

T H A M E S      V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

S O U T H

**Old Furnace Cottage, Ashburnham,  
Battle, East Sussex**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Sean Wallis**

**Site Code: OFC12/08**

**(TQ 6850 1703)**

# **Old Furnace Cottage, Ashburnham Battle, East Sussex**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Mr and Mrs J Wallace**

by Sean Wallis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

SiteCodeOFC12/08

**April 2012**

## Summary

**Site name:** Old Furnace Cottage, Ashburnham, Battle, East Sussex

**Grid reference:** TQ 6850 1703

**Planning reference:** RR/2010/1718/P and RR/2011/1485/P

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 26th March to 23rd April 2012

**Project manager:** Sean Wallis

**Site supervisor:** Sean Wallis

**Site code:** OFC 12/08

**Summary of results:** Monitoring of the footings for two new extensions to the cottage established that the area had been substantially built up in the past, probably when the furnace was operational. As a result, the new footings only impacted upon made ground deposits, and no archaeological finds or features were recorded.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Battle Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 26.04.12 Steve Preston✓ 26.04.12
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# Old Furnace Cottage, Ashburnham, Battle, East Sussex An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Sean Wallis

Report 12/08b

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Old Furnace Cottage, Ashburnham, Battle, East Sussex (TQ 6850 1703) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by the owners of the property, Mr and Mrs J Wallace.

Planning permissions (RR/2010/1718/P and RR/2011/1485/P) had been gained from Rother District Council to construct new extensions and carry out various alterations to an existing cottage. The permissions were subject to standard condition relating to archaeology, which required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work prior to the commencement of building work. The site is within an Archaeological Notification Area, due to the presence of a former ironworks close by. The remains of the ironworks, which was known as Ashburnham Furnace, are a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The cottage is located immediately to the south of the boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Mr Greg Chuter, Assistant County Archaeologist with East Sussex County Council, had indicated that two distinct elements of work were required to satisfy the planning conditions. These entail building recording of the house prior to the commencement of building work, and an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during groundworks in respect of the new extensions. This report is solely concerned with the watching brief, which was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by Mr Chuter. A separate report will detail the results of the building recording.

This is in accordance with *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5, 2010), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Sean Wallis between 26th March and 23rd April 2012, and the site code is OFC 12/08. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Battle Museum, in due course.

## Location, topography and geology

The site lies in the High Weald, about 5km west of Battle, East Sussex. The surrounding area is characterised by undulating ridges and small valleys, and by isolated farms and small settlements such as Ponds Green, Brownbread Street and Penhurst. The site itself lies within a narrow valley, which has been heavily landscaped

in the past to provide the various ponds that were vital to the iron industry which once flourished in the area. Old Furnace Cottage is situated to the east of a larger house, known as The Furnace, and there are several stable buildings to the south (Fig. 2). The land around the cottage generally slopes down towards the south-west, and the cottage lies at a height of approximately 25m above Ordnance Datum. According to the British Geological Survey, the underlying geology consists of the alluvium of a tiny stream valley, in an area otherwise of Ashdown Beds (BGS 1980).

### **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location close to a known ironworking site, which is believed to have operated between the 16th and early 19th centuries. The Weald was formerly a major centre of iron production, mostly due to the easy availability of raw materials. During the Roman period, and again during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Weald was the most productive iron-producing region in Britain (Hodgkinson 2008). It is therefore possible that archaeological deposits relating to the iron industry may have survived on the site. Although Ashburnham and nearby Penhurst are both mentioned in Domesday Book (AD10 86), the area has historically been very sparsely populated, and the East Sussex Historic Environment Record (ESHER) contains few entries for the area prior to the post-medieval period (Williams and Martin 2002; Rudling 2003).

### **Objectives and methodology**

The aims of the watching brief were to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This was to include the monitoring of footing trenches for the new extensions, along with any areas of ground reduction, and associated service runs. Sufficient time was to be allowed within the developer's and groundworker's schedules to record any archaeological features revealed.

### **Results**

When groundworks commenced in respect of the eastern extension, it became apparent that the topsoil in this area lay directly above a deep deposit of made ground (Figs 3 and 4; Pl 1) This deposit consisted wholly of clinker and slag fragments, and was at least 1.2m thick. Excavation ceased at a depth of 1.5m, due to the unstable nature of the trench sides, caused by the looseness of the made ground deposit. The foundations of the existing cottage lay above this deposit, indicating that the ground had probably been built up with waste material from the furnace, prior to the cottage being built. Due to the unsuitability of the ground for traditional strip footings, it

was decided reinforce the footings with a steel frame and, as a result, it was clear that these shallower footings would not impact upon any important archaeological deposits. It was agreed with Greg Chuter that further work in this area did not need to be monitored.

Upon commencement of the footing trenches for the western extension, a deposit of yellow brown silty clay was encountered, which was initially interpreted as representing the natural geology (Figs 3 and 4; Pl 2). The clay layer was over 2m thick, and lay above a deposit of greyish brown silty clay. The moisture content of these two deposits meant that they were not suitable for traditional strip footings, and it was therefore again decided to use shallower foundations, reinforced with steel framing. These footings were monitored during a subsequent site visit, when it became apparent that the yellow brown clay was in fact re-deposited natural geology. Various tip lines were visible in the sides of the footing trench, probably representing individual cartloads of material which were used to build up the area. It is likely that the clay originated from the furnace site to the north, and possibly represents material excavated when the ponds were dug.

The ground level around the cottage is significantly higher than the area to the south, and the watching brief has shown that this is probably due to the area being built up with waste material from the furnace.

## **Finds**

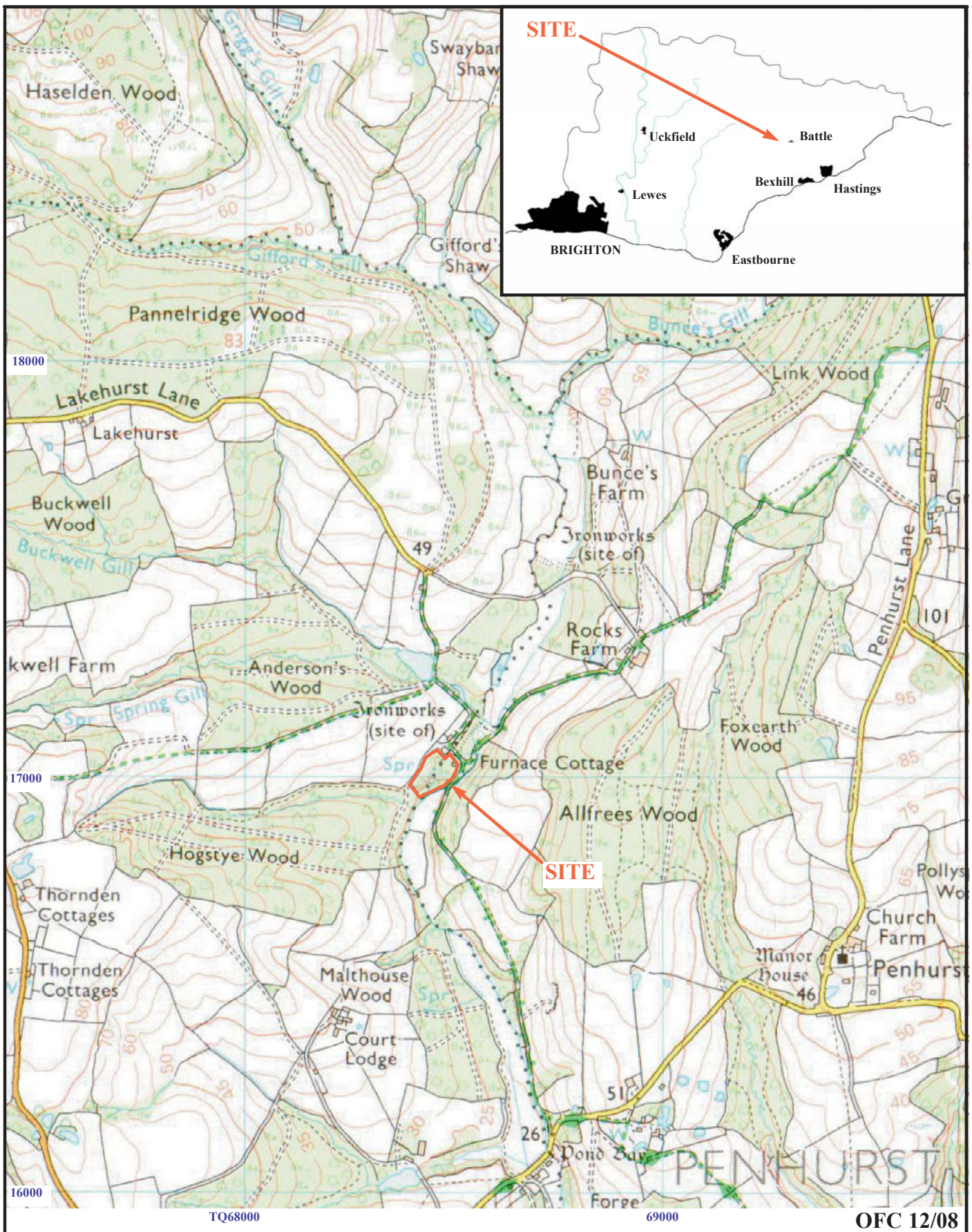
No archaeological finds were recovered during the watching brief.

## **Conclusion**

The watching brief at this site successfully examined those parts of the site which were to be most affected by the planned building work. It is now clear that the area around the cottage has been built up in the past, probably using waste material from the furnace, and that the cottage itself lies on top of what is essentially a spoilheap. The modifications to the original design of the extensions, utilising relatively shallow foundation trenches and reinforced steel, meant that no significant archaeological deposits would be affected by the groundworks.

## **References**

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000, Sheet 320/321, Solid and drift edition, Keyworth.  
Hodgkinson, J, 2008, *The Wealden Iron Industry*, Stroud  
PPS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, Department of Communities and Local Government  
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Rudling, D, (ed) 2003, *The Archaeology of Sussex to AD2000*, King's Lynn  
Williams, A and Martin, G H, 2002, *Domesday Book, a complete translation*, London



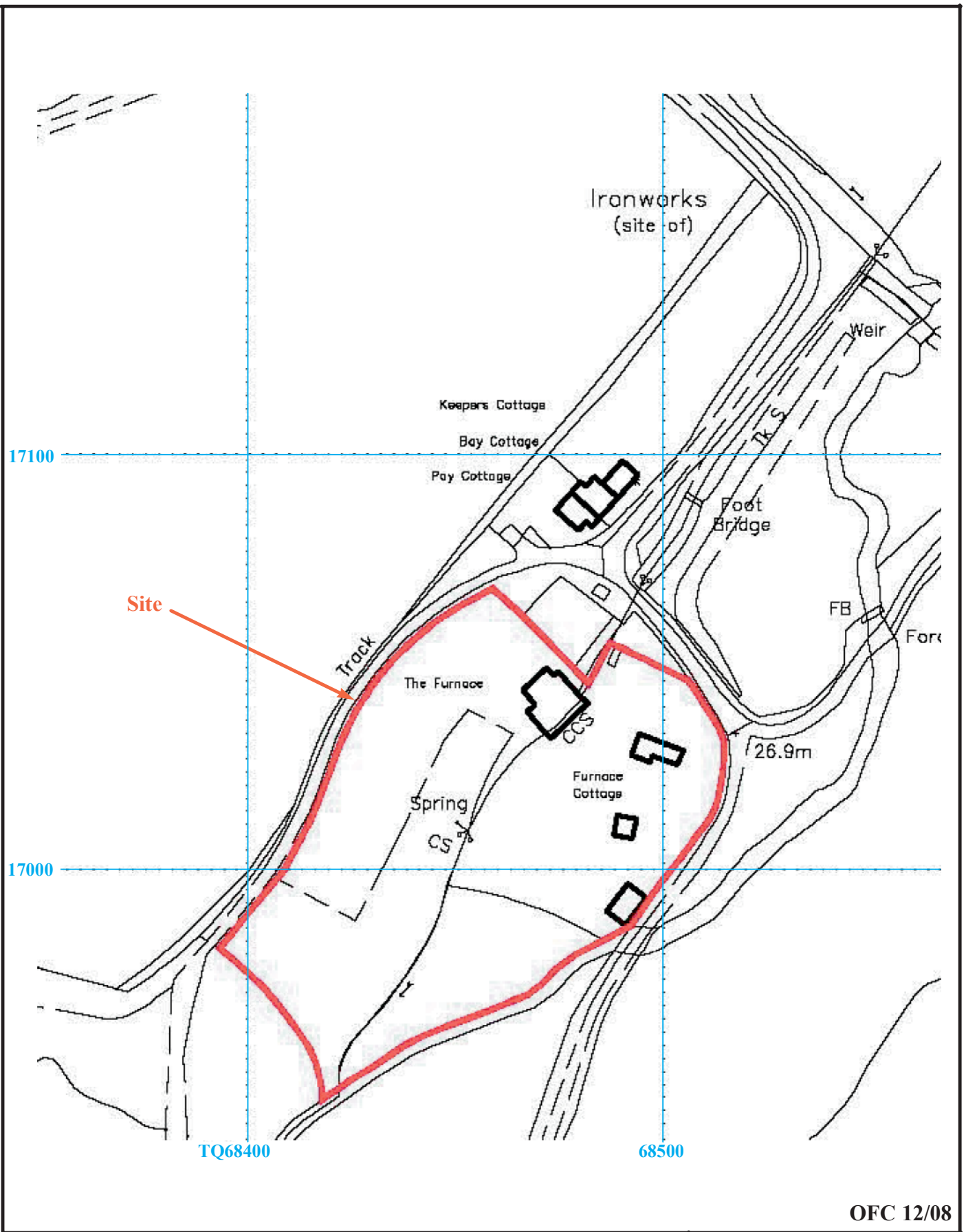
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Figure 1. Location of site within Ashburnham and East Sussex.

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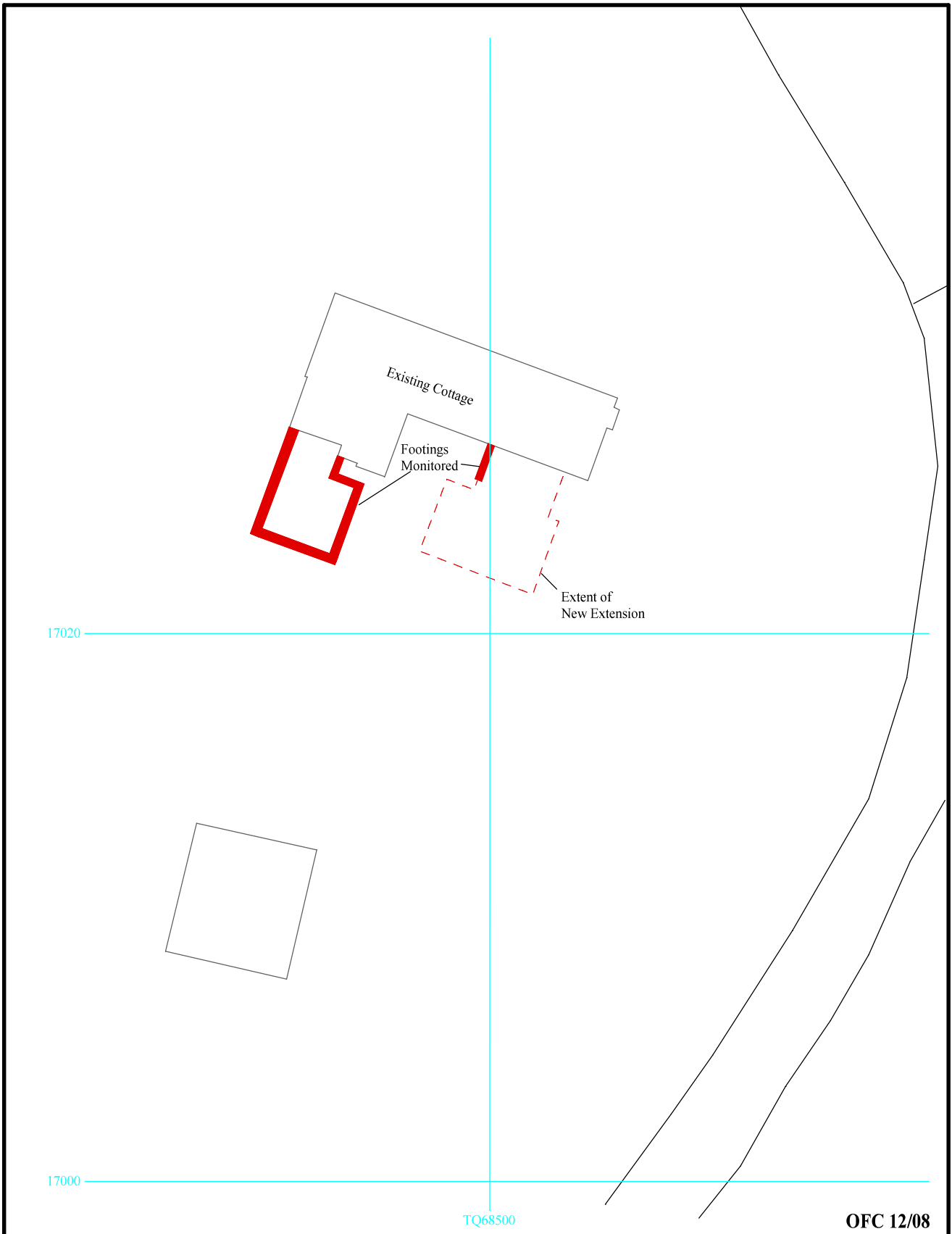
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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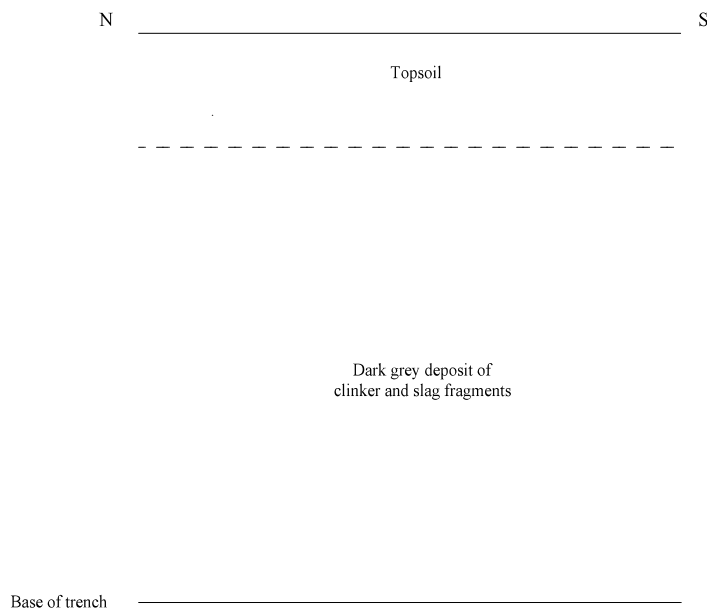
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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.

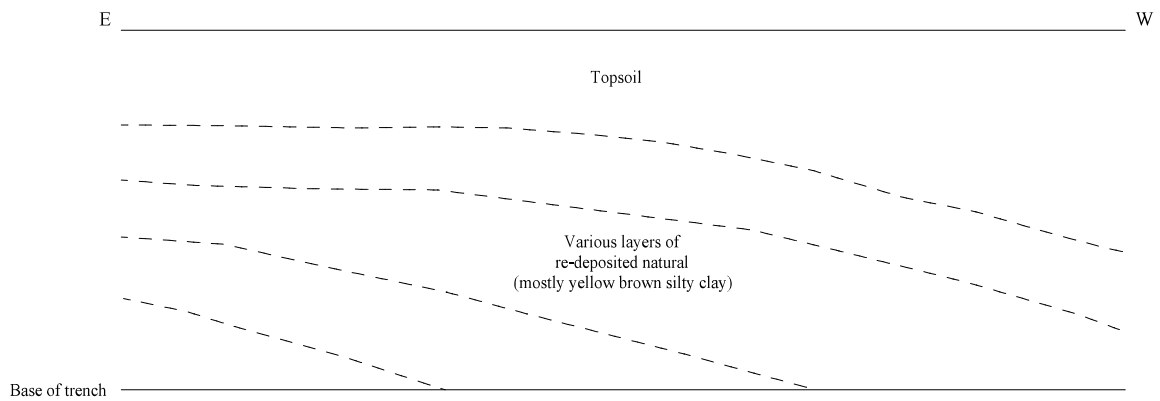


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**Footing trench for eastern extension**



**Footing trench for western extension**



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Figure 4. Representative sections.





Plate 1. Eastern extension trench looking north, Scale: 2m.



Plate 2. Western extension trench, looking south west, Scale: 1m

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Plates 1 and 2.



## TIME CHART

	<b>Calendar Years</b>
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late .....	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early .....	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late .....	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early .....	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper .....	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle .....	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower .....	2,000,000 BC





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