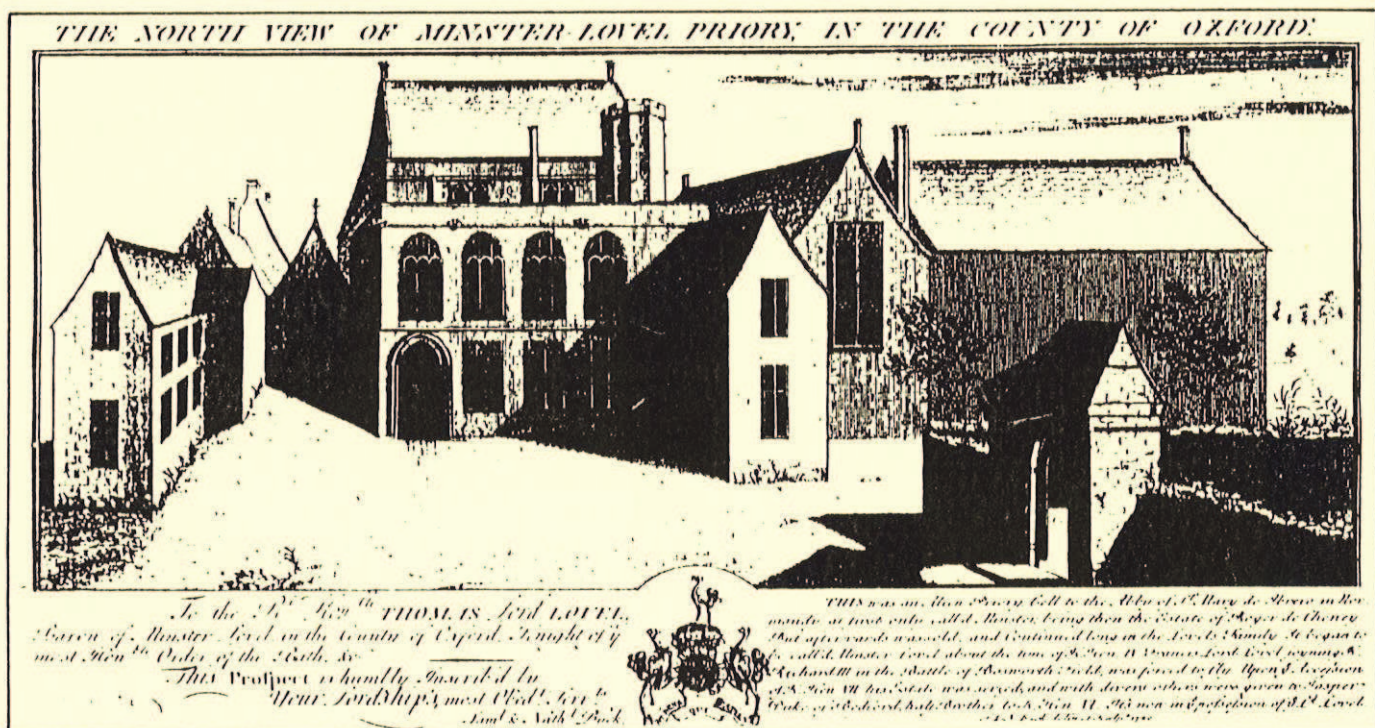


Tythe Barn, Manor Farm Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 3248 1139

Archaeological Evaluation Report



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

May 1996

**TYTHE BARN, MANOR FARM, MINSTER LOVELL, OXFORDSHIRE,
Archaeological Evaluation**

SP 32481139

1.1 Introduction

The owners of the Barn wished to resurface the interior which will involve some levelling. The Barn is a Grade II listed building (DOE Listed Buildings 124.19/11) and stands next to the Scheduled remains of Minster Lovell Hall (SAM 8) (Fig. 1). Prior to the submission of a planning application the owners wished to establish whether earlier historic fabrics or features were present and if so at what level in relation to the existing floor level.

The OAU carried out the evaluation according to a Written Scheme of Investigation in response to a Brief produced by the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist.

1.2 Background

By the 12th century, the manor of Minster had come into hands of the Lovell family. Minster Lovell was included in the medieval forest of Wychwood and there was also Minster Wood, a park. The Church and Hall were rebuilt in the first half of the 15th century by William, seventh Baron Lovell of Tichmarsh. After the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 the Lovell estates were seized by the Crown as John Lovell was a supporter of Richard III. The manor remained in the possession of the Coke family until 1812 after which it was sold off in parcels.

Manor Farm house may occupy the site of the chapel of St Cecilia; early masonry is incorporated into the structure. The chapel and church had been given as an alien cell to the Abbey of Ivry in Normandy by Maud the mother of William Lovell by 1184.

The barn is thought to be 15th century in date and forms a part of the manorial farm complex. Pevsner identifies 13th-century buttresses on the E wall of the barn (1974, 709). A map search was carried out on maps postdating 1817, the earliest reliable small scale map found; the barn and farmyard appear to have remained unchanged.

The village may date back to at least the 9th century as this is the supposed date of the dedication of the Minster to St Kenelm (an earlier date could be suggested as a coin of Marcus Aurelius was found at Manor Farm). The Church of St Kenelm was originally a late Saxon Minster Church, with a college of priests. Minsters of this date are usually seen as royal foundations. In this context it is interesting to note the Minster Lovell Jewel 'a sumptuous gold and enamel mount of c900 AD comparable to the Alfred Jewel' (Blair, 1994 108).

The area around Minster Lovell is rich in archaeological remains. Akeman Street, the Roman road from Alchester to Cirencester runs to the N of the village. There are several villas in the area to the E around Asthall, on Akeman Street. A 5th-century Saxon cemetery was found in 1872 at Minster Lovell.

1.3 Aims

The Aims of the evaluation were:

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains.

To define the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits.

To produce a report on the archaeological deposits which may be used to form the basis of further proposals if appropriate.

1.4 Strategy

A six percent sample of the area to be resurfaced was examined. This sample consisted of four hand-dug trenches (see Fig. 2). The excavation was carried out to the top of 'natural'. The excavation was carried out by the OAU under the direction of Mark Roberts BA(Hons) MIFA according to the procedures defined in the OAU manual and its standard fieldwork methodology annexes.

1.5 Results

The trenches revealed garden activity, pits and walls with associated floors. These were earlier than the present building. Only 14 sherds of pottery were recovered and these were identified and dated by Lucy Whittingham BA (Hons) FSA.

1.5.1 Trench 1 (Fig.2)

This trench was 5 m long and 1.5 m wide. The S part of the trench lay over natural clay subsoil while the N part was over gravel (102 and 103). A small pit (105) 0.18 m deep with a charcoal rich fill (104) was cut into the clay in the SE corner of the trench. The fill of the pit had been disturbed by rodents. A single sherd of late 13th- to mid 15th-century Minety type pottery was recovered from the pit. A very thick mortar floor 0.34 m deep sealed all these deposits and formed the present surface. Wheel ruts could be seen in the surface of the floor.

1.5.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 2)

This trench was 5 m long and 1.5 m wide. The natural subsoil across the trench was gravel. A layer of sandy gravel (208) 0.26 m thick had been spread over the natural to level up the site. A 0.3 m deep N-S foundation trench (207) had been cut into the levelling layer. A roughly herringbone coursed foundation of roughly hewn limestone blocks (202) had been built in the foundation trench to act as footings for the barn wall. The empty space left to the W of the wall footing in the foundation trench had been filled by a mid brown sandy gravel (206). A layer of friable grey silt (205) 0.16 m thick had been spread across the top of the trench backfill and up to the wall footing. This levelling layer contained 6 sherds of late 13th- to mid 15th-century Minety type pottery and a single sherd of 10th- to 11th-century St Neot's-type ware. A patchy mortar floor (204) had been laid on levelling layer 205. A gravel make-up layer (203) 0.08 m thick sealed this patchy floor and the present mortar floor (201) sealed the sequence of deposits.

1.5.3 Trench 3(Fig. 3)

This trench was 2 m long and 1.5 m wide. The natural subsoil was limestone brash (311) which was sealed by a brown clay with limestone (310) 0.12 m thick which may have been a garden soil. A similar layer with less limestone (309) 0.38 m thick lay over 310. A layer of dark brown clay with charcoal flecks (308) 0.14 m thick containing a rim and base sherd of late 13th- to mid 15th-century Minety Ware cooking vessel was the latest of these garden soils. A flat bottomed pit (307) 0.26 m deep and filled by grey brown clay (306) was cut into 308. A free standing drystone wall (304) had been built on the top of 308. The wall was aligned NNW-SSE and built of roughly hewn limestone block of which two courses survived. A single sherd of late 13th- to mid 15th-century Minety type ware cooking vessel was recovered from between the stones. The present barn wall had been built over wall 304. A layer of friable mid brown clay loam (305) 0.18 m thick had been dumped against wall 304 after it had been built. A mortar floor (303) 0.04 m thick had been laid on top of 305 and partially over wall 304. A layer of sandy gravel (302) 0.04 m thick had been laid down as a make-up layer for the present mortar floor (301).

1.5.4 Trench 4(Fig. 3)

This trench was 2.7 m long and 0.7 m wide and was dug in order to define the alignment of wall 304. A wall of roughly hewn limestone (402) 0.4 m wide was sealed by the present barn wall. A layer of yellow brown sandy silt with stones (401) lay to the E of the wall and may have been cobbling. A compact orange-yellow sand (404) lay to the W of the wall. This may have been a floor surface but the top of layer 305 was also compacted and this may have been a result of activity within the barn rather than signifying that layer 404 was laid as a floor. A layer of loose black silt (405) overlay the wall and the layers and was sealed in turn by the present mortar floor of the barn (400)

1.6 Discussion

1.6.1 Garden and pits

The earliest deposits seem to be soils in Trench 3 which reflect garden activity. The pottery from the last of these deposits was late 13th- to mid 15th-century. A pit in Trench 3 (307) and one in Trench 1 (105) are of the same date and may be an additional indication of garden activity.

The digging of refuse pits in gardens is well attested during the medieval period. The few sherds recovered from the evaluation did not suggest a high status occupation which might be expected adjacent to either an alien cell of a French Abbey or the manor of a very wealthy and powerful family.

1.6.2 Walls and barn

Only two contexts contained pottery (of late 13th- to mid 15th century date); the wall in Trench 3 (304) which was built on top of the garden soil, and the levelling layer (205) for the earlier of the two barn floors in Trench 2. This relative lack of dating makes the sequence of deposits difficult to untangle. However, the wall in Trench 3 must be earlier

than the barn as it is under the barn wall and on a different alignment. It is unclear whether the floor (303) in Trench 3 which seals wall 304 is the same as the earlier floor in Trench 2 (204). If so, then this might indicate an earlier building of perhaps the same dimensions as the current barn. If they are different floors, then the floor in Trench 3 must relate to an earlier smaller building. This is hinted at further S by the presence of cobbling to the E of the wall in Trench 4 while a possible internal floor lies to the W. This could suggest that several smaller buildings stood in the area covered by the S of the barn.

The foundations for the E wall of the barn are likely to be earlier than the 15th-century construction date suggested before the evaluation as they are sealed by a layer dated to the late 13th- to mid 15th century. Since the foundations are cut into a thick levelling layer which is possibly seen in Trench 3 it can be argued that the site was levelled for one episode of construction i.e. for the barn.

The early floor is sealed by the present floor which was relaid on a new make-up layer. The N, W and S walls of the barn appear to be very similar in construction, in marked contrast to the E wall, and it is possible that much of the barn structure was rebuilt in the 19th century when the roof seems to have been replaced.

1.7 Conclusions

The evaluation trenches identified medieval activity pre-dating the present barn. This includes perhaps two episodes, one of late 13th- to mid 15th-century garden activity followed by buildings. A large barn sized structure predates the present barn and was tentatively dated to before the construction of Minster Lovell Hall (ie before the early 15th century). The foundations of the rear wall of the present barn, which shows several external added buttresses and episodes of building, are also likely to be late 13th- to mid 15th century.

Mark Roberts BA(Hons) MIFA
1 May, 1996

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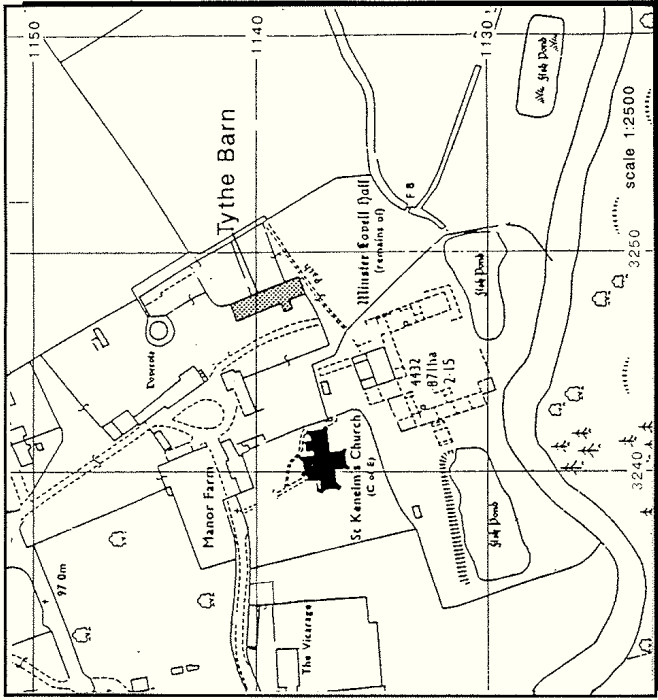
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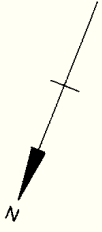
Tithe Map 1839, Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25' 1880,

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Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 25' 1921



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89.24 levels in metres above Ordnance Datum

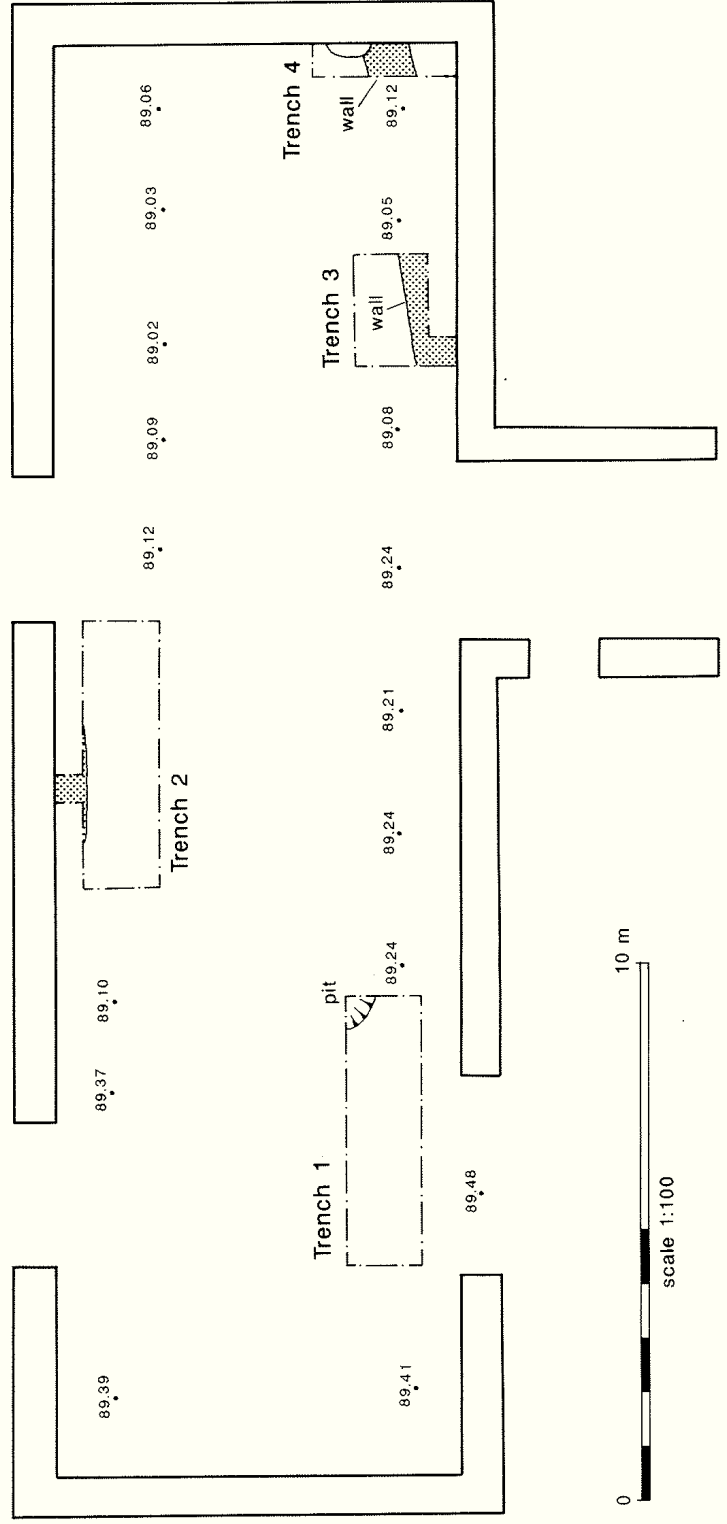
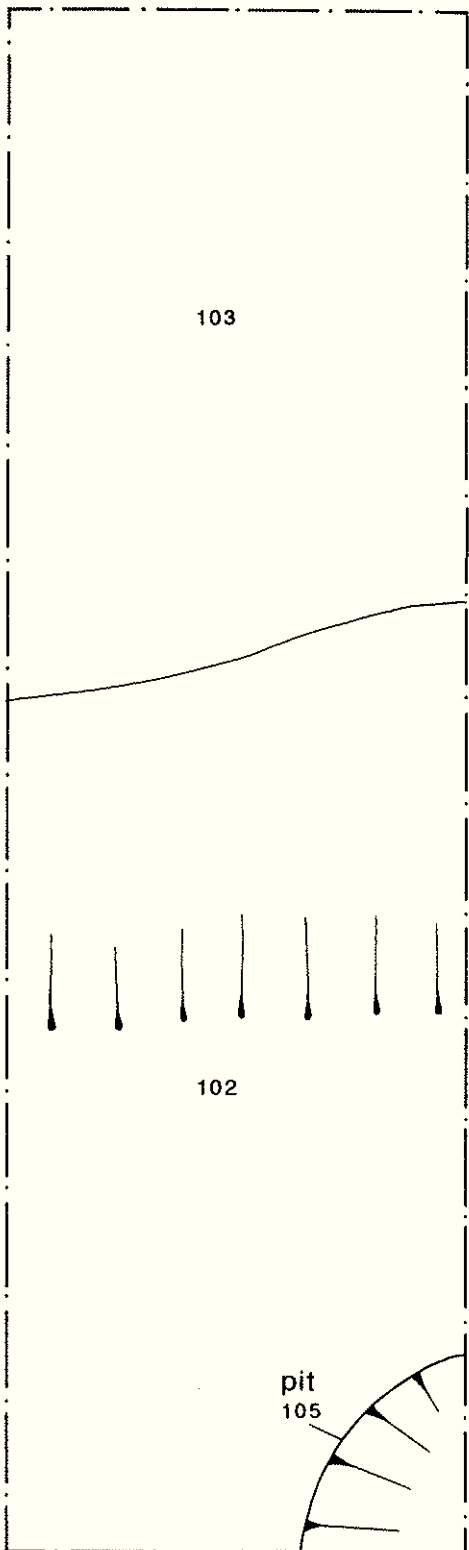
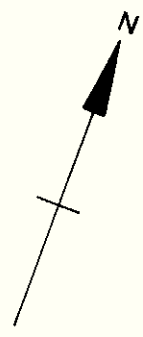
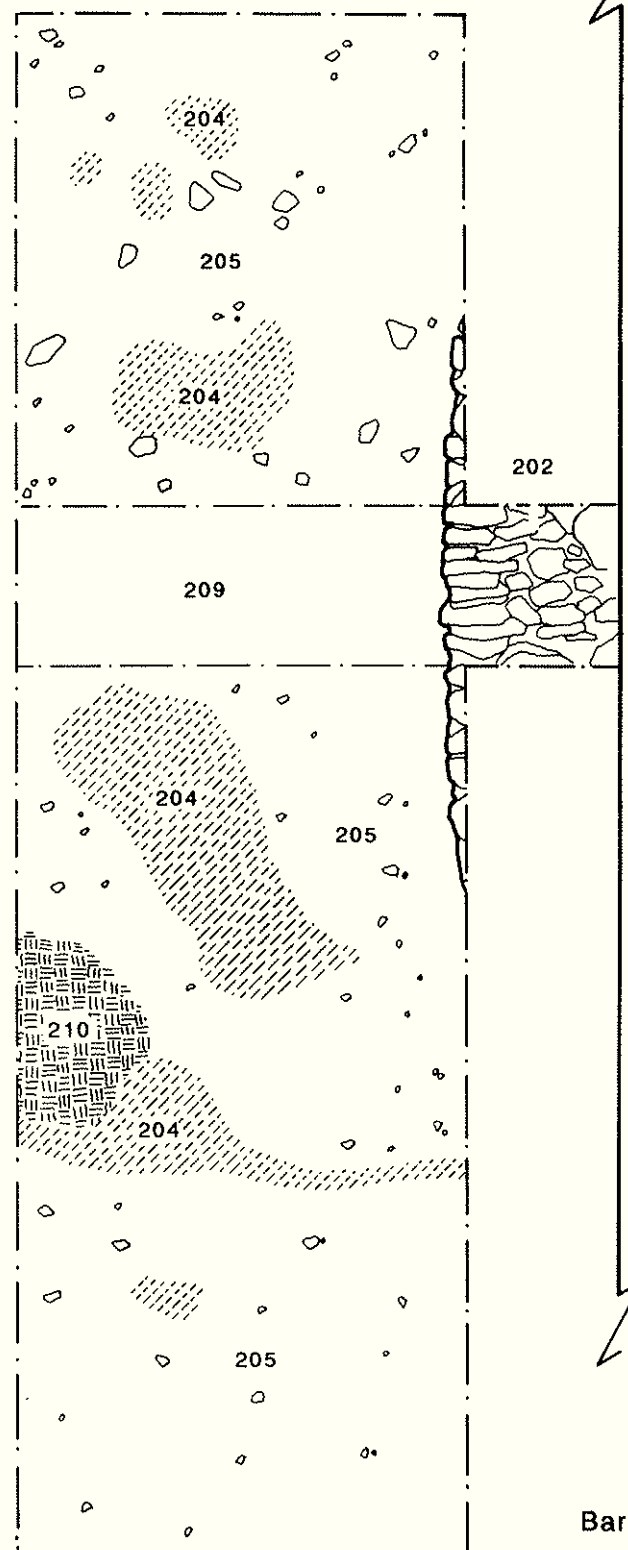


Figure 1

Trench 1



Trench 2



Barn wall

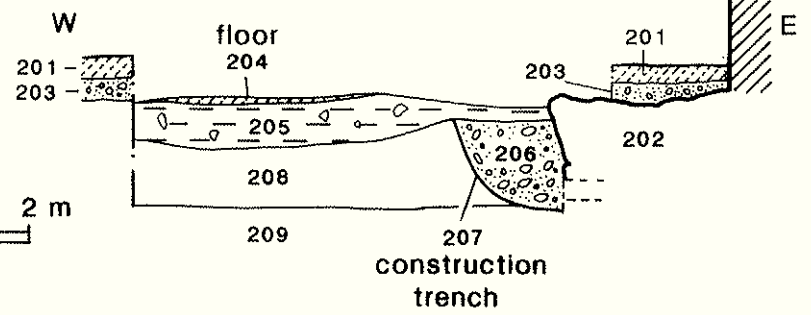
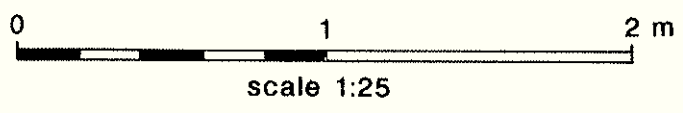
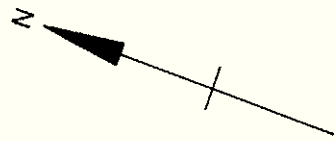
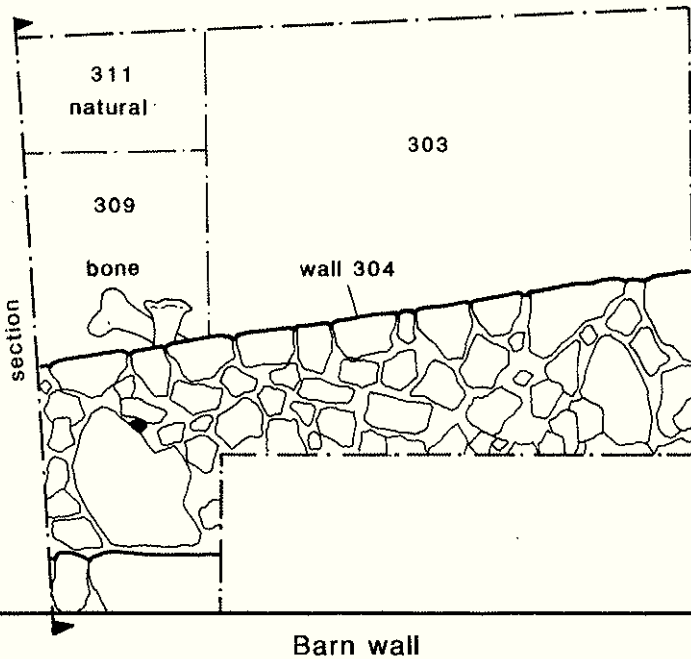


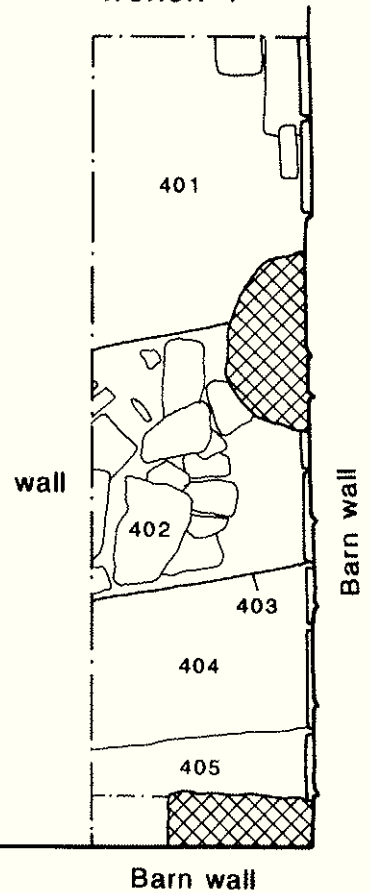
Figure 2



Trench 3



Trench 4



Trench 3 section

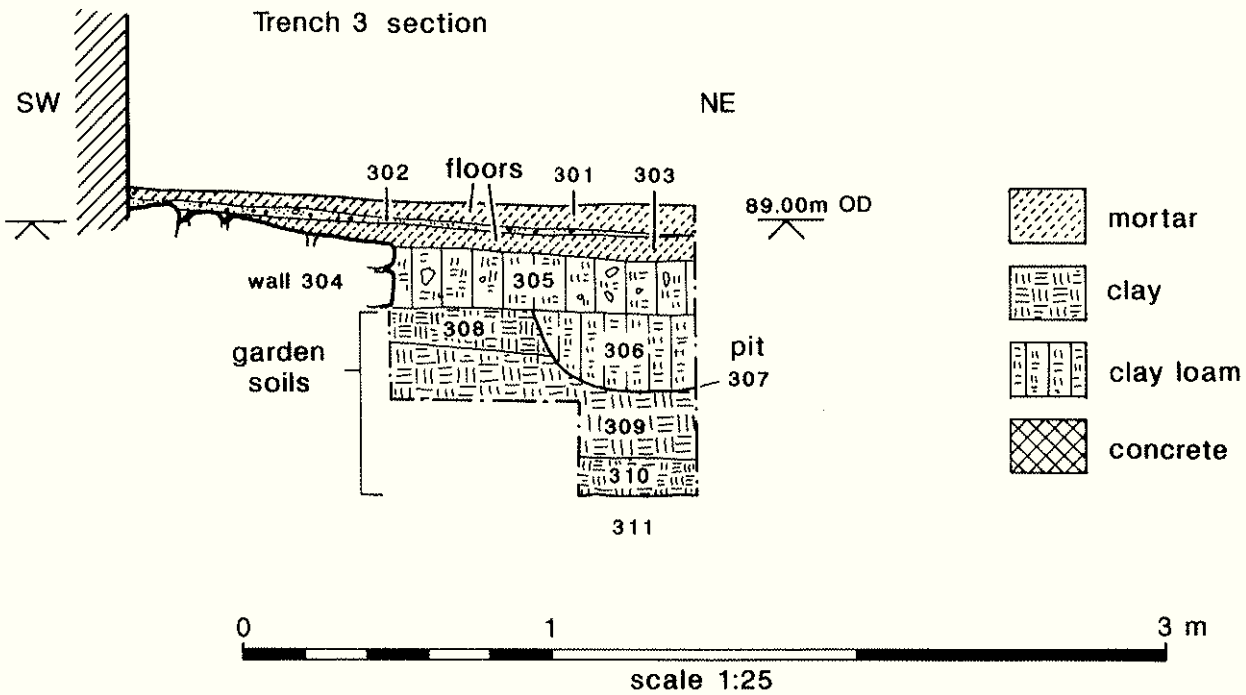


Figure 3



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