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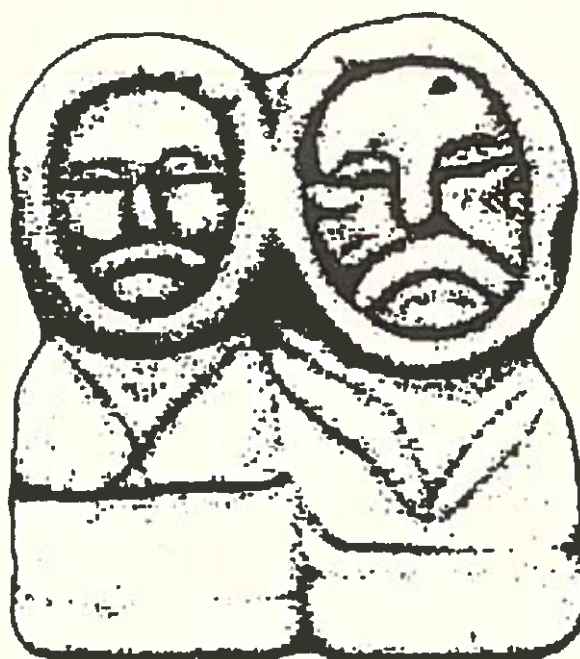
# CAMBRIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS



## ABERGLASNEY

Interim report on excavation work in the Cloister Garden:  
North-East Corner & South Range Steps

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CAP Report No. 125

**ABERGLASNEY: NE Corner & South Range Steps**

**Archaeological Excavation**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The excavation of the east end of the South Range of the Parapet and the north-east corner of the Cloister Garden began on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2000 and was completed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2000.

The work involved the excavation of two areas:

*The South Range-* The east end of the South Range was excavated. This covered an area of 5m. x 4m.

*The North-East Corner-* The north-east corner of the Cloister Garden between the Yew Tunnel and the Mansion was excavated. This covered an area of 7m. x 9m.

The numbers in brackets in this report refer to context numbers assigned to the various archaeological features and deposits uncovered during the excavation work.

## **2 OBJECTIVES**

Excavation work on the South Parapet was designed to provide a greater understanding of this area in order to enable a properly informed interpretation of the stepped access onto the South Range.

The primary objective of the assessment in the north-east corner was to describe and locate all archaeological features which may potentially be disturbed or destroyed by the proposed line of the service trench, with preservation *in situ* being preferred where this can be achieved within the development framework.

## **3 Excavation Methodology**

The excavation design allowed for the use of a mechanical excavator for the removal of topsoil and modern overburden, down to the first recognisable archaeological horizons. This was carried out using a toothless ditching bucket.

Thereafter the deposits within the trenches were excavated using standard accepted archaeological techniques.

Each excavation area was cleaned and recorded. Recording of these areas was in three formats:

- i) Photographic record shots were taken in 35mm. colour slide, colour print and black and white formats.
- ii) Drawn records, plans and sections, were produced at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 on drafting film.
- iii) Written records were produced using a continuous numbering sequence for all contexts. Excavation of selected features was undertaken in order to ascertain their date, depth, preservation, extent, function and relationship to other features.

The natural deposits underlying the archaeology were located in at least one part of each excavation area.

An environmental sampling and processing strategy was in place should the archaeological deposits warrant it. However, in this instance it was not felt that the deposits encountered

warranted or needed sampling.

All works were conducted whilst adhering to current Health and Safety Regulations.

#### **4 Results of the Excavation**

##### ***The South Range*** (Fig.'s 2 & 3)

Excavation of this area was necessary in order to establish the original layout of the stepped access from the Cloister Garden onto the South Range of the Parapet. It was not clear from previous excavation work whether the step arrangement on the South Range mirrored that uncovered on the North Range, as part of the South Range had been rebuilt removing any evidence of step scarring.

Following the removal by machine of the overburden three phases of construction for the South Range were revealed:

*Phase 1-* This relates to the original phase of the parapet construction which is believed to be contemporary with the construction of the West Range, i.e. early 17<sup>th</sup> century. At this time the Parapet structure consisted of the West Range with the bay arches and two single walls running east from the north and south ends of the West Range. Evidence for the southern wall (46) was uncovered during the excavation work, and was aligned with the present line of the South Range. Only a limited amount of the face of this wall could be exposed as later additions had been built onto it, which masked all but one portion of the upper courses. However, the wall could be traced in plan for a length of 4m. From this evidence it seems likely that the present southern wall of the South Range may be largely original in construction.

*Phase 2-* This phase relates to the construction of the Parapet walkway on the North and South Ranges. Although post-dating the construction of the West Range the construction of the North and South Ranges is still believed to be 17<sup>th</sup> century in date. This work included the construction of the north and south bays and the step arrangements leading up onto the walkway.

Excavation at the east end of the South Range revealed that the steps (49) and half landing (48) had been built on to the earlier south wall (46). The steps had been integrated into the South Range through the construction of a second wall (47) which had been mortared on to the earlier southern wall (46). This second wall (47) was up to 1m. wide and still retained evidence of having been plastered on the north face. The north face being the side of the wall which would have been visible to people ascending or descending the steps. Unfortunately due to later remodelling it was not possible to establish the original height of this wall. However, the thickness of the wall (1m.) suggests that it may originally have formed the basis for a set of steps or a walkway running east beyond the present limit of the South Range, providing access to the building in the south-east corner of the Cloister Garden.

Evidence of four step treads were preserved below the present overburden. These steps were all running in an east-west direction onto the top of the Parapet walkway. The intact steps have treads 0.3-0.4m. wide with a height of 0.2m. and are composed of individual flat limestone flagstones up to 0.05m. thick. The riser of each step was rendered with the same material as that covering wall 47. At the base of these steps were the remains of a stone built half landing (48) which represented the level at which the steps changed direction to

enter the garden on a north-south alignment.

*Phase 3-* During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Mansion and Gardens underwent extensive remodelling. The Parapet steps were removed with access onto the Parapet now being provided by two ramps located at the eastern ends of both the North and South Ranges. The installation of these ramps necessitated the removal of most of the steps and associated walls. Hence the step scarring visible on the north Range is not evident on the South Range as this part of the Parapet structure was rebuilt as part of one arm of the southern ramp which was clearly intended to be visible.

In conclusion the excavation of the east end of the South Range proved useful in confirming the sequence of construction for the Parapet. Evidence for an original southern wall was confirmed. The steps were identified as being later additions with the presence of the wide plastered wall indicative of a further structure having existed to the east, possibly reflecting a similar arrangement to that proposed for the North Range. Later 19<sup>th</sup> century alterations had unfortunately destroyed much of the evidence, although enough remained to provide a sound basis for the interpretation of this area.

#### *The North-East Corner (Fig.'s 4 & 5)*

Excavation of this part of the Garden was necessary as the proposed route for the new drainage system cuts through this area. This particular area is important as it represents the interface between the Mansion, the Gatehouse Courtyard and the Cloister Garden.

Unfortunately the presence of scaffolding on the west side of the mansion prevented access to the north-west corner of the Mansion. The proximity of the Yew Tree Tunnel to the northern edge of the excavation meant that great care had to be taken during the excavation of this area to ensure that none of the Yew Tree root system was damaged.

A number of phases of activity were evident in this area:

*Phase 1-* This relates mainly to the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and is represented by the remains of the east wall (45) of the Gatehouse Courtyard and the southern extent of the pitched stone surface (18) within the Courtyard. Both the wall and the pitched stone surface appear to have been truncated by later activity. The original height of the Courtyard wall has been significantly reduced with the original level still evident as scarring on the Yew Trees.

In this area of excavation the pitched stone surface is of random stones of different shapes and sizes and is evident to the east and west of the ornate path. The edge of the pitched stone surface (18) is well defined, although it is not clear whether this surface would originally have extended further south beyond its present limit. At the southern limit of the pitched stone surface there is a change in style. Here the pitched stone surface (19) is constructed in a much more regular pattern, than the Courtyard surface immediately to the north. Each stone was laid on an east-west axis with the stones being relatively uniform in size. Laid on a slope, this surface only extends 0.4m. north/south and it is possible that this is a slightly later area of reparation work.

Dividing these two areas of pitched stone (18 & 19) was a narrow gully (21). Gully 21 was 0.18m. wide, 0.2m. deep and extended across the width of the trench. Given the

slope on the southern pitched stone surface (19), it may be that this gully was designed to take water from upslope, thus preventing the south-east corner of the courtyard from becoming waterlogged.

This gully (21) terminated on its eastern side adjacent to a large posthole (23). Posthole 23 had a diameter of 0.45m., a depth of at least 0.5m. and was constructed immediately next to the Yew Tree Wall (45). The most likely explanation for this feature is that it originally housed a gate post which would presumably have been contemporary with the Courtyard. The next phase of excavation work in the Gatehouse Courtyard will expose a greater area and this should enable us to obtain a clearer idea of the function of this area.

Immediately to the south of wall 45 were the remains of what may have been a series of steps leading from the pitched stone surface at the end of wall 45. Two steps appear to have extended south and then three steps extended east towards the north side of the Mansion (Fig. 6). The evidence for these steps is preserved as a series of small level platforms cut into the natural clay (24). There are at least three of these platforms with the one immediately in line with the wall still retaining the base of a stone tread (50). Due to later disturbances the evidence for the steps continuing east has been lost.

To the north of the stone tread and east of the wall was a posthole (29). Unfortunately, no datable material was recovered from the fill (28) of this feature, therefore it is not possible to say whether it is contemporary with the wall and steps. However, the position of this posthole clearly respects the line of the Courtyard wall, suggesting that there may have been some form of gated access in this area.

Immediately to the south of the steps was the remains of a wall (10). A length of 1.6m. of this wall survived, with a height of 0.5m. The wall remains consisted of three courses of mortared limestone which were one course wide. The dressed face, which was not plastered, was on the west side, indicating that the wall was intended to be viewed from this side. Clearly not intended to bear any structural loads this wall probably functioned as a low terrace/retaining wall.

*Phase 2- Phase 3* relates to the extensive changes which occurred to the Mansion and Gardens during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned in the text concerning the excavations on the South Range the east end of both the North and South Ranges were remodelled. Ramps were created to provide access on to the Parapet, these ramps curved down in front of the West Wing of the Mansion. Many of the existing ground levels were raised or sloped and shale pathways laid. This extensive remodelling necessitated several phases of work.

The initial groundworks appear to be concerned with the removal of earlier garden features, such as the ornate pitched stone surface and terrace walls. To remove this material a temporary carriage surface was laid (12). The remains of this driveway are evident running north-south extending from the pitched stone surface toward the west wing of the Mansion. A set of parallel wheel tracks (11) are clearly evident running north-south on top of this surface. However, it is not clear where this driveway leads although it was not evident in any of the more southerly excavation areas, hence the idea that it may have been used for only a limited period during structural alteration works.



Following the removal of the earlier material the new ramps were constructed along with a new drainage system. Evidence for the drainage of one of these ramps was located during the excavation in the North-east corner. A small stone built culvert (3) was evident running from the ramp and into culvert 4. Although culvert 4 was clearly already built at the time of the ramp culvert (3) it seems likely that they are broadly contemporary. Culvert 4, which is still flowing, post-dates the pitched stone surface and must have been constructed at a time when the Courtyard was no longer in use. This culvert can be traced running north-south on the western side of the Yew Tree wall and is evident cutting through the remains of the East Wing of the Gatehouse.

After the construction of these culverts much of the area was raised and levelled. This was done using large amounts of waste building material (2), which consisted of limestone pieces incorporated with mortar lumps and occasional roofing stone fragments. Dumps of ash material were also used to level the area. On top of these deposits the angular shale pathways were laid to create the 19<sup>th</sup> century garden layout.

Immediately to the east of the wall remains (10) was a raised mortared stone built, square pedestal (09). This feature was unusual as it was constructed from dressed red sandstone blocks together with sandstone roof slates. This type of red sandstone was rarely used at Aberglasney and as it has been incorporated into a feature utilising broken roof slates it appears likely that this stone has been reused from a previous structure. Unfortunately it was not possible to closely date this feature, although it may well be contemporary with the low retaining wall (10) to the west. It is possible that this feature may represent the remains of a plinth for a statue or piece of garden architecture. Although it is not possible to date this feature it may be contemporary with the construction of the Loggia which is evident on the West Wing of the Mansion. The Loggia, dating to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is also constructed from red sandstone

*Phase 3 – The 20<sup>th</sup> century.* Evidence of 20<sup>th</sup> century activity in this area relates mainly to the installation of services. Three trenches were evident cutting through this area which related to 20<sup>th</sup> century drainage works. Unfortunately they had, along with the 19<sup>th</sup> century drainage works, removed evidence of the relationship between the Mansion and the Cloister garden in this area.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

This limited phase of excavation work was extremely useful in confirming answers to some of the key archaeological questions concerning the construction of the South Range and Parapet Walkway and its subsequent alterations.

The north-east corner of the Cloister Garden produced some unexpected archaeological features, including a possible plinth for a statue.

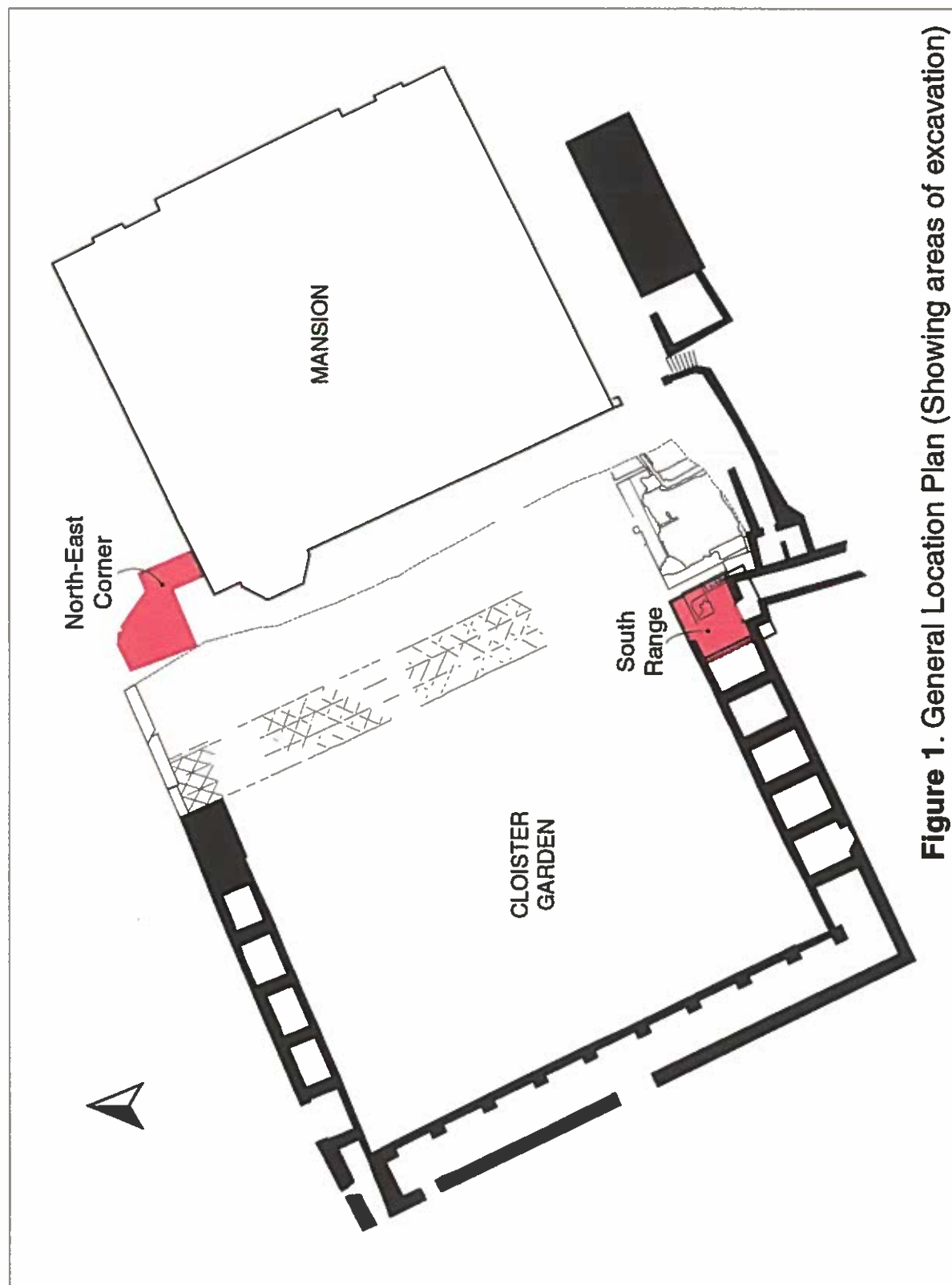
## **6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thanks to; Kevin Blockley for his help and advice during the compilation of this report; Phil Evans, Iain Grant and Helen Milne for their assistance with the fieldwork.

Thanks also to the staff of The Aberglasney Restoration Trust for all their help and support.

**FIGURES: 1 – 5**

**FIGURES: 1 – 6**



**Figure 1. General Location Plan (Showing areas of excavation)**

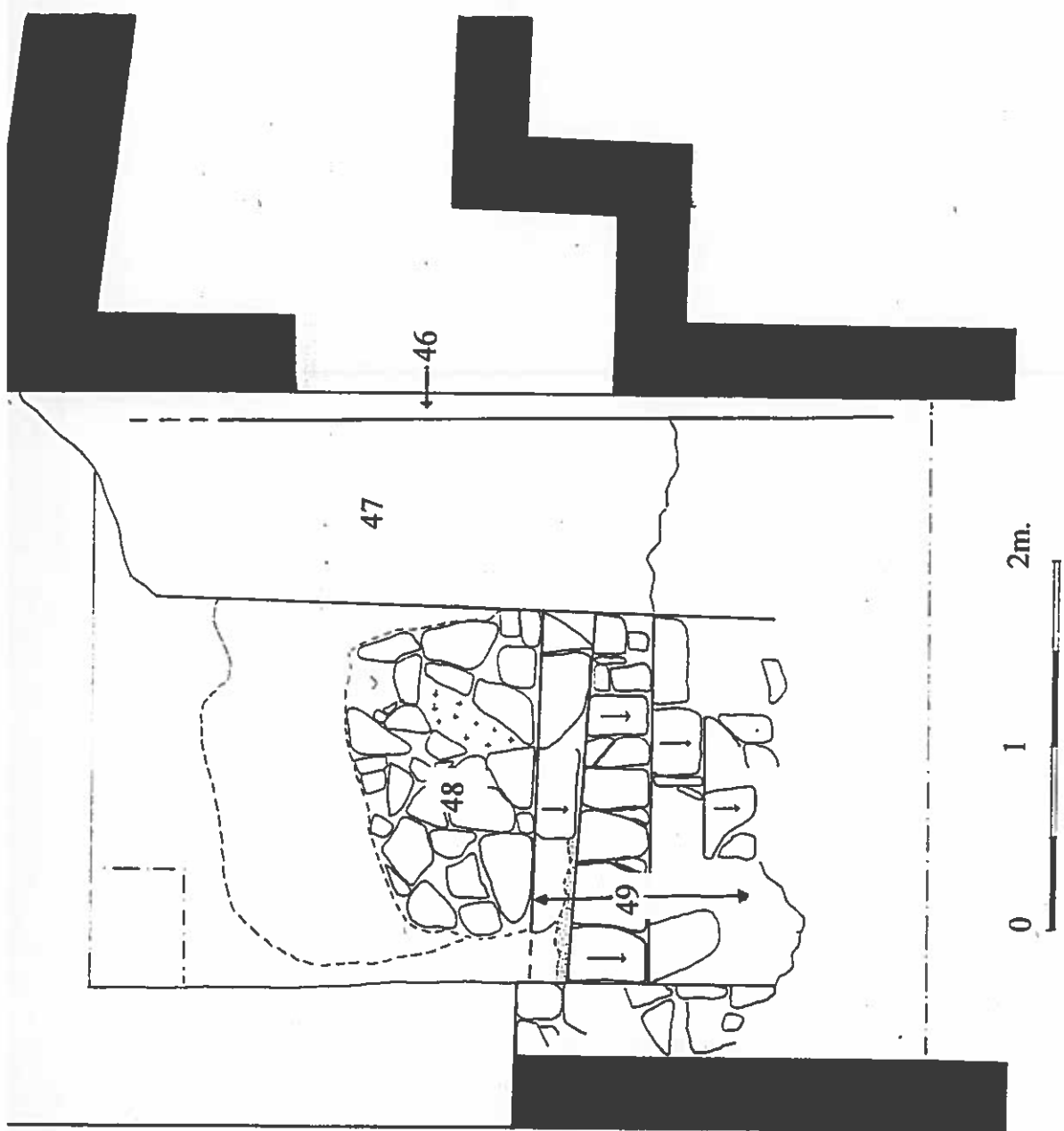


Fig. 2 Plan of the east end of the South Range.

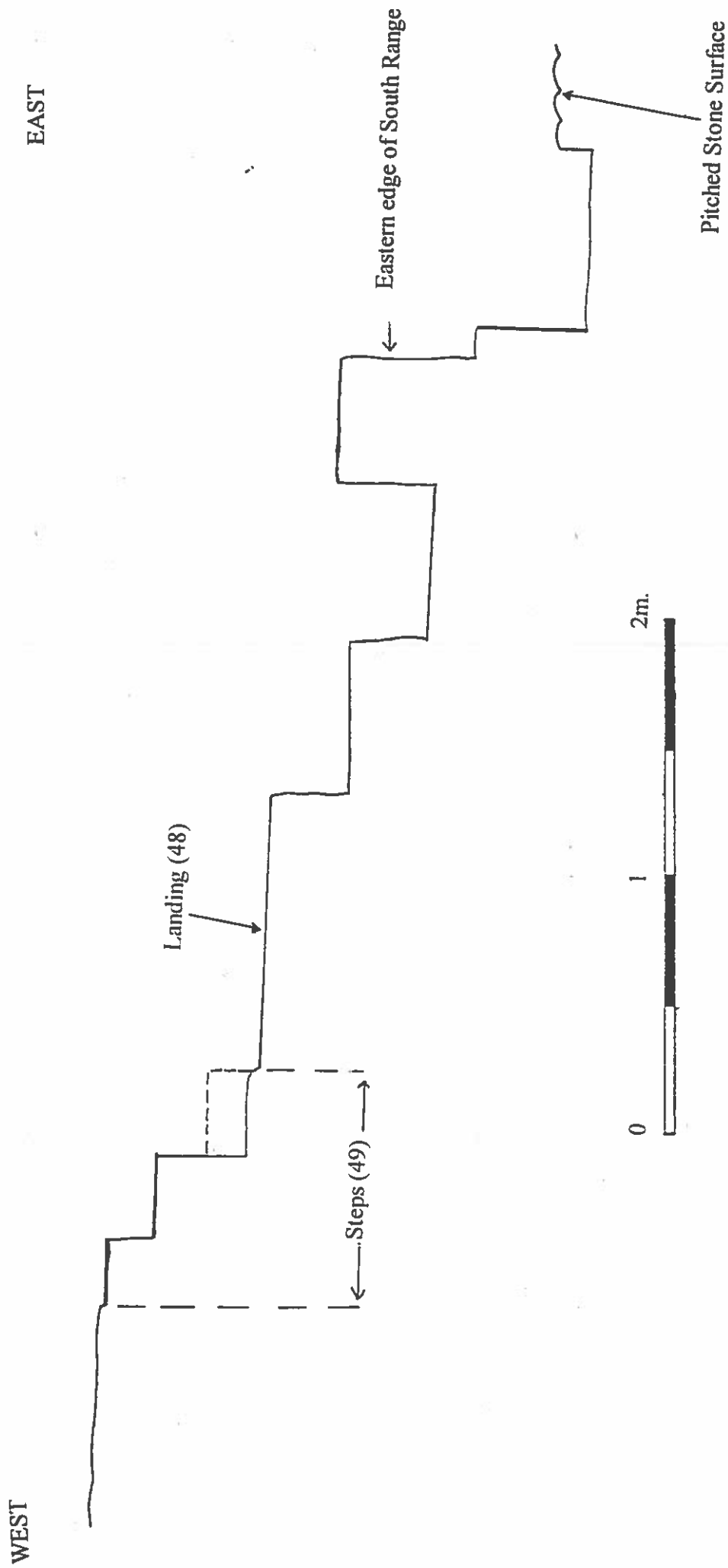


Fig. 3 Profile through the South Range excavation area.

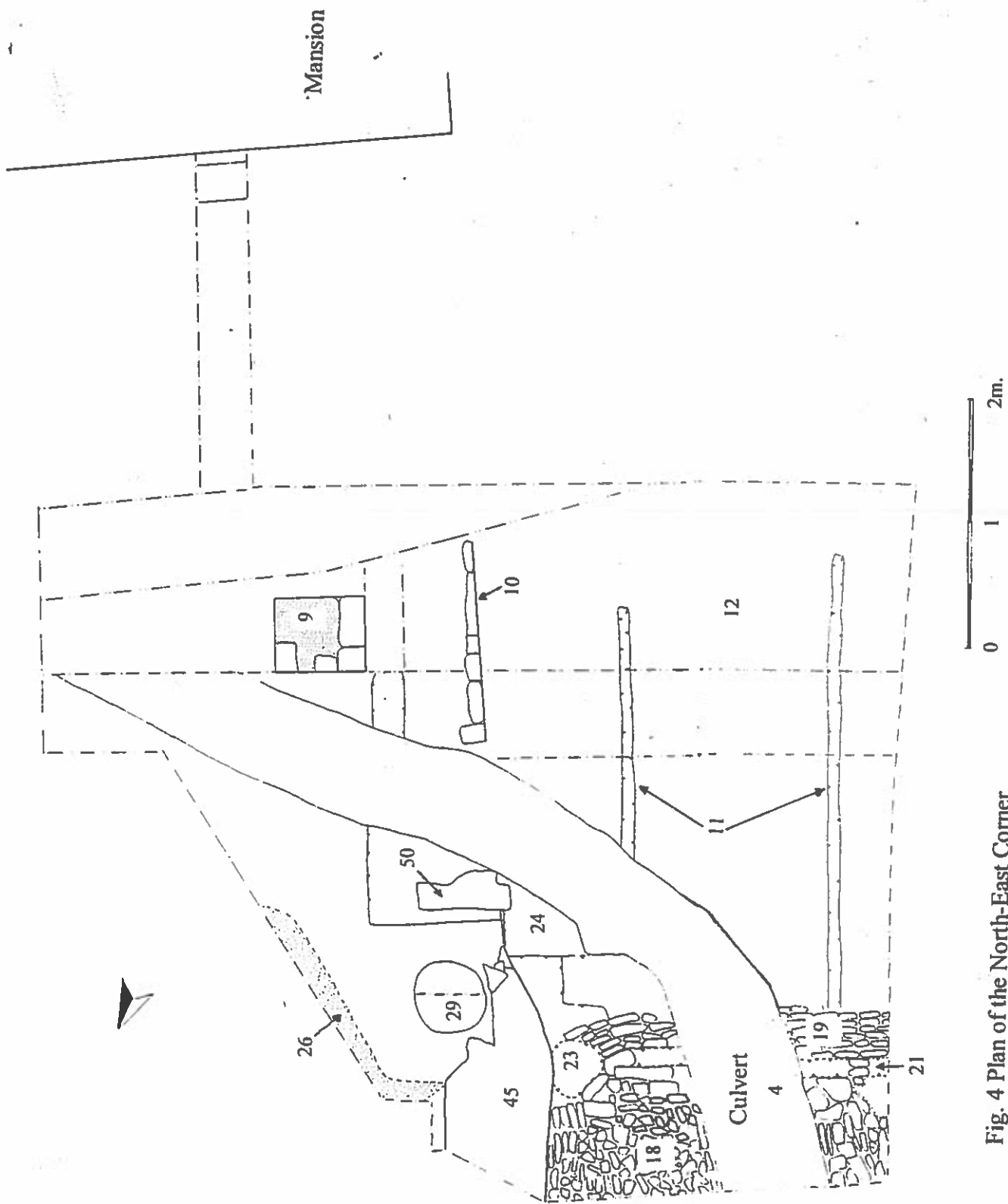


Fig. 4 Plan of the North-East Corner

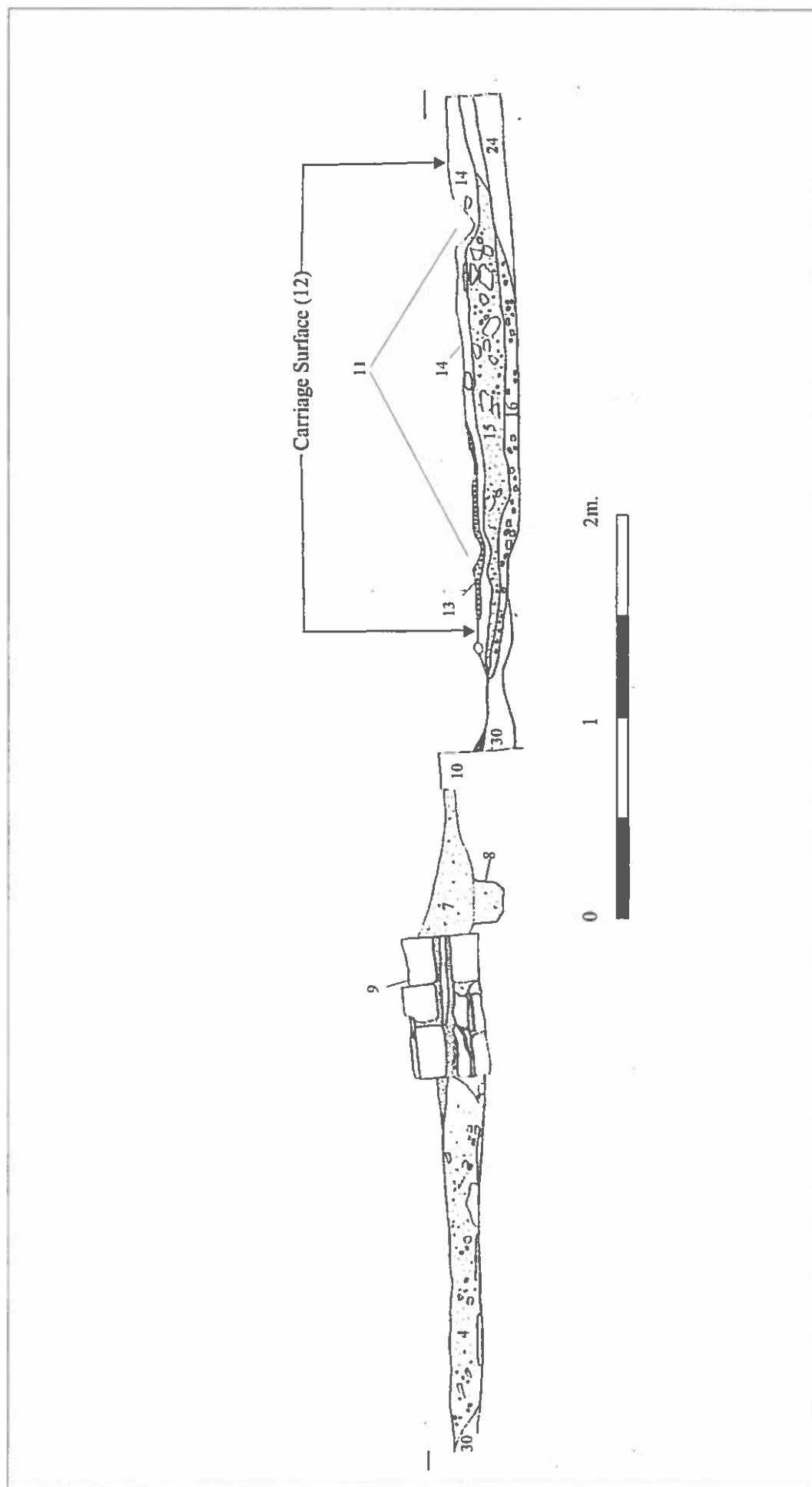
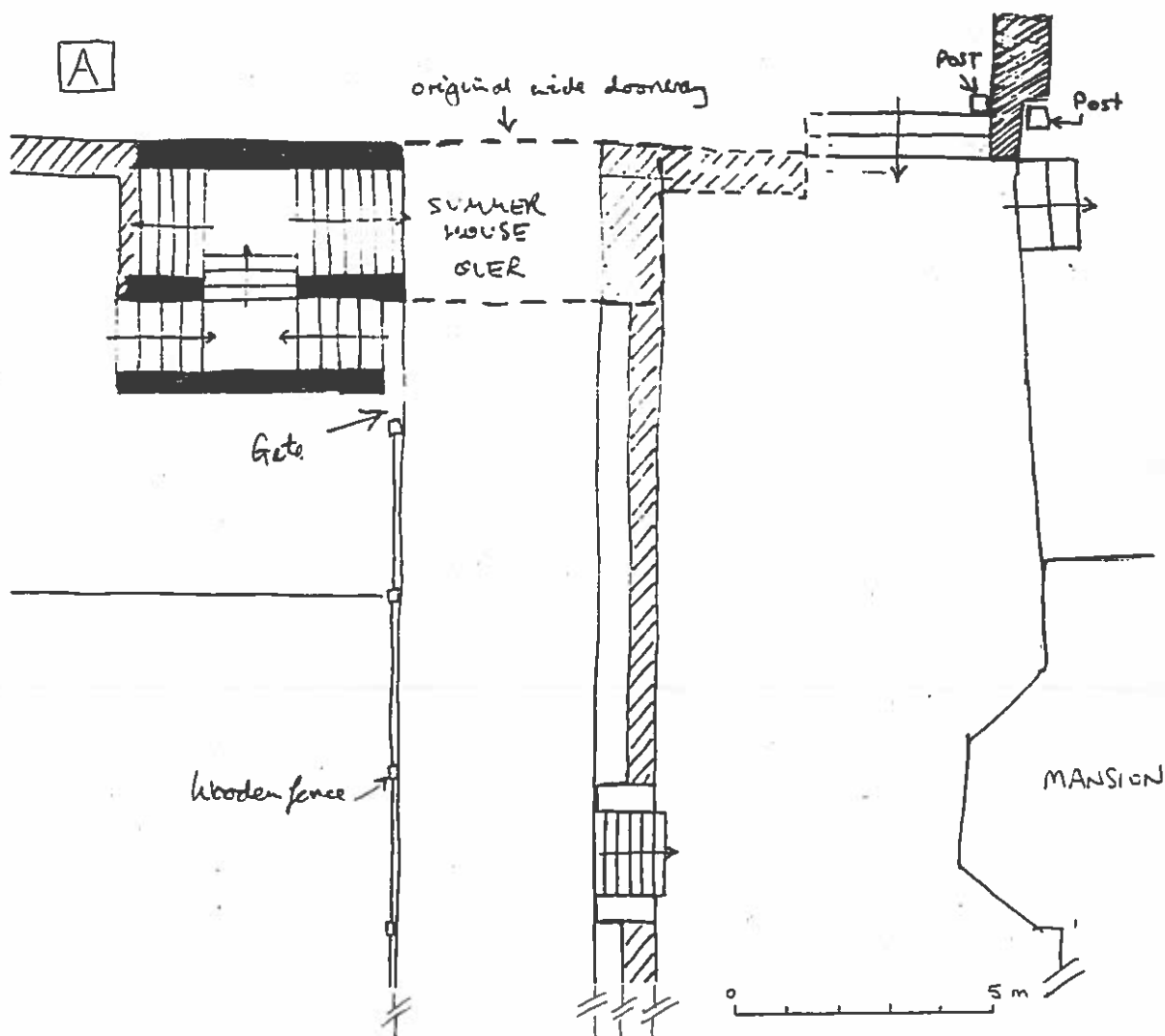
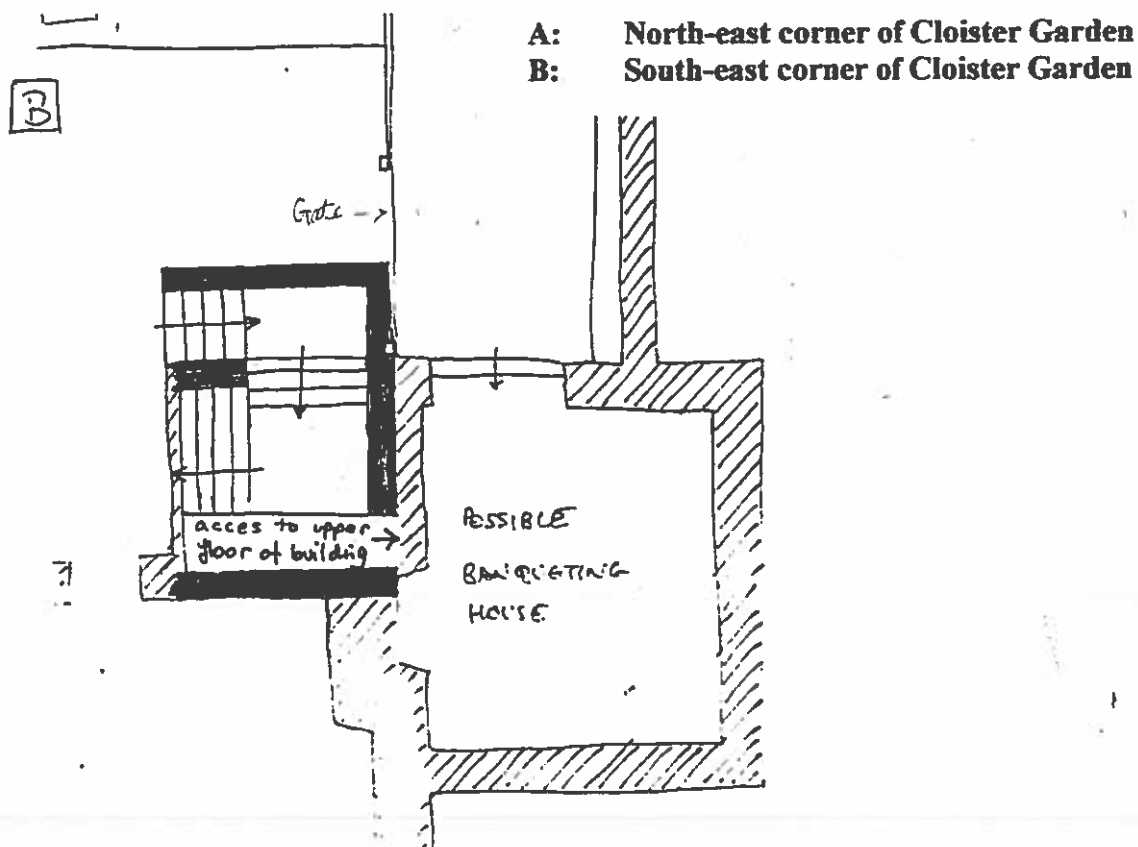


Fig. 5 Section drawing through the north-east corner excavation area.





**Fig 6 Reconstructed plans of possible step arrangements in the cloister garden**



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX I: CONTEXT LIST

1	Overburden
2	Rubble Deposit
3	Culvert
4	Culvert
5	Concrete Pipe
6	Ceramic Pipe
7	Fill of 8
8	Gully
9	Plinth Base/Platform
10	Wall Remains
11	Wheel Ruts
12	Driveway Surface
13	Ash Spread
14	Mortar Deposit
15	Driveway Make-up
16	Clay Deposit
17	Culvert
18	Pitched Stone Surface
19	Pitched Stone Surface
20	Fill of 21
21	Gully
22	Fill of 23
23	Cut of Gate Post
24	Clay Deposit
25	Brown 'Subsoil'
26	Mortar Rubble
27	Ash Deposit
28	Fill of 29
29	Posthole
30	Natural Clay
31	Overburden
32	Modern Pathway
33	19 <sup>th</sup> Century Pathway
34	Pebble Infill (of 42)
35	Mortar Spread
36	Ash Spread (Fill of 38)
37	Gravel Fill of 38
38	Cut of Culvert
39	Cut of Modern Pipe
40	Fill of 39
41	Natural
42	Foundation Cut
43	Deposit
44	Culvert
45	Yew Tree Wall

- 46 South Wall of South Range
- 47 Plastered Step Wall
- 48 Step Platform
- 49 Steps
- 50 Stone Tread