

**An archaeological
assessment of the Old
Farmhouse and Dairy,
Merridale,
Wolverhampton,
Black Country**

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and Dairy, Merridale, Wolverhampton, Black Country**

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The Old Farmhouse and Dairy, Merridale, Wolverhampton

Summary

An archaeological assessment was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in February 2000 at the Old Farmhouse and Dairy (SMR 2544), Merridale, Wolverhampton (NGR SO 9003 9841). The work was commissioned by Chris Sedgemore of Maythorn Construction in advance of major refurbishment of the building. The Old Farmhouse and Dairy was statutorily listed (Grade II) in 1995 and contains parts of a medieval building. The programme of documentary research, excavation of trial pits, and building analysis was undertaken to enable the local authority to make an informed decision regarding the impact of the intended scheme of works on the historic building and its curtilage.

The origins of Merridale may lie in the late-Saxon or medieval period. There is specific archaeological and historical evidence for occupation on the site of the Old Farmhouse from roughly the 1200s onwards. The first timber-framed building for which we have unequivocal evidence was probably a hybrid manor house/farmstead. It was constructed with a sandstone sill wall and conformed to the normal medieval plan, consisting of an open hall, with private and service accommodation at either end. Thereafter, a process of alternate rebuilding of these basic units continued into the post-medieval period. Important elements of a square panelled cross-wing that was jettied on three sides have survived. This was built as good quality service accommodation between 1450 and 1500. A chimney stack was inserted into the former position of the cross-passage some time after, and the open hall was replaced by a two storey main range in the later 16th or early 17th century. In the late 17th or early 18th century the farmhouse was extensively rebuilt in brick. In spite of gaining an attic storey, stair tower and replacement service accommodation, the building remained firmly in the vernacular tradition represented by the manor house, with gabled ranges and a one-room-deep plan. The association of the farm with dairy farming probably began in earnest in the 18th or early 19th century. The 20th century history of the farmstead was one of gradual decline, as the farmland was gradually swallowed by the suburban sprawl of Wolverhampton. This culminated in the conversion of the farmhouse to a terrace of three shops with accommodation over in the 1930s.

The building had been empty for nearly a decade before the survey began and was consequently in poor overall condition. Nevertheless, the Old Farmhouse and Dairy is a rare survival of a medieval and post-medieval building in Wolverhampton, and the survival and quality of buried archaeological deposits from the medieval period has also been demonstrated to be high.

Introduction

A programme of documentary research, excavation of trial pits, and building analysis was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in February 2000 at the Old Farmhouse and Dairy (SMR 2544), Merridale, Wolverhampton (Fig. 1; NGR SO 9003 9841). The work was commissioned by Chris Sedgemore of Maythorn Construction, and was carried out in advance of major refurbishment of the building, to bring it back into use after a nearly a decade of neglect.

The Old Farmhouse and Dairy is an important historic site, both because of the survival of parts of a medieval building above ground, and also because of the potential for survival of buried archaeological deposits. The building was statutorily listed (Grade II) in 1995. In view of the historic importance of the site, the planning authority advised that an archaeological assessment be carried out. This was to analyse the date, nature, and significance of the standing building, and to assess the likely impact of the refurbishment proposals upon both the building and the buried archaeology of the site. A written scheme of investigation was submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. This was based upon a brief for work prepared by Mike Shaw, the Black Country Archaeologist (Shaw 2000). The results of the assessment are intended to enable the local authority to make an informed decision regarding the intended scheme of works planned for the whole site.

Site location and description

The Old Farmhouse and Dairy lies on the west side of Merridale Lane, at the junction with Merridale Road, approximately 1.5 km to the west of Wolverhampton town centre (Plate 1). The site is located on the shoulder of a gently sloping boulder clay ridge with a southwest aspect. This overlooks the valley of the Graiseley Brook, which has cut through the boulder clay into an outcrop of Upper Mottled Sandstone.

Today, the surveyed building is completely clad with a pebbledash concrete render. The main elevation presents an asymmetrical three-window front with three 20th-century shop fronts on the ground floor (Plate 2). The central range and cross-wing to the north are both two storied with an attic over, while the smaller range to the south is one storied with an attic. All the windows are 20th-century. At the rear is the gabled cross-wing to the north, a gabled stair tower in the angle and the lower gable-ended wing to the south (Plate 3). A rapid survey by the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England in December 1994 identified the survival of significant timber-framed elements of a late-medieval cross-wing and an early 17th-century main range, which, it was postulated, was probably the site of an earlier medieval hall. There were also extensive modifications in brick dating from the 18th to the 20th centuries (Brodie 1994).

Method

Documentary research

Documentary research of primary and secondary records and maps was carried out at Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies. The Black Country Sites and Monuments Record, the primary source of known archaeological information for the Wolverhampton area, was also consulted, along with telephone enquiries to the National Monuments Record, Swindon, and the William Salt Library and County Record Office, Stafford. All sources consulted are listed in reference section, below.

Building analysis

An exploratory survey of the building was undertaken, including visual inspection, sample stripping of later plasterwork, and the compilation of written notes. The results were plotted on existing 1:50 scale plans of the building which were verified for accuracy on site. A photographic survey was also conducted using black and white, colour print and colour negative film. The photographic survey was also related to the 1:50 scale plans, and scales were included where appropriate.

Trial pits

A series of four trial pits was dug to assess the survival and significance of buried archaeological deposits within and around the survey building. The location of the trial pits was designed:

- to test the presence of an undercroft beneath the cross-wing (TP1),
- to ascertain if floors or features survived relating to the earlier medieval hall (TP2 and TP4),
- and, to examine an area to the south of the building where the foundations of a new extension were proposed (TP3).

Historical background

Before outlining the historical development of the site it is worth clarifying the various terms used in the past and within this report when referring to the Old Farmhouse and Dairy at Merridale. The present assessment will refer to the standing buildings as the Old Farmhouse and Dairy, Merridale, or 'the surveyed building', while the broader buried archaeology will be referred to as 'the site'. Earlier spellings of the place name Merridale appear to be either *Meredale* or *Muridene*. In the absence of a detailed place name investigation these would appear to be topographic descriptions, the *mere-* element referring to either a lake, marsh or boundary, of which the latter is, perhaps, the most applicable, and the *-dale* or *-dene* element referring to a valley, usually in a wooded area of low hills. Until the later 19th century both spellings seem to have been used, and will be reproduced here as they appear in the original context to which the text is referring. The prefix 'Old' begins to be used in the 19th century and is later used to distinguish the

surveyed building from New Merridale, a larger house to the south. Some time in the later 19th or early 20th century the present name of the Old Farmhouse and Dairy became the normal name of the building, possibly after the building was converted to shops as a means of remembering its earlier function.

Medieval and early post-medieval history

Wolverhampton was an important regional settlement prior to the Norman Conquest. For example, the cross outside the minster church of St Peter's has been dated to between the 8th and 9th centuries. It has also been suggested that Merridale may have been a hamlet by the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, even though South Staffordshire was quite sparsely populated at this time (Mander & Tildesley 1960). Certainly, Wolverhampton retained its settlement status into the medieval period, by which time the borough of Wolverhampton was divided into the town and its hinterland which was called 'the foreign'. A number of 'assartments' or woodland clearances took place in the 12th and 13th centuries around Wolverhampton and several small estates or large farms, some of which were also moated sites, were established at this time. Local examples of this type of site include Old Fallings and Old Moseley Halls, and Northcote Farm and Showell's Farm Moat, all situated to the north of Merridale. Generally speaking, these estates tended to belong to the 'middling folk' of medieval society, such as yeoman farmers or people who had made money from business. While no definitive evidence has been found to prove that Old Merridale Farm was a medieval moated site, there was a large pond and two fields called banky field nearby, and the estate was of sufficient status and antiquity for a moat to have been dug around it.

Nevertheless, the precise origins of Meredale or Merridale must remain unclear. The earliest documentation specific to Merridale dates from the 1200s (White 1995), when the Salford family acquired the estate through marriage. Their estate lay within Wolverhampton Foreign not far from the Bridgnorth Road, a regionally important medieval trade route. The family retained ownership of the estate until the early 17th century, but no family papers were traced as part of this assessment, and so little light can be shed on their background or the known periods of development of Old Merridale Farmhouse. The subsequent ownership of the property also proved difficult to trace. The 17th-century Huntbach manuscript mentions the names Jackson and Thomas Barnfield in connection with the estate (White 1995), but Mander (1960) refers to a mercer, William Normansell, as being the owner in the early 17th century. By 1663-73, the Hearth Tax returns refer to a John Thrustance de Merredell as the owner. A total of six hearths was taxed. This suggests that in the late 17th century the property comprised three main ranges, a cross-wing, main range, and, possibly, a solar, each one room deep, two storeys high, and heated on both floors.

The eighteenth century

The 18th century was a period of widespread change. The urban population of Wolverhampton was beginning to expand dramatically, and the coalfields to the east of the town were being increasingly exploited. There were also changes in the organisation

of farming, reflected by both enclosure and rationalisation of farmland and the sub-letting of several of the estates immediately surrounding the town. The 18th century was also a period of relative prosperity that saw profound developments in terms of building technology and taste, and several buildings of the 'middling' status of Merridale were remodelled in brick at this time. However, the use of timber framing persisted much longer in farm buildings, and the style of framing employed in the barns adjacent to Merridale Lane, which were depicted on a series of photographs taken in the 1960s, shortly before their demolition, is consistent with an 18th-century construction date.

The continued growth of the urban boundaries of Wolverhampton in the later 18th century may have had a negative effect on the desirability of properties like Merridale as 'gentlemen's' farmsteads. Furthermore, in the days before refrigeration, the provision of milk to the urban population was, of necessity, a local industry, and a number of dairy farms sprang up near the large industrial towns of the West Midlands. Therefore, this period may have seen the beginnings of the association of Merridale with dairy farming, although the precise chronology of this change, together with the date it changed status from a 'gentleman's farm' to a working farm, remains unclear.

The nineteenth century

In 1801, Merridale belonged to the Petit family, and in 1842, when the Tithe Survey was made, John Lewis Petit remained the owner of 'Old' Meredale Farm and the land surrounding it. The prefix 'Old', like Old Fallings and Old Moseley Hall, may have arisen to denote farmsteads of ancient status as opposed to the new farms created by enclosure and other agricultural improvements. The Tithe Map (Fig. 2), which was the first map of sufficient scale to identify Old Meredale Farm, also shows another large house to the south, named Meredale, which, by 1871, was known as New Merridale. This evidence confirms that a downgrading in the status of Old Meredale Farm had occurred by the mid-19th century.

At the time of the Tithe Survey William Myers was in occupation of Old Meredale Farmhouse, farmyard and outbuildings. The farmhouse was still surrounded by fields, with meadows along the Graiseley Brook to the south and a sandstone escarpment that may have been a local source of building stone from an early period. In addition, the large pond situated to the west of the farm next to a *Kitchen Garden* may once have been a fishpond that was part of a broader water management system associated with a moat. The names of two fields to the south of the farm called *Big Banky Field* and *Little Banky Field* may also refer to physical features associated with a moat. However, there were several other large ponds in the vicinity that were probably dug to quarry marl.

The 1852 Health of Towns Act map (Fig. 3) shows little change to Old Meredale, although some housing was beginning to encroach upon the angle between Merridale Road and Merridale Lane where a new road was inserted in between. In 1871 the first map of a sufficiently large scale to be able to recognise specific features of the buildings comprising Old Merridale Farm was surveyed (Fig.4). This map shows that between 1852 and 1871 an extension was made to the west gable of the Dairy that was separated

from the cross-wing by a covered passage. The Dairy had a set of stairs rising from the farmyard, presumably to aid hygiene. In addition, the angle between the gabled stair tower and the main range was extended to the west between 1852 and 1871. The small square building at the northwest corner of the farmhouse was probably a privy. A formal garden was laid out in front of the farmhouse, and gardens containing trees and path lay to the south and west. Some of the functions of the farm buildings to the north of the surveyed building were also noted on the 1871 map. These buildings were arranged in an irregular U-shape around a farmyard, and are a typical assortment of buildings associated with a mixed dairy farm. There was a storage barn at the northern end, with a rickyard beyond it. The eastern block comprised another barn and three other buildings with abbreviated names. 'Co. H' is probably the Cow House, 'S.H.' may be a Slaughterhouse, and 'S.T.' may denote a stable. Another possible cow house existed in the southern building, which was discrete from the main block.

The twentieth century

By the early 20th century the farm was in decline. While the layout and boundaries of the surveyed building and farm remained broadly similar on the Ordnance Survey map editions of 1889 (Fig. 5), 1905 and 1919, and a council plan of 1921, urban development was steadily encroaching upon the farm. In 1878, Henry Wright Owen, a merchant, had leased the property to Thomas Clarke, a farmer. Correspondence from the early 20th century relating to Merridale Farm shows that the buildings were in poor condition, and a specification made in 1905 outlined a large amount of sanitary repair work that needed to be carried out. In 1908, the Chief Sanitary Inspector reported in a letter to the solicitors Nock and Joseland that 'the floor of the dairy...is in a defective condition. One of the buildings used as a cowshed is very dilapidated, and without proper light and ventilation, or sufficient drainage. Further, the building adjoining the cottage and used as a shed is without proper and sufficient means of lighting, and the drainage is insufficient. The yard surface generally is insufficiently drained, and liquid lies about the surface. The buildings generally are dilapidated and there is no proper manure receptacle.'

A specification and costing from c.1911 listed a large amount of repair work on the roof and eaves of the surveyed building, the cutting of a doorway from the pantry to the passage to create an office, floor reinforcing work, cement work and repairs to the farm buildings. The building survey was able to confirm that most of this work was actually carried out. However, the building appears to have remained in a poor general condition after the repairs. A letter dated 1920 from the tenant Ernest Clarke, a butcher, to Nock and Joseland, complained as follows: 'I notice according to my agreement that I am bound to keep the inside of the farmhouse in good condition. I beg to state that owing to the bad condition of the roof and all the outside of the house it is impossible for me to keep the inside of the house in good condition. Owing to the damp the colouring comes off, also the paper very soon after it has been done.' In 1919 Ernest Clarke was forced, by labour difficulties, to auction off his whole dairy herd and, in 1926, he gave up the farm. Sale catalogues detail his livestock and agricultural implements up for auction.

Photographs taken by Mander in January 1930 show the farmhouse in a very dilapidated state (Plates 4 & 5). The cross-wing was missing its roof tiles and most of the uppermost panels of the timber frame were empty. The cross-wing retained the suggestion of a jetty on its northern face, although the jetty of the eastern gable had been under-filled with brick. Shortly after these photographs were taken, the surveyed building was refurbished and the ground floor converted into three shops. There was a plan drawn up in c. 1930 that illustrated the floor plan prior to these alterations (Fig. 6). By 1938, housing development had encroached on the site of Old Merridale Farm. Merridale Avenue had been inserted to the north of the farmyard and rows of semi-detached houses were built on the land previously covered by gardens and fields. The pond was also filled in and partly built over. The northern range of farm buildings was demolished, along with a house to the west. A further set of photographs taken in 1961 shows another campaign of repair to the farmhouse. These photographs also show the remaining farm buildings along Merridale Lane shortly before these were demolished. The light style of the timber framing, together with large brick-filled panels and sawn-timber kingpost roof, are all indicative of an 18th-century date of build.

Results

Building survey

The following section comprises a set of systematic descriptive notes about each room. These are summarised in Figs. 7-9 that present the main results of the survey in plan form. Selected colour print reproductions are also used to illustrate various construction details. The results of the trial pits follow, before an overall interpretation of the development of the building is presented.

Ground floor (Fig.7)

G1 (main front room of the cross-wing)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches dimensions), concrete-based mortar pebbledash external face and modern plaster skim internally.

East wall: Post-1930 shop front under inserted rolled steel I-beam.

South wall: Mix of modern brick and concrete blocks under inserted steel I-beam, timber-framed girding beam over.

West wall: Timber-frame transverse partition wall set on sandstone sill wall. The wall consists of c. 4 feet square framing, which is two panels high. Panels have large staves, and wattle and daub infill. Sill and head plate *in situ*, as is southern main post. Modern door inserted through north frame. Original wall largely exposed, but remains of later lathe and plaster face in places.

Floor: Concrete skim over later timber floor that is 1.5 feet lower than the base of the sill beam.

Ceiling: Open timber-frame floor, chamfered axial, dragon, and cross-beams with step stops, unchamfered joists. The joists for the jetties are pegged into the dragon beam (Plate 4).

G2 (pantry/service room)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches dimensions), concrete-based mortar pebbledash external face and modern plaster skim internally.

East wall: see west wall of G1, above. More of the later lathe and plaster face survives.

South wall: Modified elements of timber framing survive here including girding beam and some wall studs, infilled in clamped brick 2¼ inch high brick. Doorway to east may be modern reuse of an original opening.

West wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches dimensions), including inserted fireplace

in northwest corner of room. Southern opening is a 20th century insert.

Floor: Concrete skim over later timber floor, modern passage floor is boarded.

Ceiling: Timber-frame floor, chamfered axial, dragon, and cross-beams with step stops, unchamfered joists. The joists for the jetties are pegged into the dragon beam.

G3 (Stairwell of newel post staircase)

North wall: see south wall of G2, above.

East wall: Modern partitions.

South wall: Main build clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded in English Garden wall bond, 3 stretcher courses between each header course with white lime-based mortar. Inserted doorway at east end of wall blocked with machine cut brick, with modern brick-built post supporting RSJ adjacent.

West wall: Main build clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded in English Garden wall bond, 3 stretcher courses between each header course with white lime-based mortar. Original window opening lights stair, little of original frame survives.

Staircase: Newel post staircase, original to gabled stair tower (Plate 7). Newel posts and handrails pegged together, but risers and treads have probably been replaced. Original horse hair based plaster to walls and beneath staircase damaged by water penetration.

Floor: Staircase continued to blocked cellar opening under stairs (Plate 8). Ground floor and cellar steps paved with red quarry tiles, steps to cellar finished with blue edging brick.

G4 (principal room of main range)

North wall: All modern, see south wall of G1, above. Axial floor beam supported on RSJ after removal of fireplace (Plate 9).

East wall: Post-1930 shop front, RSJ over.

South wall: Solid one brick thick partition wall between main range and smaller southern range. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Twin axial floor beams of southern range supported by this wall, which is also cut by two doorways, subsequently blocked. The eastern doorway is the earlier.

West wall: Same build as south wall, above. Much disturbed by openings to 20th-century extensions made to rear (which are not discussed). Above these openings a stretch of original brickwork survives. This indicates that although of same basic build the gabled stair tower was built before the main range. A projecting decorative stringcourse ran around the back of the main range, but stopped short of the stair tower (Plate 10). Original window openings were 4 feet wide

with simple shallow segmental arches composed of a single course of header bricks on edge (Plate 11).

Floor: Modern concrete floor.

Ceiling: Open timber-frame floor assembly. Chamfered axial beam (scantling 10 inches wide by 11 inches tall) with ogee stops and unchamfered joists (scantling 3½ by 4½ inches).

G5 (service room of southern range)

North wall: See south wall of G4, above.

East wall: Post-1930 shop front, RSJ over. 20th century.

South wall: Solid, one brick thick, exterior gable wall. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Twin axial floor beams of southern range set into wall. Later doorway cut through wall and chimney stack removed.

West wall: Solid, one brick thick, exterior wall. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar, original window roughly centrally placed. Much water damage to internal plasterwork of this and the south wall.

Floor: Modern concrete floor.

Ceiling: Twin axial beams set into brick walls. Beams are poorer quality than other timber floors in cross-wing and main range. Unchamfered sawn floor joists.

G6 (Dairy range)

North wall: Main build clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2½ inches). There is a vertical break visible near the modern side entrance at the eastern corner of the wall. The window, and parlour-style fireplace that was subsequently blocked, are both post-1930.

East wall: The half-brick thick partition wall between G6 and the passage is built of clamped brick (9¼ by 4½ by 2½ inches) with lime-based mortar. It is curved at the south end and a doorway inserted around 1911. The concrete skim to this wall scoured to resemble ashlar masonry also dates from this period.

South wall: Main build one brick thick, but slightly smaller clamped red brick (9 by 4½ by 2½ inches) with lime-based mortar. There is a vertical break close to the junction of this wall with the curved partition wall to the east, which may have been a former access route. Another vertical break is located at the junction of this wall with the west wall. A window has been inserted into this wall.

West wall: Main build clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2½ inches). A centrally placed door was inserted into this wall, subsequently blocked.

Floor: Solid quarry tiled floor. An area of quarry tiles near the east partition wall is made of 9 inches square tiles akin to those mentioned in the specification outlined in 1911.

Ceiling: A crudely chamfered cross-beam with waney end supports a series of plain sawn joists. The cross-

beam is supported at each end by post-1930 brick supports. The first floor was an attic space that is now open to the roof. All of this build is post-1930 and so is not discussed in the following section.

First Floor (Fig.8)

F1 (principal chamber, cross-wing)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches dimensions), concrete-based mortar pebbledash external face and modern plaster skim internally. Modern window.

East wall: Same as north wall.

South wall: There are elements of timber framing in this wall, but it is of a much cruder and lighter design. The framing is filled with 2½ inch tall clamped brick noggin around the fireplace at the back of the large central chimney stack. These bricks are extremely crude with imprints from the wooden moulds in which they were formed. There is 2¼ inch tall clamped brickwork to the east of the fireplace, and a cupboard adjacent to the chimney.

West wall: Timber framing of the transverse partition wall continues into this storey. There are four panels measuring 3½ feet square with mainly wattle and daub infill and a fifth narrow panel, at the north end of the wall, filled in with brick. The main post at the south end of the wall has a jowled head with a straight downward brace. There is no conventional lap-dovetail joint between the main post, tie beam and wall plate. Instead the tie beam has been replaced with lighter timber, and likewise the east-west aligned wall plate is much lighter (Plate 12). A later lathe and plaster wall surface has been largely removed, but survives in places.

Floor: Same as ceiling of G1. The oak floorboards have all been removed, making access around the room difficult.

Ceiling: A 12 inch wide cross-beam with 2½ inch deep chamfers, but no chamfer stops at either end supports a series of unchamfered joists. The south end of the cross beam is supported by a later brick corbel from the chimney breast, while the north end is supported by the post-1930 brick wall.

F2 (secondary chamber, cross-wing)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches dimensions), concrete-based mortar pebbledash external face and modern plaster skim internally. Modern window.

East wall: Same as west wall of F1.

South wall: Modified elements of timber framing survive here, including some wall studs infilled in clamped brick 2¼ inch high brick. Doorway to east may be modern reuse of an earlier opening.

West wall: Same as north wall, above.

Floor: Same as ceiling of G2, modern floorboards.

Ceiling: Main axial beam was 9 inches square, with 2 inch deep chamfers and ogee stops. The unchamfered joists do not fit well into the main beam that in turn is crudely jointed to the replaced tie beam of the transverse timber-framed partition wall (Plate 13).

F3 (stairwell, first floor)

Same details as G1 below, with the exception of the south wall which was all made of 2¼ inch tall brick.

F4 (chamber over main range)

North wall: This wall comprises a curved 2¼ inch tall brick partition wall from the staircase, a doorway, the main chimney breast and a pair of cupboards to the east. The main chimney breast is constructed in 2½ inch tall clamped brick, the existing opening rebuilt in 2¼ inch tall brick. The cupboards to the east are also built in 2¼ inch tall brick.

East wall: Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Brick stringcourse picks out floors on external elevation. Internally plasterwork much damaged. Window is a post-1930 insert.

South wall: Solid one brick thick partition wall between main range and smaller southern range. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Western doorway may be original.

West wall: Same build, original window opening towards southern end of room.

Floor: Half of the oak floorboards have been retained *in situ*, the other half removed.

Ceiling: Large axial beam with chamfers and ogee stops and unchamfered joists.

F5 (chamber over south range)

North wall: Same as south wall of F4.

East wall: Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Brick stringcourse picks out floors on external elevation. Internally plasterwork much damaged by water influx. Flat dormer window is a modern replacement.

South wall: Solid, one brick thick, exterior gable wall. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar. Small later window cut through wall, but chimneybreast *in situ*.

West wall: Solid, one brick thick, exterior wall. Built of clamped red brick (9½ by 4½ by 2¼ inch) bonded with white lime-based mortar, original window roughly centrally placed, dormer may be original. Much water damage to internal plasterwork of all walls.

Floor: Later floorboards.

Ceiling: Attic room, pair of purlins exposed in roof.

Second floor (Fig. 9)

S1 (main attic chamber over cross-wing)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches), concrete-based mortar, pebbledash external face with modern plaster skim internally.

East wall: Same as north wall, except for a modern window.

South wall: There are elements of timber framing in this wall, but it is of a much cruder and lighter design and forms part of the roof truss for the attic over the main range (Plate 14). The framing is filled with 2¼ inch tall clamped brick noggin inside the framing, but there are modern bricks towards the east frontage. There is no provision for a fireplace in this room.

West wall: Modern lathe and plaster partition wall.

Floor: Modern timber floor.

Ceiling: Recent lathe and plaster.

Room S2 (rear attic chamber over cross-wing)

North wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches), concrete-based mortar, pebbledash external face with modern plaster skim internally.

East wall: Damaged lathe and plaster skin over truss assembly supporting the attic roof. A number of lighter timber studs provides an extension between the earlier timber frame and this assembly. The roof truss incorporates a reused tie-beam and principal rafter, but is otherwise a simple truss with raking struts incorporating lighter timber framing. The carpentry is jointed, but with smaller pegs. The infill between the studs is in 2¼ inch tall clamped brick, and the door into the room appears to be contemporary with the truss.

South wall: The lighter timber framing continues along this wall with studs and a wall plate (Plate 15). The infill is in 2¼ inch tall clamped brick, but above the wall plate there is a modern extension using 3 inch tall machine-cut brick. Again, the wall plate has been reused with large redundant mortices visible, but the actual assembly is still pegged.

West wall: Machine-cut, orange-red brick, (9½ by 4½ by 3 inches), concrete-based mortar, pebbledash external face with modern plaster skim internally.

Floor: Modern timber floor.

Ceiling: Recent lathe and plaster.

S3 (top of staircase)

As G3 and S3, below, but not replaced balustrade (Plate 16).

S4 (attic chamber over main range)

North wall: Main build is of 2¼ inch tall clamped red brick, including the extension of the chimney breast.

Again, there is no provision of a fireplace in this room. A large sunken cupboard is situated to the east of the chimneybreast, with steps down into it.

East wall: Main build is of 2¼ inch tall clamped red brick. The window is a larger and replacement of a dormer window.

South wall: Same build as the other walls.

West wall: Same build as the other walls, dormer window is probably original.

Floor: Water damaged oak boards.

Ceiling: Lathe and plaster with exposed purlins.

Roof assembly

With the exception of the two trusses and purlins noted above the rest of the roof appears to have been replaced in the 20th century.

Trial pits (Fig. 10)

TP1 (Plate 17)

TP1 was cut through the modern concrete floor of G1 to test if the cross-wing originally had an undercroft. The concrete floor proved to be a skim that overlay a timber floor that was inserted c. 0.4m beneath the sill beam of the timber-framed transverse partition wall. Under the floor was a cellar. The original build of the cellar consisted of regular, sawn, red sandstone blocks of ashlar quality bonded with lime-based mortar. The side faces of the blocks were finished with deep tool marks, possibly to aid the mortar to key the blocks together. The transverse timber-framed partition wall and the later walls built of machine-cut brick all used the sandstone wall as a foundation. There were various other brick walls and pillars inserted in front of the sandstone walls to support the inserted timber floor. The cellar was backfilled with building debris, including sandstone blocks from the lowered sections of cellar wall of the north, south and east walls of G1. This material was 20th-century in origin. While the cellar was only c. 1.3m deep relative to the modern floor level, the earlier height of the cellar increased to c. 1.7m when compared to the height of the sill beam of the transverse partition wall. This would be consistent with the height of a medieval undercroft. The line of the sandstone walls represented on Fig. 10 was the line of the inner timber-framed walls of the ground floor of the jetty build of the cross-wing. Therefore, the 20th-century rebuild of the exterior walls of the cross-wing followed that inner wall line, probably because there was a good foundation here. Therefore, the jetties were not underbuilt in brick to preserve the larger outline of the first floor above in the 20th century. However, there is photographic evidence to indicate that this more commonplace

modification had been made to the east elevation of the cross-wing sometime prior to 1930 (Plates 4 & 5). The cellar or undercroft was seen to extend under G2, in addition to G1. The dog-legged access way between the two cellars was seen in the east-facing section of TP1.

TP2 (Plate 18)

TP2 was cut through the modern concrete floor of G4 to test if any remains of earlier floor surfaces or the foundations for the spere truss of the cross-passage entry of a medieval hall had survived. Under the concrete floor the foundation of the 2¼ inch tall brick build of the west wall of the main range was seen to cut a c. 0.15m deep surface of compressed brown clay floor surface. The clay floor surface was built up against an east-west aligned foundation of roughly hewn sandstone blocks bonded with lime-based mortar seen in the south-facing section of TP2 (Plate 18). The location and alignment of this sandstone foundation indicates that it was the foundation of the spere truss of the cross-passage. This sandstone foundation was also cut by the later foundation of the brick-built west wall. In turn, the brown clay floor surface sealed a pit cut into the weathered grey clay subsoil, but no dateable material was recovered from its fill. Stratigraphically, the pit was clearly cut before the construction of the spere truss foundation.

TP3 (Plate 19)

TP3 was cut along the line of a proposed foundation for an extension to the south range of the survey building to test if any archaeological deposits may be disturbed. The results were negative in that the trench demonstrated that the modern ground surface, represented by a band of broken up tarmac, immediately sealed the clean red clay subsoil. The only feature observed in the trench was associated with the foundation of the southern gable wall of the south range of the survey building. Here, the foundation comprised a linear cut containing clean grey clay. The external brick wall of the survey building was built directly off this clay foundation.

TP4

TP4 was dug to test the survival of evidence for an upper end to the medieval hall. Like TP2, a compressed floor surface of brown clay was identified, sealed between the concrete floor and the clean clay subsoil.

Interpretation (Figs. 7–10)

For analytical purposes the development of the surveyed building can be summarised within five main phases. Broadly speaking, the current survey follows the general outline presented in the RCHME survey of 1994, but it is able to elaborate upon this scheme of change. The surveyed building illustrates several of the classic features of the development of the English house between the medieval period and the 20th century. This development included a process called alternate rebuilding, which is a characteristic of timber-framed structures. This term is used to describe how a series of stand alone units, cross-wing, main range and upper range, which together form the totality of the timber-framed building, was often replaced independent of one another.

The preliminary phase, Phase 0 (Fig. 10), is only represented by the survival of buried archaeological remains, although it is also indirectly attested through a lingering effect on the form of the later development of the standing building. The roughly hewn sandstone foundation seen in TP2 represents the line of a spere truss located at the lower end of a medieval hall dividing this hall from the cross-passage entrance. The hall was located where the brick-built main range now stands and was probably very similar in size. The typical medieval hall was the main communal room of a house, with a centrally placed hearth and a trampled clay floor, like that seen in TP2. The hall was open to the roof to allow smoke from the fire to disperse. The classic medieval arrangement was for the

service range to be located off the cross-passage, and for the private rooms of the owner to be located on the other, or upper, side of the hall. At Merridale in the medieval period the service wing was at the north end of the house and the upper end of the house was on the southern side of the hall overlooking the valley of the Graiseley Brook. The trampled clay floor found in TP4 may relate to the floor of the upper range of the house.

Phase 1 is represented by the timber-framed elements of the cross-wing and its sandstone undercroft or cellar (Figs. 7 & 10). The transverse partition wall, from the sill beam to the top of the second panel of framing on the first floor, and the frames of the ground-floor ceiling on either side are the main elements to survive, together with parts of the southern wall frame. The cross-wing was originally jettied on three sides. Dragon beams survive in both rooms of the wing and all the main timbers are chamfered and stopped against each other. In addition, the joists for the jetties are pegged into the dragon beams and the whole construction is of high quality. The ground floor panelling of the transverse partition wall consisted of four pairs of roughly 4 feet square panels, while the first floor consisted of five pairs of slightly smaller panels, together with straight downward braces. This pattern was repeated in the panelling of the north-facing jettied first floor (Fig. 5), and it is reasonable to assume that this was the overall style of the cross-wing. The cross-wing was located at the service end of the house. It was probably a rebuild of an earlier service wing, and this may explain its division into two rooms. However, it is also clear that the front room was the more important, given the quality of the carpentry. There would have been access to both rooms from the cross-passage.

Phase 2 involved the rebuilding of the hall range into a two-storied block, and the insertion of a brick-built chimneystack into the area formerly occupied by the cross-passage. This stack heated both the rebuilt hall and the cross-wing. The hearth tax return listing six hearths in the late 17th century suggests that the upper end of the house was heated.

Phase 3 involved an extensive set of modifications to the surveyed building. The gabled stair tower was added first, which provided access to the additional attic accommodation. Over those elements of the timber frame of the cross-wing that were retained a combination of light timber framing and brick infill was used, presumably because it was lighter. The rest of the stair tower and the walls of the main hall range were rebuilt in brick, retaining the timber floor frame. A pair of brick stringcourses accentuated the original floor levels of the main and south ranges. Contemporary with these alterations, the smaller southern range was built, probably replacing a timber-framed upper range. However, the new southern range was a service range. The attic rooms were lit by a set of dormer windows, and the roof purlins were supported by a combination of timber trusses or load-bearing brick walls, including the chimney stack, which was extended to ensure the continued operation of the flues above the higher roof line. However, there was no evidence that the attic rooms were heated. The window arrangement depicted on the photographs of the surveyed building taken in 1930 may be survivals from this phase, although both casement and sash windows are types that were in use over a long period of time from the 18th century into the 20th century. However, the small panes of glass in the sashes indicate that these windows were earlier rather than later, and the brickwork

used to infill the east-facing jetty of the cross-wing into which the lower casement window is set looks similar in form to that used in the main brick build. The entrance to the house from the door at the south end of the main range is probably contemporary with this phase. The earlier elements of build within the dairy block probably post-date Phase 3, but their precise origins cannot be accurately delineated.

Phase 4 is a catch-all phase that includes various campaigns of repair undertaken in the 20th century. The alterations made to the dairy, including a new quarry tile floor and insertion of access doors between it and the passage and pantry to the south, all date to 1911. The concrete skim to the passage was also undertaken at this time, presumably as an aid to hygiene, and the ground floor of the cross-wing was replaced. The main set of alterations occurred after 1930, when the function of the surveyed building changed from a farmhouse and dairy to a set of shops. This involved the wholesale removal of the ground-floor frontages of the east-facing elevation, earlier work above being supported on rolled-steel I-beams. At the same time the east, west and north-facing elevations of the cross-wing were taken down and replaced with machine-cut brick walls built off the foundation provided by the sandstone walls of the undercroft. This involved the cutting of timbers associated with the wider upper floors down to the size of the smaller ground-floor plan. At the same time, the dairy was converted into a pantry and a new access way into the southern range was inserted that gave access to the accommodation over the shop fronts. The ground-floor chimneystack was removed, but the upper part was supported on RSJs. The roof was extensively repaired on several occasions throughout the 20th century, such that very little early work has survived.

Dating

In spite of the extensive alterations that have taken place to the surveyed building, it is possible to propose a broad series of dates for each of the phases of development outlined above. This dating is dependant upon stylistic parallels in terms of the development of timber framing, broader comparison with general phases of improvement to houses, and the size of bricks employed in various builds. The broad dating of each phase proposed here corresponds to that offered by the RCHME survey of 1994. Phase 0 is medieval in date, conforming as it does to the medieval tradition of a house plan centred around an open hall, with a cross-passage, service and upper ranges. There is insufficient evidence to give a precise date for this phase, but the use of a sandstone sill foundation was an innovation that began to be widely used from the 13th century onwards. This correlates with the first documentary references to the association of the Salford family with Merridale. It may also make sense in terms of the later replacement of the out of date hall some three hundred years later in the late 16th or early 17th century (Phase 2). The square panelled carpentry of the Phase 1 cross-wing is a typical West Midlands style, which, when considered with the quality of the jetty work and the chamfer stops of the main beams, probably dates to between 1450 and 1500. The provision of a brick-built chimney within the former area occupied by the cross-passage became an increasingly common adaptation of the medieval hall in the later 16th and early 17th centuries (Phase 2), along with the subdivision of the open hall into two storeys of heated accommodation. The

style of the carpentry of the floor frame of the main range, including the deep chamfers and ogee stops, is also broadly applicable to this period. The size and style of the brickwork belonging to Phase 3 is late 17th-or early 18th-century in character. This period is also consistent with the composite use of light timber framing with brick noggin, and the addition of attic accommodation. Finally, the materials used in the Phase 4 alterations to the surveyed building are consistent with an early 20th-century date, typical materials including the use of rolled steel I-beams, concrete-based mortar and machine-cut brick

Conclusions

Before outlining a set of recommendations in mitigation of the proposed redevelopment of the building, a few more general conclusions may be offered concerning its broader development, not based upon direct structural evidence. One of the striking points about the development of the surveyed building was the way in which the 'memory' of a much older plan arrangement tended to persist in later phases of building. This was particularly apparent in the case of the cross-passage. The insertion of a chimneystack here was a common and obvious location for this type of early post-medieval (Phase 2) improvement. However, it left a problem in terms of the use of space on either side of the stack. One of the most common solutions in houses of this period was to retain the main entrance as a small front lobby. From the lobby access was then available to the front room of the cross-wing and the main range. Generally, a staircase was also inserted behind the chimneystack. This was probably the case at Merridale farmhouse, because the survival of the first-floor frame of the cross-wing demonstrates that there was no staircase here. However, no direct evidence for such a staircase was found during the survey. But it is interesting to note that the Phase 2 floor joists do not continue to the rear of the stack at first-floor level, and the space in front of the stack remained an awkward space to be filled with cupboards in later periods. Furthermore, when the Phase 3 improvements were carried out in brick, the choice for the location of the stair tower may have been determined by this earlier structural arrangement, as the width of the stairwell mirrors that of the earlier, and long since disappeared, cross-passage.

Another feature of Merridale farmhouse is the conservatism of the 18th century (Phase 3) rebuild, where alternative structural layouts presented by building in brick, such as the double-pile plan, were deliberately ignored. This conservatism may have been indicative of the social status of the building, or of its builders, at that time. Here, it is instructive to compare the conservative development of Merridale farmhouse with that of a neighbour, Old Fallings Hall, Bushbury, which was also remodelled in brick in the 18th century. At Old Fallings there was a deliberate adoption of a double-pile plan, and an architect working on behalf of the Gough family employed principals of symmetry and classical architecture in a design which looked away from the farmyard towards manicured parkland and gardens. In contrast, Merridale farmhouse remained rooted in a sub-medieval tradition of gabled manor houses that were one room deep. The switch of the upper and service ends of the house may have been indicative of the growing importance of the farmyard. And, it was probably at this time that the entrance changed from the lobby to its location at the lower end of the main range, as depicted on photographs of

1930. In addition, the provision of unheated attic accommodation may have been for resident farm workers, such as milkmaids.

Perhaps, the closest local parallel to Merridale farmhouse is Northcote Farm in Bushbury (Plate 20). This farmstead was the residence of the Underhills, a family of middling importance in medieval Wolverhampton, like the Salford family. At Northcote Farm a basic medieval plan was progressively remodelled in the post-medieval period, whilst retaining a gabled, one room deep, farmhouse plan. Furthermore, the c.1500 service range was also of unusually high quality, with jetties on three sides. The final local parallel to draw attention to is Old Moseley Hall, also in Bushbury (Plate 21). Here, the remodelling of the house involved cladding the timber-framed manor house with a set of external brick walls. Like Merridale farmhouse, these brick walls incorporated a set of stringcourses to emphasise the floor levels inside the building, although the brickwork here is about 100 years later.

Recommendations

The current survey has confirmed the importance of Old Merridale Farmhouse and Dairy as an extraordinary survival of elements of a late-medieval building with a historically informative series of alterations up to and including the 18th century. A programme of trial pitting has further established that there is good survival of buried archaeological deposits that have potential to shed a great deal of light on the earlier periods of development of the property. Against this background the following recommendations are offered as a guide for the proposed refurbishment works in order that these take cognisance of the historical importance of the overall site.

Below-ground archaeology

It is recommended that wherever feasible significant buried archaeological deposits or features are preserved *in situ*. Consideration should be given to the reuse of existing drain or service runs in order to minimise any disturbance to the buried archaeology. However, there may be areas where these aims are impractical to achieve, and here provision should be made for a further programme of recording during development work.

The historic building

All refurbishment works to the building should seek to maintain and preserve those historic elements of the structure that have been demonstrated to survive. Where feasible, this should include all areas identified as belonging to Phases 0-3, i.e. up to, and including, the 18th-century redesign of the property. Recognised standards of conservation or restoration should be adhered to for these historic elements, wherever feasible. However, it is recognised that this ideal may not be achievable in each and every scenario. Here provision should be made for recording of any elements of the historic structure that may be lost, if these are not already included in the current survey. While the current survey has established most of the readable developmental history of the

standing building, it would nevertheless be desirable for a further programme of recording to take place after all faulty plasterwork has been stripped and after the roof space is clear and accessible. In particular the opportunity to look at the chimneystack is particularly desirable, as this may confirm the presence of an earlier staircase here. In addition, more information may be gleaned about earlier access and flow patterns around the building.

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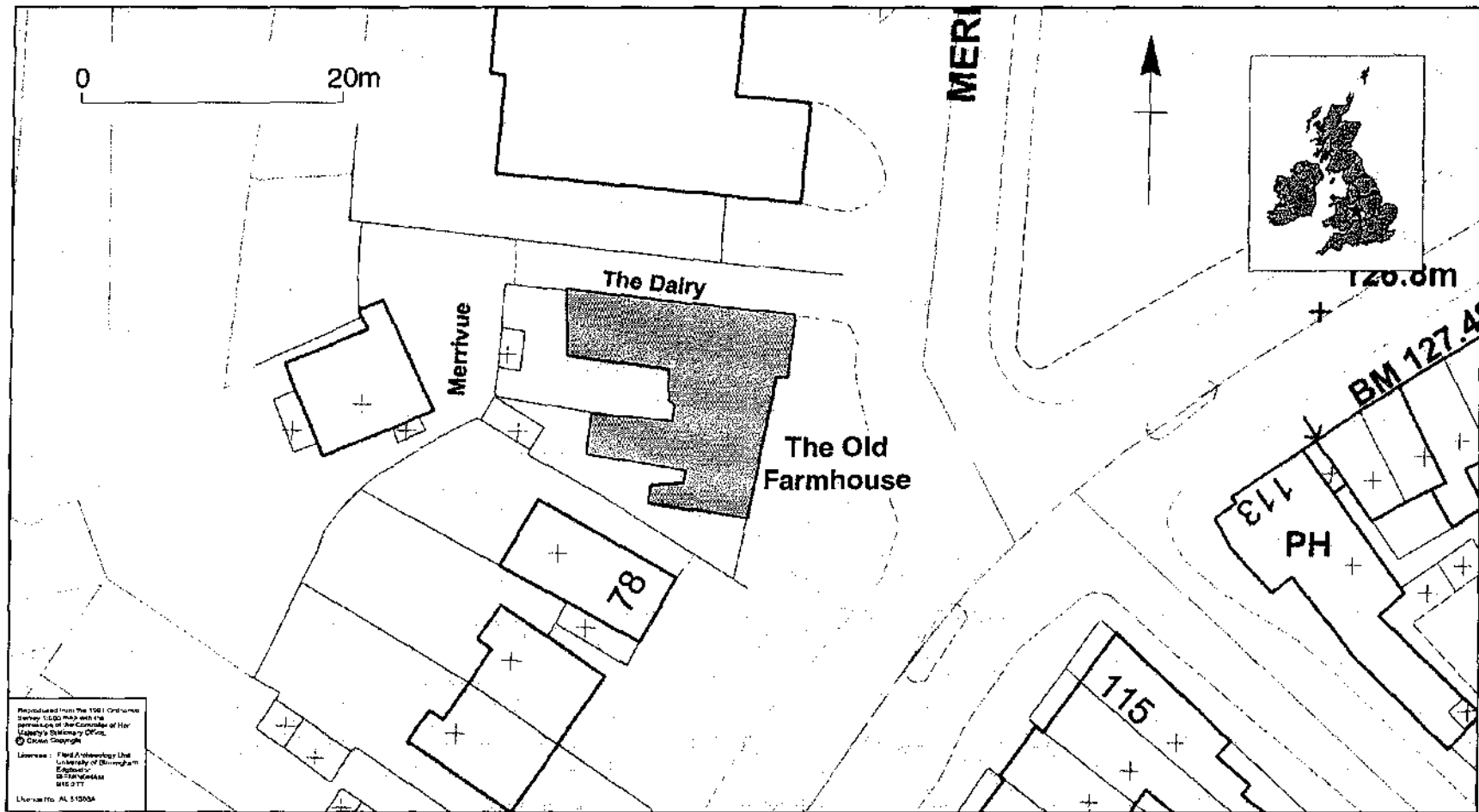


Fig.1

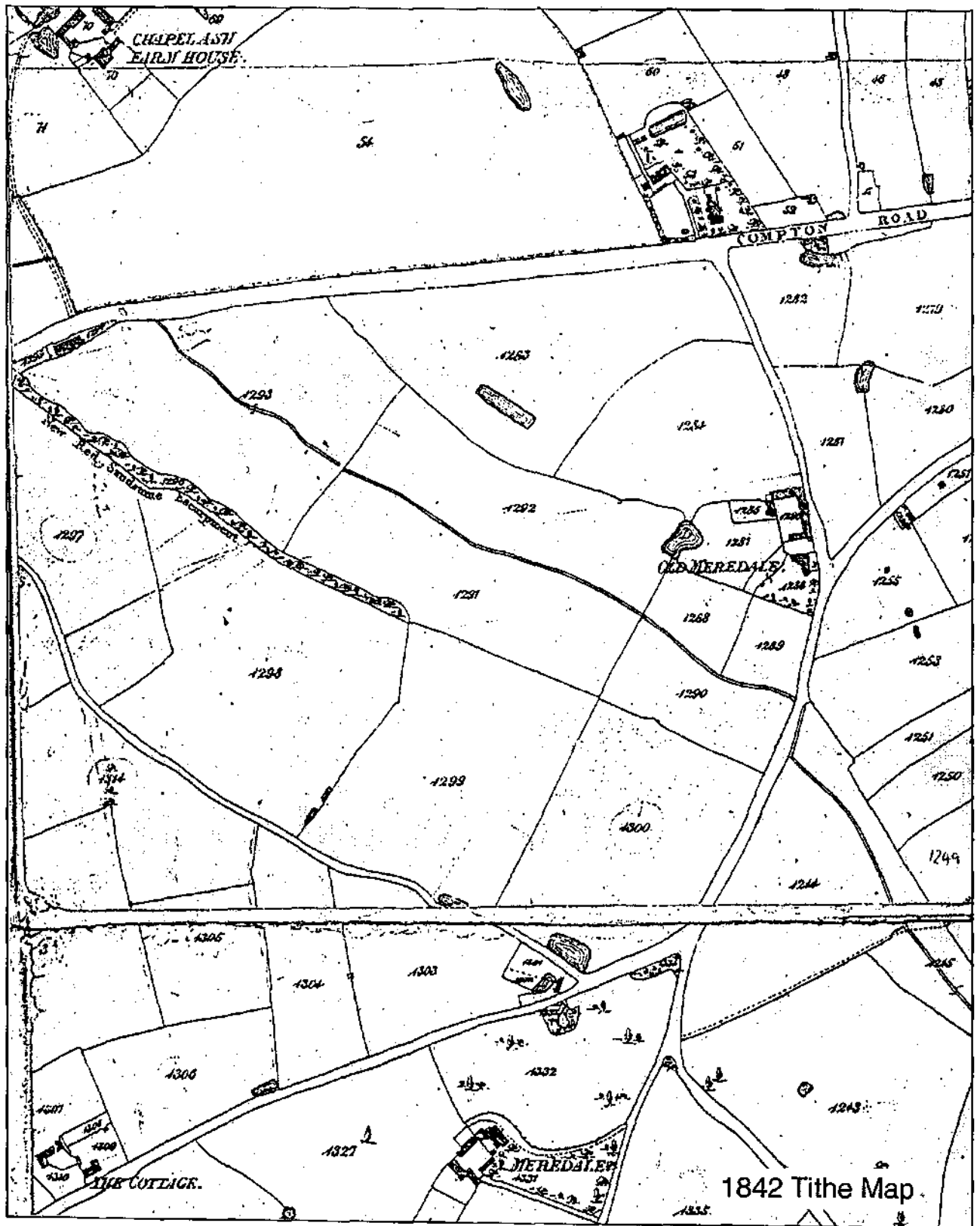


Fig.2

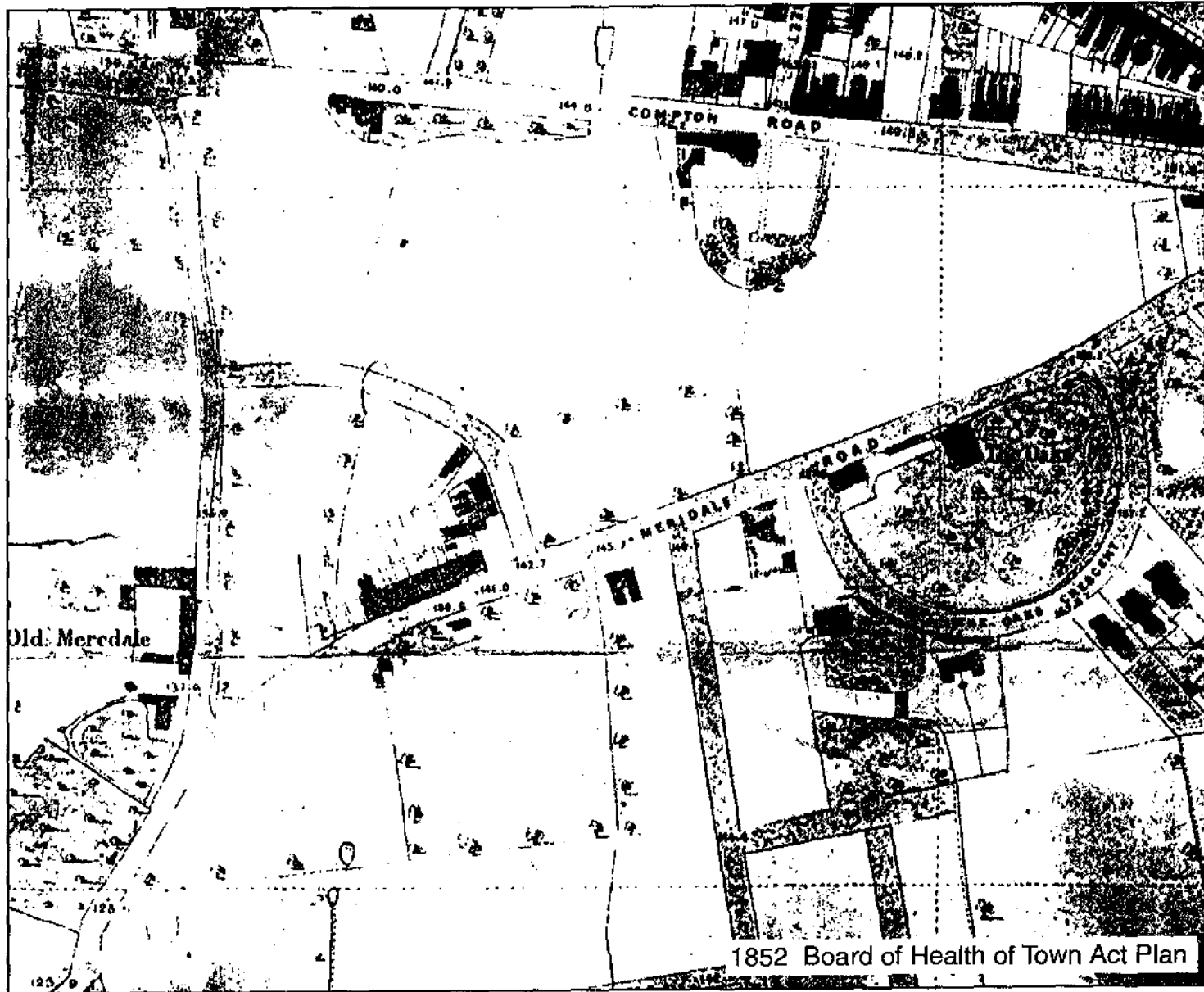


Fig.3

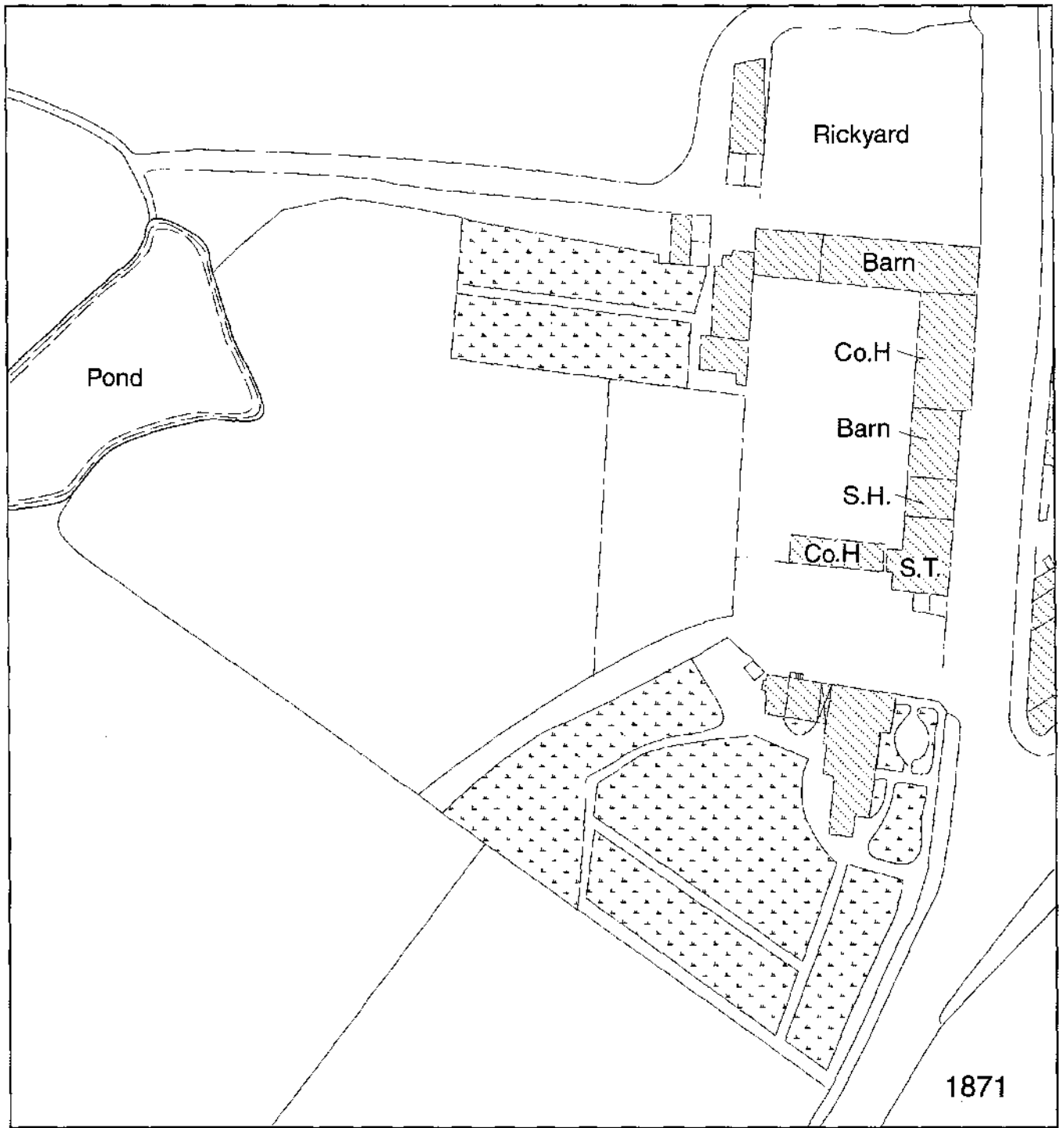


Fig.4

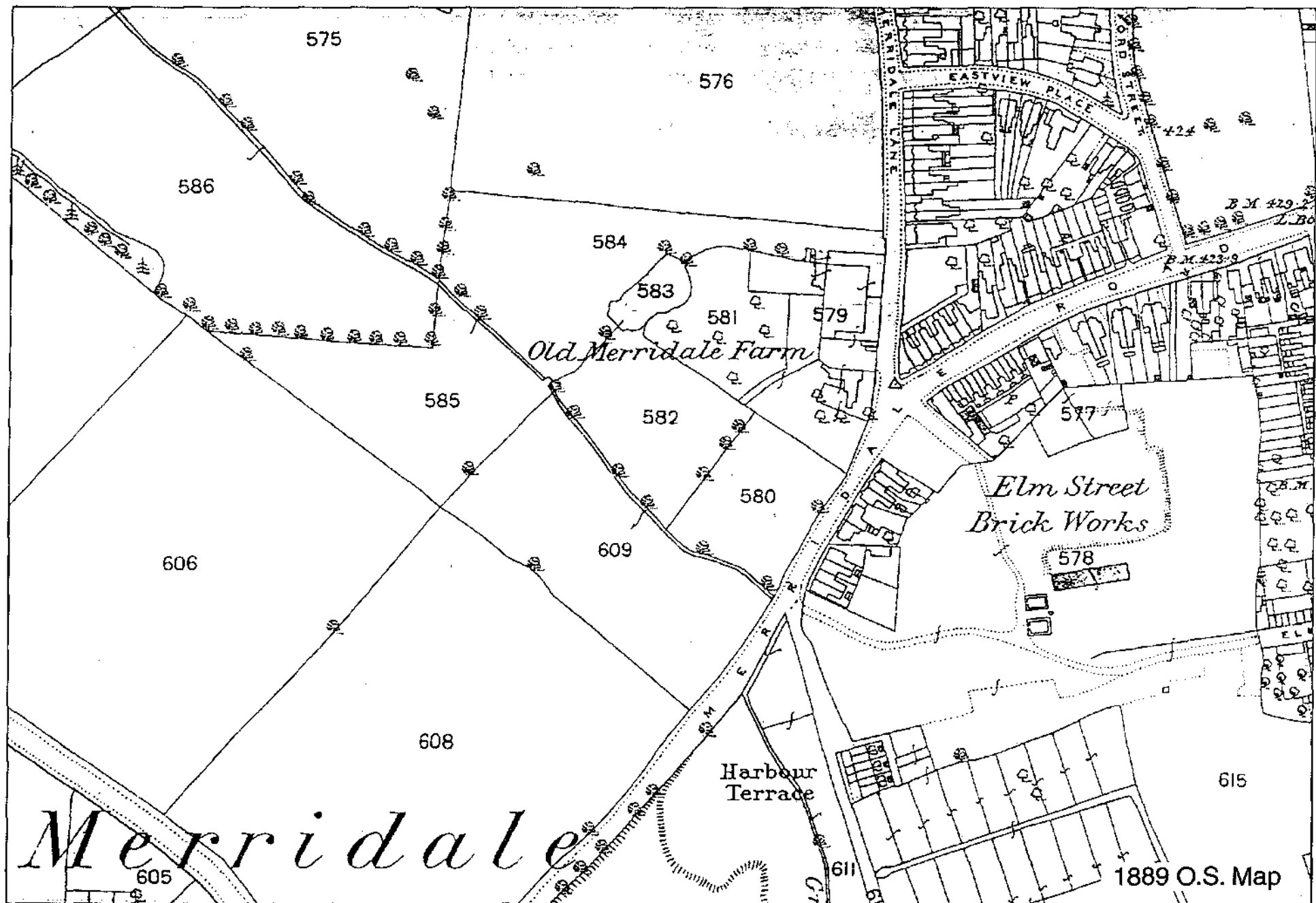


Fig.5

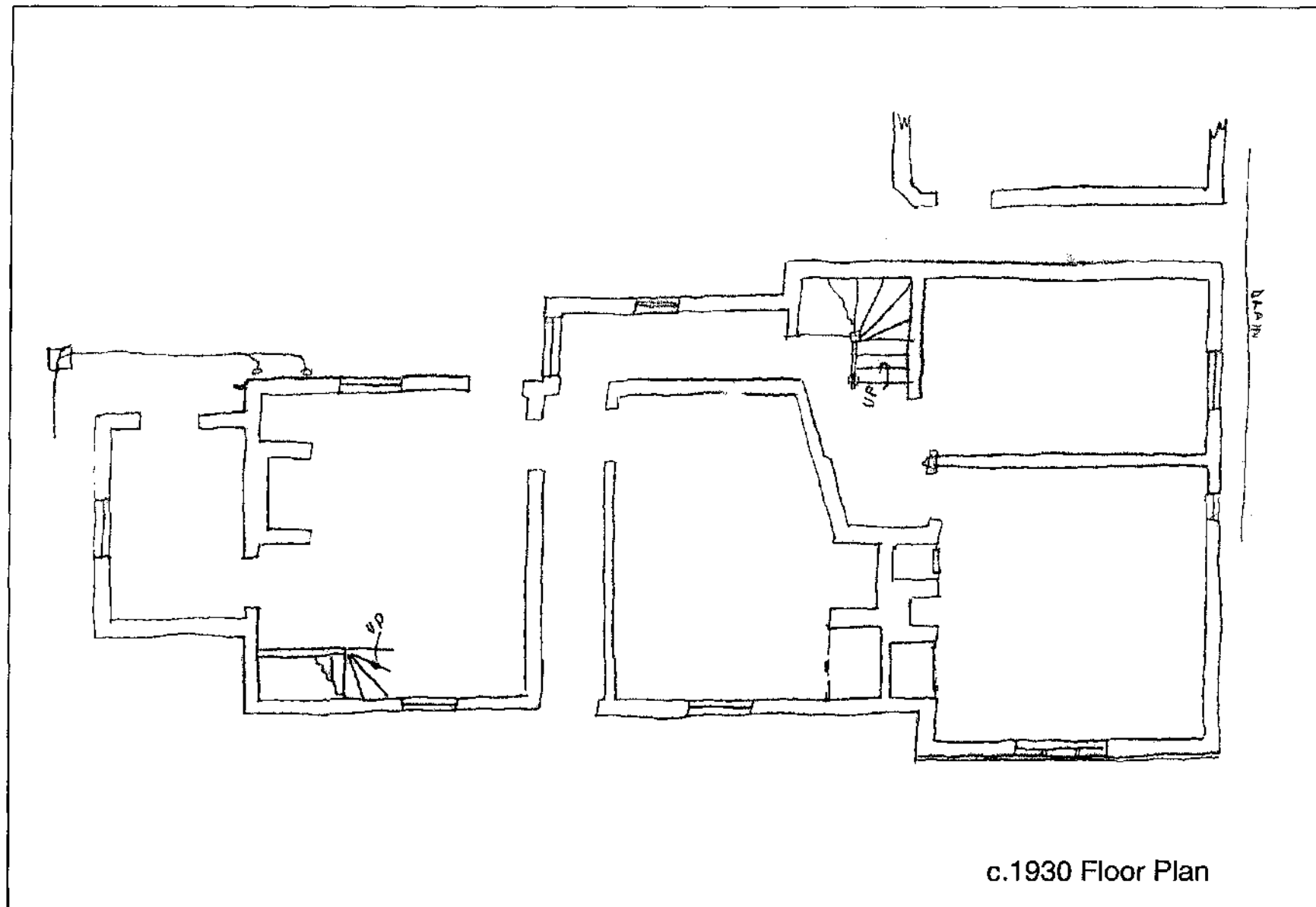





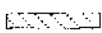
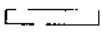
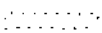
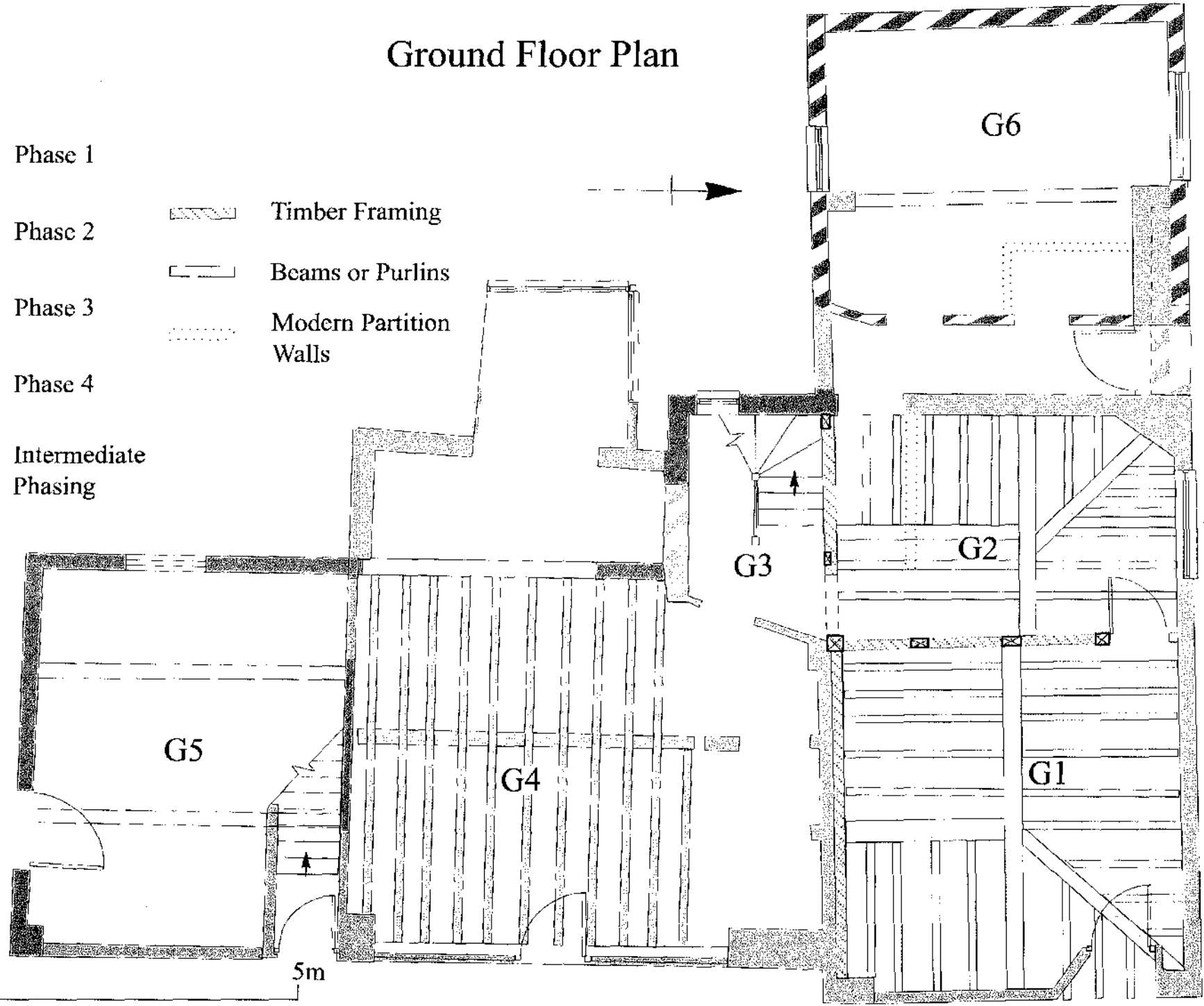


Fig.6

Ground Floor Plan

-  Phase 1
-  Phase 2
-  Phase 3
-  Phase 4
-  Intermediate Phasing
-  Timber Framing
-  Beams or Purlins
-  Modern Partition Walls



0

5m

Fig.7

First Floor Plan

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

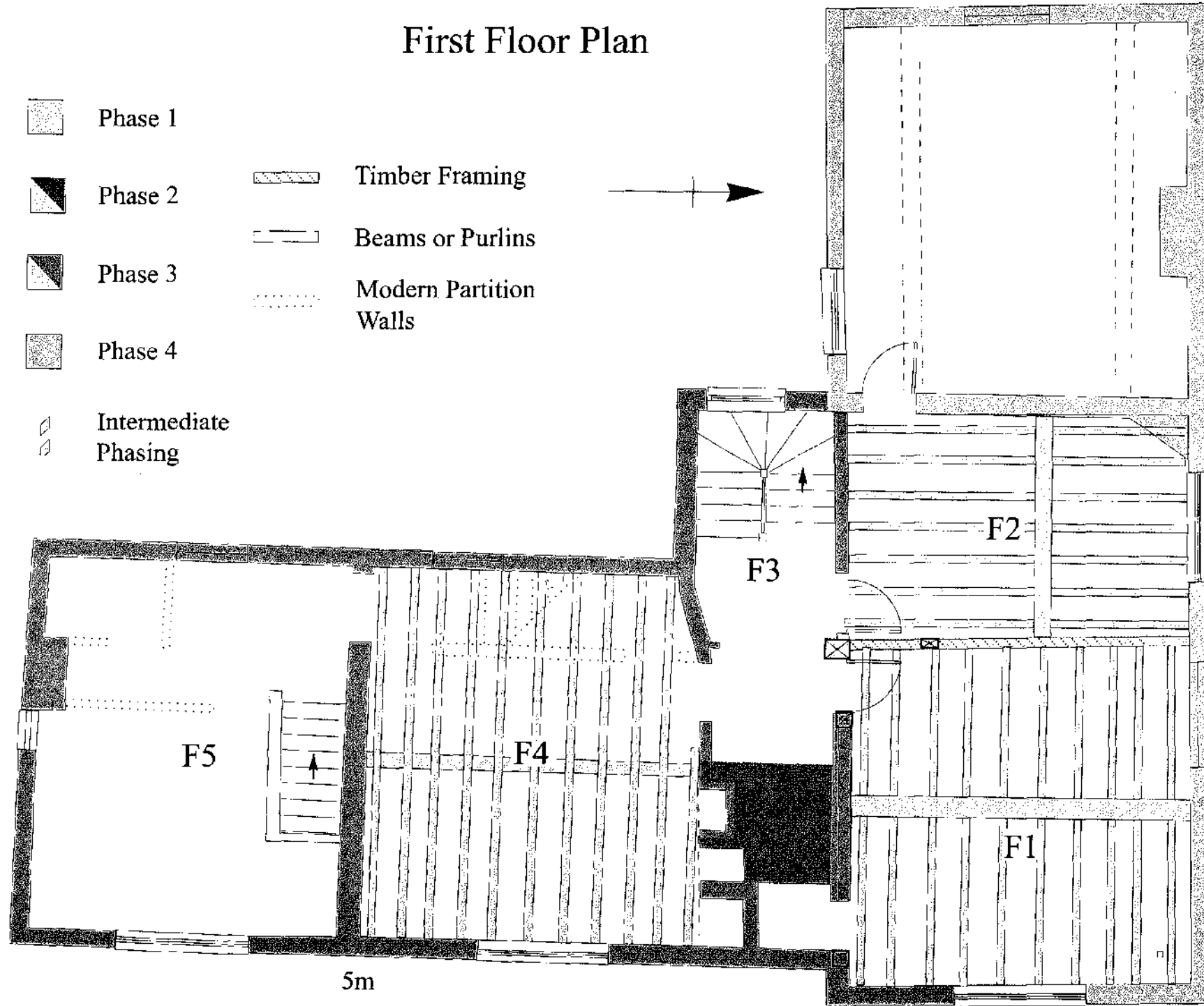
Phase 4

Intermediate Phasing

Timber Framing

Beams or Purlins

Modern Partition Walls



0

5m

Fig.8

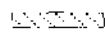
Second Floor Plan



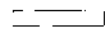
Phase 3



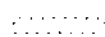
Phase 4



Timber Framing



Beams or Purlins



Modern Partition
Walls

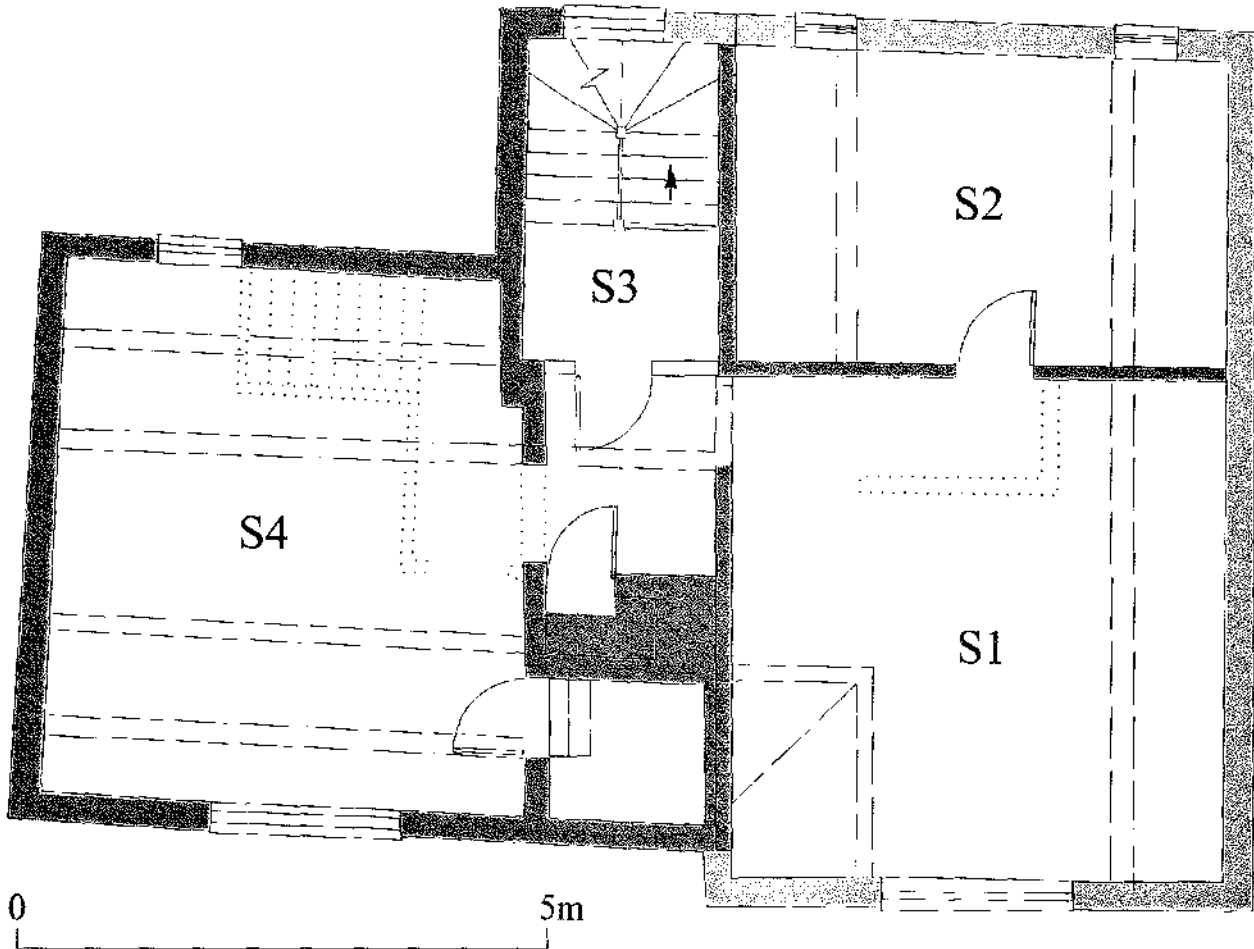


Fig.9

Undercroft Plan

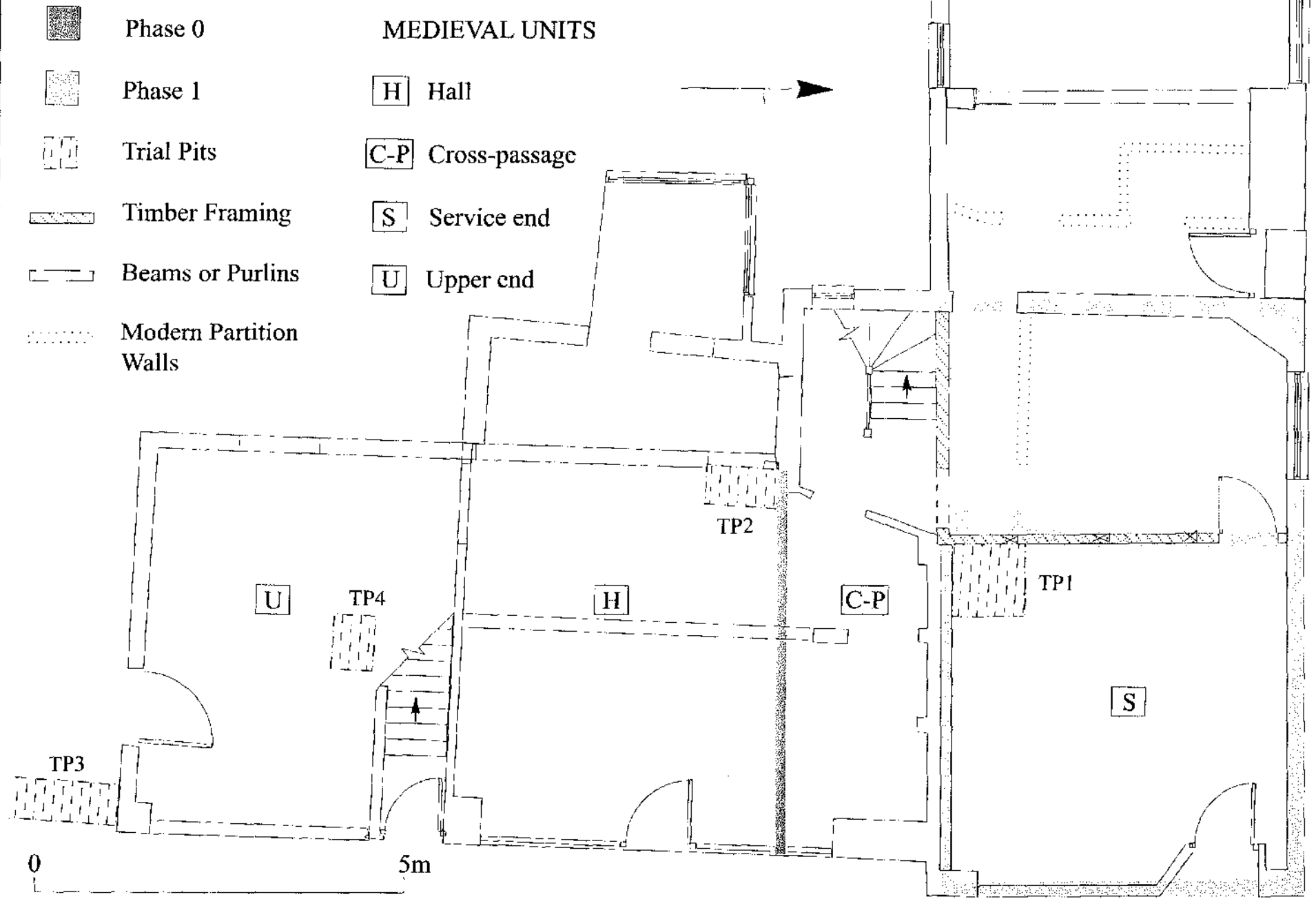


Fig.10



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

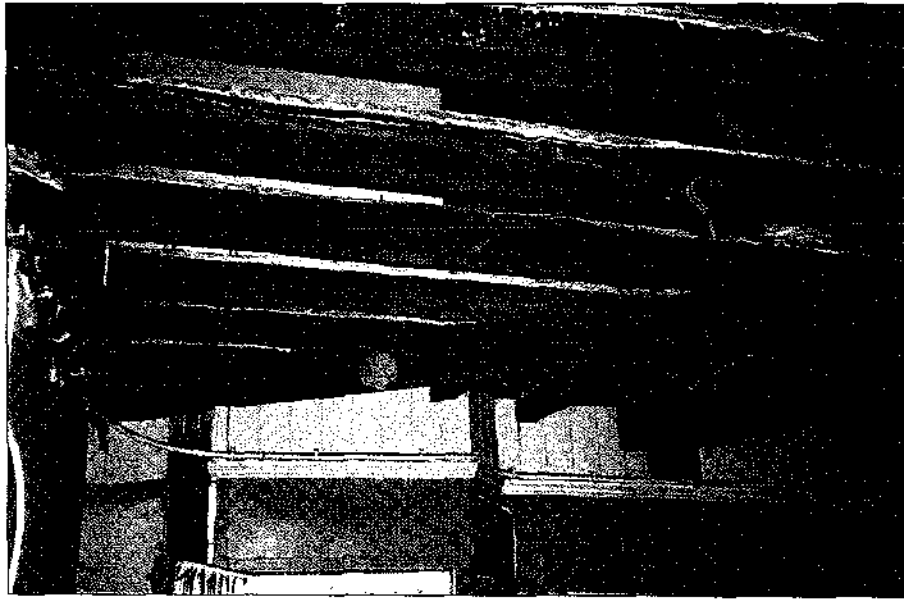


Plate 6



Plate 7

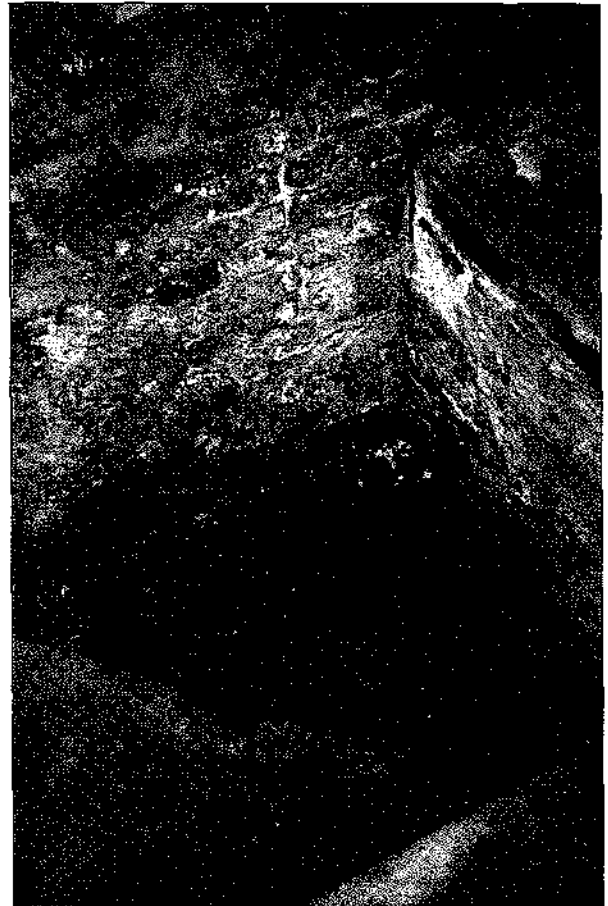


Plate 8



Plate 9

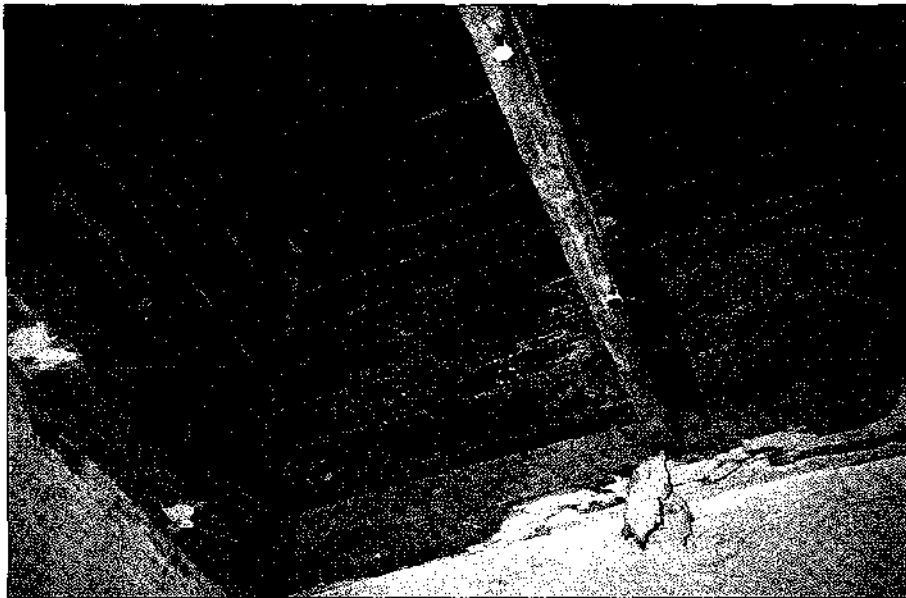


Plate 10

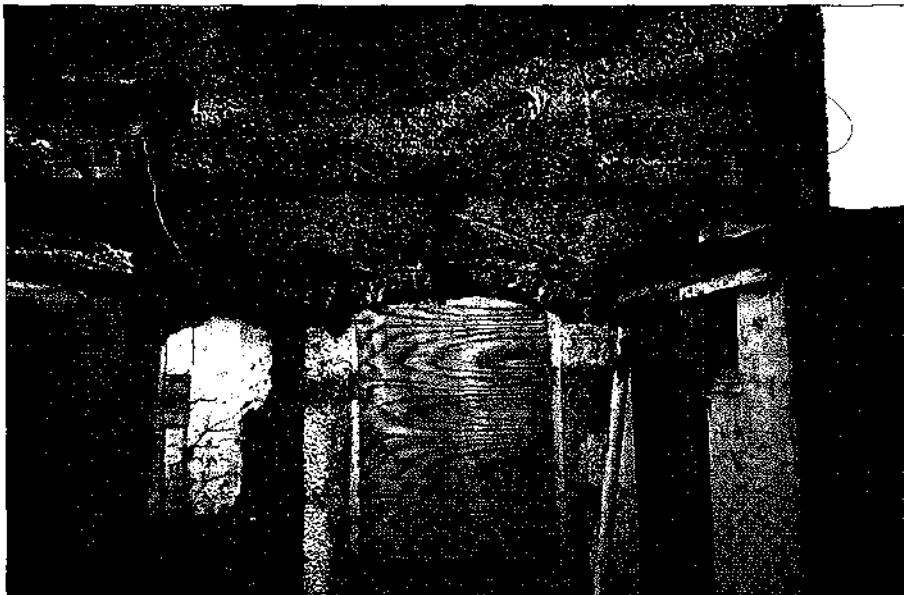


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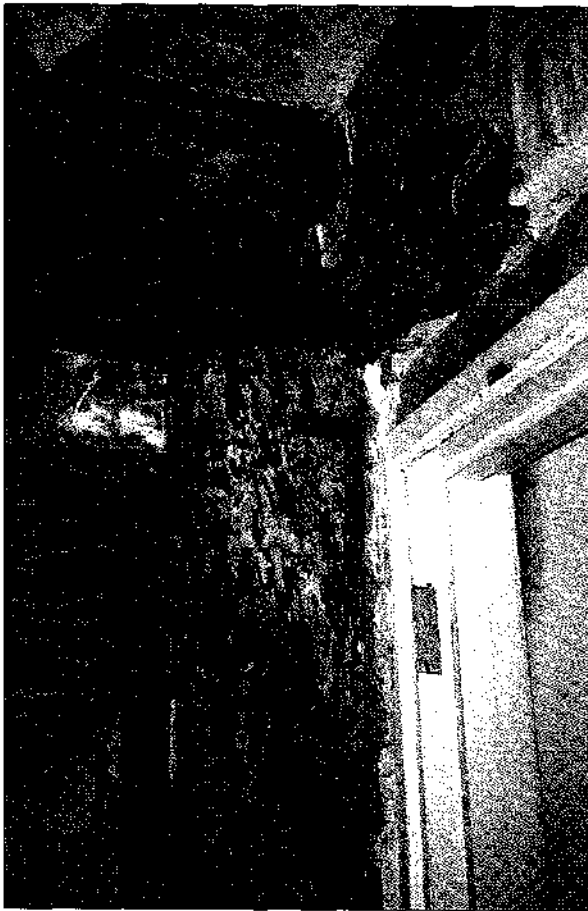


Plate 12



Plate 13

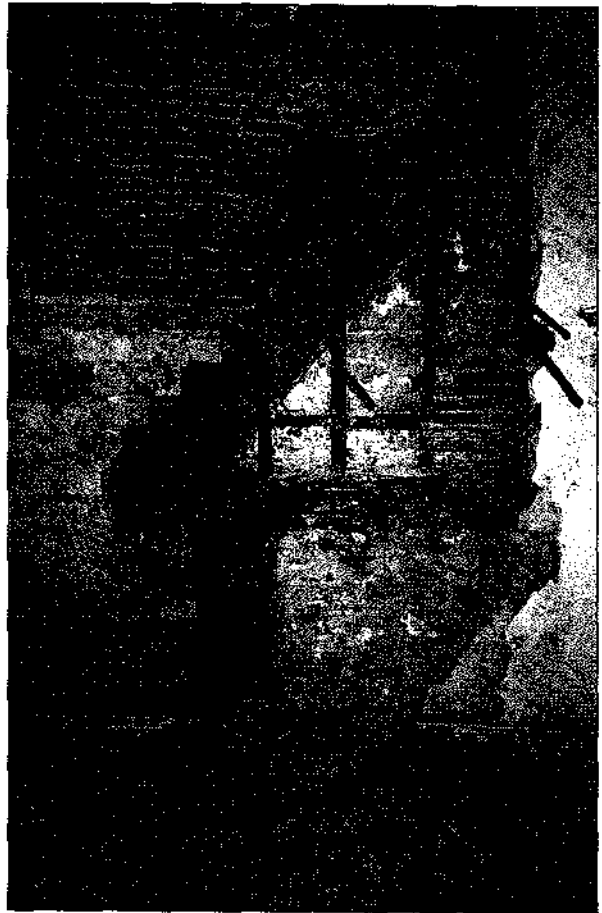


Plate 14



Plate 15

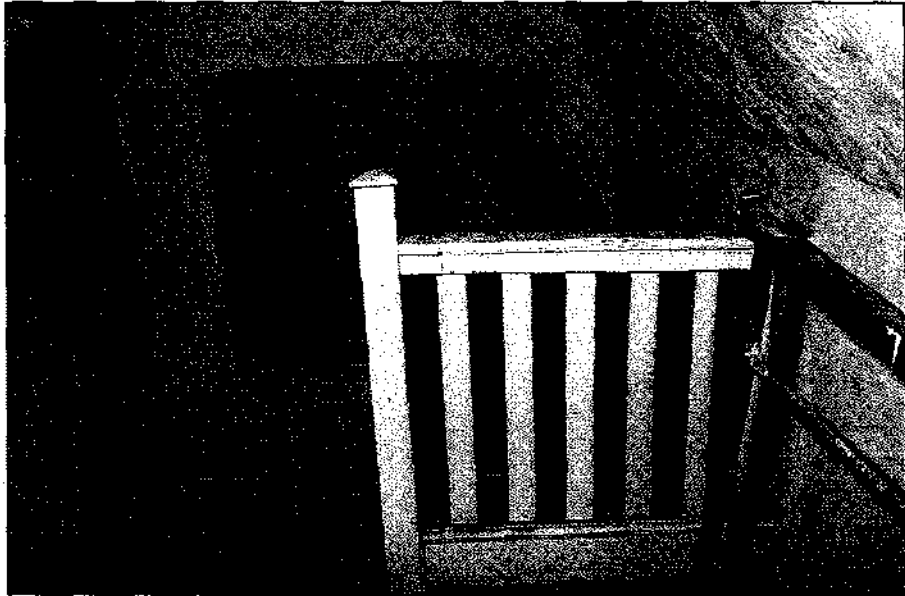


Plate 16

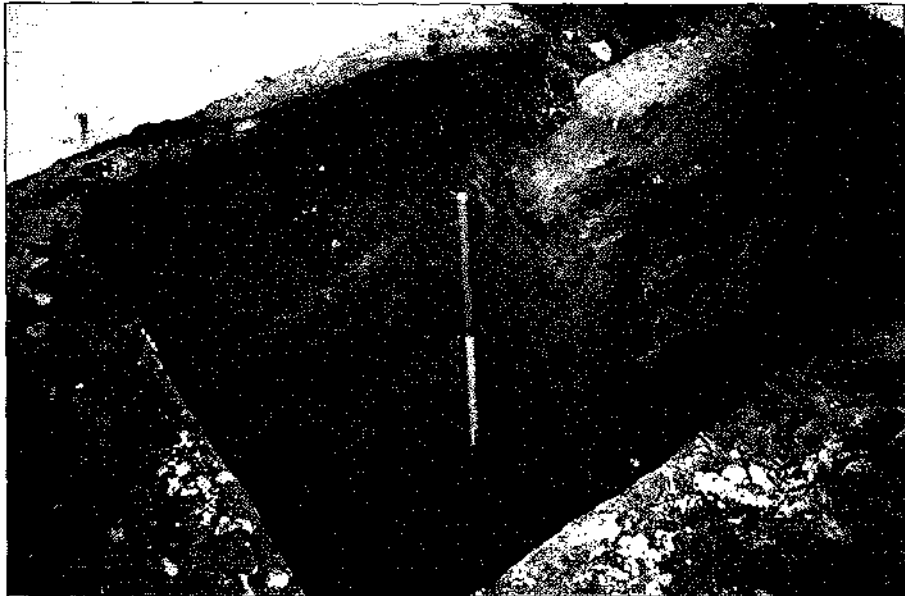


Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21

