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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE
SITE OF A PROPOSED HOUSE EXTENSION AT "THE
BOTHY", WERG MILL, MILDENHALL, WILTSHIRE
(NGR SU21456955)**

Prepared by Julian Cotton BA AIFA

Report No. 2498/1/0

April 1998

AC
archaeology

Manor Farm Stables
Chicklade
Hindon
Near Salisbury
Wiltshire SP3 5SU

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE SITE OF A PROPOSED HOUSE EXTENSION AT "THE BOTHY", WERG MILL, MILDENHALL, WILTSHIRE (NGR SU21456955)

1. SUMMARY

In March 1998 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the site of a proposed house extension at "The Bothy", Mildenhall. The location of the evaluation was very close to the known north-west perimeter of the Roman town of "Cunetio", and there was some expectation, therefore, that in-situ archaeological deposits and finds would be present. The evaluation comprised the recording of a single trench c. 5.5m² in plan, located within the confines of the proposed extension. The trench was partially excavated by mechanical means to remove topsoil and thereafter was wholly hand-dug. The excavation demonstrated the widespread presence of deeply stratified Roman deposits, to a depth of at least 1.1m, and probably dating to the late second century AD. These deposits generally consisted of flint rubble in a matrix of clay or clay loam soil, and can be interpreted as demolition rubble or levelling layers. It is regarded as likely that evidence for Roman structures is still present nearby, perhaps within the development area itself.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological field evaluation undertaken by AC archaeology at The Bothy, Werg Mill, Mildenhall, Wiltshire (see Fig 1). The evaluation was undertaken on 31st March 1998, and was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. J. Hounslow, the site owners.

2.2 The archaeological evaluation was requested by West Kennet District Council on the advice of the archaeological service of Wiltshire County Council, following the provisions of DOE guidance note PPG 16. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief provided by Wiltshire County Council (DC/arch/98dc021.br).

2.3 The aim of the evaluation was to investigate an area directly to the south-east of the existing structure (The Bothy), where the site owners propose to construct an extension.

2.4 The Bothy is situated in the SE part of Mildenhall, on the flood plain of the River Kennet, at approximately 124m OD. The underlying geology deposit is chalk.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The evaluation site lies within 50m, to the NW, of "Cunetio" a small Roman town. Cunetio (Scheduled Ancient Monument Wiltshire 666) has produced numerous significant finds over the years, and has recently been the subject of debate and

reassessment (Corney, 1997). The principal discoveries, and the implications of these discoveries, are discussed below.

3.2 The site of Cunetio was well known to local antiquarians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was subject to a number of small scale investigations. Aerial photography in the 1950s produced evidence of two defensive circuits, one earthen and one of stone, as well as the outlines of streets and buildings. Subsequent small scale excavations (summarised in Burnham and Wachter, 1990) provided an indication of the date and nature of the features. Perhaps the most significant conclusion to be drawn from these excavations was that although there was early settlement on the site, the stone circuit represents a late feature constructed after AD 360.

3.3 Recent research into the site has included further assessment of aerial photographs (Cox, 1997) and the archaeological observation and excavation of a pipeline route to the SW of The Bothy (Wessex Archaeology, 1997). The aerial photography revealed more details of the internal arrangements of the Roman town, and work on the pipe route suggested that many Roman features were present some distance outside the NW corner of the walled circuit of Cunetio, including human burials (see also Meyrick, 1947-55). The likely position of the NW walled corner (reconstructed by Corney from aerial photographs and from reconsideration of the west entrance excavations in the 1950s) is immediately to the south of The Bothy.

4. EVALUATION METHODS

4.1 A trench was laid out in the position indicated in Fig. 1. The trench as excavated was slightly larger than that specified in the brief in order that effective use could be made of the mechanical excavator provided by the site owners. The actual ground area finally excavated measured 1.6m x 3.4m.

4.2 Soil was removed by mechanical means using a toothless grading bucket to the depth at which archaeological deposits were present. No further mechanical excavation took place.

4.3 Some limited hand excavation of archaeological deposits was undertaken, in order to provide an indication of the likely depth date and nature of the archaeological sequence. As the exposed sequence was clearly of some significance, the decision was taken (in consultation with Mr. Duncan Coe, Wiltshire County Council Assistant Archaeologist) not to excavate further.

4.4 The trenches were recorded using the standard pro-forma AC archaeology recording system, with context records, scaled drawings, and photographs.

4.5 The excavation and recording methods adopted conformed to the general standards required by the Museums Service of Wiltshire County Council.

5. RESULTS (see Fig. 2)

5.1 Context 100

Context (100) formed the upper 300-400 mm of material excavated. In essence it was a deep topsoil deposit, consisting of a very dark and humic silt loam, containing occasional flint fragments, charcoal and roots. This topsoil deposit extended throughout the trench and contained post-Medieval pottery and some redeposited Roman finds (see Section 6). Context (100) was removed by mechanical excavator on the basis that it could not be proven to be of archaeological significance. In the process of excavating (100), the upper surface of the underlying layer (101) was also disturbed. Mechanical excavation was halted when it was realised that layer (101) was an intact Roman deposit.

5.2 Context 101

Context (101) was up to 0.35m in depth, and also existed across the full extent of the trench. The context consisted of a very dark brown humic silty clay containing numerous fragments, nodules and boulders of flint. Occasional fragments of other stone types were also present, including sandstone and chalk. Roman pottery, tile and animal bone were recovered from a small sondage trench excavated into (101) at the SE end of the trench. The overall impression given by context (101) was of a dumped deposit of rubble.

5.3 Context 102

Context (102) was exposed in the base of the sondage described above, and was only investigated by means of a small trial pit (600mm x 400mm in plan) against the SE-facing section. Context (102) consisted of a light grey brown mottled silty clay, containing occasional fragments and lumps of flint, chalk, mortar and charcoal. As investigated it was 0.38m in depth, but clearly continued below the maximum depth of excavation (1.1m from ground surface). The gleyed appearance and moistness of the deposit at these depths is suggestive of periodic waterlogging (as may be expected by the site's proximity to the river). An appreciable number of Roman finds was recovered from this context.

6. FINDS

6.1 All artefacts were recovered, and are detailed in Table 1 by number and weight (in grams).

6.2 Context 100 - (topsoil)

Context (100) contained some Roman pottery and roof tile fragments, but also a sherd of post-Medieval pottery, and a fragment of iron cauldron (small find 1) This cauldron fragment suggests a vessel with a mouth diameter of at least 190mm. Research into the cauldron is continuing, but it is considered to be of Romano-British origin.

Context	Roman pottery	Roman ceramic tile	Stone tile	Animal bone	Burnt flint	Iron objects	Post-medieval pottery
100	3/24g	1/16g	-	-	-	1/408g Small find 1	1/10g
101	16/216g	8/862g	1/216g	2/24g	-	-	-
102	25/448g	7/340g	-	3/54g	2/136g	-	-

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF EXCAVATED FINDS, EXPRESSED BY COUNT AND WEIGHT

6.3 Context 101

Context (101) contained a variety of tile types including *tegula* fragments, flue tiles and stone tile. The pottery assemblage showed a predominance of black burnished pottery, including flanged bowl forms. There was a surprisingly small presence of local Savernake pottery.

6.4 Context 102

Context (102) had a similarly high representation of black burnished wares, and also contained some sherds of coarse thick-walled Samian pottery.

6.5 Overall assessment

It is likely that the range of finds present in contexts (101/102) indicates a formation date sometime in the late second century AD.

7. COMMENTS

7.1 With the exception of the upper 300-400mm of deposits the entire trench contained significant, well-stratified Roman deposits. The maximum depth of excavation during the evaluation was 1.1m, and it was clear that archaeological levels continued beneath this depth.

7.2 The uppermost Roman deposit (101) appears to represent a phase of demolition or levelling. The suggested date range for this deposit (late second century AD) is not especially late in respect of the broad history of Cunetio, and it may be that redundant extra-mural structures nearby were the source of this rubble.

7.3 The lower archaeological deposit (102) investigated by the evaluation contained quantities of high status pottery and had characteristics suggestive of more gradual infill in a wetland environment. The overall depth of archaeological deposition was deeper than that previously recorded elsewhere in the general area, and it possible that the trench location overlies a pit or a channel.

8. REFERENCES

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Fig. 1: Site and trench location plan

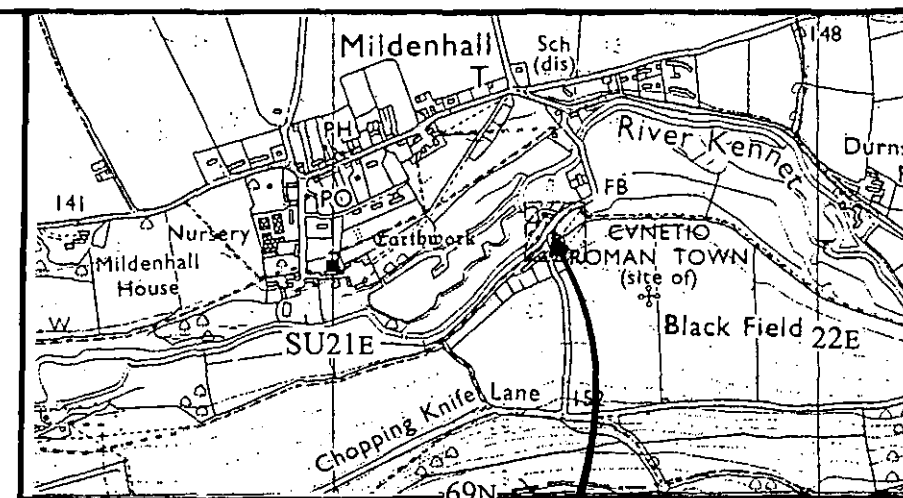
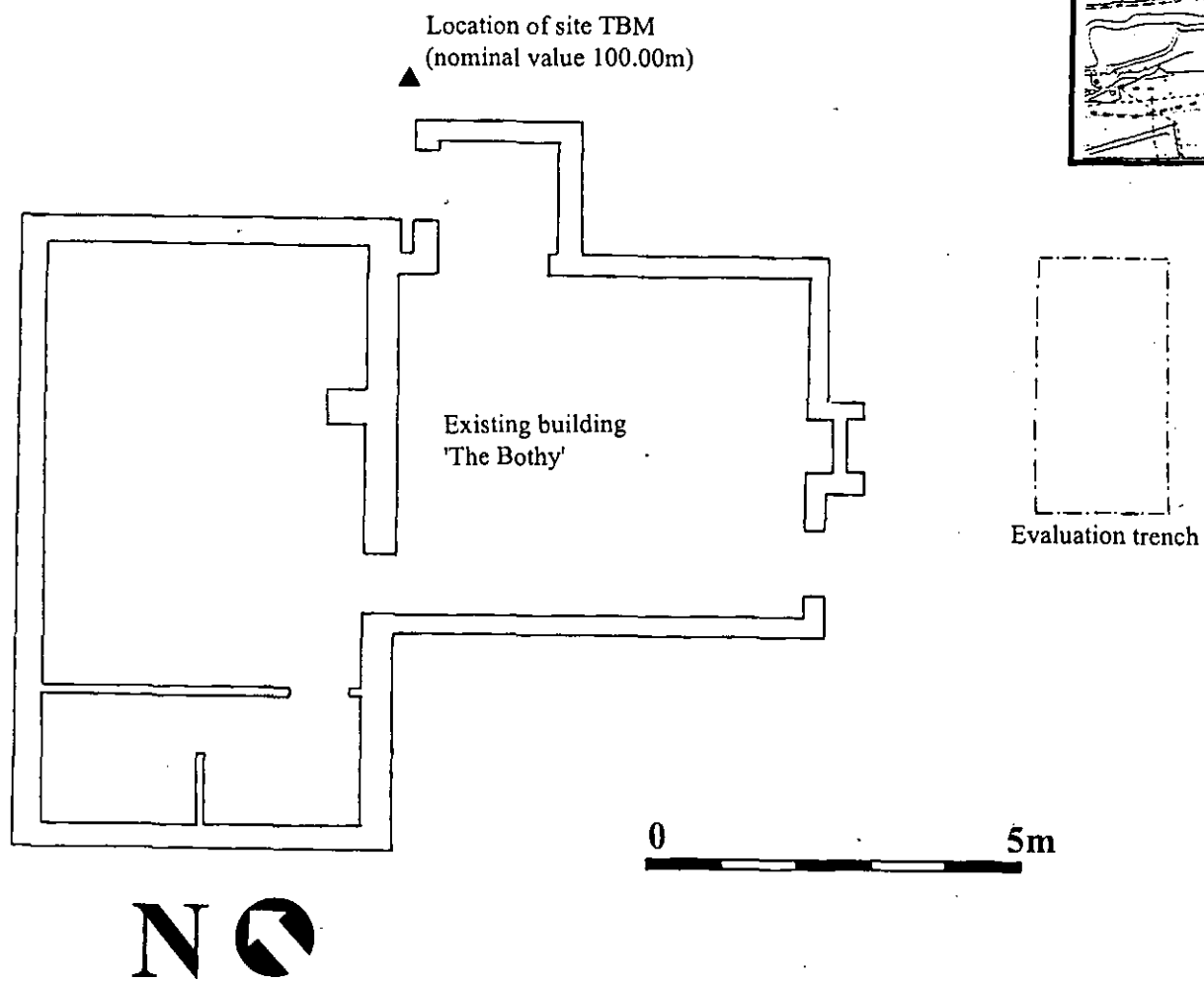
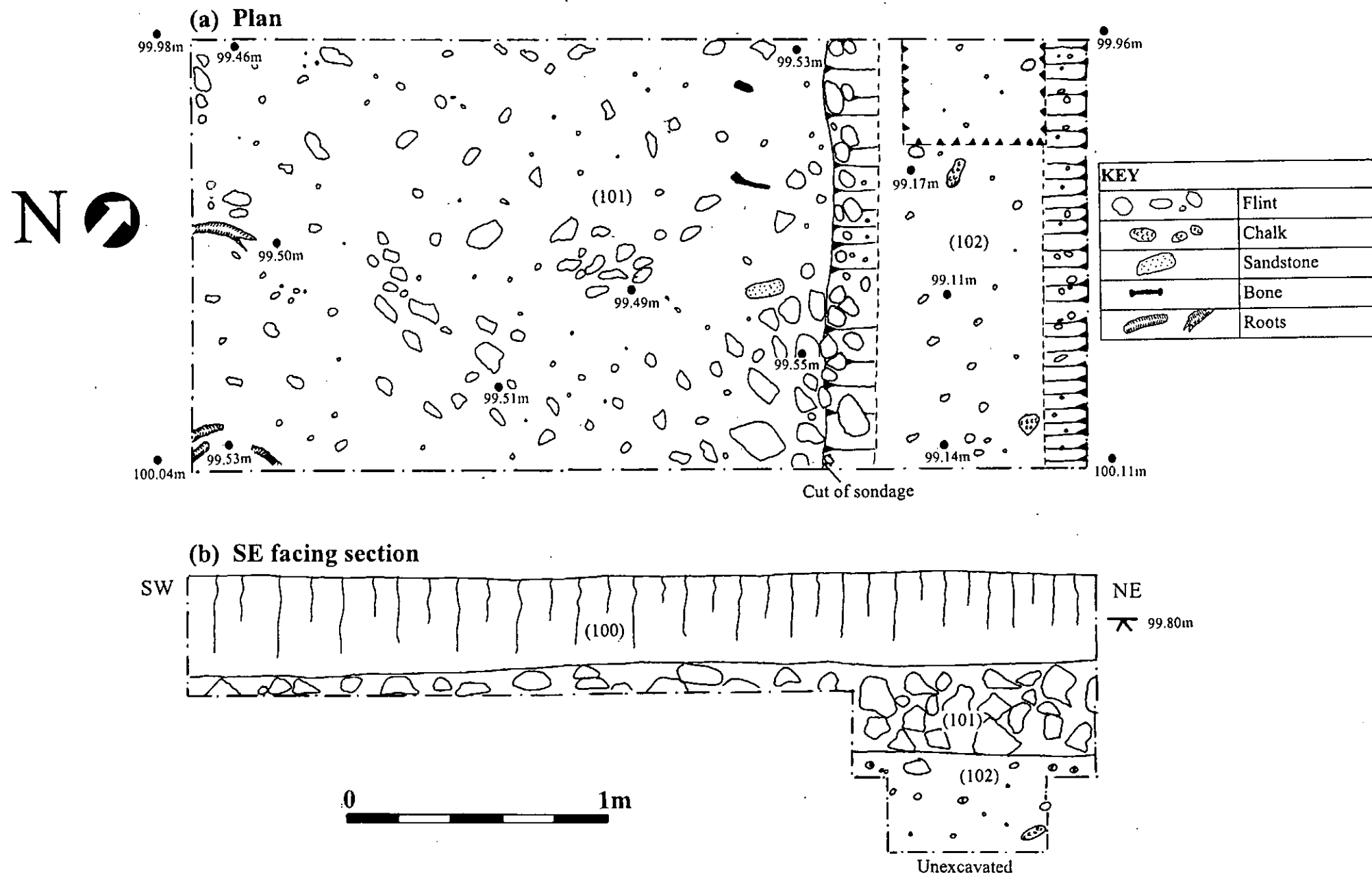


Fig. 2: Plan (a) and SE facing section (b)



Mr. D. Coe.

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