

The Cottage, Manor Farm, Clipstone

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SUMMARY

The complete renovation of a Grade II listed cruck building in Clipstone near Leighton Buzzard prompted the instigation of an archaeological watching brief during ground-breaking works. This building may have been converted from a barn to a residential use. Removal of a modern floor in the east bay of the building revealed the remains of an early flagstone surface/hearth base, together with elements of a former passageway. The renovation also exposed smoke-blackened roof timbers suggesting the building was, during its initial residential use, open to the roof.

INTRODUCTION

A programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken at The Cottage, Manor Farm, Clipstone (SP9477 2631) (Fig 1), following the granting of planning permission and listed building consent for the complete renovation of this Grade II listed building. Construction work began in October 1994 and this report presents the results of the archaeological watching brief and small scale excavation carried out by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) during the early stages of the renovation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The hamlet of Clipstone was, until the mid 19th century, a dependent part of the parish of Leighton Buzzard, the origins of which lie in the Royal Manor of Leighton. Today Clipstone forms part of the modern parish of Eggington-with-Clipstone.

Early settlement in this area appears to have favoured the higher ground afforded by the gault ridge to the south of Eggington. Here excavation and fieldwalking have identified sporadic settlement during the Iron Age, Romano-British, Saxon and early medieval periods. Whilst less archaeological investigation has been undertaken in Clipstone itself, cartographic evidence shows it to have had a more organic arrangement of enclosures and closes in contrast to Eggington's planned layout. This is indicative of Clipstone's presumed Saxon origins.

During the early medieval period Eggington and Clipstone are referred to as settlements of equal

stature, each with independent open field systems and chapels (CRO: RY 66). Eggington benefited from opportunities for settlement expansion along the foot of the gault ridge and from its location alongside the ancient trade route known as Theedway or Edeway (later a medieval Salt Way). Clipstone's position on a low knoll (100m OD) between two branches of the Clipstone Brook was topographically limiting and it witnessed a decline in settlement from the mid medieval period onwards. Eggington, over time, acquired sub-manorial status and assumed power over Clipstone (Coleman 1982).

Today Clipstone comprises two farms and The Cottage (Historic Environment Record (HER) 4415). A series of heavily ploughed earthworks (HER 10797), stretching from the A4012 junction in the S to the brook N of The Cottage are testament to the hamlet's former, more extensive, layout.

THE COTTAGE (Fig 2)

The Cottage lies to the S of Manor Farm on the summit of a low knoll. The building is of timber-framed cruck construction and one of only fourteen known examples in Bedfordshire (Alcock and Woodward 1976, Bailey 1980, Bedfordshire HER).

The timber frame is supported by a brick plinth which, towards the W end of the building, incorporates several large sandstone blocks. These may represent the remains of an earlier plinth. A measured survey, undertaken in 1976 (Alcock and Woodward 1976), suggested the building had been foreshortened by at least one bay to the W, where a modern brick wall seems to have replaced a third cruck truss. The two remaining sets of cruck blades define the E bay. The construction technique is in contrast to that found in most of the county's other cruck frames, inferring its origins lie in a different design tradition. The technique does, however, bear a strong similarity to that of a demolished four bay cruck barn on the opposite side of the road (HER 6760). The open truss form of The Cottage, with tie beams raised well above the spurs, suggests that it may originally have functioned as a barn. It is generally assumed to be 15th-16th century in origin.

At an unknown date the building, assuming it was

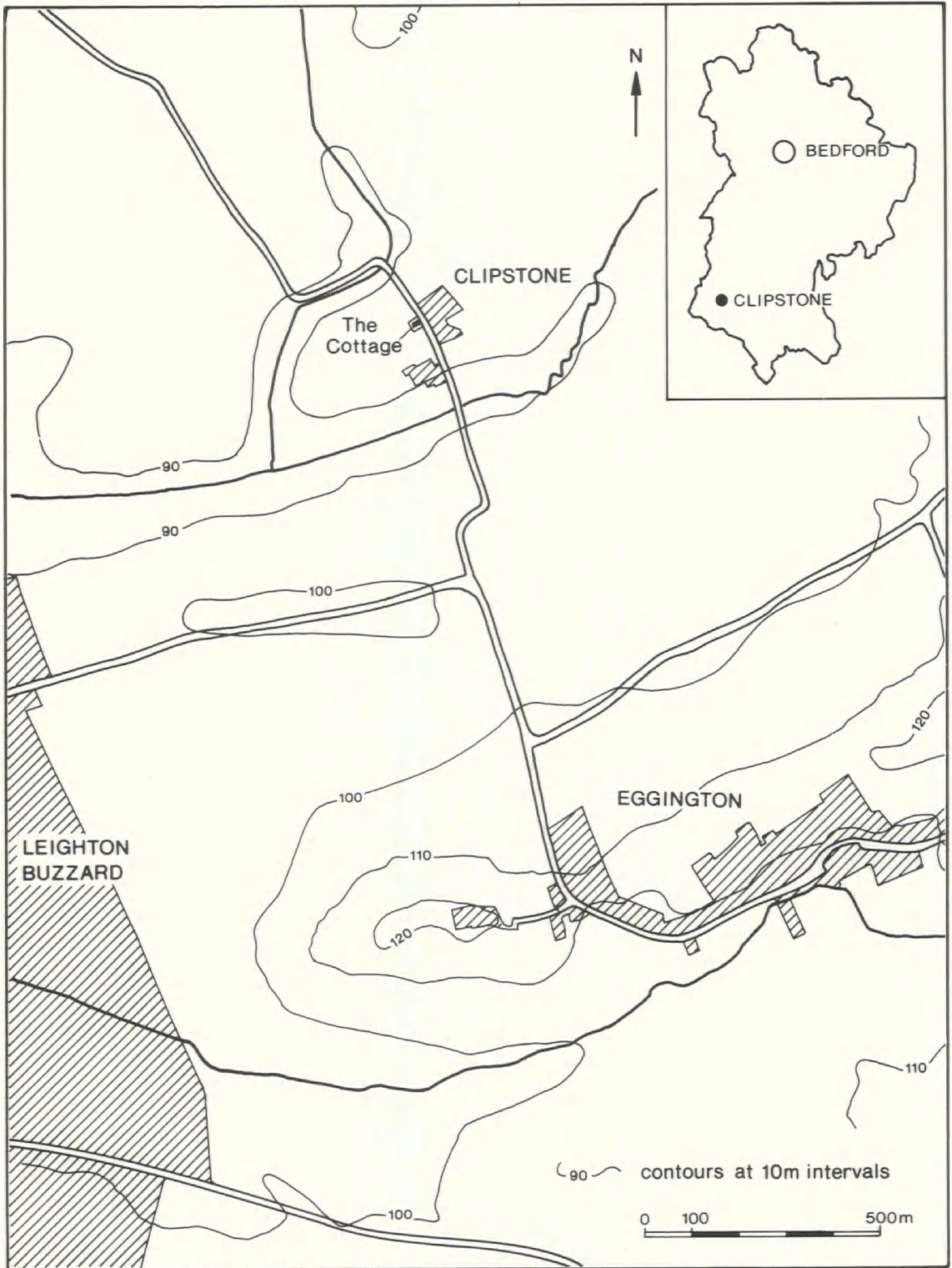


Fig 1 Site location plan

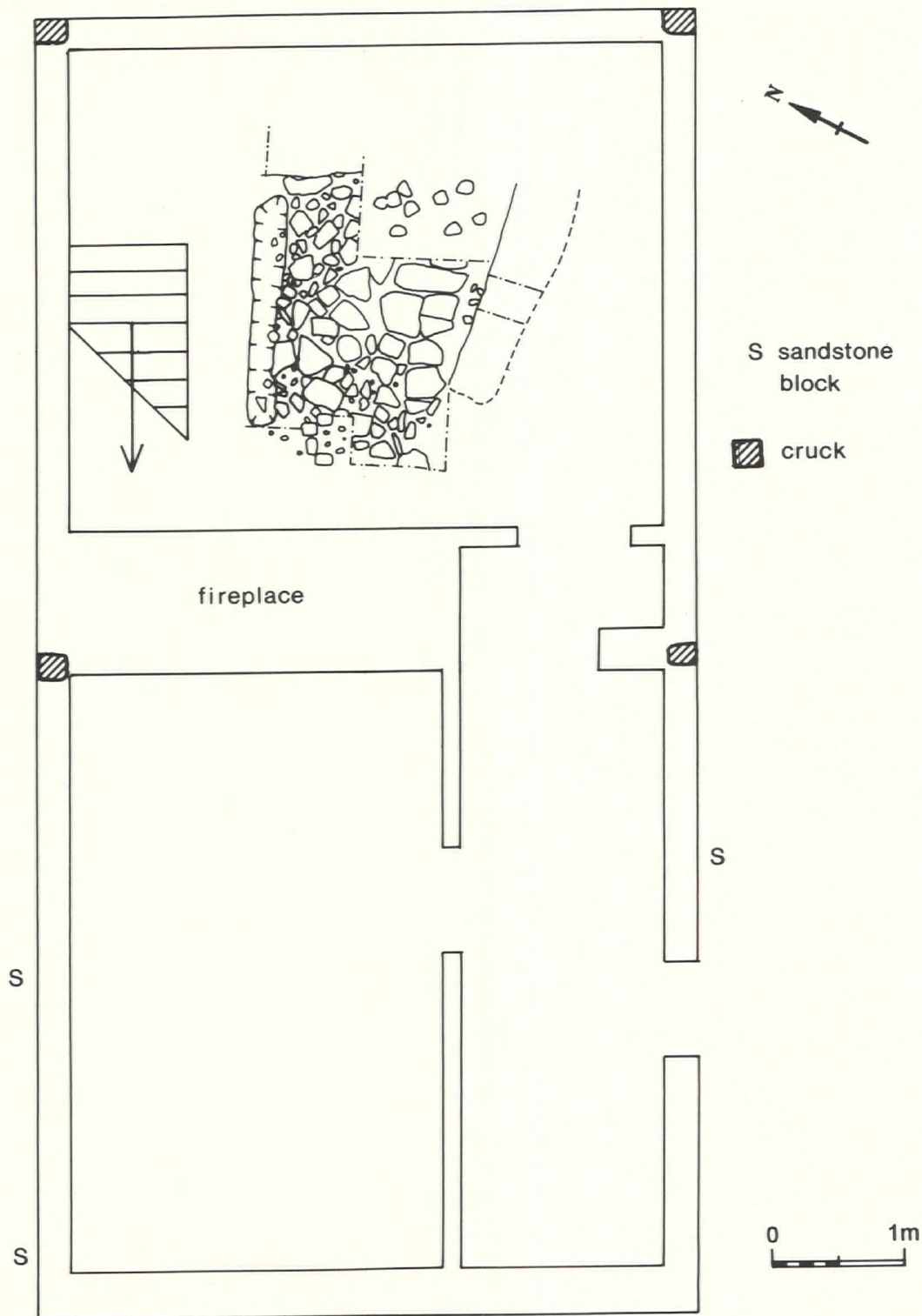


Fig 2 Ground plan (after Alcock and Woodward (1976)) showing surviving archaeological deposits in E bay

originally a barn, was converted to residential use. A chimney was subsequently inserted against the W end of the E bay.

THE RENOVATION WORKS

Renovation of The Cottage involved ground-breaking works comprising full underpinning of the structure and the removal of an existing concrete floor, prior to the insertion of a new floor. An archaeological watching brief was maintained during these works. An extension to the rear of the building was, unfortunately, built before the start of the watching brief. It was, therefore, impossible to confirm the presence of the third bay postulated by Alcock and Woodward.

During the renovation works a number of archaeological deposits and features were uncovered in the E bay of the building. These were sample excavated to determine their nature, function and character with a view to providing information about the building's function and development.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF (Fig 3)

Evidence for a number of successive episodes of structural activity was recorded during the watching brief.

Period 1 initial construction of the building

The undisturbed geological deposits comprised orange sands and gault clay. These were overlain by 300-500mm of mixed dark grey/brown silty clay (10), with frequent inclusions of small, sub-angular flints and pebbles, occasional fragments of clunch and a fragment of late/post-medieval roof tile. This layer increased in thickness to the E where the land sloped down to the road; it represents a deposit of made ground, deliberately laid to provide a level building platform. Three sherds of pottery, with a combined 10th-15th century date range, were retrieved from this layer.

Period 2 conversion of the building for domestic use

In the centre of the E bay the building platform was overlain by an arrangement of clunch flagstones with occasional ironstone and flint pebbles (7). These were set into a 50mm thick bed of yellow clay (9) and covered an area measuring 2.25m x 1.77m. The form and layout of the flagstones varied. The central area comprised large irregularly shaped pieces, while around the outer margins they were smaller and more widely spaced. Towards the W

end of the bay the upper surfaces of the flagstones were burnt. 600mm from the burnt stones, towards the centre of the bay, a 300mm wide band of ash (8) overlay the flagstones. The burnt stones and the raked-out ash suggest that the flagstones served a dual function as a hearth base and a working surface in front of the fire setting. The smoke-blackened roof timbers of the building suggest that this hearth was open.

The flagstones stopped in an even line, 1.25m short of the E wall of the building. The surface clearly respected some structure or feature, although no archaeological traces of the latter had survived.

Period 3: internal structural alterations to the E bay

Along its N edge the flagstone surface was overlain by the remains of a relatively insubstantial wall footing. This consisted of a shallow trench [15] (running parallel to the N wall of the building) formed of a layer of yellow clay which bore the impressions of sub-rounded stones. A skim of wall plaster (14), found *in situ* along the SE side of the trench, marked the inner face of the former wall.

In the NE corner of the bay the flagstones were overlain by a rectangular arrangement of red, late or post-medieval bricks [3]. These were bonded with yellow clay (13) and are interpreted as the remains of a hearth surround. Their relationship to the flagstones suggests they are contemporary with the construction of foundation trench [15].

The flagstones (7) appear to have continued to form the internal surface of the E bay following these structural alterations.

Period 4 replacement of the internal surface of the E bay

Along the S edge of the E bay a shallow trench [11] ran E - W, on an oblique alignment to the building. It took the form of an irregular, 500mm wide cut with an uneven base and was less well defined than trench [15]. Whilst the full extent of [11] was not recoverable inside the building due to modern disturbance, excavation during the underpinning of the E wall found no evidence to suggest its continuance outside the building. It is interpreted as a robber trench, dug to facilitate the removal of flagstones from surface (7).

Trench [11] was backfilled with crushed ironstone and sandstone, which continued beyond the limits of the cut as a more extensive deposit (2). This material was 110mm thick and contained charcoal and brick fragments. It physically sealed

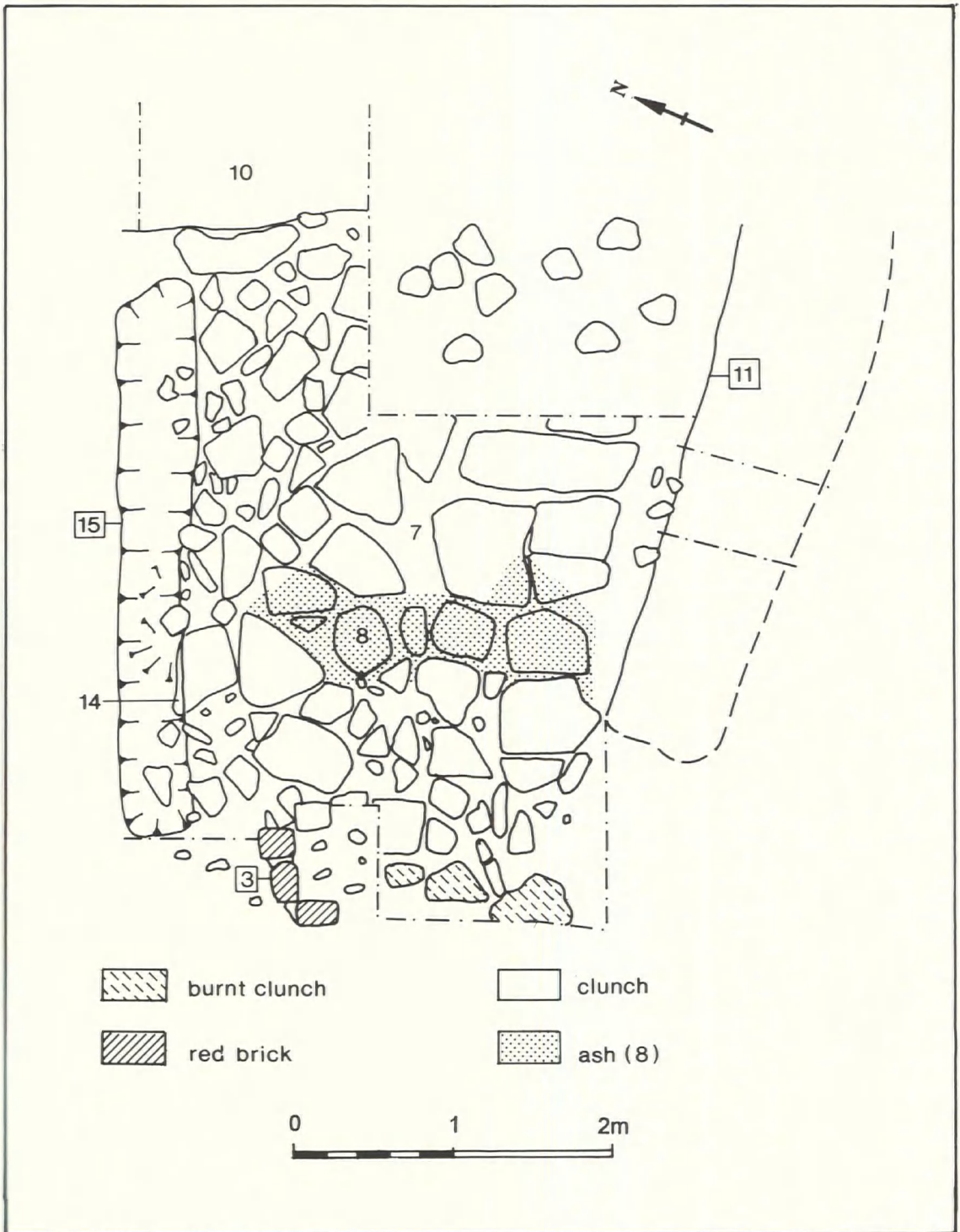


Fig 3 Clunch flagstone surface/hearth base (7) and later features

all earlier deposits with the exception of the fill of trench [15] in the north of the bay where it abutted the wall plaster (14). This suggests that the wall founded on [15] was still in place when layer (2) was deposited. This material served to raise the internal surface of the E bay, presumably prior to the insertion of a replacement floor, which was subsequently removed, leaving no archaeological trace.

Period 5 construction of the modern concrete floor in the E bay

The wall founded on trench [15] was later dismantled and the resulting void infilled with a variegated mid grey/brown deposit (5), with inclusions of late/post-medieval roof tile, clunch, flint pebbles and coarse sand.

A concentration of large clunch fragments (1), 300mm thick, sealed layer (2), raising the floor level once more at the E end of the building prior to the laying of a modern concrete floor. The absence of similar stone within the fabric of The Cottage suggests this material may be derived from the demolition of a separate building. Inclusions of roofing slate suggest an 18th century or later date for the deposition of this layer. A single residual sherd of 12th-13th century pottery was also retrieved from (1).

THE FINDS

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The watching brief at The Cottage produced a small artefact assemblage, comprising mainly pottery and ceramic building material (Table 1).

THE POTTERY

Four sherds of pottery (total weight 78g) dating from the Saxo-Norman to late medieval periods were recovered. None of the material shows signs of abrasion. Four fabric types were identified. They are listed chronologically below, using type codes and common names in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, which is held by BCAS.

Type Series

Type B01 St Neots-type ware
Fully described by Hurst (1956), and discussed more recently by Hunter (1979).

Form: wheel-thrown jar with everted rim
Date range: 10th-11th century.

Type C59B Early medieval sandy harsh
Fully described by Brine (1988).

Form: undiagnostic wheel-thrown body sherd
Date range: 11th-13th century.

Type C60 ?Hertfordshire-type Greyware
Examples from Bedfordshire are described by Brine (1988). This type is further discussed by Havercroft and Turner-Rugg (1987).

Form: undiagnostic wheel-thrown body sherd
Date range: 12th-13th century

Type C11 Brill/Boarstall type
Discussed fully by Jope (1953) and Ivens (1982).
Form: wheel-made glazed jug
Date range: 13th-15th century

Layer (10) produced a rim sherd of a St Neots-type ware jar (type B01), a sherd of early medieval harsh sandy ware (type C59B) and the handle of a jug of Brill/Boarstall fabric (type C11), which falls into a later date range of the 13th-15th century.

The St Neots type ware jar has an everted rim and is a form characteristic of this shell-tempered fabric. Although no kiln sites are known, St Neots type vessels are widely distributed throughout a core area in the south and east Midlands and have been recovered from numerous excavations on settlement sites in the Ouse Valley.

The early medieval sandy sherd is sooted externally, suggesting its use over a fire as a cooking pot. This type is assumed to have been manufactured locally, although there are no known production sites.

A single sherd of medieval greyware (type C60) was recovered from layer (1), dating to the 12th-13th century. This type is thought to derive from production sites in Hertfordshire. The presence of internal sooting or a black residue suggests the vessel may have been used either as a storage vessel or perhaps as a receptacle for contents which were deliberately burnt.

Less utilitarian wares are represented by the presence of the Brill/Boarstall type jug. The rod handle retains traces of a dense olive green glaze and is decorated with a single row of stabbed holes running vertically down the centre. The interior of the handle junction shows evidence for plugging and provides an indication of manufacturing techniques. Produced at kiln centres at Brill and Boarstall (Bucks.) this vessel attests the presence of regional imports at the site.

TILE AND BRICK

Five fragments of late/post-medieval flat roof tile (total weight 620g) in orange sandy fabric were recovered from layers (1) and (10), and from fill (5).

A large portion of a hand-made brick weighing 858g was retained from hearth surround [3]. Its incomplete nature precludes precise dating based on

dimensions, although the style of manufacture suggests it is likely to be late medieval/post-medieval in date.

Context	Pottery (sherds)	Tile & brick (frags.)	Other finds
1 (layer)	Medieval x 1	Flat roof tile x 2	Fe nail x 1 Animal bone x 1
3 (hearth surround)	—	Brick x 1	—
5 (fill trench [15])	—	Flat roof tile x 2	—
10 (layer)	Saxo-Norman x 1 Medieval x 2	Flat roof tile x 1	—
14 (layer)	—	—	Wall plaster frag
Total	4	6	3

Table 1 Finds Assemblage by Context

DISCUSSION

The archaeological deposits recorded during the watching brief at The Cottage relate principally to the construction of the building and its subsequent use and alteration. Residual sherds of Saxo-Norman and early medieval pottery are likely to derive from the known earlier, more extensive settlement at Clipstone. The presumed construction date for the building was confirmed and a broadly dated sequence of subsequent structural alterations within the E bay was elucidated.

The first stage of construction on the site comprised levelling of the ground surface in advance of the construction of the timber-framed building. Ceramic dating suggests a *terminus post quem* of the 13th-15th century for this initial work, which accords well with Alcock and Woodward's suggested construction date of 15th-16th century. Structural evidence from the standing building suggests it may originally have functioned as a barn. It was not possible to identify any archaeological deposits which could be related to this phase of the building's use.

The rising natural ground level to the W entirely precluded archaeological survival at that end of the building. Archaeological deposits, the most substantial being a flagstone surface/hearth base, survived only in the E bay. The distinct E limit to the flagstone surface suggests the presence of an internal structural division, running parallel to the E end of the building. A doorway, later blocked, but still visible in the N side of the external E elevation could have provided access to a passageway running along this end of the building. These features probably relate to the building's residential use, since a barn

would most likely have been entered *via* a larger door in the centre of either the N or S wall.

The position of the hearth base appears to have remained close to the W cruck truss in the E bay throughout the building's residential use. Renovation work on the roof revealed a crossed apex of cruck blades with smoke-blackened roof timbers. Smoke-blackening was greatest in the W half of the E bay but was also visible to a lesser degree along the length of the W bay. This suggests that on conversion to residential use the interior remained open to the roof, perhaps with a loft over that part of the E bay where no smoke-blackening was visible. At a later date a chimney was inserted against the W cruck truss and an upper floor constructed over the remainder of the building.

The creation of an upper floor necessitated the insertion of an upstairs doorway, through the tie beam of the W cruck truss. This alteration to the tie beam would have weakened the structure and the insertion of a wall below, in foundation trench [15], could have helped to redistribute stress loads. These changes appear to be contemporary with the construction of the brick hearth surround and may be broadly dated to the early post-medieval period.

The floor surface in the E bay was renewed at least once, possibly in the 18th century, before the internal wall was dismantled and a modern concrete floor was laid over a thick deposit of clunch hardcore.

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