

# STONEHOUSE WALL, PLYMOUTH

(NGR SX 46211 54207)

Results of archaeological monitoring and recording

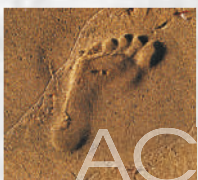
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On behalf of:  
Plymouth City Council

Document No: ACD460/2/1

Revised December 2014



AC archaeology

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## Summary

*Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out by AC archaeology in March 2014 during repairs to Stonehouse Wall, Plymouth. The wall is a 15th- or early 16th-century defensive curtain wall along one side of Stonehouse, and is designated as a Scheduled Monument.*

*The repairs included removing vegetation from a surviving length of wall walk behind the parapet, and this work exposed the previously-unknown cobbled surface of the walkway. At the west end of the wall walk 19th- and 20th-century repairs were identified, and at the east end of the wall a sequence of post-medieval alterations were recorded.*

*Repairs were also undertaken to part of a nearby probable 19th-century store, and parts of the external elevations were recorded.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)**

- 1.1** This document sets out the results of a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording conducted during repairs to the Stonehouse Wall, Stonehouse, Plymouth (SX 46211 54207; Fig. 1). Stonehouse Wall is a 15th- or early 16th-century defensive structure constructed by the landowner Sir Piers Edcombe to protect his business interests in the town of Stonehouse from French raiders. The wall is a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List no. 1003850).
- 1.2** The monitoring and recording was carried out by AC archaeology and was commissioned by Plymouth City Council (PCC).
- 1.3** Repair works to the wall, which was granted aided by English Heritage, involved the erection of scaffolding on its north side. The land on this side of the wall has been quarried away creating a significant drop between the base of the wall and the present ground level. It was initially proposed that scaffolding would be erected from the current ground level, and limited levelling would be required to create a flat surface for the scaffolding. In the late 18th and 19th century the former quarry had been used as a burial ground for St Georges Church (located to the northwest and now demolished), and a watching brief during groundworks was requested by the PCC Historic Environment Officer.
- 1.4** Following a change in the project team (with the repairs being project managed by Le Page Architects), the proposed temporary scaffolding was to be replaced with a permanent earth bank constructed against the quarry face on which scaffolding could be erected (both to enable the short term and future management to be undertaken). This would also reduce the requirements for stabilisation of the quarry face below the wall. Planning permission for this bank was granted by PCC. In addition to monitoring groundworks for this earth bank, AC archaeology was also requested to carry out historic building recording during the repairs.

## **2. THE SITE (Fig. 2)**

- 2.1** Stonehouse wall is located adjacent to, and to the south of, the Princes Yachts International boatyard at Newport Street. To the east it is bounded by Yeoman's Garage, which occupies the site of St Georges Church and to the west by an electrical substation and warehouses and workshops associated with the Princes Yachts International boat yard. The area immediately to the north of the wall is occupied by a former limestone quarry, later utilised as an extension to the St Georges Church graveyard (Reed 2001). To the south of the wall are Stonehall flats, 20th-century housing occupying the site and grounds of the former Stone Hall.
- 2.2** The underlying geology is Middle Devonian Limestone, and within Plymouth this contains caves and fissures. Fossil fauna, mainly dating from the Upper Pleistocene, have been recovered from some sites, whilst human remains have also been excavated, including from two caves north of Stonehouse Wall. Here these remains are interpreted as charnel deposits associated with the historic cemetery rather than being of earlier origin.

## **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1** Limited repairs to the wall were undertaken in 1994 as part of the wider programme of regeneration funded by the Plymouth Development Corporation. Archaeological observations made at the time were published by Keith Ray (the then City Archaeologist) along with an assessment of the wall and its history (Ray 2000).
- 3.2** An archaeological assessment and evaluation of the area to the north of Stonehouse wall was carried out by Exeter Archaeology in 2001 (Reed 2001). The date of the quarry has not been established with certainty, but if it follows the development of other quarries in Plymouth then it is likely be of later 18th century origin. It appears to have been soon exhausted and it was partially infilled and used as a graveyard – an extension to the existing cemetery for the newly-constructed St George's Church. The graveyard was disused by 1894, although a map of that date shows a surviving mortuary within its centre. The ground level to the north of the wall varies between 6.2m and 11m aOD, the lowest areas being within the quarry adjacent to the wall. Here five burials were exposed during the 2001 evaluation at a maximum height of 4.88m aOD, between 1.4m and 2.5m below the ground level. Across the site, the evaluation demonstrated that the height of the floor of the quarry varied and was sealed by late post-medieval deposits and structures such as drains.

## **4. AIMS**

- 4.1** The initial aims of the investigations (as set out in a brief provided by the PCC Historic Environment Officer (Daniells 2012) was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological deposits, features and artefacts across the area affected by groundworks for the scaffolding, in particular those associated with the 18th and 19th-century cemetery.
- 4.2** During the project these aims changed to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological deposits, features and artefacts across the area affected by groundworks associated with the construction of the earth bank, and to monitor and record the repairs as required by the conservation architect.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The work was undertaken in accordance with the written scheme of investigation (Passmore 2013) prepared in response to the brief, and was also carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, and *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (both revised 2008).
- 5.2 All recording was undertaken using the AC archaeology *pro-forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. A written record was prepared using daily watching brief record sheets accompanied by a digital photographic record accompanied by a drawn record (plans, elevations and profiles) prepared by hand and a survey-grade GPS as necessary.
- 5.3 At the request of the conversation architect, in addition to outlining the results of the monitoring and recording, this report also includes an assessment of the repaired walls to provide additional information on their significance.

## 6. THE RECORDING (Figs 3-5; Plates 1-15)

### 6.1 Groundworks for the earth bank (Plates 1-2)

The earth bank measured 40m long by 4m wide, and was constructed alongside the north side of the quarry face under the wall. Prior to construction of the bank the top of the infilled quarry was cleared of loose debris and the upper surface proof rolled to enable a visual check for soft spots. These were then infilled as necessary. Given the known depth of the burials within the quarry and the stony nature of the infill above and below them, it was not considered that the rolling would have an impact on them. No other post-medieval archaeological features are known within area of the proposed bank.

The groundworks consisted of the removal of vegetation and the thin layer of topsoil that overlaid the modern infill of the quarry. The basal material of the bank was rolled directly onto the top of this infill. No finds were recovered; the topsoil only contained modern dumped rubbish including sheet metal, furniture and toys.

### 6.2 Stonehouse wall (Figs 3 and 4a-b)

The wall walk was recorded following the removal by the stonemason of a layer of black gravelly silt and leaf litter. During this work a large quantity of loose limestone was recovered along with a range of finds, none of which were retained. These consisted of 10 sherds of industrial china (plate and jar), five sherds of a cream glazed red earthenware plate, six sherds of flower pot, one sherd from a stoneware jar, two sherds of glass, five pieces of bone, a brass door knob and light fitting, a moulded limestone fragment (possibly part of a tomb marker) and a plastic spade.

The surviving length of wall walk is 38m long by 1.08m wide and comprises rough rows of fractured limestone measuring between 80mm and 220mm long by up to 100mm deep (5). They are tightly packed and well laid on edge, with some slightly angled to the west, increasing their strength, although this may just be movement

caused by underlying roots (Plates 3-6). They are set into dark grey black-brown soft gravelly clayey silt (6). (The colour of this material varies across the wall – it was probably originally brown but has become blacker due to organic leaching from above.) This deposit contains small horizontally-laid stones, measuring up to 100 mm long, under the cobbles (Plate 7). The edge of the wall walk is defined by larger irregular edging blocks of limestone up to 250mm thick. These project out from the face of the wall by 40mm. In general throughout the surviving length of the wall walk most of its surface survived although most of the kerbing had been lost, as had the cobbles at either end. The surface had also been disturbed by the growth of vegetation; the extent of tree roots following the clearance of the leaf litter is shown on Fig. 3 (Plates 8-9).

The core itself comprises large irregularly-laid blocks of limestone bonded in red-brown very slightly silt clay (as per natural subsoil that overlies limestone) with chunks of white and buff gravelly lime mortar (Plate 7). There are large voids within the core. The north face of the wall is faced with large limestone blocks measuring up to 480mm long by 400mm deep, bonded in hard slightly gravelly lime mortar. The upper course projects out slightly from the face supporting the kerbing to the cobbles above.

At the west end of the wall walk the break between the wall and a rebuild to the west is not visible due to repointing in cement, and though the rebuild can be distinguished in plan as a narrow wall without the wall walk. Crenelations have been constructed into the top of this wall, but are not as elaborate as the primary openings to the east. Repairs were made to the southwest corner of the wall below the wall walk (Plate 10). The corner jambs and associated masonry, extending 0.50m to the east and between 0.7-0.50m to the north, appeared to represent a modern (probably 20th-century) rebuild, bonded in a pure white lime mortar containing homogeneous crushed gravel. The remainder of the facing stones on the west side of the wall walk is bonded in buff granitic lime mortar and appeared to be a refacing associated with the rebuild of the wall to the west. On the north face, the rebuilt corner replaced the primary masonry as previously recorded.

#### ***The northeast corner*** (Plates 11 and 12)

The east end of Stonehouse Wall displays several phases of construction (Fig. 4c). The medieval wall (1) is constructed of small irregular coursed limestone in lime mortar. On the south elevation this masonry incorporates a string course. The recorded section on the north elevation incorporates a large beam socket. There is a rebuild (2) utilising limestone and dark red brick in gravelly white lime mortar for splayed opening. This has then been infilled with very irregular coursed limestone and rare bricks and dressed beer stone (4). Parts of the medieval wall survive above this masonry, and this infilling must have formed an 'underpinning' to the earlier masonry. The upper section of the wall has been rebuilt (probably in the 20th century) using larger irregular blocks of coursed limestone and occasional granite in grey lime mortar (3). A scar of a removed plaque associated with St Georges Church is visible attached to stonework 3.

The north corner of the east elevation has modern repointing that probably obscures a break between north and east walls that is visible on southwest angle. The remainder of the wall is finished in white paint and later cement render over small uncoursed limestone and rare brick bonded in grey-white lime gravelly mortar. The masonry incorporates blocked sockets for attached structures, which were probably in the garden of a property located to the south of St Georges church.

The south and west elevations of the north and east walls respectively are mostly obscured by vegetation but generally the same sequence of development as described above was recorded. The east-west return, forming the current entrance to the flats (being the former entrance to Stone Hall as shown on 19th-century maps) abuts the east wall. It is constructed of roughly coursed small blocks of limestone, with larger blocks used as quoins at the east end, finished with cement repointing.

### **6.3 Store**

The remains of the former store are located to the south of Stonehouse Wall and form the boundary wall close to the southwest corner of Stonehall Flats. It formed the north range of three buildings set around a courtyard within the former quarry on the north side of Stonehouse Pool. The property is marked as 'Whitehall' on historic maps. Its history has not been researched as part of the project but it may have been the owner's house for the adjacent Whitehall Shipbuilders Yard that later became the West of England Joinery Works, also described by the Ordnance Survey as Whitehall Yard.

Repairs were made to the northeast corner of the building, and the external elevations here were recorded. The masonry comprises limestone bonded in gravelly white lime mortar although the east wall has been repointed in grey gravelly lime mortar. It incorporates well-defined jambs and quoins and slate coursing has been used where required to level up the stonework. The north wall is 0.60 m thick whilst the east wall is 0.30 m thick. The reason for this difference in the wall thickness is that the north wall supports floor joists for the two-storey building. There are beam sockets and stepped masonry to accommodate floorboards is visible on the interior elevation of the north wall (Plates 13 and 14).

In the east elevation there is an infilled tall window or doorway with the remains of limestone blocking bonded in hard cement render (Plate 15). At the base of the recorded section of the wall is a row of four inserted sockets, one set within brickwork. Two of these are partially cut into the blocking of the opening. In the north elevation there is a high-level blocked window opening. Its infill – rubble limestone in slightly coarse white lime mortar – is 0.40 m deep and flush with the external elevation. To the east of this opening is a possible socket.

Small sections of the wall have been plastered, and the base of the window blocking in the north elevation has also been repointed. The north elevation has also been capped in concrete.

## **7. COMMENTS**

**7.1** Groundworks associated with the repairs were limited and did not disturb any archaeological deposits. No further evidence for the burial ground of St Georges Church was uncovered.

**7.2** The most significant element of the repairs to the wall was the discovery of a cobbled surface to the wall walk. The wall walk was previously known to have survived only in the area of the present works, and was probably removed (in the late 18th century) to the east when St Georges Church was constructed, and to the west when land adjacent to Stonehouse Creek was quarried for limestone. Despite disturbance

caused by root action, and the loss of many of the edging stones, the majority of the cobbled surface survives. This has been repaired and reburied preserving it *in situ*.

- 7.3 The archaeological investigations have included preparing a plan of the surviving extent of the cobbles and the crenelations in the area of the repairs, recording of repairs to the west end of the wall walk where modern rebuilding has been identified, and recording of the east end of the surviving wall where a number of later alterations and rebuilds have been identified.
- 7.4 A record of the northeast corner of a former store, forming part of the Whitehall complex, located to the southwest of Stonehouse Wall was also prepared. The store was probably constructed in the 19th century within the West of England Works, situated within a former quarry. In addition to the primary masonry, blocked windows and limited repairs in brick were noted.

## 8. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF STONEHOUSE WALL AND STONEWALL FLATS BOUNDARIES

- 8.1 As a late medieval defensive structure, Stonehouse wall, along with the possible remains of a gatehouse at Plymouth Castle, and a series of Tudor blockhouses, represents the earliest of the surviving heritage assets associated with the defence of Plymouth. As such, these form the precursors to the large number of post-medieval defensive works protecting the settlements, naval facilities and anchorages (Pye and Woodward 1996).
- 8.2 The wall formed a linear barrier across the Western King Peninsula westwards from Stonehouse Creek to, and just beyond, a gateway over Chapel Street (now the north end of Durnford Street). From there, the defences seem to have continued southeast to Millbay in the form of an earthwork defining a deer park (Ray 2000, 52-53; Reed 2001, fig. 3). In addition to the gateway, a chart of c.1539 also depicts a circular tower and a multi-angular gun tower, as well as other gun ports (*ibid.*, fig. 5.4).
- 8.3 The surviving length of wall is situated roughly in the centre of the original structure, and comprises a length of curtain wall, partially flanked by a wall walk. It incorporates a gun port and a void, possibly representing the remains of a second gun port. Ray (*ibid.*, 55; fig. 5.5) intimated that the east end of the surviving wall represents the position of the circular tower. Beyond this, the line of the wall was represented on 19th-century maps by the rear of the Emma Place properties – at that date it could perhaps have partly survived as their rear boundary wall.
- 8.4 To the west, the line of the rebuilt wall continues to the northwest corner of Stonehall Flats. Beyond here any pre-20th-century structures on its course have been removed. Historic maps depict quarry faces to the north of the wall and the west of Stonewall. Immediately west of the wall walk the rebuilt wall appears to have been constructed on top of a quarry face, and it may be assumed that the whole of this length had been rebuilt (see Ray 200, fig. 5.5). However, the 1857 and 1894 1:500 Ordnance Survey maps appear to depict a second length of wall walk at the present west end of the wall. Further west, the 'lodge' into the Whitehall Shipbuilders Yard projects out from the line of the wall and on the 1857 map is six-sided, probably representing the remains of the multi-angular gun tower. It is possible therefore that this length of wall was not entirely rebuilt, perhaps only partially refaced and/or replaced to create property boundaries on cessation of quarrying.



## 8.5 Statement of significance: Stonehouse Wall

The Scheduled Monument description in the National Heritage list for England entry 1129960) includes the following statement relating to the significance of the asset, and the reasons for its designation as a nationally-important monument:

\* Rarity: as a late C15 or early C16 town wall, linked to a blockhouse, the monument is unusual nationally as an example of a civic defensive work; \* Survival: although reduced by later alterations and the removal or decay of some features, it survives reasonably well; \* Potential: it retains potential for improving our understanding of this type of construction. \* Group value: with the Western Kings Artillery Tower and blockhouse C15/C16 defences built by the Edgumbe family.

The wall clearly has both local and national historical importance relating to its role in the defence of Plymouth and as one of the earliest assets within the area having this function. Its rarity in a national context is noted by English Heritage, and gives it historical importance, in part due to its construction around a small port.

The wall also has architectural and evidential value, as recognised in the survival and potential statement by English Heritage. Whilst the surviving remains do not, other than the single gun port, incorporate any significant architectural features, the structure displays evidence of its construction and role as a defensive curtain wall. As the current work has demonstrated it has the potential for further information on its form and function to be discovered. The presence of a possible further length of wall walk (as part of the Scheduled Monument) to the west of the current repairs is highlighted as one area where archaeological recording has not previously taken place, and where the development of the wall is not fully understood.

## 8.6 Statement of significance: Stonehall Flats boundaries

Stonehall Flats occupy the site and grounds of Stone Hall – an 18th-century house. Remains of service buildings and a raised garden survive at the northwest corner of the complex. The area seems to have been largely defined by pre-existing boundaries, including Stonehouse Pool to the south, Stonehouse Wall to the north, and roughly north-south aligned field boundaries between the pool and wall. The east side of the flats is partially defined by a stone boundary wall that formed the division between the hall and properties on Emma Place and Barrack Place. This incorporates the remains of the entrance carriage gateway into Stone Hall and an adjacent pedestrian access. The west wall incorporates the remains of service buildings of Stone Hall attached to its east side. These are reportedly on the PCC *Buildings at Risk Register*. The southwest corner is defined around an existing plot of land (?a quay) that became Whitehall House and a store (the upper walls of the latter being partially recorded during the current project).

The east and west walls have local historical interest in that they preserve pre-existing property boundaries forming part of the post-medieval landscape before Stonehouse was extensively developed from the 18th century onwards.

The walls also have some evidential value in that they contain evidence relating to Stonehall and the adjacent Whitehall – this includes the entrance gateway in the east wall, the service buildings (stables and cottage) in the west wall and the remains of the upper walls of Whitehall in the southwest corner.

## 9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 9.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. The paper archive will be digitised and the whole archive deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.
- 9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identified 190797, which includes a digital copy of this report.

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 10.1 This report was commissioned by Plymouth City Council. The project was managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. It was carried out by Andrew Passmore, Abigail Brown and Stella De-Villiers. The report was written by Andrew Passmore and Stella De-Villiers, with the illustrations prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

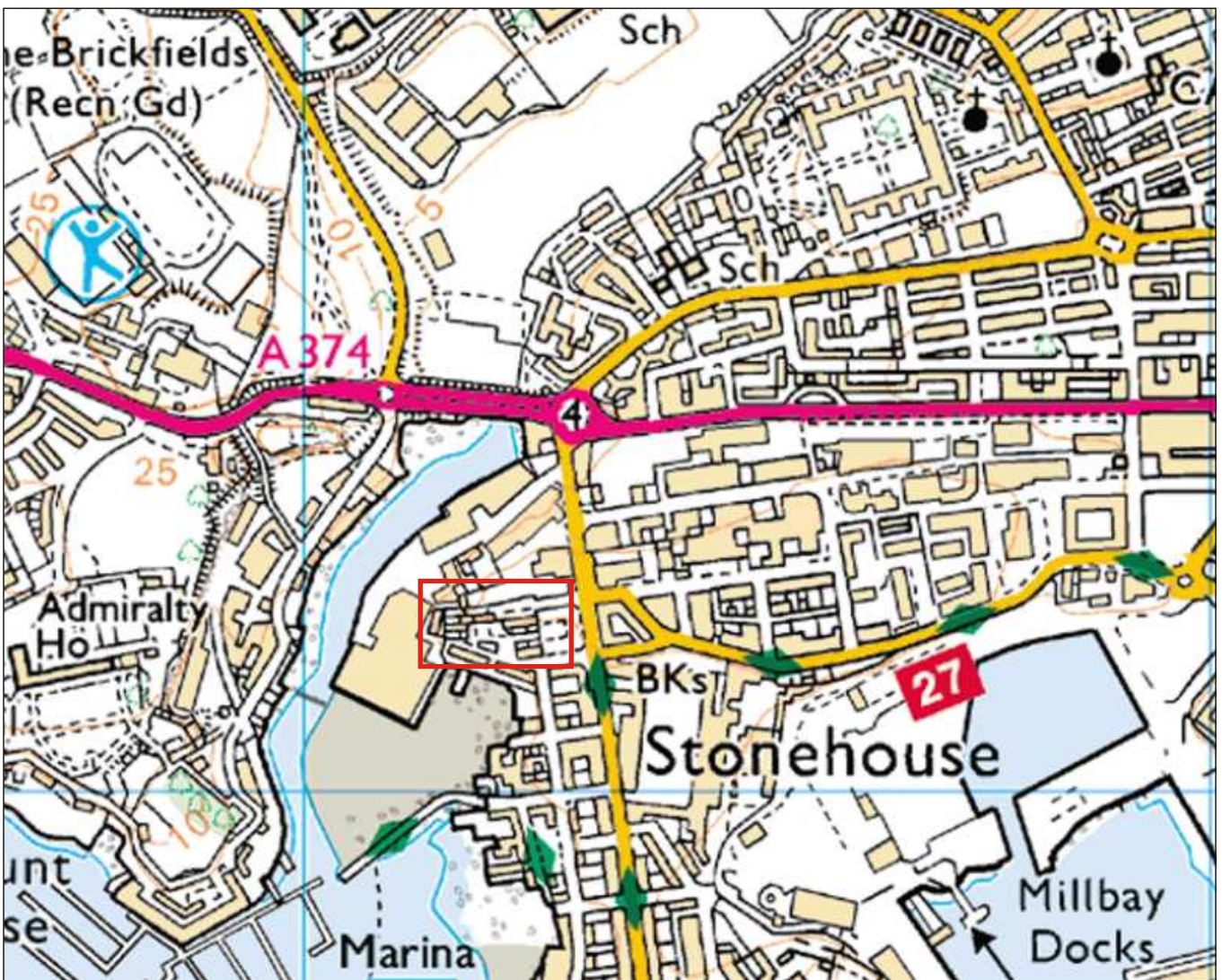
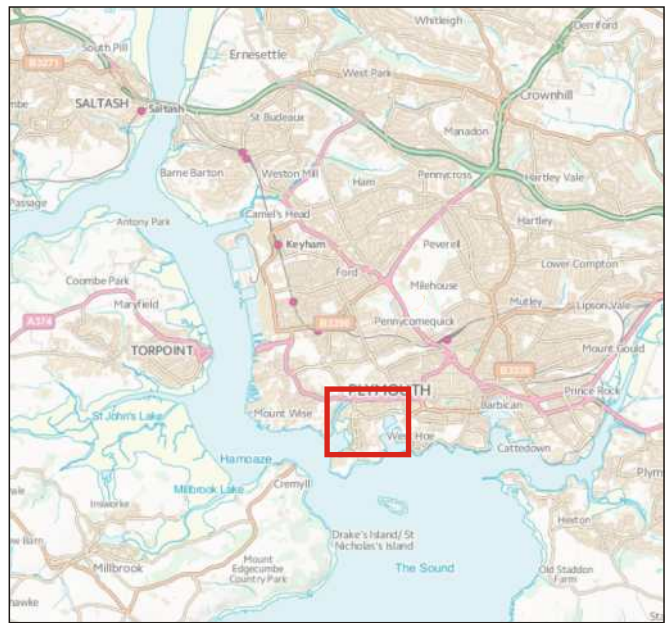
## 11. SOURCES CONSULTED

Passmore, A., 2013, Stonehouse wall, Stonehouse, Plymouth (NGR SX 46211 54207), *Written scheme of investigation for archaeological monitoring and recording*, AC Archaeology, Document no. ACD460/1/0

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Reed, S.J., 2001, *Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation of a Proposed Development Site, Newport Street, Stonehouse, Plymouth*, Exeter Archaeology Report No. **01.27**



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 Scale 1:7500@A4

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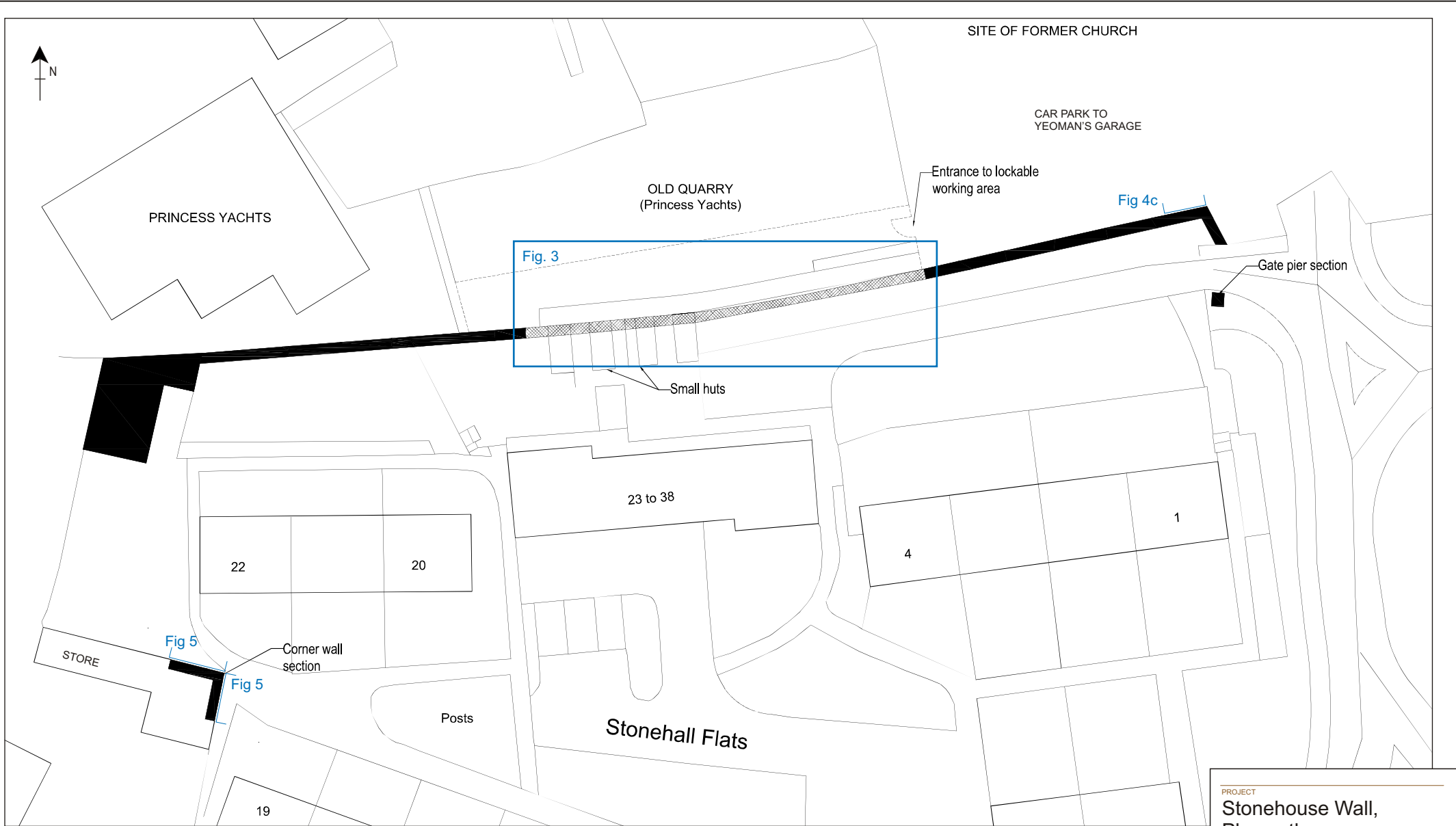
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Stonehouse Wall, Plymouth

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location

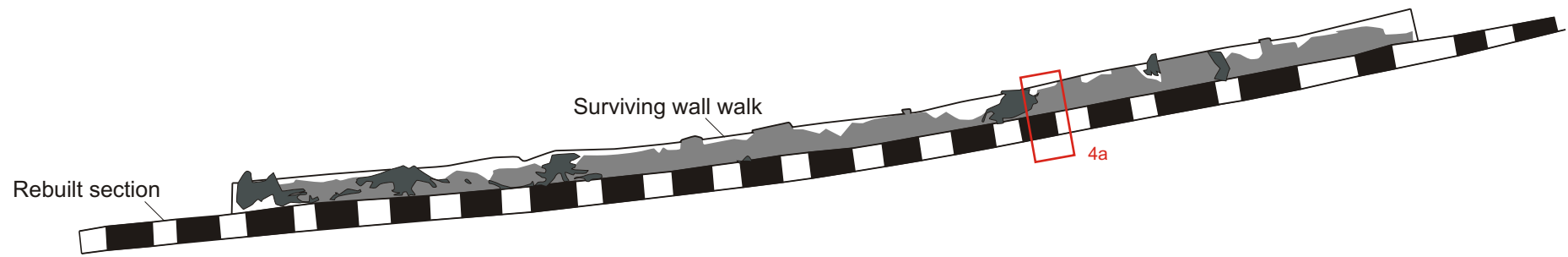




PROJECT  
**Stonehouse Wall,  
 Plymouth**

TITLE  
**Fig. 2: Site location plan**

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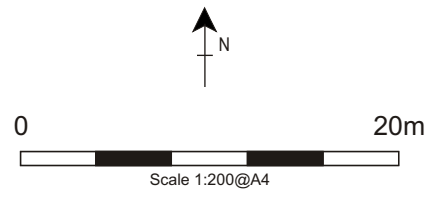


Surviving wall walk

Rebuilt section

4a

- Cobbled surface(s)
- Tree roots
- Merlon

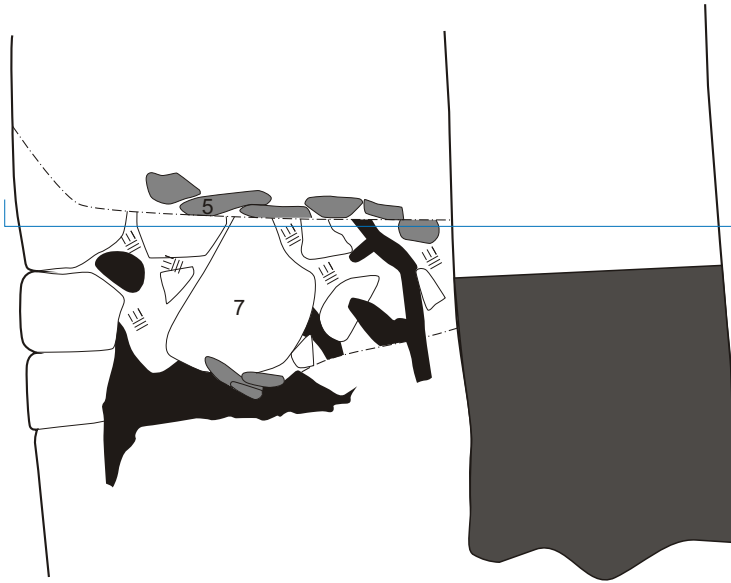


PROJECT  
**Stonehouse Wall,  
 Plymouth**

TITLE  
**Fig. 3: Plan of the wall  
 and wall walk**



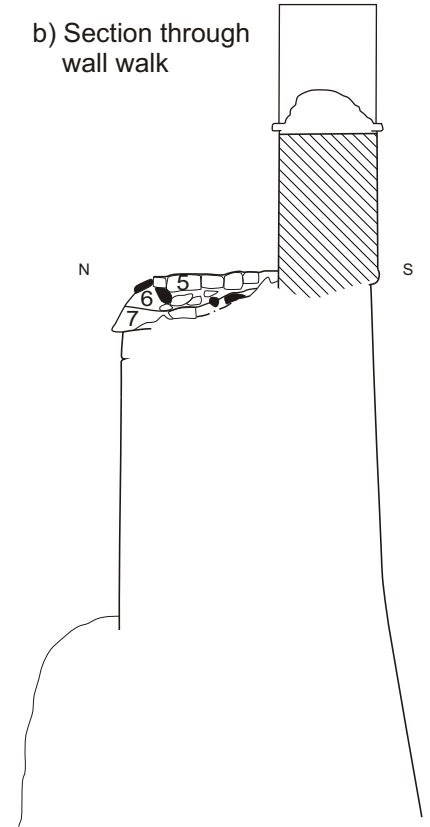
a) Plan of test trench



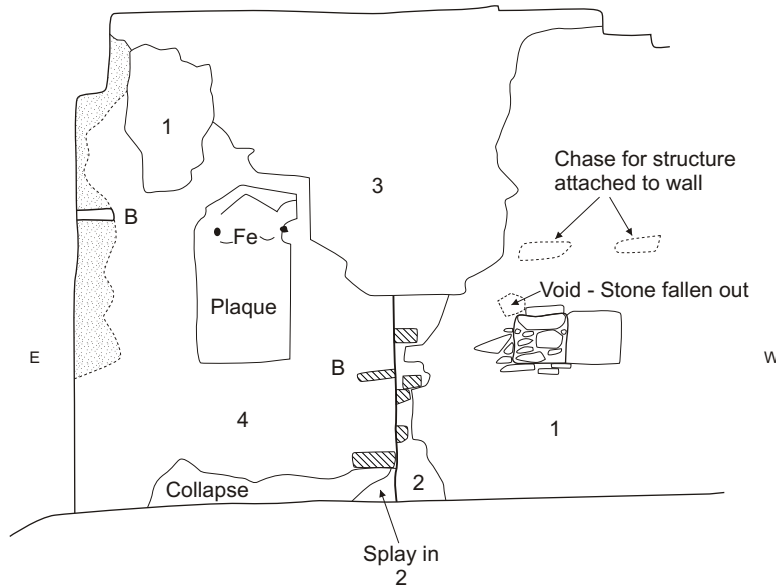
- In situ cobbles (5)
- Roots
- Clay core
- Merlon



b) Section through wall walk



c) East end of the north elevation of Stonehouse wall



- Modern cement render
- Brick
- B** Beerstone



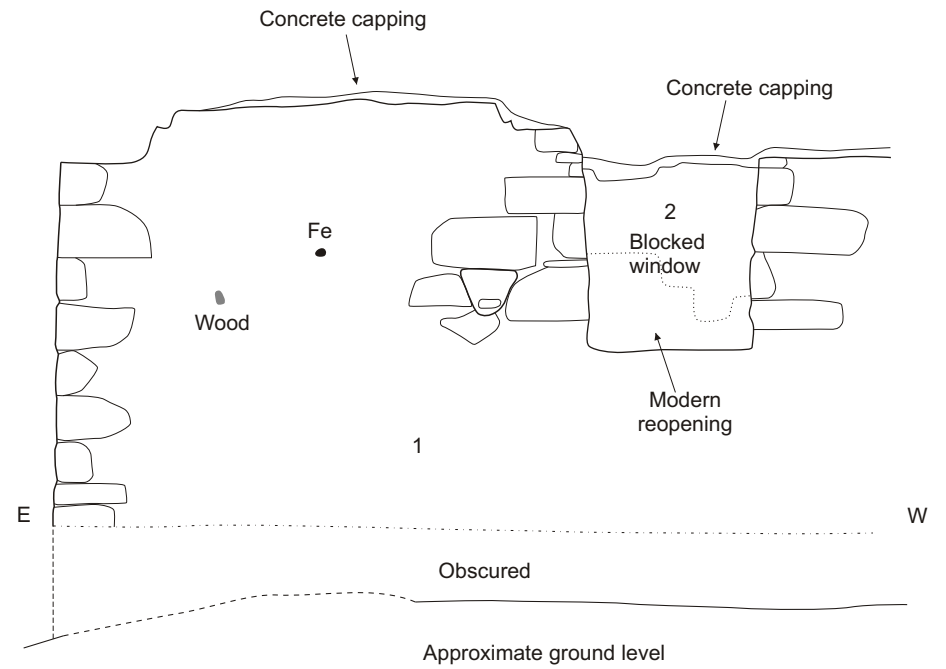
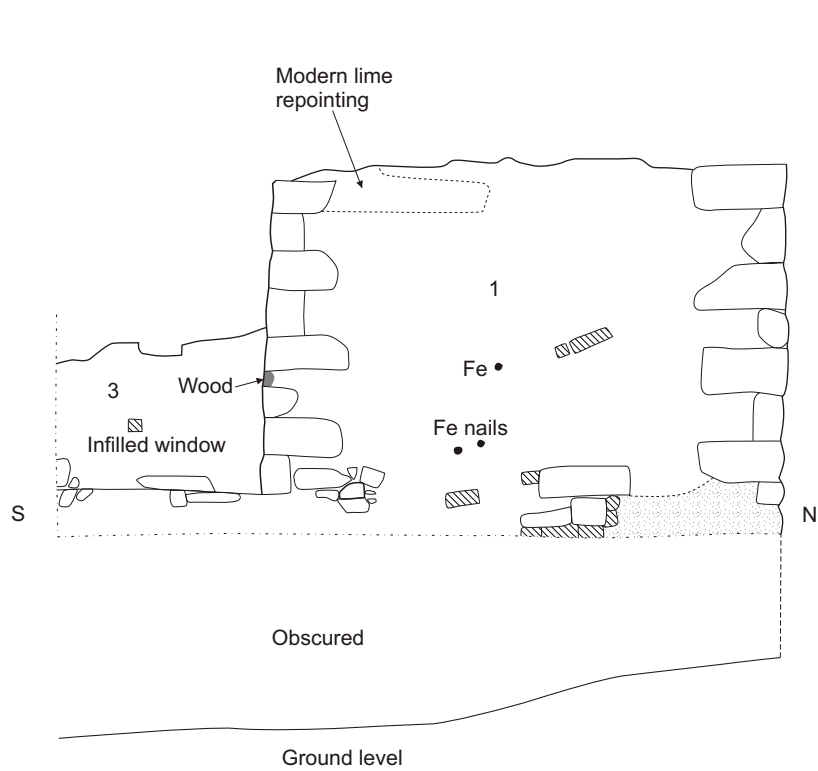
PROJECT



Stonehouse Wall, Plymouth

TITLE

Fig. 4: Details of the Stonehouse wall





-  Modern cement render
-  Brick



PROJECT  
**Stonehouse Wall,  
 Plymouth**

TITLE  
**Fig. 5: The Store,  
 external elevations**





Plate 1: General view of groundworks for the earth bank, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 2: The earth bank supporting the temporary scaffolding, looking southwest.





Plate 3: The wall walk following exposure, looking southeast. 1m scale.



Plate 4: The east end of the wall walk, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 5: The west end of the wall walk, looking west. 1m scale.



Plate 6: The wall walk during repairs, looking west.



Plate 7: Section through the wall walk, looking east. 0.2m scale.



Plate 8: Tree root damage at the east end of the wall walk, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 9: Tree root damage at the east end of the wall walk, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 10: General view during repairs to the west end of the wall walk, looking south. 1m scale.



Plate 11: The north elevation at the east end of the wall, looking south. 1m scale.



Plate 12: The east elevation at the east end of the wall, looking west. 1m scale.



Plate 13: The store, internal view showing stepped north wall at first-floor level, looking northwest. 1m scale.



Plate 14: The store, north elevation showing blocked opening, looking southwest. 1m scale.



Plate 15: The store, east elevation showing blocked opening and later sockets, looking southwest. 1m scale.

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