

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation of the
Higham Ferrers Dovecote
Higham Ferrers castle
Northamptonshire
April 2007



Mark Patenall & Iain Soden

May 2007

Report 07/67

Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park

Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological evaluation at Higham Ferrers Dovecote	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Three hand dug test pits revealed remains of the dovecote, of which two walls still stand. There are conservation proposals to conserve the remains and represent them for public display.	
Project type (e.g. DBA, field evaluation etc)	Field Evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	English Heritage, SAM No 13607	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	None	
Current land use	Public House Beer Garden	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/period	Dovecote, Medieval – post medieval	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Green Dragon Public House, College Street, Higham Ferrers.	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	50m x 25m	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	NGR ; SP 6081 8616	
Height OD		
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Mark Patenall	
Project Manager	Iain Soden	
Sponsor or funding body	Higham Ferrers Tourism Board	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	2 nd April 2007	
End date	4 th April 2007	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Higham Ferrers Dovecote	
Serial title & volume		
Author(s)	Mark Patenall	
Page numbers		
Date	May 2007	

STAFF

Project Manager Iain Soden BA MIFA
Fieldwork Mark Patenall, Robert Smith, Paul Kajewski,
Yvonne Wolframm
Text Mark Patenall & Iain Soden
Medieval Pottery Iain Soden
Post medieval pottery Mark Patenall
Tile Tora Hylton
Illustrations Jacqueline Harding BA HND

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Iain Soden		
Verified by	C Walker		
Approved by	Bill Boismier		

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
HIGHAM FERRERS DOVECOTE,
HIGHAM FERRERS CASTLE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Abstract

Three hand dug test pits revealed the remains of the dovecote, of which two walls still stand, with a third rebuilt. There are conservation proposals to conserve the remains and re-present them for public display.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Steven Bruce on behalf of Higham Ferrers Tourism Board to evaluate the site of the Higham Ferrers Dovecote, part of Higham Ferrers castle (Fig 1; NGR SP 687 961). Fieldwork consisted of three hand dug test pits within the structure of the dovecote, according to an agreed strategy set out in the Scheduled Monument Consent (no HSD 9/2/8794, 30th November 2006).

The work proposed is preliminary to formulating proposals for the conservation and presentation of the dovecote remains, which lie to the rear of the Green Dragon Public House within a garden. The standing fabric comprises three sides, one of which is rebuilt, of a rectilinear building, roofless and with a largely grassed centre. They back onto a private garden.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Archaeological background and Context

The dovecote lies behind the east side of College Street, Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire; specifically it stands within the site of the 11th- or 12th-century Higham Ferrers motte and bailey castle with ponds, warren and dovecote. Related castle earthworks lie nearby and the whole ensemble constitutes a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Number 13607), statutorily protected under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Scheduled Areas Act 1979. The dovecote probably lies within the former castle bailey. A synthesis of the archaeology of the site and its village context has been set out by the former RCHME (1975, 54-6); at that stage the dovecote drew no attention, whether in relation to the castle or not.

The Higham Ferrers Dovecote is one of a number within the county, such as the c15th century round examples at Furtho (Plate 1) or that more recently excavated at Irthlingborough Manor (Plate 2). There is a rectangular example at Willington, Bedfordshire (see www.imagesofengland.org.uk for photograph). All are stone built, in keeping with local building traditions.

Dovecotes were also an integral part of monastic, manorial and castle society, providing meat to monks, lords or constables and their staff, when other forms of livestock were unavailable, or just as a change in the daily fare. Notable castle examples can be seen at Kirby Muxloe castle, Leicestershire, built into the gatehouse fabric c1480 (Plate 3), or further afield at the Norman castles of Crevecoeur en Auge (reconstructed from an ornate, free-standing structure of c1100; Plate 4) and at Roche Guyon (c1190), where it is hollowed out in a cave high in a chalk cliff (Plate 5). Often the remains do not survive since they are relatively flimsy compared to the principal castle fabric.

3 METHODOLOGY

The excavation consisted of three hand dug trial pits within the structure of the dovecote (Fig 2). Each measured 1.5m x 1.5m in plan (or 2.25 sq m). Two pits were placed in the north and south corners of the surviving dovecote walls and the third at the mid-point of the predicted position of the eastern fourth wall (Fig 2). Each recorded the deposition of layers within the dovecote and cut through turf, topsoil and other overburden down to the last floor, where it was present. Sections were drawn at 1:10 scale and plans at 1:20 scale in accordance with Northamptonshire Archaeology recording procedures.

All works were carried out according to the policy & guidance for archaeological fieldwork projects in Northamptonshire (NCCNH 1995). All procedures complied with the Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines (NA 2003).

4 THE EVALUATION EVIDENCE

4.1 General stratigraphic sequence

The three test pits did not reveal any geological sequences, and the stratification consisted of redeposited materials up to the present ground surface, with the largest deposit being the accumulation of 19th to 20th century waste material consisting of bottles, broken glassware, ceramics, iron, rubble, bones and charcoal, which covered the entire dovecote interior to approximately 0.65m deep (106, 207, 308). The finds are discussed below.

Test Pit 1 (Figure 3; Plates 6 & 7)

The earliest feature was the construction trench of the dovecote, of which only the fill was visible with certainty (103). Aligned north-south, this was located at a depth of 0.85m below ground level, and was partially excavated until large stone fragments and limited space stopped progress. Within this lay the foundation (102), which measured 0.31m wide by at least 0.2m deep and 1.50m long. It consisted of large thin limestone blocks visible on the face. The backfill of the construction trench (103), consisted of a yellow brown clay with limestone fragments and charcoal flecks, which stopped level with the top of the foundation layer.

Aligning north-south on top of the foundation layer were approximately five courses of limestone wall (104), consisting of faced outer stones with a rubble core. This was located 520mm below ground level and was 1.18m wide by 1.50m long and remained as 700mm thickness of walling, bonded by a sandy lime mortar. Incorporated into the core was evidence of two nesting boxes with one complete and one partial entrance visible on the interior face.

The layer of yellow brown clay (105) sitting on top of the foundation layer and butting against the lower wall coursing may represent an interior floor surface, and appears similar to the surfaces in Test Trenches 2 and 3.

The final phase was the 19th to 20th century deposit of soil and rubble which covered the site, discussed above.

Test Pit 2 (Figure 4; Plates 8 & 9)

Here the construction trench of the dovecote [201], cut through a clay deposit (204), this showed a vertical 90° cut, and was excavated to a depth of 0.35m until halted by large stones. It was 0.22m wide and was aligned north-south. The depth is unknown.

The lowest foundation layers (202) consisted of mixed rough limestone blocks up to 300mm x 140mm in elevation. The coursing was uneven with a bonding of sandy lime mortar. The top of the foundation level was encountered at 780mm below the ground surface.

The construction trench backfill (203) consisted of yellow brown clay with limestone fragments and blocks, similar to Pits 1 and 3.

The clay deposit (204) encountered at a depth of 700mm, below ground surface, contained charcoal flecks, limestone rubble and rendering from the walls. It does not butt up against the walls and clearly shows the cut for the construction trench. It is therefore not the floor but ought to predate the dovecote construction.

The lower regular courses of walling (205) consisted of thin roughly coursed limestone blocks up

to 300mm x 170mm in elevation with a bonding of sandy lime mortar, this constitutes the lower dovecote wall below the present ground surface. One possible blocked in nest box was visible on the west wall.

On the inner face of (205) patches of a sandy lime render have been preserved probably due to being buried out of the elements. The areas were on average 0.01m thick; this rendering also appeared in Test Pit 3, in both cases it does not extend above the ground surface.

Layer (207) is the 19th -20th century deposit, discussed above.

Test Pit 3 (Fig 5; Plates 10 & 11)

The sequence of events for this test pit mirror that of Test Pit 2, with the construction trench (301) cutting through the clay floor surface at a depth of 850mm. The construction trench was not excavated but was probably similar to (201) in Test Pit 2. The wall build (303) was the same but with better evidence for collapsed or in filled nesting boxes on the west and north walls below the present ground surface. Rendering was also present to a greater degree on both walls, with a small area on the north wall having glass fragments incorporated within the matrix. Layer (307) was 400mm deep and consisted of mixed clay, charcoal and mortar which overlaid the floor surface and was deposited against the west and north walls, probably representing an accumulation after the dovecote had been disused.

Layer (308) is the 19th to 20th century deposit discussed above.

5 THE FINDS

The Tile by Tora Hilton

Three large fragments of ceramic roof tile were recovered from Test pit 2, context (207). The pieces join together form a substantial part of a pantile measuring 320mm long (incomplete measurement), 265mm wide and 15mm thick. The tile has a small centrally placed rectangular nib at one end and patches of mortar adhere to the underside, indicating how the tile would have been secured in place. The tile is manufactured from a hard-fired pale orange/buff fabric, tempered with sand and small fragments of red grog. Pantiles are usually post-medieval in date in this area.

The Early Pottery by Iain Soden.

Four sherds of pottery were recovered as follows:

(202) Dovecote construction trench: one shell-tempered body sherd; medieval non-diagnostic. One flared base sherd from a small jug or tankard in late medieval redware; speckled brown/orange glaze. 16th century. The medieval sherd is thus residual.

(207) layer: shell-tempered body sherd; medieval, non-diagnostic; residual.

(307) layer: Stoneware, flared thumbed tankard/jug base in imitation of imported drinking mugs such as Raeren/Cologne types; thin greenish glaze. 16th century.

The pottery is unremarkable and, as one might expect in a non-domestic building, very sparse. The single, distinctive base sherd from layer (202) is valuable, however, since it indicates a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the dovecote. The similarly-dated sherd from (307) helps confirm this early period of use. Thus the dovecote dates no earlier than the 16th century.

The Bottles by Mark Patenall

The earliest glass came from the top of fill (203), and consisted of the neck and fragments of a late 18th to early 19th century dark green wine bottle

A group of ten complete or near complete bottles and jars were recovered from the 19th to 20th century layer in Test Pit 2. Two were stoneware jars for preserves or dried goods, one light grey with a brown rim, one creamy brown body with a darker brown inverted rim and neck, both probably used large corks for stoppers. There were two early 20th century, dark green wine bottles, one with remains of a label. There was also a clear glass preserve jar, embossed with T.W. Beach Fruit Growers. There was also a clear glass, elongated neck sauce bottle. There were two Campbell Praed & Company of Wellingborough mineral water bottles, one an Egg/Torpedo without stopper, the other a half pint with ceramic bullet stopper, both early 20th century. One, light grey, half pint, stoneware ginger beer bottle completed this dumped assemblage.

In Test pit 3, a complete dark brown stoneware, ink or blacking bottle was recovered. For all these see Plate 9.

6 DISCUSSION

The excavation has fully defined the extent of the plan of the dovecote. No evidence has been found for a putative central dividing wall; in fact former nesting boxes, extending almost down to the floor level are present right across the mid-point of the east wall. No potence was found, this probably lies in the centre of the building. The dovecote entrance has not been located but it probably lies off-centre in either the reduced east wall or somewhere within the shorter, but

rebuilt south wall. No deliberately laid floor was present. The interior seems to have been lime-rendered, providing both reflected light and a degree of cleanliness. The pottery from the construction trench of the dovecote in Test Pit 2 indicates that the dovecote was constructed no earlier than the 16th century.

The collapsed or blocked – up nest boxes indicate the demise of the dovecote may have been gradual, with this being possible evidence of a reduction in the numbers of birds being kept. Alternatively, it may reflect the vulnerability of nest boxes low down to predatory cats and vermin, making their prolonged use inadvisable.

The lack of definable collapse material suggests that the dovecote was carefully dismantled, the stone of the east wall, the timber and tile being taken away for use elsewhere. Thereafter the accumulation has a horticultural character, being part of a cultivated garden. At a convenient corner, it has also attracted rubbish dumping.

It is noticeable that the nesting boxes exposed at lower levels in the excavation do not appear to have had the string course-perches which characterise all of those within the upstanding remains. This is probably because from about a metre up a squab falling of the nesting box would be killed. The string-perch was necessary to give added protection, something not needed lower down. In addition there would be no point giving help to vermin trying to gain access to the squabs from the ground. Confronted with a sheer, rendered face without ledges for a metre, mice and rats might be dissuaded from trying to climb.

The fieldwork has shown that the structural remains below ground are relatively well preserved and the standing superstructure remains solidly founded to a depth of at least a metre. Evidence suggests that the interior was rendered between the perches. The exact location of the potence is not known. The dovecote interior is covered by about 440mm of unstratified material, which acts as a blanket, covering and preserving the lower fabric.

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IFA 1999 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological field evaluation, Institute of Field Archaeologists

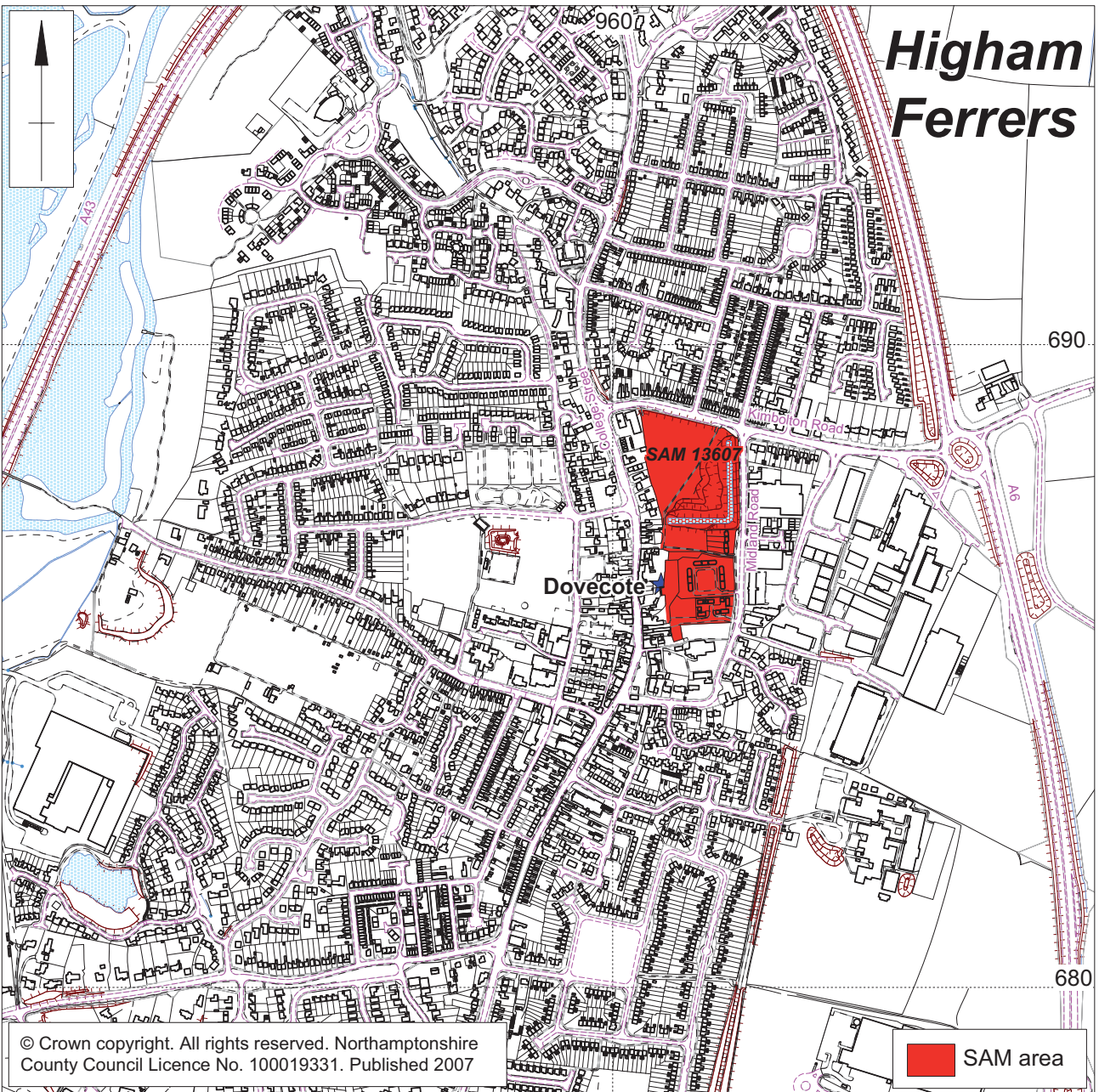
Northamptonshire Archaeology
Northamptonshire County Council

May 2007

APPENDIX A1: SITE DATA

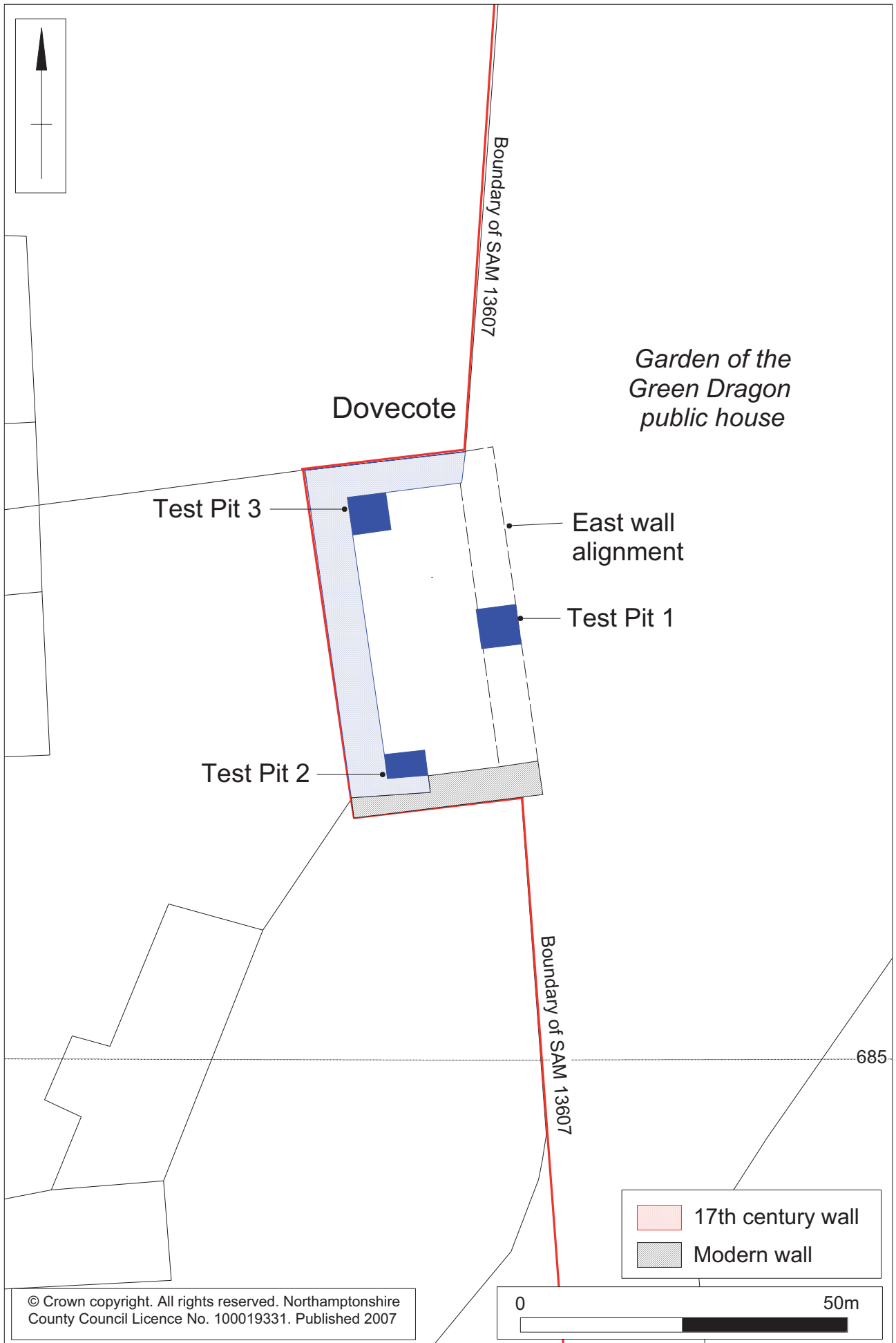
Trench No	Context	Deposit Type	Description
1	[101]	Cut	Linear construction trench aligned north-south probable vertical sides and flat base, depth and width unknown not fully excavated.
	(102)	Fill	Limestone course rubble walling foundation level with sandy lime mortar, size of stones 0.30m-0.50m long by 0.20m thick, 0.22m by 1.50m of wall exposed
	(103)	Fill	Firm mid grey brown sandy clay with frequent limestone fragments and charcoal flecks, not fully excavated
	[104]	Masonry	Limestone rough course walling various stone sizes ranging from 0.9m wide by 0.10m long to 0.26m wide by 0.27m long with average thickness of 0.05m, bonded by a sandy lime mortar, exposed wall dimensions 1.18m wide by 1.50m long by 0.30m deep.
	(105)	Layer	Firm mid yellow brown clay, frequent stones and limestone fragments, 1.50m long by 0.20m deep.
	(106)	Layer	Firm dark grey brown loam, frequent limestone rubble, brick fragments, pottery, stones and charcoal flecks, depth 0.67m.
2	[201]	Cut	Linear aligned north-south, with 90° vertical sides with a possible flat base, not fully excavated, 0.22m wide by 0.35m deep by 1.50m long. Foundation trench.
	(202)	Masonry	Limestone rubble coursed walling with some ashlar faced blocks, ranging from 0.14m-0.30m long by 0.03-0.15m thick. Bonded by a sandy lime mortar, 0.53m long by 0.23m wide exposed
	(203)	Fill	Firm yellow brown clay with limestone fragments, 0.30m long by 0.80m wide by 0.30m deep
	(204)	Layer	Firm yellow brown clay with charcoal flecks, limestone fragments and sandy lime rendering, 1.0m long by 0.80m wide by 0.23m deep.
	(205)	Masonry	Hard light grey coursed squared and irregular limestone wall with sandy lime mortar, various stone sizes ranging from 0.08m-0.30m long by 0.03m-0.17m thick, wall section 0.90m long by 1.00m deep below ground.
	(206)	Layer	Soft and friable creamy yellow brown sandy lime mortar rendering, existing patch 0.50m long by 0.30m deep by average thickness 0.01m.
	(207)	Layer	Soft and friable dark grey loam with limestone fragments, ceramics, glass, tile, iron and charcoal flecks, 0.76m deep.
3	[301]	Cut	Linear aligned north-south by east-west not excavated, see [201]. Foundation trench.
	(302)	Masonry	Rough cut, irregular coursed limestone wall with sandy lime mortar aligned north-south by east-west, stones range from 0.12m to 0.44m long by 0.03m to 0.04m thick and 0.12m exposed width. Foundation stones.

Trench No	Context	Deposit Type	Description
	(303)	Masonry	Hard, grey, irregular coursed limestone wall bonded with a sandy lime mortar. Stones range from 0.16m to 0.30m long by 0.7 to 0.8m thick, some stones ashlar faced. Extending 0.90m deep below ground level
	(304)	Fill	Firm yellow brown clay with limestone fragments, aligned north-south and east-west 1.40m long by 0.35m wide
	(305)	Layer	Soft and friable creamy yellow brown sandy lime mortar existing in patches with one patch measuring 0.60m long by 0.30m deep by average thickness of 0.01m. One small area contains some glass sherds mixed with the mortar.
	(306)	Layer	Firm yellow brown clay with limestone fragments and charcoal flecks 1.00m long by 1.40m wide
	(307)	Layer	Firm yellow brown clay with mortar fragments and charcoal flecks, 1.40m long by 0.40m deep.
	(308)	Layer	Soft and friable grey brown loam with limestone fragments, charcoal flecks, ceramics, glass and iron, 1.40m long by 0.55m deep.



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1



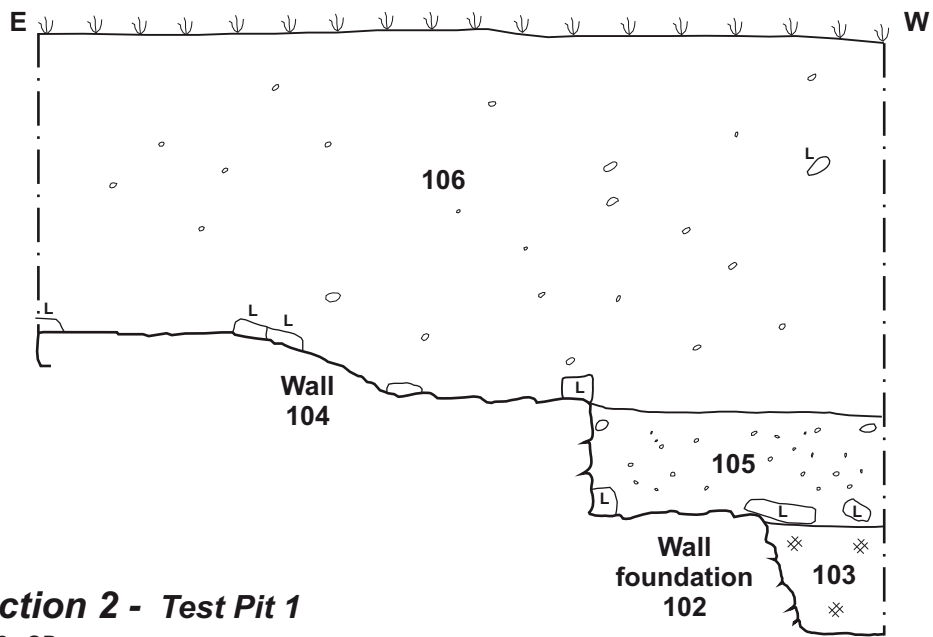
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Scale 1:200

Test pit locations Fig 2

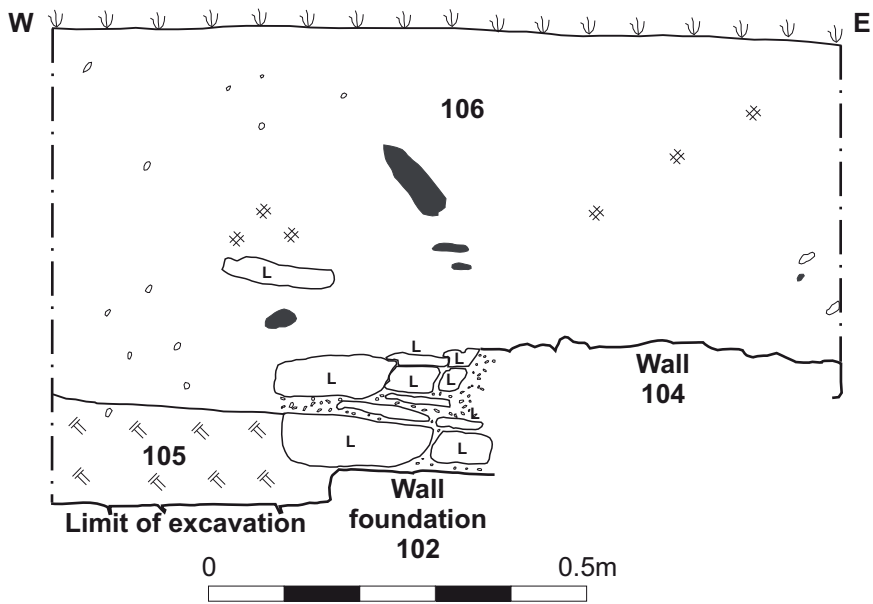
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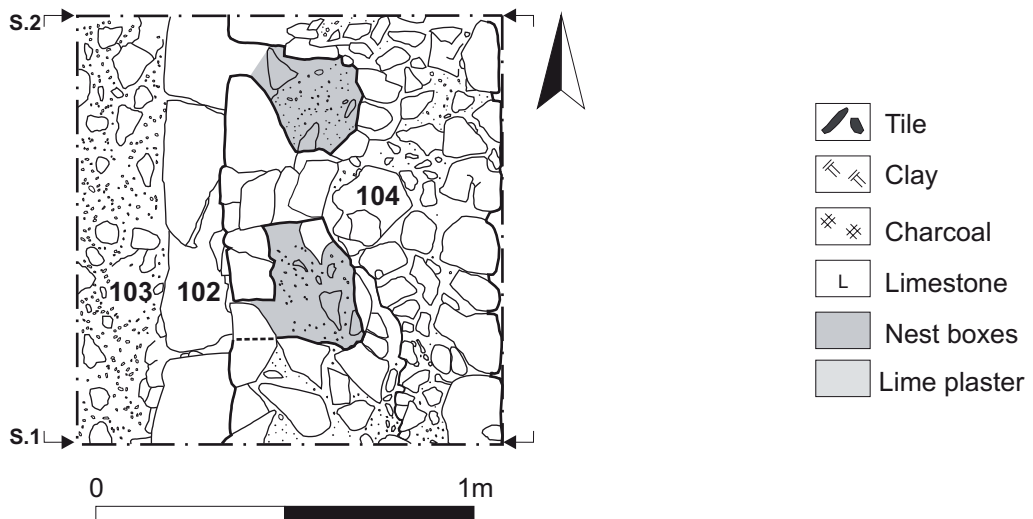


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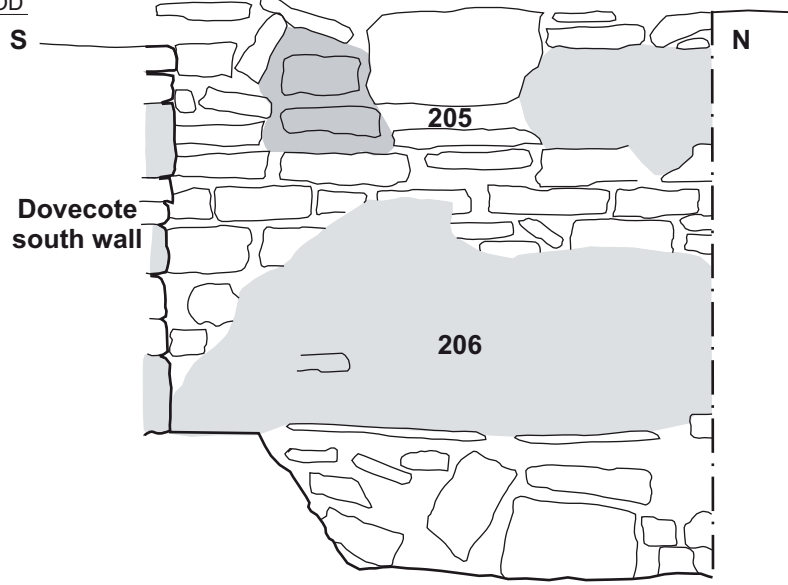
Test Pit 1



Test Pit 1, Sections 1 and 2 Fig 3

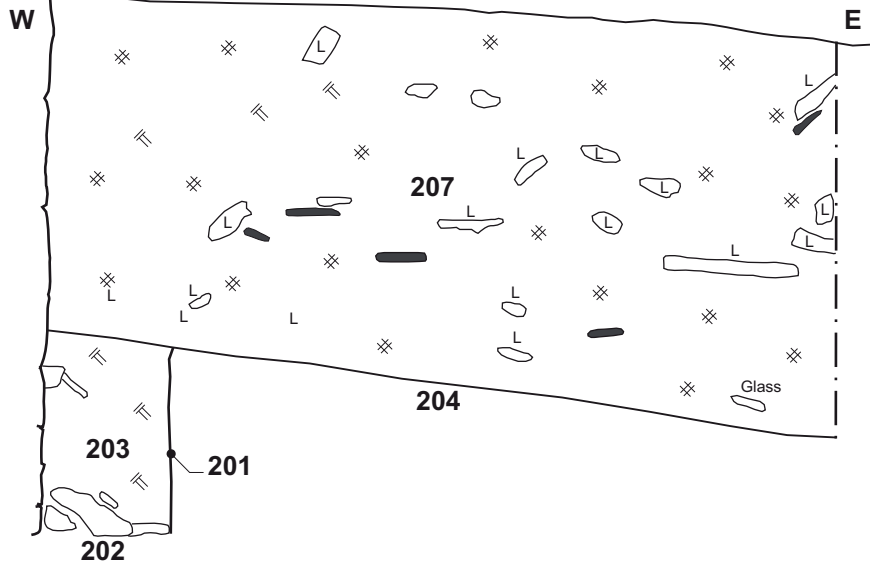
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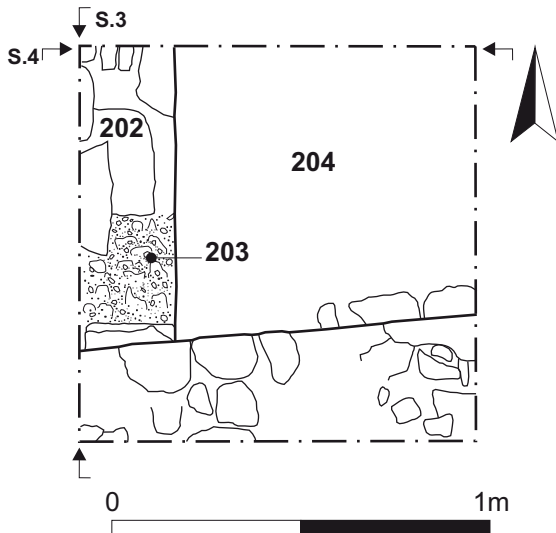




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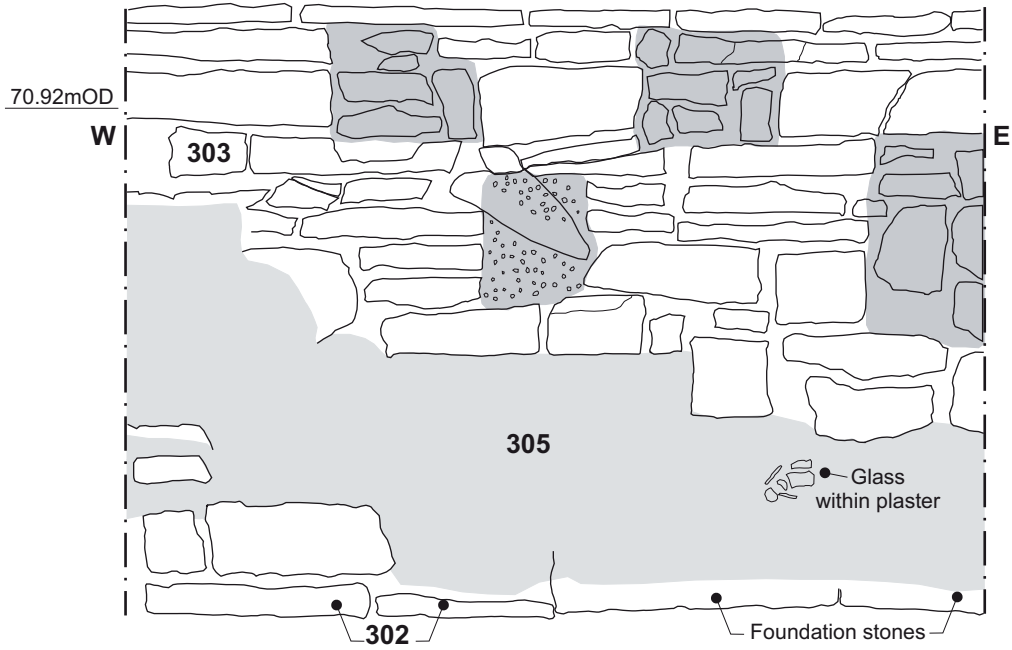
Test Pit 2



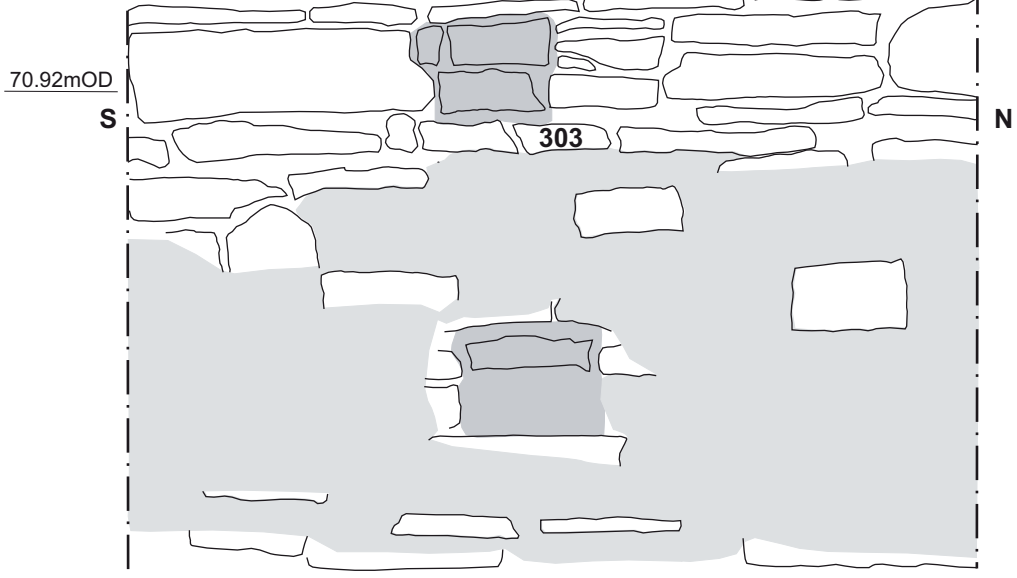
-  Tile
-  Clay
-  Charcoal
-  Limestone
-  Nest boxes
-  Lime plaster

Test Pit 2, Sections 3 and 4 Fig 4

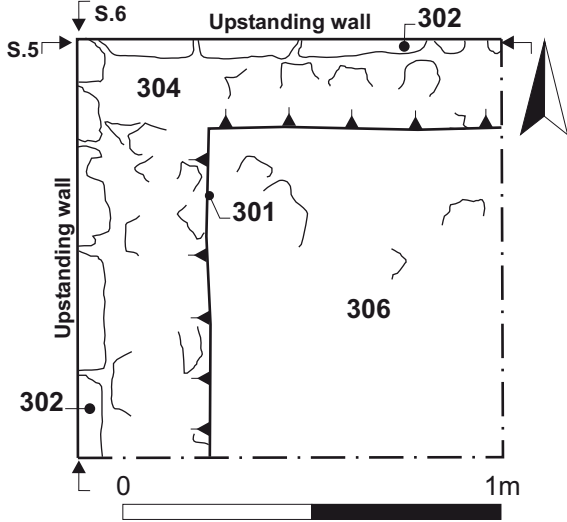
Section 5 - Test Pit 3








Section 6 - Test Pit 3



Test Pit 3



-  Tile
-  Clay
-  Charcoal
-  Limestone
-  Nest boxes
-  Lime plaster

Test Pit 3, Sections 5 and 6 Fig 5



Plate 1: Furtho dovecote c15th century.



Plate 2: Excavated dovecote remains at Irthlingborough c15th century.



Plate 3: Dovecote in Kirby Muxloe Castle gatehouse c1480.



Plate 4: Crevecoeur en Auge Castle c1100, freestanding dovecote (reconstructed).



Plate 5: Roche Guyon Castle c1190, dovecote hollowed out of the cliff.



Plate 6: Test Pit 1, construction trench, foundation wall and lower wall courses.



Plate 7: Test Pit 1, nest boxes and 19th to 20th century deposit.



Plate 8: Test Pit 2, floor surface, construction trench and lower wall courses.



Plate 9: Test Pit 2, the dumped bottles from context 203.



Plate 10: Test Pit 3, floor surface, rubble filled construction trenches.



Plate 11: Test Pit 3, upper wall coursing, blocked nest boxes and mortar rendering