



Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological building recording of Dinton Castle Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

March – October 2009



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Report 09/174

Northamptonshire Archaeology

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DINTON CASTLE, AYLESBURY

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological Building Recording at Dinton Castle, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	
Short description	<i>Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out building recording at Dinton Castle a Grade II* listed octagonal 'sham gothic castle' folly built in 1769 by John Vanhatten. The level 3 survey was carried out in conjunction with the Urgent Works Notice required to make it structurally sound. The folly was photographed and the internal elevation was drawn, showing the different blocks of stone and brickwork. Repairs have been made to the brickwork and windows.</i>	
Project type	Building Recording	
Site status	Grade II* listed	
Previous work	None	
Current Land use	Building	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Folly, built in 1769	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address	Dinton Castle, Oxford Road, Dinton, Buckinghamshire, HP17 8TX	
Study area (sq.m / ha)	C 100sqm	
OS Easting & Northing	SP 76540 11548	
Height OD		
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Yvonne Wolframm-Murray	
Project Manager	Joe Prentice	
Sponsor or funding body	Aylesbury Vale District Council	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	27 th March 2009	
End date	16 th October 2009	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		Report text and figures
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological building recording of Dinton Castle, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	
Serial title & volume	09/174	
Author(s)	Yvonne Wolframm-Murray	
Page numbers		

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING OF DINTON CASTLE AYLESBURY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out building recording at Dinton Castle a Grade II listed octagonal 'sham gothic castle' folly built in 1769 by John Vanhatten. The level 3 survey was carried out in conjunction with the Urgent Works Notice required to make it structurally sound. The folly was photographed and the internal elevation was drawn, showing the different blocks of stone and brickwork. Repairs have been made to the brickwork and windows.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) were commissioned by Aylesbury Vale District Council to undertake an archaeological buildings recording action on Dinton Castle, Dinton, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 765 115, Figs 1, 2 and 3). The work was carried out in conjunction with 'Urgent Works' required to make the folly structurally sound. Listed Building Consent was sought by the Aylesbury Vale District Council in March 2009.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dinton Castle is a Grade II* listed 'sham gothic castle' located beside the Aylesbury to Thame Road (A 418, Oxford Road), near Dinton. The folly was built in 1769 by John Vanhatten to house his collection of fossils. Dinton Castle is located a short distance north-east from Dinton Hall, and was built on a ridge with the aim to be seen from the grounds of the Hall as an 'eye catcher' (Images of England number 43080 www.imagesofengland.org.uk See Appendix 1 for full listing description, Whitelaw 1997). The ridge around Dinton Castle was also the location of an Early Saxon cemetery and finds had been recorded (Aylesbury Vale District Council 2008).

In the nineteenth-century Dinton Castle had been possibly used as the servants' accommodation and at some point may have served as a temporary meeting place for a local non-conformist congregation (Design and Access Statement 2009, www.wikipedia.org). Since the early 1990s the folly has been in the ownership of a local family.

Dinton Castle was on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register as a Priority A building and was put on the Council's Buildings at Risk Register in 1999 (EH 2007). The deterioration of the folly resulted in the 'Urgent Works Notice' of early 2009, which was advanced enough to warrant its stabilisation by scaffolding until the consolidation work was carried out between March and October 2009.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the work were to:

- Provide a drawn and photographic record of the folly,
- Provide a brief narrative on the historical background, construction methods, and materials used.

Dinton Castle was visited between 27 March and 30 March 2009 and finally on 16 October 2009. The buildings were recorded in accordance with the standards, conventions and specification defined in *Understanding Historic Buildings, A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006), and *The standard and guidance for archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings and structures* (Institute for Archaeologists 2008). The record conformed in general to that of Level Three.

All external and internal elevations of Dinton Castle were photographed alongside structural or decorative details of interest. Upon the removal of the scaffolding additional photographs were obtained. The internal elevations of the folly were drawn, which included any structural details, such as beam slots. The different areas of brick and stone were drawn as distinct blocks in outline. A plan of the building, provided by Hockley & Dawson, was checked for accuracy on site.

4 THE BUILDING

4.1 The exterior

The plan of Dinton Castle is octagonal with projecting faceted bays on the northern and southern sides, with remains of a porch on the south side (Fig 4). The eastern and western turrets are circular in plan and form two towers. The east turret containing a staircase, the western turret contains fireplaces and their respective flues. The main body of the building is two storeys tall over a half-basement with a flat roof accessed via the stair turret. There is a single room per floor, measuring approximately 4.75m east to west and 4.80m north to south. The turrets are three storeys high, the method of the roofing to the stair turret and form of any chimneys on the other turret is uncertain (Fig 5). A simple stepped plinth extends around the lower band of the building just above present ground level, and decorative stone string or drip courses with *cyma recta* moulding differentiates storeys and the base of the parapet externally (Figs 6 and 7).

Dinton Castle was constructed of both limestone and red brick laid in a creamy white lime mortar. The half-basement was constructed of limestone. The external walls were constructed of roughly coursed limestone rubble and dressed quoins. The limestone utilised was of the Portland Stone Member with occasional sandstone blocks (www.bgs.ac.uk). The structure includes many large locally-found ammonites incorporated in its external walls, they are now in poor condition due to exposure to the elements and several are missing (Fig 8). Brick was utilised on much of the internal walls and as external detailing around the windows and doors (Fig 9). Externally the brick detailing was covered in stucco, which had largely fallen off (Fig 10). Internally some small patches of light greyish-white lime plaster survived on the lower and upper floors (Fig 11).

Both the northern and southern octagonal bays have tall gothic style ogee headed windows. There is a doorway accessed via the porch on the south side at ground level (Fig 12). Originally this must have had internal stairs to rise to the lower floor which is raised over the half-basement. On either side at this level are two windows; on the corresponding north side of this floor there were three openings. On the upper floor there appears to have been another door above the porch, perhaps giving access to a balcony situated on top of the porch, again with windows to either side (Fig 5 and 7). The north side of this room has three windows, with simple stone sills (Fig 13). Both turrets have two narrow round arched windows on each floor in the style of loop windows in keeping with the manner of a sham castle (Fig 14). The outer moulding of

these windows is of stone not stuccoed brick. All are blind in the fireplace turret, the blocking comprising brick covered with stucco, in the staircase turret the ground floor windows are also blind. The two second floor windows were apparently functional but their method of glazing is uncertain. At the top of each turret there is also a bull's eye window. The one within the flue turret is blind, that in the staircase turret appears to have been open. Each is bordered with stone and not stuccoed brick (Figs 15 and 16).

4.2 The half-basement

It is not quite clear how the half-basement was accessed; a break in the north-east cant of the north bay appears to be a constructed rather than broken through opening which may have been a doorway (Figs 5 and 17). There is no indication at present of steps. In the central north facet of the octagon there is a round arched recess, the arch constructed of brick (Fig 18). There is a brick-built fireplace at the base of the west turret, the segmental arch of which is now missing, though the springers are still present on either side (Fig 19). It is not known at what level the half-basement floor was situated, but it is believed to be much deeper than the 200mm suggested previously from inspection of the test-pits dug by the owner, since at that level there would not be enough head room to make this a usable space. The half-basement appears to be filled with rubble from the collapse of the upper sections of the building.

4.3 The lower Floor

This floor is accessed via the doorway on the south side through a now fragmentary porch which appears to have had an entrance in the east side of that structure, which survives today as an L-shaped projection (Figs 4 and 12). The west wall of the porch is butted onto the south face of the hexagon, suggesting that it may be a later feature. There is no corresponding wall on the east side which indicates the presence of a doorway. The entrance into the octagon is beneath a segmental brick arch and it is assumed that there was an internal short flight of stairs to rise from the external ground level up to the level of the lower floor above the half-basement (Fig 20). No clear evidence remains, though occasional empty sockets in the interior wall face indicate the location of principal beams.

Internally the walls are constructed entirely of red brick and traces of wall plaster remains indicating the finish of the internal surfaces. There are unusually also traces of plaster within the fireplace recess, on either side of which a chopped-back rebate indicates the location of the fire surround. The arch of this fireplace has either collapsed or has been broken out (Fig 21).

The window reveals are all splayed from floor to ceiling rather than just above sill level; this could be for a number of reasons. It could be simply that they allowed the visitor to approach the window, would have allowed the option of a window seat, or more likely could have housed cabinets for the fossil and mineral collection since there is such limited wall space around the outside of the room. It would also have afforded good lighting to view any collection. Empty square sockets on either side of the window jamb at sill level indicate the presence of timber sills (Fig 23). No indications remain of the type of window fixtures or arrangements which must have been made of wood. The internal soffits of the windows were finished with a flat timber lintel (most now missing) and do not follow the ogee shape visible externally. The window adjacent to the staircase turret on the south side of the octagon still retains a small section of lime plaster on both the jamb and soffit (Figs 22).

From this level, the upper floor was accessed via a spiral staircase in the east turret (Fig 24). A series of empty sockets show the line of timbers which supported the timber stairs, and a scar within the surviving plaster shows the angle of the rise of the string.

4.4 The upper floor

The upper floor was constructed in the same way as the lower floor. On the north side were three windows, each with splayed jambs and space below the sills internally for seats or cabinets (Fig 25). The central facet of the south side of the octagon is differently configured; the jambs are straight instead of being splayed. The opening rises from floor to ceiling and there is no window sill. The soffit of the arch is lower and the external surround is finished in stone rather than stuccoed brick (Fig 26). The external stone surround is rebated and retains iron hinge pins, which indicate the presence of either a door or shutters which opened outwards and apparently gave access onto a balcony above the roof of the porch. External two square sockets on either side suggest the presence of a handrail at roughly the same level as the flanking window sills (Fig 26).

The west turret contains the only fireplace to retain its segmental arch, which is constructed of brick, and is smaller and narrower than that on the lower floor (Fig 28). The purpose of two empty square sockets on either side of the opening are unclear, though chopped-back rebates on either jamb indicate the presence of a decorative surround with mantel shelf (Figs 27 and 28).

Surviving timber set into the brickwork, or empty sockets around the internal wall plane in a horizontal band, suggest the presence of either a timber dado panel, or perhaps even full-height panelling since other horizontal bands survive above (Fig 5). Smaller, square sockets in the splays of the window reveals suggest that these too could have been either panelled or more likely fitted with internal shutters. Many of these horizontal sockets have been in-filled during the recent stabilisation works with new brick. The fact that there are no traces of plaster on the internal wall surfaces at this level further support the theory that it was panelled (Fig 29).

The eastern tower housed the stairwell with the beam slots supporting the spiral staircase visible in the walls (Fig 30). Graffiti found at the top of the stairwell indicates that it was still possible to gain access to this level until the mid 20th century (Fig 31). This section was plastered as it would have been difficult to panel the internal curved surface.

From the upper floor a further spiral flight gave access to the roof. The roof was probably covered with lead and relatively flat allowing it to be walked upon. The doorway onto the roof was narrow and fitted with a door that opened outwards, as evidenced by a rebate which still retained the iron pin hinges. The doorway was slightly off-centre to the north due to the rise of the spiral stair (Fig 32). A fragmentary timber sill remains *in situ*, and the doorway had a segmental brick arch. Flanking the outer walls of the turrets were fragments of a parapet wall. Externally this was constructed of stone with some brick on the inner face, although not enough survived to determine the configuration of its upper surface (Fig 33). A ledge in the stonework around the inner face of the wall at roof level suggests the presence of an internal gutter, perhaps fitted with spouts, since no indications were seen to suggest the presence of down pipes.

5 DISCUSSION

Dinton Castle is a fine example of an eighteenth-century structure. It is now called a folly, though perhaps since it was built with a specific purpose to house a collection of fossils and minerals, this epithet does not strictly apply. Its castellated form is typical of the period and reflects its location on high ground, a reference to earlier defensive structures which were thus located for military reasons. Its association with Dinton Hall to the south-east (now separately owned) perhaps indicates that it was more of an eye-catcher than folly.

It is interesting that a building was dedicated to the housing of a collection of fossils at this period, and is an early example of specific interest in the natural world (Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne* was not published until 1788).

The recent survey provided a drawn internal elevation showing differentiating blocks of stone and brickwork. The drawing also shows any missing brickwork. Photographs were taken during the renovation and also on a visit after the works were completed and with the scaffolding removed. The folly was stabilized by replacing any missing or damaged bricks (Fig 25, note the new bright red bricks) on the internal walls, the parapet, and the window detailing. New wooden lintels were inserted in the windows and wooden bracketing. Second floor windows have been repaired and the window above the entrance had its external carved stone ogee arch replaced (Fig 26). The survey found that the lower and upper floors were originally finished differently, with the former plastered and the latter probably panelled.

Further documentary research could potentially reveal drawings or engravings of the building as constructed and during its use. This might reveal the configuration of the parapet and further information about the porch and possible balcony above.

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WEBSITES

<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk>

<http://www.wikipedia.org>

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/>

APPENDIX I English Heritage Listing (<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk>):



© Mr Ian Buxton

IoE Number: 43080

Location: DINTON CASTLE, OXFORD ROAD (north side)

DINTON WITH FORD AND UPTON, AYLESBURY VALE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Photographer: Mr Ian Buxton

Date Photographed: 19 January 2003

Date listed: 25 October 1951

Date of last amendment: 25 October 1951

Grade II*

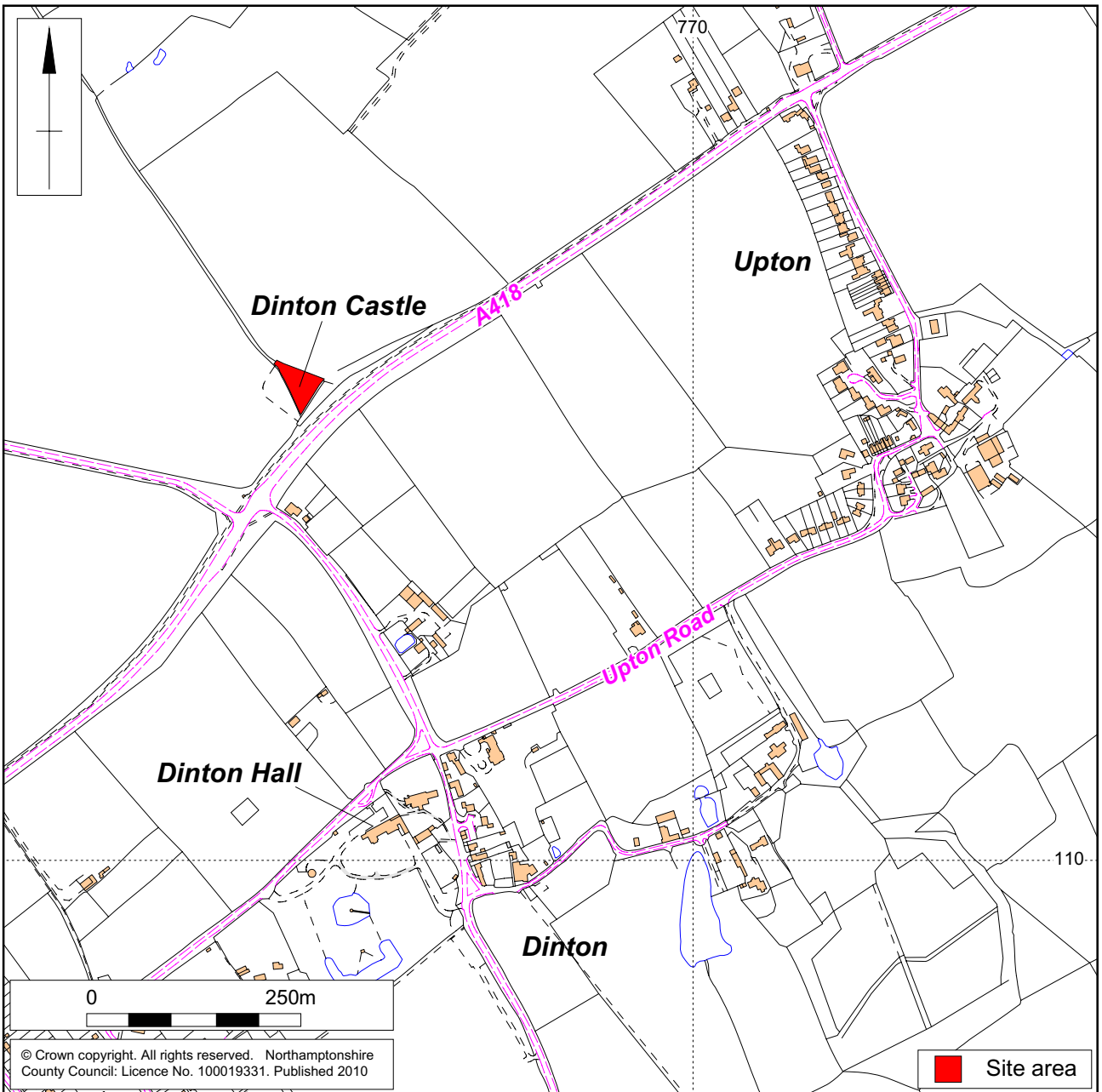
NOTE - The Images of England website consists of images of listed buildings based on the statutory list as it was in 2001 and does not incorporate subsequent amendments to the list.

For an updated version of the statutory list you should visit our LBOonline database

<http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk/Login.aspx>

SP 71 SEDINTON-WITH-FORD AND OXFORD ROADUPTON(north side)3/143Dinton Castle

SP 71 SE DINTON-WITH-FORD AND OXFORD ROAD UPTON (north side) 3/143 Dinton Castle 25.10.51 - II* Sham castle or folly, now ruinous, built as eyecatcher from grounds of Dinton Hall (q.v.) in 1769 for Sir John Vanhattern. Rubblestone with stone string courses, openings mostly cement architraved, except above entrance which has stone dressed window opening. Octagonal plan with circular towers at east and west. 2 storeys, the towers carried up to 3 storeys. Doorway in remains of porch in south face of octagon with depressed 2-centred brick arch. First floor tall ogee headed windows. Strings between storeys and at base of parapet. Parapet now mostly gone. Towers have strings between storeys with blank pointed headed loop windows. Walls have many ammonite fossils from the local limestone beds. Interior brick lined. West tower had fireplaces at each storey and east tower had newel staircase.

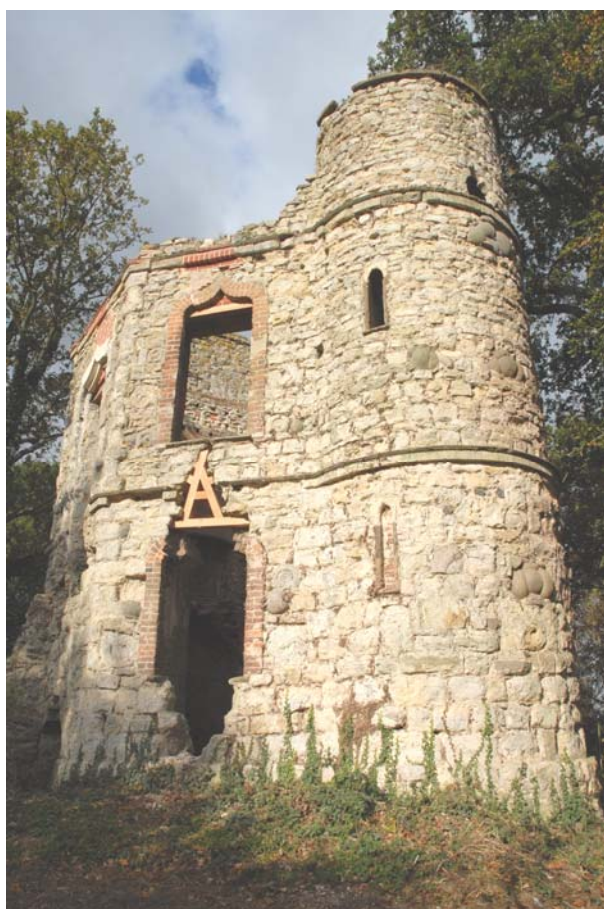


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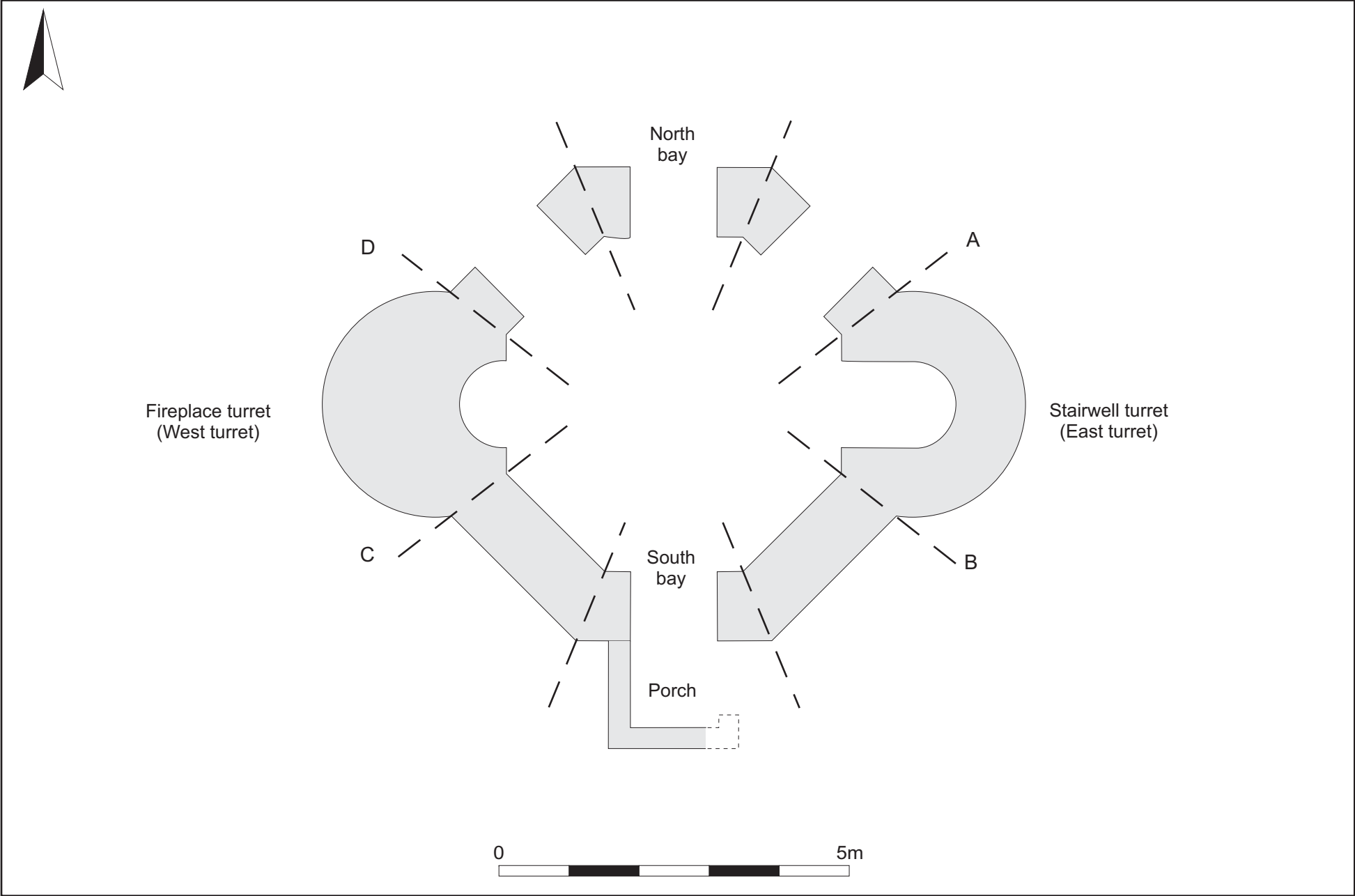
Site Location Fig 1

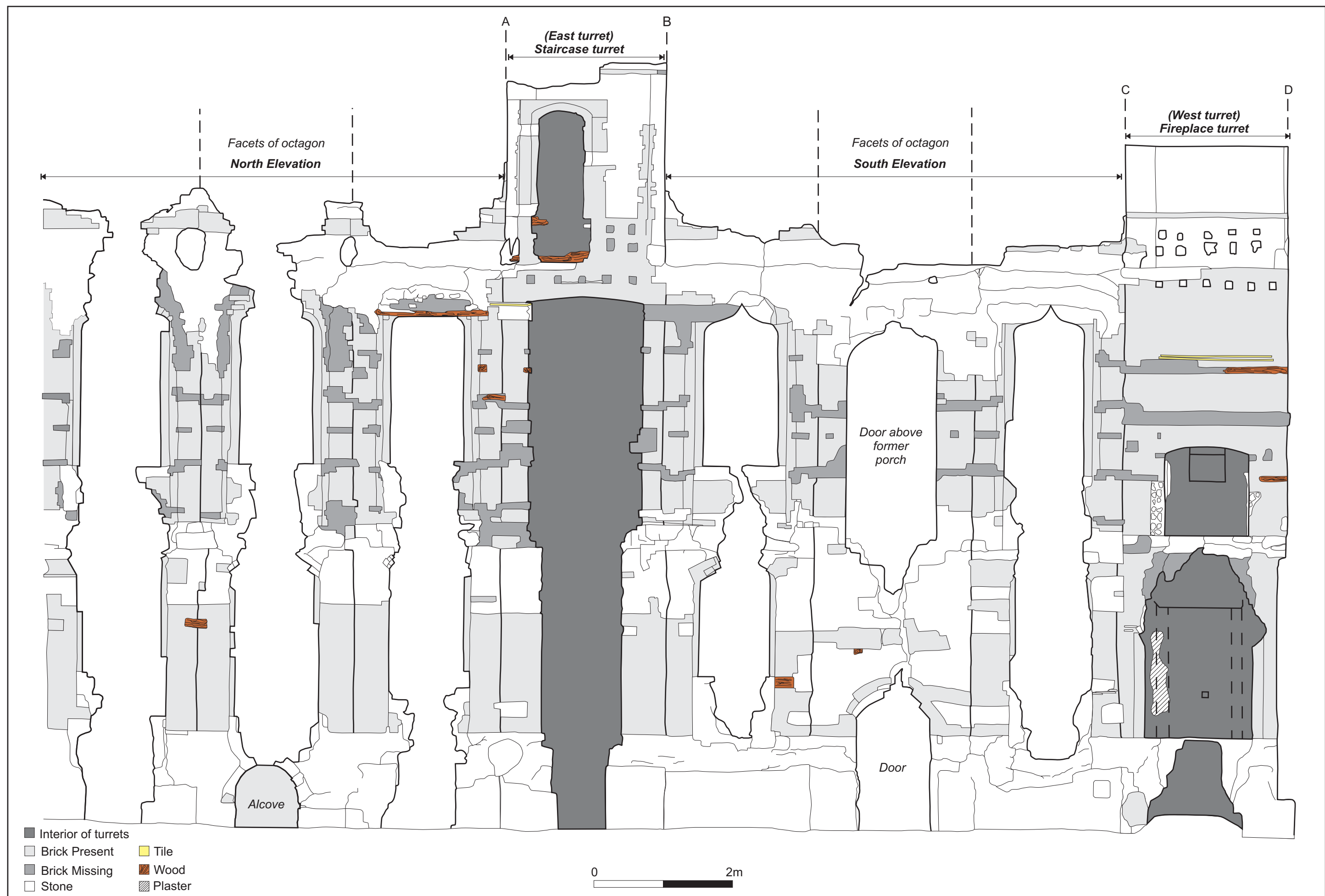


General view of Dinton Castle, looking at the south side Fig 2



General view of Dinton Castle, looking at the east turret Fig 3



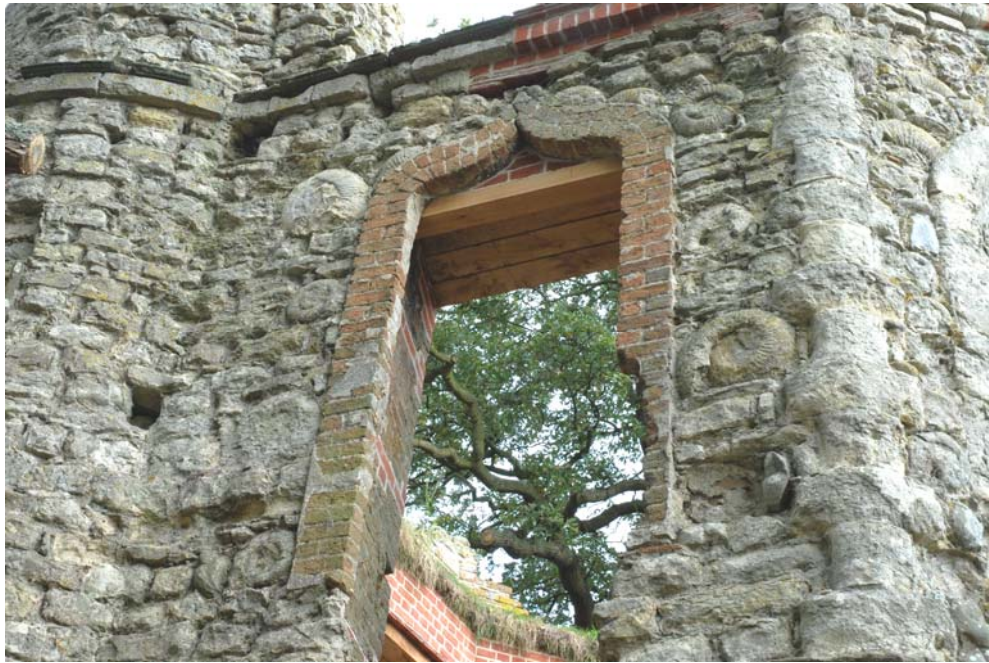




Southern elevation Fig 6



Northern elevation Fig 7



Ammonites in external wall Fig 8



Brick detailing around window on south-west wall Fig 9



Stucco covering of brick detailing on windows in northern Bay Fig 10



Surviving plaster with graffiti on window in southern Bay Fig 11



Door and porch on the southern Bay Fig 12



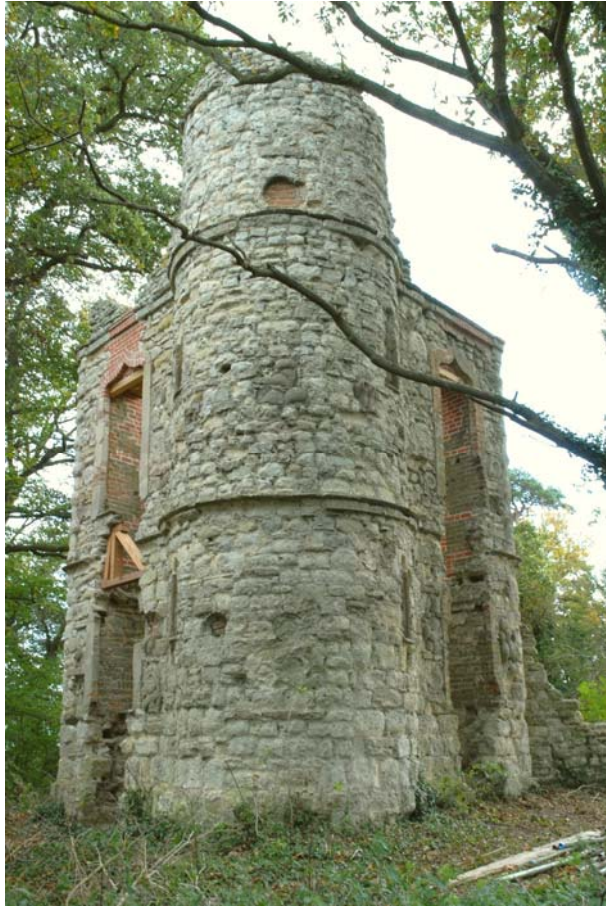
Window with stone sill Fig 13



One of the blind windows in the turrets Fig 14



Functional bull's eye window at top of the stair turret Fig 15



Blind bull's eye window at top of western fireplace turret Fig 16



Opening to the half-basement in the northern Bay Fig 17



Recessed arch in half-basement in the northern Bay Fig 18



Fireplace in half-basement Fig 19



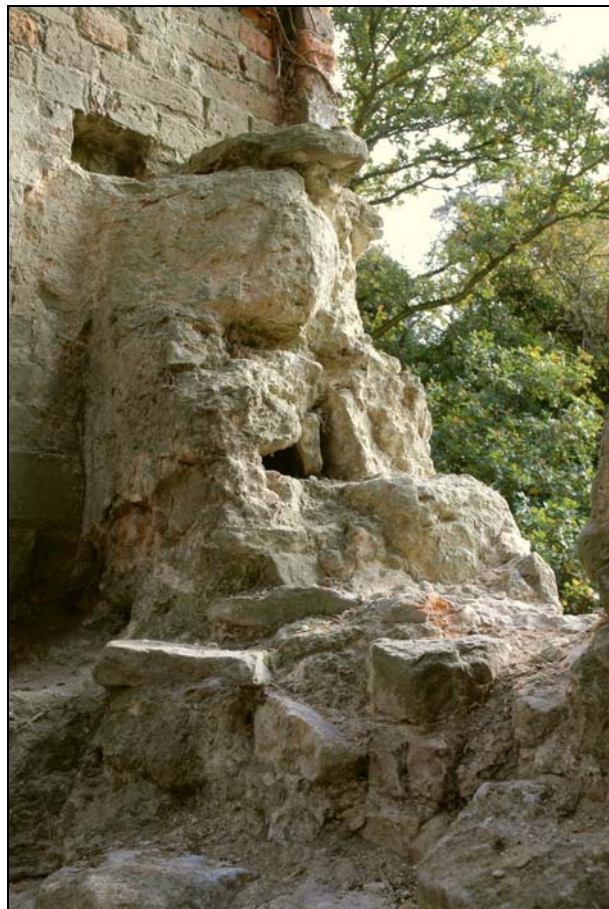
Segmental brick arch of door Fig 20



Lower floor fireplace Fig 21



Lower floor window with plaster in southern Bay Fig 22



Lower floor window with empty socket in the southern Bay Fig 23



Internal view of stair turret Fig 24



Internal view of windows in the northern Bay Fig 25



External view of upper floor door in southern Bay Fig 26



Complete chimney stack Fig 27



Upper floor fireplace Fig 28



Upper floor window in southern Bay after consolidation work Fig 29



View of stair turret into the upper floor Fig 30



Graffiti on top of stair turret Fig 31



Door leading onto the roof Fig 32



Remaining parapet of the southern Bay Fig 33



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