

# Stafford McLoughlin

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Preliminary Archaeological Assessment Report,  
Sigginstown Castle, Sigginstown, Co. Wexford.

Archaeological Licence: 16E0519  
ITM 706247 607073

Clients:  
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## **1. Introduction**

Planning permission is being applied for by Liz & Gordon Jones for the renovation and conservation of a tower-house with an attached later house at Sigginstown, Co. Wexford. The site is known as Sigginstown Castle (figs. 1 & 2, pl. 1). Both structures are recorded archaeological monuments afforded statutory protection under the National Monuments Acts (1936-2014) (archaeological monument refs: WX053-001 & WX053-001001).

Stafford McLoughlin Archaeology was commissioned by the site owners to undertake an archaeological assessment of the site prior to the submission of a planning application and an archaeological licence for testing was granted by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA).

This document forms the report of the archaeological testing of the site which was carried out under archaeological licence 16E0519 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2016. A series of 6 test pits were excavated by hand within the castle and attached house and a number of percolation test pits were excavated by mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket at a distance of c.60m to the north-east of the castle and house.

The hand-excavated test pits within the castle and house revealed both medieval and post-medieval deposits. The clearance of standing weeds from the interior of the house revealed the footings of some red-brick interior cross-walls which are still intact and visible. The west wall of the house appears to be resting on the lower courses of an earlier wall (C14) which may be the remains of a bawn.

Monitoring of the percolation pits revealed probable archaeological deposits in two of them. These took the form of charcoal-rich spreads which may be the remains of medieval ditches or refuse pits.

This preliminary report is being submitted to the National Monuments Service as per the terms and conditions of the archaeological licence. This report will also be submitted as part of the planning application for works at the site, and will contain an impact statement and recommendations for further necessary work once the design details of the proposed development have been finalised.

### **Archaeological Background**

Sigginstown Castle is located in the townland of Sigginstown, in south Co. Wexford. References to the Siggins family in Co. Wexford date from 1342 when a Thomas Siggin is recorded and Thome Siggen de Siggenstown was on the jury of an inquisition into Tintern Abbey in 1543 (Hore 1900-11, vol. 2, 86). In 1596 Sygen of Sigginstown was listed as one of the gentlemen of Forth Barony and according to the Book of Survey and Distribution of the 1660's Edward Siggins held 106 acres at Sigginstown in 1640 (Jeffrey 1979, 35; Simmington 1953, 304-5).

Edward Siggin along with eight dependents was listed for transplantation in 1653 following the Cromwellian confiscations, and was assigned 306 acres in Connaught in 1655 (Hore 1900-11, vol. 6, 502).

Siggin's land, including the castle, was granted to William Jacob, a soldier from Cambridgeshire, and 553 acres were confirmed to him in 1667 (Hore 1921, 50). The Jacob family lived at Sigginstown Castle and held the estate into the nineteenth century (Jeffrey 1979, 36).

Sigginstown Castle is a rectangular tower house with external dimensions of 7.5m east to west by 7.3m north to south. The base of the walls is battered and the tower survives in good condition to wall-walk level.

A pointed entrance doorway of dressed granite on the north wall was protected by a machicolation, a portcullis and small cross-loop in the lobby of the ground floor chamber. The doorway is now blocked. The ground floor chamber has three double splayed embrasures, and there are also spy-holes which emerge as small openings on the outer faces close to the angles.

The castle has a mural stairs which rises in the north wall and a blocked doorway gave access to the first floor which has a wicker-centred vaulted ceiling. The first floor was supported on corbels which are still *in-situ*. An antechamber controlling the portcullis is accessed from the first floor.

The second floor has a fireplace of dressed granite, and a segmental-arched embrasure with a slit window on each wall. The embrasure on the north wall has been made into a doorway to access the later adjoining house. This floor also contains a garderobe chamber with a cross-

loop. The ceiling of this and the third floor above it were supported on corbels on the north and west walls.

The third floor also has a fireplace of dressed granite, a window within an embrasure on each wall and a garderobe chamber. There is also another antechamber with a cross loop and a spy-hole at the south-east angle.

The fourth floor has four windows in arched embrasures and the stair continues to the wall-walk, the parapet of which no longer survives.

Attached to the north side of the tower house is a rectangular two-storey with attic house. It has a seven-bay east-facing front constructed of red-brick, with a central doorway and three windows to either side. The western wall of the house is built of stone with brick surrounds to the doorways and windows. The scar of the roof where it joins the tower house on the north wall goes directly over one of the windows and the construction of the house rendered the machicolation ineffective.

## **2. Cartographic Evidence**

The earliest accurately dated map of Wexford is the first edition Ordnance Survey map which dates to 1840 (fig. 2). In 1840 the castle and house are shown and marked on the map as one building. There is another building set at a right angle to the house, this an 'agricultural building' which still exists on the site today. The buildings are set within an overall pattern of small rectangular fields. There is no evidence of a bawn.

By the time of the compilation of the second edition Ordnance Survey map in c.1903 (fig. 3) there had been little change to the arrangement of the fields, however the field boundary immediately to the west of the castle had been moved slightly and an additional building connected the north end of the house with the agricultural building.

Neither map show the set of circular masonry gate piers which are still in existence set in to the road-side field boundary to the east of the castle and house. These gate piers form an entrance from the north to south oriented road to the east of the castle and are directly in line with the east-facing front facade of the house. This entrance appears to have gone out of use by the time of the compilation of the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1840, possibly due to the construction of the mill race which can be seen on the map running in a north to south direction adjacent to the road and terminating in the corn mill to the south-east of the castle. The mill race can still be seen today as a deep dry ditch.

### 3. Archaeological Testing

Archaeological testing was undertaken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2016 under license 16E0519. A series of 6 test pits were excavated by hand within the castle and attached house and a number of percolation test pits were excavated by mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket at a distance of c.60m to the north-east of the castle and house (figs 4 – 6).

- *Test pit 1*

Test pit 1 was excavated in the ground floor of the tower house. It measured 1m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.6m in one half of its area (pl. 2). Subsoil was not reached at this level and a piece of clay pipe stem was recovered from near the bottom. The stratigraphy uncovered consisted of:

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C1	0-0.12m	Compact brown silty clay deposit with modern finds.
C2	0.12-0.60m	Relatively soft redeposited brown subsoil.

- *Test pit 2*

Test pit 2 was excavated on the second floor of the towerhouse, on top of the first floor vault (pl. 3). It measured 1m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.3m where the top of the vault construction was uncovered. This was composed of stone set in mortar. No floor surfaces were noted.

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C3	0-0.09m	Modern mixed clay deposit.
C4	0.09-0.19m	Mixed deposit of mortar, redbrick, stone, 19 <sup>th</sup> century glass.
C5	0.19-0.26m	Thin layer of sandy clay, greenish/grey in colour.
C6	0.26-0.30m	Top of vault consisting of stone set in mortar.

- *Test pit 3*

Test pit 3 was located inside the attached house, at its northern end (pl. 4). It measured 1m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.27m, where a stony deposit was encountered. The foundation of the western wall of the house was observed in this trench and continued below the level excavated.

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C7	0-0.27m	Grey/brown silty clay deposit.
C8	0.27m	Line of 3 stones, possibly part of a wall, oriented N-S, also a number of other stones present including a large boulder.

- *Test pit 4*

Test pit 4 was located inside the eastern wall of the house close to the tower house (pl. 5). It measured 1m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.2m and subsoil was encountered throughout the pit at depths of between 0.1-0.2m. The foundations of the redbrick wall of the house were observed in this test pit to be no more than 0.1m deep and resting directly on subsoil.

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C9	0-0.1 to 0.20m	Compact brown/orange clay deposit with pieces of charcoal, redbrick. Directly overlay natural orange clay subsoil.

- *Test pit 5*

Test pit 5 was located outside the eastern redbrick wall of the house, towards the northern end (pl. 6). It measured 1m x 1m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.42m where a layer of intact cobbles was uncovered. The redbrick wall continued to the depth of the excavated trench and below.

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C9	0-0.42m	Loose dark brown silty clay with frequent inclusions of 19 <sup>th</sup> century glass, redbrick, mortar etc.
C10	0.42-0.46m	Layer of broken slates and mortar.
C11	0.46m	Layer of intact cobbles, average 0.1m x 0.06m in size.

- *Test pit 6*

Test pit 6 was located outside the western wall of the house and was excavated against the wall to inspect its foundations (pl. 7). The wall of the house is sitting on top of an earlier wall foundation which can be seen running the entire length of the western wall at existing ground level (pl. 8). The earlier wall appears at a slight angle to the western wall of the house and

may be tentatively interpreted as a separate feature, most likely the wall of a bawn enclosure. It measures between 0.7-0.8m in width and is composed of large stones. The western wall of the house measures 0.6m wide and the redbrick eastern wall is 0.5m wide.

<i>Context no:</i>	<i>Depth:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
C12	0-0.30m	Compact reddish brown silty clay with inclusions of redbrick, mortar and slate.
C13	0.30-0.50m	Compact reddish brown clay with flecks of charcoal, 17 <sup>th</sup> century pottery, and glass.
C14	0.46m	Wall, uncovered to a depth of 0.4m. Mix of stones sizes, stones bonded with lime mortar.

- *Features in the interior of the house*

The interior of the house was cleared by the site owners of standing weeds prior to the archaeological assessment. This revealed other features within the house which were not evident before. The ground floor contained two distinct rooms, each with a corner fireplace made of redbrick (fig. 6; pl. 9). There is a corridor at the northern end of the house, leading to an external doorway through the western wall. There is also a corridor leading to the blocked doorway of the tower house. The tower house doorway was blocked in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mid-western portion of the house contained a large staircase, which is evidenced by the arrangement of openings in the western wall and the arrangement of joists on the first floor. Other footing fragments of brick walls are evident within the house and a large flat boulder is situated close to the northern fireplace. All of these features are situated at or slightly above current ground level within the building.

In addition, dating material was found in the western wall of the house close to the southern doorway. This dating material comprises 4 pieces of North Devon Gravel Tempered Ware which was used as pinnings in the masonry (pl. 10). These pieces of broken pottery are visible at just above eye level. This material fits in well with a date for the house at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, this date is also relevant for the redbrick corner fireplaces.

- *Percolation Pits*

Six percolation pits were excavated at a distance of 60m to the north-east of the castle. All of the pits measured 2.5m in length by 1.2m in width x 0.6m deep (fig. 5; pls. 11 & 12). Probable archaeological deposits were uncovered in three of the six test pits. These deposits

took the form of compact charcoal rich silty clays and are likely to be the remains of ditches or refuse pits associated with the castle or house. There was no impact on the identified deposits and the pits were recorded and backfilled.

#### **4. The Proposed Development**

The proposed development will entail the refurbishment of the castle and attached house, as well as the creation of a new driveway, septic services, carparking area, and the refurbishment of the adjacent agricultural building. Details of the proposals are not yet available.

#### **5. Impact of the Proposed Development**

This is a preliminary report on the results of the archaeological assessment. Proposals for the development have not been compiled at this time and the impact is therefore not known. Design proposals should be available in Spring 2017 and this report will be submitted with an Impact Statement as part of the planning submission for the site at a later date.

#### **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Archaeological assessment at Sigginstown Castle has shown that the attached house is likely to be late seventeenth or early eighteenth century based on the finding of North Devon Gravel Tempered Ware built into the masonry of the western wall of the house. The interior of the house contains wall footings and the remains of corner fireplaces at current ground level, with some elements protruding above ground level.

The western wall of the house is built on top of a wider, earlier wall (C14) whose footing can be seen under the western wall but not quite in a line with it, supporting the view that it is an earlier feature. This earlier wall may be the remains of a bawn wall and it is possible that the long southern wall of the adjacent agricultural building (which runs at right angles to C14) is also the remains of a bawn wall.

The test pits inside the tower house did not reveal any floor surfaces and there appears to be a build-up of late deposits on the ground floor. The test pit over the vault revealed the build-up of the vault at a depth of 0.25m.

This is a preliminary report and no recommendations for further work can be made until the design proposals for the site are known. This report along with a built heritage survey and

conservation report will be submitted in 2017 along with impact statements once the design proposals for the site are known.<sup>1</sup>

**Bibliography**

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Fig. 1 General location of Sigginstown, Co. Wexford. RMP number: WX053-001, ITM 706247 607073

<sup>1</sup>All recommendations are made subject to the approval of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA).



Fig. 2 Location of Sigginstown Castle within extract from 1840 OS map

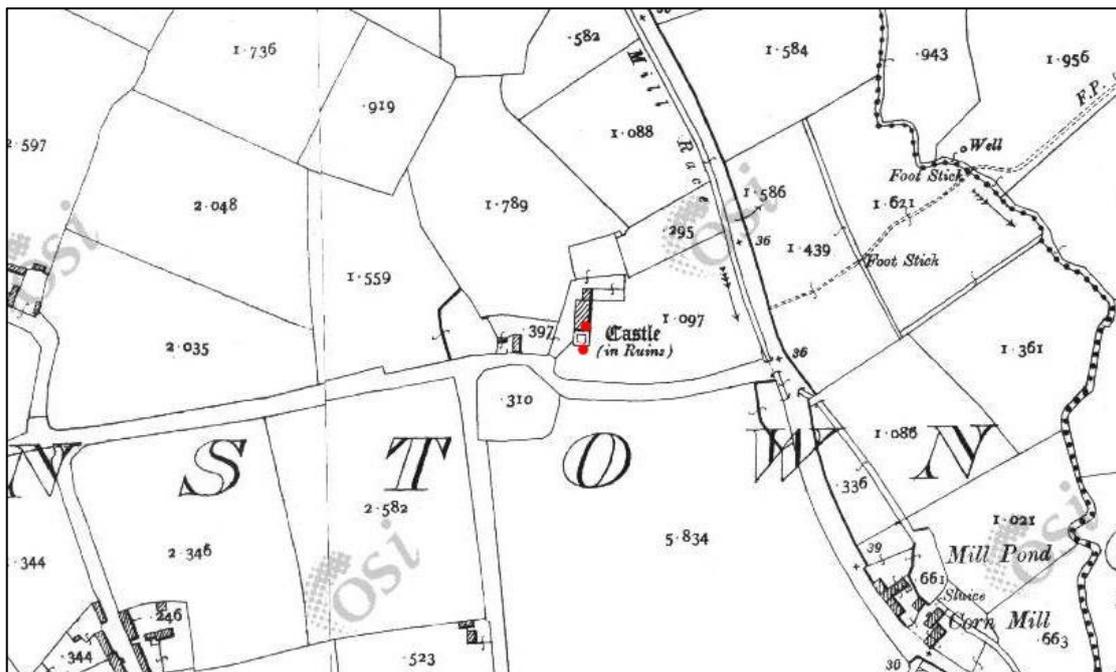


Fig. 3 Location of Sigginstown Castle within extract from 1903 OS map

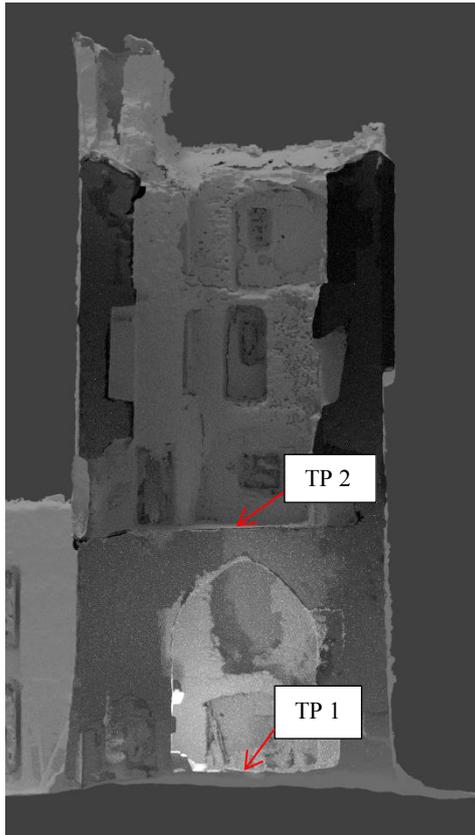


Fig. 4 Location of Test pits 1 & 2 within tower house (scan by Simon Dowling)

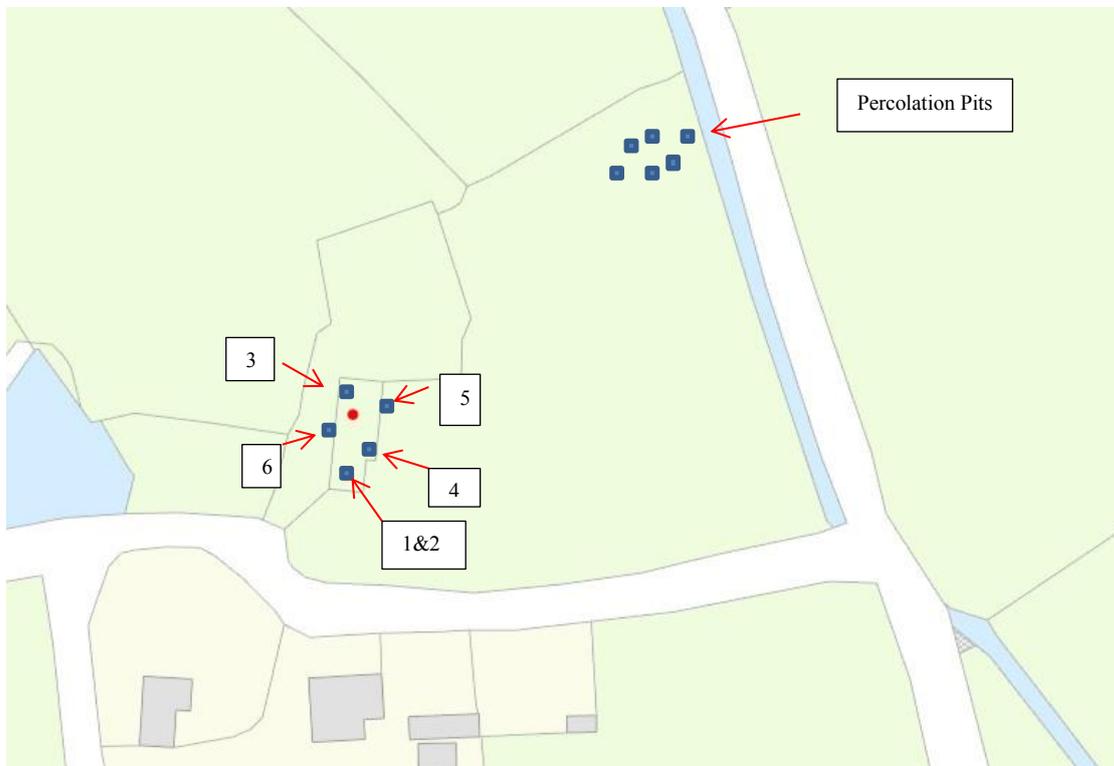


Fig. 5 Location of Test pits 1-6, and percolation pits 60m to NE of castle

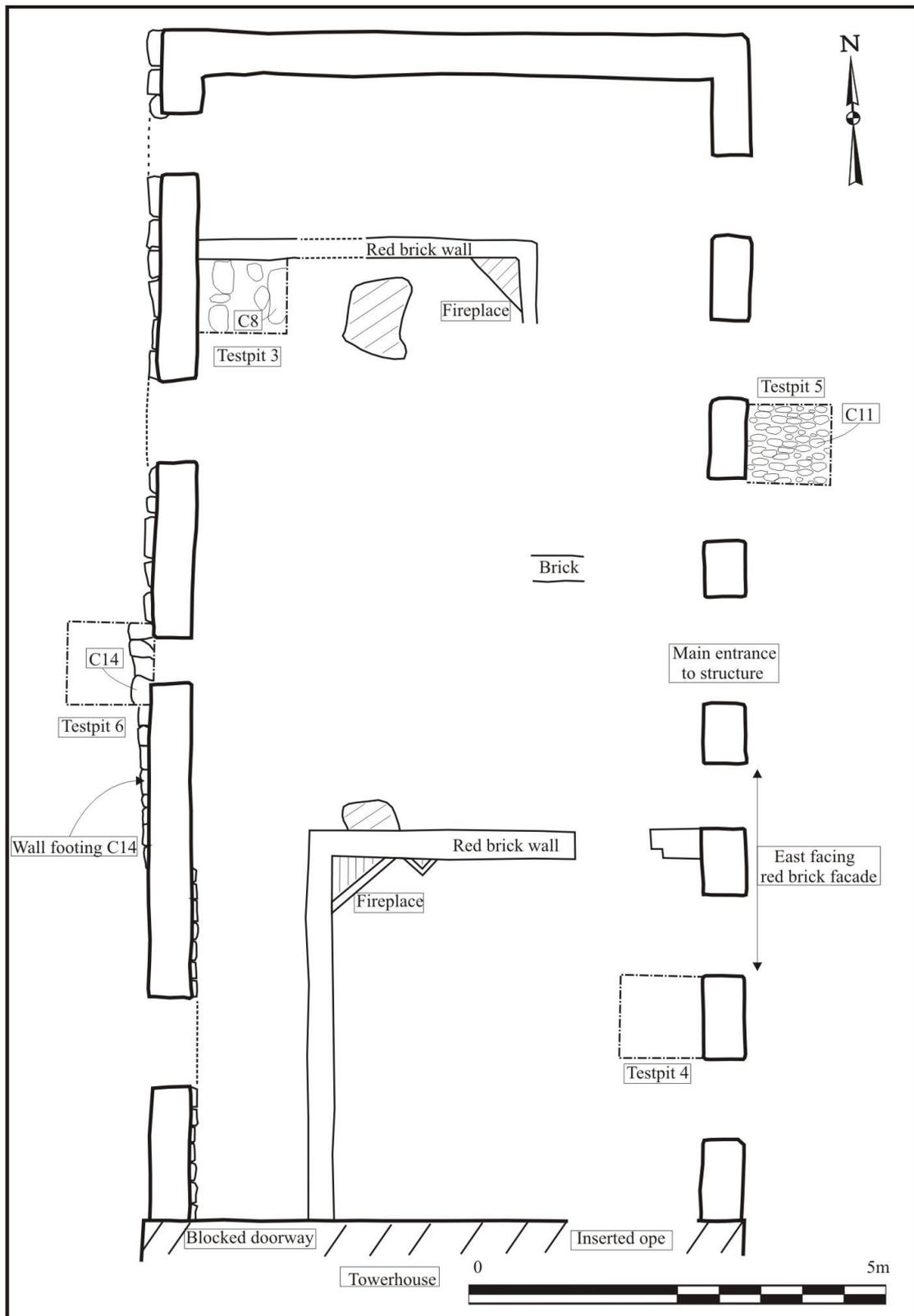


Fig. 6 Layout of attached house showing position of test pits 3-6, and location of internal features at ground level.



Pl 1 Sigginstown Castle & later house



Pl 2 Test pit 1



Pl 3 Test pit 2



Pl 4 Test pit 3



Pl 5 Test pit 4



Pl 6 Test pit 5



Pl 7 Test pit 6



Pl 8 Earlier wall C14, western wall of house appears to be sitting on top of this.



Pl 9 Interior of house showing walls and fireplaces at ground level



Pl 10 Piece of North Devon Gravel Tempered Ware used as pinning in external western wall, at the top of, and close to, the south door in this wall



Pl 11 Percolation pits to NE of castle



Pl 12 Percolation pit 1 with archaeological deposit in-situ