HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT

ON THE

ANNEXE, LITTLE WITTENHAM MANOR,

OXFORDSHIRE

On behalf of

Sir Martin Wood

by

John Steane and James Ayres

for John Moore Heritage Services

MARCH 2010

1 Introduction

The field investigation was undertaken by James Ayres and John Steane on 1st and 2nd March 2010. We acknowledge the help of David Wylie the architect who provided plans and we thank Sir Martin and Lady Wood for their interest and hospitality during our visit. In addition we thank Mr Ian Jones, the estate manger, for practical help on site.

2 Methodology

This report takes the form of a description and analysis (phase by phase) and recommendations supported by drawings, photographs and ending with a book list. We have appended a point by point response to the questions posed by Sir Martin Wood in his email of 25th February 2010.

3 Location

The place name, Wittenham, means 'Witta's Ham'. Little Wittenham was called Abbot's Wittenham because it belonged to Abingdon Abbey. It is a small hamlet of widely spaced cottages situated for the most part on a cul-de-sac ending in the Manor House and the church of St Peter (Bechinsale 1972, 89). It lies under a pair of chalk-capped hillocks known as Wittenham Clumps on the summit of which there is an Iron Age settlement and hill fort (Steane 1996, 255).

4 Architectural Description

The exterior. The west elevation (Fig. 1) is built of limestone rubble stone with some ashlar and brick coping under the eaves. The hipped roof is clad in red clay tiles. Near the centre of the 71 ft (3008 cm) frontage is a blocked doorway (the upper zone now a window) measuring 5 ft 1 inch x 7 ft 4 ins (155 x 223.5 cm) to the stone reveals and the cambered brick head respectively. The door at the north end of this frontage is of comparable dimensions being 4 ft 10 ins x 7 ft 11 ins (147.4 x 213.5 cm).

Above the somewhat larger central door is a second opening now serving as a window but formerly a loading doorway to a first floor loft and secured externally by a rail and balusters. The oak frame within this opening is well constructed with pegged mortice and tenon joints. Other window openings in this elevation appear, at least in their present form, to be later insertions (see below). An inscribed stone (drawing 5) carrying a barely legible inscription was found embedded in the lower part of the southern end of the frontage. Just below this tablet Ian Jones kindly dug a narrow trench some 18ins (40.7 cm) deep where we identified the masonry offset of a water table. The level of this roughly corresponds to the water table on the eastern frontage.

The eastern elevation. The lower part is built of limestone ashlar with some rubble (the reverse of the western frontage) with its upper story of timber frame construction. This framing is infilled with brick nogging most of which is laid in a herring bone pattern to indicate its non structural function. The bricks here measure 8½ x 4½ x 2 ins (21.5 x 11.5 x 5 cm) indicating a late 17th century date (Nathaniel Lloyd 1925, 98-9). The timber frame wall is placed centrally on the supporting masonry resulting in an offset both internally and externally. In placing the cill beam (to the timber frame zone) on such an offset, this member could easily have rotted (and may well have done so). Nevertheless we recorded just such a structural feature on an earlier stable block at Sutton Courtenay Manor (Steane and Ayres 2009).

Externally the offset at Little Wittenham Manor is achieved by three courses of brick (see photo 18), the dimensions of these bricks being 8½ x 3½ x 2½ (21.5 x 8.9 x 6.4 cm) but are of comparable date to those used in the brick noggin (e.g. 4 King's Bench Walk, London of 1677 Lloyd p98). Some of these square framed panels are infilled with bricks of somewhat larger dimensions which are laid in Flemish bond (Brunskill & Clifton Taylor 1977, 45).

Although the stonework of the eastern frontage is of a higher quality, there is a greater proportion of ashlar masonry. The blocks appear to be of re-used masonry. The edges of the ashlar have been bruised and the mortar joints are wide. Furthermore there are two fragments of Romanesque chevron moulding placed at head height some feet either side of the doorway – possibly for talismanic purposes. These fragments and, indeed, other stonework could have come from the ruins of Dorchester Abbey as a

comparison with the fragments on show in the abbey's museum would indicate. A similar Romanesque fragment but with a diaper pattern was noted internally in a room on the first floor at the north end of the building (Fig. 7).

The masonry of this building seems to be a mixture of Taynton (the yellowish) and Headington (whitish) stones. The Taynton stone comes from quarries to the north west of Burford and was brought to Radcot, loaded on to barges and shipped down the Thames. The Headington type stone came from Headington – Wheatley area (Arkell 1947).

The narrow north wall. The upper window opening, as we have seen, probably served as a doorway into the first floor.

The narrow south wall. Here the south end of the east wall is identifiable by the straight joint in the masonry that does not bond in with the adjacent rubble walling. This segment of wall does line up with what is now a garden wall (Fig. 8); significantly this garden wall not only lines through with the east wall of this range but shares a water table offset with it (see Fig. 8 and photos 15 and 16).

The remainder of this rubble wall appears to have been built in at least two campaigns. The coursed rubble stone that runs up to a height of three feet from the ground is then joined by more informal rubble masonry with some ashlar blocks.

Interior. The roof. In every sense the roof is the crowning glory of this building – a queen post roof employing very substantial scantlings. With regard to these scantlings, the tie beams measure 11½ x 9 ins (29.2 x 22.9 cm) and the queen posts 9 x 5 ins (22.9 x 12.7 cm). These various oak members are well squared up but without elaboration (chamfers etc.). Nevertheless this was a roof structure designed to be seen. For example, it is better finished than the surviving components of the painted ceiling at Greenwich, which was designed not to be seen.

The wide positioning of the queen posts has furnished the principal rafters with sufficient strength for the collars to be placed unusually high. The heavy roof is sustained on its east side by the somewhat light weight timber frame upper wall. For

this reason each truss is lined up to be supported by the posts of the timber frame - although this is approximate rather than precise. As it currently exists the roof is of five bays plus the hip bays at each end – a total of seven bays in length, each bay being of approximately 10 ft (305 cm) (see Fig. 12).

Roofs of this type required wind braces to reduce the possibility of racking. It could be that these survive under the present lining of much of the roof but we certainly found one pair of wind braces in the cock loft at the centre of the roof (photo 36). Between the principal rafters we noted in the upper cock loft a series of six common rafters most of which like much of the roof structure appeared to be primary. Generally speaking this is an extraordinarily well preserved roof (see Fig. 11).

The interior face of the west wall diminishes some 7 ft 4 ins (223.5 cm) above the present floor level. This corresponds fairly well with the point at which the masonry wall to the east becomes a timber frame structure. We noted three struts of second hand timber nailed to support the tie beams on the eastern side of the building. These struts spring from the cill beam and are located between bays 2 and 3, bays 4 and 5, and bays 5 and 6 (photos 28, 33, 40).

5. Analysis and Discussion

We order this in the way we think the construction was carried out.

Phase One

We do not think that the building served as a barn. It does not have high opposed doors, nor does it seem to have room for a threshing floor. On the other hand it bears many of the characteristics of a stable block for high quality horses – perhaps riding horses, hence its proximity to the house, a feature we have noted in a number of other cases in the district. The long tradition for good quality buildings for valued horses has been well chronicled by the late Giles Worsley (2004). Of the stables we have recently surveyed the most similar was the example at Sutton Courtenay, although the latter was about a century earlier.

Evidence for this having been a stable includes the following:

- High quality yet plain carpentry
- Evidence for an upper floor for the storage of hay and straw, and possibly housing for grooms (Worsley 2004, 85)
- Central hay loft loading doorway
- It is possible that the now demolished south bays provided accommodation for grooms for such domestic purposes a fireplace with chimney would have been located here.
- Width of central (now blocked) and northern door west side, both in the region of five feet were suitable for horses.
- Flooring in the loading bay area sustained in the lateral stone wall. We concluded that this wall was primary since it was needed to support the joists of the floor by the hay hoist and loading bay. Although this wall does not appear to have been bonded into the external walls we nevertheless believe it was constructed very shortly after the shell was completed. It may well be of structural importance. We think that the heavy scantlings of the roof structure mean that it was originally clad in Stonesfield type slates (Aston 1974).

We also believe that the building was once two or three bays longer towards the south. The evidence for this is as follows:

- The projecting purlin seen internally in the south east corner of the roof (photo 39).
- The straight joint already noted at the south east corner, a scar of a wall now destroyed.
- The water table that continues on from the east elevation into the garden wall.

Finally we believe that the present historic fabric suggests that the west elevation was formally surmounted by a timber frame wall to match that on the east front, as in the stable block at Sutton Courtenay. It might be added that in this region timber framed buildings persisted into the 18th century as seen in the gables of many of the houses at Nuneham Courtenay of *c*. 1784.

Phase Two

It is very likely that the weight of the roof structure and its stone cladding placed severe stress on those lightweight timber frame walls. This might well have been exacerbated by the original length of the building. Furthermore any timber frame structure leaning west or south would suffer greater extremes of temperature and humidity. This could explain why the upper part of the west wall seems to have been enveloped in masonry. The east wall survived better in a more equitable climate but even here reinforcements have been deemed necessary. We refer to the three struts and a timber plate that had been nailed onto the cill beam where a scarf is failing (see photo 38). The struts and the wood plate are fixed with wrought iron nails with 'rose' heads.

Phase Three

Windows, particularly those with stone keystones, were inserted in their present form and the floor in the southern half of the building has been covered with wood blocks.

Phase Four

Further work on the fenestration, the insertion of French windows, and doors and one chimney contrived in the thickness of the east wall.

Phase Five

Post war (*c*. 1950) work on the building including the projecting Fletton brick flue at the south end of the east elevation.

6. Dating

Phase One

We think it is likely that the carcase of the building was erected in the last quarter of the 17th century. It is possibly built at the time of Hungerford Dunch (1678-1680) the

style of the roof fits this. Possibly his successor, Edward Dunch, was too much of a gambler to have invested sensibly.

Phase Two

Not easy to date but probably the 18th century. This phase saw the radical surgery to the building outlined above, its truncation and the cladding of the stonework of the timber frame elements of the west elevation.

Nathaniel Dance (1754-1811) was a founder member of the Royal Academy in 1768. As Sir Nathaniel Dance-Holland he resigned from the RA in 1790 (having acquired a fortune in 1776) and became an MP (Hutchinson 1968). Henceforward he lived in Hampshire.

Phases Three, Four and Five

20th century amendments for domestic purpose – including the Fletton brick chimney of *c.* 1950 on the east wall and tiles on the roof of *c*. 1900.

7. Recommendations

- Maintain the present visibility of the following:

The roof structure
The timber frame wall (internal and external)
The stone walling (internal and external)
Interior to use permeable distemper not impermeable paint

- To achieve visibility of roof internally use glass fronted balconies rather than a forest of turned wood balusters.
- The above recommendations would still leave opportunities for insulation in the roof, the floor and the windows. The walls could be hung with textiles – a traditional solution.

- If the present concrete (we presume this is under the wooden blocks) floor is lifted a record should be made of any surviving pitched and edge bedded stone cobbles, as has been done recently at Caswell Farm near Witney.
- If the Fletton brick chimney is removed the stonework should be made good, including the masoned water table.
- Timbers of the roof structure to be sampled for dendrochronology to give the felling date.

For this contact:
Dr Dan Miles, Mill Farm, Mapledurham, Oxon, RG1 7TX 0118 972 4074
Grants are available from OAHS for this work).

- It may be advisable to lower the land by the western façade to expose the foot of the wall with its water table. This would tend to dry out the wall footings.

8. The following is our response to Sir Martin Wood's list of questions. We have numbered these for clarity.

1) Stables we have examined and written reports on in the district are at:
Sutton Courtenay Manor
Lyford Grange
Shotover Park
Ashbury Manor
Caswell House, Brize Norton
Baldon House, Marsh Baldon

2) From our experience and the reasons given above we think that the Manor Annexe was built as stables.

3) It was built as two stories, or certainly at its present height.

4) Stables do not need double height doors; they do need wide doors to enable horses to move in and out.

5) The horizontal timbers are bond timbers built into masonry walls. There is an article by Lawrence Hurst entitled 'The rise and fall of the use of bond timbers in brick buildings in England'. They are 'timbers worked into a wall to tie or strengthen it longitudinally'.

6) We have identified two original doors above and one, possibly two doors for a hoist to the hay loft.

7) We have noted the water table offset in the masonry along the east wall and discovered part of the water table along the west wall.

8) *C.* 1670-1680

9) All the walls including the internal lateral wall are of Taynton and Headington limestones.

Postscript.

Sir Marin Wood sent me a copy of an early photograph (his letter of 8th March 2010). He made some interesting observations and noted:

1. There did not seem to be an entrance or drive into the property at that place at that time. This is true. The wall which continues to the east as the churchyard wall goes right up to the 'barn'. So I agree with Sir Martin's observations here.
2. I agree that there is no 'front door' on the east façade. We had noted that this door had a lintel of concrete which seemed to suggest that it was modern.
3. Similarly there was no window in the east facing wall (east not south).
4. I cannot say I think that 'there is no window at U'. Surely the window would be further over to the left, if it is there.
5. No do I think there is 'a step'. The wall is flush, it seems to me.
6. The structure to the left of W seems to me to be the garden wall. I do not think it is a single storey building but it certainly suggests the presence of a continuance of the 'barn' to the south.

9. Booklist

The following works have been used or cited in this report.

Alcock N W and Hall L. *Fixtures and Fitting in dated houses 1567-1763*, Council for British Archaeology, 1994

Arkell W J, *Oxford Stone*, Faber and Faber, London 1947

Aston M, *Stonesfield Slate*, Woodstock, 1974

Beckinsale R P, *Companion into Berkshire*, Spurbooks, Bourne End, 1972

Brunskill R W and Clifton Taylor A, *English Brickwork*, Ward Lock, London. 1977

Brunskill, R, *Timber Building in Britain*, Golancz. London, 1985

Clifton Taylor A and Ireson A S, *English Building Stone*, Golancz. London, 1983

Curl J S, *Encyclopaedia of Architectural Terms*, Donhead, Shaftesbury, 1992

Gelling M, *The Place Names of Berkshire*, Cambridge, 1973

Hall L, *Period House Fixtures and Fittings 1300-1900*, Countryside Books, Newbury, 2005

Harris R, *Timber Framed Buildings*, Shire, Aylesbury, 1978

Hutchinson S C, *The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968*, Chapman Hall, London, 1968

Lloyd N, *A History of English Brickwork*, (1925) Antique Collectors Club Reprint, Woodbridge, 1983

Steane J, *Oxfordshire*, Plimlico/Random House, London, 1996

Wade Martins S, *The English Model Farm 1700-1914*, Windgather Press, Macclesfield, 2002

Worsley G, *The British Stable*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2005

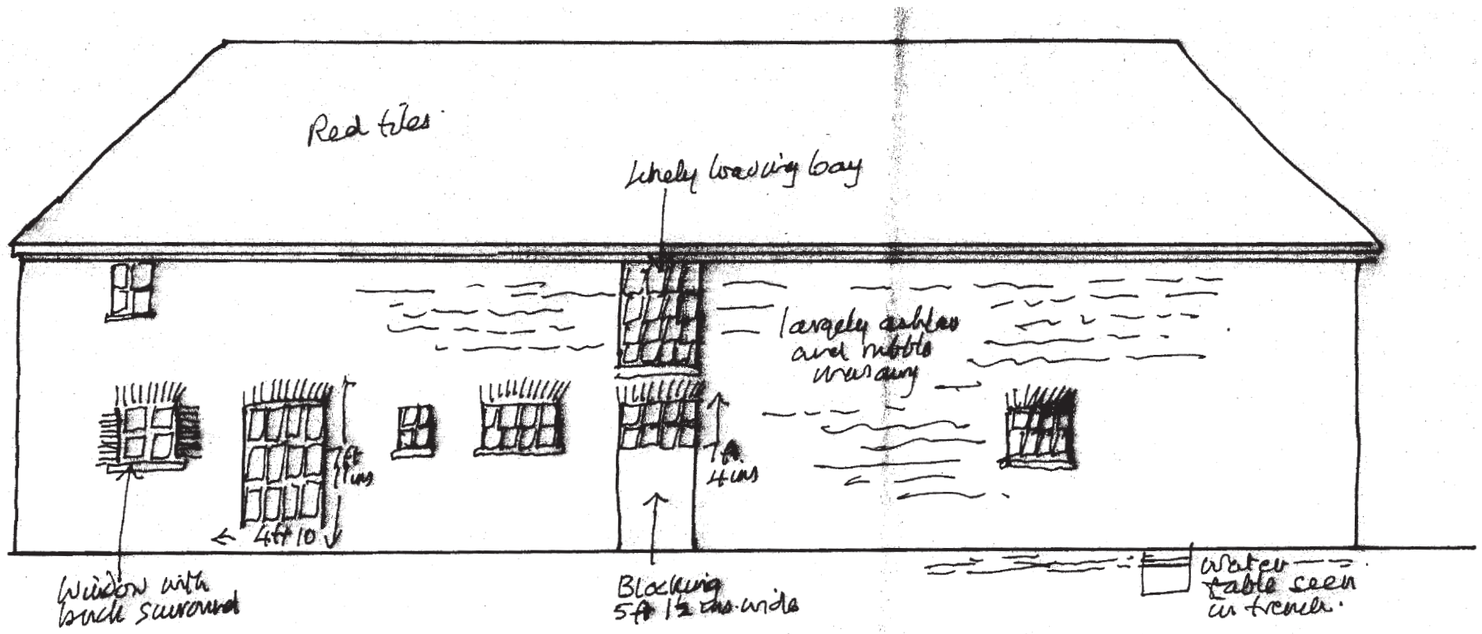

Red tiles
Likely loading bay
Largely ashlar and rubble masonry
7ft 11ins
4ft 10
7ft 4ins
Window with brick surround
Blocking 5ft 1½ ins wide
Water table seen in trench.

Fig 1

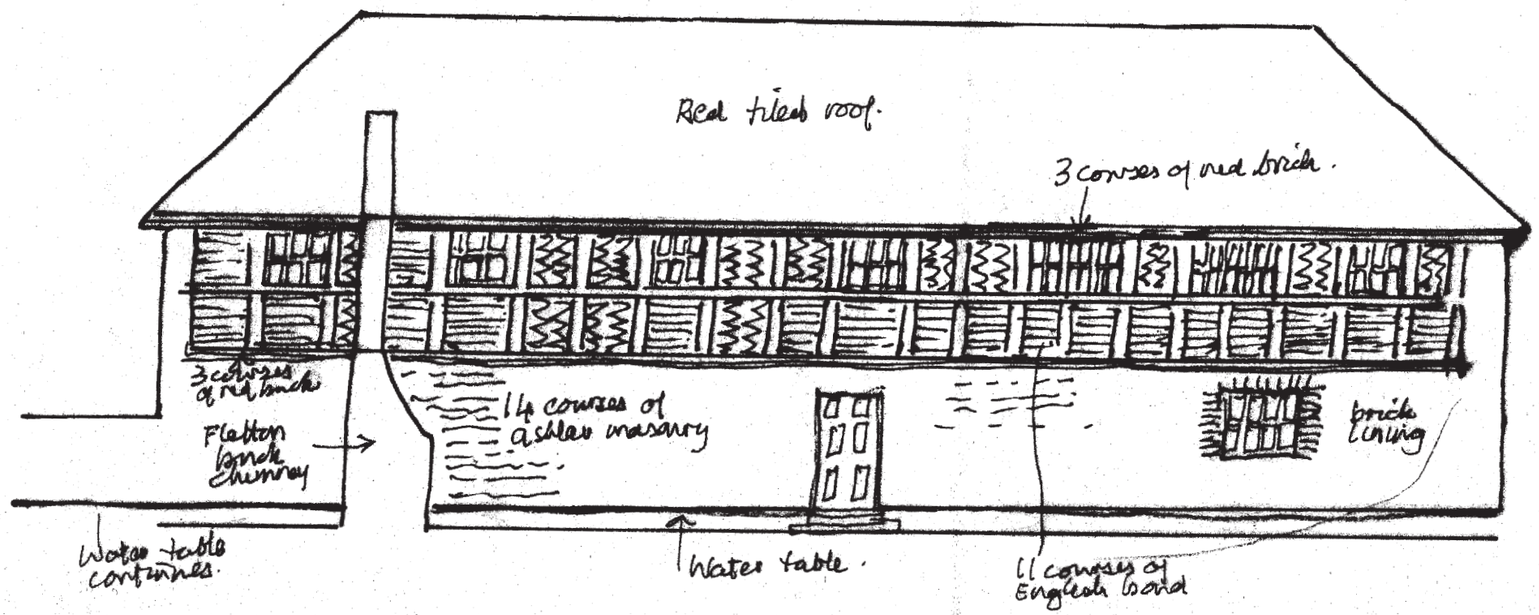

Red tiled roof.
3 courses of red brick.
3 courses of red brick
Flatton bond chimney
14 courses of ashlar masonry
brick lining
Water table continues.
Water table.
11 courses of English bond

Fig 2.

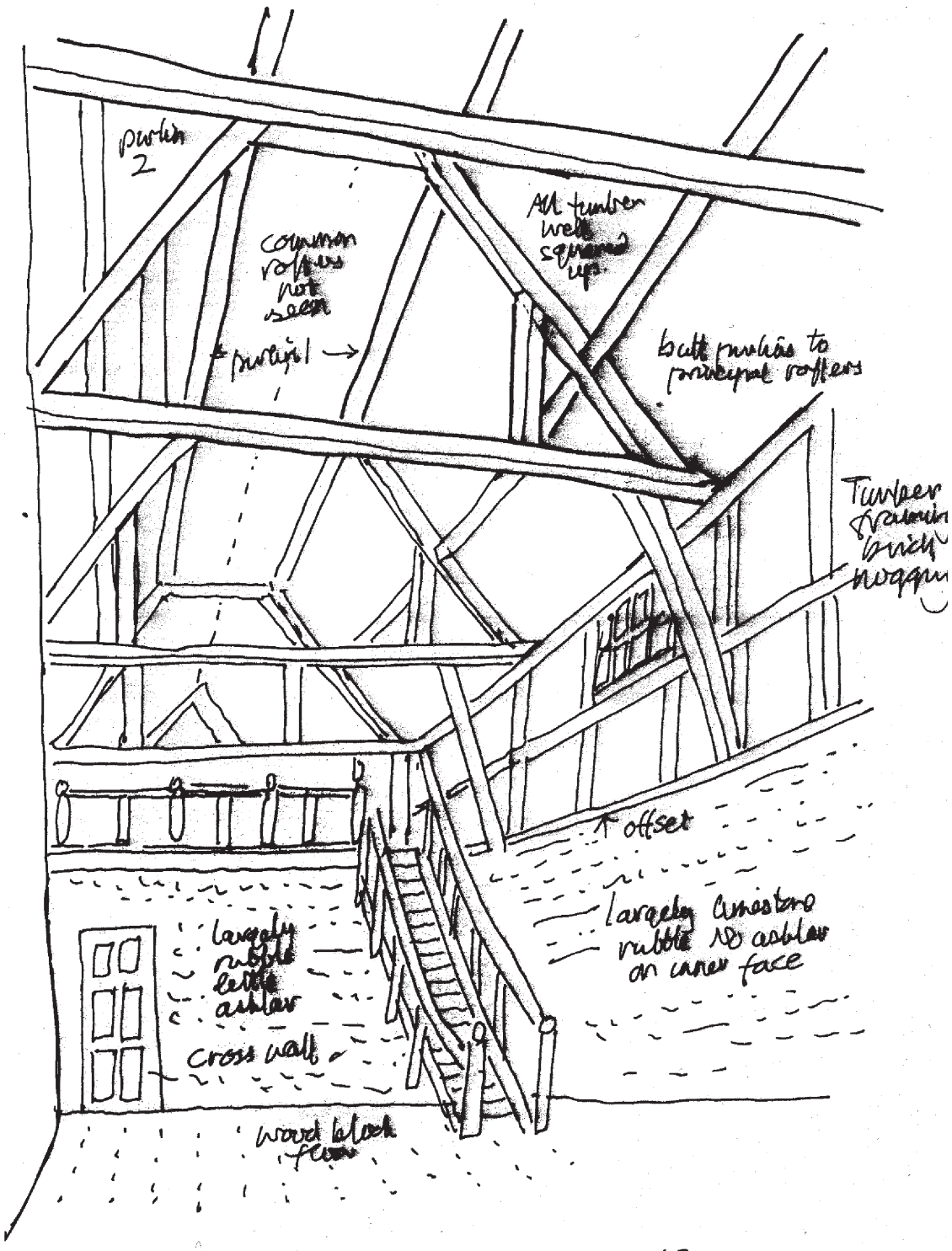

purlin 2
common rafters not seen
principal
All timber well squared up
Both purlins to principal rafters
offset
largely rubble little ashlar
cross wall
wood block floor

Fig 3

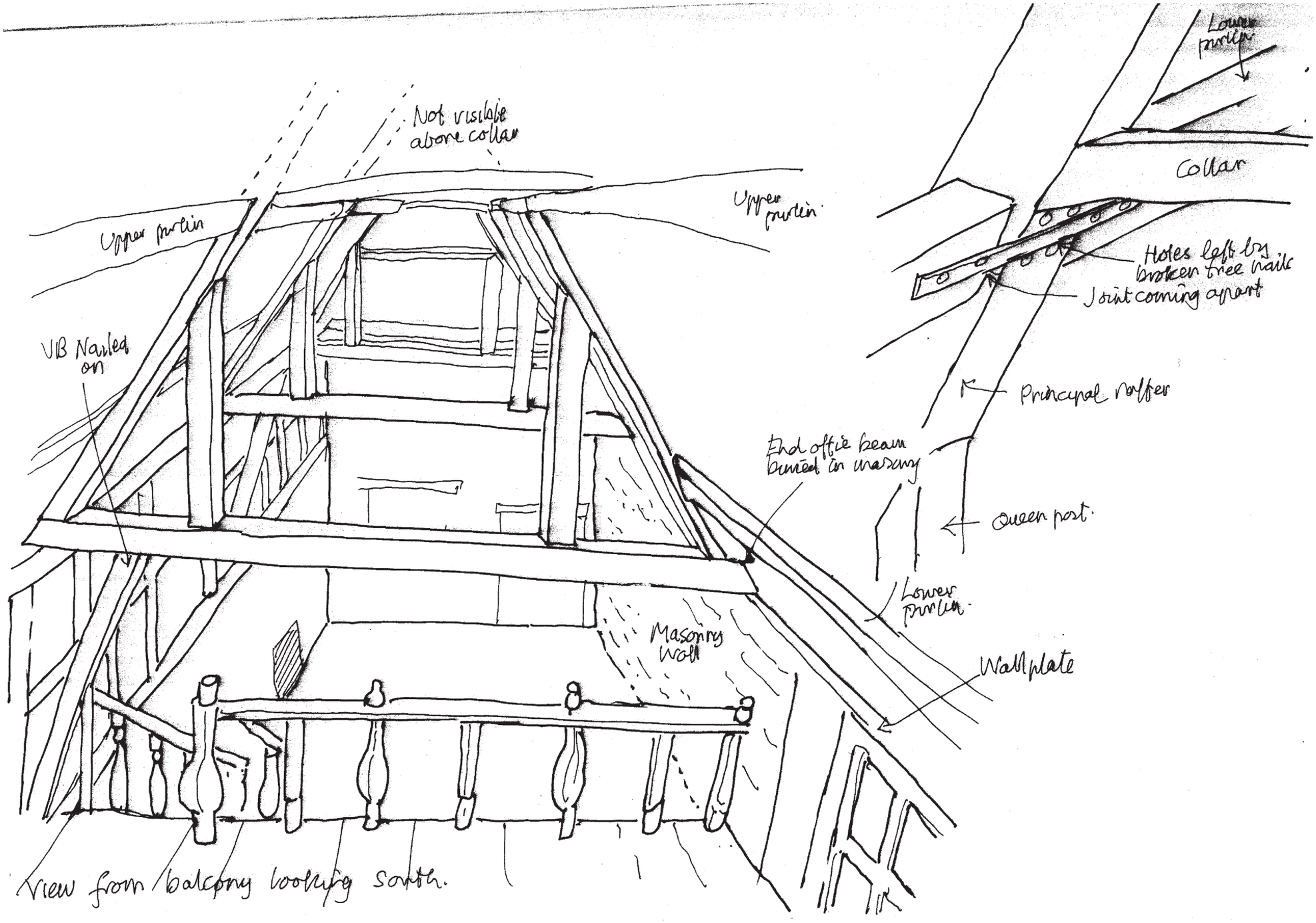
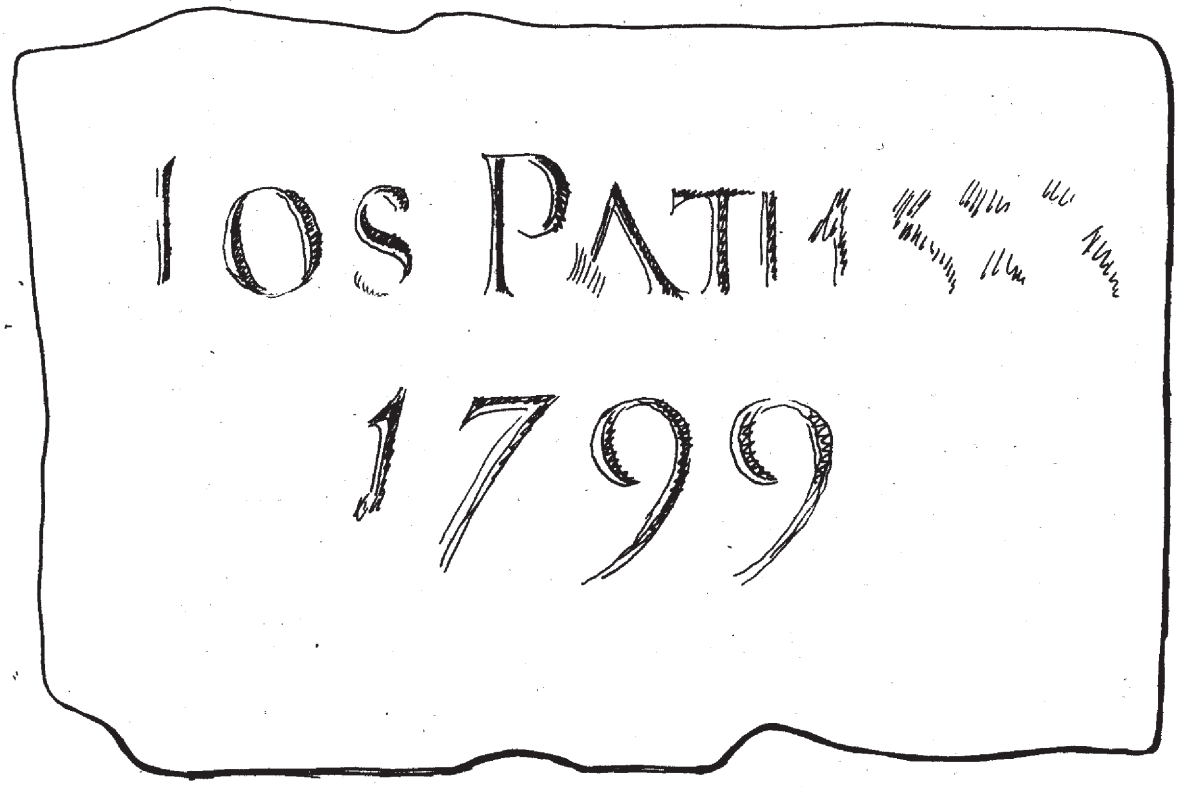
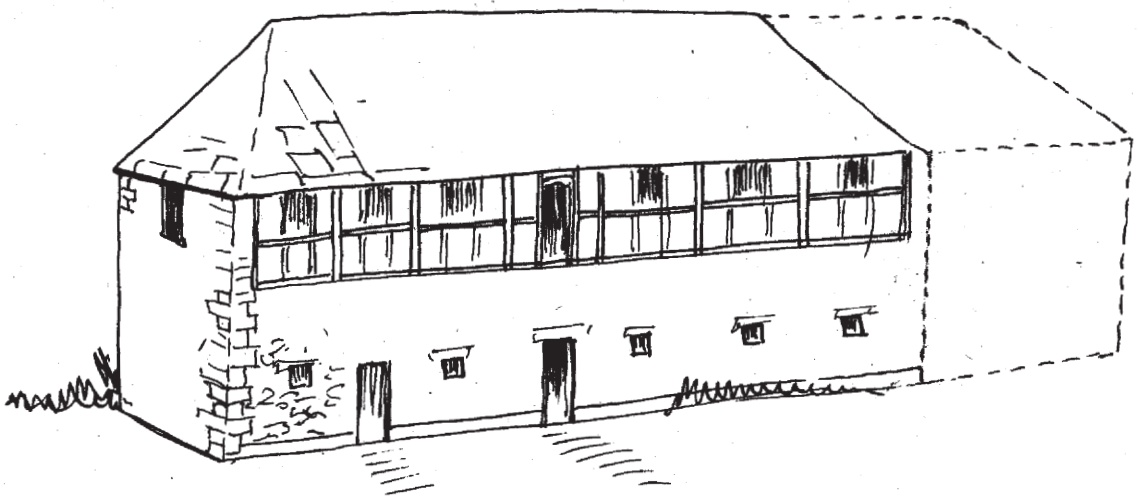

Not visible above collar
Upper purlin
Upper purlin
VB Nailed on
Lower purlin
Collar
Holes left by broken tree nails
Joint coming apart
Principal rafter
End office beam buried in masonry
Queen post
Lower purlin
Masonry Wall
Wallplate
View from balcony looking south.

fig 4



TABLET 20 x 12¼ ins. (50·8 x 30·1 cm) WEST WALL
THE MANOR ANNEX ~ LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXON.
JA·2010

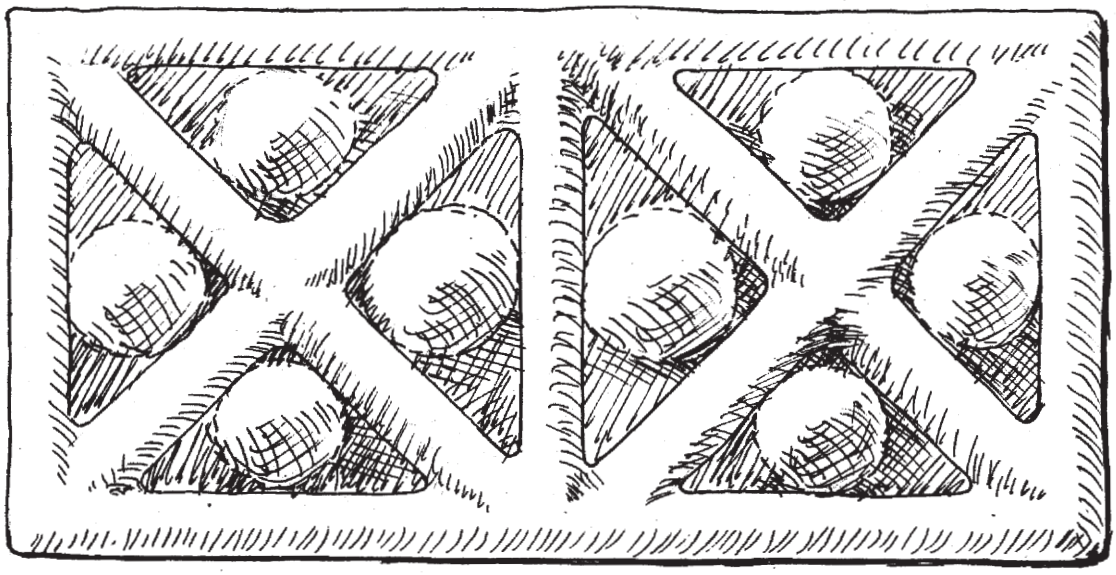
Fig 5.



RECONSTRUCTION of WEST ELEVATION of
THE MANOR ANNEX ~ LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXFORDSHIRE

J·A·2010

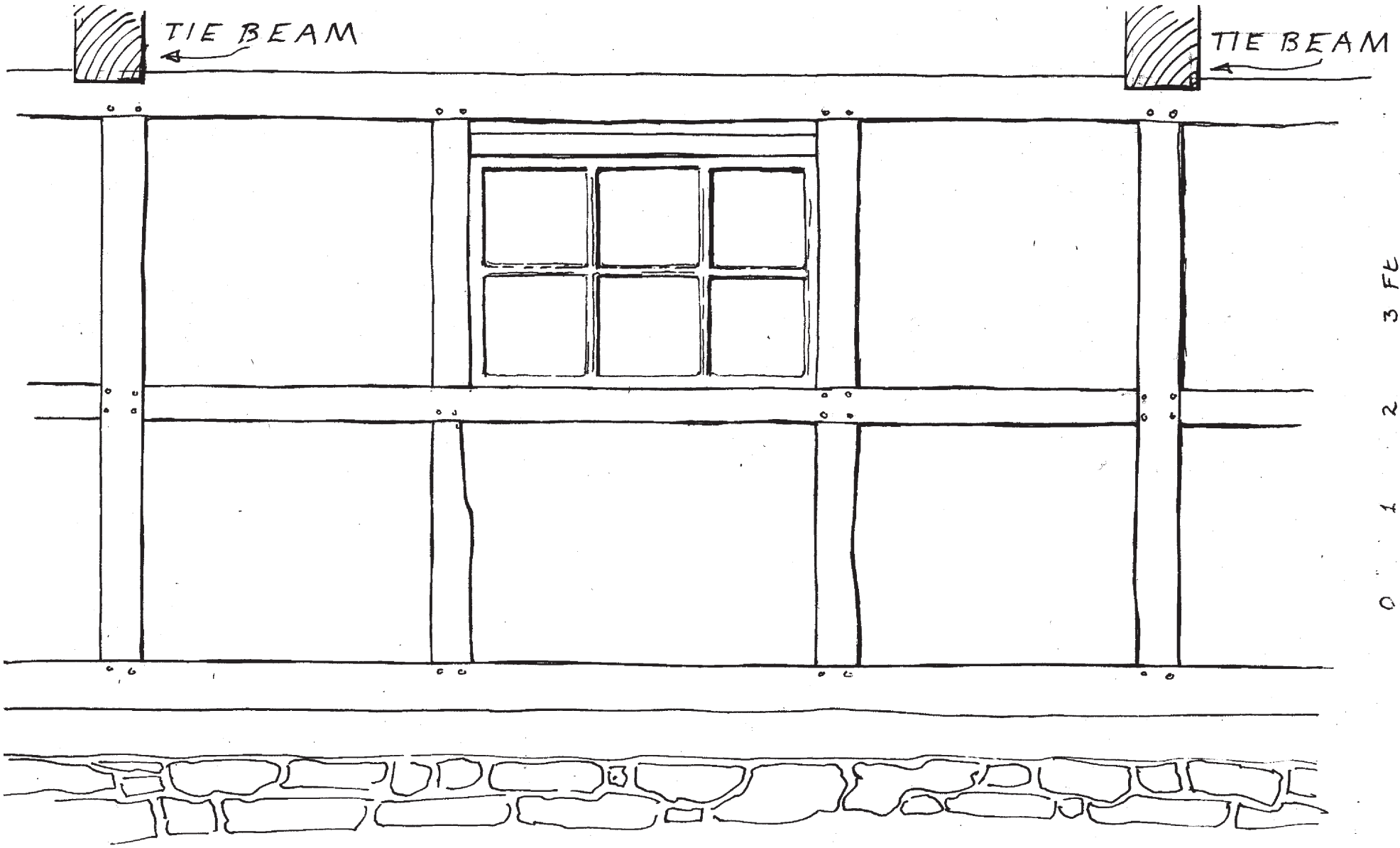
Fig 6



ROMANESQUE CARVED DETAIL ~ FRAGMENT
8 x 4 ins (20·3 x 10·2 cm) INSIDE THE MANOR ANNEX
LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXFORDSHIRE J.A. 2010

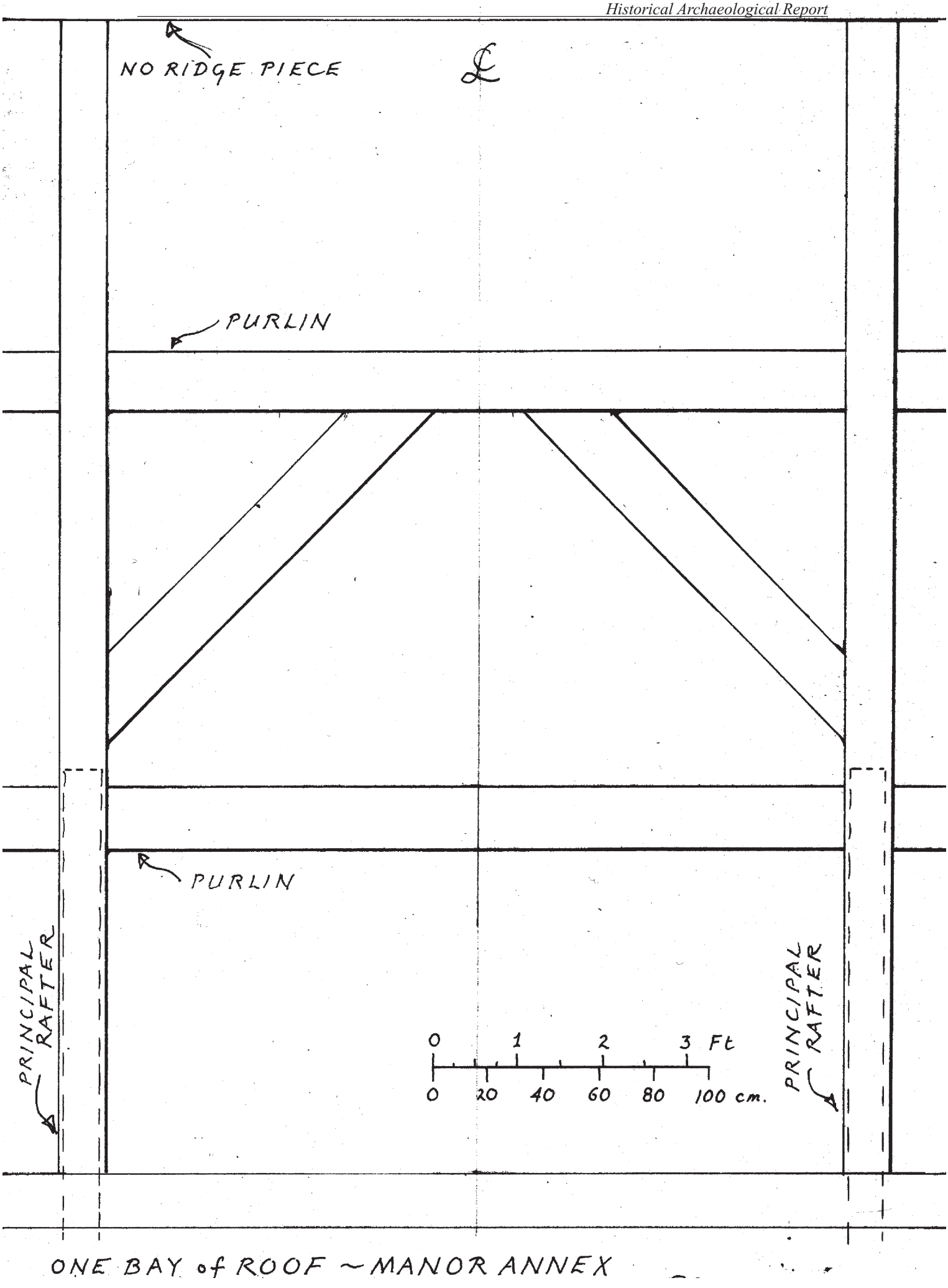

WEST
EAST
0 1 2 3 Ft
0 20 40 60 80 100 cm
END WALL TO THE SOUTH
MANOR ANNEX
LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXON

Figure 8

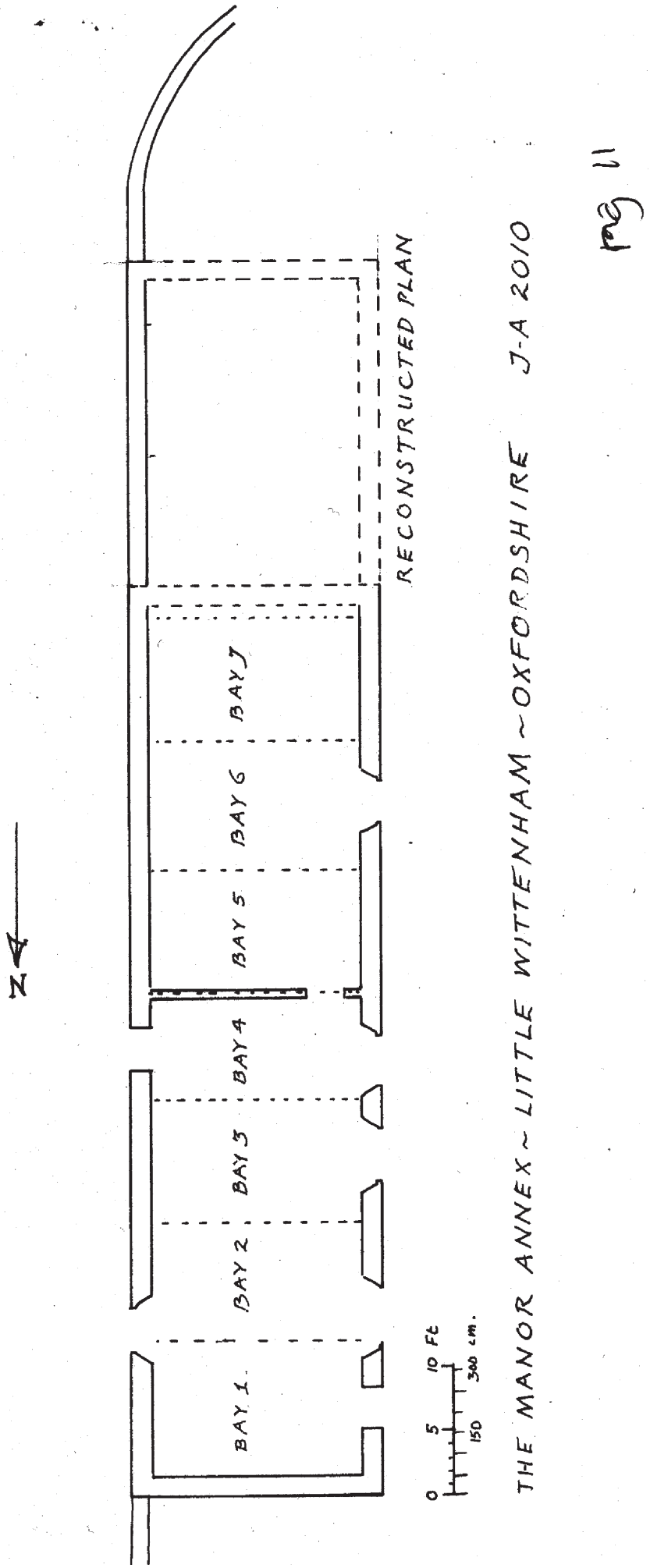


THE MANOR ANNEX ~ LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXFORDSHIRE
J.A. 2010
ONE BAY of TIMBER-FRAME EAST WALL OVER MASONRY

Fig 9



ONE BAY of ROOF ~ MANOR ANNEX


N
BAY 1.
BAY 2
BAY 3
BAY 4
BAY 5
BAY 6
BAY 7
RECONSTRUCTED PLAN
0
5
10 Ft
150
300 cm.
THE MANOR ANNEX ~ LITTLE WITTENHAM ~ OXFORDSHIRE J-A 2010
fig 11

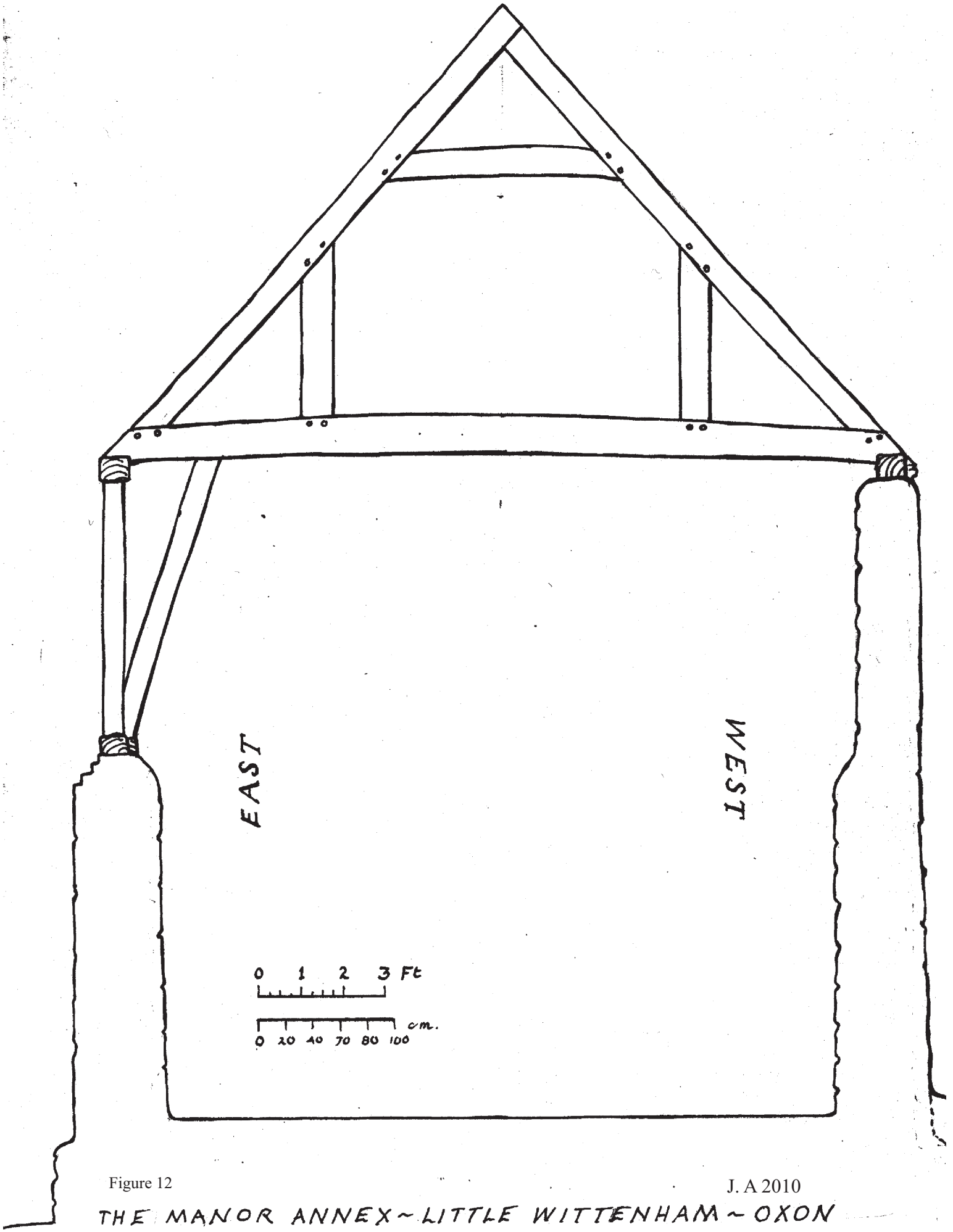


Figure 12

J. A 2010

1. East Front. Note Timber framed and brick nogged upper storey. Also hipped tiled roof.

2. West elevation

3. East wall at south end. Note herringbone panels of brick work

4. North end of east wall. Note fine ashlar stone blocks in lower part of wall.

5. Chimney added to east front. Note Fletton bricks. Also ashlar masonry of lower part of east wall

6. View of annexe from the south. Note garden wall on same line as east wall annexe.

7. View of annexe from top of tower

8. End of east wall. Note straight joint indicating that building went further to south

9. Window. North end, east wall.

10. Ground Floor window, third from north. West front

11. South window. Note stone keystone

12. Window in west front

13. Blocked door with hayloft doorway above. Note two straight joints below window and blocking behind lead cistern

14. Lead cistern

15. Water table at foot of garden wall indicating continuance of building.

16. Water table to "garden wall" to the south east side.

17. Romanesque fragment in east wall

18. External view showing central position of cill plate

19. Water table. East wall.

20. Steps up to east door. Note water table.

21. East door. Note water table

22. Detail of east wall. Note large ashlar blocks

23. Detail of water table and 1950s chimney

24. Concrete lintel over east door

25. Inside of west wall showing where the wall has been raised. Note timber bonds.

26. View of roof from balcony. Note two ranges of purlins.

27. East wall from inside. Note thick masonry wall. Also tie beam with brace supporting it.

28. East wall looking north east. Note supports nailed to tie beams

29. East wall looking south east.

30. Apex of roof looking north. Note high position of collars

31. Common rafters at apex of roof. Note halving and pegging and absence of ridge piece.

32. Five pairs of common rafters and one principal rafter.

33. Strut above stairs nailed into position.

34. Iron strap nailed across principal rafter and purlins which are pulling away

35. End of tie beam resting on west wall

36. Windbraces in place between upper and lower purlins. West roof

37. Pole plate and tie bean. South east corner.

38. Oak plate nailed to pole plate east side above stairs

39. Pole and plate purlin. South east corner.

40. Strut in bay 2 from north. First floor.

41. Detail of lateral wall (on right), east wall on left. Note crack.

42. Romanesque fragment carved stone inside first bay, first floor, east wall.

43. View showing central position of cill plate on masonry east wall.