

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT  
STEP HILL,  
MORTON UNDERHILL,  
Nr REDDITCH,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Simon Sworn

With contributions by  
Laura Griffin

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2351  
Report 1286  
WSM 33600



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## Archaeological watching brief at Step Hill, Morton Underhill, Near Redditch, Worcestershire

**Simon Sworn**

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Mr S. Miller
<i>Site address</i>	Step Hill, Morton Underhill, Near Redditch, Worcestershire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 8407 5475
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WCM 33600
<i>Planning authority</i>	Worcester District Council
<i>reference</i>	P99A0347
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2002
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2003
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999
<i>Previous archaeological work on the site</i>	

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

The hamlet of Morton Underhill lies in secluded countryside approximately 1 mile to the north of Inkberrow, Worcestershire. The natural geology consists of slowly permeable reddish clayey soils over mottled reddish mudstone. (Beard *et al* 1986 and Mackney *et al* 1983)

There has been no archaeological excavations within the hamlet of Morton Underhill, yet information contained within the SMR suggests the potential for deposits of a Roman or medieval nature. Various artefacts from the Roman period have been discovered in the vicinity (Fig 2), these include Romano-British pottery from the southeast corner of the field to the north of Burnt Lane and from gardens to the east of the north south lane. Also two Severn Valley rim sherds and one colour coat rim sherd, both dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD have also been found in the vicinity (WSM 10167).

It has been reported that the orchard to the south of Burnt Lane is called Bone Orchard because human remains had reputedly been found there, yet this is now impossible to verify as these artefacts are lost and the land is now under orchard (WSM 10168). Local tradition says that Burnt Lane is so called because plague victims were taken along it to be burnt.

The manor is not mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086, Thom and Thom 1982), but the presence of a moated site may suggest that its origin belongs to a period of new colonisation and woodland clearance that was taking place in the region in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Aston 1987, 87). Although there is now no trace of the building which once occupied its central area, amounts of tile have been recovered over the years by the then farmer Mr Jones. Across the narrow road from Step House is the possible location of the medieval chapel of St. Blaise (WSM 07925), to which a presentation was made as early as 1269 (VCH III). As this chapel did not have burial rights the human remains found in Bone Orchard may predate this period. No trace of this building is visible above ground though medieval pottery has been found from gardens and vegetable plots on the east side of the north-south lane (WSM 07927) dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type.

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## Methods

General specification for watching brief	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR 1 <sup>st</sup> Edition OS Map 1880
Dates of fieldwork	27 <sup>th</sup> May, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> June, 15 <sup>th</sup> August 2004
Area of deposits observed	Service trench c. 28m <sup>2</sup> Septic tank c. 10.20m <sup>2</sup> Barn c. 70.00m <sup>2</sup> Indicated on Fig 3
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Services      length 46.00m width 0.60m depth 2.65m (max) Floors      length 14.00m width 5.00m depth 1.00m

### *Access to or visibility of structure*

Observation of the service trenches was undertaken during and after machine excavation. Excavation was undertaken using a 360 degree tracked mini-digger using a 600mm toothed bucket. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well differentiated archaeological deposits. Access to the trenches was possible throughout, except at the northern end of the service trench where the septic tank was located, as the depth of the trench here was some 2.65m the section was not cleaned and only recorded from the surface. Elsewhere selected areas were cleaned to confirm the depth and nature of the deposits present.

### *Statement of confidence*

Access and visibility of deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. For safety reasons the north end of the service trench where the septic tank was to be placed, was not entered. Though it was clear from the surface that the only feature present was a relatively modern drainage gully in the northeast corner (Fig 4, Section 1).

### *Structural evidence*

The investigations here revealed that under the floor surface of the barn the ground was archaeologically sterile. The footing for the walls extended 0.6m below the present ground surface and would have truncated any earlier remains. Under the present tarmac lane are the remains of a number of stone layers (contexts 118, 120,121) and a possible associated drainage gully (context 119) indicating an earlier metallated surface, unfortunately there were no associated finds, preventing this from being securely dated.

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## Artefact report (by Laura Griffin)

### Artefact recovery policy

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

### Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* produced for each stratified context. Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst 1994).

### Artefactual analysis

The artefactual assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of three sherds of pottery weighing 34g (context 105), 12 fragments of flat roof tile (contexts 105, 110 and 112), two pieces of brick (context 112) and one fragment of mortar (context 112) (see Table 1). A piece of horse tooth and a small fragment of charcoal were also identified (context 112). All pottery was undiagnostic but could be grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). The group came from three stratified contexts and was entirely of late post-medieval date. The level of preservation was generally good with artefacts displaying only low levels of abrasion.

### Discussion of the artefacts

The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

#### *Late post-medieval*

All datable finds within this assemblage were late post-medieval with the pottery in particular indicating a *terminus post quem* of late 18th century date for the group.

Three sherds of pottery were retrieved from the site, all coming from context 105. All were undiagnostic and only datable by fabric type to the general period or production span. Two were from the body and base of the same vessel and identified as being of post-medieval red sandy ware (fabric 78). Both were relatively well preserved with a black glaze characteristic of this pottery type on the interior surface. The remaining sherd was a very small fragment of creamware (fabric 84) which could be dated between 1760 and 1780.

All contexts contained small amounts of building material with 12 fragments of flat roof tile and two of brick identified within the group. All flat roof tile appeared to be well-fired and of the same dark brownish red fabric. One fragment was nibbed and the majority had fragments of mortar adhered to the surfaces. Tiles of this form are of a long-lived type which was generally produced between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in this area. However, the fabric and general preservation of the examples from this site would indicate them to be at the end of this date range and therefore of similar date to the above pottery.

## Significance

All finds were of a domestic nature and consistent with the post-medieval date range allocated to the features from which they came. No material connected with the nearby medieval moated site was identified within the assemblage.

## Tables

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Post-medieval pottery	3	34
Flat roof tile	12	655
Brick	2	58
Mortar	1	2
Charcoal	1	1
Horse tooth	1	7

**Table 1: Quantification of the artefacts**

Fabric number	Fabric name	Total sherds	Weight (g)
78	Post-medieval red sandy ware	2	33
84	Modern stone china	1	1

**Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type**

Date	Artefact type	Total	Weight (g)	Specialist report?	Important research assemblage?
18 <sup>th</sup> century	Pottery	2	33	Y	N
1760-1780	Pottery	1	1	Y	N
Late post-medieval	Tile	12	655	N	N
Late post-medieval	Brick	2	58	N	N
Late post-medieval	Mortar	1	2	N	N
Late post-medieval	Horse tooth	1	1	N	N
Late post-medieval	Charcoal	1	7	N	N

**Table 3: Summary of the assemblage**

## Discussion

Following a thorough inspection of the groundworks made during the course of the project, the only potential archaeological features appear to consist of a number of drainage gullies, pits/postholes and madeground (contexts 107, 108, 111, 113, 115). These deposits were dated to no earlier than the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the associated material finds. Investigations under the barn structure indicate that there is no evidence for any earlier structure or occupation deposits. Even though the barn is situated in the close proximity of the moated site no associated medieval pottery was found.

Although evidence within the SMR suggests that there is the potential for archaeological deposits within this area, this excavation has shown that under the existing lane and the barn there are no archaeological remains present. The thin scattering of Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery throughout the hamlet and the surrounding fields may be accounted for as the result of manuring

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using domestic refuse, a well documented practice in the medieval period (Astill and Grant 1988, 79).

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### Conclusions

There appears to be no significant archaeology within the area of the service trench or under the barn. The presence of the nearby moated earthworks indicate that a level of occupation and significant local importance has been present in this hamlet for nearly a thousand years. However, occupation within the moated site may have been just that, with a very limited physical effect on the surrounding vicinity.

It should be noted that these excavations were of a very limited extent, and only covered the areas under the present barn structure, a small section under the lane and two very narrow trenches under the hardstanding either side of this lane. The extent of existing disturbance, in the form of service trenches, drainage gullies and pits/postholes under the yard surface to the west of the lane is very likely to have destroyed any potentially existing archaeology.

This watching brief has indicated that no archaeology is present in the area of the watching brief. That is not to say that further discoveries could not be made at a later date, especially in the fields either side of the lane, where any buried archaeology is likely to be far better preserved.

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### Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

*A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Mr S. Miller at Step Hill, Morton Underhill, Redditch, Worcestershire, (NGR ref SP 012591; SMR ref WSM 33600). The watching brief was conducted during the excavation of a new service trench across the lane to the south of Step Hill house, also observed was the removal of the existing earth floor surface within a Grade 2 listed building (SMR 30689), set within the centre of the hamlet. The area had moderate potential for the existence of important archaeology, being situated within Morton Underhill's medieval settlement area and close to a medieval moated site (SMR 07928). The groundworks for the proposed development were observed and revealed that under the floor surface of the barn structure there appears to be no earlier archaeological features of any significance. The service trench that runs for 46m northwards from the northwest corner of the barn was also devoid of any archaeological remains, though considerable disturbance has taken place with the construction of various modern service trenches. The visible remains of an earlier metalled surface were observed under the existing north south lane although this could not be securely dated.*

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### Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	4
Photographic records AS3	4
Digital photographs	44
Abbreviated context records AS40	32
Levels records AS19	1
Drawings	9

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Boxes of finds	1
Computer disks	1
The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

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### Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the conclusion of this project: Mr S. Miller, Mr S. Crane and the owners of Step Hill, Morton Underhill, Mr and Mrs Hunt.

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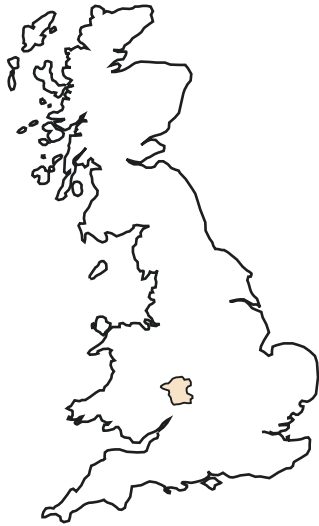
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site

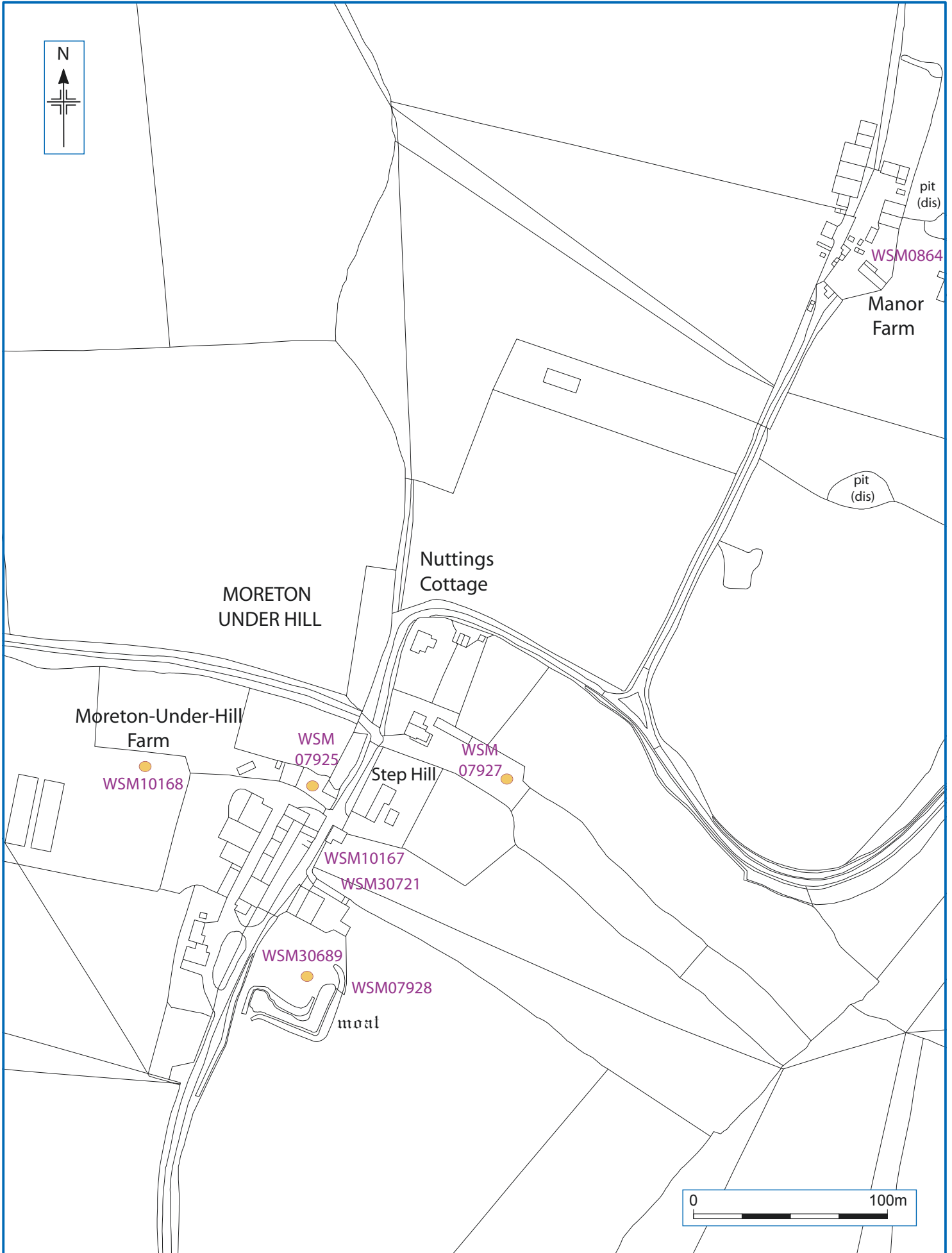
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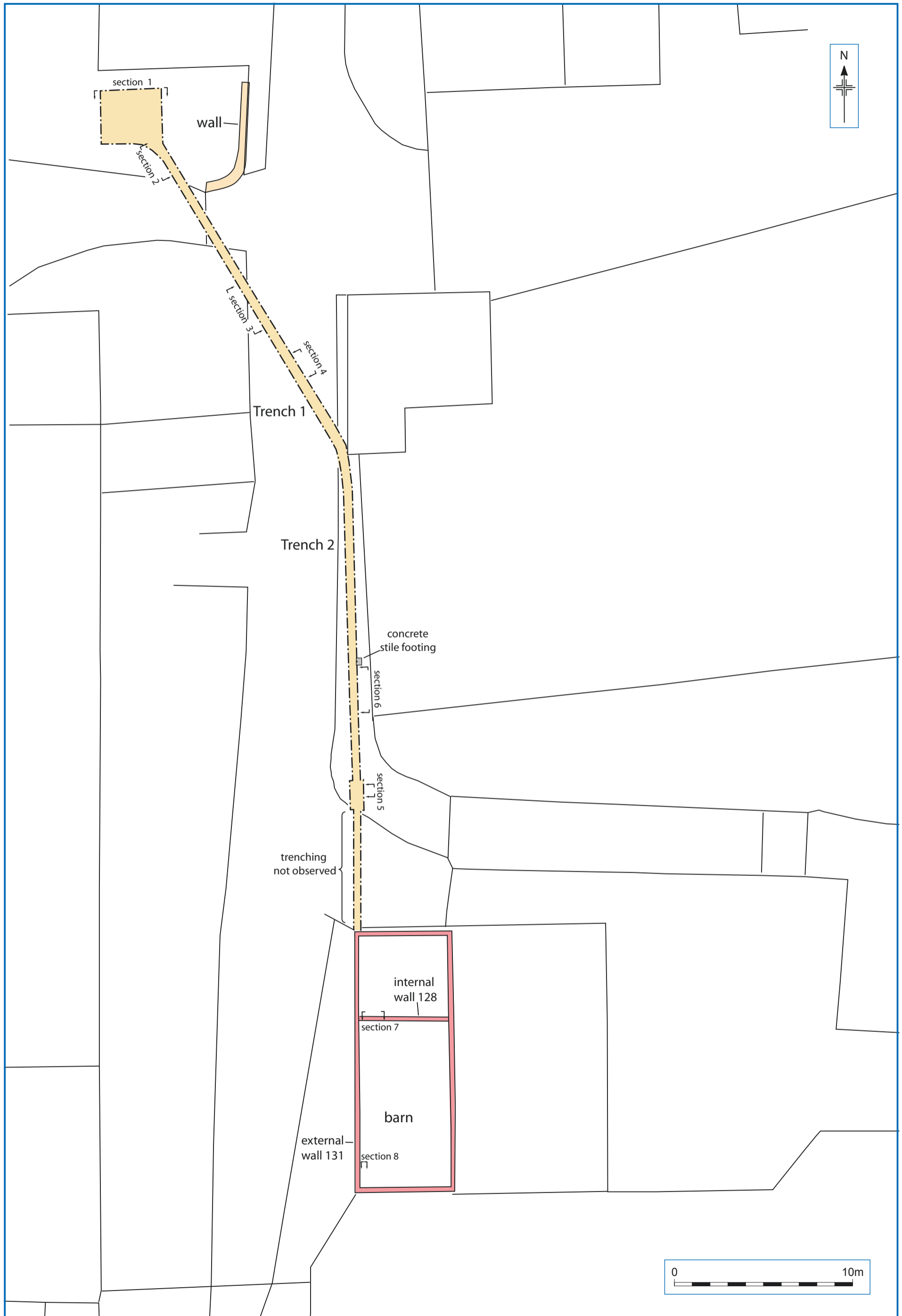
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(11th-13th century?)

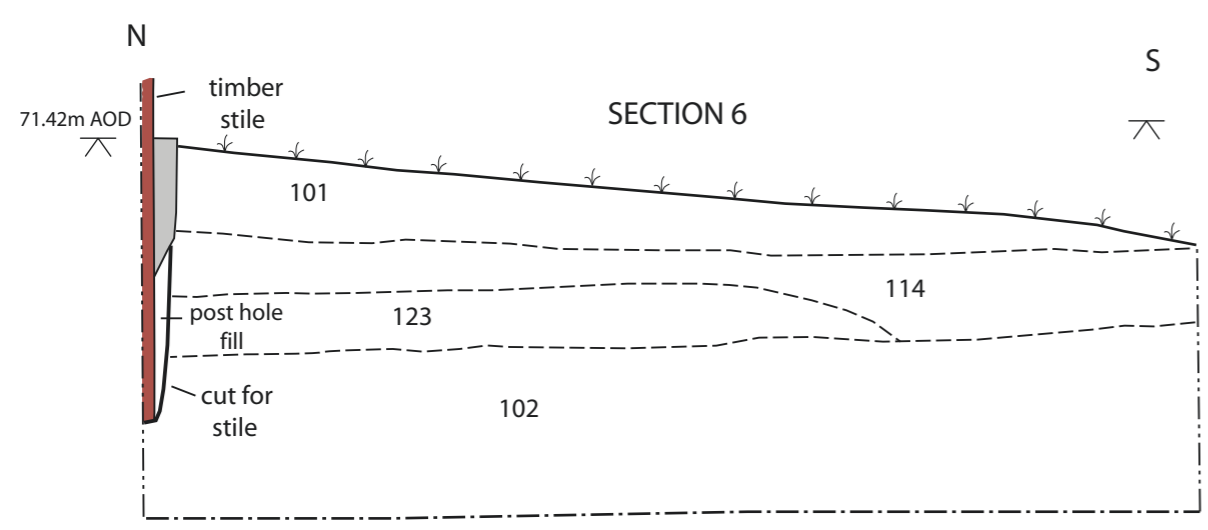
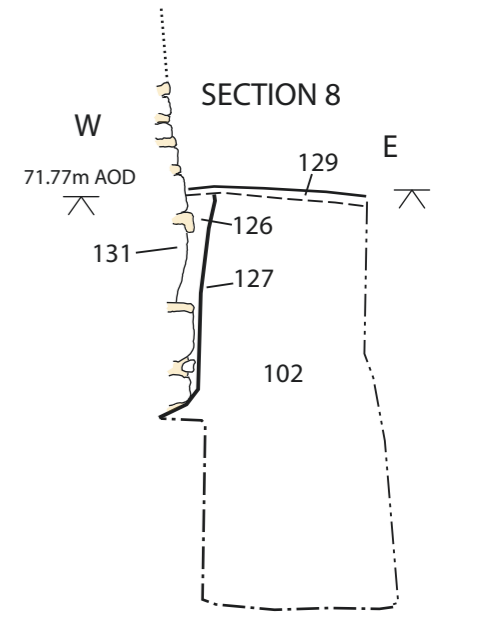
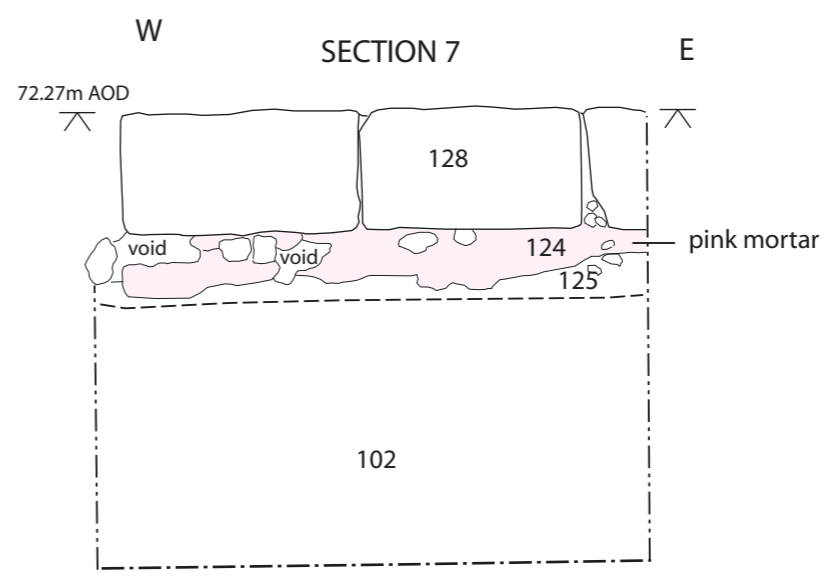
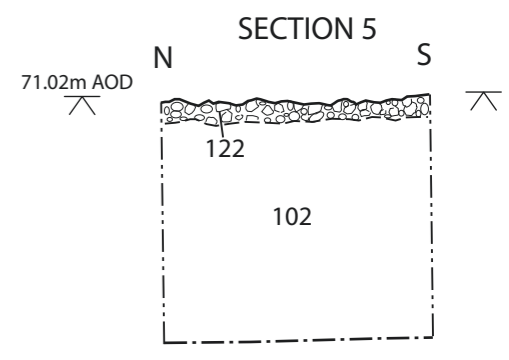
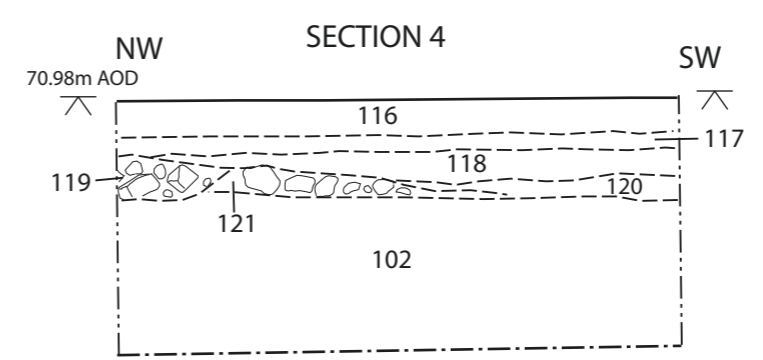
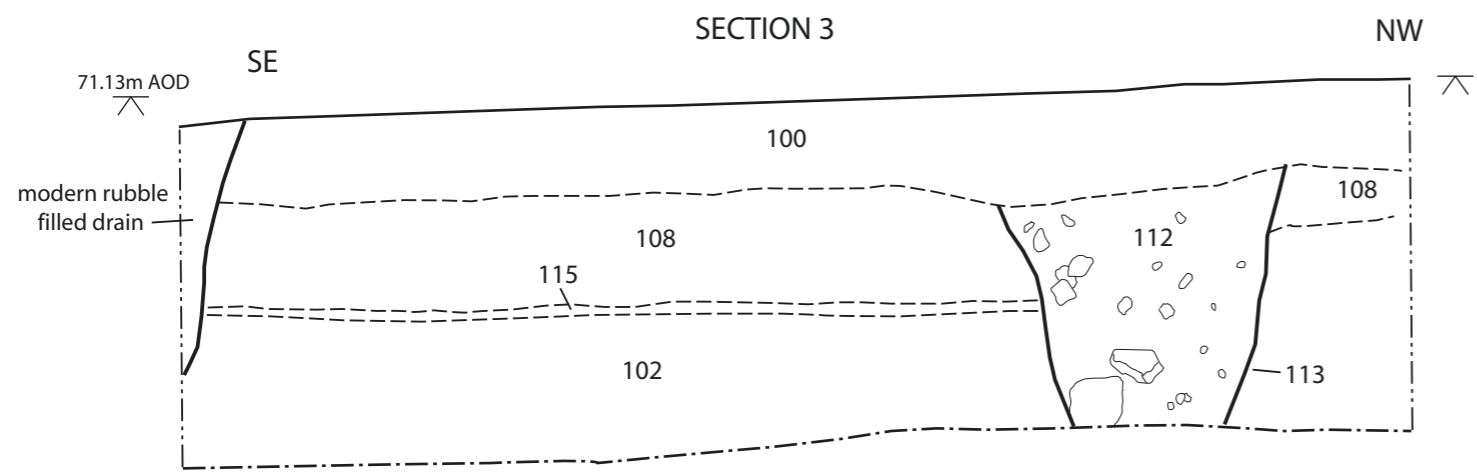
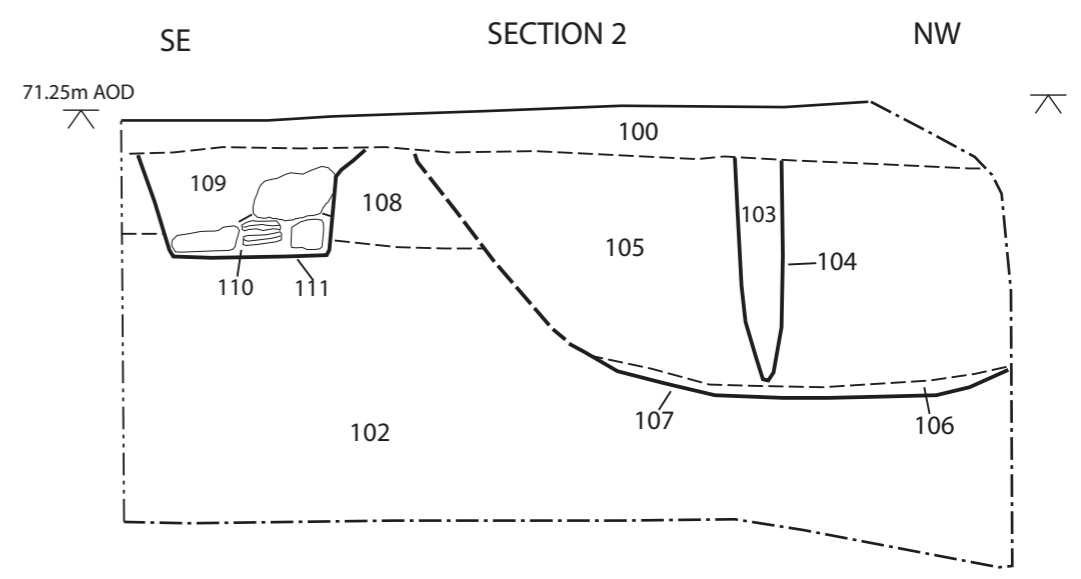
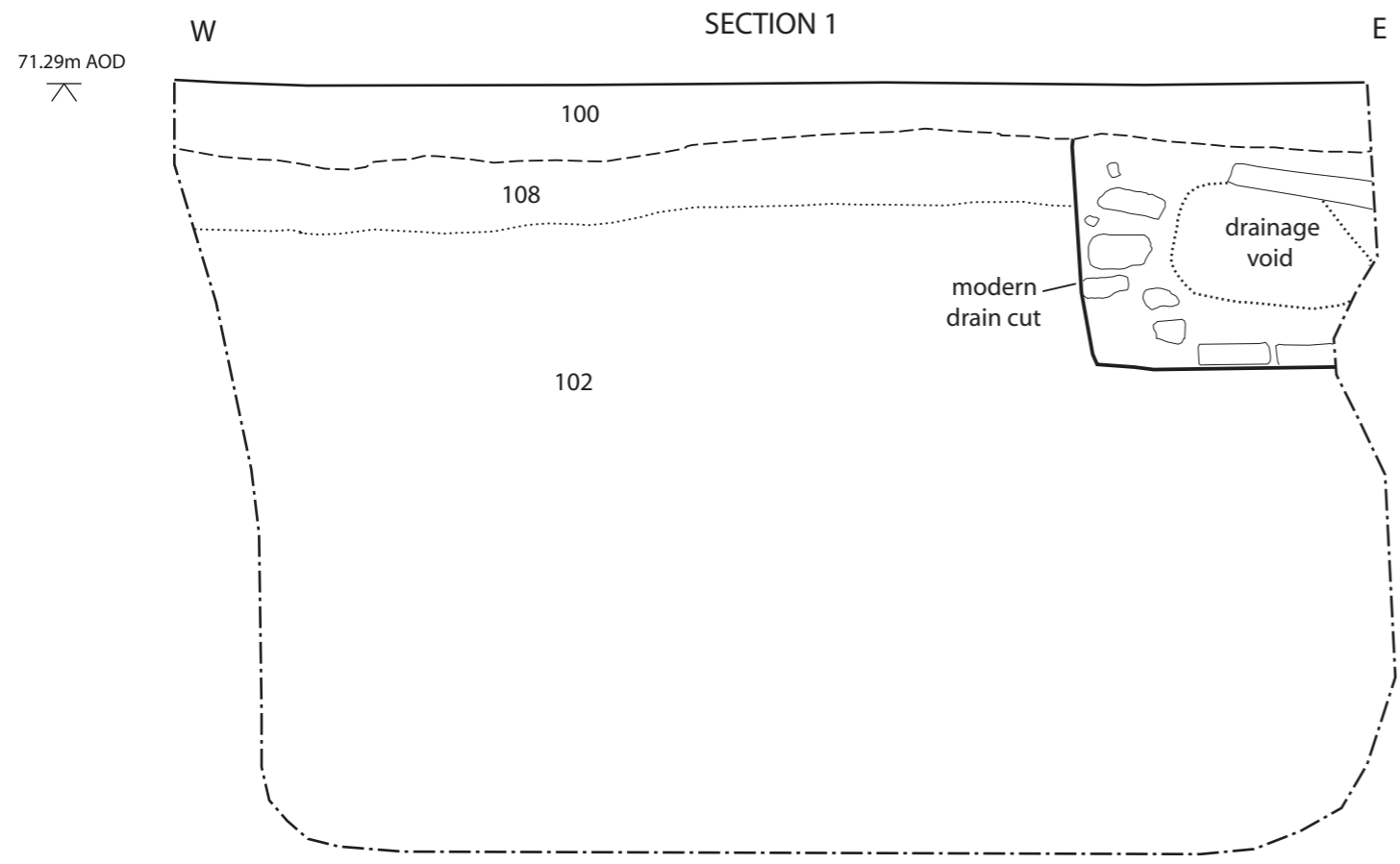
MORETON UNDER HILL

Step Hill













*Plate 1: General view of Morton Underhill, facing north*



*Plate 2: Interior of barn, facing northeast*



*Plate 3 Trench 1, facing southeast*



*Plate 4 Trench 2, facing north*

**Deposit description**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type Colour Texture</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date (where known)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Depth (below ground level)</b>
100	Loose gravels	Frequent sands and crushed brick	Modern	Present yard/drive surface	0 - 0.5m
101	Dark brown loose silty loam	Occasional pebbles and gravels	Modern	Topsoil	0 - 0.21m
102	Mottled reddish brown mudstone	No inclusions		Natural, same as 130	0.55m+
103	Plastic mid brown silty clay	Occasional sand inclusions	Post medieval	Single fill of stake hole	0.15 - 0.75m
104	Circular? cut, filled by 103	Vertical sides and 'V' shaped base	Post medieval	Stake hole	0.15 - 0.75m
105	Loose dark brown silty clay	Occasional sub-rounded pebbles and charcoal flecks	Post medieval (late 18 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Secondary fill of pit?	0.15 - 0.78m
106	Loose flaky light beige mortar	Occasional mid brown silty clay and gravels	Post medieval	Primary fill of pit?	0.69 - 0.80m
107	Concave pit? cut, filled by 105 and 106	Regular concave sides and gentle concave base	Post medieval	Possible pit, only visible in section	0.15 - 0.80m
108	Mixed loose dark brown natural, mid blue clays and crushed mortar	Occasional sub-rounded pebbles		Possible makeup layer or early yard surface, same as 123?	0.10 - 0.50m
109	Loose dark brown silty clay	Frequent sub-rounded pebbles and crushed mortar	Post medieval (late 18 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Secondary fill of drainage gully	0.08 - 0.30m
110	Loose white crushed mortar and in-situ tiles	Occasional mid - dark brown silty clay	Post medieval (late 18 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Base/lining of drainage gully 111	0.26 - 0.38m
111	Linear? vertical sided, flat based cut	Clear sharp edges, filled by 109, 110	Post medieval	Drainage gully	0.08 - 0.38m
112	Loose dark brown silty clay	Frequent sub-rounded pebbles and rubble, occasional charcoal flecks		Single fill of pit/post hole 113, deliberately backfilled	0.22 - 0.64m+
113	Circular(?), partially exposed cut	Steep, regular and clear sides, not bottomed		Pit or post hole	0.22 - 0.64m+
114	Firm mid dark brown silty clay	Frequent sub-angular pebbles, modern brick and tile, occasional charcoal flecks		Subsoil	0.20 - 0.36m



**Deposit description (cont.)**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type Colour Texture</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date (where known)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Depth (below ground level)</b>
115	Thin layer of loose gravels within a dark grey silty clay matrix	Occasional clinker and charcoal flecks		Possible earlier yard surface	0.54 - 0.58m
116	Tarmac		Modern	Present surface of north - south lane	0 - 0.10m
117	Very loose gravels and sub-angular pebbles	Occasional modern brick and tile fragments	Modern	Hardcore make-up for tarmac surface 116	0.10 - 0.14m
118	Crushed brick and sandstones	Occasional sand		Make-up layer for present road	0.14 - 0.23m
119	Loose brick and sandstones within a dark grey silty clay	Occasional charcoal flecks		Early road surface? Or possible in-filled roadside drainage gully	0.15 - 0.26m
120	Loose small pebbles and sub-angular gravels	Sand matrix		Potential early road surface	0.20 - 0.27m
121	Sub-rounded sandstones	Occasional loose mid brown sandy clay		Small bank of stones to west of early road surface	0.17 - 0.24m
122	Small sub-rounded pebbles	Plastic mid brown silty clay matrix		Present yard surface	0 - 0.06m
123	Mixed loose dark brown natural and crushed mortar fragments	Occasional sub-rounded pebbles		Possible makeup layer or early yard surface, same as 108?	0.38 - 0.55m
124	Loose pink / cream crushed mortar	Frequent sand and sub-angular sandstones, occasional voids		Foundation mortar for internal wall 128	0 - 0.15m
125	Very loose orange / brown sand	No inclusions		Foundation base for wall 128	0.06 - 0.16m
126	Firm, well compacted mid - dark brown silty clay	Occasional small sub-angular pebbles		Fill of foundation cut 127	0 - 0.60m
127	Linear, steep sided, flat based cut	Only exposed on internal side of wall 131		Foundation cut for main barn structure	0 - 0.60m
128	Single course of rectangular, square cut limestone blocks	Each stone c. 0.60 x 0.32 x 0.25m, slight small chisel, tool marks		Stone footing of internal wall	0 - 0.32m above ground surface

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**Deposit description (cont.)**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type Colour Texture</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date (where known)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Depth (below ground level)</b>
129	Black, friable silty clay?	Occasional mortar fragments		Present internal floor surface of barn	0 - 0.20m
130	Mottled reddish brown mudstone	No inclusions		Natural, same as 102	0.20m +
131	Roughly hewn limestone and sandstone blocks, c. 0.40 x 0.20 x 0.10m	Set within a loose, pinkish sandy mortar		External wall of present barn structure, recorded as: SMR 30689	