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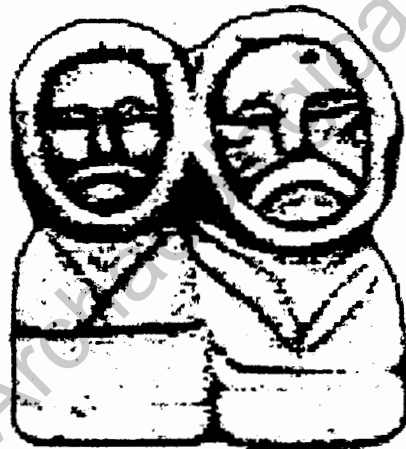
CHEPSTOW CASTLE, CHEPSTOW, MONMOUTHSHIRE:

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EXCAVATIONS OUTSIDE THE PORCH

OF THE GREAT HALL 1999

By D E Schlee, MSc



CAP Report No. 109

Cambrian Archaeological Projects Limited

CHEPSTOW CASTLE, CHEPSTOW, MONMOUTHSHIRE:

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OF THE GREAT HALL 1999

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Methodology	1
3	Pre-excavation Observations	2
4	Descriptions and Discussion of the Features	3
4.1	Overlying Stratigraphy	3
4.2	The Relieving Arch	3
4.3	Buttress 315	3
4.4	Early Stone Wall Footings	4
4.5	Wall 312	4
4.6	Wall 314	4
4.7	The Porch Step	5
4.8	Stone Lined Feature 320	5
4.9	The Fills of Feature 320	6
4.10	The Stone Slab and Cobble Surface	7
5	Results	7
5.1	Phase 1	7
5.2	Phase 2	8
5.3	Phase 3	8
5.4	Phase 4	8
6	Conclusions and Recommendations	9
7	Acknowledgements	9
	Appendix I: List of Contexts	10
	Appendix II: Summary of finds	11

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1	Location of Excavation
Figure 2	Plan of Excavated Features
Figure 3	Proposed Building Phases
Figure 4	Photograph of the Trench and Porch Doorway
Figure 5	Photograph of the Southern Half of the Trench
Figure 6	Photograph of the Relieving Arch and Buttress
Figure 7	Illustration of the Great Hall (circa 1778)
Figure 8	Section Through Pit 320 and Associated Features
Figure 9	Drawing of Basal Fragment of Bristol Redcliff Jug (context 316)
Figure 10	Phased Matrix of Excavated Features and Deposits

September 1999

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1 Introduction

An excavation of the area outside the Porch to the Great Hall of Chepstow Castle was undertaken by Duncan Schlee and Jerry Bond of Cambrian Archaeological Projects. The Work was commissioned on by Rick Turner on behalf of Cadw and was undertaken between in July 1999.

The Great Hall and the rest of the domestic buildings of the Lower Ward, are understood to have been built at the behest of Roger Bigod III, probably between 1272 and 1282. The kitchen building was begun in 1282 and was presumably an addition to the Great Hall. At that time access to the Great Hall from the Lower Bailey would have been through the Porch. The Porch was believed to have appeared much as it does today, but with a flight of steps leading from the Lower Bailey to the doorway.

Transcriptions of building accounts of Roger Bigod III (Rick Turner pers. Comm.) refer in 1272 to a building called 'La Gloriet' which contained a suite of apartments for Roger Bigod Earl of Norfolk. This building is presumed to have occupied the same sit as the Great Hall, Porch and associated rooms, or to have been incorporated into the later buildings.

A preliminary excavation of the same area was undertaken in 1998 (CAP Report No. 48). This work was intended to investigate any surviving archaeological evidence of the steps that would have led up to the Porch. The excavation found no evidence for the steps, but did reveal footings and a stone built rectangular feature that it was thought may have been part of a formal entrance structure. These earlier excavations were backfilled.

Having decided to reveal and consolidate the stone footings located in 1998, The 1999 excavation was required to fully expose and completely excavate the remaining deposits, to reveal sufficient of the masonry footings to understand their sequence, and to enable consolidation of the remains for public display.

2 Methodology

The excavation involved:

- The removal of the previous excavation backfill.
- Hand excavation of any remaining deposits within the excavation area.
- Recovery and interpretation of datable artifacts.
- Written and photographic recording of the exposed features and deposits.
- Plans, sections, and elevations drawn at 1:20.
- Report production.

3 Pre-excavation Observations

Before excavation, significant observations could be made about the architectural remains above ground that have a bearing on the interpretation of the building sequence.

- Some of the stone-work immediately in front of the Porch doorway has been re-pointed and probably partly re-built during Ministry of Works repairs. This has obscured some of the original structural relationships between the Porch and the exposed wall footings. It is suggested that some of these repairs might be removed during consolidation in order to clarify the building sequence.
- The existing grassy slope reflects an incline in the survival of the underlying masonry, this incline strongly suggests that upper courses of the stone footings have been removed (in the relatively recent past) to allow the ground to be landscaped.
- Although previously presumed to be the remnant of an 18th century building built against the Great Hall, the scar of wall 315 actually appears to be bonded to the wall. This suggests they are probably contemporary. In addition the base of the wall appears to be bonded to the relieving arch over which it is built, again suggesting they are contemporary. Finally, there are traces of decorative raking plinths on both sides of the wall towards its base. These most probably an original architectural detail. It therefore seems likely that wall scar 315 represents the remains of an original buttress extending from the south wall of the hall.

An illustration of the interior of the north side of the Lower Bailey dated to around 1778 (see figure 7) gives an idea of the appearance of the Great Hall and Porch at this time. It has been assumed that the building face to the west of the Porch is the southern wall of the Great Hall. During the excavation it was noticed that there were several discrepancies between what is illustrated, and what is visible today. This suggests that what appears in the illustration is in fact the face of a building (now demolished) built up against the south wall of the Great Hall. It is however, also possible that the illustration is simply inaccurate.

- The low arch visible beneath the lower ladder does not appear to exist in the existing wall. If it is the relieving arch that is visible in the wall, it is in the wrong place and much too high.
- The existing wall scars of buttress 315 are not of the same character, or in the same position as those illustrated. Alternatively, the window illustrated is in a different position to the window in the south wall of the Great Hall.
- The pitch of the roof suggests it cannot span the Great Hall. The second ladder appears to be leant against a tower which may represent the line of the true southern wall of the Great Hall.

- Although unclear in the fuzzy reproduction of the print that was to hand, there is a possible hint of a pitched roof built against the west face of the Porch. The excavated foundations may relate to this, but it seems unlikely.

4 Descriptions and Discussion of the Features

In this section each feature is described, outlining the evidence for and against the phasing presented in section five. Frequent reference should be made to the photographs and plans as an aid to understanding the text.

4.1 Overlying Stratigraphy

The backfill from the previous excavation was removed, revealing the section cut through the fills of feature 320. Topsoil was also removed to the north of this section, revealing previously unexcavated wall foundations. The western edge of the previous excavation was extended by approximately 0.60m in order to ascertain the extent of the wall footings to the west.

The shallowness of the soil overlying the buried features and the degree of truncation of the masonry footings that has occurred, it was highly likely that the overlying stratigraphy would be mixed and relatively late. This turned out to be the case. The only reliably stratified deposits were from layer 317 above surface 319 and from the fills of feature 320.

Layer 317 was a mixed layer of soil and demolition debris and contained glass and pottery fragments dateable to the 18th century. The fills of feature 320 are described in section 4.9.

The archaeological features and deposits lay below the topsoil (301), separated by a thin layer of pea grit. This grit is presumed to be derived from the pea grit in the mortar of the castle walls, having been washed out over the years.

4.2 The Relieving Arch

At first, the presence of the relieving arch was confusing since it appeared to post date wall footings that were assumed to be later than or contemporary with the construction of the Great Hall. Upon reflection, however, it was clear that the purpose of the relieving arch was to span existing wall foundations which might cause structural problems if the later wall was built directly on top of them.

4.3 Buttress 315

The buttress was likewise intended to spread the load borne by the relieving arch. The domed shape of the stone and mortar beneath the relieving arch probably indicates the southern extent of the buttress over the earlier footings.

4.4 Early Stone Wall Footings

Due to the later construction of the Great Hall and feature 320, it is difficult to ascertain the full extent of the early wall footings. While it is clear that footings 313 are earlier, it is less clear how 313 is related to footings 314. The relationship between 313 and footings 312 is also uncertain. All or some of these walls may represent the remains of 'La Gloriet' (an earlier building on the site of the Great Hall). Alternatively they may be in some way associated with the construction of the vaulted cellar that runs beneath the Great Hall at this point.

4.5 Wall 312

The structural relationships of this wall are unfortunately obscured. The western end of the wall does not have a clear face of dressed stones, suggesting that originally it continued running west, but has been truncated by the later slab and stone surface.

The eastern end of wall 312 is also ambiguous since its relationship with the Porch building is unfortunately slightly obscured by later consolidation. Its south face appears to continue east and either bonds with the Porch building or else the Porch has been built over it. There are two possible explanations for this. Wall 312 may belong to an earlier building, the eastern part of which was used to form the foundations of the Porch, while the western part was demolished. Note that the top of the wall scar of 312 is visible in the western face of the Porch, at the same level as the Porch sill. The buttress for the corner of the Porch building appears to be of a different build to wall 312, and to have been built around it rather than keyed in.

Alternatively, the Porch may originally have had a second room to the west which was demolished as part of later alterations to the Porch entrance. This explanation is less satisfactory when one considers the faced stonework of the Porch and buttress in relation to the position of a proposed demolished wall.

The south face of wall 312 only survives to a height of two courses of stones. These appear to be built upon what appears to be a weathered reddish bedrock surface. To the west of the trench, south of the stone slabs, this horizon seems to have been leveled up with cobbles.

4.6 Wall 314

Wall 314 is a difficult wall to explain. Its relationships with the other masonry was not particularly well defined. It is possible that at the level to which it is exposed, what is visible is mostly a combination of offset wall footings for the south wall of the Great Hall combined with the north wall of feature 320. At a lower level it may be associated with the walls of the cellar beneath the Great Hall. It may also be associated with wall 313, representing part of an earlier building, although it is perhaps difficult to see why they should have built directly over wall 214 while

choosing to build a relieving arch over wall 313. The implication of the relieving arch and buttress is that wall 214 already existed.

4.7 The Porch Step

The relationship of the Porch step with the other walls of the Porch and the newly exposed footings is very important in understanding the entire building sequence. Unfortunately these relationships are obscured by Ministry Works consolidation, and possible rebuilding of the upper courses of the step. A number of observations can however be made which may explain the sequence. Ideally these could be tested by removal of the later repair work.

The Porch step appears to be at least constructionally earlier than the masonry faces of pit 320 which abut it. The step also appears to be bonded with (or perhaps more likely keyed into) what are believed to be the earlier parts of wall 312 (see discussion above). A similar relationship is hypothesized between the Porch step and wall 314). The faced stone blocks of the Porch doorway appear to be built upon the Porch step stonework.

An explanation that accounts for these observations also supports the suggestion made in the discussion of wall 312 that the Porch building is built above the footings of 'La Gloriet', the earlier building believed to have occupied the same site. The stonework of the Porch step may be a block of masonry forming a foundation platform over the earlier walls, upon which the Porch is built. Feature 320 was subsequently constructed against the Porch step, utilizing the earlier wall footings that extended west from beneath the Porch.

4.8 Stone Lined Feature 320

The complexity of this area is compounded by the masonry-lined feature directly in front of the Porch (see Figure 8). The north face of wall 312 (discussed above), forms the south side of feature 320, and appears to abut the Porch step. This suggests that the north face of the wall was re-built when the pit was constructed, although there is no clear evidence of an earlier face within the wall (at least at the exposed level

The south face of wall 314 forms the north side of feature 320 and this too abuts the Porch step. It is possible that this too is a re-facing of an earlier wall that pre-dates the Porch step, since there is possible evidence for an earlier wall face within 314. Possible evidence to prove this is unfortunately obscured by Ministry of Works repairs to the Porch step.

The west edge of feature 320 is built up against earlier wall 313. At the level at which the footings are exposed, this wall appears to be bonded with wall 312, but this may not be the case with the lower courses.). It is possible that feature 320 is built within a large cut which can be assumed to have been necessary for the construction of the cellar beneath the Great Hall.

The north and west walls of the feature are 'battered' (sloping inwards towards the base) while the south and north walls are vertical. No functional reason for this springs to mind, but the difference might reflect the earlier origins of the north and west walls of the feature, which may themselves have originally been sloped.

The function of this feature remains unclear. Apart from suggesting it had relatively early origins, the fills of the feature did not offer any clues as to its function. The rectangular possible post hole cut into wall 314 may or may not be associated with it (the fill of the post hole contained 19th century pottery). Any evidence that a similar posthole may have existed within wall 312 would have been destroyed by the 'contouring' of the footing for landscaping purposes.

It has been suggested that the feature may have been part of a drawbridge like arrangement to cut off access to the Porch. This remains a possibility. Due to the truncation of the upper courses of the walls it is impossible to say whether the feature was housed within a second Porch room, or was an external feature.

4.9 The Fills of Feature 320

The remaining fills of the pit were excavated down to the same level as the previous excavation. a small sounding was made to ascertain the depth of the pit, but complete excavation was impractical within the constraints of the excavation. The fills are represented in section in Figure 8. Generally, the same context numbers as were attributed in the 1998 excavation were used and are reproduced below.

- 301- Topsoil (which included bottle manufacturing waste).
- 302- Similar to 301 but containing more mortar derived pea grit.
- 303- Modern cut through upper fill 306 within feature 320.
- 304- Clay silty layer below 302 within cut 303.
- 305- Thin layer of mortar below layer 304 in base of cut 303.
- 306- Dump of bottle manufacturing waste-kiln remains and bottle fragments. These waste products can be dated to between 1764 and 1766 when bottles were being manufactured within the great hall for the Bristol wine trade by Williams, Dunbar & Co. of Bristol.
- 307- Limestone infill. This appears to be rubble infill, at least 0.70m in depth. The deposit was composed of sub angular limestone cobbles up to 0.20m in length. From the section it appears this deposit was tipped in from western end.
- 308- Shale in-filling. Deposit composed of angular shale fragments up to 0.10m in length. Again, this deposit is tipped in from the west. This deposit contained a fragment of pale green glazed pottery identified as a basal fragment of a

pinch base Bristol Redcliff Jug, dating from 1250 to 1500 (Paul Courtney pers. comm.). This fragment was recovered in the 1998 excavation.

- 309- A dump deposit composed predominantly of fluvial gravels with occasional shale inclusions.
- 316- A similar matrix to 309, but with limestone blocks up to 0.3m in length. Some of these stones were dressed and are thought likely to be derived from the upper courses of feature 320. This layer came down to the stone base of feature 320. A second fragment of the same jug base found in context 308 was recovered from this context in the 1999 excavation. This suggests the lower deposits of the feature were deposited at the same time.

Although not fully excavated, a small hole was dug (through context 316) to ascertain the depth of the feature. The flat, level, stone-lined base of the feature was located 2.30m below the level of the Porch step.

4.10 Stone Slab and Cobble Surface 319

The stone slabs and possible stone surface to the west of the surviving stone fittings are presumed to be later. They appear to overly the earlier footings and their construction may have resulted in the truncation of a westerly continuation of wall 312 and possibly walls 313 and 314. This surface seems most likely to be associated with a range of buildings built up against the south wall of the Great Hall in the 18th century when the hall was used as a bottle factory. The alignment of stone slabs resembles a path and appears as if it would originally continued southwards. The relationship of the surface with wall footings 312, 313 and 314 is unclear since these would appear to be earlier than the 18th century. It is possible that if this was an 18th century surface, its associated walls (which would have overlain the earlier footings) may have been removed during landscaping of the Lower Bailey.

5 Results

The masonry wall footings revealed during this excavation indicate that the building sequence is more complicated than previously assumed, but without actually deconstructing the footings it is not possible to say exactly what the relationships between some of the features are. It is hoped that the interpretations outlined in this report offer the most likely explanations for what was found. Assuming this, the sequence can be divided into four main phases. These phases are described below, and are represented in figure 10.

5.1 Phase 1

This phase consists of features that are either demonstrably or hypothetically earlier than the south wall of the Great Hall. There are two possible explanations of this.

Either they are part of 'La Gloriet', the building that pre-dates the construction of the Great Hall, or they are features associated with the construction of the cellar beneath the Great Hall.

Wall 313 is spanned by the relieving arch and is therefore earlier. The relationship between 313 and 314 is less certain due to obscuring mortar. 314 is presumed to run beneath the Porch, largely by comparison with 312, although there is at present no evidence to confirm or refute this assumption due to Ministry of Works repairs to the Porch.

The relationship between wall 313 and 312 is also tentative. Due to its distance from the wall of the Great Hall, it is less likely that wall 312 is associated with the cellars. 312 may represent part of a building pre-dating the Great Hall. The gap between walls 313 and 312 (which would have existed before the construction of feature 320) may represent a doorway. Wall 312 appears either to be bonded to the base of the Porch, or to be an earlier wall over which the Porch was built.

5.2 Phase 2

Phase 2 relates to the building of the Great Hall and the porch which are assumed to be contemporary. Both must therefore post date wall 313. The relationship between the Porch and walls 314 and 312 is less certain, being dependent on their relationship with wall 313. From the available evidence it is more likely that they pre-date the Porch. If footings 314 and 312 were the remains of an entrance to the Porch that was later demolished, one might expect some evidence of roof and wall scars on the face of the Porch to have survived. If wall 312 was later than the Porch, one would not expect the walls to be bonded (which they appear to be).

5.3 Phase 3

Phase 3 is represented by the construction of stone lined feature 320. Although, the relationships between the various walls are obscured by mortar, the west wall of feature 320 is clearly later than 313. That the north and south walls abut the Porch (while apparently being bonded to wall 312), suggests that feature 320 is later than or contemporary with the Porch.

5.4 Phase 4

Phase 4 is represented by the slab surface 319. Although its associations with walls 313, 314 and 312 are not entirely clear, it appears most likely to be later as it is overlain by 18th century pottery and glass. It must be assumed that the walls that would have accompanied this surface (see section 3) have been removed when the ground outside the Great Hall was landscaped.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The interpretations presented in this report suggests that at least some of the exposed masonry appears to pre-date the construction of the Porch and Great Hall.

What is still not clear is whether these footings are the remains of 'La Gloriet' which occupied the same site before construction of the Great Hall, or are instead related to the construction of the cellar running beneath the Great Hall.

Building accounts relating to the construction of the Great Hall have recently been transcribed. The Great Hall, Porch and other associated chambers are built on the site of, or incorporate fabric from a building described in 1272 as 'La Gloriet', a private set of apartments for Roger Bigod Earl of Norfolk. The kitchen was begun in 1282 and seems to have been added to the Great Hall. References after 1282 for the Great Hall block only refer to Modifications, including a 1292 reference to plastering and painting, some of which survives within the Porch (Rick Turner pers. comm.).

It seems probable that wall footings 312 appear to pre-date the construction of the Porch and Great Hall are most likely the remains of part of 'La Gloried'.

Recent study of existing plans of the Great Hall and cellar, suggests that wall 314 could is probably the back wall of the cellar (Rick Turner peers. Comm.). The structural integrity of the cellar probably necessitated the relieving arch and butress in the wall of the overlying Great Hall.

The function of rectangular feature 320 also remains obscure. Due to its width and alignment it is presumably contemporary with the Porch, but since its upper courses have been removed in order to landscape the grassy bank that covered the footings, its exact relationships are uncertain. The fragments of Bristol Redcliff green glazed pottery (figure 9) recovered from the lower fills of feature 320 can be dated to between 1250 and 1500. This suggests that feature 320 was probably intentionally backfilled soon after its construction (probably between 1272 and 1282). As such, pit 320 may never have actually fulfilled the function for which it was originally constructed. Alternatively, it must have been backfilled some time before 1500

The paved surface and possible adjacent cobbled surface are both thought to be of later date, possibly associated with the use of the Great Hall as a bottle factory in the 18th century. Unfortunately insufficient of this feature was revealed to be certain of its associations. It does however appear to overly, and possibly truncate a possible westerly continuation of wall 312, and appears not to be contemporary with the weathered surface upon which wall 312 is constructed.

7 Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Jerry Bond for working on the excavation, Rick Turner, and the staff at Chepstow Castle for their help, kindness and cups of coffee.

Appendix I: Summary of contexts

- 301 Topsoil
- 302 Fill of 303
- 303 Construction cut for modern lawn edging
- 304 Fill of 303
- 305 Fill of 303
- 306 Deposit of bottle waste
- 307 Limestone infill
- 308 Shale infill
- 309 Gravel infill
- 310 Same as 301
- 311 Subsoil
- 312 Foundation
- 313 Foundation
- 314 Foundation
- 315 Buttress
- 316 Similar to 309
- 317 Same as 311
- 318 Clay layer below 319
- 319 Stone slab and cobble surface
- 320 Stone lined feature

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Appendix II: Summary of finds

- 301 Pottery
Late medieval floor tile fragment x 1
North Devon Gravel Tempered Ware (17/mid 18th C)x 37
Glass waste
Stoneware (18/19th C) x2
Westerwald German Stoneware (18th C) x 1
Pearlware(18/19th C) x 3
- Glass
- 304 Pottery
- 306 Pottery
- 306 Glass waste (18th C?)
- 306 Glass bottle fragments
- 306 Ceramic roof tiles
- 306 Clay tobacco pipe fragments (1810-1870?)
- 307 Pottery
- 307 Glass waste
- 308 Pottery
Basal fragment of green glazed pinch based Bristol Redcliff jug, dated from 1250 to 1500.
- 316 Pottery
Basal fragments of green glazed pinch based Bristol Redcliff jug, dated from 1250 to 1500. One of these fragments joins to the fragment from 308.
- 316 Metal slag
- 316 Animal bone
- 317 Pottery
Bristol/ Staffordshire Mottled Stoneware (18/19th C) x 2
Bristol/Staffordshire Slipware (Late 17/early 18th C) x 3
Local Red Earthenware (late 18/early 19th C) x 3
North Devon Gravel Tempered Ware (17/mid 18th C)x 2
Salt Glazed Stoneware (18th C) x2
China (19th C) x4
English Stoneware (18th C) x1
English Brown Stoneware (18/19th C) x3
- 317 Glass waste
- 317 Clay tobacco pipe fragments (1610-40?x 1;1660-80? x1)
- 317 Animal bone

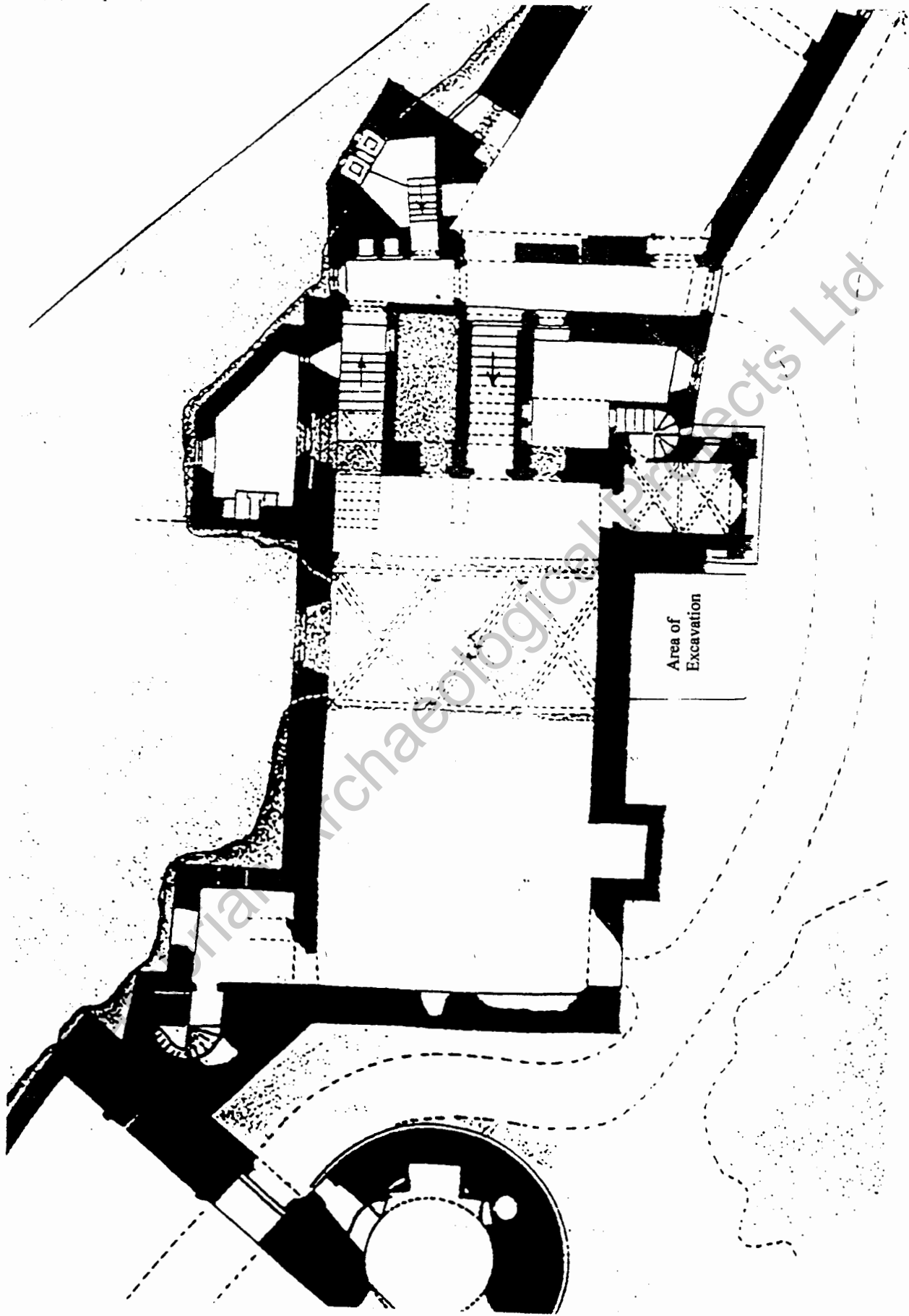


Figure 1: Location of Excavation

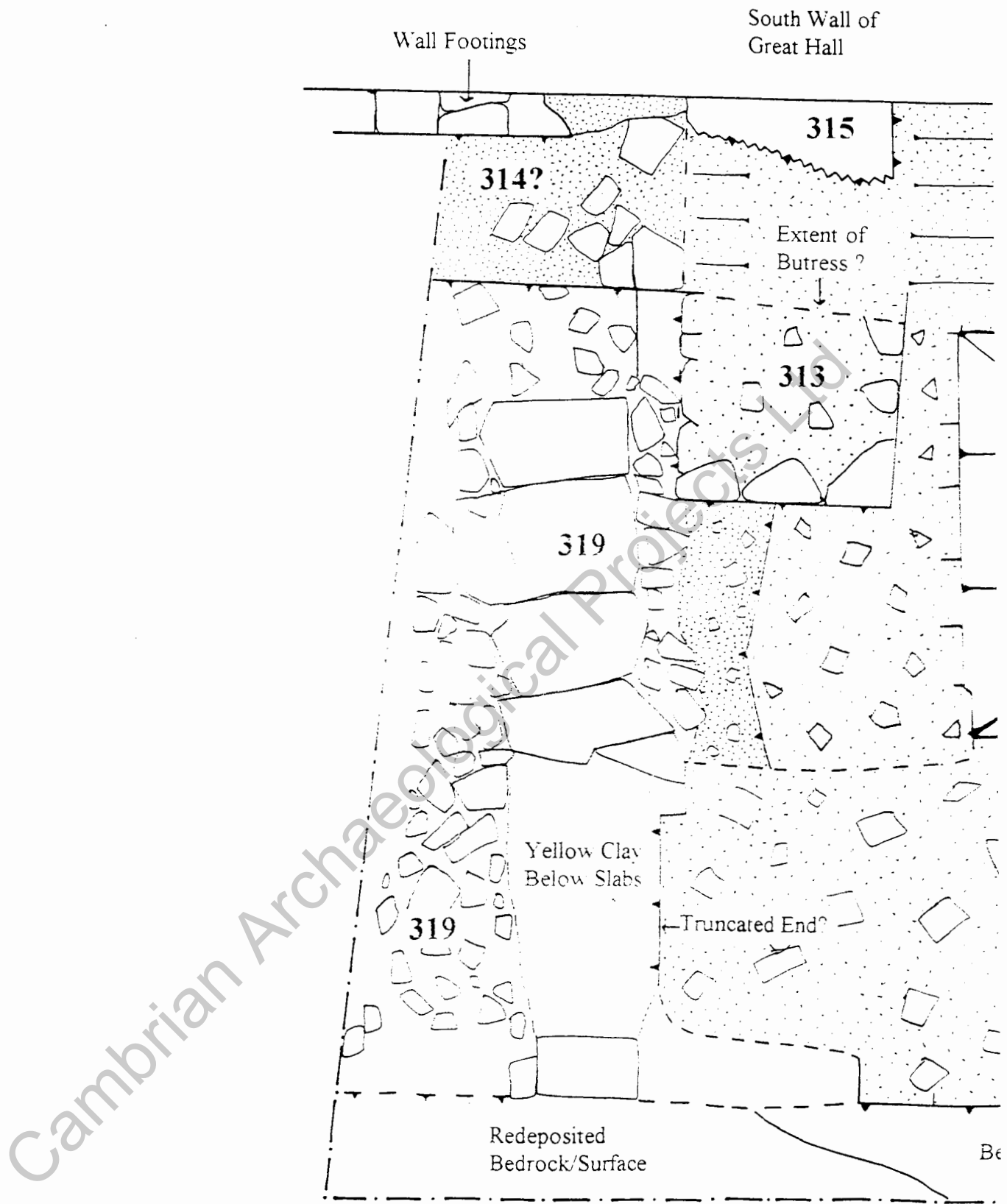


Figure 2: Plan of Excavated Features

pringer for relieving Arch

Wall Footings?

Ministry of Works Repair

314

← Butt Joint

320

Porch Step

← Butt Joint

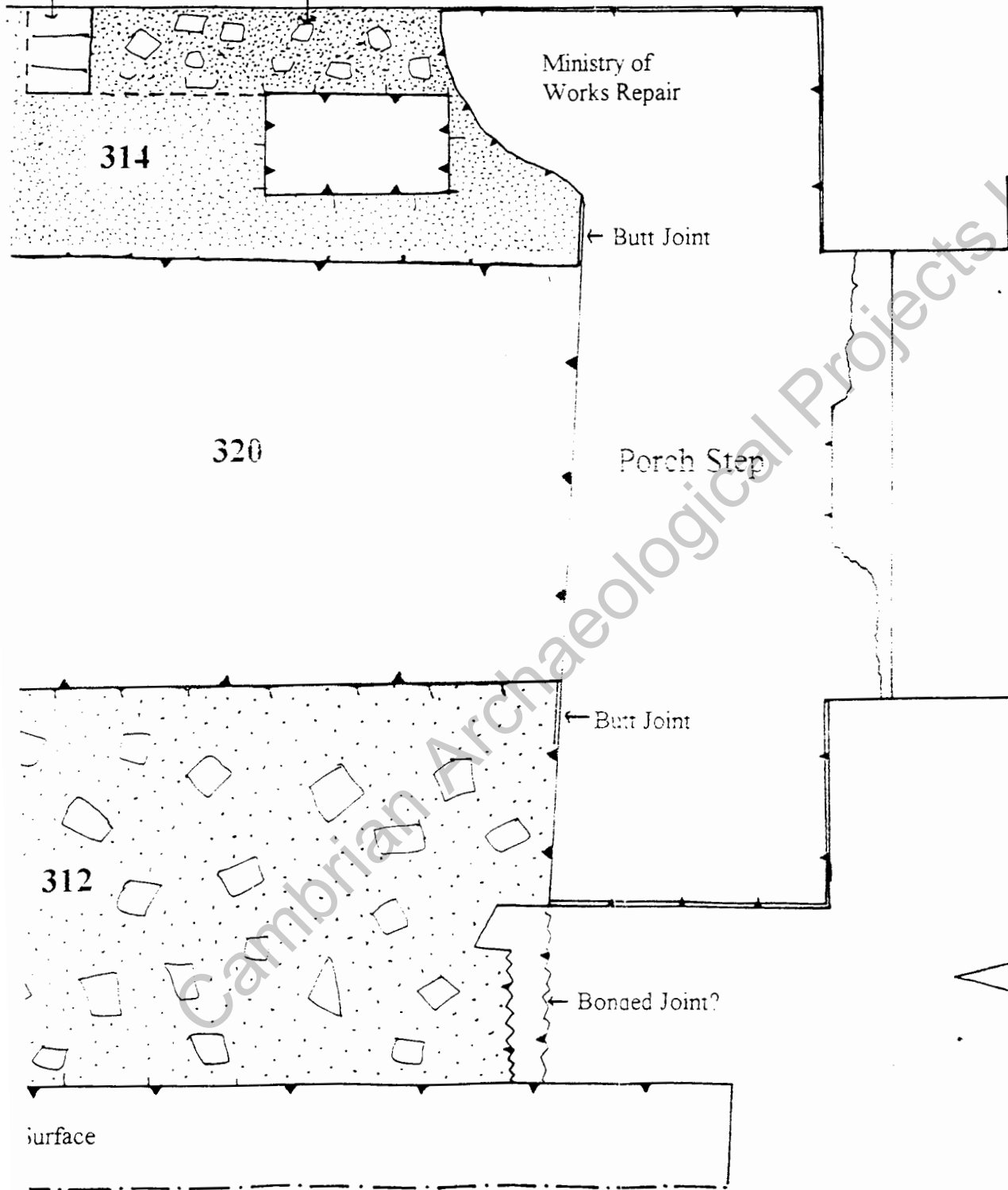
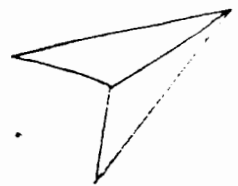
312

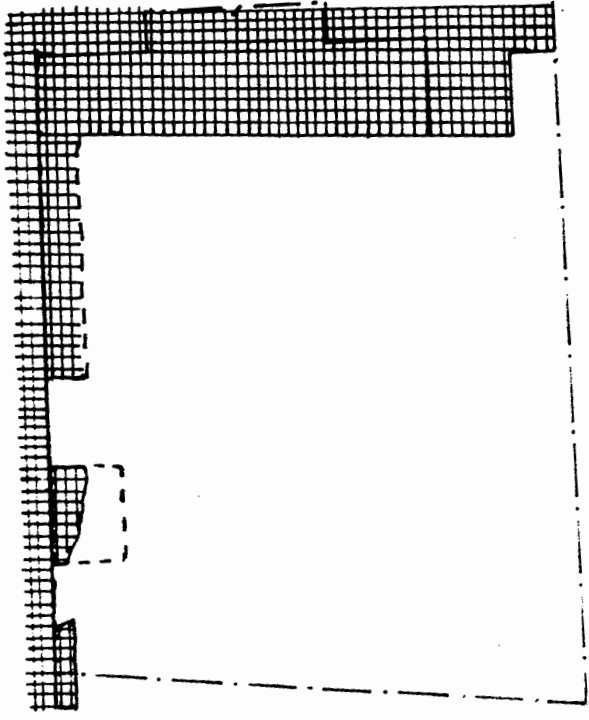
← Bonded Joint?

Surface

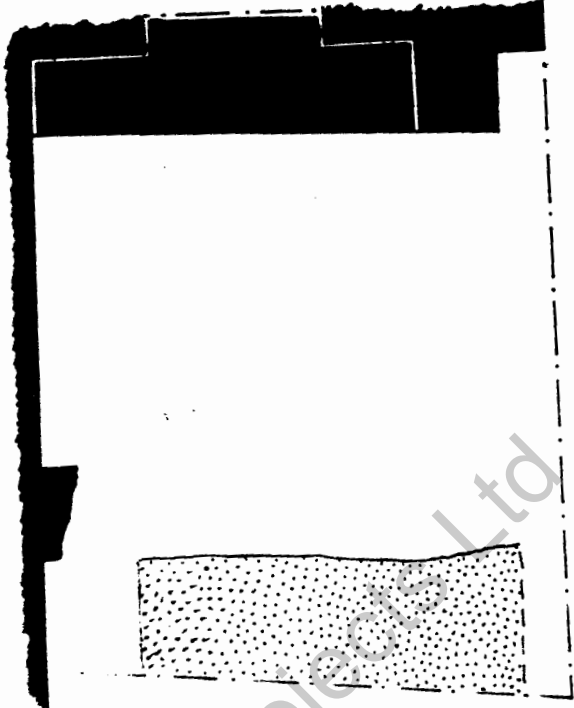
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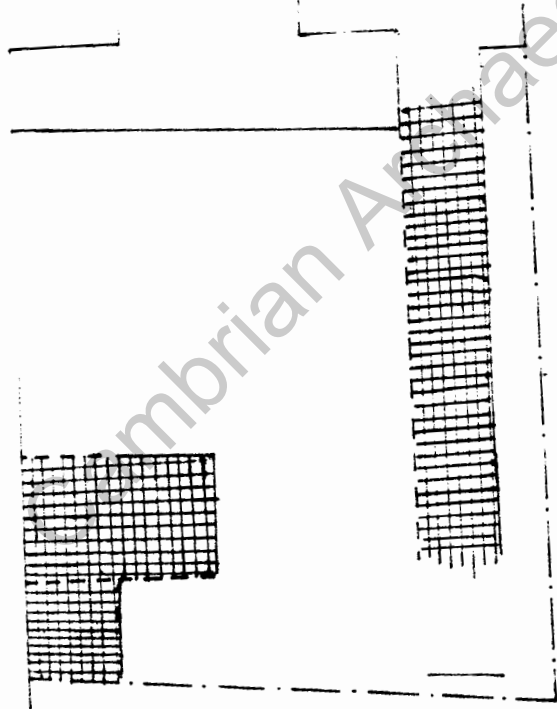




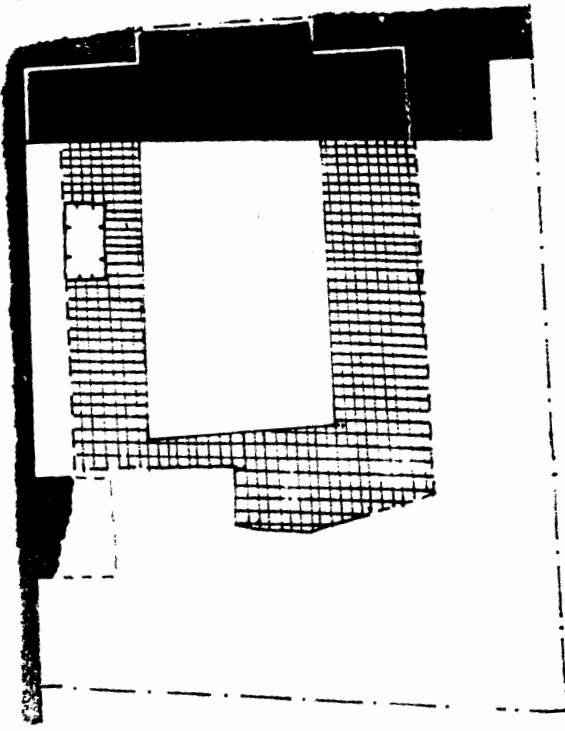
Phase 2



Phase 4



Phase 1



Phase 3

Figure 3: Proposed Building Phases

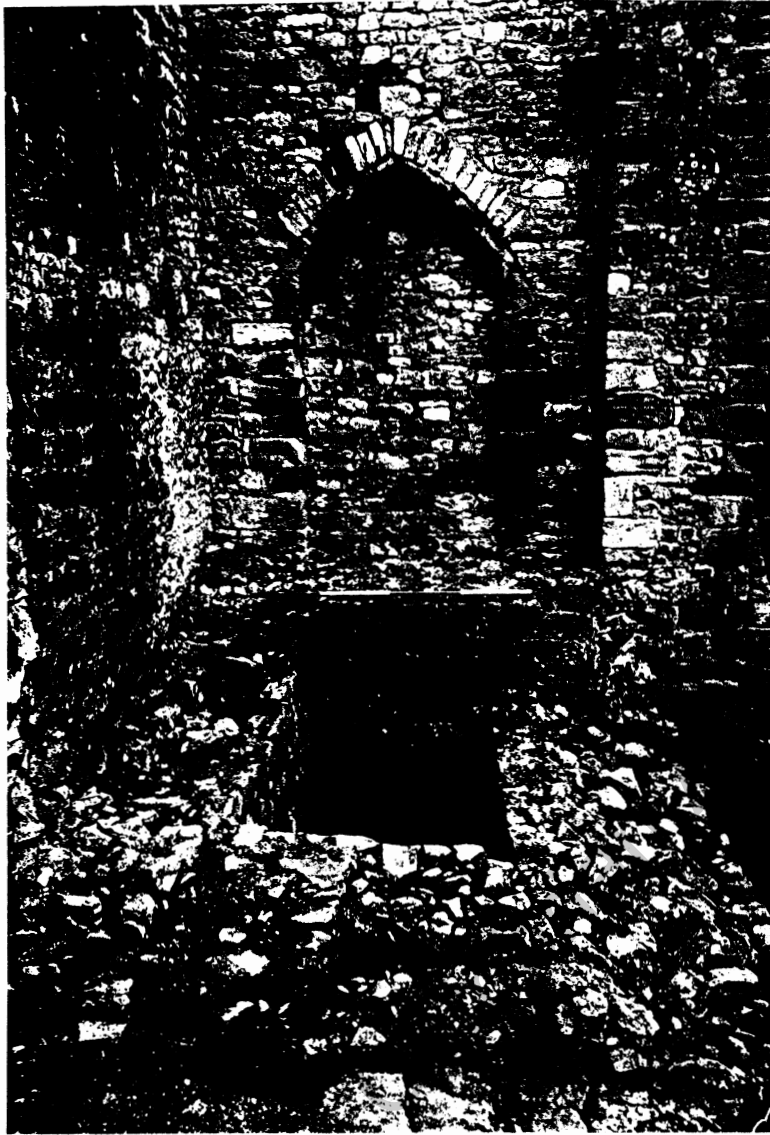


Figure 4: The Trench and Porch Doorway



Figure 5: The Southern Half of the Trench



Figure 6: The Relieving Arch and Buttress

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Figure 7: Illustration of the Great Hall (circa. 1778)

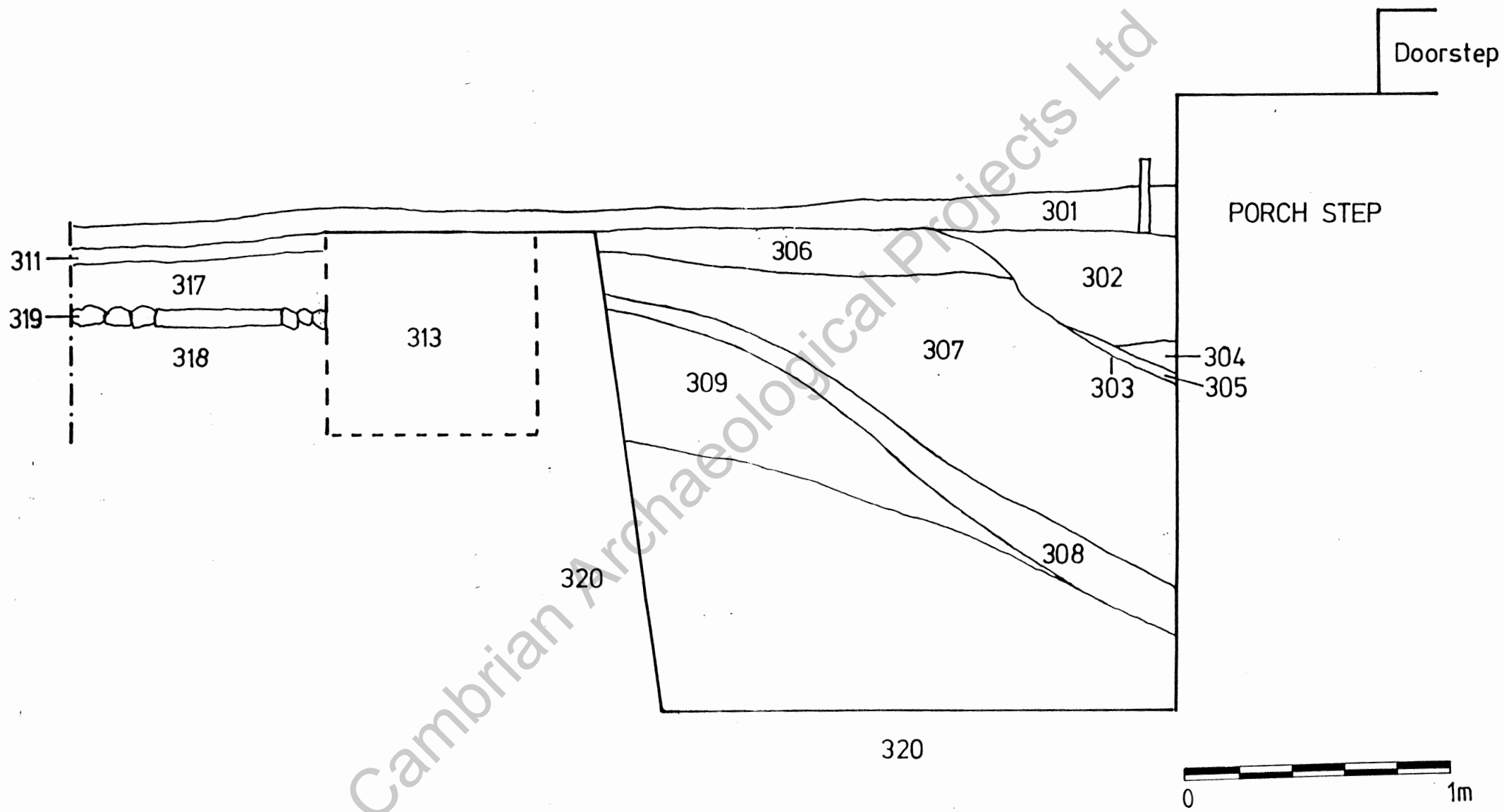


Figure 8: Section Through Pit 230 and Associated Features

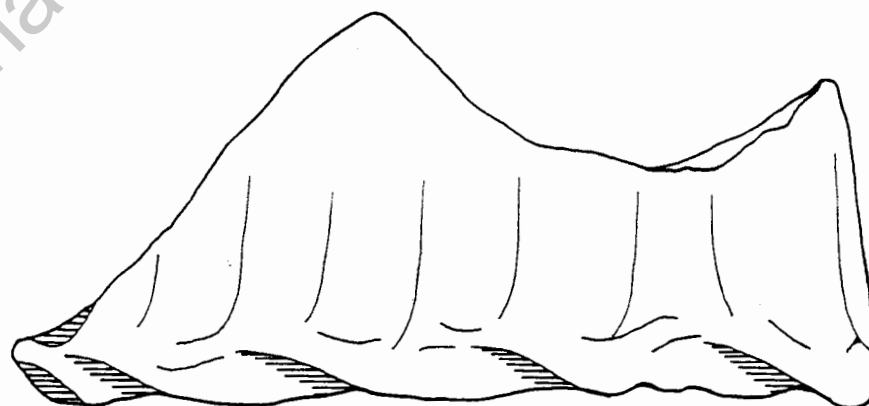
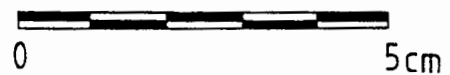
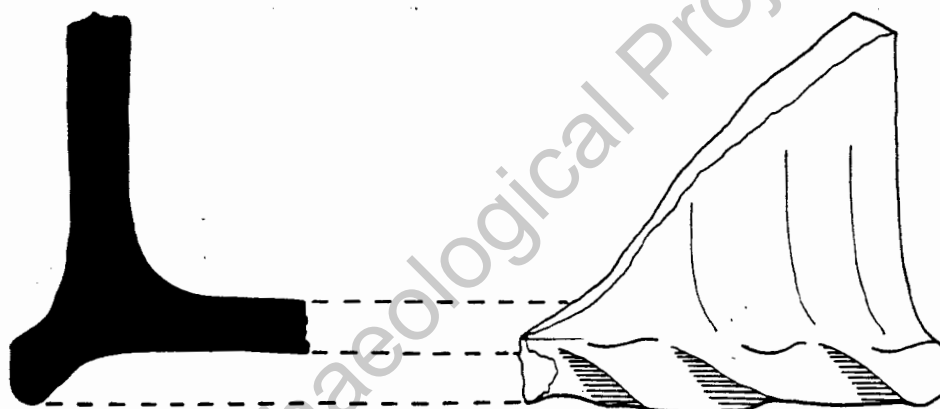
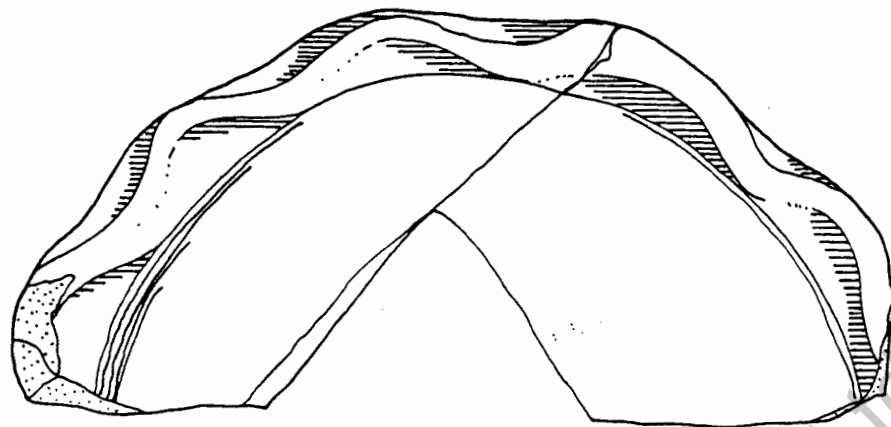


Figure 9: Drawing of Basal Fragment of Bristol Redcliff Jug (context 316)

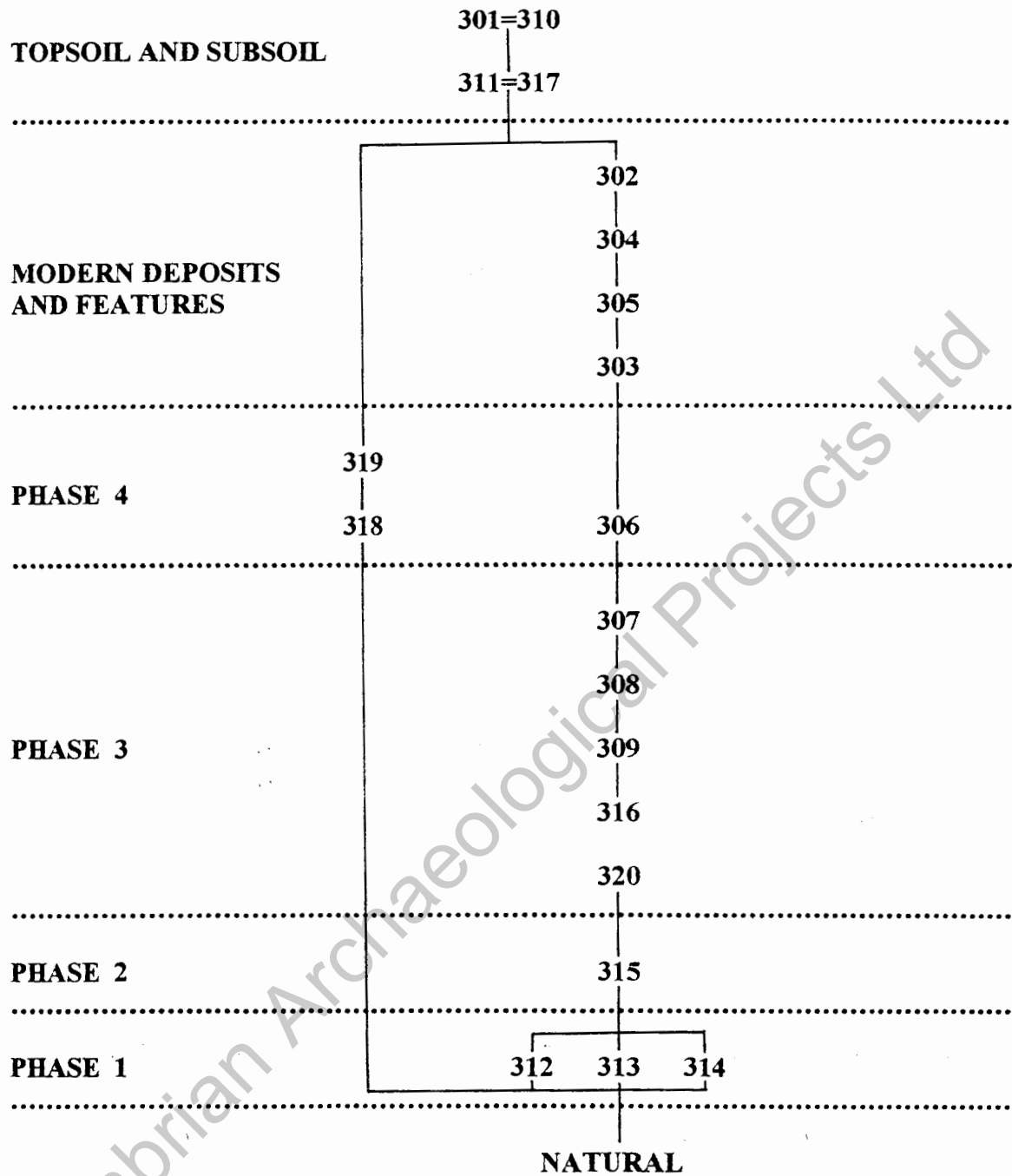


Figure 10: Phased Matrix of Excavated Features and Deposits