

**'MILKWOOD', TILBURY ROAD
OVINGTON
ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

June 2010

**'MILKWOOD', TILBURY ROAD
OVINGTON
ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

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**'MILKWOOD', TILBURY ROAD
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HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Client: NFU Mutual c/o Barker Associates

FAU Project No.: 2186

NGR: TL 76838 42059

OASIS No.: essexcou1-77289

Date of Fieldwork: 23rd March 2010

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A building survey was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on a fire-damaged Grade II-listed timber-framed cottage prior to submitting a planning application for demolition. The work was commissioned by the architects, Barker Associates, on behalf of the owners, Mr and Mrs Barnett, and carried out to English Heritage level 3 standards (2006).

The cottage was built in the early 19th century to replace a probable 17th century structure. The construction of the cottage combines reused original timbers with new, lesser quality ones from local sources such as woods and hedgerows. Such examples are therefore often termed 'hedgerow cottages' and are interesting vernacular forms.

Copies of the report have been supplied to Barker Associates, the architects, for circulation. The archive will be stored with Braintree Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description

Milkwood lies on the west side of Tilbury Road in open countryside just to the south of the village centre, at TL 76838 42059. The cottage stands within a large plot screened by hedges, facing the road (fig. 1).

The house is listed as a 16th century timber-framed thatched cottage with later additions (LBS 407580), but the survey indicates it to be more recent than this. The exterior is rendered in modern materials and all the windows are modern too. Most of the interior is plastered and the few exposed areas of timber-framing show different styles and quality indicative of a 'hedgerow cottage' made from local materials and reused timbers.

Since the fire, the cottage is little more than a shell. The roof was completely lost and only the outer walls, the chimney and the south-west gable remain (plate 1). Later extensions, also thatched, fared no better. The cover plate shows the cottage as it formerly appeared.

2.2 Planning background

The house was seriously damaged by a fire on 4th September 2009 and plans are to be submitted to Braintree District Council (BDC) for its de-listing and demolition, followed by construction of a new house towards the rear of the plot. In view of the historic importance of the building and its Listed status, English Heritage advised that a record of the exposed timber-frame should be undertaken and this was supported by the BDC Conservation Officer, who recommended a pre-planning historic building record prior to demolition.

2.3 Historical background

Cartographic and documentary research was undertaken at the Essex Record Office, Chelmsford (ERO) to understand the development of the cottage within the context of the site. References are supplied with the figures. Information was also obtained from Mr Barnet and the List description. Although only a small amount of written evidence was found, historic maps showed an earlier building occupying the plot that was replaced by the present cottage in the early part of the 19th century. This would explain the stark differences in the style and quality of framing seen at Milkwood.

Milkwood was traditionally part of the Ovington Hall estate (Mr Barnet pers. comm.). The List description (LBS 407580), carried out during an external survey in 1984, describes the

cottage as 16th century in date with later additions. The inside however, creates a more complex picture, providing a mixture of both post-medieval and later timbers.

A structure is shown within the present house plot on the 1777 Chapman and Andre map of Essex. This is not Milkwood but an earlier building, as it stands along the road rather than facing onto it (fig. 2). An untitled map of c.1800, perhaps an estate map for Ovington Hall, provides more detail, showing the same building next to a cutting in the roadside verge (fig. 3). Quite what this represents is unknown; perhaps 'squatting' by encroaching onto the road, but the outline is visible on the current Ordnance Survey map (fig. 1) and is crucial in identifying the site and establishing the provenance of the cottage.

The roadside cutting is also shown on the Ovington tithe map of 1839 (fig. 4) which includes Milkwood for the first time, providing proof that Milkwood was built between 1800 and 1839. Plot 51, just below the centre of figure 4, shows the cottage facing the road within the same oblong plot. The entry in the associated tithe award mentions the cottage is owned by John English and occupied by William Everett and Daniel Twitchet (D/CT 265A), probably labourers on a local farm. At the back of the house (plot 50) is pasture. It appears from further study that John English owned the Ovington Hall estate at the time but resided outside the parish.

Plot 91 from the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881 shows the cottage in some detail (fig. 5). Small outbuildings are shown either end and there are paths around the gardens that continue onto the roadside verge. A pump ('P') is located in the south-west corner. A lean-to has been built onto the north side as well as a small side wing to the south (fig. 5), though they are possibly original elements not included on the less-detailed 1839 map.

Little is known about Milkwood in the 20th century, but by the 1960s the cottage was in single ownership and two extensions were added (Barker Associates pers. comm.). The current owners have resided for the past 26 years (Mr. Barnett pers. comm.).

Since the 2009 fire, the site has been largely cleared of debris and unsafe parts like the south-west gable and chimney are currently supported by scaffolding.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the survey was to make a descriptive record of the cottage to English Heritage Level 3 standard (2006), addressing materials, architectural elements, historic fixtures and fittings and any evidence for original internal layout, plus a photographic record of its historic elements.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Considering the very bad condition of the building, the scope of the survey was limited. The work focused on the cottage itself, recording internal areas of timber framing and surviving historic features such as the chimney.

Full access was provided by the owners during the survey. A ground plan and internal elevations showing areas of exposed timber-framing were supplied by the architects and used in the survey to show additional historic detail (figs. 6-9).

A series of digital photographs were taken internally and externally. Specific shots were taken of any structural detail, exposed wall fabric and historic fixtures, many of which belonged primarily to the earlier structure. A representative selection of photographs is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-10. The remainder can be found in the archive.

A location/block plan was produced to show the cottage within its surrounding area (fig.1) and documentary and cartographic research undertaken to investigate its origins and development (section 2.3).

5.0 THE COTTAGE

5.1 General description

The cottage is linear in form on an east to west axis, facing onto the road. The roof is gabled and formerly thatched, though none of the roof timbers remain apart from those in the surviving south-east gable. Indeed, the whole of the first floor was lost in the fire. The exterior is cement-rendered over the frame, which is probably contemporary with the construction of the modern extensions to the west and south-east (fig. 6). Fenestration is in modern multi-

pane casements, with a bay window added on the south-east gable. The chimney is plain and now stands proud of the cottage within the former roof space (plates 1 & 2).

Original doorways and windows have been superseded by modern ones, or else have been blocked and sealed beneath modern render. In some areas, particularly the bay window room at the south-west end, the old wattle and daub panels have been replaced with modern plasterboard. The lean-to was probably originally designed as a utility area and retains limewashed timbers indicative of this function.

5.1 Internal description

In a simple country cottage such as this there would typically have been two rooms downstairs, a kitchen and living room (with cooking range and hearth), along with bedrooms in the attic. In the case of Milkwood, which was formerly two cottages, each side had its own chimney, one of which was removed when the cottages were combined into one (Mr Barnett pers. comm.).

When the interior was gutted by the fire all the internal walls were lost, leaving a single modern stud wall as the only survivor (fig. 6). Taking this into account and the relative survival of the earlier outer walls, the room layout in figure 6 probably reflects the modern rather than historic floor plan. In particular there is no evidence of the central dividing wall between the cottages, added to figure 6 from the 1897 OS map.

A single bay remains at the north-east end, which is quite narrow at 2.2m, inferring that the cottage was built of six bays. The bay is represented by two posts. The one on the south-east side is a charred stump, but the other survives to full height (fig. 6, plate 3). In their original form they would have carried beams that held the roof frame and ceiling above, of which nothing remains. Close inspection of the intact but charred north post shows the beams were supported by double-pegged braces sat on short ledges. The tenon joint with its three pegholes for the original wall plate survives virtually intact (plate 3).

The timber framed walls survived the fire reasonably well owing to their age and density. It is likely the walls were plastered on the outside when the cottage was built and this remains the case, albeit now in a modern cement-based render. Whether or not the interiors were plastered is unclear, but it seems likely. Most of the internal timber frame of the cottage remains hidden under modern plaster, except for the south-western bay window room where the frame is exposed as a feature on three sides. These walls were drawn by the architects

as elevations A-C, and included in this report as figures 7-9. They provide an interesting sample of the mixture of framing styles and quality.

The most prominent area of framing is on the gable wall (fig. 7, plate 4), whose framing is more typical of the first half of the 17th century, with jowled-headed bay posts and fairly straight and wide studs, between 10-15cm wide (c.5 inches). Not all the studs are pegged, but those in the lower register are pegged to the wall plate (fig. 7) and tenoned to the sill. Studs have been removed in the lower register to insert the bay window but their positions can be inferred from the pegholes along the wall plate, quite wide at c.60cm. Extra studs and steep primary braces have been added either side to support the open area behind the window, none of which are pegged to the frame (fig. 7). The upper register is different. Here the studs are only tenoned rather than pegged and their spacing is much closer, although their overall form and dimensions are similar to those below. A three-light window, built to hold iron frames, has been blocked in the gable (fig. 7). It is likely there was another on the opposite wall facing the road.

Similar pegged close studwork is evident on the north-west wall (elevation B, fig. 8). Three studs remain, whose line is broken by a wide modern opening into the extension, where the wall plate is covered by later timber (plate 5), hiding any pegholes here. The studs are similar in size and neatly-spaced with wide gaps of c.40cm and attached to a replaced sill.

The south-east wall (elevation C, fig. 9) is totally different in form to the two other walls, having a 'waney' primary-braced frame, more typical of the late 18th or early 19th century when good wood was scarce. The frame is largely unpegged and the studs, badly burnt in the fire are simply nailed to the brace (plate 6).

Part of the external wall frame of the cottage was exposed after the fire on the north-west side of the cottage, viewed from the bathroom of the later lean-to (fig. 6). An un-braced and waney timber is evident in the build (plate 7) and more is likely to exist along the wall. This section of rarely-exposed wall fabric is important in containing a rather rustic two-light plain timber window frame (fig. 6). This feature probably pre-dates the cottage and was likely blocked, in daub with lime plaster over, when the lean-to was built. The window (plate 7) is built onto one of the few remaining bay posts. On the other side of the window, past the extant bay post, is some exposed wattle and daub. The daub has been pressed from the inside onto staves that are held in place by nailed laths. Bark binding is still attached to the central stave (plate 7). Further along the room, at the north-east end of the lean-to, rudimentary split staves have been used across the wattles and there are the remains of a

thick daub/lime render with a high level of straw (fig. 6, plate 8), a very rustic element that would probably have covered the whole of the cottage originally.

The lean-to (fig. 6, plate 2) is probably a later addition (1839-81) and is built from a mixture of fairly substantial primary-braced timbers towards the east end and machine-sawn timbers towards the west, which are more typical of a later 19th century date.

The most obvious surviving internal feature is the chimney, which would have stood along the west side of the middle bay, supporting the truss. With the roof missing it is only the scaffold that keeps it upright. In form it appears earlier than the cottage, perhaps rebuilt from the previous structure. For its construction, red, very gritty bricks have been used for the chimney breast, topped by 19th century soft reds in the stack (plate 2). The breast bricks are much shallower than the 19th century bricks and their fabric and size (240 x 50 x 110mm / 9 x 2 x 4 inches) suggests a 15th to 17th century date (Ryan 1996, Appendix 1). Again, this can be seen as an example of reused materials from the earlier building, but it seems odd the new cottage was not simply built around the old chimney, unless the old chimney had collapsed. The earlier bricks are bonded in an earth mortar, made from lime and clay probably dug from the site; another interesting, more vernacular, element. The flue for the kitchen range is located below the chimney, topped by a timber bressumer (plate 9). Above the bressumer is a coat of daub plaster, the remnants of internal décor that contains the impressions of former ceiling joists along the top (plate 10).

Virtually none of the roof survives, but remains in the south-west gable indicate a common form, the collar clasped purlin type. The collars are double pegged to the rafters, whose ends are butted rather than pegged (fig. 7). Butted rafters are generally a later form, usually nailed to a central ridge plate that may have perished in the fire.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Milkwood was built in the early 19th century to replace an earlier structure, part of which was reused in the fabric of the new cottage. The cottage was probably built as a pair of simple two-celled, lobby-entry units for the Ovington Hall estate, most likely as farm labourer's cottages. A lean-to utility extension was added in the late 19th century, largely built from both new and reused timbers.

Reused elements of the previous structure on the site show characteristics of a 17th century building, whose similar size and form suggests that this too was a cottage. The jowled bay post is typically pre-1650 and the combination of jowled and plain posts seen in the cottage would suggest a date sometime around the cut-off point in the mid 17th century. Similarly, the quite substantial but largely unpegged form of the reused wall-framing suggests a broadly comparable date, and that whole sections of framing were re-assembled rather than individual elements. In contrast, the waney, primary-braced form also recorded is likely to be late 18th or early 19th century in date, cut fresh for the cottage and it is likely that similar areas of framing lie unexposed. Examples of similar wall-framing were recorded in a late 18th century cottage to the rear of the King William public house, Bocking (Letch 2009). By the 18th century good building timber was in short supply and expensive, so lesser quality resources were being used in everyday building construction.

The use of wattle and daub for cottages was still commonplace in rural locations in the early 19th century, at a time when the fashionable building material was brick. At Milkwood daub was applied to external wattle staves and then used as a render, to be sealed by lime plaster. It would appear from around the chimney stack that the interior was treated in a similar way. It is possible that daub from the earlier structure was reconstituted and used again.

The chimney presents something of a conundrum, for it appears to have been rebuilt within the new cottage, rather than the new cottage being built around it, which would seem logical unless the chimney had already fallen down. Perhaps the former cottage had lain derelict for a while, or itself been subject to fire before it was rebuilt in its present form. The chimney is typical of a 17th century cottage and built from bricks of that era. The use of an earth mortar to bond the bricks provides extra interest. Another example of an earth mortar used for a chimney occurs at The Swan public house, Braintree, though in this case it was also used as a render over the stack.

Unfortunate circumstances have led to the study of an interesting and significant example of an early 19th century vernacular cottage, built from reused elements and low quality timbers scavenged from woods and hedgerows. These 'hedgerow cottages' had basic forms, being made from local natural materials and whatever was 'at hand'. Such procedures were commonplace in vernacular buildings of the 18th and early 19th centuries, before mass production and better transport links made building materials cheaper. Each example is unique; a factor of its local environment and available materials as well as local knowledge

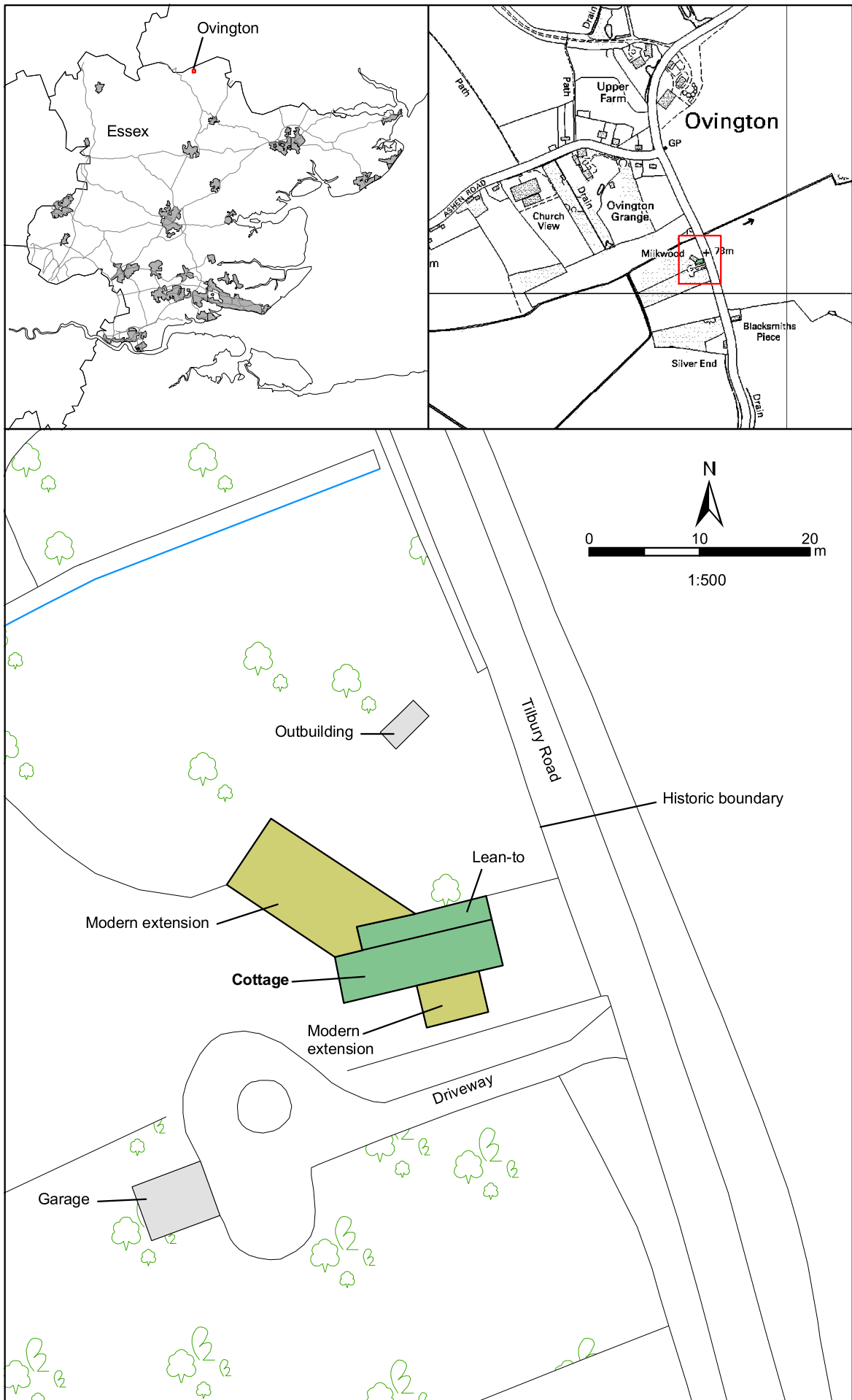
and traditions. Many no longer survive and the opportunity to record one of these cottages, even one that has suffered as badly as Milkwood, is a rare opportunity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Barker Associates for commissioning this survey on behalf of the owners, Mr and Mrs Barnett and to Neeta Borah of Barker Associates for facilitating the works and providing drawings. Thanks also to Mr John Barnett for his cooperation and interest and to the staff at the Essex Records Office. Fieldwork, recording and photography were undertaken by the author. Illustrations were prepared by the author and produced by Andrew Lewsey of ECC FAU. The project was managed by Adrian Scruby.

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Fig.1. Location and block plan



Fig. 2 Chapman and Andre map of Essex, 1777 (plate 3)

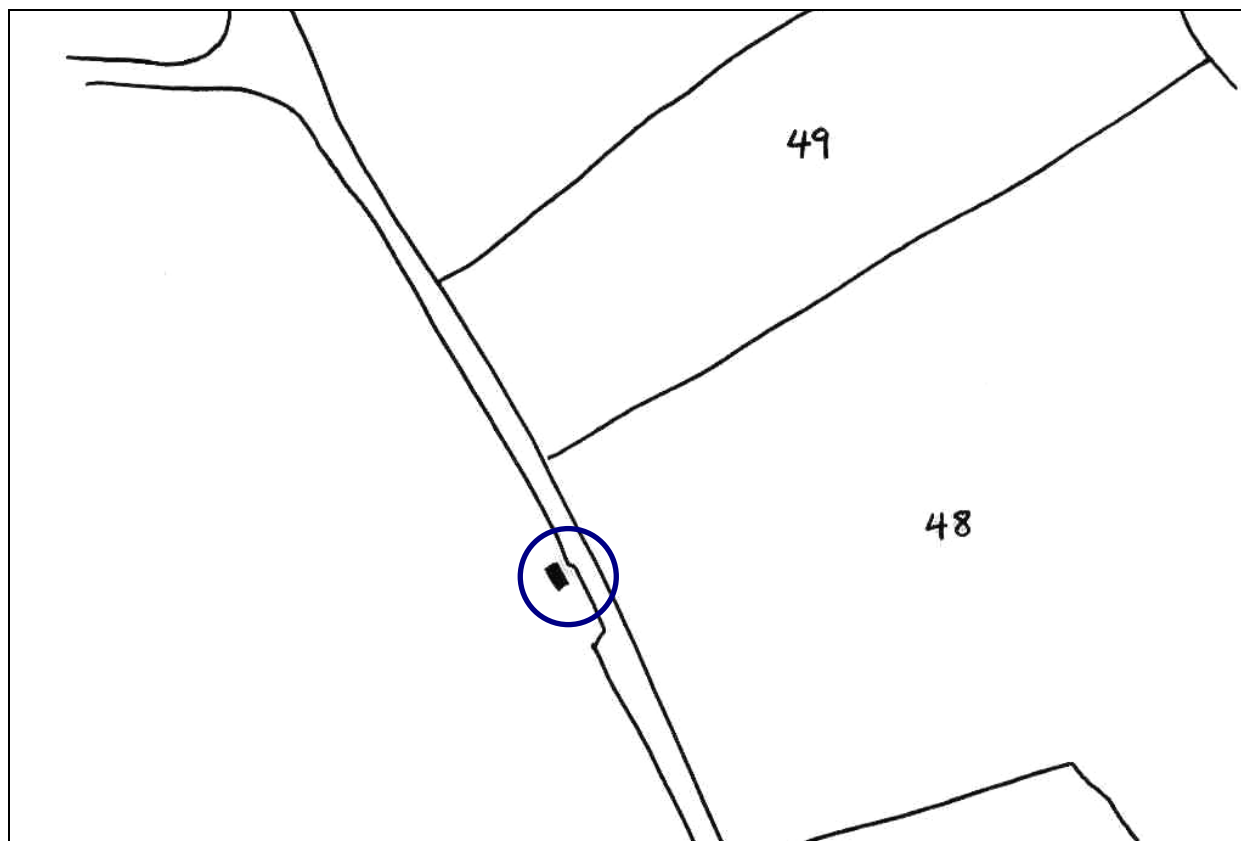


Fig. 3 Map of Ovington, 1800 (D/DB P47A)

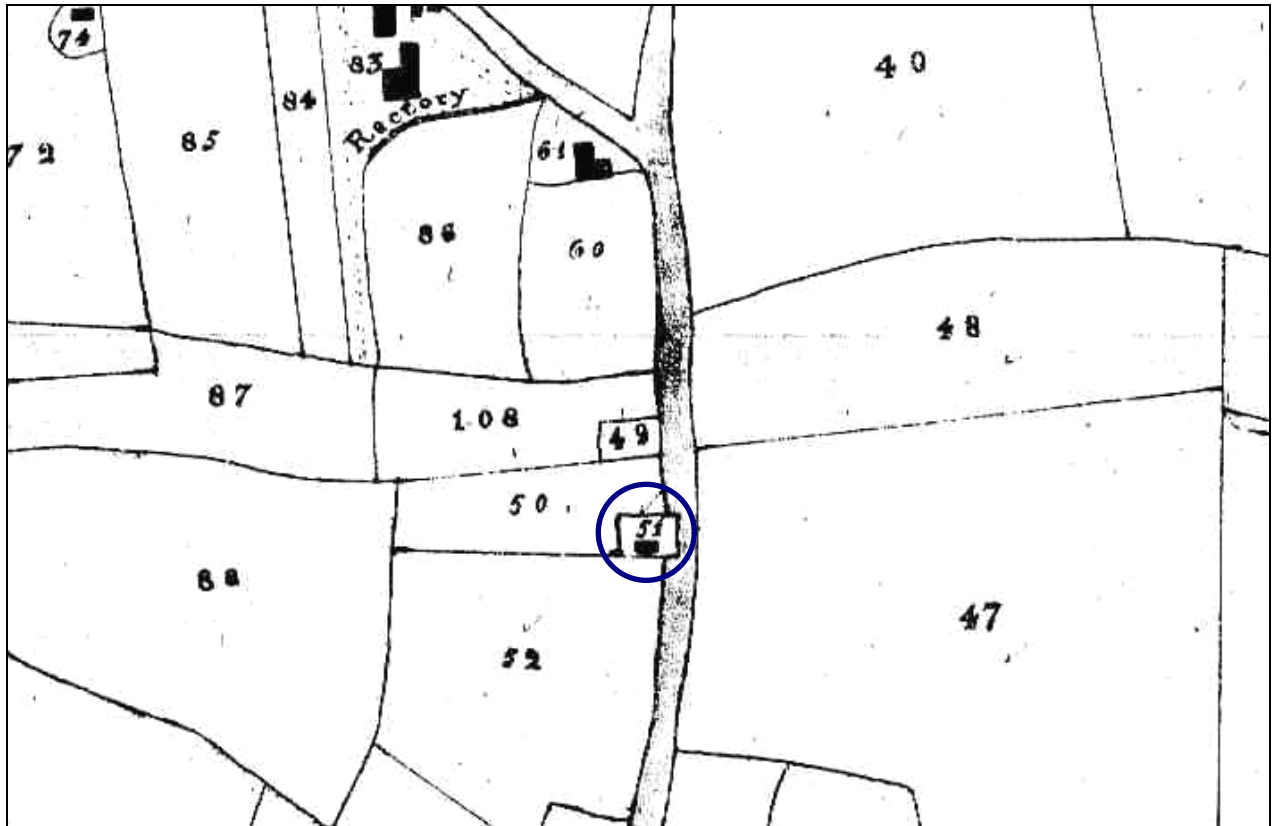


Fig. 4 Ovington tithe map, 1839 (D/CT 265)

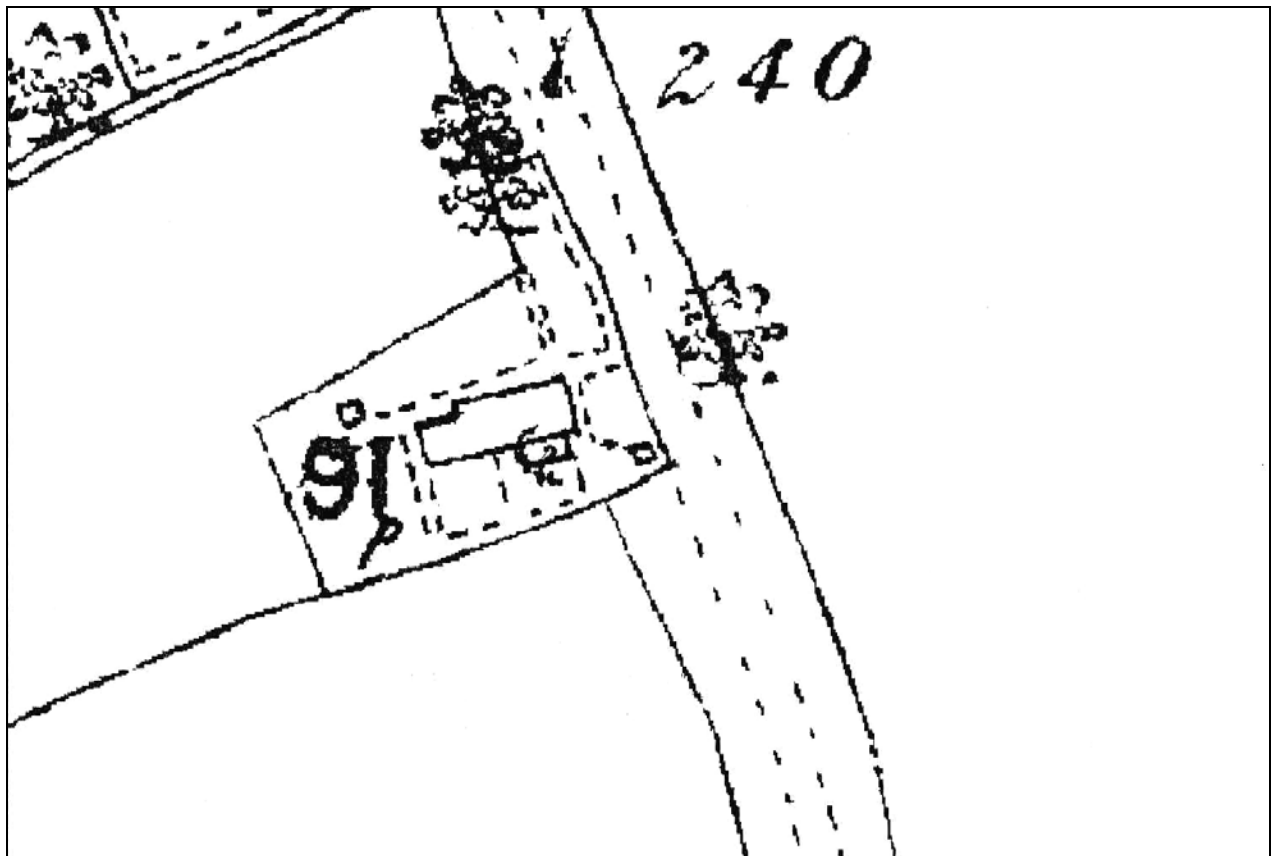


Fig. 5 First edition 25" OS map, 1881 (sheet 15/5)

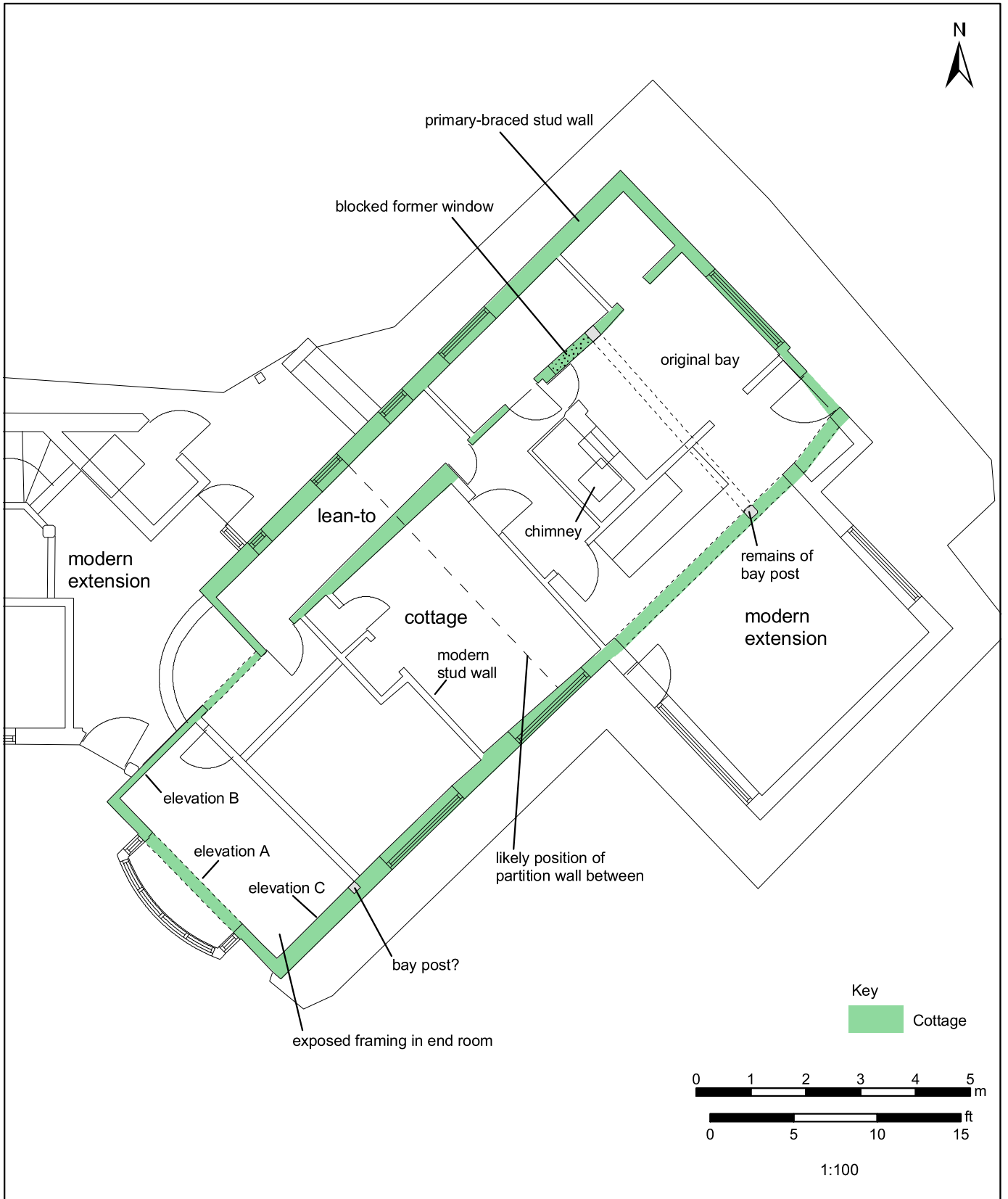


Fig.6. Ground floor plan

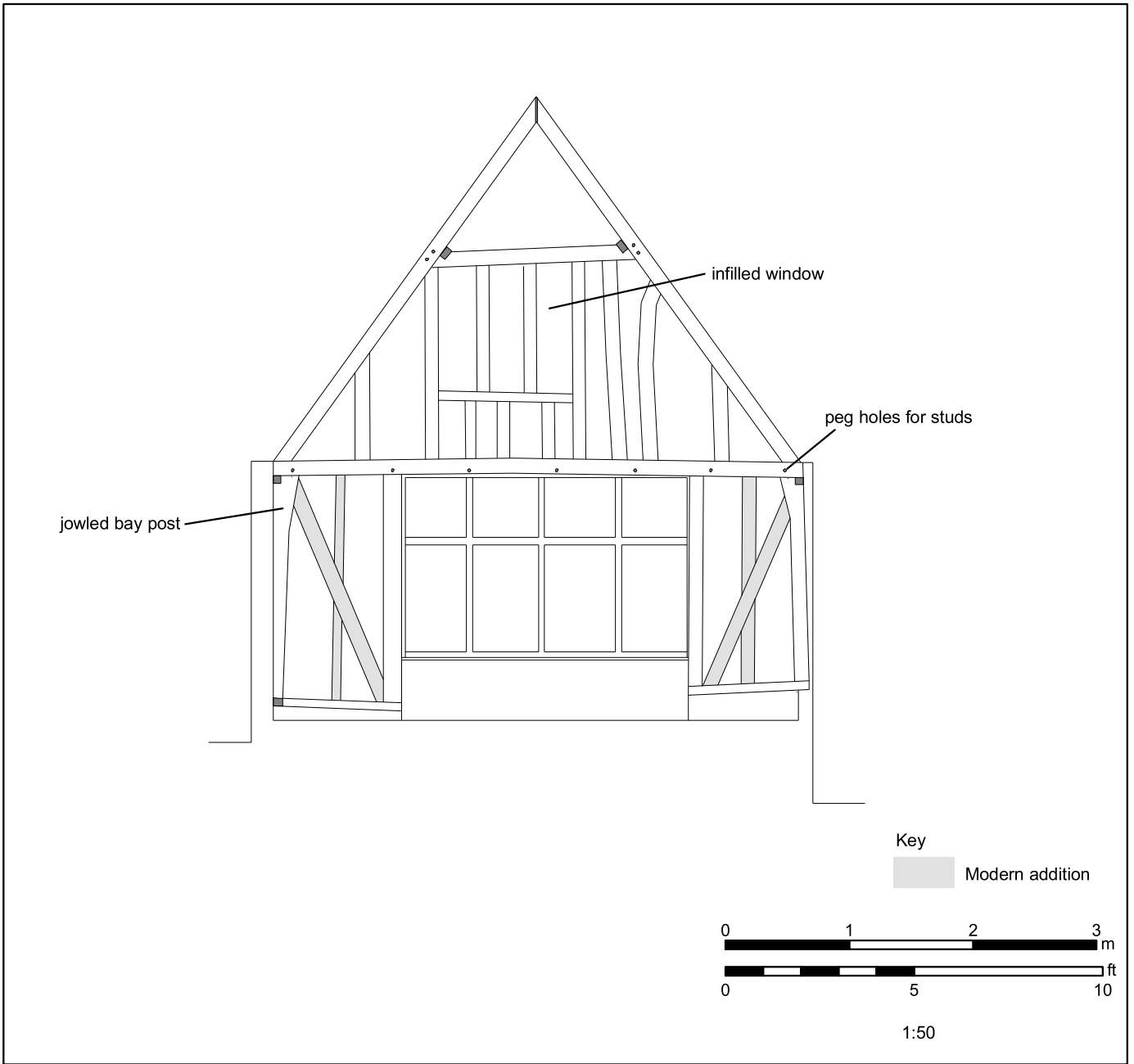


Fig.7. Elevation A

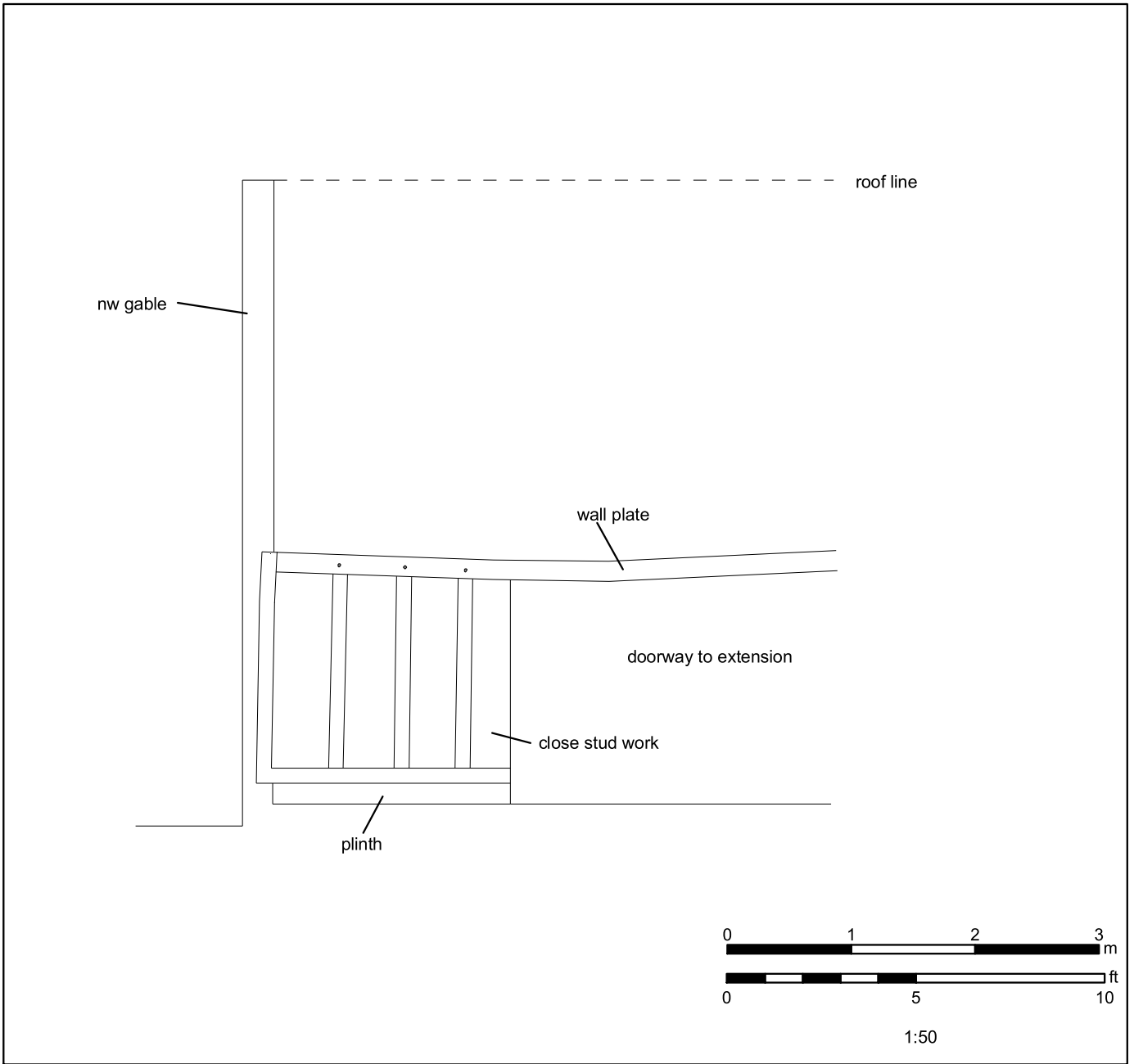


Fig.8. Elevation B

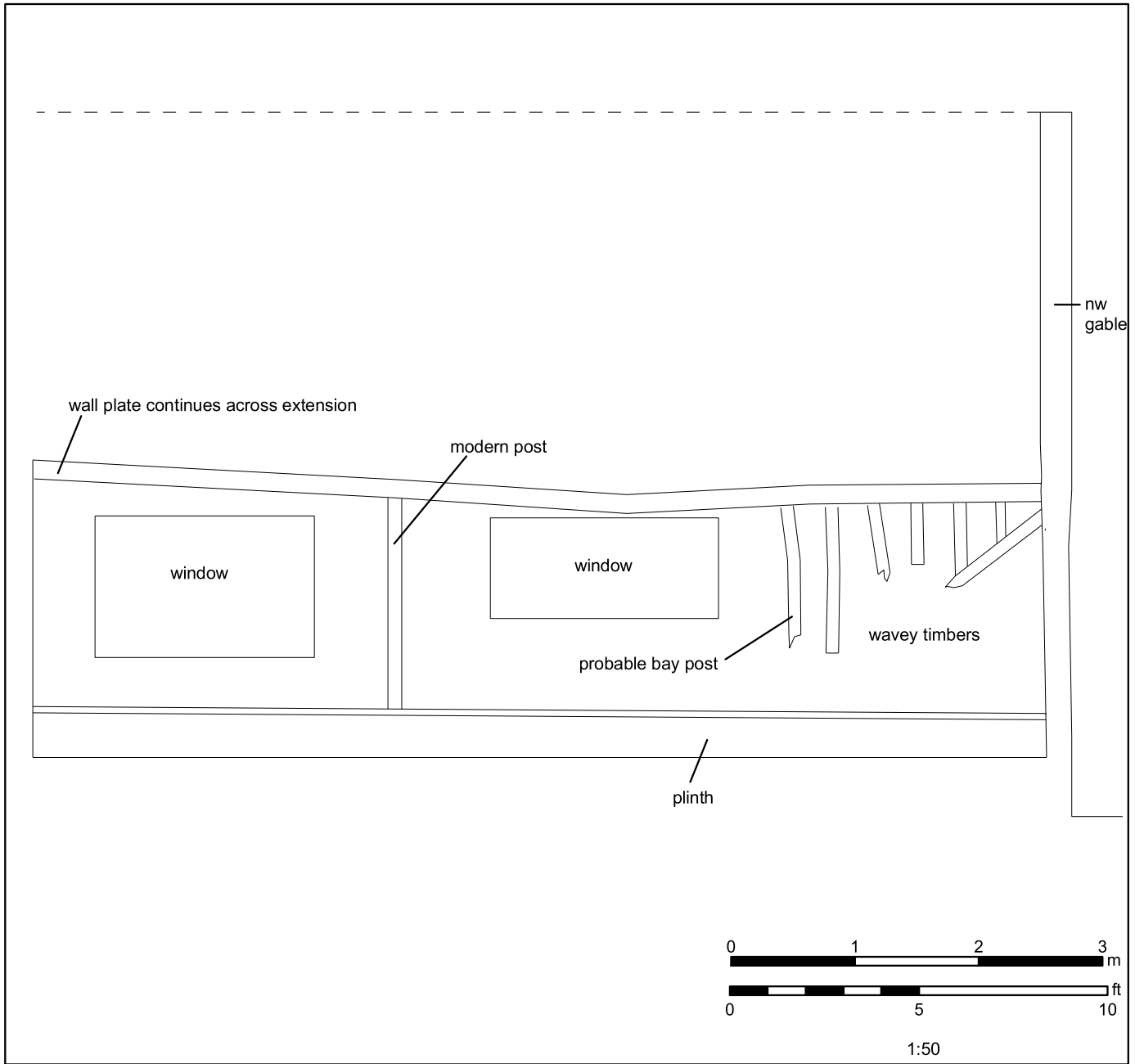


Fig.9. Elevation C



Plate 1 Cottage viewed to north with extensions either side



Plate 2 Cottage viewed to south with lean-to in foreground



Plate 3 North-east bay viewed to lean-to showing bay post to left



Plate 4 Timber-framing in south-west bay



Plate 5 Pegged studwork in south-west bay



Plate 6 Primary-braced studwork in south-west bay



Plate 7 Exposed features on north-west wall of cottage



Plate 8 Detail of wall fabric on north-west side of cottage



Plate 9 Chimney stack viewed to south-east



Plate 10 Stack brickwork bonded with earth mortar

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

Site name: 'Milkwood', Tilbury Road, Ovington, Essex

Project no.: 2186

Index to the Archive:

Document wallet containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Client/archive report
- 1.2 Unbound version of report
- 1.3 CD containing digital photographs, architect's drawings & copy of report, pdf-formatted

2. Site Archive

- 2.1 Photographic record (digital prints) & register
- 2.2 Site notes & annotated architect's drawings

Appendix 2: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Milkwood', Tilbury Road, Ovington, Essex	
Parish: Ovington	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 76838 42059	OASIS record No.: essexcou-1-75794
Type of Work: Building recording (level 3)	Site Director/Team: Andrew Letch ECC FAU
Date of Work: 23rd March 2010	Size of Area Investigated: N/A
Curating Museum: Braintree	Funding Source: Barker Associates on behalf of NFU Mutual
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related LBS No. 407580
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: post-medieval: early 19th-century	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p>Milkwood is an early 19th century thatched 'hedgerow cottage that suffered severe fire damage in September 2009. Prior to the submission of a planning application, a building survey was carried out on the recommendation of English Heritage and Braintree District Council prior to its delisting and subsequent demolition. The structure is Listed as 16th century based on its external form, but maps studied during the survey show it replaced an earlier building that stood on the other side of the plot, incorporating reused timbers from the earlier structure alongside waney 'hedgerow timbers'.</p> <p>The cottage was probably built by the Ovington Hall estate to house farm labourers and was initially divided into two lobby-entry units. Unfortunately the roof and internal room configuration were lost in the fire, although the latter appears to have been altered when modern extensions were added either side of the cottage by a previous owner. Areas of timber-framing were studied, but a comprehensive investigation could not be made because large elements had been lost during the fire or were still hidden beneath modern plaster.</p> <p>However, what was recorded was of some interest in the study of vernacular country cottages that were built from natural and available resources.</p> <p>..</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: none	
Author of Summary: Andrew Letch	Date of Summary: 10th June 2010