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CONTRACTS SECTION

EXCAVATIONS AT OYSTERMOUTH CASTLE
SWANSEA, WEST GLAOMORGAN

FEBRUARY 1994

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EXCAVATIONS AT OYSTERMOUTH CASTLE, SWANSEA, WEST GLAMORGAN

by Edith Evans BA PhD MIFA

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Summary

As a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent given to Swansea City Council to implement a floodlighting scheme at Oystermouth Castle, two electricity cable trenches were excavated archaeologically within the castle by GGAT (Contracts) and two trenches dug outside by the electrical contractors were archaeologically monitored. Some evidence for buried structures was revealed, notably masonry which may mark the position of the outer wall of the demolished east gate-tower.

Acknowledgements

The excavations were directed and this report prepared by EM Evans BA PhD MIFA of GGAT (Contacts), who would like to acknowledge the assistance given by M Bernthal during the fieldwork, by Mr A Thomas of Swansea City Council, by the electrical contractors Elliott Electrical of Bridgend, and by Mr CJ Spugeon of RCAHMW, who provided the plan of the castle.

1. Introduction

Oystermouth Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Gm 7) and is listed on the West Glamorgan County Sites and Monuments Record as PRN 471. In February 1994 the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust was commissioned to carry out archaeological works required as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent for the installation of floodlighting. These works were the excavation by hand of two cable trenches within the castle, one in the inner bailey and the other in the chapel block, and the monitoring of two trenches dug manually by the electrical contractors outside the castle.

2. Physical environment

The castle stands at SS 6131 8836 on a ridge of carboniferous limestone overlooking Swansea Bay, but separated from the present shoreline by further ridge to the east. The carboniferous limestone outcrops in places, where the walls were founded directly upon it, as can be seen for example at the entrance to the central block, a short distance to the west of the chapel block. The castle is open to the public as an ancient monument; most of the inner bailey is covered in grass, except towards the gate where the grass is replaced by a chipping surface. A similar chipping surface covers the ground surface of the chapel block.

3. Results of the excavation and watching brief

Interpretation of features found in the cable trenches was hampered by the narrowness of the cuttings (0.3m). This made it impossible to determine their nature with any degree of confidence. Where more than one interpretation is possible, all are given. See Appendix Three for details of the archaeological deposits encountered

Cutting A, in the inner ward, was made largely though rubble, although what appeared to be a crude wall was found running north-south on nearly the same line as the east wall of the staircase leading from the inner ward to the wall-walk. This wall was built on top of a possible yard surface. Cutting B, in the chapel block, revealed a stone surface in its west end, but it was not possible to establish whether it was a deliberately laid surface or bedrock. The latter, however, seems more likely.

The cable trench (Cutting D; not on plan) made along the line of the moat to the west of the castle did not penetrate below the topsoil, although lenses of oyster shells and rubble were noted within it. Most of the cutting outside the eastern side of the castle also did not penetrate below the topsoil, but a mass of masonry was discovered at the eastern end of the section in which it turned towards the castle (Cutting C). This may be part of the foundations to the vanished east tower, or alternatively masonry which has fallen from the upper part of the walls.

4 Conclusion

The cable trenches were too shallow to penetrate far into the below-ground archaeology of the castle. This is fortunate, particularly since it was difficult to interpret the results, owing to the narrowness of the cuttings. The most significant result was the discovery of a possible foundation to the eastern gate tower, although this cannot be considered as proven.

Appendix One: Specification

GGAT (Contracts Section) carries out projects for individual clients, and has amassed considerable experience and expertise in the successful execution of competent fieldwork within deadlines. In the past year, it has undertaken more than 60 desk-top studies, field evaluations, excavations and watching briefs, for a range of clients from the Welsh Office to private landowners. All work is managed to achieve the highest professional standards, and all senior staff are corporate members of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The project will be carried out in accordance with the GGAT Contracts Guidelines for the Execution of Assessment Projects.

The specification was drawn up to fulfil the conditions of the Scheduled Monument Consent granted by Cadw for the floodlighting works.

1. Objectives

1.1 Determination of the character, distribution and importance of surviving archaeological deposits.

1.2 Preparation of site archive.

1.3 Preparation of report on results of fieldwork.

2. Integrated Survey

2.1 Ground Survey - Recording excavations in relation to features of archaeological interest surviving above-ground level.

3. Excavations

3.1 Manual excavation of archaeological areas to be used to house electrical cables. Two areas will be excavated, in the positions shown on the submitted plan between points 22-27 and 10-32; each area will be c.12m x 0.3m.

3.2 Throughout each area, the minimum number of archaeological deposits will be excavated necessary to create a trench of sufficient depth to house the cable, at a minimum depth of 0.15m and a maximum depth of 0.45m.

3.3 Recording - The techniques employed will conform to best current professional practice. Archaeological deposits will be recorded with a single continuous context numbering system, in accordance with GGAT's Manual of Excavation Recording Techniques, a copy of which is deposited in the county SMR. Contexts will be drawn at a suitable scale (usually 1:20) in plan, and where appropriate in section. All significant contexts will be photographed in 35mm colour transparency and monochrome film.

3.4 Finds - all finds will be retained and recorded by context, and temporarily stored in stable conditions.

3.5 Sampling - should deposits be encountered with a high potential for the preservation of palaeoenvironmental material, bulk soil samples will be taken for possible subsequent analysis.

3.6 Arrangement of appropriate specialist services, as necessary.

4. Watching brief

4.1 A watching brief will be maintained on the hand-dug trenches outside the castle, and any features recorded.

5. Post Fieldwork Phase

5.1 Preparation of site archive of archaeological records relating to trial excavations to the specifications as laid down in Management of Archaeological Projects, English Heritage, 1991, Appendix 3.

5.2 Assessment of archaeological data.

5.3 Preparation of the research archive, to the specifications laid down in Management of Archaeological Projects, English Heritage, 1991, Appendix 6.

5.4 Deposition of the research archive with the County SMR, should no further work be undertaken.

5.5 Deposition of the site archive, including artefacts and ecofacts, excepting those which may be subject to the laws of Treasure Trove, with an appropriate institution subject to the agreement of the site owners. Deposition of a copy of the site archive with the National Archaeological Record, indexed in accordance with their Draft Guidelines for the Deposition of Excavation Records.

6. Assessment

6.1 Assessment of information gathered through the execution of sections 2-4.

6.2 Assessment of the effects of the proposed land-use on the identified archaeological resource, to include the effects of the impact of the development on the setting of the resource.

7. Reports

7.1 Client - Synthesis of data gathered through the execution of 2-4, 5.1 & 5.2 together with inclusion of supporting evidence in appendices as appropriate.

7.2 Academic - Archaeological digest report, suitable for publication in a regional or national learned journal (e.g. Archaeology in Wales).

8. Staff

8.1 The project will be managed by AG Marvell BA MIFA, and M Locock BA AIFA, and executed by one of the Contracts Section's Project Officers, all of whom are experienced in this type of work. Field staff will be experienced archaeologists drawn from the team regularly used by GGAT

Contracts. Finds analysis will be carried out by in-house specialists with relevant expertise.

9. Insurance

9.1 The GGAT Contracts Section is fully insured for this type of work, and holds substantial Professional Indemnity cover. Details of policies can be supplied on request.

10. Health and Safety policy

10.1 GGAT has prepared a Health and Safety statement, a copy of which is available on request. The Trust will not endanger the health, safety and welfare of its employees or others in the execution of its projects.

11. Reinstatement

11.1 On completion of the fieldwork, GGAT will be responsible for leaving the trenches open.

Appendix Two: Summary of previous work

Very little work has been previously been carried out on this monument, and even less is in the public domain. The results of the study was carried out by KWB Lightfoot in the 1980s has not been deposited in the SMR. A half-page description is given in Grenfell and Morris 1970, and various tour guides have been produced, but the fullest description to date is that given by DB Hague in the Glamorgan County History (Pugh ed 1971, 433-4). At the time of excavation the site had been drawn by RCAHMW as part of their programme of recording of castles in Glamorgan, but no written description had been prepared.

There is no information in any of the published material on either of the two areas excavated within the castle (Cuttings A and B). However Hague includes a short discussion on the problem of the missing gate-towers, noting the presence of masonry beneath the present turf-cover on the line of the destroyed outer portion, although most of his remarks concern the date of the demolition.

Appendix Three: Archaeological records made during excavation

A. Context Catalogue

Cutting A

Number	Type	Description	Period (where known)
001	Layer	Turf and topsoil	Modern
002	Layer	Rubble deposit	Post-medieval or modern
003	Layer	Rubble deposit	Post-medieval or modern
004	Structure	Possible wall	Possibly medieval
005	Layer	Deposit	
006	Layer	Possible surface	Possibly medieval
014	Layer	Fill of 015	Modern
015	Cut	Cable trench	Modern
016	Layer	Rubble deposit	Possibly medieval
017	Layer	Gravel Surface	Modern

Cutting B

Number	Type	Description	Period (where known)
007	Layer	Gravel surface	Modern
008	Layer	Makeup deposit	
009	Layer	Floor or bedrock	
010	Layer	Floor surface	
011	Layer	Floor or bedrock	
018	Structure	Possible foundation	Possibly modern
019	Cut	Cable trench	Modern
020	Layer	Rubble deposit	
021	Layer	Fill of 019	Modern

Cutting C

Number	Type	Description	Period (where known)
012	Structure	Wall or masonry	Possibly medieval
013	Other	Single stone	Possibly medieval

B. Excavated features

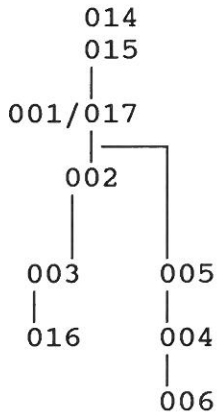
Cuttting A

This cutting was 14.5m long and 0.3m wide, and extended along the southern side of the bailey, from a point immediately east of the western doorway in the the south range to the western side of the gateway where it picked up a the trench of an electrical cable which had been laid prior to 1994. The western 7m of the modern ground surface on the line of this cutting has a slope of 10 degrees, increasing to over 20 degrees further east.

The western part of this cutting was cut through a 0.10m thickness of turf and topsoil (001) overlying a deposit of rubble in a similar loam to the topsoil but containing patches of mortar (002). The depth of the cutting at this point was 0.3m, and the rubble deposit was not bottomed. The rubble layer was traced for 7.6m from the western end of the cutting. At this point its eastern end could be seen to overly a deposit of small pieces of rubble set in a grey-brown sandy clay (003). The most characteristic feature of this deposit was the presence of fragments of limestone roofing slate, which were especially frequent at the top. They were not angled north-south, and there was therefore no reason to suppose that they had fallen from the roof of the south range. The top of 003 was visible in the modern ground surface; over its eastern end the turf and topsoil was replaced by a modern deposit of clay and chippings.

The eastern end of 003 overlay a 0.79m-wide band (016) in which the pieces of rubble were closely set and there was no roofing slate. This deposit abutted a possible wall (004) consisting of a single row of roughly-dressed blocks of limestone with no apparent bonding agent. This feature ran across the cutting from north to south, and was roughly in line with the eastern side of the steps leading from the wall-walk to the west of the gatehouse. The eastern side of wall 004 could be seen to overlie a rough surface composed of small pieces of rubble set in yellowish grey sandy clay (006). Overlying this was a deposit of sandy clay and chippings very similar in nature to 017 and probably also largely modern in origin. At its northern end, the trench cut the electricity cable trench which had been cut prior to 1994 (014/015).

Cutting A: Diagrammatic representation of contexts

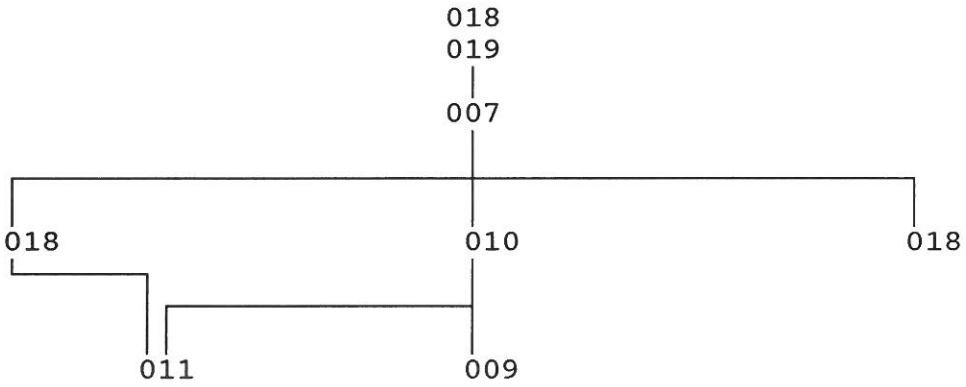


Cutting B

The initial trench (B1) dug in the chapel block encountered stone (009, 011) at the depth of only a few centimetres below the present ground surface, and failed to pick up the previous electricity cable trench. A revised trench (B2) was therefore cut closer to the south wall of the chapel block. The deposits underneath the modern overburden remained largely undisturbed by the cuttings and, since they were substantially the same in both cuttings, they will be described together. The cuttings were 11.2m long and 0.3m wide.

The present ground surface was composed of chippings in sandy clay (007). This was at least as thick as the maximum depth of the cutting alongside the dsouth wall, but at places futher north was only a few centimetres thick, particularly in the entrance and where it overlay an area of flat limestone, slightly inclined from west to east (009) encountered towards the western end of the chapel block. The eastern, lower, side of 009 was overlain by a firmly compacted surface of mixed light brown clay and rather darker loam, containing smaller pieces of stone (010). Projecting through the surface of 010 were further areas of pitched limestone (011), consisting of smaller pieces than 009 but probably part of the same deposit. It was not possible to tell in the small area excavated whether 009/011 was a man-made pitched floor or natural bedrock, which appears further west under the east side of the entrance to the central block. Most of the rest of the excavated area of the chapel block were covered by a layer of light brown clay containing fragments of rubble, mortar and charcoal. This was deeper than 0.12m, which was the maximum depth to which the cutting pentetrated. In the doorway it was replaced by a similar layer which contained a much higher proportion of rubble (020). The pre-1994 cable trench (019/021) had been cut through this deposit, and also ran along the northern side of a hemispherical mound of mortar (018) with a circumference of 0.44m at the base of the eastern jamb of the doorway.

Cutting B: Diagrammatic representation of contexts

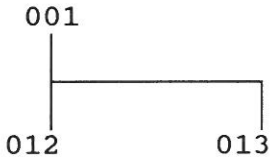


C. Features identified during the watching brief

Cutting C

The entire length of the trench dug to the south of the castle and most of that to the east cut into the topsoil, which was in places mixed with rubble and also contained patches of oyster shell. The exception was the western end of the east-west return of the trench east of the castle (Cutting C). Here a 0.96m width of stone rubblework was encountered, firmly mortared into a coherent mass with lime mortar (012). No faces were visible within the trench, though a unattached squared block of stone 0.27m square lay immediately to its south (013). Both 012 and 013 lay immediately below the topsoil. The contractors ceased digging when they encountered this feature and rerouted the trench 0.6m to the south, where at the depth of 0.3m they did not encounter any continuation of it.

Cutting C: Diagrammatic representation of contexts



Appendix Four: Catalogue of finds

Compiled by J Compton of GAT

Context	Finds	No	Date
003	Iron nail	1	
	Oyster shells	2	
	Slate fragments	5	Possibly medieval
007	Animal bone (tooth)		
	Oyster shell (freagments)		
	Burnt stone (fragments)		
	Bottle glass sherds	2	Post-medieval
	Clay pipe stem fragment	1	Post-medieval
	Sherd local red earthenware	1	Post-medieval
008	Animal bone fragments		

Only the slate fragments, which may be derived from the castle buildings, were submitted for specialist examination. J Hall reports:

> Five fragments of stone tile and slate were found. The slates came from two different souces, location unknown. Two fragments are of similar slate to fragments from Llantarnam (GGAT site 188). One fragment is made of local calcitic mudstone.

A full analysis can be found in the site archive.

Appendix Five: Catalogue of site archive

(Currently held at GGAT, Swansea, as Site no 243)

A	Final report	
B	Site data	a: Context records b: Levels data
C	Non-publication data	a: Catalogue of site drawings b: Site drawings
D	Photographs	a: Catalogue of photographs b: Colour slides c: Black and white negatives and contact prints
E	Finds	a: Catalogue of finds by context, with summary b: Details of storage information of finds Report on slates and stone tiles
I		Correspondence on administrative matters

There are no records in the categories F-H

Bibliography and abbreviations

Grenfell H and Morris B 1970	The Castles of Gower
RCAHMW	Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales)
Pugh TB (ed) 1971	Glamorgan County History vol iii: The Middle Ages

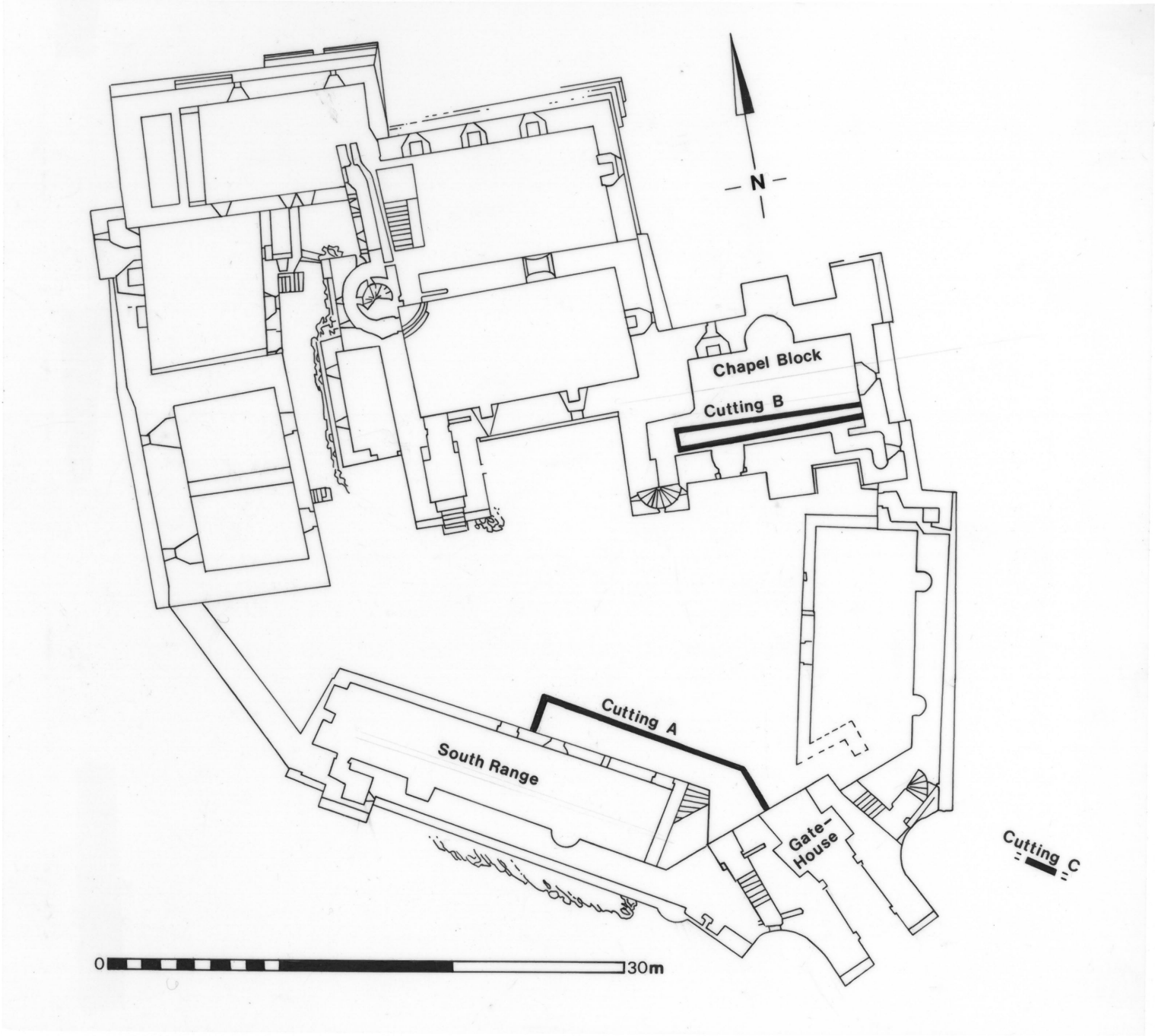


Figure one: Oystermouth Castle showing location of cuttings

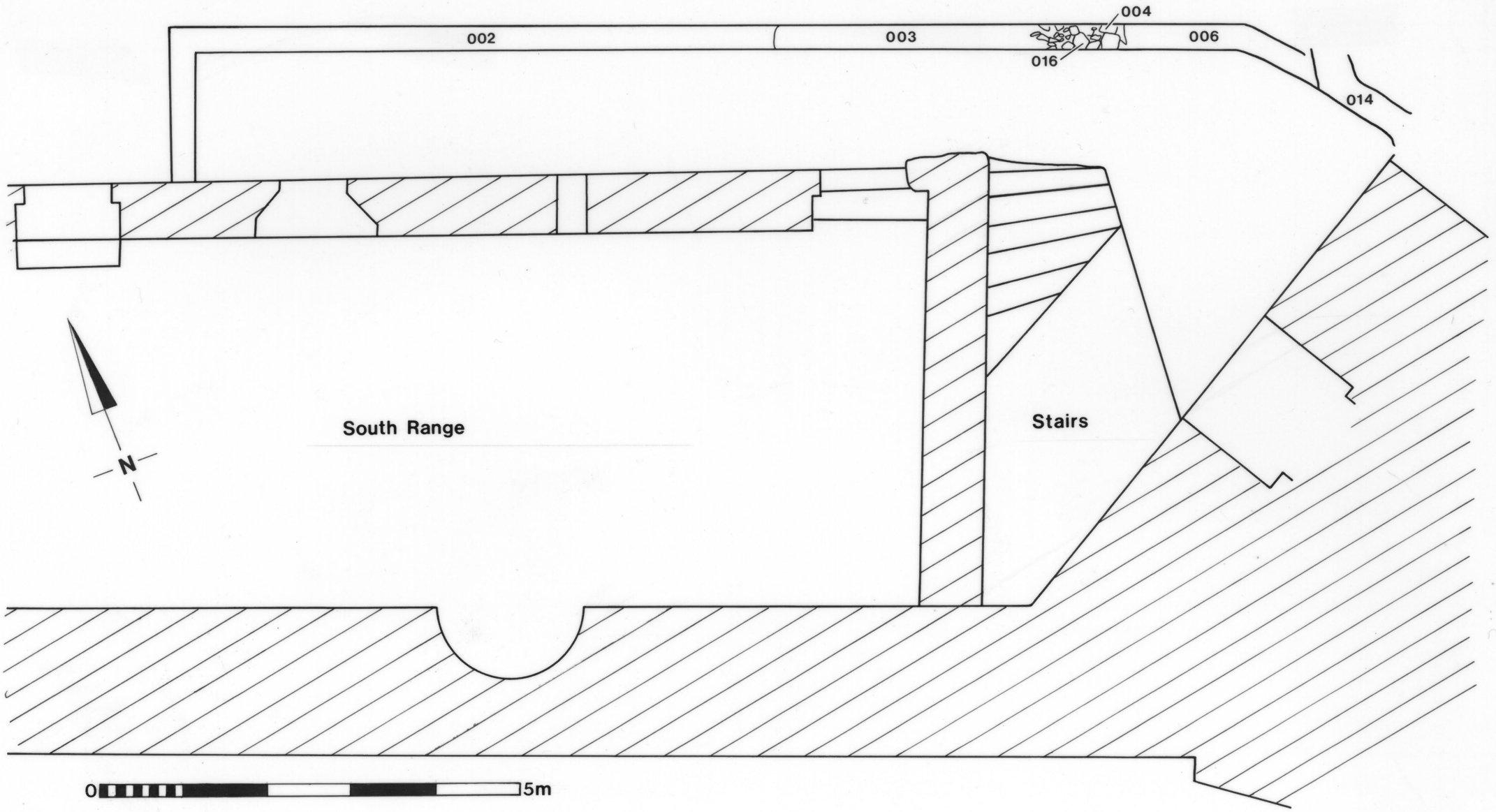


Figure two: Cutting A

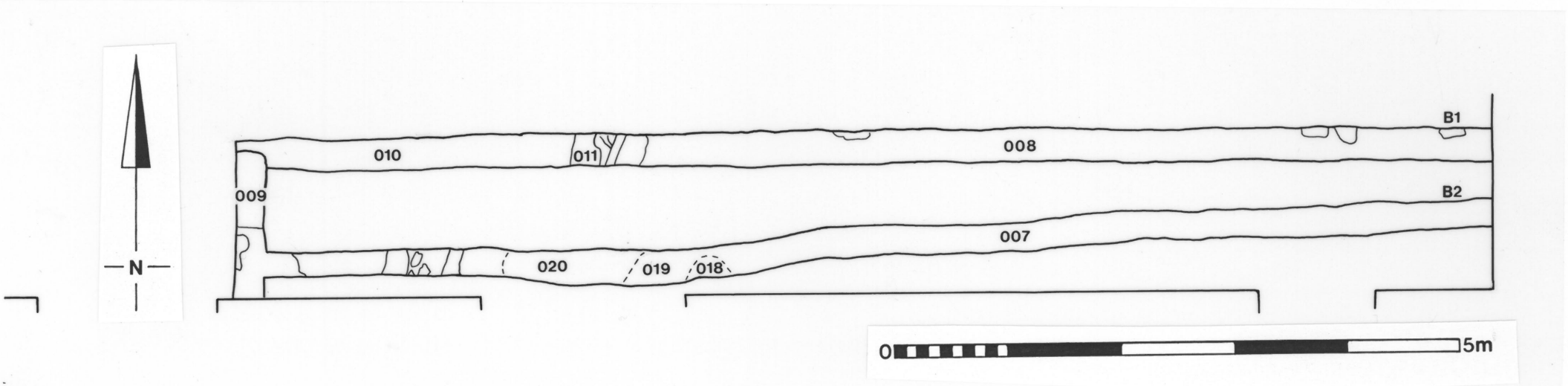


Figure three: Cutting B

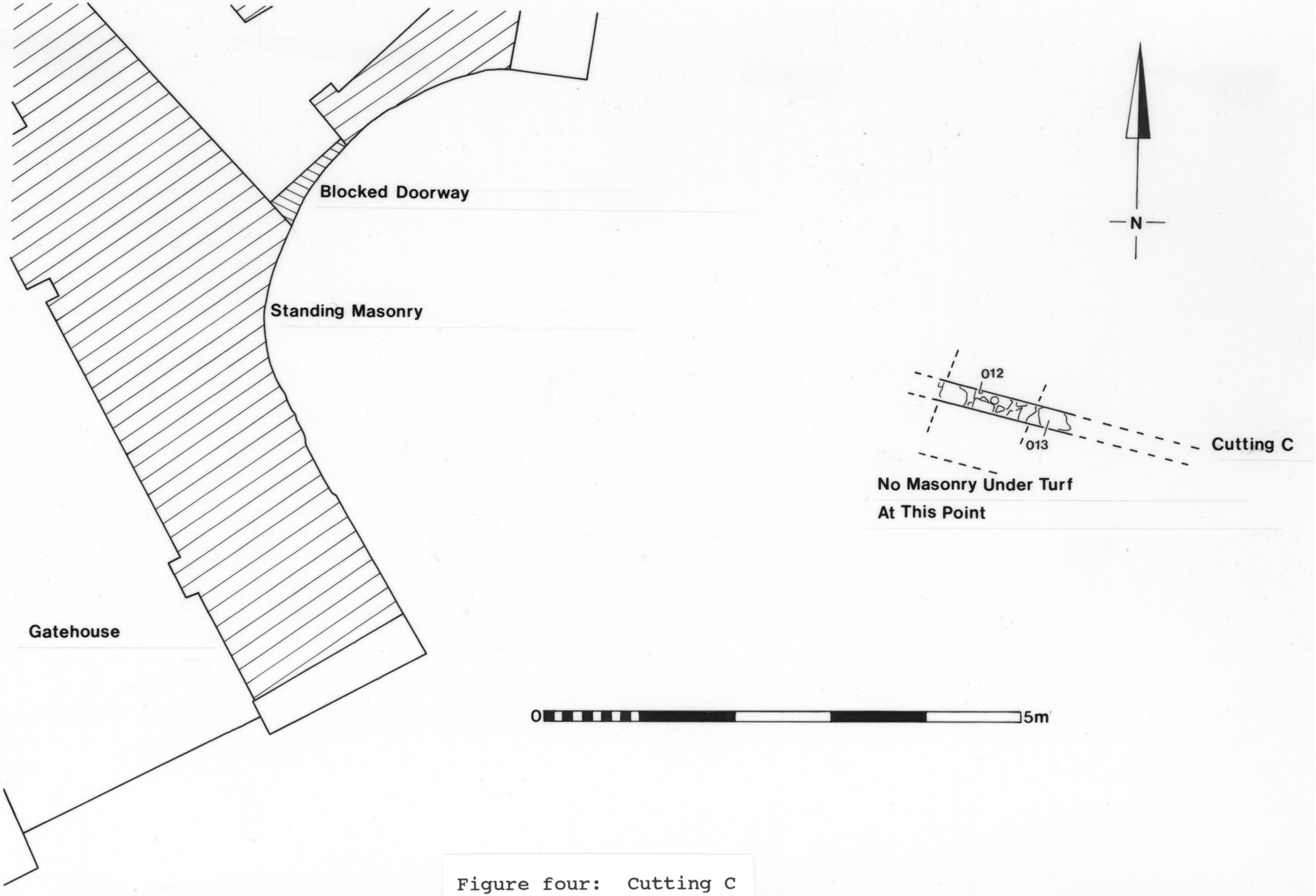


Figure four: Cutting C