

Wilsden, Tivington, Selworthy and Minehead Without, Somerset

(NGR SS 93164 44956)

Results of historic building recording

Exmoor National Park Authority planning reference
6/23/13/104LB, condition 3

Prepared by:
Andrew Passmore BSc MIfA

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the National Trust

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AC archaeology

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Summary

Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology on 5 July 2013 during refurbishment of a cottage called Wilsden, Tivington, Selworthy and Minehead Without, Somerset (SS 93164 44956). The cottage is a Grade II listed building that along with an attached cottage, has origins as an open-halled medieval farmhouse. The archaeological recording was required as a condition of listed building consent granted by the Exmoor National Park Authority.

The refurbishment exposed primary cob masonry in the front wall, and on the outside elevation two main phases of refacing were identified, one probably associated with the blocking of the cross passage. On the inside of the house a pair of doorways, set within a timber frame, was exposed. These would have lead into a (now-demolished) stair turret that provided access to a first-floor solar over the inner room. Removal of the stairs exposed a single late 16th- or 17th-century floor joist and sockets for three further joists.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology on 5 July 2013 during refurbishment of a cottage called Wilsden, Tivington, Selworthy and Minehead Without, Somerset (SS 93164 44956). The work was commissioned by the National Trust, and was required under condition 3 of the grant of Listed Building Consent (planning reference 6/29/13/104LB) granted by the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) for "proposed refurbishment of cottage to include part demolition of a cob wall, insulation of the lean to, installation of a new kitchen and the installation of secondary glazing on some of the windows."
- 1.2 Wilsden and the attached dwelling Springfield are two cottages formed from an earlier, larger house. The entire building is Grade II listed (National Heritage List no. 1057996), and is probably a late medieval farmhouse, altered and rebuilt in the 16th century, and altered again in the 20th century. The property is situated within the hamlet of Tivington between Selworthy and Minehead, within the National Trust's Holnicote Estate. Tivington is located within the valley of a tributary of the Horner Water at a height of 95m aOD. The underlying geology is mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Group.
- 1.3 The outside of the house was surveyed in 1982 by the Somerset Vernacular Architecture Group, (now the Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group) and their description forms the basis of the listed building description. A more thorough survey was carried out by the National Trust in 1996 (Richardson and Waterhouse 1996). This concluded that the building appears to have origins as a late medieval single storey, 3-room and cross passage house, with, unusually, two open hearths. In the late 16th or early 17th century the hall was floored over, a fireplace added and the lower room extended to form a two-storey cross wing. By 1841, and probably after 1809-12, the farmhouse had been divided into two cottages, an arrangement that remains today. More recent alterations have included upgrading of the cottages, including the provision of bathrooms. In Wilsden the latter was provided in an existing small extension attached to the west (front) elevation.

2. AIMS

- 2.1 The principal aim of the investigation was to prepare a record of the historic building prior to the commencement of the refurbishment. The principal areas of survey were those where intrusive works took place, in particular the west elevation where the cob wall was to be removed. A secondary aim was to record any architectural features or fabric exposed during the refurbishment.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2013) and the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (revised 2008). The recording was carried out to levels 2/3 as set out in English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*.

- 3.2 The survey comprised a written and photographic record that was prepared in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. The following methodology was employed taking into account architectural style and construction, the development of the house, and the surviving historic fixtures and fittings:

- A written description of the north elevation and the kitchen. Room numbers refer to those used in the 1996 National Trust survey. The building is aligned northeast to southwest, and in line with the National Trust survey front of the building is described as the west elevation.
- A photographic record showing the overall character and setting of the building, as well as any significant fixtures, fittings and architectural details. This comprised colour digital format only, and where appropriate, all photographs included a photographic scale.
- Elevation drawings at 1:20 and 1:50 as appropriate to illustrate the construction techniques, alterations and fixtures and fittings. The existing ground-floor plan prepared by the National Trust was also updated.

4. RESULTS (Figs 2-3; Plates 1-9)

4.1 The north wall exterior elevation

The elevation between the extension (room D) and the junction with the cross wing of Springfield was recorded (Plates 1-2). The majority of the visible wall is stone masonry, and on the basis of the observations both outside and inside the house (see 4.2 below) much of this must represent refacing. The earliest identified masonry was at the base of the wall, which comprised large blocks of roughly coursed red and occasional grey sandstone, incorporating an area of brick infill or patching (109). This probably represents the stone footing for the cob wall above.

The cob was light brown and gravelly and was present at the north end of the ground floor (104). This was almost entirely obscured by pebbledash render (101) that was removed to expose the underlying wall (Plates 2-3). The pebbledash was in poor condition and had been partially repaired using gravelly white cream cement render (102) and grey buff fine gravelly cement (105). A small patch of grey and red sandstone (103) at the north end of the wall may represent a repair to the cob.

In the south half of the wall the cob has been replaced with red and occasional grey sandstone, which has been repointed in cream gravelly lime mortar (108). This masonry continues across the opening to the cross passage (room C in Springfield), which may provide a context for the refacing. The former cross passage is lit by a window. The present opening is a 20th-century feature and has a timber-framed, frosted glass window set within brick jambs bonded with gritty cement, laid between a concrete cill and a concrete lintel (110). A further window (100) has been inserted into this masonry to light the hall (room A). The present window is modern, has a thin slate cill, and the surrounding masonry is repointed in gravel buff/cream cement. A timber is present below the window within 108.

At first-floor level the cob has been refaced with red and blue sandstone repointed in cream gravelly lime mortar and mid red gravelly cement (107). Both these episodes of repointing are modern, with the former being contemporary with the replacement of the wall plates and the last rethatching of the roof. The masonry incorporates two first-floor windows set below the eaves line. The northern window is a modern replacement and is set within rebuilt jambs of red sandstone and dark grey siltstone with a tiled cill, all bonded with a cream gravelly lime mortar (106).

4.2 The north wall interior elevation

The ground floor section of the north wall was recorded following the removal of the stairs and associated lobby and removal of most of the plaster (116). Limited plaster was removed in the first floor-landing to reveal the foot of the roof truss in the wall. Two skins of plaster were present; the earliest was painted white, whilst the later one had been painted white (twice), blue and green at various times.

The main cob wall (106) was exposed at the southern end of the room (Plate 4), and also at the eastern end where it had been laid on a stone plinth (109). A small area was also exposed on the first floor, although the majority of the fabric here was stone 107. Window 100 was set into this wall. On this elevation one side of the opening was splayed and the below the window the opening incorporated a window seat. Stone masonry associated with the insertion of the window was partially exposed within the splay.

Set into the north end of the wall was a double doorway opening defined by the remains of a timber frame (113). The head spans both doorways and has both shallow pointed and arched openings, the latter incorporating a chamfer. It displays some smoke blackening. Two of the three vertical elements to the frame survived, with those surrounding the northern opening having a continuation of the chamfer from the head. This terminated close to the top of the opening. The southern upright was missing and the head had been cut off leaving only half of the mortice (and associated peghole) visible. The bases to the other two uprights were rotten. All elements of the frame were pegged. The central upright has a chamfer on one side and a flat rebate for a door on the other, both largely obscured by later blocking. A peghole was also visible.

The doorways had been blocked using closely-packed red sandstone (114) bonded with mud, although some brick was also present in the northern opening (over which the plaster was not fully removed), which may represent a later repair. Other later repairs involved the infilling of voids left by the rotten or removed uprights using creamy white cement (117).

Two further areas of modern repair were exposed. On the ground floor the central floor east-west aligned floor beam (112) was reinforced with five rows of buff and red

bricks (111) set into cob 106. They were bonded with the same cement as 117. On the first floor, a repair had been made to the roof truss and its foot replaced. It appeared to be set into stone packing that was covered with a cement render (118) that extended into the reveal of the adjacent window.

The staircase (which has been described in detail in the 1996 National Trust survey) rose from a small lobby between rooms A-C, and was enclosed by its own door, as well as by tongue and grooved partitioning with room A (Plate 7). The latter also formed an understairs cupboard. The lower stairs were cut into a rebate in the adjacent wall. Removal of the plaster adjacent to the stairs exposed an area of brick and stone (115) above doorways 113. This probably represents infilling of a chase for a former floor joist that was removed when the stairs were inserted. Removal of the staircase partition exposed a single *in situ* north-south aligned floor joist set into the top of beam 112. This displayed scars of a former lath and plaster ceiling (Plate 8). The present ceiling is painted chipboard with applied batons replicating joists. Three joist sockets were exposed between this joist and the exterior wall set, 230mm (9") apart (Plate 9). The joists themselves were removed when the stairs were inserted. The floorboards of the landing (room H) are of 19th- or 20th-century date, but earlier floorboards survive in the bedrooms.

4.3 The bathroom (room D)

Limited removal of plaster from the east elevation (the original west exterior elevation of the house) exposed a blocked opening in a position matching the northern blocked doorway in room A. The top of the opening was formed by a (rotten) lintel and the doorway was blocked in sandstone (119), leaving a void behind.

4.4 The kitchen (room B)

The kitchen is located within what appears, on the basis of the staggered east (rear) elevation, to be an extension attached to the north end of the house (although it is likely that the room may actually represent a rebuild of a former larger medieval inner room). It may be contemporary with the division of the house into two cottages in the 19th century. The walls are constructed from red sandstone, and removal of the cupboard fittings exposed unrendered masonry. Faint traces of white paint survived; elsewhere the walls had been painted pale yellow. No historic features were visible; the only features being holes for modern services.

5. COMMENTS

5.1 The historic building recording has built upon the 1996 survey by the National Trust, and further details on the general construction methods and architectural details have been added.

5.2 No significant alterations to the building's known structural development are put forward. Recording of the external elevation has identified several phases of refacing – the earliest involving the infilling of the cross passage doorway. This was followed by the refacing of the entire first floor. The dates of these works are unknown. The former could date to as late as the early 19th-century when the farmhouse was divided into two cottages. The identification of 20th-century alterations to the window openings indicates that the later refacing (of the first floor) had taken place by then, and a slightly earlier date seems more likely.

5.3 The discovery of the wooden doorframes in the west elevation is of particular interest. The feature was initially interpreted as part of a reused screen. Evidence for the reuse was seen in the chopped off south end of the head timber. Paired

doorways are commonly found in screens on the lower side providing access to a buttery and a separate pantry or an enclosed staircase (see various plans in Wood 1983). However, such an arrangement is relatively rare in the southwest of England, and has been typically recorded in larger, often stone-built houses, in particular those with monastic or religious connections. In Somerset, examples include Shapwick House and Shapwick Manor House (Penoyre, *et. al.*, 2007, figs 4.2 and 4.8), as well as and the 'Priory', Stoke-sub-Hamdon (Wood 1983, Fig. 62).

- 5.4 However, the subsequent discovery of a blocked opening in the former external elevation indicates that the doorways are primary features. The fact that the frame also fits neatly into the cob wall, without any packing (as recorded on the window openings for example) and the discolouration through smoke blackening is also evidence that the doorways were intended for this opening from the outset.
- 5.5 Other than in screens, paired doorways are an uncommon architectural feature, and their presence at Wildsen raises interesting questions over the layout of the medieval farmhouse. At Bowhill in Exeter, paired doorways have been recorded (both in a screen and in partition wall) dating from the late 15th-century through to the mid 16th century. In each location one doorway is interpreted as leading into an enclosed stairwell serving the first floor accommodation (Blaylock 2004, 12-13, 192, fig. 12.1). A similar arrangement is put forward at Wildsen with the doorways leading into an external stair turret (roughly on the position of the present bathroom – room D). The doorways from the turret would have independently served both the original ground-floor hall (room A) and inner room (B). The present partition between these rooms is largely modern, but the south face of the surviving primary partition lines up with the upright post separating the two doorways.
- 5.6 From this, it can be deduced that the first floor was partially floored over from the start and was not fully open. Since the surviving truss over the hall is smoke-blackened, the stairs must have led to a solar (room E) over the inner room. Unfortunately, the medieval roof does not survive within this part of the building, and from the layout and drawings reproduced in the 1996 survey, much of this end of the building appears to have been rebuilt, and therefore no further evidence of the medieval layout is known.
- 5.7 The 1996 survey noted that the medieval house was unusual in having two open hearths – one in the hall, the other in the lower room – an arrangement only paralleled in the National Trust's southwest region holdings at Clayway on the Killerton estate. Such an arrangement however, may not be that rare. At East Densham Farm in East Woolfardisworthy, Devon – a late 15th or early 16th-century house formerly owned by Montacute Priory – the three room and cross passage was supplemented by a cross wing that contained smoke-blackened timbers (Collings *et. al.* 2009), and may also have had a second open hearth. The paired doorways and postulated stair turret are relatively rare architectural features in the southwest, and it is clear that Wildsen must have been well appointed and constructed by a wealthy landowner, probably of higher status than the average farmer.

6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 6.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, but will be deposited with the National Trust.
- 6.2 An OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 160079.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 This report was commissioned by the National Trust and managed for them by Christopher Turner and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The survey was carried out by Andrew Passmore who also prepared the report text. The illustrations were created by Elisabeth Patkai. Thanks are due to the staff of the contractor Barratt & Cannford Ltd for their assistance on site.

8. SOURCES CONSULTED

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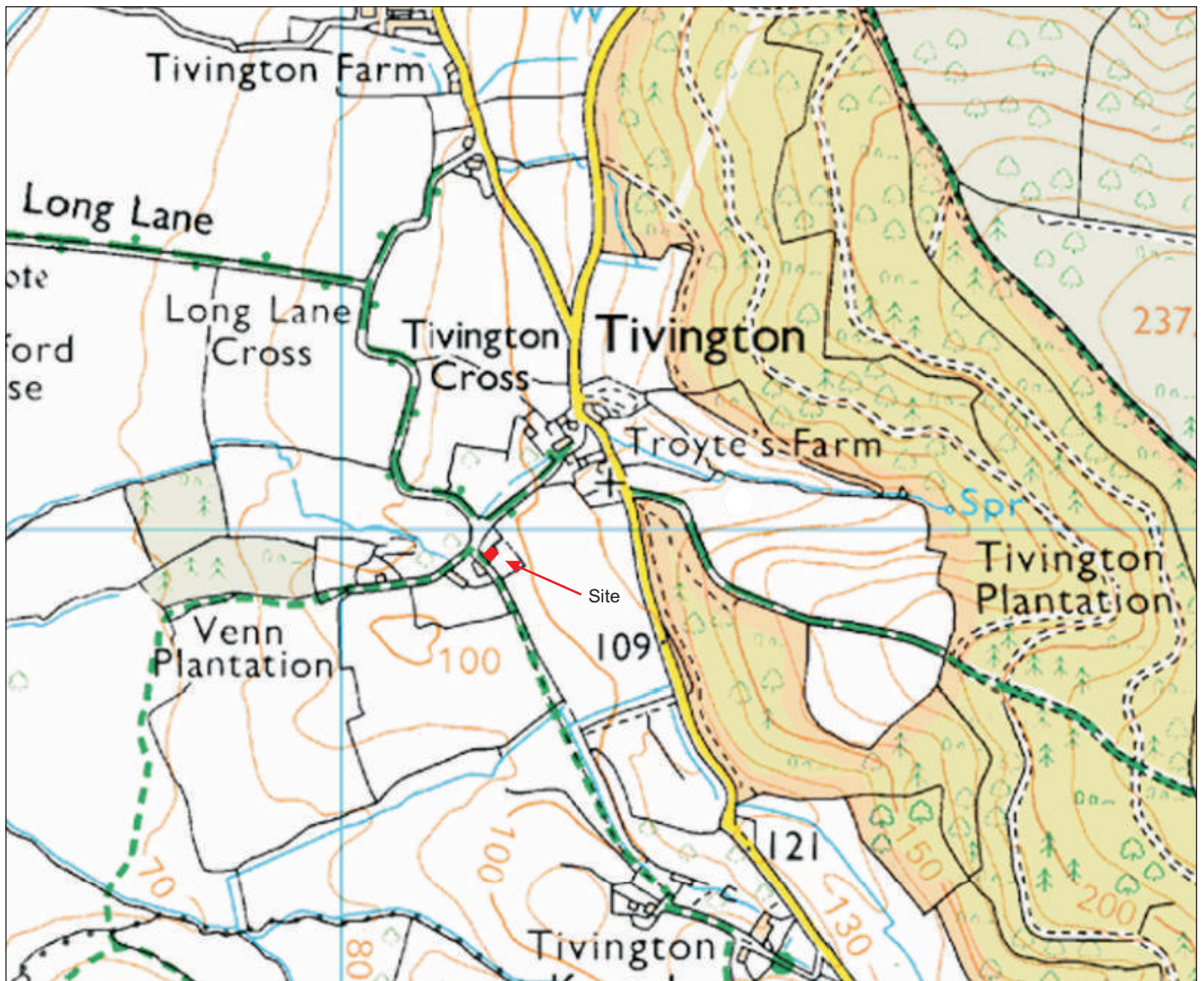
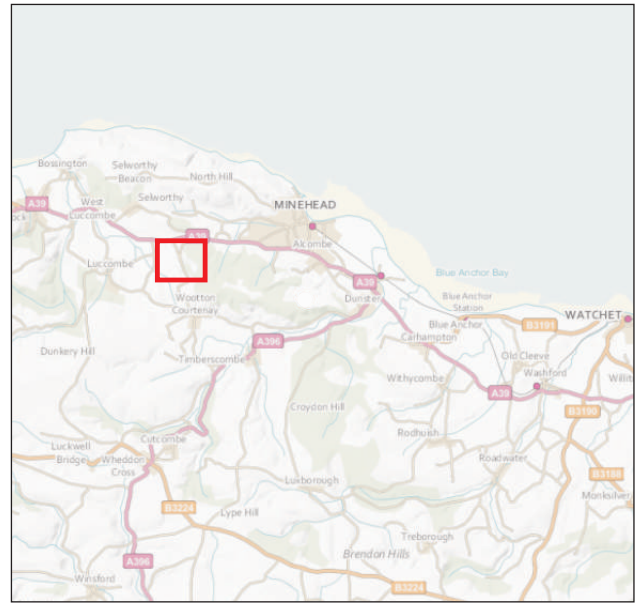
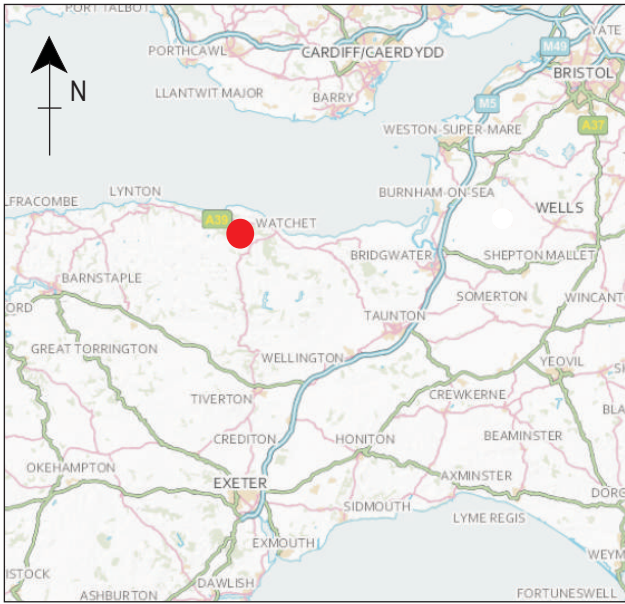
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0 250m



Scale 1:7500@A4

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PROJECT

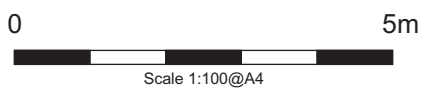
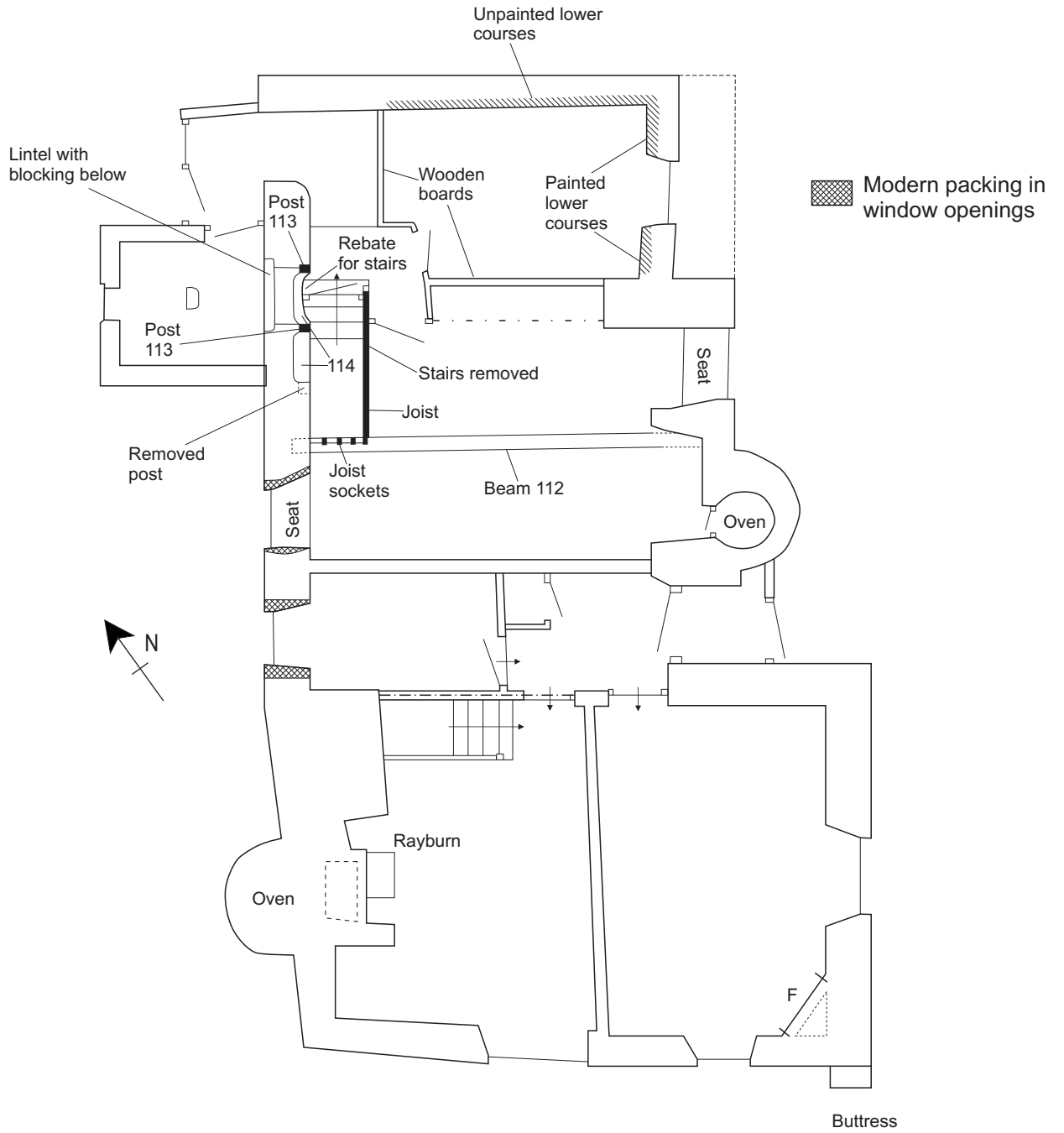
Wilsden Cottage, Tivington, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location

Location of site





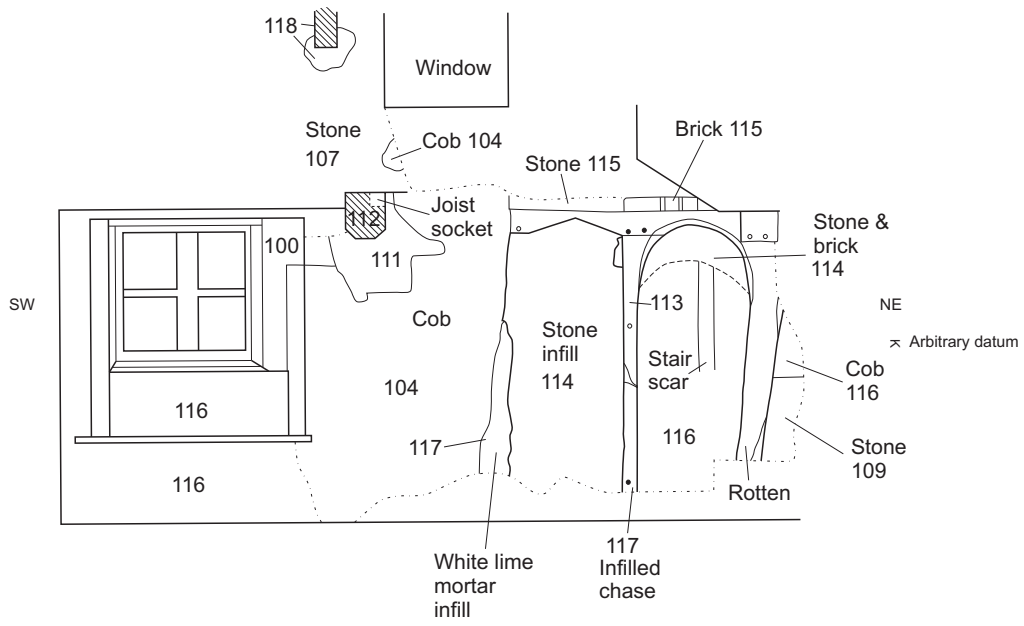
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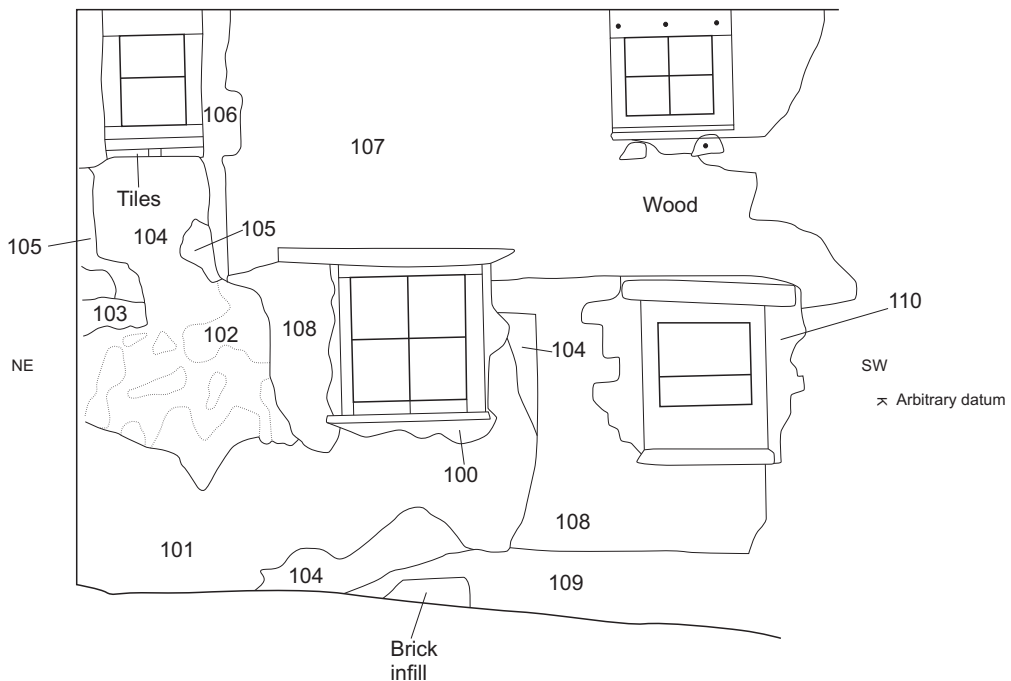
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Fig. 2: Ground-floor plan

a) NW wall, interior elevation



b) NW wall, exterior elevation



PROJECT

Wilsden Cottage, Tivington, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 3: Northwest wall interior and exterior elevations





Plate 1: The front elevation of the house viewed from the north, showing the bathroom extension (painted yellow) with the hall, blocked cross passage and gable of the south wing beyond.



Plate 2: The west wall external elevation prior to removal of render, viewed from the northwest. 1m scale.



Plate 3: The west wall external elevation after removal of render exposing primary cob fabric, viewed from the northwest. 1m scale.



Plate 4: The west wall interior elevation after removal of plaster, viewed from the south. 1m scale.

Plate 5: The southern of the two blocked doorways, viewed from the northeast. 1m scale.



Plate 6: The northern of the two blocked doorways, viewed from the east. 1m scale.



Plate 7: The stairs and adjacent door after removal of the partition, viewed from the south. 1m scale.



Plate 8: The exposed floor joist, showing evidence of a former ceiling, viewed from the north.



Plate 9: Exposed floor joist sockets in the beam following removal of the stairs, viewed from the northeast. 0.30m scale.

Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops
Bradninch
Nr Exeter
Devon
EX5 4LQ

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410

Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Manor Farm Stables
Chicklade
Hindon
Nr Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581
Fax: 01747 820440

www.acarchaeology.co.uk