

Community Archaeology Excavation Report

Greyside Abandoned Farmstead, Newbrough, Northumberland

Excavation 11th – 14th March 2020



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1 Introduction

This report describes an archaeological excavation carried out in March 2020 at Greyside abandoned farmstead, Northumberland, by members of the Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group (NOWTAG). This excavation followed on from a Level 1 Survey in 2018 by the Group, covering 1km x 2km of Greyside Farm. The report of this survey can be downloaded from the [NOWTAG website](#). The group is a community archaeology organisation, exploring the archaeology of upland Northumberland on the north side of the Tyne valley with a particular interest in non-Roman sites.

The survey area is located about 10km north of Hexham and 1.5km south of Hadrian's Wall, as shown in the location map below. It is a single field of rough damp pasture through which there is a little-used bridleway, but no roads or tracks. No LIDAR images are currently available in this area.



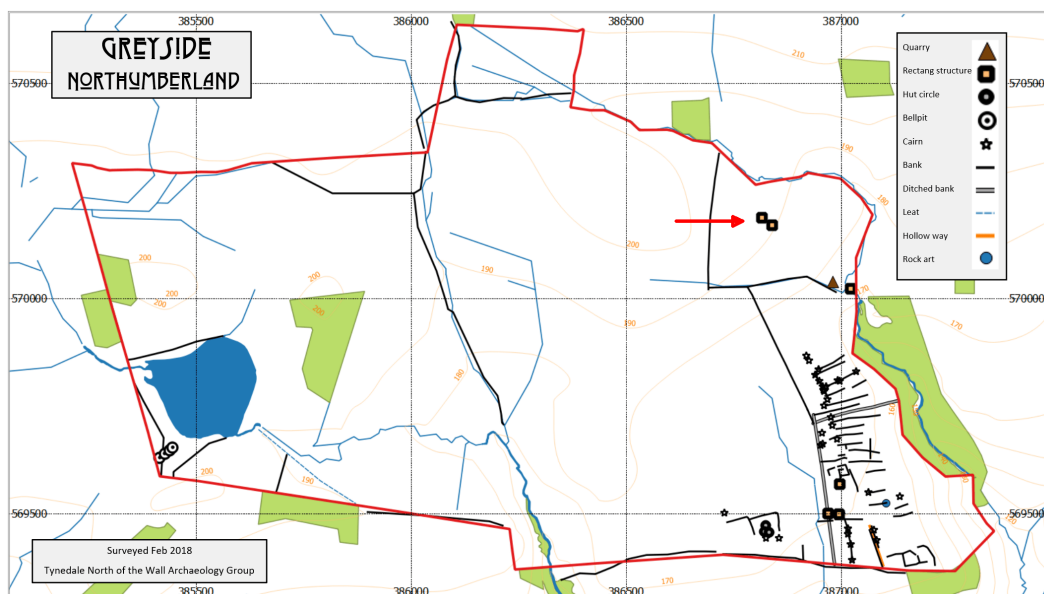
Location map of survey area

The Historic Environment record for the area lists an enclosed prehistoric settlement and some medieval field boundaries and enclosures. The NOWTAG survey showed that there was in fact an extensive system of strip fields (probably medieval) over much of the drier parts of the eastern side of the area. Adjacent to these fields were several enclosures. The western part of the survey area contained few features of interest apart from meandering earthen boundary dykes and some bell-pits.

In the north-east part of the survey area was an enclosure with several rectangular structures running along its southern boundary. This is listed in the Historic Environment Record as follows, having been noted on a 1992 aerial photograph:

Pastscape Monument **1445647**, NMR number **NY87SE165**, position **NY8681 7019**

“A rectilinear enclosure of probable Post Medieval date was seen as an earthwork and mapped from air photographs. The enclosure lies to the south of Meggie's Dene Burn. The enclosure is 41m by 34m. One side of the enclosure is curved; the southern side is formed by a line of small conjoined rectilinear enclosures which appear to be formed by stonework and could possibly be pens.”

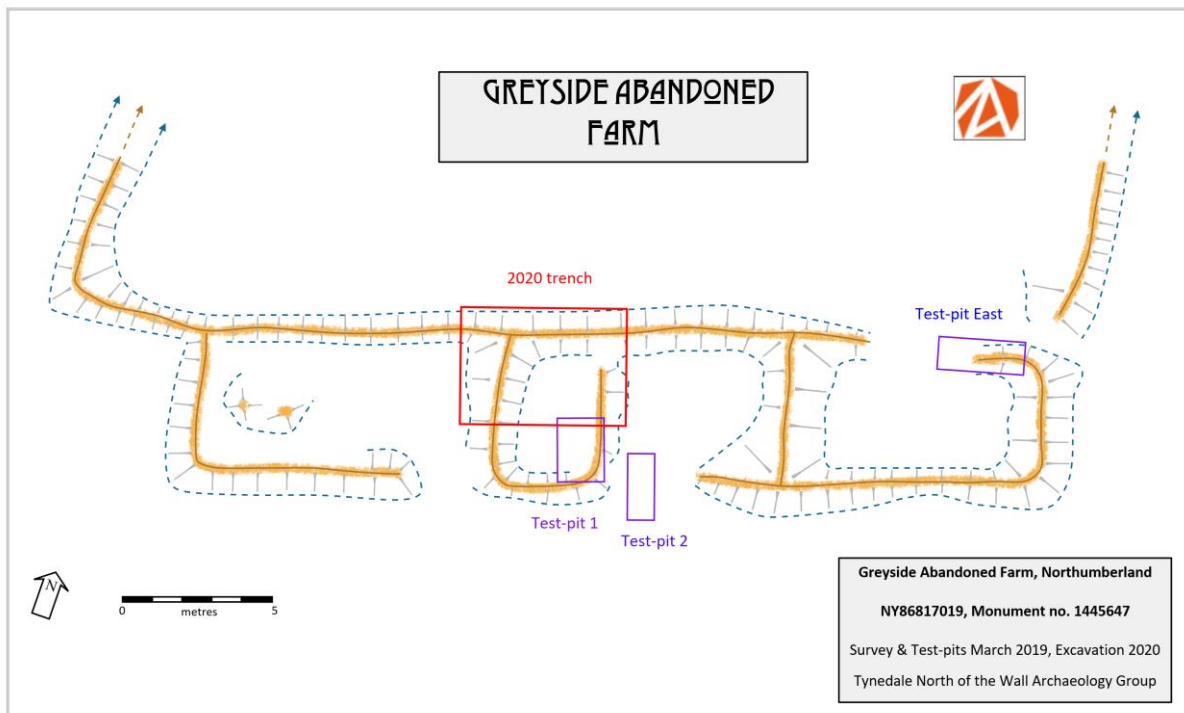


Greyside Survey plan: abandoned farmstead indicated by red arrow.

During the 2018 Level 1 survey of the area, this site was examined on the ground and it was realised that the rectangular structures were more likely to be the ruins of buildings, rather than enclosures. The wall foundations were substantial and were lime-mortared. Post-medieval pot-sherds were found in molehills on the site, despite there being no known nearby farmhouses. Hence in 2019 the site was investigated further by a detailed survey, further examination of finds from molehills, and the digging of three test-pits on the rectangular structures. The results have been published in a report; in summary:

- 1 A theodolite survey of the rectangular structures suggested that two of the rectangular structures had entrances to the south and the third (eastern) structure had an entrance to the north, leading in to the adjacent enclosure. The central structure had a dividing wall (north-south). The enclosure bank joined on to the north-west corner of the western structure, but there was a gap of about 2m between the enclosure bank and the eastern structure's north-east corner.

- 2 A gridded survey of molehills close to the foundations found a considerable number of potsherds (30) as well as clay pipe fragments (5), pieces of glass (3), and lumps of coal and of lime mortar. The pottery was all post-medieval, probably mostly 18th/19th century cheap domestic wares. The mortar fragments were concentrated in the immediate vicinity of the foundations.
- 3 Three test-pits confirmed that the walls were substantial double-faced structures. There was a stone floor surface in the central cell of the buildings, and a probable paved area in the eastern cell. Finds included two fragments of crude bricks, more sherds of post-medieval glazed pottery, and fragments of slate.



Theodolite survey plan of farmstead, with 2019 test pits and 2020 trench shown

2 Historical background

Surprisingly, the first and second edition Ordnance Survey maps of the area (surveyed in 1861/2 and 1895) show no structures at or near the location of the farmstead.



Farmstead location (red circle) on OS maps: first edition (left) and second edition (right)

The nearest buildings shown are the three houses along a lane, over 900m to the east. There are no other buildings, not even barns or ruins, closer than this, nor nearby tracks.

Earlier maps are shown in Northumberland CC (2018), a report prepared for the County Council regarding a right-of-way running north-south across the pasture. These maps include several early 19th century maps which show no evidence of a house at the site. This right-of-way is depicted on Ordnance Survey maps and is classed as a bridleway, but on the ground there is no apparent path or track across the pasture. Thus, not only is there no documentary evidence of a building at the farmstead's location in the last 200 years, there are no nearby buildings or tracks.

A dwelling at this location could be either a permanently occupied farm, or a shieling (i.e. a summer farm). There is a strong tradition in upland Northumberland of farmsteads occupied only in the summer, April to August, allowing lower meadows to be used for hay production. *Shielings and Bastles*, (Ramm, McDowall and Mercer 1970) and *The Harvest of the Hills* (Winchester 2000) describe the practice. Documentary evidence shows that this transhumance was common in the area around the 13th century (and probably earlier). Later, the practice declined and had effectively died out by 1700.

Shielings in Tynedale and around Hadrian's Wall are discussed further by Woodside and Crow (1999) and by Roberts, Carlton and Rushworth (2010). The decline in use of shielings was for several reasons. Firstly, population numbers were reduced after the plagues and famines commencing in the 14th century, so there was less need to exploit the marginal upland grazing areas. Secondly, the area was unstable in the era of the border reivers, again

leading to a reduced farming population. And thirdly, the farming economy moved away from cattle to sheep which, not being milked, could be left to roam almost unattended in the summer on upland pastures.

The distinction between a shieling and a permanent farmstead is not rigid; many sites will have been permanent in one era and shielings in another, depending on security, weather conditions, and other factors. However, the Greyside farmstead is a much more complex site, with a larger range of buildings and a larger attached enclosure than would be normal for a shieling (see plans of shielings in the references above). Shielings normally consist of a small rectangular un-mortared building of one or two rooms, sometimes with small attached garths.

3 Excavation aims and methods

The site survey and the analysis of mole-hill finds showed that the site was probably occupied in the post-medieval period and that the structures were buildings (not enclosures as suggested by the HER entry) with substantial mortared stone walls. There were no medieval or earlier artifacts. Domestic occupation was suggested by the presence of glazed pot sherds and coal. The aims of excavation in 2020 were:

- to collect more finds and samples for further information as to the occupation date and use of the site
- to discover the use of each compartment of the buildings
- to assess the state of preservation and risks to the site

Excavation was planned to last 5 days in March 2020. Unfortunately, weather during this period was poor, with rain and high winds, limiting what could be achieved on this very exposed site in the short time available. Work was also constrained by the remoteness of the site: access (including transport of equipment) involved a walk of 2km from the south, mostly across very wet rough ground. Depth of excavation was also limited by the saturated condition of the land, following the wettest February on record.

All excavation and back-filling were by hand. Stones, earth, and turves were stacked separately. The structures were cleaned to expose walls and floors. No attempt was made to excavate below floor level or to dismantle the walls. No stratification was noted in the topsoil, so the finds were not recorded by context. A single trench was excavated, 4m (N-S) x 5.5m (E-W). This was extended by 0.5m along most of its southern edge to clarify the floor surface layout. At the end of the excavation the trench was back-filled and re-turfed.

The trench was placed over the north-west quarter of the middle of the three compartments (see plan in Section 1), including the northern part of the dividing wall across this compartment. Each of the three compartments is approximately 5m (N-S) x 9m (E-W), so the line of three cover a total length of approximately 27m.

Recording was by photogrammetry. This technique involves using computer software to construct a 3-D model of the trench from about 30 conventional photographs taken from multiple directions. A computer-derived vertical view of this model is a scale-correct “orthophoto”: i.e. it has the characteristics of a drawn plan, being free of the projection and

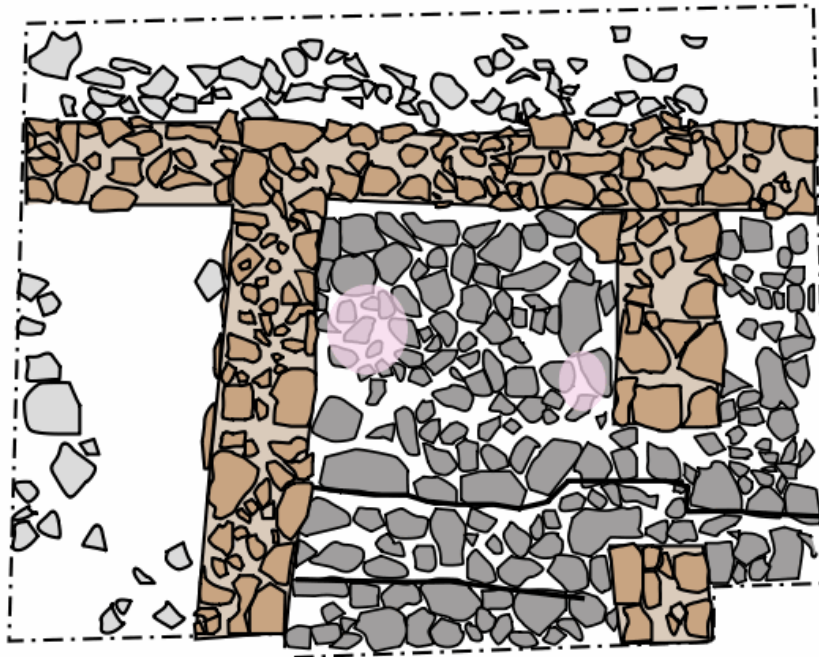
lens distortions of conventional photographs. If necessary, an accurate plan can then be drawn from the orthophoto to clarify features.

4 Results of excavation



Orthophoto and oblique view of trench. North is at top. Ranging poles are 1m.

GREYSIDE FARMSTEAD



Key:

Walls - brown
Floor - grey
Rubble - pale grey
Edge of drain - black
Burnt material - pink



1 metre

Greyside Abandoned Farmstead, Northumberland

NY86817019

Excavation March 2020

Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group

Plan of trench, drawn from photogrammetry orthophoto.

As detailed in Section 3, the trench examined the north-west quadrant of the middle compartment. The walls were of undressed, roughly coursed stones. They had collapsed leaving a spread of rubble over and around the lower courses. About 0.6m of the walls survived above floor level. There were many lumps of lime mortar in the rubble and between the stones of the walls. In a few places the mortar was bonded to the stones, but it was mostly loose, so that the material between the wall stones was a mixture of earth and mortar particles. There was no evidence that the walls had been plastered. They were approximately 0.8m wide, consisting of facing stones separated by an infill of smaller irregular stones.

Examination of the wall junctions showed clear evidence that the main walls of the compartment had been built first. The internal N-S cross-wall was a later addition, as was the north wall of the western compartment. The cross-wall had a 1m wide gap, leaving a 2m section of wall to the north of the gap. The gap is therefore on the mid-line of the compartment. The wall-lines each side of the gap are mis-aligned, suggesting that the two halves of the cross-wall were inserted separately into a pre-existing building.

The floor of the middle compartment consisted of cobbles and slabs differing widely in size (from 0.7m to 0.1m), laid irregularly with no bonding. Many showed signs of wear. The best-laid, largest slabs were in the edges of the floored area, presumably having been less damaged by heavy usage and thus less repaired. The floor was not level: there was a central lower section 0.8m wide, running east-west, edged by large stones and with a cobbled base. The most likely interpretation is that it is a drain/walkway running between raised animal pens. The drain passes through the south side of the gap in the cross-wall and continues to the east of it, again with edging stones and stone flooring to the north of it.

The floor butts against the external walls of the compartment, hence was constructed after them. However, two of the floor stones extend under the lower stones of the cross-wall, consistent with it being a later addition (or re-build).

No hearths or hearth-stones were found, but there were two scanty patches of coal-rich burnt material lying on the floor surface. The stones of the floor were not fire-damaged. There was no charcoal in the burnt material. Both patches were towards the side of the floor, close to walls (marked in pink on the plan above).

About 1.6m of the westernmost of the three compartments was included in the excavation. This was found to have no floor level, apart from a compacted layer of earth and mortar fragments overlying the clay-rich natural subsoil. A sondage was dug for 0.5m through this to confirm that there was no lower floor level. The western compartment may therefore have been a barn or walled garth built against the side of the central compartment.

5 Finds

All finds were from topsoil. At the end of this section is a collective photograph of the finds, and a table of the finds is given in Section 10.

Coal: Approximately 12 small lumps of coal were found over the floor, mainly cubic lumps of about 1cm – 2cm across.

Clay pipes: Three stems of clay pipes were found, adding to the five that had been found in the 2019 molehill survey. No bowls were recovered. The largest was of grey clay coated in white slip to disguise it, a 4/64 inch diameter suggesting an earliest date of 1750. The two smaller pieces had narrower bores so likely to be of a later date, probably Victorian. None of the three pieces have the large bores (6/64 inch and over) typical of early clay pipes: see <http://www.pipearchive.co.uk/howto/date.html>.



Pipe stems

Glass: Two fragments of thin (1mm) flat glass were found. They were similar to the fragment found in the molehill survey. One was abraded, the other had patina. In addition, two fragments of thick curved glass were found; possibly from onion glass bottles (these can date from the late 17th century, through the 18th century) or a bowl. The fragments were a single piece with the join surface patinated so not recently broken. The brown patina is too thick to reveal clearly the original colour, but green and copper in the patina suggests green glass.

Ceramics: Sherds included nine pieces of terracotta with varying grogs, four with white bodies and seven off white, possibly being ironstone. None were bone china.

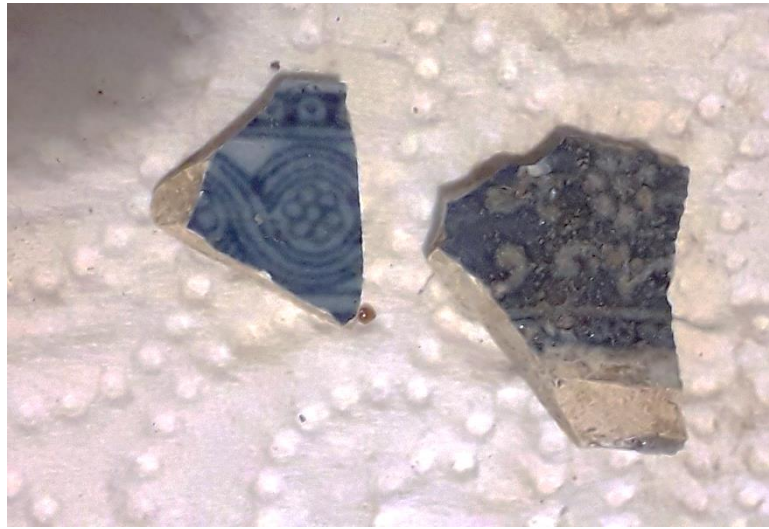
Over half the terracotta had honey glaze over white slip, two pieces with clear glaze, two with shiny black, one had black/brown detail over the slip. None were thick suggesting domestic use. All were evenly and well fired suggestive of a Victorian date. A small unglazed sherd with only one flat face had spaces in the body from organic grog. It is low fired. It could be early, even Roman.



Small unglazed sherd on left, with Roman shreds on right for comparison

Three of the white-bodied clay sherds had oxide decoration; one was overfired and bubbled (or burned) and had a band of cobalt with tiny white flower motifs. A similar motif is found on an ironstone sherd with a tiny cobalt decoration of circles within circles surrounded by

lines curling round to meet the next motif. It is much more refined than the previous one. Ironstone suggests post 1813.



Decorated sherds as mentioned in paragraph above

Slate: several small pieces of slates were found, adding to the two pieces found in the 2019 test-pits.

Brick: no brick or tile fragments were found, despite two pieces of coarse brick having been found in the test-pits.

Bone: there was a single bone fragment 12cm long, probably a sheep metacarpal with spiral and lengthways fractures, possibly burned.



Finds: The lower image is of the same finds as upper image, turned over.

6 Discussion

The part of the central compartment excavated is probably a byre; it has raised platforms for livestock, each side of a stone-lined drain for slurry. The width of the platform, 2m, is large enough to have housed older breeds of cattle (e.g. dexters) which were far shorter than modern breeds. Excavation of a longhouse farm in upper Teesdale by Altogether Archaeology showed a similar arrangement in the animal end of the building (Green 2019, Green and Frodsham 2019). The cross-wall was probably inserted to split the byre into sections. The cross-wall may have been only high enough to separate animals, or it may have been full-height, separating the middle compartment into two rooms. The long flat stones in the rubble blocking the gap in the cross-wall (see the photograph section at the end of this report) may have been lintel stones, suggesting a full-height wall.

The lack of hearths makes it unlikely that it was a dwelling space; hearths would be near the mid-line of the building, where the roof was highest, and probably against a wall. Although two deposits of burnt material were found on the floor, these weren't established hearths and there was no fire damage to the floor. They probably represented temporary use late in the building's history.

Although a few slate fragments were found, the building is unlikely to have been slate roofed: far more and larger fragments would have been expected if that was the case. Slate roofing would not have been common before cheap rail transport was available in the middle of the 19th century. Before then, heather, rush, or turf would have been used.

A byre might be a separate building, or it could have been one end of a larger building, a longhouse, occupied by humans at one end and animals at the other. Without further excavation it is impossible to tell which of these possibilities is the case here. The central and eastern of the three compartments may have formed a longhouse: their combined length, 18m, is certainly consistent with this. Human habitation somewhere on the site seems probable in view of the finds: window glass, domestic pottery, coal, etc. There are no nearby buildings from which they might have been derived.

The use of different parts of the buildings would have varied over time and between the seasons. Hodgson (1827), describes "inferior farm-houses" in pre-Victorian Northumberland:

The room at the entrance of which was, and still continues in many places to be, a byer in winter and a bed-room in summer, and is called Out-bye: the In-bye, or inner room, with three small windows to the left of the out-door, was the dwelling of the family, and often partitioned by two pressbeds into two compartments.

The western compartment of the line of structures was found to have no floor, and the wall-join showed that it was a later addition, possibly a barn or walled garth. The survey found no entrance from the western (or central) compartment into the large enclosure to the north whereas the western compartment has an entrance from the open land to the south. Hence neither the western or central compartments are likely to have been shelters for livestock held in the enclosure.

No evidence of medieval or earlier occupation was found. All finds were clearly post-medieval, apart from a terracotta fragment. Clay-pipe smoking was introduced to England around 1580 and became common in the north-east around 1650 (Graves and Heslop 2013), though the pipe-stems found in this excavation are 18th century at the earliest. Similarly, onion glass bottles (or similar forms) are mostly 18th century (though can be a little earlier).

The puzzle over why the building is not shown (even as a ruin) on 19th century maps remains. Examination of tithe and other earlier maps might throw light on this, but will have to wait for the end of the current restrictions due to the pandemic.

7 Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the landowner, Mr Walton of Greyside Farm, Newbrough, for permission to carry out the excavation. Photogrammetry by Andy Curtis, using Agisoft software. Plans were drawn by Martin Green using QGIS and Serif DrawPlus software. Lorraine Clay examined the finds. Derek Gunby provided historical information.

Members of NOWTAG who bravely took part in the excavation, despite challenging conditions: Phil Bowyer, Lorraine Clay, Ian Cooper, Andy Curtis, Derek Gunby, Martin Green, Liz Pounds, Elaine Vallack, Christine Ward.

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<https://maps.nls.uk>. Licence: CC-BY-NC-SA



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9 Photographs



Trench at early stage of excavation, looking north-west.



Trench at early stage of excavation: north wall and cross-wall being exposed.



Floor of central compartment at completion of excavation, looking north-west.



The gap in the cross-wall, looking west. The 1m ranging pole is placed across the gap. The rubble blocking the gap is still in place under the pole. In the rubble are some long (0.7m) flat stones which may have been lintels (see discussion section).



The gap, after removal of rubble. Photograph from same position as previous photograph.



The west face of the west wall of the central compartment, looking east.



Close-up of north end of west wall, showing join with north wall of western compartment. See next photograph for a view of this wall-joint from the other side.



North-west corner of central compartment, seen from outside, looking south. Shows join with north wall of eastern compartment.



Same wall-join as previous photograph, diagonal view looking south-east.



Interior of middle compartment, looking west. Shows join between cross-wall and (on the right) the north wall.



Interior of middle compartment, showing gap in cross-wall, looking east.

10 Finds table

| ID | material | body | section | thickness mm | colour | method | glaze inside | glaze outside | detail |
|----|----------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------|----------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | glass | | curved | 5-6 | brown | blown | | | gold /copper fleck joins 2 |
| 2 | glass | | curved | 4-5 | brown | blown | | | gold /copper fleck joins 1 |
| 3 | ceramic | terracotta abundant white inclusions | twisted curve | 4-6 | brown | thrown | shiny black silver patina | shiny black, silver patina | throwing line |
| 4 | ceramic | terracotta sparse white inclusions | gentle curve | 5-8 | brown | thrown | honey over white slip | none | flat base |
| 5 | ceramic | terracotta sparse white inclusions | | 5-13 | brown | thrown | honey over white slip | none | nicely turned foot ring |
| 6 | coal | coal | flat | | black | | | | |
| 7 | ceramic | terracotta | gentle curve | 3 | brown | | shiny black | shiny black | no silver |
| 8 | ceramic | terracotta abundant white inclusions | gentle curve | 4 | brown | | honey over white slip | honey | might join 5 |
| 9 | ceramic | terracotta | gentle curve | 5 | brown | | clear | none | |
| 10 | ceramic | terracotta black inclusions | gentle curve | 3 | brown | | honey over white slip | honey | |
| 11 | ceramic | off white | flat | | beige | slipcast | white | white | overglaze cobalt on rim and lines on inside with stiff brush or lines slipcast |
| 12 | ceramic | white | flat | 3 | white | slipcast | clear | clear | rectangle |
| 13 | ceramic | off white | flat | 4 | beige | | blue tint | blue tint | rhombus |
| 14 | ceramic | off white | gentle curve | 4 | beige | | yellow tint | yellow tint | 5 sides |
| 15 | ceramic | white | gentle curve | 2-3 | white | slipcast | clear diffuse cobalt design below rim | clear | |
| 16 | ceramic | off white | flat | 3 | beige | slipcast | clear | clear | rim |
| 17 | ceramic | off white | cylindrical curve | 2-3 | beige | slipcast | opaque yellow | opaque yellow | milled rows of square dots and recessed row of circles. Jam pot? |
| 18 | ceramic | off white | curved | 3 | white | | clear | thin brown slips under a clear glaze | no texture on outside so colour added during casting? Or monoprint? tip of bird tail or wing? Dark brown/white rope? Seems to be mimicking 19 |

| ID | material | body | section | thickness mm | colour | method | glaze inside | glaze outside | detail |
|----|----------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 19 | ceramic | terracotta | curved | 2-4 | brown | | honey | white slip with black line near edge and brown dappling under honey glaze | rim or associated with handle |
| 20 | ceramic | terracotta with organic grog | one flat side | | brown | | | | Roman ? |
| 21 | ceramic | white | curved | 2-3 | white | | copper line over (?) clear glaze | copper and iron(?) over clear glaze | rim or associated with handle |
| 22 | ceramic | ironstone? | curved | 2 | beige | slipcast | tiny cobalt design of 6 small circles in a circle surrounded by 4 blue lines interlacing with next group of circles and at rim row of tiny squares with dot in middle | clear blue tint | rim. Can't see printing. Dense colour - 1830?? Similar motif to 23 |
| 23 | ceramic | white | one flat side | 4 | white | | white with over(?) glaze cobalt band with teeny flower (white centre and 6 white petals) Badly overfired (or burned) | white overfired or burned | similar motif to 22 but not as refined |
| 24 | ceramic | grey | straight | 4/64 | grey | one end sooty, probably near bowl | none | white slip to disguise grey clay | post 1750 |
| 25 | ceramic | pipe clay | straight | <4/64 | | | | | more post 1750! Same bore as 26. fingernail mark, slightly oval |
| 26 | ceramic | pipe clay | straight | <4/64 | | | | | more post 1750! Same bore as 25 |
| 27 | glass | glass | flat | 1 | clear | | | | opalescent patina |
| 28 | glass | glass | flat | 1 | frosted | | | | abraded |
| 29 | bone | metacarpal | long bone | sheep? | | | | | spiral fracture and lengthways fracture. Burned |

