




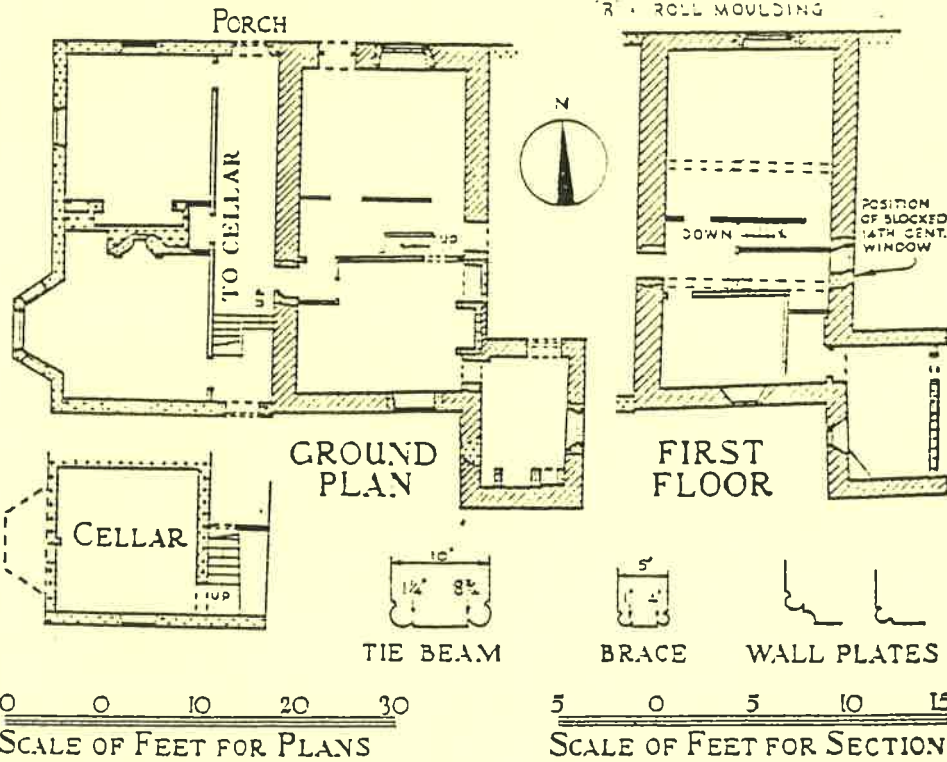
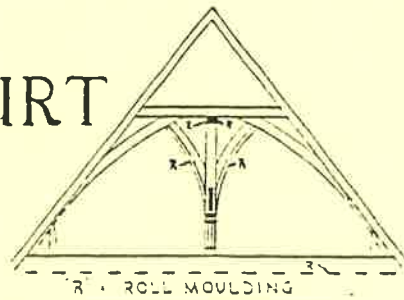
Clews Architects Partnership

Camoy's Court, Chislehampton

Investigation of Building

CAMOISE COURT

-  Circa 1318
-  17TH CENTURY
-  19TH CENTURY



Camoy's Court, Chislehampton Investigation of Building

1. Introduction

1.1 Camoy's Court is a moated manorial site in Chislehampton, whose origins have been traced by the *Victoria County History* vii, 7-12 (*VCH*). Reference is there made to the royal 'Licence to Crenellate' of 1318, which implies the intention to place crenellation or battlements on a wall or building. This date would also suit the eastern half of the house, with its fine crown-post roof and decorated window in the south wall. This is presumably the chamber block of a large hall house, with the hall and other domestic buildings lying to the west. The existing western half of the house is perhaps of 17th-century date, with an ashlar faced north wall, a brick west wall with 19th-century bay windows, and a rubble south wall.

1.2 Following an application to build an extension wing to the north-east within the moated area, an archaeological evaluation of the below-ground aspects of the development was requested under PPG16, and it was also suggested that an archaeological evaluation of the above-ground aspects of the development be undertaken to determine the effect of these proposals on the Listed Building.

1.3 Four areas were chosen for investigation, in relation to proposed new windows and doorways: I - IV, as shown on the attached plan (Fig. 1). Areas of plaster or mortar were removed where necessary to reveal obscured features, and the discoveries were recorded by photography and measured drawings.

2. Description of areas investigated

2.1 *East doorway from existing kitchen (I), Fig. 2*

2.1.1 This is at present an alcove in the kitchen opposite a blocked opening on the outside. Internally, small areas of plaster were removed from the top and bottom of the right-hand (S) jamb of the alcove, immediately next to the kitchen fireplace. These were found to be of modern plaster over a mortar containing black grits, and seem to represent a blocking of a former opening. The support for the top of the alcove (at 1.77 m above the floor) was not seen, but it may be a timber or steel lintel, and was faced with brick and tile. The left-hand (N) jamb of the door is the N wall of the kitchen, and is covered with fitted cupboards, and so is inaccessible.

2.1.2 Externally, there is a rubble patch blocking a former entrance. The present door to the N has a S jamb cut through old stonework and a new N jamb of clean unpainted stone. The blocking of the former door is of rubble or ragstone with a modern pointing and no trace of any painted decoration. The right-hand (N) jamb exists for the full height of almost 2 m and has squared ashlar blocks with old paint surfaces that continue round the corner of the jamb (which is slightly rounded), clearly demonstrating that this was a door. The lintel can be traced less certainly, and it may be that a timber has been removed here, but several stones above the top of the opening have traces of paint on them. The left-hand (S) jamb is irregular, the stones with old paint adhering to them do not form a continuous edge, and some may have been reset. Beyond this to the S is a vertical brick band which is presumably the back of the chimney flue, and which is painted. The door into the medieval SE extension has

painted jambs similar to the blocked door already described, and a timber lintel.

2.1.3 The earlier painted surfaces have a sequence of a white/cream wash, red, and white/cream (several coats of each): these are found on all the old stonework described above. Later additions have only the white/cream wash: this is found on the brickwork and also on the NE wing which may be of 19th-century date. Yet later additions have no paint at all: the blocking of the door and the N jamb of the present door.

2.1.4 It is therefore likely that old door was blocked and the new door was made in the present century, but both these events had taken place by the time the house was surveyed for the *VCH* (published in 1962).

2.2 *Division between existing kitchen and entrance area (II)*

2.2.1 The ground floor of the medieval half of the house seems to have been divided in some way, since there is a large timber post in the centre of the present dividing wall, and this is pegged and braced to a longitudinal joist running towards the N end of the building; no trace was seen of a continuation to the S end. This post may simply have been supporting the principal joist, on which the other joists rest, but it is likely to have marked a division into two rooms. In 1962 the dividing wall had a stair against it, which was subsequently removed.

2.2.2 The present dividing wall has a very even finish, suggesting that it is all recent work. On the kitchen side it is obscured by kitchen fittings, but the N side is clear above a 51 cm high bench at its base. Three small openings were made just above the bench, next the medieval post and to its E, each producing identical results. Recent plaster was found over mortar with black grits, on a base of steel mesh with a cement skim.

2.2.3 The division in its present form was evidently made after the removal of the stair shown on the *VCH* plan of 1962, but is on the site of an older division, possibly of medieval origins.

2.3 *Windows in south wall of existing dining room (III), Figs 3-4*

2.3.1 The existing dining room (proposed drawing room), in the 17th-century half of the house, is at present lit by a 19th-century bay window in the W wall. It is raised over a low cellar, and its floor is higher than the adjacent room to the N. A proposal has been made to open a window in the S wall, where traces of former openings can be seen on the outside. At this stage it was not intended to disturb the internal wall coverings of the dining room, but sufficient information was obtained by unpicking small areas on the external face which may help to determine the impact of the proposed work.

2.3.2 Two blocked windows are apparent on the S external face. The wall is generally of coursed rubble, not dissimilar from medieval masonry elsewhere in the building. The upper window has ashlar jambs, ending at a line of coursed rubble marking the former lintel, and is blocked with ashlar and rubble. Just below mid-height is a weathered horizontal timber, but the jambs continue below this to a sill marked by two courses of ashlar blocks. These blocks occupy a space only slightly wider than the jambs above, and possibly mark a lowering of the window at some stage, perhaps in association with the timber lintel. Below this are continuous courses of rubble masonry representing an undisturbed portion of the original wall. The lower window likewise has ashlar jambs and a mixed blocking, a well-defined sill

consisting of a course of ashlar blocks, but the lintel less certainly represented where the jambs meet the rubble walling, as if a timber lintel may have been removed here. At a lower level is a low window lighting the present cellar.

2.3.3 These windows must originally have served rooms with floor levels different from those existing now, presumably when the 'cellar' was a room at full height, and there was a first-floor room above. An interim phase after the change of floor levels may be represented by the possible lowering of the upper window and with the insertion of a timber lintel, then finally blocked by the insertion of the two ashlar courses. The base of these ashlar courses is about 2 m above the present floor surface of the dining room, so any such window would have been a high one.

2.3.4 A new window opening utilising the jambs of the lower window, continuing through the rubble walling and ending at the ashlar courses below the upper window would be about 1.1 m wide and rise from about .8 m to 2 m above the existing floor. The principal uncertainty would seem to be the nature of the original window openings through the wall, and whether they would prove to be straight or splayed. The stability of the blocking material of the upper window is also an unknown factor.

2.4 *Opening of first-floor door in east wall (IV), Fig. 5*

2.4.1 The east wall of the medieval half of the house is obscured by the 'garderobe tower' at the S end, and the 19th-century wing at the N end. The one open length of wall has a medieval window that was later blocked, perhaps similar to the fine decorated window existing in the S wall at first-floor level. The proposal to open a first-floor door through the east wall into the 19th-century wing necessitated an investigation of the wall at this point to determine whether another window might be present.

2.4.2 Plaster was stripped off E side of the wall, for an area slightly wider than the proposed door and to a height of about 1.9 m above the floor. The central part of the exposed area was of random rubble, presumably medieval, mortared with a dark loamy fill of a type often encountered in medieval walling (where proper mortar was only used superficially). This was covered with a thick off-white mortar, consistent across the entire area examined. In the upper left corner was a patch of brickwork, and in the lower part there was a facing of clay roof tiles set flat against the wall. The removal of one of these revealed rubble continuing behind it, and it appeared that the tiles had been placed to level off the wall surface, perhaps when the accommodation in this room had been upgraded. No trace of any window opening was found, nor were there any signs of an outer arch of rubble voussoirs (see exterior of original window in S wall) which would have been seen if there were a window in the lower right-hand side of the area examined.

2.4.3 A door in this position would be cut through plain rubble walling, presumably of medieval date, and seems unlikely to disturb any original openings in the wall. The existence of a window at this point is inherently unlikely, since it would come below one of the roof tie-beams, not that this would be impossible for the medieval builder.

3. Other features of the building

3.1 The principal feature of interest, the medieval half of the house, is now represented by the crown-post roof and the window in the south wall. The first-floor window, which has

been conservatively restored, has two ogee-headed lights with an oculus between, and a broad internal rear-arch. This room would have been open to the roof for its full length, which is of three bays, resting on moulded wallplates that are visible in the N room. The two tiebeams are slightly cambered (upward turned) and carry moulded crown-posts, which have short stems below a capital, and long curved braces to the rafter braces and collar-plate. Both the braces and the collar-plate have roll-moulded edges, and the latter has one trait-de-jupiter scarf joint with a wedge and three soffit pegs, joining the two lengths of timber at a point just N of the S crown-post. The crown-posts and collar plate formed an internal frame on which the common rafter couples with their collar-beams and braces could be placed. All the rafter couples have a short ashlar post at the foot resting on the decorated wallplate, while the rafters themselves will be resting on an outer wallplate. Carpenters' marks, in the form of scratched Roman numerals, are present on each rafter couple.

3.2 This method of crown-post construction, which originated in the second half of the 13th century, ensured that the roof was secured against both lateral loading (from weather) and from longitudinal thrust (by the rafter couples 'racking' or tilting over). The most remarkable feature of the roof, apart from its decoration, is the use of curved braces on each of the common rafter couples, extending from an offset on each rafter up to the collar-beams. The curvature of the individual braces is very accurately accomplished, and while saw-marks are visible on their sides, it remains a matter of controversy how this bent timber was made. Neither is it certain whether this was originally boarded or covered in some manner; the nail holes for lath-and-plaster, and the partly existing plaster ceiling are likely to be post-medieval in date. The visual effect of all this curved timber, whether open or covered, was a 'barrel-vaulted' roof, and was one of the achievements of the great gothic age in carpentry in the years around 1300 and before the Black Death, when carpentry design was at its most innovative phase.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The opening of the door from the existing kitchen would be the re-opening of a door blocked in the present century.

4.2 The partition between the existing kitchen and the front hall is modern, though certainly on the line of an earlier, and possibly an original one.

4.3 The south wall of the existing dining room has two blocked windows, and a new window could utilise part of an old opening.

4.4 The proposed door on the first floor would pass through medieval walling with no apparent original features.

Oxford Archaeological Unit,
January 1993.

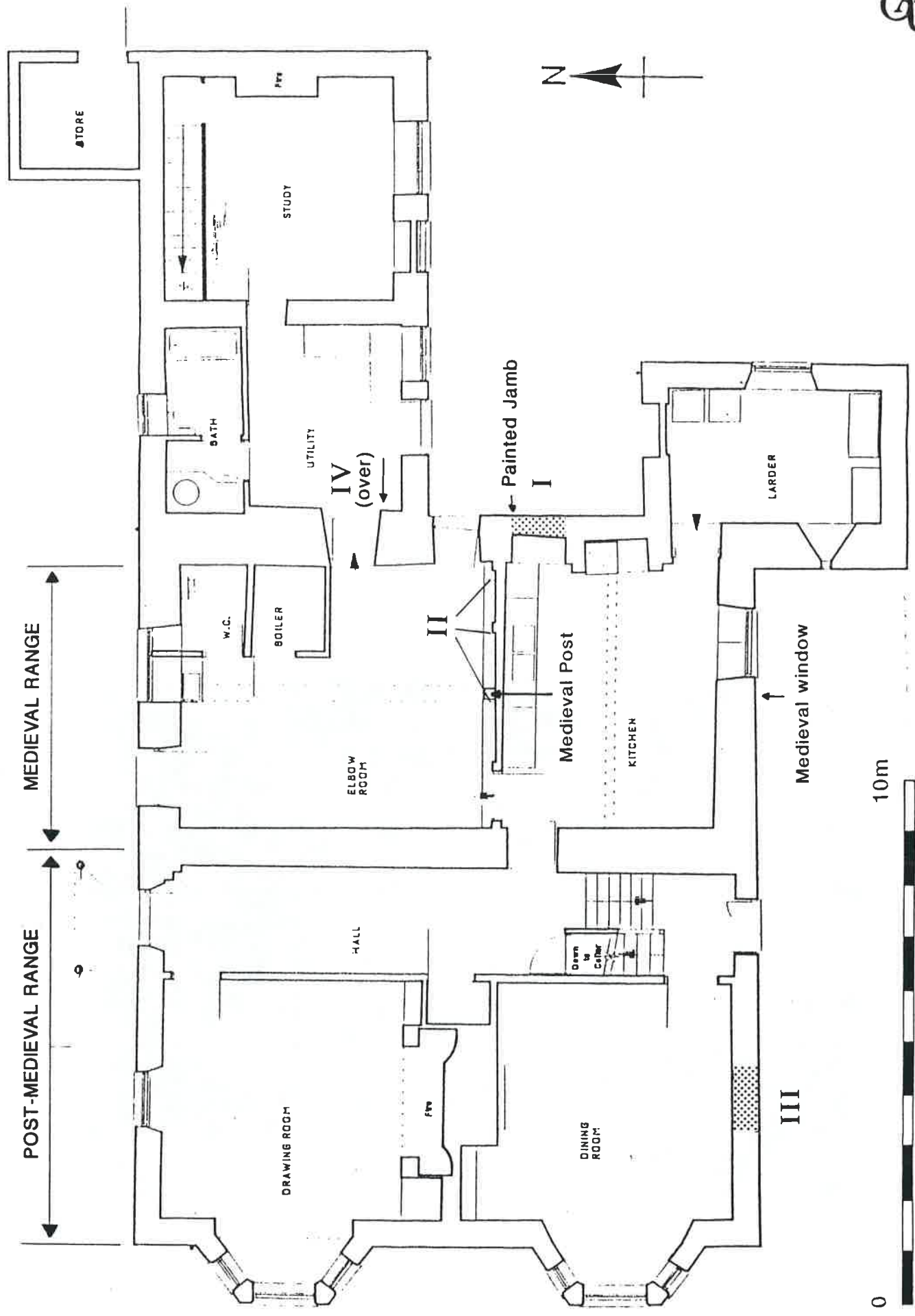


Fig. 1 Camoys Court: location of areas investigated

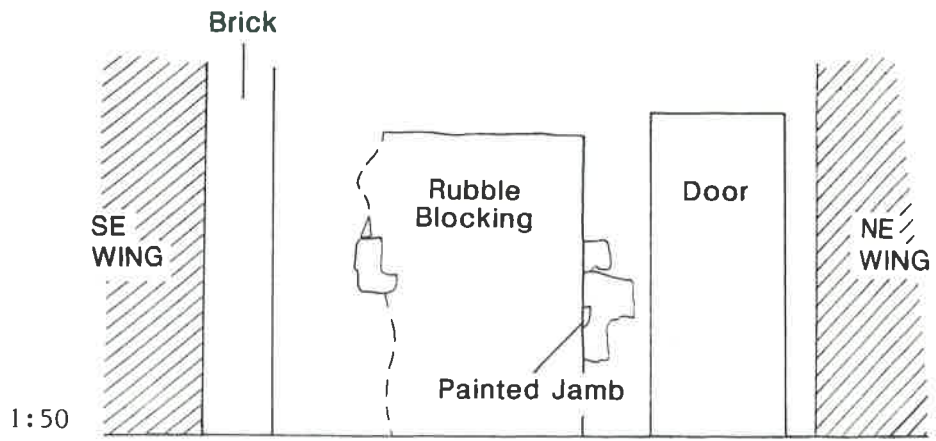


Fig. 2 Camoys Court: East side of kitchen

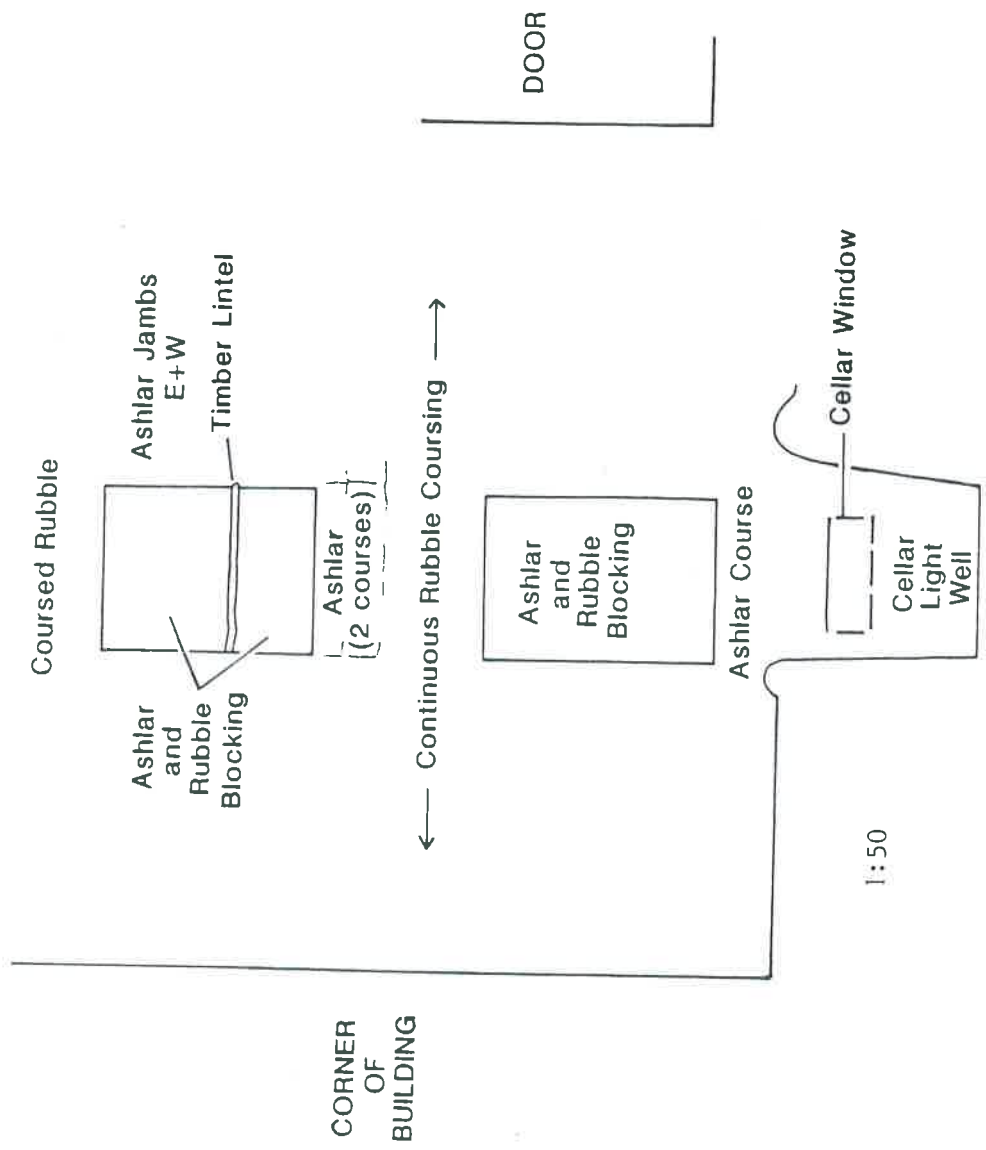
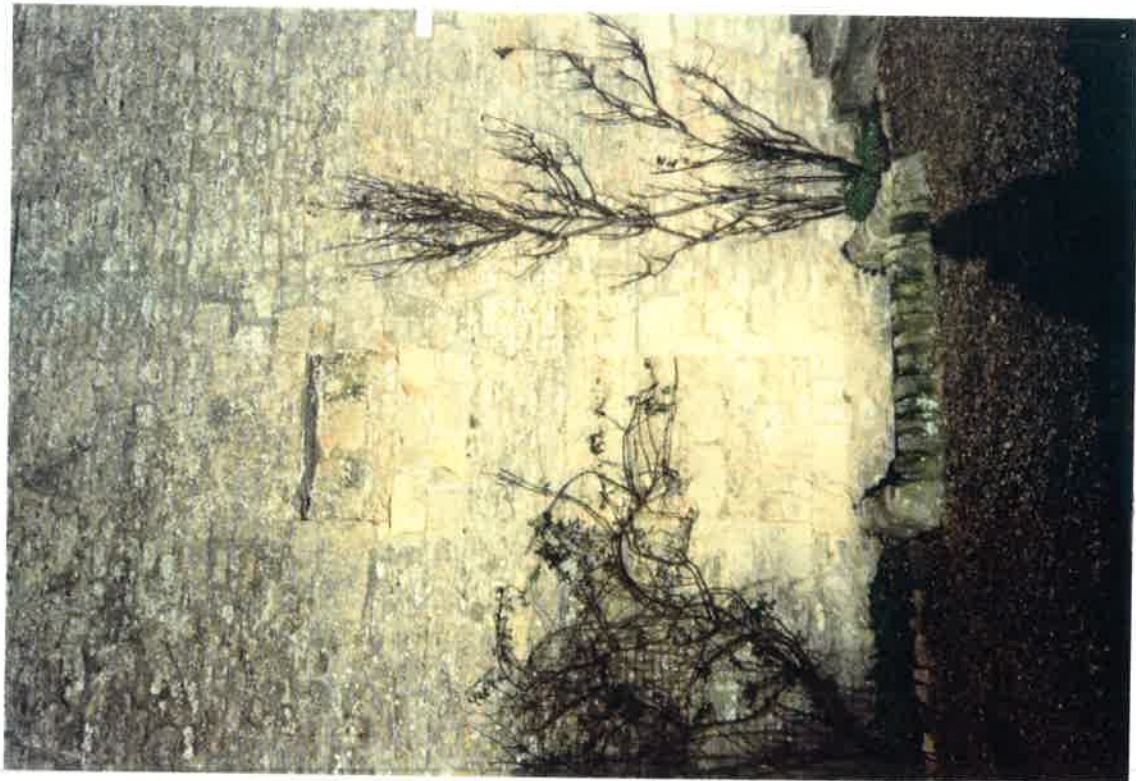


Fig. 3 Camoys Court: South exterior of Dining Room



Fig. 4 Camoys Court: South exterior of Dining Room (detail)

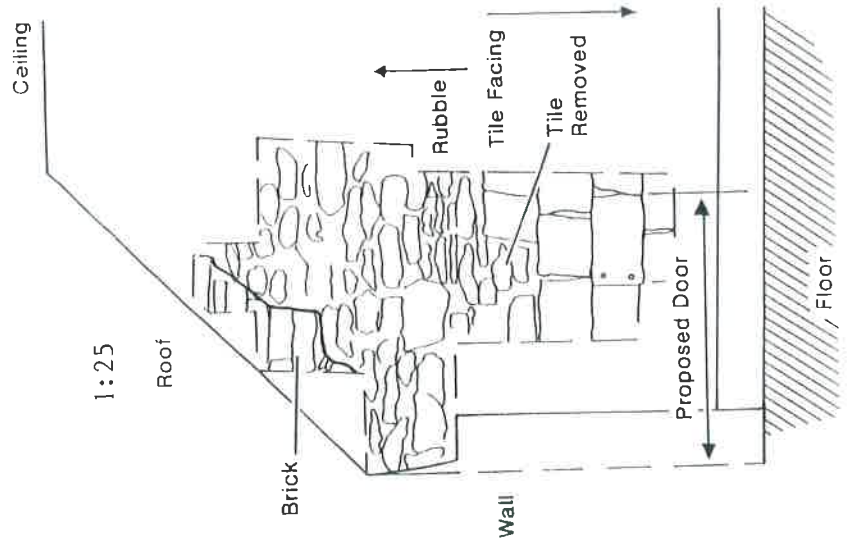


Fig. 5 Camoy's Court: First-floor opening in east wall



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