

Archaeological
Building
Recording
Services

**An Archaeological Standing Building Survey
Market Hall
Amersham
Buckinghamshire**

(NGR SU 95754 97321)

On Behalf of Amersham Town Council



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February 2022

ABRS Project No 2021-MHAB

**Planning Application No
PL/19/2918/HB**

**Buckinghamshire County Museum
Accession No AYBCM: 2019.120**

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An Archaeological Standing Building Survey, Market Hall (Clock Tower only), Market Square, Amersham, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 95754 97321).

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Summary

This document is an archaeological standing building survey of the clock tower at Market Hall, Market Square, Amersham, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 95754 97321), commissioned from Archaeological Building Recording Services (ABRS) by Amersham Town Council in advance of conservation works to secure the clock tower structure.

Amersham Market Hall is a known heritage asset, listed at Grade II. The building dates to 1682, having been built by the then lord of the Manor and MP William Tyrwhitt-Drake. There is documentary evidence to suggest that the clock tower itself may be a later addition, added to the Hall in the early 18th century, potentially to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the building. The clock tower is timber framed housing four clock faces, a mechanism and a bell frame and bell. It is likely that the clock tower has undergone a number of phases of repair.*

The bell tower consists of eight jowled bay posts carrying a lapped and pegged wall plate supporting a flattened conical roof. The bay posts have been severely truncated, leaving a much reduced cross section at the bases. There is evidence to suggest that the bell frame is later, although still of some antiquity.

The archive will be retained by ABRS under the temporary site code 2022-MHAB until deposition with Buckinghamshire County Museum can be arranged under the Accession No AYBCM: 2019.120.

1. Introduction

Archaeological Building Recording Services (ABRS) were commissioned by Amersham Town Council to undertake an archaeological standing building survey of the clock tower at Market Hall, Market Square, Amersham, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 95754 97321 (*Figures 1 & 10*)). Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent has been granted for repairs and strengthening of the bell turret and replacement of the bell frame and fittings. The building is a traditionally built former market hall, dating from the 17th century. The Buckinghamshire Council Archaeology Service has recommended that an archaeological standing building survey to Historic England Level 3 as defined in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016) be carried out prior to any proposed works being carried out.

A Brief for a programme of archaeological building recording was not issued. The work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA) *Code of Conduct*, and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (2019).

The Market Hall is statutorily listed at Grade II* (NHLE No 1221420) and located within the Amersham Old Town Conservation Area.

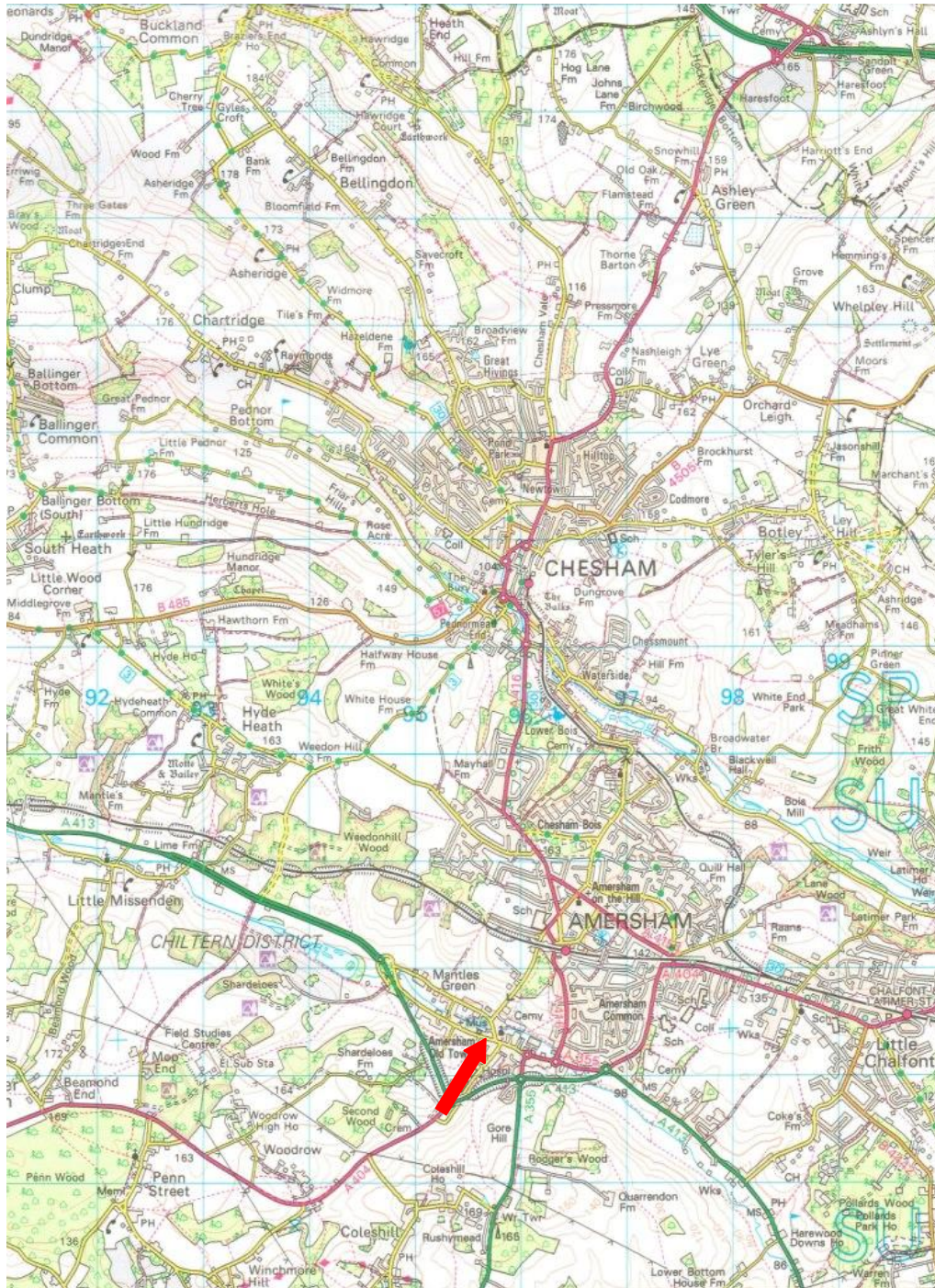


Figure 1
Site Location

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2. Historical Background

Amersham has an established medieval and Anglo Saxon history, prior to the Conquest the settlement was known as *Agmodesham*, and the manor was held by Queen Edith, following the Conquest the manor was granted to Geoffrey de Mandeville and at Domesday was listed as *Elmodesham* and described as consisting of 7 ½ hides with land for 16 ploughs; in lordship 2 hides; 3 ploughs there. 14 villagers with 4 smallholders have 9 ploughs; a further 4

possible. 7 slaves; meadow for 16 ploughs; woodland 400 pigs. The total value being £9, less than its pre-Conquest value of £16. In 1200, a descendent of de Mandeville, also named Geoffrey, later the Earl of Essex obtained a charter for Amersham allowing him to hold a Friday market and a fair on 7 and 8 September, in 1613 another charter was granted to Edward, Earl of Bedford, changing the market day to Tuesday, and establishing a statute fair on 19 September.

From 1625 Amersham returned two MPs to the House of Commons, and was until the 1832 Reform Act considered a rotten borough. From around the early 17th century the Tyrwhitt-Drake Family became Lords of the Manor and in 1624 William Tothill moved to Shardeloes and started negotiations to buy the Manor of Amersham and its right to elect two Members of Parliament and as such grew to have great influence over the town of Amersham. In 1625 Francis Drake became MP for Amersham. Sir William Drake (1606-69), grandson of William Tothill inherited the Amersham Estates in 1626 and he finally completed the purchase of the Borough of Amersham from the Earl of Bedford in 1637. This included common rights on Amersham Common and Wycombe Heath which enabled him to enclose large quantities of land. He became a baronet in 1641 and, along with his brother Francis represented Amersham in Parliament until 1648. William fled England in 1643 during the Civil War, only returning following the Restoration, also returning to parliament as MP for Amersham. Sir William died without issue in 1669 and his lands passed to his nephew, also William (1651-90), Francis's son. William was knighted in 1668 when only 18 years old, and in 1669 he immediately became MP for Amersham, a role he retained until his death in 1690. In around 1670 he married Elizabeth, daughter and heir to The Hon. William Montague, and they had 8 children, only two surviving infancy.

It was Sir William, in 1682 who endowed the town with its Market Hall. It was intended that the upper floor be used for meetings, such as those for traders' guilds and the ground floor as a market. The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS) holds a number of apparently original architectural plans relating to the Market Hall, although two of the papers bear the watermark "GR", for George I who only succeeded the throne in 1714, so the exact date of the drawings is open to debate. The elevation drawing (CBS Ref D-BASM/2/57 (*Figure 2*)) gives an extremely clear representation of the building indicating that it was built largely as it was designed, with only subtle changes to the window heads and arches, the two being more plainly finished than apparently intended. The eaves corbelling does not appear on the drawing either. Interestingly, the bell turret and clock, as it stands now is shown as an overlay, below which is apparently the proposed, but not built design (CBS Ref D-BASM/2/57 (*Figure 3*)). There are clear differences between the two proposals; the proposed tower appears to be square in plan with an octagonal arcade and ornate weather vane. Interestingly, this proposed tower bears the date 1729 on the clock face, which along with water marked paper dating to post 1714 raising the intriguing possibility that the clock tower as a whole is a later, early 18th century addition to the 1682 Market Hall, potentially celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Hall.

Other drawings within the same group include two further options including what appears to be a truly huge tower, towering 30 feet above the roofline (CBS Ref D-BASM/2/57 (*Figures 4 & 5*)). The drawings also include a proposed offset location for the clock tower (CBS Ref D-BASM/2/57 (*Figure 6*)).



Figure 2

Architectural drawings and measurements for Amersham market hall and clock tower (c. 1682 - 1714).



Clock Tower – Actual.



Clock Tower – Proposed.

Figure 3

Architectural drawings and measurements for Amersham market hall and clock tower (c. 1682 - 1714).



Figure 4
Architectural drawings and measurements for Amersham market hall and clock tower (c. 1682 - 1714).

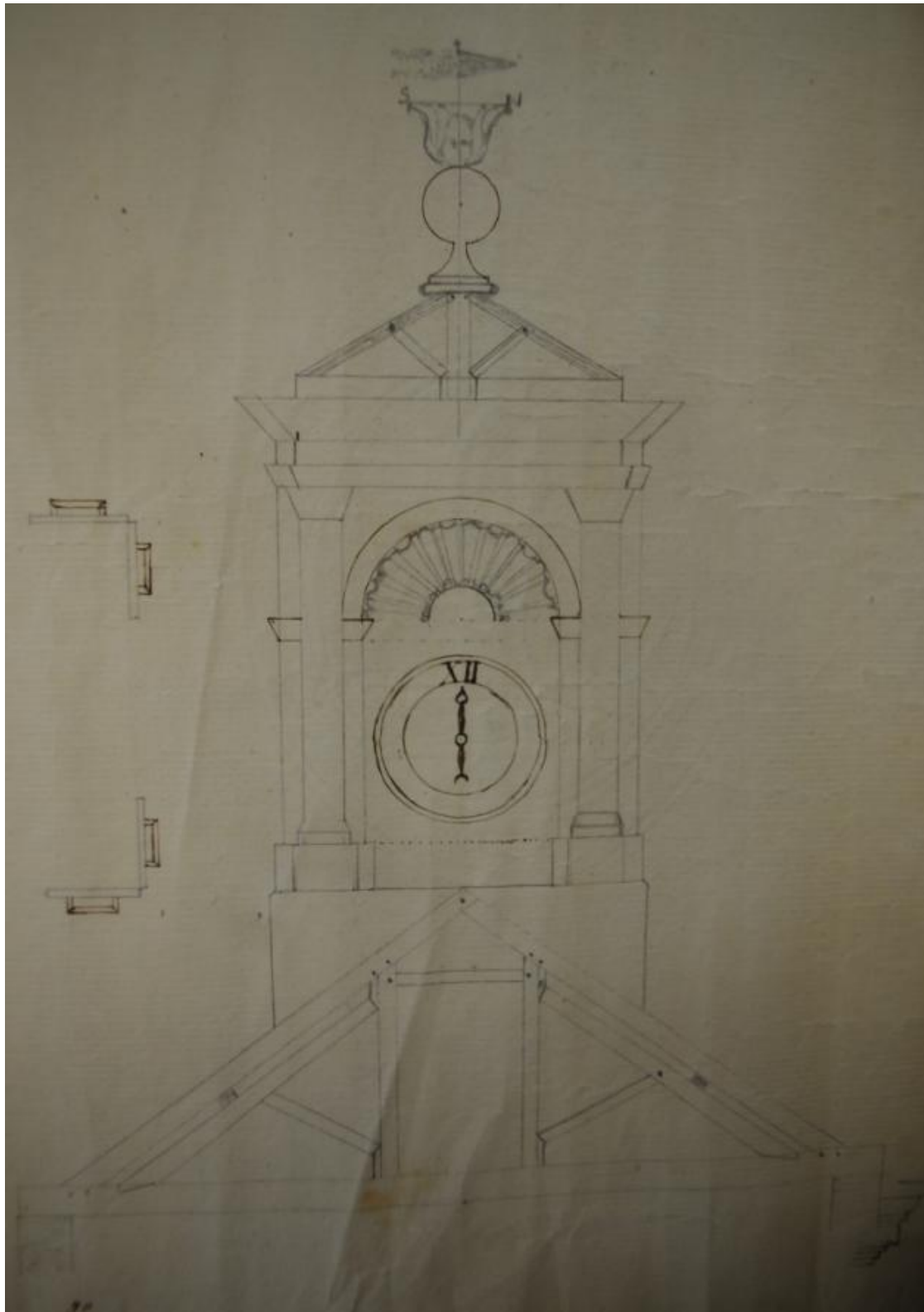


Figure 5
Architectural drawings and measurements for Amersham market hall and clock tower (c. 1682 - 1714).



Figure 6
Architectural drawings and measurements for Amersham market hall and clock tower (c. 1682 - 1714).

In 1742 “A map of the town of Agmondesham” was produced (CBS Ref D-DR/4/1A (*Figure 7*)). The map was compiled to illustrate how William Drake controlled the borough in a Parliamentary election, the houses of tenants of William Drake, Mrs Drake and Thomas Marshall are numbered and there is a key to the names of the individual tenants on the map. The map is the earliest available cartographic reference to the Market Hall, which is identified as Market House. Being an outline plan only, there is no indication of a clock tower, or any other significant detail of the building.



Figure 7

A map of the town of Agmondesham (1742).

In 1894 the woodwork in the turret is said to have been renovated, although there is no clear source for this work, nor is the full extent of this renovation clear (<https://amershammuseum.org/history/old-town/market-square/market-hall/>). In 1911 the whole building was restored by William Wykeham Tyrwhitt-Drake, a commemorative stone on the south facing elevation marking these works.

In January 1937 the South Bucks Free Press reported that the faces on the town clock had been removed so that they could be cleaned in readiness for the forthcoming coronation celebrations. The article includes a potted history of the clock tower and remarks that older residents will remember “*when the clock had three faces – now it only has two. The third face, which was on the north side and clearly visible to people walking down Church Street*”. The third face was allegedly removed at the request of Weller’s Brewery to prevent staff from clock watching, such stories are common enough when associated with municipal clocks. The description of the clock as only having three faces, and then two is interesting, suggesting that the clock, and its faces has undergone some significant alterations, the current clock has four faces.



Figure 8
Late 19th Century (?) Photograph.



Figure 9
Early 20th Century Photograph.

CBS holds a number of photographs of the Market Hall, most are un-dated, but are likely to be late 19th or early 20th century in date. A view of the east facing elevation (CBS Ref PHX/1996 (*Figure 8*)) appears to show either a blank face or a black face to the clock. An

apparently later photograph (CBS Ref PHX/1645 (*Figure 9*)) is clearer and confirms the clock as having fewer faces, with no clear evidence of a face on the south facing elevation.

The Market Hall was listed at Grade II* in 1958, the listed building description describes thus...

“1682, slightly restored 1911. Ground floor red brick, 1st floor red stretchers grey headers, lead hipped old tile roof with octagonal wooden cupola consisting of drum with clock face, round headed open arcade, flattened conical roof and gilded ball and weather vane; modillion cornice. Stone quoins, floor band, imposts and keyblocks. Ground floor round headed open arcading blocked by staircases in north east and north west corners. First floor has six large 2-light wood mullion and transom casements with flat arches; in centre is projecting cartouche supported by moulding and console and containing achievement with crest of raised forearm and hand holding metal axe. 1st floor side elevations each have central raised stone panel carved with Drake monogram and date 1682. Towards north end of east side wall is pump with lead head dated 1785”.

3. Aims and Methodology

The specific objectives of the standing building survey were as follows:

- To provide a comprehensive written, drawn and photographic record of the building prior to conservation, as it represents upstanding archaeological/historical remains of local, regional or national importance.
- To provide a comprehensive review of the local and regional historical context of the structures recorded by the project, making reference to the appropriate regional research agendas.
- To produce a high quality, fully integrated archive suitable for long-term deposition in order to ‘preserve by record’ the buildings in their current form prior to conservation.

Desk-based research included the analysis of readily available documentary and cartographic sources including Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record (HER) & Centre for Buckinghamshire History (CBS).

The Historic Building Recording verified existing measured survey drawings (supplied by the client) and completed a photographic (35mm monochrome negative) and written record of the building to the equivalent of Historic England Level 3. An ordered archive has been compiled and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum. An Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) record has been completed.

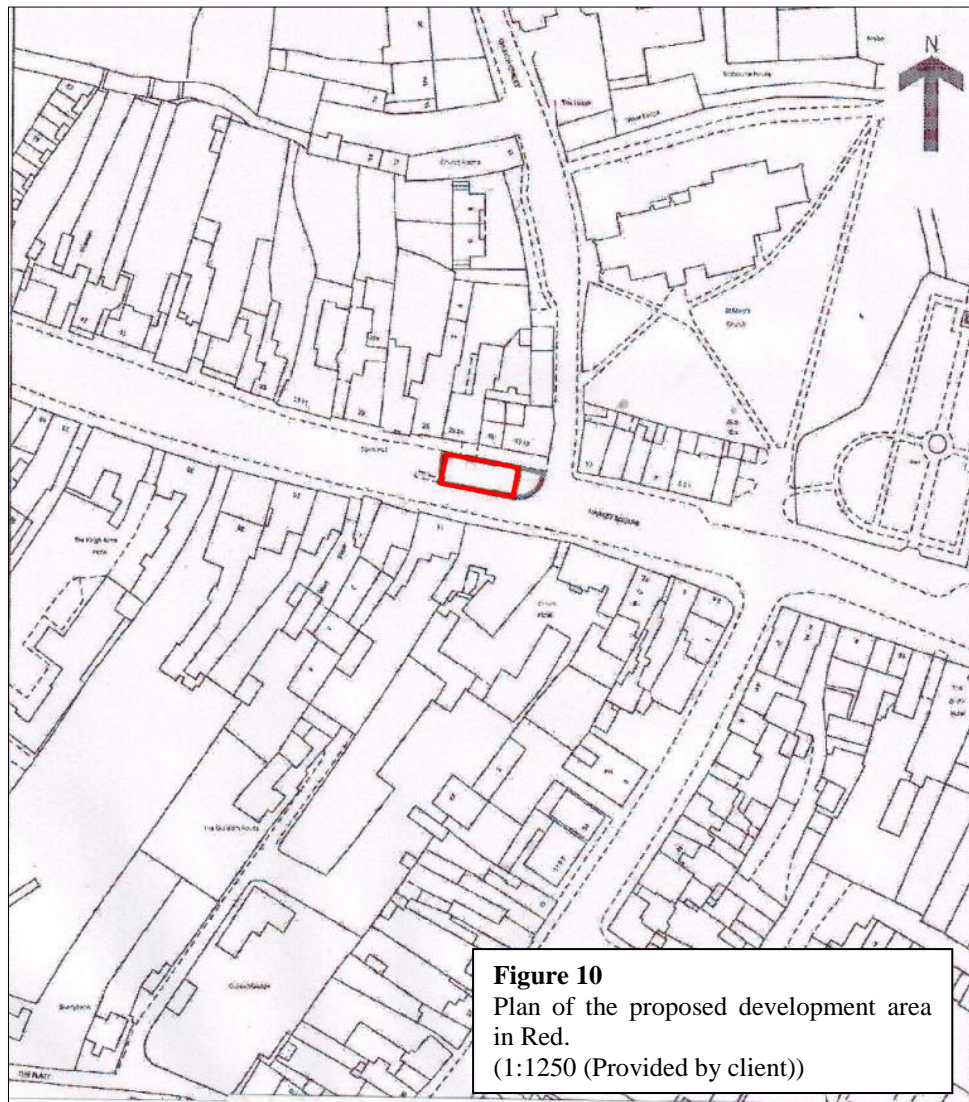
Orientation: The building subject to this historic building recording is rectangular in plan, the long axis being aligned west – north west to east – south east (*Figure 10*). The long elevations being those facing south – south west and north – north east, for ease of description this is taken hereafter to be east – west. Where the terms ‘left’, ‘right’, ‘front’ and ‘back’ etc are used in the report, this is in relation to these long elevations, as viewed from the south.

The building recording is limited to the clock tower and the immediate surrounding roof structure.

All historic maps are reproduced with north to the top of the page, following Ordnance Survey standards unless indicated otherwise with appropriate north arrow and key.

A previous archaeological standing building survey & impact assessment was carried on the building in 2019 by ABRS, the report expands that document.

The site visits were carried out by Gerwyn Richards and Jonathan Hunn on December 20th 2021, February 2nd and February 3rd 2022.



4. Description of the Structure

Amersham Market Hall is a two storey, brick-built former market hall; the ground floor is arcaded with brick arched openings. The roof is hipped with a central secret valley clad in plain tiles (*Figure 11*).

The clock tower and bell turret atop the Market Hall is located within the centre of the building within a valley between the two roofs and consists of an octagonal timber framed structure supporting a wooden cupola consisting of drum with clock faces facing north, east,

south and west under a round headed open arcade and flattened conical roof, topped with a gilded ball and weather vane (*Figure 12*).

The eight bay posts rise from wall plate level. The main frame members are pegged (*Figure 13*) and there are some examples of incised assembly marks (*Figure 14*), all in Roman numerals, all apparently contemporary, indicating the structure is original and un-altered. There are some diagonal braces, the use of deal for these braces suggests that they are later insertions, perhaps added to strengthen the structure.

The bell turret and drum are oak framed and clad with painted timber boards. Removal of these boards confirmed that they were modern softwood.

Planking adjacent to the east facing valley door contains some traces of graffiti, most of which is unintelligible, but a partial date, 177 can be seen, going some way to confirming the 18th century date of at least parts of the clock tower.

Within the open arcade is an oak bell frame carrying a bell. The bell is said to be inscribed “C. H. made me 1682”. C.H could conceivably be Christopher Hodson, the London based bell-founder who worked extensively between 1669 and 1696. The bell frame is a bolted frame and unlikely to be original. The bell frame (*Figure 15*), as part of the work was removed. Although bolts have clearly been used the frame is also jointed with dovetail joints (*Figure 16*), so it is possible, that although not original the bell frame may be of some significant age.

The exposed structure consists of eight posts (*Figure 17*), all in oak. The wall plate is lapped at each angle and pegged (*Figure 18*). The bay posts have been severely truncated, leaving a much reduced cross section at the bases (*Figure 19*). The tops of the posts are jowled, which appears to be original to support the wall plate, although it is clear that fillets have been added to at least one of the posts, possibly as a later repair.

5. Conclusion

Amersham Market Hall is a known heritage asset, a 17th century building listed at Grade II*. The building was originally built in 1682 by Sir William Tyrwhitt-Drake and gifted to the Amersham Rural District Council in 1961 by Francis Tyrwhitt-Drake.

There is some documentary evidence which suggests that the clock tower is a later addition, built in around the 1720s, potentially celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the construction of the Hall.

There is both physical and documentary evidence that the clock tower has undergone significant repair and potential re-building works. The drum was clad in modern softwood planking, almost certainly dating to the 20th century. The posts have been truncated, potentially to accommodate this planking leaving a much reduced cross section. There is also evidence that the bell frame may be a 19th or early 20th century replacement.

6. Archive & Publication

The site archive consists of

10 A3 paper sheets containing plans & notes
3 A3 permatrace sheets containing plans, sections & notes
5 DVDs containing 196 digital images
6 A4 contact sheets
149 B&W negatives and contact sheets
6 A4 photo record sheets
1 Unbound copy of this report
1 Unbound copy of *An Archaeological Standing Building Survey & Impact Assessment, Market Hall (Clock Tower only), Market Square, Amersham, Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 95754 97321)*. ABRIS Report 2019-MHAB_v1.

The archive will be held by Buckinghamshire Museum under the Accession Number AYBCM: 2019.120.

A version of the summary (above) will be submitted to the editor of the local journal for inclusion in the next edition.

6.1 OASIS Record Summary

INFORMATION REQUIRED	UPLOADED AS
OASIS No	archaeol30-357719
Project Name	An Archaeological Standing Building Survey & Impact Assessment, Market Hall (Clock Tower only), Market Square, Amersham, Buckinghamshire.
Site Co-ordinates	SU 95754 97321
Project Type	Standing Building Recording
Project Manager	Gerwyn Richards
Previous/Future Work?	No/No
Current Land Use	In Use As Building
Development Type	Conservation
Prompt	Listed Building Consent
Archive Recipient	Buckinghamshire Museum

7. References & Sources

<https://amershammuseum.org/>

<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk> accessed June 2019

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M^cKay, W.B 1945 *Building Craft Series, Brickwork*. Longmans, Green & Co.

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8. Colour Plates



Figure 11
Market Hall, General View (Looking East).



Figure 12
Clock Tower, General View (Looking North West).



Figure 13
Pegged Frame.



Figure 14
Inscribed Assembly Mark on Main Frame.



Figure 15
Bell Frame (Looking North).



Figure 16
Dovetail Joint on Bell Frame (Post Removal).



Figure 17
Clock Tower, Exposed Posts (Looking East – South East).

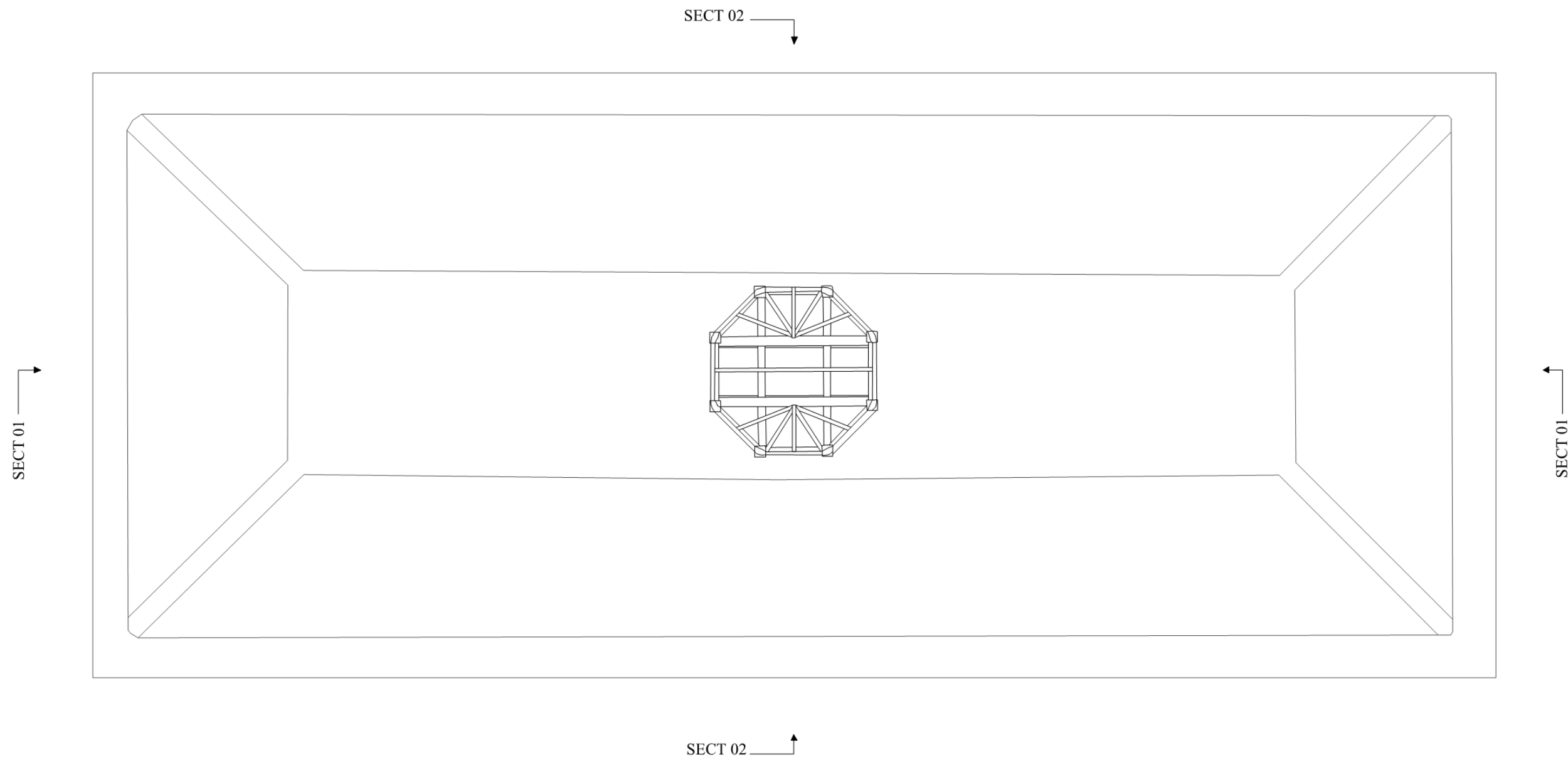
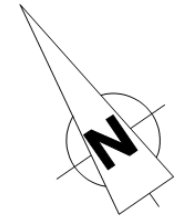


Figure 18
Clock Tower, Lapped & Pegged Wall Plate (Looking South East).



Figure 19
Base of Posts Showing Truncation (Looking East – South East).

Figure 20 Roof Plan & Clock Tower.

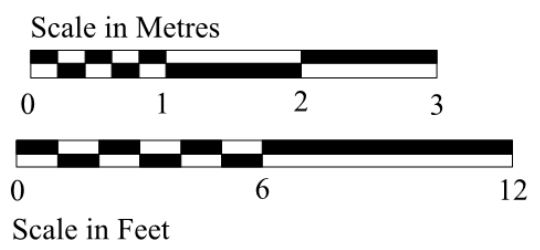
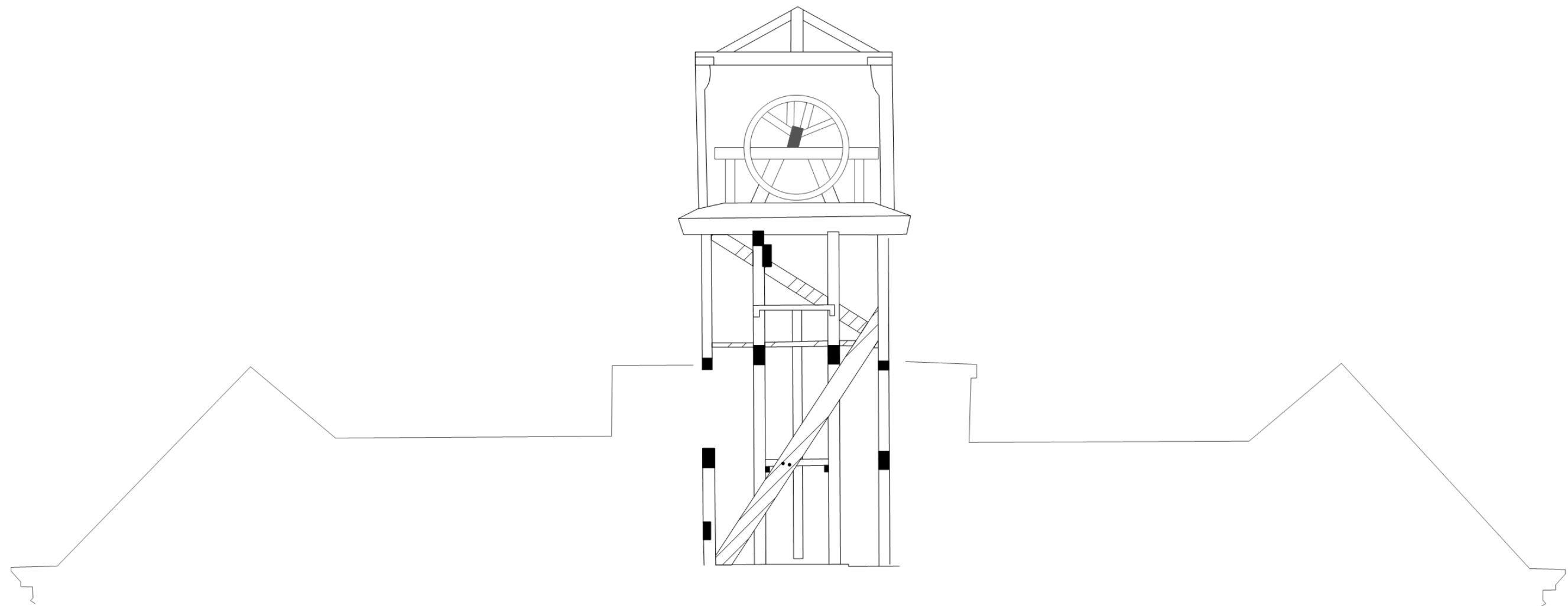


Scale in Metres



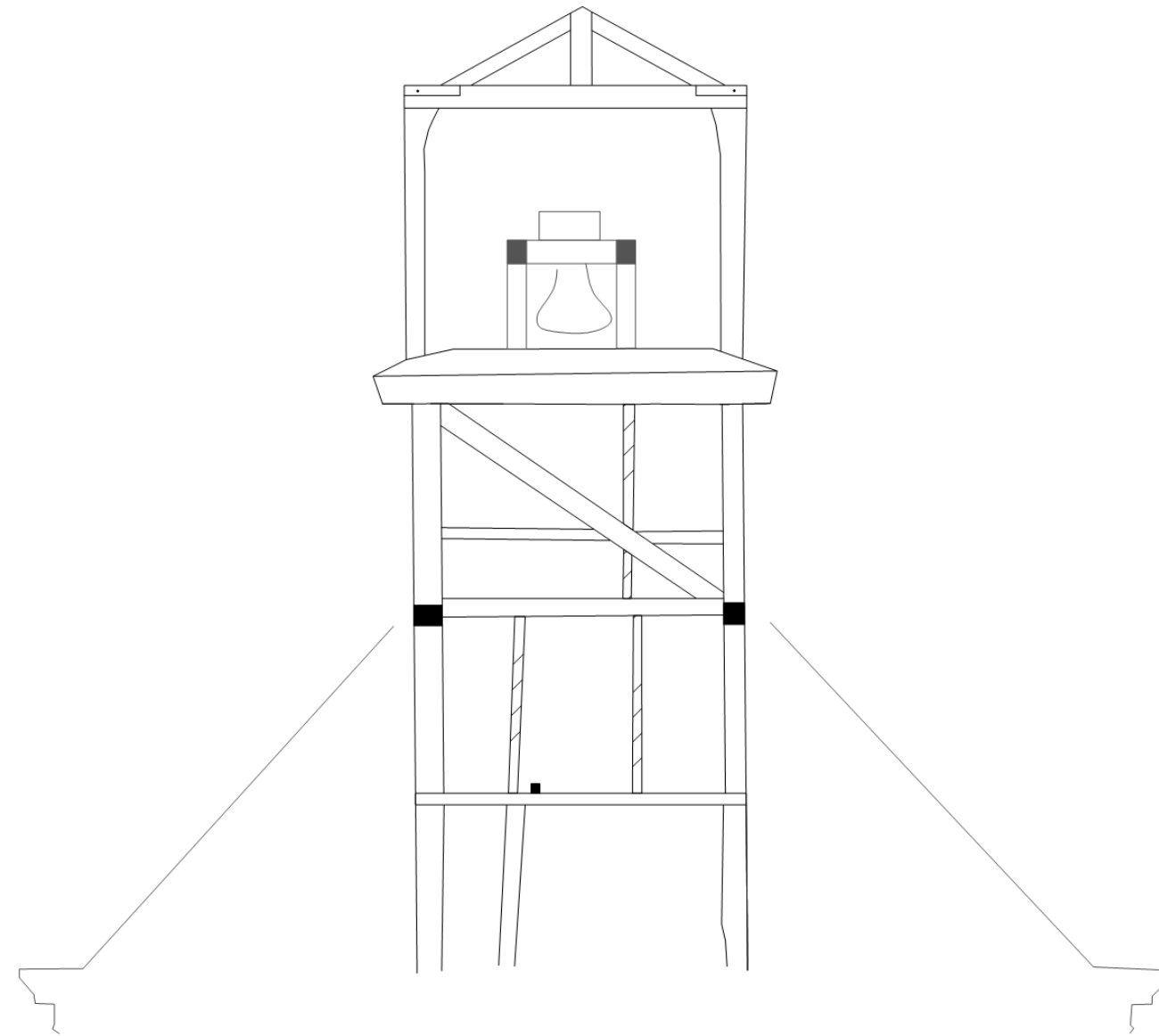
Scale in Feet

Figure 21 Section 01.

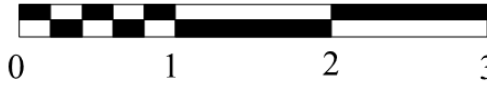


 NON ORIGINAL STRUCTURE

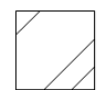
Figure 22 Section 02.



Scale in Metres



Scale in Feet



NON ORIGINAL STRUCTURE

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