

# **Pendle Heritage Archaeology Group**

## **Report of an Excavation at Wycoller Hall, Wycoller**

**2007-2009**



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## **Abstract**

*The excavation of a building within the gardens of the former Wycolter Hall has identified a structure of more than one phase, which latterly almost certainly, fulfilled the role of a hot house. It has not been possible to identify the original use of the building, which may have been larger than the final structure on site.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Evidence for a structure in the field adjacent to the aisled barn at Wycolter Hall was first discovered by the country park staff when preparing a base on which to site benches for seating. (SD93 934391) This comprised a course of bonded brickwork, two bricks in width and faced on one side by bonded stonework. The excavation was carried out over short periods during June to September 2007, May to October 2008 and April to July 2009.

## **2.0 Location, Topography and Geology**

Wycolter is a small village about 4 miles east of Colne, Lancashire. It was a sheep-farming and weaving community but declined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when weavers moved to nearby towns close to the developing mills. The village now consists of a handful of good quality restored houses and the ruins of Wycolter Hall, which is thought to be the inspiration for Ferndean Manor in the novel Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. Lancashire County Council bought the village and surrounding land in 1973, the village was declared a Conservation Area and 350 acres of surrounding farmland were designated a Country Park.

The geology of the area is mainly millstone grit and smaller coal measures. Rocky outcrops of grit and shale are found on the upper areas whilst stony cloughs lead down to a fertile valley in which flows Wycolter Beck. From Boulsworth Hill in the South-East the beck flows North West, passing close to Wycolter Hall (SD933392) before joining Colne Water.

The site is situated adjacent to the southern boundary of the recreational area to the south of Wycolter Hall at SD93 934391. The site was formerly within the pleasure gardens to the Hall.

## **3.0 Historical and Archaeological Background**

There is evidence of human occupation since Mesolithic times. Small flint tools, a Neolithic saddle quern and polished stone axes have been found. There are suspected Bronze Age burial mounds. (Bentley 1975) Wycolter is situated within Trawden Forest, originally a royal forest or chase where deer were hunted by the nobility. William the Conqueror gave the forest to Roger de Poitou who granted it to Robert de Lacy. The de Lacy family held the forest until 1311 and it is documented in the *compoti* of 1296 and 1305 that they operated two vaccaries (cattle farms), Nether-Wycolter and Over-Wycolter, although the exact locations were not given.

Wycolter Hall is a Scheduled Monument and a Grade II\* listed building. It was built between 1550 and 1560 as the residence of a yeoman farmer. When Henry Owen Cunliffe became the new squire in 1773

he soon had the building 'improved', probably by taking stone and architectural features from other buildings in the area and a garden was laid out, including a fish pond. (SMR Number PRN2342) After his death in 1818 the Hall and garden fell into disrepair. A visitor in the 1880's describes the village, the ruinous Hall and garden with fishpond and the foundations of a greenhouse. (Owen 1887). Restoration work started in the 1950s.

In 2003 trenches were excavated at Wycoller Hall. A summary of the evaluation follows. The Hall was originally rectangular, a north wing was added later and in mid eighteenth century major extensions were made to the north wing and a three-story tower was added to the southern end. The windows were also greatly changed. Modernisation to reflect the latest architectural fashion occurred later and this phase relates to changes made by Henry Owen Cunliffe around 1774/5: the staircase was moved, a large gothic fireplace was inserted (still to be seen today), and a porch was added to the western elevation, (this was later sold and removed in the early nineteenth century). (Lancashire County Archaeology Service, 2003) The study did not include the gardens.

## **4.0 Methodology**

The site code is WYC followed by the year i.e. WYC/07. A baseline was established and through means of triangulation, an area 11m by 8m was set out as a grid, each SW corner being marked by pegs and labelled. Each grid was 1m square. Excavation was undertaken by troweling with some spadework.

A level was transferred from a benchmark on the walls of Wycoller Hall to the large stone block between the large tree and the boundary wall of the field. This stone block served as the TBM. Each excavated layer was identified as a separate context.

Site drawings were prepared to a scale of 1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections (fig. 1)

## **5.0 The Excavation**

After the vegetation and topsoil overburden had been removed (context 1), a drawing was prepared at a scale of 1:20. A linear band of blackened stonework containing deposits of carbon was seen to run from the north-east corner of the building towards the south-west. This overlay the later deposits and was seen to extend for approx. 5m. This appeared to be the remnants of a fallen chimney stack. The removal of this layer revealed the infill, largely brick, lime mortar and clinker, made up of the demolition material from a former building. An irregular line of darkened grit stone was evident, passing through the area 500/503 to 509/499.

Leaving a one meter baulk, (507/499), context 2 was then removed using trowels. This baulk of stratigraphy, showing a succession of various fills, including demolition layers, was then drawn to a scale of 1:10. (Fig. 3, along line B-B) Some stone roofing slates were recovered. Four truncated walls relating to a rectangular structure, measuring 2m by 8.500m internally, were seen. These were constructed of random stonework and red brick bonded with lime mortar. The north-eastern wall, 500mm thick, was seen to have the bases of four brick piers set on its upper surface. (plate 1) This wall was constructed with a stone inner leaf and a 225mm (9") outer skin of brickwork. The south-western wall was constructed of 480mm stonework with a 225mm (9") outer leaf of brick set on the external edge of the stonework. In both these walls it was seen that the mortar in the lower courses was harder than that in

the upper courses.

The north-western wall was seen to be 400mm thick with a 225mm (9") brick outer leaf set on stonework. An inclined flag course was seen on the internal face falling approximately 100mm from the west to the east. (plate 2) The lime mortar below the flag course was harder than that above. The south-eastern wall was seen to be similar. None of the walls were tied in to each other.

At the north-west end of the building, the interior infill deposits were removed down to the natural sandy deposits to reveal a stone foundation course in the walls and also a possible floor level above this. Also in this part of the structure were three large stone flags sitting on the primary fill above the natural and two of these were either purposely set or abandoned at an angle, inclining up to the north-east wall. (plates 3 - 5)

At a distance of c. 300mm to the south-west was seen a stone wall c. 700mm thick with a stone facing to each side and a rubble core. This wall was well constructed with lime mortar. A further 400mm to the south-west a fourth wall was seen made up of two leaves of brickwork 275mm thick. This was of poor workmanship. (plate 6)

A poorly constructed brick flue was built outside the external wall to the northern corner of the building. (plates 7 - 8). Many particles of coal were spread throughout the excavated deposits and this probably represents the fuel source for the heating grate. The ashes from the fire appear to have been raked out from outside the building, although whether the fire was fed from within the building and whether it heated some type of water cauldron or boiler are questions which remain unanswered.

Other evidence of burning, with deposits of coal and ash, (record sheet 154) was identified in 508/505-6-7, 509/505-6-7 and 510/505-6-7. This context was suggested as the site of a bonfire, although the high proportion of stones found may argue against this. Some of the stones appeared more burnt at their ends, indicating that they may have been part of a hearth structure. (record sheet 157) There was also a high proportion of mortar lumps, often attached to stone and brick and the presence of reddish gritty sand within and around these. Some window glass was found which shows signs of having been heated. It seems likely that this is the remains of a discrete furnace structure which has collapsed or been demolished and then become the site of further burning during the processes of demolition or the sorting of demolition materials. A large stone 550mm by 300 - 500mm was seen adjacent to the north-east corner of the building adjacent to the flue of the furnace. Initially this appeared as if it could be a step to a doorway entrance as it was substantial in size. However, no further evidence was found to back this up.

Near to the field wall, a culvert cut across the south-east end of the building. This secondary feature was constructed of stone blocks, clay-lined, with a flat but irregular stone slab capping, and overlay the south-west external wall of the building. The exposed northern side was seen to comprise two courses of brickwork over some of its length. (plates 9 - 10). It appears to come from the pond in the adjacent field, entering the site in the north-east and bisects all three south-west walls, continuing down to the river. On excavation, the culvert was found to be almost full of fine sandy silt, with occasional brick fragments especially towards the bottom, and a fine, light - coloured sandy lens at about half depth. (context sheet 129). A coin was found just below the surface of the fill. Small fragments of window glass and a substantial amount of terracotta sherds were also found throughout the site.

A significant spread of stone and brickwork, some burnt, was seen adjacent to the field boundary at the south-east corner of the site outside the building. These features were cut into the sloping hillside.



Between the site and the large tree to the west, a further area was investigated with a 1m<sup>2</sup> trench. Initially what was thought to be a further toppled wall was determined to be a brick path, which had been somewhat distorted by tree roots. Much of the brickwork from the building has been utilised in the adjacent field boundary wall, which displays several possible phases of rebuilding and repair. Other bricks may have been re-used in the brick path, although the date of that construction has not been ascertained. Sections of rounded stone coping to a boundary wall were set on top of this wall; the copings had pockets cut in the upper surface at regular interval suggesting the provision of a metal fence.

A considerable amount of pottery was recovered from within the excavated deposits together with quantities of window glass.

## **6.0 Discussion**

It is clear that the present structure on site is made up of at least two phases. The first phase is made up of a stone building with four external stone walls and a floor of stone flags. The outer row of which to the east was set at an angle to the external wall sloping down to the centre of the floor. As the extant stone walls are not bonded in at the corners and are of varying widths it cannot be said that they relate to the floor as one or all could have been rebuilt. It is also possible that the stone walling at low level beneath the later brickwork is in two phases as the lime mortar to the lower courses is of a different, harder quality than that of the upper courses. It is probable that the stone roofing slates relate to this phase of building.

The walls to the north-west and south-east of the structure are similar in that they each have a sloping course of stone running down from south-west to north-east. It is significant that although the north-west and south-east walls are 400mm thick the stone north-west wall is 480mm thick and the south-eastern wall is 500mm thick. The likelihood is that the north-western and south-eastern walls have been rebuilt at one time.

The second phase almost certainly resulted in a change of use of the building. The introduction of brickwork as a facing to the stonework and as coursed brickwork laid on top of the stone walls together with the formation of large opening where seen to the west represents a fundamental departure from the earlier phase. From the extant brickwork it can be seen that four openings were made within the eastern wall. Strangely there would appear to be no doorway into the structure. Possibly at a later date a furnace was constructed at the north-east corner of the latter flue which was seen as a fallen feature lying across the site in a south-westerly direction.

The substantial stone wall just to the south-west of the structure is 600mm wide and well built and in view of this, it is probable that it once formed part of the building. However, this feature was not fully investigated and no return ends seen nor any occupational level determined. No explanation is offered for the poorly built brick wall positioned slightly to the west of this.

The first edition of the OS map of 1848 shows a structure set back from the track running alongside Wycoller Beck with two walls running from the track up to the gable walls of the building. These two walls appear to be approximately 6m apart. From this it would appear that the building did not feature as an attraction in the pleasure gardens of Wycoller Hall and its suggested role as a hot house is appropriate. The building is not shown on the 1893 OS map, suggesting that it had been demolished by this date.

It cannot be ascertained at this stage, why or exactly when the building fell out of use. The rubble is contained substantially within the footprint of the building, except for in the eastern corner where quite a lot of rubble was evident. It is possible that this could have been a further section of the structure, right up to the field wall, although no further foundations were excavated here. Layers of rubble within this deposit were much more evident and it looked much more like a dump of material. The amount of thin window glass within the excavation, although significant, would not have been sufficient for a hothouse, which suggests it was probably removed at the demolition stage for use elsewhere. Mixed rubble covered the whole of the interior of the structure with brick, mortar, window glass, some sandstone and pottery sherds. There were variations, however, as at the south-east end there was more brick and mortar, whereas at the north-west end there was more soil in the rubble mix. Some stone slate fragments were found but it is not known how much of the roof they covered or again whether they may have been re-used. Patches of decaying leaves were also excavated. These were broad-leaved deciduous leaves, some sycamore, others not identified. This suggests that the structure was not fully demolished all at the same time, the roof being removed leaving it exposed during the autumn, allowing falling leaves to gather before more rubble piled on top. The chimney appears to have collapsed last of all.

Entrance to this structure could be expected to have been along the south-west wall as this direction faces the Wycoller Beck track. Although traces of a brick path approaching the site were found close to the large tree, no evidence of a doorway could be verified. It is possible that access was gained from the south-east side. No clear threshold was identified but it appeared that there had at some time been a gap in the adjacent field wall. This has been rebuilt to a poorer quality than the remainder of the wall and includes some of the poor quality bricks found in the excavation. Evidently the wall was rebuilt after the demolition of the building.

By the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the development of hot houses locally meant that peaches, nectarines, melons, pineapples and many types of grapes were available (Bentley 1975, 75). Henry Owen Cunliffe was well known in local society and would have enjoyed such luxuries when dining with the local gentry. It is not too much to believe that he would want to supply such luxuries himself and provide the means to do it. Reference is made to this in the Elizabeth Shackleton Diaries, Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July 1775, after Cunliffe and Mrs. Shackleton had also been dinner guests at Marsden Hall. This Phase 2 of the building involves the erection of what appears to be a brick built hot house built on the foundations of an earlier building. The use of brickwork, whilst also being a relatively new material locally, was also likely to impress as other buildings were constructed of stone. Being of clay, brickwork was also a good material for retaining and radiating heat from the furnace positioned in the north-east corner of the building. A surveyors notebook of 1846 dating to the Enclosure Act confirms the use of the site as follows, 'hothouse, garden, fishpond and pleasure garden £2. 2. 2d'

The most likely source of the bricks was Colne. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century brickmaking was carried out by Henry and William Atkinson of Grindlestonehurst and by 1875 by William Smith at Sambury, off Knotts Lane (Harrison 1985, 137). The bricks excavated on site were probably hand-made. They are quite roughly made and are of poor quality, a coarse, gritty mix of clay and now breaking up easily.

Henry Owen Cunliffe did not inherit the Wycoller estate until 1773 and it is suggested that phase 2 of the structure dates to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. No date is put forward for phase 1 and no use, other than a possible storage building, is put forward.

The bulk of the pottery (types 1-3) represent terracotta pots or dishes, almost certainly used for plants. It is possible that some of these were made locally but it is more likely they were imported from Staffordshire. Such a substantial amount of this type of ceramic can only point to garden use.

The excavation has provided a glimpse of an aspect of Wycoler Hall in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Further excavation of the site and adjacent areas will be able to provide a fuller picture.

## **7.0 Finds**

### **7.1 Small Finds**

Two coins were found, one in the upper fills of the main building and one in the upper fill of the culvert. The coin from the culvert has been cleaned and the word Georgivs is just visible. It is probable that this is a milled half penny from the reign of George III (1760-1820) or more probably George II (1727-60). Since this coin must have been dropped into the culvert after it had gone out of use and silted up, and the coin itself may have been half a century old when lost, an initial construction date of some time in the early 17th century for the building is not unfeasible.

### **7.2 The Pottery**

An enquiry at Stoke Museums says that the pot from the excavation (as far as can be told from the photographs) dates from within a period that extends from the early c18 to the early c20. It is of a generic type used for a wide number of uses. Manufactured over a wide geographical area and in vast numbers with many stylistic variations on a few basic patterns. It is considered that they could be general purpose pots, not specifically for horticultural purposes, though there are a few pieces that appear to have been made as planters.

More specific identification is difficult without detailed, and costly, analysis of pot fabric. It is suggested that reports of previous digs within the local the area, of sites of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries are examined for type comparisons, Stylistic variation was often a form of 'trade marking' by local manufacturers. Local museums and archives may have further data, as may the Royal Horticultural Society.

Small local producers were more likely to retain older methods of production, adding to difficulty in accurately dating. Old pots were often reused for many years after date of purchase. Pot described as Type 4 bears some superficial resemblance to a type known as 'midland purple'.

The pottery details and schedules are set out in an appendix as a separate report.

### **7.3 The Glass**

Representative types:-

Type 1          Window Glass

1.5mm thickness with raised rounded edge, greenish tinge

Type 2          Window Glass

2.5mm thickness with raw edges, greenish tinge

Type 3      Glass Vessel

2.5mm thick body sherd with oxidised surface

## **8.0 Acknowledgements**

The group would like to thank Peter Short and the staff at Wycoller Country Park for their help and also all Phoenix Archaeology NW and Pendle Heritage Archaeology Group members, who included Alex Whitlock, Christine Barnet, Gillian Greenwood, Lynn and Peter Grimshaw, Mike Handford, Tina McNeil, Pam Minkley, David Morris, Janet Suggett, David Taylor, Charles Walker, Henry Wall, Sue Wilson and Peter Worrell. Particular thanks go to John Howard who directed the excavation.

## **9.0 Archive**

The site archive will be deposited at the Pendle Heritage Centre Barrowford, Nelson.

## **10.0 Bibliography**

Bentley, J., 1975, *Portrait of Wycoller*, Nelson Historical Society.  
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Oxford Archaeology North, 2003, *Wycoller Hall, Lancashire. Archaeological Building Investigation and Evaluation*. Unpublished



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**Plate 1** Section of eastern wall showing bases of four brick piers.



**Plate 2** Northern wall showing inclined flag course on internal face.



**Plate 3** Large stone flags inclining up to north east wall.



**Plate 4** as above





**Plate 5** as above



**Plate 6** Succession of walls on west of site.



**Plate 7 Culvert.**



**Plate 8 Base of brick flue.**





**Plate 9** Stones forming top surface of culvert.



**Plate 10** as above

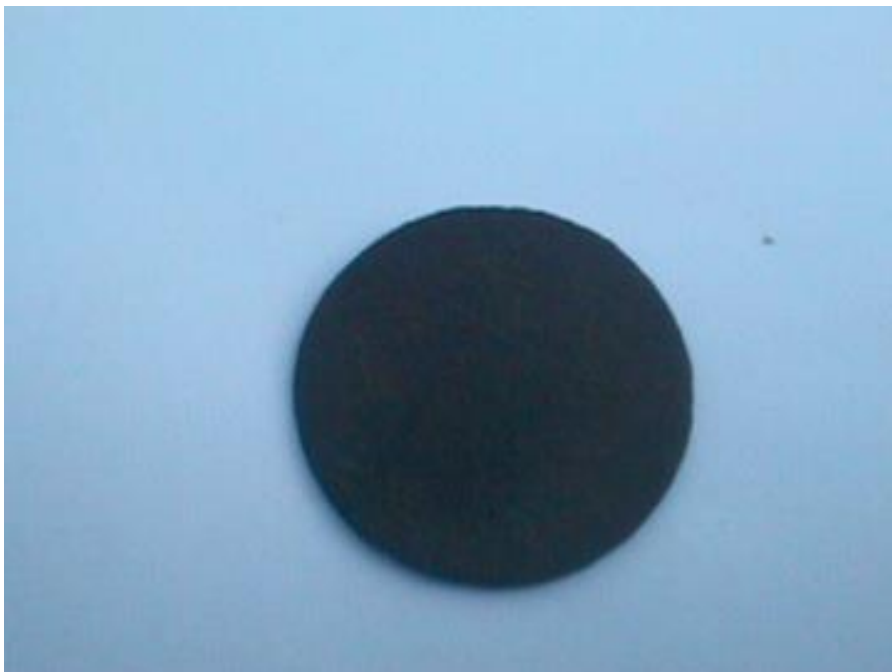




**Plate 11** General view of excavation looking south east.



**Plate 12** Coin found in culvert.



**Plate 13 Obverse of coin found in culvert.**



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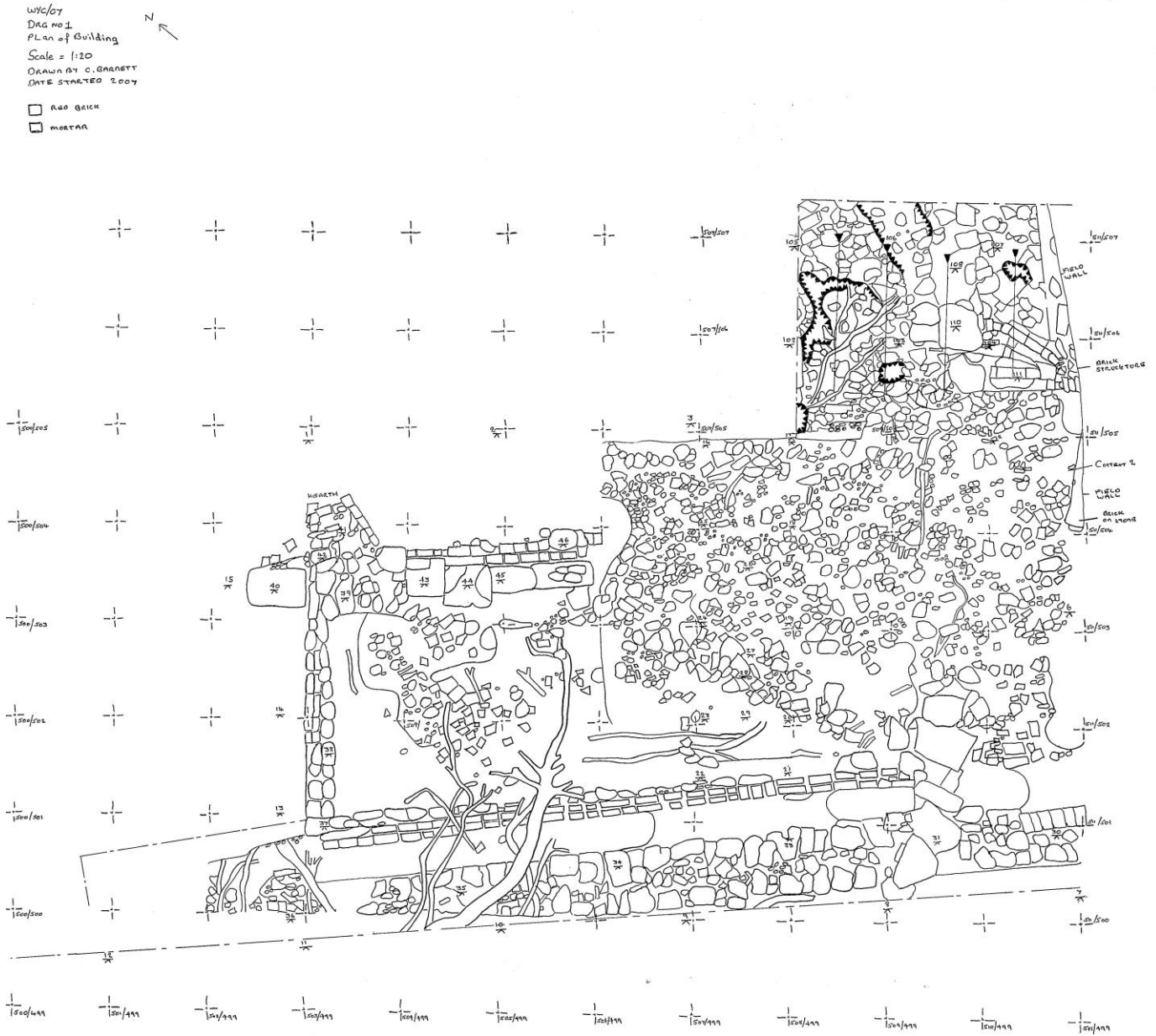
Fig 1 - site drawing; Excavation 2007 - 2009 Phase 1

Fig 2 - site drawing; Excavation 2007 - 2009 Phase 2

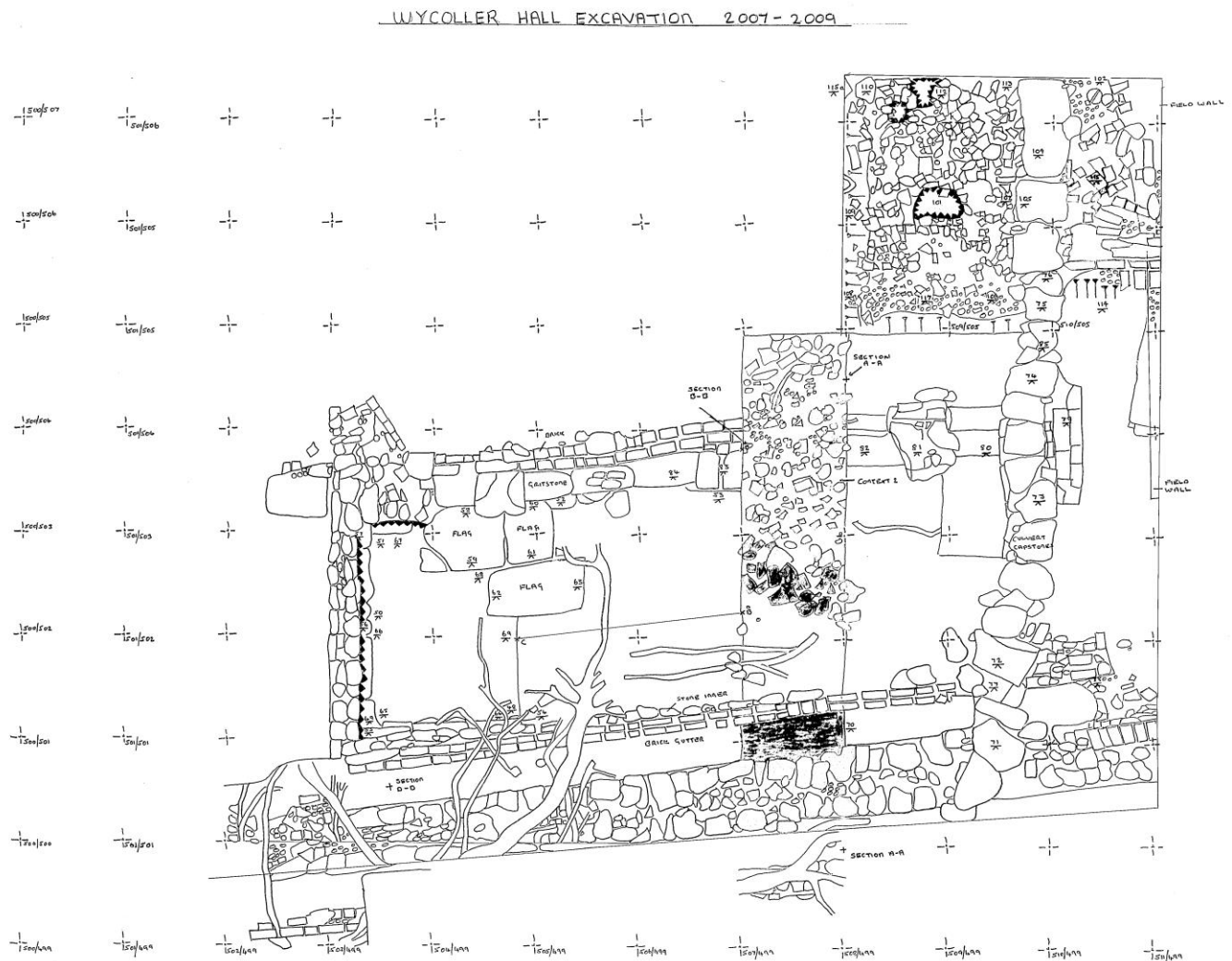
Fig 3 –Section facing South East along D D and North wall.

Fig 4 – Record Sheet

**Fig 1- site drawing; Excavation 2007 – 2009 Phase 1**



**Fig 2 - site drawing; Excavation 2007 - 2009 Phase 2**



**Fig 3 –Section facing South East along D D above and North Wall below.**

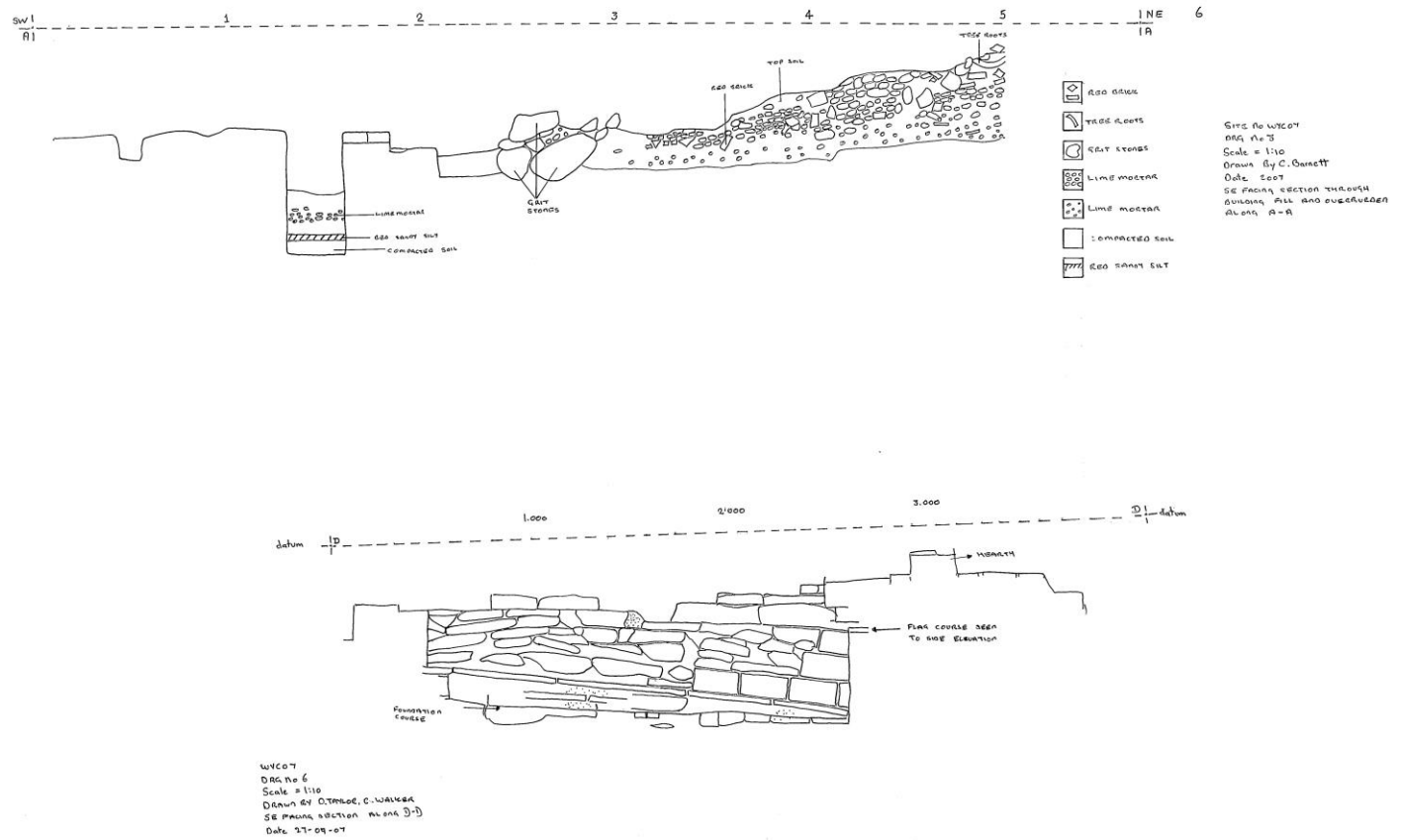
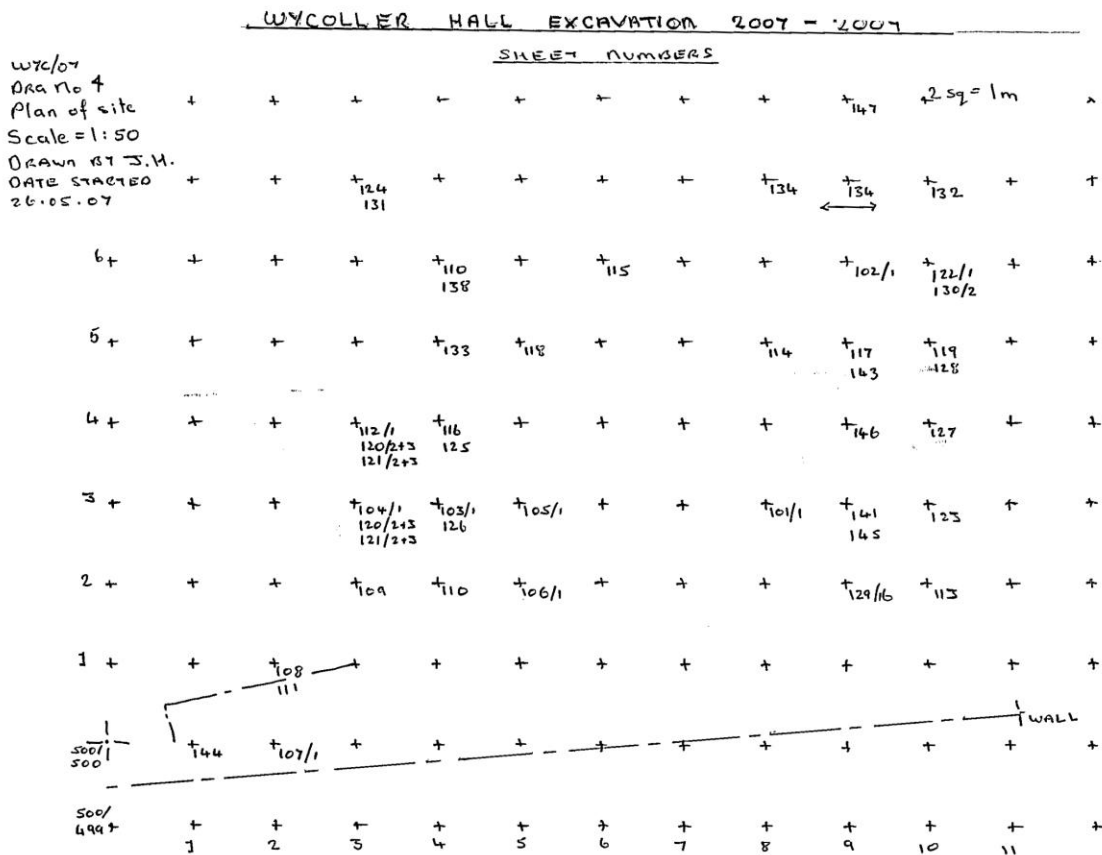




Fig 4 – Record Sheet



110 = 2 squares on 1 sheet  
 120 = which squares 503/502.3?  
 121 = " " " "  
 134 = offset ?? (C. Barnett)  
 135 = Blank  
 136 = No grid ref.  
 139 = No grid ref.  
 140 = No grid ref.  
 142 = Brick path in field

111/2  
 Sheet No. Context No.

Unassigned	Contexts
109	125 142
110	126 143
111	127 144
	128 145
113	129 146
114	131 147
115	132
116	133
117	134
118	135
119	136
	138
	139
	140
	141
123 ?	
124 ?	

