

**Archaeological observation of
underpinning pits and other works at
Chawton House, near Alton, Hampshire**

NGR: SU 709 370

**by
Christopher K Currie
BA (Hons), MPhil, MIFM, MIFA
CKC Archaeology**

Report to Sandy Lerner and the Chawton House Library

November 2001

Contents

	page no.
Summary statement	3
1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Historical background	4
3.0 Strategy	5
4.0 Results	5
5.0 Discussion	6
6.0 Conclusions	7
7.0 Copyright	7
8.0 Archive	7
9.0 Acknowledgements	7
10.0 References	8

Figures

Figures 1-3

end of report

Summary statement

Renovation works have been continuing on Chawton House and its grounds since 1995. The building is being repaired and restored for use as the Chawton House Library, in order to house Sandy Lerner's collection of manuscripts of early English women's writing, and make it available for research. On Tuesday 6th November 2001 the author was called in to observe underpinning pits on the north side of the house.

The excavation of an underpinning pit on the north side of the Victorian kitchen wing at Chawton House revealed the exact interface between made ground and the original landform. The western part of the wing sits on a rough malmstone foundation, made to compensate for the structure being built on unconsolidated ground. It is thought that the made ground infilled part of a small valley called the Dell. The present evidence suggests that this was done when the kitchen wing was built at some time in the 19th century. Cracking in the wall near the interface between good and made ground is clearly the result of subsequent subsidence.

Removal of reputed Jacobean panelling at the north end of the Great Hall revealed the remains of a stone wall into which a brick fireplace had been inserted. The latter was subsequently blocked in brick prior to the panelling being installed. Given the conjectured brief time span between the reputed building of the house at the end of the 16th century and the date of the panelling, it would seem that the wall represents at least two earlier phases. It is possible that the stonework was a survivor from an earlier structure on the site.

Archaeological observations of underpinning pits and other works at at Chawton House, near Alton, Hampshire

NGR: SU 709 370

This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work. All work is carried out according to the *Code of Conduct* and By-laws of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, of which CKC Archaeology is a IFA-registered archaeological organisation (reference: RAO no. 1).

1.0 Introduction

Renovation works have been continuing on Chawton House and its grounds since 1995. The building is being repaired and restored for use as the Chawton House Library, in order to house Sandy Lerner's collection of manuscripts of early English women's writing, and make it available for research. On Tuesday 6th November 2001 the author was called in to observe underpinning pits on the north side of the house. Previous work has been reported in Currie (1995, 2000, 2001a, & 2001b).

2.0 Historical background

Chawton House is a large brick country house 0.5km to the SE of Chawton village. Its earliest surviving fabric dates from the late Elizabethan period, when the medieval manor was replaced with the current building by John Knight. The building has since been much added to, and contains Jacobean and 19th-century fabric. Recent research on the site has revealed that it was an important stopping off point for the king, Henry III (1216-72), on his journeys between London/Guildford and Winchester. Between 1229 and 1264 this king is recorded at Chawton on 22 occasions, with at least another twelve possible visits suggested by the delivery of royal supplies, such as tuns of wine (Currie 1995, appendix 2). The kings continued to visit Chawton during the reigns of Edward I (1272-1307), Edward II (1307-27), and during the early part of the reign of Edward III (1327-77).

The popularity of Chawton, besides its convenience midway between Guildford and Winchester, rested largely on the good relationship between the manor's owners, the St Johns, and Henry III and his son, Edward I. John de St John was one of Edward I's most trusted servants, being made lieutenant in Gascony from 1293 until his capture by the French at Bellegarde in January 1297. Following his release from captivity, he continued to find royal favour, and was appointed governor of Scotland in July 1302, just two months before his death. After this, the favour shown the St John family seems to have declined. By the time of the extinction of the male line in 1347, the king's court had become less itinerant, settling permanently at London. The last recorded royal visit to Chawton was made by Edward III in November 1331.

In order to entertain the king's court on so many occasions between 1229 and 1331, it should be assumed that the manor house at Chawton was a well-equipped and extensive complex of buildings. Excavations to date have failed to find the site of the 13th-century manor, but extensive redeposited medieval materials have been discovered in the built up ground on which the post-medieval manor was constructed (Currie 2000). These discoveries show previous views that Chawton was an unimportant place in the medieval period are erroneous (Leigh & Knight 1911, 5)

Little is known about Chawton House between 1331 and Nicholas Knight's purchase of the manor in 1578. The Knight family have continued to hold the estate ever since. The Knights were related to the Austen family, resulting in the last true Knight in the male line adopting Edward Austen, the brother of the writer, Jane Austen, as his heir in 1783 provided that he took the name Knight. The area has since become associated with Jane Austen, who lived with her mother and sister in the bailiff's cottage, part of the Chawton estate, from 1809 until a few months before her death in 1817 (Wade 1996). By the early 1990s the family had ceased to live in the property for some time, and it was becoming dilapidated until the present owner, Richard Knight, sold a long lease on the property to the wealthy American, Sandy Lerner.

3.0 Strategy

The strategy follows that of Currie (2000), which was based on the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. (Birmingham, 1994). The present work was undertaken to record underpinning pits beneath the north wing of the house.

4.0 Results

Three underpinning pits were excavated under the Victorian kitchen wing on the north side of the house. Cracking in the external brickwork had suggested that this work needed to be carried out. Only one pit revealed any archaeology worthy of notice. This was the middle pit, about 6m west of the NE corner of the wing. Another pit by the NE corner of the wing went rapidly down on to undisturbed chalk. A third pit alongside the NW corner of this wing sat entirely on made ground comprising redeposited chalk with some brick rubble within. This redeposited material was much disturbed by later service trenches.

The pit of interest was 1.1m E-W by 0.7m N-S, and about 1.8m deep. The top 0.45m of soil comprised brick rubble in a chalky clay matrix. By coincidence the pit was excavated across a cut into the natural chalk. This proved to be a horizon between made ground to the west and undisturbed chalk to the east. There was probably an element of artificiality in this cut, it being a tidying of a natural hollow, of which the pond by the stable block is a remaining portion. To the west of this cut there was a dump of redeposited chalky clay containing occasional building materials (malmstone, brick and tile fragments). This extended from a depth of 0.45m below the surface at the east end of the pit to a depth of 1.25m at the western end.

Under the brick wall of the wing, the area of made ground had been infilled with a roughly laid malmstone foundation.

Whilst on the site, the author was asked to examine soil deposits beneath the floorboards at the north end of the Great Hall. This followed the removal of wooden panelling here, revealing what appeared to be a stone wall, into which the brick arch of a fireplace had been inserted. This was later blocked in brick, before being concealed behind the panelling. Removal of the soil revealed that the stone wall was set on stone foundations. This soil was found to be redeposited, infilling the area (about 1.5m wide) between the end of the hall and the north wall of cellars beneath.

There would appear to have been a door on the east side of this fireplace that was later blocked, and covered over with panelling. Excavation of the dry soil in the void between the panelling and the blocking revealed a number of animal bones, but no dating evidence. The soil appears to have overlaid a compacted chalk surface.

5.0 Discussion

Previous work at Chawton House had noted that the yard to the north of the house was comprised of largely made ground. It was suspected that this was infill over the extended dell in which the present Stable Block Pond currently sits (Currie 2000). It was previously uncertain when this was done, but the presence of a rough malmstone foundation under the Victorian kitchen wing suggests that this may have been at least partly done to allow this wing to be built, thereby extending the levelled area on which the house sits. It was notable that the cracking in the north wall of this wing was just to the west of the division between the made ground and the undisturbed chalk. The excavation of this pit has enabled a precise relationship between the made ground and the original landform to be determined.

The wall behind the panelling at the north end of the Great Hall was shown to have been built of stone originally. A fireplace in this wall was subsequently bricked up, as was a door in the east corner of the wall, and then hidden behind panelling. It is reputed that this panelling is of Jacobean date. If this is the case, it makes the stone wall behind of an earlier date. It is uncertain at this stage if this represents the remains of a medieval or later structure. It does, however, seem a brief time span between the building of the late Elizabethan manor, the insertion of a brick fireplace into the stone wall, followed by its concealment behind reputed Jacobean panelling. Either the panelling's date needs to be reassessed, or the wall represents a single phase, with the stonework being reused at the same time that the fireplace was made. Although this is possible, the wall seems rather patchy for something put up in a brand new building, and hints that the fireplace was inserted into a pre-existing wall of unknown date. Given the brief time span between the reputed construction of the Elizabethan house at the end of the 16th century, and the encasing of the hall in Jacobean panelling, there is cause to consider that the stonework survives from an earlier building. Full details of the recording of this wall will be dealt with by the historic buildings' specialist, Edward Roberts. It is not the brief of the archaeologist to discuss this at any length here.

6.0 Conclusions

The excavation of an underpinning pit on the north side of the Victorian kitchen wing at Chawton House revealed the exact interface between made ground and the original landform. The western part of the wing sits on a rough malmstone foundation, built to compensate for the structure being built on unconsolidated ground. It is thought that the made ground infilled part of a small valley called the Dell. The present evidence suggests that this was done when the kitchen wing was built at some time in the 19th century. Cracking in the wall near the interface between good and made ground is clearly the result of subsequent subsidence.

Removal of reputed Jacobean panelling at the north end of the Great Hall revealed the remains of a stone wall into which a brick fireplace had been inserted. This was subsequently blocked in brick prior to the panelling being installed. Given the conjectured brief time span between the reputed building of the house at the end of the 16th century and the date of the panelling, it would seem that the wall represents at least two earlier phases. It is possible that the stonework was a survivor from an earlier structure on the site.

7.0 Copyright

C K Currie (trading as CKC Archaeology) shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports or other project documents written by himself or his agents, under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act* of 1988 with all rights reserved; excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client and the local planning authority for the use of such documents by them in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the project design, as well as for *bona fide* research purposes.

8.0 Archive

The archive for this work will be deposited with Hampshire Museum Services. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are given to all those involved with this project. In particular, Adrian Thatcher who runs the day-to-day building operations at Chawton, and the staff at Chawton House. All the various contractors and their staff, too many to mention individually, are thanked for their generous co-operation and assistance. The site was monitored by Ian Wykes for the Archaeology Section of Hampshire County Council.

10.0 References

C K Currie, *An archaeological and historical survey of the landscape of Chawton estate, near Alton, Hampshire, to AD 1700*, unpublished client report, 1995

C K Currie, *Archaeological watching briefs at Chawton House, 1997-2000*, unpublished client report, 2000

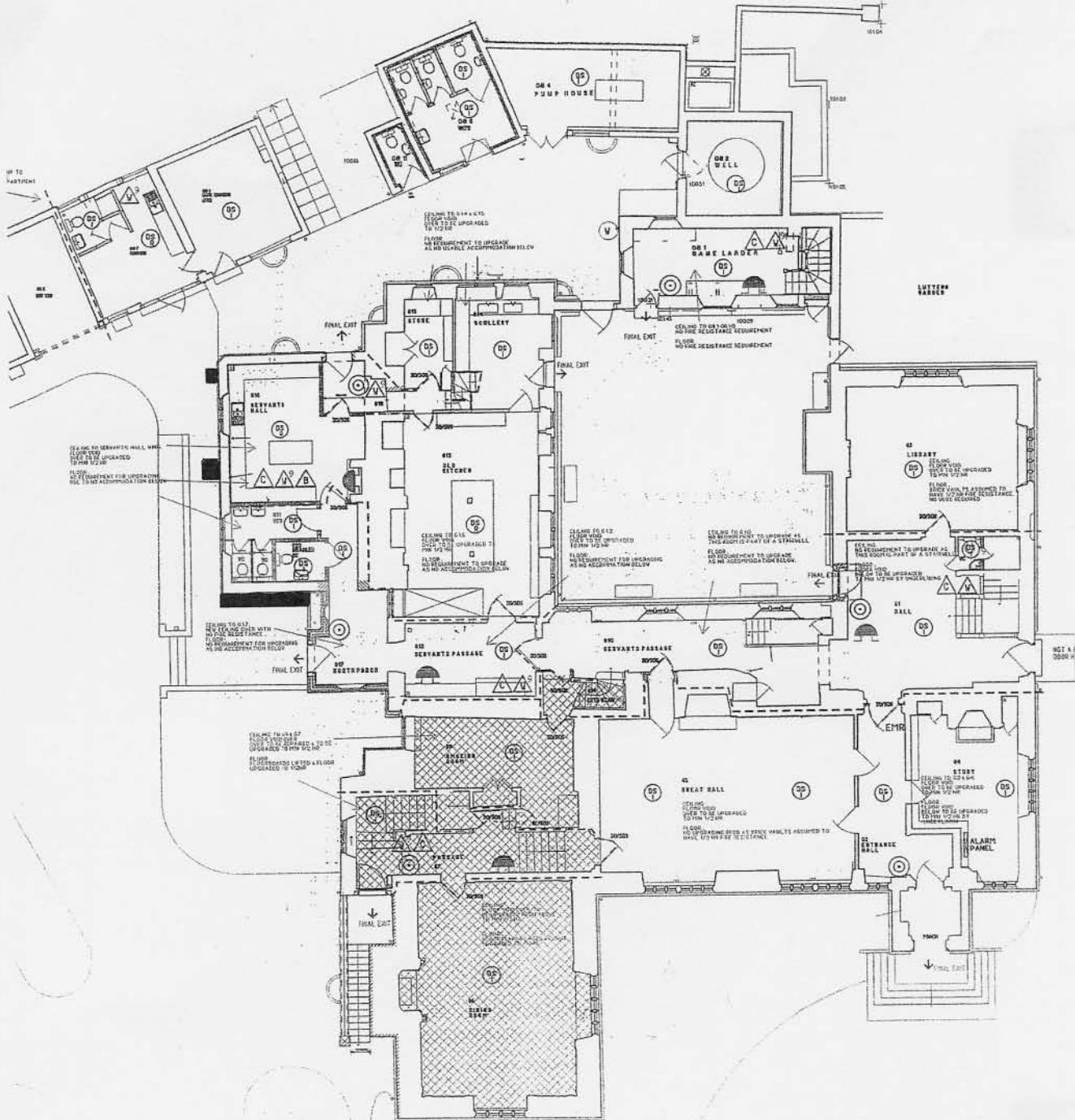
C K Currie, *A medieval encaustic tile from Chawton House, near Alton, Hampshire*, unpublished client report, 2001

English Heritage, *The management of archaeological projects*, London, 1992, revised edition

Institute of Field Archaeologists, *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, Birmingham, 1994

W A Leigh & M G Knight, *Chawton manor and its owners: a family history*, London, 1911

S Wade, *Chawton House Estate. Historic landscape restoration and management report*, unpublished client report, 1996



90000 WATER BATH & FIRE HYDRANT LOCATED IN COURTYARD #5246

Fig. 7: Exterior

