

# WITLEY COURT

Great Witley, Worcestershire.

The Archaeological Excavation of the Floor within the  
Veterinary's Room



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**Witley Court,  
Great Witley, Worcestershire.**

**The Archaeological excavation of the Floor within the  
Veterinary's Room.**

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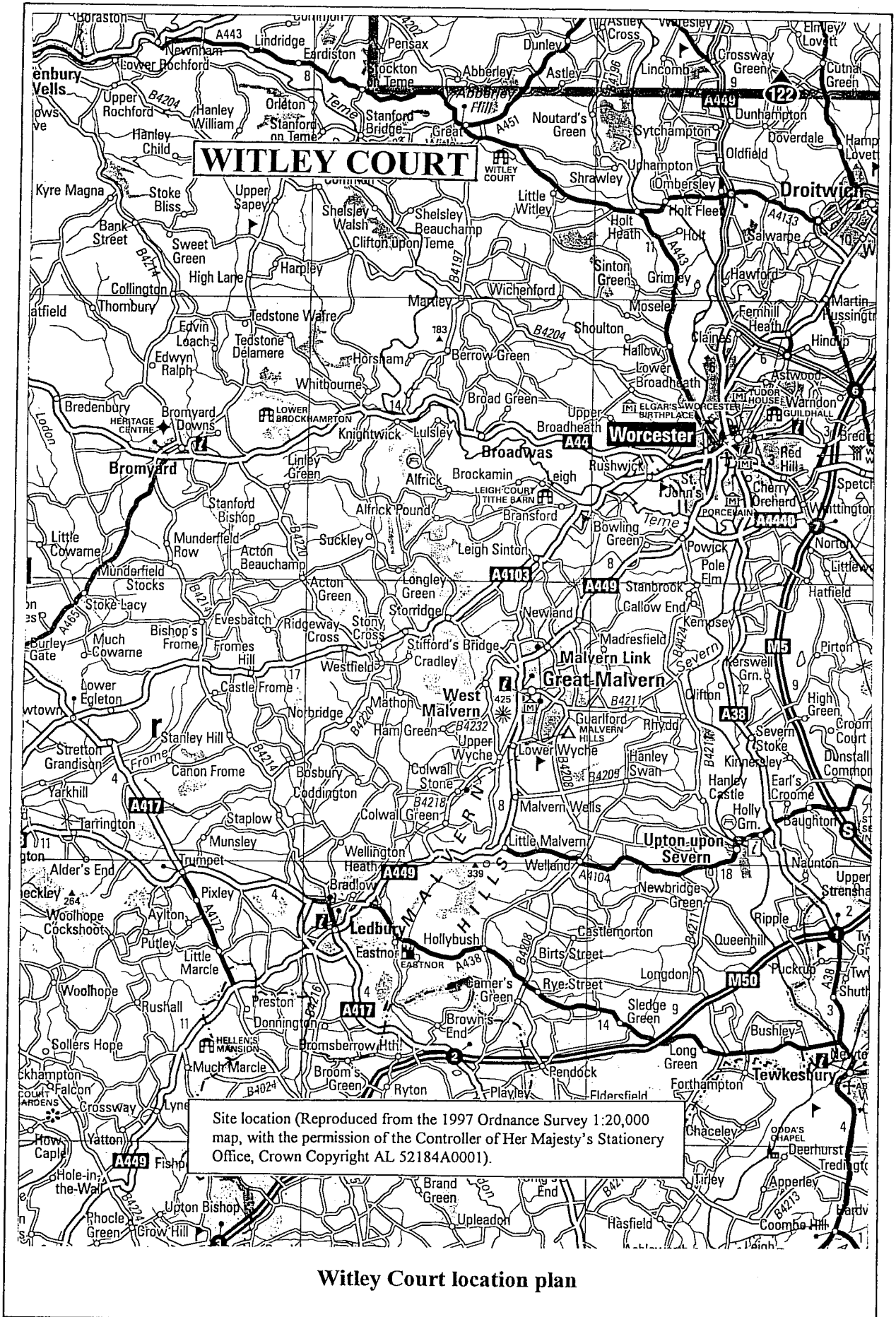
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**March 1998**

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**WITLEY COURT**

**Worcester**

**Great Malvern**

**Ledbury**

**Tewkesbury**

Site location (Reproduced from the 1997 Ordnance Survey 1:20,000 map, with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright AL 52184A0001).

**Witley Court location plan**

# Witley Court, Great Witley, Worcestershire.

## The Archaeological Excavation of the floor within the Veterinary's Room

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### Introduction.

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Archaeological Investigations Ltd. received a request from Dr. Glyn Coppack (English Heritage, Properties in care Midland Region), for the submission of proposals for the recording of the entrance to the stable yard and related rooms and the excavation and removal of a portion of the floor within the veterinary's room, (to the south of the entrance gate), to facilitate the repair of drains which, it was suspected, had collapsed causing the floor to subside.

The project proposals were accepted on the 26th June 1995 and the survey work was undertaken between September and November 1995. The excavation could not proceed until the building work associated with the reinstatement of the cupola allowed the removal of the scaffolding from the veterinary's room. Excavation work started on the 27th April 1997.

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### Historical Outline

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Witley Court is a multi-period mansion with elements dating back to the medieval period, notably an undercroft beneath the main hall range that probably dates to the 13th century (Morriss, 1990). The main house is a large brick-built half-H shaped pile probably dating from the mid-17th century. The house may have been built by Sir William Russell, whose family had owned Witley since 1498 (Walker, 1990, 7). Sir William, a staunch Royalist, was High Sheriff and Governor of Worcester during the Civil War (*op. cit.* 15). In 1655 his son sold Witley to Thomas Foley, a wealthy ironmaster (*ibid.*).

In the second quarter of the 18th century the house was modernised, with flanking pavilions attached by curving screen walls to the ends of the long north wings in the

fashionable Palladian manner. One, at least, of these pavilions contained stabling - a common enough feature of such a design. In the same period the medieval church was demolished and replaced by the present one, attributed to James Gibb, and built next to the house. At the end of the century, and in the early part of the next, considerable alterations were again made. These included the demolition of the Palladian pavilions and the creation of a new service and stable area to the west of the main house.

For over half a century Witley Court was one of the largest private houses in the country and one of its most fashionable - visited by aristocracy and royalty. By 1920 even the massive Dudley fortunes were waning and the house was sold to Sir Herbert Smith. In 1937 a fire gutted part of the house and Smith was unwilling or unable to repair it. The house was sold again - but this time for architectural salvage. For the next half century it was stripped of all its finery and most of the easily transportable building materials. It became, in the words of Pevsner, '*a palace, regal in size and grandeur....a supremely splendid shell*' (Pevsner, 1968, 171; 173). Finally, to prevent any more losses, the Court was taken into compulsory guardianship by the Department of the Environment in 1972. They began a programme of consolidation and repair that, since its creation in 1984, has been continued by English Heritage.

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### Architectural Description By R. K. Morriss

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The large stables were laid out to the west of the main house and to the south of the high ground on which the 18th century church stands. In the final phase of additions to Witley Court they were hidden from view in the main vistas of the house - by the church in views from the north, and by the Conservatory, Italian Garden and Quadrant Block in views from the south.

Basically the stables consisted of two long ranges on either side of a courtyard with gatehouse blocks at the west and east ends. Further west, flanking the entrance into the stables from the parkland, are a pair of identical pavilions with overhanging low-pitched roofs. These were the carriage sheds.

The western gatehouse has been rebuilt as part of the present restoration scheme, and its first floor has been almost completely replaced. The cupola on top is, however, older, having been carefully removed some time ago from the building. It is in the process of being re-erected and repaired.

The brick-built, but later stuccoed, range is mainly of two storeys, although the southernmost part of it appears to have originally been just one storey high. On the east elevation, to the south of the south range there is a vertical construction break in the visible walling at first-floor level but not below. The stucco hides more of the brickwork and it is just possible that this break is associated with the blocking of a window - but this seems unlikely. Where the brickwork is visible, it is of white-washed hand-made reds laid in a plain three-leaf (1½ brick thick) English bond.

The central passageway through the block (Fig. 1) was flanked by rooms to the north and south. The area at the southern end was incorporated into the stores and seems to

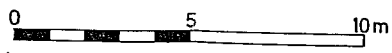
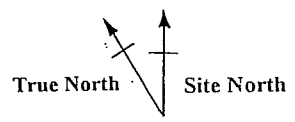
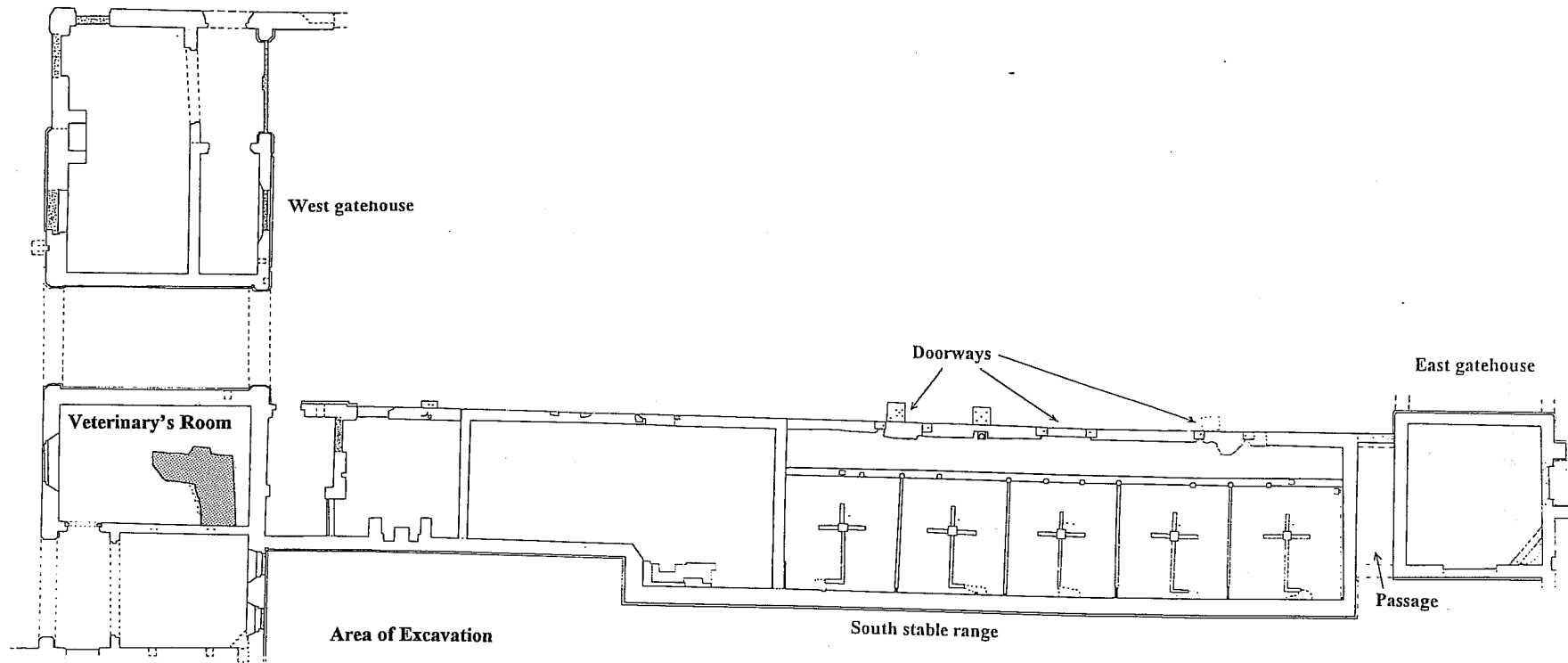


Fig 1. Ground plan of the Stable Block and Gatehouse

have been used as part of the stabling as well. The northern-most room of the southern range was used as the veterinary's room. The floor between this area and the passageway was subdivided by a west-east brick wall. The large arch at the southern end of the west wall led into a kind of stone-flagged antechamber. A large opening from it led into the smaller south room, now sub-divided by a new west-east wall. Each of the narrow chambers is lit by an inserted window opening in the east wall. On the early-20th century plan one is labelled 'Store' the other 'Lamp Room'. A narrower doorway leads through the partition wall into the northern part, (Veterinary's Room). The floor of this room is covered in the same type of yellow clinkers seen in the south stable block into which the same grid of small squares had been cut. These clinkers had also been repaired with new ones in the same manner as elsewhere. In the centre of the room is a 'T-shaped' drain system capped by the same type of cast-iron seen in the main south range. The room was lit by a window in the west wall, now blocked, and there is also a small high opening in the wall of the gate-passage with a flat-arch brick head.

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## Results (Fig. 2)

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The floor was made up of yellow clinkers laid in a herring bone pattern aligned east / west. The tiles were 55mm thick, 150mm long and 55mm wide. This was cleaned using a stiff broom and water as the floor was covered by detritus and rubble from the rebuilding works associated with the reinstatement of the cupola.

An area approximately 2.5m x 1.0m had sunk to a depth of about 0.10m below the current floor level, immediately to the east of the central drainage trap. This area was gridded out and photographically recorded prior to the lifting of the tiles. The removal of the tiles revealed a void immediately below the clinkers approximately 0.25m in depth. At the bottom of the void was a deposit of mortar/cement which proved to be the base of the tiled floor which had slumped down and fallen away from the underside of the tiled surface.

After the removal of the clinkers, some excavation was necessary to establish the extent of slumping and its cause. Two linear cuts were encountered leading from the drainage trap, (at the western end of the trench), one running on an east/west axis (feature 10) and one on a north-west / south-east axis (feature 11). These cuts each contained a water pipe originating / terminating at the drainage trap in the middle of the floor. The pipe within feature 10 continued through the eastern wall of the building at which point there was a second trap. The second pipe (feature 11) may well have been originally connected to a sink on the south wall. Its fall was toward the trap in the centre of the room as would be expected. The fills of both pipe trenches were removed so that the pipes could be inspected for signs of damage. Upon inspection the pipe running east / west (10) was found to be a re-used downpipe (drainpipe) that was not actually connected or joined in any way to the trap end of the pipework, just butted up to it. Furthermore it too was falling towards the trap when it clearly should have



been running away to the outside. Whether this was bad workmanship, or the result of subsidence due of water seepage could not be ascertained. The central trap was also investigated. This revealed a salt glazed trap commencing approximately 260mm below the iron grill and inspection covers. The trap was found to be fractured and had been mended with a substantial cement fillet.

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## Conclusions

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These works have illustrated that the subsidence below the floor, within the veterinary's room, was caused by repeated flooding and seepage from both the broken central drainage trap and the re-used length of down-pipe which was not properly connected. Both the broken central trap and the unconnected pipe will have contributed greatly to the subsidence of the floor, as both will have caused a lot of water to accumulate below the ground with nowhere to escape to except to sink into the soil. It is clear that the use of the room would have necessitated the constant washing down of the floor and other surfaces. It must be concluded that this drain was therefore in constant use until the building fell into decay. The lack of a roof over this room in more recent times must also have contributed to the problem.

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## Site archive

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All finds were examined on site but not retained in accordance with Archaeological Investigations Ltd retention policy.

- 1 Site note book
- 4 Sheets of Inked Drawings
- 3 Sheets of Site Drawings
- 1 Colour Film
- 1 Correspondence File
- This Document

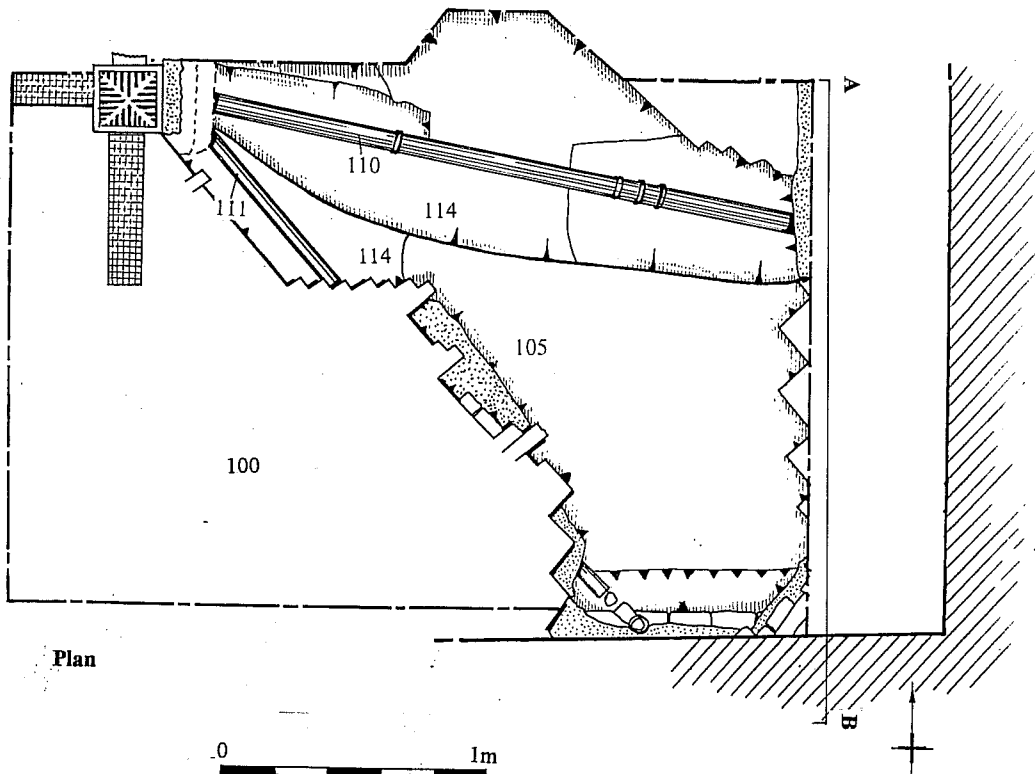
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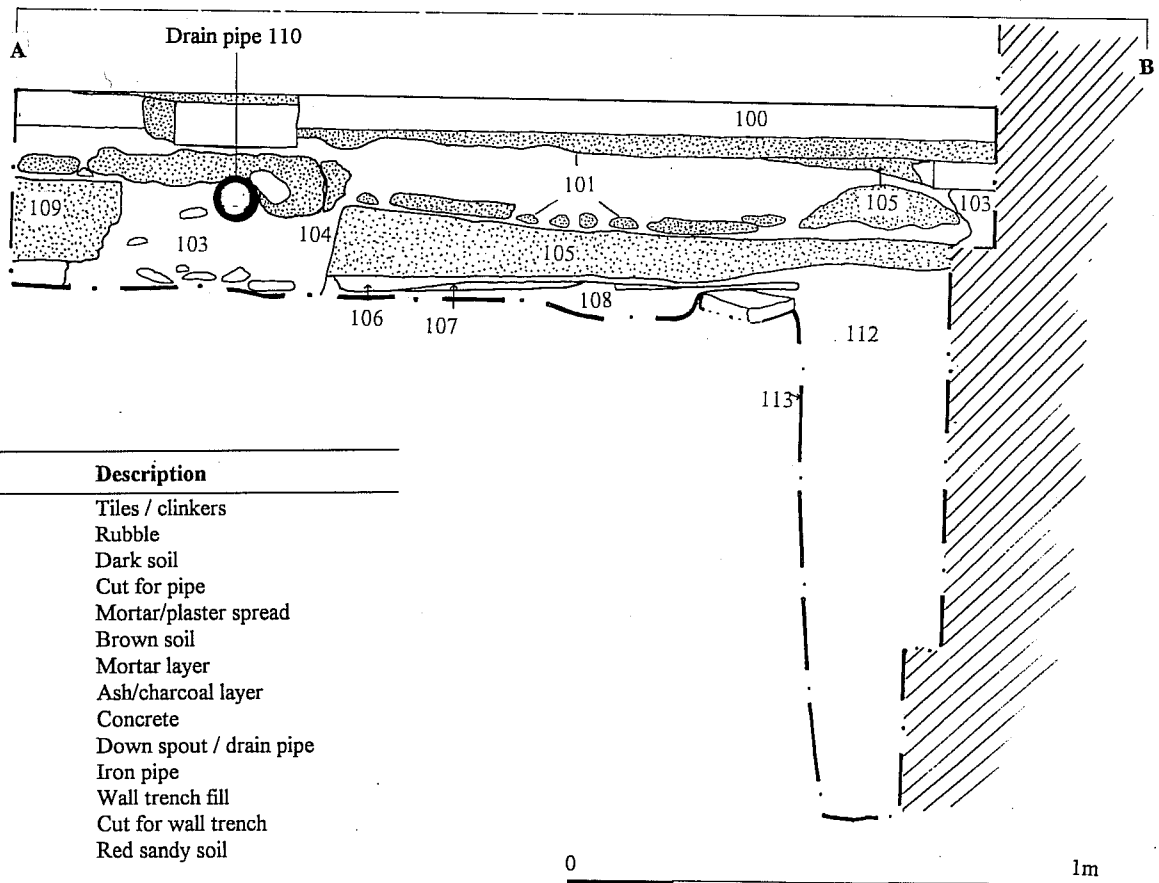
## Bibliography

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R. K Morriss *An Interim Report On The Stables & The Western Gatehouse*. January 1995, H.A.S 269



East Section



Context	Description
101	Tiles / clinkers
102	Rubble
103	Dark soil
104	Cut for pipe
105	Mortar/plaster spread
106	Brown soil
107	Mortar layer
108	Ash/charcoal layer
109	Concrete
110	Down spout / drain pipe
111	Iron pipe
112	Wall trench fill
113	Cut for wall trench
114	Red sandy soil

Fig. 2



The floor showing the pattern of the clinkers, the iron drain and the concrete patching.