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An Archaeological Evaluation At Coate's Barn, Greinton

December 1999

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An archaeological evaluation of land adjoining Coate's Barn, Greinton, Somerset

1.0 Introduction

1.1: An application to Sedgemoor District Council to erect a dwelling within the village of Greinton (Planning Application ref. 1/30/99/004), prompted a recommendation from Somerset County Council's Field Archaeologist that an archaeological field evaluation should be carried out prior to a decision on the application. This recommendation follows central government advice as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance on Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16), Department of the Environment 1990. In accordance with a Specification (*Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation Proposed Dwelling on Land Adjoining Coat's Barn, Greinton*) provided by the Environment and Property Department, Somerset County Council, and upon the instruction of the Client, Susan Burrett, the field evaluation reported on here was undertaken early in December 1999.

2.0 The site

2.1: The development site is currently a garden plot within the village of Greinton (NGR ST 41283636), lying between Coate's Barn and Coate's Farm, and adjacent to the church of St Michael (Fig.1). It lies within an Area of High Archaeological Potential, which relates to a possible area of medieval settlement at the core of the village. There are no records of archaeological remains from this site or its near environs within the village, as documented by the Somerset County Sites and Monuments Record. The modern village lies at the foot of the southern slopes of the Polden Hills, astride the main route linking Taunton and Glastonbury (A361), and overlooking the levels of King's Sedge Moor.

3.0 The evaluation

3.1: The objectives of the field evaluation were as set out in the Specification document, 6.1 and 6.2. In this instance, the proposals for development of the site could damage or destroy archaeological remains which may be present, and the evaluation was designed to provide more specific information on the presence, character and preservation of any such remains, prior to the granting of a planning consent.

3.2: The application of non-invasive, surface survey methodologies was not appropriate in this case (e.g. aerial survey, geophysical prospection, surface collection, etc.), and it was proposed that a trench be excavated within the footprint of the proposed dwelling and garage. This was undertaken in accordance with the Schedule of Works outlined in the site Specification, and in the *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset* Somerset County Council, March 1995.

3.3: A trench 14m long and up to 2m wide was cut on a north-south alignment to correspond with the long axis of the proposed building, with the aid of a mechanical excavator. Hand cleaning and definition of archaeological features and deposits permitted their further investigation by sample excavation, collection of finds, and the creation of a written, graphic and photographic record (Fig. 2). This archive of finds and records forms the basis for this report and will be deposited with the Somerset County Museum.

4.0 Results

4.1: The lower limit of excavation was determined by the presence of the natural geological formation of Triassic Keuper Marl or Mercian Mudstone; seen as a weathered level horizon of red-brown mudstone with pale green bands. This occurred at around 18.0m AOD and generally just over 1.0m below the modern surface. Above this horizon an accumulation of up to 0.4m of gritty, buff-red-brown clay (1008) contained occasional fragments of Roman pottery, animal bone, and charcoal flecks. This deposit survived best at the south end of the trench, but was truncated or cut away in places by a series of later archaeological features, particularly to the north (Figs. 2a and b).

4.2: The earliest features were two parallel ditches (F105 and F106) and a small pit (F102), in the southern half of the trench. Both ditches were approximately 0.4m deep, with steep sides and virtually flat bottoms cut into the top of the natural mudstone, although the full width of F105 at the south extremity of the trench was not seen. A later ditch F100 had truncated what appeared to be the base of a slightly deeper cut, bowl-shaped pit (F102). All three primary features contained similar clay-silt fills incorporating occasional fragments of animal bone, Romano-British pottery, charcoal, and pieces of Lias limestone. Two iron objects were recovered from the fill of F105.

4.3: A shallow, steep-sided and almost flat-bottomed cut (F100), aligned virtually north-south, was traced for over 8m along the east side of the trench before disappearing beneath that baulk. This appeared to be the west edge of a broad, shallow ditch of unknown width, cut away to the north by the later cut F103. Where sampled, its clay-silt fill contained scatters of Lias stone, charcoal, occasional weathered fragments of both Roman and medieval pottery, and a few pieces of animal bone.

4.4: The latest group of features occupied the northern half of the trench, of which the earliest was the south-west edge of a deep cut into the natural mudstone (F103). This appeared to be part of a large ditch or pit on a south-east – north-west alignment, whose full depth (over 1.5m) was not reached. Successive fills of stony rubble and dark brown clay-soil included fragments of early 19th-century glass, pottery, and some animal bone. The lowest deposit of clay-soil appeared to be contiguous with the fill of a shallow sloping depression, F101, which was cut into the layer 1008 along the west baulk of the trench. The upper soil fill of the cut F103 was almost indistinguishable from a deep (up to 0.5m) overlying deposit of humic dark brown clay-soil (1001), the bulk of which was removed by machine excavation. Set within this layer and sealed by the turf and topsoil, were mortared Lias stone wall foundations (F104), a large Lias flagstone, and to the south a spread of mortar, gravel and some mortared brick courses exposed in the east baulk of the trench. One north-south section of a wall foundation, almost 2m. long, was bonded with parallel foundations continuing east for an unknown distance; suggesting three sides of a small square or rectangular structure. These were removed by machine within the trench to reveal a fine dark brown silty soil (1009) containing some fragments of 19th or early 20th-century glass and pottery, apparently contained within the walls but continuing to a lower level beneath them.

4.5: A modest assemblage of finds was collected, but some datable material was present in almost all contexts sampled. Of 18 sherds of Roman pottery recovered, 14 were of Dorset Black Burnished ware, though none are closely datable. Three sherds of greyware were probably of a more local fabric, and included a large rim from a narrow-necked storage jar. One small plain sherd of Central Gaulish samian could not be identified to a specific form. This material was collected from the ditches F100, F105 and F106, and from the subsoil deposit 1008. There were also 18 sherds of unglazed medieval coarsewares, probably from cooking pots, but none

closely dateable between the 12th and 14th centuries. The bulk of this pottery was obtained from the ditches F100 and F103. Much of both the Roman and medieval ceramics occurred as small and moderately abraded sherds. A small group of post-medieval glazed earthenwares and dark green glass wine bottle fragments was recovered from the ditch F103 and the overlying layer 1001, though not all was retained. Animal bone survived well in all contexts and a small assemblage was kept – primarily from the earlier ditch and pit features.

5.0 Interpretation

5.2: Evidence for three main phases of earlier activity at this locality has been distinguished by the site evaluation, although the restricted scale of the investigation limits their interpretation. The parallel ditches F105 and F106, and the pit F102 may represent a primary phase of apparent Romano-British occupation. Although subjected to only limited exposure, the shape of the ditches suggest trenches cut for timber base-plates to support part of a substantial timber-frame building. All three features were cut into a subsoil deposit (1008) which almost certainly represents the Romano-British ground level. A third ditch (F100) was of similar character to F105 and F106 and cut to a similar depth, but contained some pottery of medieval date. Its physical relationship with those ditches was not observed, but all appear to have been cut from the same level and may in fact be contemporary elements of a postulated building. If this is the case, the presence of medieval pottery in F100 suggests an alternative interpretation; i.e., that these ditches are remains of a medieval structure, and that the Roman pottery within their fills is all residual – derived perhaps from the subsoil layer 1008.

5.3 Two phases of much later activity were also represented. The earliest is the pit or ditch F103, dated by finds of pottery and glass to the early 19th century, although its purpose is otherwise unknown. At a higher level, the remains of a small stone and brick building (F104) probably represent an outhouse belonging to a later 19th or early 20th-century dwelling – possibly housing a latrine.

5.2 The discovery of evidence for both Romano-British and medieval occupation on this site is of considerable interest, despite the ambiguity in determining a date for the remains found and their relatively modest character. If of medieval date, evidence for a timber-framed structure located within what was probably one of a group of plots or tofts, would accord with a predicted layout of such properties around the medieval village core and its church. Such expectations were, indeed, a principal factor in the designation of this area as one of High Archaeological Potential.

5.3 Should these remains, alternatively, represent Romano-British occupation it will be more difficult to predict its former extent and character. Whatever their interpretation, the presence of Roman pottery is a strong indicator of settlement remains somewhere in the near vicinity. Despite the lack of previous records, the presence of such remains beneath or in close proximity to the historic centre of Greinton village need occasion no surprise. Roman finds from in and around medieval village centres is a widespread phenomenon, both in Somerset and further afield. Detailed study is beginning to reveal the density and complexity of Romano-British rural settlement patterns and their relationship to medieval successors; and nowhere better perhaps than in the neighbouring village of Shapwick on the other side of the Polden Hills (Aston, M. and Gerrard, C. 1999 'Unique, Traditional and Charming', The Shapwick Project, Somerset' *The Antiquaries Journal* 79, 1-58).

6.0 *Conclusions and Recommendations*

6.1: An evaluation by means of trial trenching at Coate's Barn has revealed evidence for both Romano-British and medieval occupation in this part of Greinton, as well as some remains of post-medieval date. Despite the limited scale of investigation and some uncertainties over the interpretation of data recovered, there is good reason to suppose that further remains of all three periods survive in this locality. Should the suspected structural evidence prove to be of medieval date it may indicate the survival of building plans and toft layouts in places within or around the modern settlement, particularly at those road frontage sites not currently occupied by buildings. On this site, and in the adjacent paddock to the south, a slightly raised platform is apparent, lying parallel to, but set back several metres from the modern road to the west; a feature which may signify the survival of medieval settlement remains elsewhere in the village.

6.2: The survival of a Romano-British soil horizon above the natural, if not the presence of structural evidence, should signify a much more extensive survival of contemporary settlement remains elsewhere in and around the village. However, without more evidence it is impossible to predict its further extent or character in this locality.

6.3: The demonstration of surviving Romano-British and medieval remains on this site is of considerable archaeological interest, although their intrinsic quality is of a relatively low order. In these circumstances, and given the scale of projected development, no great additional loss of archaeological data is anticipated to arise from it proceeding. However, any necessary excavation for foundations or services which exceed a depth of 1m below the modern surface have the potential to encounter more remains here, and possibly illuminate further the evidence already obtained by the evaluation. It may therefore be prudent to make some provision by way of a watching and recording brief during the course of such excavation works on the site.

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COATE S' BARN , GREINTON

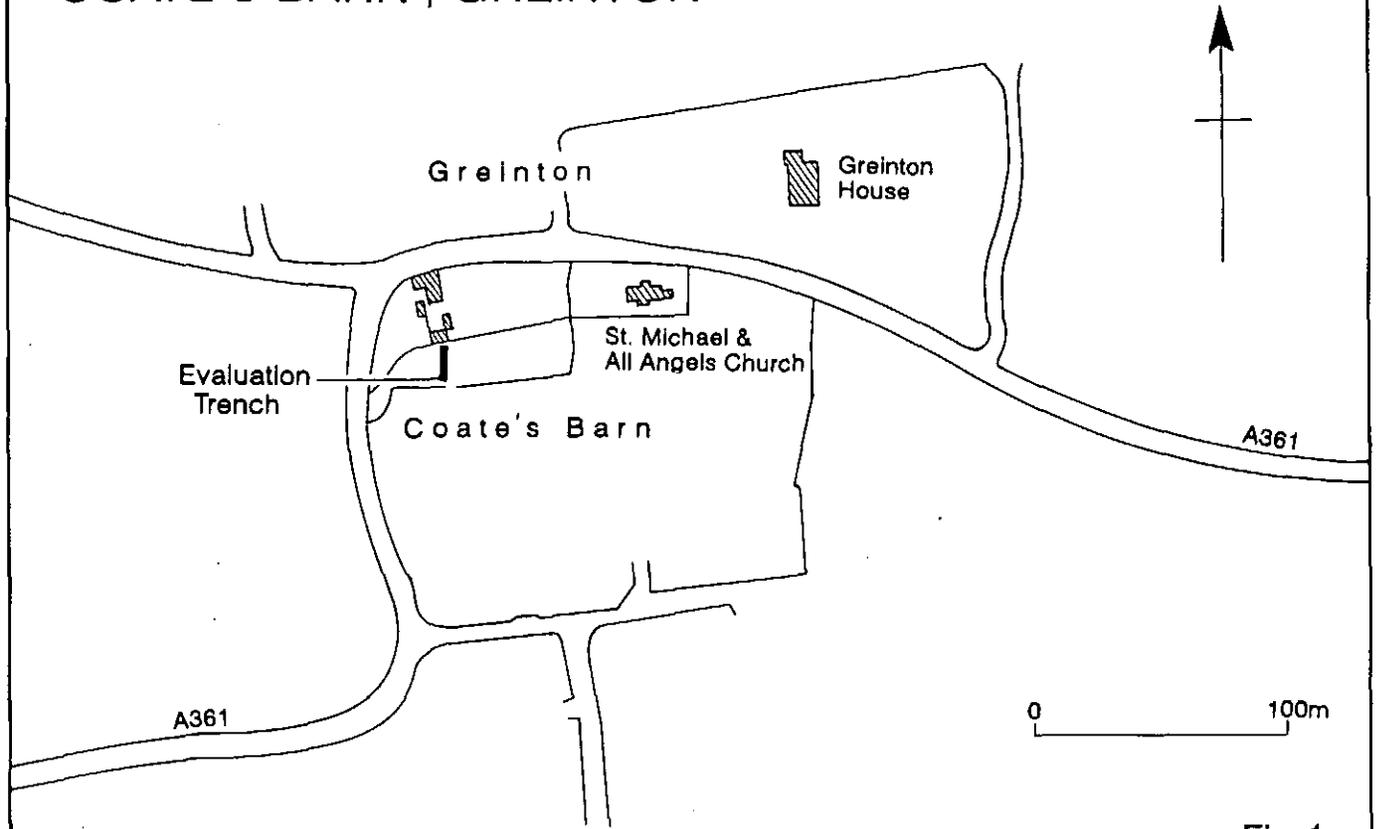


Fig. 1

Evaluation Trench

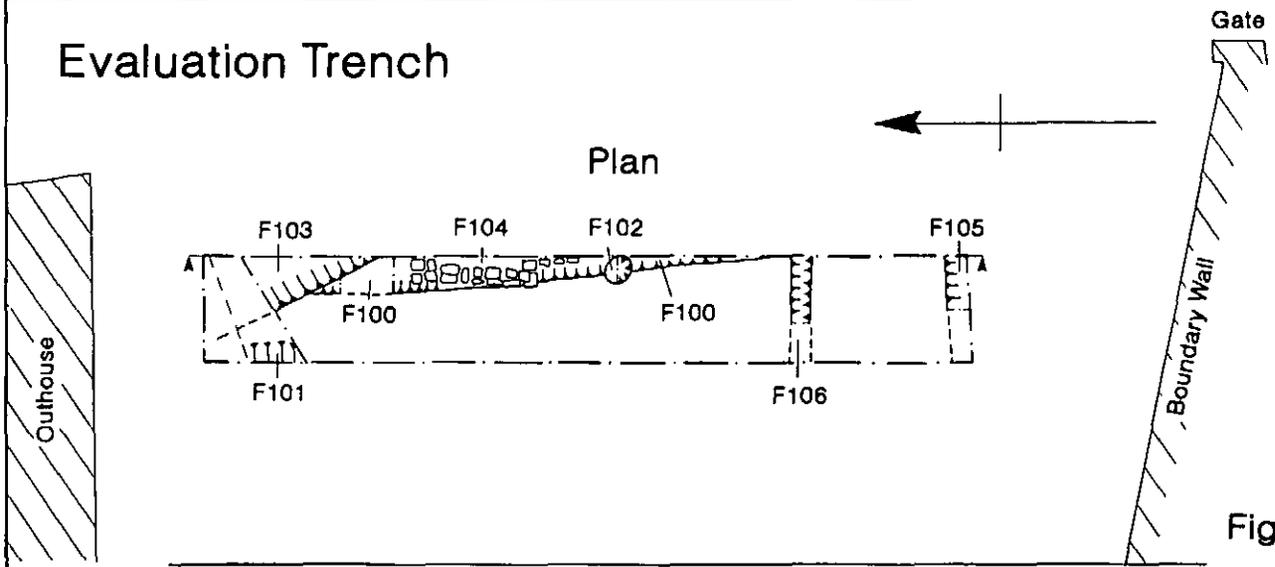


Fig. 2a

Section

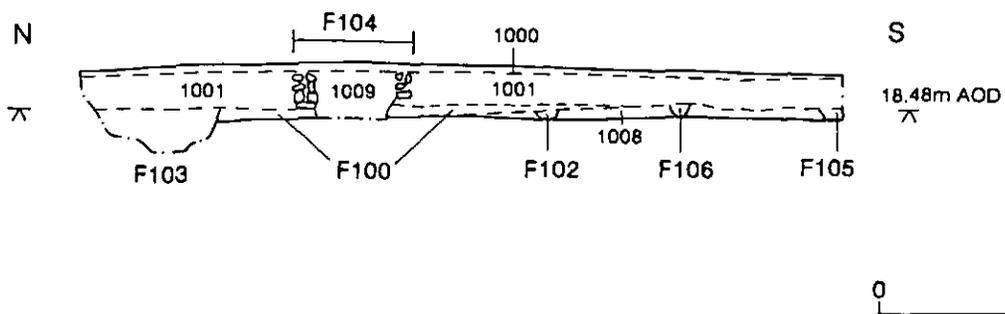


Fig. 2b