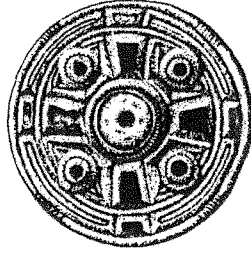


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Post-medieval occupation at Meesdenbury Farm,  
Meesdenbury, Meesden, Hertfordshire:  
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

Rebecca Casa Hatton

June 2002

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. N23

Commissioned by Mr W. T. Dimsdale

**Post-medieval Occupation at Meesdenbury Farm,  
Meesdenbury, Meesden, Hertfordshire:  
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

(NGR TL 43938/32901)

Rebecca Casa Hatton, MA, PhD

2002

Editor: Dr. Paul Spoerry  
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Report No. N23

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## **SUMMARY**

*Between December 2001 and May 2002 staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological watching brief at Farmhouse Manor, Meesdenbury, Meesden, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 43938/32901), as part of the planning requirements in advance of construction affecting an historical Grade II Listed Building. The work was commissioned by Mr. W. T. Dimsdale who also submitted the planning application.*

*The watching brief consisted of two phases, groundwork monitoring (Phase 1) and building recording (Phase 2).*

*Groundwork entailed the excavation of service and foundation trenches for the proposed kitchen extension. The excavated trenches produced evidence for clay and gravel deposits, the earliest of which pre-dated the Manor House and could seal earlier medieval buildings/features. Later activity on site was represented by a nineteenth century brick-foundation building. Uncertainty rests over the original function of this building that appears to have been used as a brewery.*

*Building recording consisted of the investigation of the rear wall of the present kitchen, in advance of the proposed extension. This consisted of a post-medieval timber frame on a brick plinth. The timber was found to be in a good state of preservation, despite modern interventions, namely the insertion of a window and service pipes. The wall appeared to belong to one phase of construction, with the kitchen and the adjacent room probably representing (part of) the original nucleus of the house. Unstratified pottery dating to the seventeenth century confirms a relatively late date for this part of the Manor House.*

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**Post-medieval Occupation at Meesdenbury Farm, Meesdenbury, Meesden,  
Hertfordshire:  
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**(NGR TL 43938/32901)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Between December 2001 and May 2002 staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological watching brief at Farmhouse Manor, Meesdenbury Farm, Meesdenbury, Meesden, Hertfordshire, at NGR TL 43938/32901 (Fig. 1).

The work was carried out as part of the planning requirements in advance of construction affecting a Grade II Listed Building (LBII).

It was carried out in two phases that consisted of groundwork monitoring (Phase 1) and building recording (Phase 2).

The work was commissioned by Mr. W. T. Dimsdale, present owner of the Meesdenbury Farm Estate.

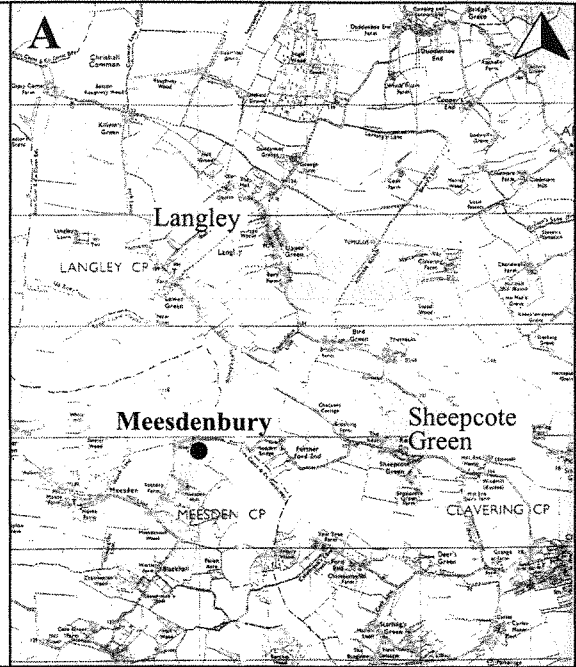
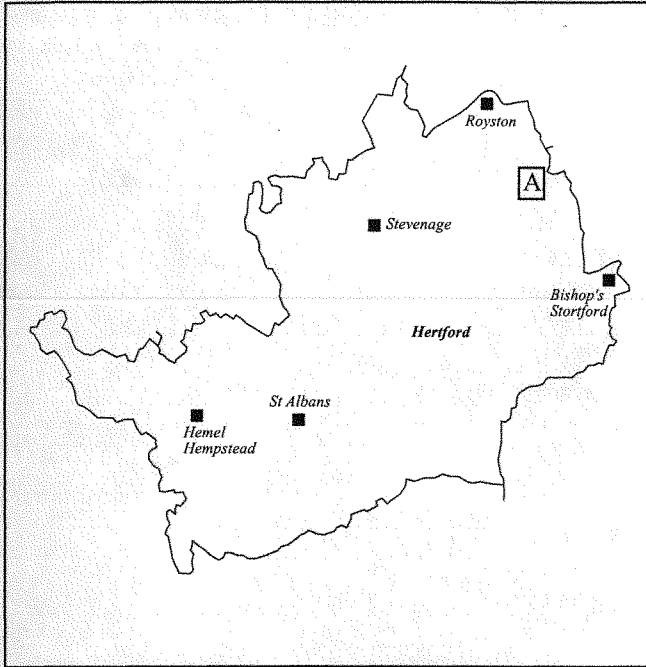
**2 SITEBACKGROUND**

**2.1 Planning Background**

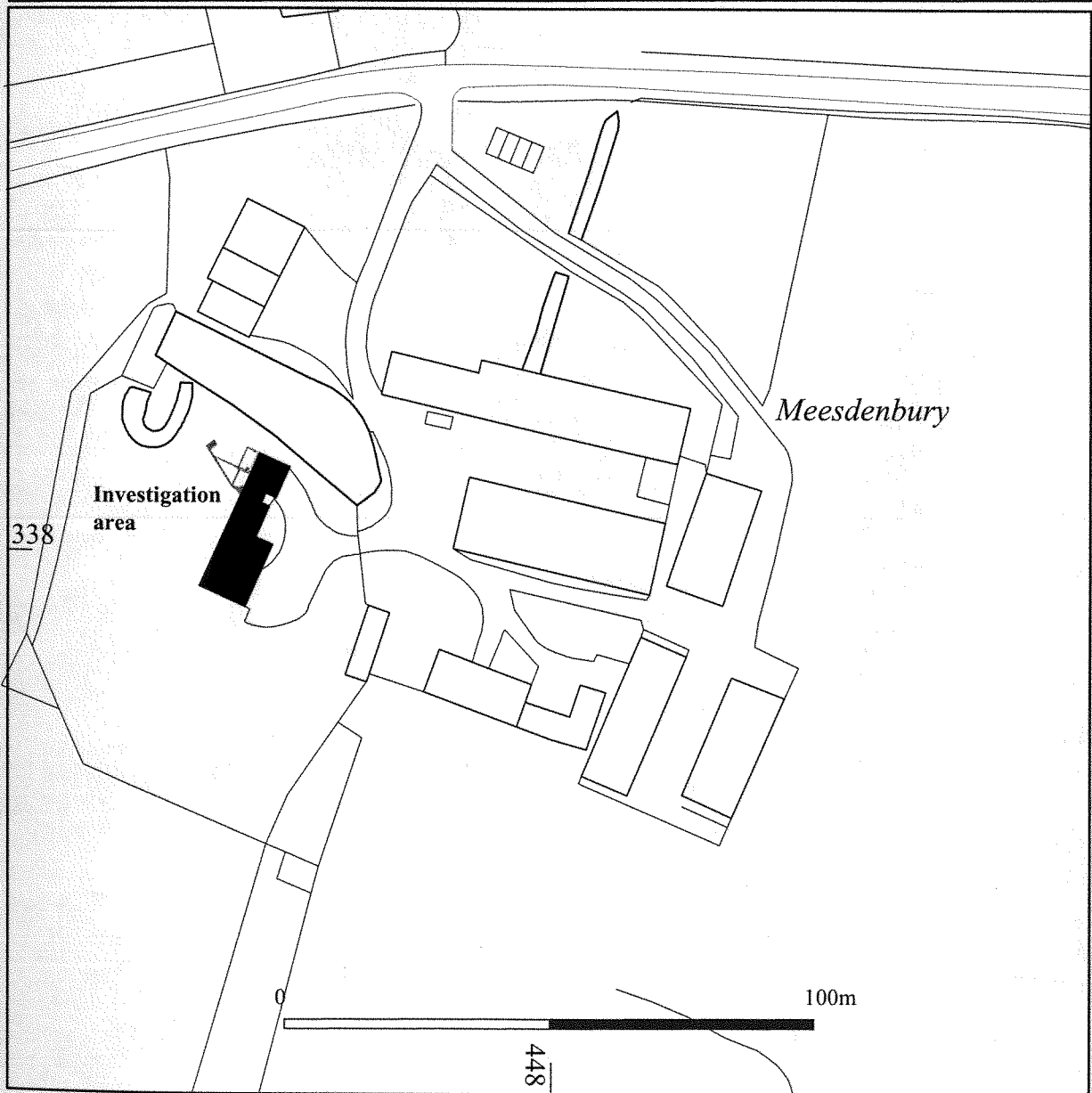
The Planning Application was submitted by Mr. W. T. Dimsdale (Planning Ref. 3/01/1482). The proposal was for conversion and redevelopment of the Manor House, involving the extension of the kitchen room, the construction of a new porch and shed, and associated groundwork. The Manor House is a Grade II Listed Building of historical significance. Furthermore, the building is located on a moated site of which earthwork remains survive.

Given the known historical and archaeological background of the proposed development site, the Planning Archaeologist, Department of Environment of Hertfordshire County Council made recommendations to the Planning Authority for groundwork monitoring and building recording to be undertaken, as part of a watching brief.

Two Design Briefs were issued by Jonathan Smith, Planning Archaeologist of (Smith 04/12/01; *Id.* 20/12/01). In response to it, two Specifications were produced by Staff of the AFU (Kemp 05/12/01; Kemp & Casa Hatton 14/01/02).



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## 2.2 Topography and Geology

Meesden is a parish of approximately 5000ha. It comprises an undulating plateau broken by small streams. On the north and north-east, the plateau slopes down to the River Stort and a tributary stream. To the south is the River Ash. The height of the contour line ranges between 130m and 140m.

In the parish there are three areas of settlement, Upper Green in the south-western corner of the parish, Lower Green in the north-western corner, and Meesdenbury.

Meesdenbury is located near the eastern boundary of the parish, off the B1038 from Newport, approximately halfway between Saffron Walden to the north-east, and Stevenage to the south-west (Fig. 1).

The Manor House sits on higher ground that slopes sharply on the eastern side towards a levelled yard occupied by post-medieval barns and modern utility buildings. To the north-east there are remains of a medieval moat and a raised mound. The moat presently joins a drainage ditch that marks the western boundary of the estate. A fence defines the southern and south-eastern sides of the moated area.

The local geology consists primarily of Chalk Till, i.e. calcareous clayey soils, of the Hanslope soil series (Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 4).

## 2.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

### Roman

The earliest element in the Roman landscape was the Braughing-Great Chesterford-Worsted Lodge (Margary 21b) road, a branch of Ermine Street that diverged by Braughing.

At Brent Pelham, further north, it follows the alignment of the road to Meesden for 1km. Here the road is generally narrow and sunken. It then turns off sharply to Meesden where it is 1m wide and 0.30m high (Margary 1967, 199 ff.).

The road was built for the movement of the army advancing into east Hertfordshire. The presence of the army brought about the development of Braughing as a *mansio* and of Great Chesterford as a '*vicus*' attached to the Neronian fort (Burnham & Wachter 1990).

### Saxon and Medieval

During the Saxon period most of Hertfordshire was in the kingdom of Essex. As late as A.D. 704 the king of Essex granted land to the Bishop of London

and a significant portion of Eastern Hertfordshire remained in the Essex Diocese until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Following the Conquest, increased pressure on the land due to the growing size of the population prompted woodland clearing and gave rise to a pattern of small dispersed settlements and hamlets. Evidence of clearance survives in the local place-names (Burnt Ground, New ground, Laey, *etc.*).

The present distribution of settlements in the parish of Meesden reflects its medieval origin. As seen above, there are three settlement nuclei, Upper Green, Lower Green and Meesdenbury.

The original medieval settlements developed away from the Roman road and fords across the River Stort and its tributary. Meesdenbury may represent the earliest of the three nuclei. The presence of the church of St. Mary (SMR4346) is likely to have acted as a fulcrum for the development of a hamlet at Rectory Farm and the establishment of a moated site further to the north. Significantly, the moat, the church and the Rectory lie on a track which begins with a lane, turning off the modern road, and continues northwards as a footpath to Meesdenbury and hence to a ford across the River Stort. To the south of the Rectory there are remains of an overgrown track that joins the Roman road (Munby 1977, *passim*).

At a later stage, the settlement probably shifted uphill towards Upper Green and on to Lower Green.

At Meesdenbury the Domesday Survey records woodland for 400 swine and five ploughs, three of which were shared by a priest. Meesden means 'bog hill'. Bury is from *burh* and probably refers to the moat earthworks.

The church of St Mary was built in the earlier part of the twelfth century (nave) as part of the post-Conquest programme of church rebuilding and refurbishing. It was built of flint, with clunch and Barnack limestone dressing. The early fourteenth century glazed floor tiles are of a rare type, of which the best examples are found in Prior Craudene's Chapel at Ely (RCHME). Reference to a share of a plough in the Domesday Book would suggest the existence of a farm and, possibly, an earlier predecessor to the twelfth century church.

The size of the population continued to grow until the fourteenth century when climatic changes began to affect the crops, causing famine and disease. As a result, a large part of the arable lay unploughed in many rural areas, including Meesden, and settlements were abandoned. It is possible that the moat went out of use around this period. Bury is mentioned in 1418 when it was presented at the Court Baron that the 'chamber' within the moat was ruinous and that the timber work of the chamber and the bridge over the moat had disappeared (VCH). By then, the manor was held by the Abbey of St Mary Graces that profited from the sale of underwood, pasture and culture of the mill.



Meesdenbury is designated as an Area of Archaeological Significance (no. 20, Local Plan). The SMR describes it as a medieval moated site (Homestead Moat, SMR1945) of which earthwork remains are still visible.

The northern arm of the original ditch is currently filled with water and maintained. It widens near the side of the Manor to form a pond. Part of the western arm was recently filled-in and disturbed by the insertion of a sewer pipe running from the Manor House to the moat. Together with part of the southern arm, it is still visible as a slight depression in the ground. Finally, part of the eastern arm is culverted. The moat is depicted on Ordnance Surveys Maps that show the extent of the northern arm. The early edition (1883) shows the moat covered in trees and depicts a well in correspondence with the western arm.

In the south-eastern corner of the site there is a flat mound that may have represented a house platform.

Earthworks along the western boundary were created during the 1960s and 1970s when a garage extension was attached to the kitchen at the north-east side of the Manor House. Soil from the foundation trenches was removed and piled up near the rear boundary (Mr. Dimsdale, pers. comm.).

#### Post-medieval and Modern

During the post-medieval period the parish of Meesden, like many others in east Hertfordshire, was predominantly rural.

In the early 1830s Charles John Dimsdale, fourth Baron, commissioned map of his estates at Meesden. The map shows names of fields, tenants and owners of land, and depicts furlongs of open fields and headlands from the medieval field system. The later Tithe Map (1840) and Enclosure Award (1841) were prompted by the three major landowners in the parish, the Dimsdales, the Alexanders and the Reverend Armytage Gausson who owned Meesdenbury. By the time of Enclosure the open fields were subdivided into smaller plots and new roads laid out.

The property at Meesdenbury was later owned by the Cecils who sold it to a former tenant. It was acquired by the late Baron Thomas Dimsdale after the Second World War (Baron Thomas Dimsdale Records, courtesy of Mr. W. T. Dimsdale).

At the time of sale in 1930, the Particulars and Conditions of Sale describe the Manor House at Meesdenbury as a 'Farm Residence, partly bricked faced and creeper-clad and partly timber and plaster, covered in red tiles' consisting of two storeys and an attic. The Particulars and Conditions of Sale also describe the 'Farm Homestead' associated with the property. Among the most interesting buildings are extant barns with weatherboards on brick foundations and cruck-framed roofs.

The manor is currently a Grade II Listed Building (Ref. 9/129). The Listed Building record describes it as a double pile late seventeenth century timber frame with nineteenth century brick casing to the front and (modern) red tile roof. The building was originally of three storeys and a cellar. The kitchen is a one and an half storey building. The interior plan is unusual. The entrance is through an arched tunnel running through the shared chimneystack of the two front rooms. The interior has been heavily modified from the nineteenth century onwards, with the insertion of the front bay windows, marble fire-surrounds, wall panelling and dado rails.

Further alterations include the insertion of corner fireplaces in the adjacent rooms in the rear range, the shift of the staircase from its original position in the entrance corridor, the blocking of the external entrance to the underground cellar from the southern side of the building (Mr Dimsdale, pers. comm.).

The cellar is eighteenth century. It has a flat roof with beams and joists that carry the ground floor.

### 3 **METHODOLOGY**

#### Groundwork Monitoring (Phase 1)

Groundwork entailed the excavation of service and foundation trenches for the proposed kitchen extension.

The excavated trenches were recorded, providing stratigraphic details and section drawings (1:20 scale) of the deposits and features exposed in the sections.

A general plan of the site was produced at 1:100 scale to show the location of the trenches within the development area. Finally, a photographic record was compiled as part of the documentary archive.

#### Building recording (Phase 2)

Building recording consisted of the investigation of the rear wall of the present kitchen, in advance of the proposed extension. By the time of the investigation the wall had been stripped of its plaster. The removal of the plaster revealed a timber-frame structure on a brick plinth. The elevation of the exposed wall was described, drawn at a 1: 20 scale, and photographed.

The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice, in conjunction with guidelines set in the Briefs (CAO).

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Phase 1: Groundwork

Groundwork consisted of the excavation of foundation and service trenches referred to as Trenches 1, 1 Extension, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 5 Extension (Fig. 2).

#### Trench 1

##### Sections 8 and 9: Make-up Layers (Fig. 2)

Trench 1 was 8.2m long and 0.80m wide on a NW to SE alignment. It was excavated to a depth between 0.65m (Section 9) and 1.60m (Section 8). The removal of the topsoil to an average depth of 0.10m exposed a series of make-up layers of varying thickness. In stratigraphic sequence, these consisted of a very dark brown clayey deposit, 2, between 0.40m thick (Section 9) and 0.50m thick (Section 8). It sealed a thin layer of clay and gravel some 0.12m thick, 3. In Section 8 the layer of clay and gravel 3 sealed a thick deposit of looser gravel and sand, 4.

Deposit 2 contained sherds of nineteenth century willow-patterned pottery.

#### Trench 1 Extension

Trench 1 Extension represented the continuation of Trench 1. It consisted of a series of short trenches between 4m and 2m long and between 0.50m and 1m wide, which butted against the kitchen rear wall.

##### Section 7: Brick Foundations of Kitchen Rear Wall (Fig. 2)

The excavation of Trench 1 exposed four courses of the brick foundation of the kitchen rear wall, i.e. 29. The foundation consisted of three courses of late sixteenth century hand-made red stretchers, with each stretcher being centred over the stretcher of the course beneath and *vice-versa*. The lowermost course comprised half-bricks laid vertically, with a ratio of two vertical half-bricks *per* stretcher above (damp-course?). The bricks were bound by a yellowish pink fine sand mortar. Each brick measured 225mm by 110mm by 56mm. Some of the upper courses were covered by a white lime-based plaster.

The exposed foundation was 0.40m deep underground and butted against a dark brown clayey deposit with frequent gravel inclusions, 6. This was excavated to a depth of 0.80m from the present ground level.

##### Section 10: Cobbled surface (Fig. 2)

The removal a thin layer of sand some 0.08m thick in Trench 1 Extension exposed remains of a cobbled surface, 8, that sealed a dark brown clayey deposit 0.30m thick, 9, over a deposit of dark clay and gravel, 10. Deposit 10 was similar to deposit 6 below the wall foundation in Section 7.

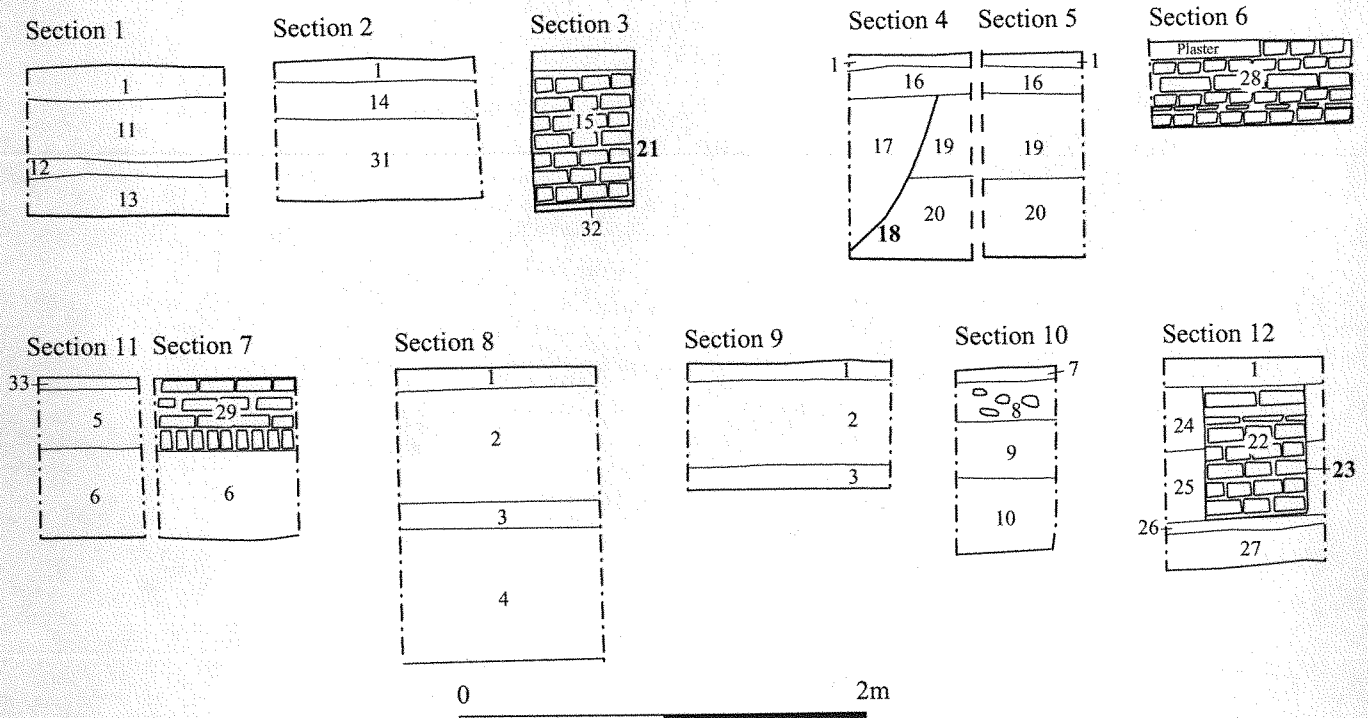
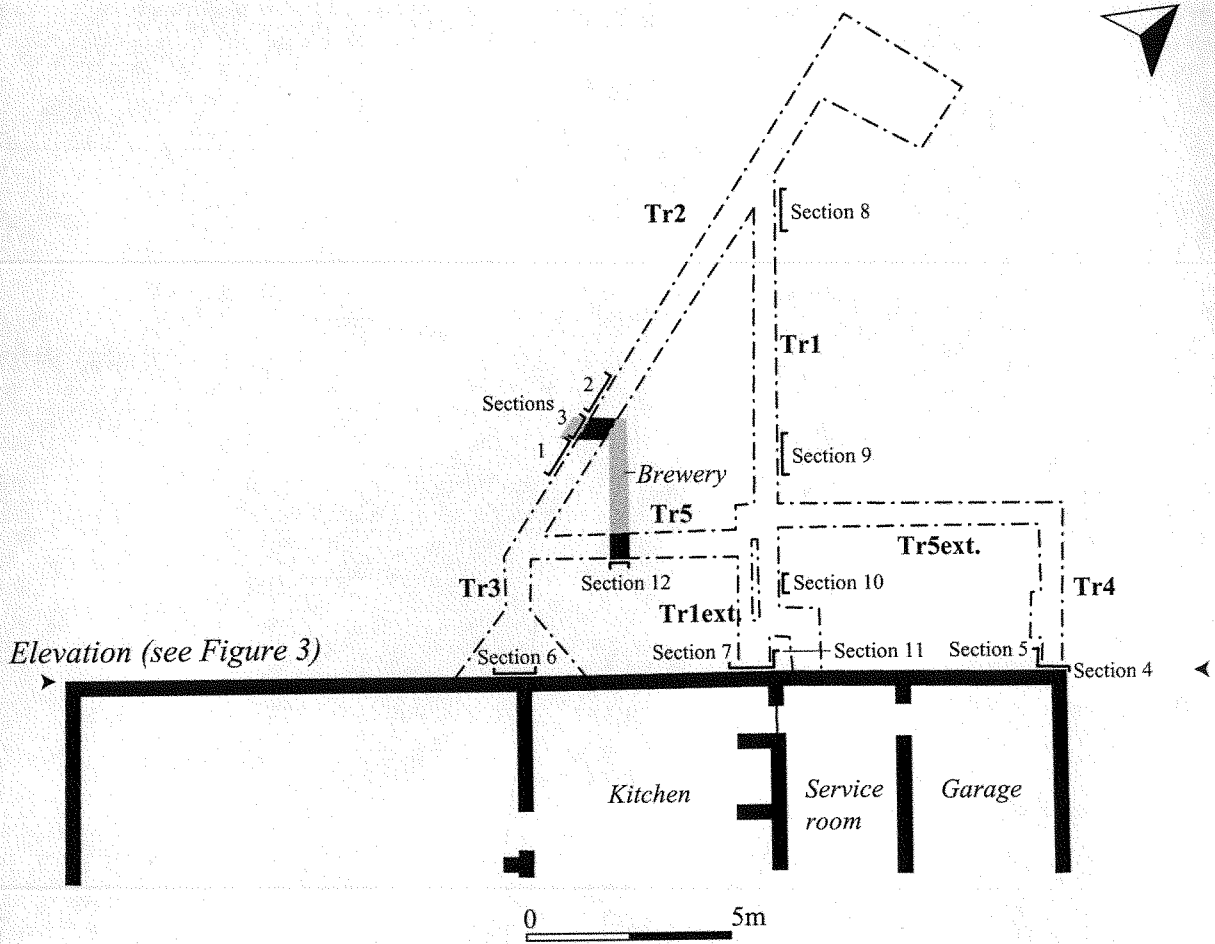


Figure 2 Plan of investigation area (above) and sections (below).

### Section 11 (Fig. 2)

There was no clear evidence for a foundation cut for the wall. In Section 11 a thin layer of sand less than 0.10m thick sealed a dark brown clayey deposit, 5. Deposit 5 was similar to deposit 9 below the cobble surface 8 in Section 10. It was 0.18m thick and contained small fragments of brick and sand, possibly from the brick wall. It sealed the same dark clay layer with frequent gravel inclusions 6, which was observed underneath the wall foundation in Section 7.

### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was 16m long and approximately 0.50m wide. It ran on a N/S alignment. The northern end terminated in a pit for a cess tank. The cess-pit was 3.5m long and 2m wide. Its depth could not be established, as it had already been partially back-filled by the time of the watching brief. The excavation of Trench 2 revealed the remains of brick foundations for a building.

### Section 1: Floor-setting of 'brewery' (Fig. 2)

The removal of the topsoil 0.10m thick revealed a very dark brown clayey deposit with occasional small gravel inclusions, 11. This latter sealed a thin layer of crushed brick and gravel 0.10m thick, 12, possibly representing a floor setting inside the building. The layer contained a fragment of nineteenth century Staffordshire brown Stoneware (Dr. Paul Spoerry, Pers. Comm.). The floor setting butted against a deposit of dark brown clay, 13, that contained small fragments of animal bone. This deposit was excavated to a depth of 0.78m from the present ground level.

### Section 2: Make-up Layer outside the 'Brewery' (Fig. 2)

The removal of the topsoil 0.10m thick revealed a dark brown clayey deposit with occasional small gravel inclusions, 14. This sealed a make-up layer of clay and gravel, 31.

### Section 3: Brick Foundation of 'Brewery' (Fig. 2)

The removal of the thin topsoil in Section 3 exposed the remains of a brick wall foundation 0.60m thick, 15/21. It consisted of six courses of nineteenth century (Carol Fletcher, pers. comm.) hand-made red stretchers, with each stretcher being centred over the stretcher of the course beneath. The bricks were bound by a dark pink fine sand mortar. Each brick measured 200mm by 120mm by 50mm. The foundation butted against a dark brown clay deposit with small gravel, 32.

### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 1m long and 0.80m wide. It terminated with a fan-shaped area of 3.5sqm. butting against the kitchen wall.

### Section 6: Wall Foundation (Fig. 2)

The excavation of Trench 3 exposed six courses of the same foundation wall recorded in Trench 1 (Section 7). The wall in Trench 3, i.e. 28, consisted of courses of stretchers alternate with courses of headers (English bond). The lowermost courses of headers were separated by a course of tiles. Each brick measured 225mm by 110mm by 56mm. The tiles were 20mm thick. The bricks were bound by a yellowish pink fine sand mortar. The overall thickness of the exposed masonry was 0.40m.

### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was 4m long and 0.80m wide. It ran parallel to Trench 1, off the perimeter wall of the modern garage extension.

### Sections 4 and 5: Modern Make-up Layers (Fig. 2)

The removal of the topsoil to a depth of 0.08m exposed a series of modern make-up layers consisting of fine sand 0.12m thick, 16, gravel 0.40m thick, 19, and mixed sand and gravel 0.40m thick, 20. Section 4 also showed the cut for a pipe trench, 18, that was filled by dark brown clay and gravel, 17.

### **Trench 5**

Trench 5 was 5m long and 0.80m wide. It ran parallel to the rear wall of the building.

### Section 12: Brick Foundation of 'Brewery' (Fig. 2)

The removal of the thin topsoil in Section 12 exposed the remains of a brick wall foundation 0.80m deep, 22/23, similar to wall 15/21 recorded in Trench 2 (Section 3). It consisted of 6 courses of stretchers, and one course of tiles. The bricks were bound by a dark pink fine sand mortar. Each brick measured 200mm by 120mm by 50mm. The tiles were 30mm thick. As in Trench 2, the foundation butted against a thin dark brown clay deposit with small gravel some 0.06m thick, 26, that sealed a deposit of gravel excavated to a depth of 1m below the present ground surface, 27. Although there was no clear evidence for a foundation trench, the wall appeared to cut through a deposit of compacted brown clay and gravel, 25, and to be butted by a later deposit of looser brown clay and gravel, 24, which contained fragments of bricks from the foundation wall.

### **Trench 5 Extension**

This trench represented the extension of Trench 5. It was 8m long, 0.80m wide and 1m deep. The stratigraphic sequence showed similarities with the sequence of make-up layers recorded in Trench 4.

## 4.2 Phase 2: Building Recording

The stripping of the recent plaster exposed the whole of the kitchen rear wall of the ground floor, revealing a timber-framed construction on a brick plinth.

### Brick Foundation (Fig. 3)

The brick foundation represented the continuation of the masonry work recorded in Trench 1 Extension (Section 7) and in Trench 3 (Section 6), above. It consisted of a lower projecting plinth with 5 courses of bricks bonded in the English bond style. It was partially rendered with a black-painted fine lime and sand based plaster. The plinth was identical to the portion of wall recorded in Trench 3 (section 6). The upper wall foundation comprised 4 courses of bricks in the same bonding style as the lower plinth, with traces of a white lime-based plaster.

A modern service pipe (1960s) had damaged both the plinth and the upper portion of the foundation wall.

### Timber Frame (Fig. 3)

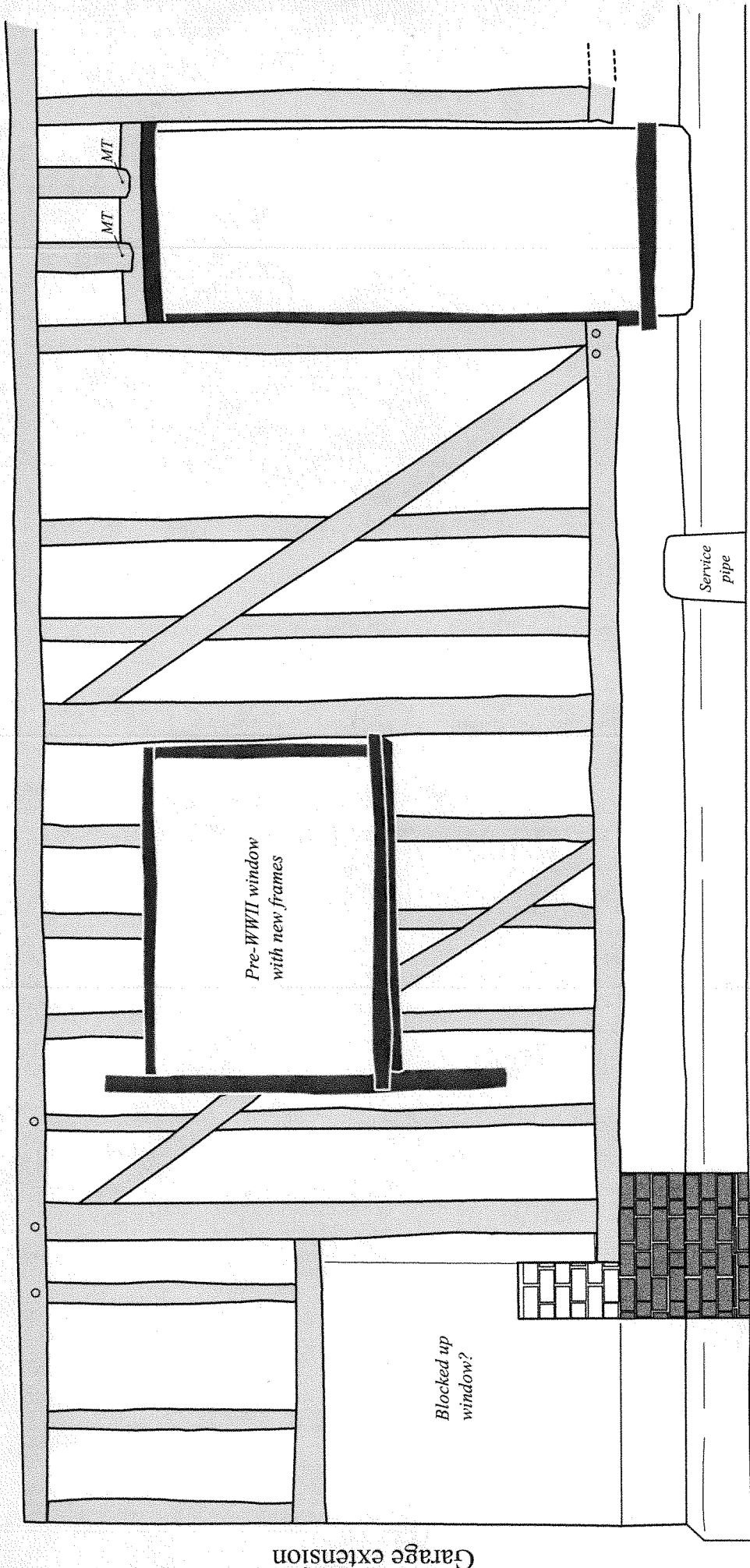
The timber frame was of the late (post-medieval) type. It consisted of timber converted into tangentially faced slabs (planks). Vertical studs and diagonal braces had been tenoned into a base plate, which rested on the brick wall, and into a top plate. The timber slabs had mortise and tenon joints fastened by wooden pegs. The studs were also fastened to the braces by thin iron rose sharp nails with six facets in a shallow pyramid. The present back door of the kitchen room at the south-western end of the wall appeared to be original, as it was integrated within the timber frame. The same applies to a window/low entrance at the opposite end, which had been blocked out by machine-made red stretchers bonded with white fine cement.

The timber frame was sandwiched between long and thin woven laths that had replaced the original material. The fastening nails (small round flat heads) were also recent, as was the coarse mortar infill between the two sets of laths. The outer set of laths were encased by a wire net that had been subsequently plastered.

Besides the blocking out of the window/low entrance at the north-eastern end of the wall (above), modern alterations included the insertion of the present kitchen window, added sometime before 1947, and of small service pipes, added in the 1960s (Mr. Dimsdale, pers. comm.).

SW

NE



*Pre-WWII window  
with new frames*

*Blocked up  
window?*

Garage extension

Service  
pipe



Modern insertions

Timbers

MT Mortice and tenon joint

Figure 3 Elevation



## 5 DISCUSSION

Given the limited extent of the trenches investigated during groundwork monitoring, and given limitations posed by modern alterations and additions to the recorded kitchen wall, any attempt at interpretation has to be cautious.

Phasing has been attempted by introducing broad chronological parameters.

### The Moat

No recording of the moat was undertaken, as this was outside the scope of the watching brief. However, during groundwork, it was noted that an old drainage pipe ran into the western arm of the moat. The drainage pipe had already disturbed the moat. No original stratigraphic sequences survived.

### Pre-Manor House Activity

Evidence for pre-Manor House activity was represented by at least one deposit, 6, that appeared to predate the kitchen wall foundation (Trench 1 Extension, Sections 7 and 11). Possible earlier layers were observed in Trench 1 (Sections 8 and 9) where deposits of clay and gravel, 3 and 4, were sealed by a later dark brown clay deposit, 2, similar to 5 (Section 11) and 9 (Section 10) in Trench 1 Extension.

It is possible that the medieval timber building, known from historical sources to stand within the moat (above), fell into disrepair or was destroyed sometime during the later medieval period, and that the area was subsequently levelled in advance of the construction of the Manor House. If this interpretation is correct, remains of the medieval building could still survive underneath the make-up deposits.

### The Manor House

As seen above, the original elements of the present manor house are dated to the late seventeenth century. Presently, the Manor consists of a two-storey main building with one and a half storey kitchen.

Alterations to the interior and exterior of the building from the nineteenth century onwards make it difficult to determine the original layout.

The main building and the kitchen appear to be contemporary, as suggested by the foundation wall recorded in Trench 3 (Section 6), and are likely to represent (part of) the original late sixteenth century nucleus of the building.

Unstratified pottery uncovered by Mr Dimsdale during the construction of the 1960's extension to the kitchen included sherds of a 'pancheon', i.e. a large bowl probably used for dairy process, that was made at Harlow in Essex sometime in the course of the seventeenth or eighteenth century (Dr Paul Spoerry, pers. comm.).

### Post-Manor House

The kitchen rear wall appeared to predate a cobbled surface, 8, sealed by a recent thin layer of sand (Trench 1 Extension, Section 10). Section 11 showed the wall foundation was butted by a dark layer of clay, 5. Deposit 5 was very similar to (and probably contemporary with ) deposit 9 sealed by the cobbled surface 8. Similar stratigraphic sequences were observed in Trench 1 (Sections 8 and 9). There, a dark brown clay deposit, 2, was similar to 9 (Trench 1 Extension, Section 10) and 5 (Trench 1 Extension, Sections 7 and 11). Deposit 2 sealed earlier mixed deposits of gravel and clay, 3 and 4, that were interpreted as representing possible make-up layers pre-dating the Manor House.

### 'The Brewery'

A similar dark brown clay deposit, 25, was recorded in Trench 5 (section 12) where it appeared to have been cut through by the brick foundations of a nineteenth century building ('brewery'), 22/23. Similarly, a dark brown clay deposit, 13, was butted by the 'brewery's' floor setting 12 in Trench 2 (Section 1).

A later deposit of mixed clay and gravel, 24, butted against the wall 22/23. It contained fragments of brick from the damaged wall.

The 'brewery' was destroyed in recent times (T. W. Dimsdale, pers. comm.).

### Modern

Modern interventions appear to have mainly affected the kitchen rear wall. These included the insertion of a window sometime before the late 1940s, and of service pipes in the 1960s. Further disturbance was visible in Trench 4 outside the modern extension to the Kitchen (utility room and garage) built in the 1960s.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of the watching brief were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site during groundwork monitoring, and to record the rear wall of the kitchen prior to the construction of the extension.

The site produced evidence for clay and gravel deposits, the earliest of which pre-dated the Manor House and could seal earlier medieval buildings/features.

The post-medieval Manor House appeared to belong to one phase of construction, with the kitchen and the adjacent room probably belonging to

the original nucleus of the house. Unstratified pottery dating to the seventeenth century would confirm a relatively late date. Modifications to the interiors and exteriors made it impossible to establish sequences of buildings. Only a small part of the original structure (the kitchen rear wall) was available for investigation. The kitchen rear wall consisted of a post-medieval timber frame on a brick plinth. The timber was found to be in a good state of preservation, despite modern interventions, namely the insertion of a window and service pipes.

Later activity on site was represented by a nineteenth century brick building that was probably part of the farmhouse associated with the Manor. Uncertainty rests over its original function. At some stage, the building appears to have been used as a brewery (Mr. Dimsdale, pers. comm.).

Modern activity appears to have mainly concerned the Manor House (i.e. service pipes, a new window in the rear kitchen wall), and to have caused relatively little damage.

The results from the present evaluation show the archaeological potential of the investigation area. The gathered evidence seems to point to activities consistent with post-medieval occupation of the moated site. Make-up layers predating the Manor House may seal earlier buildings and features. Any future groundwork will certainly offer the opportunity to throw light on the development of an undoubtedly complex site.

With reference to the Manor House, any future alterations to both the exteriors and the interiors will offer the opportunity to gather more information on the origin and development of the building throughout the post-medieval period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr. W. T. Dimsdale for commissioning the work. Mr Dimsdale showed great interest for the history of the site and was very keen to assist during the watching brief. He kindly lent the author his family records and finds from his personal collection.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Jonathan Smith, Planning Archaeologist of Hertfordshire County Council who monitored the work and assisted the author throughout the project, and to Ms. K. A. Tinniswood, Archaeological Records Officer of Hertfordshire County Council, who kindly provided SMR information about the site.

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The illustrations were produced by Jon Cane (Senior Illustrator, CCC AFU).

The project was managed by Stephen Kemp (Senior Project Officer, CCC AFU).

## REFERENCES

### Abbreviations used in the Text

CCC AFU	Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council
CAO	(Hertfordshire) County Archaeology Office
LB	Listed Building
RCHME	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
SMR	(Hertfordshire) Site and Monument Record
VCH	Victoria County History

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### Maps

Tithe Map of 1840	Baron Thomas Dimsdale Records
Estate Map of 1841	Baron Thomas Dimsdale Records
OS Map 1883	1st ed.
OS Map	1920s ed.

Soil Survey of England and Wales, Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 4, 1:250 000

**APPENDIX 1: SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD SUMMARY SHEET**

Site name and address: Meesdenbury Farm		
County: Hertfordshire	District:	
Village/Town: Meesdenbury	Parish: Meesden	
Planning application reference: 3/01/1482		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: Mr W.T. Dimsdale, Meesdenbury Farm		
Nature of application: extension of kitchen room and associated groundwork		
Present land use: domestic		
Size of application area: c.150sqm	Size of area investigated: c. 20%	
NGR (to 8 figures):43938/32901		
Site code: HT MB ME 01/02		
Site director/Organization: Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCCAFU)		
Type of work: watching brief (groundwork monitoring and building recording)		
Date of work:	Start: December 2001	Finish: May 2002
Location of finds/Curating museum: Mr Dimsdale		
Related SMR Nos: LBII 9/129; see also moat SMR1945	Periods represented: post-medieval	
Relevant previous summaries/reports: n/a		
Summary of fieldwork results: 16 <sup>th</sup> C. timber frame on brick plinth		
Author of summary: Rebecca Casa Hatton (CCCAFU)	Date of summary: 05/07/02	



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