

**Building recording and
watching brief at
Bowercourt Farm, Rock
Worcestershire**

May 2005

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Fieldwork reference number WSM 34355

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1. Project Background

A building recording and watching brief was undertaken at Bowercourt Farm, Rock, Worcestershire (NGR SO 7361 7077; Fig 1) at the request of Andrew and Carol Greenhalgh in order to preserve the original buildings by record before conversion to domestic accommodation and to identify and record any evidence for earlier activity on the site.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the project were therefore:

to review the documentary evidence for the site

to make a drawn and photographic record of the buildings affected by the development

to observe any ground reduction or excavation activities

From this information to produce a report outlining:

the development and use of the buildings and site and its relationship to the moated site known as Bower Court to its north

1.2 Personnel

Martin Cook (BA MIFA) undertook the project with assistance from Paul Williams. Martin, as well as having a first degree in Archaeology and being a field archaeologist of some twenty-five years experience, is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. He also has a Certificate in Practical Archaeology, a component of which was geomorphology, and qualifications in Building Construction (ONC) and Civil Engineering (HNC). Subjects of the final examination in the latter subject included soil mechanics and engineering hydraulics and hydrology.

2. Description and analysis

2.1 Historic mapping and documentary evidence

The tithe map for Rock (Fig 2.1) shows the farm complex (WSM 31089) to the south of Bower Court moat (WSM 30722) which is a scheduled ancient monument (monument number 30016). The farm buildings form a 'U' shape, open to the north and Bower Court. A map of 1869 (Fig 2.2) shows no significant changes. The Ordnance Survey map of 1903 shows the northern side of the farmyard now occupied by a building. The only other available Ordnance Survey mapping is that of 1927 (Fig 2.2) which shows no significant changes from the 1903

edition. The site lies in close proximity to another, larger but now abandoned, moated site (WSM 4000) which is also a scheduled ancient monument (monument number 19131) and an associated deserted medieval village (WSM 3997, also scheduled under monument number 19131).

2.2 Fieldwork

The fieldwork comprised recording of the buildings, photographs, various notes and annotations on existing architect's drawings and observation of ground-breaking activities associated with the conversion of the buildings to domestic accommodation.

2.3 Building recording

Phase 1: early 19th century

Phase 1 (Figs 3, 7, 8 and 14) comprises some lengths of coursed or semi-coursed stone wall which are probably the fragmentary remains of early 19th century (possibly pre-19th century) farm buildings on the site, subsequently reused in later structures.

Phase 2: mid to late 19th century

Elements of the phase 1 buildings were reused in phase 2. This phase saw the almost complete enclosure of the farmyard to the west and north. The west range comprised three individual stables under a double pitched roof and an attached lower structure of unknown function with a single pitched roof (Figs 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 15 and 16). In spite of the stables being newly built, elements of the structure, especially the roof trusses, were clearly reused from elsewhere or cobbled together from what ever lay about (Fig 21) The north range was primarily an open-fronted shelter shed with a double stable at its west end and a loose box at its east (Figs 6, 8 and 17). An uncommon feature was a feeding passage running the entire length of the building although this survived only as two lines of bricks marking the position of the manger (Fig 8).

Phase 3: late 20th century

Modifications to the late 19th century arrangements were subsequently made in modern materials such as breeze block and corrugated steel sheet (Figs 4, 7 and 8).

2.4 Watching brief

Areas of the service trench excavated from the public highway to the north alongside the access track to Bowercourt Farm were observed. Only one area showed something other than topsoil, subsoil and undisturbed natural deposits and this was adjacent to the moat surrounding Bower Court. Here (Fig 9), below the topsoil, was a cut face (context 009) in the sandstone outcrop (context 007). This is believed to be the eastern limit of the quarry in the field to the west (Fig 2.2; map of 1869).

The excavation for the septic tank (Fig 10; context 004) identified only topsoil (context 001), subsoil (context 002) and undisturbed natural subsoil (context 003). However, elsewhere the results were more interesting. The continuation of the service trench into the farmyard (Fig 11) demonstrated the construction methods of the footing for the existing stables. This began

with a shallow excavation across the entire area of the stable. This is a preliminary construction technique noted elsewhere by the author in buildings of the same general period. It is presumed that, in the absence of small, mobile mechanical excavators and at a time when when the surveying skills of builders were probably somewhat rudimentary, it was more convenient to excavate an open area in which to begin construction than to excavate linear trenches as would be normal today. The excavation was followed by the laying of a rubble stone base course (context 018) surmounted by three courses of bricks (context 016), bringing the foundation to ground level. On top of this was a course of tile (context 015), perhaps demonstrating, in the mid 19th century, an early awareness of the need for a damp proof course. On top of this was a stone quoin (context 014) followed by the walls of the stable itself. A layer of lime mortar, much of which may have been discarded from the construction of the stable walls (context 011), suggests that the brick floor (context 013) was the last constructional element of the stable to be completed. The absence of tile fragments over this mortar suggests that the roof was left until last.

Removal of debris and accumulated material from the northern end of the west range and western end of the north range (Fig 12) enabled the identification of underlying features. At the northern end of the west range the corner of a stone building (contexts 019 and 020) pre-dating the existing buildings but post-dating the infilling of this part of the moat (see below) were recorded. Within the western end of the north range a stone floor surface (context 021) pre-dating the existing shelter shed and a stone-lined culvert or drain (context 022) contemporary with this floor were identified.

A little further to the east a narrow trench excavated in the floor of the shelter shed (context 023) located a deep, dark and wet deposit (context 024) thought to be the south eastern side of the moat. Excavation at the northern end of the west range (Fig 13) identified sloping layers and tip lines (contexts 026, 027, 028 and 029) which were clearly the fills of a substantial cut feature, also thought to be the moat.

3. Discussion

3.1 The moated site

Medieval moated sites survive as a frequent feature of the landscape in many parts of England but the form of moated sites is by no means uniform (Aberg 1978). The moat itself is the single unifying feature and within it the platform may vary in size or shape, it may be completely or partially enclosed and adjacent to it may be a wide variety of other features including water control features and agricultural or other buildings or features.

The earliest available mapping for the moat at Bower Court (tithe map of the 1840s; Fig 2.1) suggested that by the mid 19th century at least the moat enclosed an approximately square area, surrounded its platform on three of its four sides with two causeways (Fig 2.1). The platform was occupied by two primary buildings and the gap where the fourth (south east) side of the moat might be expected to be was neatly filled by a range of presumably agricultural buildings, believed to be those in existence today (Fig 2.1). Subsequent mapping of the early 20th century (Fig 2.2) demonstrates that this range of agricultural buildings was

intended, and was probably planned, to become part of a mid-19th century courtyard farm whose farmhouse lay on the north-east corner of the moat's platform.

However, this project has demonstrated that the moat at Bower Court originally completely enclosed its platform, with or without causeways, and that the south-eastern arm passed originally beneath the shelter shed recorded by this project. It has also shown that the infilling of the moat's south-eastern arm, and that the closer physical association of the domestic residence on the moat's platform with the farm to its south, predates the mid-19th century as the remains of stone buildings and features were identified as lying upon the moat's fill but beneath the existing mid-19th century structures. Unfortunately, it was not possible to ascribe a date to either the back-filling of the moat or to the earlier buildings. Dating of the filling of the moat may be possible at some time in the future as the overwhelming majority of its fill remains *in situ*.

3.2 The layout of the farmstead

Unfortunately too little of the early farm buildings which directly overlay the fill of the moat survived to enable any discussion of this period of the site's development. The subsequent courtyard arrangement, based in this case around four sides of a near square, was a late 18th century development in Staffordshire (Peters 1969) and the final layout of the farm buildings, shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1903 (Fig 2.2) may have had its origins at this time. Brunskill (1982) notes that the courtyard style: was usually confined to the largest farms of 250 acres (110 ha) or more.

The relationship of the farmhouse to the farmyard is unusual in this case as the original domestic building within the moat would originally have been of higher status than most farmhouses. Tenurially, moated sites included the near castle, the home of the proto-yeoman, the rectory, the park lodge and the monastic grange (le Patourel 1978). By the late 18th or mid 19th century the opinions of agricultural writers were being widely adopted. There was a considerable degree of unanimity amongst the agricultural writers on this theme. Hunt and Crocker considered that the house should be so placed that it could overlook the yard, onto which all the buildings were to open, a plan which Loudon approved and Pitt followed in his designs. Dean considered that this arrangement produced better work, as the men were uncertain when they were being observed. Beatson, whilst accepting the general proposition, added that 'unless the ground and other circumstances, in every respect favour such a disposition, I would not invariably adhere to it'. In the case of Bower Court the ground did favour such an arrangement although whether this was a conscious element in the layout of the mid-19th century farm is unknown.

It was thought desirable that the farmhouse should be separated from the agricultural buildings (Peters 1969). Beatson noted that on a small farm, or where the site made it necessary, the house could be attached to the agricultural buildings but he was not in favour of the practice, noting the increased danger of fire and the unpleasantness of living on top of the animals and the manure heap. At Bower Court this separation was pre-existing and was maintained. Similarly, the desirability for the farmhouse to be approached from a separate access from that of the farmyard was simple to maintain.

3.3 The buildings of the mid-19th century farm

The farmyard is defined by the buildings of the farmstead (Brunskill 1982). It is a circulation area giving access to the various buildings and providing links between them. In winter it contained the mound of manure and on many farms it doubled as the foldyard and as such played an important part in the accommodation of cattle. From the mid-18th century onwards the rapidly increasing number of cattle tethered in cow-houses was matched by the increasing number who spent the whole year in the open. In most parts of the country there was no need to house them, and in any event it was not economical. They could, however, not be left in the fields where there was no grass. The answer was to fold such cattle in the farmyard where they were sheltered and food and water could be made accessible.

It was recommended by agricultural writers that the foldyard should face south and should be protected on the north by the barn. At Bower Court this is generally true although in this case much of the protection from the north comes from a substantial difference in ground level. On at least one side the foldyard was usually occupied by a shelter shed and Bower Court was no exception with the shelter shed forming the north range. This was a long, single storey building, open-fronted but with solid end walls and one solid side wall. Within the shelter shed were troughs to serve as mangers and racks to hold the hay. There were no stall divisions and no means for tying the cattle. Very few shelter sheds in Staffordshire had feeding passages (Peters 1969) but the example at Bower Court did. At Bower Court, at one end of the shelter shed was a stable and at the other end a loose box. The earliest surviving example in Staffordshire of a loose box dates from about 1750 with examples continuing to be built until the present day. Initially all loose boxes were for calves or use as calving pens, but later they were used as bull pens, hospitals or for fatstock as well.

The stables forming the west range were of Peter's type 3 or looseboxes (Peters 1969). The remaining building forming the northern end of the west range is of unknown use.

4. Acknowledgements

The author would particularly like to thank Mr and Mrs Greenhalgh of Bowercourt Farm and Mike Glyde of Worcestershire County Archaeology Service for their kind cooperation.

5. Bibliography

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Brunskill, R W, 1982 *Traditional farm buildings of Britain*

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Peters, J E C, 1969 *The development of farm buildings in western lowland Staffordshire up to 1880*

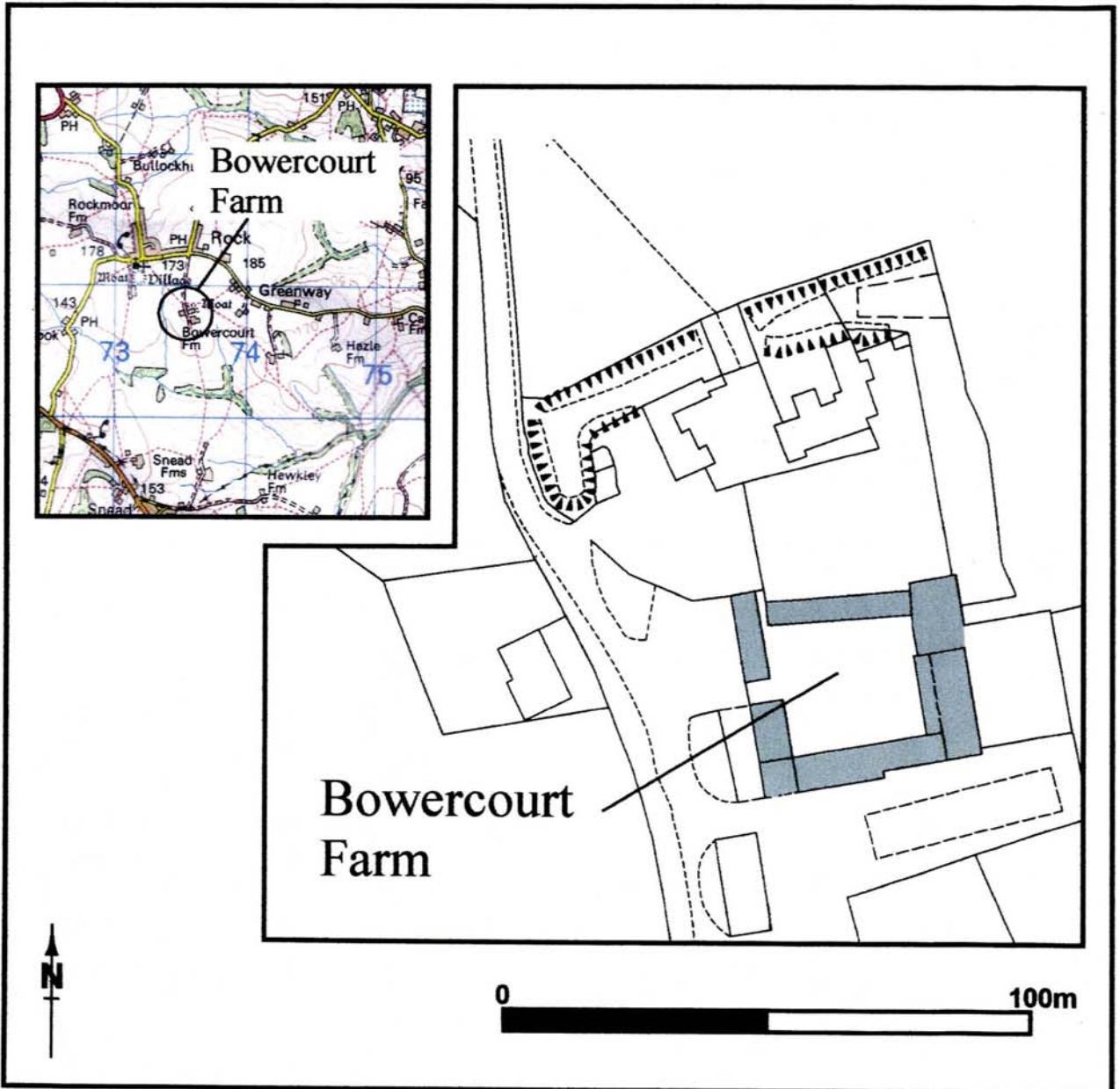
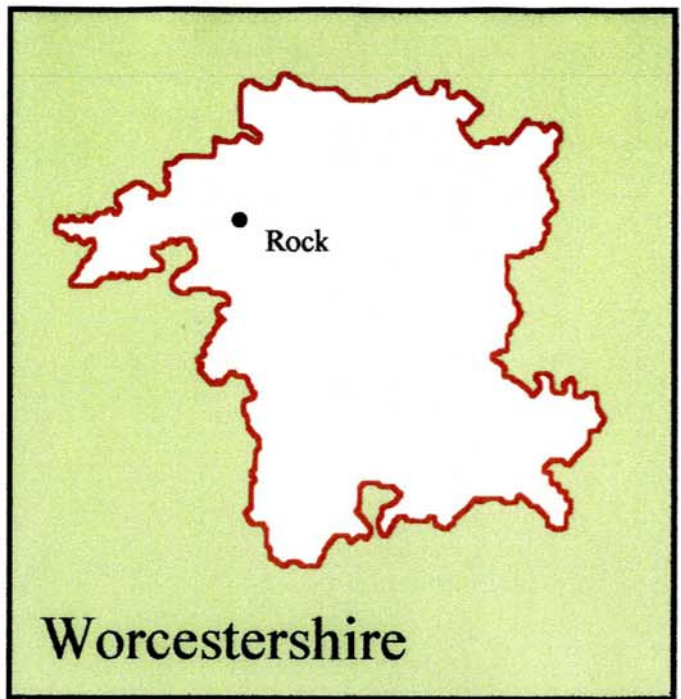
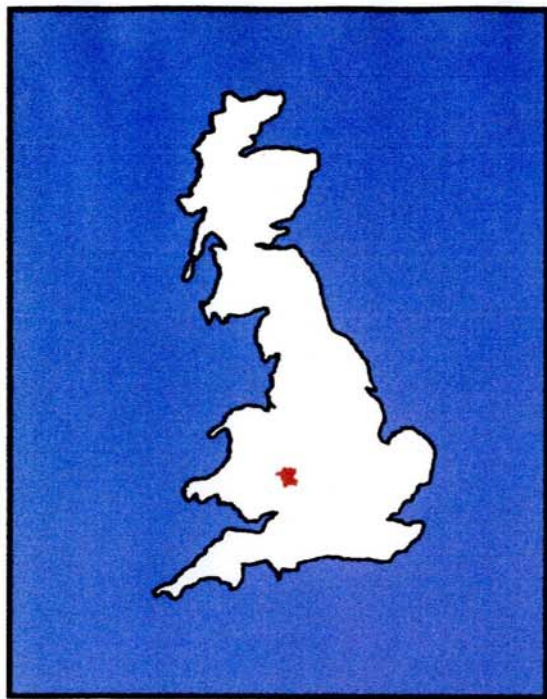
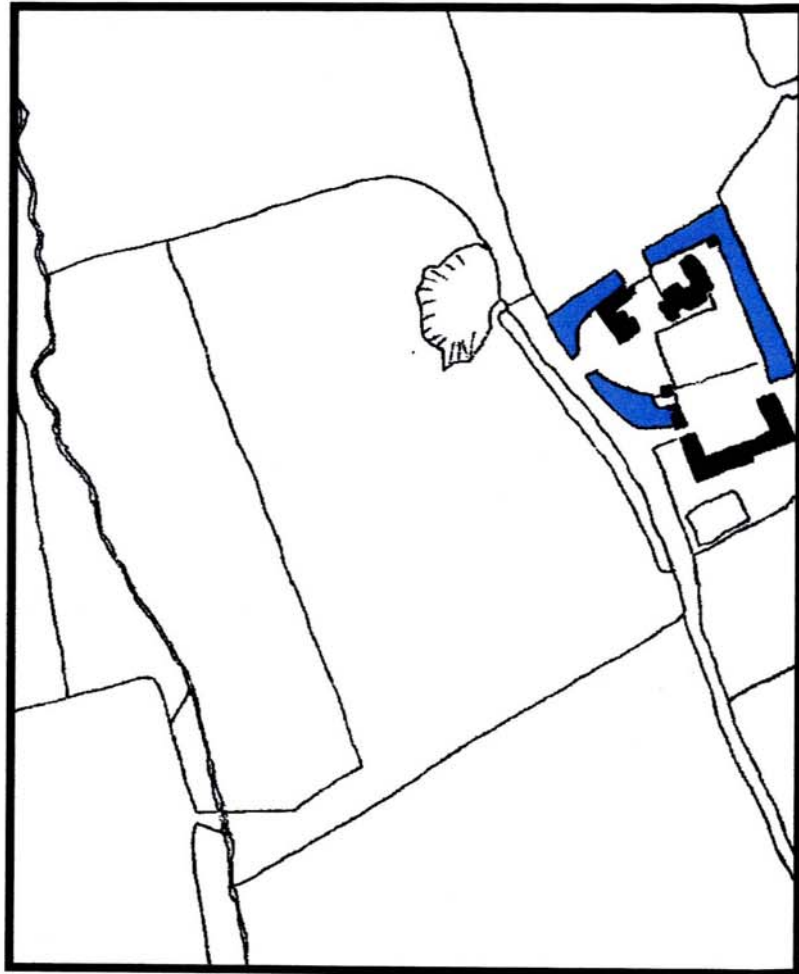


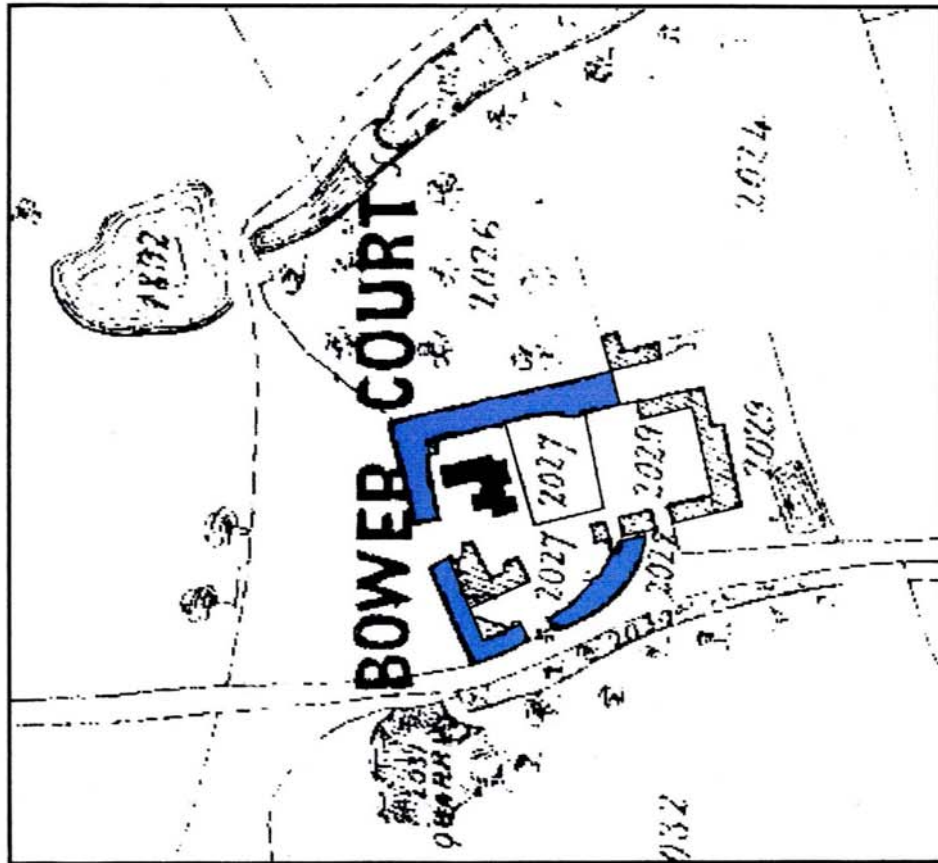
Fig 1: Location of site



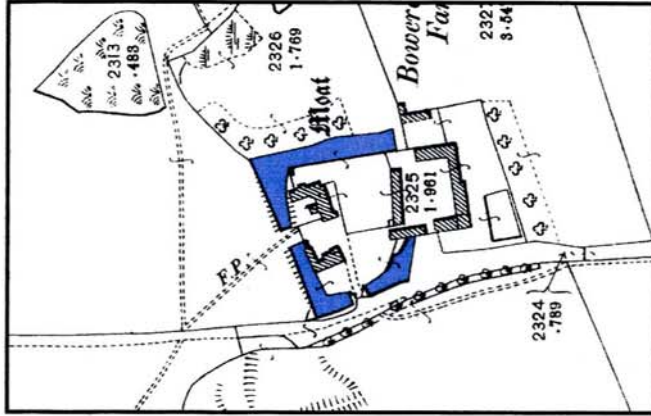
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Fig 2.1: Tithe map of c 1840

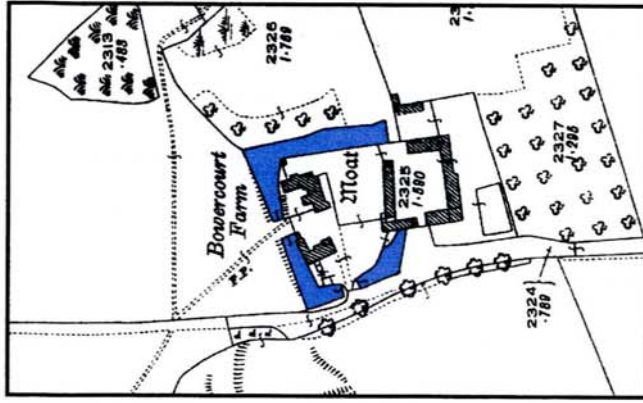
1869



1903



1927



not to scale

Fig 2.2: Other historic mapping

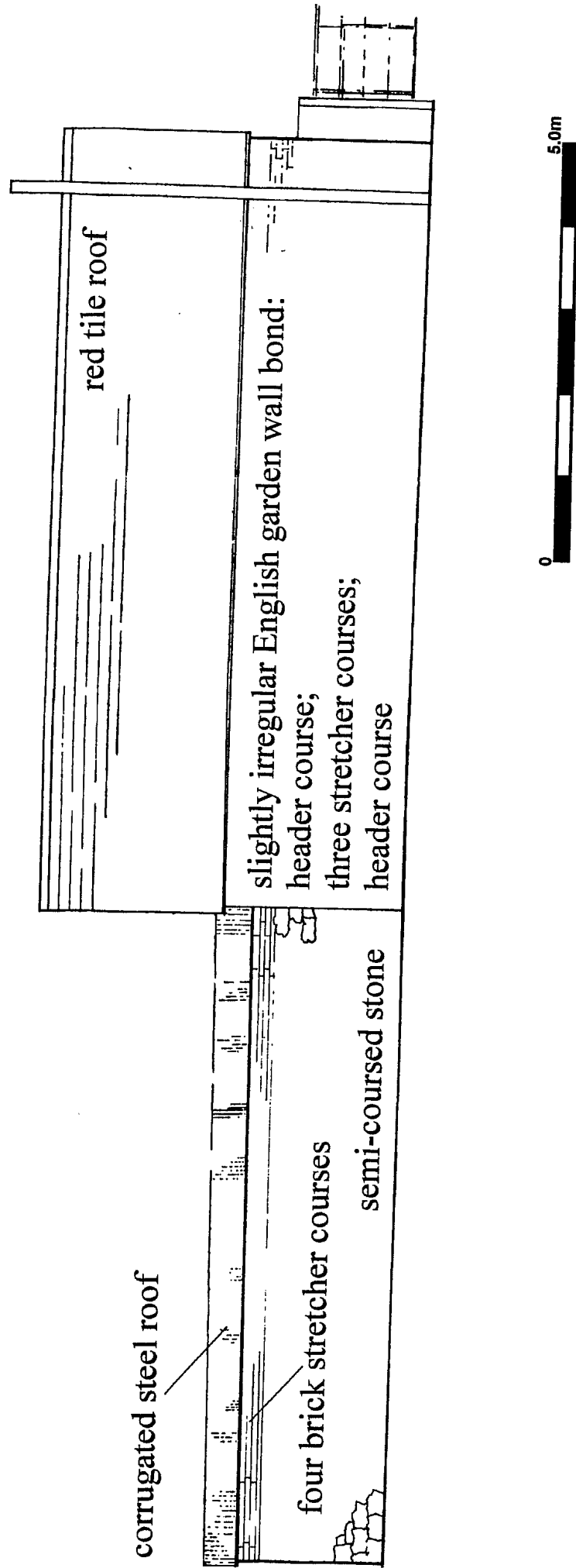
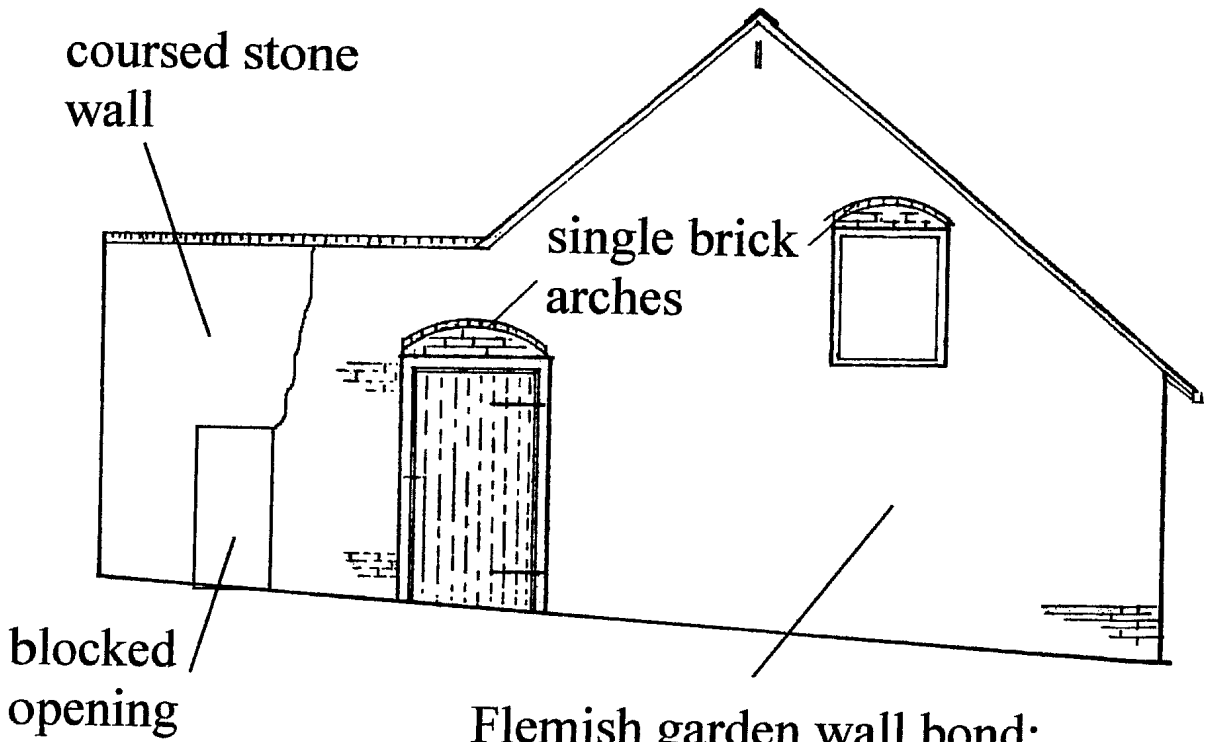


Fig 3: West elevation; west range



Flemish garden wall bond:
 header/stretcher/header course;
 three stretcher courses;
 header/stretcher/header course

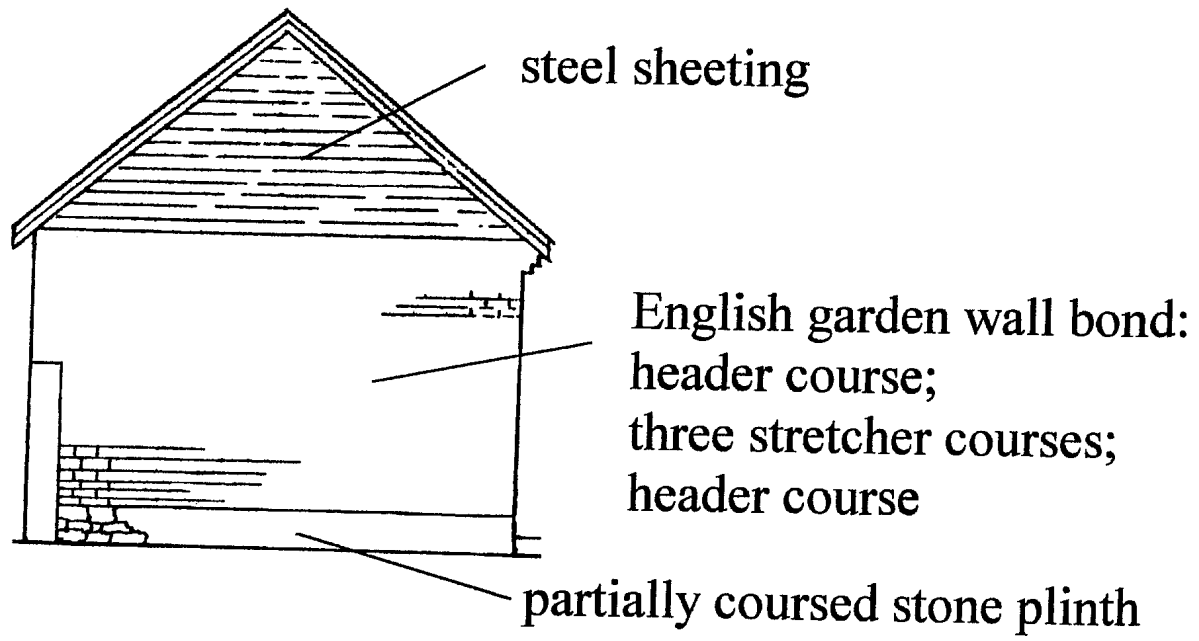


Fig 4: West elevation; north range and south elevation; west range

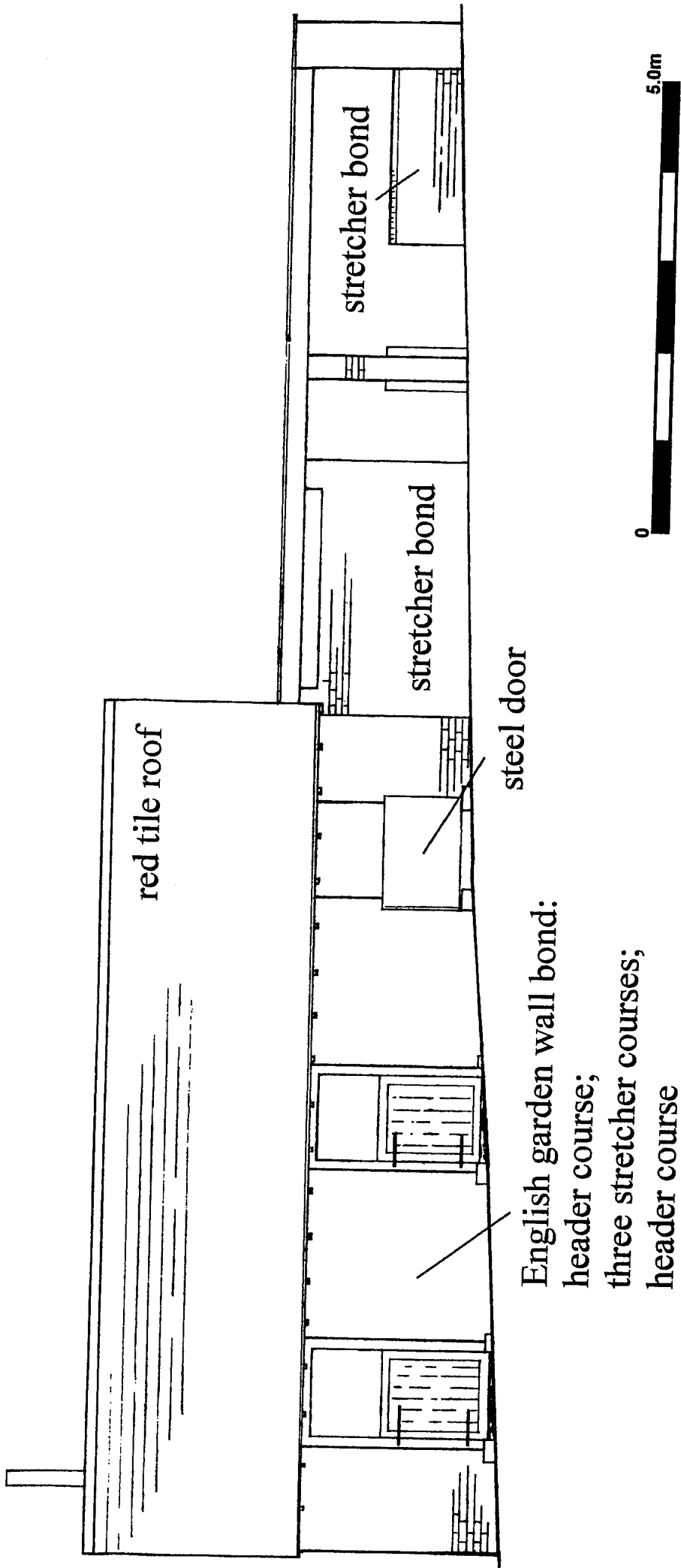


Fig 5: East elevation; west range

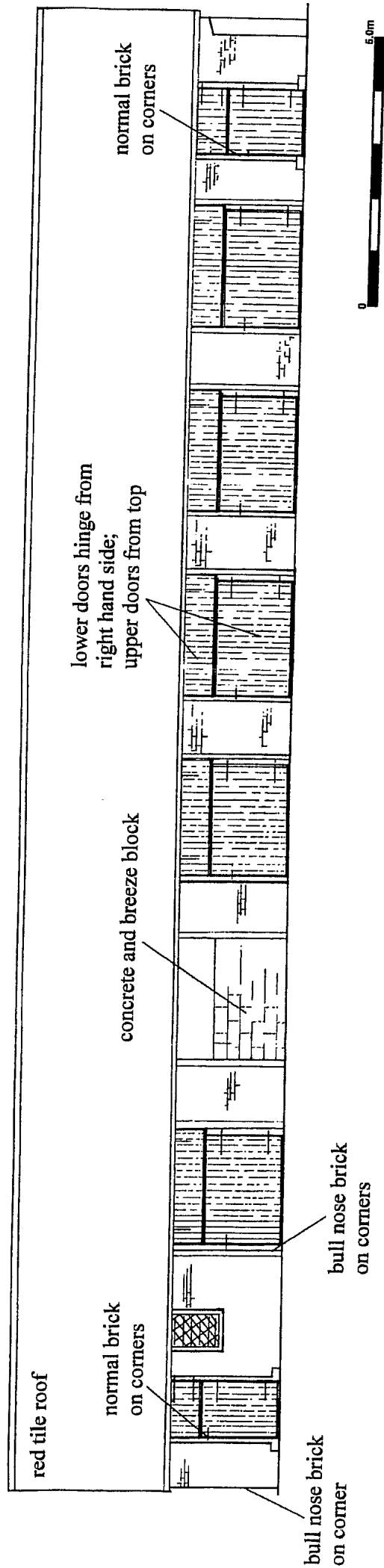


Fig 6: South elevation; north range

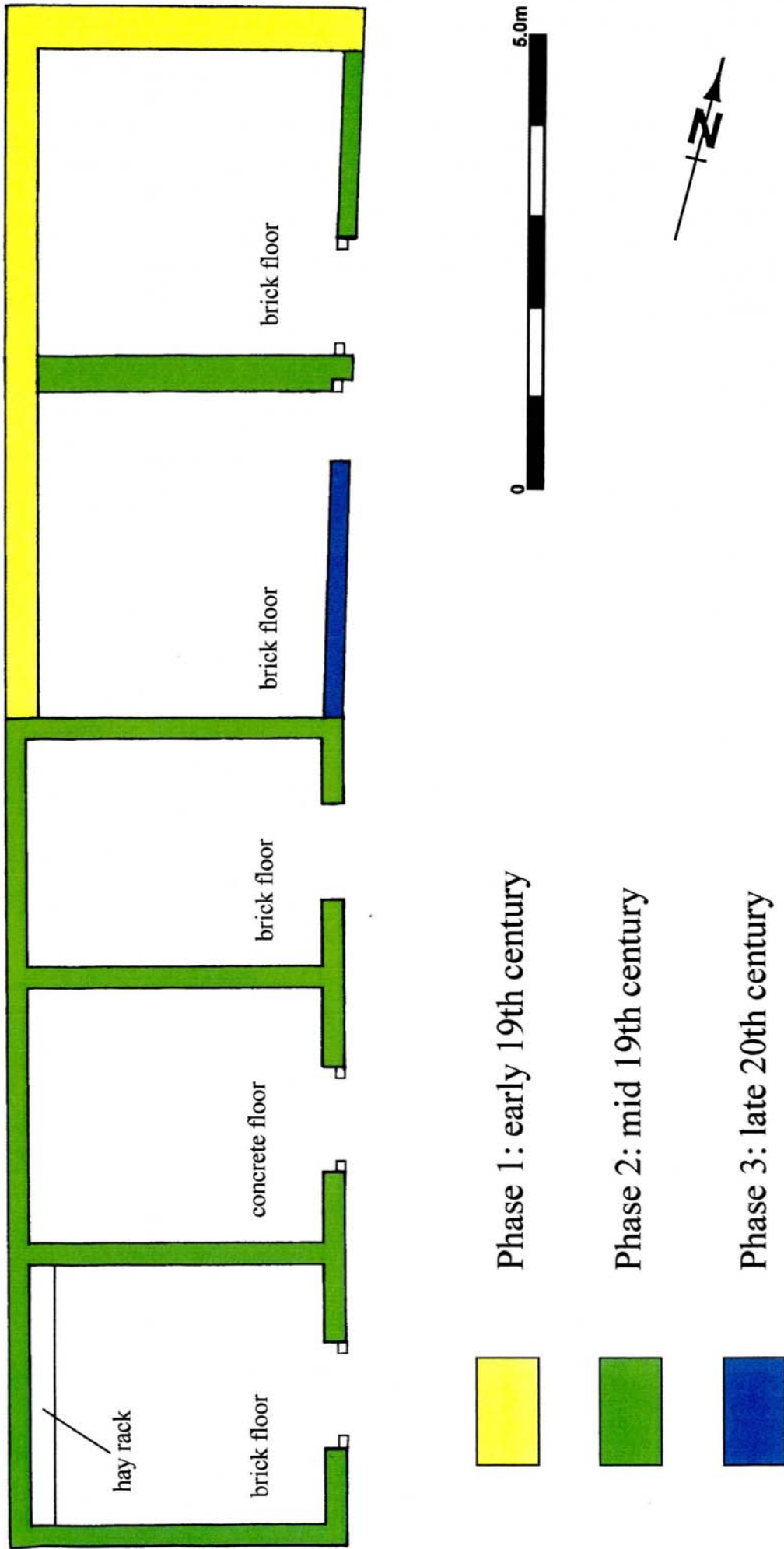


Fig 7: Phase plan of west range

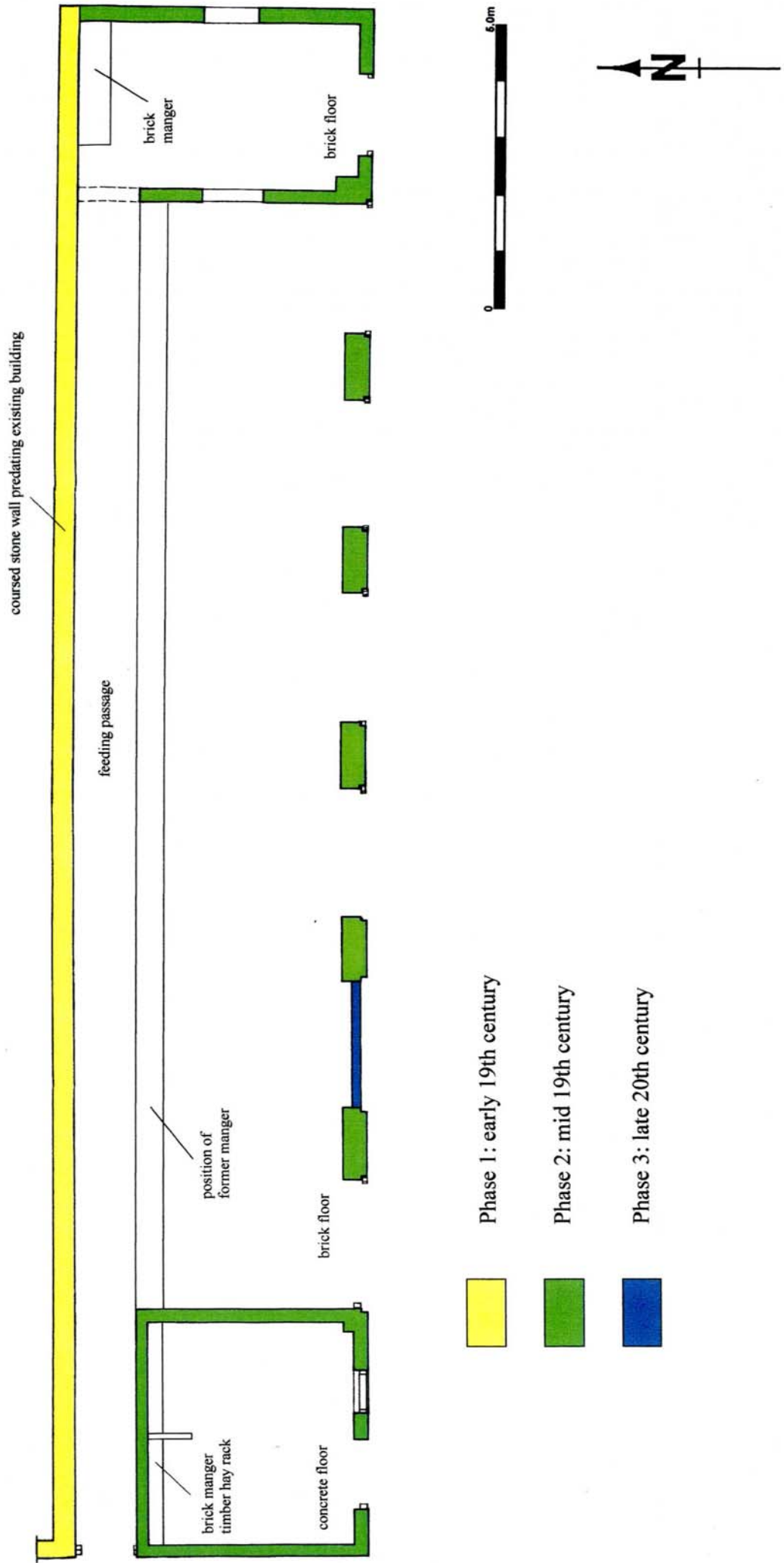
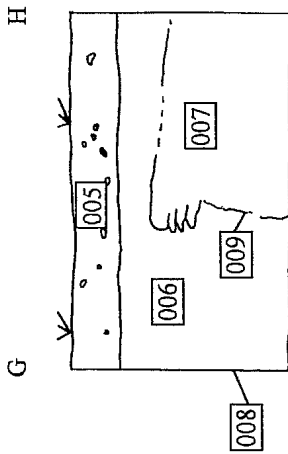
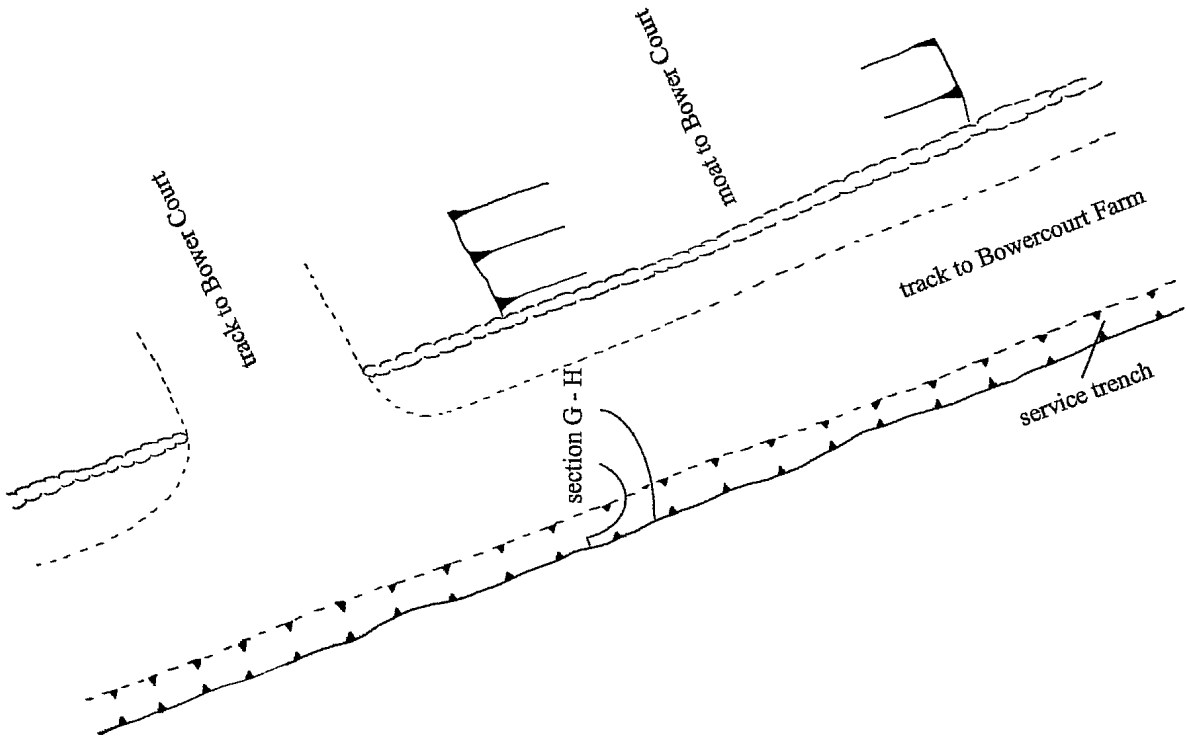
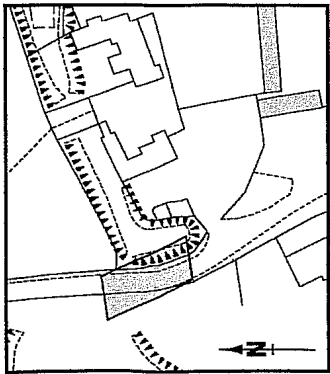
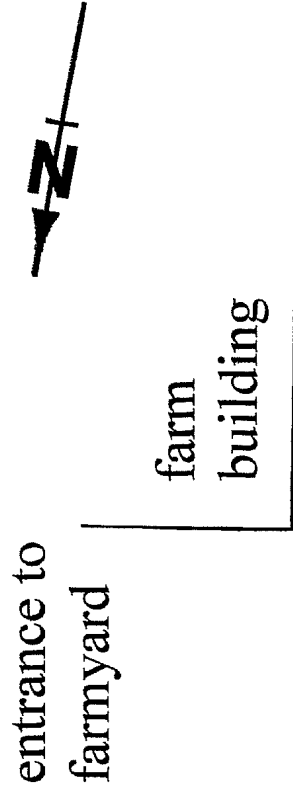
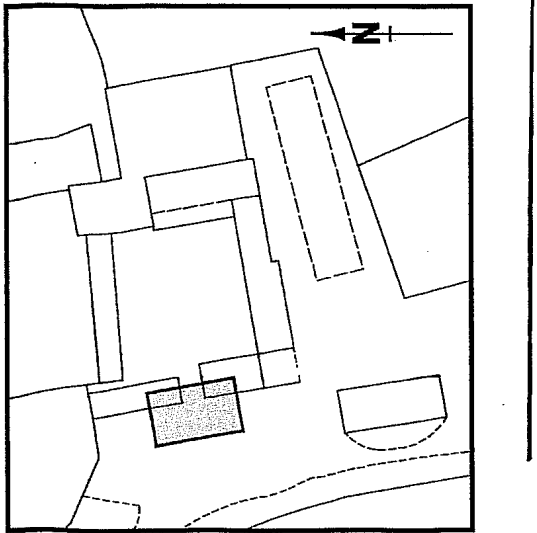


Fig 8: Phase plan of north range

location of main drawing



location of main drawing



excavation for
septic tank



section A - B

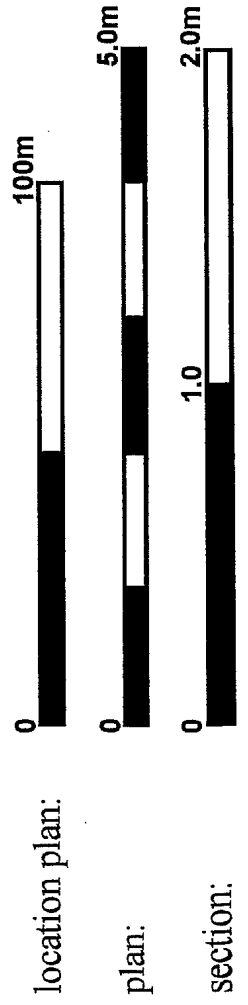
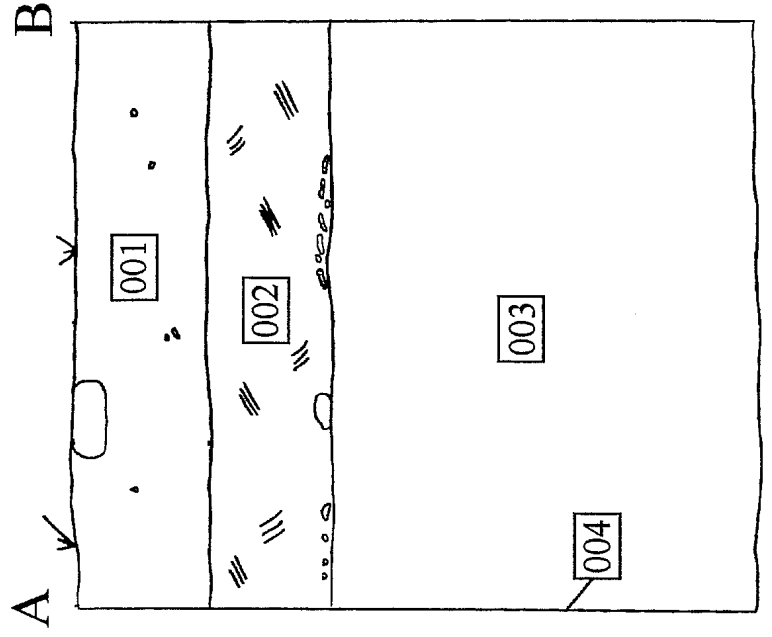
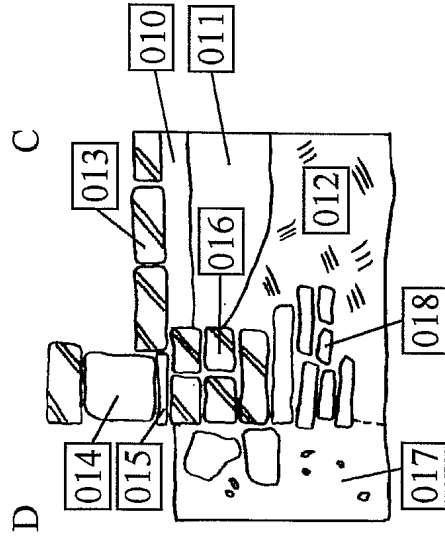
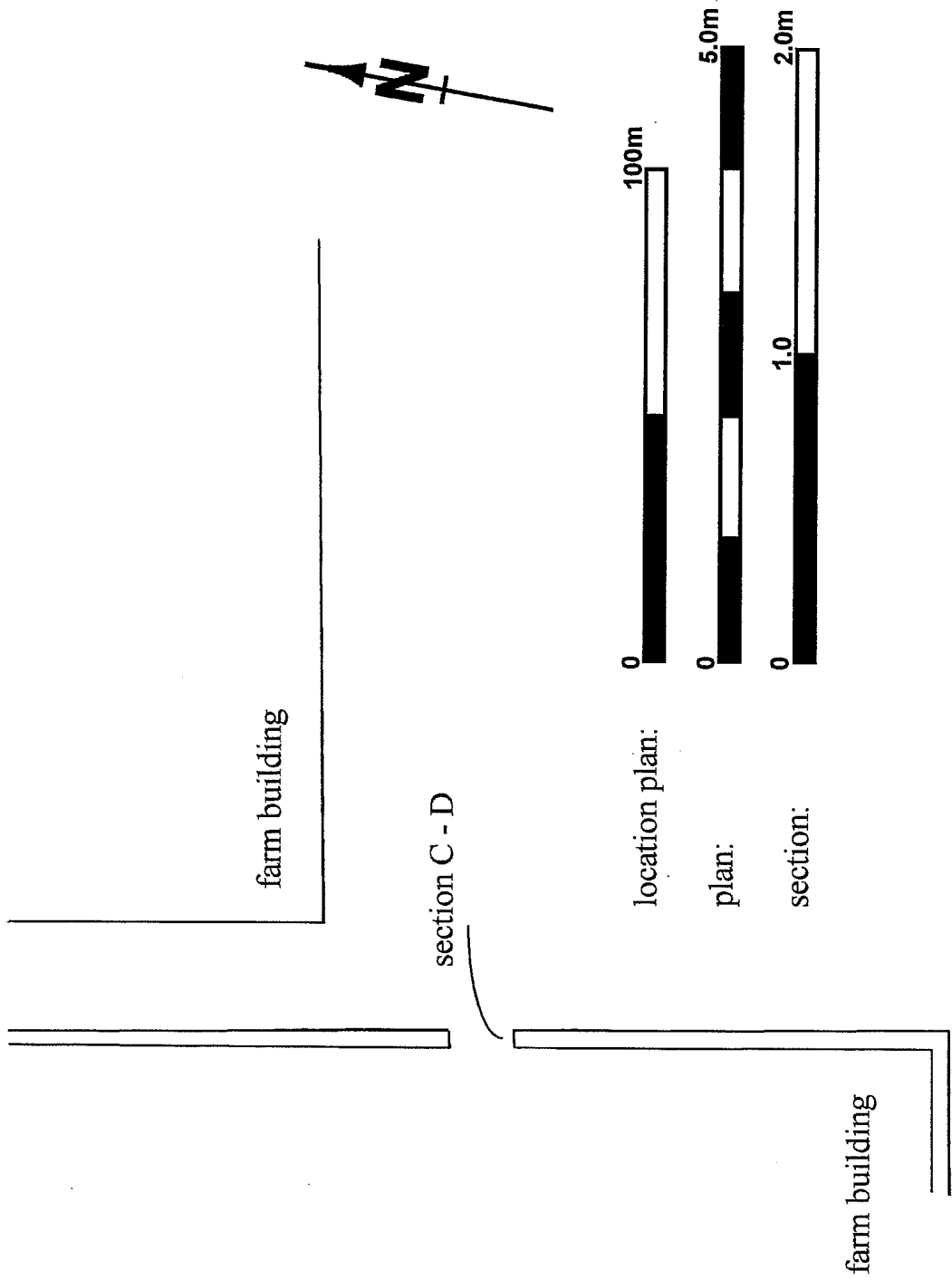
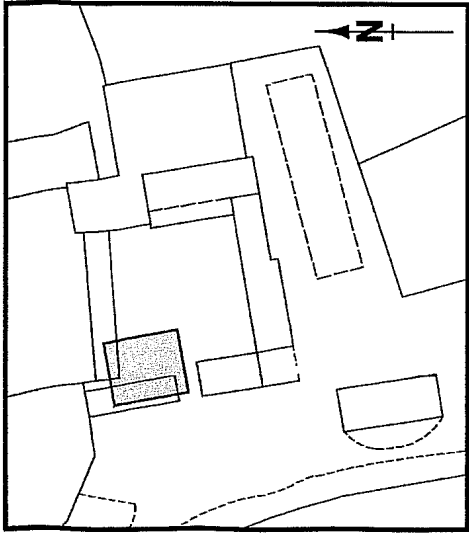


Fig. 10. Watching brief on excavation for septic tank

location of main drawing



entrance to farmyard

Fig 11: Watching brief on excavation for service trench through west range

location of main drawing

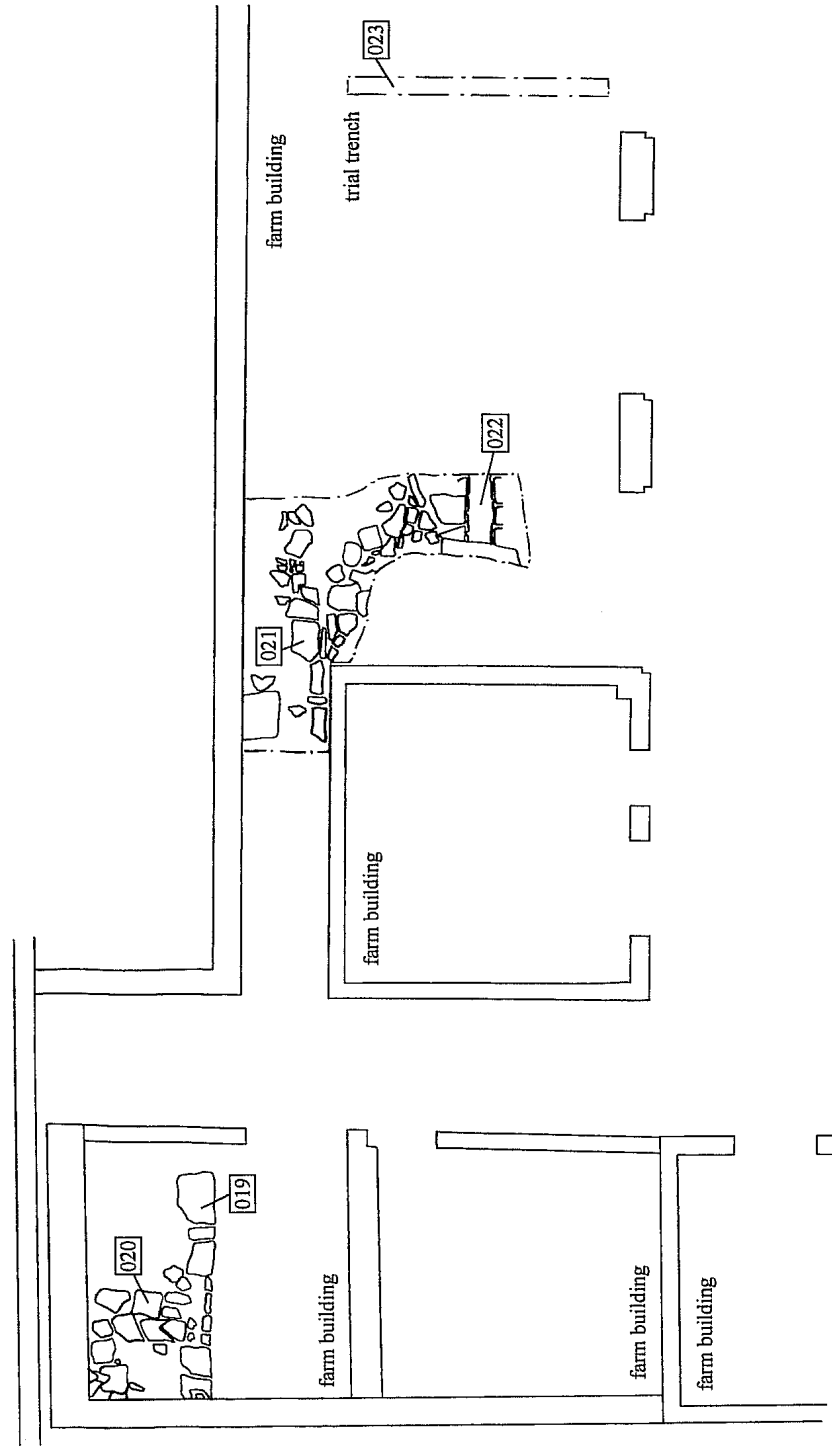
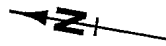
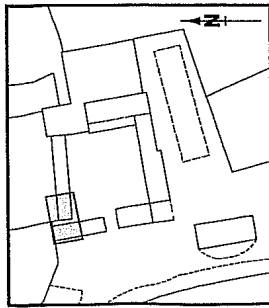
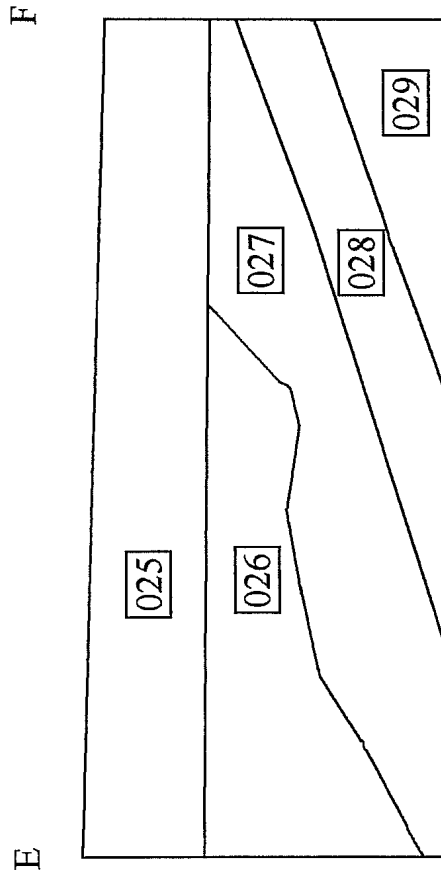
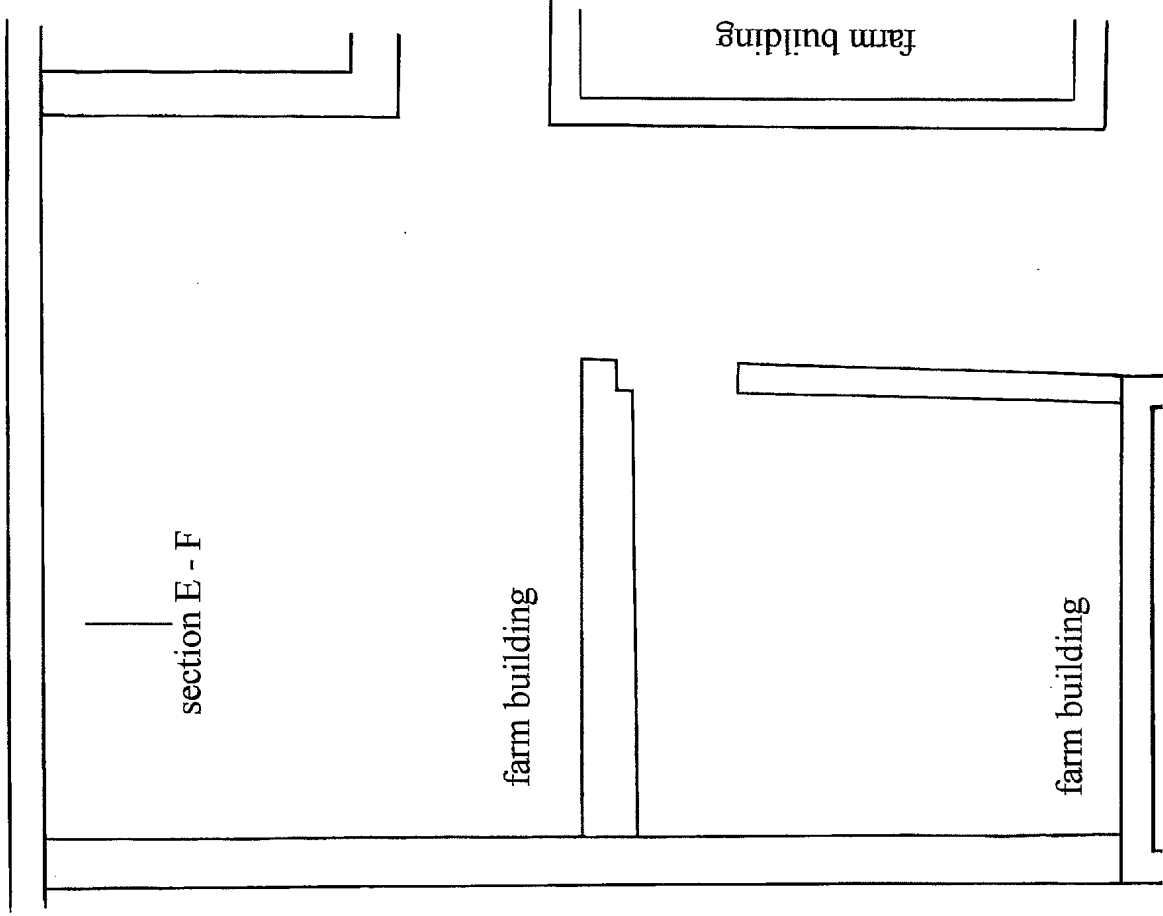
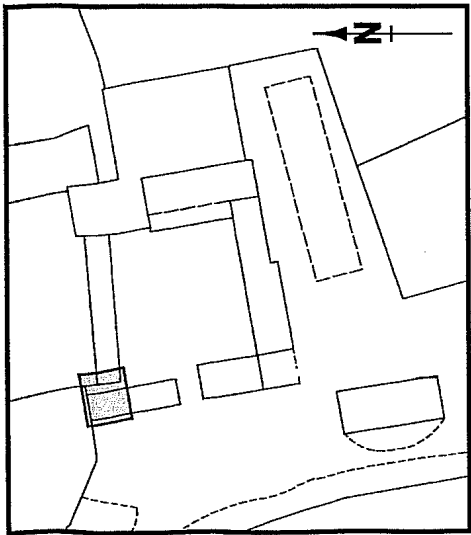


Fig 12: Watching brief on excavation at northern end of west range and western end of the north range

location of main drawing



location plan:



plan:



section:

Fig. 12. Watching brief on excavations at northern end of west range



Fig 14: West elevation; west range



Fig 15: South elevation; west range



Fig 16: East elevation; west range



Fig 17: South elevation; north range



Fig 18: West elevation; north range

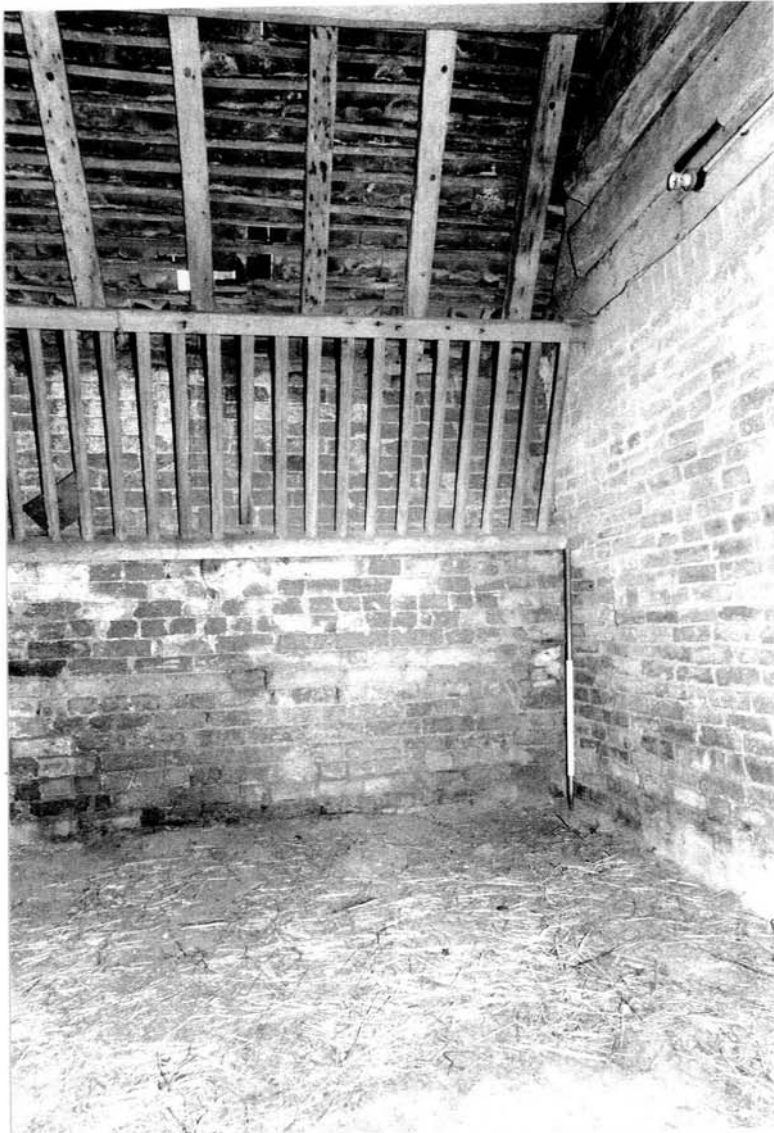


Fig 19: Hay rack; west range



Fig 20: Water bowl; west range



Fig 21: Roof truss; west range

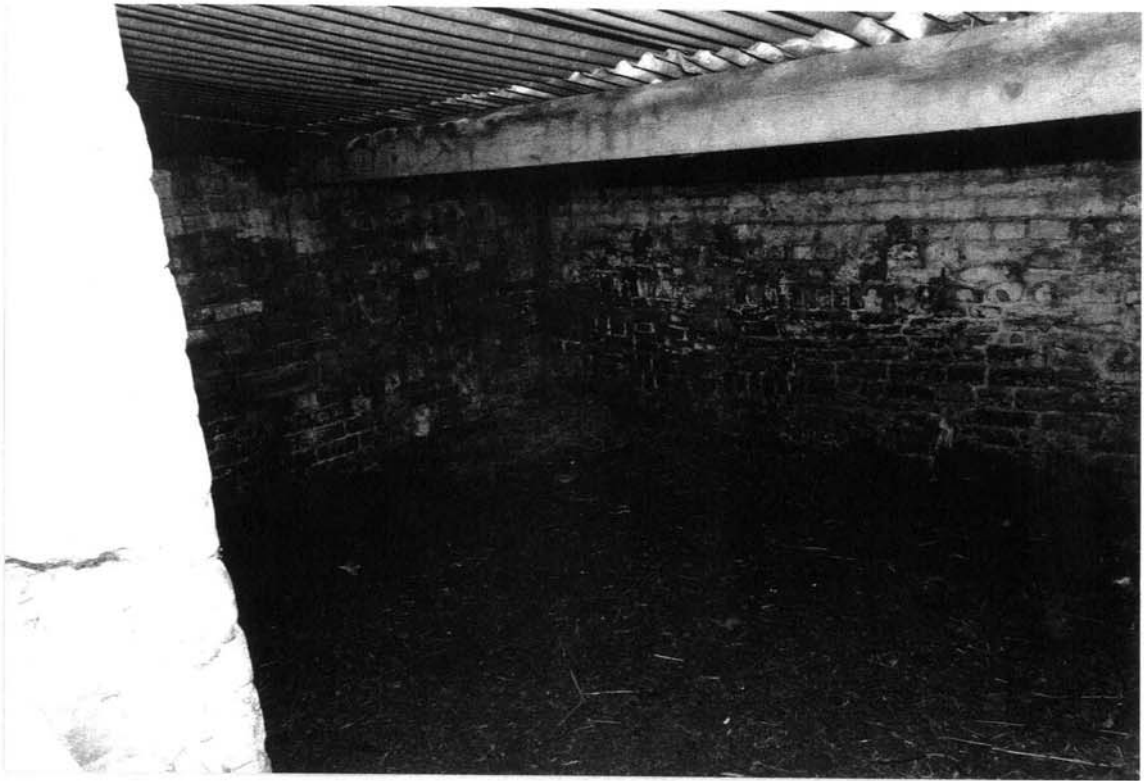


Fig 22: West range



Fig 23: West range



Fig 24: Hay rack and manger; north range



Fig 25: Manger; north range

Appendix 1: Location of the photographs

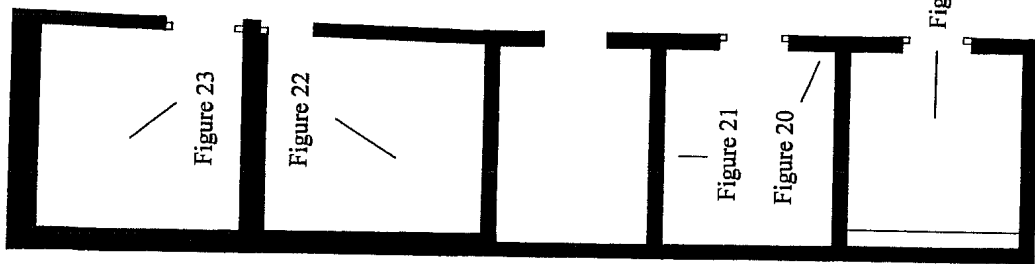


Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

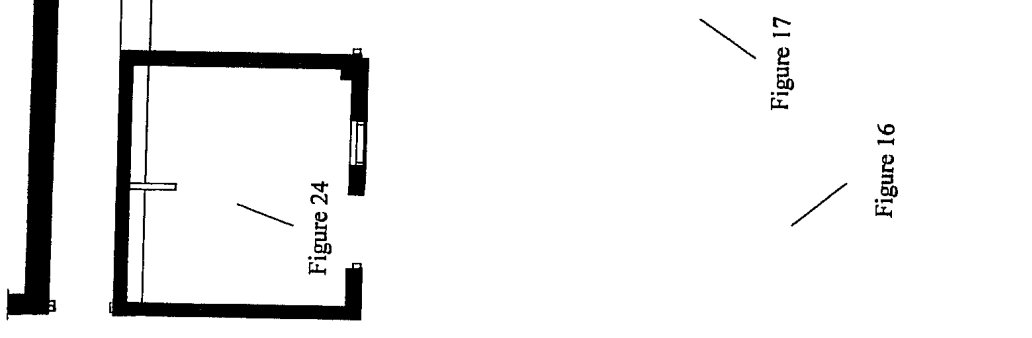


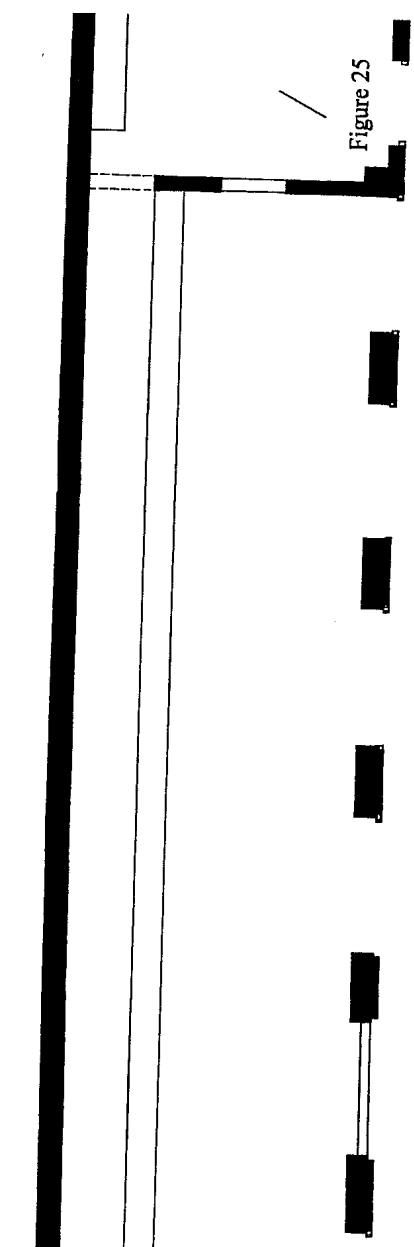
Figure 17

Figure 16

Figure 18

Figure 24

Figure 25



Appendix 2: List of the contexts

Context number	Description	Interpretation
001	Medium grey brown silty loam	Topsoil
002	Light grey clay	Subsoil
003	Light grey friable cemented silt	Mercian mudstone
004	Cut	Excavation for septic tank
005	Medium grey brown silty loam	Topsoil
006	Light grey friable cemented silt	Redeposited Mercian mudstone
007	Red sandstone	Natural rock
008	Cut	Cut of service trench
009	Cut	Cut of quarry
010	Very dark grey ashy material	Layer
011	Light buff lightly cemented sand	Lime mortar
012	Red clay	Layer
013	Brick layer	Brick floor
014	Stone block	Quoin
015	Red tile layer	Damp proof course
016	Three courses of bricks in mortar	Brick foundation to ground level
017	Light red sandy clay	Layer
018	Rubble unmortared stone	Stone basal course
019	Basal course of stone wall	Remains of building pre-dating mid-19th century farm
020	Basal course of stone wall	Remains of building pre-dating mid-19th century farm
021	Stone floor	Remains of building pre-dating mid-19th century farm
022	Stone-lined culvert	Remains of building pre-dating mid-19th century farm
023	Cut	Trench to investigate potential line of moat
024	Wet, black, organic, silty loam	Fill of moat
025	Concrete	Modern floor to 19th century building
026	Light grey brown sandy loam with moderate small rounded stones	Fill of moat – tipped layer
027	Light grey brown sandy loam with moderate small rounded stones and lime mortar	Fill of moat – tipped layer
028	Very dark brown sandy loam	Fill of moat – tipped layer

Context number	Description	Interpretation
029	Very dark brown sandy loam	Fill of moat – tipped layer