

The Lost Chapel of Bincknoll, Broad Town, North Wiltshire:

An interim report covering the excavations at
Bincknoll Cottage 2014

Broad Town Archaeology

For

Broad Town Archaeology & History Project

Site Report 2014:1

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Summary

An excavation to the north of Bincknoll Castle - an early motte and bailey castle in North Wiltshire - has led to the discovery of a substantial medieval building. A chapel has been noted at Bincknoll in various documents since at least the 13th century, the last, in 1609, describing it as 'decayed'. The location has thus far eluded enquiry. Excavation revealed evidence of a large structure constructed mainly of dressed and sub-rounded chalk blocks. Evidence points to a building that was internally plastered, whitewashed and decorated, with architectural features, suggesting an ecclesiastical use. Correlation between the documentary evidence and the finds suggest this is the lost chapel of the settlement of Bincknoll. The work, undertaken during the late summer of 2014, is part of a collaborative community project between Broad Town Archaeology and the Wiltshire Archaeology Field Group.

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Broad Town Archaeology

Broad Town Archaeology (formally Broad Town Archaeological Project (BTAP) is a community based, not for profit, project. It seeks to promote the study of the environs of Broad Town, North Wiltshire by encouraging residents in the area to report finds, support recording and, where ever possible, participate in archaeological work.

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1. Introduction

During August/October 2014 Broad Town Archaeology - a community based archaeological project - assisted by members of the Wiltshire Archaeology Field Group, North Wiltshire Young Archaeologist Club and members of the local community carried out an archaeological excavation at Bincknoll Cottage, Bincknoll, Broad Town. The investigation was undertaken at the request of the landowners, Mary & Mike Hudd, and the Wiltshire County Archaeologist. What follows is the results of that excavation – offered here as an interim report – covering the work carried out in 2014.

Further archaeological investigation is planned for early 2015. A full report will be produced in late 2015 covering both the excavation and an in-depth analysis of the finds from both years work.

1.1 Discovery

Recent landscaping work at Bincknoll Cottage revealed structural elements of a building constructed mainly from chalk blocks. To the south of the site, on the escarpment overlooking the cottage, is a motte and bailey castle surviving as an earthwork. Reference is made to a chapel at Bincknoll in a number of documents. Moreover, other features suggest a complex medieval landscape comprising fishponds, enclosures and, possibly, a manor. The archaeological features uncovered at Bincknoll Cottage during the landscaping work suggested this was the site of a substantial building.

1.2 Site location, Topography and Geology

Bincknoll Cottage is located to the south of Royal Wootton Bassett. The area of investigation centres on NGR SU 10547 79752 (Figure 1). The site lies between 121.6m and 128.3m above O.D. on a small mound overlooking lower ground to the north. The underlying geology is the Gault Formation, Upper Cretaceous Period (BGS Sheet 266).

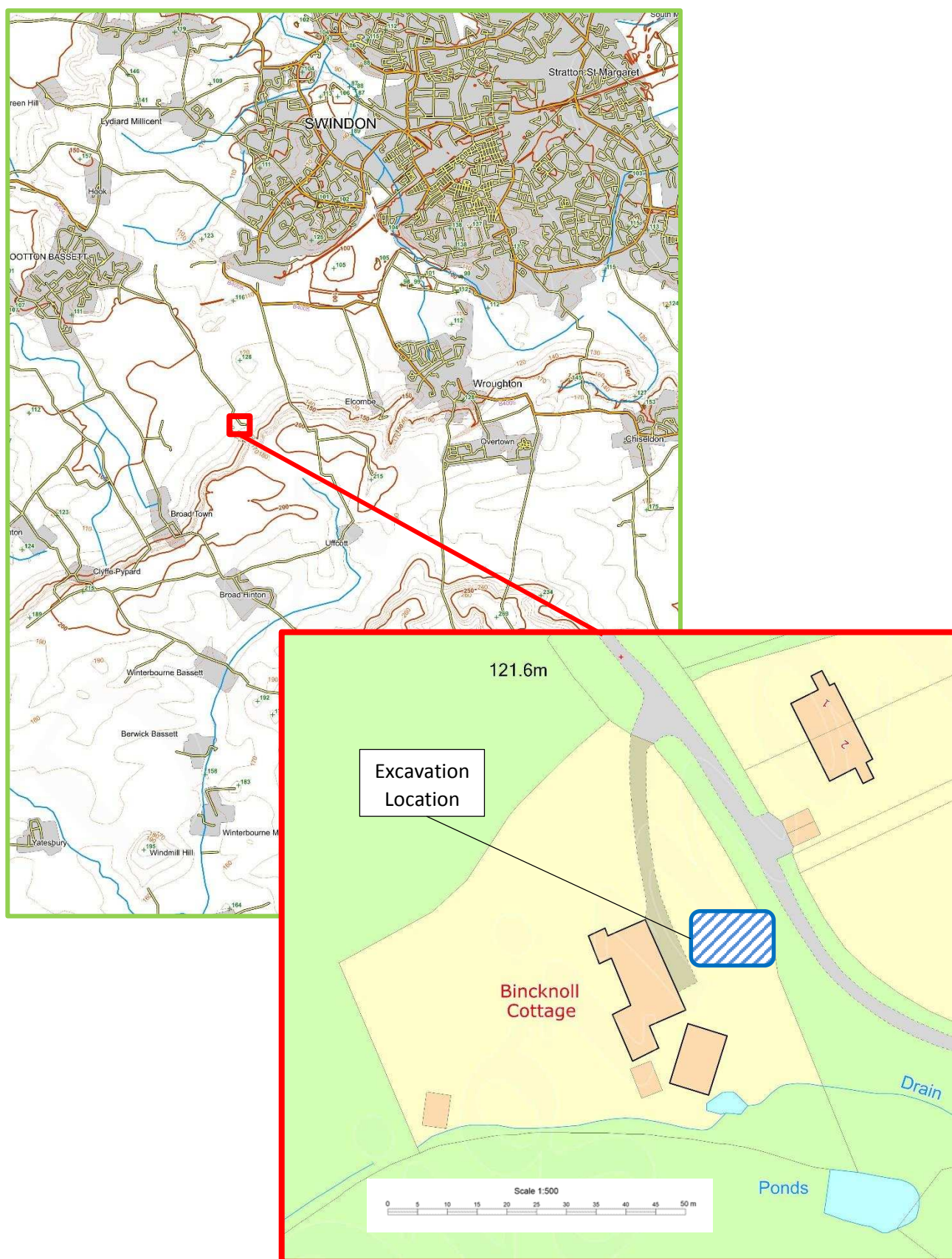


Fig. 1 Location of site (centre NGR SU 10547 79752). ©Crown Copyright and Database Right 2015. Ordnance Survey (Digimap License)

2. Historical and Archaeological Background

2.1 Historical Background

Bincknoll is first documented as one of the manors of Gilbert de Breteuil, in the Domesday survey of 1086 (Creighton 2000, 114). Present-day Bincknoll is a small hamlet comprising five houses and a farm. Topographically, the settlement is dominated by a chalk escarpment immediately to the south, and it is probable this ridge has formed part of a politically organised landscape since early Saxon times (Clarke 2004, 93).

Documentary evidence suggests the existence of a chapel at Bincknoll, although its location has not currently been identified. A document of c.1210 regarding the Priory of Goldcliff (Monmouth later Gwent) records that the prior held an estate at Bincknoll which paid a tithe of £1 (VCH Interdict Docs. 18). A further document of 1291 states that tithes were paid from the demesne of Bincknoll Manor, reputedly for the endowment of a chapel there, which were granted to St. Denis's Priory in Southampton. It was valued at £1 and was entirely let to a tenant (VCH. PRO. C146/105.19 Tax Eccl.189). The chapel is also mentioned in Pope Nicholas's *Taxatio* (AD 1291) as a Rectory belonging to the Priory of St. Denis, and it is again named in the *Norarum Inquisitiones in Curia Scaccarii temp. regis Edwardi III* in 1340 (Aubrey and Jackson 1862,167). Certainly by the mid-fourteenth century: 'That of Bincknoll Chapel was said to include 1 yard land in 1341 but later ½ yard land.' By the early 17th century the chapel appears to have gone out of use. A Bond from 1609 gives an indication of the state of the building at that time: 'All that decayed Chapell with appurtenment situate and being in Bincknoll alias Bynoll within the parish of Brodehinton in the above said County of Wilts and all that rectory parsonage and manor house called the parsonage house of Bincknoll alias Bynoll situate and being in Bincknoll alias Bynoll aforesaid' (WRO 326/3-2). No further reference to the chapel has been discovered.

2.2 Archaeological Background

The hamlet of Bincknoll has been subject of only limited archaeological investigation, although a number of archaeological features in the immediate area are recorded on the Wiltshire HER. These include a possible deserted medieval hamlet (MWI 15247); enclosure boundaries (MWI 15246); and a motte and bailey castle (MWI 15243). Further archaeological features can be identified in recent aerial photographs. This includes a feature to the northeast of Bincknoll Cottage, at NGR SU 10712 79994 (centre), noted as 'The Dyke', and suspected to be a relict of medieval fish ponds (adjacent fields are named on the Tithing Commissioner's Map as 'The Fishery'). Evidence for substantial ridge and furrow survives as earthworks, or, where ploughed away, can still be seen in the alignments of modern lane and hedgerows.

3. Archaeological Investigation

3.1 Methodology

A project design was developed with the Wiltshire County Archaeologist and landowner aimed at ascertaining the dimensions of the structure, recovering dating evidence and representative architectural remains. Execution of the design necessitated a minimum of four trenches to be dug across the partially exposed structure, which was subsequently increased to six (Figure 2). All trenches were dug by hand as the features were visible at ground level (Figure 3 & 4).

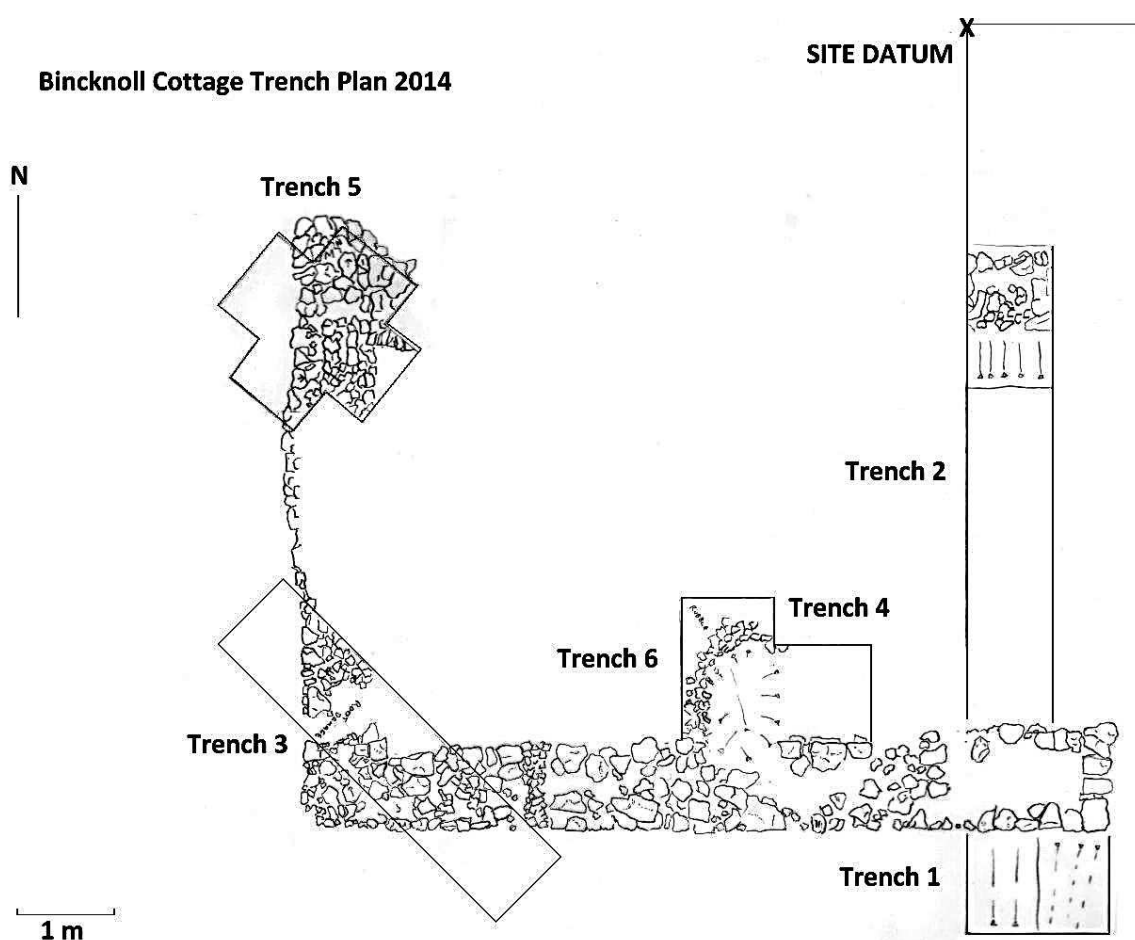


Fig 2 Bincknoll Cottage trench plan 2014 season.



Fig 3 View, looking south, of the rubble field exposed by the landowner (13/06/2014).



Fig 4 View of south-western corner of structure, as exposed by the landowner (13/06/2014).

3.2 Aerial Survey

The immediate area surrounding Bincknoll Cottage was the subject of an aerial survey. A flight from Kemble Airfield, Gloucestershire made three passes of Bincknoll on 20/06/2014, capturing much of the settlement and the motte and bailey castle to the south of Bincknoll Cottage. No significant features were located. The site was subsequently flown using a Phantom II Vision +, recording the dig in its latter stages.



Fig 5 Bincknoll settlement viewed from the north-west. Bincknoll Cottage stands to the middle right of the picture. Bincknoll Farm Cottages stand in the middle of the picture (modern buildings), top centre is Bincknoll House and Bincknoll Farm (20/06/2014). (Martin Kellett & Bob Clarke)

3.3 Geophysical Survey

The front and rear gardens of Bincknoll Cottage were the subject of a geophysical survey. The front garden was surveyed on 29/07/2014. The results demonstrated many features across the site (figure 6). The probability of further buried walls was indicated in the results and later proven by excavation. The rear garden, surveyed on 23/09/2014, produced only slight features; those running NW-SE are interpreted as ridge and furrow (figure 7).

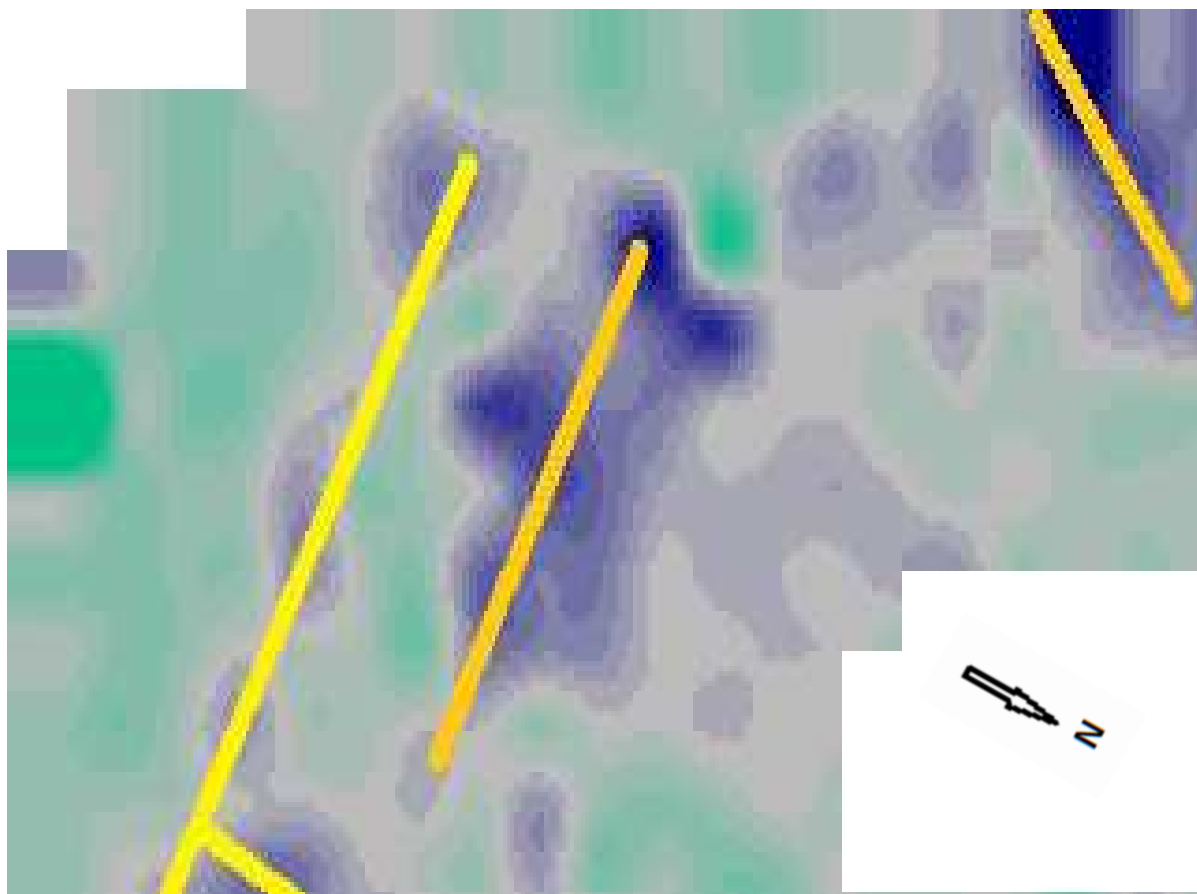


Fig 6 Geophysical results from the front garden. Whilst the plot was difficult to obtain due to the small grid size and material on site it did produce results later confirmed through excavation. Yellow – exposed walls; Orange – suspected walls. (Jim Gunter & Mike McQueen)

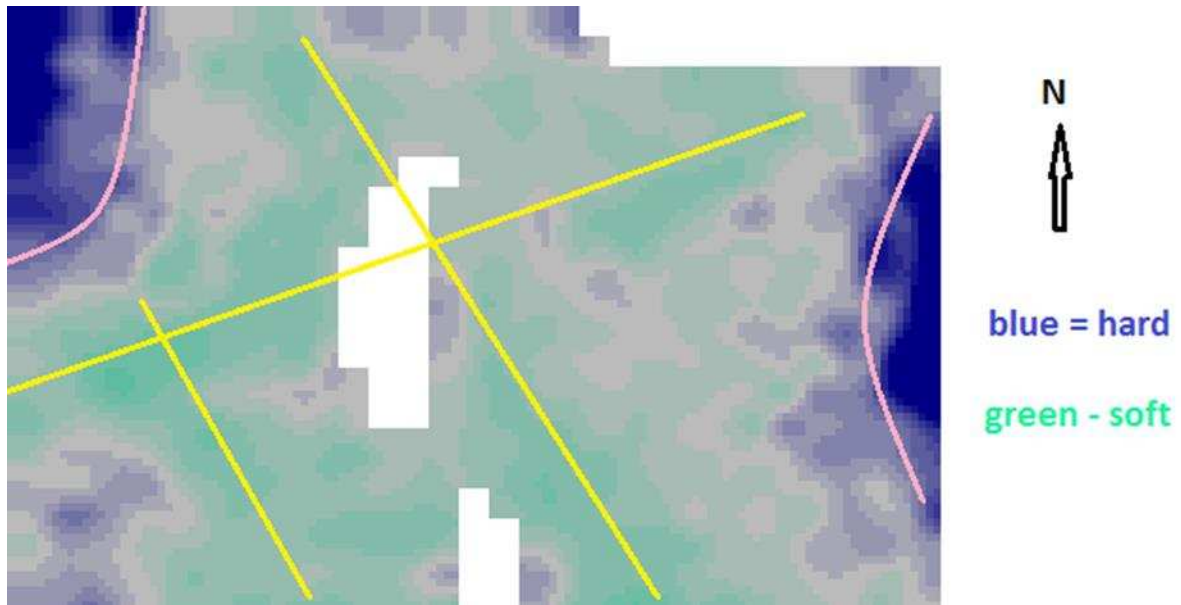
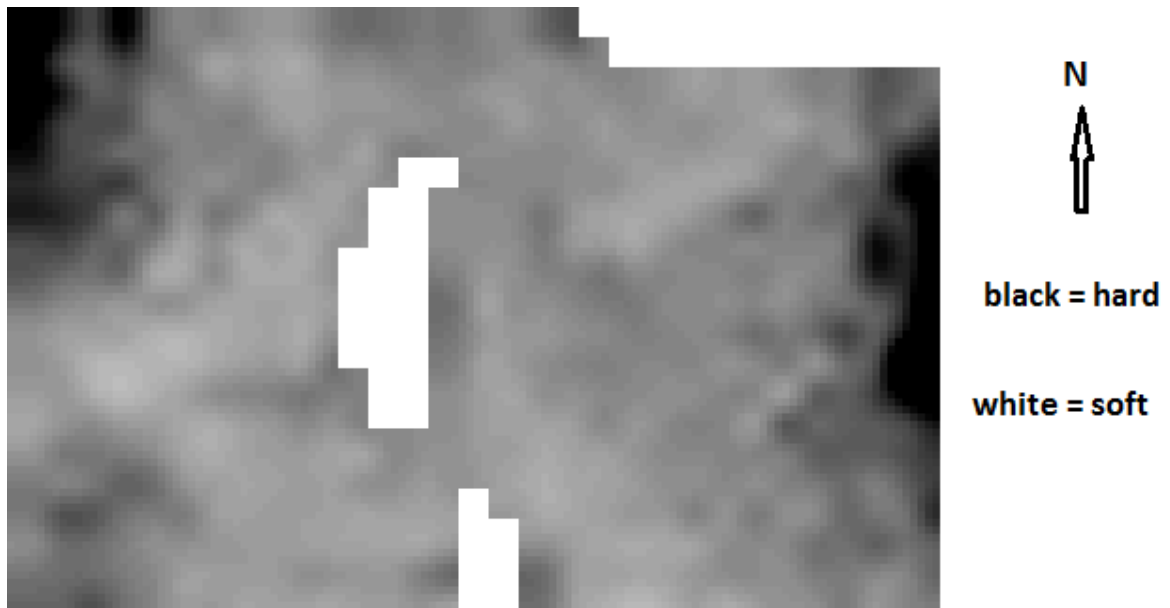


Fig 7 Geophysical results from the rear garden. The two parallel yellow lines are thought to indicate remnant ridge and furrow. The line running top left to bottom right is probably an earlier boundary or headland. (Jim Gunter & Mike McQueen)

3.4 Team Composition

The aim of the excavation was to ensure as many people as possible experienced archaeological techniques first hand. Over 60 volunteers worked on site between August and October, many not having excavated before. They were supervised by professional archaeologists from a number of different organisations including QinetiQ Ltd; English Heritage; Talits Archaeology; Wiltshire Council; Wiltshire Museum and Wessex Archaeology. The on-site team was further supported by the Archaeological Department of Wiltshire Council and the University of Exeter, Department of Humanities.



Fig 8 A general shot of trenches 2, 3 and 6 in work 31/08/2014. (Image Rob Lowe & Rob Lowe)

4. Excavation Results

4.1 General Observations

The excavation revealed three sides of a structure constructed mainly of chalk blocks and rubble. The building is aligned perfectly east-west. The western end is the focus of this report. The eastern end is to be investigated through excavation in 2015. The work revealed a structure 6103mm wide (internally 4303mm), comprising walls with a uniform width of c.900mm across the first secure course (Figure 9). All structural components were generally well preserved, although the uppermost courses have begun to decay due to prolonged exposure to the elements.



Fig 9 General layout of site at the end of the 2014 season. Image taken from a Phantom II Vision + (Mike McQueen)

4.2 Trench One

Trench One (T1) was located against the external face of the southern wall. It revealed 1170mm of structural remains that became increasingly poor quality as the depth of the excavation increased (Figure 10). Below the topsoil just one context (012) was recognised. Context (012) comprised a mid-brown solid clay that had a clear horizon with the natural (039). Context (012) contained a single animal tooth, substantial amount of worked flint along with small amounts of charcoal (> 3mm in size throughout the matrix). The natural (039) consisted of chalk-based marl. No foundation trench was noted in T1.



Fig 10 Trench one showing the depth of the southern wall and general rubble appearance.

4.3 Trench Two

Trench Two (T2) was located in order to address a number of objectives. First, to ascertain the extent of the demolition rubble layer which the landowner had previously uncovered during landscaping; second, to discover the width of the structure; and third, to locate, any surviving floors or surfaces. An area 8m by 3m was defined and cleaned down to the rubble context (014). The demolition rubble layer extended 6.25m north of the southern wall, the material size becoming progressively smaller the further north it was encountered (Figure 11). A trench 1m by 6m was then opened cutting through the rubble in order to ascertain the depth of (014) and locate any underlying structures (Figure 12). Context (014) comprised chalk blocks (a number of which had evidence of dressing), roof tiles, mortar, animal bone, nails and three oyster shells. A wide range of pottery types were recovered from (014), including sherds of Newbury 'A' ware, datable to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries (Mephram 1997); Minety (16th century) (Musty 1973); Ashton Keynes (17th century)(McSloy 2006) and a single sherd of German stoneware. Below (014) there was a marked change in context; context (040) had a similar composition to (012) encountered in T1. Two small areas of burning were recognised at the top of the context (040) and there was evidence of knapped flint throughout context.



Fig 11 Trench two showing the northern end of the investigation. Here the rubble field steadily petered out, suggesting the northern wall had collapsed outward. This was before the robbing activity located later by the excavation.



Fig 12 Trench two looking south. The rubble field across the site was extensive. An exploratory trench through the spread can be seen in the process of excavation.



Fig 13 Burning patch. This feature formed part of the demolition process.

The northern wall of the structure was located in T2, where it was found to be heavily robbed out. During the demolition phase, a trench [020] had been dug alongside the wall inside the building (Figure 14). At least 600mm of the wall appears to have been removed, and a mix of mortar and smaller pieces of building material (< 60mm on average) thrown back into the robber trench afterwards. Evidence for this activity must have been visible for some time afterwards, as a slight soil line (< 5mm in depth) had built up in the cut of the robber trench. The trench was later filled with mixed rubble material that spread across the site as the southern wall collapsed. Beyond the northern wall, context (013) was very clean with only a few struck flints and small pieces of roof tile noted. It did, however, display the robber trench cut [020] clearly, as there was a large amount of discarded mortar that had been cast on top of the surviving north wall.



Fig 14 Trench two, showing the edge of the robber trench [020] and the remnants of the north wall.

The internal face of the southern wall was also investigated (Figure 15). The rubble context (014) in this area produced a large amount of badly decayed, white painted plaster, a few examples displaying a red painted lines c.5mm in width. There was also slight evidence of other colours being employed. Again, a number of flint flakes indicative of knapping waste were located directly below the rubble field in context (040). No evidence of flooring, either earth, mortar, or tiled, was located.



Fig 15 Trench two detail of inner face of southern wall.

Context (040) did produce two diagnostic pieces of carved chalk, which fit together to form one near complete item (Figure 16). This has been provisionally dated to the late fourteenth century and may have formed part of a monumental structure (Prof. Warwick Rodwell pers. comm.).



Fig 16 Carved chalk object recovered from trench two.

4.4 Trench Three

Trench Three (T3) was placed across a section of wall on the western extremity of the known south wall, intending to locate any extant evidence of a corner to the structure. This trench revealed a wall with a right-angled return (Figure 17). The internal context (025), comprising a dark brown soft soil, was investigated. Substantial tree roots running through this area appear to have modified the context. No securely datable finds from context (025) were retrieved, although structural information noted that the change in poorer quality stone recognised in T1 occurred at the same depth as here.



Fig 17 Trench three clearly showing the south west corner of the building. The section of missing wall is the result of tree root damage.

4.5 Trench Four

Trench Four (T4) investigated the internal face of the southern wall where three dressed stones were found in the uppermost course. At just 1m by 1m T4 was very productive. The demolition layer comprised sheets of white painted wall plaster, roof tiles and architectural features – wedge shaped chalk blocks interpreted as a voussoir. Pottery sherds were present – predominately from the Ashton Keynes production site – although one sherd, probably originating in the Bristol area (Barton 1963), was located in the upper fill of the context (017). Below the rubble layer, the edge of a pit was discovered containing articulated animal bone. This is further described in the narrative of Trench Six. The three dressed stones, fashioned from chalk blocks, visible in the internal uppermost course of the wall, were not repeated further down (Figure 18). The next course, comprising unshaped stone, projected 70mm into the building's interior. Beyond that the composition followed that recognised in other areas.



Fig 18 Inner face of the southern wall in trench four. Note finely dressed top course and the protruding second course.

4.6 Trench Five

Using the positional information from T2 and T3, Trench Five (T5) was placed to locate the northwest corner of the structure. As with other areas of the site, the wall was located after removal of the turf (150mm) (Figure 19). The wall at this location mirrored the construction techniques recognised in other areas, with one exception: it has an extension protruding north for a further 450mm at a lower level. The extant wall was bonded with substantial amounts of orange/red mortar. Both sides of the wall were investigated. Inside the structure, context (029) comprised a yellow/brown clayey deposit that was friable in texture, from which two small pieces of white painted plaster and one, post-17th century pot sherd, were recovered. Outside the structure, context (028) comprised a mid-brown soil, firm in its compaction, and with a small percentage of pebbles. Two fragments of glass and one piece of secondary worked flint were recovered.

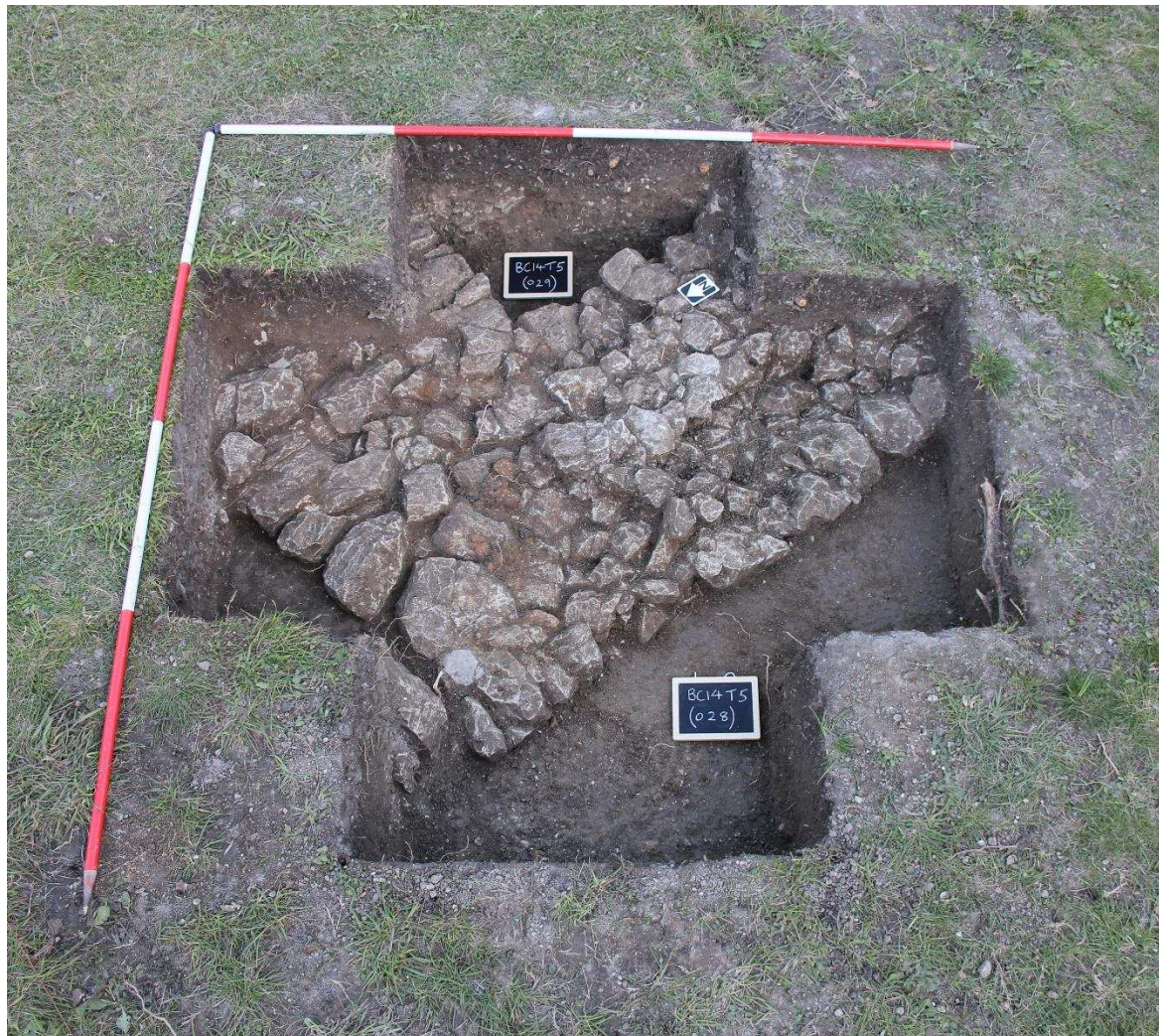


Fig 19 Trench five showing the north west corner of the building. Note depth below topsoil.

4.7 Trench Six

Trench Six was opened to investigate the animal burial noted in T4. The burial was contained in an oval pit [031] that partially cut through the southern wall and the demolition rubble layer. The animal, identified as a cow, was laid on its right side and aligned north-south with the head at the northern end. The burial pit had a slight concaved base that extended below the rubble layer. The pit truncated the wall at its southern extremity; a number of large stones laying on top of the wall 700mm to the west are the result of this truncation (Figure 20). The articulated animal remains were complete; however, it appears to have required some effort to place the animal in the pit. The head had been bent back onto body and the left foreleg twisted up over the body and head. The right foreleg was bent back parallel with the lower body and both rear legs had been crouched (Figure 21). Examination of the burial has yet to determine whether the animal had been destroyed or died due to unnatural causes.



Fig 20 Trench six southern section. The pelvis and rear legs of the animal burial. Note jumbled stones to west of bones. These are remnants of the wall that were dislodged when the burial pit was first dug.

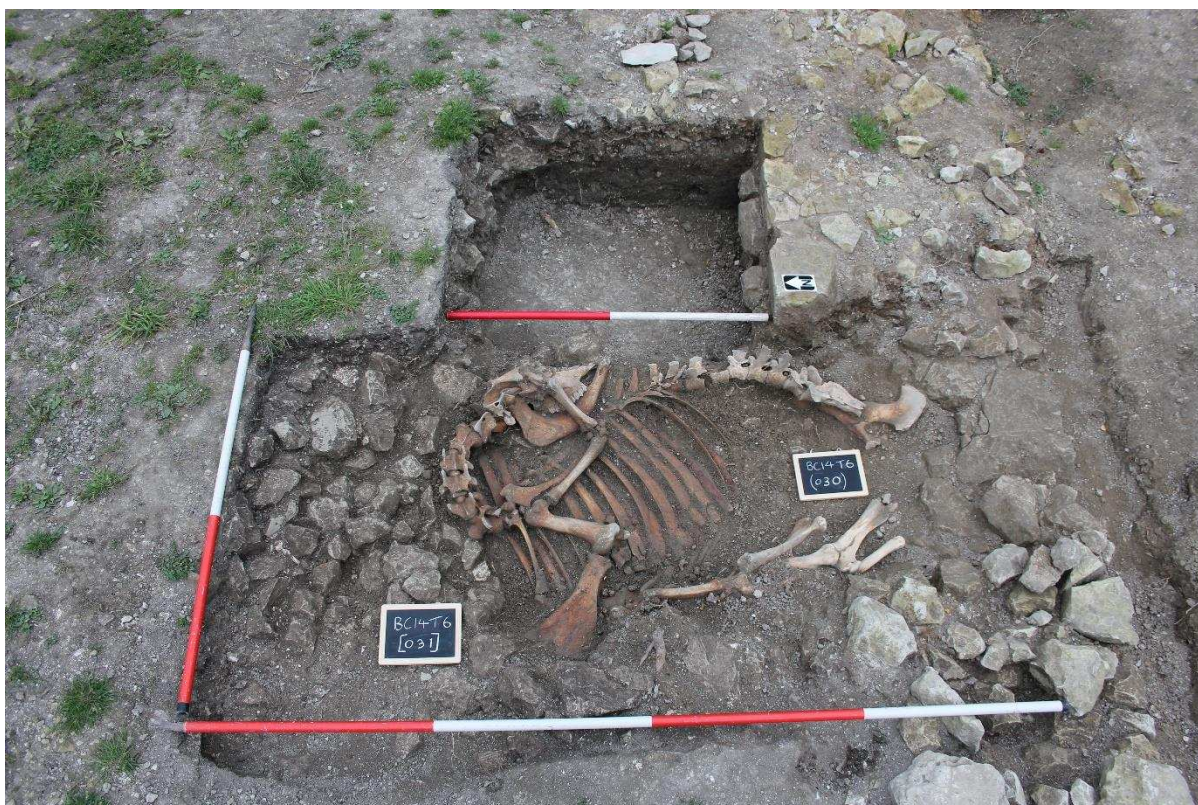


Fig 21 Trench six cow burial. Note how the pit truncates both the wall and rubble field. The animal has been laid in the pit in an awkward position. The head has been thrown back over the body and the left foreleg is twisted up over the carcass.

A range of finds were present in the burial context (030), including a lead shot and the stem of a clay pipe. The lead shot had been flattened out due an impact with another object. It weighed 14gm; similar to that of known musket shot weights. Sherds of a number of different pottery types were present, including a much-abraded sherd of Minety pottery, seven green glazed sherds of post-17th century date, and a very small single sherd of flint tempered ware, possibly datable to the late prehistoric period. An iron object, probably a knife (175mm x 22mm) and seven flint flakes, two of which were burnt, were also located. The stem of a clay pipe bearing local manufactures name of JOHN/GREEN/LAND also came from context (030). John Greenland worked in Marlborough from 1705 until at least 1736 (Atkinson 1980, 67); this, coupled with the lead shot and post medieval pottery suggests a *terminus post quem* of the early eighteenth century for the cow burial.

5. Finds

A full assessment of all finds will be undertaken for the final report, expected towards the end of 2015. Below are just a few examples the architectural features located across the site, all provide information as to the type of structure that once stood at Bincknoll Cottage.



Fig 22 Trench four. Plain, whitewashed plaster was evident across the southern side of the site. In trench four substantial pieces were encountered.



Fig 23 Discovered during the initial southern wall clean up. Examples of whitewashed plaster with red lines painted across them. Suspected colours on other small pieces include green and black.

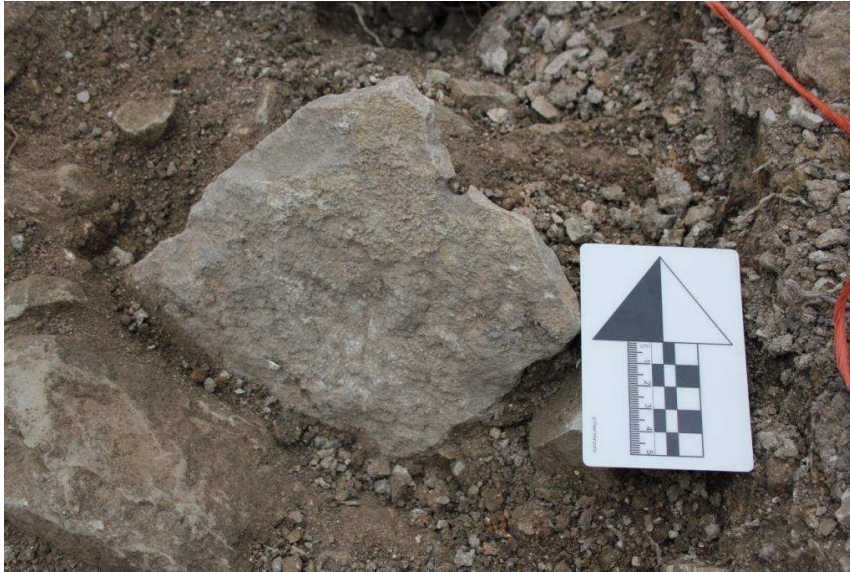


Fig 24 Trench four near complete roof tile. A number of roof tile fragments were recovered from the rubble field and trench four. This suggests the final phase of the structure was tiled rather than thatched.



Fig 24 Trench four voussoir. This example was one of ten located during the investigation of the southern wall. These wedge-shaped blocks are thought to form part of an arch structure, possibly over a window or doorway.

6. Discussion

Excavations in 2014 have gone some way to answering whether the structure found at Bincknoll Cottage is indeed the lost chapel of Bincknoll. Certainly, this interpretation is supported by the discovery of architectural features such as painted wall plaster bearing red stripes, carved chalk objects that may indicate elaborate internal decoration, and archway features recognised as voussoir; all of which suggest a building of status. Dating evidence for the initial construction phase of the building has proved problematic with no secure material culture being discovered in the foundation levels. The excavation does, however, support documentary evidence chronicling the demise of a chapel at Bincknoll.

The chapel was described in a bond from 1609 as 'All that decayed Chapell –' (WRO 326/3–2). By the time the cow discovered in trench six was buried around a century later, it would appear that any above-ground remains of the structure had been removed. The pit dug to bury the animal was not only cut through the rubble layer, the rear quarter of the animal was also laid over the southern wall. Moreover, large stones from the wall had been removed and were now resting on top of the wall immediately to the west of the pit as if thrown there during the excavation of the pit. It is highly possible that the area once containing the building was, for a period afterward, considered waste ground, probably difficult to work due to the amount of rubble just under the turf line. The disposal of the cow on waste ground should not then come as a surprise. The discovery of a clay pipe bearing a local early eighteenth-century manufacturer's name, along with sherds of post-medieval pottery, helps to reconcile the archaeological and documentary evidence.

Pottery of eleventh and twelfth century date onwards, recovered from across the site, also supports a tentative link with the documented chapel. However, in all cases the context for this pottery was in the demolition layer, frustrating the chance to secure construction dates or phases. The paintwork is possibly of pre-Reformation date, although, without technical analysis of a sample, the suggestion has to be speculative (Dr Ellie Pridgeon pers. comm.). The carved chalk object appears to have a very 'rustic' execution, again making a secure date difficult.

It is currently not known how far the building extends to the east of the site; until this is known any comparisons with other structures remains unsafe. However, one, tentative, comparison is possible with a structure surviving at Chisbury, 25 km to the southeast on the edge of Savernake Forest. This manor was also owned by Gilbert de Breteuil in the late eleventh and early twelfth century. It is clear that the structure discovered at Bincknoll Cottage is a lot smaller than the current chapel at Chisbury; although recent work has raised the possibility of an earlier building at Chisbury through the discovery of reused architectural features (Cotswold Archaeology 2005, 5). There is a slight possibility that the smaller, earlier building at Chisbury may well have been comparable in size to the structure at Bincknoll Cottage. Only when the eastern end of the building at Bincknoll Cottage is ascertained will more comparisons be possible.

The 2014 season at Bincknoll Cottage certainly supports the documentary evidence for a chapel in the latter stages of its existence, and the features discovered within suggest a

building of status. On balance it is now possible to say that the building discovered at Bincknoll Cottage is the probable site of the chapel mentioned in early sources at Bincknoll. Further work is now planned for 2015; evidence from that will either refute or support this hypothesis

7. Archive

An archive containing all original material is to remain with the landowner. A full copy of the paper archive will be lodged, electronically, with the Wiltshire Council Archaeology Service and the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes.

All finds are to remain with the landowner at Bincknoll Cottage, Bincknoll, Royal Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Wiltshire.

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APPENDIX 1: Excavation Context Summary

Context	Description		Trench
(008)	Topsoil	Trench 2: topsoil/disturbed/unratified material.	T2
(009)	Topsoil	Trench 4: topsoil/disturbed/unratified material.	T4
(010)	Deposit	Initial layer. Not topsoil but disturbed upper context.	T1
(011)	Deposit	Machine graded exposed area.	T2
(012)	Deposit	Fill of T1, Flint throughout, no cuts.	T1
(013)	Deposit	Outside demolition field, flecks of chalk, mortar, charcoal.	T2
(014)	Deposit	Under demolition. Plaster, tile, pottery, flint.	T2
(015)	Topsoil	Trench 3: topsoil/disturbed/unratified material.	T3
(016)	Deposit	T2 feature 1m x 1m plaster in situ.	T2
(017)	Deposit	Test pit 1m x 1m pottery, plaster, roof tile, architectural feature.	T4
(018)	Deposit	Stone detail – recorded due to tooling detail.	T2
(019)	Deposit	Possible continuation of (013) – extending south under rubble.	T2
[020]	Cut	Robber trench, square edged, steep, clear.	T2
(021)	Deposit	Continuation of (013) – under rubble field.	T2
(022)	Deposit	Overburden of robbed out wall – (034).	T2
(023)	Topsoil	Trench 5: topsoil/disturbed/unratified material.	T5
(024)	Deposit	Loose rubble, probably top layer dislodged.	T5
(025)	Deposit	Inside corner of wall, clean.	T3
(026)	Deposit	Clean dark brown deposit, possible tree throw – fill of [027].	T4
[027]	Cut	Possible tree throw.	T4
(028)	Deposit	External to wall, possible foundation cut, glass and flint.	T5
(029)	Deposit	Inside corner of wall, mortar, painted plaster, pottery.	T5
(030)	Deposit	Pit, oval, round, vertical, flat – N-S orient burial pit for cow. Extended into T4.	T6
[031]	Cut	Burial pit – Cow.	T6

(032)	Deposit	Fill of [020] clean – unidentified metal object.	T2
(033)	Deposit	Rubble from south wall collapse, filled robber trench.	T2
(034)	Deposit	Wall – robbed out, lower course remains.	T2
(035)	Deposit	Deposit of plaster and mortar, sloped N – S, clear.	T2
(036)	Deposit	1m x1m test pit between T4 & T2, architectural features then plaster slip.	T7
(037)	Deposit	Plaster field.	T7
(038)	Deposit	Redeposited layer, plaster evident all the way through, lots of worked flint.	T7
(039)	Natural	T1, T7.	
(040)	Deposit	Under demolition, rare pottery, worked flint.	T2