

**Building recording and watching brief  
at Oak Tree House,  
Ladywood Road,  
Salwarpe,  
Worcestershire**

WSM 40817

Martin Cook BA MIFA

19th May 2009  
Revised 12th June 2009  
Revised 13th November 2009

The School House  
Church Lane  
Tardebigge  
Worcestershire  
B60 3AH

07850 918755

# **Building recording and watching brief, at Oak Tree House, Ladywood Road, Salwarpe, Worcestershire**

## **Introduction**

Historic building recording and a watching brief were undertaken at Oak Tree House, Ladywood Road, Salwarpe, Worcestershire (SO 3872 6112; Fig 1) at the request of Mr Terry Preece, on behalf of his client Mr J Jacovou according to a brief provided by Worcestershire County Archaeology Service (planning ref W/08/1415; WSM 39647). The building recording comprised annotation of architect's plans and elevations and photographs. The watching brief comprised observation of the preliminary strip of the ground immediately to the south of the existing property, before piling took place. This was undertaken during extension of the existing building.

## **Brief background to the site**

Documentary research took place on 14th April 2009 at Worcestershire County Record Office and the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record.

## **The map evidence**

The earliest available map was the Salwarpe inclosure map of 1817 (Fig 2.1). This shows an 'L' shaped building on the site of the existing house and a nucleated group of other buildings to the south-east. The 1885 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig 2.1) show a broadly similar picture and the Ordnance Survey maps of 1903 and 1927 (Fig 2.2) show no significant changes.

## **Information from Worcestershire Historic Environment Record**

There were no entries within a 100m radius for Oak Tree House on the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record.

## **Analysis**

### **The fieldwork**

Building recording took place on the 1st April 2009 and the watching brief took place on the 27th and 28th April and the 6th October 2009.

### **The building recording: description**

#### *Phase 1 - after late 16th century*

The historic core of Oak Tree House can be identified, from two converging pieces of evidence:

- the consistency of wall thicknesses
- it is the only part of the entire structure that could 'stand alone' (ie it has four walls, all later additions being 'open' on at least one side)

This identifies the earliest surviving structure as a rectangular, two cell cottage (Figs 3.1 and 3.2). At ground floor level almost none of the historic fabric is visible to be described: in the case of the exterior it is obscured by later additions; in the case of the interior, it is covered by modern decoration. Only in the kitchen are ceiling timbers exposed. These show many redundant mortices (Fig 13), indicating reuse but it is not known if these timbers were reused when the existing phase 1 building was constructed or whether they represent a later phase of rebuilding. With respect to the exterior, only the north elevation has not been impinged upon by more recent additions and this has been rebuilt, apparently sympathetically, in the late 20th century. The extent of this replacement, and the lack of any records relating to it, mean that it is no longer possible to draw any conclusions from its fabric. However, at first floor level, the roof structure is visible and is certainly of some antiquity. It is clear from the original gable ends, the north elevation still being external (Figs 4.2 and 10), the southern being visible in the wall of a corridor (Fig 16), and a bathroom (Fig 17), that the roof structure is of queen post design. In addition, the roof structure has purlins protruding beyond the face of the gables. This indicates that the roof construction is that of a 'tie-beam truss'.

This early structure, although significant visible evidence is lacking, must therefore be of 'post-and-truss' construction (Brown 1979).

#### *Phase 2— earlier 17th to mid 17th century*

This is represented by the insertion of a fireplace into the south-east corner of the phase 1 structure (Fig 3.1). The traditional position for a fireplace was against the gable end, as at Oak Tree House. In this case the type of construction could not be determined as, at ground floor level, the structure had been plastered over and no longer survives at first floor level and above. The earliest that brick or stone chimneys were added to smaller domestic accommodation is the later 16th to early 17th centuries but in the west midlands this change seems to have taken place from the earlier 17th to mid 17th century (Barley 1961). It seems likely, although it cannot be proved from existing evidence, that the fireplace was inserted before the phase 3 extension was built. Otherwise it might be expected that it would have been built to serve the phase 3 extension as well. The beam over the fireplace (Fig 14) is also a re-used timber.

#### *Phase 3 - mid 17th to 18th century*

Phase 3 sees the phase 1, two cell, building extended to the south, at both ground and first floor level, to form a three or four cell structure (Figs 3.1 and 3.2). A proportion of the external timber framing (box framing) remains visible on the east elevation (Figs 4.1 and Fig 8). If the replacement of the phase 1 timber framing is faithful to the original then the phase 3 framing is of slighter scantling and inferior quality. Further evidence of this lowering of standards is a purlin extended by the simple expedient of strapping another length of timber to it (Fig 18). The panels in the timber framing are now filled with brick noggin. According to Brunskill (1997) this type of extension took place from around 1650 and could include a staircase which gave access to the upper floor which at this time usually extended over the whole of the plan. At Oak Tree House it is unknown, from existing evidence, where this staircase was located. It is highly likely that it was at this time that the tie-beam in the phase 1 southern gable end was cut through to provide access to the extension at first floor level (Fig 16).

#### *Phase 4 - 1817-1885*

During this period Oak Tree House was extended to the west in brick, unusually for this period in stretcher bond (Figs 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 10 and 11). A string course and cog dentilation were provided by way of decoration on the eaves and the windows were provided with tile drip moulds. On the corners of the front elevation, every seventh course of brickwork was slightly recessed, presumably to give the impression of stonework. In order to assist in conveying this illusion it is possible that the phase 4 structure, or at least the corners, were originally lime washed. Today it is, of course, painted. These modifications gave Oak Tree House a largely symmetrical, principal façade and a step up the ladder towards gentility. That this was achieved at modest cost is indicated by the devices described above and by the somewhat 'rough and ready' carpentry visible in the areas of the house that were not usually seen by visitors. Of particular note in this respect are the ceiling beams visible on the first floor, extraordinarily one of which comprises the roughly squared trunk of a forked tree (Fig 15). The construction of the phase 4 structure provided for the rearrangement of the interior space as well. A dog-leg stair on the northern side now provided access to the first floor and the original stair, presumably within the phase 1 structure, was removed. A further stair on the southern side provided access to an attic. A small extension on the east was probably a pantry.

#### *Phase 5 - 4th quarter of 20th century*

A further extension to the south and two porches on the west elevation were added (Figs 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 10 and 12). It seems likely that the conversion of the phase 2 fireplace to a decorative feature only and the conversion of the flue space above it to a lavatory took place at this time.

### **The watching brief: description**

Preliminary excavation comprised removal of c 300mm of material over the footprint of the proposed extension, in preparation for piling (Fig 6).

A concrete slab patio (context 005) and a bedding layer of sand (context 006) were first removed. Below these modern deposits, patchy remains of cobbled surfaces (contexts 001 and 002) were identified in the north and south of the stripped area. In the south of the stripped area the footings of

two brick walls (contexts 003 and 004) were recorded. The only other deposit was the natural subsoil, a mid-red brown tenacious clay (context 007).

## **Discussion**

### **The building recording**

#### *General*

Post and truss, sometimes called post-and-panel, is found mainly in the west, midlands and north (Brown 1979). It is closely allied to cruck construction and follows the same basic principle: the weight of the roof to the ground by means of transverse frames spaced at determined intervals. Of the many variations of this type of construction, the most common consists of a pair of posts, one on each side of the building, held together at the top by a tie-beam. On this beam are fitted the principal rafters, held together about half-way up, by a collar which is supported by two vertical struts. This seems to be the form used at Oak Tree House (Figs 16 and 17). These timbers form what is known as a 'tie-beam truss'. The weight of the roof is supported, like that in cruck construction, by purlins, which are framed into the trusses and wall-plates. Supported on these are the common rafters which in turn support the roof covering.

Brunskill (1997) and Mercer (1975) have identified the general development of smaller timber framed buildings. A plan form, which Brunskill dates to *c* 1600, comprised a small hall open to the roof, heated by a massive brick or stone fireplace, with a lobby entrance against the jamb wall of the fireplace (Fig 5.1). Barley (1961) noted that the traditional position for a fireplace was against the gable end. Mercer gives comparable examples to Brunskill at Hound Hill and Charnock Richard (Fig 5.2). These are remarkably similar to phase 1 at Oak Tree House (Fig 3.1). Brunskill also suggested a couple of inner rooms, a parlour and buttery or pantry, which had a loft above reached by a ladder. No obvious evidence of a similar arrangement could be identified at Oak Tree House.

By *c* 1650 Brunskill's plan had undergone considerable extension. The hall had become a living room and kitchen combined and was served by a new fireplace which incorporated an oven. There was a new entrance but the parlour and buttery remained. A new staircase gave access to the upper floor which now extended over the whole of the plan. The main change was the addition of a new parlour heated by a fireplace and with a chamber above. Barley has suggested that, in the west midlands, brick or stone chimneys were added to smaller domestic accommodation from the earlier 17th to mid 17th century. On balance, it is felt that this is the date of phase 2 at Oak Tree House (Fig 3.1). It is possible that the tie-beam in the western gable end, which has been cut through (Fig 16), is further evidence of this.

Barley dates a movement towards symmetrical, two-storey elevations to the late 17th to early 18th centuries. After 1700, farmhouses began to appear with a balanced façade, especially with a doorway flanked by two windows on either side and five windows on the first floor. Before the 18th century was more than a quarter gone, the symmetrical façade, with or without a double plan, was becoming a commonplace for larger farmhouses. In the context of Oak Tree House, which was never a grand building, it is felt that this development took place somewhat later and phase 4 (Fig 3.1) has been dated to the period 1817-1885.

### **The watching brief**

The only significant features recorded were the footings of two brick walls (contexts 003 and 004) and patchy areas of cobbled surfaces (contexts 001 and 002). The wall footings are almost certainly the remains of a group of small out-buildings, first shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1885 (Fig 2.1). The cobbled surfaces could date from almost any period.

## **Summary**

Building recording and a watching brief were carried out at Oak Tree House, Ladywood Road, Salwarpe, Worcestershire. The earliest phase, substantially obscured by later additions, is thought to date to around the late 16th century and to have comprised a two cell building of post-and-truss construction. This original structure has been extended repeatedly over the centuries, up to and



including the late 20th century. A watching brief identified the remains of cobbled surfaces and brick out-buildings, the latter first seen on the Ordnance Survey map of 1885.

### **Bibliography**

Barley, M W, 1961 *The English farmhouse and cottage*

Brown, R J, 1979 *The English country cottage*

Brunskill, R W, 1997 *Houses and cottages of Britain*

Mercer, E, 1975 *English vernacular houses: a study of traditional farmhouses and cottages*, RCHME

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would particularly like to thank Mr and Mrs Jacovou and their builders, Terry Preece (architect) and Mike Glyde of Worcestershire County Council for their kind cooperation.

### **Archive**

The archive consists of

- 6 Annotated scale drawings
- 1 CD-ROM

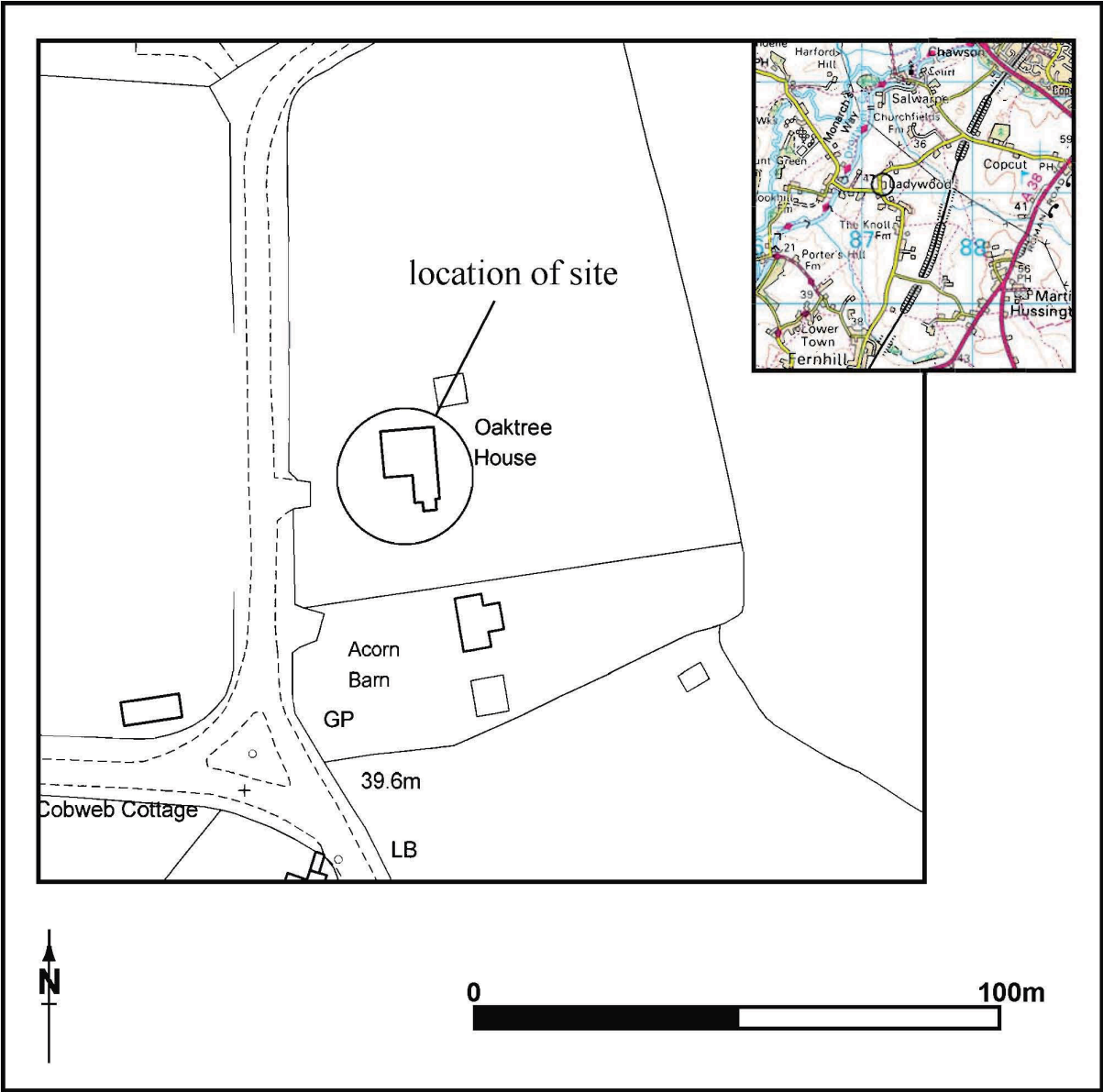
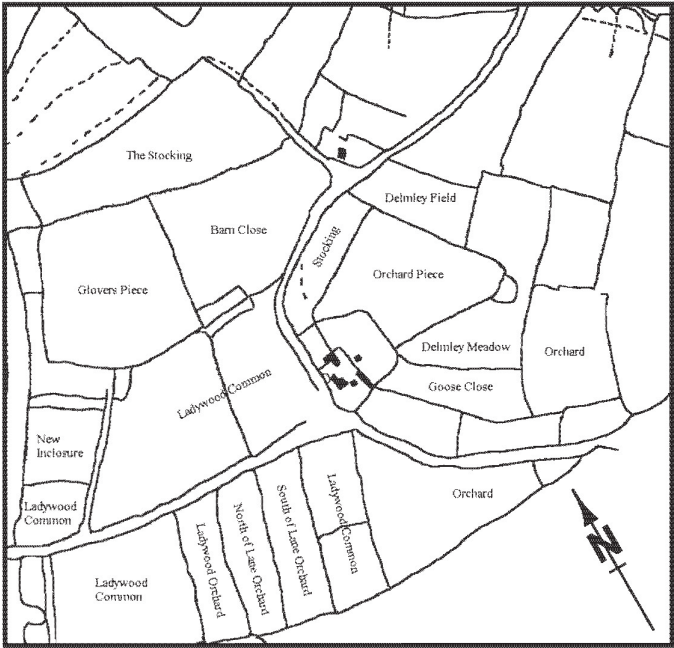


Fig 1: Location of site

1817 Salwarpe inclosure map



not to scale

1885

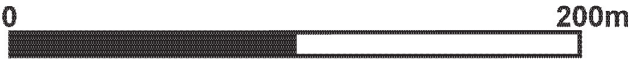
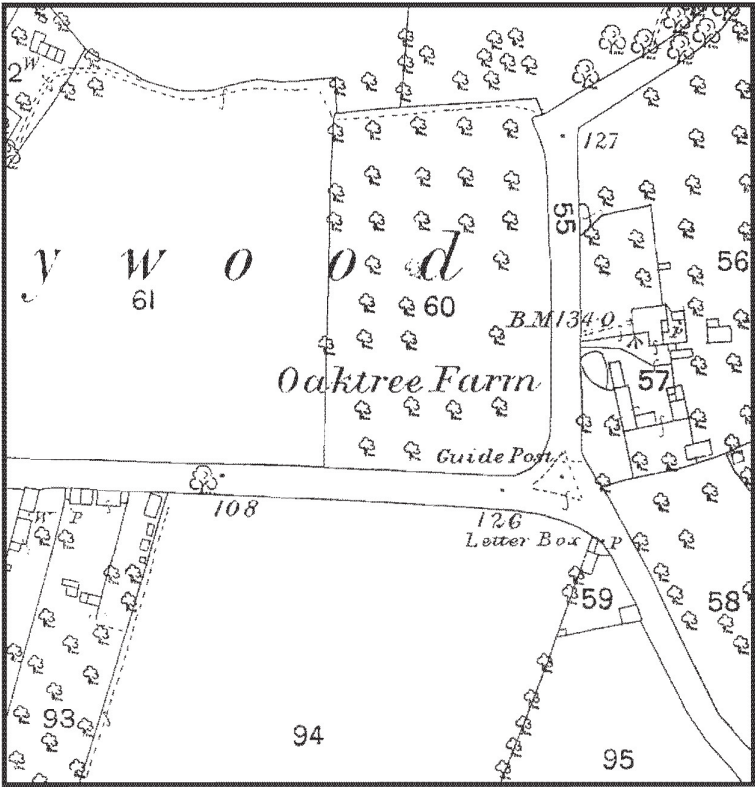
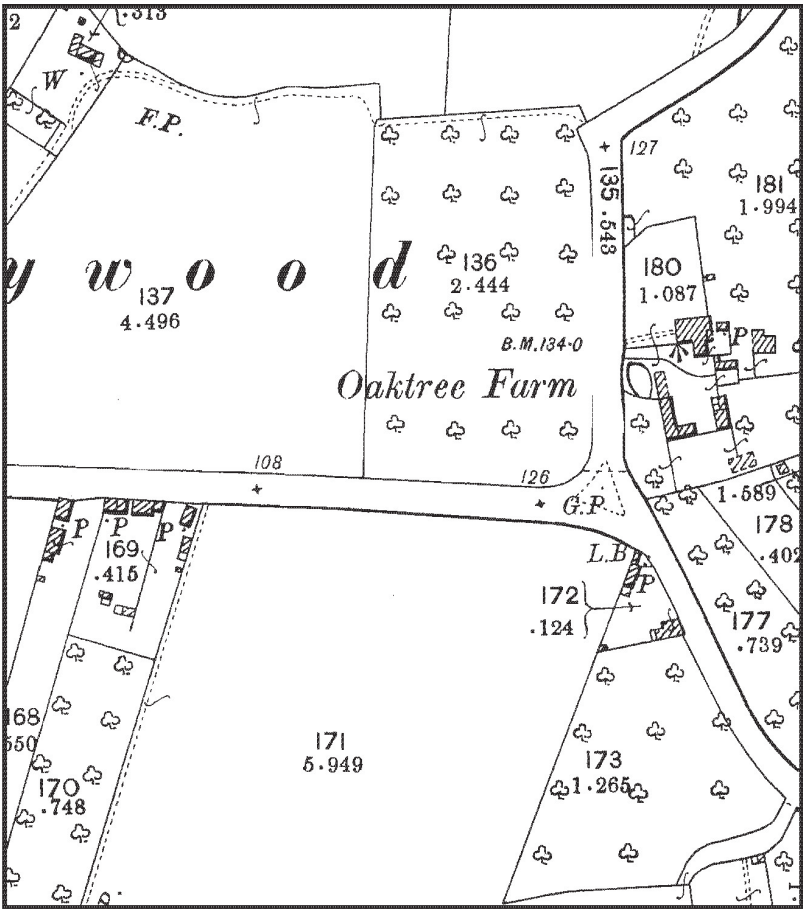
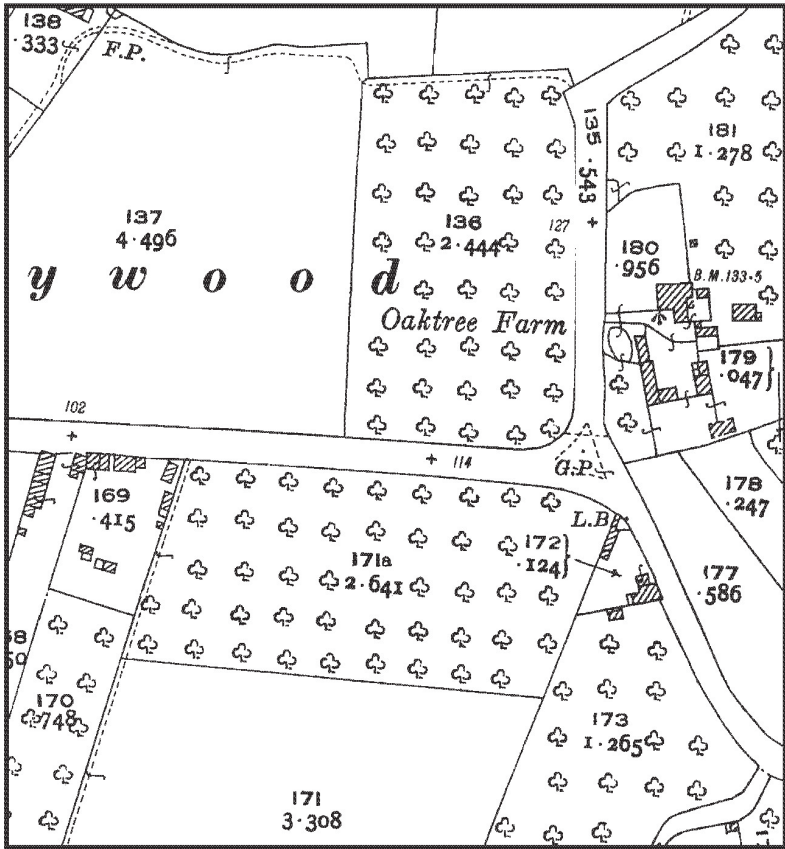


Fig 2.1: Historic mapping

1903



1927



0

200m

Fig 2.2: Historic mapping

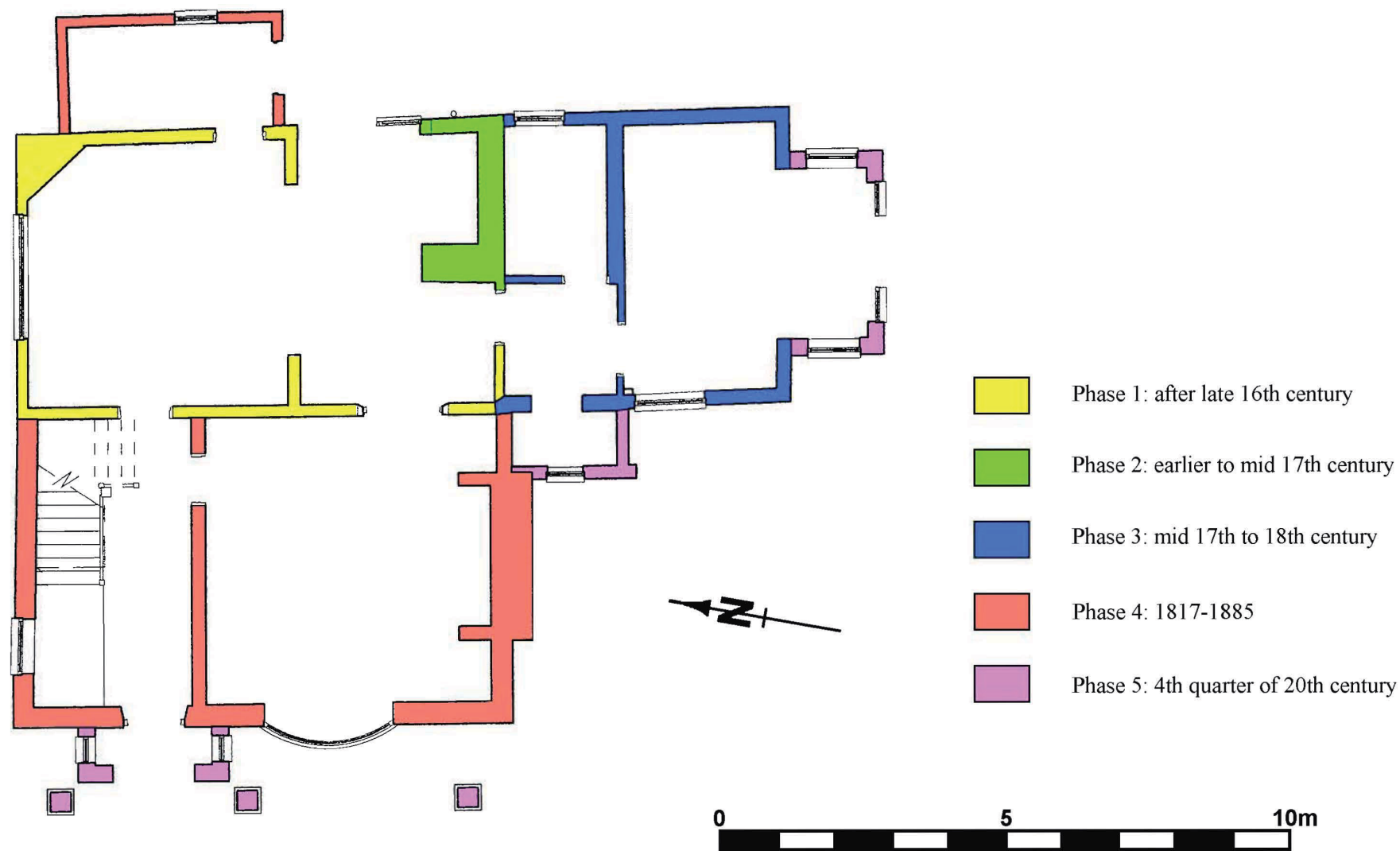


Fig 3.1: Phased ground floor plan

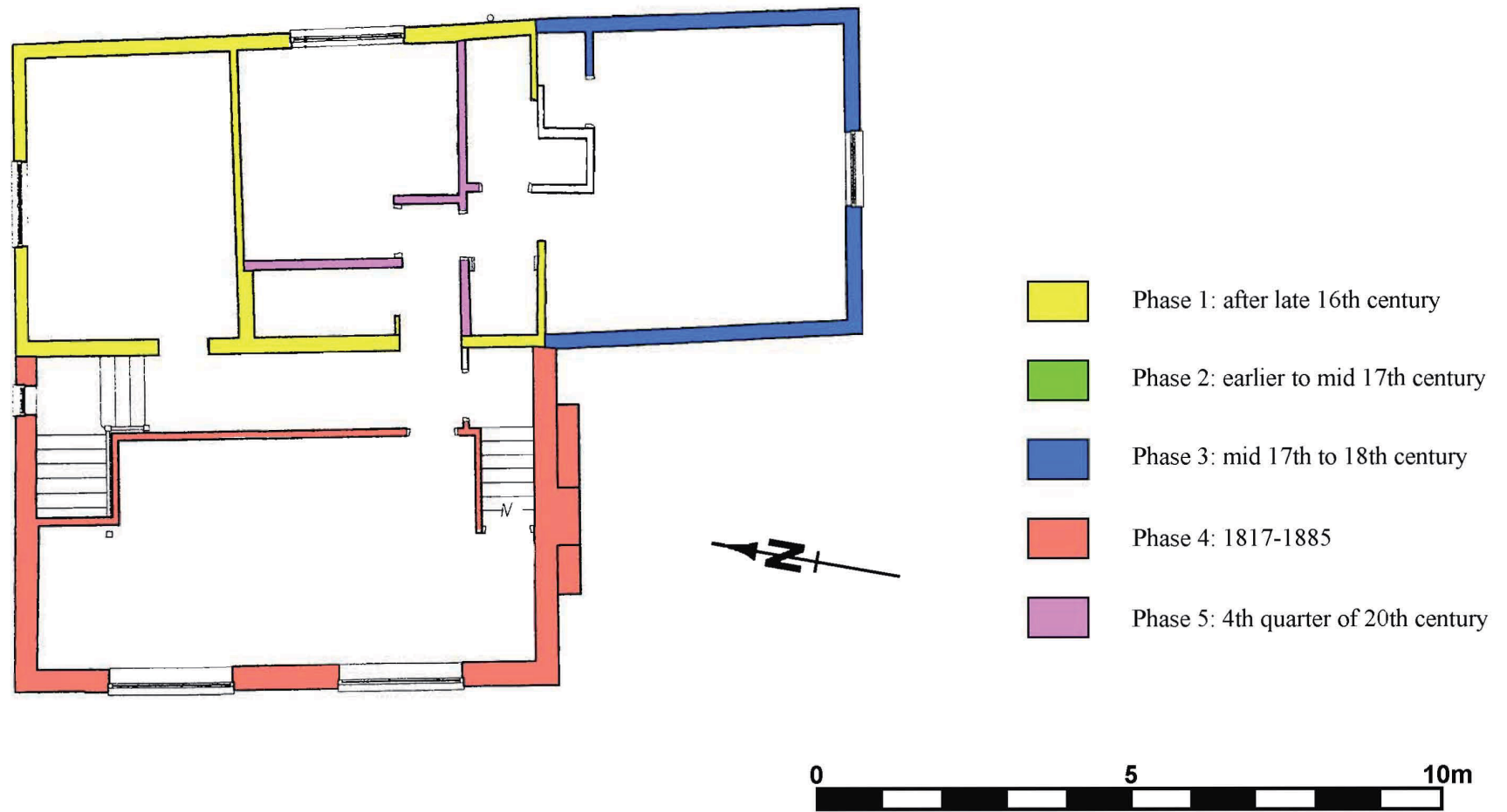
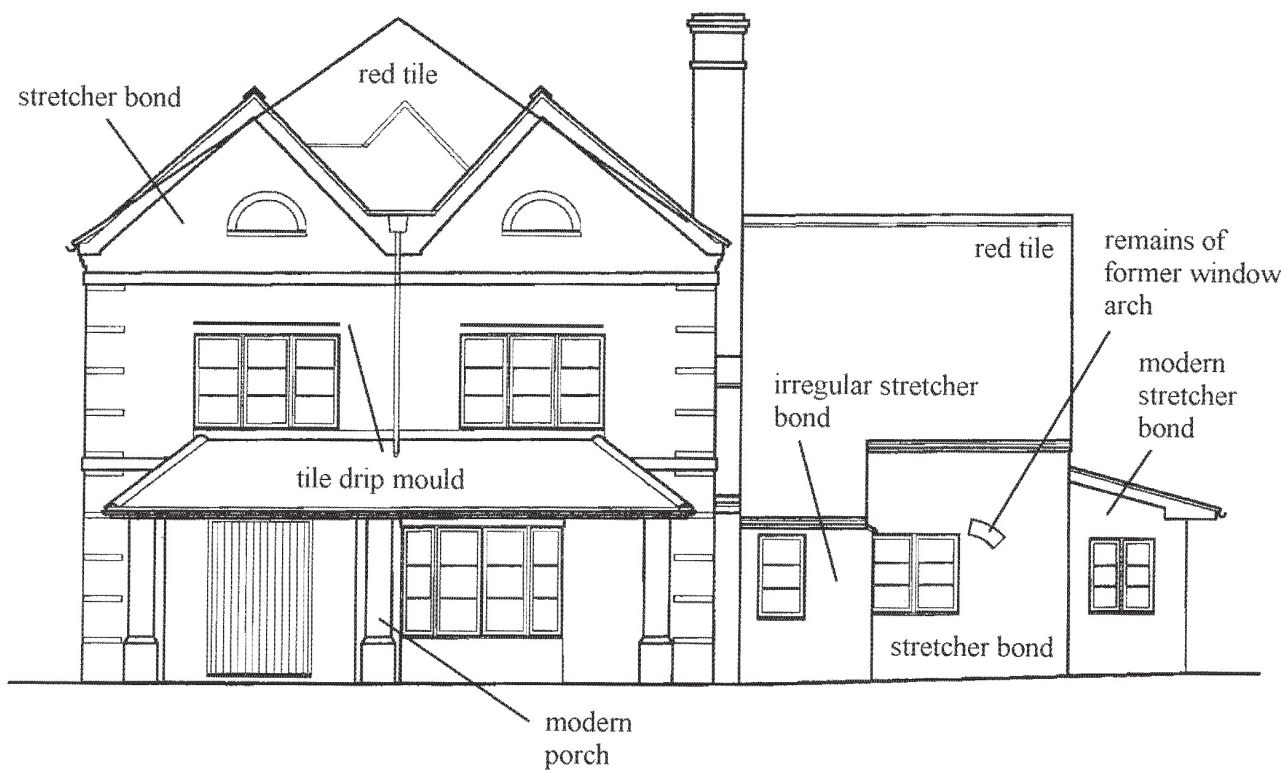


Fig 3.2: Phased first floor plan



West elevation



East elevation

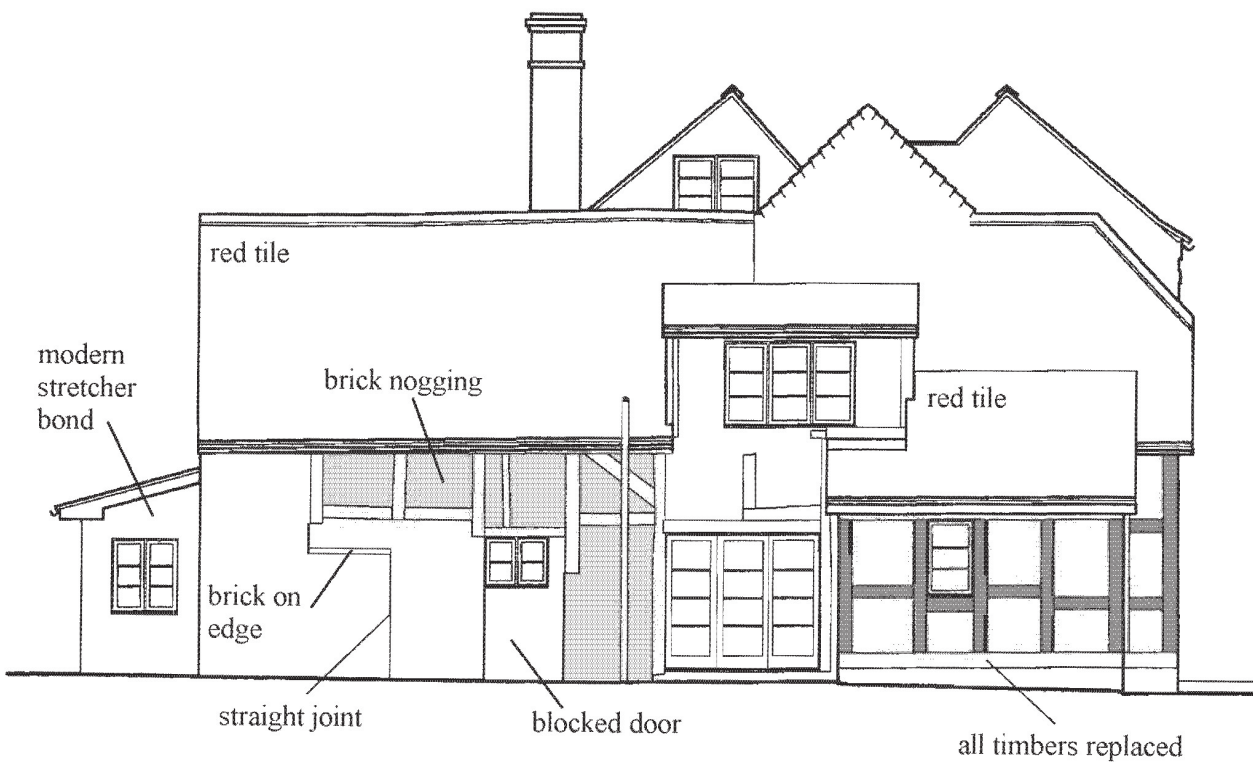
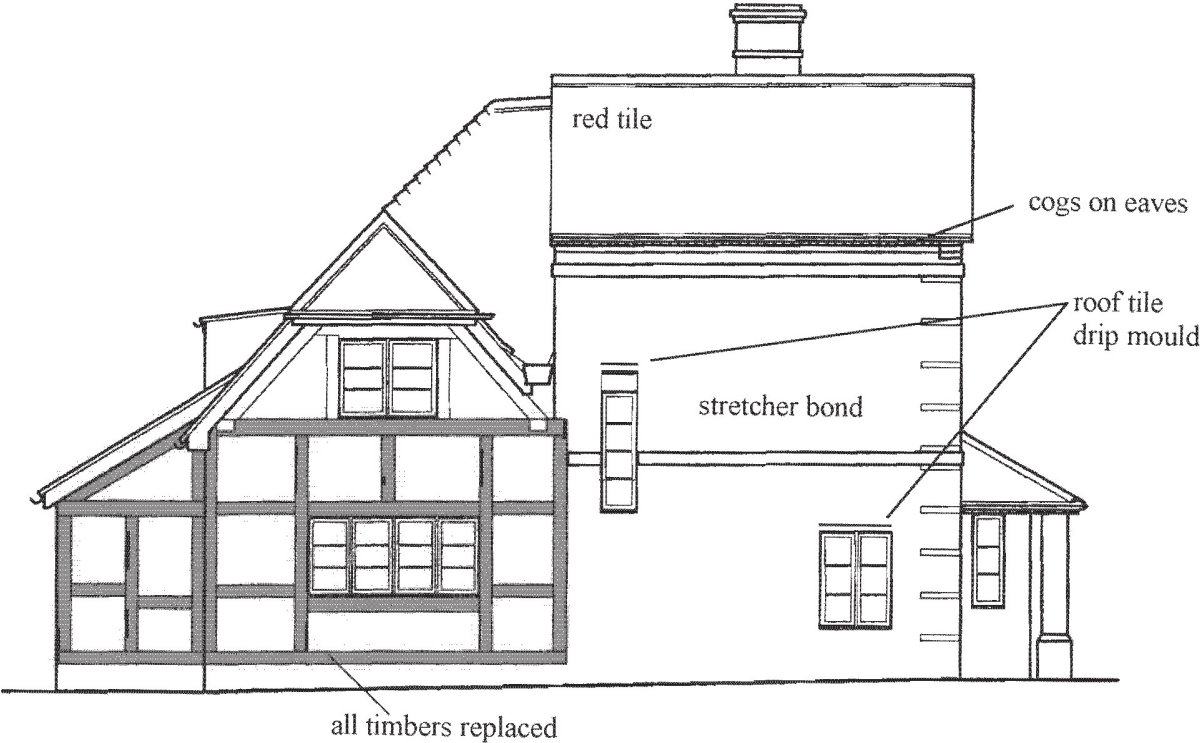


Fig 4.1: West and east elevations

North elevation



South elevation

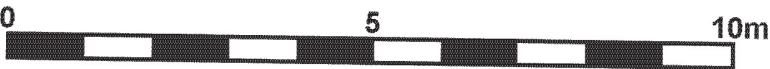
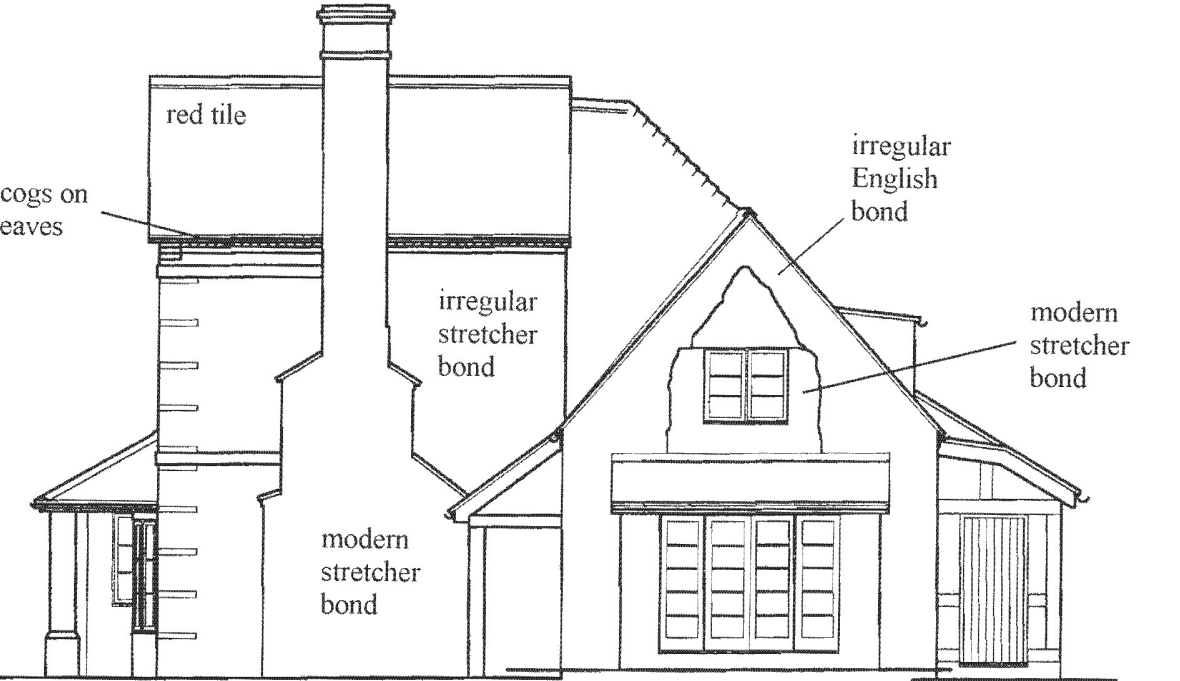
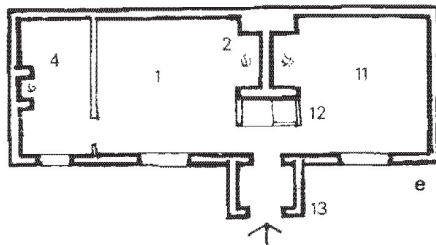
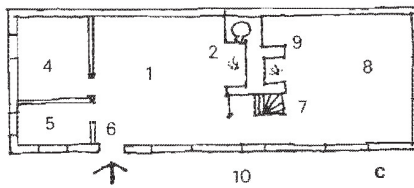
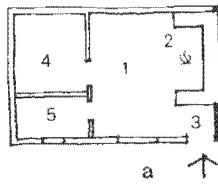


Fig 4.2: North and south elevations

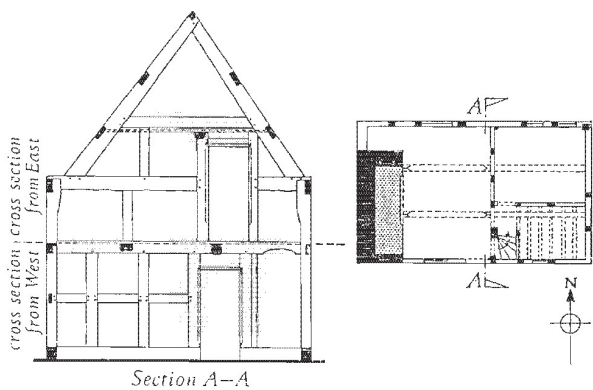




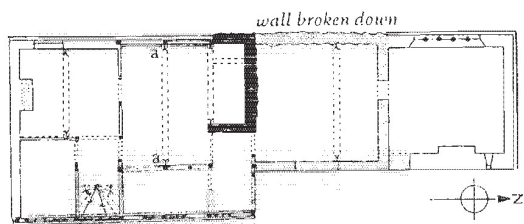
not to scale

Fig 5.1: Comparative development of timber-framed buildings; after Brunskill 1997

Pamphill Farm Cottages, Hound Hill; ST 995014



Charnock Richard Commissary's Farm, Back Lane; SD 543 178



not to scale

Fig 5.2: Comparative timber-framed buildings; after Mercer 1975

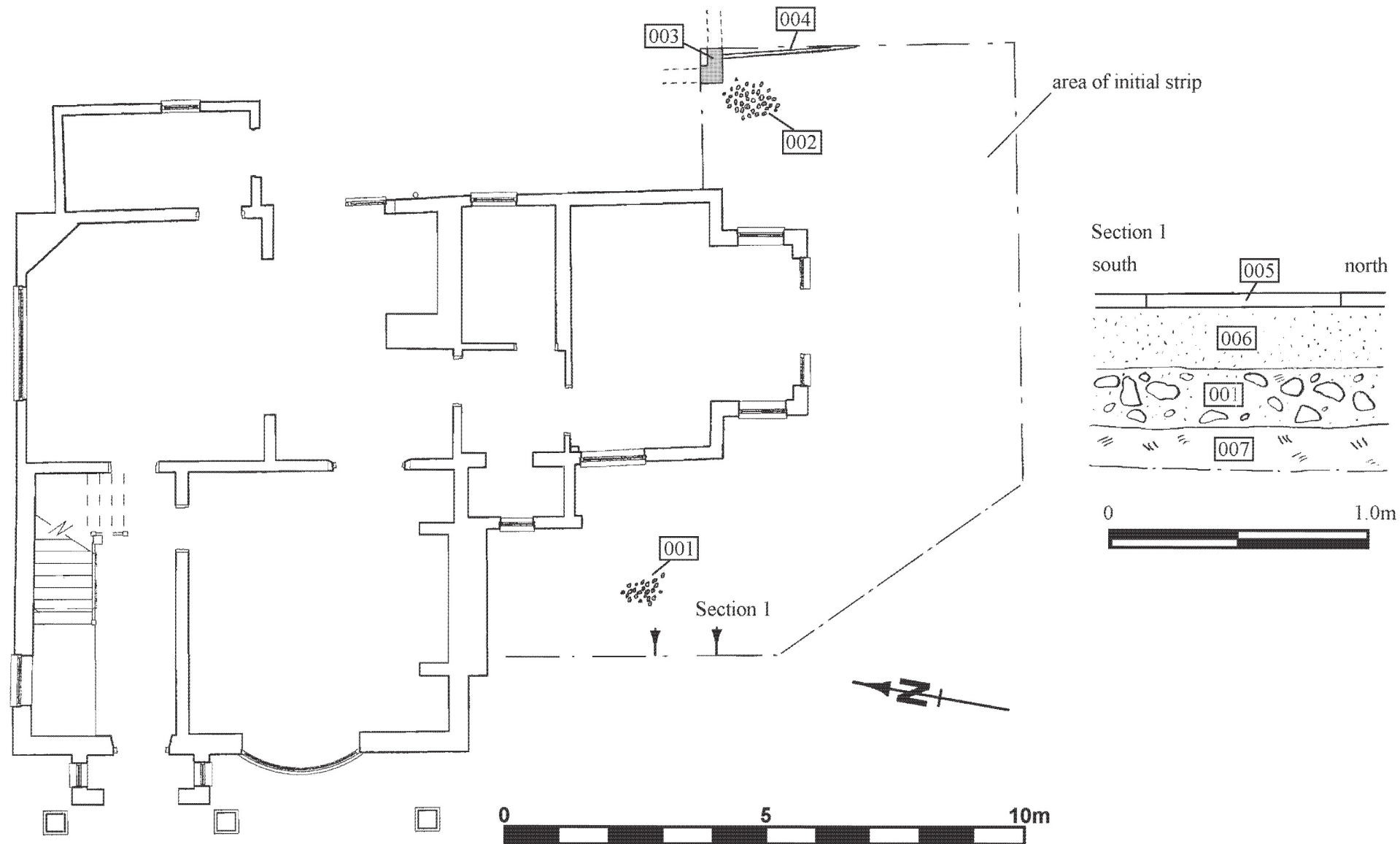


Fig 6: Recorded features



Fig 7: West elevation



Fig 8: East elevation



Fig 9: East elevation



Fig 10: North elevation





Fig 11: South elevation



Fig 12: South elevation



Fig 13: Ceiling beam in kitchen showing redundant mortices



Fig 14: Beam over fireplace in kitchen showing redundant mortices



Fig 15: Forked tree used as ceiling beam on landing



Fig 16: Gable truss at south end of phase 1 structure





Fig 17: Gable truss at south end of phase 1 structure



Fig 18: Extended purlin at south end of phase 3 structure



Fig 19: Contexts 002, 003 and 004

## Appendix 1: List of contexts

Context Number	Description	Interpretation
001	Medium rounded cobbles	Surface - drive to front of Oak Tree Farm
002	Medium rounded cobbles	Surface - yard at rear of Oak Tree Farm
003	Two brick thick wall in lime mortar	Yard wall first shown on 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 - pre-dates 004
004	Two brick thick wall in lime mortar	West side of small, square building first shown on 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 - post-dates 003
005	Concrete slabs	Modern patio
006	Sand	Bedding layer for 005
007	Mid red brown tenacious clay	Natural subsoil

## **Appendix 2: Location of Figures 7 to 18**

Fig 9

Fig 8

Fig 14

Fig 13

Fig 12

Fig 11

Fig 7

Fig 10

