

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING
AT CONEYGREE COTTAGE,
SCHOOL BANK, OMBERSLEY,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Archaeological recording at Coneygree Cottage, School Bank, Ombersley, Worcestershire

Anna Deeks and Tom Vaughan

1 Background information

<i>Client</i>	Posting House Properties Ltd
<i>Agent</i>	Adrian Hutts Architects
<i>Site address</i>	Coneygree Cottage, School Bank, Ombersley, Worcestershire
<i>National Grid Reference</i>	SO 8461 6372
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WSM 32192
<i>Planning authority</i>	Wychavon District Council
<i>reference</i>	W/02/0463
<i>Brief</i>	AS 2003a
<i>Project design</i>	AS 2003b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999a and b

The Field Section of the County Archaeological Service was requested to undertake a watching brief and building recording project at Coneygree Cottage, School Bank, Ombersley, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9903 5727). The development proposal is to rebuild the derelict cottage with a substantial extension to the north and east, to the rear of the property. The watching brief was required as deposits from at least the 15th century may be disturbed during groundworks.

Previous archaeological work on the site

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

A number of sites have been archaeologically monitored within the village and surrounding area. The redevelopment of Cresswells on Main Street revealed 18th/19th century debris and a structure to the rear of the existing building (WSM 20253/31038). The anticipated medieval backyard deposits were determined to be disturbed and removed previously (Vaughan and Williams 2001). Monitoring has also been undertaken of development work at The Baches, Uphampton, 1km to the north-west. Deposits of 18th century and later date were identified (Williams 2002).

2 Topographical and historical background

The parish of Ombersley lies to the east of the River Severn, approximately 3.5km to the north of Worcester. The present day boundaries of the parish have their origins in an 8th century Anglo-Saxon charter in which Aethelward granted the lands of Ombersley to Bishop Ecgwine (Guyatt 1995, 1). Thus the parish is defined by the River Severn to the west, the River Salwarpe to the south, Hadley Brook to the east and the parish of Hartlebury to the north. The name *Ambreslege* is first recorded in 706. It is thought to derive from the Old English personal pronoun *Ambre* + *lēah* meaning the 'woodland clearing of a man called Ambre' (Mills 1991, 248).

Coneygree Cottage is located to the north-east of the historic core of Ombersley (Fig. 1) directly to the north of St Andrews's church (WSM 08016), the cottage is a Grade II listed building registered on the County Sites and Monuments Record as an archaeological site (WSM 30718); (Fig. 2). The listing description is as follows:

cottage with 15th century origins, rebuilt in the 17th, with mid 19th and mid 20th century alterations and additions. It comprises part dressed sandstone, part timber-framed with painted brick in-fill, rendered, plain tiled roof and external brick stack at the left gable end.

There are two framed bays; a single storey and an attic. The framing consists of collar and tie beam trusses with queen struts visible in the gable ends. The front elevation has a 3-light and a 2-light casement on the ground floor. The entrance in the left bay has a ledge and battened door with a moulded architrave and a gabled timber porch. There are attic lights in the gable ends. Within the interior the roof has a single row of trenched purlins and intermediate collar and tie beam purlins. Part of a former cruck frame survives in the left side wall frame. The main beams are stop-chamfered (English Heritage National Monuments Record, date listed 21st March 1985).

The name *Coneygree* is a derivative of the Middle English *coni (n) ger*, literally meaning ‘rabbit warren’. The name is believed to date back to the beginning of the Norman period, when rabbits were probably first introduced to the British Isles (Field. 1972). There are several different spellings of the name including *Conegree*, *Coneygar*, *Conigree* and *Connigar*. The first documentary reference to this name dates to 1574, when a note on Ombersley and Suddington lists ‘1 piece of land called Conigre’, however without any mapped source to support this document there is no direct evidence to suggest that this parcel of land is related to the cottage under current study.

The index to the court rolls lists five entries with names deriving from *coninger*:

Coningre	1/3 croft	demesne forfeit for felony	2H5	(1415)
Coningre	1 croft		8 H5	(1421)
Coningre	1 pcl near Cutmill		1H6	(1422)
Conyngar	1 croft Ombersley		20E4	(1481)

(CRO BA 3972/13 I, b705:56);(Guyatt 1995, 133)

of these only the entry of Conyngar comprising 1 croft dated 20th year of the reign of Edward IV (1481) is definitely located in Ombersley.

Further potential references to the early origins of the site, this time recorded as *conygree*, appear in the ‘Ombersley Survey 2-9-3 James 1 [1606] (18th century copy);(CRO BA 3972/9b b705:56) which lists:

John Roote 1 croft “Coneygree”
Pcl arable land “The Coneygree” (4 acres)
And also arable ‘Wenneries’ and ‘Ladies’ Aker’ (5 acres)

Walter Pardoe 1 cott. + lands “Micheal Sheppards” late “Hemyngs”
+ lands called ‘**conygree**’ (1/4 acre)
DH2, O+G (*orchard and garden*)
Land called ‘**conygree**’ (1 ¾ acre)
WOP (*wood on premises*)

(Guyatt 1995, 90)

The latter is also listed as a dwelling comprising 2 bays (Guyatt 1995, 20)

The survey contains other references to “*coneygree*” and “*conigree*”, all of which refer to parcels of land or inclosed pasture, however they do not mention any associated buildings.

The first mapped evidence of the cottage is provided by the Inclosure Award of 1827 (Fig.3), which describes the plot as *In Standing Field* (plot 966) (HWRO BA3972/13 b705:56 Guyatt 1995), no reference is made to the name *coneygree*. The building is located slightly to the west of a narrow strip of land directly bordering the road. Plots to the north and west are described as orchard. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (Ordnance Survey 1888) also clearly depicts the building within the same narrow strip of land north of the road (Fig.4). The map also shows a second smaller structure,

which lies adjacent to the west of Coneygree cottage. The 1905 edition (Ordnance Survey 1905) indicates the same layout, although without trees in the plot, and far fewer in the property to the north (Fig.5). The 1929 edition map shows the same structures, the boundaries to the north and west have been removed, and the cottage now lies in a larger property including the previously enclosed orchard to the north (Fig. 6).

3 Aims

The aim of the building recording was to record the techniques used in the construction of the buildings, its phases of development, the functional and historical use of the building and its association with surrounding buildings and landscape. The use of dendrochronology (tree ring dating) was also to be considered in dating the structure.

The aim of the watching brief element was to monitor all groundworks associated with the development to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

4 Methods

General specification for archaeological fieldwork	CAS 1995, RCHME 1996 photographic/level 3 survey
Sources consulted	SMR Sources cited by the SMR Inclosure Map and Award 1827 BA 3972/15 OS 1 st edition 1888 6" sheet XXI SE OS 2 nd edition 1905 6" sheet XXI SE OS 3 rd edition 1929 6" sheet XXI SE
Date(s) of fieldwork	24 th January – 10 th March 2003 Subsequent site visits made on the 20 th August and the 18 th September 2003
Area of deposits observed	c 509.15m ² .
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations and ground reduction – External to property 495.5m ² . Foundations – Internal to property 13.63m ² . Depth 0.43m
Artefact recovery policy	All artefacts were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).
Method of analysis	All hand-retrieved finds were examined. Artefacts were identified, quantified, dated and recorded on a Microsoft Access 1997 database. A <i>terminus post quem</i> (TPQ) date was assigned to each stratified context. The pottery was examined and recorded by fabric type according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

Access to or visibility of structure

Observation was carried out following the completion of machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe archaeological deposits. In addition to foundation trenches observations were made to the east of the property where machine excavations were carried out

through a bank of material, which had formerly abutted the east gable end. The exposed section indicated that a substantial steep sided cut had been made through the bedrock located to the north of the property. The northern foundations of “Coneygree” cottage were constructed directly onto the extant bedrock.

Access to the building itself was relatively unimpeded, with only the temporary restrictions resultant of the ongoing internal alterations to the building.

During alterations two additional openings were revealed in the east gable end of the cottage. These openings were not noted during the initial phase of survey but have been added to both the structural description (section 5) and discussion (section 7).

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

5 Deposit/ Structure Description

Deposit description

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
100	Upper fill	U/S from ground reductions	<i>TPQ</i> post-medieval	Upper fill of quarried area running east-west (north wall of property sits against northern extent to this cut, directly onto bedrock)	0.00 – 0.50m b.g.l
101	N/A	Clay matrix between main build of west wall and re-facing	<i>TPQ</i> post-medieval	Within matrix of west wall	N/A
102	N/A	Area of re-pointing mortar of northern wall	<i>TPQ</i> post-medieval	Re-pointing/ packing fill	N/A
103	Lower fill, deposit	Redeposited weathered sandstone and marl	Undated	Lower fill of quarried area	0.50- 1.20m b.g.l
104	Natural	Compact pink/red decayed sandstone and grey/blue sand	N/A	Natural	0.50-1.20m

Structure description

Building/structural element	Description	Date
Main build- Ground Floor	Dressed red sandstone laid directly onto bedrock. Unmortared at base with some repointing in a brownish pink lime mortar. Exposed faces (below ground level prior to groundworks) of north and east elevations contain areas of both well dressed stone and rough unfaced rubble.	<i>TPQ</i> post-medieval
South elevation - External	Main build is covered in a lime washed mortar. Contains a single door opening with gabled timber porch, one two casement and one three casement window- casements and glazing bars are 20 th century replacements.	As above
North elevation- External	Contains no openings and prior to ground works was only partially exposed above ground level	As above
East gable end - External	Ground floor main build of sandstone blocks some of which project beyond the return at the southeast corner. A row of three small rectangular opening was revealed within the lower element of the elevation (Plates 18 and 19). The openings were well constructed, contrasting with the main build which was constructed of random undressed blocks of stone and stone rubble. The internal faces of the openings were all lime-washed. In addition some sooty deposits were noted on the stonework of the central opening. During the excavation of the earth bank to the east of the property the front of the uppermost stones over the opening was truncated (R. Cannon pers comm). Indicating that a projecting stone 'hood' may have originally covered the openings. The first story is composed of machine made bricks infilling black painted timbers, contains single three casement window opening and unglazed diamond light in attic apex.	As above
West gable end - External	Ground floor main build of sandstone blocks, first storey composed of hand made bricks infilling black painted timbers. The chimney stack, present on this elevation, is supported by a stone plinth consisting of three courses of dressed unmortared sandstone blocks. The main build of the stack comprises 4 courses of handmade brick of no formal coursing, followed by smooth red handmade bricks (measuring 11x23x7.5cm) bedded in very hard brown/pink cement mortar. A single two casement window is present to the south of the chimney stack on the first floor	As above

Structure description (continued)

Building/structural element	Description	Date
Ground floor - Internal	Comprises two bays divided by a wooden partition running halfway across the internal space, perpendicular to the south wall. Original infill of these walls and door no longer extant. The west bay contains a fireplace in the west elevation, with evidence of several phases of construction. The east bay has floor covering of red quarries tiles and contains a 20 th century kitchen unit.	Floor and stone elements of fireplace original to interior c.18 th century with later rebuild/alterations to fireplace c.19 th century. Kitchen fixtures 20 th century
First floor - Internal	A staircase in the north-east corner of the building provides access to the first floor. The first floor is divided into three bays by two A frame trusses supported by the north and south walls of the building with horizontal members continuing to the floor level. The floor is composed of wooden boards on average 23cm wide. The west gable end contains a small brick fireplace central to the elevation. Infilling of the timbers of the gable end comprise wattle and daub to the north and brick to the south of the elevation. The east gable houses no fixed internal features	c. 17-18 th century
Timber framing and roof structure	The first floor is divided into three bays by two box frames constructed within the confines of the stone walls, the infill of these frames is no longer extant. The roof is supported by a series of broad common rafters in turn supported by purlins, which are jointed through the box frame and inserted into gable ends at east and west. Additional members have been added to support these roof timbers and create a flat false ceiling to the first storey.	c.17 th -18 th century

6 Artefact Analysis

The assemblage came from three stratified contexts and unstratified material. It ranged from possibly medieval to modern, but was mostly post-medieval in date. The material was mostly unstratified and quite abraded, although it included some quite large and unabraded sherds of post-medieval pottery (mostly of 18th century date). A summary of the pottery fabrics can be seen in Table 01, and a summary of the material recovered in Table 02, below.

Fabric Number	Fabric Name	Period	Total	Weight
101	Miscellaneous modern wares	Modern	3	2
78	Post-medieval red ware	Post-medieval	12	297
83	Porcelain	Post-medieval / modern	1	3
85	Modern stone china	Modern	2	2
91	Post-medieval buff ware	Post-medieval	3	308

Table 1

Material	Type	Total	Weight
Bone		1	19
Brick		1	493
Iron	Horse shoe	1	173
Glass	Vessel	3	147
Pipe	Stem	5	12
Pot	Modern	5	4
Pot	Post-medieval	16	608
Tile	Flat roof tile	3	334

Table 2

?Medieval	The possible medieval material was a single piece of unstratified 13 th to 18 th century tile.
Post-medieval	Context 101 had a <i>TPQ</i> date of post-medieval from the single piece of clay pipe stem recovered from it. The material recovered from re-pointing in the north wall (102) was associated with an 18th century based on sherds of post-medieval red ware (fabric 78).
Modern	The majority of modern material was unstratified (100). Context 103 also had a <i>TPQ</i> of modern.

7 Discussion

Documentary evidence of the cottage indicates it has been present since at least the early 19th century, and may have origins far earlier in the 17th or 18th centuries. There are certainly references to a dwelling called Coneygree dating back to these periods but without corresponding mapped evidence it is not possible to state with certainty whether these references relate to the building subject to the current study. The building itself provides little stylistically in terms of dating evidence, other than clearly later additions (19th – 20th century) such as the widow fittings and internal kitchen fixtures. The fireplaces also show clear evidence of having been altered. The stone elements appear original to the build of the cottage with later additions in hand-made brick which can be dated to between the 18th and 19th centuries. The main build of dressed sandstone blocks largely unmortared at foundation level is typical of vernacular structures in existence from the 17th century onwards. Previous to this small vernacular structures were almost exclusively of timber-frame construction, with stone reserved for buildings of grander design and higher status. The presence of a course of rubble stone above well dressed stone at the base of the northern elevation coincided with the previous ground level. Furthermore on the western elevation the coursing alternated between well dressed and rough rubble sandstone blocks. These changes in build are unusual and make indicate two phases of construction are present. However as there is little consistency between the height at which the change in build occurs and a more probable explanation is that the dressed stone was reused material used in conjunction with rubble for those faces buried below ground level. The use of well dressed stone in all exposed elevations (south and east) and at the quoins further supports this interpretation.

The cottage had been constructed within a cut running east to west, the northern extent of which corresponds exactly to the northern elevation of the cottage, whilst apparently continuing to the east. The foundations on the north and east side of the cottage are constructed directly onto the bedrock, largely without any mortar- although some areas have later been re-pointed. There is no definitive evidence to suggest whether the cut was intentionally made for the cottage or as a discrete area of quarrying later used to house the cottage. Although areas of crushed redeposited sandstone were noted in the upper levels of the internal floor foundations, none of the stone was present in the main build of the cottage. As such if the area was intentionally quarried for stone it appears to have been exported from the site, possibly employed as roadstone or local building material.

The material filling the cutting to the east of the cottage was evidently not the original back fill contemporary to the construction of the cottage. The upper and lower fills (100, 103), which abutted the east gable, was given a *tpq* of modern indicating that some form of disturbance occurred during this period. Mapped sources indicate that the land was used as orchards certainly until 1888 and possibly as late as 1929, such cultivation may account for the residue material recovered.

The presence of post-medieval material both between the main build and an area of refacing in the west elevation and repointing in the north wall provides a TPO. Furthermore this implies that the original build of the cottage pre-dates the post-medieval period.

The use of more than one material to infill timbers in the east and west gable ends indicates that some remedial work was carried out, presumably involving the replacing of lathe and plaster with brick. In the north-west corner of the west gable lathe and plaster with stone has been used whilst in remainder of the west and all of the east brickwork has been used. Given that the main build of the cottage is stone it seems reasonable to suggest that the lathe and plaster with stone infill represents the earliest of the two forms. The use of brickwork infill occurs in vernacular architecture from the late 17th onwards, largely contemporary to the use of brick in the construction of entire buildings (Mercer.1975). The use of brickwork, as an apparently secondary phase of construction or repair, supports the documentary evidence of an initial construction phase of early to mid 17th century.

Three small rectangular openings were revealed in the east gable end following ground clearance. The presence of sooty deposits on the stonework of the central opening indicates that the openings can be interpreted as small openings associated with ovens. The well-constructed openings had been blocked with hand-made bricks and large dressed sandstone blocks and were not apparent from the

interior due to the presence of thick plaster. There was no evidence of any external features associated with these openings, however from the protrusion of the upper stones of the openings (which was truncated during ground works, Richard Cannon pers. comm.) strongly indicates that some form of canopy or hood was extending above the openings. The openings were intentionally built within the roughly constructed lower element of the elevation and as such it can be assumed that they were intended to be below ground level. An example of bread ovens constructed as protuberances to a stonewall and covered by earth has been observed at the National Trust East Midlands property of Throstle Nest on the Longshaw Estate (Dr B. Lott pers comm). The monitoring of ground works did not note the remains of any associated external feature; as such this interpretation must remain largely conjectural. However as noted above the modern *tpq* of the upper and lower fill (100, 103) of the bank which abutted the elevation indicates that some form of disturbance took place during this period, which may comprise the extraction of any external features originally associated with the openings. Any such activity may have coincided with the blocking of the openings, which in the case of the central opening employed 20th century machine made bricks.

The function of this structure is not certain, however a number of factors suggest that it was intentionally constructed and used as a bakery. Firstly the presence of three below ground openings in the east gable end can be tentatively interpreted as openings associated with external ovens. Furthermore the fact that there are three apparently contemporary openings strongly indicates that the ovens were operating on a greater scale than domestic activity. Secondly the use of stone in the construction of the cottage is somewhat unusual given the local vernacular of timber-framing. Whilst high status buildings in the vicinity are stone built the cottage does not fall within this classification and as such the use of the cottage as a bakery would provide a convincing explanation.

8 Conclusions

The results of the building survey and watching brief indicate that the cottage was first constructed in the mid 17th century, there was no apparent evidence to support the claim made in the current listed building description for the property, which states that it dated to the 15th century. This date correlates well with the evidence of documentary sources. The building has been subject to several phases of re-pointing and re-facing, which occurred during the post-medieval period, according to associated material assemblage

The location of the cottage within an intentional terrace is unusual, especially given the fact that the extracted stone has not been incorporated into the main build of the property itself. The construction of the buildings footings directly onto the bedrock does indicate that the area was last quarried almost immediately prior to the construction of the cottage. The fill to the east of the property was given a *tpq* of modern indicating that some form of disturbance took place during this period. There is no documentary evidence to suggest that the land was formerly used as a quarry, however the nature of the cut and the area of extraction does imply that a large quantity of sandstone was removed. There is no evidence of such landscaping activity in any of the properties adjacent to the site. The explanation for this terrace remains unclear.

The presence of three intentional well-constructed openings within the east gable end has been interpreted as the remains of external bread ovens, which would have been covered by the fill within the cutting. Any such external features were removed during the modern period (18th – 19th century) during which time the openings were also blocked. The number of openings strongly indicates that the ovens were being used at a ‘cottage industry’ scale rather than domestic, and as such the building may have been constructed as a bakery, which remained in use until the 18th – early 19th century.

9 Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

A archaeological recording project was undertaken on behalf of Posting House Properties Ltd at Coneygree Cottage, School Bank, Ombersley, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 8461 6372; WSM 32192). The results of the building survey and watching brief indicate that the cottage was first constructed in the mid 17th century. The location of the cottage within an intentional terrace is unusual, especially given the fact that the extracted stone has not been incorporated into the main build of the property itself. There is no documentary evidence to suggest that the land was formerly used as a quarry, however the nature of the cut and the area of extraction does imply that a large quantity of sandstone was removed. There is no evidence of such landscaping in any of the properties adjacent to the site. The explanation for this terrace remains unclear.

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10 Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	6
Photographic records AS3	4
Colour transparency photographs	4 films
Black and white photographs	4 films
Architects survey drawings	1
Drawings	3
Box of finds	1
Computer disks	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

Acknowledgements

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