

**HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING
AT THE BEDFORD HOTEL,
TAVISTOCK, DEVON, 2008**

Prepared for Stephen Whettem Architects

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Exeter Archaeology

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SUMMARY

Historic building recording was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology in 2008 during alterations to the Bedford Hotel, Tavistock (SX 4815 7435). Medieval fabric relating to the abbot's lodgings was recorded, which included part of a passageway and a possible service range. A building described as a ballroom in the mid 18th century was incorporated into the hotel and was expanded and altered in the 19th century. Finds recovered from this rebuilding hint at a date after 1820, which probably identifies the work with John Foulston's alterations in 1830. This work included the addition of new internal walls and the insertion of windows into medieval fabric.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

This report has been commissioned by Stephen Whettem Architects Ltd on behalf of Warm Welcome Hotels (Southern) Ltd and presents the results of archaeological recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology in 2008 during the course of alterations to the rear courtyard and ballroom range of the Bedford Hotel, Plymouth Road, Tavistock, West Devon (NGR SX 4815 7435; Fig. 1). The works comprised the installation of a new fire escape route through the basement of the building that entailed alterations to the fabric of the hotel. The rear of the hotel incorporates medieval fabric from the Benedictine Tavistock Abbey.

A 'programme of archaeological building recording in accordance with a written scheme of investigation' was a condition of Listed Building Consent (LBC) granted by West Devon Borough Council under the *Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990* (reference no: 9879/2007/TAV, dated 7 March 2007 'Works to Listed Building involving alterations to fire escape'). A parallel application and LBC (reference no. 9347/2006/TAV, dated 16th October 2006, 'alterations in connection with construction of function room within internal courtyard and installation of passenger lift and external stairs') carried a different condition regarding provision of access for archaeological observation and recording to 'any archaeologist nominated by the local authority'.

2. STATUTORY PROTECTION

The whole of the site of the abbey is scheduled as an ancient monument of national importance under the provision of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979 (National Monument No. 29679). Details of the extent of the Scheduled Monument and its extent (both above and below ground are presented in the method statement for this project (Blaylock 2007, section 1.3) and are not repeated here.

The hotel and associated structures within the curtilage are protected through listing under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as a Building of Special Architectural or Historical Interest. The hotel buildings are listed grade II.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND, by S.R. Blaylock

The Benedictine Abbey of St Mary and St Rumon at Tavistock was the premier monastic establishment in medieval Devon, with possessions valued at £902 in 1535 (Finberg 1969, 28). The abbey was founded and first constructed in the third quarter of the 10th century. The founder was Ordulf, and the abbey was begun during Edgar's reign (959-75), probably in 974, and finished in 981 (Radford 1929, 55-6). Sacked and probably destroyed by Viking raids in 997, the abbey was rebuilt in the early 11th century and prospered, so that by the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 it was the richest religious house in Devon (*ibid.*, 58). The abbey church was originally dedicated to St Mary, but later acquired the dual dedication to St Mary and St Rumon. The church contained the shrine containing St Rumon's relics from at least the early 12th century. There were vicissitudes during the later medieval period, but the abbey remained one of the most important in the diocese of Exeter. It attained the height of its wealth and influence in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, immediately prior to the Dissolution. The Abbot of Tavistock acquired mitred status in 1459 (i.e. status equivalent to that of a bishop), and the further status of a seat in Parliament in 1514 (*ibid.*, 61). This increasing importance was reflected in the buildings of the abbey, which were extensively rebuilt in the later Middle Ages. The abbey church was rebuilt in the early 14th century, and

there is considerable documentary evidence for other major building work in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries (*ibid.*, 80). Recent work on the surviving standing fabric of the abbey buildings has suggested that there was a good deal of rebuilding work in the last few decades of the abbey's life, with some suggestion that differential building materials have a chronological implication: early fabric employing largely local Hurdwick stone, whereas later building used a wider variety of stone, including granite on a large scale, and imported Beer and Caen limestones. William Worcestre, who described the abbey in 1478, mentioned a 'new' cloister as well as giving several key dimensions of the abbey church and buildings (Harvey 1969, 115).

What is known of the plan of the abbey is made up of a skeleton based on surviving buildings, fleshed out with details from excavation; from documentary, pictorial and cartographic sources; and from the study of the later buildings on the site, which often contain fragments of earlier fabric or clues in their structure or alignment. The standing buildings comprise principally the east and west gates (known respectively as Court Gate and West Gate or Betsy Grimbal's Tower); another gate represented by the arched substructure to the tower of the parish church of St Eustachius, which led into the monastic cemetery between the abbey and parish churches, and was thus known as the Cemetery Gate (a fourth gate, the Water Gate on the river frontage, has failed to survive); one of the ancillary buildings flanking the great court which, unconventionally at Tavistock, lay to the east (rather than the west) of the main buildings around the cloister; a fragment of the abbey church and cloister, standing in the churchyard; a large medieval building (now known as Abbey Chapel) with a porch entry of domestic character, which may represent part of the abbot's lodging, or some other peripheral building outside the main cloister (infirmary and misericord have both been suggested in the past). Other fragments include a section of the precinct wall along the River Tavy, with fine runs of crenellations; the Still Tower, a two-storeyed tower at the south-west limit of the monastic precinct; and numerous smaller fragments. The site of the cloister is presumed to be reflected in some structures and boundaries traceable in post-medieval maps and documents (Freeman and Wans 1996, fig. 2; Stead *et al.* 1999, fig. 11). These studies have shown that the Bedford Hotel is positioned on the site of the refectory range of the cloister and its substructure probably incorporates some monastic fabric (Blaylock 1998, 19-20 and fig. 2), although there are considerable difficulties in distinguishing medieval and later work in this building (*idem* 2001, 4-5 and fig. 3). The chapter house survived until the early 18th century (Radford 1929, 85 and pl. 15). The abbey church is known from Worcestre's measurements and description; Radford's excavations and reconstructed plan; more recent excavations and archaeological observations in 1961, 1997, and 1999 (Stead *et al.* 1999, fig. 2, etc.). Recent work has attempted to produce a composite plan of what is known of the abbey buildings, but this is necessarily conjectural, still incomplete, and fraught with difficulty (*ibid.*, 197-98 and fig. 11).

The hotel building that stands today began as a private house of five bays by three, rebuilt in c.1725 on the site of the medieval refectory range, for one Jacob Saunders. At this stage the house faced south (this was before Plymouth Road had been cut through the townscape to the north of the building), and it can be seen in this form on a number of early prints and drawings, such as the magnificent print by Charles Delafontaine of 1741 (Radford 1929, pl. 16), or the map by John Wynne of 1752 (Stead *et al.* 1999, fig. 4). The predecessor to Jacob Saunders' house (a building sometimes known as the 'Saxon School': Mettler 1986, 9) is depicted in a sketch of 1716 by Edmund Prideaux (Radford 1929, pl. 15), which shows a number of features that may have survived from a medieval or sixteenth-century predecessor. The hotel building was modified and extended in 1822-29 by Sir Jeffry Wyattville for the

Bedford Estate (in the Tudor gothic style that had become *de rigueur* as the prevalent building style in the Tavistock of the 6th Duke of Bedford), and further additions were made soon after, in 1830, by John Foulston, including the large ballroom range that was formed within the footprint of existing buildings to the south of the hotel and to the west of the Abbey Chapel, the former Abbot's Lodging (Cherry and Pevsner 1989, 784; Mettler 1986, 12-18).

The present development includes the construction of a new function room for the hotel (which will fill the area of the present courtyard) and centres on the construction of a new fire escape route around the substructure of the function room and passing through the ground floor storeroom and garage beneath the ballroom. This involved the breaching of the east wall of the ballroom range by cutting down the sill of a ground-floor window, in a position suspected to preserve medieval fabric (Blaylock 1998, 18-19; *idem* 2001, 4 and figs 3 and 7), and cutting a new door through an internal stone wall separating the present storeroom from the present garage (this was judged to be of 19th-century date in 1998: *idem* 1998, 20). The creation of the new fire escape route also involved the construction of a corridor along the north side of the garage to channel the fire escape through to the car park to the west. The associated work involved the removal of the present fire escape, demolition of an adjoining block of uncertain, but almost certainly 19th-century, date and construction of new buildings up to the standing elevations of the hotel and chapel buildings surrounding the courtyard.

As has been seen in the brief summary above, past work on the site of the Abbey, and particularly on the analysis of the fabric in the region of the Bedford Hotel, the Abbey Chapel, and Foulston's ballroom range that extends south from the main range of the hotel to connect with the west end of the chapel, has (a) demonstrated how much of the plan of these structures derives from medieval structures, and (b) shown that there is significant survival of medieval fabric in this part of the site, as well as potential for some survival from the predecessor to Foulston's ballroom, known as the 'Gothic room' (Mettler 1986, 17-18).

Previous observations of 1998 and 2001 have thus provided some guide to the fabric of the building in the areas affected by the works. Detailed recording was necessary as a preliminary to understand areas directly affected by the proposed works and to guide the final detail of the proposal. The area of a new doorway in the east wall of the substructure of the ballroom range is the main case in point, which lay in an area identified in 1998 and 2001 as possibly surviving medieval fabric.

4. AIMS

The aim of the investigation was to ensure that an accurate record of parts of the site and standing building affected by the works was made, and that any hidden archaeological features that may come to light during the works could be observed and recorded.

5. METHODOLOGY

The first task was to carry out detailed recording of fabric in the areas of the new doorways for the fire escape, in order to try to refine knowledge of the date and character of the masonry to be disturbed. This involved stone-for-stone drawing at a scale of 1:20, on the exterior and interior elevations (in order to develop a better understanding of the history of this area and the dating of the fabric), photography and a written description of the fabric and the immediate environs. In addition a desk-top type assessment of pictorial and cartographic

sources was carried out to establish the structural history of the rear range of the hotel, and adjacent parts of the main hotel range and the chapel building (this exercise did not form a part of the survey of the abbey fabric in 1998 and 2001). Subsequent detailed recording was undertaken following the breaking through of the new doorway.

Archaeological deposits exposed in a test pit open at the time of the building recording were also recorded by Exeter Archaeology and was drawn in section at a scale of 1:20. All finds were retained.

6. RESULTS (Figs 2-5)

West wall of courtyard – external elevation (Fig. 3; Pl. 1)

At the south end of this wall medieval fabric generally survives to a height of between 1m and 1.20m, with more extant masonry remaining to the south where the wall incorporates an arched door opening with relieving arch. Additionally voussoirs for an arched opening in the south wall of the courtyard spring from the corner of this wall (see Blaylock 2001, fig. 7, southwest end of elevation 9).

The elevation incorporates four window openings, three of which were glazed at the time of the recording. The western, open window was recorded in detail, and part of the adjacent glazed window was also drawn. The open window is splayed and has a slightly arched head of Hurdwick stone voussoirs, a technique repeated on the middle of the three adjacent windows. The windows were inserted into the medieval wall in the 19th century, and the fabric contains a higher proportion of slate than Hurdwick stone. The masonry is bonded in a light brown lime mortar with flecks and fragments of coal. The elevation retains a patchy coat of cement, which is also present around the flat-headed window.

West wall of courtyard – internal elevation (Figs 4-5)

To the north of the arched doorway the medieval fabric survives to a height of 1.50m, but to the south is visible to a higher level almost up to the modern suspended ceiling. The southern jamb of the door partially comprises a tall, moulded piece of granite. The doorway is blocked in coursed stone and is largely obscured by historic plaster. The 19th-century window has a wooden lintel on this elevation situated behind the exterior arch, and both mortar and cement render is present.

The north reveal of the window is formed by a cross wall that continues west from the courtyard wall. This wall is 19th-century in date and is contemporary with the insertion of the windows into the adjacent courtyard wall. Some brick was exposed within the core of this wall.

Test pit adjacent to west wall of courtyard

A test pit, measuring 1m wide by 0.70m deep, located adjacent to the west wall of the courtyard was recorded. At the base of the pit a rubble deposit was exposed, which was overlain by a slate-lined drain. Above this drain sat a cobbled courtyard surface laid on a thick make-up layer. Although no dating evidence was recovered for these features, they are almost certainly related to the hotel rather than the earlier abbey.

7. FINDS (Pl. 2)

A small assemblage of finds was recovered. The finds comprised a basal sherd of a late 18th- or early 19th-century Montelupo Tuscan oil jar found placed within the medieval wall fabric, and three joining sherds of white earthenware plate with the transfer-printed crest and name of the Bedford Hotel set into the fabric of the 19th-century cross wall. The plate was manufactured by Wedgwood, probably after c. 1820.

8. DISCUSSION

The outbuildings at the rear of the Bedford Hotel were formed within the footprint of existing buildings to the south of the hotel, altered and extended in the 1820s by Sir Jeffry Wyatville and in 1830 by John Foulston. These buildings include the former medieval Abbot's Lodging and range described as a ballroom in the mid 18th century (Blaylock 2001, 7-8 and fig. 2 where the former is labelled as a hall). As expected, medieval fabric survives within the 'hall' building, the adjacent passage and the range to the west, now incorporated within 19th-century hotel rooms. The function of this latter range is not known, but its relationship with the hall and passage may hint at least partially as a service range. This range was enlarged in the 19th century when it formed the west side of a new hotel courtyard situated between the main abbey complex and the West Gate (Betsy Grimbold's Tower). New internal walls were added, and windows were inserted into the eastern courtyard elevation. The pottery recovered from the cross wall is consistent with the 19th-century date for these alterations, and Foulston's 1830 works is the most likely context.

9. ARCHIVE

An integrated site archive has been prepared and is currently stored at Exeter Archaeology's premises prior to deposition with the Plymouth City Museum (Accession number AR.2010.14). An OASIS entry has been completed (number exeterar1-78015) and includes and digital copy of this document.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Stephen Whettem Architects on behalf of Warm Welcome Hotels (Southern) Ltd and managed by Stephen Whettem (Stephen Whettem Architects) and Stuart Blaylock and John Allan (Exeter Archaeology). The fieldwork was carried out by Richard Parker and Gary Young, and the report written by Andrew Passmore with illustrations prepared by Tony Ives.

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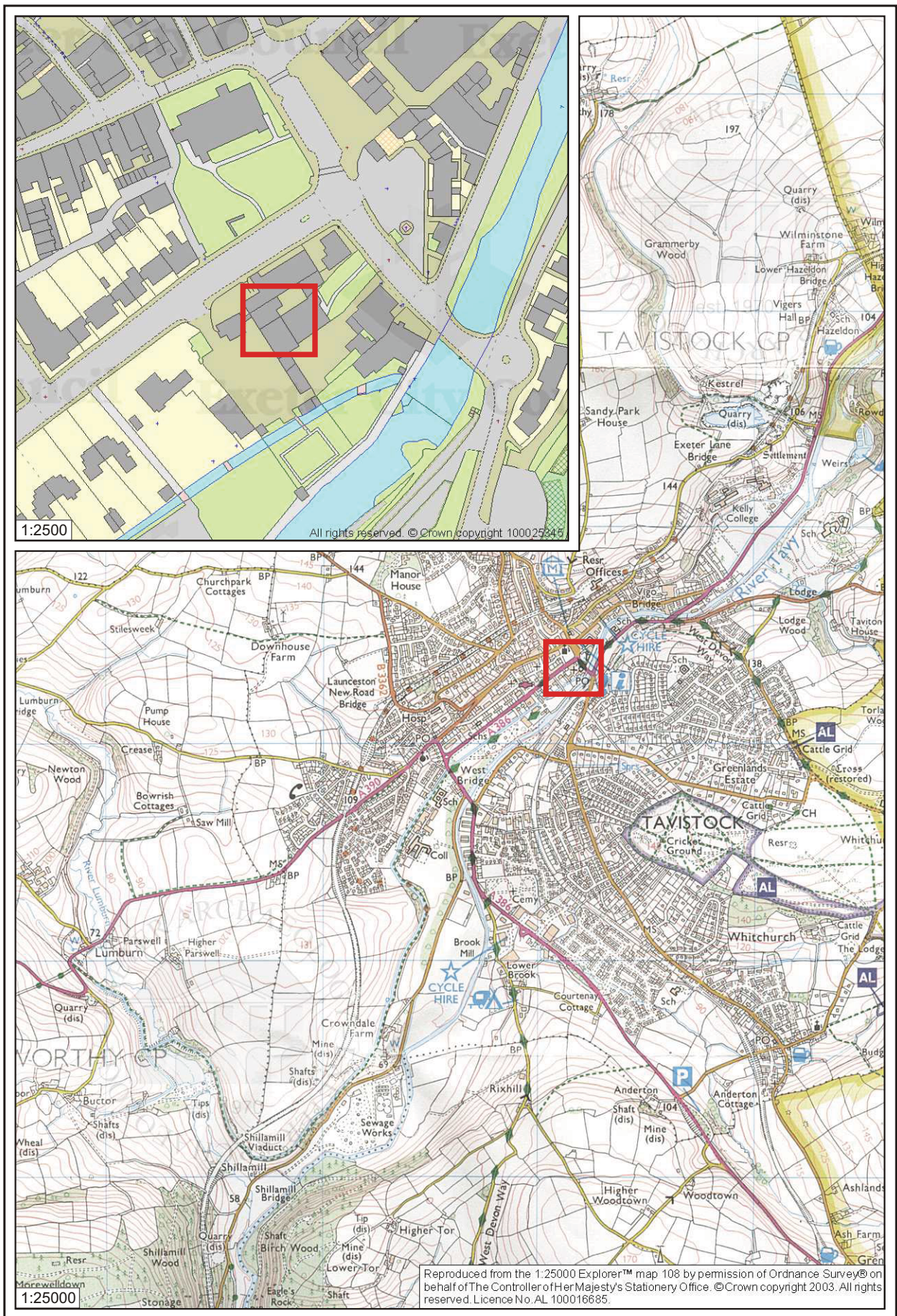


Fig. 1 Location of site.

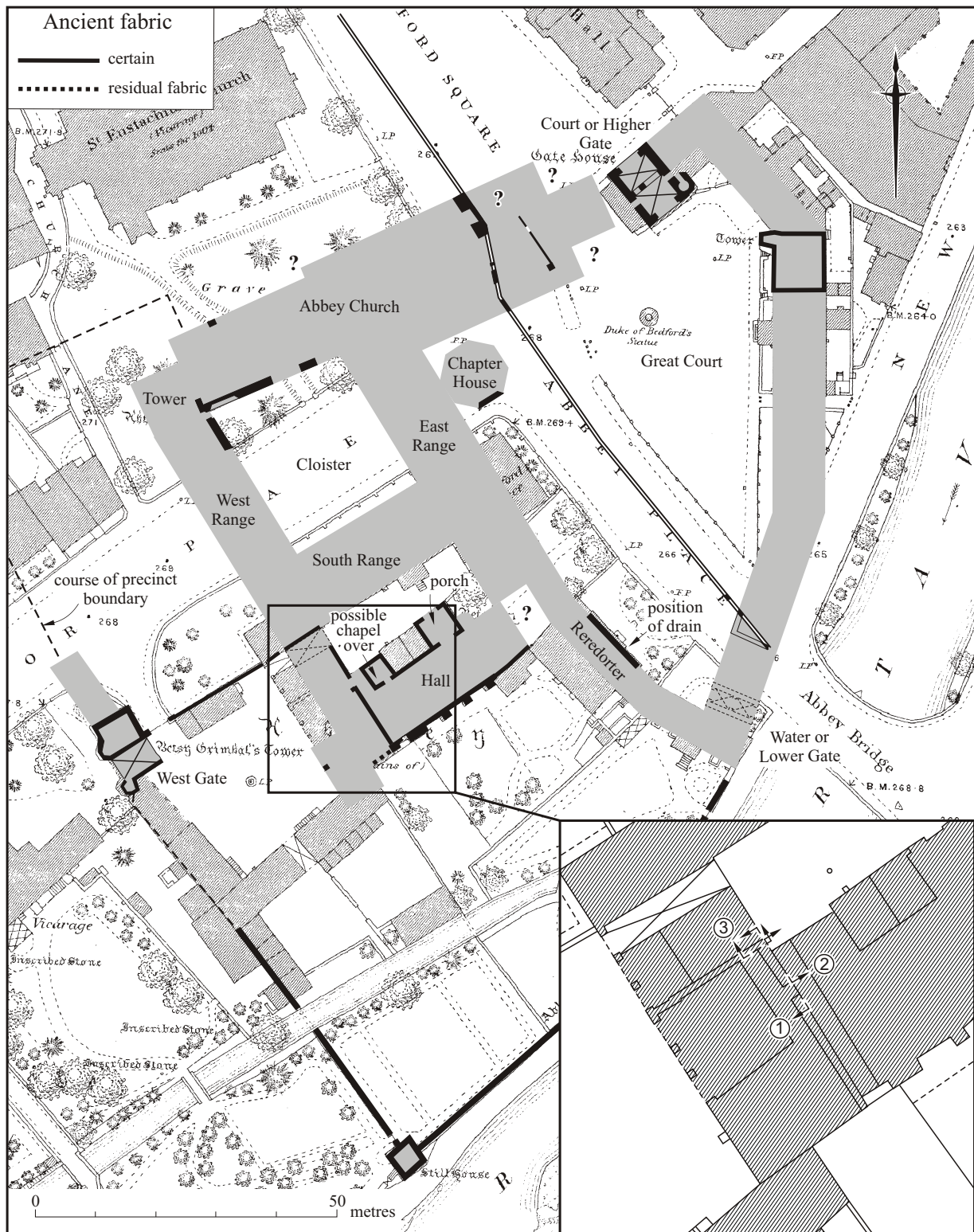


Fig. 2 Conjectural reconstruction of the main elements of the plan of Tavistock Abbey, superimposed on the OS 1:500 town plan of Tavistock, sheet CV.8.17, of 1885 (revised version of Blaylock 2001, fig. 4). Inset shows location of observations.

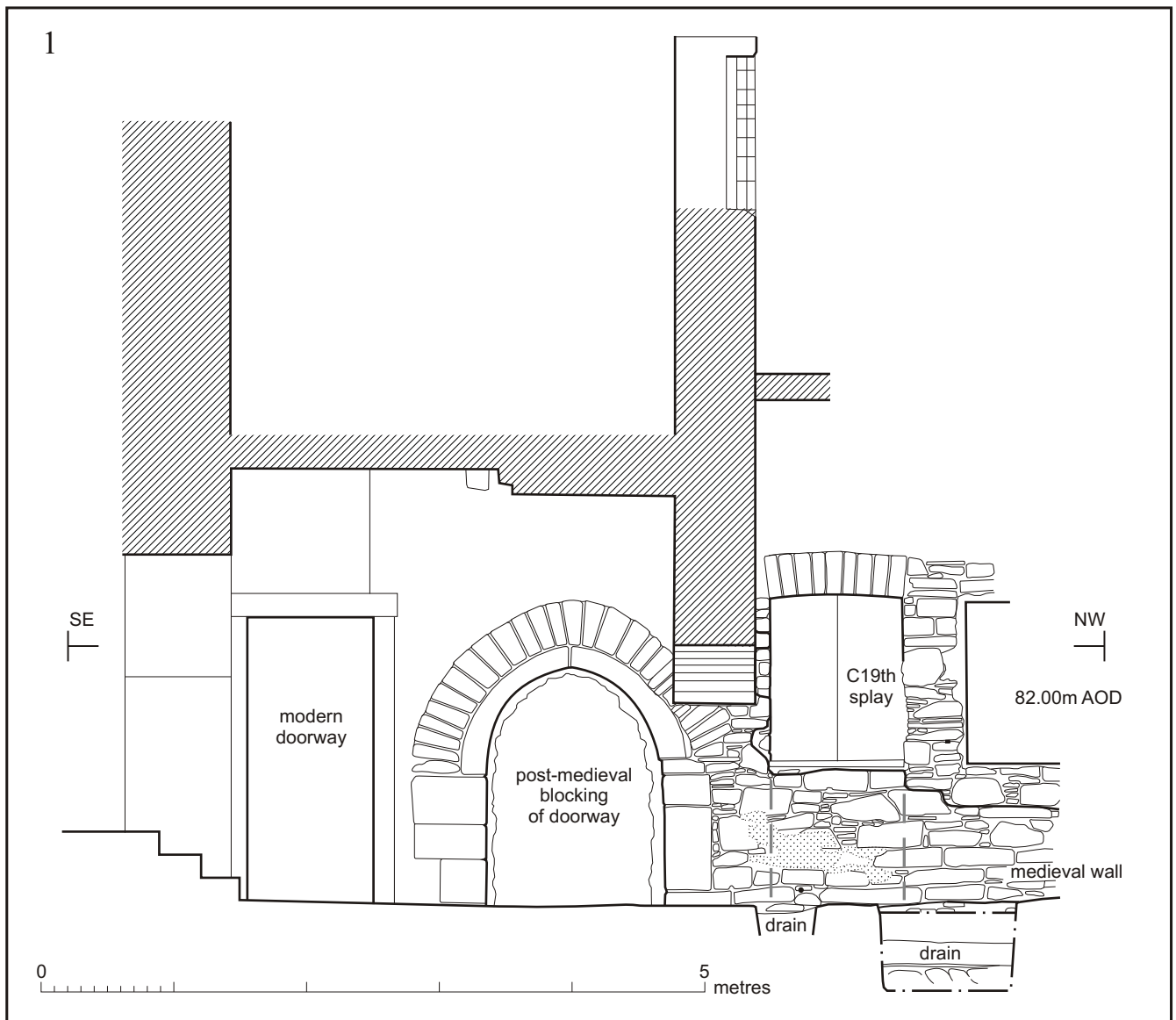


Fig. 3 West courtyard wall: exterior elevation (grey vertical lines below the C19 window show extent of removed fabric).

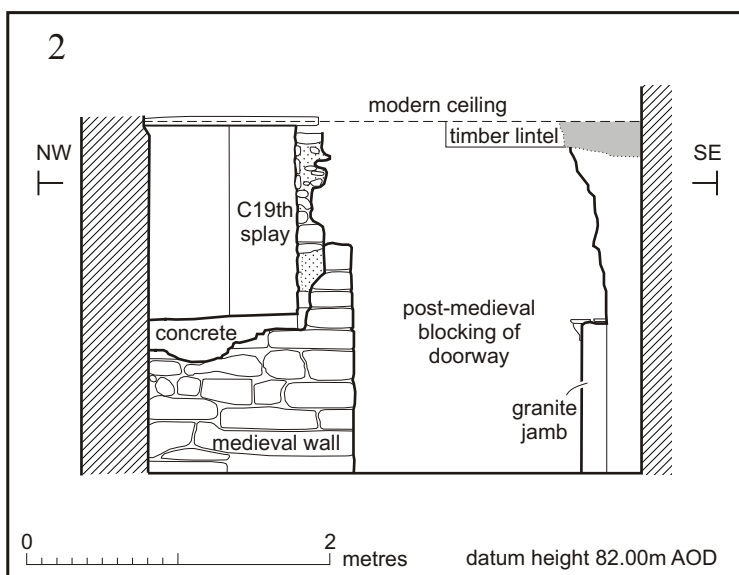


Fig. 4 East courtyard wall: interior elevation.

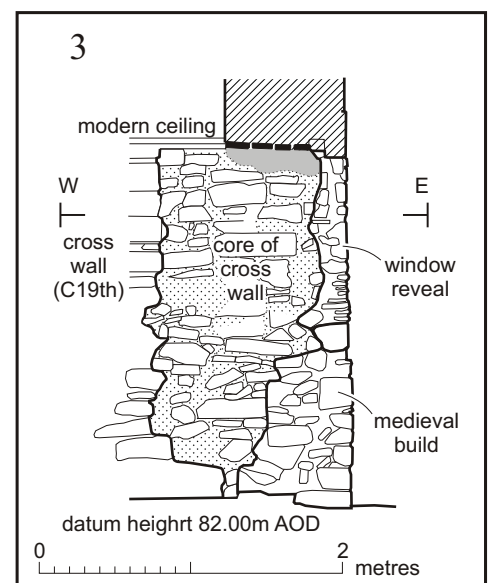


Fig. 5 Section through removed window opening.



Pl. 1 The south and west courtyard walls showing medieval arched openings and open 19th-century window, looking south. 1m scale.



Pl. 2 The Bedford Hotel plate showing the arms of the Duke of Bedford and the word 'Tavistock'. 100m scale.