



# **Chris Butler MIFA Archaeological Services**

## **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Plat Cottage Winchelsea East Sussex**

TQ 9047 1728

Project Number 2005/04/01

by  
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### ***Summary***

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the construction of a new extension at the rear of Plat Cottage, Back Lane, Winchelsea.*

*A possible Medieval wall footing was encountered on the east side of the building, and an assemblage of pottery dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was recovered. No other archaeological features were encountered.*

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Tennant through Chris McGrath, Chartered Architect, to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the construction of an extension to the rear of Plat Cottage (TQ 9047 1728).
- 1.2** Plat Cottage is located in Back Lane, Winchelsea (Fig. 1), and occupies a square plot mid-way along Back Lane, and opposite St Thomas's Church. The property currently occupying the site originates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was originally two small cottages, later knocked into one. It has a weather-boarded exterior and tiled roof, with a brick built chimney at either end. There is a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century extension at the rear of the property. This extends along the entire length of the property, and is built from bricks and has a tiled roof. A conservatory was added to the south-east rear end of the extension in the 1990's and apparently replaced an earlier structure on the same footprint. This conservatory is now being replaced by the new extension.
- 1.3** The site is situated in the historic and archaeologically sensitive town of Winchelsea. Plat Cottage is on the northern edge of Quarter 19, which was probably the second most important of the quarters within the new town of Winchelsea.
- 1.4** Winchelsea is located on a hilltop some 1.5 km inland, with the River Brede on its north side. The ground falls rapidly on all sides into the Pett Levels to its south, and Rye Bay to the east. On the west side a ridge takes the A259 through Icklesham and on to Hastings. A Bench Mark on St Thomas's Church is 38.79m OD, and a TBM of 36.74m OD was located at the site. The geology, according to the British Geological Survey (Sheet 320/321), is Wadhurst Clay overlying Ashdown Beds sandstone, mainly Cliff End Sandstone. The upper seams contain horizons of Tilgate Stone, a calcareous sandstone frequently used in the past as a building stone in Winchelsea.
- 1.5** An application had been submitted for planning permission for the construction of a new extension, and the planning consent had been granted by Rother District Council (being the local planning authority). However, given the archaeological sensitivity of the development site, an archaeological planning condition requiring a recording brief was attached to the consent (Planning Application Reference RR/2004/1367/P). The County Archaeologist requested that watching brief be undertaken, utilising the volunteer services of members of the Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group (HAARG), under the direction of a suitably qualified archaeologist.
- 1.6** The fieldwork commenced on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2005, and continued on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005, under the direction of the author, assisted by a number of volunteers from HAARG.

## 2. Archaeological & Historical Background

- 2.1 The new town of Winchelsea was laid out in 39 'quarters' between 1283 and 1292, by the order of King Edward I. Initially the new town seemed to prosper, but in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries it suffered some seven major attacks by the French, who pillaged the town on almost every occasion. In addition the changing coastline hastened the decline of the town as a port, as a shingle bar spread across the river outlet. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the town had declined and the last merchant had left, and for the next 300 years Winchelsea was in decay. In the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century textile manufactory was undertaken with cambric and crepe being produced.
- 2.2 The site is located in Quarter 19 of the town, which appears to have been one of the principal quarters. A map of the town was reconstructed from the 1292 Rent Roll by Homan (1949). He showed that the rental was arranged in a certain order round each quarter, and that the measurement was a *virga*, apparently of 16 feet (4.88 metres). Excavations in Quarter 19 in 1974 confirmed that the tenement boundaries fit perfectly with those proposed by Homan (Martin et al. 2002).
- 2.3 The 1974 excavations were undertaken in the south-western corner of the quarter, in German Street, and revealed the foundations of a Medieval stone built house. The house was subject to reconstruction in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, and was abandoned in the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century (King 1975)
- 2.4 An archaeological survey was carried out between 1984 and 1986, which included the southern part of Quarter 19. Further surveys were carried out in the southern undeveloped part of the quarter in 1988 and 1993. The only building to pre-date the 18<sup>th</sup> century (2 Friars Road) was surveyed in 2000, whilst the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century 1 Friars Road was also surveyed at the same time (Martin et al. 2002).
- 2.5 An un-vaulted cellar exists under Plat Cottage, and was viewed in 1980. It proved to be of indeterminate age and was initially thought to be late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Martin et al. 2002), however it is possible that it is Medieval (Martin et al. 2004(a)).
- 2.6 Other archaeological excavations have been carried out on a number of sites in Winchelsea, and have either been summarised in Martin et al. (2004(b)) or individual reports (e.g. Butler 2003).

**2.7** The following cartographic references have been consulted:

1. A map of Ancient town of Winchelsea MDCCLXIII by Charles Stephens WIN 2315
2. A later copy of the above map (1768?) AMS 5806/3
3. Town of Winchelsea – Thorn Farm 1767 AMS 5788/1/2
4. OS 25inch 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1872 sheet XLV14
5. OS 25inch 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1899 sheet XLV14
6. OS 25inch 1909 edition sheet XLV14
7. OS 25inch 1929 edition sheet XLV14

**2.8** The 1763 map of Winchelsea by Charles Stephens is the oldest known map of the town. The 1767 ‘Survey and valuation of the Estate of Arnold Nesbit esq lying in the several parishes of Winchelsea, Secklesham and Pett in the County of Sussex, taken and delineated by John Machoun’. Both of these maps show the part of Quarter 19 where Plat Cottage is located to be an empty space.

**2.9** The first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 25inch map, surveyed in 1872, shows Plat Cottage. The property is unchanged through to 1929, when a small building shown on the earlier editions at the rear of the property is no longer present.

**3. Archaeological Methodology**

**3.1** The foundations for the new extension (Fig. 2) were excavated by hand, and the spoil was removed from the site. Initially the foundation trench was excavated to a depth of 600mm, but after a visit from the Buildings Inspector, the depth was increased to a maximum of 1.6m in the south-west corner.

**3.2** It was not possible for the author to revisit the site during the removal of the soil to this greater depth. However, the soil had become largely sterile at a depth of 600mm, and a HAARG member who visited the site on the completion of this subsequent work confirmed that the soil was sterile and no archaeological features could be seen.

**3.3** The excavation of the foundation trench was carried out under the direction of the author, and wherever possible the soil was removed in spits. On encountering possible archaeological deposits, the surface was cleaned and subsequent soil was removed more carefully with a trowel. All of the spoil was sifted through prior to being removed offsite, and a metal detector was also used.

**3.4** All archaeological deposits, features and finds were excavated and recorded according to accepted professional standards, using context record sheets. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.

- 3.5** A full photographic record of the work was kept as appropriate and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently held by Chris Butler Archaeological Services and, after any further analysis, will be offered to Winchelsea Museum. A site reference of PLC05 has been allocated.

## **4. Results**

- 4.1** The topsoil was a dark grey-brown sandy loam with rare small rounded gravel pieces and occasional pieces of building material (Context 1). This formed a consistent layer across the whole of the site to a maximum depth of 400mm, and is possibly a redeposited soil brought in to make up the ground level. This layer contained a few pieces of residual Medieval pottery, quantities of Post Medieval pottery and a range of other artefacts. A small deposit of scallop shells were found within a slightly darker horizon of soil within this layer at the south-east corner of the trench.
- 4.2** Below Context 1 was a mid grey-brown stiff silty clay layer (Context 2), which included rare small rounded gravel pieces and charcoal flecks. This layer varied between 200mm and 600mm in depth, and was above a compact yellow-brown sandy clay natural (Context 6). See Fig. 3 for example section of trench. Context 2 contained numerous sherds of 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> century and 15<sup>th</sup> - 16th century pottery, together with some Post Medieval pottery, animal bone fragments and numerous pieces of building material.
- 4.3** At the west end of the foundation trench a similar layer of soil contained numerous pieces of building material, including brick and tile fragments and slate (Context 3). This part of the site appeared to have been disturbed by Post Medieval building activity. Contexts 2 and 3 were cut by a number of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century service drains (see Fig. 2).
- 4.4** Within Context 2 on the east side of the cottage, the footings of a wall built of sandstone blocks were encountered 400mm below the current ground surface. The upper part of the wall comprised irregular shaped Tilgate Stone blocks up to 250mm in size bonded in a compact yellow sandy clay (Context 4). The upper 50-60mm of this layer was very disturbed and mixed with numerous small water-worn pebbles. Two pieces of 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery were found in the undisturbed part of Context 4.
- 4.5** The lower part of the wall (Fig 3) comprised a carefully laid drystone construction, approximately 1m wide, of irregular shaped Tilgate Stone blocks up to 250mm in size, with smaller rectangular pieces of Tilgate Stone wedged at the edges and base (Context 5). There was no specific bonding material, but a dark brown sandy loam filled the gaps between the sandstone blocks, which survived to a height of three courses (c.400mm). There was no visible cut for the wall footings.

- 4.6** Probing showed that the wall continues out of the trench to the west towards the cottage, where it is in direct alignment with the original rear wall of the cottage. The wall does not appear to continue eastwards or turn a corner within the trench, but it is possible that later disturbance by modern service drains has removed any evidence for it here.
- 4.7** The opportunity was also taken to view the cellar. This is entered by wooden stairs through a wooden hatch, located at the front of the house. The cellar entrance is brick built: 1.04m wide, 1.03m deep and 750mm high, with a rounded section (presumably to assist the lowering of barrels). The cellar itself is unvaulted, and measures 3.16m wide and 3.81m deep. The ceiling, which may be a false ceiling, is 1.88m above the floor. On the west side of the cellar there is a small recess: 1.03m wide and 890mm deep, with an arched top 1.67m above the floor. On the back wall of the cellar there is a line running diagonally from the top right to bottom left, which may indicate the presence of an original stairway.
- 4.8** There were no other features noted during the watching brief.

## 5. Finds

- 5.1** The excavation produced a small assemblage of finds, which are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 The Finds**

Context Number	Pottery No./gms.	Animal bone No./gms.	Glass No./gms.	Other No./gms.
<b>1</b>	48 Post Medieval 7 Medieval 1 East Sussex Ware (473)	6 bone (68) 12 scallop shells (16)	4 (24) 1 ink bottle (60)	28 clay pipe (64) 1 metal spoon (24) 2 tile/brick frags (46) 4 metal frags (22) 1 QEII 1955 half crown
<b>2</b>	14 Post Medieval 24 Medieval 60 Later Medieval (697)	30 bone (330) 2 oyster shells (40)		4 clay pipe (6) 43 tile/brick frags (662) 3 slate frags (10)
<b>3</b>	7 Post Medieval 8 Medieval 2 Later Medieval (141)	4 bone (86)		1 slate frag (1) 1 tile frag (52)
<b>4</b>	2 Medieval (8)			2 brick/tile frags (60) 1 slate frag (4)



## **5.2 The Pottery**

The pottery from the site was predominantly Later Medieval and Post Medieval, with a few earlier pieces also recovered. The pottery, which was identified by Luke Barber, is described by period below:

- 5.2.1** A single abraded sherd of Late Iron Age-Romano British East Sussex Ware was found in Context 1.
- 5.2.2** Over 30 sherds of Medieval pottery dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to early 15<sup>th</sup> century were found in all of the soil contexts. These have come from a variety of sources, including the Rye kilns, Winchelsea Black Ware, and Saintonge. Two sherds of 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery, including one from a green-glazed jug with a raised circular motif decoration, found in the wall structure are probably from the Rye kilns.
- 5.2.3** The largest group of pottery dates from the mid 15<sup>th</sup> to mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, and derived mostly from Context 2. It comprises predominantly hard-fired sandy earthenware products from the late Rye kilns, together with a number of Raeren and Siegburg stonewares, and Dutch red ware.
- 5.2.4** The pottery from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries is represented by some tin-glazed earthenwares, local earthenwares, and a single Borderware sherd, whilst from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries there were numerous Creamware, porcelain, transfer-printed china and pearlware sherds, together with some brown-glazed earthenware sherds.
- 5.2.5** The Medieval and Post Medieval pottery assemblages appear to be typical of those normally found in Winchelsea (Martin et al. 2004(b))

## **5.3 The Clay tobacco pipes**

- 5.3.1** A total of 31 stems and a single bowl were recovered from Contexts 1 and 2. Most of the stems are typical of those found in the later 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with just two examples having a large diameter stem which may indicate an earlier date.
- 5.3.2** The bowl has a raised leaf design on the mould join, but no spur or other decoration. This is one of the commonest spurless designs, dating from the period c.1850-80, and is found all over south-eastern England (Atkinson, undated).

## 5.4 Other finds

Context **1** produced a small collection of late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artefacts, including a spoon that dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a clear glass ink-bottle, machine made in a two-piece mould (late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and a 1955 half crown of Queen Elizabeth II. These recent artefacts demonstrate the disturbed nature of the topsoil.

Other finds of bone and shell within Contexts **1** and **2** suggest that kitchen waste was being discarded into this area, along with the broken pottery.

## 6. Discussion

- 6.1 The discovery of the small section of wall foundation hints at the presence of an earlier building on the same site and alignment as the existing Plat Cottage. Its location on the same alignment as the original rear wall of the cottage suggests that the earlier building was either on the same position, or was located slightly to the east of the current building.
- 6.2 The presence of two sherds of 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery in the upper part of the wall may provide some evidence for its dating, even if this related to its robbing out rather than construction. However, the style of construction is also very similar to other Medieval buildings that have been excavated in Winchelsea.
- 6.3 Although the foundations may have been largely robbed-out, the surviving foundations (*c.* 1m wide) are of sufficient size to have carried the weight of a building, and are therefore unlikely to have been simply a boundary wall. Other Medieval wall foundations excavated in Winchelsea have been between 500mm and 710mm wide, with smaller foundations possibly for timber framed constructions (Martin et al. 2004(a)).
- 6.4 The construction method used elsewhere in Winchelsea in the Medieval period comprises stone foundations bedded into the clay, with a lime mortar used to bond the upper courses. Yellow bricks are also frequently used. The lime mortar normally has a heavy admixture of small water-worn pebbles (Martin et al. 2004(a)). If the wall at Plat Cottage was robbed out the presence of numerous small water-worn pebbles in the upper part of the surviving wall (Context **4**) may be the remnant of the original lime mortar.
- 6.5 Although the current building on the site is likely to date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the watching brief has shown that there was likely to have been a building in the same location dating from the earliest phase of the town's life. Whether the cellar underlying the current property relates to the earlier or later building is still not clear.

## 7. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mike Austen, Sue McGrath and Rachel Virgo who helped with the watching brief. I would also like to thank Chris McGrath who made arrangements for the on-site work to take place, and liaised with the contractors, and the owners Mr & Mrs Tennant for their co-operation and the provision of frequent cups of coffee. Luke Barber commented on the pottery, and Greg Chuter of ESCC provided information from the H.E.R.

## 8. References

- |                              |         |   |
|------------------------------|---------|---|
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Fig. 1: Plat Cottage, Winchelsea: Map of Winchelsea, showing the location of Plat Cottage in Back Lane. (OS 1:2500 1929 45/14; ESRO)

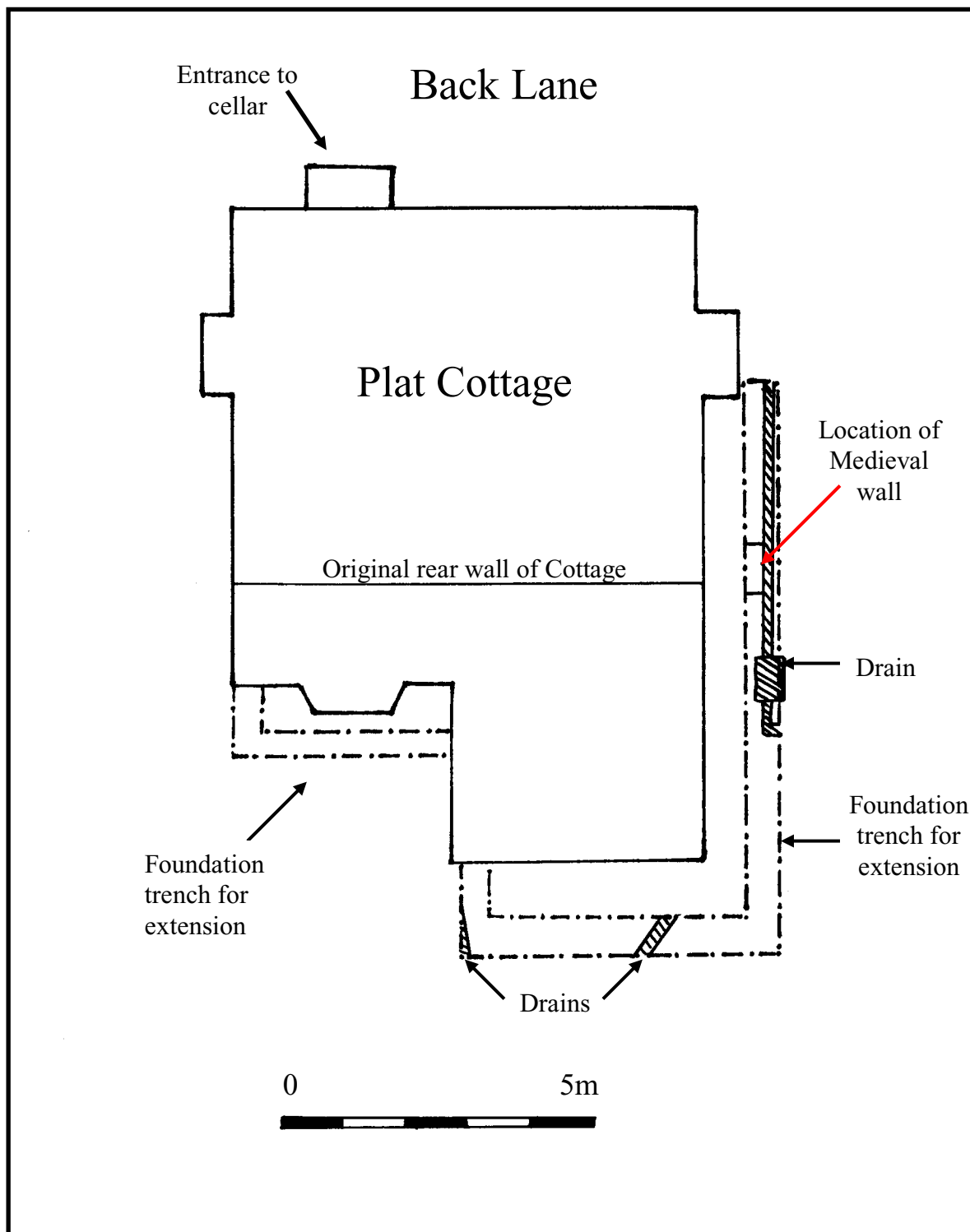


Fig. 2: Plat Cottage, Winchelsea: Site Plan showing location of extension, the Medieval wall and entrance to the cellar.

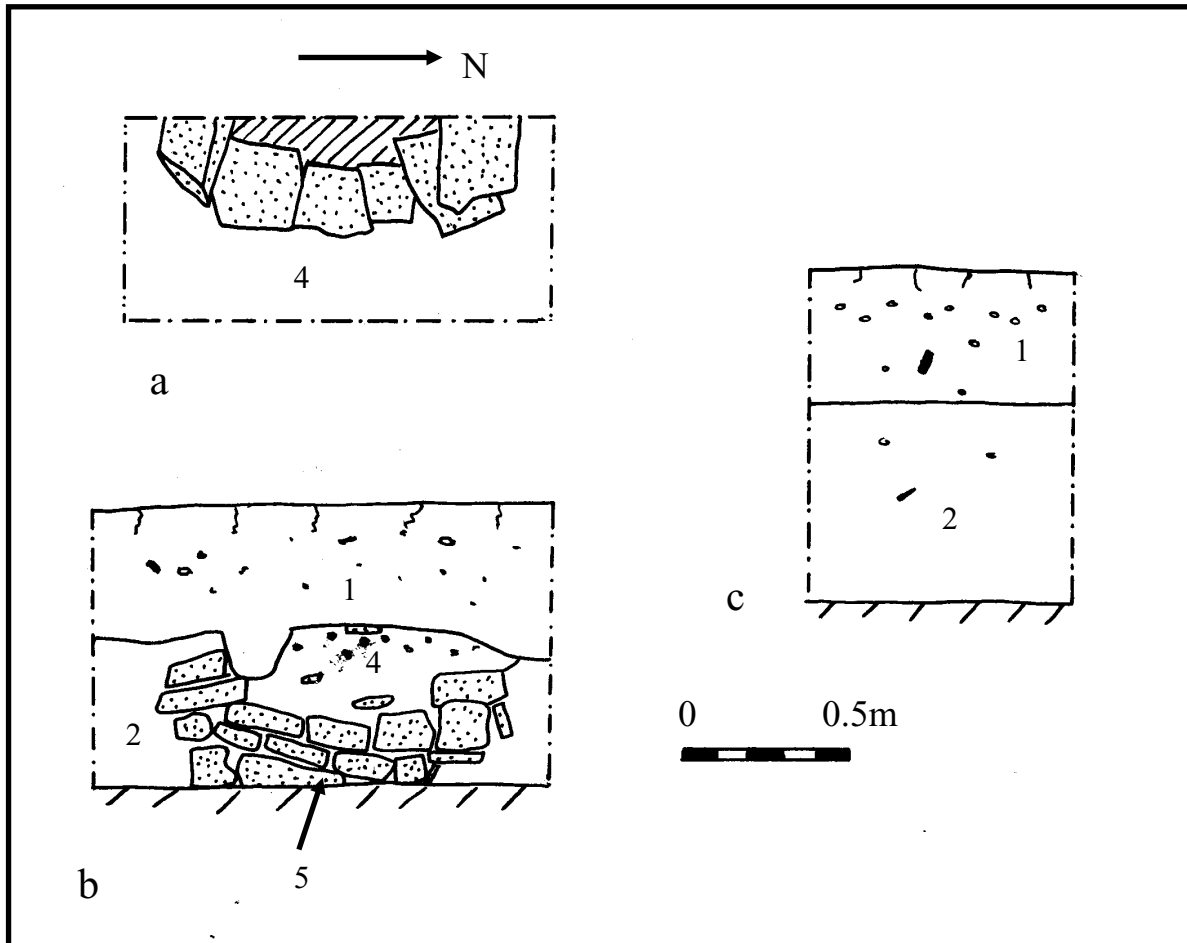


Fig. 3: Plat Cottage, Winchelsea: a: Plan of Medieval wall; b: Section of Medieval wall; c: Example section of extension foundation trench.

## **Chris Butler Archaeological Services**

Chris Butler has been an archaeologist since 1985, and formed the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in 1987, since when it has carried out numerous fieldwork projects, and was runner up in the Pitt-Rivers Award at the British Archaeological Awards in 1996. Having previously worked as a Pensions Technical Manager and Administration Director in the financial services industry, Chris formed **Chris Butler Archaeological Services** at the beginning of 2002.

Chris is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, a committee member of the Lithic Studies Society, and is a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex. He continues to run the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in his spare time.

Chris specialises in prehistoric flintwork analysis, but has directed excavations, landscape surveys and watching briefs, including the excavation of a Beaker Bowl Barrow, a Saxon cemetery and settlement, Roman pottery kilns, and a Mesolithic hunting camp.

**Chris Butler Archaeological Services** is available for Flintwork Analysis, Project Management, Military Archaeology, Desktop Assessments, Field Evaluations, Excavation work, Watching Briefs, Field Surveys & Fieldwalking, Post Excavation Services and Report Writing.

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