

POULTRY HOUSE, EAST SIDE OF GRANGE BECK,  
SKELLGILL LANE, LOW ABBOTSDALE,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2009, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) to undertake an archaeological survey of a ruined poultry house on the east side of Grange Beck, in Wensleydale, North Yorkshire (NGR SD 93385 91246). The resulting report would provide a detailed record of the structure, would enhance the understanding of this type of structure within this part of the Yorkshire Dales, and would provide sufficient, accurate information to assist with the formulation of any management and/or consolidation proposals, should this be thought necessary at some future date.

The single storey poultry house has a rectangular plan, with maximum external dimensions of 4.80m by 4.15m. It is constructed of roughly coursed and squared sandstone/limestone rubble, and was formerly covered by a pitched roof, now collapsed. There is a door in the south side, a narrow window in the west wall, and stone-built nesting boxes around all four internal walls. Cartographic evidence suggests that the poultry house can be quite closely dated to the period between 1892 and 1910, and the rebuilding of some of the nesting boxes in brick implies a mid 20th century refurbishment. Adjacent earthworks and stone scatters imply that there were other structures adjacent to the hen house, although they may not have been contemporary.

This poultry house shares some characteristics with another example recorded to the north-west, also in Low Abbotside, namely a location away from the farmyard, a position against and at the base of a slope, presumably partly for shelter, and the positioning and dimensions of the nesting boxes. However, the Grange Beck poultry house is slightly larger, it did not have a "pop-hole" which meant that the hens had no independent access in or out of the house, and the window did not seem to have any permanent protection from predators. The reason for placing the poultry house at a distance from the associated farm is as yet unclear, but it might represent a transitory stage between hens being housed within the farmyard and the portable timber hen houses of the early 20th century.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Reasons and Circumstances for the Project

- 1.1 In April 2009, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) to undertake an archaeological survey of a ruined poultry house on the east side of Grange Beck, in Wensleydale, North Yorkshire (NGR SD 93385 91246). The resulting report would provide a detailed record of the structure, would enhance the understanding of this type of structure within this part of the Yorkshire Dales, and would provide sufficient, accurate information to assist with the formulation of any management and/or consolidation proposals, should this be thought necessary at some future date.
- 1.2 No detailed project design or methods statement was produced in advance of the survey. Instead, the scope of the work was defined following discussions between EDAS and the Senior Conservation Archaeologist of the YDNPA in April 2009.

## Site Location and Description

- 1.3 The poultry house is located on the east side of the Grange Beck, just to the north of Gill Gate, itself c.1km north of Bainbridge in upper Wensleydale (see figure 1). The ruined structure occupies a low-lying beck-side position at an elevation of c.240m AOD at the bottom of the west-facing slope of the valley (see figure 2). The structure is recorded on the YDNPA's Historic Environment Record (Site MYD49873).
- 1.4 The site is accessed via a gateway off Skellgill Lane, an unclassified road running north from the main Askrigg road on the north side of the river Ure. This gateway leads into a small enclosed pasture field, which slopes steeply downwards from east to west towards the Grange Beck. The slope is not even, but sub-divided by a number of terraces and steep west-facing scarps, both natural and man-made. The poultry house is located in the relatively level area between the base of the slope and the Grange Beck.
- 1.5 The area around the poultry house was heavily vegetated at the time of the survey (May 2009), with a 0.50m high spread of nettles within the building itself. As part of the survey work, these nettles were carefully cut back so as to expose the historic structure. The interior of the poultry house was also partially choked with stone rubble obscuring the floor, and the fallen remains of a corrugated iron roof.

## Survey Methodologies

- 1.6 As noted above, the scope of the archaeological survey work was defined by discussions between the Senior Conservation Archaeologist of the YDNPA and EDAS in April 2009. The field survey was undertaken on the 21st May 2009 by Shaun Richardson of EDAS and Richard Watts of the YDNPA. Several elements were involved:

### *Documentary research*

- 1.7 No documentary research was required to be undertaken as part of the project. However, any readily available material, including historic map coverage, was made available to EDAS by the YDNPA. In addition, a considerable amount of documentary material relating to 19th century poultry keeping and more specifically

poultry keeping within the Yorkshire Dales was gathered as part of another survey of a hen house undertaken by EDAS (Dennison & Richardson 2009), and this has been drawn upon for this report. A full list of the sources consulted, together with their references, is given in the bibliography below.

#### *Site survey*

- 1.8 A detailed topographic survey of the immediate area surrounding the poultry house was undertaken to record the position and form of all features considered to be of archaeological and/or historic interest. The survey area measured c.35m north-south by c.22m east-west, and the resulting plan was produced at a scale of 1:100. All information was captured using hand-measurement techniques. A 30m baseline was laid out running approximately parallel to the long axis of the poultry house, between the building and the Grange Beck, and measurements were taken as offsets from this baseline. The survey recorded the position at ground level of all upstanding buildings and other structures, wall remnants, earthworks, paths and any other features considered to be of archaeological or historic interest.
- 1.9 A ground floor plan and a cross-section through the poultry house were produced at a scale of 1:20; the cross-section also included details of the north internal wall of the building. The information was captured using hand-measurement techniques; where not obscured by vegetation or corrugated iron sheeting, the rubble of the north internal wall was traced from approximately scaled photographs. The resulting plan and section shows all significant details such as openings (blocked or unblocked), inserted doorways, fittings, joist sockets etc. On the field drawings and on the final drawings, a differentiation is made between stone, brickwork and timber used in the construction of the building.

#### *Photographic survey*

- 1.10 The drawn survey was supplemented by a photographic survey of the building. This comprised a general photographic record of the building and its significant parts, together with close-up photography of significant details. The photographic guidelines produced by English Heritage (2006, 10-12) were followed and each photograph was provided with a scale where appropriate. Photographs were taken using 35mm colour print film and a selection have been reproduced for illustrative purposes in this report.
- 1.11 All photographs were clearly numbered and labelled with the subject, orientation, date taken and photographer's name, and are cross referenced to film and negative numbers. All photographic film was exposed and processed to ensure high quality definition, and was processed to archival standards according to the manufacturer's specifications. A catalogue of the photographs appears as Appendix 1.

#### **Report and Archive**

- 1.12 This report forms a detailed written record of the building, prepared from the sources of information set out above, and analyses its form, function, history, and sequence of development, as far as is possible using the previously gathered information. The building is also placed within its historical, social and industrial context, where possible.
- 1.13 The full archive, comprising paper, magnetic and plastic media, relating to the project has been ordered and indexed according to the standards set by the

National Archaeological Record (EDAS site code GBH 09). It was deposited with the YDNPA on the completion of the project.

## 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON POULTRY KEEPING

### Introduction

- 2.1 As has been noted above, a considerable amount of documentary material relating to 19th century poultry keeping, and more specifically poultry keeping within the Yorkshire Dales, was amassed as part of a previous EDAS survey (Dennison & Richardson 2009). This is repeated below for convenience, to place the present survey into context.

### Historical Background

- 2.2 There would evidently have been poultry kept on farms and in settlements during the medieval period within the Dales, but as yet, published information on the subject is limited. Hen houses are sometimes detailed as separate structures in medieval manorial complexes in West Yorkshire (Moorhouse 2003, 193) and, given the scale on which large aristocratic and ecclesiastical household consumed such meats (some households had a sub-division of the kitchen known as the poultry, responsible for fowl and young animals of all kinds - Woolgar 1999, 236), it would be surprising if such households within the Dales, such as the Scrope household at Bolton Castle, had not obtained at least some of their poultry requirements locally. Hens appear as “pullans” in 17th century Wensleydale and Swaledale inventories (Hartley & Ingilby 1981, 97).

- 2.3 Moving into the later post-medieval and modern periods, detailed published references to poultry keeping in the Dales remain relatively uncommon in both early and more recent farming literature. For example, in Marshall’s *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, published in 1796, poultry merited only a single paragraph, considerable less than bees:

*“Poultry. Nothing sufficiently striking has occurred to me, in this District, respecting the management or the breeds of poultry to excite particular notice. The different species and the management of them, are on a par with those of the island in general.”* (Marshall 1796, 228).

- 2.4 Over 150 years later, a study of farming in Swaledale also barely mentions poultry (Long & Davies 1948). The paucity of detailed references is almost certainly due to the near universal presence of a small number of poultry on every farm, and their economic unimportance when compared to sheep and cattle; very large commercial poultry farms appear to have been a relative rarity in the Dales even into the modern period, with most poultry serving either domestic needs or local markets. The economic unimportance of poultry was forcefully stated by Brown in 1793 in his overview of agriculture in the West Riding (then including some parts of what are now the Dales), although it must of course be remembered that his statements were made in the context of a drive for wider agricultural reform, as the following extract makes clear:

*“Poultry. The profits arising from this article, are of no importance in an agricultural point of view; for it may be questioned, whether the expence of supporting them, when added to the damage they do to houses, and the depredations they commit on corn, both at feed time and harvest, does not far exceed any benefit which maybe drawn from keeping them. We allow it is very convenient for a farmer, to*

*keep a few for his own table, and to supply his family with eggs; but any greater quantity we maintain to be prejudicial to his interest.*

*It is really diverting to read the modern declamations against inclosures, and the increased size of farms. The authors alluded to, take it for granted, that these measures lessen the number of poultry, and that the only way of getting the markets plentifully supplied with that article, is to lessen the size of the farms, and to keep the waste lands of the kingdom in their present unproductive state. At this time we shall not enter upon these topics, being convinced that such a discussion is wholly unnecessary. We may only say, that where poor people, labourers or others, get poultry supported at the expence of the farmer, it may be a material object to them, seeing that they are fed by others; but considering the question, do far as respects public advantage, the breeding and feeding of poultry ought never to be ranked as an object deserving the farmers attention.*

*It might also be a question, whether the benefit said to be derived by poor people is not in many cases imaginary. We have heard, that in some places, (not in the West Riding), a man would spend a day in going to market to sell a pair of chickens, the value of which did not compensate for the loss of time spent in disposing of them” (Brown 1793, 197-198).*

2.5 Poultry do not appear at all in Tuke’s overview of agriculture in the North Riding (Tuke 1794); the equivalent survey for the East Riding does include plans of a goose and duck house and a poultry yard, but again these are done very much in the spirit of late 18th century model practice, rather than being typical of what one might have encountered in Wensleydale during the same period (Leatham 1794, 64-67, plate 1).

2.6 Whether “prejudicial to his interests” or not, almost all farmers in the Dales would have kept some poultry on their farms, and although they might have been of lesser economic importance than sheep and cattle, poultry could still provide an important income for the farmer’s wife or another female farm labourer. Contemporary agricultural manuals and encyclopaedias give details as to how the ideal hen or poultry house should be organised. One such example, dating from 1849, states that:

*“It should have a full exposure to the south, and comprise an open shed for shelter from either rain or sunshine, and contain supplies of dry sand, ashes, small gravel and chalk for the uses of the birds. It should be contiguous to a meadow or a common, and have a small opening in its enclosure, through which the birds can pass at will to the grass.*

*The poultry houses, or fowl-houses, or dormitories, should be lofty, and securely closed in the lower part, and as thoroughly open in the upper part as will merely comport with due shelter from rain. One, if very roomy, will generally be found enough for even a very numerous stock; yet two or more are useful in the case of great diversity in the habits of some of the stock, or for the purposes of separating the healthy from the diseased at the appearance of infectious disorders. The floor should consist of some material which will cause it to be dry and even, and allow it to be frequently washed; and it should be formed with a gradual slope towards the middle or towards one side, where a drain may carry off the liquid after washing and scrubbing; and this drain should terminate either in a general reservoir for liquid manure, or in a special reservoir for its own reception. The poultry house should be lime-whited every spring. The roosting poles should be a different heights and farther apart than the length of the largest birds. A rude ladder, or*



*sloping-board with transverse bars, should extend from the floor to the lowest pole to facilitate the ascent of the chickens who have left their coops and are beginning to roost. The boxes for nests should be constructed of unplanned boards, and fastened to the walls about 3 feet from the ground; and may be placed in an outside building devoted to the purpose, but must never, in any case, be placed in the poultry-house. Clean short-straw must be coiled round the nests; but hay, on account of both its smell and of its harbouring insects, is always unsuitable.*

*A stock of fowls should consist of pullets and hens of from one year to four years, - and of no larger a proportion of cocks than one to every 24 or 30 hens. A large number of laying fowls is quite as easily attended to as a very small number. But the woman who has charge of them must have a mild temper, and a kindly disposition, and watchful and careful habits; and she may mightily repress or powerfully improve the whole establishment; and even though she be ever so good a servant, she ought to be somewhat sharply looked after by the master. Daily, when the fowls are in the field or elsewhere, she should wash the floors, nests and roosts, renew the supply of dry sand and gravel in the poultry yard, and attend to all other matters which affect the general health of the stock.” (Wilson 1849, 933).*

- 2.7 The same source then goes onto to criticise those who handle newly hatched poultry too roughly, noting that such a person:

*“ ... may possible prove as great a foe by his ignorance and lubberliness, as the fox and the polecat and the gled and the raven all together by their voracity; and just as in a well managed poultry establishment, these foes are kept away by a proper construction of the building, or with the aid of a good terrier, so ought every barbarous human impertinent to be kept aloof by the most stringent commands of the master.” (Wilson 1849, 934).*

- 2.8 It appears that not all involved in poultry rearing took notice of the best practice laid out in contemporary manuals, as slightly later in c.1880, another commentator wrote of poultry houses that:

*“Poultry keeping is a branch of farming that is generally too much neglected in England, the accommodation given to poultry stock being mostly limited in extent and of the most makeshift character. But if it is desired to turn poultry properly to best account, they should have a good spacious fowl-house allotted to them, with yard and shed attached, the house being moderately warm and perfectly dry. Warmth may be ensured by placing the fowl house in the neighbourhood of the boiler, or some flue that is in constant use, where fires are always kept up for the purpose of preparing the food of the general stock.” (Beeton c.1880, 287-88).*

- 2.9 By the early 20th century, there had been a move away from stone and brick poultry houses, towards a greater use of more portable timber structures, some of which were pre-fabricated (Wright c.1910, 42-43; Barron & Leigh 1922, 1-17; Blount c.1930, 37-39). Contemporary catalogues (for example, Cooper c.1910; Sutcliffe 1927) list an enormous variety of such structures; William Cooper Ltd devoted over 70 pages of their catalogue to poultry houses (Cooper c.1910, 151-222), varying from their most modest model, the “Favourite”, described as the “Cheapest House in the Trade”, to the far more grand and larger “Invicta” and “Renown” house. Many of the larger models were mounted on either wheels or sledge-like runners so that they could be moved.

- 2.10 An important mid 20th century account of poultry keeping using such moveable wooden houses survives for Brick House Farm at Askwith in lower Wharfedale.

The practices described there probably differed little from those undertaken across the Dales for many years before:

*"In the 1940s, when two hundred hens would earn nearly enough to provide a living for one man, most Dales farms kept poultry and Brick House was no exception. There were one or two hen huts in the garth (a small paddock of about half an acre immediately below the garden), holding up to two hundred birds. Usually the farmer's wife looked after the fowls, whilst the farmer saw to the repair and cleaning out of the huts, which he would move to fresh ground from time to time.*

*The birds were a mixture of Rhode Island Reds, White Leghorns, or Buff Orpingtons, breeds scarcely heard of today. They were fed on cooked kitchen scraps, some meal from the Corn Merchant's, (if there were enough coupons), and corn. Oystershell and limestone grit were available so that the eggs had good, strong shells. The 'pop-hole' in the hen hut was opened in the morning to let the hens out, and closed at sunset to protect them from foxes or other predators. Sometimes the last one or two would not go into the hut at night, and it was very frustrating, at the end of a long, tiring day, to have to turn out at dusk and spend the next half an hour at the mercy of their whims. They would jump onto the ramp leading to the hole but, just when you thought they were about to go in, jump down again and run round the back of the hut, so that you had another frustrating ten minutes to spend out in the dark.*

*Sometimes the hen huts were moved into the wood adjacent to Brick House Farm to give the grass garth a good rest. The hens loved scratching about in the woods, and found all sorts of interesting and juicy extras to supplement their diet. The eggs, particularly those of the Rhode Island Reds, were large and had rich golden yolks, mainly due to the greenery eaten by the hens.*

*In the spring a cockerel was sometimes run with the hens, and when one became broody she was given a clutch of fertile eggs and fastened into a brooding box, filled with hay for a nest. Twice a day she was let out to exercise and to feed. At other times the farmer might purchase day-old chicks for rearing under heat, or four to eight week old pullets which were housed in wooden arks on the clean grass or in the wood. These arks were triangular in shape, with roofs sloping down to the ground and a floor consisting of slats on which the birds could perch. A triangular run of netting, attached to the ark, meant that the birds could scratch the earth but not wander away or be exposed to foxes and rats. The arks were moved on to fresh ground every day or two, and were light enough to move by hand when the birds were young.*

*As they became older, they were moved into a clean henhouse, away from the other birds, so that they did not pick up any infection. This house would have been brushed free of dust, dirt and cobwebs, had its perches and dropping boards soaked, scraped and cleaned, and its roof re-felted, if necessary. If time permitted it may have been creosoted inside and out to destroy parasites and germs, but raw creosote had to be avoided as it would have burnt the birds' feet and claws.*

*When the arks were no longer required by the pullets, perhaps fifty or so cock chicks would be bought in June and reared in them. Where corn had been grown the arks were carried out on to the stubble. Eventually the young birds were let out and fattened on the cornseed which had dropped out of the sheaves, or been shed out of the standing corn. As autumn approached, and after threshing, they were*

*brought into the empty stackyard to clean up the split corn and other leftovers from Threshing Day.*

*As the older birds stopped laying, the big ones were killed, plucked and sold for the table. The cockerels, now fattened on the corn and household scraps, were killed and plucked against orders received for Christmas, and delivered a day or so beforehand. Traditionally the profits from the sale of eggs and poultry belonged to the farmer's wife, and provided a healthy additional source of income. It is hard to believe now that chicken, and poultry meat in general, was regarded as luxury meat, only to be eaten as a treat on special occasions." (Watkinson 1997).*

- 2.11 The mixed flocks of old and young birds described above are stated by Hartley and Ingilby as being the usual practice in the Dales (Hartley & Ingilby 1981, 97), and the account also supports the more general observation that poultry keeping on farms remained a largely female preserve (Brunskill 1999, 88).

### **Hen Houses in the Yorkshire Dales and Beyond**

- 2.12 A number of hen houses have been recorded as part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's "Feature of the Seasons" project ([www.yorkshiredales.org.uk](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk)). Sometimes hen houses and piggeries were combined into a single building known as a "poultiggery" or a hennery-piggery, with pigs housed on the ground floor and hens in a loft overhead. Both animals were thought to benefit from this arrangement; the pigs kept away predators such as foxes and the heat generated by them encouraged laying, while the hen loft overhead helped to keep the pigs warm. Many of the recorded examples were of a similar form to that recorded by the current survey (see below), i.e. of a single storey with single-pitch stone-flag roofs but many are located within or close-by to the main farmstead.
- 2.13 Such structures clearly had a distribution outside of the Dales, both regionally and nationally; a hennery-piggery of a very similar form was recorded by the Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group (YVBSG) at Low Birkwith, on the Lancashire/North Yorkshire border (Armstrong *et al* 1996, 4-11), and Armstrong makes reference to a limited number of other examples in the Pennine Dales (Armstrong 2000, 47-48). The association of pigs and poultry was also common in Cheshire and Lincolnshire (Barnwell & Giles 1997, 62 & 143-144), although here the poultry houses were usually located close to the farm house. A hen house bearing some resemblance to the example forming the subject of this report, and located only several hundred metres away, was recorded as part of a larger survey of Grange Gill Quarry in 2008 (Dennison & Richardson 2009).

## **3 SURVEY DESCRIPTION**

### **Introduction**

- 3.1 As noted above, the ruined poultry house is located on the east side of the Grange Beck, at the bottom of the west-facing slope of the valley. The structure is aligned very slightly north-west/south-east but, for ease of description, it is considered to be aligned north-south. Although the building was clearly used to house hens for much of its life, information from the landowner suggests that his father once used it to keep geese in (Mr Ian Bell, *pers. comm.*). Therefore, throughout this report, the term "poultry house" is used rather than "hen house".

## Cartographic Evidence

- 3.2 The Grange Beck poultry house is not shown on the 1856 Ordnance Survey 6" map, and at this date, Skellgill Lane is shown as being unenclosed to the north of Gill Gate farm; a "Ford" is marked across the beck to the north of a waterfall. The poultry house is also not depicted on the 1893 Ordnance Survey 25" map, but is it shown as a rectangular structure on the 1912 25" survey. On this latter map, it stands in isolation, apparently with no associated structures or field boundaries (see figure 2). Skellgill Lane was still unenclosed at this date, with a branch leaving Gill Gate farm and running north-west to the ford across the beck.

## Survey Description

- 3.3 The poultry house is described below in a logical sequence. The plan form, structure and architectural detailing of the building are described first, followed by the external elevations and a circulation description of the interior. Reference should also be made to the floor plan and section drawing (figure 4) and photographs in this report. Appendix 1 provides a catalogue of all the photographs taken.

### *The Setting* (see figure 3)

- 3.4 The poultry house stands within a narrow area of low-lying land on the east side of the beck, at the base of a steep but uneven slope running downwards from Skellgill Lane. This slope is broken in a number of places. A natural west-facing scarp runs down from the boundary of the lane towards a trackway, represented by a flattened linear strip of ground running approximately parallel to the beck. At its widest point, immediately above the poultry house, the track is over 5m wide, but it narrows towards either end. At the north end, it appears to run up the natural slope towards one of the gateways off Skellgill Lane, whereas at the south end it becomes more difficult to trace but might be heading towards a ford across the beck some distance to the south of the poultry house.
- 3.5 Below (i.e. west of) the trackway, there is again a natural west-facing scarp, disturbed by a number of lower steeper artificial scarps. The natural slope terminates at a prominent west-facing scarp immediately to the east of the poultry house. At its widest point, the scarp measures 3.5m wide and stands over 2.0m high. Although the scarp may have originated as a natural feature created by the action of the beck, it has been artificially enhanced at a later date. This is most obvious to the south of the poultry house, where the main scarp divides into three smaller scarps, the lowest of which may once have been revetted with stone. A large hawthorn on the main scarp to the north of the poultry house may represent deliberate planting to try to stabilise the slope. The alignment of the base of the main scarp shows that the poultry house was terraced into the slope slightly. The east wall of the house has caused water to pond at the base of the slope here, creating a very damp environment reflected in the existing flora.
- 3.6 There is also some evidence for a number of other former structures to the north of the poultry house. Some c.5.5m to the north, a single wooden fence post stands at the base of the main scarp, while closer to the poultry house, the squared stone rubble base of a small rectangular structure is visible in plan only. This structure was aligned east-west, measuring 2.0m long by 1.5m wide.
- 3.7 To the north-west of the poultry house, there is a prominent linear bank of grassed stone rubble running alongside the beck. This bank is over 25m in length and up

to 4m in width; the east-facing scarp of the bank is relatively low, only 0.6m high, but the west-facing scarp to the beck is much higher and steeper, particularly towards its northern end. The bank might be thought to be purely the remains of a water control feature, designed to prevent the beck from eroding the level area on which the poultry house is placed. However, the surface of the southern end of the bank has the appearance of a platform, especially when viewed from the south, and within the grassed rubble here there are features that might be interpreted as collapsed walls. Overall, the platform is c.11m long, and has a lower curving feature attached to its south end, partly defined by stones which are significantly larger than the majority of those forming the bank.

*The Poultry House* (see figure 4)

- 3.8 The single storey poultry house has a rectangular plan, with maximum external dimensions of 4.80m north-south by 4.15m east-west; the east wall has partly failed due to pressure from the slope above it, and has developed a considerable bow towards the centre. The building is constructed of roughly coursed and squared sandstone/limestone rubble (see plates 1 and 2), the walls measuring on average 0.45m wide; the rubble is set with a friable grey lime mortar containing frequent ash/charcoal inclusions. There are intermittent courses of projecting stones to the external faces of the north gable and west elevation. The building was formerly covered by a pitched roof, now collapsed; in its most recent phase, this comprised a simple softwood roof structure covered with corrugated iron sheeting.
- 3.9 The only access into the interior of the building is through a doorway in the south gable (see plate 2). The doorway has monolithic limestone jambs and a flat limestone lintel. It is rebated to the interior, and preserves the remains of a stable-type door. The upper and lower leaves of the door were each supported on wrought-iron spearhead strap hinges set on iron pintles to the east jamb, and secured to latch fasteners to the west jamb. The upper leaf of the door was formed by softwood uprights nailed to softwood battens secured to the hinges; narrow gaps between the uprights provided ventilation. The lower leaf had completely gone at the time of the survey, but was presumably solid. To the east of the doorway, there is a possible opening placed just above ground level. This is unlikely to be a former "pop-hole" for hens, as it lacks any evidence for a shutter and is also at a level that provides easy access for vermin, and so is perhaps just the result of collapse rather than an actual structural feature.
- 3.10 The poultry house was lit by a relatively narrow window, splayed to the interior, in the centre of the west elevation (see plate 4). The head and sill of this window are formed by smooth sandstone flags, and preserve no evidence for a frame, dowel holes or any other fittings. There was once another window at a high level towards the north end of the east elevation but this had largely collapsed by the time of the survey; it may once have had a counterpart at the south end of the same elevation. Apart from the projecting stones, the north gable is completely blank, while the lower part of the east elevation is hidden by the adjacent slope.
- 3.11 As has already been noted, the interior of the poultry house was choked with rubble and the remains of the roof structure at the time of the survey, obscuring the original floor, although it might be expected to have been covered with flagstones. There are nesting boxes to all four of the interior walls, all c.0.40m deep and all placed 0.70m above the existing interior ground level (see plate 3). Some of the boxes preserve their original stone construction, with the rear formed by a smooth flagstone or slate, but many of the others have been rebuilt in brick. Two main

types of brick have been used; a neatly moulded handmade red brick (average dimensions 230mm by 110mm by 70mm) and a pink machine-made brick (average dimensions 240mm by 110mm by 80mm). In several places, pieces of softwood have been placed at the base of the brick-built partitions between the nesting boxes. There are three nesting boxes to the south wall, two to the east of the doorway and one to the west, although this was later blocked with bricks. There are four boxes to the west wall, paired to either side of the window, and six to the north wall. The east wall now contains seven boxes, although there were formerly probably eight, one having been apparently lost through alterations in brick. There were no surviving traces of either limewash or plaster to the interior walls at the time of survey.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Cartographic evidence suggests that the poultry house can be quite closely dated to the period between 1892 and 1910 (when the 1893 and 1912 editions of the Ordnance Survey maps were surveyed or revised) and, as the surviving unaltered stone-built nesting boxes indicate, it was originally built to house hens. As Armstrong has rightly commented, vernacular agricultural buildings are sometimes classified by plan types and recorded without reference to land use and the fields which they served (Armstrong 2000, 31). In this respect, the poultry house at Grange Beck differs from the other (relatively few) recorded examples of hennery-piggeries, all of which appear to have been sited in or close to the farm yard. A detailed study of the history of local land ownership during the 19th century lay outside the scope of this project, but it appears most likely that the poultry house was associated with either the nearby Coleby Hall, a short distance to the south-west on the west side of Grange Beck, or Gill Gate farm, again to the south but on the east side of the beck. In either case, the hen house lies some distance from its farm yard, a characteristic shared with a similar mid 19th century example previously recorded at the nearby Skellgill Lane quarries (Dennison & Richardson 2009).
- 4.2 The poultry house also shares a number of other characteristics with that recorded at the Skellgill Lane quarries. It is sited against and at the base of a slope, presumably partly for shelter, although the location of the Grange Beck building is not as exposed as that at the quarries, and indeed its slope setting here must always have meant it was somewhat damp. In both buildings, the nesting boxes are of similar dimensions, and are set at about the same level above the internal floor. However, the Grange Beck poultry house differs in a number of ways. As well as being slightly larger than the quarry hen house, it does not have a “pop-hole”, and so the hens had to be physically let out in the morning and shut up at night using the doorway in the south gable; cartographic evidence suggested that the pop-hole at the quarry hen house was a later addition. The quarry hen house also preserved evidence for dowels to the only window to prevent entry by predators, but the main surviving window to the Grange Beck poultry house had no such provision, nor does there seem to have been an internal or external shutter; presumably any such provision was temporary.
- 4.3 The nesting boxes of the Grange Beck poultry house were also rebuilt using brick at a later date, possibly increasing the original number of stone nesting boxes around the north end of the building. It is tempting to see the softwood and corrugated sheeting roof as having replaced an earlier roof structure at the same time, perhaps as part of a general refurbishment dating to the mid 20th century. If the building was once used to house geese as local information suggests, then this would have required little or no internal modification.

- 4.4 The poultry house did not exist in isolation. Apart from the possible structural remains at the southern end of the becks bank, which could be of an earlier period, there was once a fenced area to the north of the poultry house and a separate smaller structure. The function of the smaller structure is unclear, but it might perhaps have served a similar purpose to the structure attached to the hen house at Skellgill Lane quarries. This was suggested as possibly either having housed geese or perhaps a small dog to keep away predators although, as noted above, it was a slightly later addition (Dennison & Richardson 2009). A few geese may have been housed in the small structure at Grange Beck initially, and then perhaps later moved into the main poultry house.
- 4.5 In conclusion, the survey work at the Grange Beck poultry house has provided a detailed record of a building which formed a part of the formerly widespread practice of poultry keeping across the Yorkshire Dales. Although poultry keeping was always a relatively minor element of agricultural practice in the region, eggs and meat from poultry would have formed a locally important source of income to many farms, and therefore any surviving buildings relating to such practices are worthy of consideration. The reason for placing the poultry house at a distance from the associated farm is as yet unclear, but at least one other example of this practice has been recorded locally. The isolated location might be seen to represent a transitory stage between hens being housed within the farmyard and the portable timber hen houses of the early 20th century.
- 4.6 It is understood that examples of the later portable timber hen houses survive within the Skellgill area (Miles Johnson, YDNPA, *pers. comm.*), and survey of these, together with a wider consideration of other surviving examples of poultry houses within Wensleydale, would provide a better understanding of how poultry keeping developed in the region between c.1800 and the Second World War.

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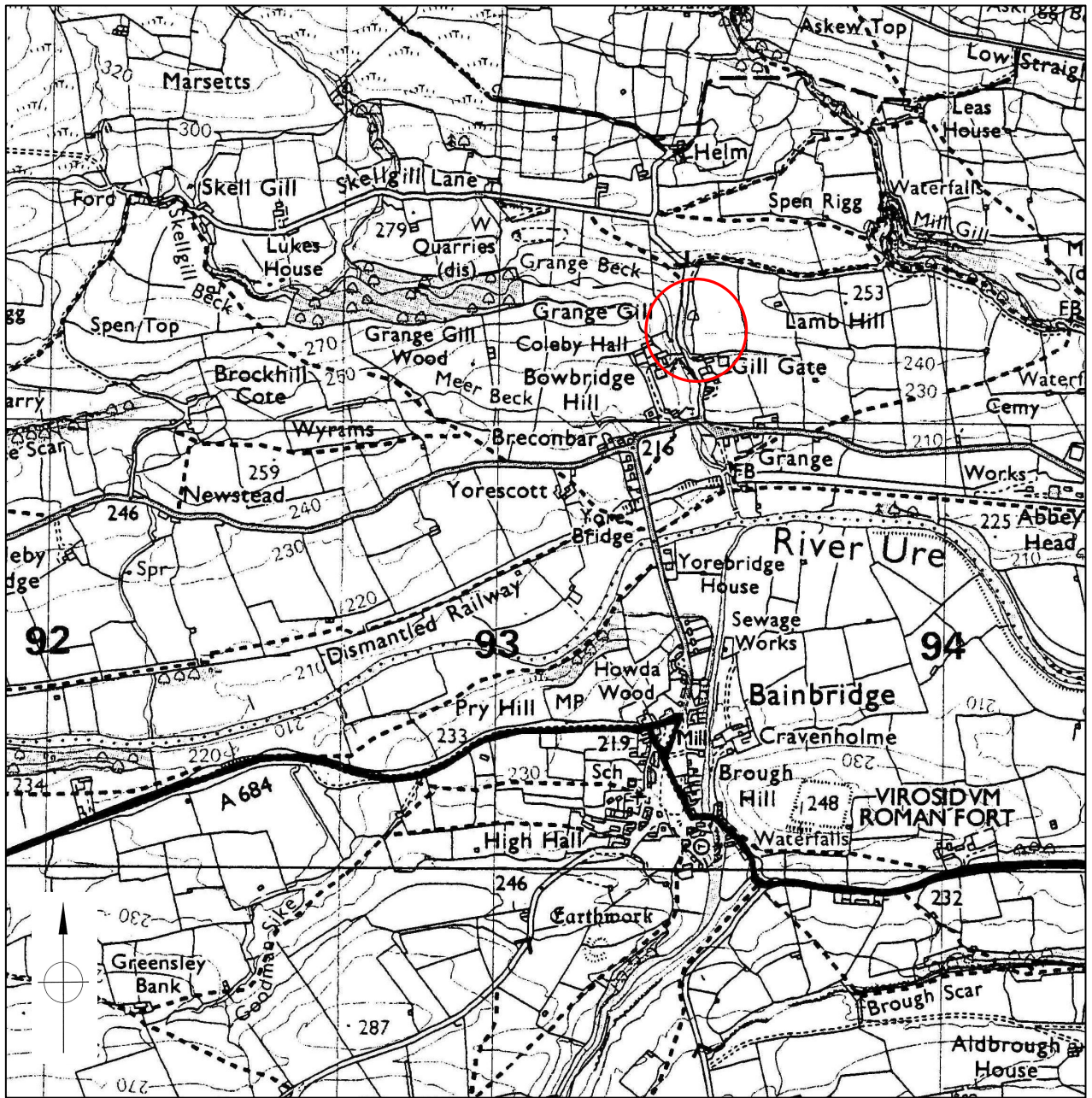
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## **6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

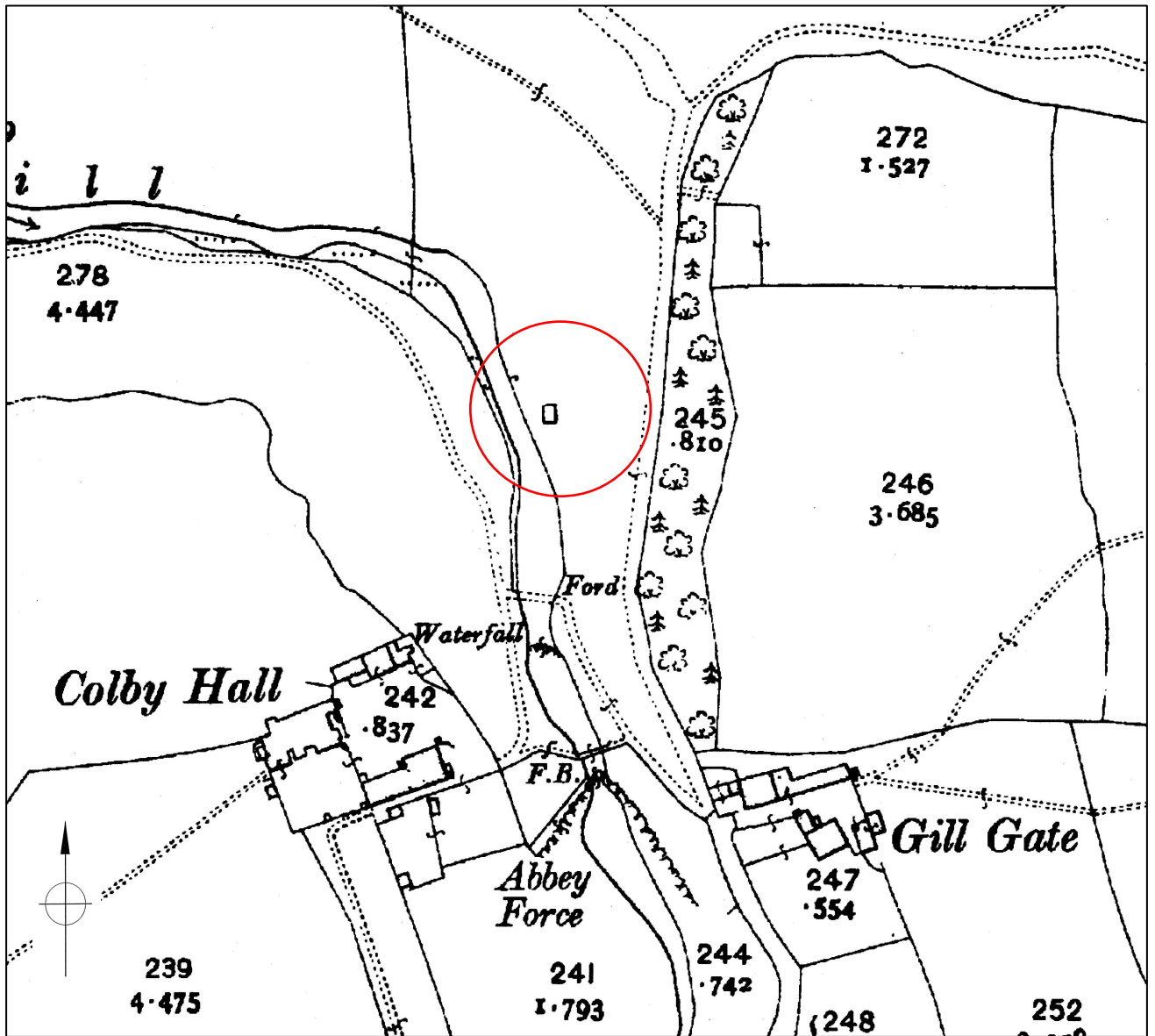
- 6.1 The archaeological recording at the Grange Beck hen house was commissioned by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. EDAS would like to thank Robert White and Miles Johnson of the YDNPA for their assistance and co-operation in carrying out the survey. Thanks are also due to Mr Ian Bell for permission to carry out the work.
- 6.2 The on-site survey was undertaken by Shaun Richardson (EDAS) and Richard Watts of the YDNPA. Shaun Richardson produced the site archive and a draft report. The final report was produced by Ed Dennison of EDAS, with whom the responsibility for any errors remains.





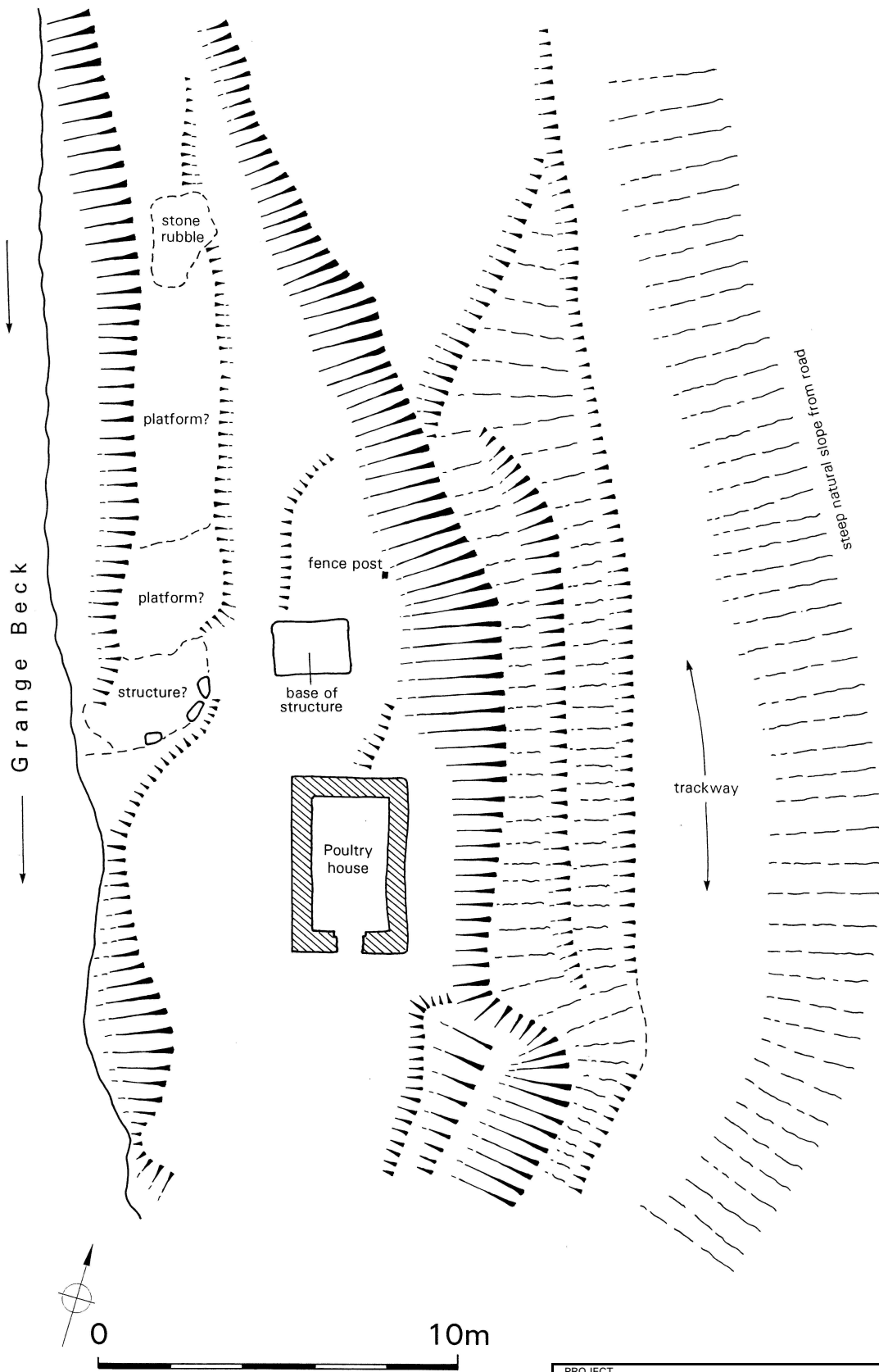
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TITLE		GENERAL LOCATION	
SCALE	NTS	DATE	OCT 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	1

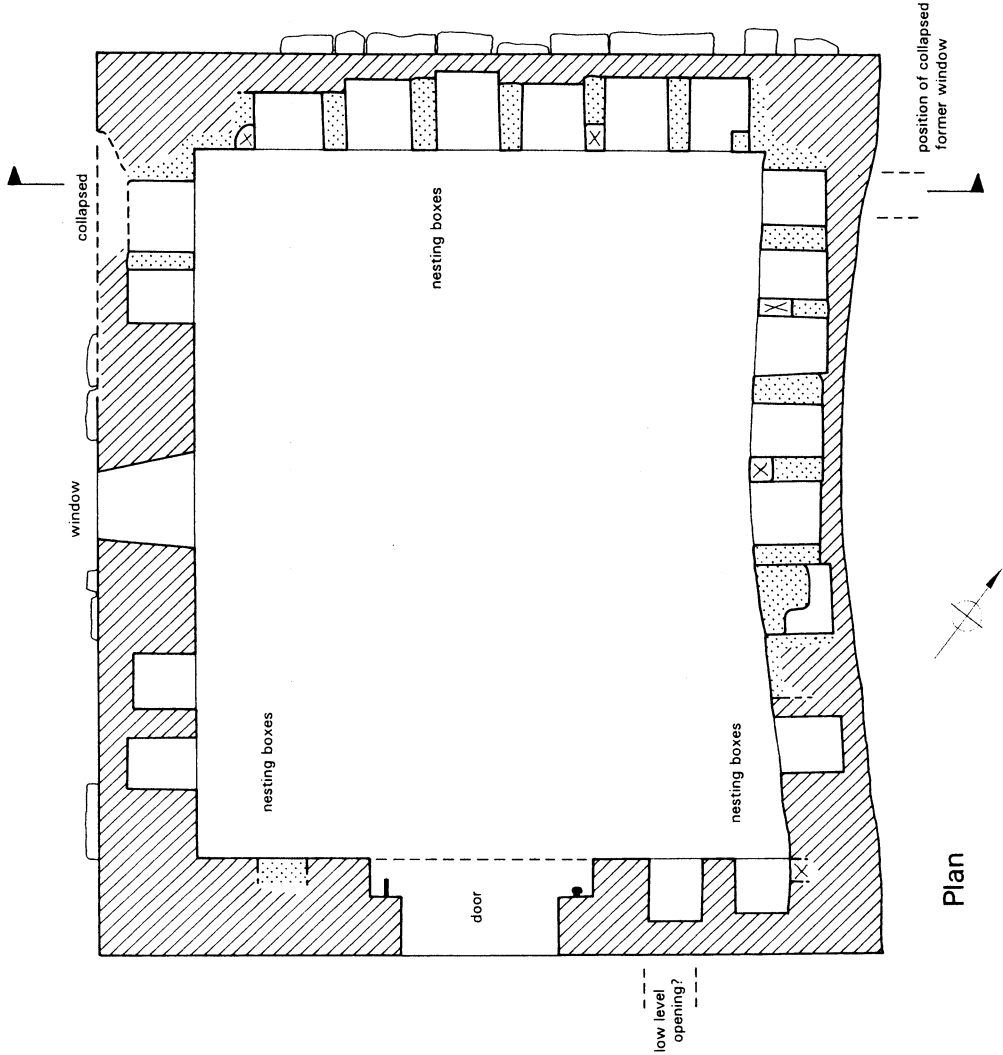


Source: Ordnance Survey 1912 25" map (sheet 66/3) (revised 1910).

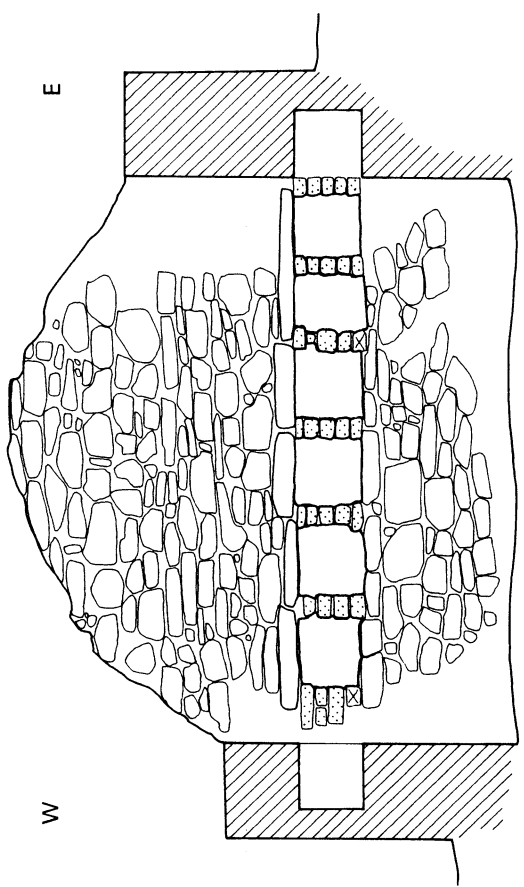
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SCALE	NTS	DATE	OCT 2009
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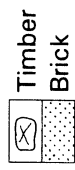
PROJECT		GRANGE BECK HEN HOUSE	
TITLE		EARTHWORK SETTING	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	OCT 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	3



Plan



East-west section



PROJECT	GRANGE BECK HEN HOUSE		
TITLE	PLAN AND SECTION		
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	OCT 2009
	EDAS	FIGURE	4



Plate 1: West elevation of hen house, looking E.



Plate 2: South elevation of hen house, looking NW.



Plate 3: Internal north wall of hen house, looking N.



Plate 4: Internal south-west corner of hen house, looking SW.

## **APPENDIX 1**

## APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Film 1: 35mm colour prints taken 21st May 2009

Film	Frame	Subject	Scale
1	4	South gable, looking N	1m
1	5	General view, looking NW	1m
1	6	General view, looking NW	1m
1	7	Doorway in south gable, looking N	1m
1	8	West elevation, looking E	1m
1	9	West elevation, looking E	1m
1	10	North gable, looking S	1m
1	11	North gable, looking S	1m
1	12	General view, looking SW	1m
1	13	General view, looking SW	1m
1	14	Internal north wall, looking N	1m
1	15	Internal north wall, looking N	1m
1	16	Detail of nesting boxes, internal north wall, looking N	1m
1	17	Internal west wall, looking NW	1m
1	18	Internal east wall, looking NE	1m
1	19	Internal south wall, looking SE	1m
1	20	Detail of door, looking SE	1m
1	21	Detail of door, looking SE	1m
1	22	Internal south wall, looking SW	1m
1	23	Detail of doorway, looking S	1m
1	24	Detail of doorway, looking S	1m