

**Church Farm House
Lower Basildon
West Berkshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR SU 6117 7925

Planning Application No. 157012

Listed Building Consent Application Ref: 157006

Mrs D Henderson

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Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at Church Farm House (a Grade II Listed building), Lower Basildon, West Berkshire on behalf of Mrs D Henderson. The lowering of internal floor levels revealed that the dwelling was constructed upon made ground overlying clay natural. Several archaeological features were noted including two wells (one brick lined), a possible pit feature and a brick and flint wall. A tentative post-medieval date has been ascribed to these features. Evidence of an earlier floor level and structural additions to the house were recorded.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at Church Farm House, Lower Basildon, West Berkshire (NGR SU 6117 7925, Fig.1), during the reduction of internal floor levels.
- 1.1.2 The work was carried out on behalf of the client, Mrs D Henderson through the Architects, Robert Rigby of Reading in response to a brief set by Veronica Fiorato of West Berkshire County Council's Heritage Service.
- 1.1.3 The floor reduction was carried out by Boshers (Cholsey) Ltd of Reading in several stages during July, August, September and November 2000. An inspection of the building fabric was undertaken by the OAU during the July and August.
- 1.1.4 Church Farm House is located immediately adjacent to the churchyard of St Bartholomew's within an area of archaeological potential.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical

- 2.1.1 During the Roman period a ford was located at the bend in the Thames at Lower Basildon; the place name for the ford was *Bestlesford* from which the present-day

settlement takes its name. Excavations in advance of the Great Western Railways' construction uncovered parts of a Roman villa. The railway separates Church Farm and St Bartholomew's Church from the village.

- 2.1.2 There has been a church on the site of St Bartholomew's since the 11th century, although the present structure dates to the 13th century. The earliest surviving portions of the fabric are the south doorway, nave and the chancel that was rebuilt c. 1280. The brick-built Georgian tower was constructed in 1734. There have been three major periods of restoration at the church; one in 1846, one in 1875-6 when the knapped flint walls were restored and one in 1999 overseen by the Churches Conservation Trust, during which the OAU maintained a watching brief (OAU 1999)
- 2.1.3 The main parish is now located in Upper Basildon, which is served by St Stephen's and St Bartholomew's stands in isolation from the village itself, although immediately adjacent to Church Farm and to the Rectory.

2.2 Church Farm House

- 2.2.1 Church Farm House is a Grade II Listed building dating from the 16th century, with alterations and extensions occurring from then to the present day. The fabric would appear to be originally part timber-frame, the external fabric now being part face-brickwork and part brick-and-flint. The original construction most likely incorporated the present Sitting Room, the Boot Room and the Lobby as evidenced by the single-phase build of ceiling timbers that serve them. Extension work carried out in the c. 17th century now houses the Kitchen, Pantry, WC and the Breakfast/Family Room and this build was refaced with brick-and-flint, probably during the 18th century.
- 2.2.2 The roofs are plain tile with a four bay section being constructed as internal pitch roofs with lead gutters behind rendered, castellated parapets. The original roof timbers appear to feature a regular main rafter with clasped purlins. Ground floor construction is solid with the exception of the breakfast and music rooms which are elm boarding on sleeper walls and joists. The roof was evidently replaced in 1709 as an existing roof tile bears the legend "James Page wents a Coat most sadly August The 2: 1709"!

3 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 3.1.1 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the entire area affected by development.
- 3.1.2 If exceptional archaeological remains were discovered, for which the resources allocated were insufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard, the OAU would signal to all parties that such an archaeological find had been made.
- 3.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 4.1.1 The watching brief was undertaken on all areas of ground disturbance, specifically:
- The reduction of all floor surfaces revealing archaeological features predating Church Farm House
 - The reduction of all floor surfaces revealing archaeological features associated with previous phases of Church Farm House.
 - Particular attention was paid to the reduction of floor surfaces in the Boot Room and Sitting Room, as these were located immediately adjacent to the churchyard. It was unknown whether the present boundary of the churchyard had remained constant. There was a possibility of encountering human remains.

4.2 Recording

- 4.2.1 Archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures lay down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

4.3 Finds

- 4.3.1 Unstratified finds recovered during the reduction of the floor in the Breakfast/Family Room included fragments of 15th- and 16th-century pottery as well as later glassware and clay pipe bowls and stems.

4.4 Presentation of results

- 4.4.1 The results of the watching brief are described room by room from the earliest context to the latest. Following those results there is a discussion of their significance.

5 RESULTS (FIGS 2, 3 AND 4)

- Floor surfaces were reduced, to a depth of between 150 - 200 mm, in the Boot Room, Sitting Room, Kitchen, Breakfast/Family Room and Hall. Archaeological features were revealed in three of the rooms (Figs 2 and 3).

5.1 The Sitting Room

- 5.1.1 The floor surface was removed and revealed a mid orange brown, natural clay (5). A 1.5 m diameter well (1) truncated the natural but it was unclear whether this well was brick-lined. However, it was filled with demolition or building rubble consisting predominantly of tile. A pit (2), 0.60 m in diameter, was located adjacent to and north-east of the well. This feature contained a mid greyish brown clayey silt which was overlain by an approximately 0.08 m thick deposit of demolition or construction material. Overlying these was a layer of flinty made ground (6). A mortar and brick surface (7) measuring 1 m x 2.5 m was exposed in the north western corner of the room. A fragment of a brick fireplace 1.8 m long by 0.40 m wide was located in the south east corner. These features were sealed by the existing tiled floor surface. The tiles in the southern two-thirds of the room were 0.23 m square whilst the tiles in the northern third were 0.15 m square. That later section of the room was reached via a

doorway in a partition wall (now removed) and down a single step.

- 5.1.2 The initial plans for the floor reduction included the underpinning of the western wall of the sitting room. However, following the excavation of an exploratory test pit in the south-west corner of the sitting room, the engineer deemed that this was not necessary. The resulting section revealed the construction cut for the western wall (9) and a portion of the brickwork behind the existing mortar (Fig. 4, Section 1), together with a possible make up layer for the later floor.
- 5.1.3 A second exploratory test pit was partially excavated and also revealed construction cut 9 (Fig. 4, Section 2).

5.2 The Boot Room

- 5.2.1 A similar stratigraphic sequence was noted in this room with the natural clay (6) being overlain by made ground consisting primarily of brick rubble. A 1 m diameter brick-lined well (4) truncated the natural clay and was filled with brick rubble.

5.3 The Breakfast / Family Room

- 5.3.1 The removal of the floor in this room revealed the remains of a right-angled brick and flint wall containing a brick paved surface. The wall clearly extended to the north and the east. The wall was overlain by a make up layer that was then sealed by the existing floor surface.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1.1 Whilst the house itself would appear to be of 16th century origin no clear date can ascribed to the archaeological features uncovered. The brick-lined well located in the Boot Room was initially thought to have been an external feature of the original house. However, the structural evidence suggests that it predated the house as the rooms along the western façade were constructed in a single phase. The well and the probable pit situated in the Sitting Room, and the brick and flint wall revealed in the Breakfast / Family Room certainly pre-date the house. The construction of the wall and the nature of its materials suggests that it may have been part of an animal shed / farmyard building.
- 6.1.2 All the features were below the impacted level of the alterations and were not investigated further.
- 6.1.3 The absence of any stratified finds hindered the assignation of dates to the archaeological features.
- 6.1.4 Albeit on the basis of limited evidence, it appears that the house was built on the site of structures/outbuildings associated with a possible farmhouse nearby.
- 6.1.5 No evidence was found to suggest that the churchyard had once extended into the area under investigation.

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Church Farm House, Lower Basildon, West Berkshire

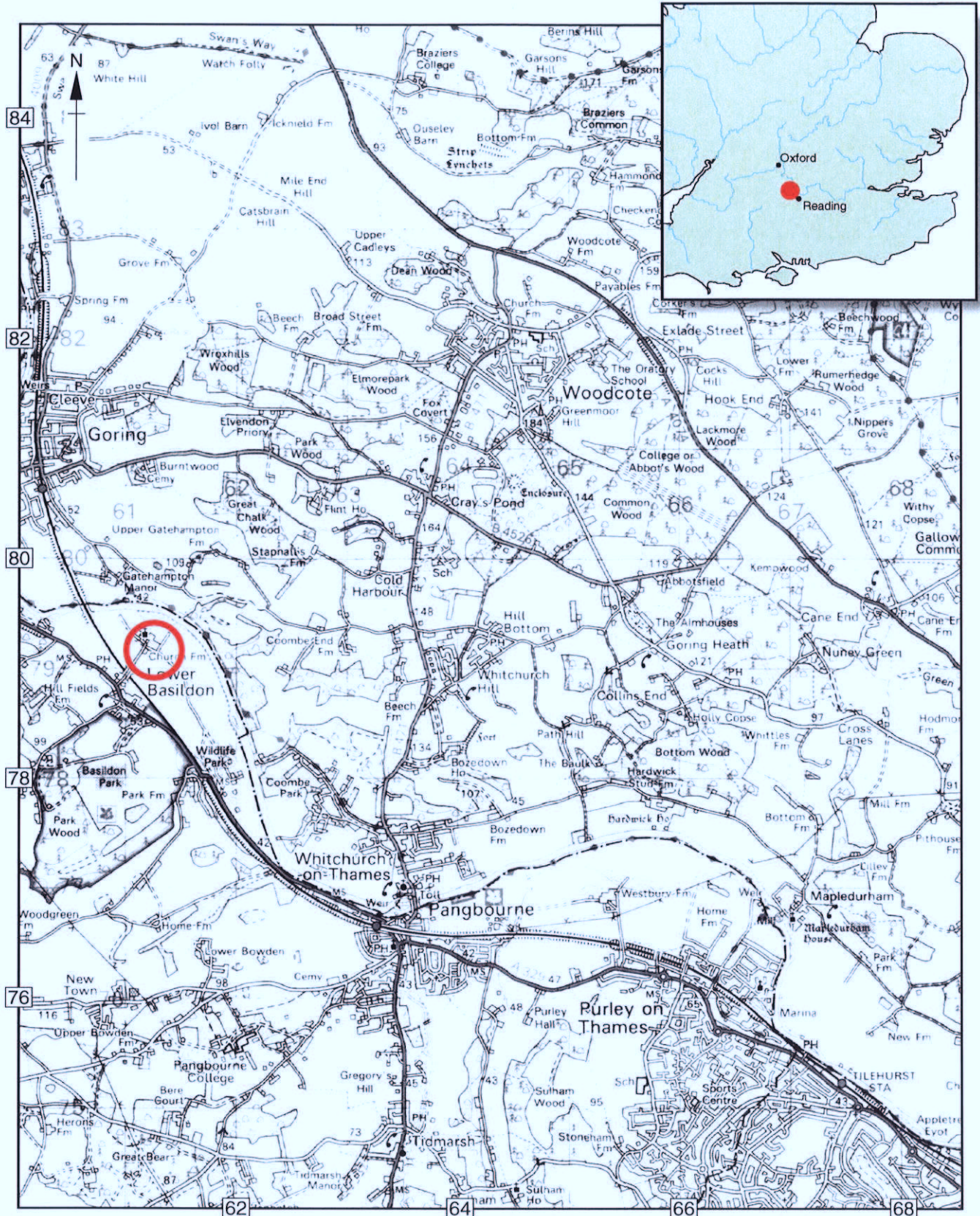
Site code: LBACF 00

Grid reference: SU 6117 7925 **Type of watching brief:** Reduction existing floor surfaces to depth of between 150 - 200 mm..

Date and duration of project: Phased visits during July, August, September and November 2000.

Summary of results: The house has probable 16th century origins with additions and alterations to the present day. Archaeological features found to predate the house were possibly associated with a medieval farm / building.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with West Berkshire Heritage Service in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

Churchyard

New 1:100 scale and NW elevations to be submitted / drawings to be used for planning

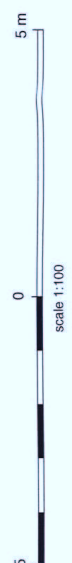
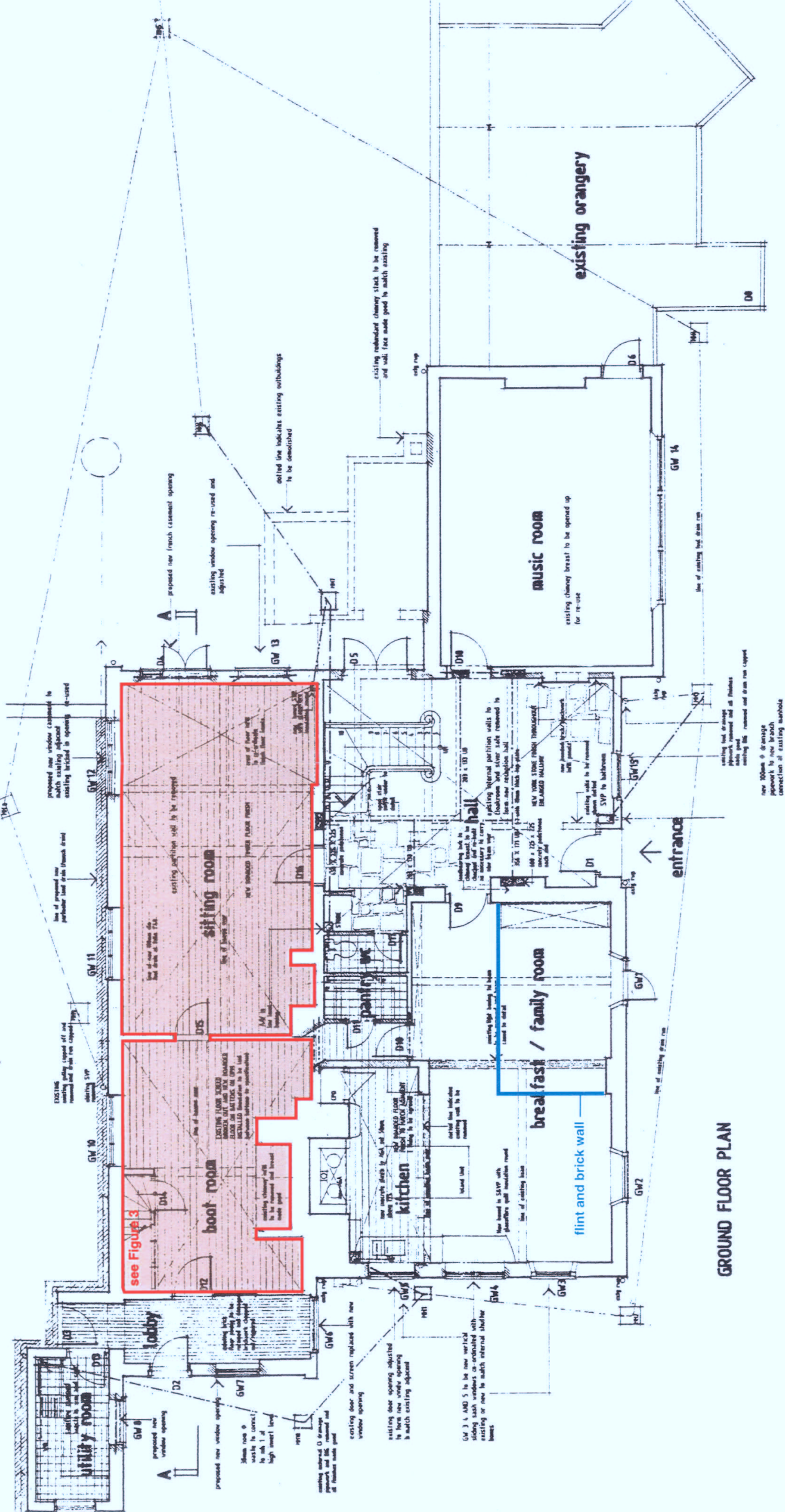


Figure 2: Ground plan of building

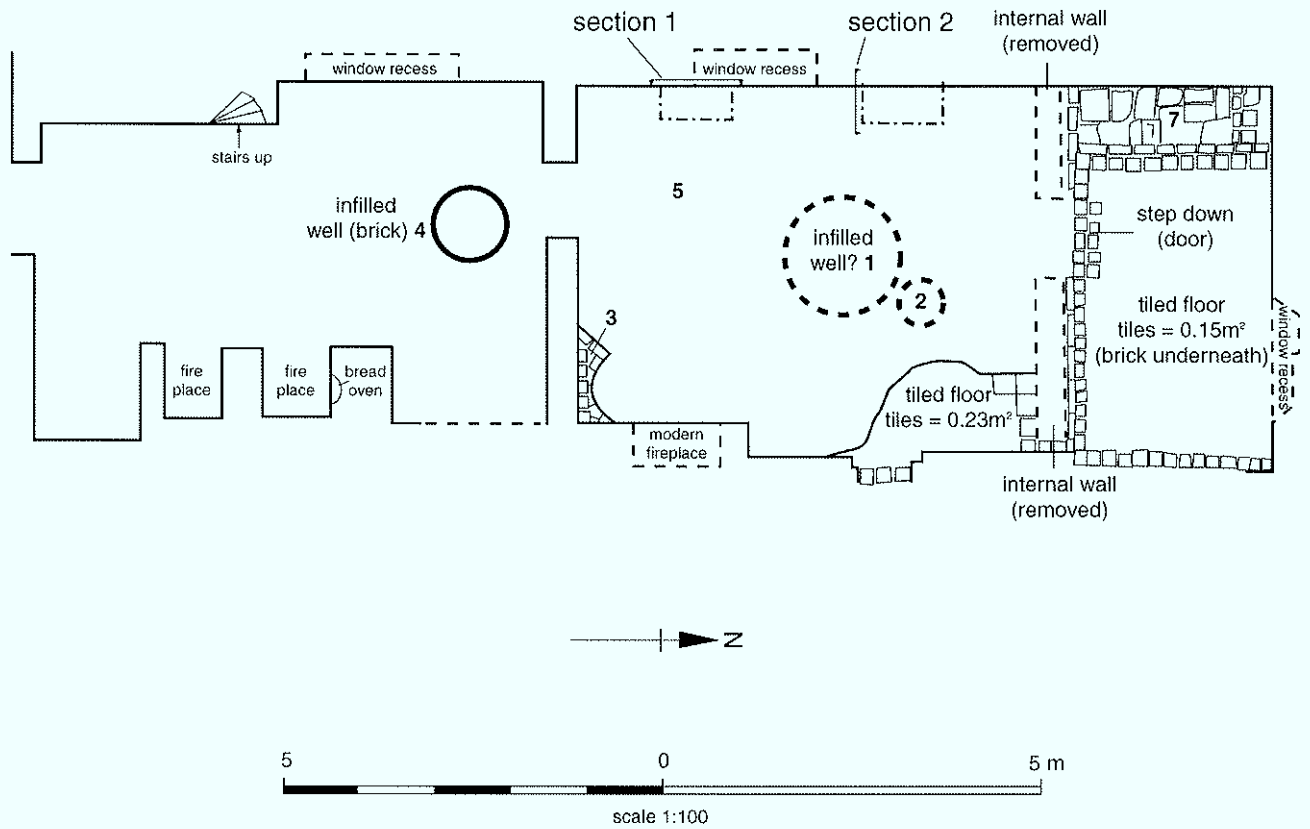
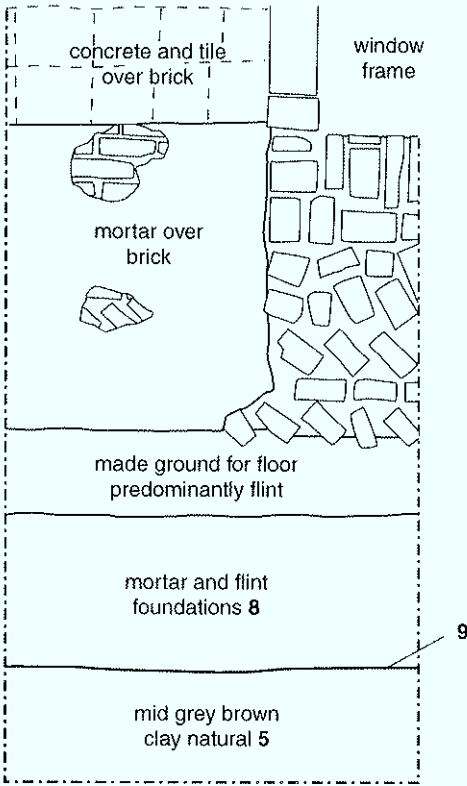


Figure 3: Plan of features in western facade

Section 1



Section 2

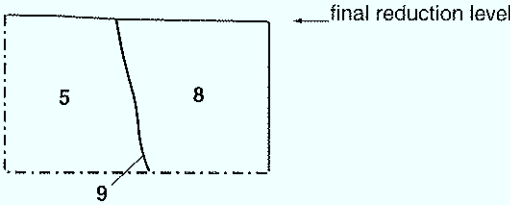


Figure 4: Sections



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