

ART. XI – *Survey and excavations in the Keekle Coalfield, 1987-90: A study of four post-medieval Cumbrian farmhouses*

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THE extraction of coal lying close to the present ground surface by means of opencast mining has been a significant landscape feature over the past 30 years in West Cumbria. The stripping of topsoil over vast areas has potentially damaged the archaeological record, for while the actual landform can be reinstated with some accuracy any archaeological sites in the area will have been completely destroyed. Less obvious but no less irrevocable is the alteration to the historic landscape occasioned in particular by the removal of the dispersed farmsteads, few overtly modern, which are so characteristic of the area. Brunskill (1974, 1982) has demonstrated the amount and importance of the evidence that can be gained from a study of vernacular architecture in Cumbria, but this has been all too infrequently acknowledged in the planning process. It was therefore a new and very welcome departure in 1986, when a programme of survey and excavation of four farmsteads within the Keekle Coalfield Extension was agreed with the British Coal Opencast Executive (North Western Region). This work was undertaken, by the Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (then the Cumbria and Lancashire Archaeological Unit), in a series of phases between 1987 and 1990, to coincide with the extractive process.

The Keekle Coalfield Extension lies in the hills above the narrow West Cumbrian coastal strip, immediately to the east of Whitehaven. It has affected an area of almost 2.5 square kilometres of permanent improved pasture, within which were the four farmsteads examined in this programme of work: High Wreah, Keekle Bank, Bogholes, and Priestgill. Immediately prior to the land being taken for opencast extraction, the area grazed both sheep and cattle.

The programme centred on the investigation of the farmsteads, but did not venture significantly beyond the bounds of each farmyard to examine the fields beyond. Thus, the approach adopted was in each case site-specific, rather than an examination of the landscape in its entirety, in large part a result of the fact that the archaeological recording was being undertaken within a working opencast site. All the standing buildings in each farmstead were first surveyed, although in every case the work concentrated most detail on the farmhouse. Following demolition of the buildings, each site was subject to trial trenching, in an attempt to identify any activity earlier than the latest buildings. The trial trenching also aimed to test the conclusions drawn from the buildings' survey as to the sequence of construction.

Historical Context

There are relatively few known archaeological sites in the central West Cumbrian coastal strip with the exception of a number of Roman military installations. This is perhaps due to the relative lack of fieldwork in the area, coupled with extensive nineteenth century industrialisation. Sites are known, however, from all periods

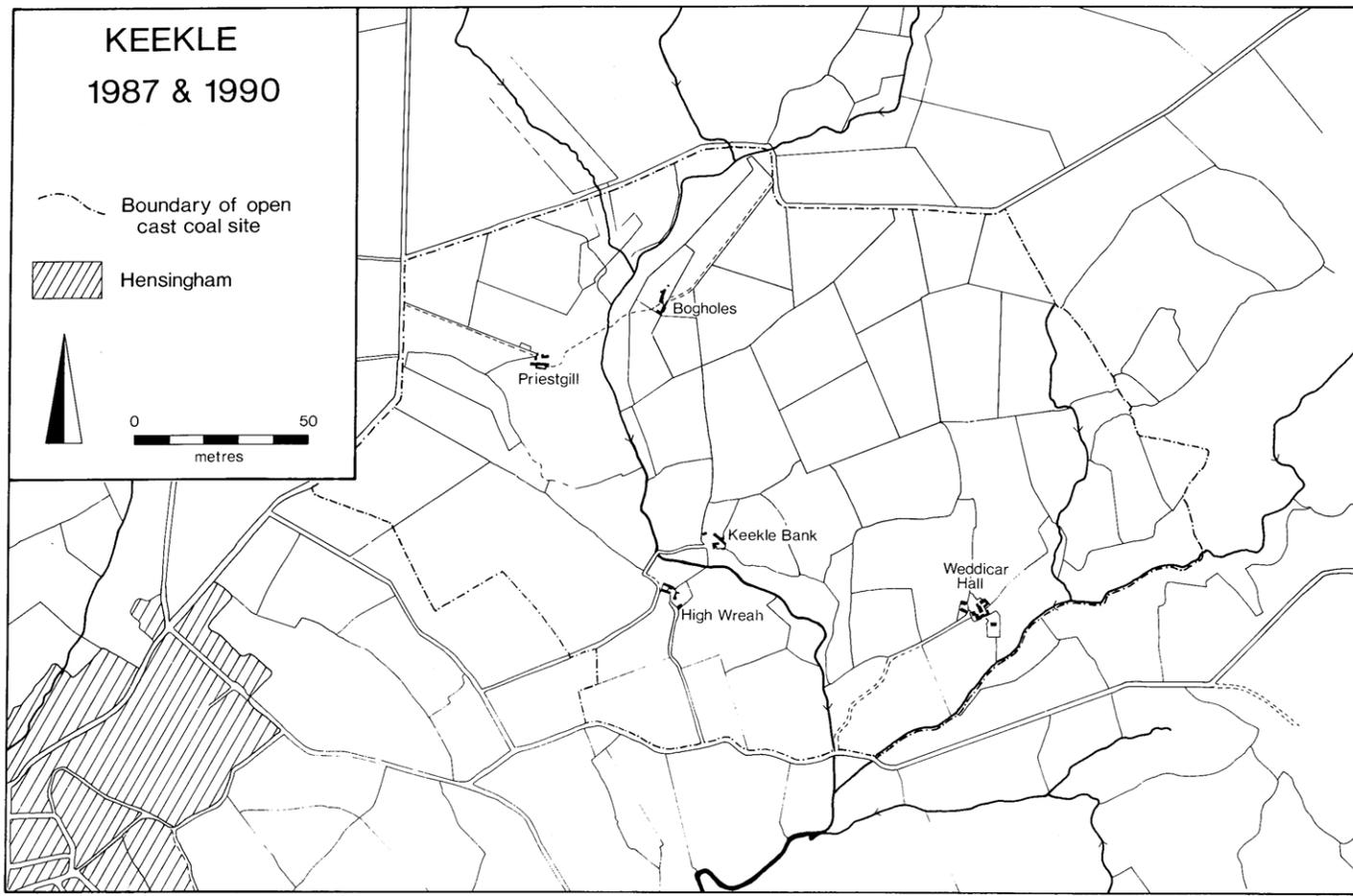


FIG. 1. The Keekele Coalfield Extension

from the mesolithic onward, demonstrating that the coastal landscape has been exploited, primarily for agriculture, although there is a marked dearth of upstanding monuments. It is not until the medieval period that a fully formed landscape can be defined, although place-name evidence and the identification of stone sculpture of the pre-Norman period has produced a fragmentary picture of these centuries.

Place-name evidence suggests that there was a relatively early Anglo-Saxon influence on the coastal plain and also inland, along the river valleys, with few British names enduring. By far the greatest survival, however, is of topographical names deriving from Scandinavian forms, which may imply not only integrated settlement, but also occasionally Scandinavian speakers taking over existing place-names and adapting them to their own language (Fellows-Jensen 1985, 348). There is also some evidence in the later pre-Conquest period of new settlements on the higher land, many containing the suffix *-thwait*. Certainly there was a flowering of stone sculpture with Anglo-Scandinavian attributes in the area during these centuries, in contrast to the rare occurrences of purely Anglo-Saxon iconography.

This portion of West Cumbria became part of the large liberty of Egremont after the Norman Conquest, the Keekle Coalfield Extension mostly being part of the mesne holding of Moresby (Wilson 1915, 102-3), although other parts fall within Distington and Weddicar. Much of the area was granted to the Priory of St Bees by the lords of Egremont and Moresby during the thirteenth century (*ibid*), with extensive grazing rights, it forming an element of Whillimoor, a tract of land which remained in common grazing until the Parliamentary Enclosures of the eighteenth century (Winchester 1978). Pressgill, Wreay, and Bogels are listed on the Hodkinson and Donald map of Cumberland of 1774.

Three of the four farmsteads have names containing Scandinavian elements, but all the components refer to topographical rather than strictly settlement features, and therefore cannot be used to suggest dates for their origins. The earliest reference is from 1120/35 to *Checel*, referring to the Keekle Beck (*Kykla* = winding stream (ON) Armstrong *et al.* 1950, 18), although the farm of Keekle Bank is not referred to until 1635 (*op cit.*, 443). Surprisingly, and unlike the other three farms within the Coalfield Extension, it does not appear on the Hodkinson and Donald map of Cumberland of 1774, although a farm called Moorgate is marked nearby.

A block of land called Priestgill (*prestr* (ON)/*preost* (OE) = priest + *-gil* (ON) = cleft or ravine) is first referred to c.1180, when it was granted to the Priory at St Bees by Hugh de Moresby:

totum jus et cladium quod habui vel habere potui in tota terra de Prestgile cum pertinenciis infra subscripta divisas contenta . . . videlicet, a superiori scala super sichetam que vocatur Prestgil sub via regia que ducit ab Egremunt versus Duintinton linealiter usque ad superiorem scalam super Kekel usque Prestgile sichettam (sic) predictam ubi cadit in Kekel et sic ascendendo per eandem sichettam usque ad superiorem scalam predictam sub via regia predicta.

all right and claim which I had or could have in all the land of Priestgill contained together with appurtenances within the boundaries described below . . . namely, from the upper shieling on the stream which is called Priestgill below the highway which leads from Egremont to Distington in a straight line to the upper shieling on the Keekle to Priestgill stream aforesaid where it falls into the Keekle: and thus by ascending the same stream to the upper shieling aforesaid below the highway aforesaid (Wilson 1915, 102-3).

This document clearly indicates that the area was being used for summer pasturing,

rather than apparently permanent settlement in the later twelfth century. It is possible that the modern farm at Priestgill may be situated on one of the shieling sites described, as it lay close to the stream from which it took its name, a short distance to the east of the old road to Distington.

The name "Wra" (from ON *vra* = nook or corner) is first mentioned in 1350 (Armstrong *et al.* 1950, 401), but the farmstead at High Wreah is not specifically mentioned until 1673, although a lintel over the main door of the farm is dated 1668; another farm called Low Wreah also existed to the south-west. The Hodkinson and Donald map of 1774 is at too small a scale to be able to establish whether the "Wreay" mentioned there is High or Low Wreah. However, High Wreah was situated on a distinct bend in the Keekle Beck, which here forms the eastern angle of Hensingham parish.

Bogholes is the only farmstead to contain ostensible Old English elements. Its first reference is not until 1726 (*op. cit.*, 443) and it seems likely that it was constructed during the early eighteenth century expansion of agriculture in the Lake Counties.

The evidence that all the farmsteads lay within pockets of enclosure on the eve of the Parliamentary Enclosures (CRO QRE/1/6, 18, 85, 126) is of significance, perhaps particularly that Bogholes seems to lie on the edge of a finger of enclosure stretching out into the Whillimoor (Winchester 1978). Keekle Bank, in particular, was surrounded by a field pattern with all the hallmarks of a pre-Parliamentary Enclosure intake.

The Survey

The farms and farmhouses within the study area developed over a considerable period from relatively simple structures to complex farms. This development was reflected both in the complicated phasing of each farmhouse and also in a steadily increasing number of associated outbuildings. These ancillary structures were an integral element of the overall farm and have been assessed accordingly, although the analysis here has, for the most part, concentrated on the earlier phases of each farmhouse. A full analysis of all the structures is incorporated within the project archive.

The main building stone in this part of West Cumbria is a porous sandstone and as a consequence almost all vernacular buildings are extensively rendered to prevent intrusive damp. All of the investigated farmhouses were both externally rendered and internally plastered. Two of the farms (High Wreah and Bogholes) were not occupied at the time of the survey and it was therefore possible to remove wall coverings selectively to provide evidence of structural stratigraphy. However, the remaining two (Keekle Bank and Priestgill) were occupied, severely restricting analysis of the structures.

Keekle Bank

Keekle Bank was a small farm terraced into a moderate slope rising from the bottom of the valley of the Keekle. Radiating out from the farm were some small, irregular

fields indicative of an intake; this localised field system seemed to have developed from the focus of the farm and clearly did not pre-date it. There is, therefore, an implication that the farm (although not necessarily the present buildings) had some antiquity.

The farm layout was a product of continued development; the original configuration corresponds with the conventional longhouse arrangement (Brunskill 1974, 78), comprising a farmhouse with a cross passage, a cow-house and two barns in an extended line. Subsequently a courtyard arrangement of ancillary barns and cow-houses was constructed separate from the original farmhouse. This courtyard complex is shown largely complete on the OS 1st edition 6" map and therefore had been constructed prior to 1863.

Keekle Bank Farmhouse

Phase 1

The original layout of the farmhouse was a three-celled cross passage house with a downhouse (Brunskill 1974, 54), comprising a parlour (Ki), a living room (Kii), and the downhouse (Kiii). In this type of building it is common to find a substantial outshut with an associated small pantry extending from the living room (Kii) and the evidence would suggest that there had been an outshut in the original layout. The staircase was a later wooden structure which was located against a substantial bulge in the former north-eastern external wall of Kii; it is probable that the bulge was the external protrusion of a small outshut spiral staircase or even steep companionway steps.

Phase 2

Subsequently, both ends of the farmhouse were added to; a small cow-house (Kiv) was butted onto the south-eastern end of the farmhouse and a large barn (Kv) was added to the north-western end. Although structural analysis was severely restricted by wall coverings, there were indications of considerable alterations to the north-western end of the farmhouse associated with the construction of barn Kv. The thickness of the north-eastern wall of the building narrowed from 0.82 m to 0.5 m near the north-western end, the south-western wall of room Ki was 0.1 m thinner than that of the adjacent living room (Kii), and the north-western end wall of the farmhouse was seen to be a partition butting onto the side walls. The evidence would suggest that the north-western gable wall was demolished in conjunction with the construction of barn Kv, the north-eastern side wall was extended for the full length of the barn, part of the south-western wall was rebuilt and similarly extended for the full length of the barn, and finally a partition wall was constructed to define the end of the farmhouse.

The masonry of barn Kv was very crude, comprising mainly uncoursed field stone, whereas that of cow-house Kiv comprised coursed, roughly dressed stone; although both structures stratigraphically belong to the same phase there is some possibility that they were not products of a single episode of construction.

It is perhaps unlikely that such major alterations to the original fabric as those

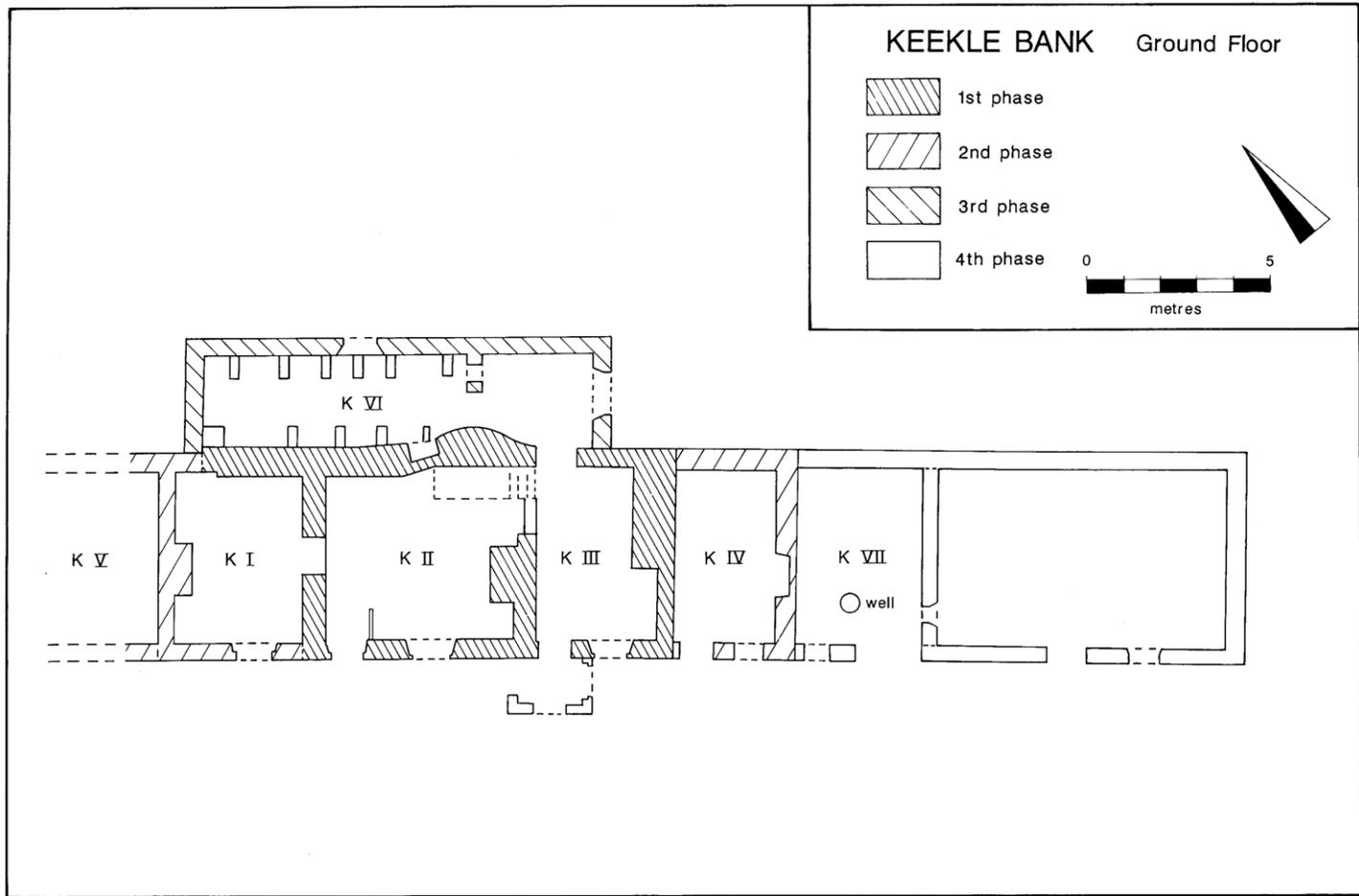


FIG. 2. Keekle Bank, Farmhouse: Ground Floor Plan

associated with the construction of the large barn were made soon after the construction of the original farmhouse. It is possible therefore that the development of the farmhouse took place over an extended period.

Phase 3

A pantry (Kvi) was built onto the north-eastern side of the farmhouse at some point after the construction of the barn.

Phase 4

Although the long barn (Kvii), on the south-eastern end of cow-house Kiv and pantry Kvi, had a similar stratigraphical relationship to the farmhouse, the OS 1st edition 25" map (1865) shows the pantry extension but not the barn. It is therefore evident that the barn belonged to a later phase. The character of the masonry similarly demonstrates that the barn and cow-house Kiv belonged to distinct constructional episodes; the fabric of the barn was coursed, well-dressed stone, with substantial ashlar quoins and was very distinct from that of the adjacent cow-house. Within this barn was a well which may originally have been an external feature, before being incorporated into the structure.

Farm Chronology

Unlike the neighbouring High Wreah (see below) the early chronology of Keekle Bank is uncertain. There is a date-stone over the door of the phase 3 barn (Kvii) at the south-eastern end of the farmstead, but this is clearly re-used and also the date cannot be reliably ascertained. The stone displays a quadranted shield with "W P G" at the bottom and there also appears to be the figure "16" at the top right hand quadrant of the shield, presumably part of the date. The stone would appear to be the commemoration of a marriage and therefore it is likely that the family name began with P, the initial of the husband's christian name was W and that of the wife was G. Such an elaborate date-stone is uncharacteristic of small vernacular farms and this may have originated from the adjacent Weddicar Hall, owned by a William Patrickson during part of the seventeenth century; he lost the manor to John Ponsonby in about 1652 as a result of the Civil Wars (Littledale 1925, 175-7). William Patrickson married during the 1650s and it is possible that the stone may refer to him, since the ownership of Weddicar Hall was disputed into the 1660s, although the name of his wife is not known. Alternatively it may be attributable to a later unidentified member of the Ponsonby family.

Typologically this form of cross passage house was prevalent in the northern part of Cumbria from the second half of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century although its origins are uncertain. Of the investigated farms it is the closest in form and general character to High Wreah (dated 1668) and the date of its construction may not be dissimilar. The farm is shown on the OS 1st edition 25" map of 1865 in its phase 3 form.

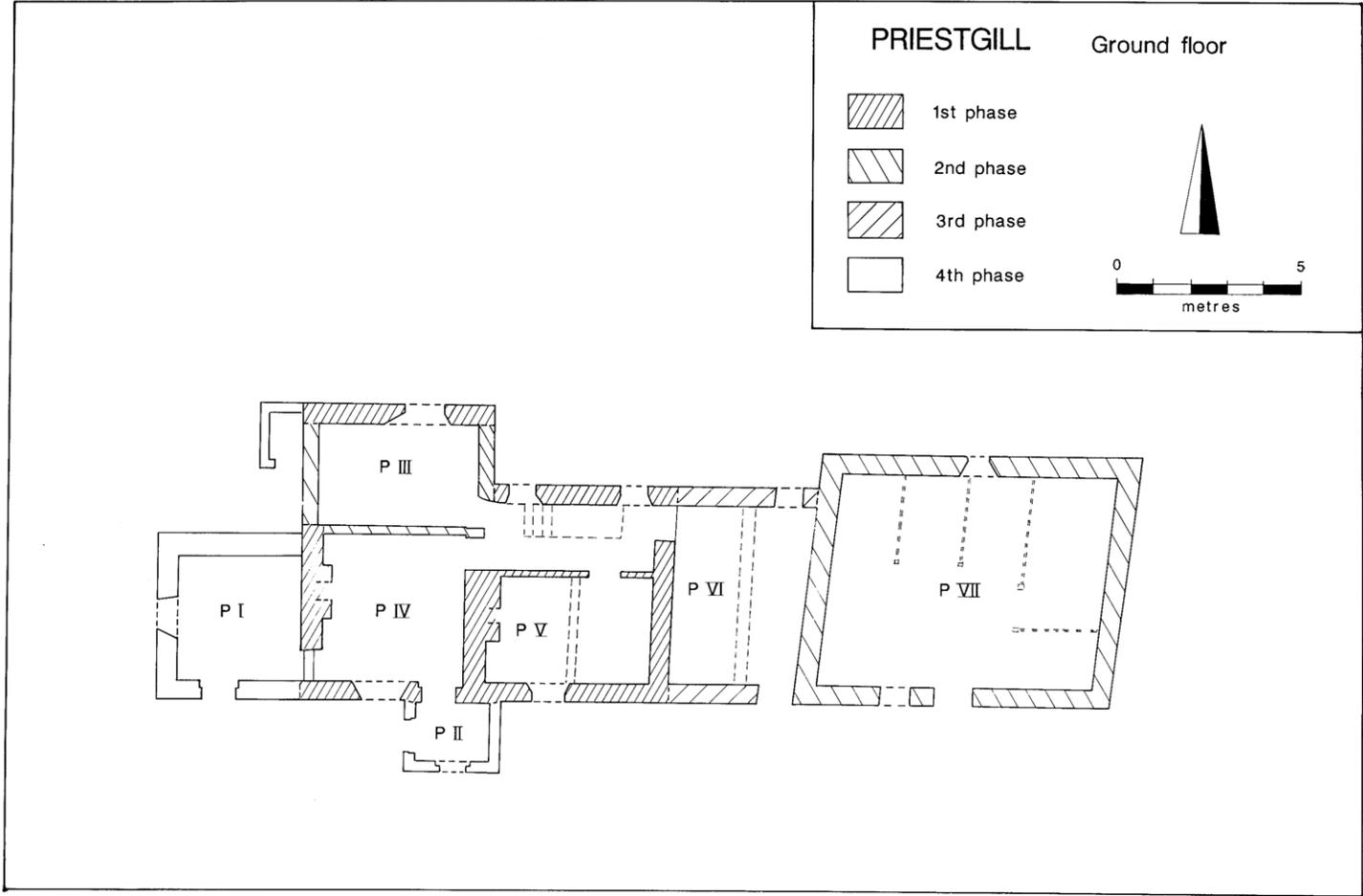


FIG. 3. Priestgill, Farmhouse: Ground Floor Plan

Priestgill

Priestgill was a farm on level ground on a gentle spur between the Keekle and the small stream which gave the farm its name. There were a few fields extending from Priestgill, but these did not form an obvious intake and many nearby fields were rectilinear, straight-sided and orientated with respect to tracks and roads. A disused railway cut straight past the eastern side of the farmyard; this is not shown on the OS 1st edition 25" map (1865).

The layout of the farm was similar to that of Keekle Bank, originally a two-celled farmhouse to which a cow-house and pantry were added. Later, a courtyard arrangement of farm buildings was constructed, which was of much greater complexity than that at Keekle Bank. The courtyard was relatively late in date, since it used nineteenth century building methods and materials, but nevertheless incorporated at least three phases of construction. This multi-phased origin of the complex is confirmed by the 1st edition 25" OS map (1865), which shows the buildings on the northern and western sides of the courtyard, but those on the southern side (Pxi) and the large open barn (Pxii) extending to the west of the courtyard are absent.

Priestgill Farmhouse

Phase 1

The building plan of the farmhouse suggests that it was a complex, multi-phased structure; however, because the wall faces were obscured by plaster and render any determination of constructional stratigraphy can only be tentative. As far as can be ascertained, it would seem probable that the original form of the farmhouse was a two-celled (Piv and Pv), two floored building with a single storey continuous outshut or pantry (Piii) at the rear (Brunskill 1974, 60). The thickness of the northern end wall of the outshut (0.55 m) was consistent with the rest of the building, although the side walls were relatively thin (only 0.4 m) and seemed to be a later alteration. The north wall also had a small, asymmetric, stone mullioned window on the ground floor, which may suggest that this wall was a component of the original construction. In the original configuration of the building it is probable that the load-bearing northern wall of the building continued the full length of the structure, but part of this had been subsequently removed during alterations to the outshut, along with the original side walls of the outshut.

Phase 2

In the second constructional phase a second floor was added to the outshut, the side walls were replaced with thinner, although still load-bearing, walls, and part of the original northern wall of the farmhouse was removed to increase the size of the downstairs room (Piii). At this stage a narrow partition wall was constructed to divide rooms Piii and Piv, and the present wooden stairs were constructed. The classic parallelogram shape of the cow-house (Pvii) would suggest that it was built fairly early in the constructional sequence as a separate structure, although this independence prevents close dating. It has therefore been ascribed arbitrarily to the latest possible constructional episode.

Phase 3

The side walls of the farmhouse were extended to link with cow-house P_{vii}, creating a small room. Whilst this cannot be dated, nor associated with other renovations to the building, it is probable that this happened very shortly after phase 2.

Phase 4

In the final phase the kitchen (P_i) and the porch (P_{ii}) were added.

Farm Chronology

The chronology of the original stone structure at Priestgill has been determined entirely on typological evidence. The continuous outshut form of vernacular house is relatively late in comparison with cross passage houses, ranging in date from about the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries (Brunskill 1974, 60). The farm, however, is shown in its final form, with both phase 4 kitchen and porch, on the OS 1st edition 25" map (1865). The small stone mullioned window in the back wall of the outshut is a feature normally ascribed to the mid-eighteenth century at the latest, suggesting a *terminus ante quem* for the original farmhouse (Brunskill 1974, 121).

Bogholes

Bogholes was a small farm on the level ground above the Keekle referred to as "Bogdale" on the 1st edition OS 6" map of 1863. The farm lay within a series of straight-sided fields, whose shape was largely dictated by the local topography. There was no clear evidence that the local field system originated with the farm as a focus.

The farm layout reflected the Laithe-house arrangement (Brunskill 1974, 78), whereby the farmhouse is aligned with stables and a cow-house. The two farm buildings, B_{viii} and B_{ix}, separated from the main farmhouse complex, were modern brick constructions and reflected the latest phase of farm development. The other farm buildings revealed an erratic development; stable building B_v in its earliest form was constructed within 1.3 m of the farmhouse, probably to create a cross passage. It was then substantially rebuilt in its present considerably shorter form and the gap between it and the farmhouse was subsequently filled with an ephemeral, modern brick structure. Both this modern structure and the two brick farm buildings (B_{viii} and B_{ix}) are absent from the OS 1st edition 25" map of 1865. Although farmhouse B_v was a modern rebuild, it reused the original southern gable wall of an earlier building; the gable displayed little evidence of significant alteration and it can therefore be suggested that the first phase of the building was similar in height and width.

Bogholes Farmhouse

Phase 1

The farmhouse was originally a very simple, small structure which had subsequently been considerably enlarged. As first built, it was a cross passage house

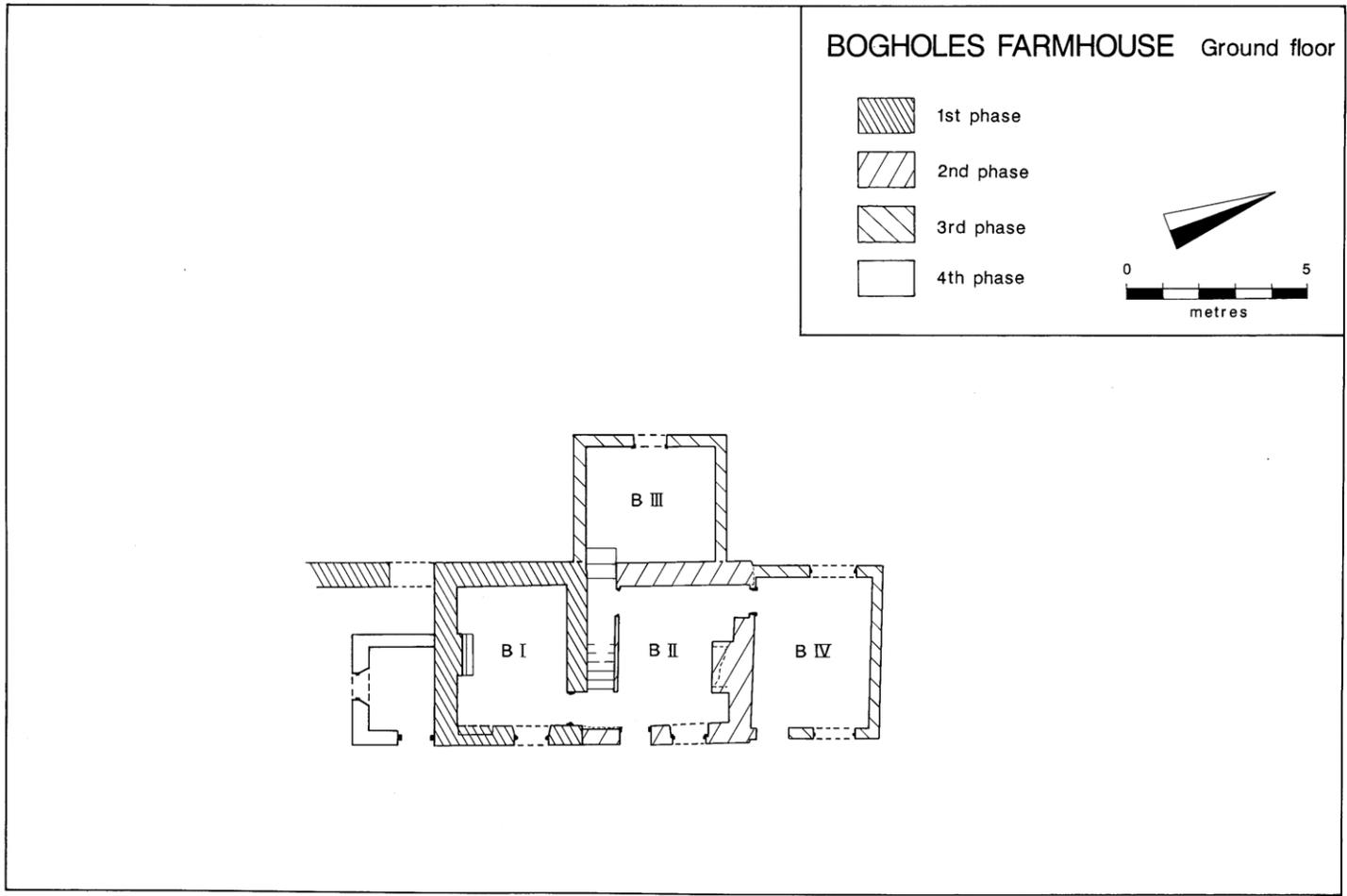


FIG. 4. Bogholes, Farmhouse: Ground Floor Plan

comprising a single-celled farmhouse with a stable (Bv). Although wall coverings prevented observation, it is probable that there was a blocked doorway linking the cross passage to the dwelling (Bi). The internal partition wall between rooms Bi and Bii (see below) had a window at eaves level and the quoins at its western corner were butted by the side walls of room Bii. Clearly this wall was an external gable wall in its earliest phase. Since there was no evidence of an outshut it is uncertain where the original stairs or companionway was located.

Phase 2

Subsequently, a further room (Bii) was constructed onto the north side of the dwelling. In phase 2 the farmhouse therefore comprised a simple two-celled structure with no cross passage. Although the units were constructed at different stages both had a similar construction, with walls *c.*0.6 m thick of uncoursed, partly dressed masonry with sandstone quoins. Both were of a similar size and each was independently heated, given the flues constructed against both gables. The staircase was also situated in Bii. In this phase it is likely that cow-house Bvii was added to the end of the original stable.

Phase 3

In the final phase of construction two brick structures were added. A bathroom/bedroom (Biii) was built against the western side of cell Bii and a kitchen (Biv) was constructed onto the northern gable of the phase 2 farmhouse. Also within this phase stable Bv was rebuilt in its shorter form and by this stage the cross passage was clearly disused.

Farm Chronology

Bogholes has been the subject of an extended development from a very simple cross passage form, with a suggestion of some antiquity. The chronology of the cross passage house type is largely based on date-stones (Brunskill 1974, 59) and is generally attributed to the period from the second half of the seventeenth century through to the end of the eighteenth century, although the conservative nature of vernacular architecture means that such dating can not be relied upon entirely.

The structures added during the latest phase of construction (Biii, Biv and Bv (rebuilt)), are significantly absent from the OS 1st edition 25" map, which would indicate that this phase post-dates 1865.

High Wreah

High Wreah was a relatively large farm located on a gentle ridge on the opposite side of the Keekle to Keekle Bank. It was surrounded by large open, straight-sided fields which were defined by roads and tracks, and there is nothing to suggest a field system focused on the farm.

The farm layout replicated that of Keekle Bank and Priestgill with an original longhouse which was subsequently expanded by the construction of a courtyard of barns and cow-houses.

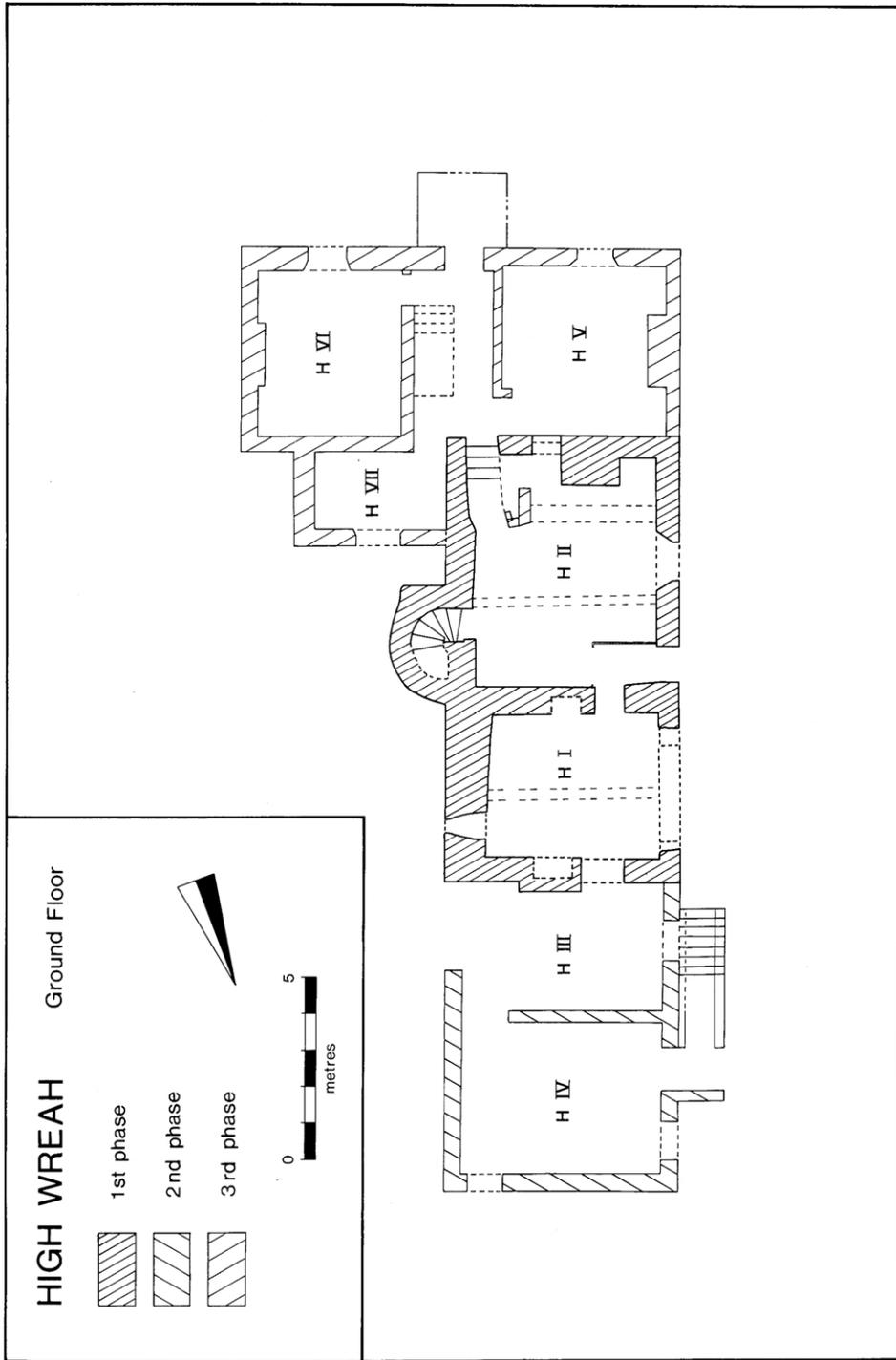


FIG. 5. High Wreah, Farmhouse: Ground Floor Plan

High Wreah Farmhouse

The dwelling was archaeologically of some significance; it had a clearly defined, constructional development, with typologically early original fabric and a seemingly *in situ* date-stone of 1668 over the main entrance. Fortunately, it was not occupied at the time of the survey and it was therefore possible to explore the obscured fabric by selective removal of render and plaster.

Phase 1

The original farm was a two-celled structure with a semi-circular stair turret projecting from the western wall. The structure would have had a single entrance, that containing the date-stone on the western side of cell Hii; the entrances through each of the gables were later additions. The external walls were in places extremely thick, varying from 0.6 m to 1.3 m (eastern side wall). There were flues against both of the original gables and fireplaces in both cells at ground floor level; the fireplace on the northern gable had been subject to considerable alteration. At the time of the survey the room was in use as a garage and the fireplace had been blocked in and plastered over; removal of the plaster revealed two *in situ* fire surrounds one inside the other. The fireplace in the southern gable was of an inglenook type and extended across most of the southern internal face. There was no evidence of a blocked fire window, although the area was difficult to examine.

Phase 2

In the second phase a two storey block of farm buildings was built against the northern end of the phase I farmhouse (Hiii and Hiv). Its walls were only 0.4 m thick, the ground floor comprising a barn or cart shed (Hiii) with an arched entrance over double doors accessible from the garth at the back, and also a small cow-house (Hiv) with an entrance from the front (west). Above these was a large granary accessed by an external staircase and heated by a fireplace utilising the flue against the northern gable wall of the farmhouse. A low blocked door extended through the farmhouse gable wall between the granary and the first floor room of the farmhouse.

In this phase a doorway was established on the ground floor between cell Hi and barn/cart shed Hiii, which clearly post-dates the phase I fireplace, as the fire surround was utilised as part of the door-frame. The doorway was of an insubstantial, internal type and must therefore have been inserted following the construction of the phase 2 farm buildings.

Phase 3

A large domestic extension was constructed against the southern side of the original farmhouse which in design is later than the phase 2 farm buildings. It incorporated a living room (Hv), a parlour (Hvi) and a small pantry (Hvii) and provided for a new southerly-orientated front entrance. Access was provided between the new and old sections at ground level by the provision of a door through the east side of the original gable wall, which involved substantially narrowing the southern end of the side wall of cell Hii to enable an adequate access. A further door was identified extending through the back of the inglenook fireplace into room Hv of the extension.

The wooden door lintel had a lath and plaster underside, which clearly indicates an internal door which must have been inserted after the construction of this phase 3 extension. Subsequent to the insertion of the door the spaces on either side of the fireplace were filled with cupboards and finally the inglenook was blocked off entirely with a wood partition.

On the first floor a landing was constructed in between the large internal flue and the eastern side wall of the original farmhouse to provide access between the new and old sections. This involved the construction of a timber framed, plaster and lath covered internal partition to provide a vertical corridor wall and to cover the irregular face of the flue. On removal of the partition wall during the survey, a graffiti inscription was discovered in pencil on the plaster-covered flue:

J.J. Lawson
J.J. Mayson
and Andrew

This was wrote on the day of the
New Whitehaven Borough election between
..... Bontisell = 1336
H.C. Gully Eng = 1125
Nov 24th 1885'

The graffiti was clearly inscribed prior to the construction (or completion) of the landing between the two sections of building.

Farm Chronology

In contrast with the other three farms the chronology of the High Wreah farmhouse and its subsequent alterations is relatively well-established. The 1668 date-stone was located over the original farmhouse entrance and would appear to be *in situ*. Given the lack of evidence of any alteration to this section of the farmhouse it may be concluded that this records the date of the first phase of construction.

The chronology of the third phase, the southern extension, can similarly be reliably dated. The farmer at Keekle Bank, whose family used to own High Wreah, firmly believed that the extension was added in the nineteenth century. This is supported by the graffiti inscription on the first floor internal flue, which can only have been written before the landing partition wall obscured it; this indicates that the extension, for which the landing corridor was intended, post-dated 1885.

The Excavations

In the wake of demolition, machine-cut trial trenches were excavated through the farmsteads to uncover as large an area as possible. On each site the length, location and number of trenches depended on the limitations which affected them. In all cases it was possible to excavate through the most important part of the farmstead, namely the farmhouse. The trenches excavated measured between 1.20 m and 1.30 m wide, depending on the width of the machine bucket, and were dug stratigraphically so that any potentially interesting feature could be further investigated by hand. Such features were also recorded photographically and planned at 1:20 if necessary. One side of each trench was cleaned, the section drawn at an appropriate scale (1:10

or 1:20) and annotated, and a separate written record was kept as well. The trenches, and any features of particular interest, were surveyed on to the National Grid. The survey work was kindly undertaken by the client.

Keekle Bank

Two approximately parallel trenches were excavated from the south on a north-west to south-east axis. The area open to excavation was limited because a large proportion of the site, including the stable complex to the south and the paddock to the east, had already been, subject to opencast operations. However, the site of the farmhouse had been left relatively intact. Trench 1 was dug parallel to the farmhouse approximately 5 m south-west of it, whilst Trench 2 cut through the farmhouse, outbuildings and stable.

The underlying, naturally deposited material varied in colour and texture from red sand to blue/grey clay. A shallow horizon of demolition rubble lay over much of the site.

The foundation for a wall separating two small outbuildings (Kiv and Kvii) was exposed, constructed from roughly worked stones and fairly hard white mortar. A lead pipe originating from a well in Kvii appeared to go underneath the wall. The mortar bonding the same wall further to the north-east became more crumbly and was buff coloured, implying that at some stage the wall was partially knocked down in order to make way for the pipe to pump water to the farmhouse, and that it had been rebuilt afterwards. This disturbance could also explain the lack of a traceable foundation trench.

The south-west wall of the barn (Kv) was fragmentary following demolition. The wall was constructed of well worked stone and was cemented with white lime-based mortar. There were also a few large pebbles built into the foundations. A few sherds of post-medieval pottery from the foundation trench demonstrated that the wall was of a fairly late date; the northern wall of the barn was similar in character. The south-west wall of the outbuilding to the south (Kvii) also survived, although again only as one course of masonry. It was marginally different in character to that of the stable wall, using slightly better stone and a neater construction. The foundation trench on the north-east side of the wall had a width of 0.15 m and contained a crumbly dark brown sandy loam fill with mortar and small stones and pebbles. The narrow width of the foundations could indicate that the trench had been disturbed when the well was dug, although the building survey suggested that the latter had originally been an external feature. A gap in the wall foundations points to the position of the doorway giving a threshold width of 1.75 m. The floor of the barn beyond Kvii was constructed from concrete, indicating a modern date. Below the concrete, which was up to 0.20 m thick, was a levelling layer of clinker and black sandy loam which was spread over natural clay.

The well in Kvii was constructed from carefully worked blocks of stone (0.12 m high, 0.20 m long and 0.20 m wide), the inner faces of which were slightly curved to give a neat cylindrical finish. Its diameter was 0.60 m, and its depth greater than 3 m. The foundation trench was clearly visible and contained large stones, pebbles, bricks, lumps of clay and dark brown loam. Two drains, one on either side of the well, had been cut through, and were therefore later than its foundations; they were both orientated north-east to south-west and were of a modern ceramic type.

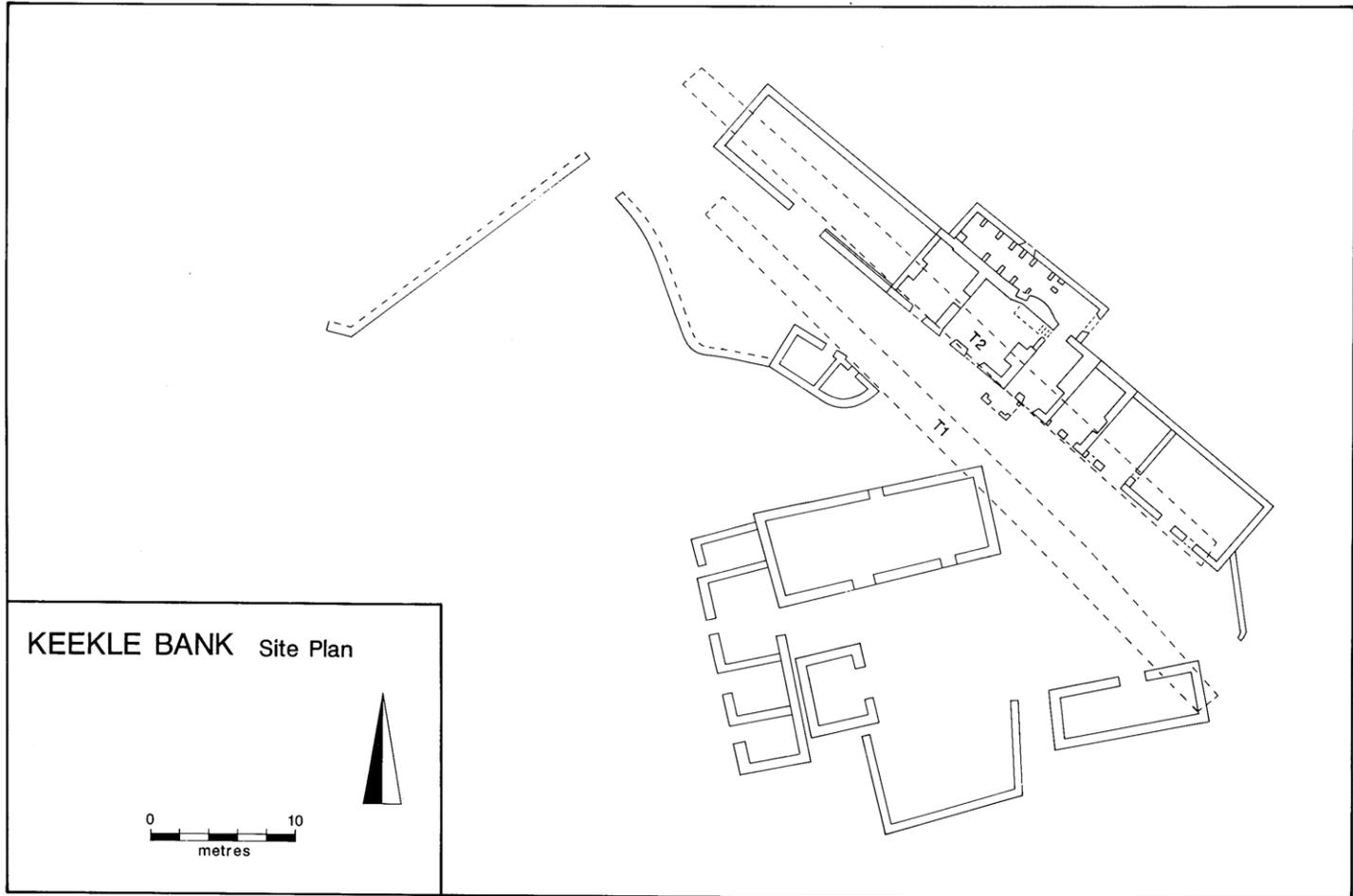


FIG. 6. Keekle Bank, Site Plan

Yard surfaces, comprising loose grey/brown gritty loam containing approximately 50% of unworked pebbles and small angular stones, and substantial cobbling, were covered by tarmac. Another concrete surface was associated with the barn at the south end of the farmhouse range, but there was generally little trace of the dwelling itself.

There was a dense network of drains orientated north-east to south-west across the site, mainly ceramic tiles laid in trenches. There were also two similar, and possibly contemporary, stone-built culverts. A square brick structure was exposed in the farmyard, the sides of which were one brick wide, four courses high and approximately 1 m in length. The base of the structure was built on to natural clay at a depth of 0.80 m. The purpose of this structure remained uncertain although it was possibly associated with drainage.

Discussion

Little of the farmstead survived and in reality there was very limited scope for the recovery of information from this site. No material earlier than the late eighteenth century was identified and there was no evidence for earlier structures pre-dating the stone buildings identified in the building survey.

Priestgill

Four trenches were cut by machine from north to south, the area investigated was delimited by the railway embankment to the east, a drainage gully to the south and a mound of rubble comprising the remains of the farmstead to the west. To the north two of the trenches extended into the field adjacent to the farm complex.

The structures and features that survived demolition were nearly all cut into the natural yellow-orange boulder clay, which became increasingly brown then grey with depth. The foundation of the wall forming the south-east corner of the stable, attached to the east side of the farmhouse (Pvii), was recorded, the lower course intruding slightly into the boulder clay beneath. The north wall of the same building was also identified, with a foundation trench only on the north side, perhaps associated with a drain running parallel to the wall. The two extant courses of masonry were constructed of roughly worked stone cemented by a crumbly white mortar. The foundation trench was filled with a loose grey loam which contained small pebbles, stones and patches of boulder clay. The west wall was constructed in a similar fashion to the north wall, using large roughly worked and smaller, more angular, unworked stone.

The north wall of the outshut to the farmhouse had been almost entirely removed in demolition, but a wall comprising four courses of roughly worked masonry cemented together by mortar was identified to the south, which corresponds with the line of the northern side wall of building. The construction of this wall was similar to that of the adjoining stable. A square cavity at the base of the wall had a drain-like fill in it. The foundation was cut into natural clay, about 0.15 m in depth, but there was no visible foundation trench. Two courses of the west wall also remained, constructed in the same manner as the northern wall.

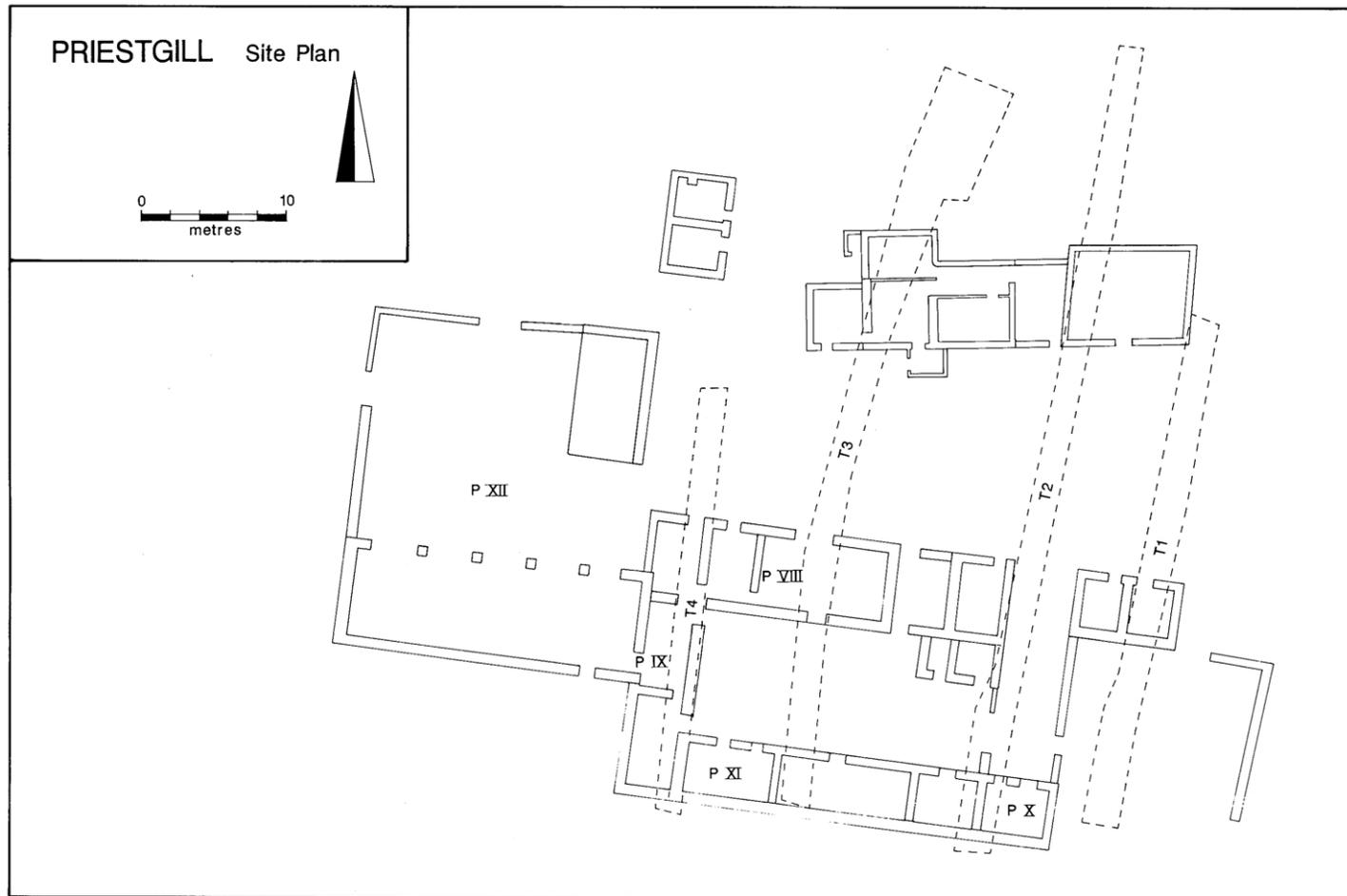


FIG. 7. Priestgill, Site Plan

Other surviving structural remains consisted of floor, yard and track surfaces constructed from cobbles, concrete and rubble. A concrete surface was identified as a pen outside stables Px. This was supported by a layer of stone, brick and coarse gravel in a black loamy clay matrix levelled directly over natural clay. Another concrete yard surface was also recorded, supported by a platform of bricks three courses high and associated with the stable complex at the west of the site.

A spread of tightly packed machined cobbles with curved surfaces and squared sides formed the floor of part of the stable complex on the east side of the farmhouse. The track running across the farm eastwards beneath the railway bridge was a much rougher cobbled surface of large roughly rounded and loosely packed stones. The edges of the track itself defined a broad shallow hollow within which were a number of other rubble-based layers and lenses spread to maintain a reasonable track surface.

A small pit (1.30 m by 0.55 m deep), cut into natural clay near stable Pvii, was filled by black gritty loamy clay with mortar flecks, small pebbles, angular stones and fragments of brick.

A myriad of drains was located across the site, mainly orientated approximately east-west. The most numerous type comprised ceramic pipes, of varying diameter, laid at the base of narrow trenches. More substantial drains were constructed from stone and brick. A brick drain constructed with a slate base was observed in the courtyard and another well-constructed drain, built entirely of stone, was observed to the north of the farmhouse.

The stratigraphy exposed in the field at the north of the site varied; behind stable Pvii a simple sequence of black clay loam topsoil (up to 0.25 m deep) above a light brown subsoil was exposed. Beneath this was yellow boulder clay, more pure than that below the farm buildings, again becoming increasingly grey with depth. No intrusions were visible, although ridge and furrow was apparent on the surface of the field beyond the end of the trench. Behind the farmhouse a layer of soft black clay loam, approximately 0.30 m in depth, sealed a layer of dark grey clay loam subsoil which contained a wealth of post-medieval pottery and building debris. This was probably the remains of a domestic rubbish tip at the back of the farmhouse or it may have been used as levelling for the field. Underneath this deposit were several other clay, loamy, and sandy horizons, none of which were of obvious archaeological significance.

Discussion

The artefacts recovered from Priestgill were all post-medieval in date with the exception of one late medieval sherd of green-glazed pottery, and that was found within a post-medieval context. Again, there was no evidence of structures earlier than those identified by the building survey, although the excavations did confirm the hypothesis that the original form of the structure had included a wall in line with the north wall of the dwelling. This wall was not in the correct position to be the north wall of the outshut and was similar in construction to the west wall of the main dwelling, both appearing to be the result of a single phase of construction.

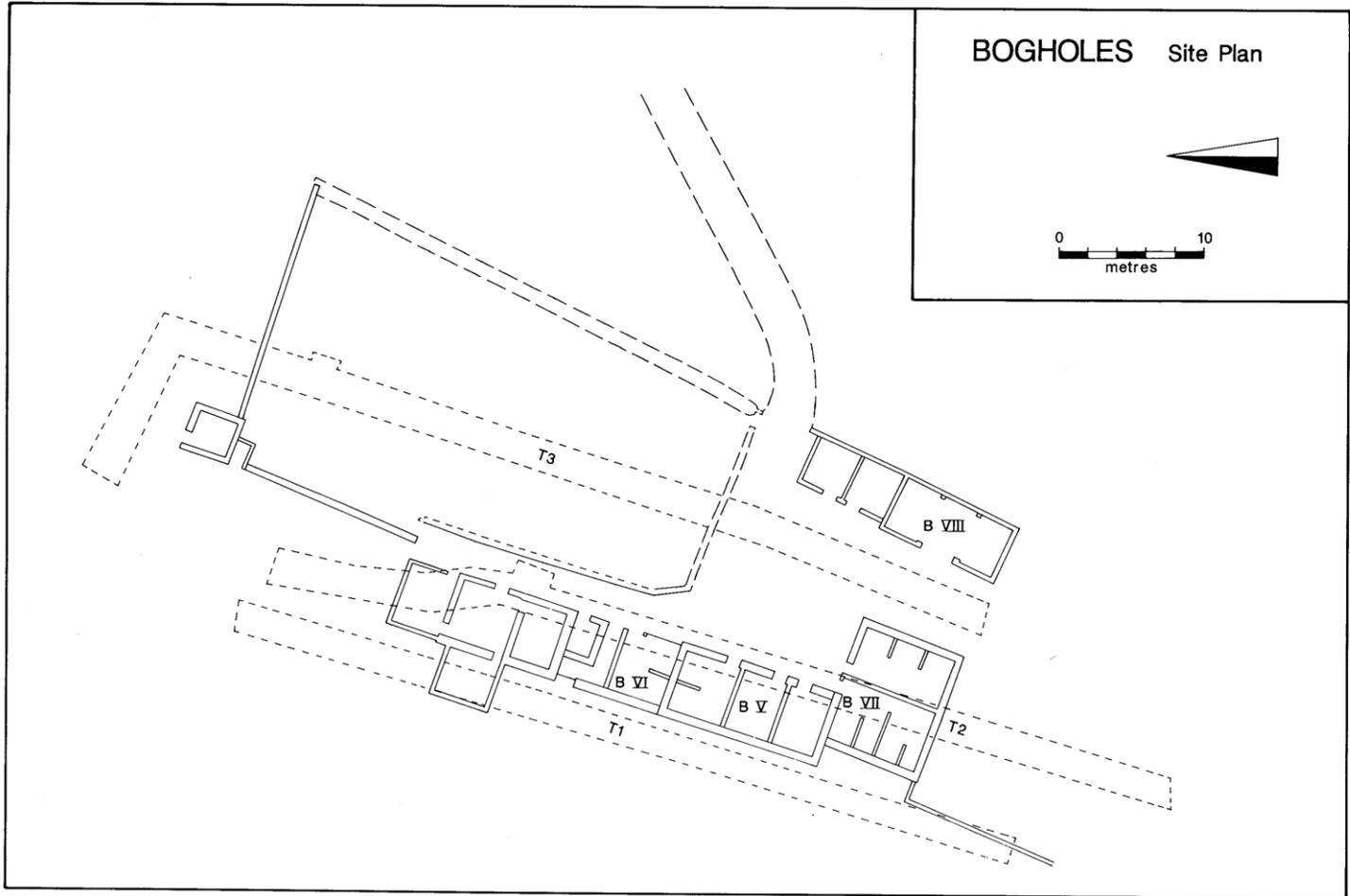


FIG. 8. Bogholes, Site Plan

Bogholes

Four, almost parallel, trenches were orientated approximately north/south. Trench 1 was excavated between the edge of the field to the west of the farmstead and the farm buildings themselves; Trenches 2 and 3 were cut through the kitchen garden and front yard, and Trench 4 in the field to the east, to investigate the ridge and furrow visible there.

The natural subsoil consisted of varying yellow/orange boulder clay which became progressively browner and then greyer with depth. Over most of the site this was sealed by a layer of demolition rubble although in the garden was a light/grey brown subsoil overlain by a dark brown/black clay loam topsoil.

The foundation for a stretch of wall, approximately 3.50 m in length and orientated north/south, was visible beneath a concrete surface to the north of the farmhouse. A foundation trench on the east side (0.50 m wide and 0.25 m deep) was filled by small angular stones in a dark grey loam matrix and capped with small flat stones. Two to three courses of walling remained of roughly worked and unworked stones; the foundation was relatively insubstantial and of dry stone construction, perhaps implying that it did not support a major structure. It was probably a garden wall, part of which was replaced by a retaining wall approximately parallel to and 2 m further east. The retaining wall appeared later in origin than either the garden wall or the foundation of the wall under the concrete, being constructed from brick and rendered, the rendering being contemporary with the adjoining concrete surface.

The foundation of a wall was recorded at the south end of the garden, as was a sequence of modern tarmac and concrete yard surfaces immediately south of the wall itself. Layers of pink gravel, light brown gritty sand and brown sandy gravel between Bvii and Bviii represented another build-up of modern yard surfaces.

As at Priestgill, two types of drain were common, orientated east-west. All those in the west of the site consisted of drainage tiles laid in narrow trenches. The drains in the garden, however, were of a different type: a trench was excavated into natural clay and this was filled with loosely packed stones, pebbles and sometimes fragments of brick, and then covered over with topsoil.

A large feature, measuring 0.55 m in depth, cut the natural clay at a central position in the garden and contained grey/brown sandy clay loam with very few coarse components. A small pit cutting this contained an animal burial (probably a sheep or perhaps a goat). A few modern potsherds were found within both fills, suggesting a relatively recent date for these features.

The field to the north of the farm complex revealed a simple sequence of natural clay, below a dark grey/brown clay loam subsoil, itself overlain by a black clay loam topsoil. A small amount of post-medieval pottery was found within the topsoil.

The excavation across an area of ridge and furrow in the neighbouring field to the north-east of the farm buildings exposed a simple stratigraphic sequence comprising orange/yellow natural clay below a dark grey/brown clay loam topsoil, which was 0.35 m in depth at the deepest point and 0.10 m at the shallowest. Although in places slight undulations were observed in the topsoil the furrows did not significantly disturb the subsoil.

Discussion

Again, scant remains of the farmhouse survived demolition and little can be said in relation to the building survey. No material earlier than the mid to late eighteenth century was identified, perhaps confirming the documentary evidence for the late foundation of this farm, although none of the other farms produced any significantly early material either.

High Wreah

Seven machine-cut trenches were excavated across the demolished farmhouse, outbuildings, and farmyard with associated garths at High Wreah, all aligned approximately north to south.

Little of note was identified in the small garth to the east of the farmyard although numbers of field drains were seen. A large, apparently linear feature between 3 m and 4 m in width and filled with a dark grey compact loam with flecks of iron panning was identified in the north. Wooden planks, apparently carefully laid to form a vertical retaining lining, seemed to form the western side, sealed by a lens of pink clay, clearly redeposited natural subsoil. It had been cut on its southern side by a rubbish pit containing late nineteenth century pottery, including a broken Golden Jubilee mug (1887).

A possible clay pit, more than 1.5 m deep, was revealed in the south, with fills of yellowish grey and grey/white clays. This was immediately to the north of a field boundary, which comprised an earthen bank, with large quantities of stone concentrated at the base of the south side, and a quickset hawthorn hedge on top. A slight channel was identified to the south of the bank, containing possible stakeholes. This represents either a fenceline, or possibly a hedgeline, from the stratigraphy perhaps predating the bank. A number of amorphous features to the south of the field boundary included an irregular feature, c.0.15 m wide, and some small sub-rectangular features; these had been disturbed by modern field drains.

Large numbers of drains were encountered in the farmyard, often demonstrating sequences of replacement, and mostly leading towards the steep valley side to drain into the Keekle Beck below. A brick tank, either a cesspit or perhaps for slurry, lay close to the valley side and was associated with a thin concrete yard surface, which extended between the farmhouse and the outbuildings. This had been laid over a mixed hardcore, including bands of clinker and large stones set in a mortar make-up. Below was a stone-lined drain.

A large amount of cinders had been spread across the north part of the farmyard, presumably from domestic fires. Their northern extent overlay a black organic material, the remains of a manure heap. Close to the northern range of outbuildings, the topsoil sealed a deposit of angular blocks of red sandstone interspersed with cobbles, and including a single massive square block, showing evidence of circular working. This was separated from the main accumulation by a pit filled with clinker. The north-western part of the farmyard was notable for the lack of drainage, and its commensurably waterlogged nature. The surface material became increasingly dirty and mixed towards the south-east, as the outbuildings were approached. The area between the two outbuildings was cut by stone-lined drains, and five shallow postholes were also identified. These cut a slight linear feature filled with clay, all perhaps predating the construction of the outbuilding.

The area towards the gate of the farmyard was covered in a black humic topsoil, with pipe trenches near the gate. Many pieces of pot were recovered from the roots of the tree by the gate, including a single piece of late medieval pottery. Many drains and pipe trenches were also observed immediately outside the farmyard, in the angle of track between the gate and the curve of the garden wall.

The northern outbuilding appeared to lie on a platform of subsoil presumably to level the site. The north wall was constructed of angular blocks of yellow sandstone, heavily rendered on the outer face, although the north-west corner comprised brick and concrete infilled with rubble, with external drains. The most westerly bay had been floored with yellow bricks set in mortar. Internal partitions lay within slight cuts, that to the west being constructed of mortared red sandstone blocks, which overlay unmortared boulders, either the foundations or an earlier phase of construction. The second compartment was filled with rubble and mortar, although there was slight evidence for a cobbled surface beneath. The floors were a thick mortar to the west of the eastern internal partition, and of concrete on a bed of mortar, containing stones, including a lens of cobbles, to the east.

The southern wall had been badly disturbed during demolition and was seen only as the lowest course of mortared red sandstone on a foundation of large cobbles. There was some evidence that the outer skin of the wall had been refaced. The corner of the projecting wall forming the south-east side of the main entrance was identified as a block of red sandstone. The south-west corner of the structure lay within a wall trench, although there was some possibility that this belonged to an earlier phase of structure than that recently demolished. The wall was constructed of sandstone faced with a thick render externally, associated with a surface of yellow bricks.

The southern outbuilding was seen as a concrete platform, with traces of a revetment wall on the north side, comprising large blocks of red sandstone, with a rubble core. The north wall was constructed of limestone, lying beneath spread surface material. The eastern wall was associated with a stone-capped drain; the wall was faced and it had a rubble fill. The southern wall of this range was again constructed of red sandstone, which had been rendered, on a foundation of cobbles within a trench, visible externally. The fragmentary concrete floor sealed a layer of cobbles set in a layer of cinders, under which was a patch of yellow bricks and, in places, spreads of red sandstone chips.

The brick walls of the extension to the farmhouse behind Hiv were identified, within which was a laid brick floor. Both walls contained an amount of stone blocks within the make-up, and the whole had been heavily mortared. It was clear, however, that most of the walls had been built on earlier stone foundations, demonstrating that the relatively modern structure was a rebuild. A small feature, possibly linear, was identified to the north of the eastern wall, tightly packed with both angular and rounded stones and sealed by the make-up for the brick floor.

The north-western corner of the farmhouse (Hiv) demonstrated a complicated sequence. The corner was constructed of large rounded stones and pieces of red sandstone, all heavily mortared and externally rendered. Immediately to the north was another wall of large blocks of red sandstone, only some 0.40 m thick, whilst immediately to the south was a heavily mortared brick wall, set directly into the natural subsoil. This had been covered by two layers of concrete, presumably

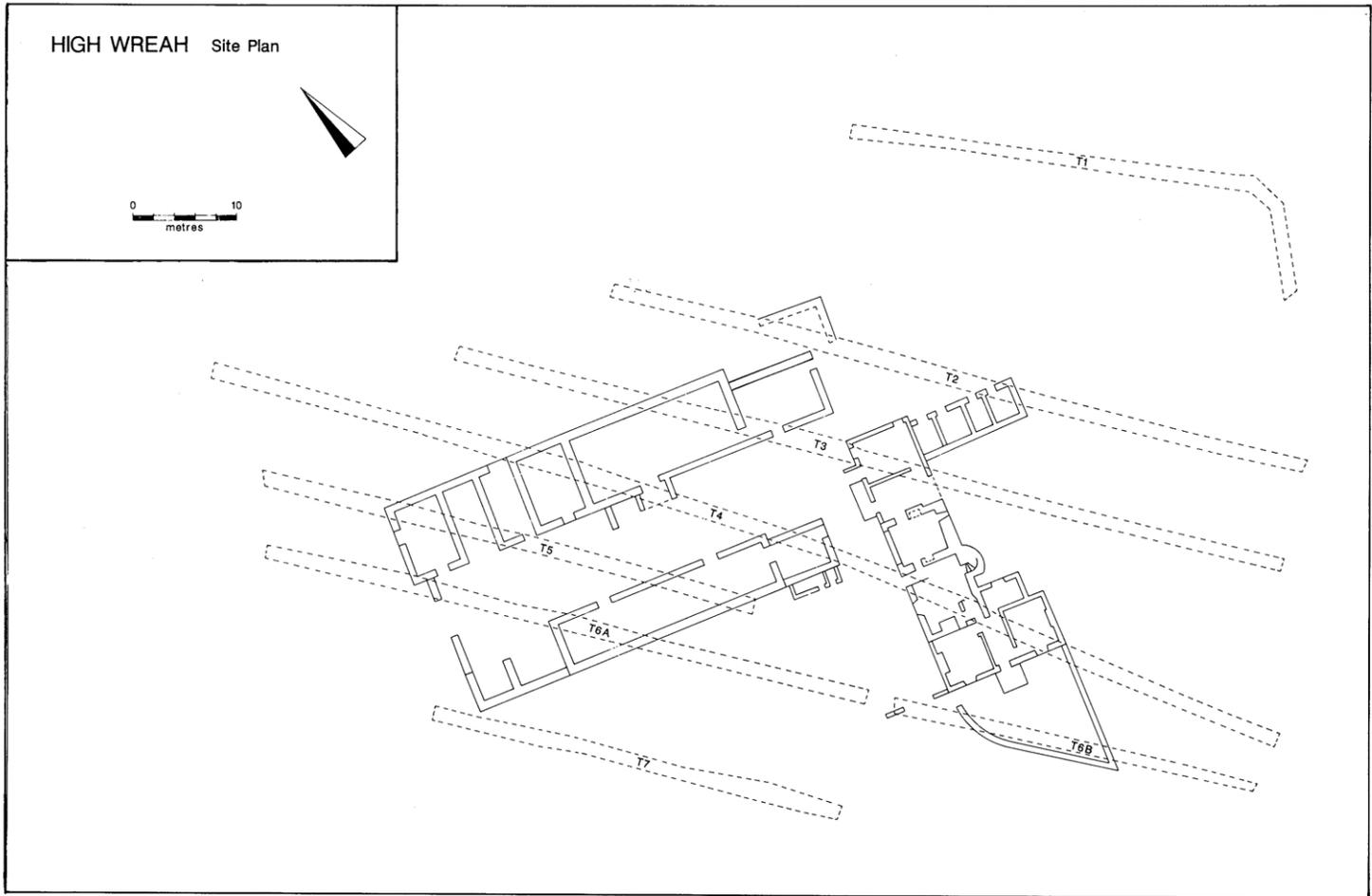


FIG. 9. High Wreah, Site Plan

forming a floor and its subsequent refurbishment. These layers also covered what appeared to be a further wall of red sandstone, juxtaposing the south-eastern side of the brick wall. A mortar and rubble fill acted as a bed for the concrete floor, below which in places was a layer of cobbles, perhaps an earlier floor surface. These seemed to respect the most south-easterly wall. Within Hiv was a single posthole and some amorphous striations cutting the subsoil, both apparently earlier than the building.

The eastern wall of Hiv was seen to lie within a foundation trench although this could in part have been created by a pipe-trench along its internal side. This wall comprised heavily mortared blocks of both yellow and red sandstone, and again there was evidence of rebuilding in the form of remains of a narrow wall of red sandstone immediately to the east. This whole area was sealed by demolition rubble. An external surface of small cobbles with slate fragments set horizontally seemed to respect the narrow wall and this in turn overlay a lens of packed small stones set in cinders. These apparent surfaces stretched only some 5 m to the east.

The west wall of Hii was constructed of unmortared blocks of sandstone and limestone, set directly into the natural subsoil, within which were the remains of floors of tiles set onto concrete, and slate flags set in mortar and on lenses of cinders. The original south-eastern corner of the structure demonstrated evidence for two sandstone walls (1.25 m and 0.75 m wide) facing each other, between which was a narrow gap (*c.*0.25 m wide) infilled with mortar. Immediately to the east of this agglomeration was a further narrow wall (only *c.*0.30 m wide) formed of cut blocks of red sandstone, with well worked faces, all heavily mortared. This latter wall would seem to have been the internal partition within extension Hvii.

Little but demolition material could be discerned within Hvi and Hvii. The south wall of Hvi was constructed of heavily mortared, yet well-faced blocks of red sandstone. To the south, this wall was butted by a wall of yellow sandstone and boulders, which appears to be the boundary surrounding a small garden to the south of the farmhouse; it was possible that this was constructed on the foundations of an earlier wall.

Beyond the farmhouse, the garden had a disturbed very stony humic soil, in places containing deposits of rubble and cinders, although bricks were notable by their absence. This area was associated with a large number of drains. A few amorphous features were noted, of little apparent significance. The boundary bank to the east displayed a hollow on its north-western side. Faint traces of a ditch were identified to the south. The southern garden wall survived in a poor state, apparently lying directly above a compact dark clay loam, with no evidence of a cut. It was constructed on a raft of slates. The similar farmyard wall was a drystone construction of rounded stones, badly affected by tree roots, but apparently set into a slight bank.

The track to the farm lay immediately to the east of the farmyard, comprising gravel over a layer of cobbles, which extended from the latest road surface towards the garden wall; a central element was of tarmac. Beyond this, a black humic topsoil sealed redeposited natural clay patches and lenses of mortar. These tipped gently up towards an earthen field bank forming the eastern end of the trench. The area beyond the farmyard was also cut by numerous drains, but displayed several amorphous undulations in the subsoil, which may have been evidence of former

cultivation. These appeared to continue beneath the farmyard wall suggesting that they predated it.

Discussion

The excavations again largely confirmed the results of the building survey, providing little evidence of occupation pre-dating the eighteenth century. The farmhouse was shown to have had a complicated history, with evidence of earlier structures on the site of the northern extension, although none of particular antiquity. The single posthole beneath this extension was intriguing but could not be used to posit a timber phase pre-dating the stone structure. The ranges of outbuildings were also possibly of more than one phase.

Conclusions

The survey and excavations of the four farmsteads within the Keekle Coalfield Extension brought together methods of building survey with excavation in an integrated approach. This was novel for its time, and this novelty was enhanced by the fact that the work was not being undertaken on some great structure, but on examples of differing vernacular architecture, in themselves of no more than local significance but, when put together, the sites assume a greater importance.

In the past, the study of vernacular architecture in the Lake Counties has been achieved entirely by the superficial survey of extant fabric and has been heavily reliant on date-stones to give an absolute chronology (Brunskill 1974). This has resulted in most sequences starting at the point of "the Great Rebuilding" in the later seventeenth century from which time a fashion for dated lintels flourished, particularly throughout the eighteenth century. There was therefore a need to examine the assumptions implicit in such a chronology by other means, such as dendrochronological dating (the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) (RCHME) has undertaken some work of this type in Cumbria) and by excavation, which would hopefully accrue a body of structural and artefactual evidence which would confirm the dating, or demonstrate much earlier origins (Newman, in prep).

The methods of building survey had been pioneered long before the Keekle Coalfield Extension project, but their strengths and weaknesses were well demonstrated here. A relatively new aspect was the use of instrument survey to provide a base on which details could be annotated. This was proved to be the most accurate method available, particularly when dealing with asymmetrical structures, such as the cow-house at Priestgill, where otherwise an assumption of visual symmetry could cause distortion. The need to remove rendering and other wall coverings to reveal and test key relationships was shown to be vital, when the amount of information revealed in those farms that were unoccupied at the time of survey is contrasted with that available from the occupied farms (particularly Keekle Bank). Manual survey can be over dependant upon assumption, and can lead to errors in the recording of irregular buildings.

The methods used for the excavations, long machine-cut trenches aimed to maximise information retrieved in a minimum amount of time, were in 1987 not as common as today, and had rarely been used in the North-West. The result of such a

method is that interpretation is derived from “snapshots” across the site. Here, the deficiencies of the methodology were exacerbated by the thoroughness of the demolition of the structures, which meant that it was often difficult to target precisely key relationships identified by the building survey; on occasion, the very structures themselves had been entirely removed. This indicates very clearly the need for controlled demolition when attempting to elucidate the origins of surveyed standing structures through subsequent excavation.

Both the survey and excavations demonstrated that all four farms were of post-medieval construction, with no real evidence of earlier activity on any of the sites. The two sherds of medieval pottery (one from Priestgill and one from High Wreah) can easily be ascribed to a general “background noise”, particularly when seen in conjunction with the traces of ridge and furrow identified in the vicinity of both farms and also at Bogholes. This apparently conflicts with the documentary evidence, which brings clearly into focus the conundrum of attributing ancient settlement loci to later adopted topographic names. This is particularly applicable at Priestgill, where the early source (Wilson 1915, 102-3) indicates seasonal settlement within the block of land subsequently occupied by the farm, but no early references to the farm itself. Similarly, “Wra” is firstly mentioned in 1350, but not as a farm until the later seventeenth century, this date agreeing with both the evidence derived from the date-stone and fabric of the farmhouse, and the information retrieved from excavation. Both survey and excavations were focussed exclusively on the sites of existing farms, with no work undertaken on the farm lands themselves. The limitations of such an approach can perhaps be seen in this apparent conflict.

In general the independent interpretations of the survey and excavations corresponded, the integration of the two producing a much fuller picture than either could have in isolation, both highlighting the complexity of the construction sequence in complementary ways. For instance, at High Wreah, the excavations not only confirmed, both in terms of the stratigraphical sequence and the material assemblage, that there was little apparent activity pre-dating the seventeenth century core of the farmhouse identified in the survey, but also supplemented the record by demonstrating that the phase 2 granary to the north, and the modern extension behind it, were both rebuilt, perhaps indicating activity contemporary with the phase 1 farmhouse. At Priestgill, the conclusions reached during the survey, that an original north wall must have been demolished during phase 2, agreed with the evidence of excavation, where a relatively well-preserved wall of similar construction to the phase 1 west wall of the farmhouse was identified in a position commensurate with such a theory.

The conclusions reached from this project are not perhaps earth-shattering, but they are of some significance. The need for a wider, landscape-orientated approach can be demonstrated by the apparent contradictions between the documentary evidence and that obtained by fieldwork, since site-specific investigations cannot address the possibility of shifting settlement, as may have been the case at both Priestgill and Keckle Bank. By the integration of such site-specific investigations a relatively full picture can, however, be produced. The survey and excavations confirmed that the earliest forms of the farms equated well in date with those documentary references mentioning definite farmsteads as opposed to generalised topographical locations. The survey, particularly, highlighted the variety of

architectural forms in a limited geographical area, and both it and the excavations hinted at the complex, although in archaeological terms, short history of such structures. The project has therefore demonstrated that the establishment of these farms reflects a significant expansion of permanent settlement onto marginal moorland, in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps beginning the movement which was to be completed by the Parliamentary Enclosures.

Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken throughout with the support of British Coal Opencast Executive, North-west Region, who also gave much valuable assistance in the various phases of work. For such a project to stretch through four separate phases, over four years, is perhaps unusual, although it was carefully scheduled to ensure that work was undertaken within the programme of extraction. Only at Keekle Bank did this mean that part of the farmstead had already been removed during the topsoil strip. Kier French also provided support, including the use of a surveyor and total station. The building surveys were undertaken by Jamie Quartermaine, and the excavations by Rachel Newman (at High Wreah), and Patrick Tostevin (under the line management of Rachel Newman).

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