

**DOTHILL MOAT, TELFORD:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

by

HUGH R. HANNAFORD

and

STEVE LITHERLAND

**DOTHILL MOAT, TELFORD:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

by

HUGH R. HANNAFORD AND STEVE LITHERLAND

CONTENTS

Introduction and acknowledgements	p.1
Part I: The Archaeological Evaluation	p.2
Part II: History and Documentation	p.6
Part III: Conclusions and Recommendations	p.12
Sources	p.15

FIGURES

Fig 1	Location maps
Fig 2	Trench 1 plan
Fig 3	Trench 2 plan
Fig 4	Trench 3 plan
Fig 5	Trench sections
Fig 6	Dothill House in 1626, after Samuel Parsons map
Fig 7	Dothill in 1734, after John Pratchetts estate map

DOTHILL MOAT, TELFORD

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION, JULY 1989

Introduction and Acknowledgements

The district of Dothill is situated on the northern fringe of the Telford urban area (Fig 1). The site of Dothill Moat occupies the southern part of a large area of open space, currently a mixture of grassland, scrub, woodland, and water, with existing houses and schools to the south and east, and housing under construction to the north. Most of this land has been earmarked for further housing development, with the exception of a parcel of ground along the southern edge of the site, and a lake, known as the "Tee Lake", in the southwest corner, which have been set aside and designated an Area of Nature Conservation.

Dothill Moat is known from documentary sources to have been the site of a medieval manor, and a plan of the early seventeenth century (Fig 6) shows a large house with outbuildings, and the remains of a moat around the garden at the southern end of the house. In the 18th century the house was extended to the north, and in the 19th century the earlier part of the house was demolished. The site was finally abandoned and cleared in the early 1960s. The only visible remains of the site today are a few 18th- or 19th-century brick boundary walls, and a stretch of water to the south, which may be the remains of the southern arm of the moat.

The field project was directed by Hugh Hannaford with documentary research by Steve Litherland. We are grateful to the following for their co-operation and assistance: Mr Jonathan Lloyd, Wrekin District Council, Dothill County Junior School, Loosemores Plant Hire, and to Mark Breedon, Martin Scholes, John Sterenberg, Phil Vine and Karen Walford for their participation on site. The report was edited by Peter Leach and was produced by Mark Breedon and Sonia Hodges (illustrations) and Alex Jones.

PART I

The Archaeological Evaluation

In July 1989, at the request of the landowner, Wrekin District Council, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation of the Dothill Moat site.

The main purpose of the evaluation was to assess the survival and quality of archaeological deposits in that part of the site of the manor house and grounds threatened by the proposed development. The area under threat lay to the north of the house as shown on 17th- and 18th-century plans, though still within the area occupied by its yards and outbuildings. It was felt that there was a possibility that the northern arm, and the northern section of the east arm of the moat may also have lain within this area. Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig 1) were designed to investigate this area.

A further trench, Trench 3 (Fig 1), was cut from east to west across the southern part of the site. It was hoped that this would reveal the extent of the archaeological deposits in the area of the early post-medieval manor house, testing for survival of the house itself and any signs of medieval occupation. It was also hoped to locate the western arm of the moat, thereby defining the extent of the moated area.

The exact location of Trenches 1 and 2 was determined by the presence of dense scrub and trees-which were not to be damaged- over much of that part of the site. Also, a large expanse of thick, modern concrete, covering the farmyard in its last phase of occupation, prevented the extension of Trench 1 to the north. Considerations of safety, especially as the site lay within an area of recreation used by the public, added further constraints to the work.

The trenches were dug by machine through the topsoil and cleaned by hand. Further excavation was done by hand, and the results documented by a drawn, photographic and written record. The archive of finds and records,

currently retained by BUFAU, will be deposited in the Shropshire County Museum.

Trench 1 (Fig 2)

At the southern end of Trench 1 the natural subsoil, here a mixture of light grey sand and clay, lay about 0.5m below the ground surface beneath 0.2m of topsoil and a layer 0.3m deep of a homogenous light grey, silty sand. The only features recorded in this trench were a rubbish pit (F4) of 17th- or 18th-century date, located about 6m from the southern end of the trench, and two brick walls (F10 and F11) crossing the trench from east to west. The northernmost of these walls, F11, whose top was level with the ground surface, stood at least 1.3m high. It was constructed of hand-made red bricks. Another brick wall abutted the north face of F11 and continued northwards at right angles. In the angle thus formed were the remains of a brick floor about 1.2m below the top of the wall. Most of this floor had been cut away and the wall perpendicular to F11 truncated at a later date; brick rubble was then dumped over these features. The modern concrete farmyard (mentioned above) sealed this rubble and abutted the north face of F11.

The second wall, F10, crossed the trench about 17m from the north end. It was also aligned on an approximately east/west axis and was also constructed of hand-made bricks, although the bottom of the south face of this wall had an extra course of red sandstone blocks. The top of this wall was also level with the ground surface, suggesting recent demolition.

F11 can be identified as part of the north-eastern section of a dumbbell-shaped block of buildings shown on the plans of 1626 and 1734 (Figs 6 and 7). The brick floor against the north face of this wall suggests that additions were made to this side of the building after 1734. F10 was probably part of the boundary wall running eastward from the southeast corner of these buildings.

No trace of the moat or medieval occupation was found in this trench.

Trench 2 (Fig 3)

Trench 2 was divided into two halves to allow a footpath to cross it. Along the entire length of the eastern section of Trench 2 the natural subsoil, here a brick-red boulder clay, immediately underlay the topsoil at a depth of about 0.4m. No archaeological features were observed in this section of the trench.

For most of the western section of the trench the subsoil comprised a mixture of light grey sand and light yellowish-grey clay, similar to that encountered in Trench 1. This lay at a depth of about 0.7m below the ground surface and was also overlain by a layer of light grey silty sand, about 0.4m thick at the western end of the trench but decreasing in thickness towards the east.

This layer sealed two linear features crossing the trench on a north-south alignment. The first of these (F3; Figs 3 and 5c) was U-shaped in profile and about 0.9m wide by 0.35m deep, and had the appearance of a truncated ditch. The dark greyish brown, silt-sand fill produced one fragment of stone rooftile and a piece of medieval pottery. The other linear feature (F2) was also filled with a dark greyish brown, silty sand. It was about 0.55m wide but very shallow, being at most 0.1m deep, and seemed to have been truncated.

Towards the eastern end of this section of the trench, the grey sand and clay natural gave way to the red boulder clay seen in the eastern half of the trench. Here the boulder clay was cut by a feature about 4m wide and 1m deep running north to south (F6; Figs 3 and 5a). The western edge of this cut was revetted with a brick wall (F7) whose lower east face had been thickened with 18th-century bricks (F8). This wall continued as an upstanding feature about 0.3m high, for 16m north of the trench, then turned and ran to the west for 32m, with a height of up to about 2m. The cut was filled with dark grey, humic soils which had accumulated against the brick revetment walls. This feature has been interpreted as a ha-ha, bounding the grounds of the post-medieval manor house on the east side.

Again, no trace of the moat was seen in this trench, although the ha-ha was more or less on the line of the supposed course of the eastern arm of the moat, and may have represented a northward extension of the line of the moat in the post-medieval period. Apart from the truncated ditches, no other trace of medieval occupation was seen in this trench.

Trench 3 (Fig 4)

In Trench 3, the subsoil was again seen to be of light grey sand and clay, here lying between 1m and 1.2m below the ground surface.

Little evidence of medieval occupation was seen in this trench, although a few sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from later contexts. The earliest feature recorded in Trench 3 was a ditch (F5) 2.2m wide, running north to south about 8m from the west end of the trench. The cut was not fully excavated for reasons of safety, though it was tested to a depth of 1.6m below the present ground level. The uppermost fills of this cut, dark greyish brown and reddish brown sandy silts, yielded pottery of 17th-century date. The ditch was sealed by a layer of dark grey humic soil about 0.3m deep, probably a garden soil.

12m east of this ditch was a cobbled surface 4m wide (F15), possibly a pathway running north to south and perhaps one of those shown within the gardens around the southern end of the house on the 17th- and 18th- century plans (Figs 6 and 7).

Between the pathway and the ditch a 4.5m length of brick wall (F12) was exposed in the north section of the trench. The wall appeared to have northward returns at either end. It was cut into the same layer of humic soil that sealed the ditch F5, and its construction also post-dated that of the cobbled path. The wall stood about 0.7m high, had been truncated, and the top was sealed by a thin layer of rubble of 19th-century date beneath the topsoil.

To either side and built at the same time as this stretch of wall were two small drains, both running north to south, with brick sides and floors and

lids of ceramic and stone roof tile. One of these drains (F9; Fig 5b) overlay the ditch F5, the other (F13) was cut into the west edge of the cobbled path. The wall and drains were of 18th-century date, and were probably associated with alterations to the house at this time.

Of approximately the same date was a sandstone wall (F14), running north to south over the middle of the cobbled path. Only the bottom course of this wall survived on excavation; the wall must have been fairly insubstantial in any case, as it lacked foundations of any sort. This wall appeared to have been truncated at the same time as the brick wall to the west, and probably represented some feature of the 18th-century garden.

PART II

History and Documentation

Introduction.

The following section of the report introduces the history of Dothill manor, house and park. The aim of an evaluation of the documentary evidence is to map out a history, using mainly secondary sources (which are readily available) and to suggest certain priorities for further research based on an assessment of the existing primary sources of information. These priorities should meet the criteria that the effort - not to mention expense- of further research would be justified in terms of the additional or new avenues of interpretation relating to the history of Dothill. The recommendations, combined with the conclusions arising from the archaeological evaluation are presented in Part III of this report.

Setting

The history of Dothill appears to follow a fairly typical pattern for the development of the middle-ranking English country house; similar examples have been recently investigated nearby at Madeley Court, Telford, and at Wolseley Hall in Staffordshire. (Moffett, forthcoming, B.U.F.A.U.; Buteux,

Cane and Litherland, 1989, BUFAU). Generally, over a period of five centuries or more, an early moated enclosure, within which the manor or settlement is positioned, becomes the basis for an expansion of buildings fluctuating according to the needs of the owners over time. Comparing the development of Dothill with Madeley Court and Wolseley Hall, it may be significant that the periods of expansion of these three substantial country houses correspond very closely over nearly four centuries since the late 1500's. These 'moments' of confidence probably reflect the relative historical fortunes of the middle-ranking gentry in this region -if not nationally. At Dothill the gradual encroachment of new buildings over the moated area as more space was required, together with a long period from about the late 15th to late 18th centuries when moats were unfashionable, means that the definition of the boundaries of the original enclosure become more and more obscured through infilling and reclamation for building. Today, only the south-east arm of the original medieval moat is still visible at Dothill, and even this has been partially infilled since it was recorded on the latest (1967) Ordnance Survey large-scale map of the area.

Scenically the area is dominated by the bulk of the Wrekin to the south-west, and even today in the minds-eye one can imagine the pleasant prospect that must have encountered the various occupants of the house at Dothill, as it nestled in a slight undulation in the flattish ground just above the 'Weald Moors'. The surrounding area was extensively arable as early as the 10th century and was dominated by three large estates, one ecclesiastical at Lilleshall, and two royal estates at Wellington and Wrockwardine. From the 13th century urban development had begun at Wellington, influenced by the economic growth of the area engendered by a strong monastic presence, and the piecemeal exploitation of the mineral resources that were to become a major factor in the development of the region from the 17th century onwards. The Forester family, later owners of Dothill, were to be deeply involved in the speculation attracted by the nascent 18th-century industrialisation, and profits made from these ventures may well have paid for later extensions and building at Dothill House.

The Early History of the Moated Enclosure and its Owners.

Dothill was presumably one of the berewicks of Wellington from Norman times. (Eyton, 1859). Its identification at the time of Domesday almost certainly implies an Anglo-Saxon farm or settlement, though not necessarily on the later manorial site itself. A certain John de Fraeres, who owned much property in the area, held the manor in 1292, but by the late 14th century the manor was owned by the Horton family, whereafter it passed to the Steventons in the late 15th century. The Steventons became closely related to the Forester family in the 17th century, who were also major landowners in the area. The Hortons were tax collectors, the Steventons a 'middleing' family with some land and the Foresters had extensive estates and houses in the area, so it may be expected that the development of the house at Dothill would have reflected the respective fortunes and needs of the owners as it passed from one family to another.

The moated enclosure at Dothill is a very common type; both in shape (originally a rectangle of about 50 by 70 metres) and size at c. 0.35 hectares (V.C.H. 1985. p.216); many of the 5,000 plus moats known to exist in Britain correspond roughly to this pattern. Moated sites are still a grey area in both archaeological and historical terms, perhaps because of their very abundance and range, but it is known that most were dug during the later 13th and early 14th centuries, after which the practice sharply declined. The reasons for building them are also unclear, although the main ones are believed to be defence, drainage and symbolic prestige- in ascending order of academic preference - but of course any combination of these factors could apply according to the local needs of the builder. Only archaeological investigation can throw meaningful light on the origins of the moat at Dothill, but one might suggest that given the typicality of the enclosure and ownership of the site from the late 13th century by families with the wealth to build a moat (and maybe the defensive motivation in the case of the family of tax collectors!), it is likely that the moated enclosure dates from the late medieval period.

According to D. C. Cox who compiled the Victoria County History report for Dothill, the medieval hall would have stood in the north-west corner of the moated platform, remains of which can be discerned on an early 17th-century map of the house and estate (Fig 6). The following section of the report draws heavily upon his interpretation of the primary evidence relating to Dothill, since, in the limited time available for research a close examination of the various papers in the Forester collection at the Shropshire Record Office was not possible.

The House and Park.

The development of the house from the 17th century onwards is very well recorded by a series of estate maps in 1626, 1734, 1756, 1764, 1776, and 1793; thereafter, the Tithe map from 1856 and OS maps continue to define the layout of the house and gardens until it was demolished circa 1960. Such an outstanding sequence of evidence would merit further detailed work should proposals to present the site to the public be pursued.

In 1626 (Fig 6) Dothill house consisted of a five-bayed north-south range with a two-storied porch to the east (1). The range appears to have incorporated an earlier, probably medieval, three-bayed hall (2), which would originally have been open, with a large upper bay window or oriel at the east end where the solar or upper living room would have been. Opposite, a westerly running wing was added, and beyond that lay the service end of the house (3). This type of piecemeal extension of a pre-extant medieval structure is very common, and together with the beginnings of formal gardens, invites comparison with Madeley Court less than 10 miles away. The map evidence shows that the moat was already partially infilled by 1626 to accommodate the then recent expansion of the house, with formal gardens laid out over the remainder of the platform (4). A cluster of agricultural buildings also lay to the north -an arrangement which continued up to the 20th century (5); an area currently represented by a large expanse of concrete and the remains of boundary walls.

The gardens were already developing around the house at this time, with a large lake to the west known locally still as the 'Tee Lake', and an arbor

to the east consisting of two huts perched on a tree. By the time of the next map of 1734 (Fig 7) about 7 hectares of formal gardens surrounded the house, mostly to the west, providing pleasant vistas southwards through surrounding churches and houses to the Wrekin. To the south another lake had been cut into a canal with a grassed amphitheatre beyond, both common features in 18th-century gardens. By then all that remained of the moat was it's south-east arm, making another canal. However, by the end of the 18th century these formal gardens, once resplendent with all the colour of that age of opulence, had reverted back to grass again.

A further extension in brick was made to the north side of the house, according to the account book of William Haycock who built it, between 1763 and 1765; this had five bays and three storeys. Early in the 19th century the rest of the earlier house was demolished, probably due to its age, and the brick structure from the 1760's was joined to another brick farm building to the north, supposedly a dairy standing since the 17th century. H.E.Forrest (1920, p149) noted that this new wing was chiefly remarkable for the loftiness of its rooms and windows, particularly on the ground floor. On the southern gable he also noted a date-stone bearing the initials 'W.S'. of William Steventon, and the year 1628. It is likely that this stone would have been an incorporation from the earlier 17th-century house, but it does suggest that there was a further stage of building at Dothill, shortly after the drawing of the map of 1626. This 18th- and 19th-century house remained substantially as it looked in an illustration of 1876 (S.R.O. 1119/3) until it was demolished in c.1960.

PART III

Conclusions and Recommendations

In that part of the Dothill Manor site to be affected by proposed residential development it is clear from both excavation and documentary evidence that very little (if any) of the former moated site is involved (Fig 1). The only substantial remains encountered during the excavation in Trenches 1 and 2 almost certainly belonged to the north western outhouses

and farm buildings of the post-medieval manor house. Truncated ditches here, do however indicate some medieval activity or occupation. There was no sign of an infilled moat in either trench, suggesting that the postulated northern boundary of the moated enclosure lay further to the south.

Trench 3 was located in that part of the site, formerly occupied by the manor house, which was not under threat of development and likely to be further protected within an area designated for nature conservation. Although very limited in scope, it could at least be established that the depth and preservation of archaeological stratigraphy here was considerably better. It seems likely that sufficient remains here to enable the recovery of at least the plan of the post-medieval manor house and gardens. Once again the infilled moat was not contacted, unless it be represented by the incompletely excavated ditch feature F5 (Figs 4 and 5b). Remains of the house are represented by the wall foundations F12, possibly belonging to the post-medieval west wing (Fig 6.(3)).

While no medieval features could be identified in the trench itself, the presence of residual medieval pottery suggests that there will be evidence of medieval activity on the moat platform. There is every reason to suppose that the remains of the pre-17th-century manor still survive, along with the remainder of the moat, and thus that a great deal of information relating to the origins and early history of the manorial settlement is preserved. Current work on a very similar moated manorial site at Wolseley Hall, near Rugeley, Staffs is already documenting how rich and well preserved such evidence can be (Buteux, Cane and Litherland, 1989).

Recommendations arising from this evaluation can be considered under two main headings: 1) the archaeological implications of development; 2) site management and presentation.

1) Archaeological Implications

For the manor house site itself, as has already been indicated, the moat and its interior lie almost entirely outside the area proposed for development. Assuming that the projected ecological conservation area

requires no sub-surface disturbance, this designation should prove an ideal vehicle for the preservation of Dothill moat and its historical/archaeological resource. Should more information be required while these circumstances persist, a non-destructive geophysical survey involving a combination of magnetometer and resistivity equipment might be appropriate. This would almost certainly reveal the precise location of the moat and the shape of buildings within its enclosure. On the other hand, a certain amount of disturbance to vegetation and habitats which would be unavoidable, might not be thought desirable or sufficiently worthwhile at this time.

On present information, the adjoining farm and outbuildings site to the north west appears to be the most vulnerable to development. While much of this area contains the levelled remains of mainly post-medieval structures, whose history, status and arrangement is fairly well documented, there remains the question of its origin and use in the medieval period. The moat itself, almost certainly a later 13th or 14th-century phenomenon, will have been added to an earlier settlement, probably but not certainly focussed upon the site of the manor house. The pre-moat manor, and indeed, other remains of early settlement at Dothill, could as well occupy this adjacent site. In these circumstances a further archaeological response, related directly to the proposals for development, should be considered.

A more extensive clearance under archaeological supervision of surviving post-medieval remains and vegetation here- preceded by a more detailed interpretative ground survey- should be undertaken just prior to the development programme, enabling an archaeological excavation and recording exercise to cover areas to be destroyed. In addition to this and at an early stage of development, a more extensive archaeological monitoring of groundworks for foundations and services would be a valuable complement to any results deriving from more controlled excavation.

It should at this juncture be pointed out that no specific evaluation was undertaken for the purpose of locating medieval settlement remains at Dothill other than those potentially existing within and around the moated manorial site. The potential for such evidence surviving in the farm area

is already indicated (above). Two other sites in the vicinity have been postulated recently by local researchers as potential settlement locations; at NGR. SJ 6410 1340 and SJ 6445 1330 (Fig 1). Of these, the former has already been lost beneath the current development scheme. The second lies within an area not apparently yet developed and where traces of the medieval field pattern may also survive. It may yet be considered worthwhile to undertake a rapid field evaluation survey of any such survivals and to test by a trial excavation the hypothesis concerning a settlement site here before development is completed.

2) Management and Presentation

Management and thus preservation of the moated manorial site seems assured through its inclusion within the nature reserve.

Should development and any further archaeological discoveries occur in the adjacent farm area, several options for presentation may present themselves.

An excavation programme itself can provide a considerable, if transient focus for local interest and education. Opportunities could be developed both to present discoveries and the processes of archaeological research, and to enable a degree of public participation where appropriate. In the longer term, provision should be made for both popular publications and the more academic publication necessitated by archaeological excavation.

The results of an excavation may then be exploited to illuminate and enhance the history and significance of Dothill Manor in a local context. The likelihood of worthwhile remains for preservation in situ appears low at present, but should not be forgotten; more likely might be preservation of historic boundary arrangements or the indicating of particular sites or features within the modern development. Furthermore, discoveries here might well form the basis of a local presentation through site information panels, popular publications, layout of buried historic features, local temporary or semi-permanent exhibitions of discoveries and information in libraries, schools, etc. This approach could be extended to include the

otherwise hidden manorial site itself, and to set the whole complex into its historic context. Similar techniques are being employed at Wolseley Hall by B.U.F.A.U., and have been undertaken on behalf of English Heritage in the region.

Evaluation of the documentary sources so far points the way to opportunities for further research into such topics as topographic development of the manor and its landscape, the gardens and their development, the history and fortunes of Dothill's respective owners, or comparative studies involving other such sites in the area- Madeley Court being an obvious and potentially fruitful example. Such studies may be of particular interest in emphasising the historic character of the Telford area as a whole, and its early industrial links, notably through past owners of both these estates. Great opportunities exist here for local education projects, in particular involving local schools.

Briefly, the archaeological recommendations arising from this evaluation can be summarised as follows:

i) Maintenance of the moated manorial site undisturbed within the nature reserve. Geophysical prospection could enhance our understanding of its character and survival but no further excavation for salvage, information gathering or display purposes is recommended.

ii) More extensive archaeological excavation involving the farm/outbuildings site, dependant upon the scale and effect of development; combined with an additional monitoring programme in the early stages.

iii) Some further limited evaluation by survey and excavation of other potential early settlement sites to be affected by the development.

iv) Presentation and publicity opportunities for any larger scale excavation programme.

v) On-site presentation of the site as a whole through publications, displays, in situ features, permanent information panels, etc., relating to both the excavated evidence and general historical background.

vi) Research and educative opportunities stimulated by discoveries and presentation.

Sources

Aberg, F.A. ed 1978. Medieval Moated Sites, C.B.A. Research Report 17.

Baxter, P.M. 1949. A History of Wellington.

Buteux, S. 1989. Wolseley Hall, An Archaeological Evaluation; and
Cane, J. and The Excavation, 1st Interim Report. BUFAU Reports
Litherland, S. 67 and 82.

Eyton, R.W. 1859. Shropshire History. vol IX.

Forrest, H.E. 1920. Some Old Shropshire Houses and their Owners.
T.S.A.S. 4th series, vol VII. pp144-151.

Moffett, C. in Madeley Court, Shropshire: from monastic grange
preparation to country house. (Draft at B.U.F.A.U).
T.S.A.S. forthcoming

Pevsner, N.B.L. 1960. The Planning of the Elizabethan Country House.

Taylor, C. 1983. The Archaeology of Gardens.

Victoria County History, Shropshire. vol XI, 1985. pp215-217.

Primary Sources Evaluated.

All held at Shropshire County Record Office- S.R.O.

1224 denotes the Forester Collection.

1224/1/1.	1626.	Samuel Parsons map of Dothill. 25.5 in. to the mile.
1224/1/2.	1734.	John Pratchetts map of the estate. 135.4 in. to the mile
1224/1/3.	1756.	T.F.Pritchards map of the house. 50 in. to the mile.
1224/1/4.	1764.	Anon. Plan of Dothill Demense. 26.6 in. to the mile.
1224/1/5.	1776.	Dutton & Hand Plan of Estate. 18.8 in. to the mile.
1224/1/6.	1793.	Estate Block Plan. 8.9 in. to the mile.
14/1/6.	1856.	Tithe map and Apportionment.

DOTHILL MOAT

Archaeological Evaluation 1989

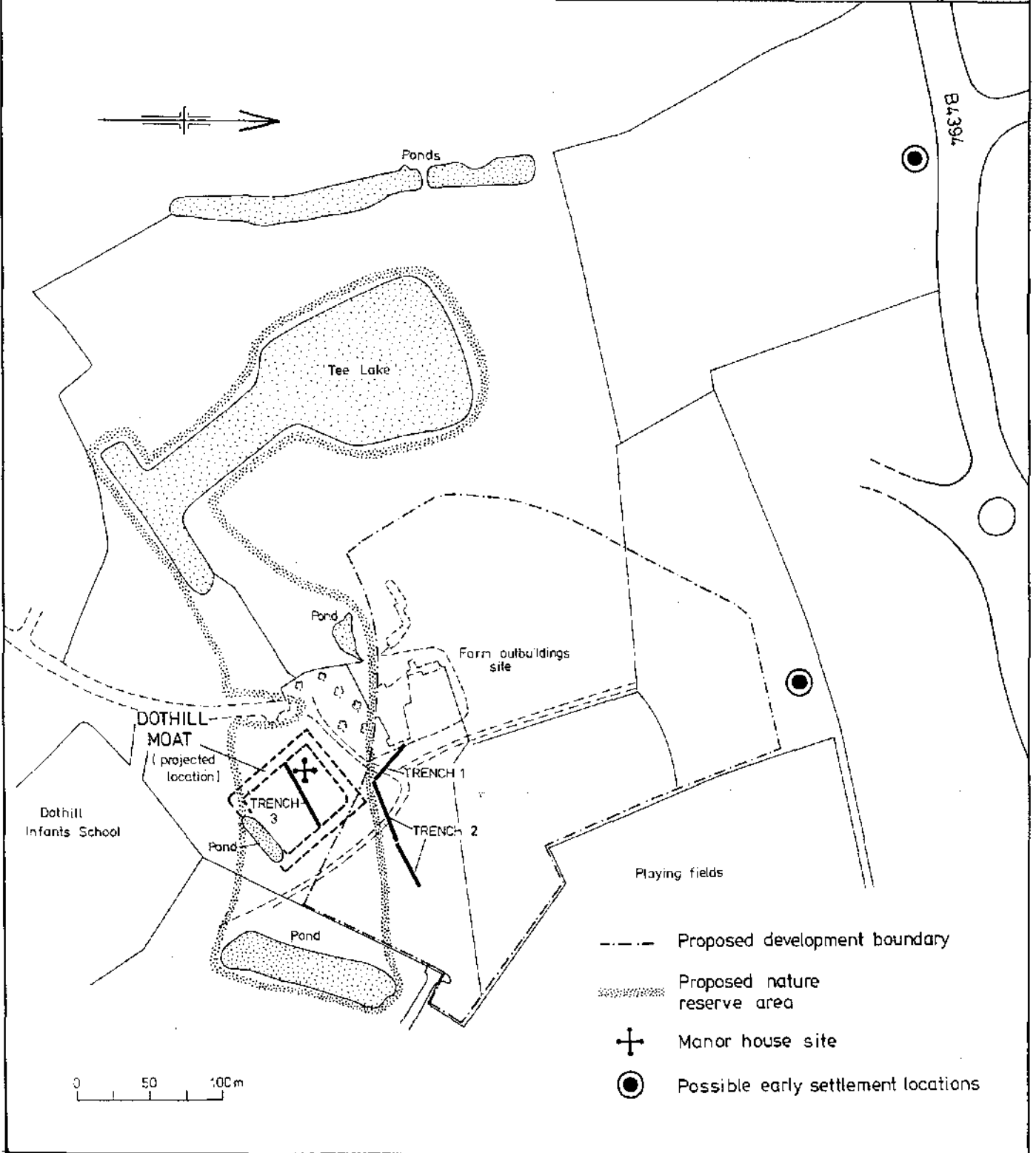
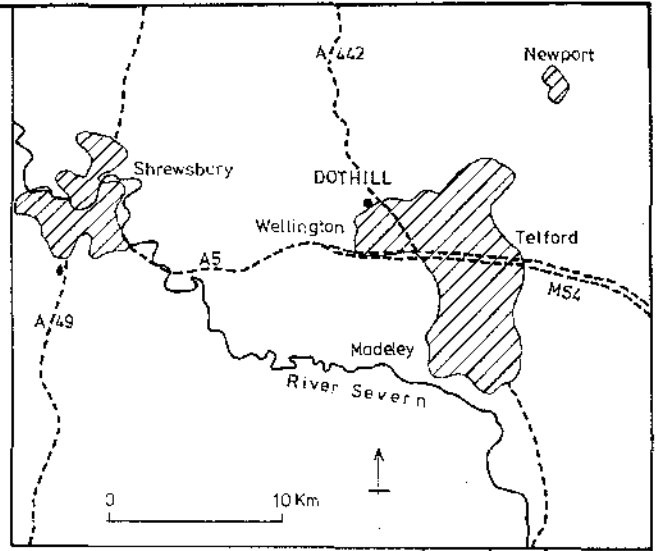
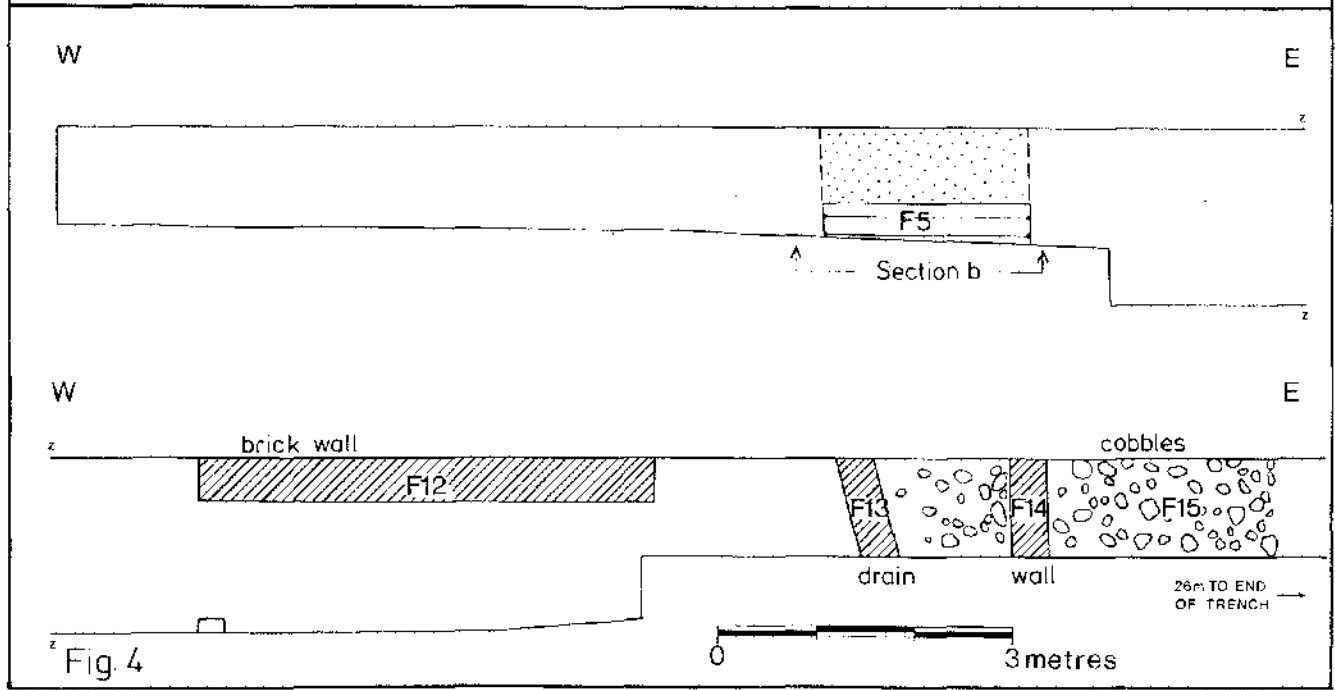
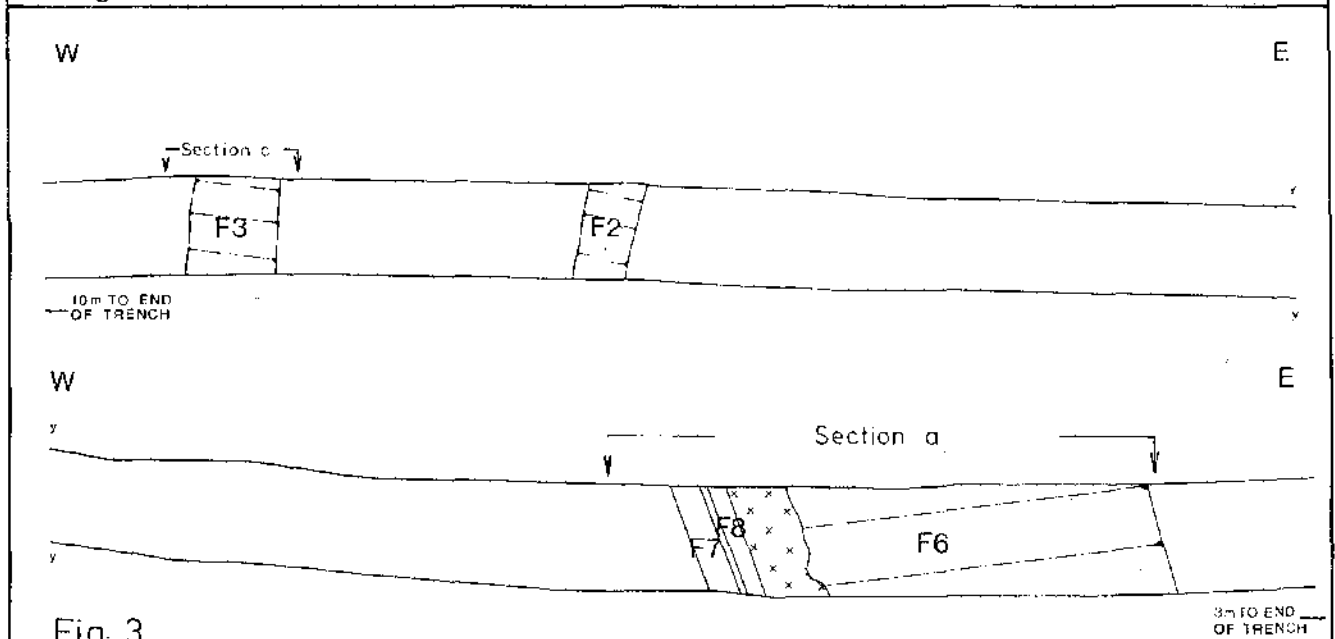
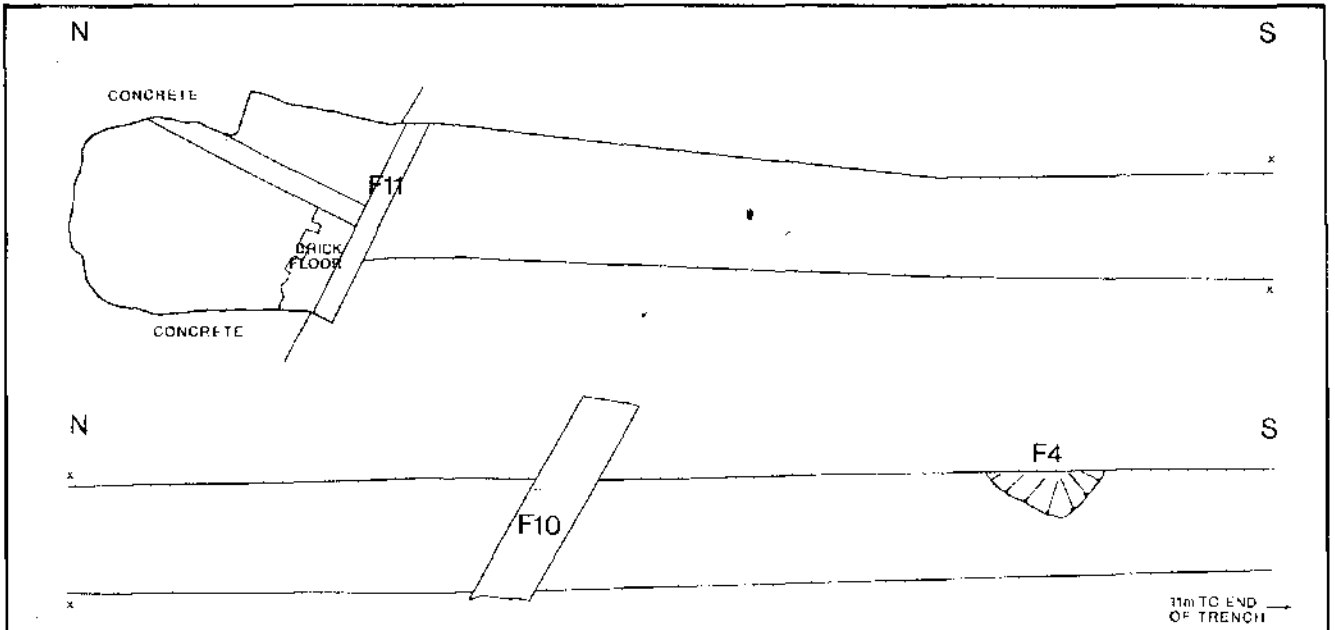


Fig 1



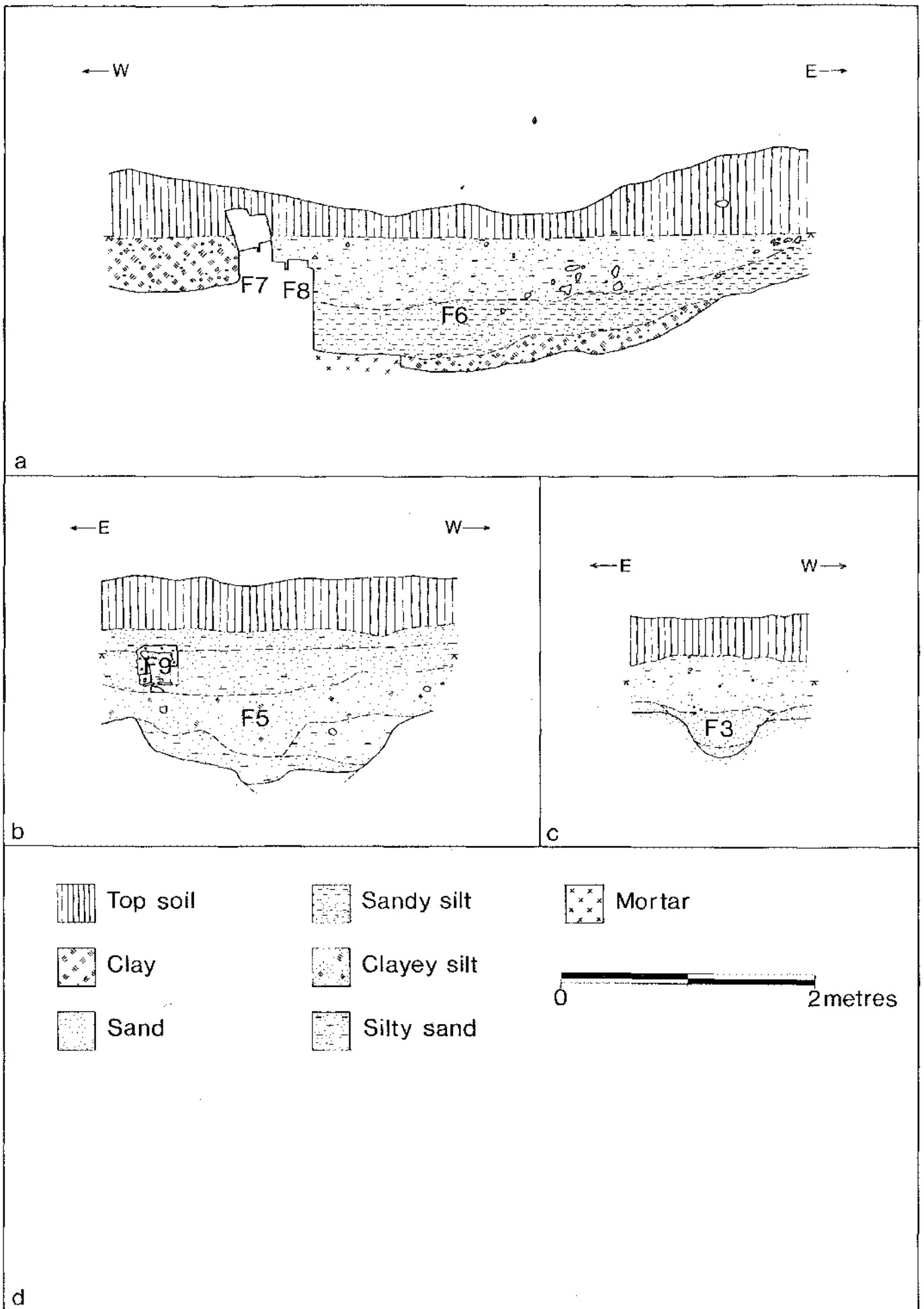
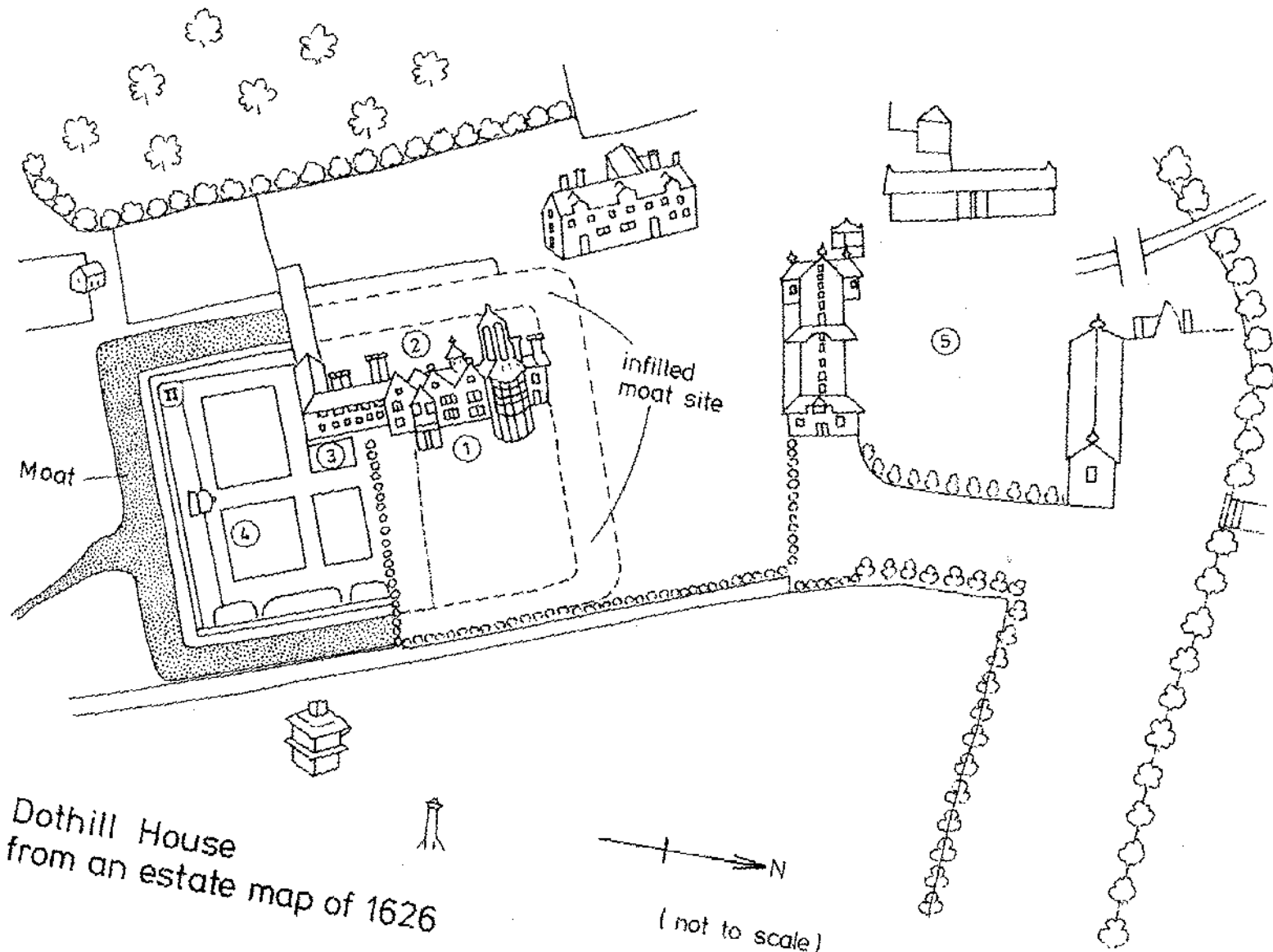


Fig 5



Dothill House
from an estate map of 1626

Fig. 6

Dothill House and Gardens
from an estate map of 1734

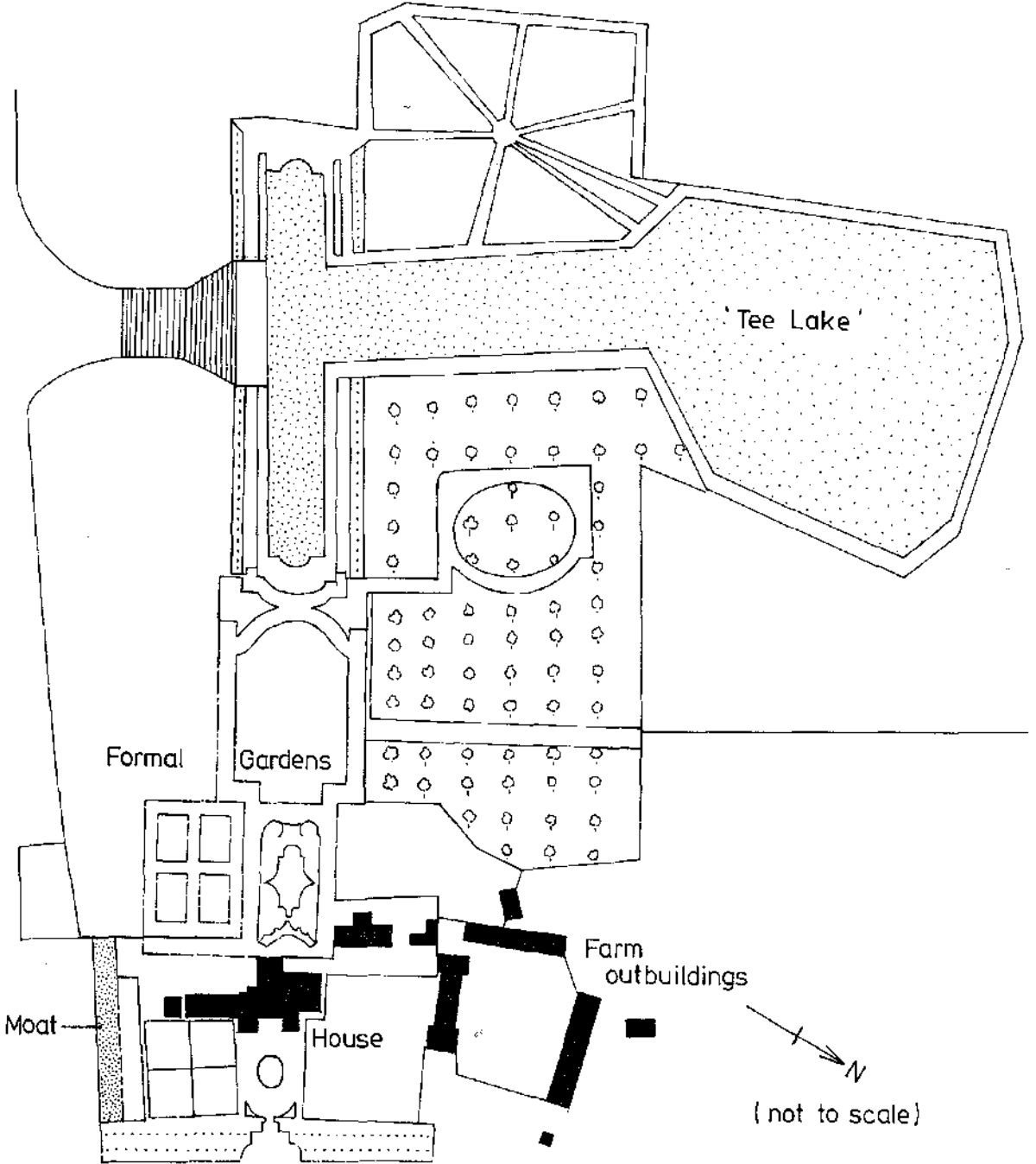


Fig. 7