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Houses from the later Part of the Twelfth Century at Farup near Ribe, South-West Jutland

by PER KRISTIAN MADSEN

In the autumn of 1982 *Den antikvariske Samling i Ribe* undertook a series of trial excavations on various sites in the Ribe area. The excavations were made possible by a grant from Queen Margrethe II's Archaeological Fund, and were founded upon certain problems indicated by a current settlement history research project. This project, which began in the spring of 1981 and is directed by Stig Jensen, has two principal aims (Jensen 1984). The first is to establish a settlement history for the area which is the purlieu of *Den antikvariske Samling* (fig. 1), and the second to indicate which archaeological and antiquarian tasks one should seek to give priority to within this area.

It is not within the scope of the project to undertake new excavations, as it was originally restricted to work on the basis of known finds. It transpired that finds from the transitional point between the Viking Period and the Middle Ages were particularly lacking. The group of archaeologists and historians who are concerned with these periods (1) therefore indicated that it was desirable to extend the project with a series of trial excavations. Accordingly a number of sites were selected which appeared appropriate for various reasons. The excavation of one of these sites, in Nr. Farup, about 4km. north-west of Ribe (fig. 1), covered a considerably larger area than was originally planned. The reason for this was a series of good results, an account of which is given here.

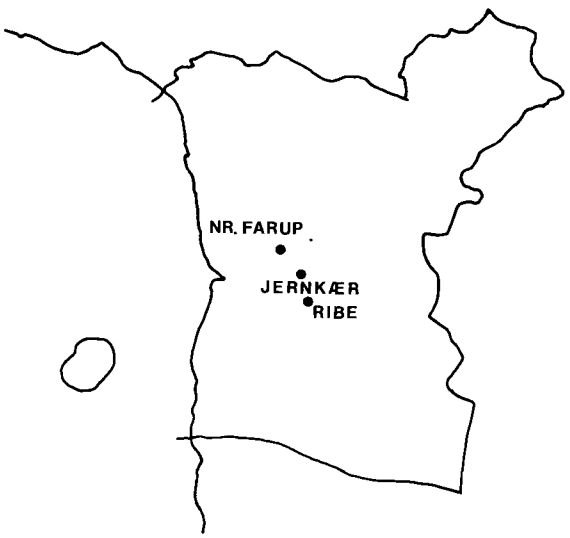

Fig. 1. The map of south-western Jutland with Ribe and *Den antikvariske Samling*'s museum district. Farup and Jernkær marked.

THE EXCAVATION

The site for excavation was chosen from an aerial photograph taken in June 1966 by Hans Stiesdal (fig. 2). The picture shows part of a field in Farup parish (Ribe herred, Ribe amt, ASR 270, sb.no. 13) between the settlements of Farup to the south and Kærbøl in the north (cf. fig. 3). Two house sites show themselves in the centre of the photograph, together with traces of several other features associated with these, including ditches. A dark blotch can be seen towards the east on the photograph which is probably the site of a more recent property which burnt down. The field itself is on the westernmost part of the *geest*, the slightly higher land which borders on the marsh, and on which the settlements in Farup parish just mentioned lie. On the survey map of 1869 (fig. 3) it can be seen that the 10' contour (1 foot = 31.4cm.) delimits the field in question towards the west and south-west almost exactly. The location of the settlements on the 1869 map is also seen on the *Videnskabernes Selskabs* map of the area of 1804. Of more recent developments only the so-called *katastrofevej* ("disaster-road"), which runs in a straight line west from Kærbøl to Tanderup, where the westernmost farms in Farup parish lie in a line on the edge of the marsh, and which to-day runs through the field in a cutting in the north, need be mentioned.

The excavation took place in September and October 1982 and lasted just 3 weeks (2). It progressed by stages: the topsoil was removed by machine, after which it was possible to shovel-scrape and to plan the features. Finds of two periods appeared: two house sites, some pits and ditches of the pre-Roman Iron Age (Asingh & Jensen 1983), and four buildings and some courses of fencing which may be dated to the second half of the 12th century. All the features were clearly detectable in the form of grey-black post-holes and features against the yellow sand of the natural. A few more recent disturbances could easily be distinguished. Only in the north-easternmost part of the excavated area were there indications that one or more post-holes may have been obliterated by ploughing.

The general plan (fig. 4) shows the excavated area, 3,000 sq.m. in all, except for a strip-trench excavated east of the east end of Building 1. The following account of the buildings uses the numbers 1 to 4 as they appear on the plan.

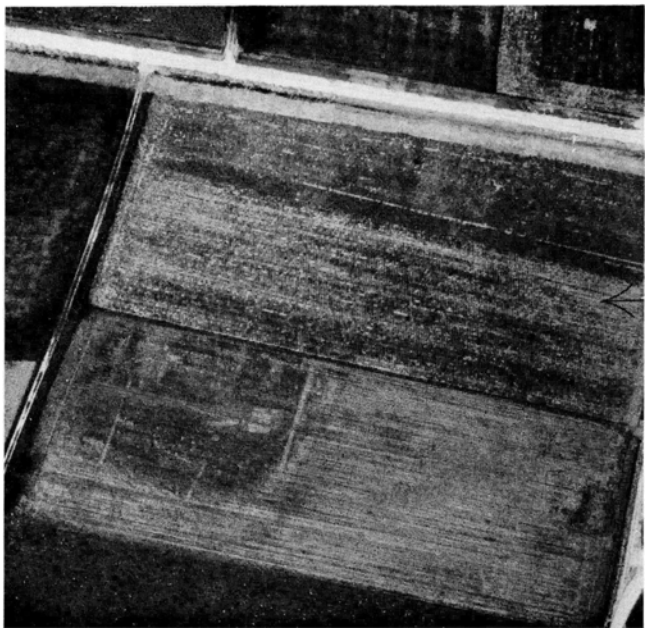

Fig. 2. Air-photograph of the site, 1966. By H. Stiesdal.

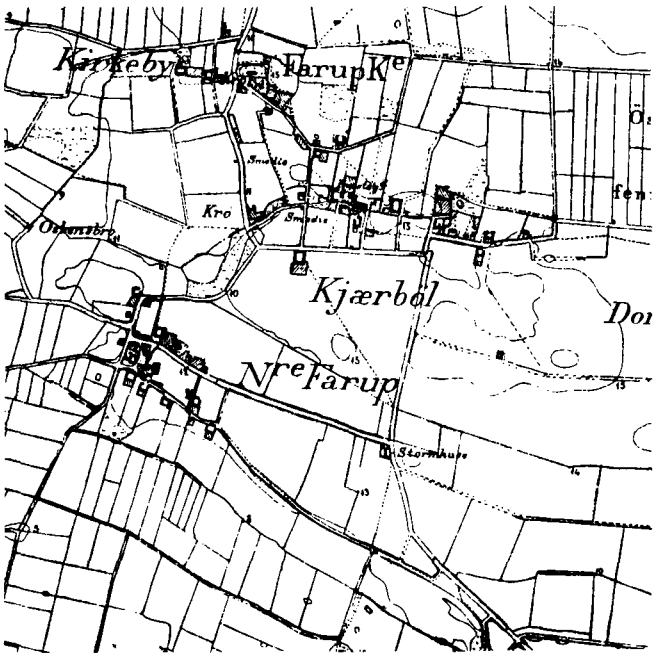

Fig. 3. Section of the Survey Map 1869. By permission A. 386/85 of the *Geodætisk Institut*. 1:25,000.

BUILDING 1 (figs. 5–7)

This building was orientated NW-SE and was about 23m. long. It has a central section, the largest part of the house, joined to which is a smaller section, slightly protruding, in the east, and an outbuilding set at an angle in the west.

The central section measures *circa* 16m. by 5, and like the eastern section was built of posts set into the ground. The three post-holes inside the central section presumably carried a partition wall of a less substantial construction than the exterior walls. The middle part of the building was thus divided into three rooms about 4, 7, and 4 meters long internally respectively. As part of the western room is included a "projection" towards the south, corresponding to the situation towards the north-east in the building.

The post-holes were U-shaped in cross-section. The two holes in the middle of the west gable show that the posts here were more substantial than those in the long walls, but taking into account the length of the house it is not likely that they were to carry a ridge beam (*ås*) running the whole length of the house. If this were the case one or more support posts would have been required, and no sign of such posts was found. None of the post-holes contained stone packing, but, as the plan also shows, in several cases their sections showed signs of recutting.

The post-holes in the side walls are situated opposite each other in pairs, but not at uniform intervals, the

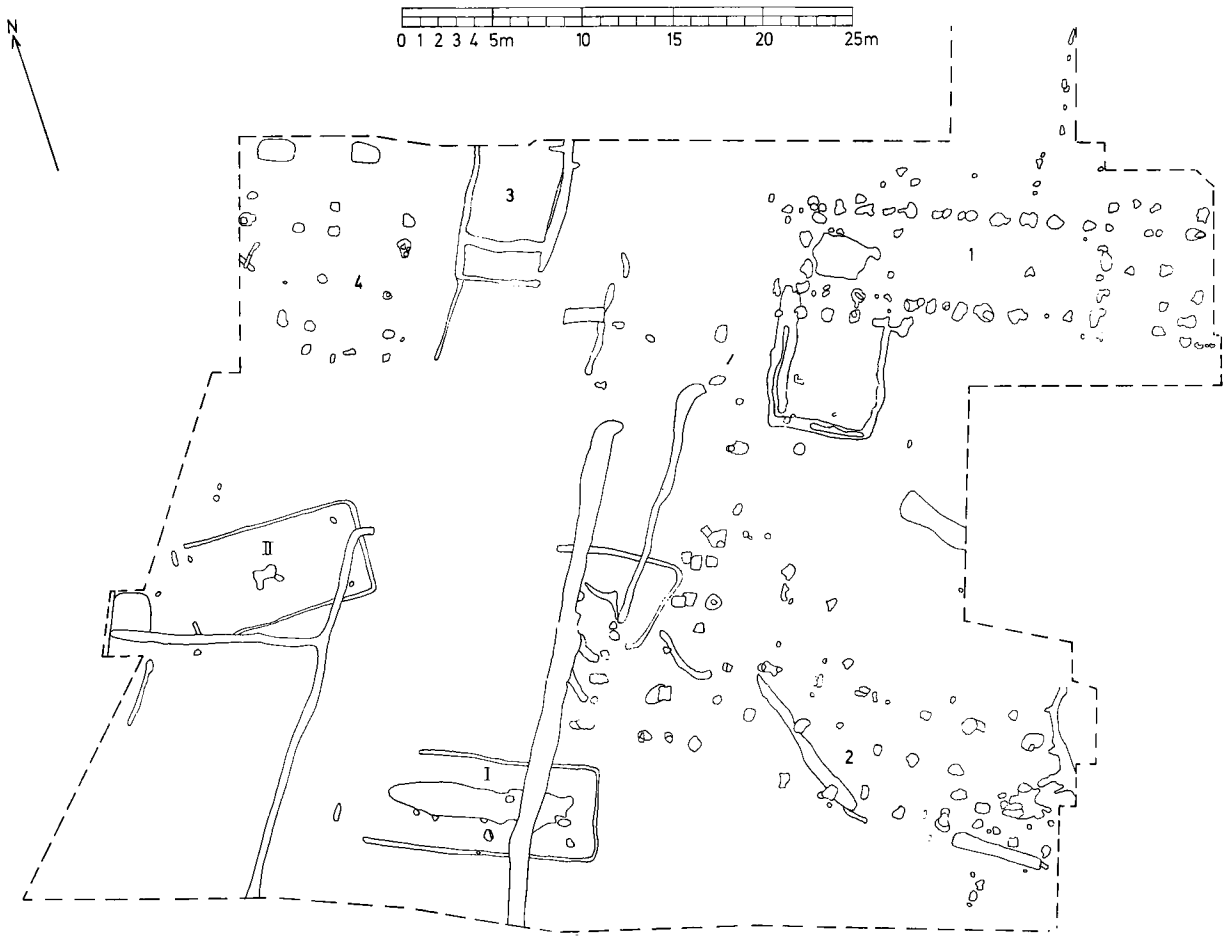

Fig. 4. General plan of the excavation including all registered features; roman numerals I-II mark houses which together with a number of pits and trenches belong to the pre-Roman Iron Age, while the 4 early medieval houses, fences and other postholes from that period are shown as number 1–4. A larger pit in the west end of house 1 is assigned to the 16. or 17. century due to the pottery evidence; it is not the fireplace of the house, as might be suggested by the plan. Pauline Asingh and Børge H. Nielsen del.

intervals varying from 1.5 to 2 meters. The wall-posts were probably joined by tie-beams across the building and one may also assume that they bore a wall-plate (*tagrem*) along the building's length. This wall-plate, besides stabilizing the rather broad bays at the top, would have assisted in carrying the roof. This is probably an example of a type of structure, in which the individual pairs of rafters would not necessarily have been placed directly above the roof-bearing wall-posts (cf. Vensild 1982).

In the eastern part of Building 1, the dimensions of the post-holes indicate that the posts used were mostly more slender than those in the adjacent part of the building. This is clearly visible in the northern row of wall-posts, where the intervals between the posts are also reduced to about 1 meter. This agrees with the idea that there is some sort of "lean-to" (*udskud*) here, as in the south-west part of the building. Thus the wall was lower, as the lean-to would be distinguished by a lower, sloping, one-sided roof connected to the presumably steeper north side of the main roof. The nave-and-side-aisle construction thus seems to be kept to in the eastern end of Building 1 too. The question arises, however, of whether this part of the building has possibly been lower than the adjacent section to the west, and whether this is in fact an extension. In either case the uppermost part of the wall between the two sections could have stood open and visible above the roof of the east end of the house.

In this particular wall in fact, according to the evidence of the post-holes, certain peculiar phenomena are in operation which, on the basis of a possibly

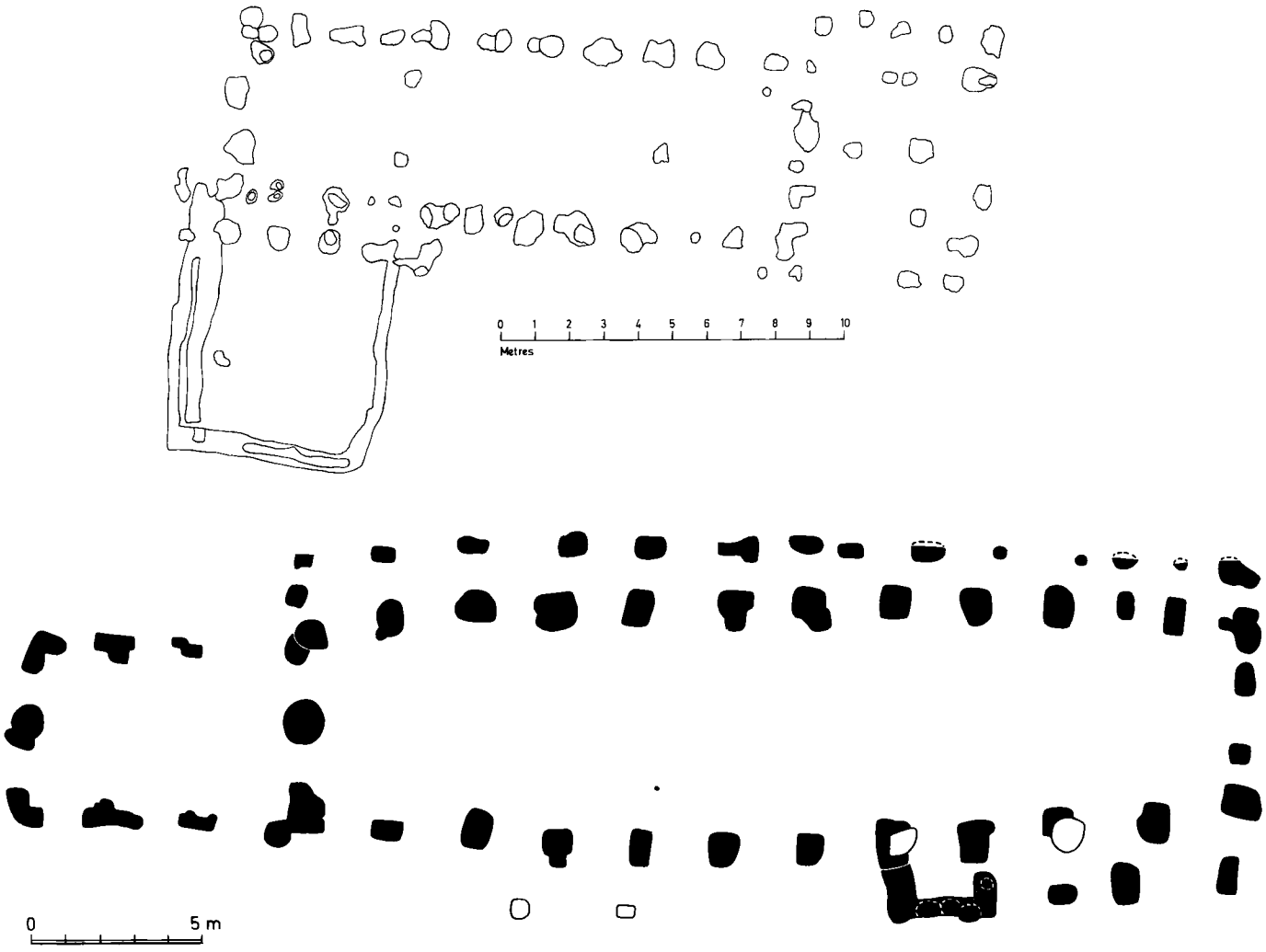

Fig. 5. Building 1: (above) general plan (Børge H. Nielsen del.), and (below) plan of Waterbolk & Harsema 1979, building 87.

slightly risky interpretation, may reveal further features of the building's construction. It appeared that at least three of the posts in this wall had been renewed (fig. 6). This replacement however did not affect the post A5 which is immediately recognizable as the corner-post at the intersection of the north and east walls. This post, however, seems strikingly slender in its size if it were supposed to be a proper corner-post. On the other hand post-hole A37 north of A5 does correspond to the dimensions of the holes of the roof-bearing wall-posts in the central section of the building. If both the side- and gable-walls were topped off by a beam, it is conceivable that these beams were jointed together at the corners of the building, where the post A5 would thus have functioned as a supporting-post for them, and that both beams would further have continued beyond the corner, the beam of the gable-wall on to the more substantial post A37, while the side-wall-beam could have gone on from A5 to the post in post-hole A42 in the east end of the building. This is a span of about 5 meters, and smaller posts in post-holes A49/A50 could have supported the beam along this length. As the corner construction is remarkably slight, it is feasible that it has been built after the nave-and-side-aisle principle with a head-plate (*højrem*), and this could also be taken as evidence that the eastern and the central sections of Building 1 were erected simultaneously.

In the eastern gable of Building 1 only the very bot-

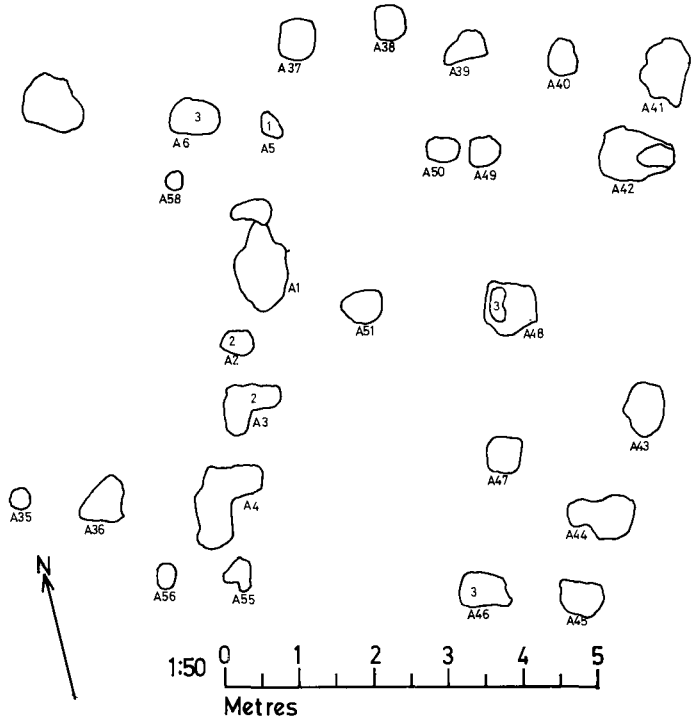

Fig. 6. Plan of the east end of house 1 showing all details, and the excavation numbers as refered to in the text. 1: Pottery, 2: Wattle-and-daub, 3: Stone. Pauline Asingh and Børge H. Nielsen del.

toms of the post-holes found had survived ploughing. It is therefore not impossible that one or more posts stood in the open section of the wall which can be seen on the plan (fig. 5). The southern wall was apparently of lighter construction, and runs about half-a-meter south of the long-wall in the central part of the house. How probable it is that the almost 3m.-broad gap between the two westernmost posts in the south wall show a door-opening is uncertain. Such a feature is, however, visible in the post-holes within the building, which must have carried a partition wall which marked off a room about 3 × 3.5m. large in the south-western corner of the east end of the building. However these posts

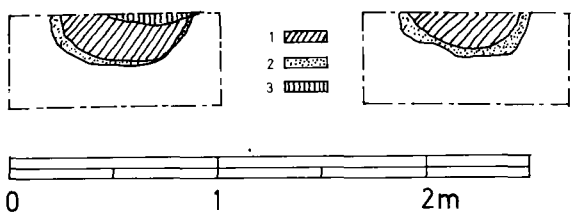

Fig. 7. Two sections in the turf-filled trenches in the south-west part of house 1. 1: blackish-grey sand humus. 2: lightgrey leached sand. 3: layer of turfs, black and greasy. Per Kristian Madsen and Børge H. Nielsen del.

should perhaps be seen as part of a secondary phase, possibly in connection with the replacement of the three posts in the wall between the eastern and central sections. These post-holes were the most productive of finds in the whole building, which may be the result of cutting through a refuse- or floor-layer created during the period of use of the building when secondary construction was underway.

There remains the western wing, which measured about 6m. square. This was represented by a turf- and humus-filled trench of varying breadth and depth in the natural sand (fig. 7). The trench connects with the south-western lean-to and it is difficult to decide whether this is an original part of the building or a later addition. It is certainly not older, amongst other reasons because a northern boundary to the area the trench encloses is totally lacking. The trench corresponds to the structure which is designated Building 3 on the plan. In either case the trench appears too slight to carry a wall entirely made of turf, even though, as far as Building 1 is concerned, this could have been lower than the rest of the building. It is not totally impossible that the trenches are the remains of so-called *træk*: low enclosure- and insulation walls of piled up turf, placed on the outside of a wooden wall. But if this were the case it would be remarkable that anyone should go to the trouble of creating foundations for such walls in ground trenches, even though they were not to bear any of the weight of the roof.

The trenches should probably be regarded as some sort of foundation-trenches for a timber structure which was probably not firmly founded in the ground itself. The surviving turf-fill could be remains of a low "foundation wall" under a now lost base-frame of timber construction (ground plate). Not the slightest trace of posts either in or beside the trenches belonging to Buildings 1 and 3 could be found either by trowelling-down or by sectioning. Similar turf-filled trenches were found on a minor excavation in Darum parish in 1982 (ASR 190) and during the excavation of a late-Medieval/Renaissance-period settlement at Tangen by Tjæreborg, east of Esbjerg, and layers of turf were used as a filling in foundation-trenches under the Cistercian church in Løgum after the year 1225 (Sterum 1976, 1977). The use of grass and mud turves is also well-known in the stone-impoverished west and south-west of Jutland, for instance in the construction of Medieval fortifications (mottes) (Stiesdal 1983).

A find from Bryggen in Bergen, Norway, may possibly indicate what sort of timber structure may in the given case have been built over such turf foundations, even though turf foundations were not used in this example. This is the lower part of a house which was dated by the excavators to after a town-fire of 1332. The house rested upon a framework of lafted logs without a foundation in the ground. The rigidity of the walls, which were built of horizontal planks, was maintained by angled braces between the corner-posts and the base-frame (Reimers 1982 fig. 2). In the case of Building 1 at Farup, junction with the rest of the building would have contributed greatly to stability. This suggested reconstruction is little different in principle from more recent half-timbered houses on foundation-stones. Perhaps we have here a transitional form between earth-fast posts and the use of a filling, which is peculiar to the stone-impoverished south-west of Jutland.

For the parts of Building 1 which are not founded on turves very persuasive parallels can be found in the Dutch village of Gasselte where a whole series of farms with similar buildings have been excavated (cf. fig. 5,2). As at Farup these are probably examples of nave-and-side-aisle construction, with "lean-tos" outside parts of the side walls, lesser stretches of which can also be founded in wall-trenches such as appear in the south-western projection at Farup. The houses in question are dated to the 11th and 12th centuries. The latest finds at Gasselte are from the mid-12th century (Waterbolk & Harsema 1979, type B, p. 255f). Turf-filled trenches are not reported from Gasselte. There are many indications that buildings of this type are essential for the understanding of the development of house plans and construction, not only in the Netherlands and North West Germany, but also in Scandinavia (cf. Näsman 1983) where Building 1 at Farup seems so far to be unique in representing this building-type.

Whether its occurrence in the Ribe area is due to a specific knowledge of the house types of the Low Countries, or whether it is an expression of common traditions of house building along the southern coast of the North Sea, is uncertain. In this connection it is worth noting that buildings with lean-to side-buildings occur at Gasselte somewhat later than houses with the same feature at Telgte in Westphalia from the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th centuries, being possibly later than the use of this house type in the area of the Lower Rhine. However, the lean-to on the Westphalian houses runs around almost the whole of the building, prefiguring, it seems, the three-aisled so-called *Hallenhaus* of North West Germany (Reichmann 1982 p. 170 with references). The question is, whether the Gasselte houses, and especially our house at Farup, should also, and exclusively, be seen in this context. If this is so, may we expect to find three-aisled houses of Early Medieval date in southwestern Jutland and possibly also further north, where houses with vall plate construction and lean-to side-buildings are known from more recent times? (cf. Vensild 1982).

BUILDING 2 (figs. 8–9)

Building 2 measures *circa* 26m. × 6, and was recognized in three parallel rows of post-holes. The building, orientated NNW-SSE, lay 10 to 12m. south of Building 1 (figs. 2 & 4). The post-holes were remarkably clear in the sand, and there were no significant disturbances. The gap in the two southern rows may be considered to be original in that there may have been an opening for a gateway in the south side of the building. Across the building the posts stood in rows of three, but the interval is not the same throughout the building. The western gable is more solidly constructed, with five posts set in the ground. Sections in the west gable and several other parts of the building show that the post-holes were upto 1 meter deep below the uncovered surface. Figure 9 shows the section of one of the posts in the western gable. The profile of the decomposed post is clearly visible, and shows that it was 20cm. square in cross-section. The end of the post itself, of oak, was preserved in the bottom of the post-hole, and dendrochronological analysis, undertaken by the Wormianum, determined that the outermost preserved ring of this piece of wood was formed in the year 1141. 20–25 years should be added to this date to compensate for the section of the timber planed away, indicating that 1161–66 are the earliest conceivable felling dates.

It is clear from the section that this is the primary post in the post-hole, the post which was placed there when the building was built and not during a later repair. It can be seen that the trace of the decomposed part of the post is preserved above the remaining fragment of wood to the top of the section: the post therefore has not been uprooted, and similarly there are no signs of recuts by the side of the original posts in any of

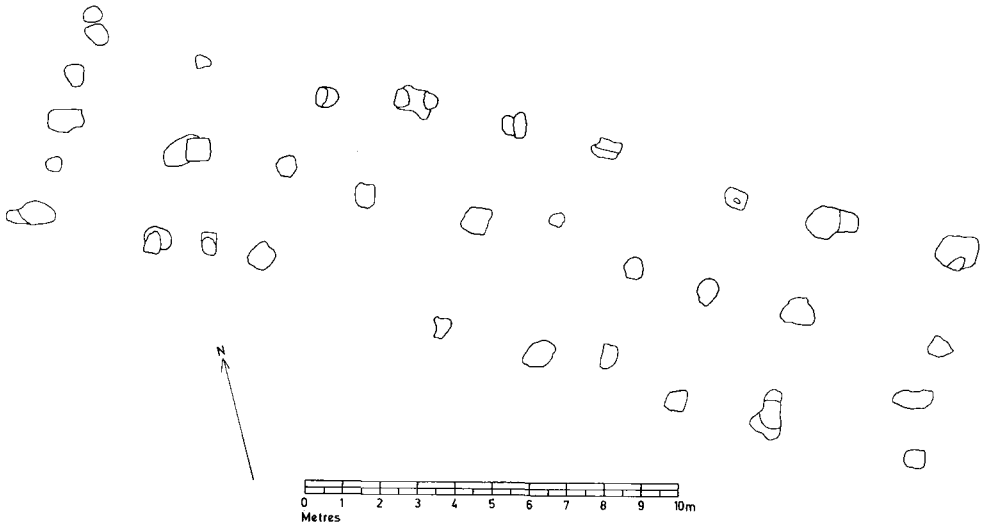

Fig. 8. Building 2: general plan. (Børge H. Nielsen del.)

the post-holes. On the other hand in several places (cf. fig. 2) the original post-hole was cut by a regular four-sided feature cut in towards the centre of the earlier hole, as can be seen to the right on fig. 9. The obvious interpretation is that someone has dug in towards the post from the then ground surface, presumably because the post was rotten and needed replacing. If the cuts were of this kind, the replaced posts must have been placed upon stones or wooden beam pieces, not sunk into the ground like their predecessors which were apparently left to rot *in situ*. An alternative explanation is that the cuts are associated with the demolition of the house, with the timber from it required for re-use, possibly to re-erect the building as a whole on a new sort of foundation.

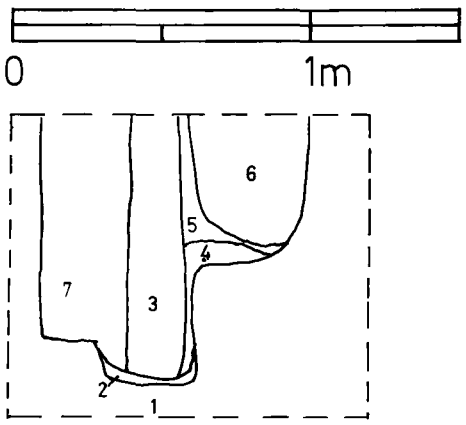

Fig. 9. Building 2: section of post-hole with preserved wood. 1, yellow sandy subsoil. 2, sandy silt. 3, imprint of post with preserved wood. 4, dark brown fill. 5, yellow sand. 6, dark brown fill with a few black patches. 7, Fill with white, black, and dark brown banded layers. Pauline Asingh and Børge H. Nielsen del.

The different fills of the post-hole in fig. 9 and the form of the feature itself give further information on the technique employed in erecting the post. Its end was placed in a narrow hole in the bottom of the 1m.-broad hole, on a thin layer (fig. 9,2) of infallen fill. We can picture to ourselves that as the post was erected a man stood on the ledge to the left in the hole to direct the post into its place. It was held fast in the hole by trodden-in fill of various sorts, nos. 5, 4 and 7 on fig. 9. This procedure is hardly unusual in itself, but with regard to the question of the reconstruction of Building 2 it is worth assessing whether there might be a case for the erection of whole timber sections prefabricated on the ground, not just single posts. It may be added that similar large post-holes have been observed in several places in buildings which like Building 2 must be from the 12th century (Madsen & Petersen 1983, building II; cf. the postulated long-houses at Andersminde, Stummann Hansen 1982, and on Okholm, Bencard 1969).

Building 2 is to be reconstructed either as a 2- or a 4-aisled building. In the former case, the middle row of posts would have borne a central ridge-beam (*midtås*) the length of the building to support the roof, while the outer post-rows would belong to the construction of the walls themselves. The alternative is that each of the three post-rows bore a ridge-beam and that the outer side walls were constructed in such a way as to leave no

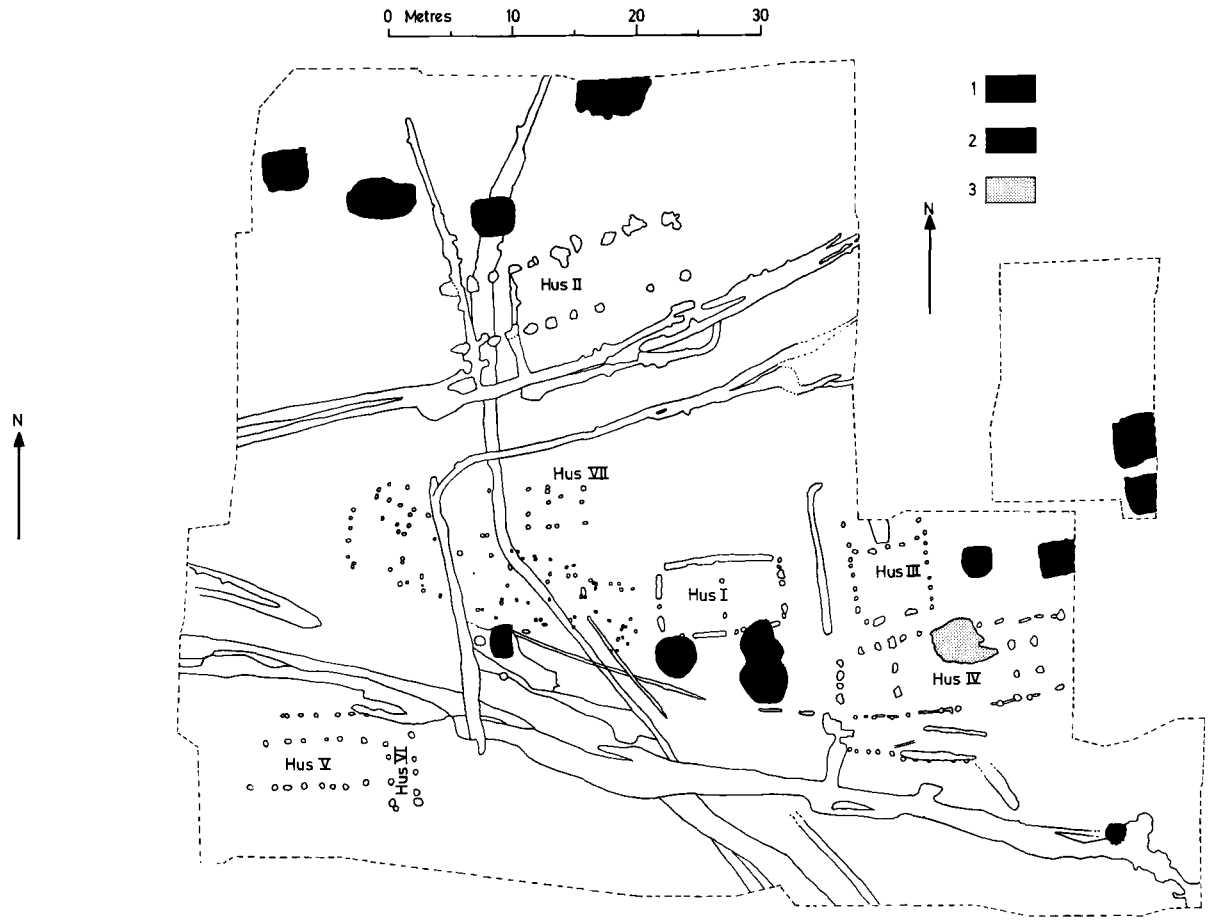

Fig. 10. General plan of the excavation at Jernkær, 1982. 1, well. 2, sunken hut. 3, pit. Jens Erik Petersen and Børge H. Nielsen del.

trace in the ground. The apparent opening in the south may support the 2-aisle theory.

Accordingly, this would well be a ridge-post construction (*sulehus*), related to the nave-and-side-aisle principle of Building 1, although not the same. There is some evidence that Building 2 had a hip-roof, i.e. the markedly much broader outer sections at either end of the building. Furthermore, it appeared from the sectioning of the trench system which runs immediately upto the western end of the building (fig. 4) that the two short trenches which run at an angle out from the east side of the principal trench outside the gable incline away from it. This must indicate that the trenches' purpose was to carry away water which ran down from the hipped end of the roof. This western end was particularly exposed to wind and the elements, and was subject to a great deal of rainwater.

Buildings of the same type and size, and the same date as Building 2 have not hitherto been found in the Ribe area. Amongst the buildings excavated in the deserted medieval village of Jernkær between Farup and Ribe (figs. 1 & 3) are two (fig. 10 buildings I and III) in which the roof must have rested upon a ridge-beam. Both these buildings however, according to the finds, belong to the late Viking Period (Madsen & Petersen 1983). The medieval buildings at Jernkær (fig. 10 nos. II, V and VI) already have roof-bearing wall-posts and rafters; these include the building at Jernkær (no. II) which at *circa* 20m. × 6 approaches the size of Building 2 at Farup. A series of buildings probably from the second half of the 12th century at Bulagergård by Veerst all had roof-bearing wall-posts (Adamsen 1982, 1983). From the excavations of the medieval settlements on Falster, both buildings with roof-bearing posts in the walls and ridge-post buildings are known. These buildings are however significantly later than the Jutish buildings referred to (Hansen 1982). From more recent times ridge-post buildings are known, amongst

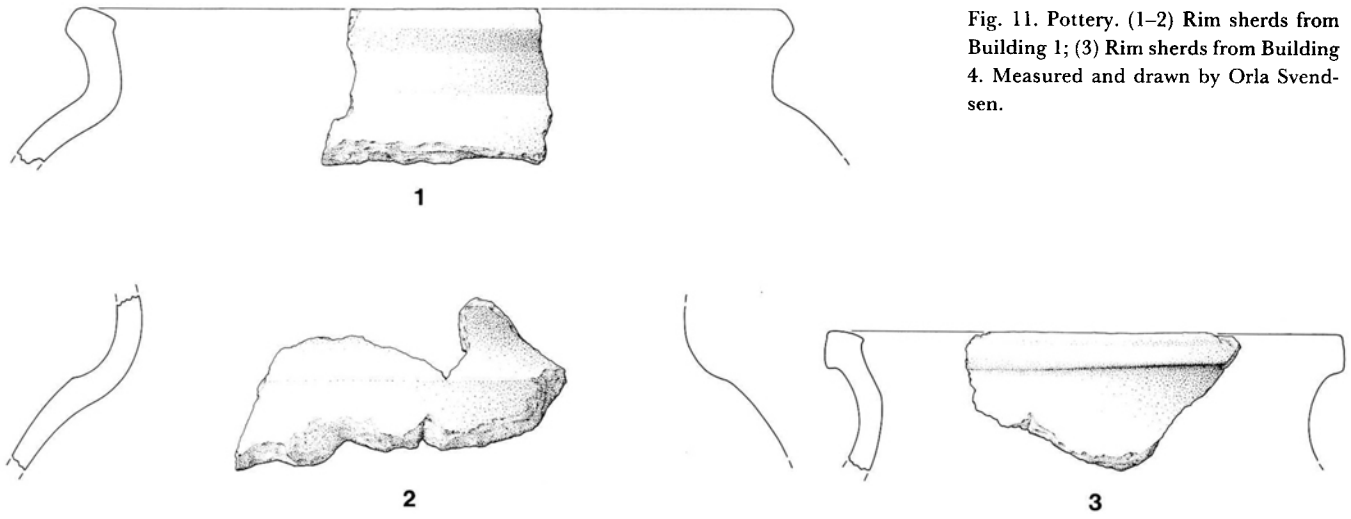

Fig. 11. Pottery. (1–2) Rim sherds from Building 1; (3) Rim sherds from Building 4. Measured and drawn by Orla Svendsen.

other places, from Fyn, where so far two buildings have been excavated of the type with central posts. They are dated by the excavator to the first half of the 14th century and about 1500 respectively (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1981). Finally the buildings discovered in excavations at Pebringe and Store Valby on Sjælland should be mentioned, amongst which there are examples with ground-set ridge-post construction (Steensberg 1952; Steensberg & Østergaard Christensen 1974).

BUILDING 3

The structure designated Building 3 was only partially excavated (fig. 4) and its turf-filled trench has already been discussed in connection with Building 1. Sectioning and area-stripping showed that the southernmost part of the structure with an opening direct into the open area is a later addition, as this part of the trench cuts the south-western corner of the earlier trench. Perhaps what has been uncovered is part of a building comparable to Building 1. The structure cannot be seen on the air-photograph of 1966 (fig. 2), and a possible extension towards the north lies on an area of the field where crops in the year in question did not show marks of house sites.

BUILDING 4

This building was situated to the west of Building 3, but the relationship between the two was not apparent. The building appeared in the form of two parallel rows of five posts each, placed opposite each other in the 5m.-broad building. The length was about 8 meters. The distances of the intervals varies greatly and the small end-intervals might indicate that the building did not have a hip-roof. Like many of the buildings referred to in connection with Building 2, the roof of Building 4 must have been borne by the wall-posts. These may have been connected by tie-beams, and it seems most reasonable to reconstruct the roof as rafter-built.

DATING

The dendrochronological dating of one of the original posts in Building 2 shows that at the earliest it was built in the 1160's. The few, crushed pottery fragments which were found in some of this building's post-holes do not contribute anything more to this dating.

A number of body sherds and two rim sherds of medieval globular pots came from Building 1 (fig. 11,1–2). Most sherds, including the two rim sherds, were found in the post-holes of the eastern part of the building, where the posts have either been replaced or could have been put in later. The pottery could therefore be later than the date of the building's construction, in the suggested case belonging to its period of functioning. In material, firing and rim-form the clay material corresponds to what is dated to the second half of the 12th century or *circa* 1200 in the context of the town of Ribe

(Madsen 1982). The same goes for the body and rim sherds from the south-western cornerpost in Building 4 (fig. 11,3). Reference may further be made to more voluminous finds from the Jernkær excavation, where the same dating is probable (Madsen & Petersen 1983).

There are thus grounds for believing that the excavation has revealed parts of one or more farms in the 12th-century Farup parish. Since several things, amongst others the very few replacements of posts and the possible removal of Building 2 by demolition, suggest a relatively short functioning life for the buildings found, these may have gone out of use around or very shortly after the year 1200. They were used and probably abandoned within the same period as when the great tufa and brick church in Farup was under construction. There is however no necessary case for more comprehensive changes in the parish which could be associated with the building of the church. The placement of a church – of timber – on the relevant site could go further back than the excavated buildings, the removal of which could result from the relocation of buildings within a unit which is much larger than the area uncovered in the excavation. It may alternatively be that an individual farm within a common group was moved, in connection with a redistribution of land (cf. Madsen 1985).

In whatever case, we may assume that in the buildings excavated some of the people lived and worked who saw the building of the church, and perhaps were directly involved in it. A great deal happened in the Danish villages in the period which has been uncovered here at Farup, and the answer to many a question like those outlined above can be pursued through a continuation of the excavations.

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NOTES

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1. Leif Chr. Nielsen, Aage Andersen, Henrik Fangel, Per Kristian Madsen, and Ebbe Nyborg.
2. Pauline Asingh, Stig Jensen, Claus Feveile, Teddy Jessen, and the author participated in the excavation.

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