheated room. The roof is supported by flimsy common-rafter trusses linked by collars no more substantial than necessary to support a ceiling.

This building is presumably of 18th- or 19th-century date; as its construction is similar to that of the rear range, the two parts of the building may be contemporary. The purpose of the turret is unknown; it appears to have been designed for a specific function and it may originally have been weather-boarded or slate-hung rather than rendered. The picturesque shape of the turret might suggest that it was a prospect tower or a summer house; however the lack of a fireplace in the upper room and the position of the turret at the rear of the house where it does not seem well placed to take advantage of the view of the river, seems to militate against this. It may be an industrial or agricultural structure of some sort; a granary or store, an apple loft and pound house, or perhaps a net loft.

5 THE 2009-10 RECORDING (pls 3 and 4)

The present, very low-pitched roofs of the eastern extension were observed when they were removed; they had been entirely rebuilt in the late 20th century, and were of flimsy construction and in poor repair. Their removal exposed the construction of the north wall of the turret. The lower part of the wall, against which stands a fireplace proved to be of cob construction to the height of the demolished roof, above which the upper part of the turret could be seen to be timber framed (Pl. 3). The framing is clad with wide, horizontal boarding, the edges of the boards being butted, rather than lapped. The boards meet none too accurately

at the edges and it is evident that this was not intended as the finished surface treatment; widely-spaced cleft laths had been nailed diagonally over the boarding forming a base for a coat of render. As far as could be determined, none of the original render had survived. It may have been renewed when the roofs of the lean-to were replaced in the 20th century. Much of the existing render was supported on modern expanded metal lath. No new evidence of the original form or function of the turret building has been observed.

The lean-to structure linking the rear extension of the main house with the turret has a low pitched common rafter roof with softwood timbers of small scantling that bear the marks of a circular saw and are thus unlikely to predate the 19th century.

The scar of the demolished roofline of the north-east extension also revealed part of the fabric of the 18th- or 19th- century rear extension attached to the back of the mediaeval house. This is constructed of very flimsy timber framing (Pl. 4). Traces of vertical studs and horizontal braces were revealed, but these were so insubstantial that much of the actual strength of the wall must be derived from the nogging panels of red, hand-made bricks. The colour of the bricks was highly variable, some being more yellow than orange/red, but this may simply be due to the natural colouration of the brick earth or clay employed in making the bricks. The character of the masonry and the timber framing would be consistent with a late 18th- or early 19th-century date.

The lower part of this wall was thicker and formed of large blocks of limestone, bonded with a brown earth and lime mortar mix. This thicker wall runs for much of the length of the 18th- or 19th-century range, but does not appear to be perfectly aligned with it. It is possible that this formed a boundary wall to a garden or yard prior to the construction of the extension to the mediaeval house. The doorway between the two parts of the building has jambs integral with this masonry, and may have been adapted from an earlier opening in the wall.

A new doorway between the main house and the rear extension was inserted through a cupboard in the east wall of the house to the south of the stairs. As previously suggested this location was a former opening between the house and extension. The east wall of the house was observed to be constructed of brown cob laid onto breccia footings. The blocked opening had been inserted through this wall, and surviving masonry associated with this doorway included stone and bricks at the head of a door and orange/red bricks on the internal elevations. Some of the latter on the north reveal appear to represent blocking of a socket for a removed lintel.

5. DISCUSSION (Fig. 2)

The property formerly comprising Exe View Cottage and 30 Countess Wear Road forms part of a 15th-century three-room and cross passage house, a rare survival of a late medieval rural vernacular dwelling within the city. The building originally had an open hall, and the inner room to the north wall also heated by an open hearth. At an unknown date, possibly in the 17th-century, the open hearths were replaced by fireplaces in large chimney stacks and a first floor added.

The turret was probably constructed, as a detached building, in the 18th century. It may have been an industrial or agricultural structure; a granary or store, an apple loft and pound house, or perhaps a net loft. This was followed soon after by (in the late 18th- or early 19th-century) by the construction of two boundary walls – the eastern boundary with Countess Wear Road

and a north-east to south-west aligned wall between the turret and main house. At broadly the same time, but almost certainly slightly later, two new rooms were added to the house – an extension to the northwest, and an extension to the northeast. The latter does not extend the full length of the medieval property, which probably indicates that the property had already been subdivided by that date.

In the 20th-century a new kitchen range wing was added to the north end of house, with a further extension added to the north of the turret. Other alterations were made to the existing extension and the main house, including addition of a new, raised roof.

SOURCE CONSULTED

Listed Building Online website, <http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The appraisal and recording were commissioned by Harriet Ziegler and managed for EA by Stuart Blaylock and John Allan. The fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Parker and John Allan. This report was prepared by Andrew Passmore based on Richard Parker's site notes, and the report illustrations were prepared by Tony Ives.

APPENDIX 1: THE LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Building Name: 30 AND 32

Parish: EXETER

District: EXETER

County: DEVON

Postcode: EX2 6LP

Details:

LBS Number: 88994

Grade: II

Date Listed: 29/01/1953

Date Delisted:

NGR: SX9406590058

Listing Text:

COUNTESS WEAR ROAD

1.

1092

Nos 30 and 32

(Formerly listed as Nos 3 and 4, Exe View)

SX 99 SW 24/514 29.1.53

II

2.

Ancient cob building with a thatched roof. C17 but modernized T shaped block. Two storeys. Unevenly spaced C18 casement windows. End stacks.

Listing NGR: SX9406590058

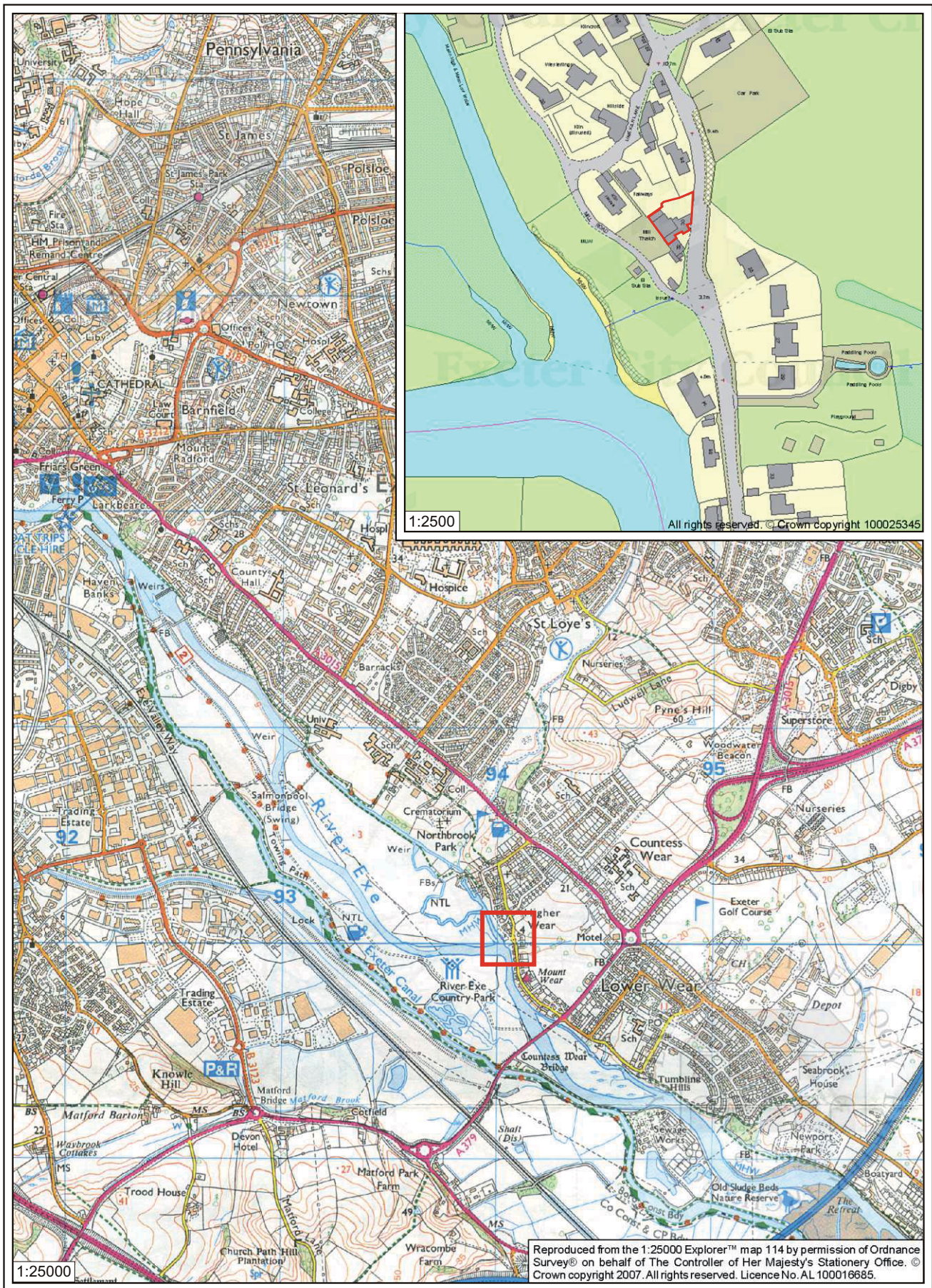


Fig. 1 Location of site.

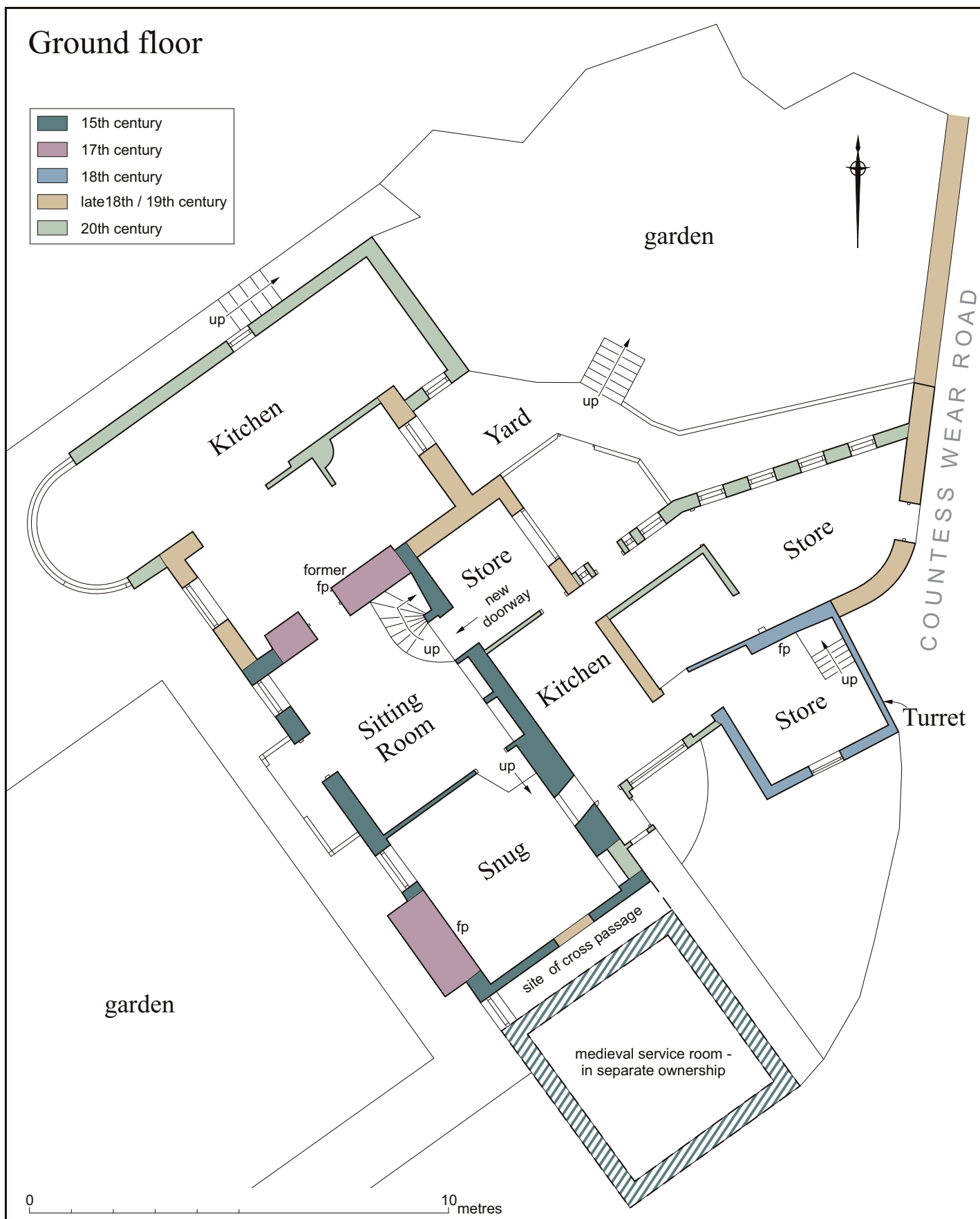


Fig. 2 Phased ground-floor plan.



Plate 1 The cross-passage screen, looking southeast.



Plate 2 View of first floor showing jointed-cruck truss, looking northwest.



Plate 3 The turret showing cob and timber-framed construction, looking southwest.

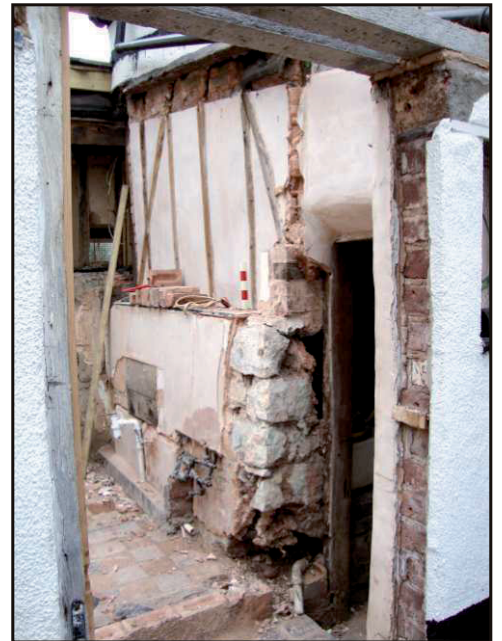


Plate 4 Outside wall of extension showing limestone yard wall and later framing, looking southwest. 0.25m scale.