

# ~ Blakeney Guildhall ~

This building was once of two storeys, of which this fine 14th century undercroft or basement survives. It is divided into two aisles by stone piers and covered by a ribbed vault of brick. The doorways and windows are original. The first floor, probably entered from higher ground from the south, retains only the lower part of its window embrasures. A projection at the south-east angle contains the shute to serve a garderobe or privy. The bricks, no doubt locally made, are typical of their period, being variable in quality and appearance. For this reason medieval brickwork was often plastered over.

Although traditionally called the Guildhall, nothing is known of the building's early history. As Blakeney was a port and fish market in the medieval period, the building may have been erected as a merchant's house, the undercroft being used for storage of merchandise. It closely resembles buildings of this type in other medieval towns.

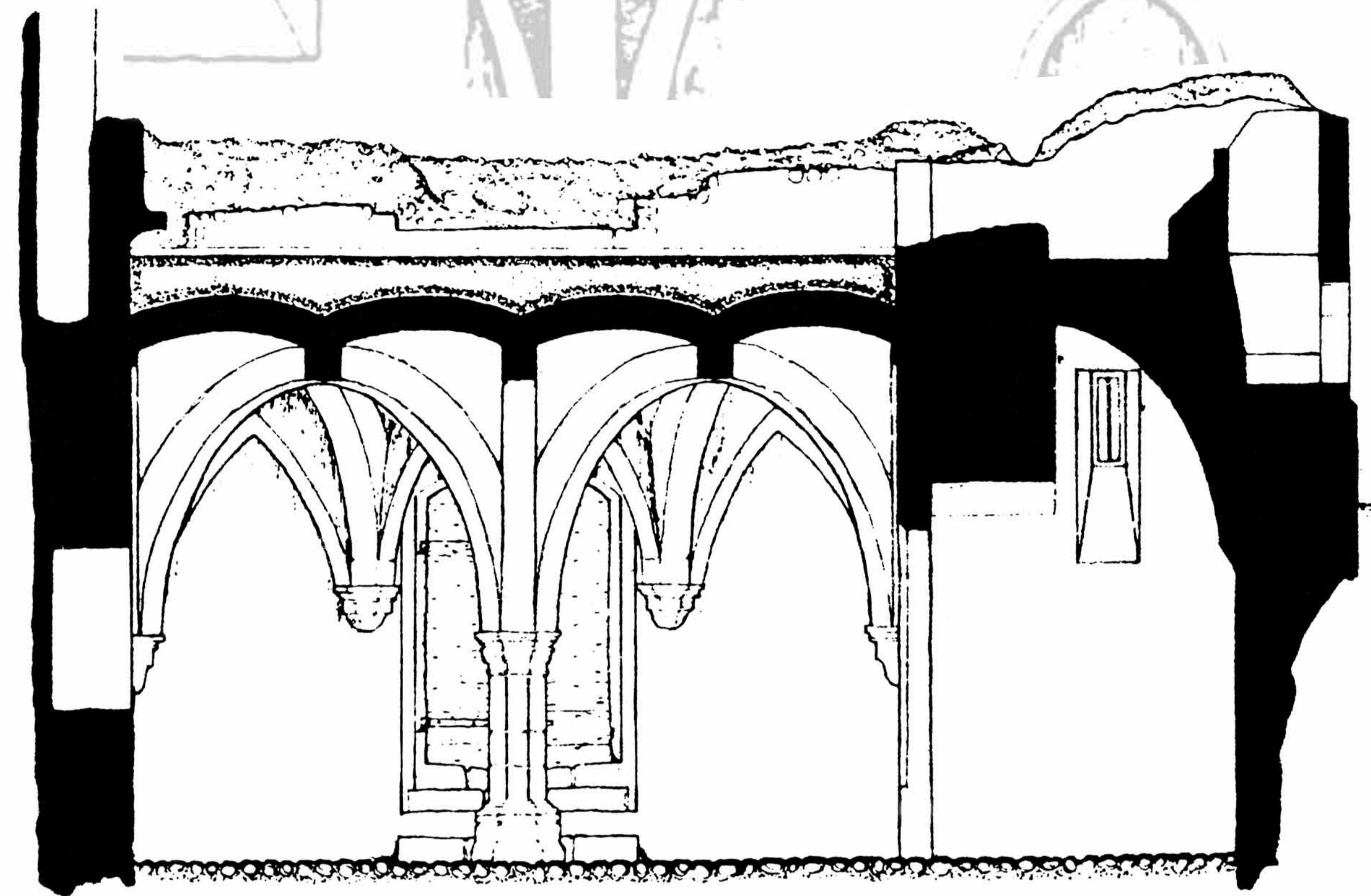
Although it is possible that the Guildhall was once owned by the nearby Carmelite Friary, it has belonged to the village for well over 400 years. A series of deeds records the transfer of ownership from one group of trustees to the next, each deed providing for the property to be used for the benefit of the village.

In the first deed that survives, dated 1627, William Wilch, Thomas Barker and William Mayden, trustees appointed in 1587, convey the property to 42 younger parishioners. In 1687 the last surviving trustee, Henry Ward, conveys the

property to 25 others. There are further deeds of 1750 (William Church, yeoman, to 25 others) and 1808 (Edward Browne, cornfactor, and Thomas Warnes, ship carpenter, to 25 others). Any subsequent deeds do not appear to have survived. The trustees listed in the 1627 deed are mostly mariners; the others include a worsted weaver and a glazier.

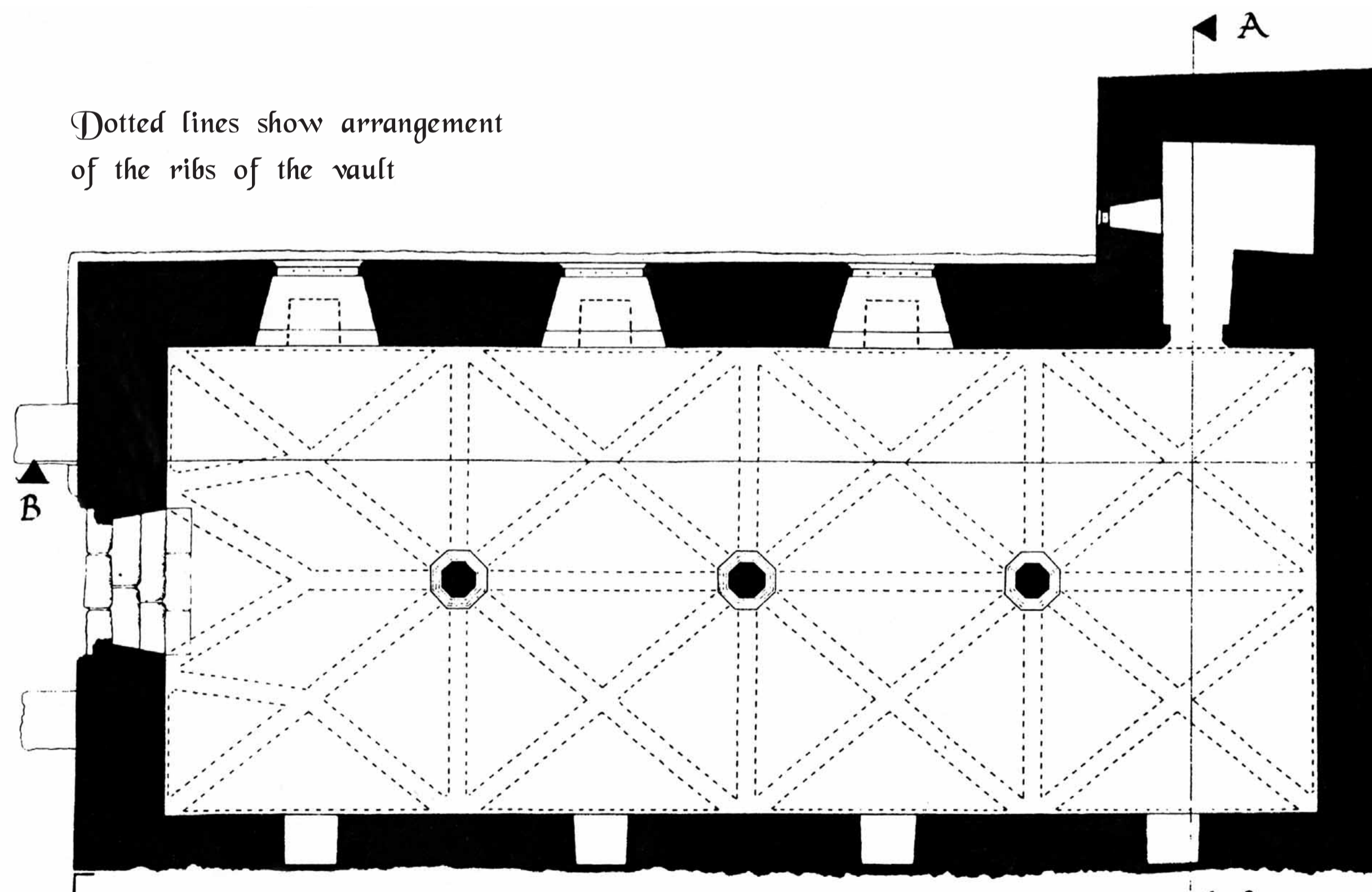
The 1627 description of the property is essentially the same in each document (allowing for the change from Latin to English): one messuage with its appurtenances, formerly belonging to Thomas Tower of Wiveton, bounded on the east by a hill called Welburgh, on the north by a way called Welstones, on the west by a road leading up to the Rectory, and on the south by a property late Robert Hilby's formerly Thomas Barker's. The 'head house' of this property was called The Tavern and another building on the property once contained four shops.

A report of the Charity Commissioners (1834) reported that the Guildhall was being used as a coal store by Messrs Brereton for a rent of 63 bushels of coal delivered each year to 63 poor families in Blakeney (a quarter of all households in the village). The Commission suggested that the rent be increased. During the later 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, the Guildhall had a variety of uses, including boatstore and mortuary for drowned sailors. Following a meeting of parishioners in 1950, it was taken over by the Ministry of Works who excavated the building from the hill and built the retaining wall. It is now in the guardianship of English Heritage, assisted by the Parish Council.



Section A-A

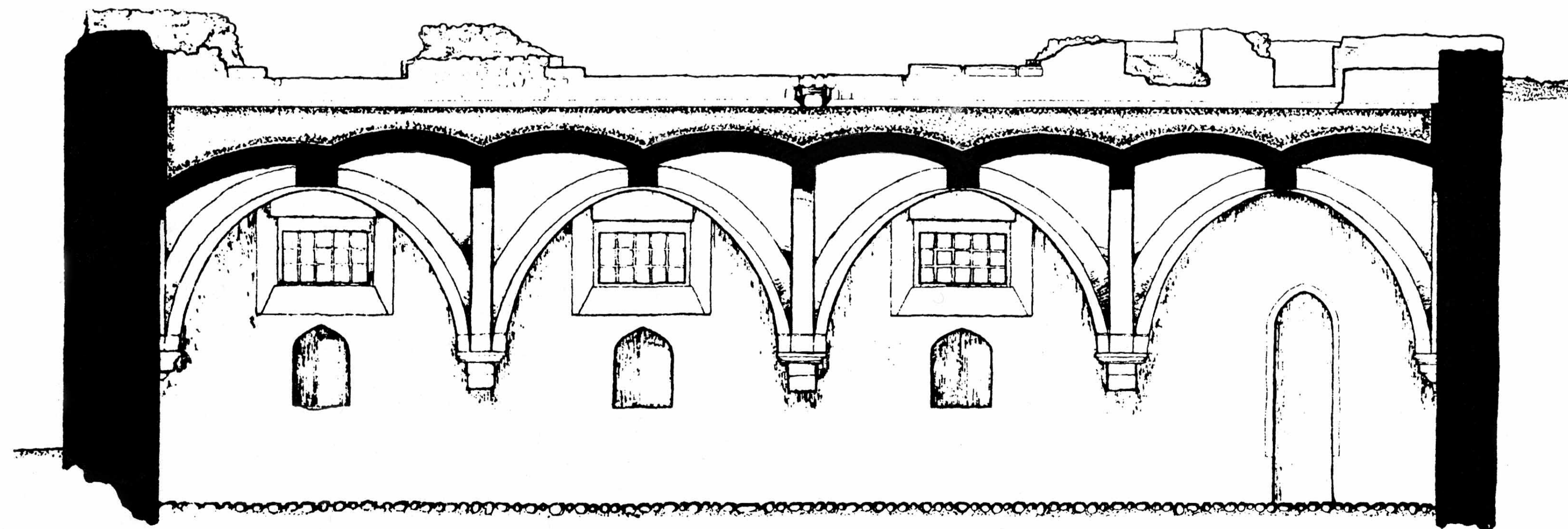
Dotted lines show arrangement of the ribs of the vault



Lower Floor Plan



Scale of Feet



Section B-B



Scale of Metres