

COLEBROOKE MILL, COLEBROOKE, NEAR CREDITON, DEVON

(Centred on NGR SS 77210 00411)

Results of historic building recording and an archaeological
watching brief

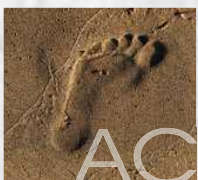
Planning ref. Mid Devon District Council 06/01323/FULL,
condition 11

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On behalf of:
Mr and Mrs Bragg

Document No: ACD42/2/0

Date: October 2016



AC archaeology

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Summary

Historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief were carried out by AC archaeology between January and June 2016 prior to and during works associated with the conversion of a redundant mill building into a single dwelling at Colebrooke Mill, Colebrooke, near Crediton, Devon.

The mill building is present on mid-19th century mapping and the lower two storeys are at least of that date. The building and an adjacent structure have agricultural origins. A third storey was added to the mill building, and the structure extended, probably at the end of the 19th century when the barn was converted into a mill. Some historic wooden infrastructure remained and is described. Extensions to the mill building are also described. Ground reduction within the mill building revealed a wall footing, brick-lined drain and the filled-in pit for the internal pit wheel. No finds were recovered.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief carried out by AC archaeology between 25 January and 30 June 2016 prior to and during works associated with the conversion of a redundant mill building into a single dwelling at Colebrooke Mill, Colebrooke, near Crediton, Devon (NGR SS 77210 00411; Fig. 1). The archaeological work was commissioned by the site owners Mr and Mrs Bragg, and required by Mid Devon District Council as a condition (no. 11) of planning permission (ref. no. 06/01323/FULL) for “conversion of mill building to a no. 1 dwelling”, as advised by Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (hereafter DCHET).

1.2 The site lies at around 80m aOD and the underlying natural subsoil comprises alluvial silts, sands, gravels and clays, above a solid geology of breccia of the Crediton Breccia Formation (BGS 2016).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 An initial desk-based appraisal was undertaken, which comprised a review of:

- Archaeological and historical data held by Devon County Council’s Historic Environment Record (DCHER), and;
- Historical cartographic and documentary information at the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter.

2.2 Colebrooke Mill is first documented in c. 1760 and in 1864 was described as comprising a 'good dwelling house' and 'substantial mill house with two pairs of stones and machinery ... driven by an overshot waterwheel eighteen feet in diameter' (DCHER ref. MDV60807).

2.3 The Colebrooke parish tithe map of 1846 shows the position of the current mill building marked by a simple rectangular, east to west aligned structure with a probable pond adjacent to the west fed by a leat, with a road running immediately alongside the building to its east (Fig. 2). To the north, and part of the same holding, is a larger irregular shaped building to the northwest of which a leat emanating from the pond passes. The accompanying apportionment of 1847 describes the site as the tenement

of Colebrooke Mill comprising of three plots (626-8). Plot 628 contains the rectangular and irregular buildings and is described as 'houses, yard and garden', with plot 627 to the east of the road comprising a building and described as 'houses and garden' with the garden in use as an orchard, with plot 626, described as a meadow. The tenement was owned by Augustus Coryton esq and occupied by Robert Melhuish. Robert Melhuish was miller at Colebrooke Mill in the 1861 census and this may be the same man listed in the tithe apportionment or it is, perhaps, his father of the same name who in the 1841 census was miller at Cobbings Mill in Colebrooke. Cobbings Mill does not appear in the Colebrooke tithe apportionment or any later census returns and Colebrooke Mill appears as 'Colebrooke Mills' for the first time in 1861. It is odd that the apportionment does not specifically list a mill in operation at the site as elsewhere Ford Mill is described as having 'houses, yard, and mills'. If this indicates that the mill at Colebrook was not in operation at this time then clearly it was active again by 1861, when a miller is in residence, and in 1871 it was home to miller William Mark, who is still there as William Marks in 1881; there is no record for 1891, and Jesse Gay is miller in 1901 and 1911.

- 2.4** By 1889, the 1st edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map indicates that the construction of the railway in the 1860s had considerably altered the immediate landscape (Fig. 3). The road was re-routed to the east, no longer running through the tenement between the buildings in tithe plots 627 and 628. A range of buildings have been added to the east side of the rectangular building in the position of the current mill building. The mill leat to the west has been straightened as a result of the railway cutting, and at this time it appears to run to the south of the mill complex and then stop abruptly. The 1904 2nd edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map is the first to depict the plan of the buildings as they existed at the beginning of the project. Also visible on this map are the location of the mill wheel and its surrounding structure, adjoining the west gable end of the mill building.

3. AIMS

- 3.1** The aims of the investigation were to prepare a record of Colebrooke Mill prior to its conversion as well as to record any evidence of early activity on the site exposed through the groundworks.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The archaeological works were carried out with reference to a method statement prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2009).
- 4.2** The historic building recording was undertaken in accordance with a brief for the works provided by the DCHES (Reed 2008) and Historic England's (2016) *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. It consisted of a detailed and general photographic record, supplemented by a written description and annotated architects' plans/elevations.
- 4.3** Attendance by the site archaeologist during the watching brief was in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for An Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014). This involved attending the groundworks during and after ground reduction.
- 4.4** The groundworks that required monitoring comprised:

- Reduction of the floor level in the older part of the building; and,
- Excavation of a levelled area to the rear and east of the building.

4.5 All groundworks were undertaken by hand or using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket. Exposed sections and surfaces were inspected by the attending archaeologist to establish the presence/absence of archaeological features, deposits or finds.

5. BUILDING SURVEY (Fig. 4; Plates 1-12) by Stella De-Villiers

5.1 Introduction

The mill comprised several parts forming a complex of buildings; the original structure occupied by the mill (the 'mill building') with ranges added to the east and north with a further extension to the north and a store extension to the east with the complex enclosing a yard open to the north (Plate 1). The land to the south and southeast of the mill was at a higher level than that to the north. To the northeast of the mill complex the associated dwelling, comprising a detached brick built house, was located.

5.2 Mill building

Exterior

The lower two storeys of the mill building were constructed of slate laid in rough courses with lime mortar bonding with the second storey constructed of brick in a Flemish bond. It had a gabled corrugated sheet roof.

West elevation

A large modern opening in the ground floor of the west elevation had a timber lintel and brickwork surround. On the first floor was a two-light window with a brick arch above and a brick sill. To the south of this a small square opening had a metal shaft projecting from it. Below this to the south was a brick blocked opening. The topmost part of the elevation was covered with vegetation which obscured any architectural features (Plate 2).

South elevation

The south elevation was completely obscured by vegetation.

East elevation

On the ground floor this elevation contained a two-pane window under a wooden lintel off-set towards the north side of the wall. An area of brick infill below the frame indicates that the current window has replaced an earlier deeper one. Above this window on the first floor was a loading door, with a brick arched head and brick sill. The second floor was plain brick masonry and the gable above finished with Timber planks surrounding a centrally placed window (Plate 1).

North elevation

The north elevation was largely obscured by the north range. On the east side of the ground floor was a large door with a wooden lintel that was accessed from the yard by a concrete ramp (Plate 3). Above the door, serving the first floor, was a two-light window with an arched brick head and projecting brick sill. Below this window was an area of brick infill indicating that the window replaced a larger loading door at this level. Above this, and positioned slightly further east, was a window on the second floor, also with a projecting brick sill.

Interior

Ground floor

The ground floor of the mill building had been divided by a largely removed timber partition consisting of 6 posts of varying size, supplemented by a modern brick pillar, which supported a first floor beam. The partition would have defined an area to the west which formerly would have been the location of the pit wheel for the waterwheel (Plate 4). Some of these timbers formed part of the hurst frame, and attached to one of the one of the posts was an iron lever associated formerly used to engage/disengage the gears.

In the south wall at this end of the building was an opening situated approximately 1m above ground level; this had a stone sill sloping inwards (Plate 5). A similar open was present towards the eastern side of the building. In the upper part of the north wall was a large wooden hub to take a strap for driving a shaft (Plate 6). To the east was a concrete floor and a concrete feeding trough in the southeast corner. A blocked window in the north wall had splayed reveals and had been partially obscured by the timber partition (Plate 7).

First floor

The first floor was supported on two large beams aligned north-south and was accessed from the upper floor of the north range. The first floor was located only on the east side of the ground floor partition leaving the area above the former pit wheel open. Within the floor were seven grain shoots around the outside of the room and a central trap door for moving grain between the floors. On the south side was an opening which may have been where a ladder was formerly located. Towards the west end of the north wall there is a window opening with a brick arched head; this now opens into the north range.

Second floor

The second floor formed a mezzanine on the west side of the building directly above the location for the former pit wheel, but empty sockets in the north and south wall indicate that the second floor once extended across the whole building. Access was via open wooden stairs. In the floor were five further grain shoots and a wooden box for an Archimedes screw for moving grain (Plate 8). The floor also incorporates some iron fittings and displays oil stains associated with former line shafts to this level. There was a grain storage bin on the north side of the second floor (Plate 9) and in the south wall is an opening that could not be seen externally.

Roof

The roof was supported on three A frame trusses with bolted tie beams; additional beams had been added to the trusses for support (Plate 10). Wooden planks sit on the back of the trusses, and the roof has a corrugated iron finish.

5.3 North range

Exterior

The north range was constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond. The east elevation incorporated two inserted eight-pane windows with concrete lintels and sills on the ground floor situated either side of a central door with a brick arched head (Plate 11). On the first floor was a central loading door, with two small two-pane windows on either side; all had brick arched heads and brick cills. There were occasional blocks of dressed granite of various sizes set within the brickwork that represent the exterior

faces of corbels exposed internally (see below) In the west elevation there was a window opening with a timber lintel on the ground floor, and two-light windows with brick arched heads on the first floor. The range had a gabled slate roof with decorative terracotta ridge tiles.

Interior

Ground floor

On the ground floor the lower half of the walls had been rendered and the floor was concrete. The first floor was supported on closely-set joists that sat on granite corbels set into buttresses projecting from the east and west walls. There was scissor bracing between the floor joists.

First floor

On the first floor a broken stone grinding wheel adjacent to the south wall was connected by a metal shaft to the wooden hub recording in the mill building (Plate 12). The brick buttresses continued upwards from the ground floor to eaves level. The roof was supported on two king post trusses that had bolted joints. The purlins sat on the back of the trusses with the rafters on the back of them, which appeared to be of late 20th-century date.

5.4 North range extension

Exterior

This was a tall, single storey range. The east elevation was open fronted with a central post supporting a timber lintel. The north and west walls were constructed in brick laid in Flemish bond with bullnose bricks utilised to form rounded corners. Three openings were positioned in the west elevation, one to the north and two, one above the other, to the south, all of which had timber lintels. There was a brick buttress to the south of these latter windows. The range had a gabled roof with slate on the east side facing the yard, decorative terracotta ridge tiles, and largely corrugated sheeting on the west side.

Interior

Internally the lower half of the walls had been rendered and the floor was concrete. There were scars in the concrete floor indicating that the extension was not originally open fronted but that the front wall had been removed and that it had been divided centrally by a partition wall running east-west. The roof was supported on a king post truss with additional timbers bolted to the top and bottom. These additional timbers had been used to support horizontal timbers indicating that a ceiling had been removed. The purlins sat on the back of the truss with rafters on the back of them.

5.5 East range

Exterior

The lower half of the east elevation was constructed in slate laid in rough courses with lime mortar with the upper half constructed of timber planks. The south elevation was completely obscured by vegetation. The north elevation was partially obscured by the East range extension, with the remainder being constructed of timber planks with a large opening to the west, between the extension and the mill building, with a loading door above at first floor level (Plate 3). It had a gabled corrugated iron roof.

Interior

Internally the walls, except on the north side, were constructed of slate stone. It had a cobbled floor which continued for a short distance into the yard. Empty sockets in the west wall indicate that the loading door at first floor level originally served a loft. A round brick pillar to the east of the opening and central to the north side indicates that at some point the ground floor was, apart from a stub of wall on the east side, open fronted. At some point the eastern side gap was filled with planking which continued to the first storey. This planking remained when the East range extension was constructed. The pillar supported a sawn-off timber with empty sockets and pegged joints which was being used to hold the base of one of the roof trusses. The timber appeared to be reused, but may have formed the principal bridging beam supporting the first floor. There were two roof trusses with collars. The purlins sat on the back of the trusses and dated to the 20th century.

5.6 East range extension

Exterior

The east elevation of the extension was constructed of slate stone laid in rough courses bonded with lime mortar. It was failing in several places along the base of the wall with large holes having formed where stonework had fallen away. The north elevation had been rendered and contained an eight-pane window (Plate 1). The northern half of the west elevation was rendered and the southern half constructed in concrete blocks (Plate 3). There were two wooden doors in the northern part and a door opening and a window in the southern part.

Interior

The store was divided into three parts accessed via the doors in the west elevation. The partition walls and the walls to the north, south and west were all constructed in concrete block, with the former constructed against the stone east wall. The extension had a corrugated iron roof sloping down towards the yard.

6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF by Elizabeth Govier and Paul Rainbird

6.1 Introduction

The archaeological watching brief encompassed three phases of monitoring involving the excavation of test pits, ground reduction within the mill building, and landscaping to the south and east of the former mill building.

6.2 Building works (Figs 4-5; Plates 13-14)

The initial building works comprised the excavation of seven test pits (four internal and three external) to investigate the foundations of the standing walls. No features, deposits or finds of archaeological interest were revealed within the test pits.

The ground reduction within the mill building removed a concrete floor (001) and foundation layer (002) for the concrete floor, and revealed a brick-lined drain (S003), a wall foundation (S005), a possible posthole (F008) and a rubble filled pit (F010) which are described below. Elsewhere, the natural subsoil (011) of dark red sandy-silty-clay was revealed, which in the southwest corner stepped up to create a distinctive platform 0.20m to 0.30m above the natural subsoil exposed elsewhere within the building.

Drain S003 (Fig. 5; Plate 13)

Drain S003 was aligned north-south and measured 1.80m long by 0.30m wide by 0.11m deep. It was constructed of two lines of bricks laid lengthwise and on their sides

in a single course. There was no bonding material. The bricks were unfrogged and of variable size measuring between 0.11m by 0.11m by 0.06m and 0.22m by 0.11m by 0.06m.

Wall S005 (Fig. 5; Plate 13)

Wall footing S005 was aligned east-west and measured 2.20m long by 0.60m wide by 0.10m high. It was positioned 0.30m in from the south wall of the mill building and was constructed of stone and brick bonded with lime mortar. It appeared to be contemporary with drain S003.

Posthole F008 (Fig. 5)

Possible posthole F008 was sub-circular with dimensions of 0.50m long by 0.44m wide. It was not excavated since it was revealed at the formation level, but had a fill (007) of dark brown clayey-silt.

Pit F010 (Fig. 5; Plate 14)

Pit F010 was irregular in shape but had maximum dimensions in plan of 4.16m long by 3.36m wide. It was located at the west end of the building and possible posthole F008 was located on its eastern edge. It was not excavated but had a fill (009) of stone rubble in a dark brown clayey-silt matrix.

6.3 Landscaping works (Figs 4 and 6; Plates 15-19)

The machine excavation of a 2m wide roughly L-shaped drainage trench against the south elevation of the mill and east range to the rear of the property was observed. The land south of the mill and associated buildings is a relatively steep banked area sloping down towards the mill, where a ditch was located parallel and against the property. Historically this area was utilised as a mill pond, bounded by stone walls to the east and north.

The ground level was initially reduced across a width of 4-6m away from the south and east of the mill and east range (Plates 15-16). The soil sequence consisted of a garden topsoil of a dark greyish-brown clayey-loam, measuring 0.28m thick, onto a natural subsoil consisting of mid-purplish-red gravels. Frequent modern building debris was encountered throughout the topsoil.

The trench excavated along the south elevation was essentially the removal of modern rubbish debris and the topsoil from the ditch, with slight widening occurring (Plate 17). The return of the trench along the east elevation of the east range was excavated to a depth of approximately 2m at the south end and 0.10m at the north due to the sloping nature of the ground level (Plate 18). The formation level was the natural subsoil and the base of the wall was not reached; there was no foundation cut for the wall indicating that the building was constructed into a terrace formed by the present yard. The excavation revealed no archaeological finds, features or deposits. However, along the east elevation two buttresses were exposed, paced 3m apart and keyed into the wall (Fig. 6 and Plate 19). The northeastern buttress was at least 2.10m high and the southwestern was at least 1.60m; both were 0.60m wide and 0.50m thick. Directly to the northeast of the northeastern buttress was an area of damaged wall with frequent loose building material.

At the southeast corner of the east range wall, projecting south there was evidence of an additional wall appearing contemporary with the east range. This marks the end of the leat/millpond area and may have acted as a weir/dam wall retaining the water to the west. Also partly exposed at the west end of the south elevation was the location of the sluice and head race leading to the now removed waterwheel on the west

elevation of the mill building. The remnants of a wall projecting east from the sluice probably formed a retaining wall for the mill pond.

7. COMMENTS

- 7.1 Historic mapping shows that a structure was present on the site of the mill building by 1846. It is not possible to say if this is the building which housed the mill when first documented in c.1760 or, indeed, the one described in 1864. This seems unlikely since the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1889 appears to show that the current mill building was not the mill at that time; instead this was probably housed in the building to the north which no longer exists. The current mill building is a conversion from a farm building to a mill at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries as map evidence indicates that the leat was not diverted to pass the west end of the mill building until between 1889 and 1905. Prior to this it is most probable that the mill was situated in the larger building to the north, now lost, and that this was the mill described in 1864, containing two millstones, which also explains the name 'Colebrooke Mills' (in the plural) as listed in the 1861 census (Watts 2005). Prior to its conversion, which necessitated the addition of a third storey in brick and timber, the mill building was a farm building, possibly a cow house with hayloft above. In this regard the wall and drain features exposed on the ground floor may be explained as the support for a trough at the rear of the barn and drain allowing for the cleaning out of the barn floor downslope and through the door to the north.
- 7.2 Some historic wooden infrastructure remained showing that the mill operated over three floors. No evidence for a tail race was observed. Except for a brick and stone-built launder, overgrown and not examined in detail, nothing remained of the waterwheel or features related to it; it probably had a launder passing the water of the leat from the headrace over an overshot wheel at the west gable. The west elevation of the mill building had been altered by the insertion of a large door following the removal of the wheel during the 20th century. Internally, an adjacent rubble filled pit appears to be the robbed out remains of the internal pit wheel which would have been joined directly to the axle of the waterwheel. The floor above should have supported the millstones, but nothing remained *in situ* of this or the related machinery. Only part of the hurst frame on the ground floor survived. The north range was constructed at the same time as the conversion of the mill building and housed ancillary facilities, including a vertical grind stone for tool sharpening powered from the mill mechanism by a wooden hub and metal drive shaft. Construction of this extension necessitated the blocking of former openings within the earlier barn, and other openings were also altered at same time.
- 7.3 The east range was constructed with stone walls similar to those of the lower two storeys of the mill building, but this is probably an extension since in the south elevation the walls are only keyed together at ground-floor level. The east extension probably started life as a linhay extension to the mill building when it was in use as a farm building (cf Child 1995, 71). The store extensions to the east range were of modern date and must have replaced buildings in that location constructed between 1846 and 1889; parts of the east wall to the complex undoubtedly relate to the earlier structure, which, by the evidence provided by the buttresses, in-fills and voids was always unstable and requiring regular repair.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 8.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology in Bradninch under the project number ACD42. The site archive will be offered to the RAM Museum, Exeter under the temporary accession number **26/2009**, but if they are unable to accept it will be dealt with under their current accessions policy. The digital archive will be deposited with the archaeology data service.
- 8.2 An entry to the OASIS database, which will include a digital copy of this report, has been created using the unique identifier **257468**.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 9.1 The works were commissioned by Mr and Mrs Bragg and managed for AC archaeology by John Valentin and Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Abigail Brown, Stella De-Villiers and Elizabeth Govier. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Stella De-Villiers.

10. SOURCE CONSULTED

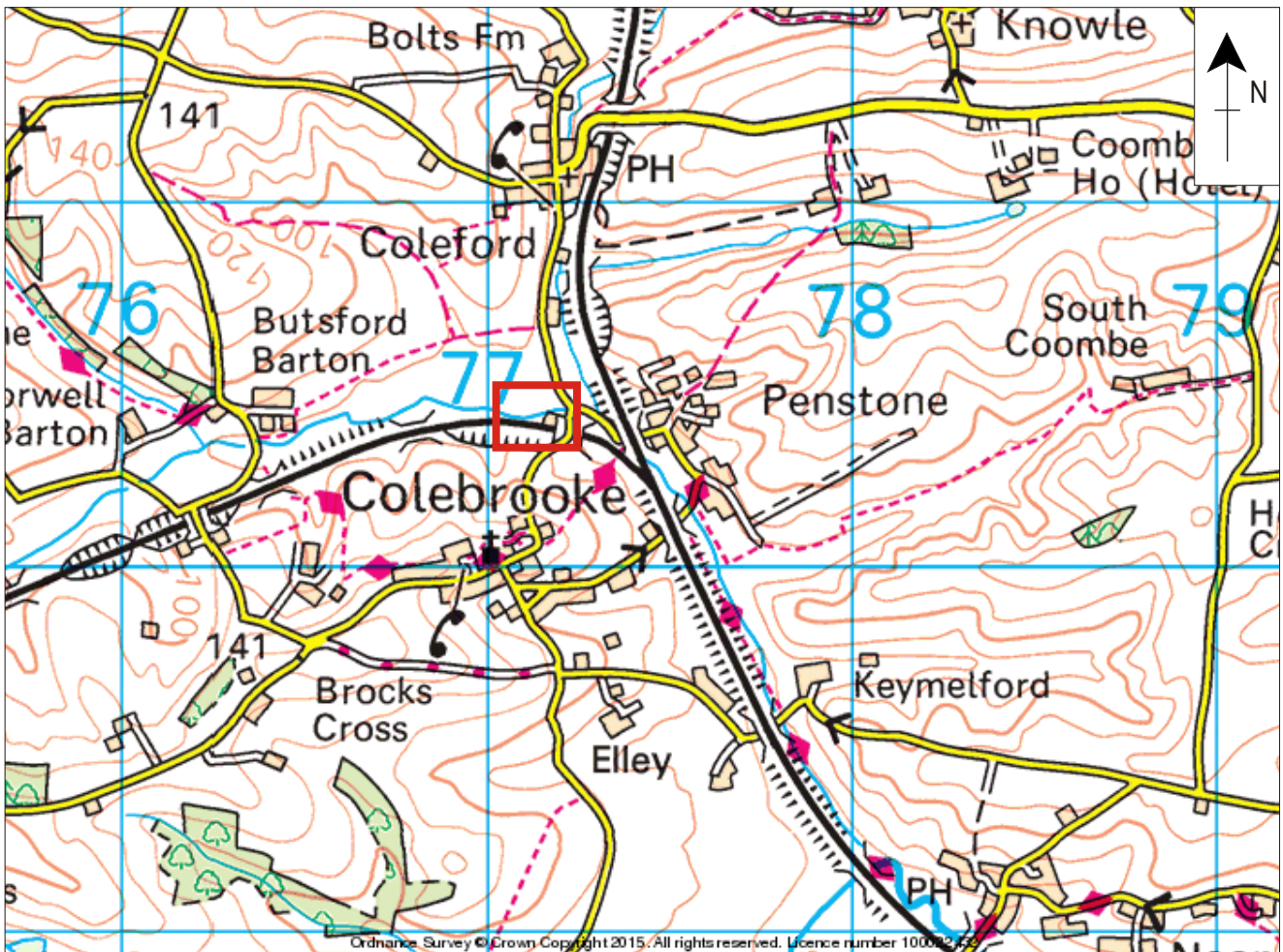
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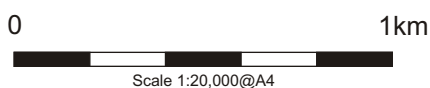
Watts, M., 2005, *Water and Wind Power*.



PROJECT
 Colebrooke Mill, Colebrooke, Near Crediton,
 Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site



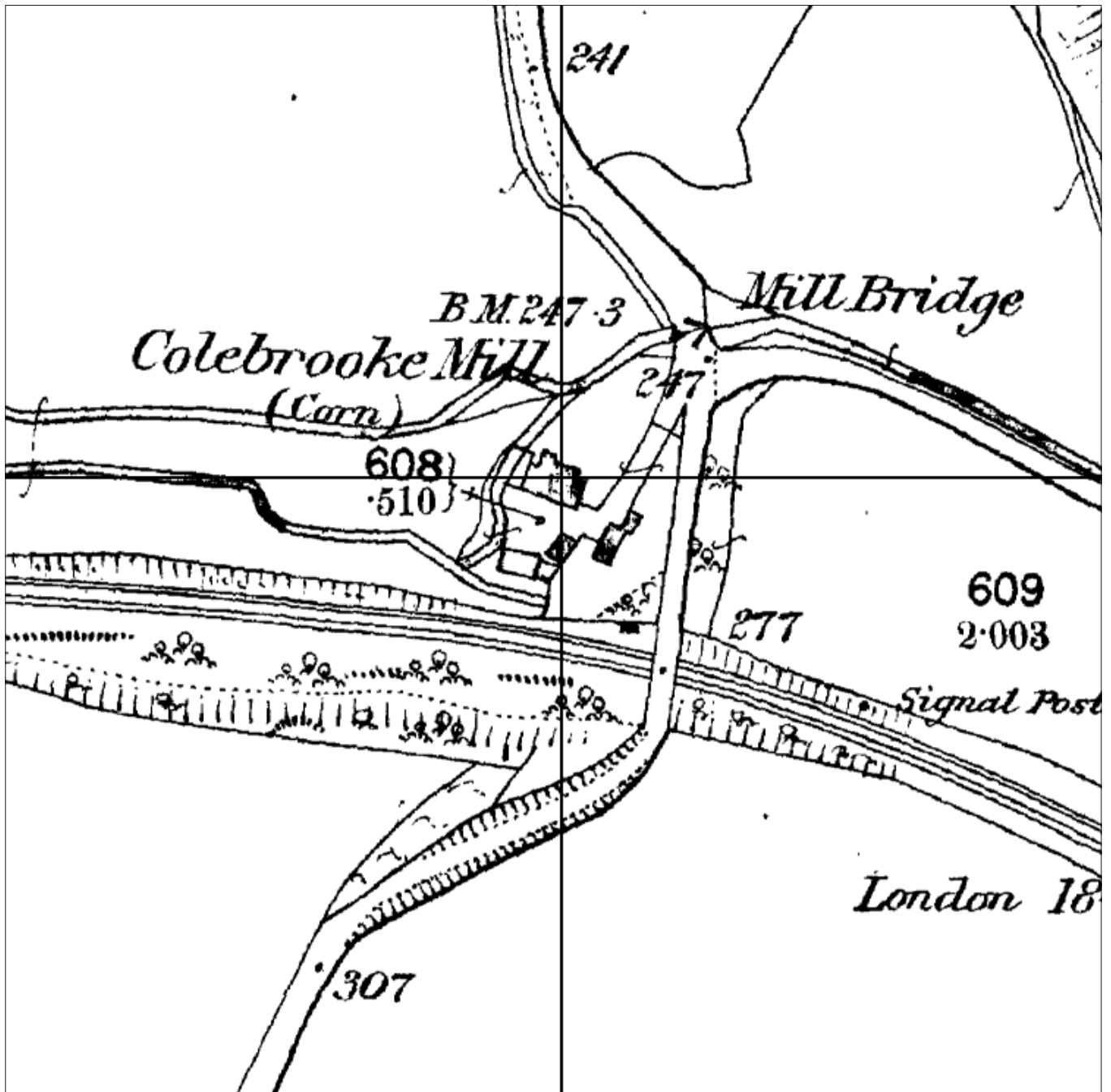


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Fig. 2: Extract from the
Colebrooke tithe map, 1846



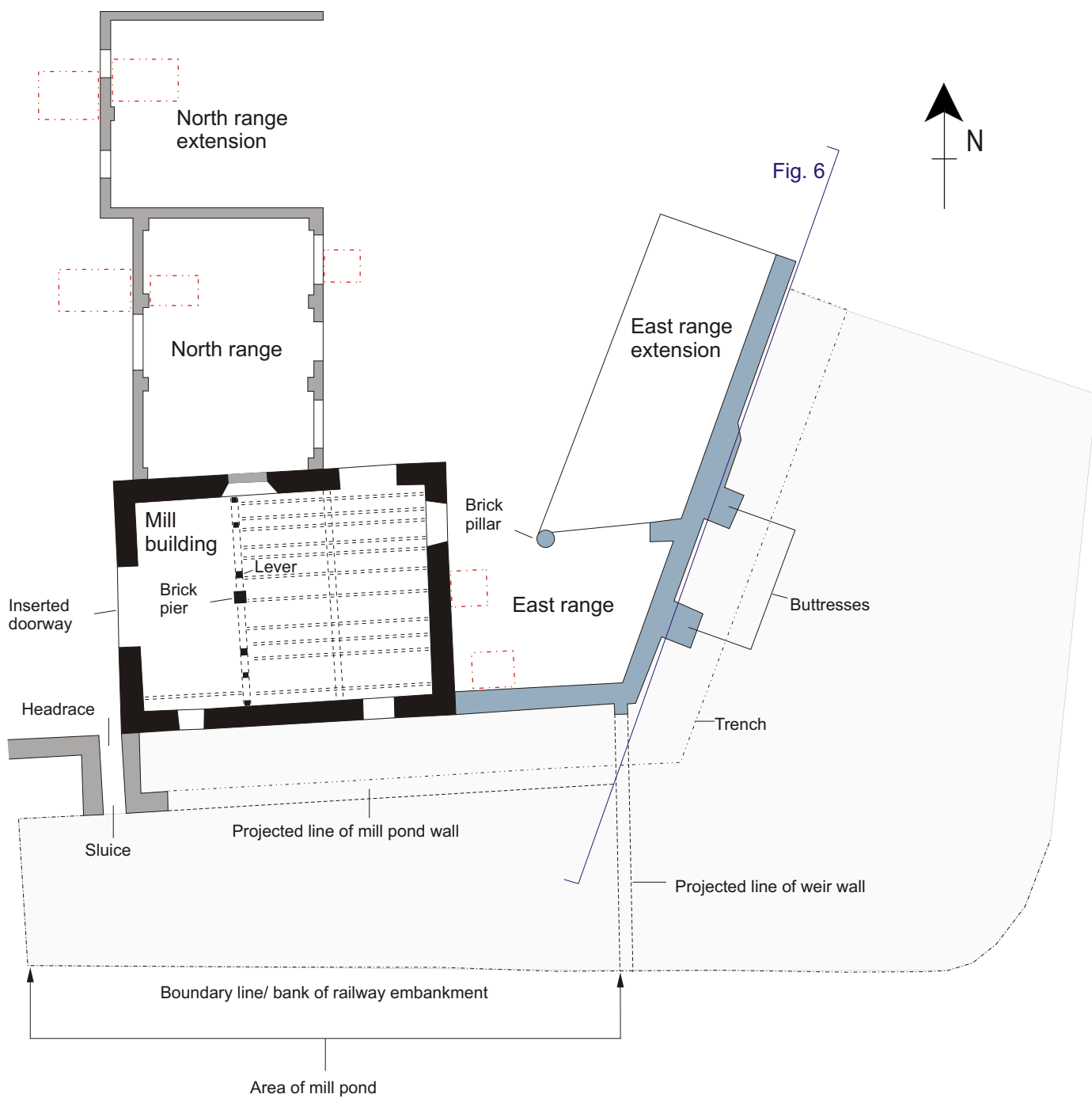
County: DEVONSHIRE, Date(s): 1889 Survey scale: 1:2,500 (c) Crown copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited 2016. All rights reserved.

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Fig. 3: Extract from the First Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1889



Key

- By mid 19th century
- Mid/late 19th century
- Late 19th/early 20th century
- Test pits
- Area of external groundworks



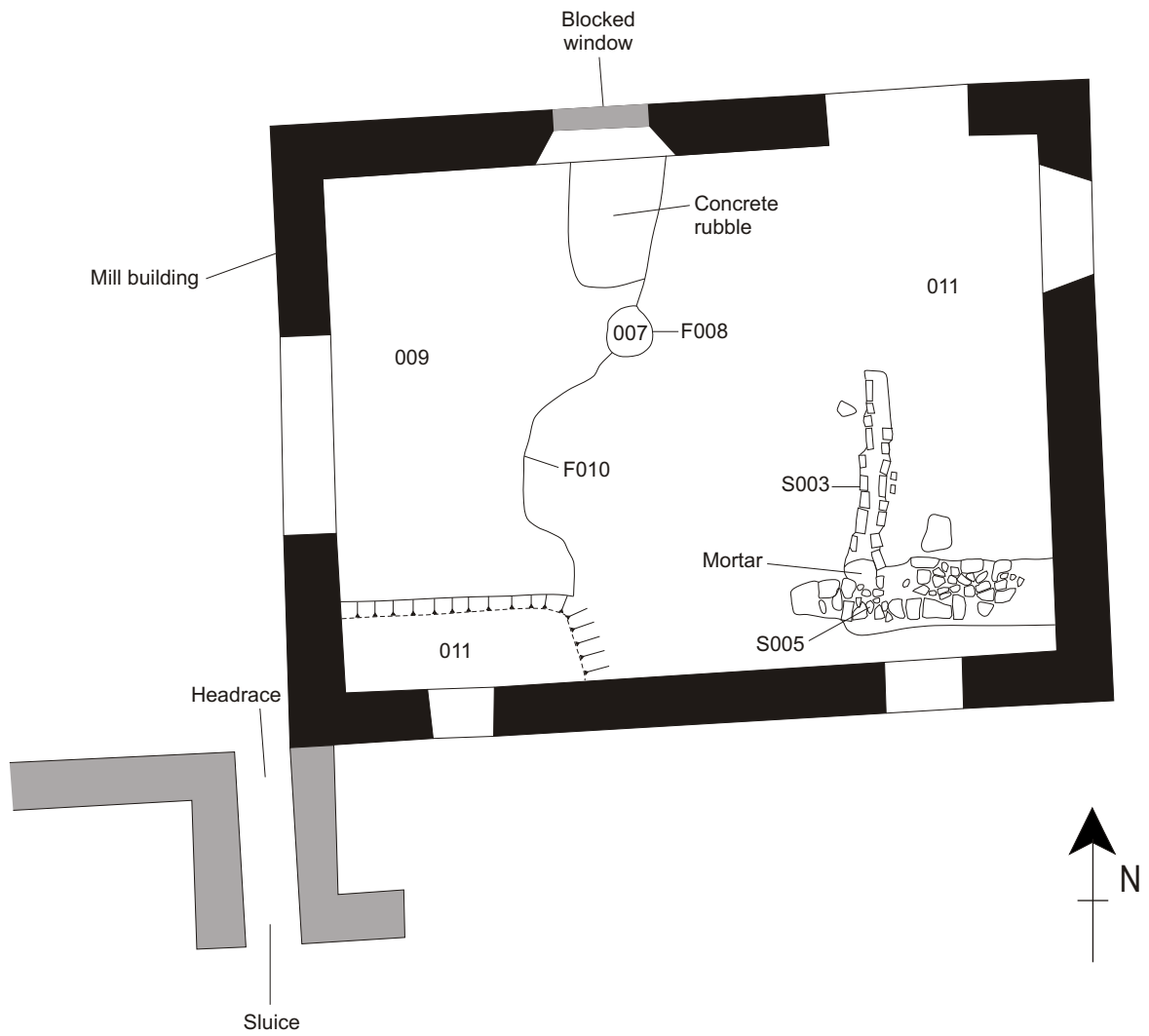
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Fig. 4: Site plan including locations of watching brief observations





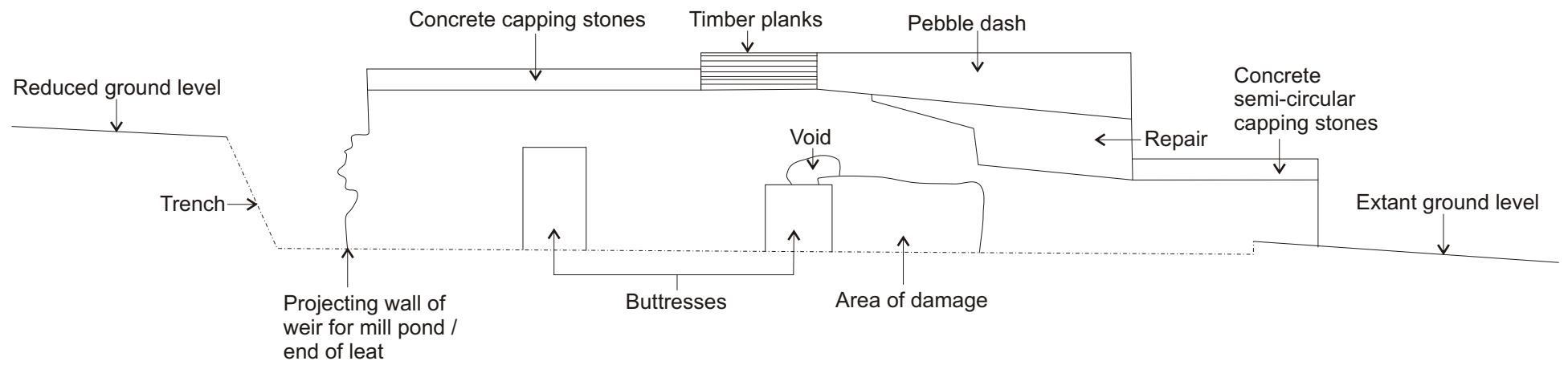
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Fig. 5: Plan of features revealed
during ground reduction within
mill building





PROJECT

Colebrook Mill, Colebrook, Near Crediton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 6: East elevation of east range revealed during groundworks





Plate 1: Colebrooke Mill, general view, looking southwest



Plate 2: Mill building and north range, west elevations, looking southeast



Plate 3: Mill building and east range, north elevations, looking south



Plate 4: Mill building, ground floor, looking west



Plate 5: Mill building, ground floor and upper levels structures, looking southeast



Plate 6: Mill building, north wall, wooden drive shaft



Plate 7: Mill building, ground floor, blocked window in the north wall, looking northwest



Plate 8: Mill building, base of second floor



Plate 9: Mill building, second floor from first floor, looking east



Plate 10: Mill building, roof structure



Plate 11: North range and north range extension, looking west



Plate 12: North range, upper floor, looking south



Plate 13: Mill building, drain S003 and wall S005, looking east (scale 1m)



Plate 14: Mill building, pit F010, looking northwest (scale 1m)



Plate 15: General view of watching brief area showing south elevations of mill building and east range, looking northwest



Plate 16: Reduced level of the area to the south of the mill building, looking east



Plate 17: View of trench along south elevation of mill building and east range, looking northwest



Plate 18: View along trench against east elevation of east range, looking northeast



Plate 19: Detail of buttresses along east elevation of east range, looking southwest

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