

Archaeological Monitoring at Langley Abbey Norfolk



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



February 2010

Client: Langley Abbey Estates

OA East Report No: 1149

OASIS No: oxfordar3-69047

NGR: TG 3623 0286

Archaeological Monitoring at Langley Abbey, Norfolk

Site Code: XNFLAA09
NHER No. 10344
Date of Works: 25th - 27th November 2009
Report No: 1149
Excavator: Graeme Clarke
Client: Langley Abbey Estates
Report Date: February 2010

Report Number: 1149
Site Name: Archaeological Monitoring at Langley Abbey, Norfolk
HER Event No: ENF123672
Date of Works: November 2009
Client Name: Langley Abbey Estates
Client Ref: N/A
Planning Ref: Scheduled Monument Consent HSD 9/2/14096
Grid Ref: TG 3623 0286
Site Code: XNF LAA 09
Finance Code: XNF LAA 09
Receiving Body: N/A
Accession No:

Prepared by: Graeme Clarke
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Date: February 2010
Signed:



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Summary

On the 25th-27th November 2009, OA East carried out an archaeological watching brief at Langley Abbey, Langley Green, Langley, Norfolk, NR14 6DG (TG 3623 0286). The monitoring was carried out during an ongoing development including the repair of a barn formed from a substantial medieval abbey building, and the creation of educational access and interpretative displays. These works include the installation of a soakaway and drainage trenches, the construction of a new stairway and the removal of two concrete pads, a concrete floor and a modern brick wall.

Features were also identified at the junction of the northern wall of the gatehouse and the north-western corner of the barn/western range, and these are interpreted as being contemporary with the original use of the Abbey. These comprise a buttress surviving below ground level, and subsequent reinforcement at a later date.

The monitoring identified features in the barn/western range that post-date the dissolution of the Abbey including: a porch leading to a door in the eastern wall, a retaining wall blocking a further door in the eastern wall and a heavily truncated internal stair leading leading to a door in the western wall. A brick wall was also identified to the north of the gatehouse.

1 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.1.1 Langley Abbey lies in the flood plain of the Yare, about 14km south-east of Norwich (see Fig. 1). Both earthwork and masonry remains survive (see Fig. 2), with medieval Abbey buildings incorporated into the fabric of present day farm buildings. The site is well managed and grazed by cattle.
- 1.1.2 The site lies on a slightly raised outcrop of gravel jutting out towards the floodplain of the River Yare, which lies c. 0.5km to the north. North of the site is found peat (in this river system deposited in three post-glacial phases interleaved with marine clays) and this lies over the river gravels. The peat is itself overlain in places by alluvium of more recent date. The solid geology beneath is Norwich Crag.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The works affected the site of the medieval abbey, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument. They took place adjacent to the location of the Abbey church and immediately adjacent to and within farm buildings that include the substantial remains of the western range and gatehouse. Prior to fieldwork taking place it was thought that they may affect the area of the Abbey's burial ground.
- 2.1.2 A history of Langley Abbey by Loddon Women's Institute in 1974 provides a comprehensive overview and is summarised below. The Premonstratensian Order was founded by St. Norbet, and the first house was established in AD1119 at Premontre near Laon in France. The Premonstratensian Abbey of Langley is situated in the civil Parish of Langley with Hardley on the South Bank of the River Yare in Norfolk.
- 2.1.3 Langley Abbey owed its foundation to Robert Fitz Roger, who died in 1214. He was a very rich and powerful man, being Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1190-3, 1197 and 1211. It was about the fifteenth house established in the Kingdom, and was dedicated in honour of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.
- 2.1.4 The Patronage of the Abbey descended with the Manor of Horsford and in 1473 both Langley and Horsford were in the hands of Sir Richard Fieunes, Lord Dacre and in this family the Abbey remained until its dissolution in 1536.
- 2.1.5 On 5th June 1547 (in the 38th of Henry VIII), John Berney Esq. was given a grant of the Manor of Langley, with the site of the Abbey and all the houses in Langley Parish belonging to the Monastery.
- 2.1.6 In 1742 Langley Abbey, which had been in the Berney family for over two hundred years was sold to a George Proctor, son of William Proctor of Epsom. Langley Hall then became the seat of the Proctor Beauchamp family who continued its development into a spacious mansion standing in a richly wooded park of 800 acres. The hall was chiefly built about the year 1740 by Mr Recorder Berney of Norwich, who must have been the last Berney to hold the Abbey lands. It was considerably enlarged by Sir William, the first Baronet. This hall is now Langley School.
- 2.1.7 The last Beauchamp to occupy the family seat was Lady Beauchamp who took the family name when she was separated from her husband (Barker Harlow). She was the daughter of Sir Reginald, and was succeeded by her son, who found it necessary to

dispose of the estate, probably to pay death duties, and it was bought by a Company. They immediately sold the whole estate in 1957.

- 2.1.8 Langley Abbey Farm was purchased by the sitting tenant, Major Allhusen, while Mr Moar managed the farm (Gladden 1974).
- 2.1.9 The current owner Mr Christopher Townsend purchased Langley Abbey itself, and the surrounding farm, with his wife and family in 2002, and lives in the farmhouse on the estate. The Abbey is not open to the public, but there are proposals to provide managed public access.
- 2.1.10 Excavation by F.C Elliston Erwood published in 1922 provide a very complete plan of the principal abbey buildings (see Fig. 3). The church was constructed in the early 13th century to the north of the cloister. The chapter house and dormer sub-vault were also constructed at this time forming the eastern range. Further elements to the abbey were added in the later 13th century including the cellarium and frater forming the western and southern ranges respectively. Additions to the structure continued into the 14th century with building of the church tower to the west of the nave and abutting the northern end of the cellarium. The gatehouse was built extending west from the northern end of the cellarium. Aisles were added to the north and south of the nave. A chapel was also added adjoining the north of the church. Later in the 16th century a stable was built beyond the court to the west of the cellarium. Upon the dissolution of the abbey in 1536 the great majority of the structure of the abbey was destroyed (Erwood 1922).
- 2.1.11 The only buildings to survive the dissolution of the abbey and to still be present as substantial remains are the cellarium/ western range, the gatehouse and the stable. The gatehouse has been renovated to become an office for the Langley Abbey Estate. The western range has until recently been employed as a barn and is currently undergoing the renovation partly under the remit of the archaeological monitoring detailed below.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.
- 3.1.2 The Brief required excavation and monitoring to fulfil the archaeological condition placed on works conducted at the site (Scheduled Monument Consent HSD 9/2/14096). The work to be monitored under the archaeological condition included the installation of a soakaway and drainage trenches, the construction of a new stairway and the removal of two concrete pads, a concrete floor and a modern brick wall.
- 3.1.3 The Brief provided an outline of two parts, detailed below, of the programme of archaeological work, namely the excavation of the proposed drainage trench and soakaway and the monitoring of the other works under archaeological supervision and control.
- 3.1.4 **Excavation:** The area of investigation was located to the north of the gatehouse (see Fig. 4). The proposed works comprised the excavation of a drainage trench linking the downpipe at the north-western corner of the barn/western range with the new soakaway located approximately 7m to the north of the gatehouse. The trench was proposed to be about 11.4m long, approximately 400mm wide and up to 300mm deep. The soakaway was expected to have a diameter of 1.2m and a depth of about 1.2m.

The dimensions given prior to the works were approximate and based on on-site discussions between NLA, English Heritage, Donal McGarry (The Project Architect) and contractors.

Within the areas of excavation all archaeological deposits were to be excavated archaeologically by hand. Topsoil, farmyard deposits and clearly modern deposits (post-1900) were to be excavated by machine under archaeological supervision and control.

- 3.1.5 **Monitoring:** The monitoring of works under archaeological supervision and control covered four agreed elements of the proposed works (see Fig. 4). A further element was identified during the works and based on on-site discussions between representatives of OA East, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Donal McGarry and contractors. The four agreed elements prior to the commencement of works comprised:

Element 1

A drainage trench immediately adjacent to the eastern wall of the barn/western range. This linked a new downpipe to an existing drain to the north; it crossed a doorway. The trench was to be about 2m long, approximately 175mm wide and about 250mm deep.

Element 2

A drainage trench in the courtyard to the west of the barn/western range. This was to run north-west from the south-western corner of the barn/western range towards the centre of the courtyard.

Element 3

The lifting and removal of two concrete pads immediately to the east of the barn/western range.

Element 4

The excavation of deposits in the south-eastern internal corner of the barn/western range (to create a new stairway). Prior to the investigation the nature of these deposits was uncertain. Once revealed they necessitated discussion with NLA regarding the exact nature of the archaeological works. Prior to the excavation of these deposits, the concrete floor above them (the floor of the barn/western range) and the modern brick wall retaining them was to be removed. The removal of the concrete floor and brick wall was not to be monitored by an archaeologist.

The additional element agreed on-site comprised:

Element 5

The lifting and removal of two courses of set stone and underlying foundation located on the internal side of the western wall of the barn/western range and associated with an adjacent doorway.

- 3.1.6 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 3.1.7 Site conditions were good with sunny or overcast weather.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Excavation

- 4.1.1 The excavation of the drainage trench revealed masonry, at a level of 3.06m above ordnance datum (AOD), located at the junction of the north-western corner of the barn/western range and the gatehouse and immediately below the present ground level (see Fig. 4 and Plate 1). The masonry **14** comprised a single course of faced limestone, bonded with lime mortar and set in a foundation of mortar bonded flint nodules. On the rough inner surface some brick was also observed set into the foundation. The central part of the feature behind the masonry comprised loose dark earth with some faced limestone rubble. The masonry extended out of the excavated area towards the east.
- 4.1.2 This feature was considered to represent the remains below ground level of the pre-existing buttress indicated on the historical ground plan of Langley Abbey (Erwood 1922). This feature would appear to confirm the present wall immediately over the buttress was part of the original later 13th century western range as indicated by the historical ground plan. This is also born out in the orientation of the northern wall of the present gatehouse which has an appreciable change in direction from a point above the western edge of the revealed buttress. It must be noted that the present fashioning of the juncture of the barn/western range gives the misleading impression that the entire wall at this point is part of the 14th century gatehouse.
- 4.1.3 A mass of flint nodules set in lime mortar **13** was observed to extend around the northern side of the buttress and this was partly faced on the northern side with red brick (see Plate 1). This material was observed to lie partly over the slanting face of the limestone blocks comprising the buttress and appeared to spill over the top of the buttress at its north-western corner. This was considered to represent a later feature than the original buttress. This feature appears to be at variance with the information given on the historical ground plan (Erwood 1922) which indicates an older, early 13th century, line of masonry abutting the northern side of the uncovered buttress.
- 4.1.4 The corner of a wall **15** comprised red bricks (dimensions 240mm x 120mm x 60mm) set with mortar and similar build was also revealed just below the ground surface 1.8m to the north of the northern gatehouse wall. This wall extended south and west from the drainage trench. No wall is indicated on the historical ground plan at this point. This feature is considered to be a relatively late feature and not part of the original Abbey structure.
- 4.1.5 No further archaeology was encountered in the drainage trench or soakaway excavation. The ground conditions comprised a dark grey silty sand topsoil with frequent flint gravel and much brick. The frequency of brick in the topsoil and the presence of the remains of a brick wall indicate previously unidentified but late features in the vicinity.
- 4.1.6 The natural ground comprised loose pale yellow silty sand with much flint gravel.
- 4.1.7 On-site discussions between representatives of OA East, Donal McGarry and contractors resulted in the archaeology encountered being left 'in-situ' without any further disturbance by the drainage works.

4.2 Monitoring

- 4.2.1 Elements 1 and 2 of the monitoring brief did not encounter any archaeology.
- 4.2.2 Element 3 revealed a paved surface **7, 8** approximately 1.3m square and in line with a doorway through the eastern wall of the barn/western range (see Fig. 4 and Plate 2). The paved surface lay at a level of 2.33m AOD. The paved surface comprised yellow brick set into the topsoil with no bonding. The eastern end was edged with limestone blocks with flat upper surfaces. This feature may represent part of a porch for the door in the barn/western range to the west, or it may simply be a surface construction which utilised those faced blocks that were freely available. The feature appeared to have been truncated towards the door by the modern concrete surface the current work had removed. This feature was considered to be post-date the dissolution of the abbey. Discussion with the contractor on-site formed the opinion that the feature was at a level that could be turfed over without further disturbance.
- 4.2.3 Element 4 comprised the excavation of deposits in the south-eastern internal corner of the barn/western range. A limestone wall **6** was encountered directly beneath the brick wall removed by the contractors (see Fig. 4 and Plate 3). Two courses of limestone blocks were observed to block the doorway of width 1.10m in the barn/western range's south-eastern corner, down to and continuing below the present ground surface (see Fig. 5). The limestone and brick wall together blocked the doorway to a height of 3.45m AOD, 1.25m above the external ground level and 0.30m above the present internal floor level of 3.15m AOD. The blocks were faced flat on the outer, eastern side and bonded with lime mortar. The inner western side was observed to be rough and not faced. The material inside the building, to the west of the limestone block wall, beneath the modern build up of successive layers of hardcore and tarmac 0.60m thick comprised loose brown silty sand with frequent gravel **9**. This material's full thickness was not exposed but the upper horizon was observed to be at the same level as the top of the limestone wall **6** at 2.55m AOD. The material included many rough fragments of limestone, and brick fragments.
- 4.2.4 The wall was interpreted as a retaining wall, constructed from re-used material from the abbey across the doorway to hold a deliberate backfill of material designed to raise the internal floor level of the barn/western range. This event was considered to post-date the dissolution of the abbey. On-site discussions between representatives of OA East, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Donal McGarry and contractors resulted in the excavation of the wall by archaeological methods to the present ground surface.
- 4.2.5 Element 5 involved the preservation through record of what appeared to be a heavily truncated staircase up to the adjacent doorway in the western wall of the barn/western range (see Fig. 4 and Plate 4). On-site discussions between representatives of OA East, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and Donal McGarry formed the opinion that the staircase lead down to a level inside the barn/western range that post-dated the dissolution of the abbey and could therefore be excavated by archaeological methods. The evidence for this conclusion lay in the level of the footing of the internal limestone arch of the doorway being at a higher level than the base of the staircase at 1.97m AOD. The footing indicates the original internal floor level of this chamber of the Cellarium/ western range being 2.49m AOD.
- 4.2.6 The two courses of set stone **10** were composed of re-used faced limestone blocks set with lime mortar. These were set into a foundation **11** of flint nodules and lime mortar.

The eastern end of the foundation was edged with further re-used limestone blocks at the pre-existing ground level.

- 4.2.7 The two courses of limestone blocks were removed including the upper portion of the foundation. On-site discussions between the representative of OA East and contractors resulted in the lower portion of the foundation and the limestone eastern edge of the feature being left 'in-situ' without further disturbance.
- 4.2.8 During the course of these works the stone architrave base for the original medieval doorway was revealed at 2.92m AOD (see Plate 5). This feature in association with the footing of the limestone arch on the inside of the doorway at 2.49m AOD indicated the original relative height between the higher external ground level and the lower internal floor level of the cellarium/ western range at the time of construction in the later 13th century (a difference of 0.43m). The internal floor level in the northern part of the cellarium/ western range was later reduced by 0.52m, probably in the post-dissolution period, necessitating the installation of the staircase replacing perhaps originally two steps. Subsequently the doorway itself went out of use and the majority of the limestone blocks were removed. The present external level of the doorway, to the west of the barn/ western range, lies at 3.41m AOD.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Features Identified as Contemporary with the Abbey

- 5.1.1 The Archaeological monitoring identified features at the junction of the northern wall of the gatehouse and the north western corner of the barn/western range that are contemporary with the Abbey. The remains of a buttress was identified immediately below the ground surface and considered to be that indicated on the historical ground plan (Erwood 1922) of being 13th century in date and part of the original western range. The mass of material extending around the northern edge of the buttress is considered to be evidence for the reinforcement of the buttress at a later date. The evidence recovered from the excavation is at variance with that indicated on the historical ground plan as a result of the earlier phases of investigation. This plan indicated the line of an earlier 13th century wall abutting the buttress and extending west along the same orientation as the present gatehouse. These features are to be covered over to the present ground surface without further disturbance. Additionally the work has provided new information on the medieval floor level in the western range and how it related to the newly-defined contemporary ground level outside.
- 5.1.2 The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area. The results of the watching brief have made a contribution to the understanding of the medieval and post-medieval use of the Abbey. The changes in the internal surface level within the barn/western range and the addition of architectural features in the post dissolution period reinforces our perception of continuing change in use and emphasises the post-medieval development of the Abbey site and buildings.

5.2 Features Identified Post Dating the Dissolution of the Abbey

The Archaeological monitoring identified features in the barn/western range that post date the dissolution of the Abbey. The remains of the porch leading from the door in the eastern wall are to be turfed over without further disturbance. The retaining wall

blocking the doorway in the south-eastern corner was excavated (and thus preserved through record) to the present ground surface. The retaining wall was seen to continue down below the excavated level. The heavily truncated staircase leading from the doorway in the western wall down into the barn/western range was excavated (preserved through record) to the present ground surface. The remains of this feature are to be preserved at this level without further disturbance and will be overlain by the present concrete floor. The brick wall identified in the excavation to the north of the gatehouse is to be buried beneath present ground surface without further disturbance.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1.1 The author would like to thank Christopher Townsend who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The author would also like to thank David Robertson and Paul Spoerry for their guidance and advice. Thanks must also be extended to the contractors, Jon and his team, for all their great help on site and to the Architect Donal McGarry for advice and information. The project was managed by Paul Spoerry of OA East.
- 6.1.2 The brief for archaeological works was written by David Robertson of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and William Fletcher of English Heritage. David Robertson represented both parties when visiting the site and monitored the watching brief.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Erwood, F.C, Elliston, 1922, The Premonstratensian Abbey of Langley, Co. Norfolk. Norfolk Archaeology Vol. XXI, pp175-234.

Gladden, Eunice, 1974, The Premonstratensian Abbey of Langley – Norfolk. Loddon and District Women's Institute.

APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-69047		
Project Name	Archaeological Monitoring at Langley Abbey, Norfolk		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	25-11-2009	Finish	27-11-2009
Previous Work (by OA East)	No	Future Work	Unknown

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	XNFLAA09	Planning App. No.	HSD 9/2/14096
HER No.	NHER 10344	Related HER/OASIS No.	N/A

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Planning condition
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Please select all techniques used:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Langley Abbey	Medieval 1066 to 1540	N/A	Select period...
Langley Abbey	Post Medieval 1540 to 1901		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Norfolk	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	Norwich	Langley Abbey Estates Langley Abbey Langley Norwich Norfolk
Parish	Langley	
HER	NHER 10344	
Study Area	0.1 Hectare	National Grid Reference TG 3623 0286

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	D. Robertson of NLA & W. Fletcher of EH
Project Design Originator	Paul Spoerry, OA East
Project Manager	Paul Spoerry
Supervisor	Graeme Clarke

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
Location ...N/A	Location ...OA East	Location ...OA East
Accession ID ...N/A	Accession ID ...XNFLAA09	Accession ID ...XNFLAA09

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
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Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>








Digital Media	Paper Media
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diary
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<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Matrices
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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:






Langley Abbey is Scheduled Monument No. NF150.
Archaeological Monitoring from 25th to 27th November 2009 given event number ENF123672.

Drawing Conventions

Plans

Limit of Excavation	
Illustrated Section	
Deposit Number	117
Wall/Building	
Mortar/Concrete	
Limestone	
Stone	
Brick	

Sections

Limit of Excavation	
Doorway	
Deposit Horizon	
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m OD 
Inclusions	

Convention Key



Figure 1: Location of the development area (red)

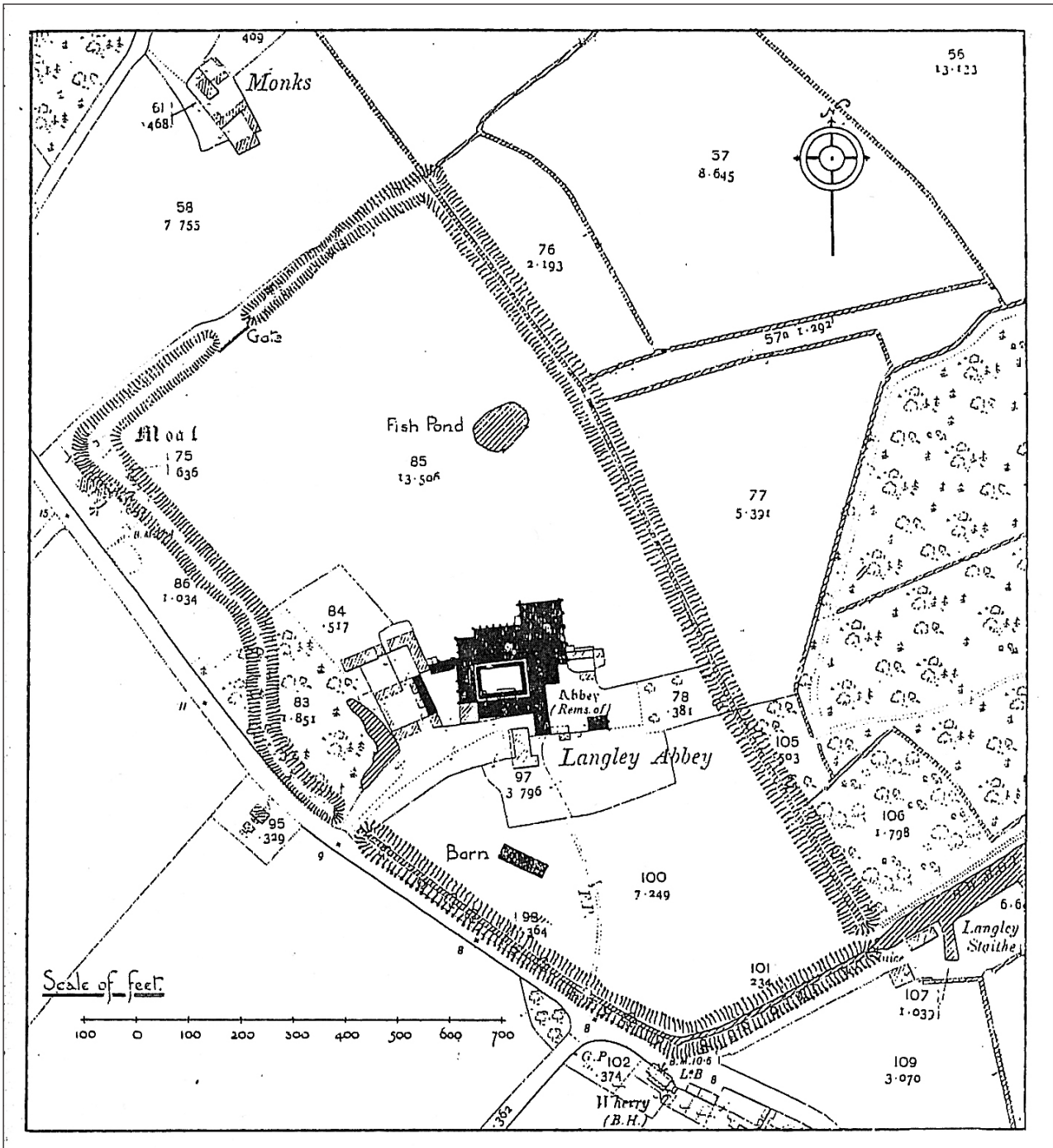


Figure 2: The Langley Abbey precinct (Erwood, 1922)

LANGLEY ABBEY HISTORICAL GROUND PLAN

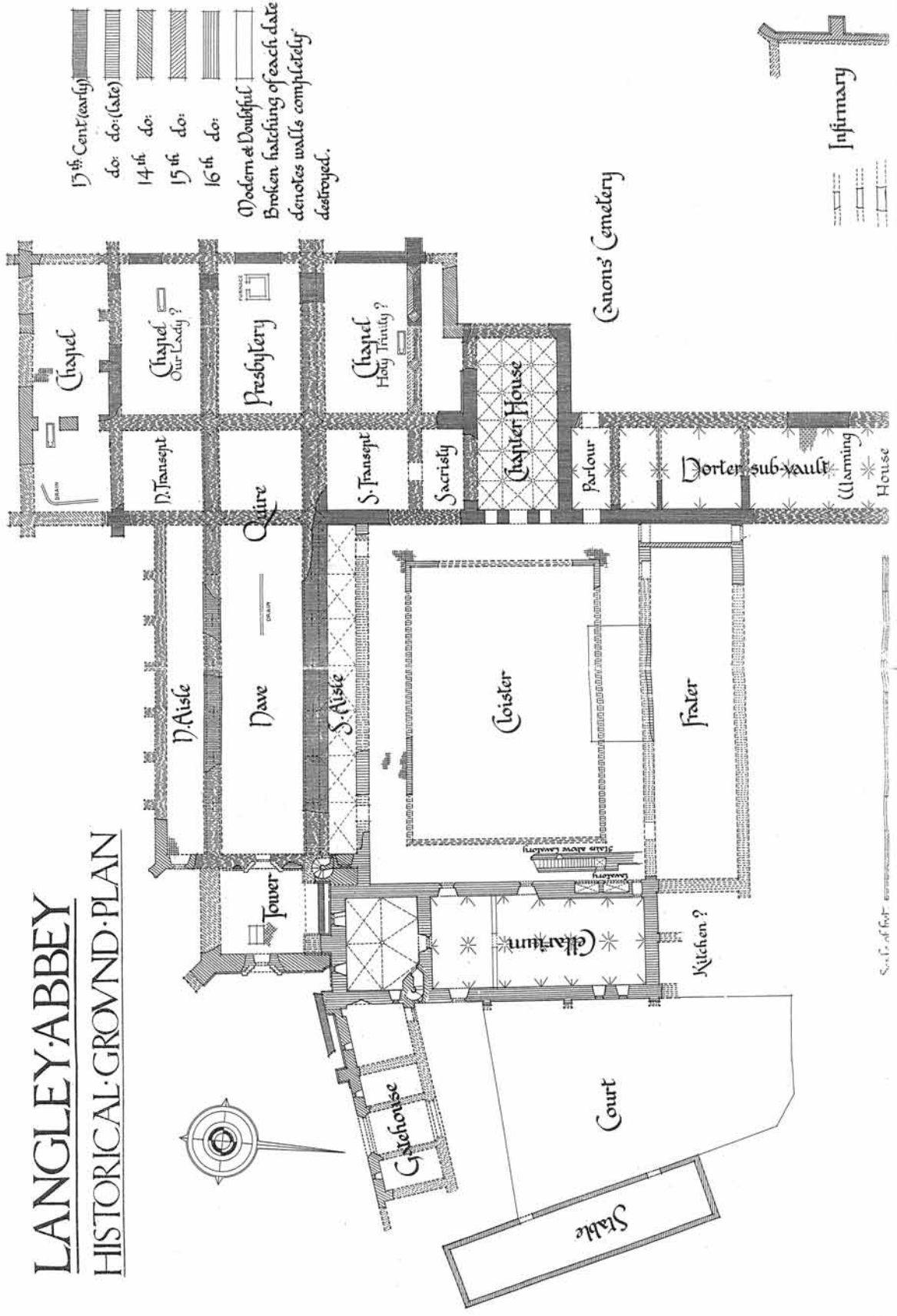


Figure 3: Langley Abbey: Historical Ground Plan (Erwood, 1922)

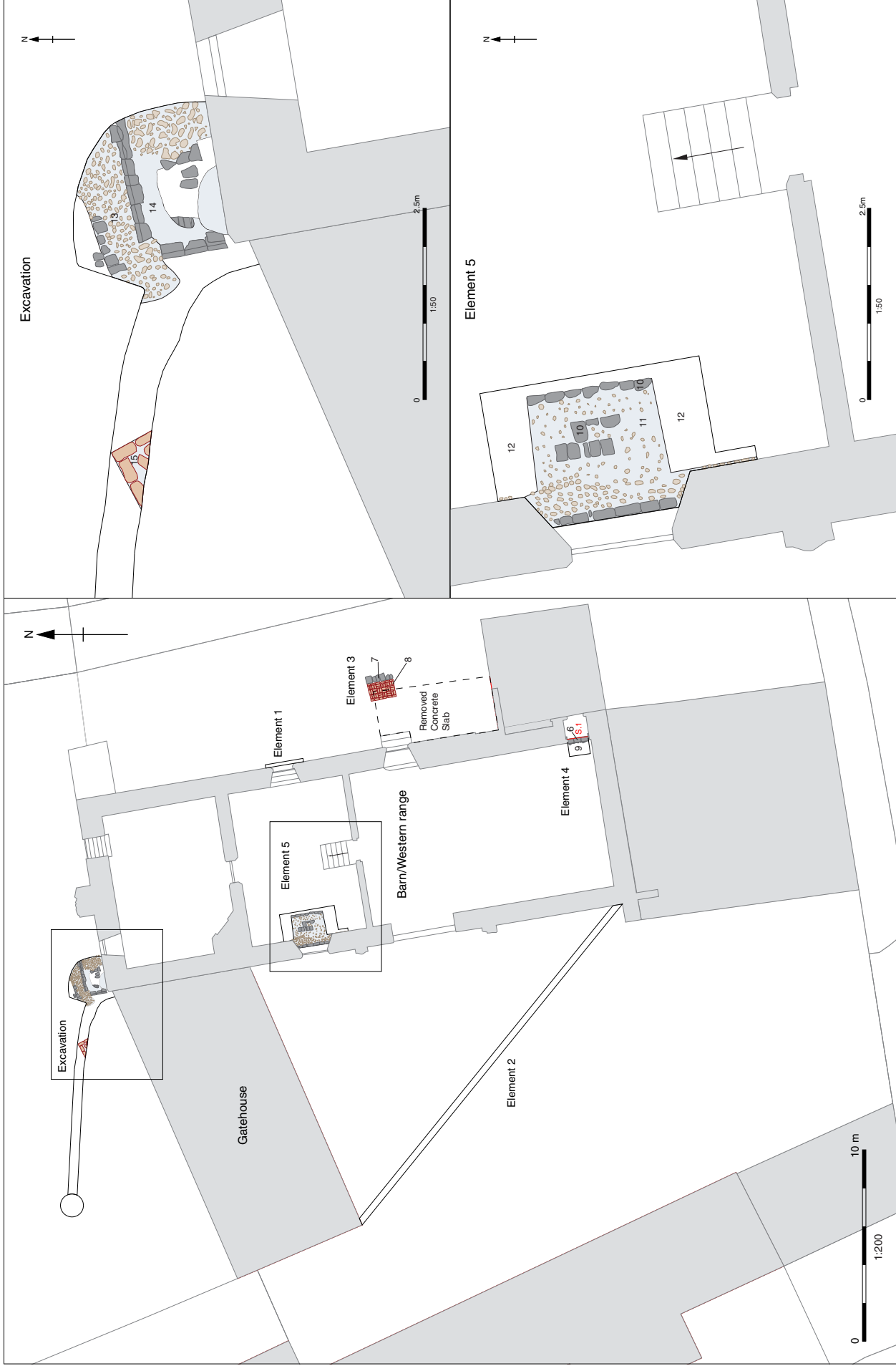


Figure 4: Plan of barn/western range works

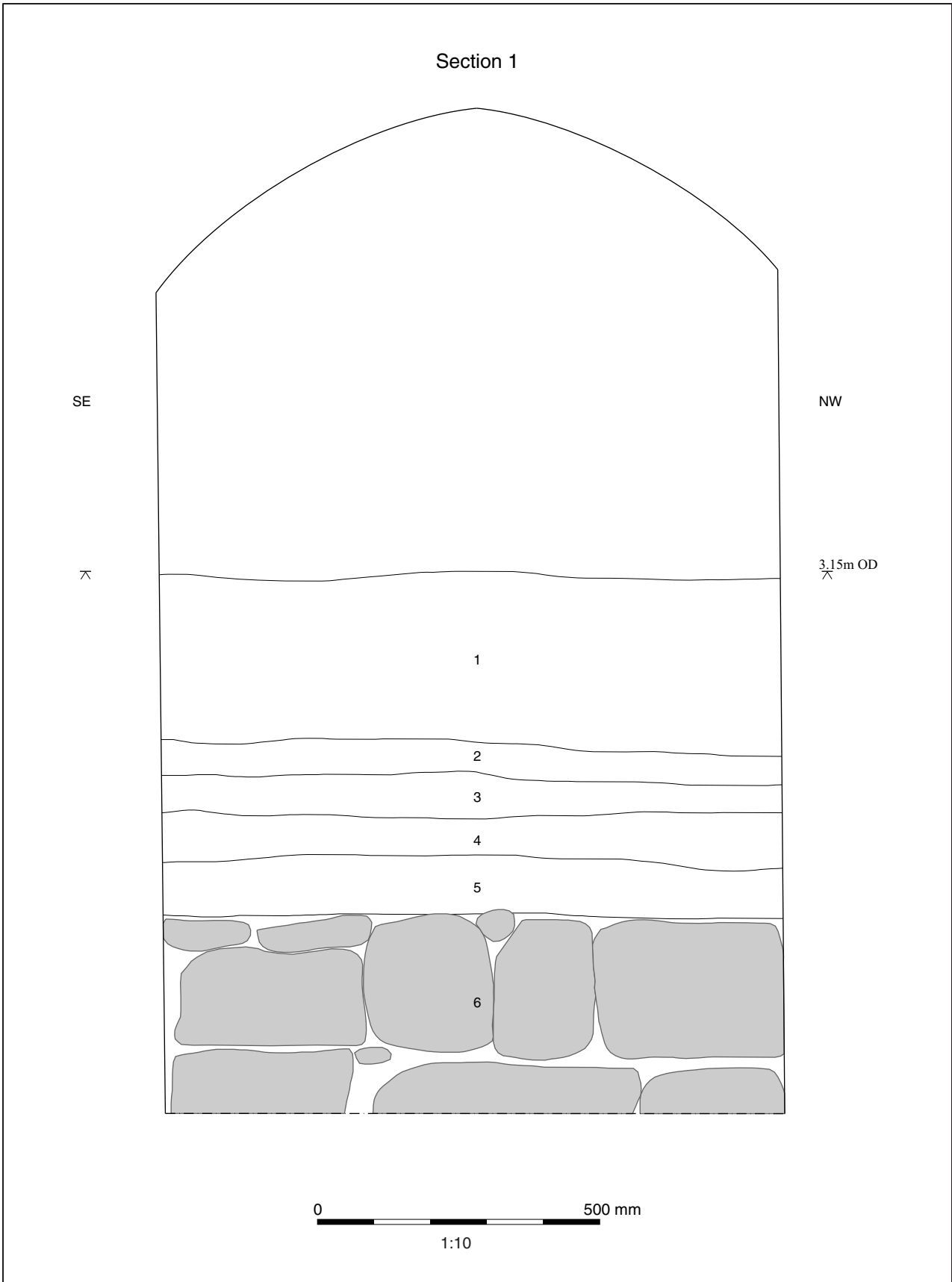


Figure 5: Section of partly exposed limestone wall (6) blocking doorway



Plate 1: Medieval butters foundation (13) and (14), from north



Plate 2: Brick and limestone construction (7) and (8), from west



Plate 3: Partly exposed limestone wall (6) blocking doorway, from east



Plate 4: Heavily truncated stair (10) and foundation (11), from east



Plate 5: Base of architrave in doorway above stair (10), from east



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