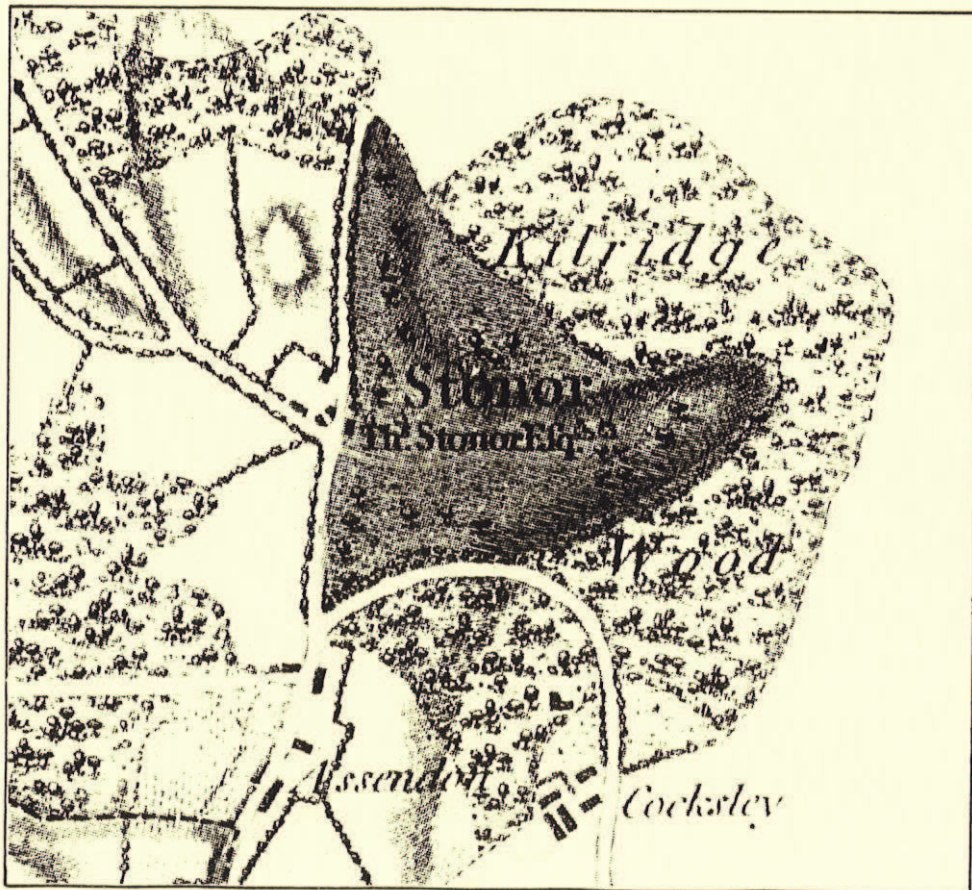


Hutton Nichols Brown

# Stonor Park, Oxfordshire.

Watching Brief during Construction Work  
October - November 1994



Oxford Archaeological Unit  
December 1994

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(NGR: SU 7425 8923)

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## Stonor Park, Oxfordshire.

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#### *Summary*

*A watching brief maintained during construction work within the area of the former 13th century hall at Stonor Park, Oxfordshire revealed a substantial timber ceiling of mid to late 15th century date with an unusual contemporary roof structure. Interventions in the north aisle wall revealed a former window opening and details of the construction of the original medieval wall. A north-south oriented wall of no great age adjoining the north wall of the aisle was partially exposed during external ground level reduction.*

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## **1 Introduction**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Hutton Nichols Brown (Architects) of Henley-on-Thames to undertake a watching brief at Stonor Park, Oxfordshire as a condition of planning consent for construction work related to the creation of additional staff accommodation within the area of the east aisle of the former 13th century hall. The building work was carried out by Fisher and Townsend (Contractors) and the site was visited for archaeological monitoring / recording on three occasions during the course of work. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a brief set by the Oxfordshire Deputy County Archaeologist (Historic Buildings).

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Grade I listed Stonor Park House is a complex multi-phase building originating in the late 13th century. The earliest elements within the extant structure are the remains of a stone two-aisled hall (with southern solar wing) of c.1280-1300, built into the hillside at the north-east of the present house (see fig.2). Only the eastern aisle survives in the standing structure though the central arcade of four chamfered arches on rounded piers has been retained.
- 2.2 Major programmes of alteration and addition were carried out in the 14th and 15th centuries, principally related to the establishment of a foundation of Chantry priests in c.1349. Further additions were made by Sir Walter Stonor in c.1534-40 while alterations by Sir Francis Stonor in the late 16th century attempted to regularize the appearance of the house. Additional alterations were made in the 18th and 19th centuries including the erection of the north-west wing and probable rebuilding of the greater part of the east wing. The fabric of the extant house can thus be seen to encapsulate a complex history and development.

- 2.3 An illustrated account of the building was prepared by WA Pantin for the VCH (Oxon.) viii, p.145-147 (Pantins illustration of the conjectural phases of development is included here as figure 7).

### 3 Observations

#### 3.1 *Roof Construction*

- 3.1.1 Access at attic level to the eastern side of the aisle roof revealed an structure of unusual form. A representative section of the roof construction was drawn at a scale of 1:20 and is reproduced here as figure 3. The western side of the roof was not accessible at the time of the survey.
- 3.1.2 Principal and common joists of the first floor ceiling rest upon a wall plate running along the internal edge of the flint constructed wall (wall plate 2, fig.3). A queen post rises from the principal joists of the ceiling structure to support a clasped purlin and principal rafter construction. Tenoned into the lower queen post on its eastern face is an interrupted tie beam which is lapped over a second, upper wall plate (wall plate 1, fig.3) at its eastern end.
- 3.1.3 It would appear that the roof and ceiling are of contemporary build and a mid 15th century date is suggested by the jointing details employed in the ceiling construction (see fig.5). The queen post and interrupted tie beam arrangement would appear to be original and as such implies that the present layout of the attic storey was established at an early stage.

#### 3.2 *First Floor Ceiling*

- 3.2.1 Subsequent to the stripping out of internal partition walling and ceiling rendering at first floor level, a substantial timber ceiling was exposed. An overall plan was made at a scale of 1:50 and is included here as figure 4 (NB: this plan illustrates soffit details of the ceiling timbers). Jointing details were recorded at a scale of 1:5 (see fig.5). Colour slide and black and white negative photographs were taken.  
*Timber was made of all visible carpenter marks - appears to be*
- 3.2.2 The ceiling as exposed comprised a substantial central N-S beam (0.26m x 0.26m scantling) in two sections (A and B on fig.4) and tenoned into principal E-W joists of similar scantling (C and D on fig.4). At the northern end two raking timbers (E and F), again of similar dimensions, ran diagonally from a point c.2.60m S of the N wall to the NE and NW corners of the aisle respectively. All principal timbers in the ceiling construction had straight chamfers on their soffits and were rebated for floorboards on their upper surface. Common joists had battens applied on their upper surface for the support of modern floor boarding. Both principal joists (C and D) had mortices for stud partition walling on their soffits. Common joists (0.17m x 0.13m scantling) ran between the lower wall plate (Wall plate 2, fig.3) and the central N-S beams. Common rafters were chamfered on their soffits with straight stops to the E and lamb's tongue stops at the junction with the main N-S beams. At the W wall of

the aisle, 'flats' occur on the underside of the joists c.0.18m E of the central arcade wall, with plain chamfer stops to E and W (see photo. 1). Corresponding with the line of these 'flats' the principal members of the ceiling structure were notched. All timbers S of principal joist D were replacements though an original mortice in the S face joist D implies a former continuation of the extant structure. The arrangement of the ceiling joists does not as stands correlate with the extant timber framing on the ground and first floors, either in height or bay spacing and so is not necessarily contemporary.

- 3.2.3 The arrangement of 'flats' and notches in the common joists and principal members of the ceiling construction along the W wall (3.2.2 above) would appear to imply former internal panelling or wainscot screening of the arcade wall from the east aisle. At the northern end of the aisle however, the chamfer stops and notches are cut back at an angle to the N wall (see fig.4) and though it was not possible to identify this arrangement in the western half of the aisle due to the insertion of a modern stairwell, the visible elements seem to suggest some form of screening set away from the external wall at the north end. No associated features to clarify this supposition were identified during the course of refurbishment work.

### 3.3 *The North Wall*

- 3.3.1 An intervention was made in the north wall of the east aisle of the former hall to convert an existing window opening into a doorway. This intervention revealed the original form of the wall construction, and also exposed a former window reveal.
- 3.3.2 The intervention in the north wall was located within an area of brick blocking of a former window opening below a segmental brick arch. The brick arch matched the width of an internal splay at the eastern end (and a fragmentary brick splay at the western side). There was no evidence to suggest that this opening was medieval in origin. Below the blocked window the new opening was cut through the original north wall which was noted to be of flint rubble construction.

### 3.4 *External Excavations*

- 3.4.1 An integral part of the construction work to the E aisle was the reduction of the external ground surface by c.1.0m to facilitate access to a new doorway in the N wall at first floor level. These excavations revealed a north-south oriented wall adjoining (straight joint) the north wall at a point 0.90m east of the eastern edge of the blocked archway. The wall was of brick and flint infill construction. The wall was seen to extend for c.1.00m to the north of the external aisle wall though this did not represent its full extent.

### 3.5 *General Observations*

- 3.5.1 The first floor level of the aisle corresponds approximately to the level of the arcade capitals (which were 0.20m above the present floor construction).

- 3.5.2 The southern framed wall of the aisle was noted to contain a blocked window opening at its western end which was partly obscured by the arcade wall (see photo. 2). Taken in conjunction with the fact that the height of the framing in this wall does not correspond to the level of the principal horizontal members of the ceiling construction this would seem to imply that the framed wall has been imported to its current position from elsewhere in the building.

#### **4 Discussion and Conclusions**

- 4.1 The discovery of the medieval ceiling above the 13th-century open hall is of interest for understanding how the building began to change in the late medieval period. It suggests that the aisled hall was made into a single room, possibly in conjunction with additions or changes in the remainder of the range for the accommodation for chantry priests after 1349. Perhaps it remained an open hall, with the remainder of the range having two or three floors. The somewhat elaborate roof arrangements, ensuring that the attic space was unencumbered by roof timbers, suggests that this level was also intended for domestic use. The full implication of these discoveries would require further study of the dating of the timbers (by dendrochronology) and investigation in the remaining part of the east range.

Ric Tyler and Julian Munby  
 Oxford Archaeological Unit  
 December 1994



## Appendix A

### List of Sources
























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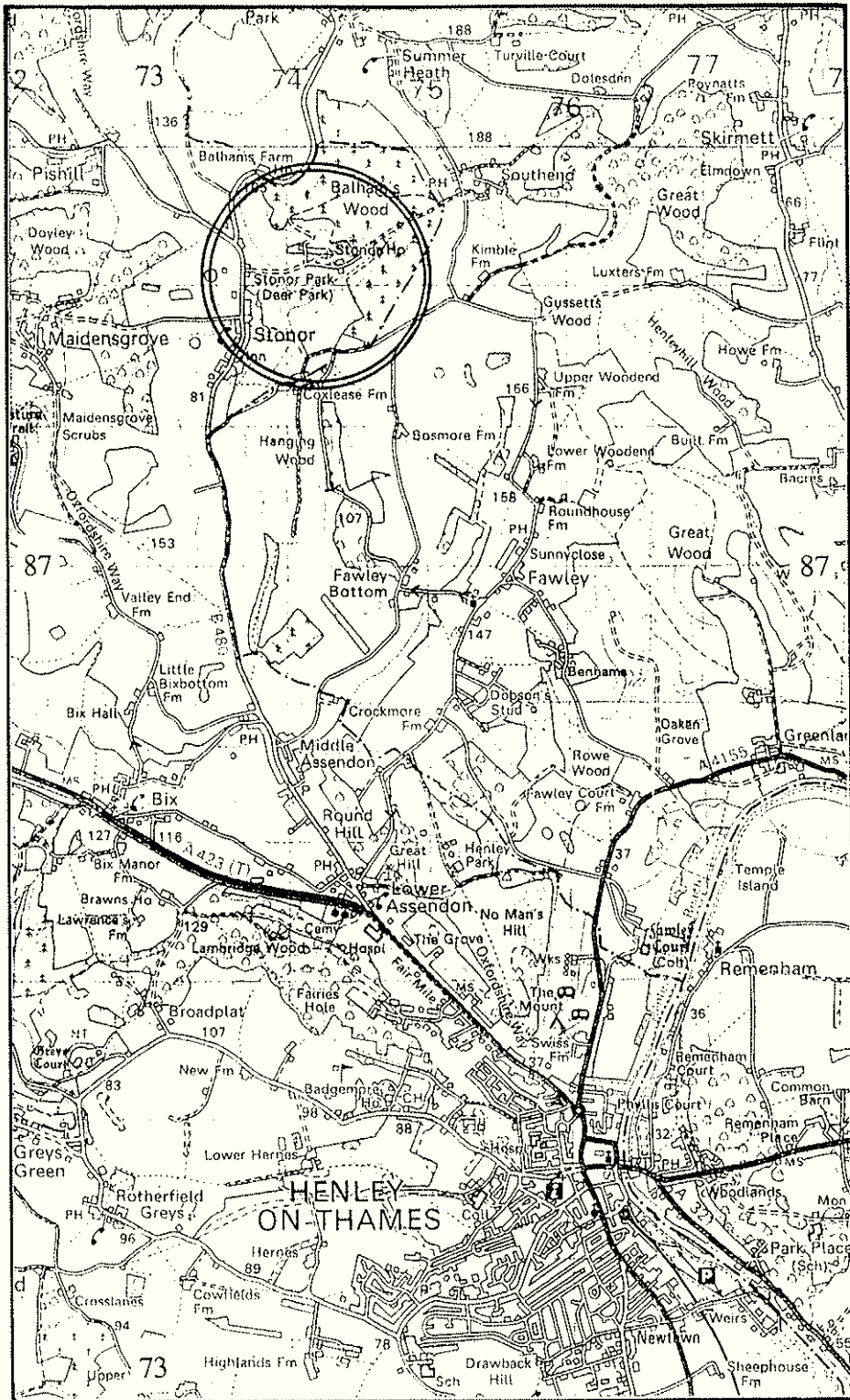
## Appendix B

### Register of Carpenter's Marks

Joist Number (see fig.4)	Joist Position	Carpenters Marking
1	East	
	West	No Mark Visible
2	East	
	West	
3	East	
	West	
4	East	
	West	No Mark Visible
5	East	
	West	
6	East	
	West	? 
7	East	
	West	
8	East	
	West	
9	East	
	West	
10	East	
	West	Not Clearly Visible
11	East	
	West	Marking Obscured
12	East	
	West	
13	East	No Mark Visible
	West	
14	East	
	West	

Joist Number (see fig.4)	Joist Position	Carpenters Marking
15	East	
	West	
16	East	
	West	Marking Unclear
17	East	No Mark
	West	No Mark
18	East	No Mark
	West	No Mark
19	East	No Mark
	West	No Mark
20	East	No Mark
	West	No Mark
21	East	No Mark
	West	No Mark

Position of Markings: East Side: S face of Joist, W end.  
 West Side: N face of Joist, E end.



Based on Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map of 1980.  
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Fig. 1: Stonor Park: Location Plan.

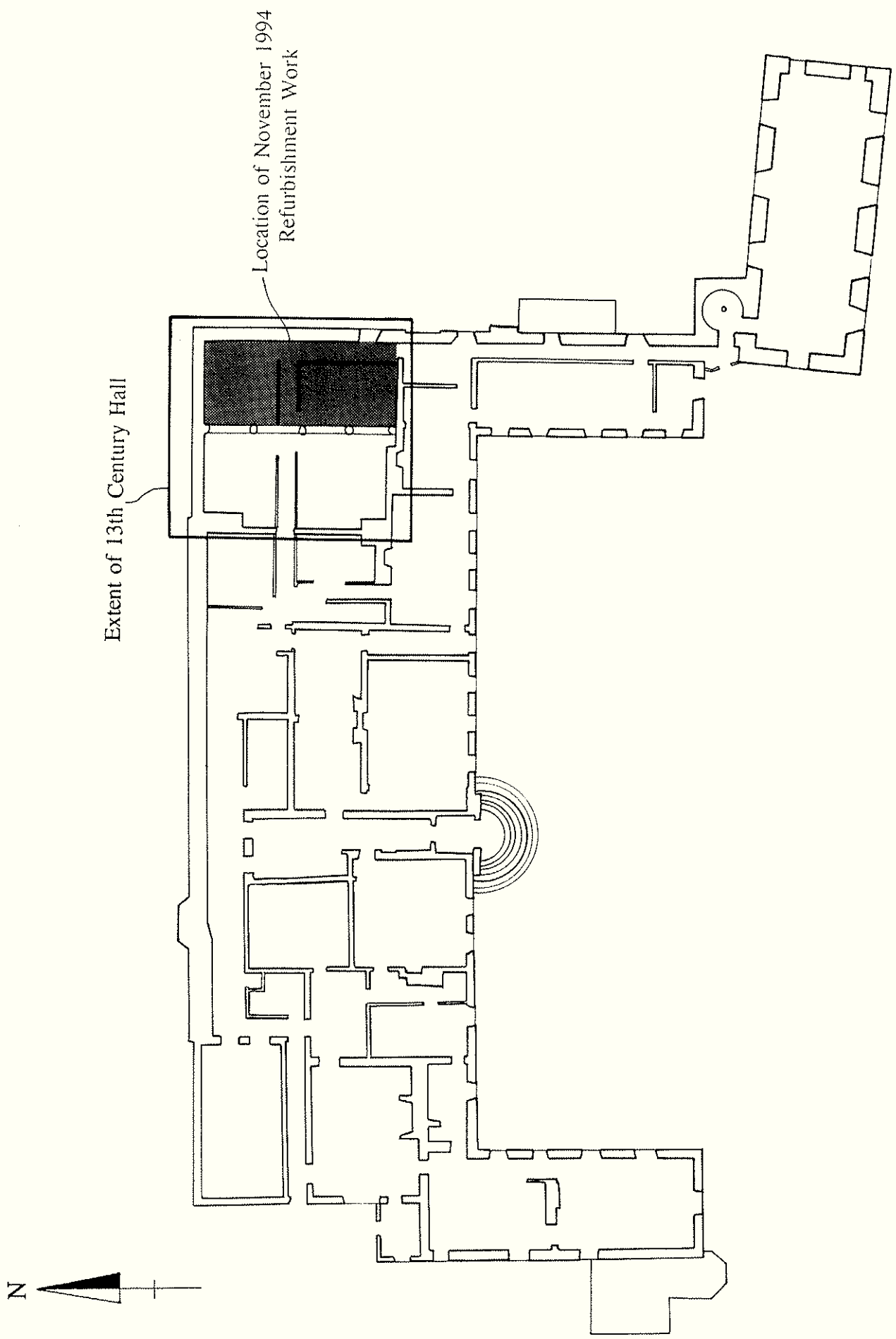


Fig.2: Stonor Park: Block Plan showing Location of Refurbishment Work.

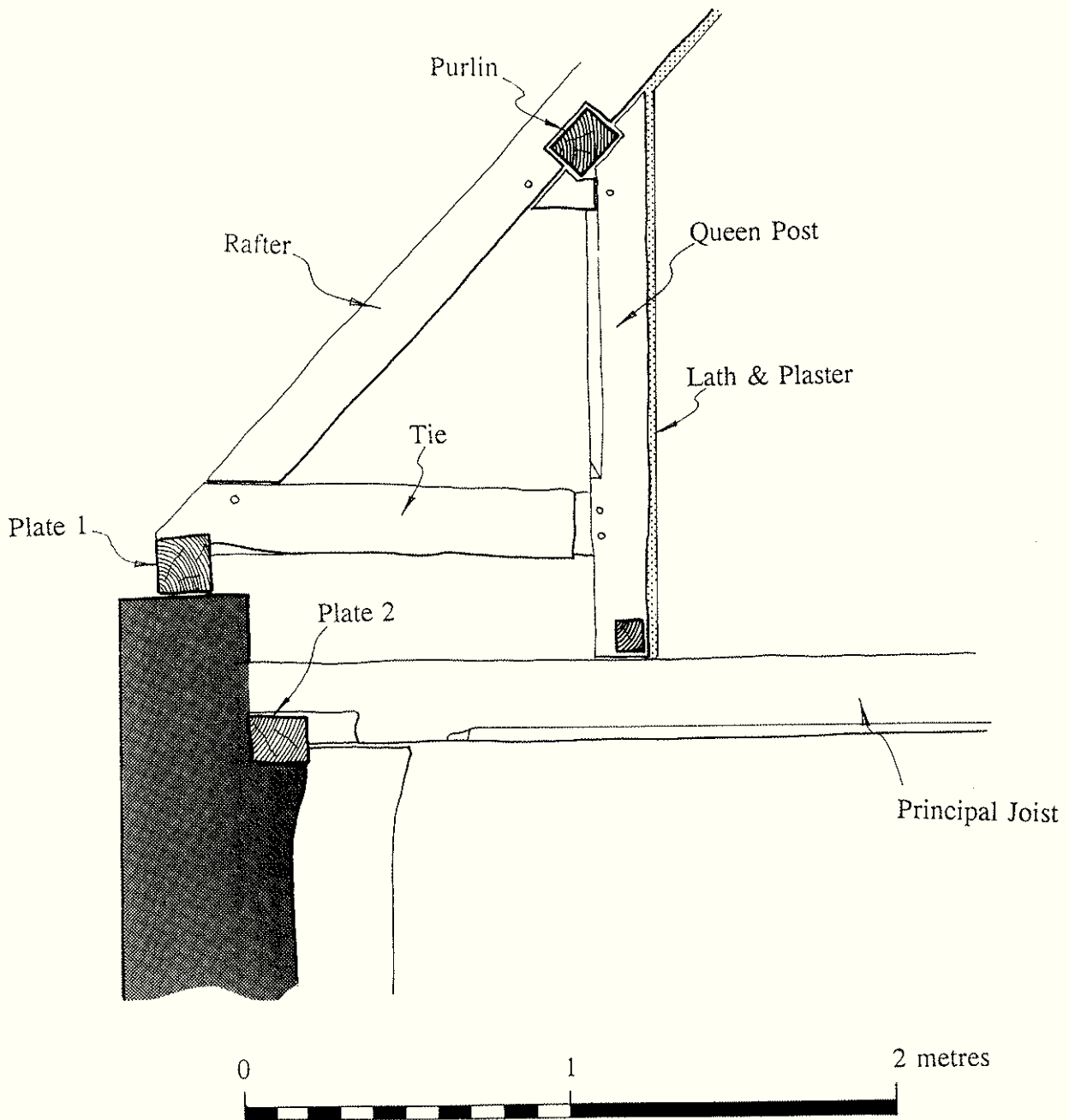
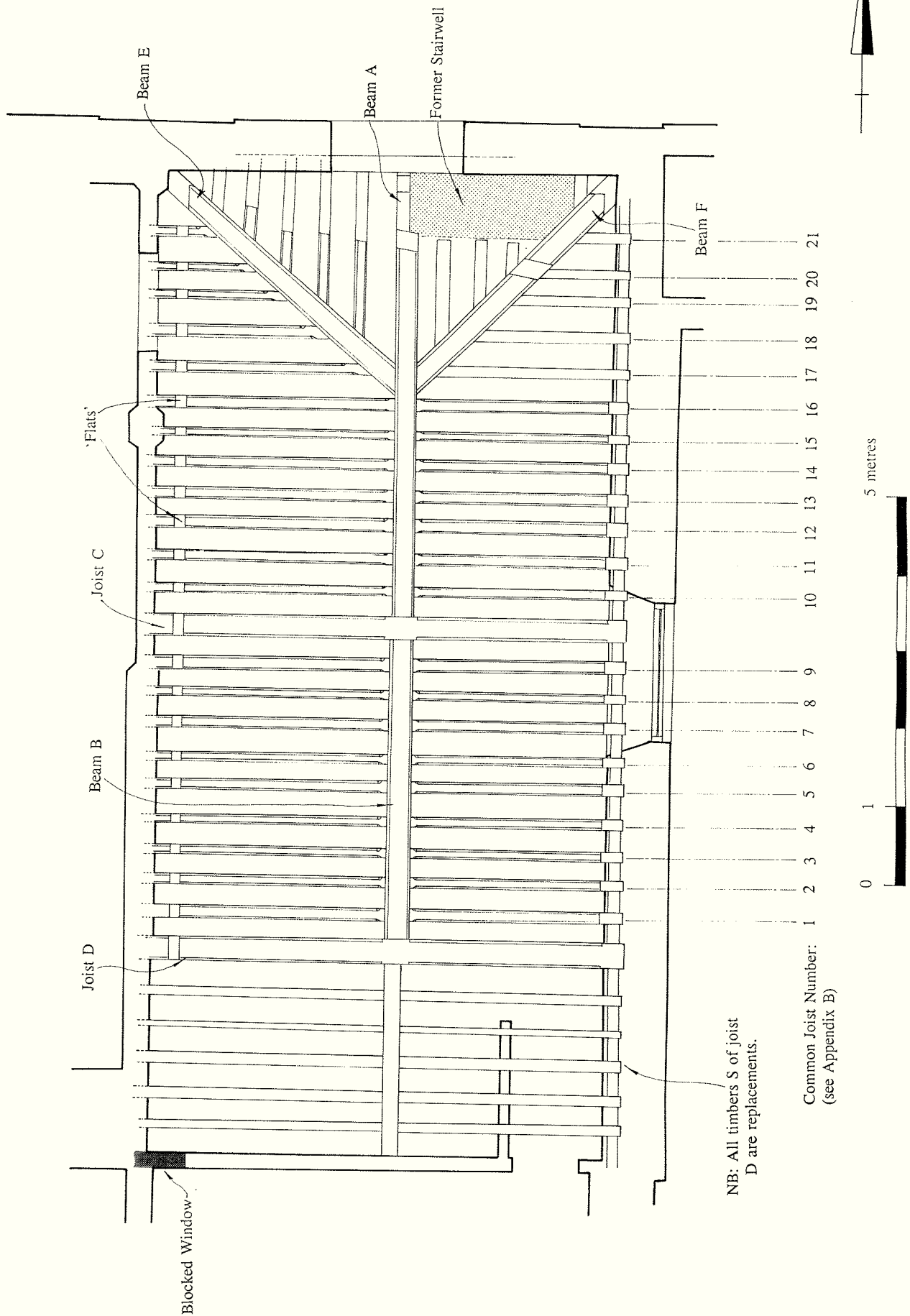


Figure 3: Detail of Roof Construction.



NB: All timbers S of joist D are replacements. (see Appendix B)

Common Joist Number: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Figure 4: Plan of second floor ceiling timbers.

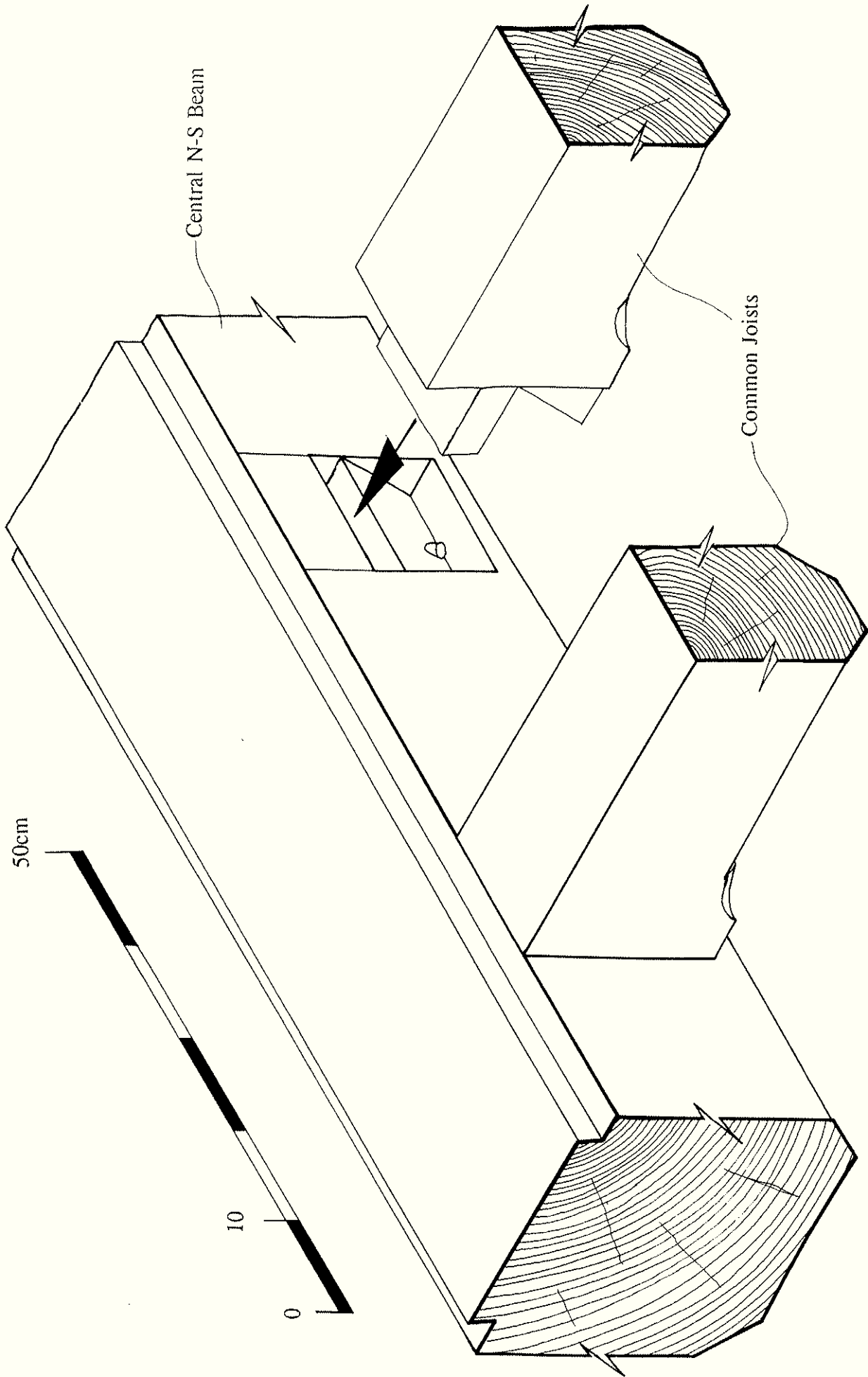


Figure 5: Detail of ceiling joints.



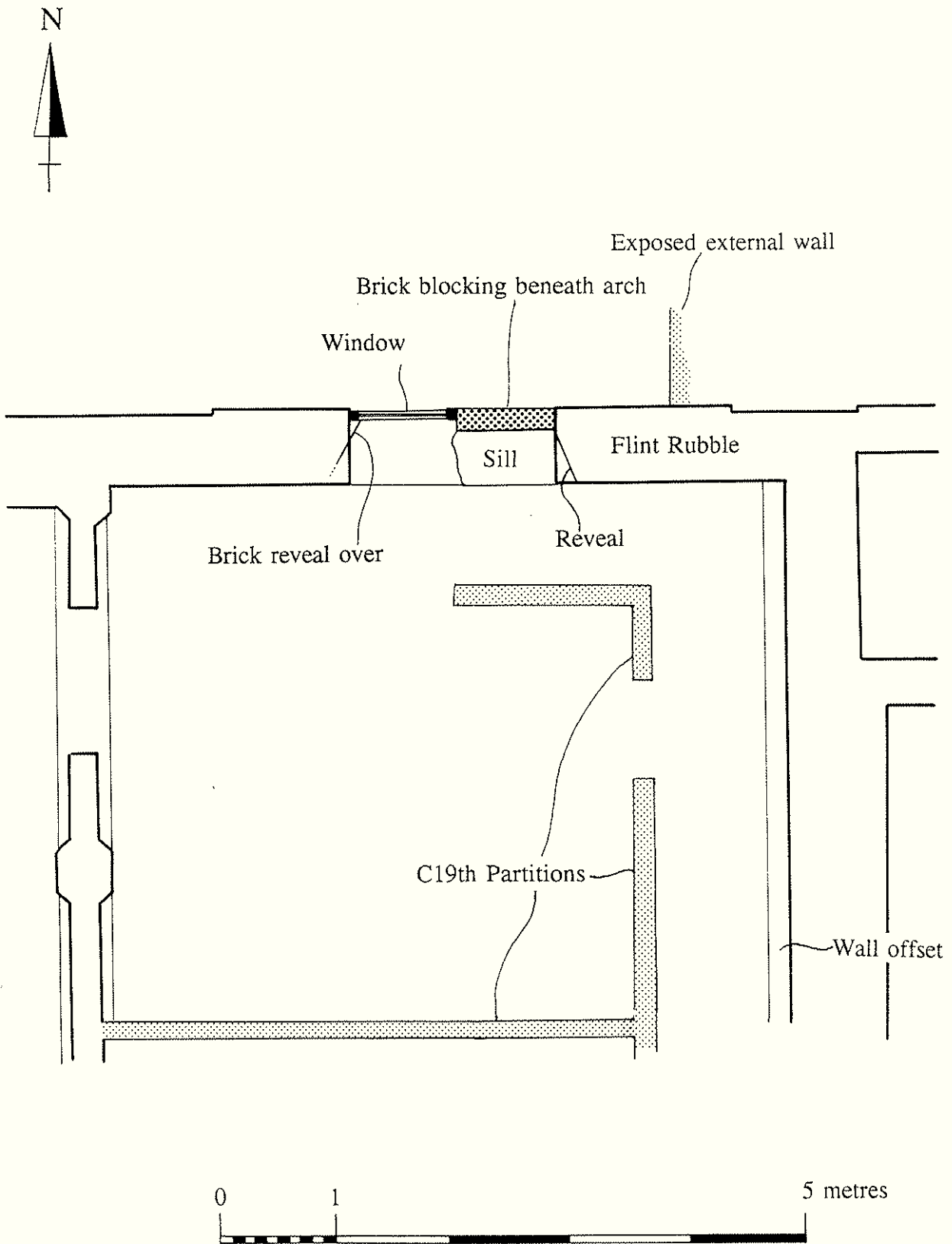


Figure 6: Plan of north wall and exposed external features.

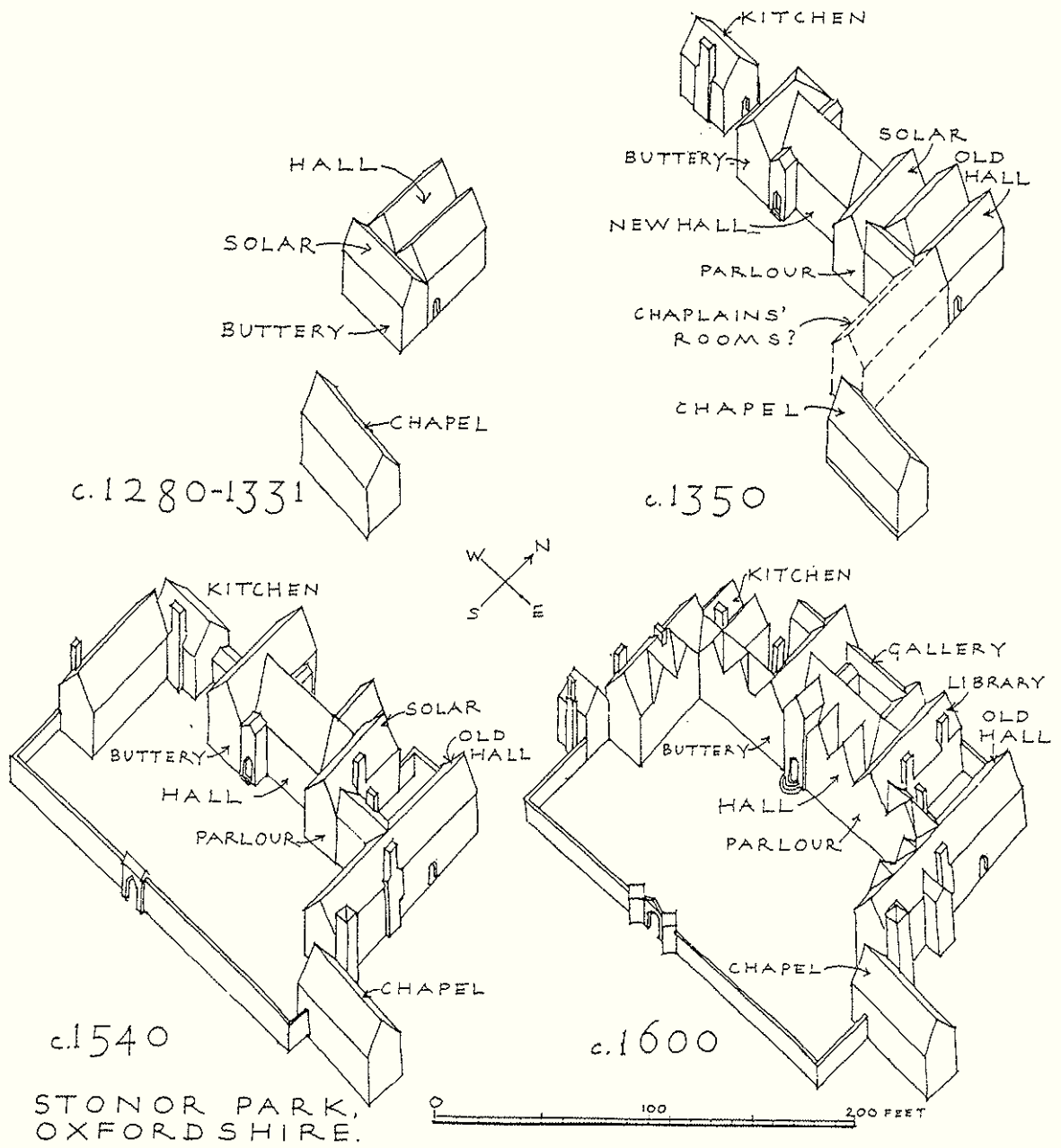


Figure 7: Conjectural development phases (WA Pantin). Copyright VCH.



Photo. 1: Detail of 'flats' along west side of first floor ceiling.



Photo. 2: Detail of blocked window in south wall.

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