

**Mother Ludlam's Cave  
Moor Park  
near Farnham**

**Report on the trial excavations 18 May 2002**

**by David Graham**



*The cave entrance c1880 (photograph: John Henry Knight)*

**for  
Waverley Borough Council**



# Mother Ludlam's Cave, Moor Park, near Farnham

## Report on the trial excavations 18 May 2002

### Introduction

A small-scale archaeological investigation at the mouth of the cave was carried out on 18 May 2002 by a team from Surrey Archaeological Society. The work was requested by Waverley Borough Council's Heritage Officer in advance of the installation of new wrought iron gates. The landowners - Mr Frost and Mr Smith - kindly gave permission for the work.

### Description and Geology

Mother Ludlam's Cave is a well-known local attraction (SU 8707 4575), located immediately to the east of the public footpath leading from Stella's Cottage (off the B3001) to Moor Park House, that now forms part of the Moor Park Heritage Trail. The front of the cave is approximately 13m deep and 3m high and is cut into the sandstone face of a bluff formed by the north branch of the River Wey. There are a small number of other caves in the area, the nearest of which is known as Father Foote's Cave some 45m to the south-east.

The entrance to Mother Ludlam's Cave, which is by far the largest of the group, is lined with a 3m high arch built of carstone, that extends approximately 6m into the hillside. The cave continues for a further 7m to a point where the void narrows to a low passageway. Speleological investigation (fig 1) indicates that this narrow passageway extends for at least a further 60m into the hillside, before becoming impassable to humans. This passageway has been cut by a stream which still flows strongly through the cave, through a culvert under the public footpath and down a series of eroded former garden terraces to join the River Wey.

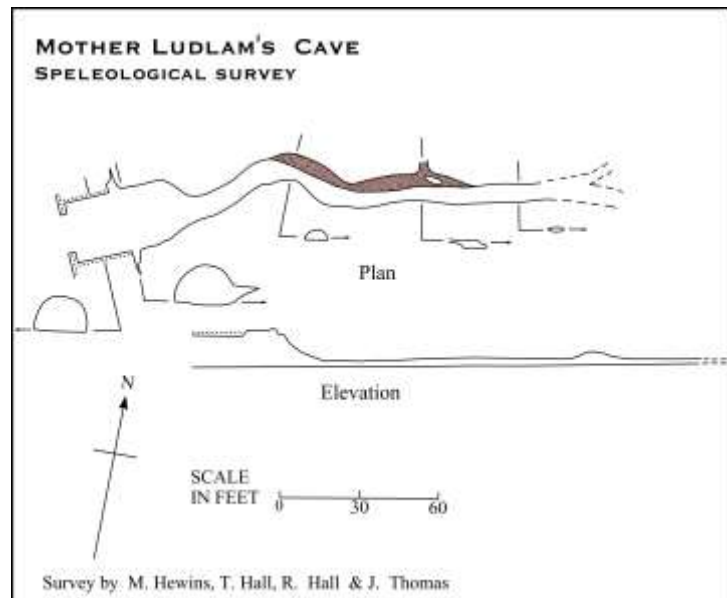
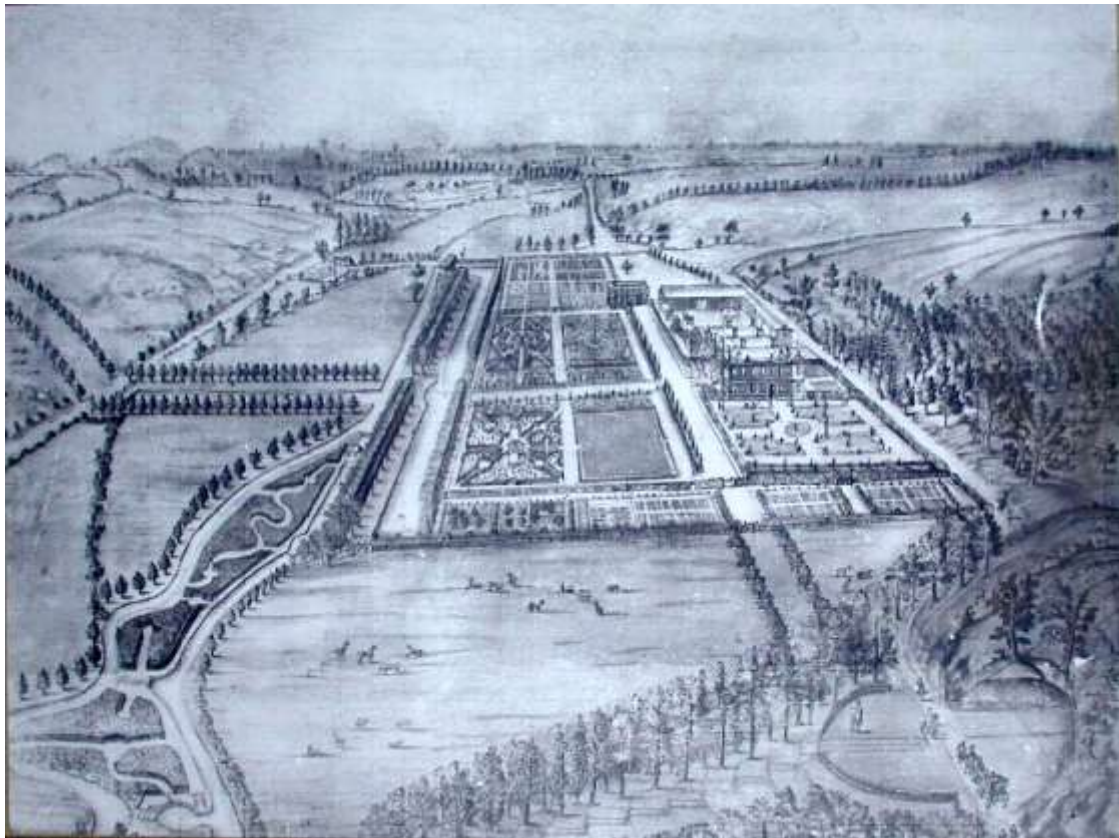


Fig 1 Extract from *Wessex Cave Club Journal*, 1961

The cave itself is within the Lower Greensand (Folkestone Beds), of which the lower part of the sequence (1m) dips gently to the north (<math><5^\circ</math>), is grey/orange thinly bedded and partially iron stained. The next 1m is heavily iron stained, coloured orange, with both random and oriented thin (<math><1\text{cm}</math>) carstone seams. The oriented seams follow foresets of 1m thick crossbeds. The top 2-3m of the sequence is a more homogeneous silty brown sand with little evidence of sedimentary structures. The collapse of the roof behind the arched entrance (hole <math><2\text{m}</math> across) has resulted in a large mound of sand being deposited on the cave floor, which has disrupted the flow of the stream.



*Fig 2 Panorama of Moor Park House (formerly Compton Hall) and garden, late 17th century. The cave and associated cascades are shown bottom right. (Reproduced by courtesy of Surrey History Service. SHC: PX/991)*



*Fig 3 Interior of the cave in 1773, showing the brick or stone flooring and marble seating.*

There is some desecration of the cave back wall by carved graffiti and evidence of fairly recent fires in the centre of the floor which have brought down sections of the cave roof.

### **Historical Background**

Possibly the earliest reference to the spring appears in the *Annals of Waverley* in around 1216 when a Brother Simon supplied water to the Abbey via an aqueduct leading from a spring called 'Ludewelle'. Ludewelle, meaning the loud or bubbling spring, may have become corrupted over the centuries to become the 'Ludlam' element of the modern name.

In any event, the cave appears in a late 17th century illustration as a 'grotto' associated with Moor Park House, the home of Sir William Temple and his secretary, Jonathan Swift. The cave (fig 2, bottom right) is shown on the edge of the carriageway approach to the house with a series of cascades leading the stream from the cave mouth to the river. A slightly later engraving dating to 1773 (fig 3) shows the interior of the cave as having a stone or brick floor, marble seating and the stream contained within a marble-lined channel. A description of the cave and its legend is given in the *Antiquities of England and Wales*, 1787, by Francis Grose (see Appendix).

However when William Cobbett visited the cave in October 1825, he described it as being in a poor state of repair: 'but alas! It is not the enchanting place that I knew it ... the basins to catch the never-ending little stream, are gone; the iron cups fastened by chains, for people to drink out of, are gone; the pavement all broken to pieces'. Today the entrance is lined by a carstone archway which, because it is not shown in the 18th century illustration, must belong to a later, probably 19th century, refurbishment of the cave. The carstone arch, together with a wrought iron gate, was certainly in place by the late 19th century as these are shown in a photograph taken by John Henry Knight in the 1880s (see cover). As already mentioned, the interior of the cave is now derelict with no features being visible apart from the carstone arch, the gates having been removed in the 1960s. However, local residents remember seeing brick flooring still in place in the 1940s.

### **The Excavations**

The excavations were designed to establish whether any of the earlier features referred to above remained intact underneath the accumulated silt, collapsed roof material and general rubbish that currently cover the floor of the cave and the area immediately outside it. The trenches suffered badly from water logging and any future work within the cave will need to address the problem of controlling the flow of the stream through the cave.

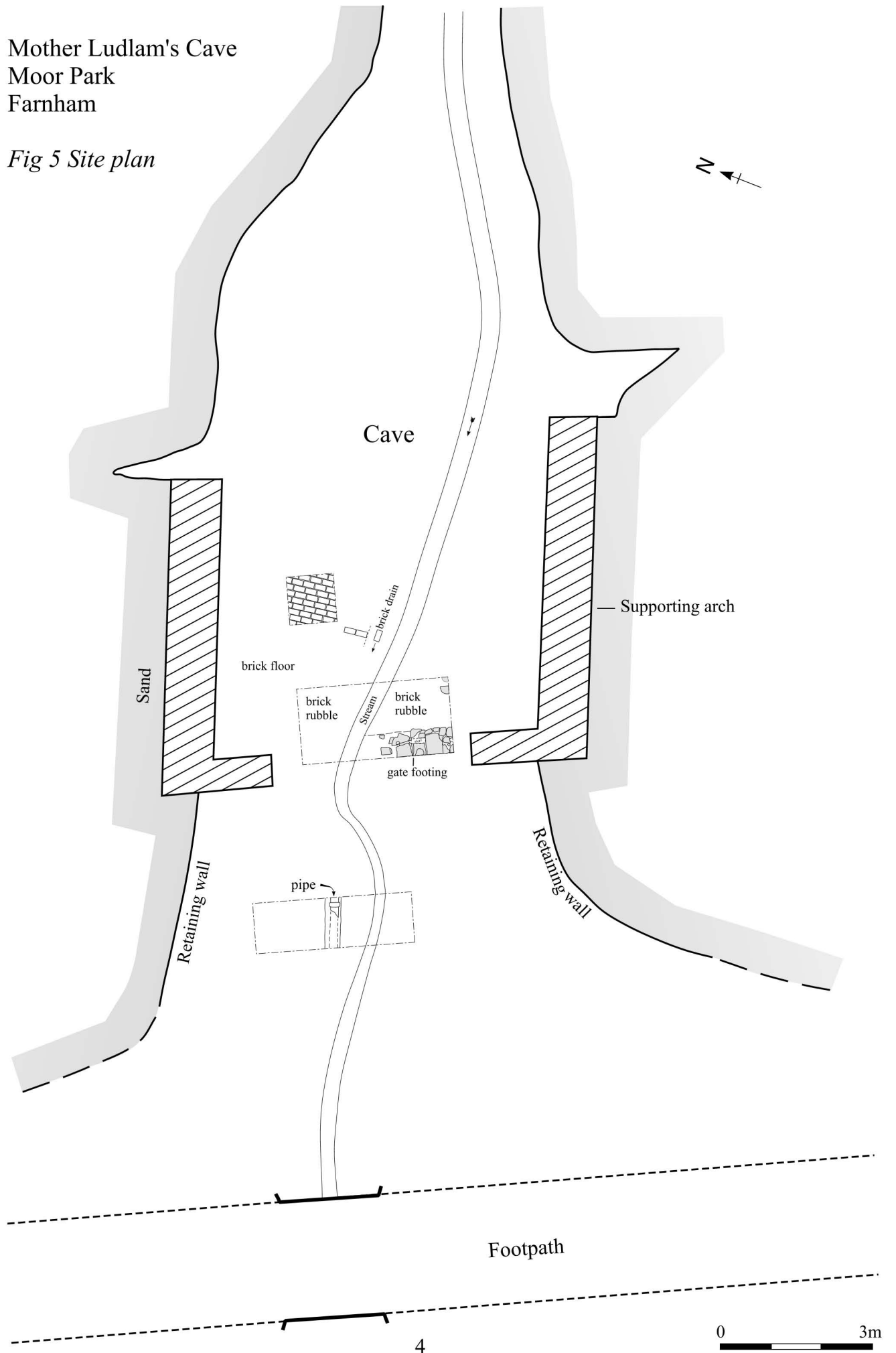


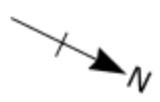
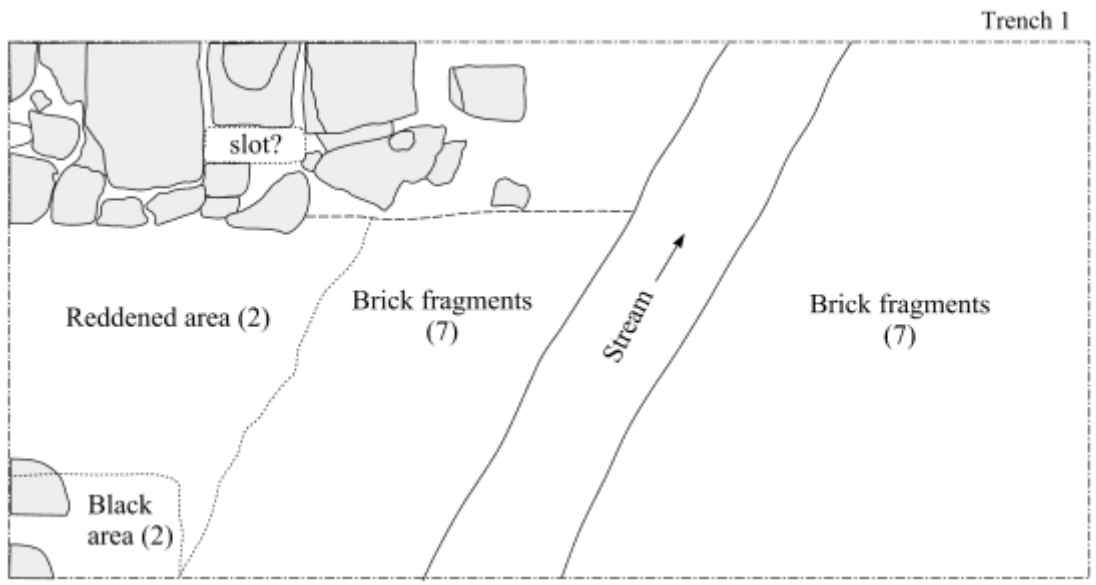
*Fig 4 View of the cave during the excavation*

Three trenches were excavated (fig 5): one outside the cave across the presumed course of the stream culvert; one across the mouth of the cave approximately on the line of the yet to be

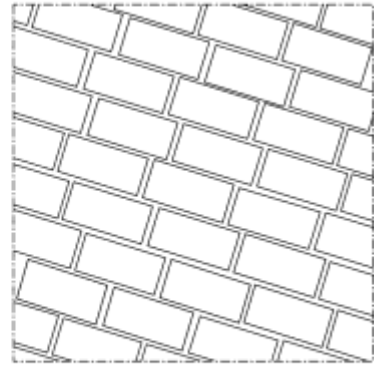
Mother Ludlam's Cave  
Moor Park  
Farnham

Fig 5 Site plan

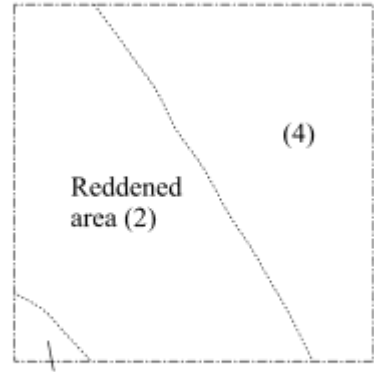




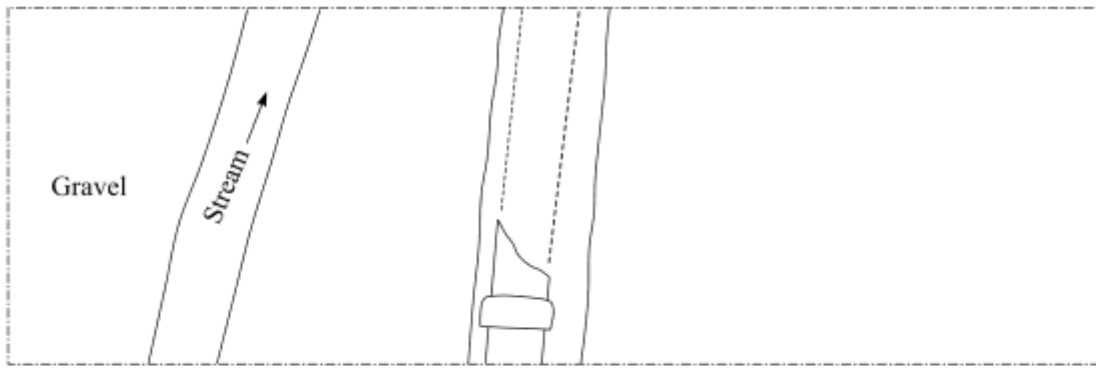
Trench 2: brick floor (8)



Trench 2



Trench 3



Section A - B (Trench 1)

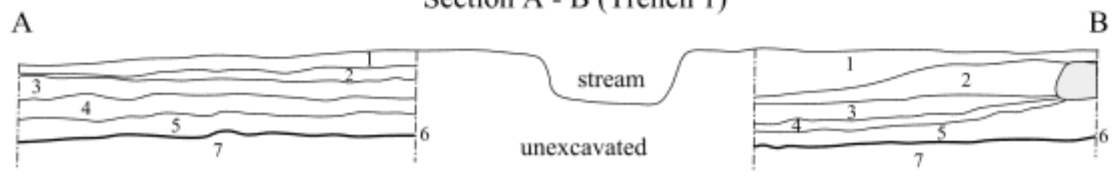


Fig 6 Trench plans and section

fitted wrought iron gates and one small trench slightly further into the cave to test for the remains of any flooring.

#### *The culvert trench (fig 5)*

This trench, which lay outside the cave, succeeded in exposing a line of silted up and collapsed salt glazed pipes of fairly recent date. These undoubtedly carried the stream from the cave itself and underneath the small bridge crossed by the public footpath, a few metres to the west. There was no sign of any earlier stream management features at this point and it is likely that, if these once existed, they were destroyed by the insertion of the glazed pipes or had previously been eroded away by the action of the stream itself.

#### *The cave entrance trench (figs 5-7)*

This trench was set out across the entrance to the cave and showed that the area had been the site of a number of recent fires. Beneath this burnt level however a laid stone footing was encountered, nearly in line with the walls of the existing carstone archway. This footing almost undoubtedly relates to the construction of the archway and perhaps formed the base for the iron gates that closed the mouth of the cave from the 19th century until they were removed in the 1960s. A flat layer of brick rubble was encountered below the level of the footings within the cave and this perhaps represents a hardcore base for the brick floor, which appears to have been removed in this area.



*Fig 7 Cave entrance trench showing footing at rear right corner*

#### *The interior trench (figs 5, 6 and 8)*

This small trench was excavated slightly further into the cave in the hope that some of the flooring might remain intact away from the main entrance. In the event, there was again much evidence for fires in the cave, but ultimately a layer of fine well laid brick flooring was exposed at a depth of c30cm. A small extension of the trench to the south revealed the brick-lined drain that had once contained the course of the stream. The bricks (9 x 4½ x ? inches) were hand made, showed slight signs of frogging and are therefore likely to belong to the second quarter of the 19th century and perhaps to relate to a 'post Cobbett' restoration of the cave.



*Fig 8 The brick flooring inside the cave*

### **Conclusions**

The excavation has shown that no original water management features exist intact immediately in front of the cave, although the remains of ponds and associated dams are visible down the slope just across the footpath to the west. The trench across the cave



entrance showed the remains of a footing that once supported a wrought iron gateway associated with the existing stone archway and roof, but most significantly the third trench showed that the brick floor remains intact, at least in this part of the cave, and possibly elsewhere as well.

No attempt was made to break through the brick floor to search for the earlier floor level shown in the 18th century drawings but several fragments of apparently smaller bricks were found as scattered rubble elsewhere and it may be that these represent the remains of this floor.

The trenches were backfilled and the fence across the entrance replaced leaving no visible evidence of the excavation.

### **Acknowledgements**

I should like to thank: the landowners - Mr Frost and Mr Smith - for allowing the work to take place; Miss G Molony for her efforts in establishing the Heritage Trail, for making the arrangements for the new gates and also for helping on the day; and Dave Attryde, Andrew Norris, Gary Readings Mike Rubra, Elizabeth Whitbourn and Katherine Wiltshire, all of whom helped on site. Dave Attryde took the photographs and Audrey Graham produced the site plans.

David Graham  
8 June 2002

### **Appendix**

Extract from *The Antiquities of England and Wales, Francis Grose, 1787:*

Mother Ludlam's Hole, near Farnham, Surrey

This Grotto, although not strictly within the plan of this book, being neither a piece of antiquity, nor even entirely a work of art, is here inserted, in compliance to the request of several of its admirers. Indeed, it is not only in itself a natural curiosity worthy [of] notice, but also respectable, as having served for the retirement of the great Sir William Temple, to whom the Park and adjoining seat formerly belonged, and who so much esteemed this spot, that, in obedience to his last will, his heart enclosed in a silver box, was buried under a sundial in the garden.

MOTHER Ludlam's Hole lies half way down the west side of a sandy hill, covered with wood, towards the southernmost end of Moor Park, and is near three miles south of Farnham, and about a quarter of a mile north-east of the ruins of Waverley Abbey, which were, when standing, visible from it. Moor Park, though small, affords several scenes, most beautifully wild and romantic.

This cavern seems to have been originally the work of Nature, formed by a rill of water, which probably forced itself a kind of channel, afterwards enlarged by art. At the entrance it is about eight feet high, and fourteen or fifteen broad, but decreases in height and breadth till it becomes so low, as to be passable only by a person crawling on their hands and knees: farther on it is said to heighten. Its depth is undoubtedly considerable, but much exaggerated

by the fabulous reports of the common people. It does not go straight forwards, but at some distance from the entrance turns towards the left hand, or north.

The bottom is paved, and the widest part separated by a marble frame, with a passage for a small stream of clear water, which rising within, is conducted by a marble trough through the centre of the pavement into a circular basin of the same materials, having an iron ladle chained to it, for the convenience of drinking. From hence it is carried out by other troughs to the declivity of the hill, where falling down seven steps, it is collected in a small reservoir. Four stone benches placed two on each side, seem to invite the visitor to that meditation, for which this place is so admirably calculated. The gloomy and uncertain depth of the receding Grotto, the gentle murmurs of the rill, and the beauty of the prospect, seen through the dark arched entrance, flagged with weeds and the roots of trees, all conspire to excite solemn contemplation, and to fill the soul with a rapturous admiration of the works of the Great Creator.

This place derives its name from a popular story, which makes it formerly the residence of a white witch, called Mother Ludlam, or Ludlow; not one of those malevolent beings mentioned in the *Demonologie*, a repetition of whose pranks, as chronicled by Glanvil, Baxter and Cotton Mather, erects the hair, and closes the circle of the listening rusticks round the village fire. This old lady neither killed hogs, rode on broom staves, nor made children vomit nails and crooked pins; crimes for which many an old woman has been sentenced to death by judges, who, however they may be vilified in this sceptical age, thereby, certainly cleared themselves from the imputation of being either wizards or conjurors.

On the contrary, Mother Ludlam, instead of injuring, when properly invoked, kindly assisted her poor neighbours in their necessities, by lending them such culinary utensils and household furniture, as they wanted for particular occasions.

The business was thus transacted, the petitioner went into the cave at midnight, turned three times round, and thrice repeated aloud, Pray good Mother Ludlam, lend me such a thing (naming the utensil) and I will return it within two days. He or she then retired, and coming again early the next morning, found at the entrance the requested moveable. This intercourse continued a long time, till once, a person not returning a large cauldron, according to the stipulated time, Madam Ludlam was so irritated at this want of punctuality, that she refused to take it back when afterwards left in the cavern; and from that time to this, has not accommodated any one with the most trifling loan. The story adds, that the cauldron was carried to Waverley Abbey, and after the dissolution of that monastery, deposited in Frensham church.

In fact, a monstrous cauldron was kept in the vestry of that church, according to Salmon, who seems to hint, that some such ridiculous story was told concerning it as that above recited. 'The great cauldron, says he, which lay in the vestry beyond the memory of man, was no more brought thither from Waverley than, as report goes, by the Fairies. It need not raise any man's wonder for what use it was, there having been many in England, till very lately, to be seen, as well as very large spits, which were given for entertainment of the parish at the wedding of poor maids; so was in some places a sum of money charged upon lands for them, and a house for them to dwell in for a year after marriage. If these utensils of hospitality, which drew the neighbourhood to contribution upon so laudable an occasion, had committed treason as the property of a convent, they had not been too heavy to be carried off'.