



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**An archaeological watching brief on groundworks for
an extension to 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington,
Bedfordshire**

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An archaeological watching brief on groundworks for an extension to 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington, Bedfordshire

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Summary

A watching brief on groundworks at 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington, showed that mid-20th-century extensions and earth-moving relating to the existing property had previously removed all potential for archaeological survival.

Introduction

Full Planning Consent was granted by Bedford Borough Council for construction of a new extension at 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington, Bedfordshire, MK43 7QS; (17/02426/FUL). The extension replaces an earlier example.

The site lies close to the historic core of Stevington and is just within the village's Conservation Area. The nineteenth-century house being extended was previously the subject of a Heritage Statement (Prentice 2017). The extension had a potential, although not likelihood, to discover deposits related to earlier periods of frontage. It is for this reason that Condition 08 was applied to the consent for a programme of archaeological fieldwork and reporting by the Bedford Borough Senior Archaeological Officer (Planning).

In compliance with Condition 08, a Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted and approved (Soden 2017). A consultation of the Bedford Borough Historic Environment Record took place, with data-license issued, if data was to be used, on 11 Dec 2017 for 1 year.

The property of 3-5 Court Lane is principally of half-timbered construction with a twentieth-century addition to the western end and was later rendered. It appears from documentary evidence to have been built between 1806 and 1885. Prior to the Enclosure map of 1806, the plot which is now occupied by the present building/s was located within an area of open field. It is located close to the centre of the village on the south side of Court Lane (NGR SP 988 533; Fig 1).

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington



Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2018

Much altered by previous occupants, and formerly having rear (south) kitchen extensions added which provided additional space, the timber structure of the building was in a poor condition due to being covered by a non-permeable cement render. In addition to the west gable extension which was entirely of post-World War II brick, also rendered, there were small detached structures set within a large area of either concrete or modern block paving at the rear of the property. These were separated from the main garden area by a stone retaining wall (Fig 2).



Fig 2: The site prior to the current works showing footprint of previous extension (yellow dashed line) and paved area, looking north.

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington

The site was visited on 20 March 2018 to monitor the excavation of foundation trenches for approved extensions on both the south and west sides of the former building. Weather conditions were dry and bright with occasional sun, but directly after persistent rain.

The Watching Brief

The watching brief commenced at the west end of the building in the narrow 'alley' located to the west of the west gable end of the extended section of the original building (Fig 3).

Topsoil, concrete and block paving were removed first using a small machine, exposing natural clay. No cut or structural archaeological features were present.

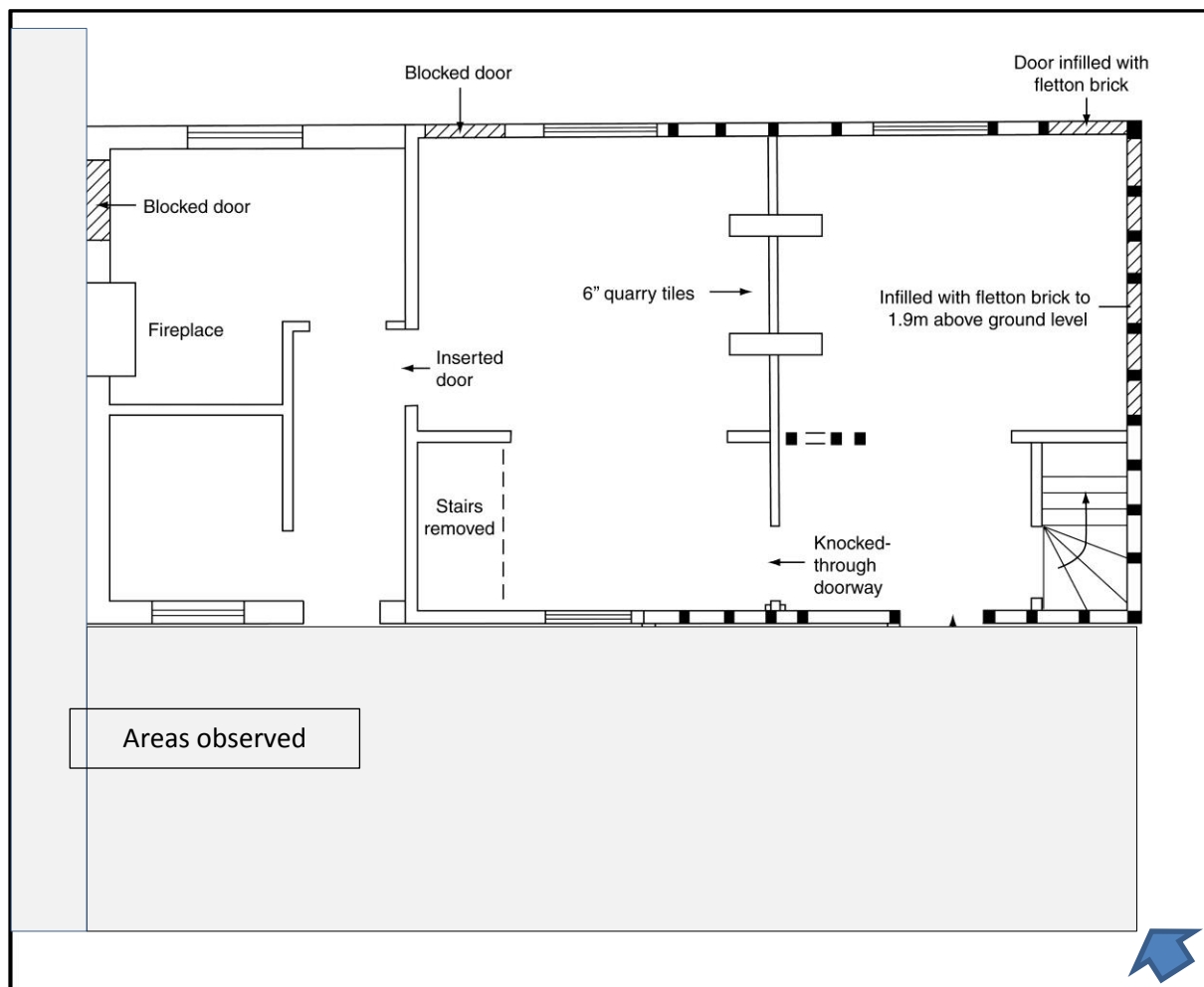


Fig 3: Plan of the building showing side and rear areas observed (Base drawing Andy Isham)

The side-area had previously been much compromised by the insertion of a service trench for pipework serving the downstairs bathroom located in the recently-demolished modern extension (Fig 4). Along this 'alley' the construction of a boundary fence by the adjoining property had been set within a narrow trench which also projected into the area (Fig 4).

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington

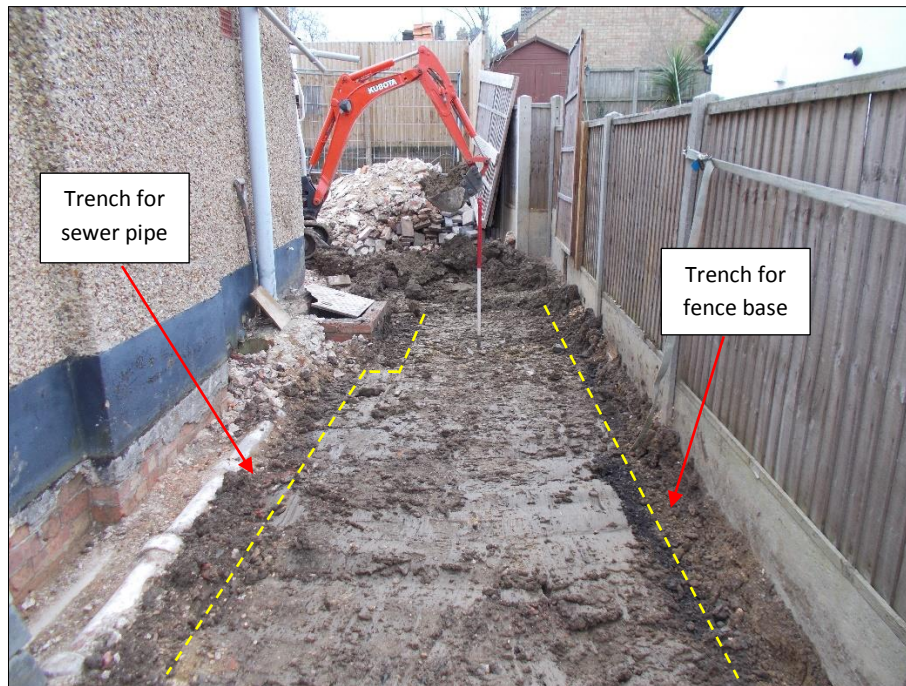


Fig 4: The 'alley' against the west gable wall, looking south. Yellow dashed lines indicate edges of modern cuts for service trench and fence footing. 1m scale.

Both modern cuts had reduced the un-disturbed area of natural clay down the middle of the area to approximately 1.3m in width and there were no indications of earlier cut features surviving beneath what had until recently been a concrete surface laid over a sub-base of hardcore.

To the rear of the cottages the removal of the same modern concrete and block paving showed that there had been extensive reduction into the natural slope which rises gently towards the south, some 5m away from the rear of the present house. This previous reduction had removed all topsoil and subsoil and the former paving had been laid directly onto the truncated natural clay geology (see Figs 5 and 6). The present garden soil, sectioned where the retaining wall had been removed, was observed to lie directly on top of this natural clay geology (see Fig 5, indicated by dashed yellow line showing clean distinction between the two layers). To the east of the eastern boundary fence, the approximate natural southward rise of the ground surface can be seen in the present ground surface of the adjoining property (Fig 5, orange line).

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington

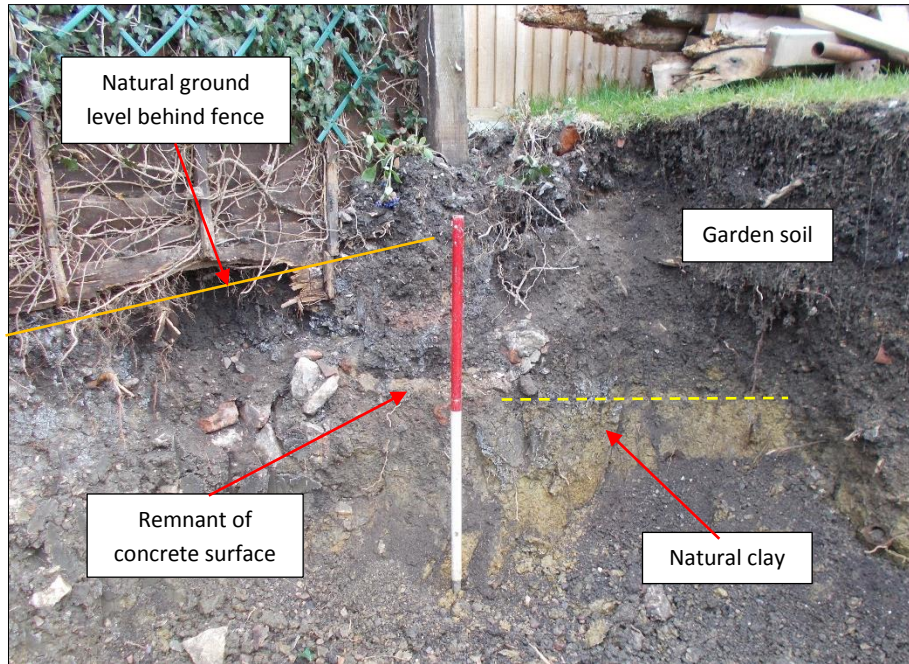


Fig 5: The base of the present garden soil lying directly on top of the natural clay geology, looking south-east. 1m scale.

The whole area to the rear of the cottages had been thoroughly truncated by previous works which had reduced the area to slightly below the level of the brick sleeper wall on which the timber superstructure of the cottages was built. Due to the slight natural slope to the south of the former field in which the cottages were built, this reduction had removed a considerable layer of natural topsoil and also subsoil so that as a consequence the whole rear area close to the cottages was cut up to 0.5m into natural geology.



Fig 6: A remnant of the previous concrete surface and hardcore lying directly on top of the natural clay geology, looking south. 1m scale.

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington

As a consequence of this previous ground reduction all of the modern footings for the new rear extension were cut from within the already reduced sequence. Thus there was no possibility for earlier archaeology to survive.

Conclusions

The area of the western extension to the west gable wall has been shown to have previously been reduced into the top of the natural clay geology prior to the laying of concrete over hardcore on this side of the cottages. It was further narrowed by the trench for the modern sewer pipe on one side and the footings of a modern fence on the other. There was no indication of earlier cut features penetrating the truncated geology.

The area to the rear, south, side of the cottages had also been reduced to a similar level to provide an essentially flat apron of ground around the entire south elevation of the building. This reduction was more pronounced to accommodate the former natural slope of the ground which rose southwards away from the building. As a consequence, there was no survival of either topsoil or subsoil anywhere on this side of the building. There were no indications of deeper cut features having survived this ground reduction.

The only finds observed (and not retained) were fragments of nineteenth- or early twentieth-century china and glass such as is common household detritus commonly found around buildings of this period prior to the introduction of household refuse collection. There were no artefacts of any earlier periods.

There is very little possibility of providing evidence of an early frontage to Court Lane in this property due to the 20th-century extensions to the 19th-century building. In terms of this property any record of the historic environment which might have contributed to our understanding of the early and developing village was lost probably in the middle of the 20th century.

Bibliography

Prentice, J, 2017 *A Heritage Statement for 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington, Bedfordshire*

Soden, I, 2017 *A programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording, analysis and reporting on the ground-works for a householder-extension at 3-5 Court Lane, Stevington, Bedfordshire*

3-5 Court Lane, Stevington

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	3-5 Court Lane, Stevington
OASIS ID	iainsode1-315398
Project Type	Watching Brief
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	Yes/no
Current land use	Rural residential
Development type	Householder extension
Reason for investigation	Planning Condition
National grid reference	SP 988 533
Start/end dates of fieldwork	20 March 2018
Archive recipient	Bedford Museum
Study area	c200 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

25 April 2018