

THE GATEHOUSE, TORRE ABBEY, TORQUAY, TORBAY

(NGR SX 90730 63782)

## Results of historic building recording

Torre Abbey: Scheduled Monument 24840, National  
Heritage List number 1009302

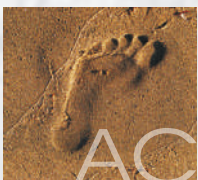
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Prepared by  
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On behalf of  
Torbay Council

Document No: ACD1108/1/0

Date: July 2015



AC archaeology

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## Summary

*An historic building record of the second floor of the gatehouse at Torre Abbey was prepared by AC archaeology in May 2015 in advance of conservation works by Torbay Council.*

*The second floor is currently a single open space. During the survey a former layout was recorded, with evidence for two rooms along with a corridor that also gave access to the southeast turret. A further scar on the north wall may represent evidence for a later partition dividing one of the rooms from a corridor.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of historic building recording carried out by AC archaeology on 8 May 2015 at the gatehouse of Torre Abbey, Torbay (SX 90730 63782; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by the building's owner Torbay Council in advance of conservation works to the second floor of the gatehouse. Guidance on the scope of the work was provided by Torbay Council's Senior Historic Environment Officer.

1.2 Torre Abbey (founded 1196, dissolved 1539) was the wealthiest Premonstratensian abbey in England. The history of the abbey is well documented and excavation has shown that the abbey church had a complex development. The abbey ruins are the most complete surviving example of a medieval monastic complex in Devon and Cornwall, with the gatehouse forming the best-preserved medieval element of the abbey itself.

1.3 The abbey complex, including grounds to the south, is designated as a Scheduled Monument, whilst the main buildings are also listed at grade I. The following extract is given in the Scheduled Monument description for the gatehouse.

Adjoining the south west corner of the kitchens is the early 14th century inner gatehouse, the Mohun Gate, a three storied crenellated structure, complete but with a modern roof. It is asymmetric in plan, having multi- angular towers on three of the corners, and two arched and vaulted passageways, separated by an arcade. The main northern passage was for mounted travellers and wheeled vehicles, the smaller passage for pedestrians. Both have ribbed vaults with decorated bosses and are divided centrally by arches and jambs on which the doors were hung. The pedestrian passage has a cobbled floor. All of the external architectural detail is in sandstone. The ground floor accommodation consists of a room for the gatekeeper, with a fireplace, and a door opening into the pedestrian passage. A spiral stair within the south east turret provides access from the outside to the upper apartments and the roof walks. On the first floor there is a rectangular room above the pedestrian passage and gatekeeper's room which has a vaulted ceiling and a fireplace. The second floor consists of one large room with a fireplace, and a passage in its north east corner giving access to a garderobe (toilet) closet and evidently to a wall-walk above the first floor over the kitchen. One narrow window on the ground floor of the north west tower has been modified as a gun loop for a small matchlock weapon.

### 2. AIM

2.1 The aim of the investigation was to prepare a record of the second floor of the gatehouse prior to its conservation, in particular to make a record of the scars of former partitions visible on the floor and walls, which would be removed during the conservation works.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The recording was carried out in accordance with guidance provided by the Torbay Council Senior Historic Environment Officer, and comprised:

- A 1:20 scale floor plan and internal elevations of the second floor,
- A written description of the second floor, and
- A photographic record of the interior of the second floor showing the general nature of the room in its current condition along with details of historic architectural features.

3.2 In line with the aims of the project the recording considered the original construction techniques, and surviving evidence for the historic layout including any alterations.

3.3 The work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (revised 2014), and AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. Reference was also made to English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*.

### 4. BUILDING SURVEY (Figs 2-3; Plates 1-8)

4.1 The second floor of the gatehouse is currently configured as a single room measuring 8.7m by 5m. It is entered from an inserted doorway in the north elevation. This wall also incorporates a 1m high fireplace with a Tudor-style four-centred arch. Within the hearth modern bricks are visible forming the arch indicating that the present shape of the opening is a 20th-century recreation (Plate 1). The room is lit by windows in the east and west elevation (see Plates 7 and 8). All of the walls are rendered, with the exception of the stone voussoirs forming the head of the doorway into the room which have been left exposed.

4.2 In the lime mortar floor is a T-shaped scar defining the positions of former walls, and the subdivision of the floor into three spaces (Plates 2-4). A large room occupies the northern half of the building. To the south the scar divides a 1m wide corridor adjacent to the east wall from a small room to the east. There is no evidence for doorways within the former internal partitions; these may therefore have been set into wooden framing forming the partitions.

4.3 Associated scars of these removed partitions are visible in the south and east walls. (Figs 3b and 3c; Plates 2 and 5). These do not extend the full depth of the room and were recorded only to a maximum height of 1.75m above the floor level.

4.4 Areas of repair to the floor were recorded, mainly in the south end of the room. Some of these repairs were made into the scars of the former partitions. Two of the repairs are associated with the modern insertion of wooden posts that rise from the floor to the ceiling.

4.5 A further scar was recorded on the north wall (Fig. 3a; Plates 1 and 6), west of and adjacent to the doorway into the room. This extends from the floor up to the ceiling. There is no related scar on the floor. This scar may be associated with another partition forming an extension of the corridor recorded to the south.

## **5. COMMENTS**

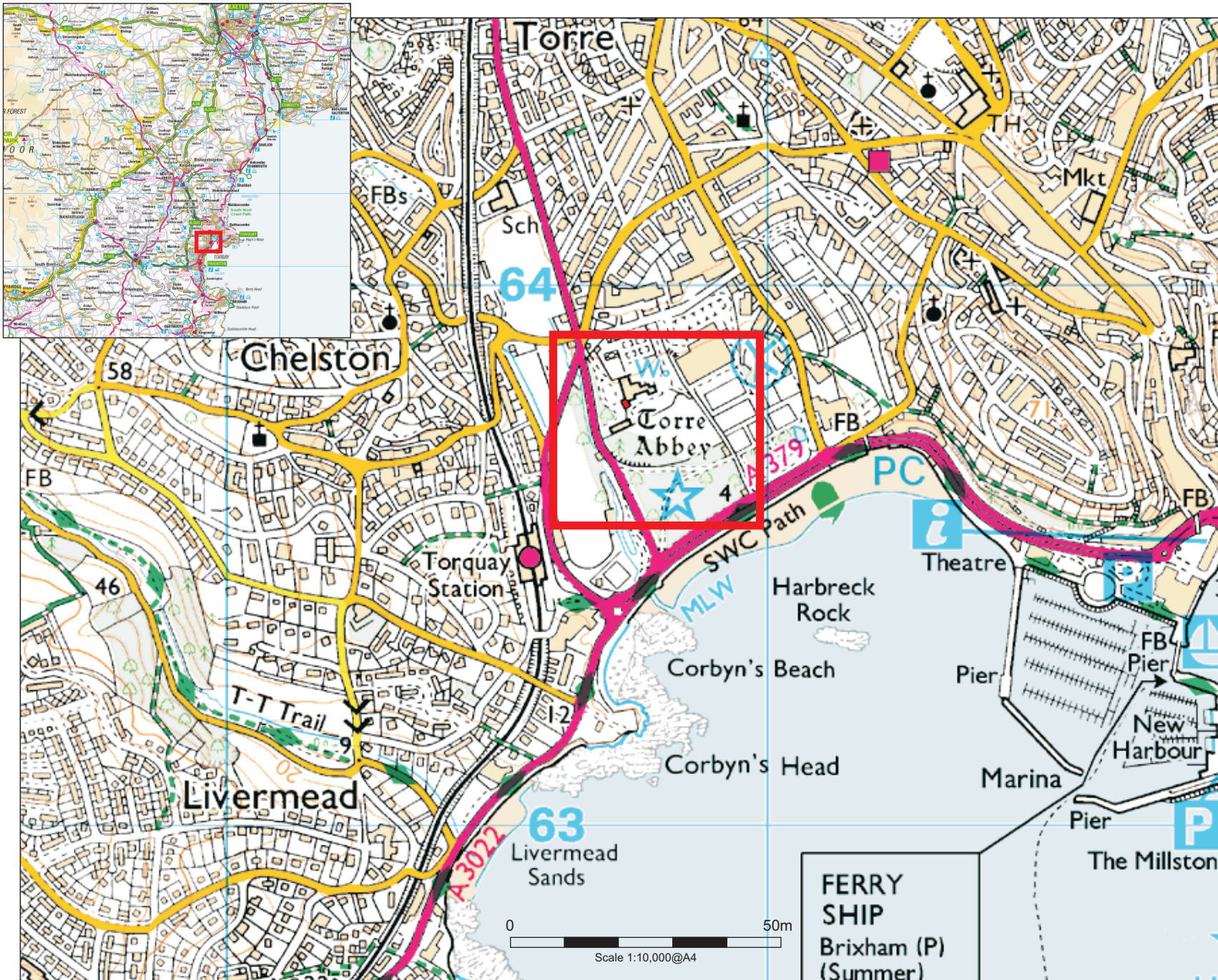
- 5.1** The survey has created a record of the second floor of the gatehouse prior to repairs taking place. The scars in the floor delineate former partitions that separated two rooms along with a corridor that also served the southeast turret; scars of these partitions are partially visible on the walls, although their survival is poorer than those on the floor, having been partially covered over. A further scar is present in the north wall, and this may represent evidence for a partition forming an extension of the corridor. Given there is no associated scar on the floor, and the partition to the south continues across the width of the building (at the head of the corridor), it is possible that this represents a later partition subdividing the larger north room into a smaller room and corridor.

## **6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY**

- 6.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, and will be deposited at Torquay Museum.
- 6.2** An OASIS entry has been created for the project using the unique identifier 217099, and includes a digital copy of this report.

## **7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 7.1** This report was commissioned by Torbay Council, and managed for them by Hal Bishop and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Stella De-Villiers, who also prepared the report including the illustrations.

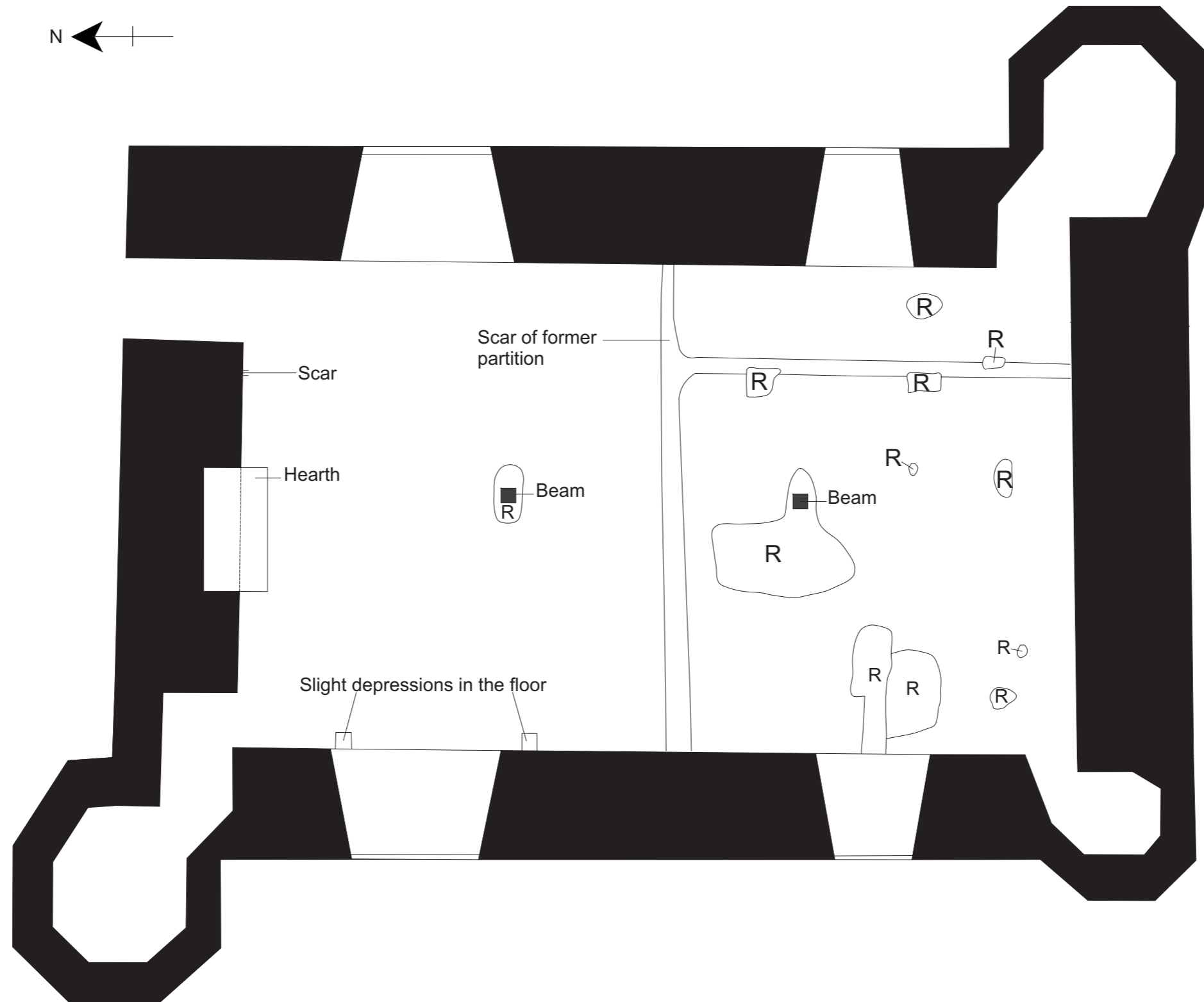


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PROJECT  
The Gatehouse, Torre  
Abbey, Torquay, Devon

TITLE  
Fig. 1: Location of site



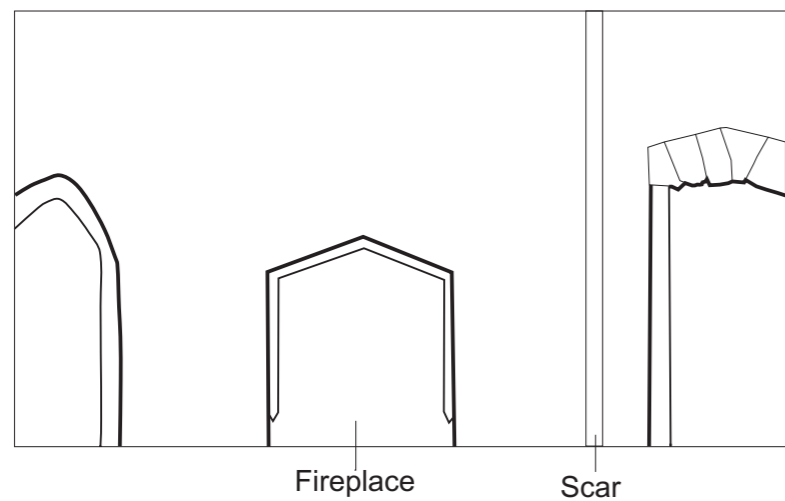


 Areas of repair

PROJECT  
The Gatehouse, Torre  
Abbey, Torquay, Devon  
TITLE  
Fig. 2: Plan of second floor



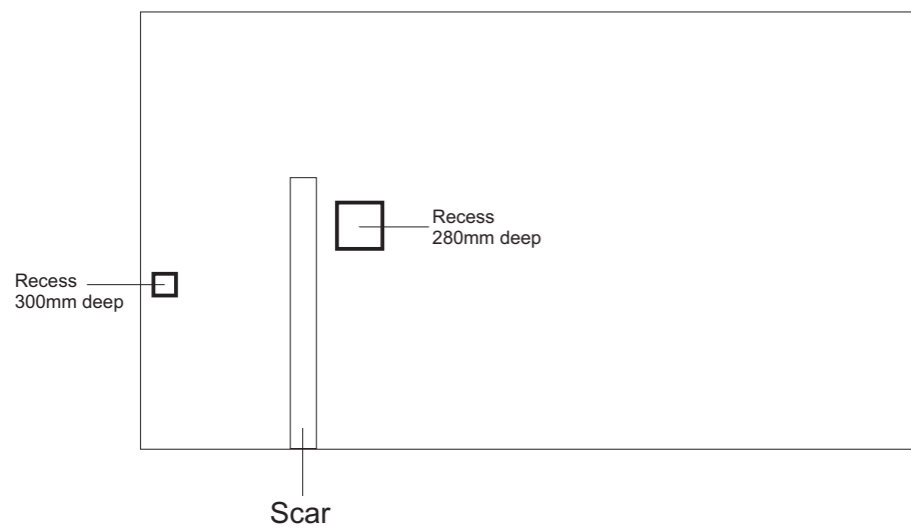
a) North wall



b) West wall



c) South wall



d) East wall

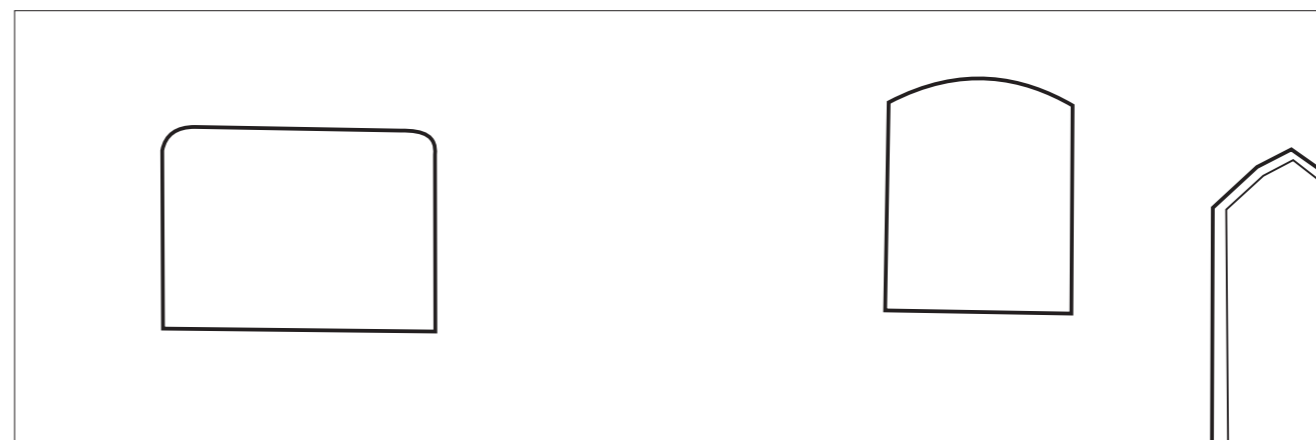






Plate 1: North wall showing fireplace and wall scar adjacent to door, looking north-northeast (1m scale)



Plate 2: General view showing scars on the floor and south wall, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 3: General view showing scars on the floor, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 4: General view of scars on the floor, looking northeast (1m scale)



Plate 5: South wall showing scar, looking south-southeast (1m scale)



Plate 6: Doorway in the north wall, also showing scar on wall, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 7: Example of a single light window



Plate 8: Example of a four light window

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