

Land at Longcross, Zeals, Warminster, Wiltshire, BA12 6LJ:

Results of historic building recording

NGR ST 78773 32150

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On behalf of:
Boyes Transport

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archaeology

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Centred on NGR ST 78773 32150

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Historic building recording was carried out by AC Archaeology in July 2015 prior to the change of use of the land to an HGV trailer storage with a new vehicular and pedestrian access at Longcross, Zeals, Warminster, Wiltshire (centred on NGR ST 78773 32150). The recording was required under condition 6 of the grant of planning permission (Wiltshire Council (WC) reference 13/05423/FUL).
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Messrs Brimble, Lea and Partners on behalf of the developer, Boyes Transport.
- 1.3 The development area lies to the northeast of the village of Zeals and currently comprises two land parcels, both currently rough grassland and scrub with some hard-standing in the eastern plot. It is situated at a height of c. 136mOD and the underlying geology comprises sandstone of the Boyne Hollow Chert Member, formed during the Cretaceous period (Fig.1).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The development area includes what was thought to represent a Second World War pillbox. This building has not yet been recorded by the Defence of Britain project and little information about it is currently known, although it is certainly associated with the protection of Zeals Aerodrome (Wiltshire Historic Environment Record no. MWI80) to the north. Building began on the airfield in 1941 and it opened in 1942 with three runways and a 50ft wide perimeter track and 30 hardstandings. There were 8 Over Blister hangars and a control tower plus a T1 hangar close to the road. A transmitter building, masts and antennae were located outside, but close to, the airport perimeter (Plate 7).
- 2.2 Most of the ancillary buildings, including a hospital and Armoury, were also outside of the perimeter fence. The airfield suffered from waterlogging and was out of commission for part of the war. It was used by the Royal Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force, the United States Army Air Force and Royal Navy crews. It closed in 1946 and much of the site has reverted to agriculture, although numerous buildings survive and have been converted for domestic or industrial use. Numerous air raid shelters also survive. No structures, other than the 'pillbox', survive within the development area although a second structure once lay to the east (Fig.7).

3. AIMS OF THE WORK

- 3.1 The development will remove historic features of architectural interest. The principal aim of the investigation is therefore to prepare a record and archive of the historic building prior to its demolition. There was considered to be sufficient exposure of building's fabric not to require further recording during demolition.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (Cox 2015) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (revised 2014). Reference was also be made to English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*.

- 4.2 The survey was prepared in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*, and was taken to level 3 as set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. The survey comprised:

- A written description of the building and its local context;
- Scale drawings of existing plan and elevations;
- A photographic record including the overall character of the building, as well as detailed views of any architectural features and fixtures and fittings. Photographs are in colour digital format only (minimum 10 megapixels).

5. RESULTS (Fig.2; Plates 1-6)

- 5.1 Parts of the building had collapsed or had been partly demolished at the time of recording. Much of the outer blast walls were only present at ground level and the roof to the structure only partly survived (Plates 1 – 6).

- 5.2 The building is arranged around two distinct elements; an outer blast wall measuring 9 x 9.2m in plan and a central four-celled structure measuring 5 x 5.6m in plan. The central building is constructed on a concrete raft foundation that also acted as its floor. The floor had been partly truncated along its southeast edge by modern disturbance. Where present, the walls to the structure were partly cement-rendered and constructed of red brick, laid in English bond in mortar cement, referred to as *permanent brick* in a military context.

- 5.3 The blast wall survives in part to an original height of 2.6m, with cement coping layer, and would have enclosed virtually all sides of the inner structure with the exception of a 4.5m wide entrance set within the southeast elevation. Leading on from that entrance is an open-roofed corridor which access points to the main structure's four cells, each with individual entrances within the northeast, northwest and southwest elevations. Each of the entrances would have had a pair of doors, as indicated by the presence of scarring from a former timber surround. Above the surrounds are the empty recesses that formerly housed timber lintels. Additionally, the southwest entrance may have been furnished with a small secondary roof (or porch) as

revealed by three angle-irons set within the brickwork. Other than the doorways, no additional external features within the walls was evident.

- 5.4** Where present, the roof of the man building sits directly onto the walls of the structure and is flat and arranged around a series of concrete I-slabs encased in a waterproof bitumen lining. The building is divided into four rooms by integral brick partitions. The largest of the rooms is partly rendered and contains two tiers of three cast-iron louvered vents, set just above floor level and below ceiling height and extending through to the two northeast rooms. A number of threads within the northwest wall previously housed a horizontal bracket. Sited to the rear of the floor is large brick and concrete-formed rectangular sump, 0.8m in depth. The northeast extent has two protruding 4-inch ceramic drains which formerly acted as ducting. Within the opposing southwest extent are three further ceramic ducts laid vertically. Immediately positioned to either side of the sump are three distinct regularly formed recesses each 0.6m deep, along with a number of remnant threads indicating the possible position of a large generator within the building.
- 5.5** The southwest room, although smaller, appears to have also housed a generator as revealed by a similar 0.6m deep longitudinal sump and two remnant angle-iron brackets positioned at a height of 1.9m.
- 5.6** Both of the rooms to the northeast have the same dimensions, with the walls rendered to mid height. Passing through the party wall of the rooms is a central socket that would have held a wide bracket. This appears to have been fixed to the wall elevations of both rooms as revealed by regularly positioned remnant iron threads. The only other feature is a 4-inch ceramic drain/duct offset within the western part of each floor, which presumably housed a cable for individual subsidiary generators.

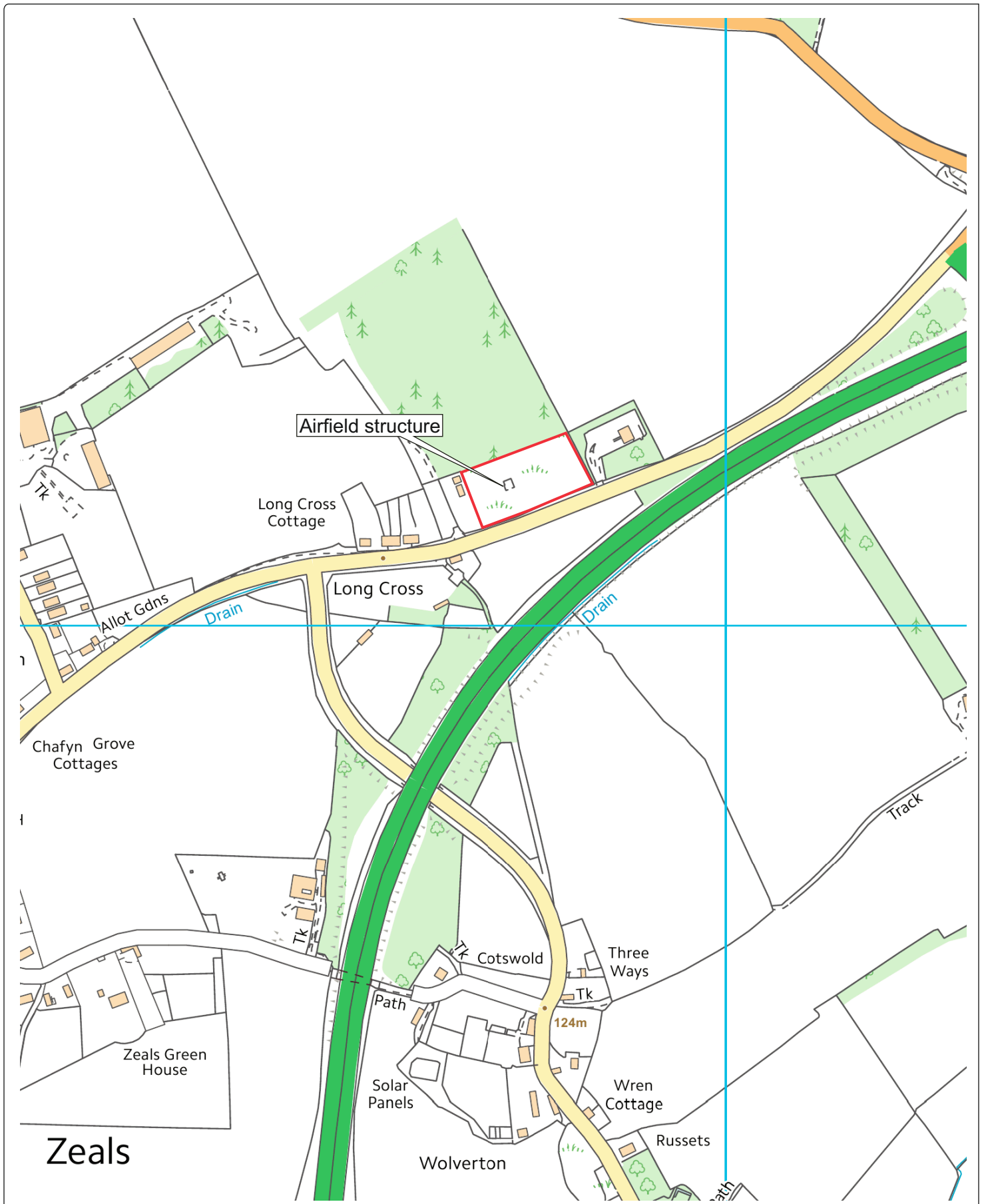
6. COMMENTS

- 6.1** It is difficult to assign a function to this building. It is clearly a structure associated with the former RAF Zeals airfield (Plate 7) and is not a pill box or air raid shelter. It may have been used as a substation or generator house, possibly a back-up in case of mains failure.

7. REFERENCES

Cox P., W., '*Land at Longcross, Zeals, Warminster, Wiltshire, BA12 6LJ: Written scheme of investigation for historic building recording. Centred on NGR ST 78773 32145*'. Unpublished document prepared by AC archaeology. Doc ref ACW807/1/1.

GGAT 112, Second World War Military Airfields of South Wales – RAF Llandow. March 2012



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PROJECT

Land at Longcross, Zeals

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location

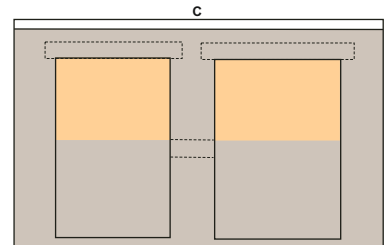
- A = rendered floor surface
- B = position of brackets?
- C = Flat of pre-cast concrete sheets sealed with bitumen
- D = Recess for brackets

-  Render
-  Exposed brickwork
-  Wall survives to full height

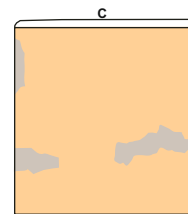
NE elevation



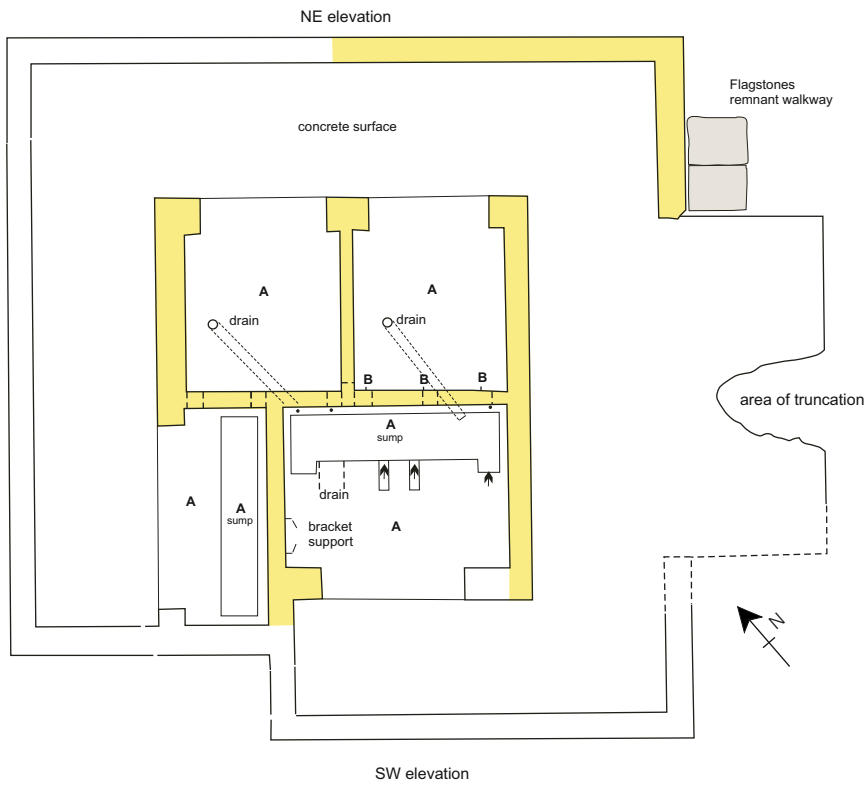
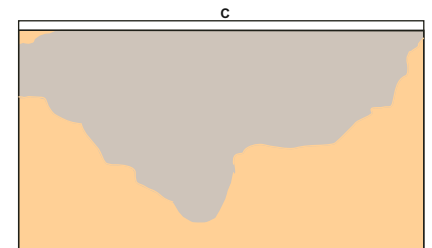
NE elevation



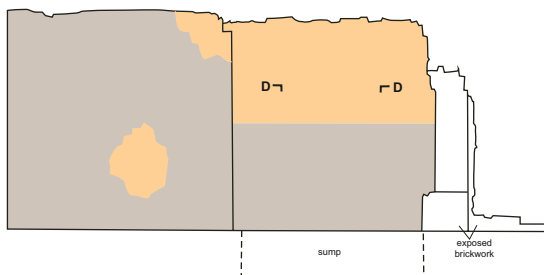
SE elevation



SE elevation



NW elevation



SW elevation

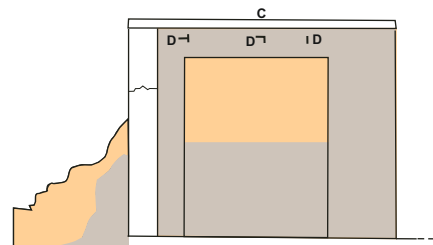




Plate 1: Northeast facing elevation (scale 2m)



Plate 2: Southeast facing elevation (scale 2m)



Plate 3: Southwest facing elevation (scale 2m)



Plate 4: Northwest facing elevation (scale 2m)



Plate 5: General view of the building from the south



Plate 6: General view from the east



Plate 7: Air photograph of RAF Zeals taken 24 March 1944

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