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Excavation of a Medieval Farmhouse with an adjacent Droveway, at Beaple's Moor Cross, Knowstone

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EXCAVATION OF A MEDIEVAL FARMHOUSE WITH AN ADJACENT DROVEWAY, AT BEAPLE'S MOOR CROSS, KNOWSTONE

By KIRSTEN EGGING DINWIDDY

with contributions by Dana Challinor, Lorraine Mepham *and* Sarah F. Wyles

Archaeological works undertaken in advance of the installation of a wind farm between Batsworthy Cross and Beaple's Moor Cross, Knowstone, Devon, revealed the remains of a medieval farmhouse, associated field boundaries and a droveway. No earlier settlement was detected, though the droveway is considered prehistoric in origin. The farmhouse was probably constructed in the 13th century, when favourable environmental and economic conditions led to agrarian expansion into the upland fringes. The subsequent deterioration in the weather and the socio-economic changes wrought by famine and plague are likely to have been influential in the site's abandonment, sometime in the 14th century. An increased demand for agricultural commodities in mid-16th to early 20th centuries brought about the re-establishment of the region's agricultural usage and improvement of the routeways. Later, as the trend towards urbanisation increased, farming declined and expanses of upland reverted back to moorland.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

Archaeological investigations were undertaken on 190 ha of land to the south of the village of Knowstone, near South Moulton, North Devon (Fig. 1), preceding the installation of a nine-turbine wind farm and associated infrastructure. Preliminary investigations comprising a geophysical survey and an environmental impact assessment (Npower 2006; 2010; Archaeological Surveys 2006) led to an evaluation of each turbine location and associated development areas, as well as an earthwork survey and open area excavation at the proposed location for Turbine 2 (NGR SS 82351 21535) (Wessex Archaeology 2015). Installation works in the field to the west of the excavation were archaeologically monitored in the autumn of 2015. This article focuses predominantly on the Turbine 2 location excavation results.

The wind farm covers pasture fields to the south of the A361, on either side of the road running through Batsworthy Cross in the south-west to the Beaple's Moor Cross towards the north-east, much of which follows the Nutcombe Ridge. Turbine 2 is situated at the north-east end, between Beaple's Moor Cross, the disused Moortown Quarry and Three Acre Plantation (Fig. 1). The Exmoor National Park lies approximately 8 km to the north, whilst around the site are smaller zones of moorland and woodland. The River Sturcombe flows 1.4 km to the south-east. Underlying superficial geological deposits are recorded as Regolith, in this instance a stony clay, which overlies sandstone and mudstone of the Crackington Formation bedrock (British Geological Survey online viewer).

The site is situated on high ground, at approximately 260 m above Ordnance Datum. The ground slopes gently down from north to south, with a well-established turf growing in a 0.14 m thick topsoil. An 0.12 m thick, slightly stony subsoil overlies the natural silty clay and sandstone geology.

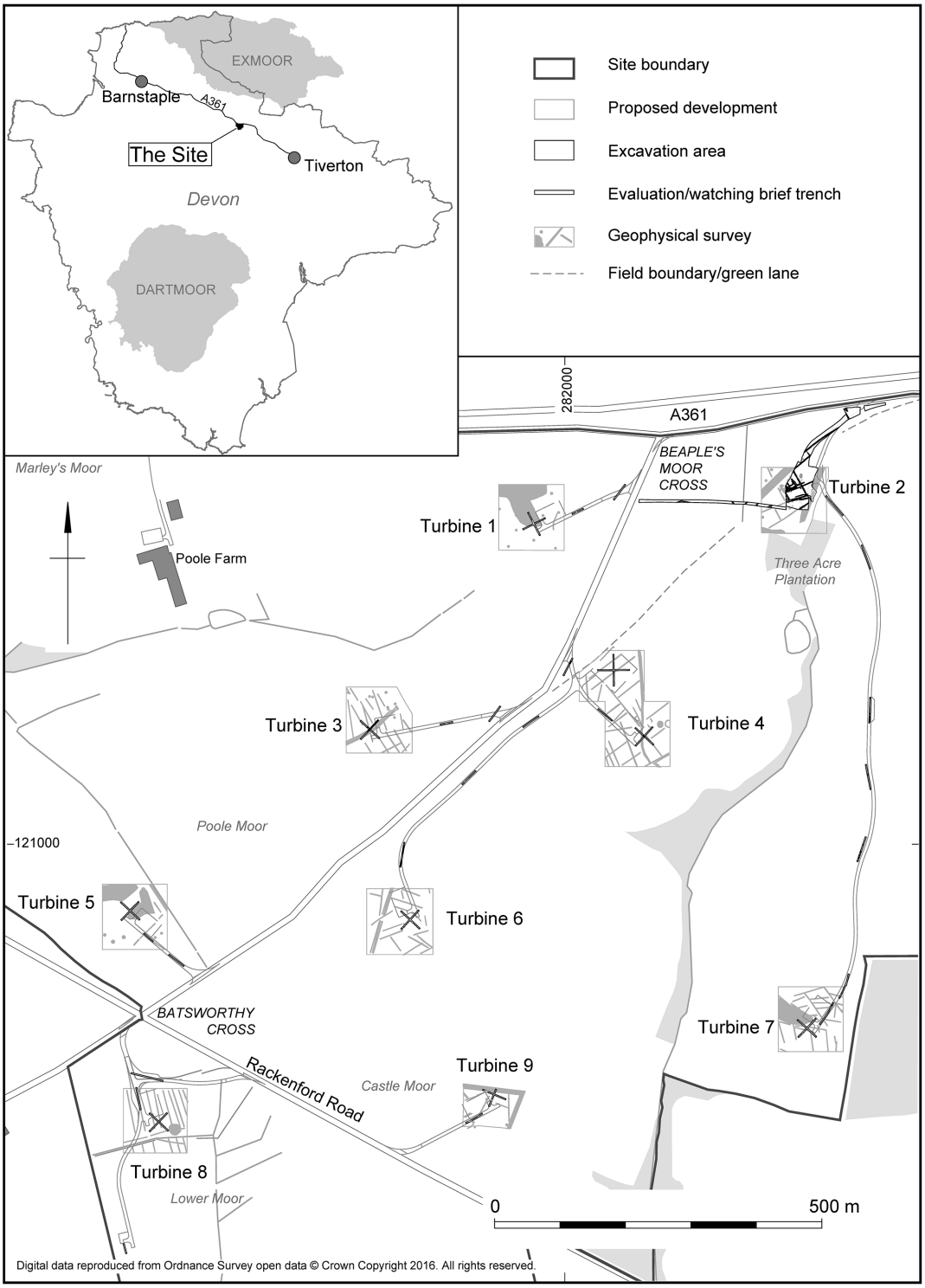

Fig. 1. Site location plan.

Archaeological and historical background

Many of the existing roads and trackways, earthworks, cropmarks and geophysical anomalies in the region, are believed to have prehistoric origins, probably associated with the various sites (e.g. burial mounds) that feature in the wider landscape. A small standing stone – The Knowstone (boundary stone of a man named *Knutr* or 'Knut's Stone'; Gover *et al.* 1932, 340; Mills 1998; Fig. 2) – once marked the junction between three ancient routes. The stone (Devon and Dartmoor Historic Environment Record (DDHER) No. MDV12330) was relocated during the construction of the A361 North Devon Link Road in the 1980s. Much of the road between Batsworthy Cross and Beaple's Moor Cross follows the route to the south-west, the ditch and bank earthworks of which cross the site (the droveway). According to late 19th-century maps, the north-eastern section (approximately 1 km) had

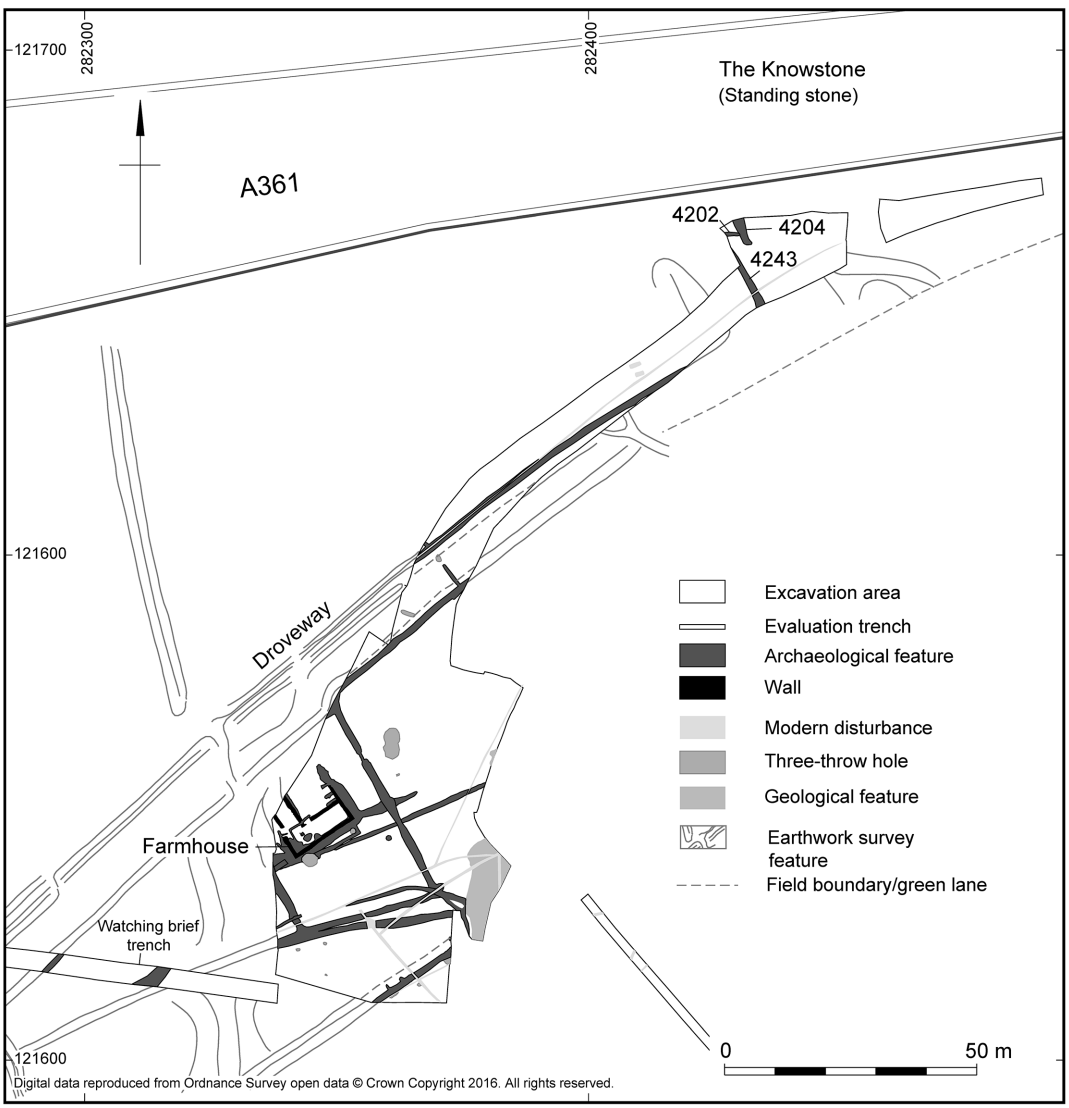

Fig. 2. Site plan.

long been decommissioned, traffic instead using the road to the junction at Beaple's Moor Cross (OS 1st Edition 1889–90).

The nearby village of Knowstone (*Chenutdestana/Chenueston Cnudstane*), named after the above-mentioned standing stone, is noted in *Domesday* (AD 1086) four times; later documents link the estate, or parts of it, to the medieval families of De Brett, Beuple, Loring, Harington, Bonville and Grey. A number of properties in Knowstone have 11th century origins, whilst in the 13th century the masons working on the church also built the present Mason's Arms. As with much of the south-west of England, the rural settlement pattern comprised small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, the farming inhabitants typically involved in 'convertible husbandry' (i.e. mixed rotational cultivation and pastoral agriculture) into the 16th century, around the time when a patchy retraction from marginal land becomes apparent (Rippon *et al.* 2006; Turner 2006; Miller and Hatcher 2014, 93; Beresford 1979).

Having been declining for years, the trade in wool was much reduced, though other products, such as metal, coal and cloth, contributed to a healthy commercial economy and the beginnings of consumerism (Dyer 2012, 18). The demand for supplies for, and as a result of, the Industrial Revolution, a resurgence of agriculture was seen across the region (Countryside Agency 2005, 2; Rippon *et al.* 2006, 65). Surrounding farms, including the Moortown Barton farm and cider house, and potentially the Moortown Quarry have their origins in this period. Latterly, a decrease in farming, greater urbanisation and the tourist trade have allowed some moorland revival.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

The excavation revealed the remains of a small L-shaped farmhouse, comprising two ranges and a yard area (Figs 3 and 4). These were enclosed by a series of ditches and banks which had been modified over time. The surrounding land was divided into a series of fields, the two to the rear being tapered at alternate ends. The earthworks of the droveway, upon which the farmhouse fronted, were probably substantially altered during the life of the settlement, as well as during a later period (Fig. 2 and see Fig. 11).

The farmhouse

The farmhouse (Fig. 5) was represented by a series of rubble-cored, drystone walls up to 0.65 m wide and 0.50 m high, and predominantly of local dense grey sandstone, with occasional quartz veins (Fig. 6): context numbers 4111–2 and 4114–5 (see Figs 4–7).

It is clear that – at least seasonally – rainwater needed to be managed in and around the building. A broad eaves-drip gully (4108 and 4109, up to 1.5 m wide; Fig. 4) extended around the outside of the south-west to north-east aspects, suggesting a thick, low-eaved thatch or turf roof. The various channels and stone-lined drains along and through the walls, and across the floors, are testament to water seepage into the building (e.g., 4341, Fig. 3; 4436 and continuations of 4108–9, Fig. 4). These formed part of the wider arrangement which would have carried the water away from the house and into the ditches defining the settlement plot.

The building comprised two rectangular ranges, one to the south-east (the living area) measuring 3.75 m by 12.50 m, and one to the west (3.00 m by at least 3.65 m). The yard to the north-east was approximately 8.10 m wide, and no longer than 12.60 m.

Two 1.25 m-wide probable doorways were identified in the northern wall of the living area; one with evidence for a doorpost (Fig. 7c) would have led to the yard, and one which communicated with the western range. A gap in the western wall, at the junction between the two ranges, may also indicate an entrance way. The drainage channels in this location (Figs 3 and 4) suggest that a further internal division may once have existed, perhaps installed in order to shield the hearth (see below) and occupants from draughts. Drainage channels also lined the inside of the walls of the living space and the yard, apparently

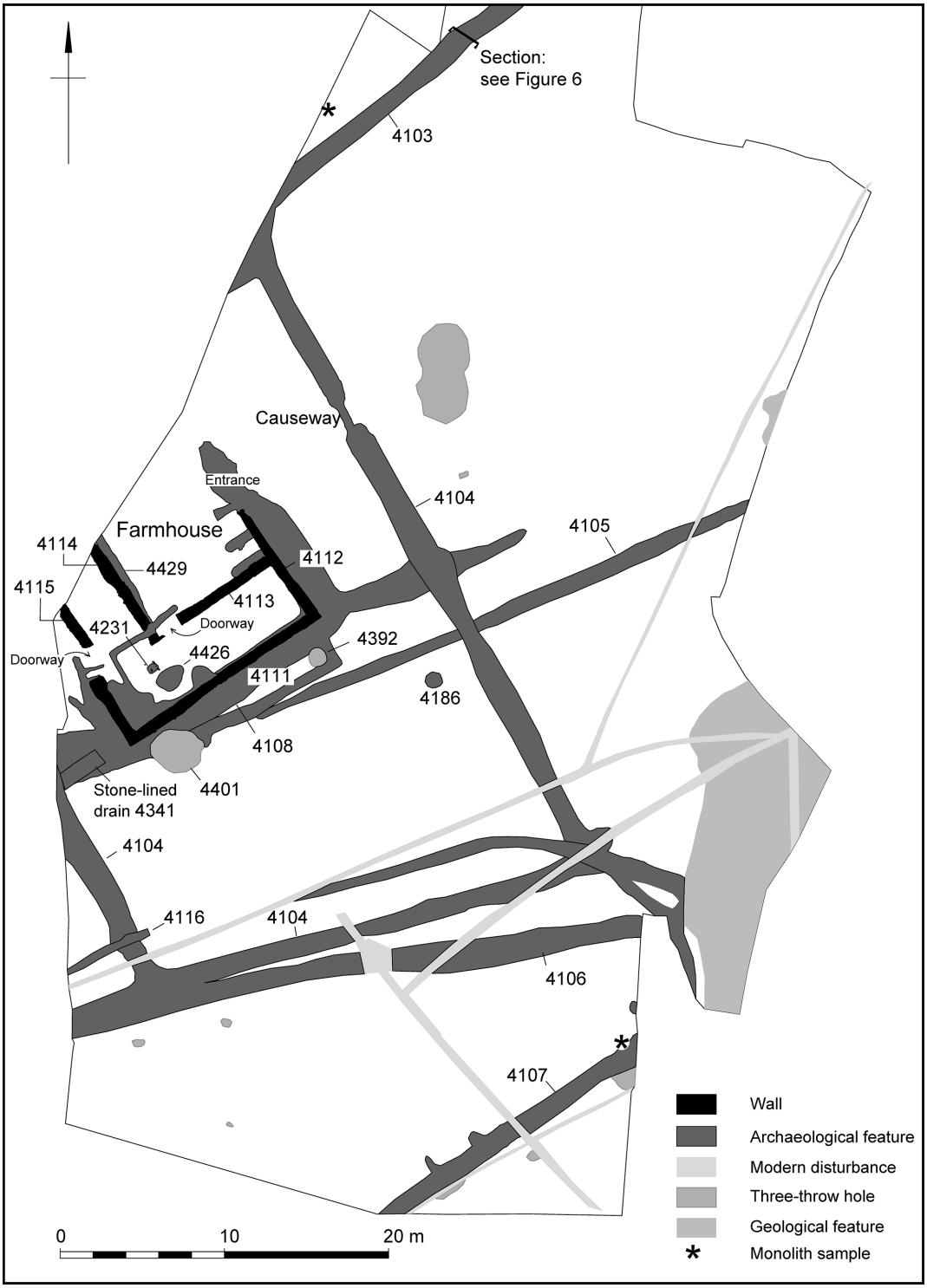

Fig. 3. Site plan: detail of farmhouse and plot.

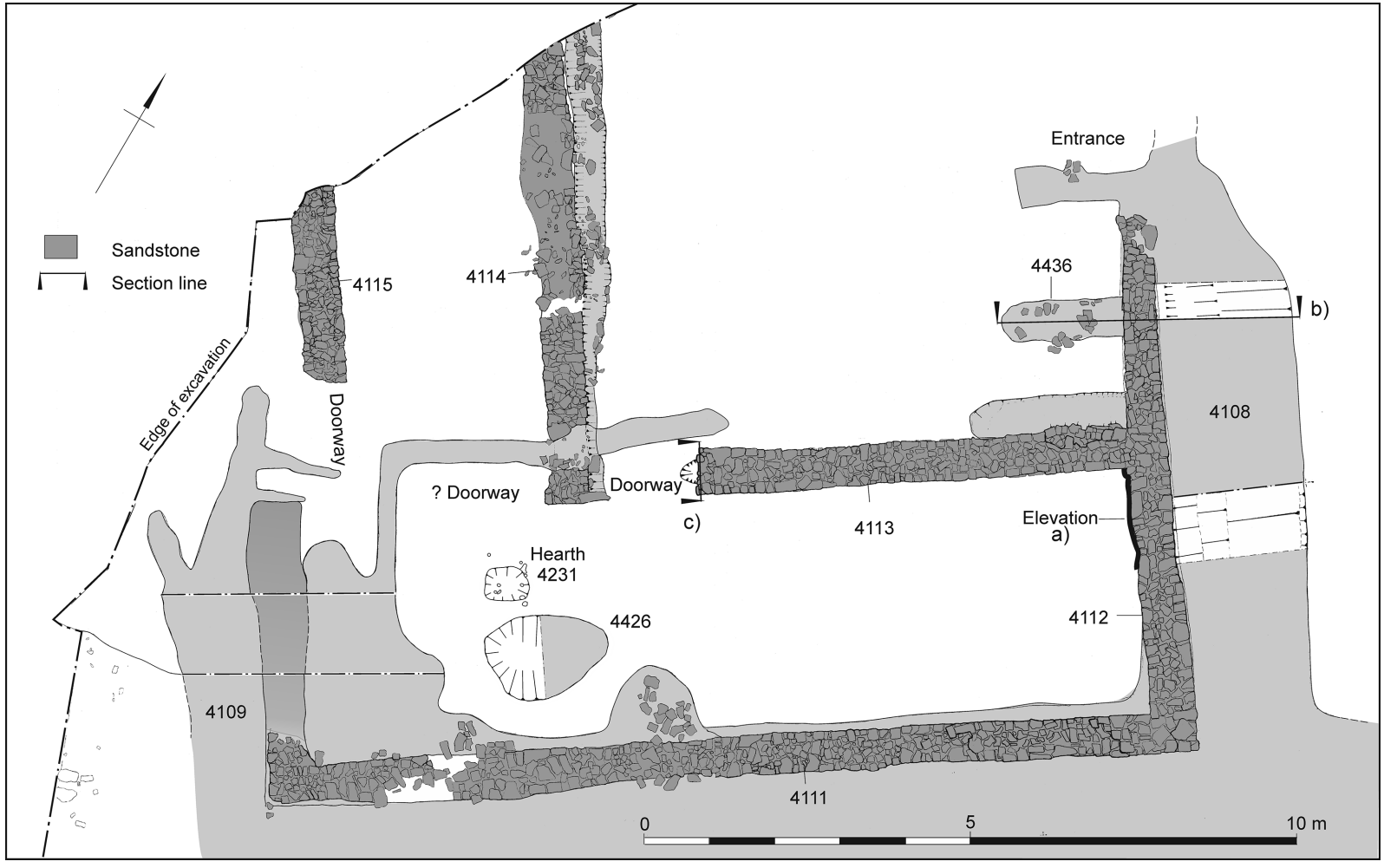

Fig. 4. Site plan: detail of farmhouse and associated features.

Fig. 5. View of the farmhouse from the south-west.

Fig. 6. External elevation of wall 4112, from the north-east (scales 1 m and 0.20 m).

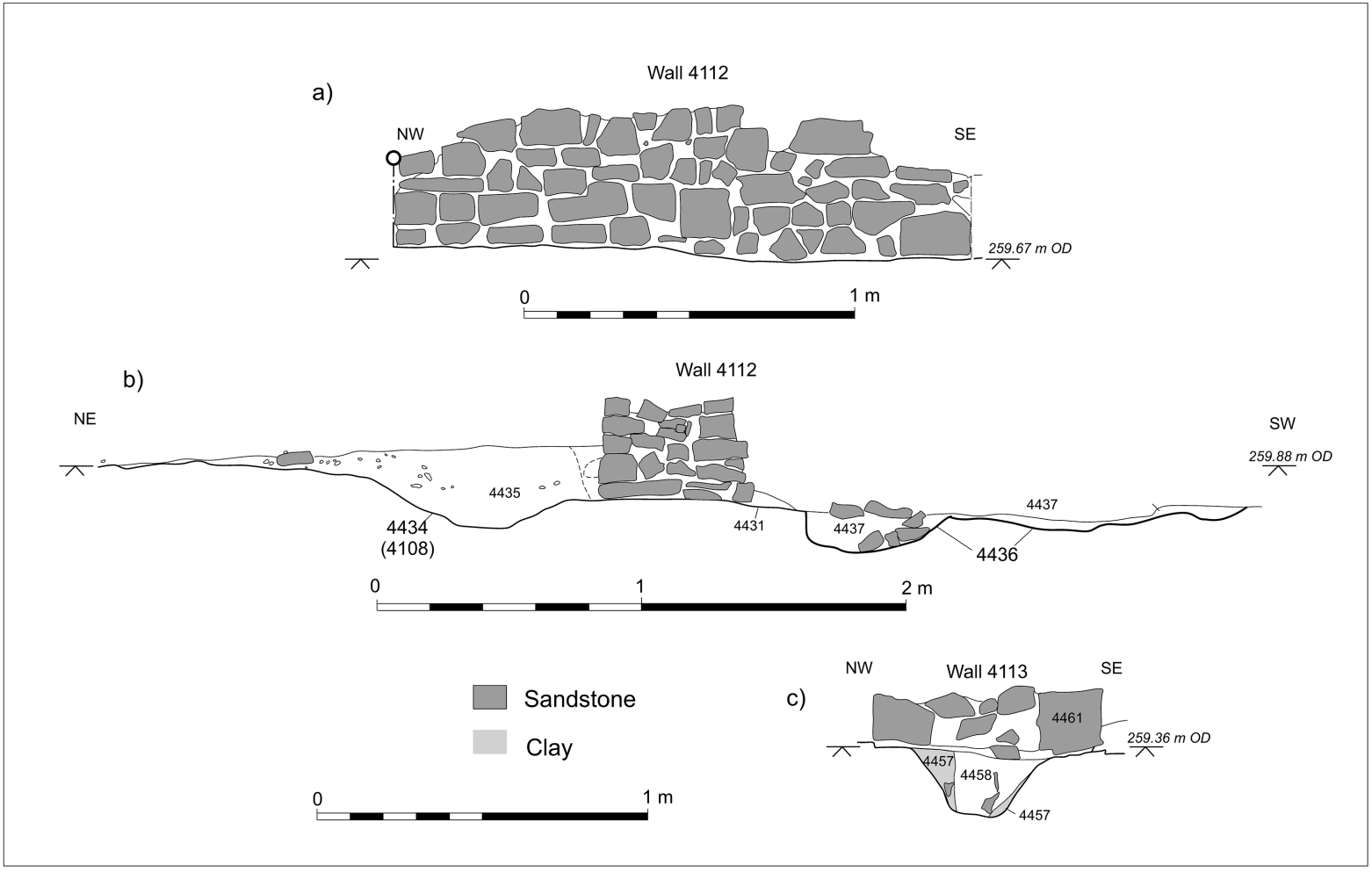

Fig. 7. a) West-facing elevation of wall 4112; b) North-west-facing section through wall 4112 and gullies 4108 and 4436; c) South-west-facing section showing end of wall 4113 and probable doorpost 4457.

draining towards the south-west. The hearth (4231; Fig. 4), situated in the south-west end of the living area, comprised a 0.68 x 0.49 m sub-rectangular shallow depression lined with charcoal and fire-reddened clay. Charred remains (Wyles and Challinor, below) demonstrate the use of gorse/broom and cereal-processing waste to kindle and fuel the fires, which would have been used to prepare the meals for the household, as well as to provide some heat and light. A few associated stakeholes likely represent the use of cooking spits and pot-hangers. Similar hearths have been recorded in the region, including some with a granite hearthstone, the remains of a chimney hood and associated cooking pits (Beresford 1979, 135). The lack of dating and evidence for function from the adjacent shallow pit (4426) precludes definitive interpretation.

The full extent of the western range was not revealed during excavation, though earthworks to the north-west (Fig. 2) suggest that the farmhouse continued for a few more metres, stopping 4 m or so short of the droveway. It appears that boundary ditch 4104 (see below), continued along the south-western side and around to the north-east, across the building's frontage (Fig. 3). Whilst no internal features were identified to aid the interpretation of the function of the western range, it has been suggested elsewhere that such spaces may have been used as a store, craft space, or private quarters (Clarke 1984, 38).

External access to the yard area was probably just beyond the end of the eastern wall, opposite the rock-filled causeway leading into the adjacent field (Fig. 3; see below). The continuation of the eaves-drip gully, a short length of wall and perpendicular, short drainage gullies on the north-eastern side of the complex suggests some form of covered area, or lean-to, at least in that part of the yard. The geophysical survey results (Fig. 1) hinted at a continuation of this wall to the north-west of the entrance, though no earthworks were identified here, and there was no evidence upon excavation. Further drainage features were observed along the eastern (?outdoor) aspect of the western yard wall.

Despite careful cleaning, no other features were found within the farmhouse. Medieval pottery, probably dating to the 13th to 14th century, was recovered from several of the farmhouse features (Mepham, below).

Associated features

Earthworks around the farmhouse include ditches and associated banks, designed to drain and delineate the plot and protect the enclosed area from livestock (Figs 2 and 3).

Immediately around the farmhouse, drainage comprised an eaves-drip gully (4108–9; Fig. 7b) with projections at the corners extending to the north-east and south-west, and a series of north-east to south-west channels. One of the earliest included a 30 m-long ditch 4105, along with the drip-gully (Fig. 3).

Ditch 4106, 19 m to the south of the farmhouse, was likely to have been of a similar phase. This formed the boundary between two fields, one, tapered to the south-west and bounded to the north-west by the droveway, and the other (tapered to the north-east) delineated to the south by ditch 4107 (Figs 3 and 8). These correlate with the earthwork survey findings, which defined a bank along its northern aspect. Pollen from soils buried below this bank indicate an arable environment with some alder trees, followed by an increase in grassland and pastoral activity (Landon and Scaife 2015).

A later phase of activity was represented by enclosure ditch 4104 (Fig. 9), which cut through ditches 4106 and the drip-gully extensions (Fig. 3). The enclosure ditch defined a trapezoidal area approximately 25 x 40 m, the northern boundary being formed by the southern edge of the droveway – which may have been re-established as part of the later alterations (see below). The parallel east and west elements of the enclosure led to an almost square southern boundary, possibly widening the tapered end of the field to the south, or forming an island/bank between ditches 4104 and 4106. In addition to the benefits of drainage, the enclosure earthworks will have afforded any gardens protection from

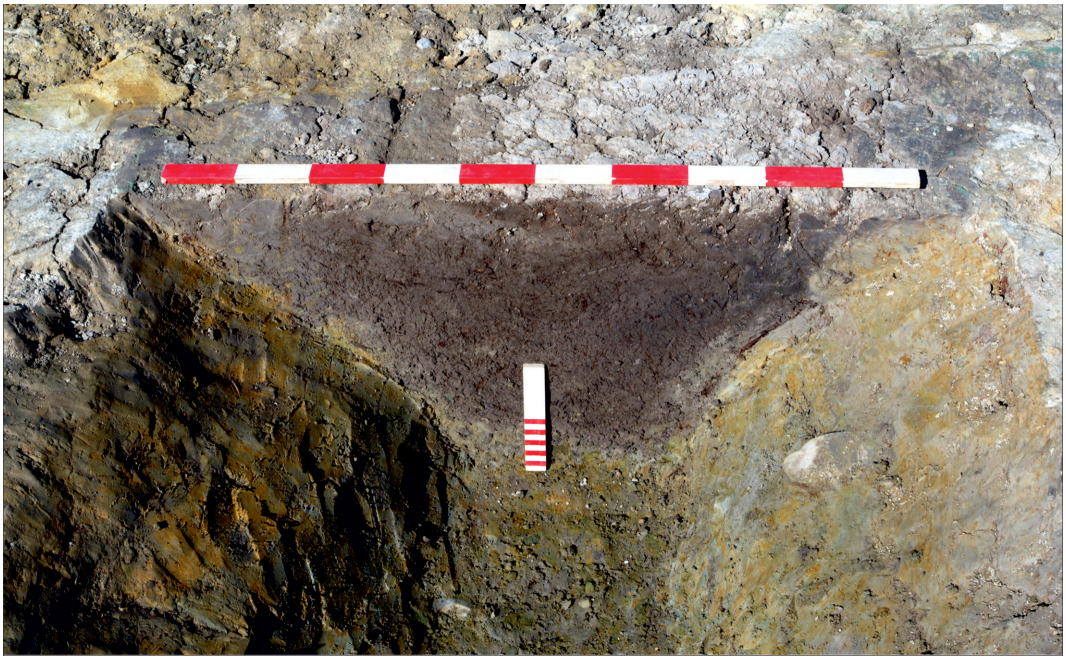

Fig. 8. West-facing section of ditch 4107 (scales 1 m and 0.20 m).

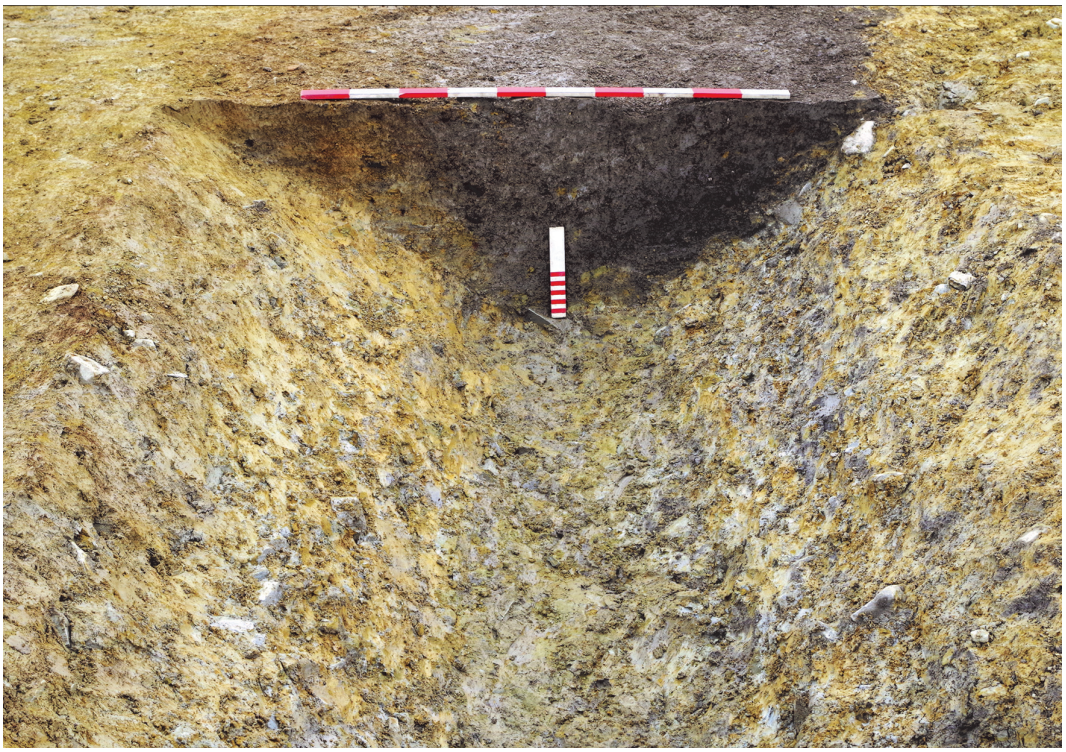

Fig. 9. South-facing section of ditch 4104 (scales 1 m and 0.20 m).

Fig. 10. Causeway in ditch 4104, from the south-east (scales 2 m, 1 m and 0.20 m).

grazing livestock. A 1.5 m long rock-filled constriction in the eastern leg of the enclosure ditch, opposite the yard entrance, probably represented a causeway (Figs 3 and 10), allowing controlled access to the domestic plot.

An additional channel, extending from the eaves-drip gully to the rear of the building, appears to skirt around tree-throw hole 4392, and halt at larger, similar feature 4401 (Fig. 3). A stone-lined drain (4341) was seen to extend from the south-west corner of the building. Though not early, it is not clear which stage of the use of the farmhouse these relate to.

Feature 4186 was circular, steep-sided and flat-based, and was probably a fire-pit. Basal fills comprised a lens of charcoal-rich silt, followed by a thin deposit of fire-reddened clay and stones. The main fill comprised a pale greyish silty clay and moderate-sized sandstone pieces. Though undated, the nature and contents of this feature suggests it was associated with the occupation of the farmhouse.

The network of ditches form part of a larger field system identified to the south and south-west of the farmhouse (DDHER MDV19726). Abraded 13th- to 14th-century pottery, probably derived from manuring of the surrounding fields, was found in some of these ditches, as well as amongst the assemblage from the southern flanking ditch of the droveway.

The droveway

The remains of the droveway extended across the site, immediately north-east of the farmhouse plot. It continues as hedge banks and field boundaries towards the A361 in the

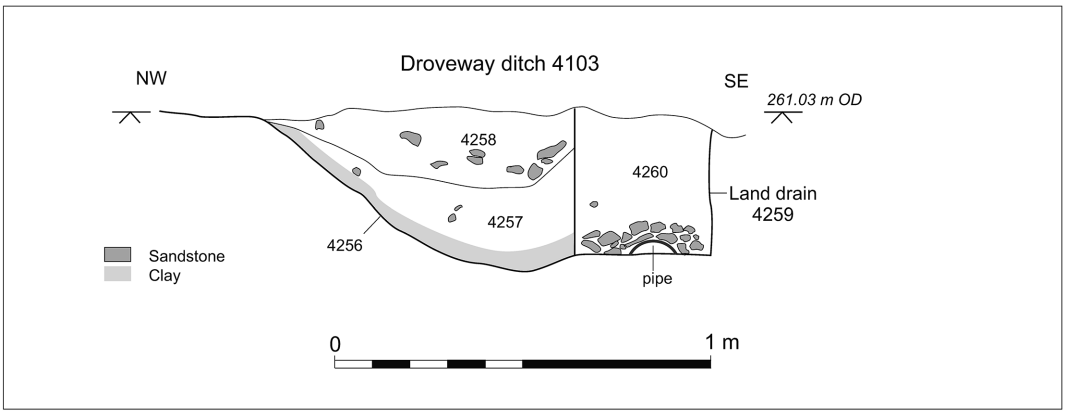

Fig. 11. South-west-facing section through southern droveway ditch 4103.

north-east, and the road between Batsworthy Cross and Beaple's Moor Cross (Figs 1 and 2; DDHER MDV19724; Wessex Archaeology 2015). By the mid-19th century this part of the route was already long-disused and the surrounding fields restored to heathland (Tithe map 1841; OS 1st edition 1889–90). The HER entry describes the droveway as being cut by a small wall or bank close to the farmhouse site, though this appears to have been outside the excavation area.

The 5 m-wide course of the droveway, which lacked any sign of a formally laid surface, is defined along each side by an earthen bank (partly of segmented construction). Features indicating adaptations associated with the farmhouse include entrance-ways into the domestic plot to the south, and into the fields to the north. A few residual sherds of 13th- to 14th-century pottery were recovered from one of the accumulated ditch fills. An internal division, in the area where both flanking ditches were revealed, would have constricted the droveway path to around 2 m wide, presumably designed to aid stock control around the settlement, or if of a later date, between the surrounding fields.

Evidence for maintenance of the flanking ditches during the post-medieval period includes a few sherds of pottery found in the soils buried below part of the northern bank, and a stone-filled land drain which had been installed along the length of the southern ditch (4103; Fig. 11). Pollen from here suggests open grassland, ferns and patches of hazel and heathland, probably indicating expansion of the moorland – though there was evidence for some cereal cultivation (Landon and Scaife 2015).

Later features

Ditch 4116 (Fig. 3) post-dated the farmhouse enclosure and associated drainage channels, though it roughly corresponds to the outline of the earlier field to the rear. No dateable artefacts were recovered, but stratigraphic, cartographic and historic evidence suggests it may date to the 18th or 19th century, when the industrial revolution increased the demand for agricultural products sufficiently to warrant the cultivation of marginal land. Traces of later, potentially similarly dated, ditches were identified in the northern part of the site, 135 m to the north-east of the farmhouse, and to the north of the droveway (4202, 4204 and 4243; Fig. 2).

A subsequent watching brief revealed a 20 m-long section (0.60 m wide, 0.07 m deep) of a probable stock enclosure evident on aerial photographs approximately 155 m to the west of the farmhouse. No dating evidence was recovered, though it is assumed to be of medieval or later date.

FINDS

Pottery *by* Lorraine Mepham

The pottery assemblage recovered from the site amounts to 132 sherds (831 g), of which 129 sherds (755 g) are medieval, and the remaining three sherds (76 g) are post-medieval. Only the medieval material will be discussed here. The condition of the assemblage is fair to poor, and sherds have suffered a relatively high level of surface and edge abrasion. Mean sherd weight for the medieval assemblage is 5.9 g.

The medieval sherds are all in similar coarse fabrics, tempered with prominent subangular quartz sand and occasional rock inclusions. These fall into the category of North Devon medieval coarsewares, which were certainly made in Barnstaple and possibly in Bideford, and perhaps also at other sources in the area; dating evidence, mainly from Okehampton Castle, indicates a starting point for the industry in the early 13th century, and it continued in use until the 15th century (Markuson 1980, fabric A; Allan and Perry 1982, fabric 1; Allan 1994). Petrological analysis of samples from inland sites, including Okehampton, has confirmed a link with the Barnstaple production centre (e.g. Vince and Brown 1982). The industry had a very limited repertoire in terms of vessel forms, and only jars are represented here, with slightly 'dished' rims profiles, some internally bevelled; comparable forms were found at Okehampton in 13th- to 14th-century contexts (Allan and Perry 1982, fig. 43). Several sherds exhibit external sooted residues. In the absence of any more diagnostic forms the pottery cannot be dated more closely, but it seems likely that this small assemblage represents a relatively short-lived occupation rather than any lengthy sequence.

One complete jar profile (comprising 26 sherds; Fig. 12), with a narrow, scored band around the girth, was recovered from the southern droveway ditch. A further 49 sherds came from the drainage system associated with building 4110, while minimal quantities were found in other features and deposits in and around the building.

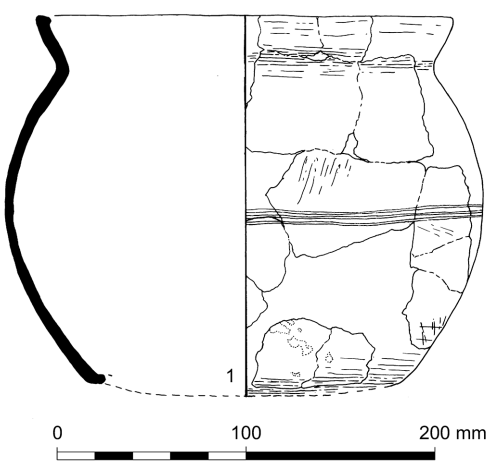

Fig. 12. Medieval pottery from the southern droveway ditch 4103.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Charred plant remains *by* Sarah F. Wyles

Two bulk samples from hearth 4231 were processed by standard flotation. All identifiable charred plant macrofossils were extracted; identification followed the nomenclature of Stace (1997) and Zohary and Hopf (2000, tables 3 and 5), and with reference to modern reference collections. The results are presented in Table 1.

Phase		Medieval	
Feature		Hearth 4231	
Context		4232 S quad	4232 W quad
Sample		5	6
Vol (L)		0.5	0.4
Flot size		250	175
%Roots		5	5
Cereals	**Common Name**		
Hordeum vulgare L. *sl* (grain)	barley	2	2
Hordeum vulgare L. *sl* (rachis frag)	barley	-	1
Triticum turgidum/aestivum (grain)	free-threshing wheat	35	37
Triticum turgidum/aestivum (rachis frags)	free-threshing wheat	10	6
Secale cereale (grain)	rye	cf. 28	cf. 18
Secale cereale (rachis frag)	rye	14	7
Cereal indet. (grains)	cereal	60	50
Cereal frag. (est. whole grains)	cereal	12	15
Cereal frags (rachis frags)	cereal	127	69
Other Species			
Stellaria sp. L.	stitchworts	2	-
Rumex sp. L.	docks	1	1
Brassica sp. L.	brassica	1	-
Raphanus raphanistrum L.	runch	-	1
Calluna vulgaris fruit	heather	cf. 18	cf. 14
Erica /Calluna type stems	heather	+	++
Erica /Calluna type pinules	heather	cf.+	cf. +
Vicia L./*Lathyrus* sp. L.	vetch/wild pea	5	-
Anthemis cotula L. (seeds)	stinking mayweed	2	1
Leucanthemum vulgare Lam.	oxeye daisy	2	4
Poaceae culm node	grass	24	13
Lolium/Festuca sp.	rye-grass/fescue	2	5
Poa/Phleum sp. L.	meadow grass/cat's-tails	-	4
Avena sp. L. (grain)	oat grain	16	15
Avena sp. L. (spikelet)	oat spikelet	1	8
Avena sp. L. (awn)	oat awn	2	3
Avena L./*Bromus* L. sp.	oat/brome grass	42	50
Monocot. Stem/rootlet frag		+	+

Table 1. Charred plant remains from medieval hearth 4231.

The assemblages were dominated by cereal grains including free-threshing wheat (*Triticum turgidum/aestivum* type), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and rye (*Secale cereale*). Fragments of rachis were also found. All are common in Saxon and medieval contexts from southern Britain (Greig 1991).

Oat/brome grass (*Avena/Bromus* sp.) were most common amongst the weed seeds; other species include vetch/wild pea (*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp.), rye-grass fescue (*Lolium/Festuca* sp.), meadow grass/cat's-tails (*Poa/Phleum* sp.), stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) and oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*). There were also a large number of heather stems (*Erica/Calluna* type) and possible pinules, together with heather fruits (*Calluna vulgaris*), other monocotyledon stem/rootlet fragments and grass culm nodes.

Threshing, winnowing and coarse sieving of free-threshing wheat in the field tends to remove the majority of the chaff elements prior to storage as relatively clean grain (Hillman 1981; 1984). The hearth assemblages are consistent with the burning of waste from an early stage crop processing such as coarse sieving. The waste (possibly specifically retained), as well as gorse/broom (Challinor, see below) may have been used as tinder, though a shortage of alternative fuel cannot be discounted.

The remains of heather demonstrate the use of heathland resources, whilst an increase in stinking mayweed – as is common in the Saxon and medieval periods – indicates cultivation of heavier clay soils (Greig 1991; Green 1984), associated with the increasing use of mouldboard ploughs in preference to ards (Jones 1981; Stevens with Robinson 2004; Stevens 2009). These assemblages, with a lack of high status/exotic species, are consistent with a rural medieval site, and indicate a feature used solely for domestic purposes.

Wood charcoal *by* Dana Challinor

Samples from hearth 4231 were examined to identify which fuelwoods were utilised in the firing, and whether these would shed any light on specific function and to examine, to some extent, the use and availability of local woodland resources.

Charcoal >2 mm in transverse section was considered for identification with 30 fragments (of variable size) randomly selected for identification from each sample. This was considered adequate to characterise the fuel used and to determine any significant differences between the quadrants. The charcoal was fractured and sorted into groups based on the anatomical features observed in transverse section. Representative fragments from each group were further examined and identifications were made with reference to Schweingruber (1990), Hather (2000) and modern reference material. Classification and nomenclature follow Stace (1997). Observations on maturity and character of the wood were recorded.

The abundant charcoal fragments were generally mid-sized and in quite poor condition, with strong orange sediment infusion and notable blue-green staining; the latter being characteristic of vivianite, a ferrous phosphate linked to the decomposition of organic waste in wet sediments. The preservation is consistent with fluctuating levels of waterlogging.

Four taxa were identified (Table 2): *Quercus* sp. (oak), *Betula* sp. (birch), Ericaceae (heather family) and *Cytisus/Ulex* (broom or gorse). Although the members of the Ericaceae family cannot be easily distinguished from the wood anatomy, the presence of fruits (and possible stems) of *Calluna vulgaris* (heather), makes it likely that the charcoal derived from this taxon. Likewise, *Cytisus* (broom) and *Ulex* (gorse) are not readily separated. Almost all of the charcoal fragments exhibited moderate to strong ring curvature, and many of the *Cytisus/Ulex* had preserved pith and bark. Variable sizes and ages were noted, but most roundwood was <10 years old. Charring causes a significant level of shrinkage (up to 40%), but it was clear that the stems would have originally been of small diameter.

	Feature	Hearth 4231			
	Context	4232 N quad	4232 E quad	4232 S quad	4232 W quad
	Sample	3	4	5	6
Quercus sp.	oak	10r		3r	2r
Betula sp.	birch	3r			
Ericaceae	heather family			1r	
Cytisus/Ulex	broom/gorse	17r	30r	26r	28r
Total		30	30	30	30

KEY: r – roundwood

Table 2. Results of the charcoal analysis.

The results show that heathland resources were exploited for fuelling the hearth; representing 85% of the whole assemblage. Oak and birch were also used, to a more limited extent (15%), as supplementary fuel. It is impossible to say on the basis of this one feature whether this reflects a shortage of deciduous woodland and/or an increase in heathland habitats since it is possible that the charcoal reflects a deliberate selection of fuel for a specific function. It is recorded that, traditionally, gorse was commonly used to provide a fast, high heat, for example suitable for heating up oven structures, before being swept out for baking (Gale and Cutler 2000, 260). Given the quantities of chaff, rootlets and monocot stems (see Wyles, above), it is likely that a variety of fast-lived fuels were used, perhaps as kindling, or if other resources were limited, as the main source of fuel. This indicates that, at least to some extent, the dominance of gorse (or broom) reflects accessibility to the moorlands of northern Devon and the management of heath resources.

DISCUSSION

The earliest evidence for activity on the site is probably the droveway, perhaps part of a purported ancient route (DDHER Number MDV12330) which extends at least from Oldways End, the site of the junction of several similar routeways some 5 km to the north-east, to Chulmleigh 15 km in the south-west, where the Rivers Taw, Little Dart and Hollacombe Water converge. Evidence suggests that the 1 km stretch that includes the part that crosses the site was largely abandoned by the late post-medieval period or early 19th century. It would appear that modifications were made when the medieval farmhouse was constructed and in use, as well as some time during the post-medieval period, after the house had long-since been deserted. The droveway would have been important to the occupants of the house, who would have needed to move their grazing stock between areas of rough pasture, usually away from the adjacent arable fields (Astill 1988, 47).

The farmhouse was probably a 13th- to 14th-century vernacular building likely to have been inhabited by wealthier farmers. Roofing depended on the availability of materials (e.g. turf, thatch), while walls may have consisted of masonry to full height, or 'dwarf' walls, topped with a timber-framed structure. Internal spaces typically included a living room with a hearth, stores, craft or private space, a yard and a garden area. Floors were usually trodden clay or earth, and regularly swept clean, with the debris being deposited outside (Clarke 1984, 38).

Enclosure of the plot to include some garden space is not unusual, several similarly-dated but larger and longer-lived settlements in the region (e.g. Hutholes and Hound Tor, Dartmoor; Beresford 1979) are similarly defined, and are considered to be largely associated with stock control. The fields around the farmhouse, known as 'parks' or 'closes', are also characteristic of the region and period (Rippon *et al.* 2006, 58; Miller and Hatcher 2014, 93).

The lack of evidence for lengthy period of use is supported by the pottery assemblage, which implies a fairly short-lived occupation during the 13th to 14th centuries. A combination of the favourable conditions provided by a climatic optimum, a booming economy and a lucrative wool trade, prompted the expansion of mixed farming into the upland fringes (Steane 1985, 174; Rippon *et al.* 2006, 58; Miller and Hatcher 2014, xii).

The consequences of a subsequent deterioration in the weather – evident at the farmhouse and contemporaneous settlement sites in the region as attempts to ameliorate the effects of the wetter conditions, such as drainage channels along the insides of walls, an increase in the use of stone-walling, paved thresholds and yards, and improvements to field drainage systems (Beresford 1979; Steane 1985, 175) – and of the famines and plague of the 14th century are well-recognised and have often been implicated in the desertion of settlements (e.g. Beresford 1979; Platt 1997; Dyer 2002, 228–29, 237; Turner 2006). However, pottery from deserted houses (e.g. Hutholes and Hound Tor) indicates occupation between the mid-13th and mid-15th centuries (English Heritage nd.; Allan 1994, 145). Rippon *et al.* (2006, 65) found that the pollen record of the mid- and North Devon region implies a general continuation of the agricultural *status quo* until the 16th century, and only patchy arable retreat from marginal areas during the late 15th century, when documentary evidence attests to a shift from arable to pastoral farming (*ibid.*; English Heritage 2006, 7).

In the case of the Beaple's Moor Cross farmhouse, the evidence points towards the challenging conditions of the 14th century as being instrumental in its demise, though it is possible that there was some agrarian use of the neighbouring fields. After some reversion to moorland, the increasing demands for agricultural products between the mid-16th and 19th centuries necessitated greater exploitation of the region including some reclamation of the upland fringes and improvements to the connecting thoroughfares, such as those represented by the changes to the droveway (Countryside Agency 2005, 2; Rippon *et al.* 2006, 65). Increasing urbanisation and a decline in farming have allowed large areas of upland to revert back to moorland.

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