

The National Trust

Great Coxwell Barn
Great Coxwell, Faringdon
Archaeological Excavation Report
NGR SU 2690 9400

By Valerie Diez, Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Prepared by: Valerie Diez

Date: June 28th 2001

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Date: 6th July 2001

Approved by: *JRHiller*

Date: *17/6/07*

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Introduction

OAU was commissioned by Gary Marshall (the National Trust's Regional Archaeologist) to undertake a small excavation at Great Coxwell Barn, near Faringdon, Oxon. The excavation was carried out in early May 2001. The objective was the enlargement of a test pit (Trench 14) excavated by The National Trust on the west side of the barn, in order to elucidate the nature of a cut feature containing the remains of timber(s) at its base, in case the feature turned out to be a grave. A licence for the removal of human remains was obtained by OAU from the Home Office to cover this eventuality. This report was written by Valerie Diez, who supervised the excavation extension of the trench, and the report will be integrated into the NT's report on recent excavations at the barn.

Methodology

The test pit (Trench 14, Fig. 1 and Plate 1) excavated by The National Trust originally measured 1 m x 2.5 m. The OAU extended this sondage by hand excavation to 2.7 m x 2.5 m and the trench was stepped on the south side for health and safety reasons. On the east and west sides of the trench the bedrock acted as a natural step, at 0.8 m from the actual ground level on the west side and 0.5 m on the east side.

The trench was excavated down to the level of the timbers that lay *c* 1.5 m below ground level. A small sondage excavated on the side of one of the planks revealed that the cut feature extended a further minimum depth of 0.8 m beneath the timbers.

The test pit was planned and both sections of the feature were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trench was photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the OAU Fieldwork Manual (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992). A sample of one of the timbers was taken for dendro-chronology dating.

Stratigraphic description (Fig. 2)

A cut feature (47) through the natural bedrock (48) was observed running parallel to the foundation of the barn (49), at a distance of about 1 m from the barn footings (Figs 1 and 2). After extension of the trench, this feature appeared to carry on into the south section of the trench and was linear. The feature was 1.2 m wide and had a minimum depth of 1.4 m. In total six deposits were excavated that formed the fills of feature 47.

The fill observed at the bottom of the excavated depth of the cut was a yellow silty sand (53). Overlying this were two waterlogged oak planks (52) that were exposed at a depth of 0.7 m from the top of the cut feature. The timbers were 0.26 m wide by 0.05 m thick. They had a minimum length of 2 m; the ends of the timbers were observed at the north-east end of the test pit, but they extended beyond the section line at the south-west end on the trench (Plate 1).

Overlying the timbers was a loose reddish-brown coarse sand (50) that was approximately 0.2 m thick. Above this sand the fills observed in the test pit sections [140 and 141] were different. This could be explained by a possible re-cut located in the north-east part of the trench (Gary Marshall, *Pers comm.* and see Fig. 1). At the north-east of the cut sandy fill 50 was sealed by a light-brown clay loam (46) that was 0.4 m thick towards the top of the cut (47). This deposit contained two sherds of glazed Brill-Boarstall pottery from a glazed jug (Oxfordshire fabric OXAM); the vessel type dates to the 13th or 14th century.

The bottom of the recut (Fig. 2, section 140) was filled by a 0.06 m thick layer of dark brown clayey silt mixed with residual decayed wood (54). This deposit was overlain by a light-brown clay loam (56) that was 0.2 m thick.

The upper fill of the cut (47) was sealed beneath a sequence of six further deposits (Fig. 2, section 141). A distinctive layer of yellow stones/gravels in loam soil (45) also overlay the bedrock. This material may derive from erosion of the bedrock. This deposit was overlain by layer 55 at the south of the trench and by layer 44 at the north-east. Layer 55 was a mid-brown clay loam with about 20% stones and gravels inclusions, while layer 44 was a yellow clay silt deposit with 35% stone inclusions.

These two layers were overlain by a deposit of modern rubble containing brick fragments and a large quantity of broken iron objects (43). A cat skeleton was also found on top of this rubble deposit, which is probably recent and is provisionally dated to the mid-20th century. The skeleton and the layer were sealed beneath a modern hardcore layer (42) overlain by the present topsoil and grass (41).

Finds

The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised two sherds (7g) from context 46, both from the same glazed Brill-Boarstall glazed jug (Oxfordshire fabric OXAM). The vessel is likely to have been made during the 13th or 14th centuries (Mellor 1994, 111-40).

Other Finds

The cat skeleton from context 51 is clearly modern and will be retained in the archive. A further piece of animal bone not identified to species was recovered from context 46. Two iron nails were recovered from the fills of the cut feature containing the timbers, and presumably derive from the construction method of the feature.

Interpretation

The cut (47) through the bedrock seems to be a linear feature, and considering its position (extending parallel to the west wall of the building) it would appear to be associated with the barn building itself. Some form of drainage feature is the most likely function for the feature, possibly collecting the rainwater run-off from the roof

and carrying it away from the barn. The drain cut was capped with timber planks (52), and water-borne silts being deposited within the drain cut probably formed the deposit located beneath the timbers.

As there was no evidence of a waterproof seal having been deposited over the planks or within the drain cut itself, it may be assumed that it was not intended to collect water for the purposes of storage.

The pottery from fill 46 suggests that the drain was constructed in the 13th/14th century. The longevity of the drain is unknown, and it could have collapsed at any time thereafter. The probable recut observed in the fill of the drain in the north-east of the trench is of unknown purpose, but may represent a later attempt to clean out the drain for re-use, though evidently this operation was not carried out to the full depth of the feature. The later deposits in the trench were clearly modern, and probably derive from a phase of building activity at the barn.

A sample of wood was taken from one of the plank for dendro-chronology dating by Dan Miles. However, his appraisal of the timber was that the sequence of rings from the sample was inadequate for dating.

Bibliography

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region *Oxoniensia* 59, 17-217

Wilkinson, D ed. 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (first edition, August 1992)

*Trench 14 Excavation, Great Coxwell Barn
Report*

Appendix: Archaeological context inventory

Trench	Ctx No	Type	Width	Thick (m)	Comment	Finds	No/Wt
14	41	Deposit		0.25	Topsoil		
14	42	Deposit		0.14	Hardcore layer		
14	43	Deposit		0.44 max	Modern rubble		
14	44	Deposit		0.28 max			
14	45	Deposit		0.16			
14	46	Fill		0.4 max	Fill of 47	Pottery Animal Bone Iron nail	2 sherds 1 1
14	47	Cut	1.20	1.4	Drain cut		
14	48	Natural			Bedrock		
14	49	Masonry			Footing of barn wall		
14	50	Fill		0.2 max	Fill of 47	Iron nail	1
14	51	Skeleton			Cat skeleton	Animal bone	166
14	52	Wood	0.26		2timber planks		
14	53	Fill		0.3	Fill of 47		
14	54	Fill		0.06	Fill of 47		
14	55	Deposit		0.4			
14	56	Fill		0.2	Fill of 47		

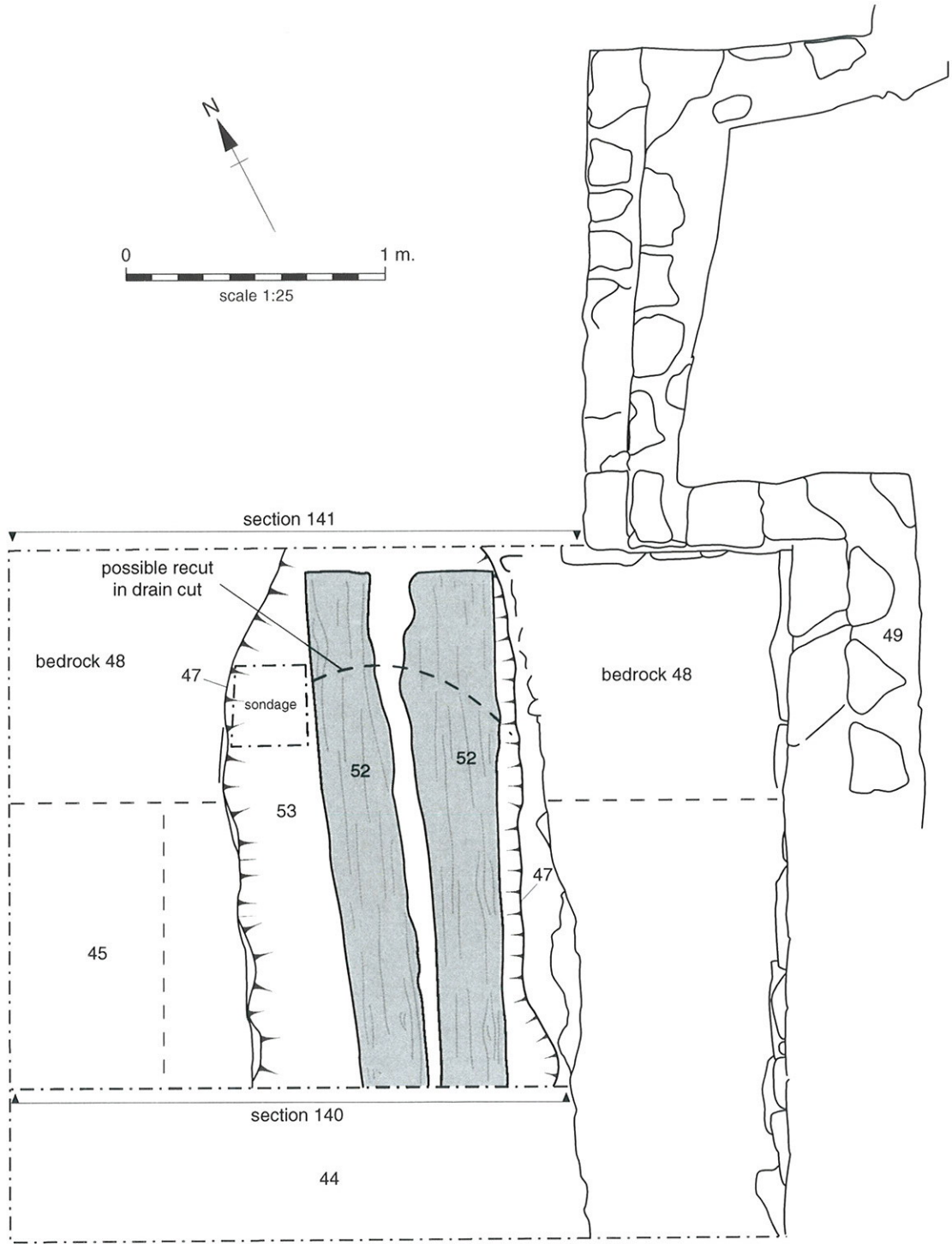


Figure 1: Trench 14 plan

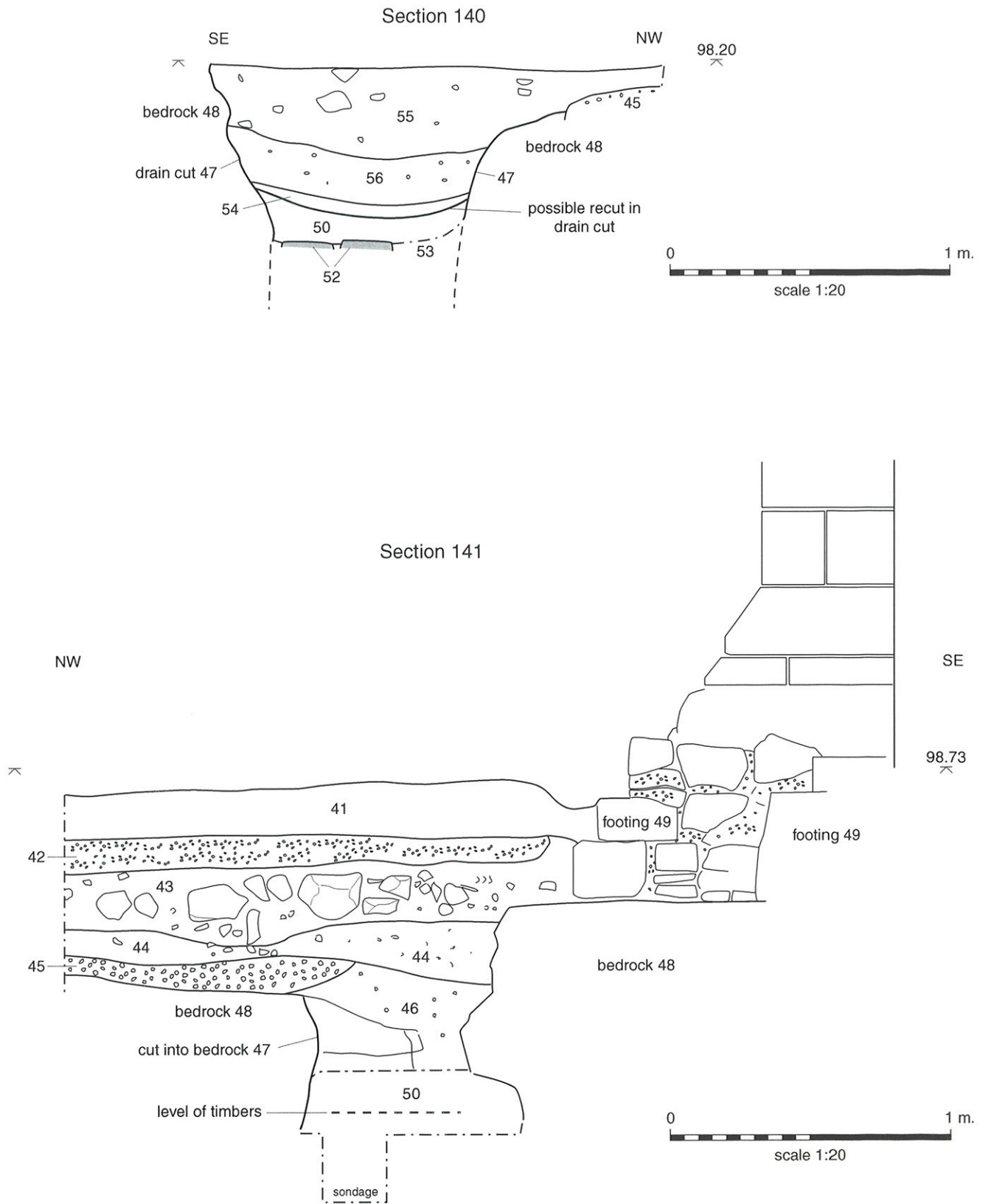
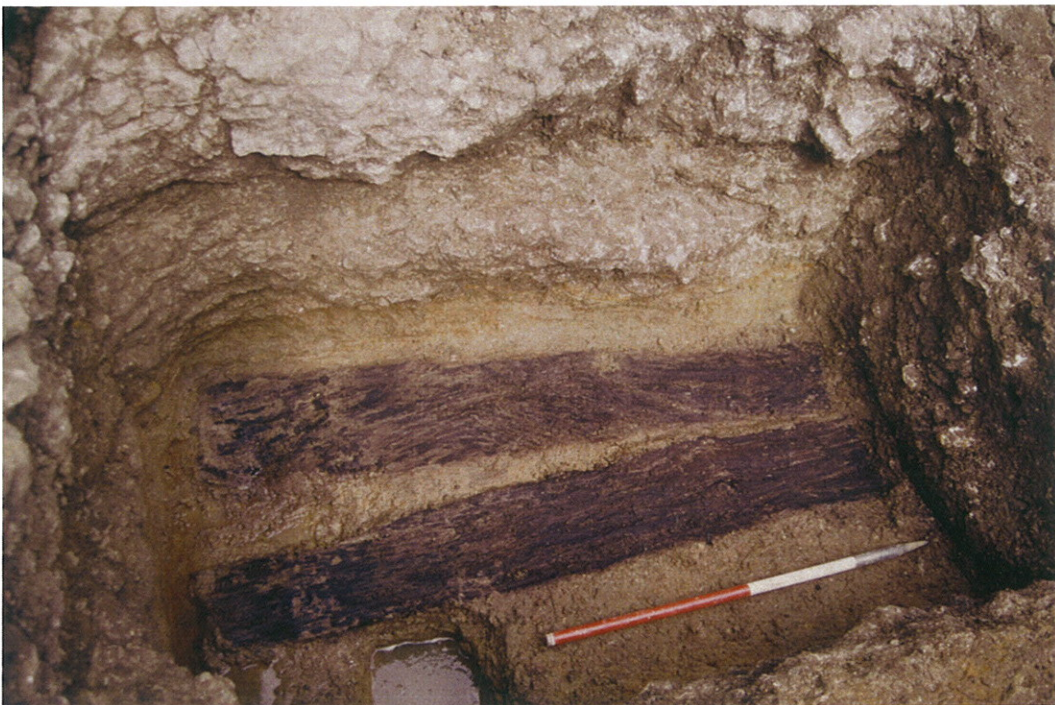


Figure 2: Sections 140 and 141



Trench 14, general view



Details of timber planks (52)



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