

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

WOLSELEY HALL



An Archaeological Evaluation

B.U.F.A.U.



AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF WOLSELEY HALL
STAFFORDSHIRE

by

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Acknowledgements Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit 1989

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

"A fine house with fine gardens....."

Dean Davies, 1690.

1.1 Wolseley Hall Revisited

The country house set in its gardens is probably the most familiar symbol of our national heritage. Perhaps because there has been no foreign invasion, civil war or revolution since the seventeenth century these houses, both great and small, represent a physical continuity - and an imagined community - that still holds a central place in the English imagination (in 1986 the revenue from visitors to historic buildings and gardens totaled £110 million).

Sir Roy Strong captured something of this attraction when he wrote:

"We sense, behind some grey, mouldering stone wall, the magic of a landscape painting. Majestic trees pierce the skyline and a profusion of shrubs leads the eye through the artificial landscape in successive tantalising vistas. Alerted, we strain our eyes for a brief, fleeting glimpse of some noble pile floating in the distance, either embraced within some hollow or standing proud on a prominence. The ravished eyes stir the heart to emotion, for in a sense the historic houses of this country belong to everybody, or at least everybody who cares about this country and its traditions."

Nevertheless, there are so many historic houses and gardens now open to the public that, except to the real aficionado, the experience can begin to pall. The project underway at Wolseley Garden Park represents something excitingly different. Here, new gardens are being created - richly varied, thematic, fresh - not in an attempt to reconstruct the historic gardens yet keenly sensitive to the historic setting.

The ancient focus for the gardens, the manorial hall, is no longer standing; down the tantalising vistas, through the majestic trees, across the profusion of shrubs, eyes will strain in vain for a glimpse of the noble pile. But more tantalising yet, its foundations lie just under the

soil, offering a unique opportunity for an equally different and exciting project to complement the creation of the gardens: by means of excavation and documentary research not one noble pile, frozen in time, but a whole sequence of houses, from the early Middle Ages to the twentieth century, lie waiting to be brought to life, through their foundations of stone, brick and wood, through words and pictures, and through the everyday possessions of their inhabitants down the centuries.

1.2 Background and Aims

In carrying out the landscaping necessary for the creation of the gardens, and in the course of searching for a secret passage said to have been located close by the hall, the owners discovered the remains of a massive wall of ashlar masonry, more than six-feet high, set in what appeared to be a moat. This wall did not belong to the neo-gothic hall demolished in 1967 but to a much earlier period in the history of Wolseley, to the time of the Wars of the Roses.

Archaeological advice was sought and, in consultation with Mr Philip Barker, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Sir Charles Wolseley to evaluate the potential of the site. This evaluation was carried out between 10th of April and 5th of May 1989, and the results are reported here.

The evaluation had three distinct but complementary aims. The first was simply to find out more about the site - its nature, date, size, layout and history - by means of trial excavations, geophysical prospection and documentary research. The limited scope of this work means that the results are necessarily preliminary; it would be suprising (and indeed disappointing) if further work did not show that some of the tentative conclusions drawn are only partially correct or, occasionally, wholly erroneous. The second, and in many ways the most important, aim was to assess the potential of the site for longer term, more detailed research - to assess the survival and quality of the remains of buildings and artefacts, and the survival and quality of documentary evidence, even if at

this early stage the remains and evidence could not be fully understood. The third aim was to assess the potential of the site as an attraction, amenity and educational resource - to determine whether the remains were well preserved enough and of a suitable character for public display and presentation.

The report is organised into five main sections. Sections 2 - 4 describe, in some detail, the trial excavations and geophysical survey, the history of the hall, and the broader archaeological and historical context and importance of the hall. As these sections are fairly lengthy and employ (where appropriate) some technical language an attempt has been made in Section 5 to summarise the main points in layman's terms. The final section of the report comprises recommendations for further work, both in the short term (ie prior to the scheduled opening of the gardens in spring 1990) and in the longer term.

SECTION 2: THE TRIAL EXCAVATIONS AND GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

2.1 Introduction (Fig 1)

The site lies on a gently sloping gravel terrace on the south bank of the River Trent. To the south the ground slopes sharply upwards towards Cannock Chase, rising up the sandstone scarp against which the gravel terrace lies. The excavations described here were prompted by the more-or-less accidental discovery of substantial stone wall footings. Of these the most significant appeared to be a massive moat revetment and curtain wall marking the north side of the site. There is important documentary evidence to suggest that early buildings on the site were surrounded by a moat (see Section 3) and that the ha-ha which marks the western side of the site follows the line of this feature.

Three trenches were excavated, all within the postulated moated area, and their objectives can be summarised thus:

- 1 - To investigate the sandstone walls already exposed and to confirm their initial interpretation as a moat revetment and defensive curtain wall.
- 2 - To ascertain the size of the moat through limited trenching and geophysical survey.
- 3 - To assess the survival of archaeological deposits and structures within the moat platform and obtain a preliminary indication of their function and date.
- 4 - To investigate the relationship of the most recent Hall building to earlier structures and the extent to which this building incorporated or disturbed earlier buildings.
- 5 - To assess the potential for recovery of environmental evidence from waterlogged deposits within the moat.
- 6 - To assess the potential of the site for display and presentation to the public as an attraction of Wolseley Garden Park.

2.2 Trench 1 (Figs 2 & 3)

A one metre wide trench was positioned to investigate the exposed moat wall (Structure 3), the moat itself, and the interior of the platform.

The Moat (F.14)

To the north of the wall, outside the putative moat platform, a machine was used to excavate a section across the moat. This trench revealed a shallow feature cut no more than 1.5 metres below the level of the natural gravels as exposed either side of the moat wall. This feature was c.3.0 metres wide and had gently sloping, stepped sides. Although this is small compared with normal moats, it is possible that the revetment wall was constructed within a pre-existing moat thus effectively reducing the width of the ditch. None of the original moat fills had survived the recent disturbance in this area and no assessment of the environmental potential of the moat could be made here. However the bottom of the moat lies below the present water table, which indicates that survival of organic remains may be good where moat deposits survive.

The Moat Wall (F.15; Structure 3)

The revetment wall is a complex structure, standing just over 2 metres high. A 27 metre length was exposed and cleaned. Initially, at least two phases of construction were apparent, expressed as a significant change in alignment. Further examination suggested that parts of the upper courses may have been rebuilt in the late Medieval period (R.A.Meason, pers comm), with stonework of a poorer quality than the lower courses. The original wall was approximately 1.5 metres thick and constructed of massive ashlar, bonded with soft cream/pink mortar. Initial estimates of the width of the wall, suggesting a truly enormous fortification, were distorted by an area of infill between the moat wall and stone structures immediately to the south. The foundation course, where exposed, consisted of large, rough-hewn red sandstone blocks. The size and build of the surviving masonry suggests a curtain wall of considerable height. However, even if the wall was originally only 2-3 metres higher than at present, an outer face 4-5

metres high would have presented an impressive obstacle. The surviving upper courses of the wall consist of less regularly sized ashlar and the top of the wall has been stepped back in some places. This is likely to have occurred after the curtain wall had been demolished down to ground level and building on the moat platform began to encroach over the remaining stonework (see Structure 4 below).

A large area of disturbance in the centre of the exposed stretch of wall is probably attributable to stone robbing. The top of the wall is cut, in at least two places, by modern drains leading into the moat area.

To the north of the moat wall is a large, irregular, rectangular structure straddling the moat. This enigmatic feature is built of sandstone and survives to the same height as the wall. Limited excavation in the interior demonstrated that it had been built after the digging of the moat and that its foundations followed the contours of the moat sides. The outer faces of the structure suggest that most of its surviving height was meant to be exposed, and the gap carefully left between it and the moat wall suggests that it was built when the moat was still water-filled. The interior had been divided with brick partitions at a later date and mortar traces on top of the sandstone walls hint at a brick superstructure, but no evidence of function was recovered. The position makes its use as a bridge foundation unlikely (documentary research indicates that the main gate was always on the south side of the site). It may have served to support a building extending out over the moat. Finds from the thick layer of rubble excavated within it suggest an 18th century date for its demolition, presumably contemporary with the infilling of the moat.

The Moat Platform

A sandstone wall (F.2) abutted against the southern side of the moat wall. This feature was built on a slightly different alignment to the moat wall and the consequent gap between the two had been partly filled with sandstone masonry. It is not clear whether this material is purely infill between F.2 and the back of the moat wall, or the base of a bay window or a chimney attached to F.2. Another wall of similar width and alignment was

uncovered 10 metres to the south. This wall (F.1) stood five courses high (1.0 metre) with a rough north face and a well-dressed south face. Another wall (F12), with a rough east face and well-dressed west face, was bonded onto F.1 from the south.

The natural gravel lay 1.0 metre below the top of these walls, and to the north and east of the walls was sealed by a sequence of layers of silty soil and gravel (1005, 1010, 1011, 1012) represented by stippling on Fig 2. The interpretation of this material is problematic. It may either have been dumped within a building (Structure 1) at the time of its construction, in order to raise the floor level, or it may represent earlier stratified deposits through which the walls were cut. In either case it seems certain that the rough wall faces which abut the material were never intended to be exposed, no attempt having been made to tidy up the mortar which spilled out between the joints in the stone work. The implications of both possibilities are discussed below (see Discussion). These layers contained sherds of 12/13th-century cooking pot, and sealed the earliest feature on the site, a shallow gully running east-west. In contrast, the metre of material (1007) which lay against the south face of F.1 was mainly demolition rubble, a mixture of brick, tile, sandstone and plaster, with a few sherds of 18th-century pottery and clay pipe. This rubble may represent one of a number of rebuilding operations carried out in the 18th century, or perhaps the major 1820 rebuilding of the hall, and overlay the remains of a stone floor. The original slabs had been robbed out but their impressions could be discerned in the mortar against wall F.1 and a further wall (F.3) 4.0 metres to the south. This latter wall was less well preserved, with only one course surviving above floor level. It seems, however, to have been an outside wall, with a vertical slot in its south face perhaps to house a guttering down-pipe which fed into a brick-built drain similar to one exposed on the north west corner of wall F.2.

Another wall (F.16), a mirror image of F.1, stood 1 metre high, 4.0 metres to the south of F.3. This wall was dressed on its north face and material similar to 1005-1010 (dumped between F.1 and 2) had been dumped against its rough southern face.

All these walls, although well built, were only one course thick and it is possible that some may have supported timber superstructures (a key 17th-century description of the house describes it as "an old timber building" - see Section 3).

However, this trench also revealed evidence of more substantial foundations. The eastern wall of Structure 1 had been built against the corner of a very substantial building (Structure 2) with foundations up to 1.0 metre wide. Only the north west corner of this structure was uncovered but its size and position make it a likely candidate for the late-medieval Great Hall. Its sandstone foundations had been cut by the brick-built foundations of the later neo-gothic hall (Structure 5), constructed c.1820 and demolished in 1967. These later foundations clearly indicate a change in building alignment during the 1820 rebuilding.

Further to the south, at the southern end of the trench, foundations similar to those of Structure 2 were located. They formed the north east corner of another building (Structure 6) on the same alignment as those to the north, and are possibly the remains of a building associated with the Great Hall.

2.3 Trench 2 (Fig 4)

A small machine trench was excavated to check the extent and alignment of the moat wall further to the east of Trench 1. The wall was located at a depth of 1.0 metre below present ground level and was of the same size (c.1.20 metres thick) and build as the lower courses seen in Trench 1 to the west. An unidentified but less substantial sandstone structure, perpendicular to the wall, was partially excavated to its south. To the north of the wall the siltier material of the moat fills was contacted, containing 18th-century pottery and tile.

The depth below ground of the structure to the south of the moat wall, and its association with a possible yard surface, suggests that the present ground level within the moat enclosure has been raised by about one metre.

On the basis of the finds from this trench, this operation probably took place during the 18th/19th-century rebuilds of the hall, possibly as a prelude to the construction of the outbuildings which today stand to the north-east of this area.

2.4 Trench 3 (Fig 5)

This hand dug trench was positioned to assess the extent and nature of a sandstone structure (Structure 4) attached to the eastern wall of Structure 1. Its north wall was contiguous with, though later than, that of Structure 1, but of similar build. Trench 3 located the eastern wall and the latest floors of the building. The wall was of well-faced sandstone surviving to a height of at least 0.50 metres. The lowest course of the main wall was offset to form a plinth, and remains of mortar on the floor suggested brick shelf supports against this wall. The floor was of orange brick and tiles, the two materials being separated by a well made sandstone drain. It had been sealed by a thick layer of demolition rubble, similar to that encountered against the outside wall of Structure 1 and probably resulting from the same demolition phase. The projected line of the northern wall of this structure indicates that it was built over, or cut into, the remains of the demolished curtain wall, and the internal features suggest its use as a buttery.

2.5 Geophysical Survey (Fig 6)

As part of the works associated with the creation of the gardens the flat grassed area to the south of the curving driveway to the hall has been recently landscaped and re-seeded. It was reported that stonework, presumed to relate to wall foundations, was encountered during this work. The most readily apparent explanation for these alleged foundations was that they belong to a continuation of the moat wall to the south of the driveway, perhaps defining the southern end of the "outward court" known to have been a feature of the late-medieval house (see Section 3).

In order to test this hypothesis a resistivity survey was carried out over part of the area. Resistivity surveying is one of a range of techniques which make use of electronic instruments to locate buried features without actually disturbing the ground. Essentially the technique involves measuring the resistance of the earth to an electric current passed between metal electrodes. Put simply, features such as a stone wall will inhibit the flow of the current and thus register a high resistance on a meter while buried ditches, with a higher moisture content than the surrounding ground, will conduct electricity better and register a lower resistance. The survey is carried out in a systematic manner over a regular, measured grid and the results logged onto a computer. The results can then be plotted out on paper in a variety of ways (Fig 6 is a 'dot-density' plot) to show the location and intensity of 'anomalies' - areas of above or below average resistance - which relate to features buried under the ground. The interpretation of these anomalies is, however, by no means a straightforward process.

The survey was carried out by John Gater and Chris Gaffney of 'Geophysical Surveys' (who should not be held responsible for the oversimplified explanation of the principles of resistivity surveying given above). The following is an edited summary of their full report.

Instrumentation and Method

The resistance survey was carried out using a Geoscan RM4 and DL10 data logger. The resistance readings were logged at 1.0 metre intervals over the survey area and then transferred to an Amstrad PPC640 field computer. Field plots were produced on a portable HP Thinkjet with further processing carried out on a Mission 386 linked to suitable printer options.

The survey area was divided into ten grid-squares of 20 x 20 metres, numbered 1-10 for easy reference (Fig 6). The results of the survey were reproduced as dot-density plots (Fig 6), a stacked (X-Y) profile and a contour plot. A simplified interpretation of the results showing the major anomalies (A-G) is shown on Figure 1.

Results

The resistivity technique responded well on the site, despite the small survey area. However a large part of the survey area ('A' on Fig 1) produced very low, anomalous readings which were seen to correspond to modern disturbance on the ground. Attempts were made to analyse the data from this disturbed area, but the plots made little sense. It subsequently came to light that the cause of the anomalous readings in this area was a buried mesh laid to reinforce the grass for car parking.

In grid 10, the high resistance anomaly in the southern half is a reflection of the break in slope at this point. The slight increase in readings at B, running into grid 9, may be significant, but it is impossible to determine an archaeological interpretation. The same applies for the higher anomalies at C and D, which appear truncated by the area of disturbance. Perhaps the most interesting anomalies appear in the western half of the survey.

Both the dot-density plots and the detailed colour contours showed areas of high and low resistance. The X-Y profile helped to indicate the relative change in resistance between the disturbed and apparently undisturbed areas. The contour plot included grids 4-8. This showed the only area of a possible ditch ('E' on Fig 1) and a series of possible high resistance anomalies (F/G). These continued to the west (H), beyond the survey area.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, the presence of the buried wire mesh makes interpretation of the resistivity data extremely difficult. Despite this fact, the survey has identified several anomalies which may be of potential archaeological interest. It is possible that some of the anomalies reflect wall foundations, metallised surfaces or rubble deposits, together with a ditch, but such interpretations must be treated with caution. In the light of the modern disturbance on the site it is recommended that auguring or trial trenching be carried out prior to any full excavation based solely on the geophysical evidence. This would quickly establish whether modern

landscaping/consolidation is, in fact, responsible for the observed anomalies.

2.6 Discussion

The excavations described above have revealed a long and complex sequence of occupation on the site, beginning with the medieval occupation on the natural gravel terrace and ending with the demolition of the latest house in 1967.

However, it should be stressed that on the basis of the most conservative estimate of the site's extent less than 2% of the moat platform has so far been examined. It is impossible to construct a detailed structural sequence or chronology from such a small sample. Nevertheless, the evaluation trenches provided surprisingly consistent results which enable some basic statements to be made.

Firstly, it seems likely that the Great Hall and associated structures, already ancient when described in the 17th century, were not the first buildings to have occupied the site. Pottery characteristic of the late 12th and 13th centuries was found, and a linear feature sealed beneath later buildings hints at timber buildings early in the sequence. The precise nature of this early occupation is not yet understood, but the layers located within Structure 1 raise the possibility of the survival of deeply stratified early deposits.

Interpretation of the most substantial recorded structure, the moat wall, is very difficult. It probably surrounded the entire moat platform, but whether it followed the course of an earlier, simple moat or enclosed a larger area is not yet known. Neither excavation nor geophysical survey was successful in fully defining the extent of the moat platform. It is possible that the wall was constructed within a pre-existing moat, with the masonry rising sheer out of the water. This wall has obviously undergone a considerable number of re-builds, and probably has a complex relationship with the buildings on the northern side of the site (Structures 1 and 4,

for example). The changes in alignment of the foundation courses are not yet understood.

The sequence of stone buildings on the north side of the site can only be tentatively suggested from the limited excavations so far undertaken. However, the identification of Structure 2 as the medieval Great Hall seems reasonably certain. It was obviously a substantial stone-founded building which formed the core, until its destruction c.1820, of a large complex of buildings which themselves underwent a long series of additions and rebuildings before their final demolition in 1967.

Some of these phases of change have been identified by excavation. Structure 1 represents part of the range of buildings at the north end of the Great Hall. An extension (Structure 4), perhaps in the form of a buttery, was added fairly late in the sequence, probably after the curtain wall had been demolished to ground level. The walls located to the south of Structure 1 suggest an equally complex sequence at the south end of the Hall.

The brick foundations of the latest house have been located; they are relatively slight and the damage their construction caused was probably very limited.

The potential for recovering a good artefact sequence is dependent on the survival of occupation or refuse deposits. However, the range in both date and type of artefact recovered from the demolition levels hints at a rich finds assemblage. Animal bone and pottery survive well and the moat, where its fills are preserved, has great potential for water-logged organic survival.

Overall, the prognosis for survival of archaeological features is good for most of the site. The precise nature of this survival depends on the resolution of one question in particular. Do the layers seen within Structure 1 represent early strata, cut through by later buildings, or were they dumped when these buildings were constructed? If the former is true - and the floor surface to the south of Structure 1 represents a cellar

floor, cut through deeply stratified earlier layers, the survival potential of the earliest occupation is demonstrably great, but some later floor levels may have been lost. If the latter is correct, and the material within Structure 1 is dumped, the potential for early strata survival is more equivocal but extremely good preservation of the sequence of stone buildings can be expected.

Most of the walls are well built and often up to five courses of masonry survive. The latest floors of some buildings have survived, mainly because they have been protected by a metre of demolition rubble. This bodes well for the survival of earlier floors and occupation deposits. The Medieval Great Hall, positioned as it is under the 1820 house, will probably have survived well and may be complete in plan.

An attempt to define the possible extent of the moat platform can be seen on Figure 1. Trench 2 established that the moat wall extended beyond the eastern side of the latest house. The position of the moat's eastern side remains unresolved. The geophysical survey, while generally disappointing, has perhaps located the south-west corner of the moat.

SECTION 3: THE HISTORY OF WOLSELEY HALL

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report summarises the conclusions that can be drawn so far about the history of Wolseley Hall derived from the various documentary sources consulted, rather than the archaeological evidence. However this history is arranged to complement the initial conclusions that can be drawn 'from the earth'; acting as both a background framework and a check for the archaeological interpretation of the house. Francis Bacon gave a clear outline of this process in 1612.....

"Out of the names, monuments, words and proverbs, traditions, private records and evidences, fragments of stone, passages of books and the like; we do recover something from the deluge of the past."

While the coverage of the documentary records relating to Wolseley is uneven there is a sequence of evidence from the 12th century onwards. Despite the erratic coverage, at this interim stage of research certain propositions concerning the development of the hall can already be made, with a degree of certainty and in some detail. With further detailed research still ahead - in conjunction with the rolling programme of excavation - some parts of the report are necessarily speculative and discursive.

At this preliminary stage of research it has been decided to delineate five main periods of building activity at Wolseley, and these are reflected in the following sub-sections of this report. It should be recognised that these divisions are provisional, and further research will almost certainly lead to refinement and subdivision.

3.2 The medieval origins of Wolesley House and Manor

There has been some controversy concerning the location and origins of the house. In a 1924 'Guide and History of Ancient Haywood' by 'Stafforda' - a pseudonym for the local poetess and historian Elizabeth Whitehouse - it was claimed that the ancient residence "stood on a field which stands high on the right of the present house", and that "in 1820 nothing but the remains of the house were visible". Miss Whitehouse appeared to think that the house had only moved to the present site around 1785-90.

These claims were quickly refuted by Sir Charles Wolseley, the 9th baronet, in 'A Few Notes on the History of Wolseley Hall'. He stressed that there was no family tradition that the house had ever been on any other site than the present one. Taken together with the apparent absence of any independent evidence (Stafforda did not list her references) and the findings of the recent archaeological excavations at the hall, there would appear to be little basis for Stafforda's claims.

At first sight Stafforda's history does not appear to be very reliable, and it would be easy to dismiss her as an 'antiquarian' of dubious scholarship. However, during the course of the present research it was discovered that she was the author/editor of a notebook transcribing the correspondence between Sir Charles, the 7th baronet, and James Trubshaw the architect/builder of the 1820 hall. This notebook was the second volume of two, the first now lost. This discovery must lead to a reassessment of her published history, though a clue to her apparent confusion can be found in the notebook itself. Here she persistently mistakes comments made by Sir Charles with reference to the building of Wolseley Hall, for another building - which is fairly certainly Wolseley Park House.

The precise date of the first occupation of the site of the hall by the Wolseley family is also subject to dispute. Sir Charles, the 9th baronet, says in his 'Notes on Wolseley Hall' that the Wolseley family claim to have lived there from sometime before the Norman Conquest. Deeds relating to the Wolseleys have been found dating back to the 12th century; however not until 1315 is a deed endorsed in such a way as to suggest that they were

resident on the site of the present hall. This, taken with the archaeological evidence of the 12th/13th century cooking pot recently excavated, suggests that Wolseleys may have occupied the site from at least this time, if not earlier. What the manor house may have looked like at this time is open to speculation, and only archaeological research on the site can provide the answers.

3.3 The fortification of the Manor House

The correspondence between the granting of a Licence to Crenellate ("... with stones, mortar and sand ... the said manor house may inclose with walls and towers ... embattled, kernelled and machicollated ...") to Ralph Wolseley by King Edward IV in 1469 and the recently exposed massive sandstone curtain wall, makes it certain that Wolseleys were resident on the site by the 15th century. These licences are formulaic, and no specific information relating to the site can be inferred from the phrases used. The date would fit well with the military scares of the Wars of the Roses, but the contemporary Licence to Empark suggests a package of status enhancing measures, which is currently the prevalent view of moat digging and crenellation, particularly at such a late date. This theory is supported by the prominent position Ralph Wolseley held as a Baron of the Exchequer during Edward IV's reign. The sequence of development of the manor house to fortified moated structure is as yet unclear. Because of the formulaic nature of medieval documentary evidence only archaeological excavation may be able to prove whether or not the moat preceded the crenellation, or was built simultaneously.

In addition to the fortifications major rebuilding of the manor house may also have occurred at this time. The hall described by Celia Fiennes in the late 17th century may belong to this period, and in comparison to similar sites in the Midlands appears to have been of large size, commensurate with the pretensions of Ralph Wolseley. Celia Fiennes described it as "a large lofty hall in the old fashion" which suggests it could easily date back to the 15th century. Again in 1629 Thomas Wolseley informs his successor that "the house is not unfit for the best man in the

county" although "the hall is old and wantfull of some repairs". The hall would have been used for entertaining; Sir Charles the 9th Baronet noted that "in 1860 there were persons living who could remember this hall with the 'dias' end raised at the top end for the family, with seats below for the retainers". However by the 15th century it is unlikely that the Lord of the manor would have eaten in the hall except on special occasions and would have normally dined in an adjacent parlour.

According to a measured survey of the Great Hall made in 1757 it measured 50 x 32 x 25 feet, an above average size. It is equivalent in height to a two-storied building and on early 19th-century drawings of the old house a structure is visible on the west side of the house which appears to be of about the right size and height, and of older design than the surrounding buildings, beside which it appears somewhat incongruous. If this is indeed the Great Hall, then these drawings show that it had three large windows on its west face straddling the line of the ground and first floors in the surrounding parts of the house. It seems certain therefore that the Great Hall survived until the 1820 rebuild. Sir Charles, the 7th bart, described to Trubshaw, his builder, the location of two main beams, or architraves, which he had removed during the demolition of the hall - incidentally nearly killing himself underneath them as they collapsed.

3.4 The seventeenth-century house

Documentary references to the house appear with greater frequency, and in greater detail, during the course of the 17th century. This reflects both the rising literacy of the privileged sections of English society, the corresponding phenomena of the appreciation of aesthetics, architecture and the countryside, and the growing status of the Wolseley family. Sir Robert was the first member of the family to be created a baronet, in 1628, and Sir Charles, the 2nd baronet, served on Cromwell's Council of Government in the 1650s.

In 1629 the house was valued at £40 and the estate at £298-06-08. By 1714, at Sir Charles's death, the estate was valued at at least 3000 guineas.

These figures cannot be compared directly, but it is reasonable to assume that the value of the estate did rise considerably during the century. While the main phase of building for which there is documentation is during the ownership of the 2nd baronet, it is quite possible that Sir Robert did undertake some building as a matter of prestige - if only to the Great Hall which was already noted in 1629 as being in a state of some disrepair. However, the loyalty of the 1st baronet to the King's cause during the Civil War, and his subsequent incarceration by Parliament, is likely to have curtailed any other building plans, although it is possible that the fortifications of the house were refurbished as a precautionary measure during these troubled times.

After the First Civil War Sir Charles, the 2nd baronet, appeared before the Committee for the Compounding of Delinquents on October 27th 1647 and managed to regain the sequestered estates of his father at the cost of 2500 guineas. His support for Cromwell gained him permission to cut oak in nearby Cannock Chase, and it is likely that this was used in the building programme that he pursued during his enforced retirement from political life during the Restoration of Charles II.

Sir Charles was related through marriage to Celia Fiennes who travelled extensively round England at this time, following the tradition of Leland and Camden, recording whatever interested her. She provides several descriptions of Wolseley Hall, which she visited frequently. In addition, in 1690 a description of the house appears in the 'Journals of the Dean Davies'. He describes Wolseley as "a fine house with fine gardens, but a very ill avenue to it". Fortunately Celia's descriptive adjectives are a little less subjective than those of Dean Davies.....

"The House stands in a fine park, the House is an old building and but low, it is built round a Court; there is a large lofty hall in the old fashion, a dining and drawing room on the one hand and a little parlour on the other; the best rooms were newer built with chambers over them and a very good staircase well wainscoted and carved with good pictures; the rest of the house is all old and low and must be new built."

Later in 1698 she returned to Wolseley and described the house again.....

"His Seate stands very finely by the river Trent, there is also a moate almost round the house; the house is old timber building, only a large parlour and noble staircase with handsome chambers Sir Charles has new built; its built round a Court with a gate house which leads to the outward court that has a paved walke broad stone the same as the first court is paved with."

Interpretation of these descriptions would appear to imply that the structures around the Great Hall were recent additions, probably made at the same time as the panelling was added. Robert Plot describes some of these alterations in his 'Natural History and Topography of Staffordshire' published in 1686. He says, "of all the joyners work I met with in this county, there is none comparable to that of the new dining room at Wolseley, the carved work whereof is also very good". The staircase remained the main architectural feature of the house until its destruction in 1967, being incorporated into the later hall, and mentioned in all subsequent descriptions of the house.

These descriptions correspond, to a large extent, with those Sir Charles, the 9th baronet, made of the layout of the house prior to 1820, where "the staircase is behind the Great Hall which again is beyond the courtyard which was entered through the gateway". It is likely therefore that the groundfloor plan of this section of the house was little changed until the 1820 rebuild, and that the entrance to the house was always from the south. The new parlours with chambers above are likely to have been beyond the staircase, and these chambers must have been substantial enough to warrant the expense of building such a fine staircase.

In addition to these qualitative descriptions of the house, which are open to interpretation, there is also an inventory of the contents listed room by room made at Sir Charles's death in 1714. This inventory, in combination with both the findings of the archaeological excavations and a plan of the house which is known to exist, could form the basis of a systematic account of the development of the house, room by room. This

would be a particularly important academic exercise to be pursued in subsequent researches, providing as it would important information on the use of different rooms and their contents as well as their names and positions within a major house. The results could then be compared with other work done on houses across the country. At this stage, however, it can be noted that the main downstairs rooms were: the Great Hall, the new parlour, and drawing room and staircase, smoke parlour, an old parlour and ancillary rooms such as the kitchens, cellar, buttery and larders. All of these had chambers or garrets above them as did the gatehouse. The new parlour may well have been what Celia Fiennes describes as the dining room which would be commonly used for eating rather than the Great Hall, which by this time would be reserved for special occasions.

It is possible that a 17th-century equivalent of an estate agent may have described the arrangement of these rooms as follows: the gatehouse would have been at the 'imposing' entrance allowing access from the 'spacious' great yard outside to the inner courtyard, 'with much period charm', around which the 'well-appointed' house was built. Ancillary farm buildings, such as the barn or the stables, would have been on the east side of the courtyard. On the north-west side would have been the reception rooms, the drawing and dining rooms, and possibly the new parlour. The staircase would have given access to the newly built rooms upstairs on this side of the house. This would be a continuation of the concept of the 'dais' or lord's end of the house where the guests would be entertained. Next to these would have been the Great Hall, and further to the south the other lesser parlours and kitchens and service rooms, with their associated garrets and chambers above. These additions may have been in the severely classical style favoured by the descendants of the 17th-century revolutionaries, and which were the aesthetics favoured by Celia Fiennes. The layout suggested above is conjectural, and further research will be required to test these hypotheses.

3.5 Eighteenth-century additions and modifications

Unfortunately documentary sources for the period between Sir Charles's death in 1714 and the rebuilding of the house in 1820 are sparse. Much more research is required into this period before anything other than the most general conclusions can be drawn. However, this was a period of great building activity by the English landed classes, and, as such, it may be expected to have been a strategic stage in the development of Wolseley Hall. It is possible that the silence of the documentary record indicates that the main stages in the development of the house took place before and after the period, but until further research is carried out no firm conclusions may be drawn.

In 1698 it was apparent, as Celia Fiennes noted, that much of the house was "old and low and needed to be new built". This process was begun by Sir Charles with the building of the structures immediately around the Great Hall, on the west side of the inner courtyard. However, towards the end of the century the first pictorial records of the house begin to appear. There are at least two of the house before the 1820 gothic rebuild. These show a house different in many respects from that which may be imagined from the descriptions of Celia Fiennes. Most of the house - apart from the Great Hall - is two storied and appears to be built of stone, in contrast to the timber buildings to which she refers. While the inner courtyard is still visible, it appears to have been largely enclosed by the wings of the house on all sides - at least from the south-west viewpoint of the drawings. These drawings were probably made between 1795 and 1820, a date range provided by the destruction of Wolseley bridge in a great flood on the one hand and the gothicisation of the house on the other. It is interesting to note that the moat does not appear on either drawing, which gives credence to the assertions of the 9th baronet that it was filled in by Sir William, the 6th baronet, in the late 18th century when moats had gone out of fashion.

There is clearly an intermediate stage in the development of the house between the open plan of the Restoration house and the square block of the 1820 hall, and this must be placed sometime after 1714. Because of the

continued existence of the Great Hall with the staircase behind it, it is likely that the west side of the house was not substantially altered. However in the drawings there seems to be a noticeable infilling of the southern frontage of the house in a similar style to the newer parts of the west wing and which appears to continue around the parts of the east wing that can be seen. This progression would seem to make sense in terms of a slow development from the original open plan of the Restoration house. In addition there is a plan of the house on the Tithe map assessment of 1838. This plan differs markedly from that which appears on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey of 1884, and it is therefore quite possible that the Tithe map plan of the house could have been made from an earlier estate map, which has since been lost, showing the house prior to its 1820 gothicisation. Here the remains of the inner courtyard are just discernable towards the rear of the house next to the river. Again, with further excavation this process of development should become clearer. Sir Charles, the 9th baronet, notes that Sir William, the 6th baronet, carried out some substantial modifications to the house in the latter half of the 18th century. During these alterations the moat was infilled, the ha-ha wall built on the western edge of the original moated enclosure, and a Dower house was built next to the gardens to the east of the house. These modifications may have occurred sometime between 1785 and 1790, because Stafforda mentions evidence of building by the family at this time; except it appears clear from other sources consulted that she mistook this rebuilding work as referring to Wolseley Park House, instead of the Hall where it was actually happening (see Section 3.2 above). This evidence of building activity would certainly correspond with the likely timing of this phase in the development of the house. It is possible that the alterations made to the southern front of the house in stone could have accompanied this other building activity. Perhaps the archery tournament at Wolseley in 1791 described by the Reverend William Fernyhough was organised by Sir William, the 6th baronet, and the classical ideals on which the poem draws influenced the design of this stage of the house.....

Near that sweet spot which boasts Arcadia's pride,
Where Trent meandr'ing pours her gentle tide,
In sylvan taste, where lawns and villas gay
Attract and charm the trav'ler on his way.
Where a rich vale winds beauteous to the eye,
A vale that might with ancient temple vie,
Near these fair scenes on Cannock's healthy plain,
Lately approached a joyous green-robed train.
Bowmen renowned, from distant parts who came
In arch'rys arts the candidates for fame.

3.6 The nineteenth-century Gothic Hall

The last descriptions that exist of the house prior to the 1820 gothicisation are by some of the numerous Radicals that Sir Charles Wolseley, the 7th 'Radical' baronet, put up at his home. Major Cartwright, an octogenarian who spent much of his later years galloping round the country promoting the cause of political reform, said of Wolseley Hall.....

"It is exquisitely beautiful. The River Trent bounds the garden. From my infantile associations I should not help feeling a sort of filial attachment to that old friend of my youth".

Bamford, a lesser known Radical from the labouring classes, did not have such fond memories of the hospitality of Sir Charles.....

"Lady Wolseley was in the straw upstairs [ie having a baby], so that Sir Charles had much of his own way beneath. Finnerty [another radical of higher social standing] was ensconced in the parlour, while Bamford was relegated to the housekeepers room, but would rather have stayed in the Inn".

Shortly afterwards Sir Charles ordered the commencement of an extensive restyling of the hall. While no building plans appear to have survived,

plenty of other sources exist describing in detail the alterations to the house, including the letters between Sir Charles and his builder/architect James Trubshaw. Whilst building work was continuing throughout 1820 and 1821 Sir Charles was languishing in Abingdon Gaol because of certain seditious speeches made in support of Political Reform. Indeed, one biographer associates his admiration for the then risque gothic style to the chance he had to study in detail one of its latest examples whilst an inmate at Stafford Assylum and Gaol.

The exact extent of the rebuilding at this time is uncertain, but there are clear indications that, though very extensive, it did not involve a entire rebuild. Sir Charles was clearly short of money at this time, and in letters to the patient Trubshaw he continually admonishes him, "we cannot do by patchwork what we could have built from the ground".

Certain things are clear, however: the gatehouse, panelled 'Great Hall' and staircase were swept away, and the remaining exterior infilled in stuccoed brick and gothicised with figurative turrets and crenellations. Stafforda notes in her transcription of the letters that "the difficulty appears to lie in the remoulding and partial rebuilding of the present house, using up the oak from the old 'Great Hall' and the present home which was also an old residence".

The overall impression is one of controlled chaos, with Trubshaw attempting to steer a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of Sir Charles' often contradictory orders and very tight financial constraints. For instance, it is difficult with hindsight to see in architectural terms what debt the gothic tradition owes to classical Italian models, but Sir Charles nevertheless maintains in his usual brusque style: "The Italians, and they you know we copy, are all very full and hearty and very handsome, they are their houses, whereas ours look like tea-caddies".

The whole house was re-roofed in slate - the cheapest material - without any lead flashing or guttering, a legacy that later baronets, struggling to maintain the increasingly leaky hall, were to constantly regret, and which, indeed, led ultimately to the demolition of the hall in 1967. It seems

clear that the west side of the house was largely razed at the time of this rebuilding, including the Great Hall and the staircase. This made sense, at least to a fanatical moderniser like Sir Charles, because by that time they were the oldest structures belonging to the house. The southern gatehouse was also pulled down and the rest of the frontage given a gothic facade. It is likely that the new suite of reception rooms was located in this part of the house, as well as the library and the drawing room. This sequence of rebuilding continued the tendency to box in the courtyard until the plan of the house became a solid block. The later Sir Charles, the 9th bart, notes how haphazardly the house was constructed at this time, many of the first storey rooms being inaccessible, except by means of makeshift lean-tos and ladders.

After completion the house was seldom occupied by the Wolseleys themselves; instead it was rented out. There is a continuing set of modifications to the house after 1820 - mainly by Sir Charles, the 9th baronet, correcting the various oversights of the initial rebuild, during which the original staircase was refitted properly and the oak panelling from the Great Hall was replaced in the new dining room. The general consensus about this phase of rebuilding appears to be that it was a disaster. Indeed, Patrick Montague Smith, a previous historian of the house, went as far as to say that it would have been "a gem from the eighteenth century", if the alterations had not taken place, and that it would by now be under the care of the National Trust rather than demolished.

SECTION 4: WOLSELEY HALL IN CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the report the horizon of discussion is widened. The archaeological and historical research described above has begun to build up a skeleton of facts about the house, and further work can more-or-less complete the skeleton, but a great deal more needs to be done to clothe the skeleton with flesh and transform the bare tabulation of facts into living social history. In order to gain an impression of the full potential of Wolseley Hall as an archaeological, historical, educational and recreational resource the site must be considered in its broader context, not just as a moated site, medieval hall or country house, but as an economic and social unit at the hub of a large estate, reflecting and participating in more than five centuries of political, social and economic change.

Currently, research along these lines is at an early stage, and the notes that follow are little more an indication of potential; but these considerations will assume greater importance as the project develops, because the relationship of the hall both physically and socially with the wider landscape is vital to our understanding of the dynamics of the development of the house.

4.2 The local setting

The gardens and grounds which surround a country house provide its most immediate physical setting. The words of Sir Roy Strong quoted at the beginning of this report bring out well the inextricable - almost spiritual - nature of the bond between a country house and its garden or park. Many of the visitors to Wolseley Hall whose descriptions of the house have been quoted above devote as much - if not more - space to describing the splendours of the grounds.

For example in 1698 Celia Fiennes wrote in her journal:

"There are very good gardens abundance of fruite of all sorts and the finest dwarfe trees I ever saw, so thicke like a hedge and a huge compass every single tree and very full of fruite of apples pears and cherries; there are fine flowers tuber roses white and yellow, there was a fine sena tree that bears a great branch of yellow flowers; the ground lyes all well about the house, and a fine park by the end of it part of which is on a high hill the side of which the deer sports themselves, which looks just on the house and is wonderfull pleasant; its a large parke 6 miles round full of stately woods and replenish'd with red and fallow deer, one part of it is pretty full of billberrys which thrives under the shade of the oakes"

The gardens at Wolseley Hall were a source of admiration to so many visitors to the house not only because of the natural beauty of the setting but also because of the effort that so many Wolseleys had put into them. A love of gardening seems to run in the Wolseley blood, and there are plentiful sources for a study of the history of the gardens, which may be related to the history and archaeology of the house, to the aspirations and ideals of its owners, and to the broader development of the English country garden. Pursuit of this line of research would, of course, be particularly appropriate given the character of the Wolseley Garden Park project.

The gardens of a country house were far more than just a source of pleasure to its owners and their visitors. They were also, as Celia Fiennes description hints, an economic resource, and in earlier periods this function was dominant. Beyond the gardens lay the rest of the estate, the economic body of which the house was the heart, each dependent on the other.

An estate is primarily a source of revenue, revenue that enables the maintenance of a standard of living in keeping with the perceived status of the owner. Prosperity fluctuates in accordance with how successfully the estate is managed, and the capital generated by a well run estate allows the growth of the estate, house and family. There are a number of documentary sources through which the development of the estate may be chronicled; leases to tenants are put down on paper, land claims are made in writing, and surveys are made to ascertain the value of the estate when

the need arises. All these classes of evidence exist for Wolseley Hall in sufficient quantity and regularity to enable an outline of the development of the estate to be drawn. Leases exist from the late 16th century, Court Rolls from the 14th to the 16th century, and rentals and estate letters span the 15th to the 20th centuries. Professor Lawrence Stone in particular has shown how the changing pattern of estate management can be discerned, for example the exploitation of timber and minerals, or changes in agricultural practice - of which the Emparking at Wolseley in 1469 is a classic example. These changes have been quantified by historians, and against this evidence the performance and growth of the Wolseley estate can be assessed.

The location of an estate in its broader local context is important in terms of the benefits it bestows - and the constraints it places on - the running of the estate. For example Wolseley Hall, village and estate are located beside a route from London to Ireland that has been a major thoroughfare since the Middle Ages. Also, Cannock Chase and the South Staffordshire coal seams are nearby. These factors have profound implications for the historical geography of the area and continue to exert an influence on the development of Wolseley today - in conjunction with the rich historical resources of the area.

4.3 The national context

Throughout history the development of Wolseley was influenced by what was happening in the broader context of English society, and the involvement of various members of the family in key political events of English history, such as the Wars of the Roses, the Civil War and the 19th-century Political Reform Movement, clearly adds to the colour and interest of the history of the site.

Consideration of Wolseley in a national context will not only enable a fuller and more rounded understanding of the nature and history of the site to be achieved, but will also highlight the importance of the site and its potential. It will be convenient to consider the significance of the site

at a national level first from an archaeological point-of-view and then from an historical point-of-view, but of course these two perspectives are, in reality, closely linked.

Wolseley Hall belongs to a large and heterogeneous class of archaeological monument, the 'moated site'. At a conservative estimate there are about five and a half thousand moated sites in Britain, a little under two hundred of them in Staffordshire. The defining element of a moated site, the moat, can surround a variety of structures - windmills, medieval hospitals, monasteries, monastic granges, chapels - but most often, as at Wolseley, they surround a manor house. Moated sites also vary greatly in shape, not uncommonly they are circular, but most frequently - again as at Wolseley - the 'platform' is of roughly rectangular form. Not unexpectedly they also vary greatly in size, from examples with platforms only a few metres across to examples with platforms covering an area of nearly 6 hectares (15 acres). The majority, however, have platforms covering an area of less than 0.4 hectares (1 acre), and here Wolseley does stand out because, although the exact extent of platform has not yet been determined, it is probably considerably bigger than this, putting Wolseley amongst a relatively small group of large moated sites.

On present evidence it would appear that the practice of digging moats began around 1150 (moats around castles are a special case and are generally distinguished from the type of moated site being considered here, although there is a grey area between the two). The majority - estimates vary - were dug during the 13th and early 14th century, after which the practice sharply declined, coming to an end by-and-large about 1500, although there are a few later examples. If the moat at Wolseley Hall was dug at the same time as the licence to crenellate was granted, in the mid fifteenth century, it would be an unusually late example. However if the digging of the moat was contemporary with the earliest documented occupation of the site, in the 12th/13th century, then it would fall within the mainstream of moat construction. Further archaeological excavation should be able to resolve this question.

The function of moats is a much debated topic. Defence is the most obvious answer, but in fact the vast majority of moats are far too small to provide any real defence against a serious assailant. Other suggestions have been made - that moats were dug to improve drainage on wet sites, that they for use as fishponds or as a source of fresh water. These explanations are not mutually exclusive and perhaps, at different times and at different places, all were true. A popular view of the function of moats is that they were status symbols: in imitation of the great castle moats, persons of importance, or with pretensions to importance, had moats dug around their houses in order to enhance their social standing. A similar interpretation is often placed on achieving license to crenellate (see below), and if this was the principal function of the moat at Wolseley Hall then it is another demonstration - perhaps a considerably earlier one - of the importance of the family and their statement of the fact.

Although moated sites are so numerous they are still relatively poorly understood - as the above discussion of their date and function might indicate. Only about 3 percent of the total have been excavated, and most of these excavations have involved little more than a trench across the moat and a small sondage on the platform. Many excavations have had to be carried out in unsatisfactory and hurried 'rescue' conditions in advance of the destruction of the site for one reason or another and in very few cases has it been possible to investigate the whole or a large proportion of the moated platform and so achieve a good understanding of the range and sequence of structures present, and therefore of the nature, functions and economy of the site.

Those moated sites on which there are still standing buildings might seem at first glance to be the most informative, and it is certainly true that standing buildings can tell us much more than mere foundations. But, on the other hand, many of these buildings are demonstrably much later than the moat - as would be the case at Wolseley were the neo-gothic hall still standing - and, while interesting in themselves, their very presence serves to inhibit investigation of earlier buildings. It would also appear to be true that it is just those sites which have prospered down the centuries, and which therefore have the potential to chronicle the development of a

manor house from its medieval origins to the present day, which are still occupied and therefore inaccessible to archaeological investigation.

At Wolseley Hall, however, a unique opportunity exists to excavate, in a meticulous unhurried fashion, a moated site of national significance. Much of the area of the moat platform is available for investigation. Limited trial excavations have revealed evidence of over five hundred years of continuous occupation and the potential for good survival of early remains. The possibility exists to uncover a sufficiently large area of the site, including not only the domestic buildings but also ancillary buildings such as stables, byres and barns, to make an important contribution to the better understanding of moated sites in general, and their social, economic and symbolic functions. Just as important, the opportunity also exists, because of the existence of Wolseley Garden Park and the facilities it will offer, for the public to fully participate in the process of discovery.

From a historical, as well as an archaeological, point-of-view Wolseley Hall has much to offer when its development is viewed in the context of the broad sweep of events and social changes occurring at a national level. The single example given below is intended to provide a flavour of how this approach can enhance our understanding of the history of the hall and estate.

The fortification and emparking of Wolseley were clearly linked to the contemporary Wars of the Roses, which were soon to reach their conclusion with the nadir of the Yorkist cause at Bosworth field in 1485. In 1465 Ralph de Wolseley had forcefully emparked an area of Cannock Chase adjacent to the estate, "being in great favour with the earl of Warwick" [the Kingmaker], probably in anticipation of the Licence to Empark granted by the Yorkist King Edward IV, which was given along with the Licence to Crenellate in 1469. Support of either the Yorkist or Lancastrian factions could be very beneficial for the parties concerned. Ralph de Wolseley, for instance, served as Victualler of Calais and later as a Baron of the Exchequer to King Edward. The diminishing authority of Royal rule allowed conflicts at more local levels of society to develop, aided and abetted by the interests of 'overmighty' subjects such as Warwick, who offered

patronage and protection in return for the support of their lesser subjects across the country. Ralph de Wolseley was clearly a machiavellian character, taking advantage of the situation to further his own interests. Through perfidious and sometimes dangerous manoeuvring - making enemies of the powerful Gresley family and the local Bishop - the Wolseley estate expanded greatly. While the prevalent historical view of Crenellation and Emparking is that they were primarily status symbols, particularly in the 15th century, nevertheless the activity highlighted the growing material influence of the Wolesley family, which had profound implications for the future development of the hall.

Evidence

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SECTION 5: SUMMARY

Wolseley Hall, a neo-gothic mansion built in 1820, was demolished in 1967, having fallen into a state of irredeemable disrepair. In the course of works associated with the creation of Wolseley Garden Park on the site of the demolished hall and its derelict grounds, a search was made for an underground passage said to be located close by the house. The search was unsuccessful, but instead a massive wall of ashlar masonry was uncovered, surviving to a height of more than six feet and set in what appeared to be a moat. The importance and significance of this discovery was quickly recognised; the wall did not belong to the 19th-century hall but to its medieval predecessor.

Archaeological advice was sought and, in consultation with Mr Philip Barker, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Sir Charles Wolseley to evaluate the potential of the site. The evaluation had three main aims: to establish the basic facts about the site, its nature, date, size, layout and history; to assess the potential of the site for a major programme of archaeological excavation and research; and to determine whether the remains were well preserved enough, and of a suitable character, for public display and presentation, as an attraction of Wolseley Garden Park and as an educational resource.

Trial excavations have indicated the survival of extensive archaeological remains spanning, virtually uninterrupted, a period of about eight centuries, from not long after the Norman Conquest until the 20th century.

Evidence for occupation of the site in the 12/13th centuries was found in the form of fragments of coarse cooking pots of the period, probably used by the inhabitants of the earliest hall, which would have been built mainly of timber. At this time, or a little later, a large moat was dug around the hall; the trial excavations located the moat at two points on its circuit and geophysical survey (a technique of archaeological prospection which uses electronic instruments to 'see' under the ground without recourse to excavation) picked up what is probably one of its corners.

Later in the Medieval period the moat was reinforced by the construction of a massive stone curtain wall. This is the wall encountered prior to the excavations, and more details of its construction and alignment were revealed in the course of the archaeological evaluation. Small trial trenches dug within the walled area revealed the foundations of a complex of buildings which had undergone many changes and additions over the years. These foundations are relatively slight, and may have supported mainly timber superstructures. However, one corner of a larger and more robust building was also uncovered. This building is almost certainly the medieval 'Great Hall', which formed the core of the complex and survived many of the changes which were made to the house over the years. It did not, however, survive the building of the 19th-century neo-gothic hall whose brick foundations were cut through the foundations of the medieval building.

The excavations carried out so far have been on too small a scale to provide more than a glimpse of the archaeological remains buried beneath the soil. However, they have served to demonstrate that these remains are well preserved and that the site has great archaeological potential. Further excavation will reveal not only the plans of the buildings in which generation after generation of Wolseleys and their retainers lived and worked, but also the everyday objects from their life and work.

This impressive degree of survival probably results from the fact that successive members of the Wolseley family have usually chosen to modify and add to the houses of their ancestors rather than resort to wholesale demolition and large scale building programmes with each change of stewardship. Even substantial changes, such as the rebuilding of 1820, did not significantly damage earlier foundations.

The evidence of life in the hall may also be enhanced by examination of the moat fills for organic materials such as wood and leather, preserved by water-logging.

In academic terms, the importance of an opportunity to examine such a sequence in detail cannot be overstressed. The potential contribution of

this site to our understanding of moated sites and the development of the English country house is considerable.

In tandem with the excavations, research was also undertaken into the documentary and pictorial sources for the history of the house. These sources, while uneven in their coverage, provided both a framework and a check for the archaeological interpretation of the ruins.

Deeds relating to the Wolseleys have been found dating back to the 12th century, which ties in well with the archaeological evidence, although it was not until 1315 that a deed was endorsed in such a way as to confirm that the family were resident on the present site of the hall. In 1469, during the Wars of the Roses, Ralph Wolseley was granted a 'Licence to Crenellate' by King Edward IV. Permission to fortify one's house was a sign of status, and the granting of a licence to Ralph Wolseley, a Baron of the Exchequer, shows the growing importance of the family. It is probable that the massive curtain wall was built at this time, and possibly also the Great Hall.

The increasing importance and influence of the family is reflected in their subsequent history. Sir Robert was the first member of the family to be created a baronet, in 1628, and Sir Charles, the second baronet, served on Cromwell's Council of Government in the 1650s. Sir Charles' support for Cromwell gained him permission to cut oak in nearby Cannock Chase, and it is likely that this was used in the building programme that he pursued during his enforced retirement from political life during the Restoration of Charles II. We know from descriptions in the journals of Celia Fiennes, Sir Charles' niece and a frequent visitor to Wolseley Hall towards the end of the 17th century, that many of the medieval buildings were retained, including the Great Hall, but a large parlour and "noble staircase with handsome chambers" were added. The staircase "well wainscoted and carved with good pictures", re-erected when the neo-gothic hall was built in the 19th-century, remained a much admired feature of the house until its demolition.

From Celia Fiennes descriptions, from later pictures, from the archaeological evidence, and from a room-by-room inventory of the house drawn up after Sir Charles' death in 1714, an impression of the layout and appearance of the house at the end of the 17th century can be obtained: from an outer courtyard a gatehouse gave access to an inner court around which the main buildings of the house were ranged, the Great Hall, living quarters, kitchen and service rooms to the west and the ancillary buildings - stables, barns, etc - to the east.

Further modifications and additions were made towards the end of the 18th century, particularly in the time of Sir William, the 6th baronet. These alterations are still poorly understood, but much of the house was given a new stone facade at this time and the moat was infilled.

However, the most substantial alterations to the house were undertaken in 1820/21 by Sir Charles, the 7th baronet, who transformed the house into a neo-gothic mansion. Much of the old house was swept away, including the medieval great hall, but other parts were retained in what was, by Sir Charles' own admission, a "patchwork" job. As a consequence of seditious speeches made in support of Political Reform, Sir Charles, the 'Radical' baronet, was languishing in Abingdon Gaol during much of the building work. Correspondence between Sir Charles and his builder/architect James Trubshaw has been unearthed in the course of the documentary research and sheds much light on the progress of the building work. By general consensus, the result was something of a disaster; the design was undistinguished, much of the work was shoddy or simply incompetent, and later baronets attempting to maintain the hall were faced with an unequal struggle which led ultimately to its demolition in 1967.

The historical research to date on Wolseley Hall has done more than simply provide a framework for the archaeological investigations; it has also demonstrated the potential for further work to set the evolution of the hall in its wider context, as a social and economic unit at the hub of a large estate, reflecting and participating in eight centuries of political, social and economic change.

SECTION 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The short term (up to April 1990)

The trial excavations and documentary research described above have clearly demonstrated the potential of the archaeological remains on the site of Wolseley Hall to be an attraction which could form an integral part of Wolseley Garden Park, complementing the gardens and enriching the experience of a visit to the park. Furthermore, the discovery and excavation of the ruins provides a new focus for publicity leading up to the opening of the gardens in April 1990.

The primary aim of work prior to the opening of Wolseley Garden Park in April 1990 should be to excavate and consolidate a sufficient portion of the ruins to produce a monument both impressive and comprehensible to the visitor.

On Figure 7 an area has been indicated which it is believed will fulfill this requirement. If the excavation is carried out in June/July this summer it would be possible to organise it as a University of Birmingham training excavation, providing a large work force at reduced costs (but of course one purpose of such an excavation would be training, the needs of which would affect the pace of the work and its nature). In detail, the archaeological aims of the excavation would be to expose and analyse the eastern extension ('buttery') of Structure 1 and its relationship to the moat wall, to elucidate the sequence of halls and to uncover the possible cellars/'tunnel' associated with the hall building.

Subsequent to the excavations it would be necessary to consolidate the remains exposed for display to the public. Preparation of an explanatory panel or panels would also be necessary. It is also suggested that a glossy colour brochure on the archaeology and history of the hall is prepared to accompany the family history already in preparation. A display

of finds from the excavations could be mounted in the display/gift shop area of the converted farm buildings.

The necessary period of post-excavation analysis following the excavation would not only provide research material for the display and booklet, but would be an on-going focus for publicity. Further documentary research should form an integral part of this process.

6.2 The long term

It is not only ruins and ancient finds which are of interest to the public but the process of archaeological excavation itself. Indeed experience has shown that this is what the public find most interesting. To watch the process of discovery is to participate in it, and there is always the chance that you will be watching when that really exciting discovery is made.

It is therefore recommended that a programme of annual excavation and post-excavation work should be initiated. A small area of the site could be excavated each year, timed to coincide with optimum digging conditions and visitor figures - these are likely to be based on the same criteria. A fairly small, tidy and well displayed working archaeological site would not only serve the archaeological needs of the site but would attract visitors itself. Stafford will presumably be a significant part of the visitor catchment area, and public awareness of, and interest in, archaeology has been enhanced by Stafford Borough's support of the excavations at Stafford Castle and by the Birmingham University Unit's excavations in the town. A modest display centre opened adjacent to the Unit's excavations in the centre of Stafford in 1984 attracted 29,000 visitors in six months.

The site at Wolseley Hall is ideally placed to repeat and improve on this experience.

In addition, there is currently considerable interest in using archaeology as part of history teaching in Staffordshire schools. Production of a

schools education package based on the site would be widely welcomed. Raising the profile of archaeology in this way inevitably attracts a wider range of visitors to archaeological sites.

Finally it is recommended that - as has already started - the excavations are videoed or filmed. Such a film could not only attract publicity and interest in the site (a film chronicling the excavations at Stafford Castle was recently screened by the BBC and a similar possibility exists at Wolseley Hall), but could also be screened in the theatre or display area at Wolseley Garden Park as an introduction to the excavations. This would provide visitors with the opportunity to re-live the whole of the excavations and not just one brief moment of them.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks are also due to a number of individuals and organisations contacted during the course of the documentary research. Lady Wolseley kindly lent some of the family papers, and offered useful insights into the history of the family. The Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record was very helpful in providing information on the site, and Dr. Chris Dyer of the Medieval Settlement Group and Birmingham University clarified a number of points concerning the development of moated sites.

As ever the help of staff at various record offices and libraries is gratefully acknowledged, especially those at the William Salt Library, Stafford; the Staffordshire Record Office; the National Museum of Wales, Aberystwyth; the Lichfield Joint Record Office; the history section of the University Library, Birmingham; the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts; and the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

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Figure 1:

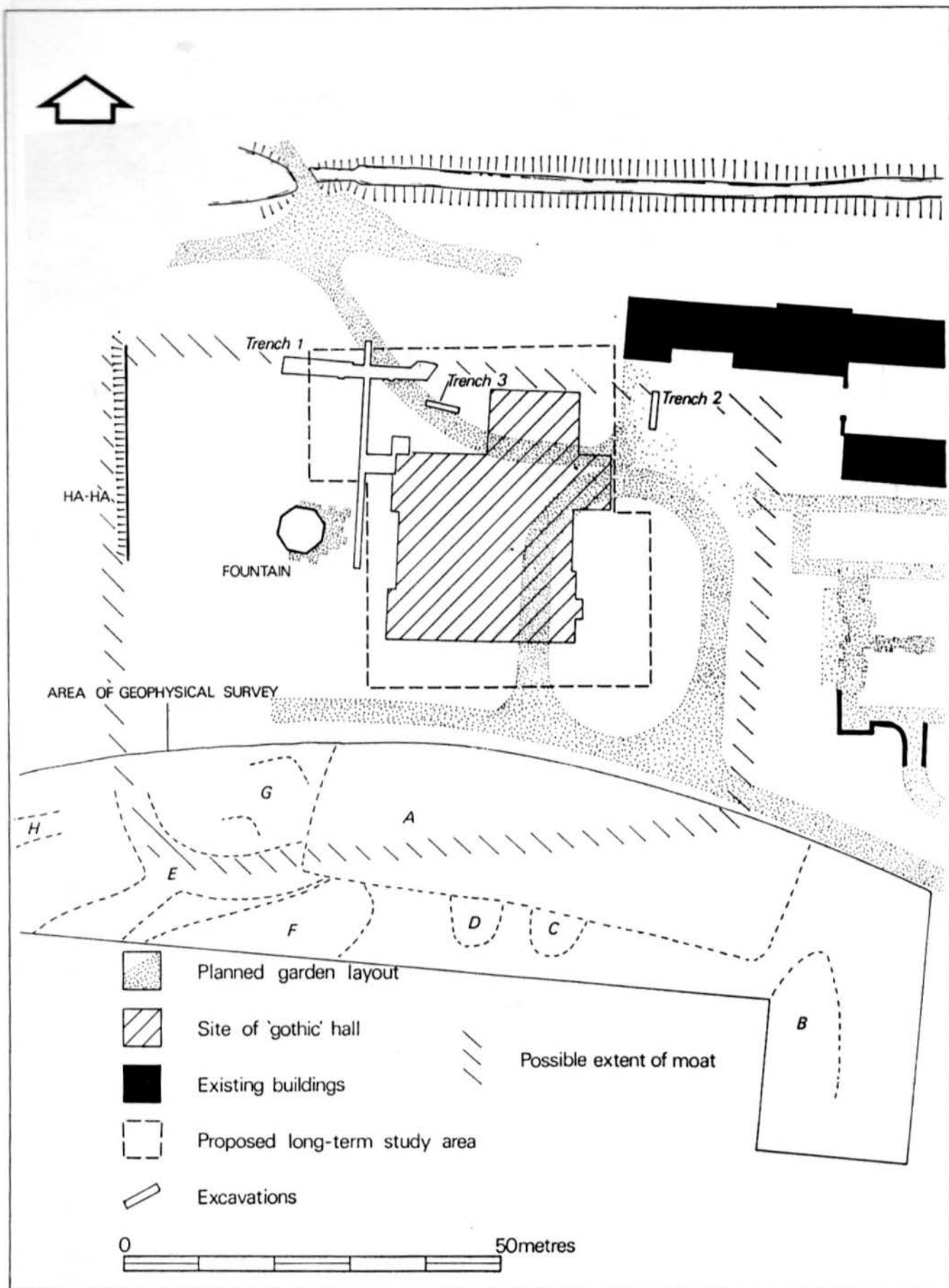


Figure 1 Wolseley Hall, showing location of excavations, planned garden layout, and proposed study area

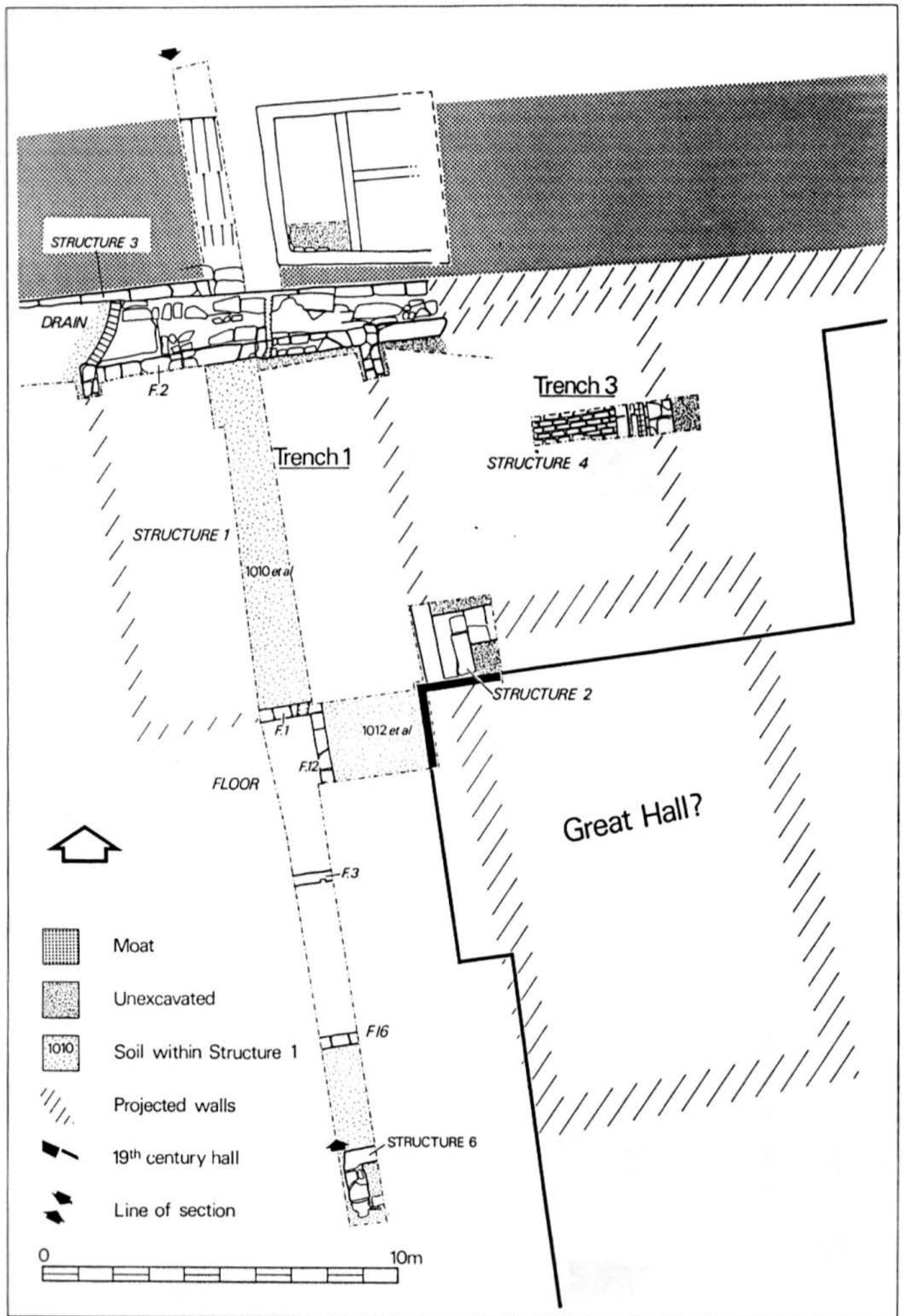


Figure 2 Trench 1 plan

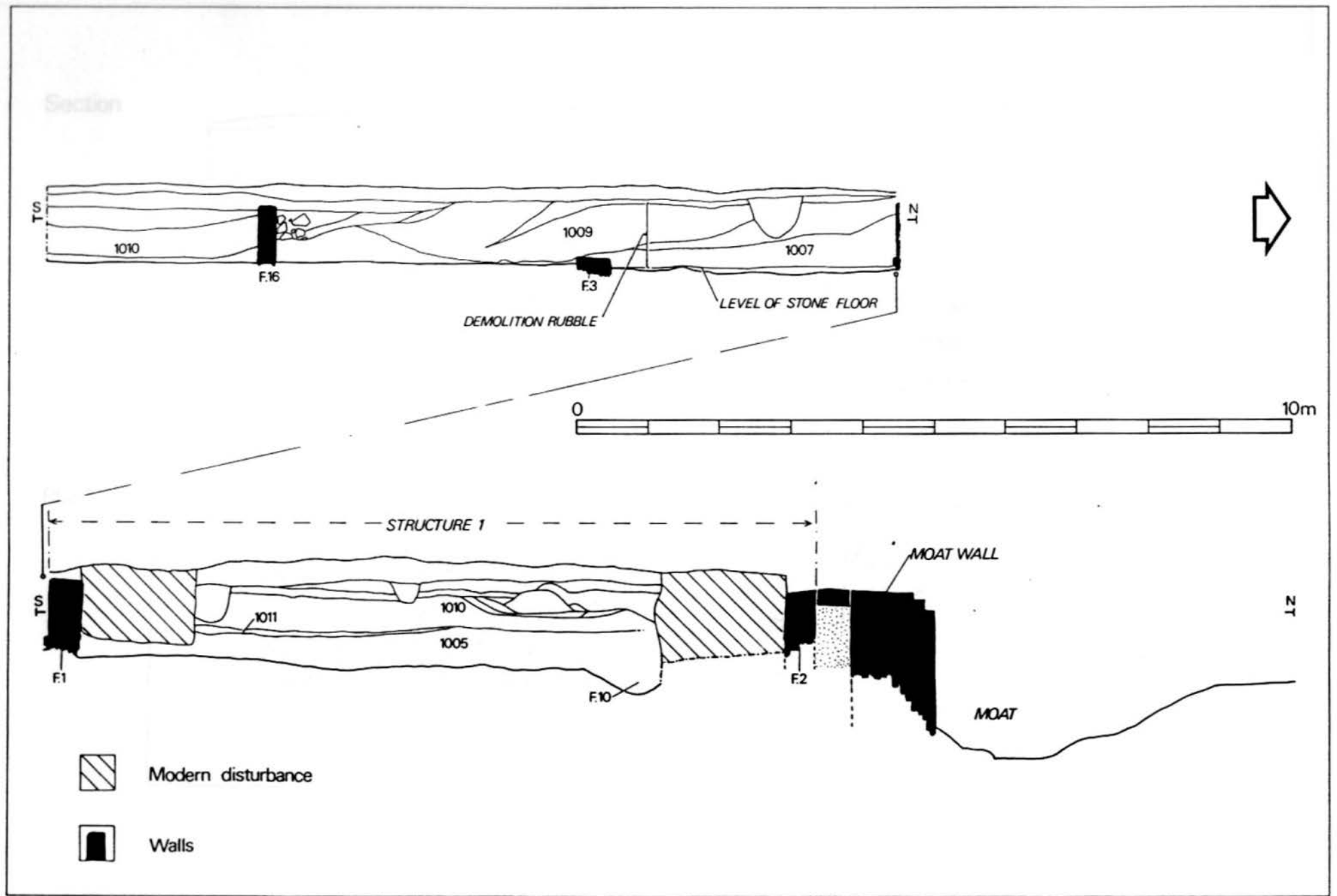


Figure 3 Trench 1 section and profile across the moat

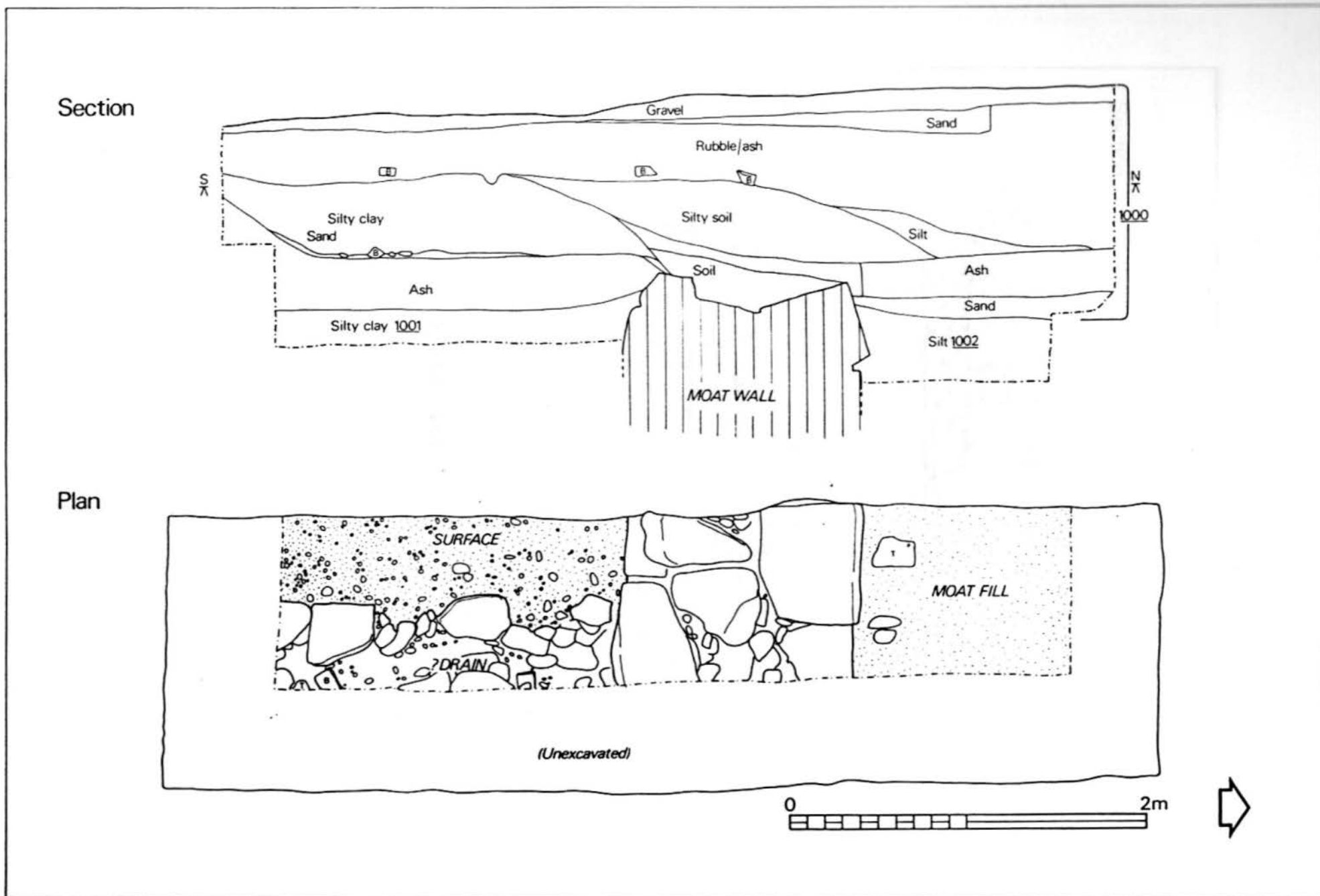


Figure 4 Trench 2 plan and section

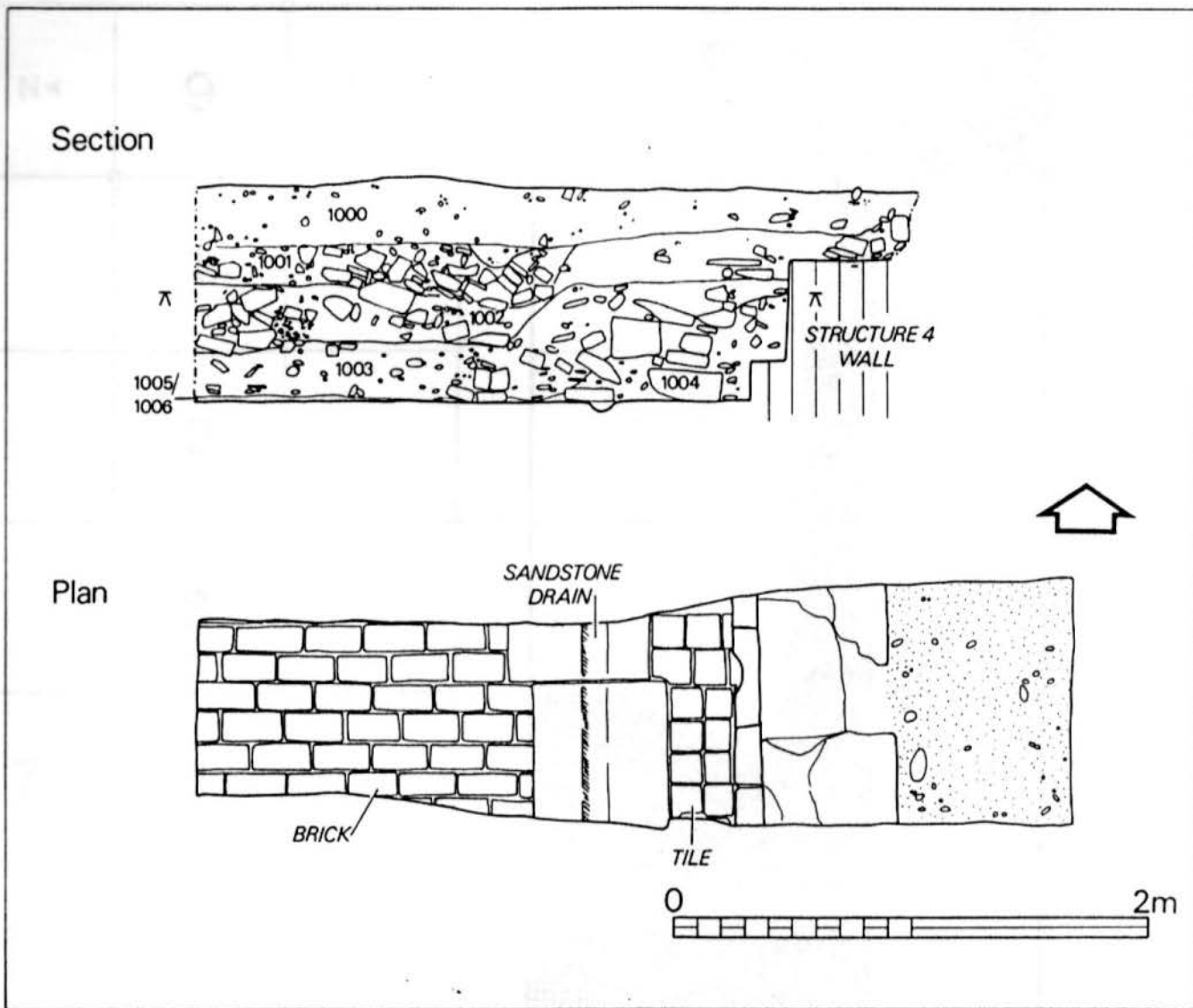


Figure 5 Trench 3 plan and section

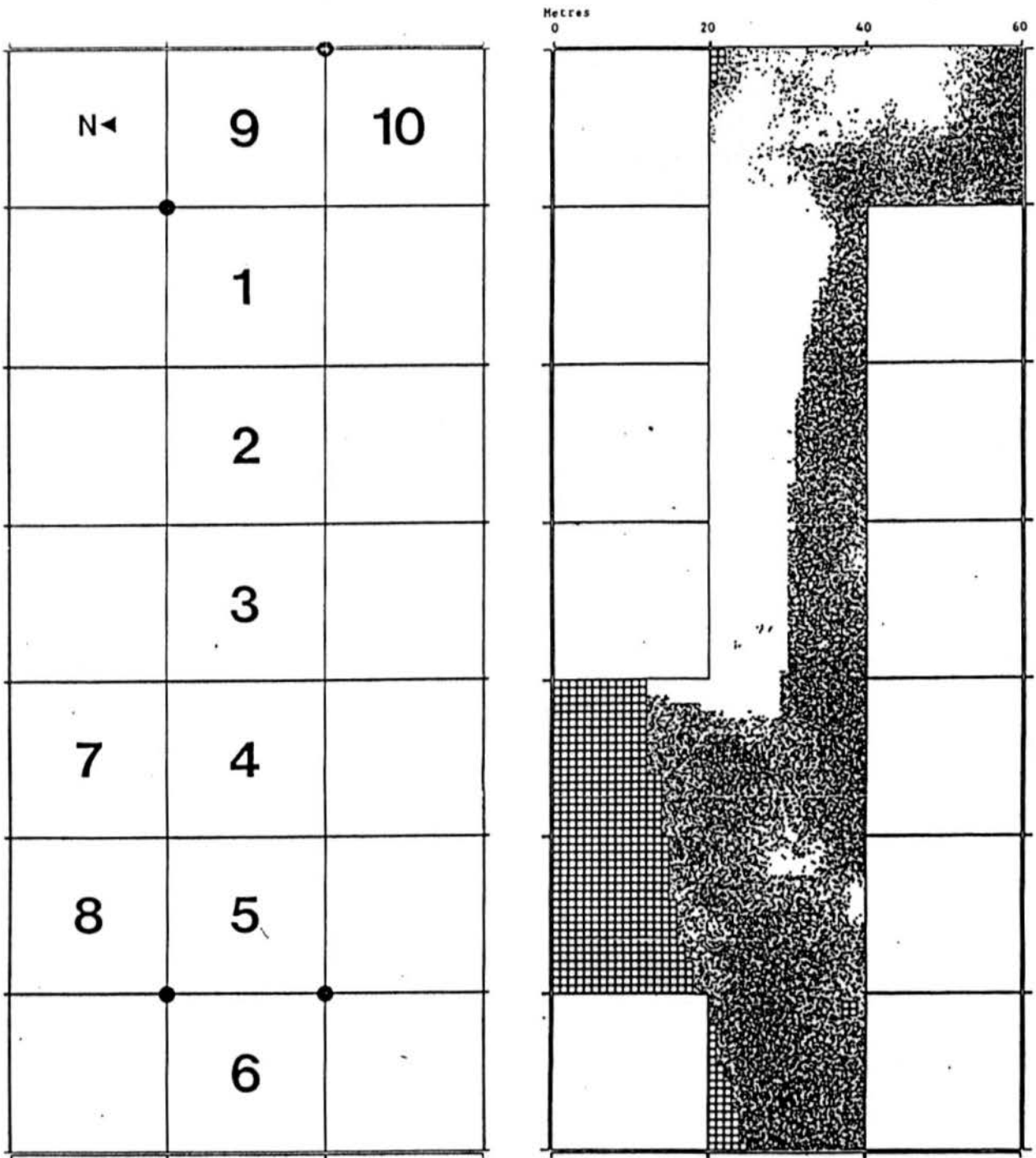


Figure 6 The geophysical survey results; dot density plot and grid layout

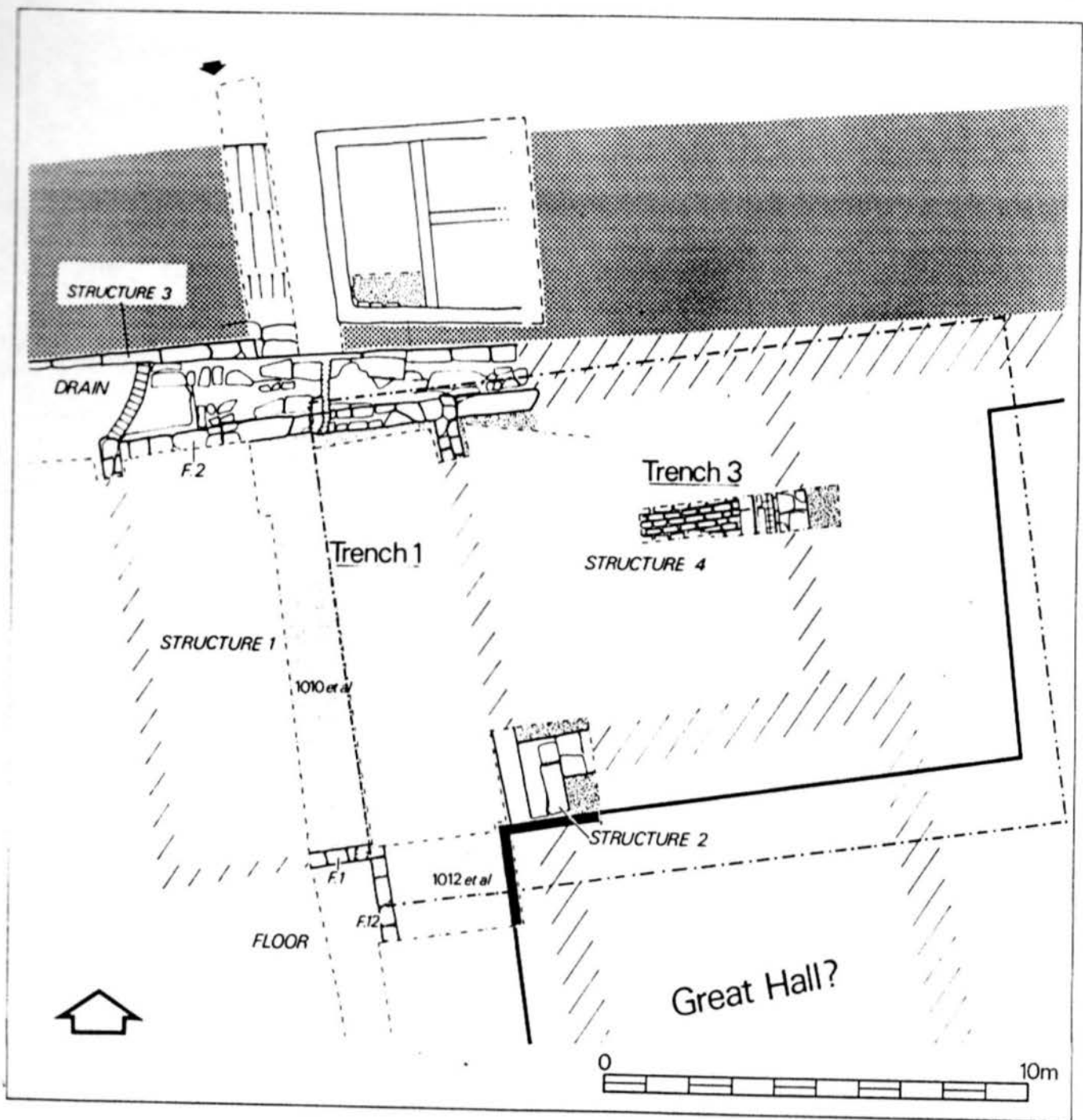


Figure 7 Plan showing area of proposed training excavation