

**SWALEDAL AND ARKENGARTHDALE
ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP**

**REPORT OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
CARRIED OUT AT**

**RALPH BANK HOUSE
LOW ROW, SWALEDAL**

FOR

MR D AND MRS C CALVERT

PLANNING REFERENCE: R/05/49A

NGR: SD 98349804

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE CODE: RBS13

YDNPA EVENT No: EYD 7777

YDNPA SOURCE No: SYD 13933

YDNPA Monument No: MYD 55191

Introduction

Ralph Bank House is sited below the B6270 road at the west end of the village of Low Row in Swaledale, North Yorkshire. The House is considered to date back to the C17th although over time it has been extensively modified; at the present time it is largely derelict. Domestic use of the building continued until about the 1940s when the present owners acquired it and converted it to farm use. The owners have submitted to the local planning authority, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), a planning application to repair, alter and rebuild the building to form a new dwelling (1).

Conditional Planning Permission was granted; Condition 11 of the planning consent states that “No Development shall take place until a scheme specifying the methods of recording or preserving any archaeological deposits or fabric which may be affected by the approved works and including a timetable for such recording has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.”

The owners, Mr D and Mrs C Calvert, approached the Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Archaeological Group (SWAAG), an amateur archaeological group, for their help. SWAAG developed a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an Archaeological Watching Brief (WB) (2). The WSI was submitted to, and approved by the YDNPA, and subsequently implemented by SWAAG, thereby satisfying the conditions of the planning approval.

This report presents the results of the WB and considers them in relation to the site’s overall archaeology and history.

Copies of this report have been lodged with the YDNPA, and the Reeth Museum. A complete archive for the Watching Brief has also been lodged with the Reeth Museum and copies of the digital material generated during the Watching Brief have been lodged with the YDNPA for incorporation into the HER.

Background

As part of the planning and development process detailed historical and architectural assessments of Ralph Bank House were commissioned by the owners, references 3, 4, 5. The YDNPA also developed an assessment as to whether the building is of such architectural or historic interest that its restoration in the landscape is justified, reference 6. Information contained in all four documents has been drawn on during the development and execution of the Watching Brief, and in the drafting of this report; copies of the complete documents are lodged with the project Archive. The following is a brief summary of the history and evolution of the Ralph Bank House site.

Ralph Bank House is located at NGR SD 98349804 to the south of the B6270 road and some 10m below it. It faces approximately south east on a steeply sloping site. The house is rectangular, approximately 16m by 5.8m externally and constructed largely of roughly hewed sandstone and gritstone blocks some of which, at the lower levels, are very large.

The building presently comprises three rooms, a large (6.25m long) western room, and smaller (3.5m) centre and (2.9m) eastern rooms. Set above the doorway to the eastern room is an incised date stone showing 1654 and which is considered to be authentic. It is considered that the original building would have been a C17th two-cell, one room deep, building, (the current west and centre rooms) to which was added, in ca 1654, the present eastern room. Subsequently, in the late C18th and/or early C19th it is thought that the building was remodeled to include new fireplaces in both faces of the wall dividing the two main rooms (current western and centre room), probably the wall height raised, and a thatched roof replaced with a lower pitched roof of local stone flags.

Photographic evidence from ca 1880 shows that a further full height extension had been added at the western end of the building. There is also evidence from maps of a mid C19th square, enclosed garden to the south of the building.

Domestic use of the building continued until about the 1940s when the Calvert family (the present owners) took over the property and land. At about that time the western end of the building was demolished in part, a larger doorway opened up in the south wall (the current opening into the western room) and a galvanized corrugated steel sheet roof added to allow the western room to be used as a store for (largely wooden) farm implements.

Today the building is largely derelict. Much of the south (front) walls above the first floor have been lost, although the back (north) wall remains and rises to the original eaves level. The dividing walls between the rooms remain, but at varying levels. The late C18th/early C19th fireplaces can be seen although both would appear to have been modified to incorporate Victorian fire grates and ovens. Large areas of the floors of all three rooms are covered by substantial stone flags.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objective of the archaeological WB was to identify, record and possibly sample excavate any features of archaeological interest revealed during the site works described in the following sections.

The specific aims were to:

- Record archaeologically (written, graphic, and photographic records as appropriate) any archaeological features revealed by the works and as the result of any sample excavations; and to
- Recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental material exposed by the groundworks.

During the planning process the Client and the Planning Authority had agreed that the WB would specifically focus on the following stages of the works:

- Lifting of the remaining floor slabs;
- Digging down for the new floor, note that there will be a need to dig some trial holes to determine the depth of the footings to determine the make up of the new floor;
- Reducing levels in areas of grassed over rubble adjacent to the west gable;
- Reducing levels to create a garden area to south (site of original garden as shown on tithe map).

However, during discussions on site, the Client clarified that they did not intend to reduce the levels of the rubble at the west gable, nor to reduce the levels to create a garden area to the south, the last two bullet points above; the Client was made aware that additional monitoring would be needed if at a later date they chose to do that work. The intention was to build up the level of the garden area behind a retaining wall constructed at the southern boundary of the garden area.

The WB would therefore monitor the digging of the trench for the base of that retaining wall, the pit for the septic tank which is to be sited alongside of the retaining wall and the works associated with the floors.

Methodology

The scope of the WB comprised the three elements described above, although, for clarity, the digging down for the new floor has been described in separate sections for each of the rooms.

Figure 16 in Appendix 1 is a plan of the work site illustrating the locations of the wall trench, and the rooms in the building which were excavated.

The WB was carried out over three days: 1st, 5th and 6th March 2013.

Digging of the trench for the garden retaining wall and associated septic tank pit:

A mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.2m ditching bucket was used to open, on the south side of the building, a trench and adjoining, and to its north, an area to provide for the septic tank for the property.

After de-turfing, the underlying soil was removed, carefully in layers, under visual control. Spoil was also monitored.

Where necessary, mechanical excavation was stopped and features excavated by hand.

The excavation was recorded photographically (see Appendix 1) and located by reference to the house, using the south wall of the house as a baseline.

Lifting of the Floor Flags

Floor flags were present in each of the three rooms in the house. The flags were lifted manually and the underlying levels excavated manually. For details of the floor compositions see the Results section where each room is separately recorded.

Digging down for the new floor

Lifting the floor flags showed that the floors in each of the three rooms comprised differing areas of rock and earth. Each room is separately described in the Results section.

Because of the variable make up of the floors manual excavation was preferred; each excavation was fully recorded, see Results section. Following completion of the excavation, each room was handed back to the Client to dig down using mechanical means; it was not judged necessary or useful to monitor that activity (see Results below).

Results

Each area is considered separately; see Figure 16, Appendix 1 for a site plan showing the relative positions of the areas excavated.

In the following narrative context numbers are shown in square brackets, thus [201] and small finds are shown thus <1>. A complete list of the contexts is included as Appendix 2 to this Report and in the Archive.

Trench for the garden retaining wall and associated septic tank pit

The trench opened up measured 12m east/west x 1.6m wide to depth of 50cm on the north side of the slope. The area opened for the septic tank measured 2.9m x 1.3m. Topsoil [201] was observed to a depth of 20/30cm in the north, septic tank section and throughout the whole trench, with a clear demarcation where it overlaid a light brown subsoil (natural). No other changes in strata were observed.

Artefacts were recovered from the topsoil [201] but not from the brown subsoil layer; see Finds section

At 5m and 7m from the eastern end of the trench two stones measuring 60cm x 30cm x 3cm [202] and 25cm x 30cm x 3cm [203] respectively, had been placed vertically.

At 11.5m from the eastern end of the trench, the probable remains of the base of a field boundary wall [204] running roughly north to south were uncovered. This extended into the area to the north of the main trench and which is intended to house the septic tank. The remaining stone from the wall appeared to have been robbed out.

The two stone slabs and the putative wall base were recorded photographically (see Appendix 1) and then removed as part of the necessary reduction for the foundations. No associated structures or stones in deeper layers were observed.

Digging down for the new floor

This aspect of the watching brief is recorded room by room.

West Room

Removal by the contractor of the first flag at the east end of this room revealed an under-floor culvert. It was therefore decided that the contractor would remove only the vegetation and surface material. Cleaning back manually exposed the edges of flags [100] and bedrock below [102].

Floor flags covered the majority of the room and would seem to have been laid on a mix of sand and soil [101] probably to level an older floor surface; the flags stopped short of the southern wall by 1m creating a noticeable lip where they overlapped a lower layer of floor flags [106]. The older floor surface appeared to be a mix of limestone bedrock [102] at the northern and western end of the room with flags on the southern side and the culvert [103] at the eastern end.

Cleaning of the bedrock at the western end of the room exposed a clay/silt layer which ran between the laminated layers of the bedrock. The layer sloped gently east under the wall of the culvert [103] running approximately north/south and capped, but not sealed, with small pieces of stone [104]. The culvert measured 15-20cm in width and 15cm deep.

Removal of the capstones [104] from the culvert exposed a silt in-fill [105] which based on on-site analysis was sieved through a 0.5sq cm mesh; see Finds section.

The culvert walls [103] were built directly on the clay/silt layer.

Further cleaning of the floor at the north end of the room revealed two further culverts running east/west and joining the north/south culvert [103] at its northern end nearest the house wall.

The west lateral culvert extended for 1.58m with a width of 15-17cm and a depth of 10-15 cm before running under the house wall. The channel was covered with relatively secure capstones and contained a solid in-fill [107].

The east lateral culvert extended in the west room for 2.55m with a width of 15-20cm and a depth of 5-10 cm. At its eastern extremity it passed into the centre room of the house via a gap between the threshold stone and the northern wall, from where it ran a further 65cm at a similar width but with the depth reducing as the level of the bedrock rose.

In the west room the capstones for the eastern lateral were fragmented, broken and collapsed into the channel, which was filled with a dry, coarse, granular material [108] containing a few fragments of bottle and vessel glass. Where the channel passed into the centre room capstones were not present and the fill was a denser more compacted material with an absence of finds.

Excavation of the southern entrance to the west room revealed only soil and no evidence that the culvert continued.

The room contained a fireplace on the eastern wall adjoining the centre room and which is probably an infill of a much earlier and larger C18th fireplace. Examination of the surround and base suggests that the base of the original fireplace sat lower than the flags [100].

Excavation of the room was photographically recorded, see Appendix 1.

East Room

Flags only partially covered the floor, in particular in the centre of the room and up to the east wall. The remaining surface was limestone bedrock towards the north of the room and soil to the southern aspect.

Where the flags had been removed on the eastern side of the room the surface was covered in a uniform, thin layer of coal: dust, flakes and very small pieces, as if from the bottom of a coal pile. Beneath the coal layer [110] extending 5 to 15 cm was a grey top soil like layer [111] over an orange/brown soil [112]. Bedrock [102] was then reached.

Other areas of the floor comprised orange/brown soil [112] containing coal debris inclusions and large sections of the floor surface were exposed limestone, bedrock [102]. It was in parts heavily fractured. There was also coal in the cracks in some of the areas of rock, particularly in the NE corner.

To determine whether the bedrock underlay the whole of the room, a trench running east/west and 1m wide was opened in the front (south) quarter of the room adjacent to the south wall.

The trench revealed three layers: soil, orange/brown soil, and grey clay [111], [112], [102] respectively. The grey clay was probably undisturbed ground. The trench was excavated down to 60cm with no sign of bedrock.

To determine further the extent of the bedrock, a second trench was opened. It was 0.5m wide and running north/south for 1m starting from the north edge of the east/west trench. The layers described above were again seen, although the bedrock was only found in the more northern section of the trench, south of which the grey clay was again identified.

The excavation of the room was photographically recorded, see Appendix 1.

Centre Room

What were initially thought to be floor flags in the northern two thirds of this room proved to be fractured bedrock, and so no further work was carried out in this area

To help assess the build-up of the floor on the southern side of the room, a T-shaped trench was opened up just inside the doorway. The east/west top of the T was parallel to the front, south wall, 1.2m in length and 35cm wide. The leg of the T ran north/south central to the top, 45cm long and 35cm wide. The trench was excavated to depths between 7.5cm and 20cm.

A dark compacted layer [109] varying in depth up to 20cm and possibly introduced to level the floor contained numerous stones between 25mm and 150mm across and 25mm to 75mm thick and a number of lumps of hard white material, about 25mm across. This last material was probably mortar from the walls of the room.

Below the top layer [109] was an orange/brown soil [112] which contained many pieces of stone which appeared to be broken pieces of the bedrock.

At a depth of 20cm bedrock [102] was reached, in the cracks of which was a coarse grey clay. The excavation was photographically recorded, see Appendix 1.

Finds

The site yielded a range of Finds. All of which were consistent with the period representing the assumed domestic occupation of the site. Each area of the site is described separately below; see also Figure 16, Appendix 1 for a site plan.

Trench for the garden retaining wall and associated septic tank pit

Randomly distributed and occasional within the topsoil [201] were:

- sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass;
- fragments of clay tobacco pipe stems;
- charcoal; and
- animal bone.

Fragments of mortar were also recovered which bore similarities to the mortar in the main building structure. In the absence of its association, in the trench, with stone or ceramic building materials, it is presumed that this was from the main building and could have originated from the construction or decay phases.

West Room

This was the most complex of the three rooms. Finds were exposed principally in the east end of the room away from the areas of bedrock and either in the vicinity of, or in, the culverts.

The north/south culvert [103] contained:

- an assortment of animal bones;
- sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass;
- coloured glass marble and ceramic marbles (at the northern end of the culvert);
- fragments of lead window comes;
- a metal window fastener;
- a copper-alloy button and buckle;
- a clay tobacco pipe bowl [105], <2>; and
- a silver George III sixpence dated 1820 [105], <1>.

The clay tobacco pipe bowl was assessed against the Oswald Typology, (reference 7) and dated as mid/late 17th century. In a private communication, Dr Susie White, Curator of the National Clay Tobacco Pipe Archive and author of reference 8, after inspection of the photographs of the pipe bowl confirmed a date of 1650 – 1670.

The west culvert [107] contained:

- sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass;
- animal bones including a sawn pig radius;
- a clay tobacco pipe stem;
- a hand-made nail; and
- metal window furniture.

The leveling layer [101] contained:

- sherds of post-medieval pottery;
- fragments of horseshoes;
- a metal window catch;
- hand-made nails;

- a copper-alloy button; and
- animal bones.

The east culvert [108] contained:

- 3 sherds of post-medieval bottle and vessel glass.

East Room

The northern part of the floor exposed following the removal of the flags largely comprised bedrock and contained:

- sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass.

The trench excavated at the southern part of the room was more productive yielding an assemblage of:

- sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass;
- animal bones;
- a fragment of a clay tobacco pipe stem; and
- pieces of mortar which had probably come from the walls of the room.

Centre Room

The majority of the floor surface of this room was bedrock and devoid of finds.

The trench excavated at the southern end of the room produced, in the dark soil layer, several fragments of thick, green, post medieval bottle glass. There were no finds below this layer.

Discussion and Conclusions

Recorded evidence together with an assessment of the building (references 3, 4, 5, 6) supports the view that Ralph Bank House was built and inhabited from about the mid-17th century, although it has been substantially modified over the subsequent years. Also, at one time (1843 tithe map) there was apparently a small enclosed garden area to the south of the house.

Important to the interpretation of the information gathered during the Watching Brief is that the building was acquired by the Calvert family in the 1940s and that at sometime after that the outer south door to the west room was closed off and replaced with the present much wider door to facilitate the owner's storage of largely wooden farm implements; this is recorded in reference number 4 and was confirmed on site by the grandson of the then owner.

Key conclusions which may be drawn from this WB are:

- The Finds collected across the site all seem to be of a period which supports the view that the site has been occupied since the 17th century.
- Finds dating to the medieval period were not identified.
- The wall base and flags identified in the trench may form part of a garden enclosure.
- The earliest floor throughout the house may have comprised earth (south side of rooms) and bedrock (north side of rooms). Also, the range and diversity of pottery and glass finds from the central and eastern rooms in particular might suggest that when the floors were leveled in front (to the south of) of the bedrock outcrop, an infill was used, possibly brought from an adjacent area on the site.

- In the Eastern Room the floor was in part covered with coal residues pointing perhaps to the room having been used as a coal store.
- The Western Room is the most complex and interesting of the rooms due to the presence of the culverts and the sequence of floor flags. Based upon the results described above and the use to which the room was put post the 1940s, it is postulated that the room has evolved in at least four phases:
 - **Phase 1** covers the period prior to and including the C17th and early C18th: the building of the house and the initial period of occupation. During this phase the door in the south wall (now blocked up) was probably in use and of which a door step, going under the south wall, remains. The floor of the room was probably a mixture of bedrock and flags and the culverts (north/south and the lateral east/west culverts) had been installed to drain a spring(s) which came into the house through the back, north wall. The north/south culvert appears to have been created by digging out floor material (bedrock at the north and soil at the south) and lining the channel with stone; it is not clear as to whether at this time, the culvert was level with the floor, and capped. That the culvert existed during this phase is supported by the mid/late C17th date of the clay tobacco pipe bowl found in the silt in the culvert.
 - **Phase 2** covers the period in the late C18th/early C19th when the large stone fireplace was installed at the east end of the room. The hearth flag and side pillar were both seated on the original flag layer and abutted the bedrock to the north of the fireplace (see photograph, Figure 12 in Appendix 1).
 - **Phase 3** is the period post 1820 extending through the Victorian era and into the C20th. At some time during this phase the large fireplace was blocked off and the smaller Victorian grate fitted; the flag for this grate was laid on top of the original flags, see photographs Figures 8 and 12 in the Appendix 1. It is believed that probably at the same time the floor was improved and the majority of it covered with flags all seated on a leveling layer of soil [101]. Note that the flags were not relaid all the way to the south wall but stopped 1m short of it. That was probably to allow the continued use of the door at full height. Putting down the flags also had the effect of sealing the culvert, which perhaps explains why the most recent dated find is the silver coin issued in 1820. The glass and ceramic marbles, which were found in the culvert were concentrated at its northern end, and were probably introduced into after it was sealed, by children playing marbles against the northern wall; the junction between the wall and the culvert may not have been well sealed.
 - **Phase 4** occurred post the 1940s when the building was acquired by the Calvert family and converted for use as a farm implement store. It is believed that as well as modifying the south doorways, some of the flags were lifted and re-leveled using a sand layer for bedding.

Note that the finds in the culvert extend across several periods. However, it is difficult to use them to date the culvert as the culvert is, by its nature, an unsecure context. Material will have been introduced into the culvert by the action of the water, through human action and particularly as regard bones almost certainly though the action of rodents. Indeed at an early stage in the excavation a SWAAG member observed a rodent taking refuge in the culvert.

Suggestions for Further Study

Commission specialist reports to characterise further the Finds assemblage.

Acknowledgements

SWAAG would like to thank Mr & Mrs Calvert for commissioning this watching brief and for permission to include the reports, references 3, 4, and 5, in the WB Archive. We also wish to express our thanks to Andrew Calvert for his efficient facilitation of the site works and to Robert White of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority for his helpful comments and encouragement and for permission to include reference 6 in the archive.

References

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3. "Design Access and Heritage Statement for Refurbishment of Former Dwelling at Ralph Bank House. Low Row", author Paul Crosby Architects, December 2011
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5. "Structural Appraisal, Ralph Bank, Low Row, Richmond," author Victoria Design Group, Consulting and Civil Engineers. December 2011
6. "Ralph Bank House, Low Row, Melbecks Parish," author Senior Listed Buildings Officer, Yorkshire Dales National Park, November 2010
7. "London Clay Tobacco Pipes" authors D. Atkinson and A. Oswald, J Archaeol Assoc, 3rd Series, Vol 32, 171-227, 1969.
8. "The Archaeology of the Clay Tobacco Pipe XV111. The Dynamics of Regionalisation and Trade: Yorkshire Clay Tobacco Pipes c1600 – 1800" author S. D. White, edited by Peter Davey and David A. Higgins. pub. BAR 374, 2004 (ISBN 1 84171 629 4).

APPENDIX 1

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD & PLANS

These photographs together with the remainder of the photographic record and site archive have been lodged with the Reeth Museum



Figure 1: West Room before excavation



Fig 2: West Room before excavation



Figure 3: East Room before excavation



Figure 4: Base of field wall in trench



Figure 5: Trench showing the vertical slabs



Figure 6: West Room showing culvert



Figure 7: West Room, top layer of flags cleaned back



Figure 8: West Room, showing culvert



Figure 9: Excavation of Centre Room



Figure 10: Excavation of East Room



Figure 11: West room. Door on left, lip between old and new flags



Figure 12: West room. Shows different contexts around fireplace.



Figure 13: George III silver sixpence [105] <1>



Figure 14: Clay tobacco pipe bowl [105] <2>

Watching Brief Ralph Bank House, Low Row

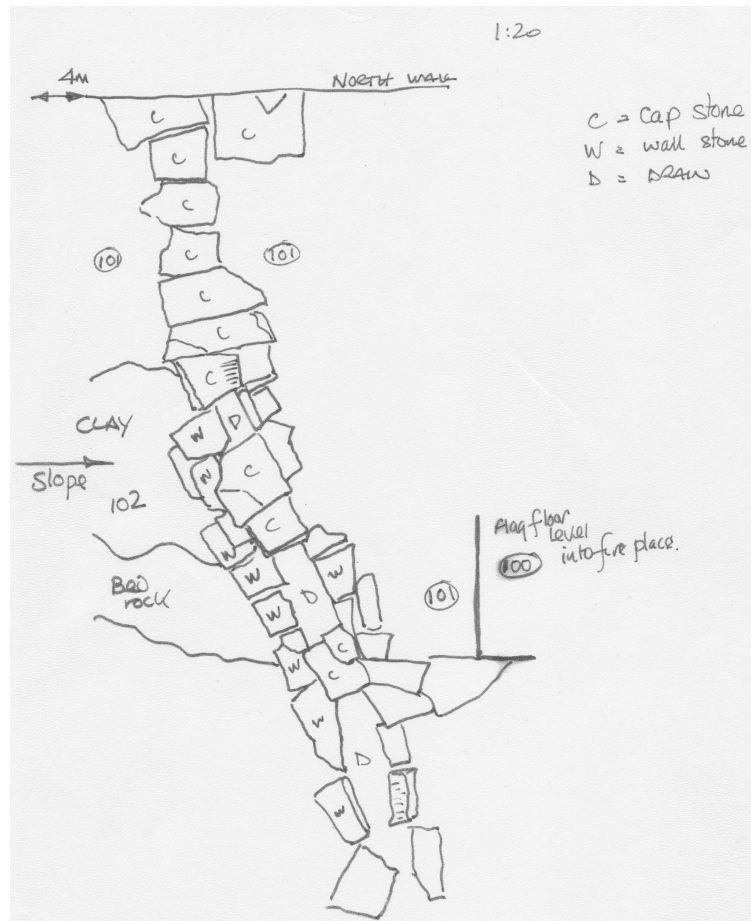


Figure 15: 1:20 scale drawing of the West room culvert

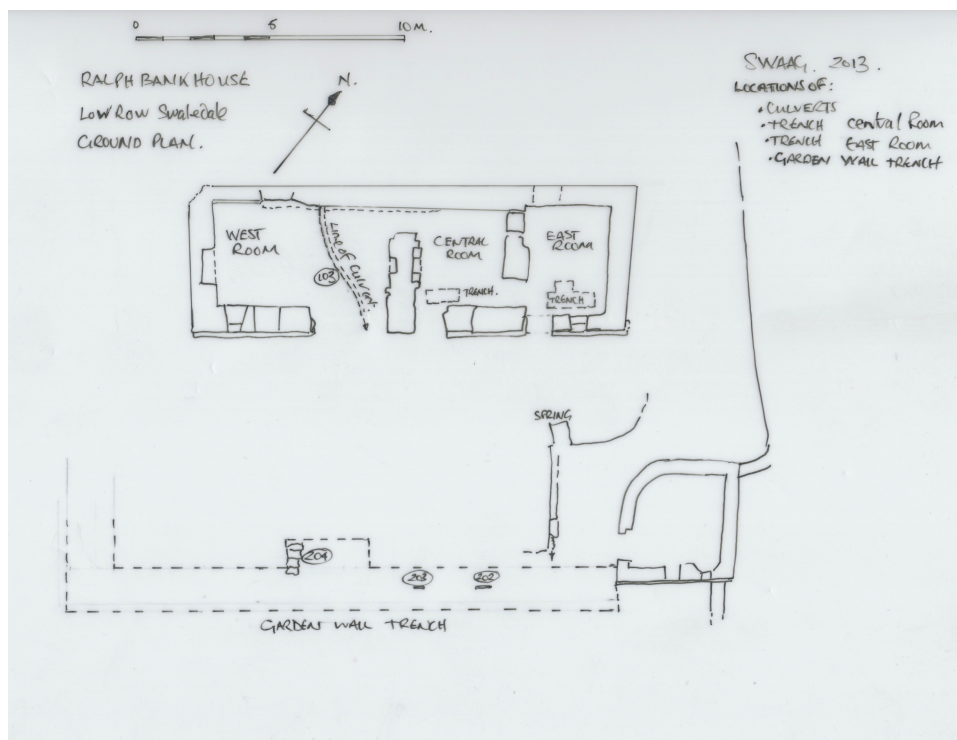


Figure 16: Site plan showing locations of excavations

APPENDIX 2

CONTEXT SHEETS

Site Code: RBS13 WB.

PS = PAUL RASTON. Sheet Number1.....

Site Code: RBS13 WB.

B. Philip BARNOW

Sheet Number2.....