

CHAPTER 2

REPORT ON THE 1985 EXCAVATIONS BUILDING 250: A SET OF ANIMAL PENS

Site supervisor: Ann Bomann

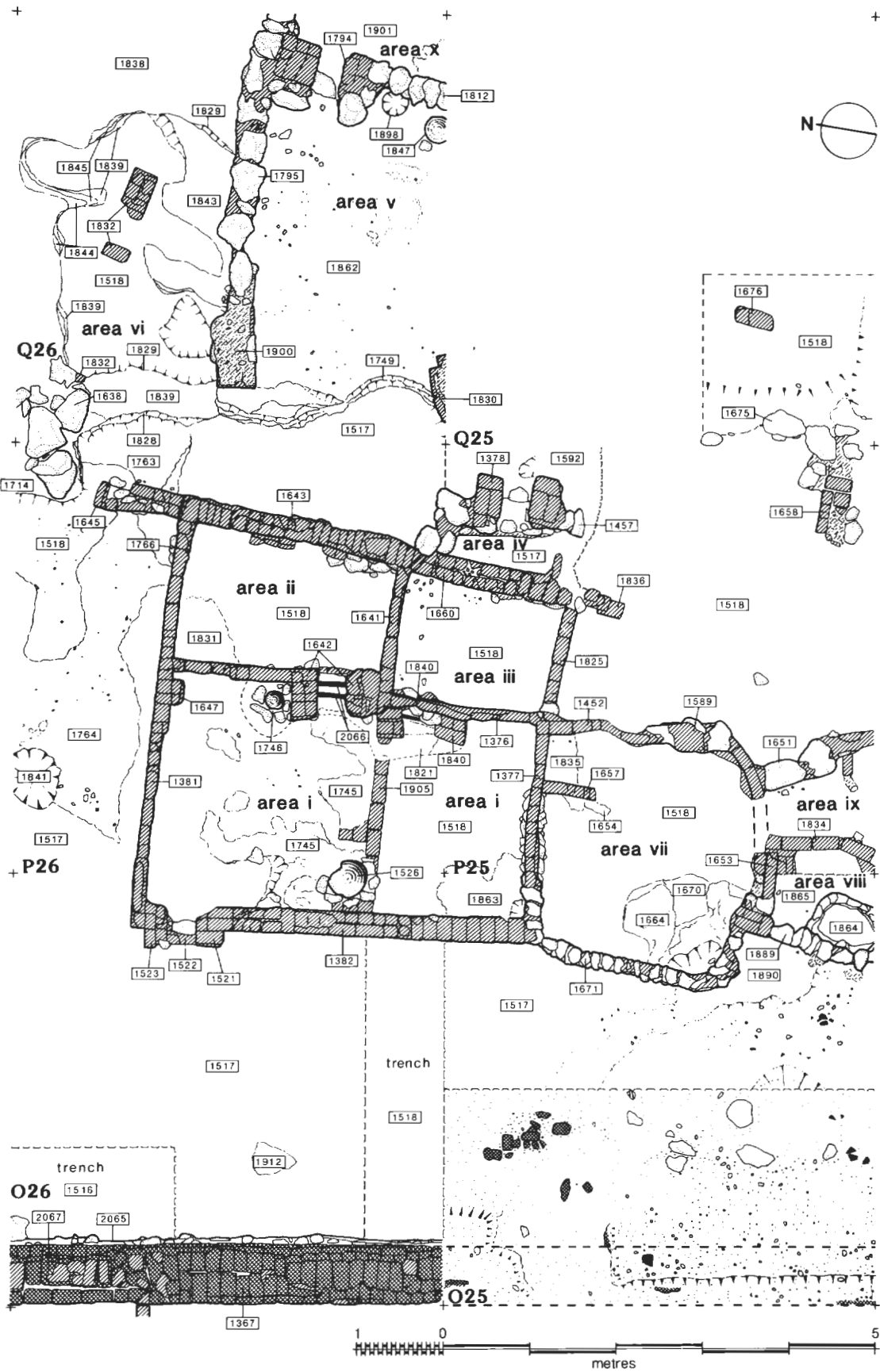
2.1 Introduction

The excavations reported in this chapter represent the first stage in examining the last "new" area outside the Walled Village where it can be suspected that surface material is an inexact guide to the ancient use of the ground. This is the sector which runs along the east side of the Village, between the Village Enclosure Wall and the steeply sloping hillside in which a few tombs were dug. On the south it begins with the Main Chapel and the end of the terrace exposed in 1984 (*AR* II: 11-14); to the north it is closed by a group of chapels excavated in 1922 by Woolley (nos. 551-556, *COA* I: Plate XXV). The surface now has a very confusing appearance which makes assessment of excavation prospects very difficult. Old diggings of the tombs have left spoil heaps which obscure some parts, especially in the south. Lines of stones are apparent on the lower hillslopes which might derive from more chapels. A large part bears a thick sherd cover from ancient deposits having been dug over illicitly in recent years. Two holes from this activity were visible in 1977 during the early stages of the E.E.S. survey, and both had exposed elements from walls (Kemp 1978: 24-5, Figure 2).

There is an overall rise in ground level from south to north. This represents not only the natural slope of the valley floor, but superimposed on this is a slight but distinct mounding that runs north from the Main Chapel and peters out in the vicinity of the line of the five-metre squares numbered 27, i.e. about 30-35 metres away. It is this part that has suffered most from modern illicit digging, and where the surface sherd scatter is densest. Beyond this zone to the north lies a shallow sandy depression, the floor of a side valley that runs off to the north-east. On its northern side is a patch of ground covered with stones and sherds, clearly the remains of a building, and one dug over by Woolley in 1922 (*COA* I: 69, last paragraph). From pieces of limestone feeding-trough lying on the surface one can judge that it was probably yet another set of animal pens. Finally, on the slope above, lies Chapel 555.

The site of the new excavation was towards the northern end of the main zone of disturbed ground east of the Village, in a place where sherds were abundant and close to the location of the illicit excavation of 1977. By the end of the season a block of five squares had been completed (except in the case of O25 where the western half was deliberately left unexcavated, see Figure 2.1). They included a short section of the eastern Village Enclosure Wall, providing an

[Facing page. Figure 2.1. Plan of Building 250 and adjacent ground showing major walls and features from all periods, and the ground at the end of the excavations, except for square Q26 where an upper stage is shown. (Originals by A. Bomann)].



opportunity to link it directly to the stratigraphy of the structures built outside to the east. These turned out to be a further independent set of animal pens, of the now familiar kind. Of particular interest is the evidence for their having been in use throughout the entire length of the Village's occupation, in the course of which they were rebuilt.

The site is by no means exhausted. It is possible that we are close to the southern edge of the site, and that much of the ground between here and the Main Chapel was always open. On the east the excavations have exposed the western end to another set of pens further up the hill, and a similar exposure has been made on the north.

The work of excavation and recording was much hampered by the extensive modern digging, which, as it gradually emerged, had resulted in large pits being dug into the hard archaeological strata down to the underlying natural desert. Figure 2.7, phase D, shows how much of the original deposits remained, whilst in the section drawing, Figure 2.6, two of the pits occur as units [1650] and [1673]. These pits were filled with loose dusty sand and disturbed archaeological debris. As far as possible this loose fill, sometimes a metre thick, was removed in appropriate units until whatever survived of the original strata and structures was completely freed. After suitable recording the intact deposits were then excavated in the normal way. By the exercise of much patience and skill the loss of information caused by the modern digging was minimised. The final record, although based on a series of fragments of the site separated by robbers' pits, is sufficiently coherent to suggest that not much of significance has been lost. This is, in itself, an encouraging precedent for evaluating future excavation policy in areas where serious modern disturbance has taken place.

2.2 The Village Enclosure Wall on the east and adjacent stratigraphy

Square O26 included a five-metres stretch of Village Enclosure Wall along its west side (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). The wall had been built in two stages. A foundation trench [2064] had been dug into the sandy desert cover [1517] of bedrock [1518], and into this had been laid a low wall with an exterior batter, made from stones set in alluvial mud mortar [2065]. It was about 50 cms. high. This served as a foundation for the wall proper, 68 cms. wide, and built of alluvial mud bricks [1367]. At the northern end of this particular length a patch of bricks had later been repaired using marl mortar [2067]. This two-stage method of construction occurred also along the eastern end of the southern enclosure wall, exposed in 1981 in square N19. However, the rest of the southern wall, as far as the current excavations have revealed, was built in one piece. The wall in O26 had eventually fallen outwards, as occurred along the south, but by contrast the amount of fallen brickwork [1371] was relatively slight.

The section, Figure 2.2, shows the south face of O26 and P26, and the stratigraphic relationship between the Village Enclosure Wall and Building 250. The dense vertical shading is for the intact organic layers; the unshaded units at the east end are the result of modern disturbance. As just noted, the natural desert is represented by two units: hard marl bedrock [1518] and a deposit of

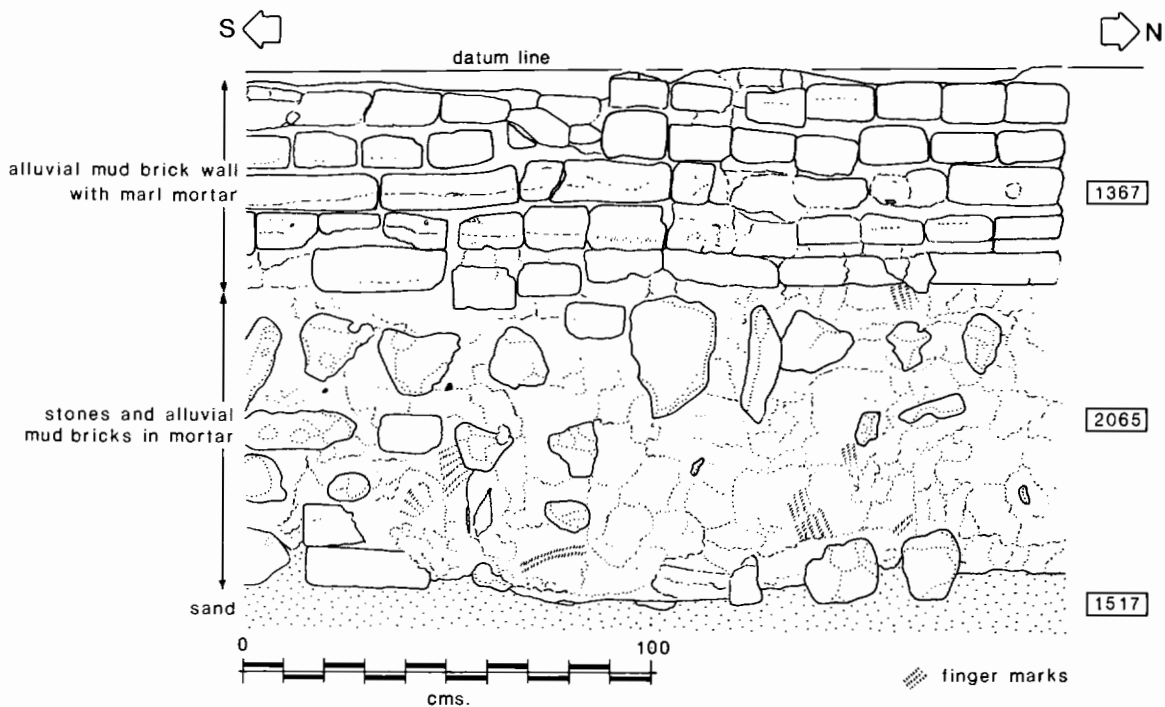


Figure 2.3. Elevation of a portion of the east face of the Village Enclosure Wall in square O26. The datum line is at 72.16 metres a.s.l. (Original by A. Bomann).

sand [1517] with occasional chaffy horizons. The foundations of the Enclosure Wall lie in a distinct trench [2064] cut into this sandy desert layer [1517]. This had filled up partly with discoloured sand but also, towards the top, with the organic rubbish [1383] that came to cover the whole area. The lowest courses of the walls of **Area i** of Building 250, walls [1382] on the west and [1376] with buttress [1840] on the east, also rest shallowly in the same sandy soil. Except in the case of the Village Enclosure Wall it was normal at the site for foundation trenches to be quite shallow. The walls of Building 250 may well, therefore, have been constructed very early in the life of the Village. Much of the organic layer [1383] accumulated after the construction of wall [1382]. Although all the organic material of this layer was removed as a single unit, the section reveals a thin sandy horizon demarcating a separate lower-lying portion on the west, the material which partially filled the Enclosure Wall foundation trench. It is possible, with hindsight, to see that this element, apart from having begun to form shortly after the Enclosure Wall was completed, may also have antedated wall [1382]. If so it could have formed during the brief life of a possible earlier building phase represented by wall [1646] to the east (see below, and Figure 2.7, phase A). Nevertheless it would still put the foundation of Building 250 proper early in the Village's life.

The same section shows dramatically the subsequent history of the building. Both inside it and outside organic rubbish accumulated, gradually burying the various walls until a decision was made to reconstruct at a higher level. The reconstruction was, however, only partial. In the case of wall [1376] the doorway was blocked up. As the photograph (Figure 2.9) shows, the height of

the wall was also increased. The thick western wall [1382], however, seems to have been left without modification. The organic deposits continued to build up. By the time of the Village's abandonment, wall [1382] must have been almost invisible. The surface of the ground in **Area i** running in a smooth and continuous slope to both west and south into the surface of the ground in front of the Village Enclosure Wall. The section also shows, by contrast, that wall [1376] was still standing when the last inhabitants left.

2.3 Building 250: the first stage and a possible predecessor

This relatively simple sequence occurs across a small part of the area which has seen little modern disturbance. The building contains many other signs of alteration, but disturbance to the ground and loss of some wall lengths make it more difficult to read the sequence directly. In the ensuing discussion the evidence from the section just described should be held in mind as a general key to what happened. An attempt has been made in Figure 2.7 to reduce the various changes to a sequence of four phases. It is desirable to equate these with the numbered sequence of phases obtained primarily from the Main Quarry sequence (Kemp 1983; *AR I*: Chapter 6). At this stage, however, we have too small a basis for linking the two closely.

Building 250 seems to have begun as a sub-rectangular enclosure, with a southern annexe of uncertain nature (phase B in Figure 2.7), all constructed of marl brick. Its western wall [1382], roughly parallel with the Village Enclosure Wall, was of two stretcher courses in thickness, as was the rear eastern wall [1643, 1660] which had been laid at an angle to the former, perhaps because of the irregular slope of the ground as it began to form the lower slope of the hill. This eastern wall showed signs of having been originally longer than the building itself. On the north the foundation courses [1645] run on for a further metre, and the same is true at the south with the 50 cms. prolongation [1836]. In both cases modern digging leaves open the possibility that brickwork has been lost. On the other hand traces of foundations in square Q26 offer another explanation. At the lowest level, again on the floor of a large modern pit, three short lengths of wall of the same twin-brick thickness [1832] occur on an alignment which is almost perpendicular to wall [1660, 1643, 1645] (Figure 2.4). Again they occur at the bottom of a modern pit so that we can assume some modern as well as ancient destruction. When we turn to the south-eastern part of the excavated area, what could be a matching fragment of a southern wall running eastwards [1658] occurs in the south-east corner of square P25. This lies close to the foot of a huge dump left over from the excavations of the 1920s and which covers much of square Q25 and the adjacent ground. In order to test the ground to see if removal of the dump was justified a two-metre square of ground in the south-west corner of Q25 was cleared. This lies next to the brickwork [1658] just mentioned. The results showed that the depth of archaeological deposit thins rapidly as the ground slopes up the hill, and that the brickwork of [1658] is not directly continued eastwards. Nevertheless it is still tempting to link up these various fragments of wall of twin-brick thickness and to see them as parts of a single rectangular enclosure laid out at a very



Figure 2.4. Wall fragments [1832] at the lowest level in **Area vi** in square Q26, looking west. The ragged edges of the adjacent dark organic deposits mark the edges of modern robbers' pits.

early stage at an angle to the line of the Village Enclosure Wall. The outline of this enclosure is given as phase A in Figure 2.7. One further piece of evidence is relevant here. In the last days of the excavation the exposure of a rubble deposit [1903] on the desert surface of **Area v** revealed a roofing fragment. The deposit as a whole probably antedates the building of the pen, and its full significance cannot be judged until the northern part of square Q25 is excavated as well. It has, however, been included as part of phase A in Figure 2.7. At the west end of the square loose grass of the kind used in roofing had been disturbed by modern robbing and had been brought up close to the modern surface (in unit [1711]). Three roofing fragments with impressions of poles and reeds also came from another adjacent disturbed deposit [1636] which lay in the southern part of **Area ii**. Whether this loose material from disturbed deposits relates to a single construction remains to be seen.

By this interpretation the main lower part of Building 250, **Areas i to iii**, was an addition to this original enclosure, an addition which utilised its west wall whilst the remainder was largely demolished. The purpose of the original enclosure is not known.

Areas i to iii formed a compact building. **Area i**, occupying more than half of the total, was itself initially subdivided into two parts by a wall [1905] which continued the dividing wall [1641] between **Areas ii** and **iii**. It was removed probably at an early stage, leaving only the lowest course of bricks. Although this course crosses **Area i** unbrokenly, it is likely that it contained a doorway above this foundation level at the west end, where bricks jut northwards as if to support door jambs. At this stage **Area iii** was already an animal pen of the familiar type, its entrance flanked by projecting buttresses [1840] and crossed by wooden poles (see Figure 2.9). This is the only one which can be recognised at this stage. **Area ii**, which subsequently served this purpose, seems initially to have been an outer court containing, in its north-east corner, the main entrance to the whole complex.

The south side of **Area i** seems to have been partly open to give access to structures now almost wholly destroyed, partly by modern robbing which was particularly intense here and partly as a result of ancient alterations. The most intact part, consisting only of foundation courses, is **Area viii**, partly surrounded by brickwork [1834] (Figure 2.5). As the section (Figure 2.6) shows, this space came to contain an organic fill [1771].

2.4 Building 250: the second stage

The earliest floor deposit in **Area i** consisted of an organic/marly mix [1820]. Patches of a more consolidated marly nature [1821] lay on top. Whilst it was being formed several modifications were made to the building. **Area i** was turned into a single court by the removal of the cross wall [1905], and given direct access to the outside through a newly constructed doorway [1522] at the northern end of the west wall [1382]. This doorway had been badly damaged by modern digging, but its flanking buttresses [1521, 1523] were definitely additions to the structure, and rested on a thin layer of the organic material that ran in front of the Village Enclosure Wall [1383]. With the creation of this new doorway we may associate the blocking of the old one in the north-east corner of **Area ii**. On the main plan (Figure 2.1) the blocking can be identified as unit [1766] in wall [1381]. To the south a more substantial change occurred. The southern wall of **Area i** was made continuous by adding a wall of stone to the existing part-wall of brick. Together they form unit [1377]. This stone wall was also continued southwards [1671] to form part of a general rebuilding of this area in a mixture of brick and stone, a change in building materials which has been encountered at other parts of the site (AR I: 5-6; 42; 78-80).

Modern robbing has devastated much of **Area vii**, as the section (Figure 2.6) shows. Although the west wall [1671] was untouched, the east wall [1589], and its southerly continuation [1651], was left as a straggling line of stones and bricks resting on an accumulation of archaeological deposit but with no original deposits on either side. What happened inside **Area vii** we can no longer tell.



Figure 2.5. **Areas vii - ix** in squares O25 and P25, looking south.

Modern digging had also undermined and removed much of the south wall [1653], although its original position is marked in broken lines on both the plan (Figure 2.1) and section (Figure 2.6). Further south still the first-phase wall [1834] was knocked down and a broader space created which consisted of **Areas viii** and **ix**. Against the new west wall [1889] a trough [1864] was constructed from stones and gypsum (Figure 2.5).

The walls of the southern group can be resolved into two enclosures, **Areas vii** and **viii/ix**, the southern end of the latter still covered by unexcavated ground. How one entered them is still not resolved. The one certain point is that there was no doorway between **Areas i** and **vii**.

Following these changes the whole area began to fill with rich organic rubbish, which accumulated in horizontal layers both inside and outside Building 250. This build-up is well illustrated in the two sections (Figures 2.2 and 2.6) and comprises units [1384], [1525], [1586], [1655] and [1652]. The top of these deposits had in some places weathered into the grey crust frequently encountered in other parts of the site (and marked on one of the sections,

Figure 2.6). Occasional thin horizontal bedding-planes of straw or sand occur haphazardly within the organic accumulations, and a more substantial feature is the base of a large pottery storage vessel [1526] set in a ring of stones. The extent of rubbish accumulation was much greater than within the animal pens which lay further away from the Village, Buildings 300 and 400. Furthermore, some of the deposits had a high sherd content, something inappropriate to waste from animal pens. It looks as if the rubbish came predominantly from within the Village, and that the area was used as a general dumping ground in the same way as was the ground in front of the Village to the south.

2.5 Building 250: the third stage

After a maximum of about 50 cms. of rubbish had accumulated a major reorganisation of the buildings was undertaken. The effect of this was to move the animal pens further back from the Village Enclosure Wall, by about three metres (Phase D in Figure 2.7). This is reminiscent of the fate of Building 350, excavated in 1980-81. It lay in front of the Walled Village, but was entirely abandoned and replaced much further back by Building 400, the remaining parts of the walls becoming completely buried in Village rubbish which was levelled to make a terrace running between the Village gateway and the Main Chapel (see *ARI*: 53-56). With our present building the open ground immediately outside the Village was similarly enlarged in extent. One reason that can be put forward is that in so doing the access to the chapel group 551-556 was improved. This group lay beyond the north-east corner of the Village and could be reached conveniently only by skirting round the east side of the Village. If, as with some of the chapels, they were built late in the Village's history this would provide the motive for the alterations to Building 250.

This displacement of the buildings involved the loss of **Areas i** and **vii** to **ix**. When excavated, the tops of the walls of the latter and wall [1382] which formed the west side of **Area i** were all flush with the top of the organic fill and must have been scarcely visible when the Village was abandoned (apparent in the sections, Figures 2.2 and 2.6). The one exception was the stone and brick wall [1377] on the south of **Area i** which, rather surprisingly, had been raised in height by the addition of brickwork along much of its length. In Figure 2.7, phase D, this short length of wall is shown as still standing, as is a slight projection of wall [1381] on the north, which was strengthened by the addition of a buttress [1647] at this high level.

Thus in the new arrangement only **Areas ii** and **iii** remained in use, and in both cases the doorways were reconstructed at a higher level, the old ones being carefully blocked up. In the case of **Area ii** the new entrance converted the area into a farrowing-pen protected by wooden cross-poles [2066] between a pair of buttresses [1642] (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). Beside the northern buttress the base of a pottery vessel was set in a ring of stones [1746], presumably as a makeshift trough. Oddly, the loss of **Area i** meant that there was no longer an outer court. Animals that emerged from **Area ii** were free to wander beside the Village Enclosure Wall. With **Area iii** the actual size of the pen was increased as well. The old east wall [1660] was knocked down and replaced by a new wall [1457]

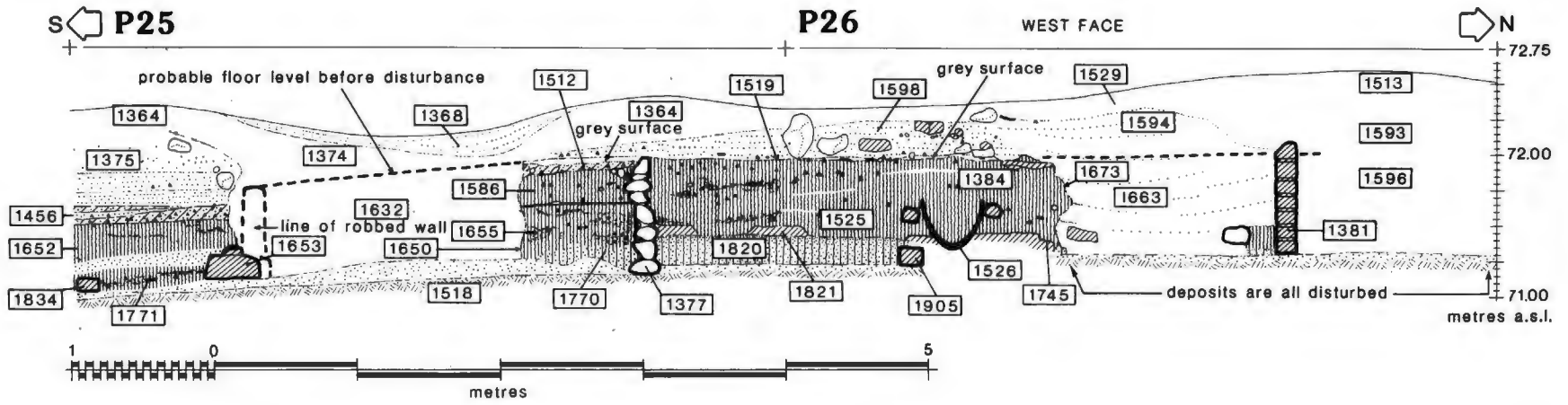


Figure 2.6. North-south section across the west face of squares P25 and P26.

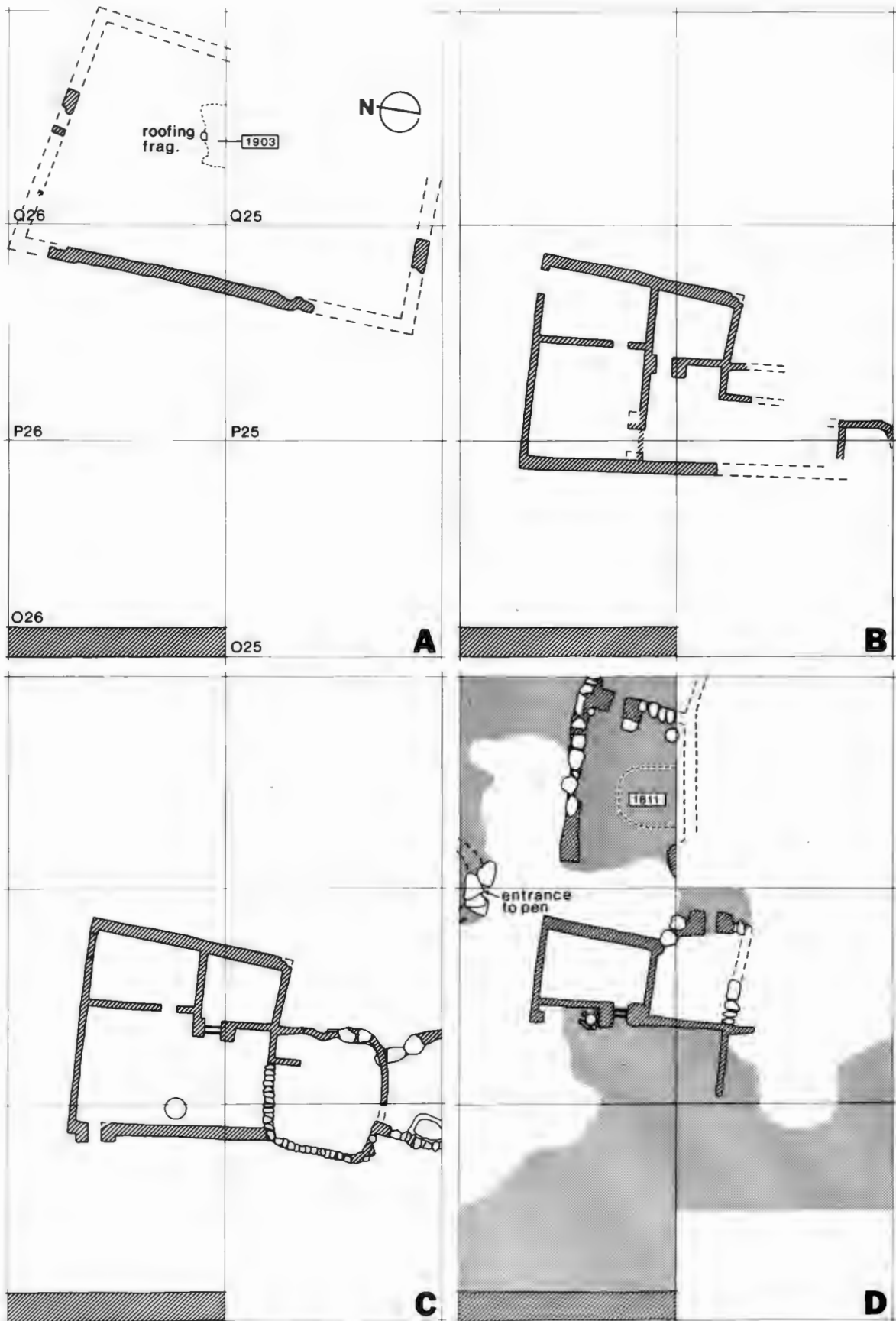


Figure 2.7. Outline plans of Building 250 at four stages of development. Shaded areas in D represent undisturbed deposits.

1985 excavation

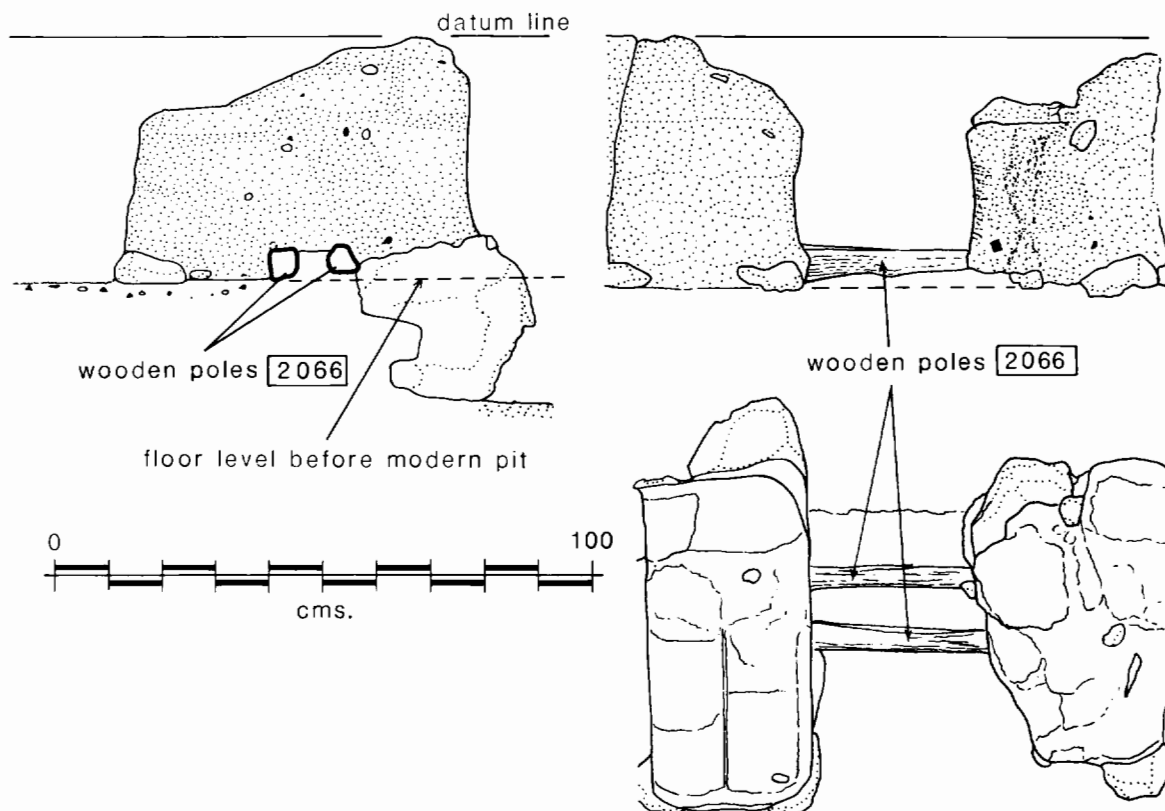


Figure 2.8. Plan and elevations of the doorway of the second phase leading into **Area ii**, in square P26. The datum line is 72.42 metres a.s.l. (Originals by A. Bomann).

further to the east, adding a new space, **Area iv**. This contained the new doorway with buttresses [1378] which now also looked east. The southern part of this wall, where it would have turned to meet wall [1825], has been lost to modern digging, which has destroyed much of wall [1825] as well. However, enough survived to show that this had been rebuilt, too, a line of stone foundations resting on the original brickwork.

One question that is difficult to answer is whether these alterations occurred in the course of a continuous history of use, or whether they represent a degree of rebuilding after a period of abandonment. By the time they were carried out the build-up of deposits inside **Areas i** to **iii** must already have rendered the doorways unusable. Indeed, in order to block up the old doors and to create the stone foundations for the new door in **Area ii** shallow holes must have been dug into the surrounding deposits. By contrast the new doorways lie at a level very close to that of the top of the ancient deposits, as is the case with the pen in square Q26, **Area v**. Thus very little debris accumulated once the third and final phase had been completed. This could be taken as a sign that the whole community moved out from the Village shortly afterwards, were it not for the fact that the doorway into **Area ii** has seen a great deal of use. This is evident from the elevation drawing, Figure 2.8, which shows how the sides of the doorway have been worn into convex faces from the repeated passage of animals between them. And it is also true that the animal pens lying further away from

the Village, primarily Buildings 300 and 400, did not see the same degree of growth in the thickness of floor deposits, presumably because they were regularly cleaned out. Either the owners of Building 250 had to fight a losing battle against the dumping of Village rubbish, or the building was abandoned for a while.



Figure 2.9. The west walls of **Areas ii** and **iii**, looking east. Note the blocked-up doorway into **Area iii** on the south, with the second-stage brickwork above, and the new doorway at higher level into **Area ii** on the north. In the background on the right are the foundations of wall [1660] and bricks and stones from the doorway [1378]. The lowest wall [1905] which subdivides **Area i** had not yet been exposed.

This phase also saw the construction of at least two new sets of pens. One occupies the southern part of square Q26 (Figure 2.10). **Area v** is the outer court, bounded on the north by wall [1795]. At the west end deep modern trenching has destroyed everything down as far as natural desert, so that it is not known if this wall joined the rear wall of **Area ii** directly, or turned southwards roughly along the line of division between squares Q26 and P26. The

1985 excavation

southern edge of the courtyard is still buried in square Q25, although its course is apparent from a line of stones visible on the surface of square Q25 not far from the edge of the excavation. Its position is marked in Figure 2.7, phase D. The brick mass [1830] might also be part of the south wall. At the eastern end is the west wall of the inner pen [1812], pierced by a gateway with flanking buttresses [1794]. The small area of exposed organic fill [1901] has still not been removed, so that the existence or otherwise of wooden cross-poles cannot be verified. As with **Areas i** and **ii**, a trough was provided beside the door in the form of a base from a pottery vessel [1847], replacing an earlier one marked by a depression in the floor [1898].



Figure 2.10. **Areas v** and **x** in square Q26, looking north, with organic floor deposit [1901] still in place.

Area v also produced a curious later deposit which runs into the unexcavated ground of Q25. A thin layer of clean sand [1792] had filled **Area v** after its use for animals had ceased. Above this lay a 15 cm. thick deposit of organic matter [1811], including ash, charcoal, straw and bristles. Its position is marked in Figure 2.7, phase D. In its appearance it resembles on a small scale the upper

midden deposit in the Main Quarry (*AR* I: 85-87, M10 levels (2) and (3)). The meaning of this deposit in terms of the history of the site is not at all clear.

At the northern junction between squares P26 and Q26 a mass of large stones [1638] projects from the section face. They form a doorway, complete with lintel, evidently the entrance to an outer court for an animal pen set lying immediately to the north. Much of the ground on which it stood [1714] has been dug away in modern times. The surface indications to the north are consistent with walls and deposits continuing in this direction for sufficient distance to account for the presence of a single set of animal pens, but probably no more than this. The surface of the ground thereafter slopes down slightly to the sandy floor of the valley. The level of the doorway and its associated patch of floor shows that it belongs to the latest phase.

Building 250 provides us with further examples of the now-familiar animal pens, but in the earliest phase in particular also with a variant of general layout, something which it shares with Building 350 excavated in 1980-81. The prime interest and importance of the site, however, lies in its chronology. Whilst not all aspects of this are yet properly understood its history does seem to confirm the evidence from Building 350 that organised pig-keeping was introduced early in the Village's life, and lasted through whatever vicissitudes there were in the community's history until the very end.