



Stanmer Well and Donkey Wheel

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dara O’Kane and Chris Edwards for their assistance and patience conducting the survey.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Sue Craig of the Stanmer Preservation Society for providing access and a wealth of local knowledge.

Abbreviations

East Sussex Records Office - ESRO
Stanmer Preservation Society – SPS
Sussex Archaeological Society - SAS



Figure 1: View of Donkey Wheel (Source: Author).

Introduction

The Stanmer Well and Donkey Wheel was re-built in 1838 on the site of an existing well to provide water to the adjacent farm and the inhabitants of the village. The 68 metre deep well and vertically mounted donkey wheel are housed within an Early English Gothic well house designed by architects Ralph Joanes and Joseph Butler. The well house is constructed from knapped flint with sandstone dressings and a modern Welsh slate roof. The building is statutory Grade II listed (listing number:1380957).

Location

Stanmer Village comprises a single street located 6 miles north-east of Brighton and 8 miles west of Lewes in East Sussex. The well and donkey wheel occupy a prominent position along a bend in Stoney Mere Way, Stanmer's principal road. The well house is orientated with its principal elevation facing north and is built into the northern boundary of the churchyard at the southern end of the village. The area surrounding the well house comprises the agricultural buildings of Home Farm to the north, Home Farm House to the west, Stanmer Church, House and parkland to the south and a large pond with grazing pastures beyond to the east. Topographically the site is at the base of a gradual hill rising to the north and terminating at the pond to the east.

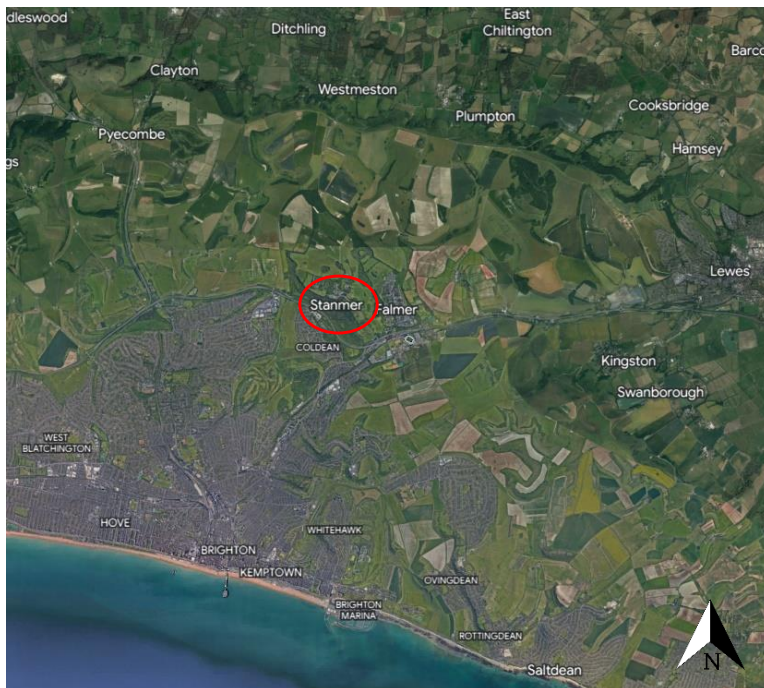


Figure 2: Satellite image of East Sussex (Source: Google Earth).



Figure 3: OS Map of Stanmer Village (Source: Ordnance Survey).



Figure 3: OS Site Location Map (Source: Ordnance Survey).

Site Overview

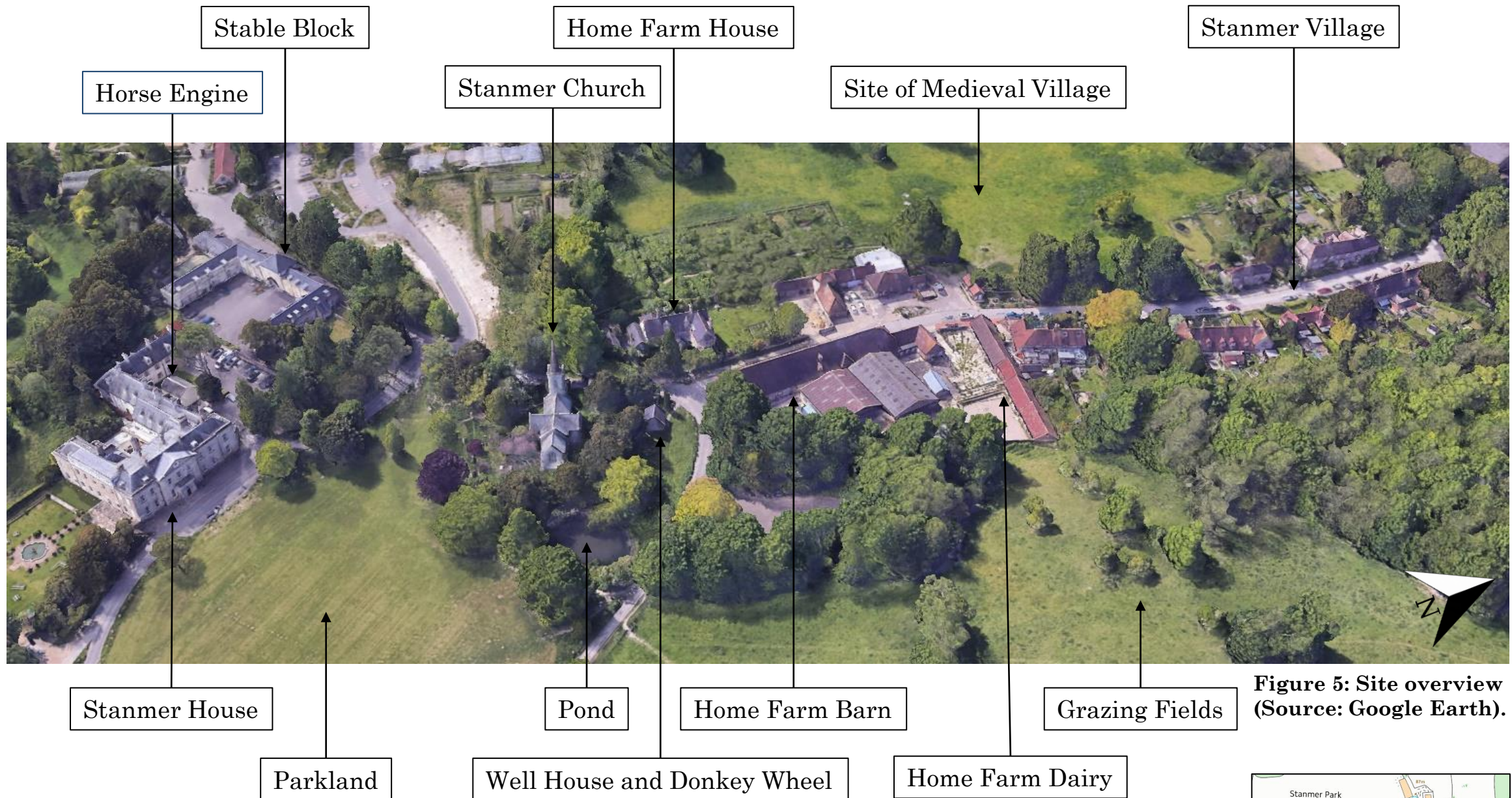
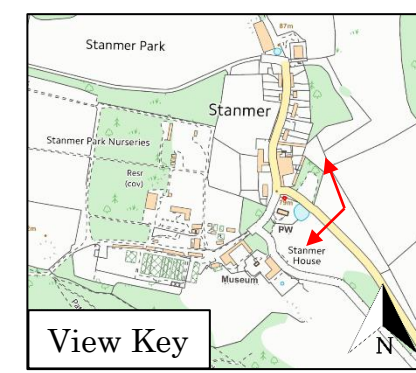


Figure 5: Site overview (Source: Google Earth).

Site Name: Stanmer Well and Donkey Wheel
Grid Reference: TQ 336658 09611
Local Authority: South Downs National Park
County: East Sussex



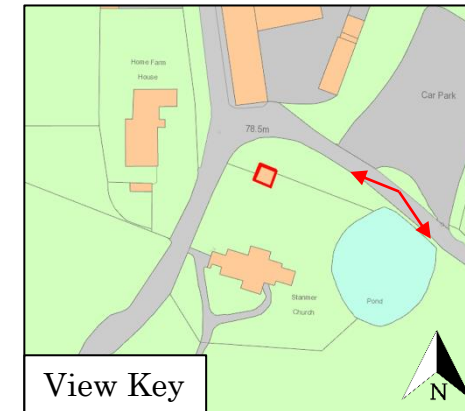
Site Overview Continued



East

West

Figure 6: Panoramic view of pond with parkland beyond (Source: Author).



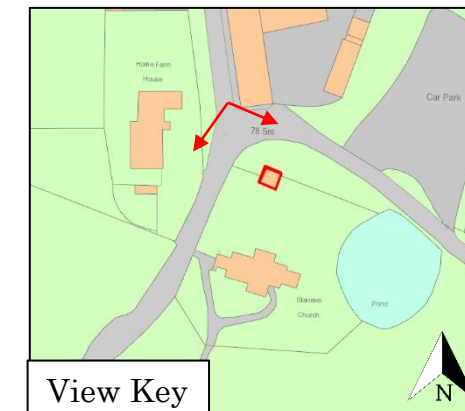
View Key



East

West

Figure 7: Panoramic view from corner of Home Farm Barn (Source: Author).



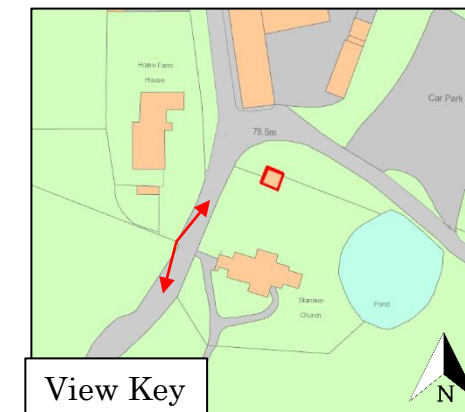
View Key



North

South

Figure 8: Panoramic view of Stanmer Church along Stoney Mere Way (Source: Author).



View Key



Stanmer Village and House

Originating as an Early Medieval manorial estate, the name Stanmer derives from the Anglo-Saxon words 'stan' meaning 'stone' and 'mere' meaning 'pond'. A detailed survey of the estate's holdings by Thomas Marshall in 1608 recorded that the village comprised 27 dwellings, 20 barns, and 631 acres of arable land and pasture in addition to a manor farm comprising 486 acres.¹ However, there is no mention of the well or a well house, which would have formed part of the manor farm. In 1615 the Stanmer Estate was purchased by the Michelborne family who amalgamated the surrounding land throughout the seventeenth century. As a result, almost the entire parish was unified under their ownership by 1700.²

After briefly being owned by Peter Gott, the Receiver General for Sussex, the Stanmer Estate came into the ownership of Henry Pelham I in 1710. Desiring to modernise the estate his son Henry II employed French architect Nicolas Dubois in 1722 to replace the old manor with a new house in the Palladian style and create landscaped gardens to the east of the house.³ As part of the modernising work a well and horse engine were constructed in 1726 by engine-maker John Foukes adjacent to the new house. Described in building records as 'the parish well'⁴ it was probably intended to replace the well adjacent to the churchyard, suggesting it had been extant for a significant period of time. Moreover, the building records record Foukes' bill included works at the new farm house adjacent to the site of the existing well, indicating that the donkey wheel may be the result of his work.

The Pelham family would continue to develop the Stanmer Estate throughout the eighteenth century. New entrance lodges were added, the landscaped gardens updated and new terraced houses were built in the village to create a *ferme ornée*.⁵ In 1801 Thomas Pelham was made the First Earl of Chichester, a Peerage still retained by the Pelham family.



Figure 9: Engraving of Stanmer House and Church 1826 (Source: B&H Regency Society).



Figure 10: Stanmer Horse Engine and Well House (Source: Bevendean History Group).

¹ H. Warne., 'Stanmer: A restructured Settlement', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 127 (1989), p.92.

² Colson Stone., 'Stanmer Park – Historic Landscape Survey', (Unpublished 2003), p.31.

³ S. Farrant., 'The Building of Stanmer House and the Early Development of the Park c.1720 to 1750', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 117 (1979), pp.196-199.

⁴ J. Goodfield. and P. Robinson., 'Stanmer & the Pelham Family', (Brighton 2007), p.30.

⁵ S. Berry., 'Stanmer House and Park, East Sussex: The Evolution of a Small Downland Country House and its Setting c.1710-1805', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 143 (2005), pp.252.

Map Regression

The area around the site has remained largely unaltered for over two hundred years. The principal change being the new church, well house and road layout created in 1838.

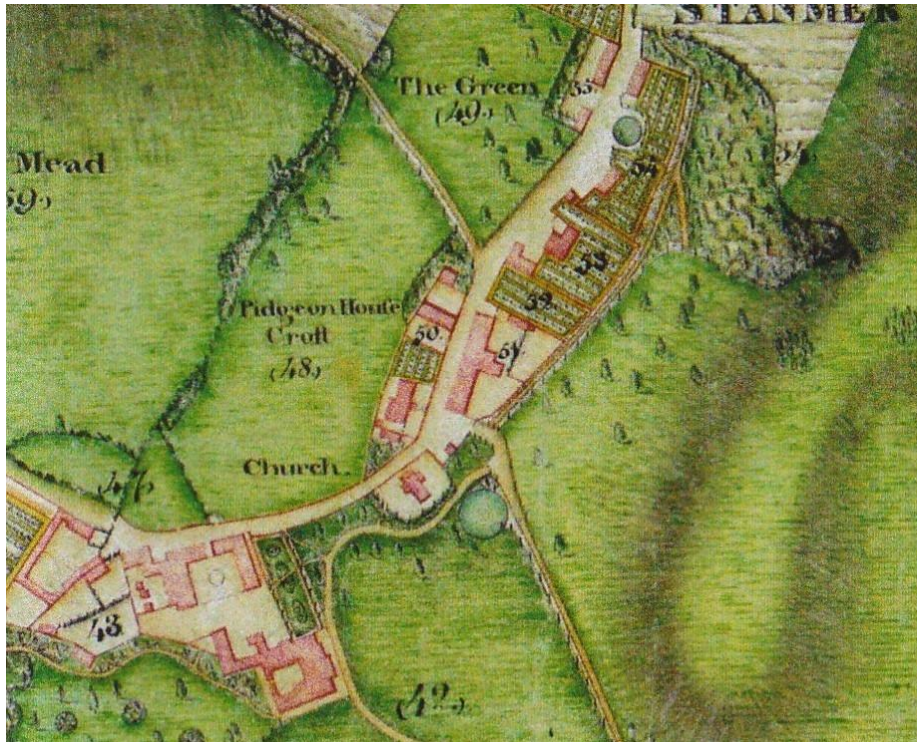


Figure 11: Survey of Stanmer Estate by William Figg 1799-1800 (Source: ESRO).

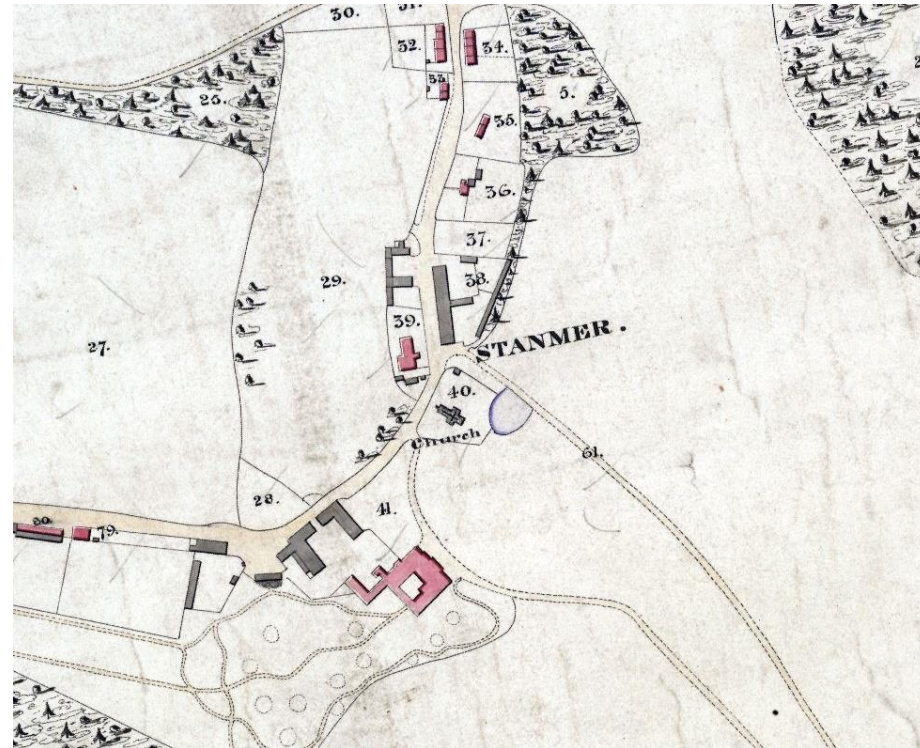


Figure 12: Stanmer Tithe Map 1840 (Source: The Keep).



Figure 13: Ordnance Survey Map 1879 (Source: National Library of Scotland).



Figure 14: Ordnance Survey Map 1956 (Source: National Library of Scotland).

Pre-1838 Church and Well House

William Figg's 1799-1800 Estate Map (figure 11) shows earlier iterations of Stanmer Church and the well house existed prior to being demolished and rebuilt in 1838. Stanmer Church was first recorded in 1232 in connection with the Canons of South Malling in nearby Lewes.⁶ Despite the small congregation of only 15 houses within the parish the church was regularly altered and maintained, being re-roofed in 1732 and again in 1801 in addition to being re-pewed and a new ceiling being added.⁷

The pre-1838 well house and church are depicted in a water colour painting by Henry Petrie in 1802 (figure 15). Moreover, prior to demolition a plan of the old church was produced in 1838 (figure 16). Therefore, a careful comparison of the two records may allow for the accuracy of Petrie's depiction to be ascertained. The well house (1) is shown as a timber clad structure with a possible clay tiled roof. The proportions of the building appear to be similar to the existing structure and the height and pitch of the roof may indicate the presence of the donkey wheel. The location of the church's buttresses (2), entrance path and porch (3) all correspond with those shown in the 1838 plan. Moreover, additional features such as trees (4) and the orientation of the road and surrounding boundary walls (5) also correspond with the plan. Further contemporary depictions attest to the accuracy of the 1838 plan (figure 17). Therefore, Petrie's depiction of the pre-1838 well house can be considered accurate and may indicate the donkey wheel was extant by 1802.

Figure 15: Stanmer Church from the north-west by Henry Petrie 1802 (Source: SAS).

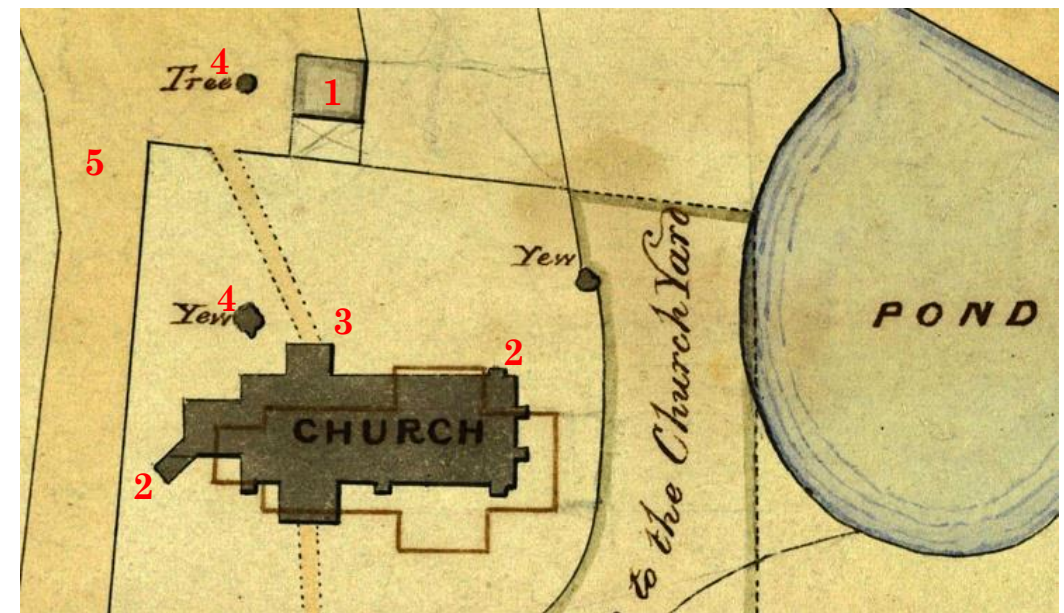
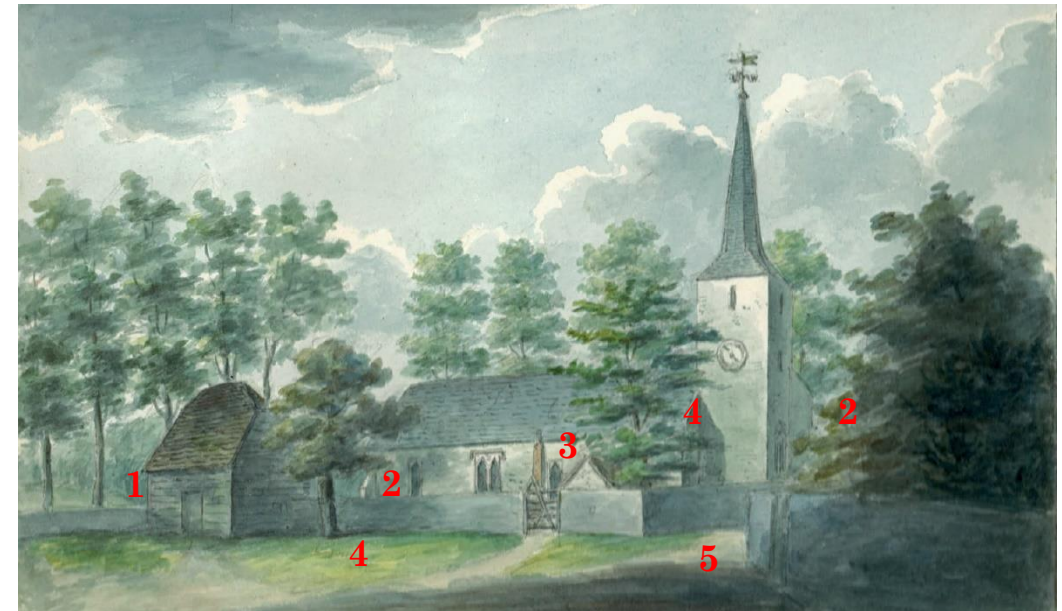


Figure 16: Except from plan showing the old church at Stanmer and the outline of the proposed replacement 1838 (Source: ESRO).

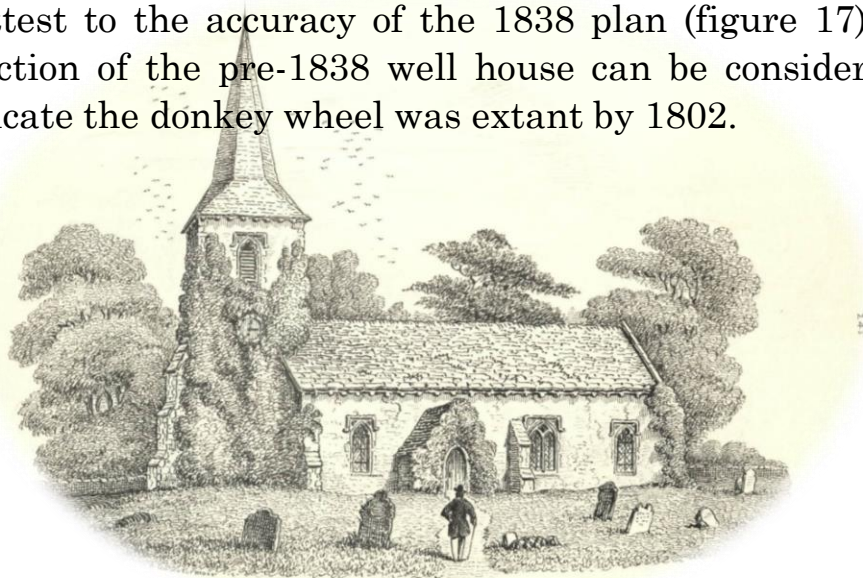


Figure 17: 18th Century Etching of Stanmer Church (Source: SAS).

⁶ See Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1225–32, Henry III, 2, 492. 1232, Nicholas, Master, presented to the penitentiary of South Malling with the church of Stanmer.

⁷ S. Berry., 'The Impact of the Georgians, Victorians and Edwardians on early parish churches: City of Brighton and Hove c.1680-1914', Sussex Archaeological Collections 149 (2011), p.205.

Church and Well House Rebuilt

In March 1838 a faculty was obtained from the Archbishop of Canterbury to demolish and rebuild Stanmer Church.⁸ This may have been due to a fire destroying the church. However, it was probably a result of the desire for the Stanmer Estate to reflect the newly found status of the Pelham family as the Earls of Chichester. Indeed, in 1810 architect Joseph Kay drafted plans for improvements to Stanmer House and the church.⁹ Nevertheless, the Third Earl Henry Thomas Pelham had the medieval church demolished and commissioned architect Joseph Butler of Chichester to design its replacement. Architect Ralph Joanes of Lewes acted as the clerk of works and signed off the accounts as the architect. Therefore, it is possible the principal design for the church was produced by Butler, while its execution and finer details such as the well house were handled by Joanes.

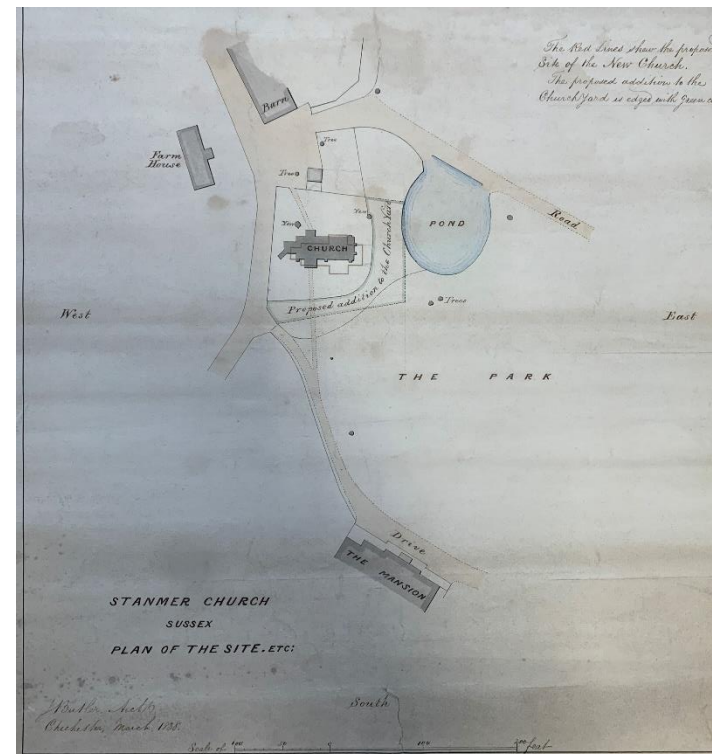


Figure 18: Plan for the rebuilding of Stanmer Church and the well house March 1838, signed by Joseph Butler, Architect (Source: ESRO).

Butler produced a plan in March 1838 (figure 18) that outlined the site of the new church, extended the churchyard and repositioned the drive to the west of the church. The well house which was also rebuilt is shown as extant on the plan but does not appear to have been incorporated into the boundary of the churchyard at this time. However, faint pencil marks suggest this plan may have been adapted during the works to extend the churchyard to its present bounds. The stone for construction was brought in from the Pelham estate quarry in Lindfield and was worked by stonemasons Parsons and Son.¹⁰ The construction of the well house also incorporated masonry from the old church.¹¹ The building accounts list construction taking place between March 1838 and November 1839 with a total cost of £3638 3s. 0³/₄d. There is no record for the construction of the donkey wheel in the accounts, which again suggests it predates 1838. The new church and churchyard were consecrated by Archbishop William Howley on 24 October 1839.¹²

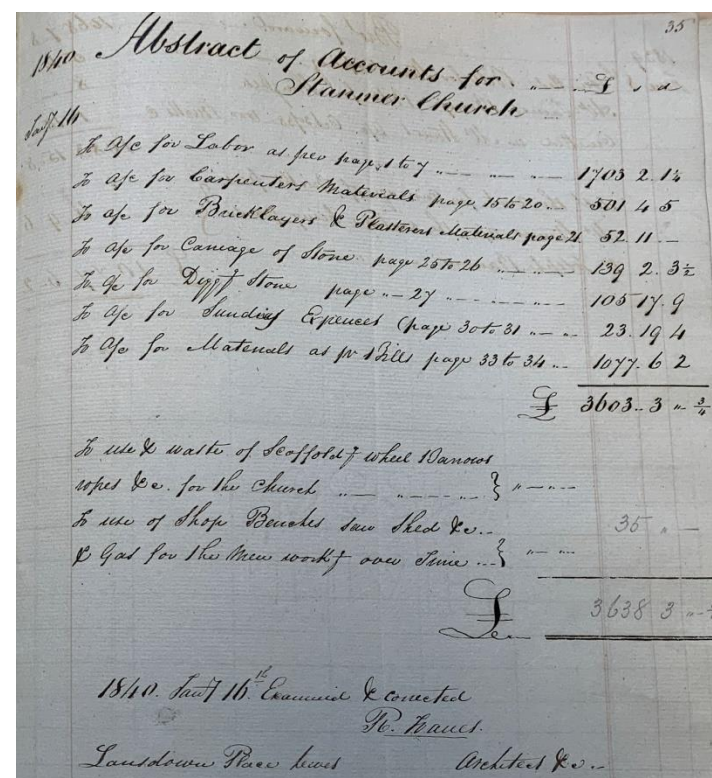


Figure 19: Abstract of Accounts for the rebuilding of Stanmer Church (Source: ESRO).

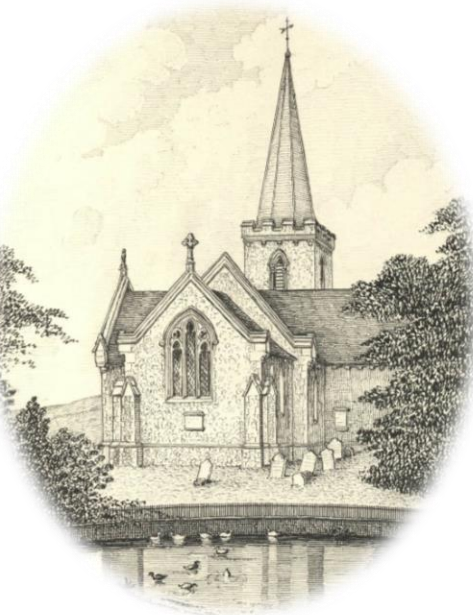


Figure 20: Engraving of Stanmer Church and pond c.1850 (Source: SAS).

⁸ See ESRO ACC 4600/5

⁹ See ESRO ACC 4600/8

¹⁰ Berry, 'The Impact of the Georgians, Victorians and Edwardians on Early Parish Churches', p.210.

¹¹ Goodfield and Robinson, 'Stanmer & the Pelham Family', p.62.

¹² See ESRO acc 4600/5

Donkey Wheels

Due to the lack of a nearby stream or river at Stanmer the well and donkey wheel formed an essential part of a system of water management. In addition to the aforementioned horse engine, a number of dew ponds are located across the estate and a rainwater catch was built in 1870-5 which channelled water into a complex of cisterns and pipes serving the house and village. The chalk geology of the South Downs means surface water drains quickly creating a subterranean aquifer. However, deep well shafts are required to reach the water table; indeed the hand-dug well at nearby Woodingdean is over 391 metres deep.¹³ To hoist viable quantities of water a considerable distance donkey wheels became commonplace at large houses in the chalk upland areas of South East England towards the end of the Medieval period.¹⁴ Surviving examples of vertical donkey wheels can be found at Saddlescombe, Catherington (now at the Weald and Downland Museum), Carisbrooke Castle, Friston Place and Greys Court (figure 23).



Figure 21: Carisbrooke Castle Donkey Well (Source: Alamy).



Figure 22: Stanmer Well late 19th century (Source: SPS).

The fortunes of the Stanmer Estate and the Pelham family had declined by the mid twentieth century. After being requisitioned as billeting for a Canadian tank regiment during the Second World War the estate was sold in 1947 to The Brighton Corporation, now Brighton and Hove City Council. The well and donkey wheel had remained in use until 1900¹⁵ by which time it was worked by the children of the village (figure 22). However, by 1968 the well house had fallen into disrepair. A campaign led by Kenneth Major to save donkey wheels (figure 23) prompted the Brighton Corporation to repair the well house, removing overgrown ivy and installing a new roof in 1970.¹⁶ The Stanmer donkey wheel is one of only three surviving vertical donkey wheels in Sussex, which historically was home to a considerable number.

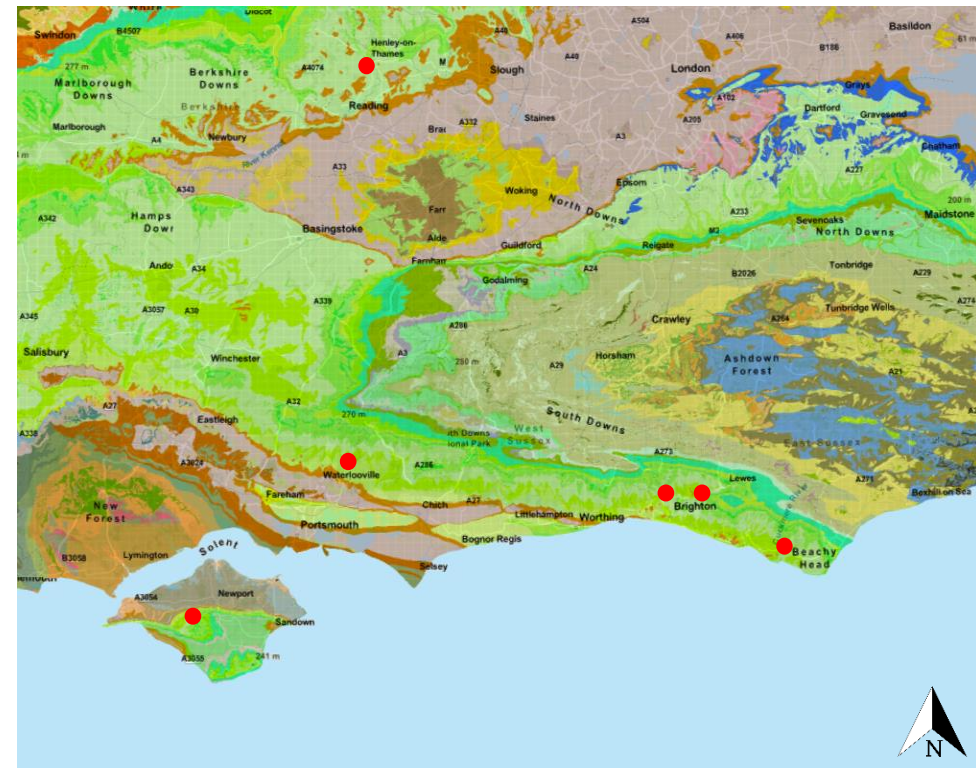


Figure 23: Locations of existing donkey wells – chalk geology indicated in green. From left to right; Carisbrooke Castle, Catherington, Greys Court, Saddlescombe, Stanmer, Friston Place (Source: BGS).

¹³ P. Mercer., 'The Hunns Mere Way: The Untold Story of Woodingdean', (Seaford 2010), p.153.

¹⁴ J. K. Major., 'Animal-Powered Machines', (Oxford 2016), pp. 7-9.

¹⁵ Colson Stone, 'Stanmer Park', p.91

¹⁶ Sussex Industrial Archaeology Study Group, 'Newsletter Number 5' (Online 1970).

Well House Repair

In addition to the repairs listed above, the 1970 works possibly also involved rebuilding the interior of the eastern gable end reusing dressed masonry from elsewhere. Moreover, to ensure structural stability a tie bar was introduced between the two gable ends.



Figure 24: Inspection of the donkey wheel prior to repair 1968 (Source: SPS).



Figure 25: The roof of the well house removed during repairs 1970 (Source: SPS).

Donkey wheel is saved

ONE of Brighton's curiosities is to be repaired and preserved for posterity as an industrial rarity of the past. It is a donkey wheel (above) housed in an ivy-covered flint house on the northern side of Stanmer Churchyard, in the Corporation-owned Stanmer Park.

When it was in use, a donkey was harnessed between the spokes at the bottom of the wheel. The wheel started revolving and, to keep stationary, the donkey had to keep moving, as on a treadmill. The wheel turned a spindle which raised water in a chain of buckets from a deep well. The well is still there.

This curiosity aroused the interest of the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society and also of the Sussex Industrial Archaeology Study Group. And when the question of the wheel's future came before the Parks and Gardens Committee, it was decided to carry out restoration work. The present roof of the wheelhouse is in poor shape and a new roof will be necessary.

The latest report of the Study Group comments: "Bearing in mind that this is one of only three now surviving donkey wheels in Sussex, where records indicate there were once a considerable number, it is to the credit of the Corporation that something is to be done."

The Study Group are also interested in another industrial relic close by at the back of Stanmer House. This is a horse gin (gin being short for engine), and was another way of obtaining water in the old days.

A horse, walking a circular track, pulled a horizontal beam, which in turn operated a wheel and drove a pump. Say the Study Group: "It is interesting to note that the specimen next to Stanmer House, believed to be of the early 18th century, is possibly the oldest example of a water-raising horse gin in the country."

Figure 26: Article in the Brighton Argus detailing repairs 8 November 1968 (Source: The Mills Archive).

move any wheels in danger of demolition to museums of rural life, and they are already moving one from a hospital in Surrey to Grey's Court where there is room for it. But they would rather persuade owners to maintain their wheels *in situ*.

Ass-piration

The donkey wheels of England may yet be saved. There are only 27 of these giant relics of the wheelwright's craft left in the country and two keen industrial archaeologists, Hugo Brunner and Kenneth Major, are out to preserve them from farmers and others who have them on their land and either neglect them or break them up. Until the First World War donkey wheels, and similar models trodden by humans, generally convicts, dogs, or horses, were used for bringing up water; they were also used for hauling beams up to high ceilings, and can still be found at cathedral crossings—Canterbury and Peterborough in particular—where they were left after the last beam was put in place. Brunner, a director of Chatto and Windus, grew up with the largest donkey wheel in the country—it is 19 feet in diameter—at Grey's Court, in Oxfordshire. He and Major want to



A donkey wheel, since demolished, in use before the First World War.

Figure 27: Article in the Times detailing the campaign to save donkey wheels 11 September 1972 (Source: The Mills Archive).

Construction

The well house reflects the Early English Gothic style of Stanmer Church, which Pevsner describes as ‘remarkably correct and the composition very graceful.’¹⁷ Indeed, dating to 1838 the church and well house are notable for the quality of their execution and as early examples of Gothic Revival Architecture. The walls of the well house are constructed from random knapped and split flints with galletting between them. The quoins, plinth and west window penetration are formed from blocks of fine-grained grey sandstone. The quoins are generally uniform in their proportions. The entrance comprises a round-headed arch with an archivolt of cyma reversa moulding that rests on a chamfered plinth of Wealden iron stone. The arch is constructed from a somewhat lighter grey sandstone, which is significantly weathered suggesting it may have been reused from the old church. The roof is a modern replacement using Welsh slate. The eaves feature carved coping and are supported by projecting sandstone corbels with kneeler stones above.

Internally, the floor and wellhead are constructed from 10x6x21cm bricks laid in stretcher bond. The upper portion of the well shaft is lined with coursed flints. The donkey wheel is 4 metres in diameter and features clasp-armed spokes projecting out at right angles from a central shaft (figure 29) hewn from a single piece of oak with iron brackets at either end. The action of a donkey or person treading the wheel raised and lowered two counter balanced buckets. A shallow brick arch was incorporated into the bottom of the east elevation. This allowed water drawn from the well to be fed directly into the nearby pond, replenishing it in times of drought. The wheel and central axle are supported by two oak timber posts at either end, the presence of mortice holes suggest they were reused perhaps from the original timber framed well house. The roof structure comprises a modern machine cut timber frame. The internal face of the east gable end has been repaired using roughly coursed sandstone blocks, some of which have been dressed indicating they have been reused from elsewhere. This may be the result of repair works carried out in 1970.

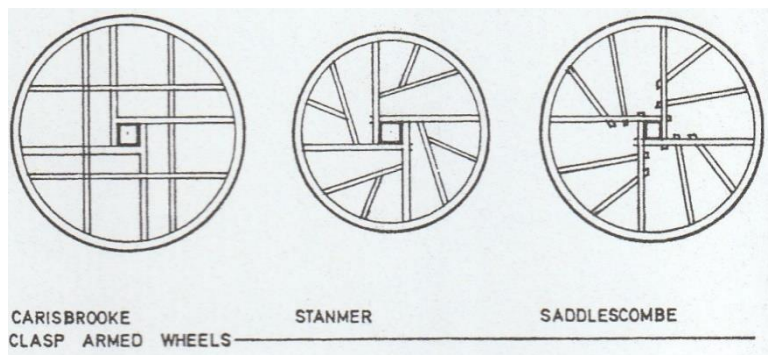


Figure 28: Illustration of the design of some contemporary clasp-armed donkey wheels (Source: J Kenneth Major).



Figure 28: North elevation of well house and various photographs of architectural and material details (Source: Author).

¹⁷ N. Antram. and N. Pevsner., ‘The Buildings of England – Sussex: East with Brighton and Hove’, (London 2012), p.289.

Photographic Survey – Interior

Dressed sandstone reused in gable repair



Machine cut timber roof frame



Modern replacement wheel slats

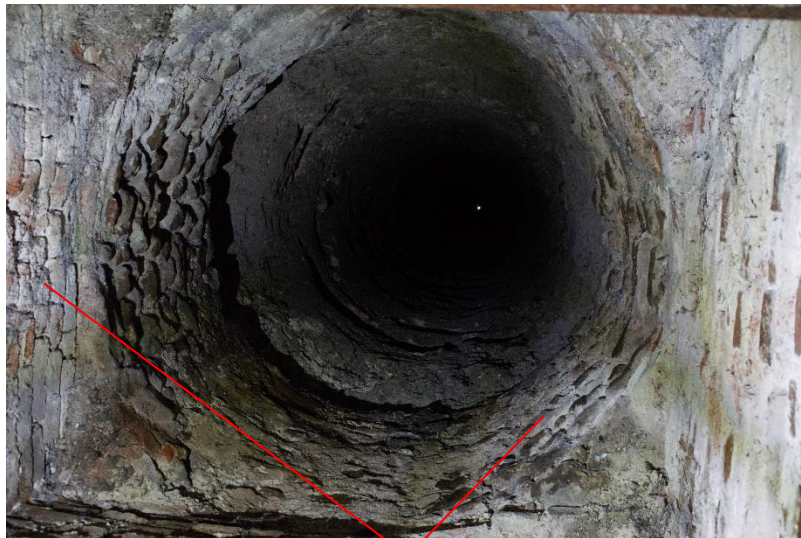


East

West



Oak wheel shaft with ironwork bracketing and posts with mortise holes



Wellhead lined with roughly coursed flints below brick parapet



Clasp-armed wheel spokes, ironwork reinforcement and mortise and tenon joints

Internal penetration of west window



Chamfered wheel shaft

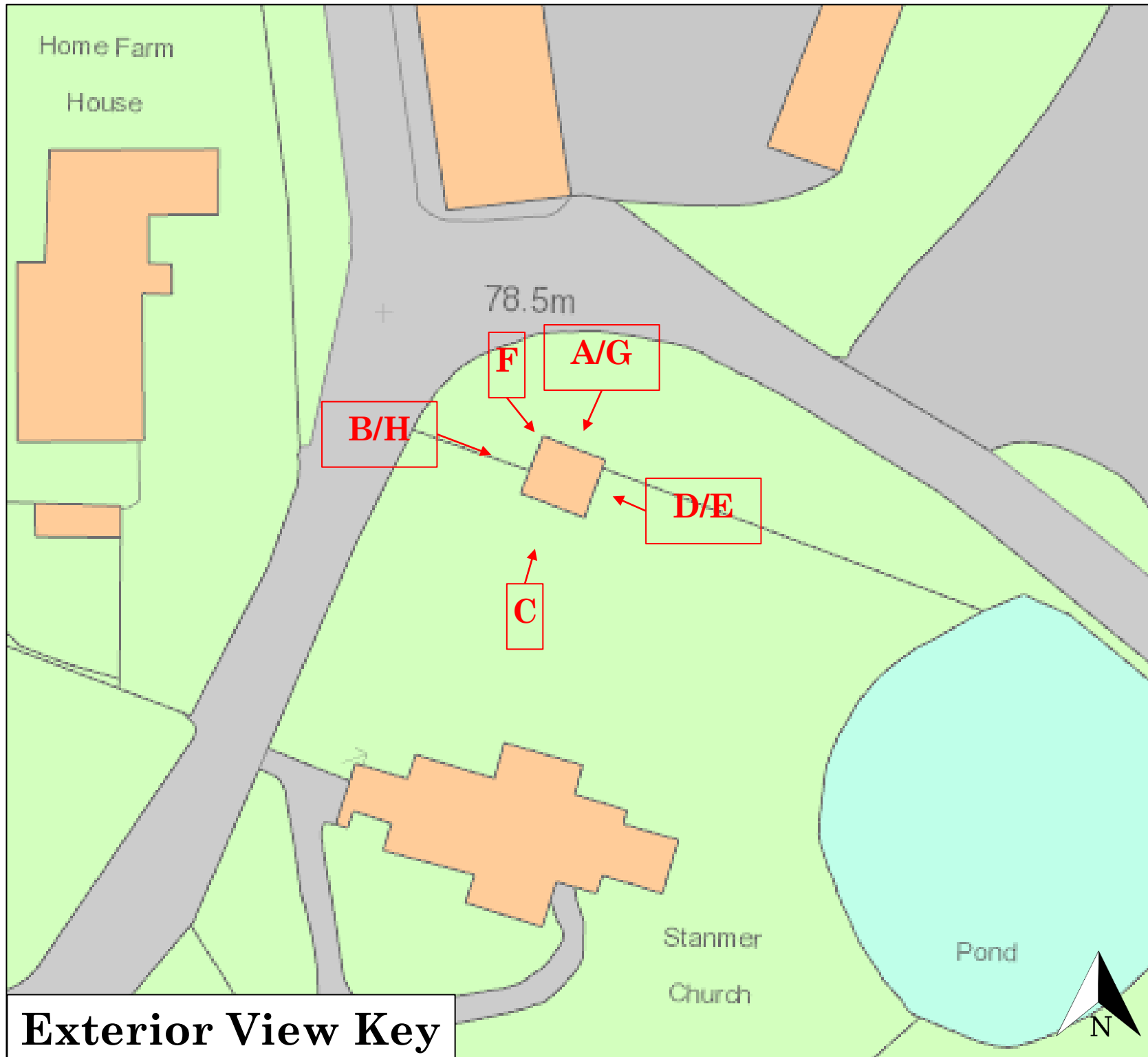
Spokes secured to rim using iron nails

Half-lap joint with wooden pegs

Supplementary spokes spread the load at equal intervals

View of donkey wheel looking west

Exterior





A. North Elevation



B. West Elevation



C. South Elevation



D. East Elevation



E. Shallow brick arch - east elevation.



F. Coping, kneeler and corbel with cement repairs - west elevation.



G. Round-headed arch and mouldings possibly from old church.



H. Western gable end with coping, chamfered window penetration, metal wall anchor/tie bar and modern weather vane.

Context



Context View Key



A. View looking north across the parkland showing Stoney Mere Way, Stanmer House (left) and Stanmer Church (right).



B. View looking west from the pond showing the well house, with the church (left) and Home Farm House and Barn (right).



C. View looking south from the northern end of the village, showing terraces of estate workers houses.



D. View looking south from Home Farm, showing farm buildings including Home Farm Barn.

Survey Methodology

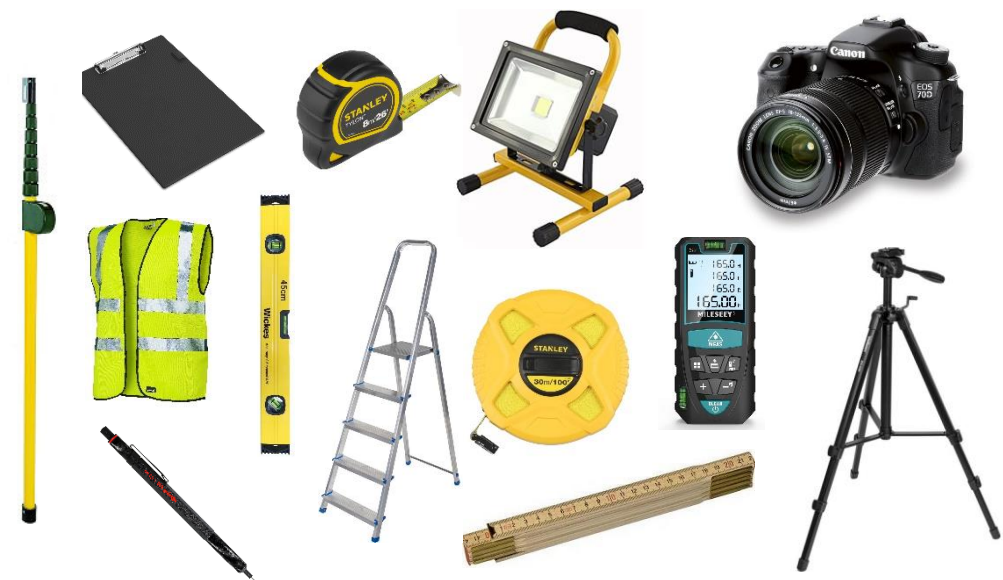
1. Arrange permission/access to carry out the survey of the wheel-house with SPS.
2. Conduct desk-based assessment of primary and secondary documentary evidence available at local archives and online.
3. Organise one/two assistants to help with measuring and recording the site.
4. Preliminary site visit to identify significant features, create sketches to record measurements and identify equipment required.
5. Purchase or loan survey equipment (detailed below) from Oxford Brookes University.
6. Transport equipment to site via car and conduct safety briefing and visual inspection of site.
7. Begin photographic survey¹⁸ in the morning for best lighting of north/east elevations and conclude in the afternoon for the south/west elevations respectively. Use tripod and ladder to capture elevated photographs of each elevation avoiding converging verticals and achieve sharp in-focus images. Proceed to take photographs of architectural features of interest and contextual photographs of site and surrounding area. Internal

photographs taken from corners using wide 18mm lens, flash and portable floodlight. Photograph individual internal elements of the structure and donkey wheel itself. All photographs captured in RAW format to achieve accuracy of colour/detail and for post-processing. Multiple site visits were conducted to capture the site in differing light conditions.

8. Conduct measured survey¹⁹ using 30m measuring tape for running measurements of any features at chest height including depth of any setbacks using folding rule. Record measurements using sketch plan adding detail where necessary and calling out each digit as reading taken. Vertical running measurements taken using a ladder, measuring tape and spirit level up to 2.5m or using a telescopic measuring rod at each external corner and the centre of each elevation. Take internal diagonal measurements between each corner and vertical readings of overhead beams, roof structure and wheel for section drawing. Confirm donkey wheel of regular construction and take detailed measurements of lower quadrant to reconstruct entire wheel to scale in section drawing.
9. Conclude on-site survey and begin to produce measured drawings²⁰ at 1:50 scale including a ground plan, section, north, east, south and west elevations.
10. Return any loaned equipment and compile material for workbook.

Survey Equipment

- Canon EOS 70D Camera with built-in flash and 18-55mm variable zoom lens and tripod.
- Stanley 2m folding rule and 8m/30m measuring tapes.
- Sokkia telescopic measuring rod.
- Mileseey laser distance measure and spirit level.
- Ladder, portable floodlight and hi-vis vest.
- Notebook, clipboard, mechanical pencil, pen and rubber.



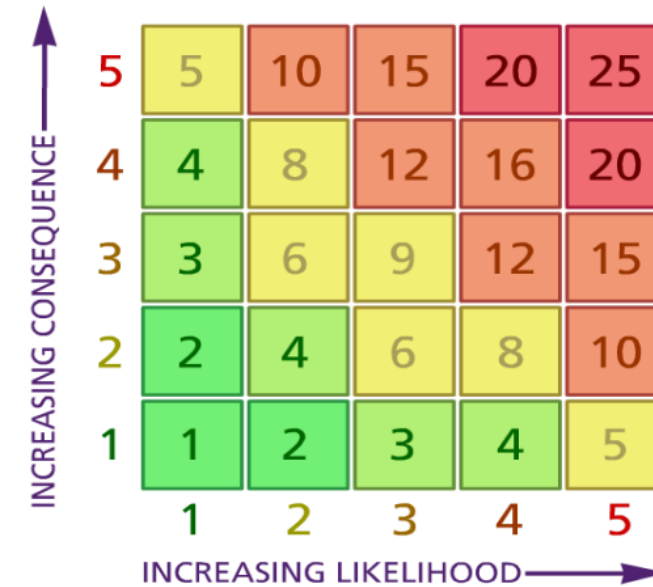
¹⁸ Informed by S. Cole., 'Photographing Historic Buildings', (Swindon 2017) and S. Cole. and P. Backhouse., 'Digital Image Capture and File Storage: Guidance for Best Practice', (Swindon 2015).

¹⁹ Informed by Historic England, 'Measured and Drawn', (Swindon 2003) and D. Watt., 'Surveying Historic Buildings.' (Shaftesbury 2010).

²⁰ Informed by Historic England, 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice', (Swindon 2016) and F. Reekie., 'Reekie's Architectural Drawing', (London 1996).

Risk Assessment

Prior to conducting the survey the risks were assessed and presented to the assistant surveyors, who were provided with hi-vis and shown how to use equipment. Care was taken to ensure mobile phones were charged, suitable weather equipment/shelter was available and breaks were taken at appropriate intervals. The site is located in public parkland and therefore consideration was given those visiting the site. The following risk assessment was developed using the principles outlined in RICS Surveying Safely²¹ and the matrix (right).



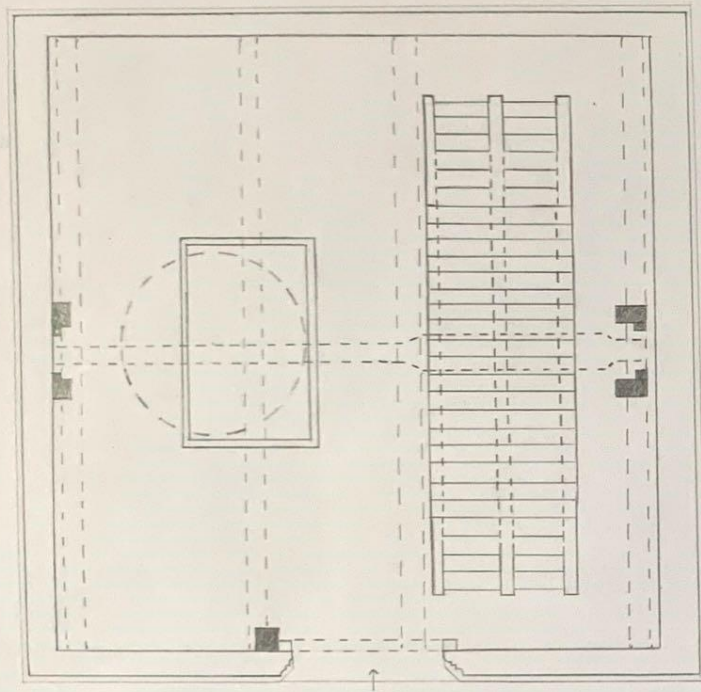
Hazard	How and to whom	Consequences	Controls (prior and during survey)	Likelihood Score	Hazard Score	Total
Slips and trips	Surveyors – uneven and broken ground both inside and outside the well house.	Minor injury – cuts, bruises or broken bones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure surveyors wear suitable flat footwear and familiarise themselves with the site prior to beginning work. Identify/remove any trip hazards within well house. Ensure well house is well lit at all times. 	4	2	8
Falling into well	Surveyors/Public – 68m deep well shaft at centre of well-house.	Major injury – possibly death.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grate covering well shaft to remain locked and in place throughout survey. Cordon off exposed well grate to side of wellhead. Close the well-house when not in use. 	1	5	5
Falling from Height	Surveyors – Falling while measuring using ladder.	Minor injury – concussion or broken bones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use ladder on firm ground and maintain three points of contact. Base of ladder held by another surveyor. Use telescopic measuring rod for features above 2.5 metres. 	3	3	9
Impact from falling objects	Surveyors/Public – falling debris from structure during measuring.	Minor injury – concussion or broken bones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct visual inspection to identify any loose/damaged features. Cordon off site from public while measuring/using ladders. 	2	4	8
Struck by vehicles /cyclists	Surveyors – traversing public road surrounding the site.	Major injury – possibly death.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify risk before survey commencing. Wear hi-visibility waistcoat when working around wheel-house. Establish safe break area away from road. 	1	5	5

²¹RICS., 'Surveying Safely: Health and Safety Principles for Property Professionals', (London 2018).

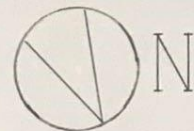
Measured Drawings – Plan and Section

STANMER DONKEY WHEEL

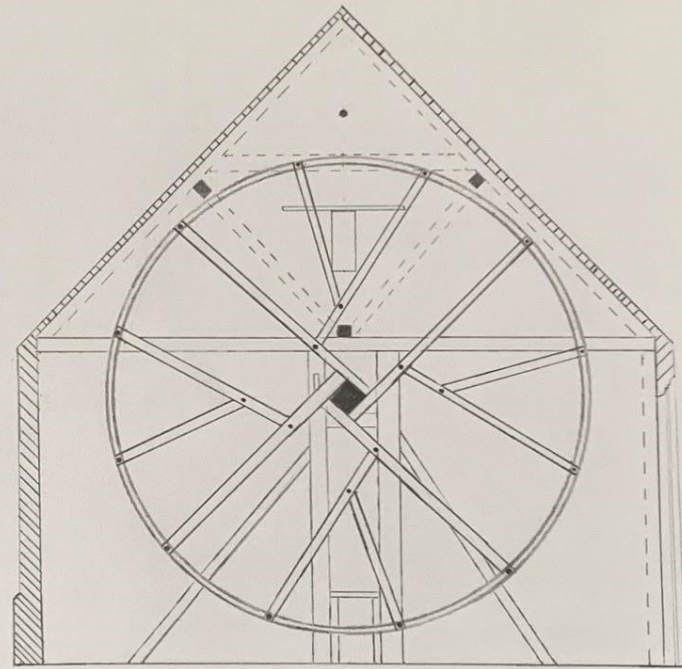
SHEET 1
DAVID EDWARDS
MAY 2023
TQ 33658 09611



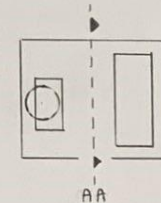
PLAN (1:50)



1:50 at A3



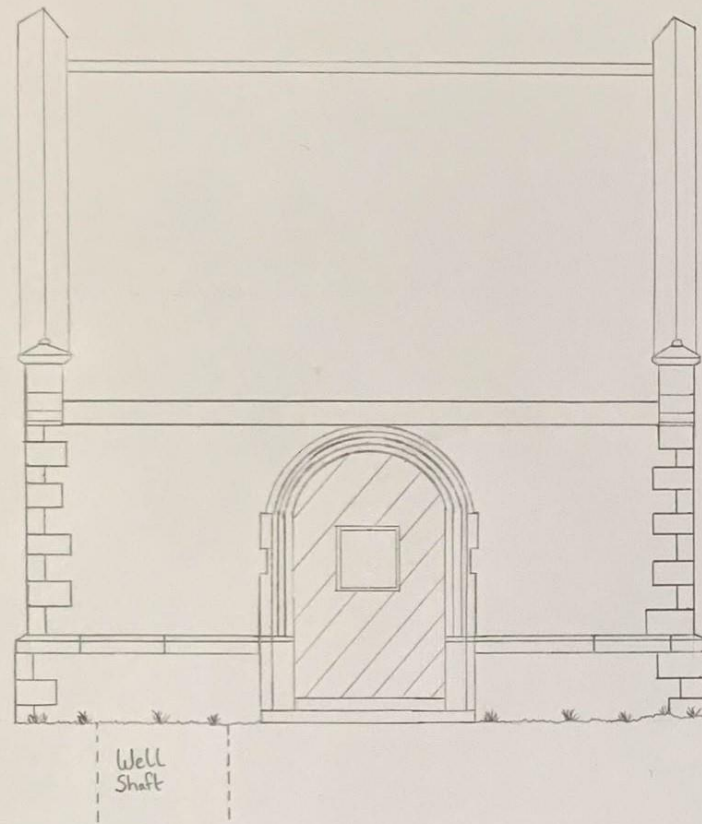
SECTION AA (1:50)



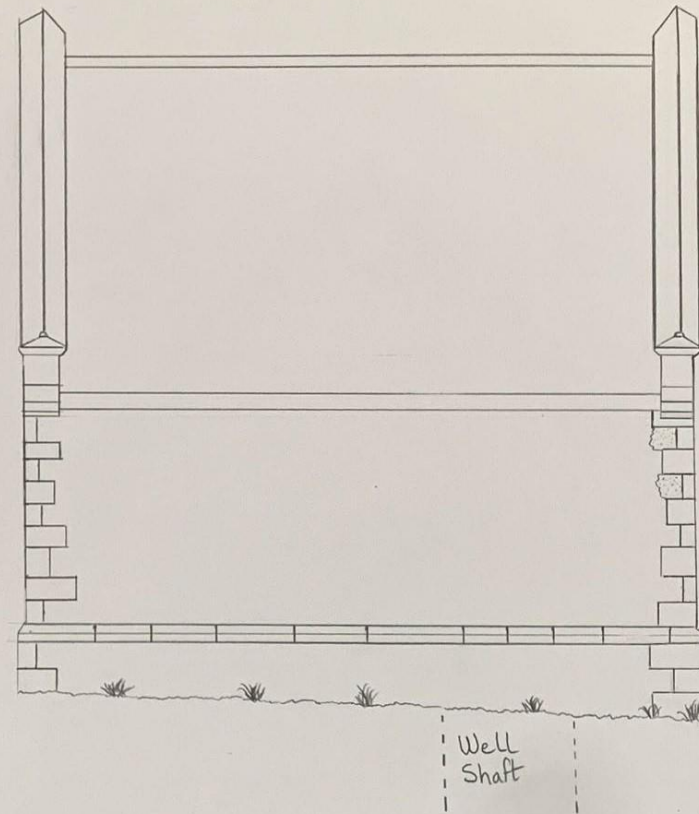
North and South Elevations

STANMER DONKEY WHEEL

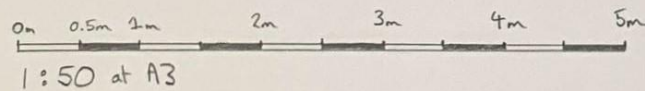
SHEET 2
DAVID EDWARDS
MAY 2023
TQ 33658 09611



NORTH ELEVATION (1:50)



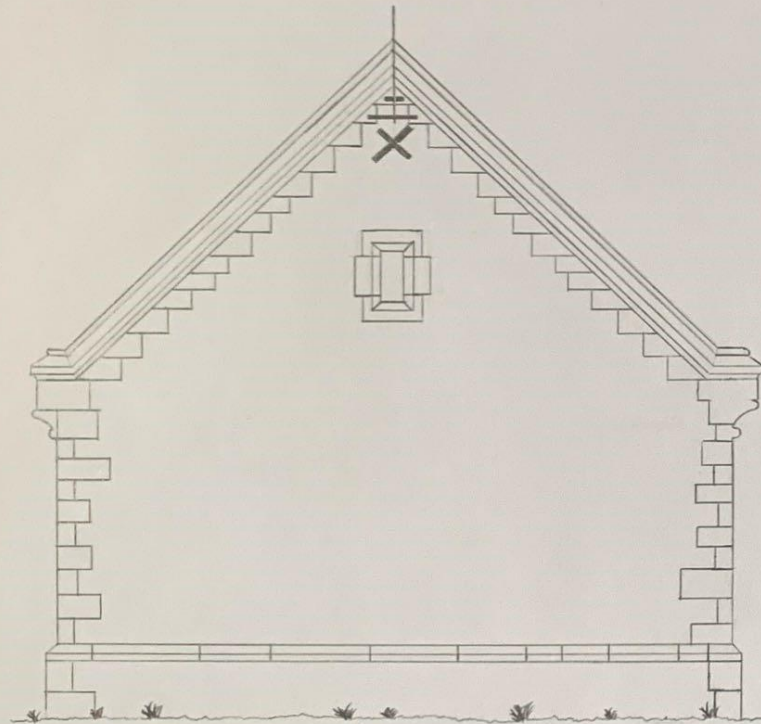
SOUTH ELEVATION (1:50)



West and East Elevations

STANMER DONKEY WHEEL

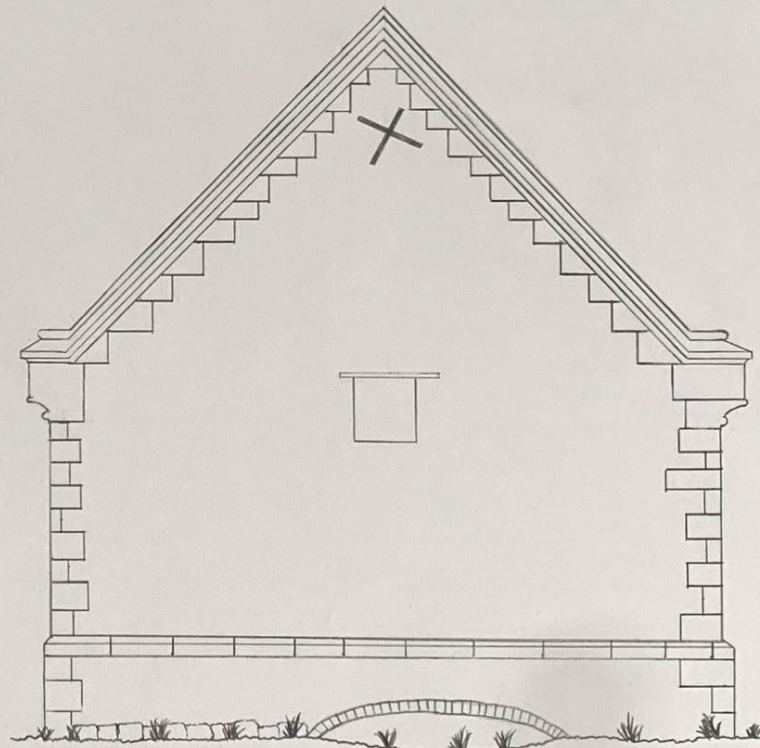
SHEET 3
DAVID EDWARDS
MAY 2023
TQ 33658 09611



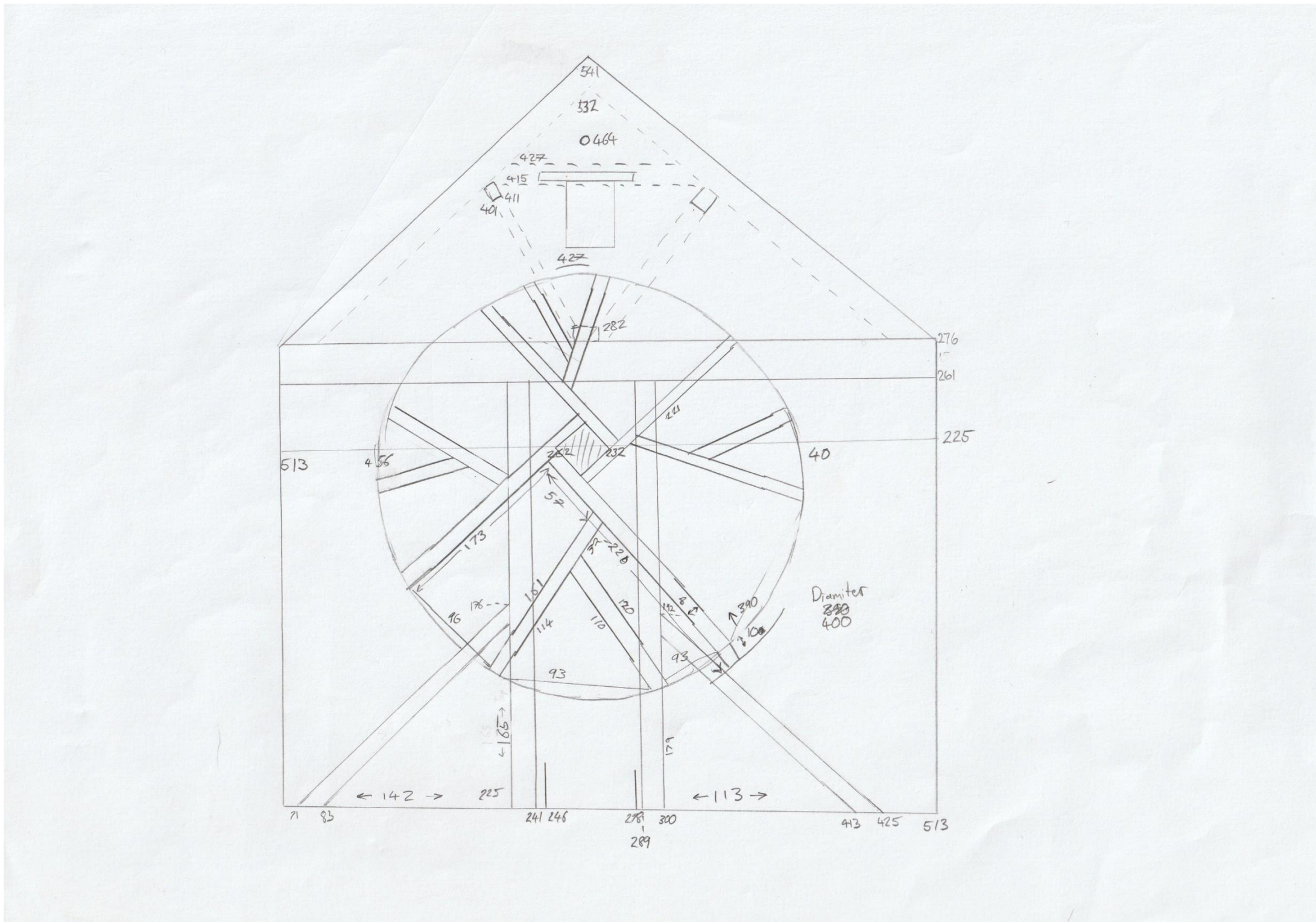
West Elevation (1:50)



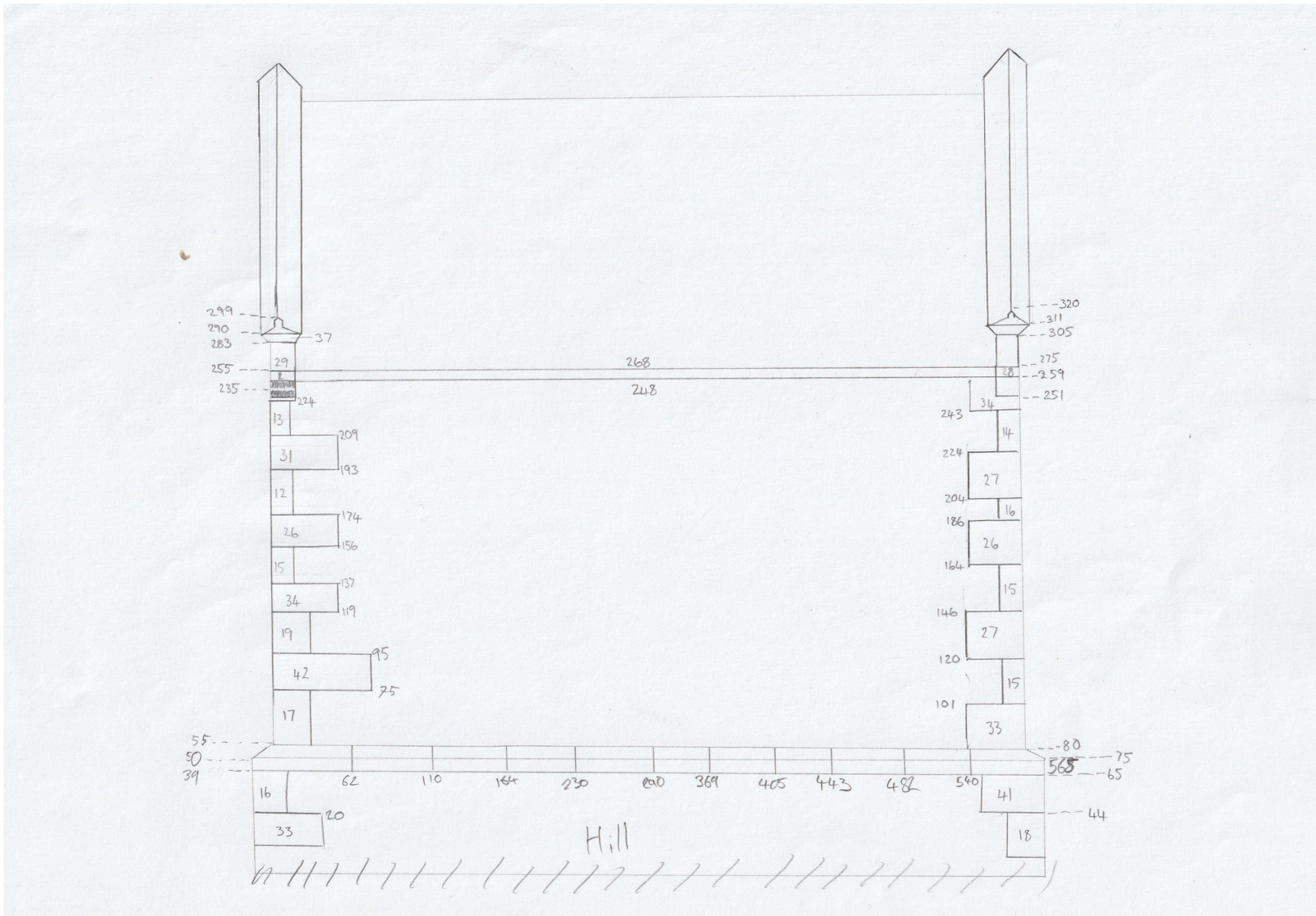
1:50 at A3



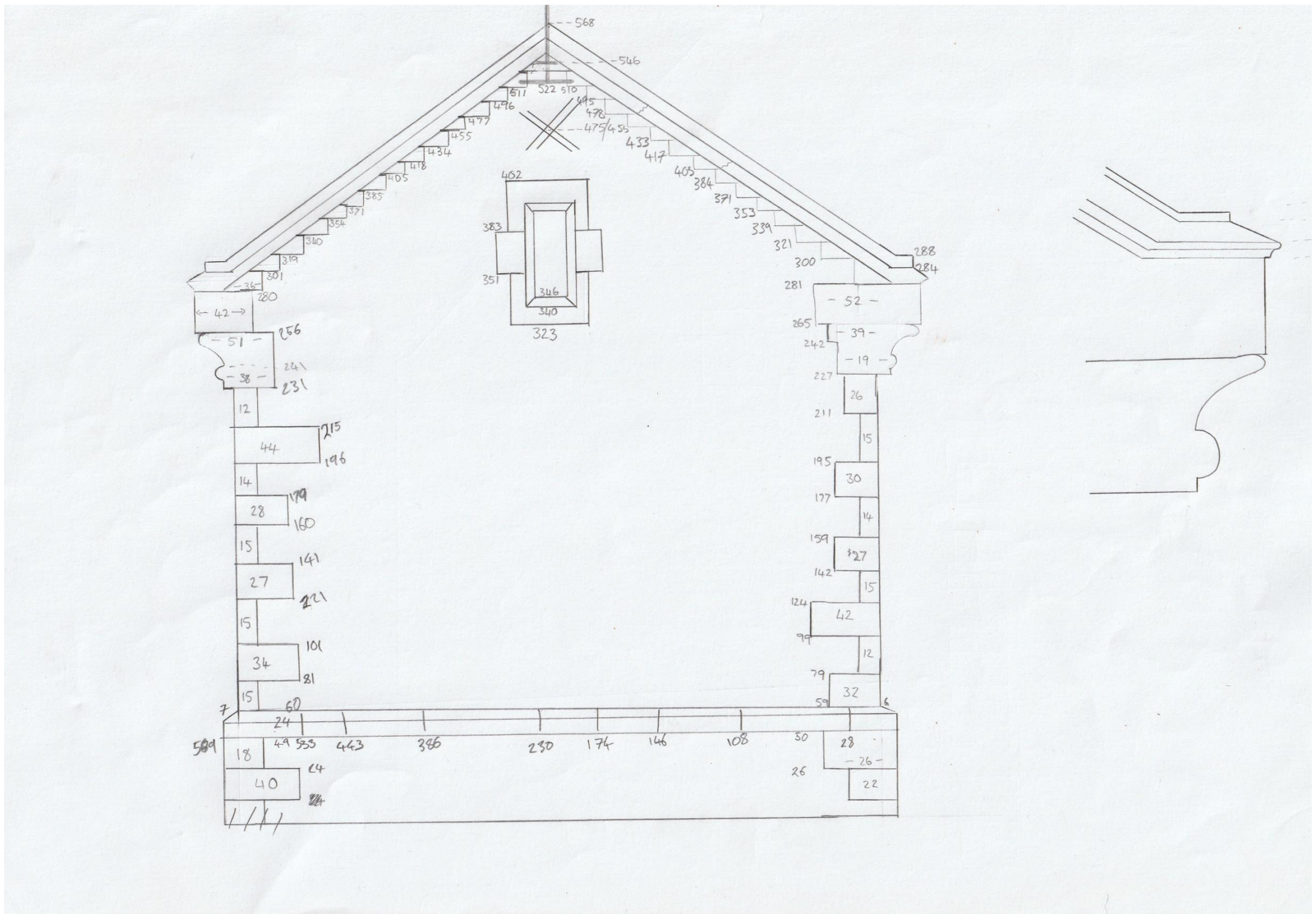
East Elevation (1:50)



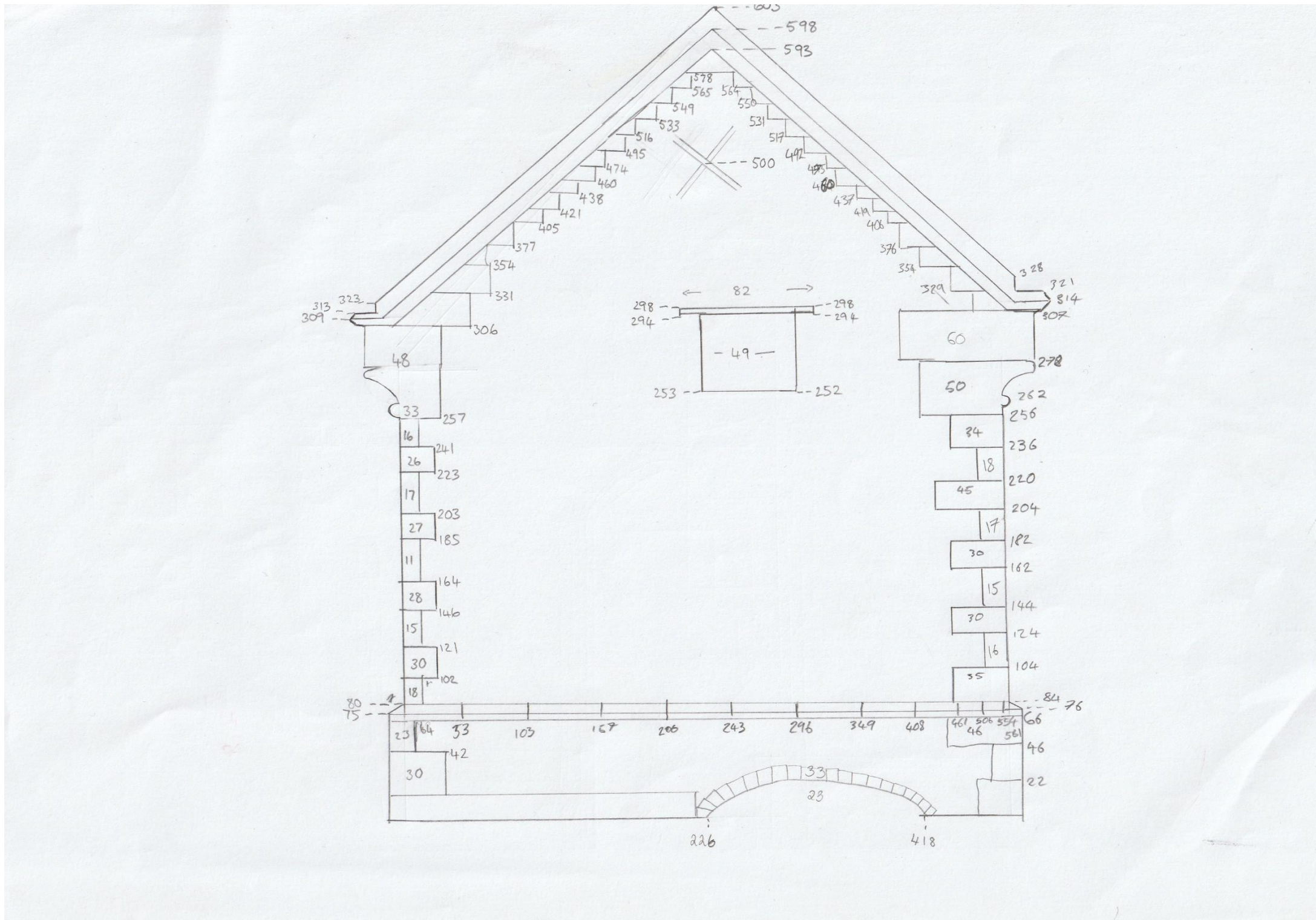
Section Sketch



South Elevation Sketch



West Elevation Sketch



East Elevation Sketch

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