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# Land at Hacket Forge Little Langdale Ambleside, Cumbria

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OCTOBER 2021

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Archaeological Watching Brief  
Report EH105/02

# Land at Hacket Forge, Little Langdale Ambleside, Cumbria

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report For Mr Stewart Orrell

**DATE ISSUED:** October 2021  
**JOB NUMBER:** EH069  
**REPORT NUMBER:** 02 Version (1.0)  
**PLANNING REFERENCE:** 7/2019/5067  
**GRID REFERENCE:** NY 3228 0305  
**OASIS REFERENCE:** edenheri1-432579

**PREPARED BY:**

**Martin Railton**

**Managing Director**

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Heritage Impact Assessment  
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment  
Historic Landscape Survey  
Written Scheme of Investigation

Geophysical Survey  
Trial Trench Evaluation  
Archaeological Excavation  
Archaeological Watching Briefs

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## SUMMARY

In 2021 Eden Heritage Ltd was commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Hacket Forge, Little Langdale, Ambleside, Cumbria (centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference NY 3228 0305). The archaeological work was undertaken for Mr Stewart Orrell (the Client) and was associated with construction of a new extension to the existing dwelling at Hacket Forge, for which planning permission had been granted by the Lake District National Park Authority (Planning Reference 7/2019/5067). The development was granted planning permission on the condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken, due to the recorded presence of a 17th/18th century iron forge, which identified the site to be of archaeological interest.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken over one day on 11th October 2021 during the excavation of foundations for the new extension. The watching brief monitored the excavation of foundation trenches, and topsoil stripping, over an area measuring approximately 5.6m by 7m, located immediately to the east of the existing dwelling, to a depth of 0.6m below ground level (blg). A possible ditch was identified during the excavation of the northern foundation trench, which may have been associated with a former outflow channel or leat, which is believed to have provided power to the forge building. This appears to have been deliberately backfilled, probably in the 18th century when the site became a small holding. The area had also later been remodeled as a small garden. The stone foundations of a late 19th century extension (former outside privy) were also recorded.

As this archaeological watching brief was conducted as part of a recommendation to observe groundworks in association with the new extension, no further work is deemed necessary. However, given the potential for further remains in the area, it is expected that any future excavation work at the site will be subject to a similar programme of archaeological investigation, as recommended by the Lake District National Park Authority.

## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eden Heritage Ltd thanks Robert O'Neil, for commissioning the project of behalf of Mr Stewart Orrell, and for all assistance throughout the work. Eden Heritage Ltd also thank Eleanor Kingston, Lead Strategy Adviser - Historic Environment at the Lake District National Park Authority for her assistance during the project. Eden Heritage Ltd would also like to extend thanks to James and Stephen Lowther of Lowther and Dawson for their help on site.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Martin Railton, who also produced the report.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Project Circumstances

- 1.1.1 The following document outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief on land at Hacket Forge, Little Langdale, Ambleside, Cumbria (centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference NY 3228 0305). The archaeological work was undertaken for Mr Stewart Orrell (the Client) and was associated with construction of a new extension to the dwelling at Hacket Forge, for which planning permission had been granted by the Lake District National Park Authority (Planning Reference 7/2019/5067).
- 1.1.2 The site was c.700m to the southeast of the hamlet of Little Langdale, being approximately 5.5km to the west of Ambleside in the Lake District National Park, Cumbria. The property was situated to the south of the road to Little Langdale (Side Gates) on the north bank of the River Brathay (Figure 1).
- 1.1.3 The buildings at Hacket Forge are believed to occupy the site of a former iron forge which was located on the north bank of the River Brathay. Iron making is believed to have taken place at Hacket Forge in 1630 when William Wright converting two fulling mills to a bloom forge, known as Hacket or Langdale Forge. However, in the early 18th century it ceased to be a bloomery forge and was converted to a finery forge, beginning to work again in 1713 refining pig iron and making it into bars (LDNP HER 3131). The heritage statement for the proposed development suggested that the dwelling may have originated as a 17th century iron-workers cottage, which was subsequently re-developed as a farmhouse in the 18th century and was later extended (O'Neil Architects 2020).
- 1.1.4 As a result, a programme of archaeological work was required at the site, in accordance with Condition 3 of the planning approval. This was to allow the examination and recording of any archaeological remains, prior to their loss through the proposed development works.
- 1.1.5 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was subsequently produced by Eden Heritage Ltd for an archaeological watching brief at the site (Eden Heritage Ltd 2020). The WSI was submitted to Eleanor Kingston, Lead Strategy Adviser - Historic Environment at the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) for approval, prior to the commencement of the fieldwork project.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Scope of the Work

- 2.1.1 The proposed development will involve construction of a single storey extension at the east end of the existing dwelling at Hacket Forge (following removal of a 19th century outhouse), with other minor alterations proposed to the fabric of the dwelling (Figure 2, see front cover).
- 2.1.2 The project comprised an archaeological watching brief, which was maintained over one day during the excavation of foundations for the new extension to the east of the existing dwelling (Figure 2).
- 2.1.3 The general aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed within the immediate vicinity of the excavation, in order to attempt to re-construct the history and past-use of the site. This comprised close monitoring of the excavation work undertaken by the groundworks contractor, followed by the archaeological investigation and recording of any archaeological features or deposits identified.

### 2.2 Archaeological Watching Brief

- 2.2.1 An archaeological watching brief consists of a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, in this case during the excavation work for the new extension. All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with codes and practices outlined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists regarding archaeological watching briefs (CIfA 2020a).
- 2.2.2 In summary, the main objectives of the watching brief were:
- to establish the presence/absence, nature, and extent of archaeological remains revealed by the works and to record these where they are observed;
  - to investigate and record any evidence for archaeological features or finds present;
  - to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
  - to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
  - to recover palaeoenvironmental material (where it survives) in order to understand site and landscape formation processes;
- 2.2.3 The excavation was undertaken using a KX016-4 excavator under close archaeological supervision. Excavation was undertaken to removed modern garden paths and vegetation from the area of the



proposed extension, followed by the excavation of foundation trenches to the required depth (Figure 2). This was followed by the removal of some of the topsoil from the interior of the extension area.

2.2.4 All potential archaeological features encountered were investigated and recorded according to standard recording procedure as set out in the Museum of London Archaeological Service Archaeological Site Manual (Museum of London 1994). All written records utilised the Eden Heritage *pro-forma* record sheets. A full photographic record in digital format was maintained.

2.2.5 All non-modern finds were collected and are reported upon in Section 5. No environmental evidence was encountered during the work and therefore no samples were taken.

## 2.3 Archive

2.3.1 The project archive has been prepared in accordance with the recommendations in *Archaeological Archives: A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Brown 2011) and will be maintained by Eden Heritage Ltd. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier EH105, GHC/A.

2.3.2 Copies of the final report (in PDF/A format) will be provided to the Lake District National Park Historic Environment Record (HER), where viewing will be available on request.

2.3.3 Eden Heritage Ltd supports the **Online Access to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS** (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. As a result, details of the results of this study will be made available by Eden Heritage Ltd as a part of this national project, and a copy of the report will be uploaded to OASIS. The OASIS reference is: edenheri1-432579.

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Location and Geological Context

- 3.1.1 Little Langdale is a valley in the central southern Lake District in Cumbria, the site being located in that part of the county formerly known as Westmorland. Little Langdale lies south of the larger, Great Langdale, and is at the head of a historically important routeway into the central Lake District Massif. Hacket Forge is situated on the road to the hamlet of Little Langdale, on the north bank of the River Brathay, which once marked the former county boundary (Figure 1).
- 3.1.2 The property at Hacket Forge is located within gardens and woodland which extends to the east along the river, beyond which is Colwith. The site is centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference NY 3228 0305. The elevation at Hacket Forge is c.110 aOD (above Ordnance Datum).
- 3.1.3 The geology of the site is complex. Little Langdale is situated on the border between the Seathwaite Fell volcanoclastic sandstone and breccia formation, and the Low Water tuff formation. The recorded geology at the proposed development site is Lincomb Tarns Tuff Formation. This igneous Bedrock formed approximately 449 to 458 million years ago in the Ordovician Period. This is overlain by glaciofluvial deposits, of Devensian clay, sand and gravel, and localised deposits of Till, formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (BGS 2020).

### 3.2 Historic Background

- 3.2.1 From the 13th century the Manor of Little Langdale was held by the Penningtons of Muncaster, who enfranchised to tenants in c.1692 (Winchester 2017, 200). The economy of the area was traditionally based on hill farming and woolen textiles were an important product of the area. Two fulling mills were recorded in 1454, and a woolen mill at Colwith was recorded in the late 17th century (Ibid).
- 3.2.2 Iron ore was also mined in the 17th and 18th centuries. Iron making is believed to have been established in 1630 when William Wright converting two fulling mills to a bloom forge, known as Hacket or Langdale Forge, belonging to Lord Muncaster. In 1710-11 this was worked by William Rawlinson and John Machell producing 19 and 11 tons of sponge iron in each of those years, respectively. However, at this time it ceased to be a bloomery forge and was converted to a finery forge, beginning to work again in 1713 refining pig iron and making it into bars (LDNP HER 3131). The forge ceased operations in 1760s (Winchester 2017, 201).
- 3.2.3 The earliest readily-available map to show the site in detail is the First edition Ordnance Survey map of 1862, which shows the location of Hacket Forge occupied by an L-shaped building labled 'Forge'.

This is situated immediately to the north of the river, accessed by a track from the road to the north, with 'Forge Steps' providing a river crossing to the west, and 'Forge Wood' located to the east. 'Forge Cottage' is also annotated but this is a separate building to the northwest of the site (Figure 3a).

- 3.2.4 The Ordnance Survey map of 1898 shows very little change within the site, apart from the addition of two small outbuildings to the north of the building named 'Forge' and an extension at the east end, which is known to be an outside privy (Figure 3b). The building to the northwest is no longer named (the name 'Forge Cottage' was apparently also given to the current building, Hacket Forge). The Ordnance Survey map of 1915 indicates further changes to the west end of Forge and two new outbuildings in the field to the west, but the site otherwise remained unchanged (Figure 3c & 3d).
- 3.2.5 Analysis of the current building has indicated that, after the building known as 'Forge' went into disuse, it was re-developed possibly by upgrading a former 17th century iron worker's cottage to form a farmstead, known as Forge Cottage, which gradually became known as Hacket Forge (O'Neil Architects 2020, 1). This was continually occupied as a farmhouse until the late 20th century.

### 3.3 Previous Archaeological Work

- 3.3.1 In 1973 The National Trust visited the forge site and recorded that only the turf-covered foundations of the forge survived together with a quantity of slag and building debris. A well-preserved leat and pond were also recorded as surviving at the site by the Lake District National Park Authority, along with the possible remains of a forge building, and a group of ruined buildings to the west, that may have also been forge buildings (LDNPP 2015, 21).
- 3.3.2 An archaeological survey of the site was undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (later part English Heritage) between 1994 and 1999 along with several other iron-working sites in Cumbria. The survey recorded the earthwork remains of a well-preserved leat and pond, which extended 255m along the riverbank to the west of the current site. The remains of the forge building could not be positively identified, but it was believed that this probably occupied the site of current dwelling due to its location at the head of the leat. It was noted that the pond had been landscaped after it had gone out of use to create more easily cultivatable land when Hacket became a small holding, and the east end had been further modified to create a number of modern garden features. The outflow channel had also been infilled but was visible as a slight depression in the ground, running up to the north side of the existing dwelling (English Heritage 2000, 72).

## 4 Archaeological Watching Brief

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken over one day on 11th October 2021 during the excavation of foundations for the new extension (Figure 4). This followed the demolition of the previous extension attached to the eastern gable of the dwelling (former outside privy). This work monitored the excavation of 1.0m-wide foundation trenches to a depth of c.0.6m below ground level (blg) over an area measuring approximately 5.6m by 7m located immediately to the east of the existing dwelling. Topsoil was also removed from internal floor area to a depth of 0.3m blg (Plate 1).
- 4.1.2 The excavation revealed a 0.5m-deep layer of topsoil (**100**) across the whole site, which comprised a loose black loam. To the north this was covered a 0.4m-deep deposit of yellow/grey clay sand, containing occasional stone pieces and gravel (**102**), which was believed to be a glacial till deposit.
- 4.1.3 The natural yellow sandstone bedrock (**101**) was also exposed within the foundation trenches at an average depth of approximately 0.6m blg. However, the depth of the bedrock was found to vary considerably across the site, and this was also exposed at the northeast corner of the site at 0.3m blg. The bedrock also rose to the surface at the southwest corner of the excavated area, where it could be seen to form part of the foundations of the existing dwelling and the former extension.



**Plate 1:** Area excavated for the new extension, looking west

## 4.2 Results

- 4.2.1 The excavation of the foundation trenches revealed a possible ditch crossing the north side of the area. The possible cut of the ditch **[106]** had a shallow rounded profile and was revealed cutting the natural yellow/grey clay sand **(102)** on the north side of the excavated area at a depth of 0.5m blg (Plate 2). The ditch was at least 3.2m wide and 0.4m deep, and was aligned approximately northwest to southeast, running into the northern baulk of the northern foundation trench (Figure 5).
- 4.2.2 The possible ditch was filled with a 0.3m-deep deposit of yellow/brown clay silt **(103)** containing occasional small stones and flecks of charcoal, with some large stone pieces at its base. Above this was a 0.1m-deep deposit of loose red sand and crushed brick **(104)**. No datable finds were recovered from the fill of the possible ditch, which was covered by 0.5m deep layer of loose black loam **(100)**.
- 4.2.3 Following the excavation of the foundation trench, water ingress from the possible ditch caused some flooding of the foundation trenches. However, the other trench sections were inspected in order to determine the alignment of the possible ditch. In the foundation trench immediately to the east of the ditch the bedrock **(101)** rose to 0.3m blg (see Figure 5), suggesting that the ditch may have run immediately to the south of the bedrock outcrop on a northwest to southeast alignment.



**Plate 2:** Possible ditch **[106]** in the northern baulk of the excavated area, looking northeast

- 4.2.4 Another outcrop was revealed at the southwest corner of the excavated area, where the natural bedrock **(101)** was found to directly underlay the foundations of both the existing dwelling and the former extension (Plate 3). Part of the foundations of the 19th century extension (former outside

privy) were revealed immediately to the east of the dwelling, comprising three slate slabs **(105)** measuring 0.75m by 0.5m and up to 0.1m thick, with an overall depth of 0.35m. The slabs had evidently been utilised to form the southwest corner of the extension with smaller slate pieces having been used to infill the space between these slate slabs and the bedrock outcrop (Plate 4).



**Plate 3:** Foundations of the former extension **(105)** showing building scar and former roofline on the eastern gable of the existing dwelling, looking northeast



**Plate 4:** Corner foundations of the former extension **(105)**, looking east

- 4.2.5 The whole of the excavated area was covered by 0.5m of loose black loam **(100)** which was interpreted as a former garden soil. The soil contained fragments of modern and post-medieval pottery, glass, brick, coal, roofing slate and some modern plastics. This area was planted with shrubs and was crossed by slate garden paths prior to the construction of the new extension (see Figure 2).
- 4.2.6 The topsoil **(100)** was cut by a modern ceramic drain, aligned north to south, which had previously carried rainwater from the dwelling across the excavated area and into the River Brathay (Figure 5).

### 4.3 Discussion

- 4.3.1 A possible ditch **[106]** was identified during the excavation of the northern foundation trench at the site, which may have been associated with a former outflow channel or leat. This appears to have been deliberately backfilled with layers of clay silt **(103)** and possible building waste/rubble **(104)**.
- 4.3.2 The evidence of the English Heritage survey suggests that the outflow channel of the pond (located to the west of the site) would have run eastwards up to the north side of the existing dwelling, presumably originally providing power to hammers and bellows within the former forge building. The leat has since been infilled. However, it is possible that the ditch recorded in section during the watching brief was associated with an associated outflow channel, close to where the water re-entered the River Brathay. This was evidently backfilled, and the area was later utilised as a garden. The leat was probably backfilled in the 18th century when the site became a small holding.
- 4.3.3 No evidence was revealed for the former forge building. The foundations of the former 19th century extension (outside privy) were revealed immediately to the east of the existing dwelling which was demolished prior to the start of the watching brief. The building was noted during a previous site visit to have been of simple drystone construction with alternating quoins, an entrance on the north side and a sloping slate roof. This was previously located within an informal garden, with a steep drop to the River Brathay to the south. The garden was defined to the south side by a drystone revetment wall, which was likely constructed to retain the former garden soil **(100)** and allow the level to be raised to the east of the dwelling. The topsoil may have been imported for this purpose.

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## 5 Finds

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 All non-modern finds were returned to the Eden Heritage Ltd offices where they were assessed under the direction of Martin Railton, Managing Director. All finds were dealt with according to the recommendations made by Watkinson & Neal (1998) and to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance for finds work* (CIfA 2020b). All finds were assessed according to material type and conforming to the deposition guidelines recommended by Brown (2011).
- 5.1.2 The finds were recovered during both the topsoil stripping and the excavation of foundation trenches. They were all recovered from the topsoil (**100**) covering the site. All of the recovered finds were post-medieval or modern ceramics, which are discussed in more detail below.

### 5.2 Post-medieval Ceramics

- 5.2.1 A total of 10 sherds of post-medieval ceramics, weighing 1,248g, were recovered during the watching brief. The sherds were of moderate size and in good condition, suggesting that they had not moved far from their original point of deposition. Three larger sherds were also recovered from the site.
- 5.2.2 A limited range of post-medieval fabrics were present, comprising mainly glazed stoneware and earthenware sherds of 19th century date, which were from utilitarian vessels including bowls, pancheons and storage jars. Two possible 18th century slip ware sherds were also recovered.
- 5.2.3 One sherd comprised part of the rim of a brown glazed earthenware bowl with a diameter of 180mm. Three large sherds of black ware were recovered from much larger vessels, including a body sherd, part of the base of a storage jar (which may be modern), and part of the rim of a large storage vessel with a lug handle, which had a diameter of 410mm. Two body sherds were recovered from the same 19th century stoneware vessel with an olive-green glaze, which could not be identified to form.
- 5.2.4 The sherds were all wheel-thrown and were undecorated apart from the two slip decorated sherds.

### 5.3 Research potential

- 5.3.1 All of the ceramic material was recovered from the topsoil (**100**) and was therefore not recovered from stratified deposits, meaning the research value of the material is limited. The assemblage does not add any significant information to the site stratigraphy or the history of the site. The post-medieval material on site probably arose as midden material associated with the domestic dwelling.



## 6 Conclusions

### 1.1 Interpretation

- 1.1.1 A possible ditch was identified on the north side of the site during the archaeological watching brief at Hacket Forge. It is possible that this feature relates to 17th/18th century water management at the site associated with the former iron forge, which is recorded to have been located on the north bank of the River Brathay. The location of the possible ditch suggests it may have been associated with the outflow channel of a pond located upstream to the west. It is assumed that the forge building occupied the site of the dwelling known as Hacket Forge (formerly known as Forge Cottage) and that a leat ran from this pond to the north side of the building to supply power to the forge.
- 1.1.2 The forge apparently ceased operations in 1760s (Winchester 2017, 201). The ditch appears to have been backfilled in the late 18th century when the site was re-modelled as a small holding, and the building became a farmhouse. The pond was landscaped at the same time to create cultivatable land. The area to the east of the house was also later remodeled to form a garden with a revetment wall.
- 1.1.3 A small extension was added to the east side of the dwelling in the late 19th century (to house an outside privy) the foundations of which were revealed during the watching brief. The dwelling and the extension were also found to have been constructed directly onto the bedrock on the west side of the excavated area. This extension was demolished prior to the start of the watching brief.

### 1.2 Research Potential

- 1.2.1 The watching brief has identified the presence of possible post-medieval water management, associated with the former iron forge at Hacket Forge. This information will add to the previous archaeological survey of the site and help inform future archaeological work within the area.
- 1.2.2 A small assemblage of post-medieval ceramic material was recovered which is of very limited research value. This probably originated as midden material associated with the domestic dwelling.

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## APPENDIX 1: FIGURES





**Eden Heritage**  
 Archaeology & Heritage Services

Eden Heritage Ltd 2021

**PROJECT:** Hacket Forge, Little Langdale, Ambleside, Cumbria  
**CLIENT:** Mr Stewart Orrell  
**REPORT:** EH069/02  
**SCALE:** 1:25,000 at A4  
**DRAWN BY:** MDR  
**DATE:** October 2021

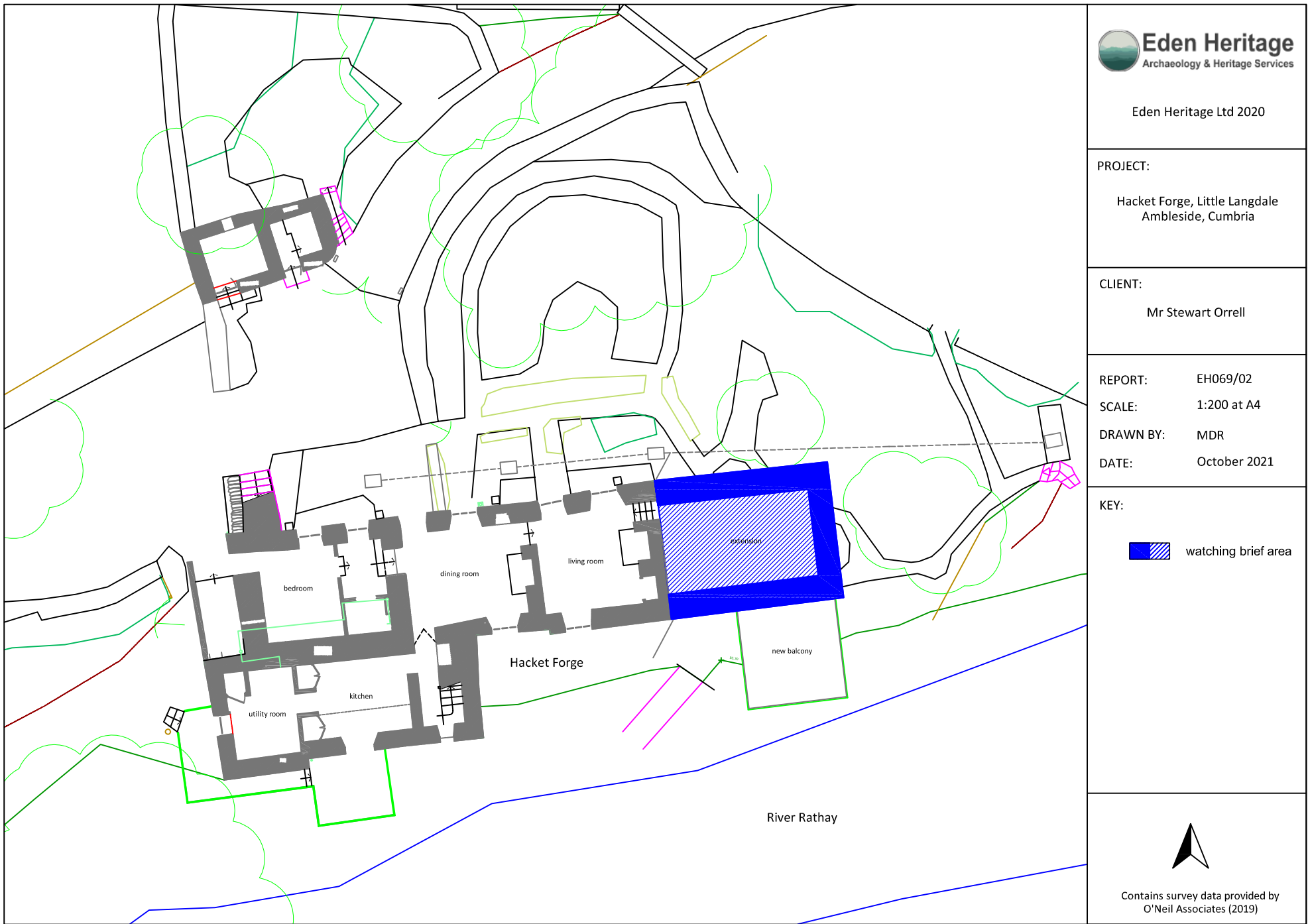
**KEY:**

 site location



Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2018)

Figure 1: Site Location.



Eden Heritage Ltd 2020

**PROJECT:**  
Hacket Forge, Little Langdale  
Ambleside, Cumbria

**CLIENT:**  
Mr Stewart Orrell

**REPORT:** EH069/02  
**SCALE:** 1:200 at A4  
**DRAWN BY:** MDR  
**DATE:** October 2021

**KEY:**  
 watching brief area



Contains survey data provided by  
O'Neil Associates (2019)

Figure 2: Detailed site location showing proposed development area.

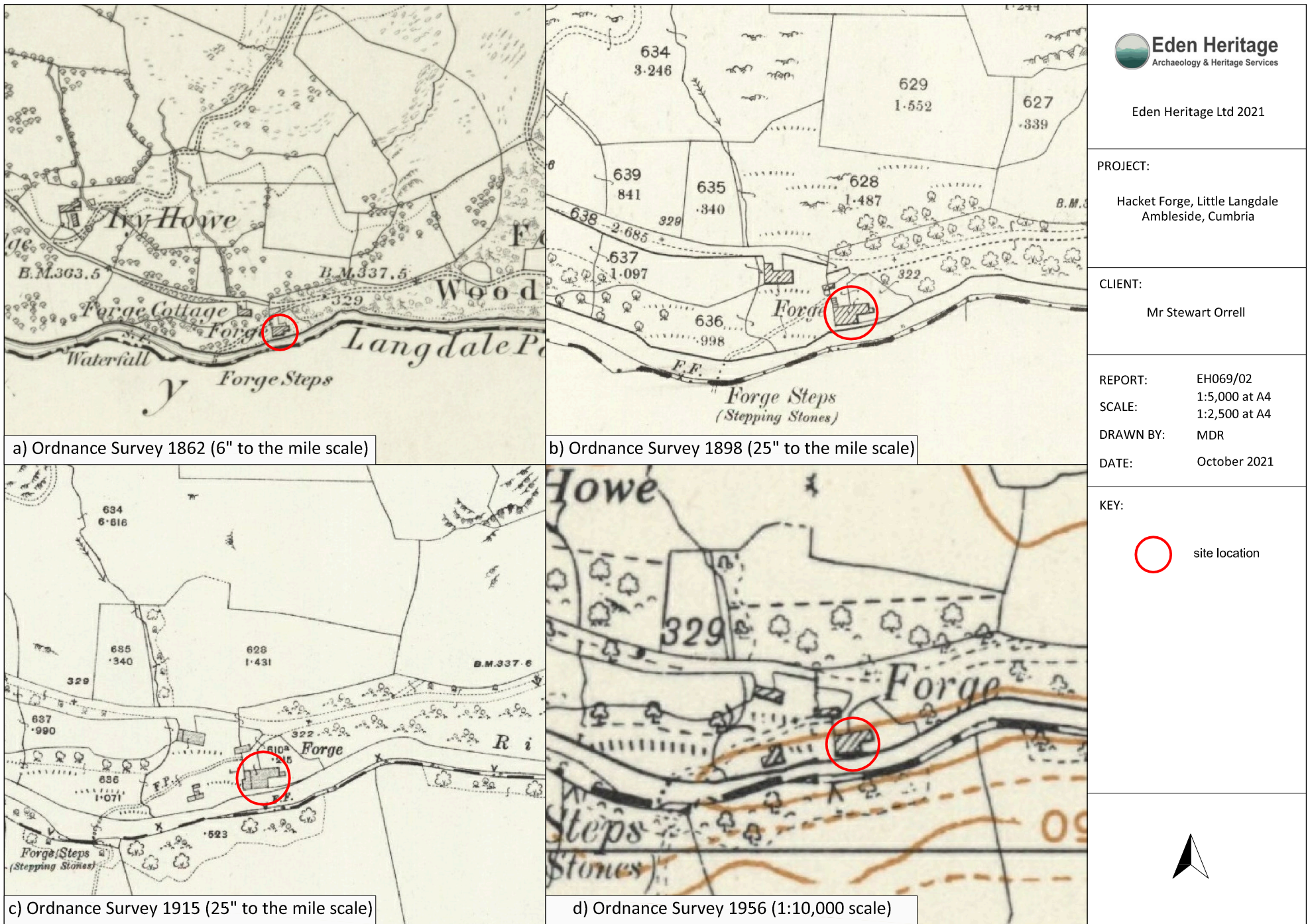


Figure 3: Extracts from historic Ordnance Survey maps (1862-1956) depicting Hacket Forge.





PROJECT:

Hacket Forge, Little Langdale  
Ambleside, Cumbria

CLIENT:

Mr Stewart Orrell


REPORT: EH069/02

SCALE: 1:40 at A4


DRAWN BY: MDR

DATE: October 2021

KEY:

 limit of excavation

 context number

 ceramic drain pipe

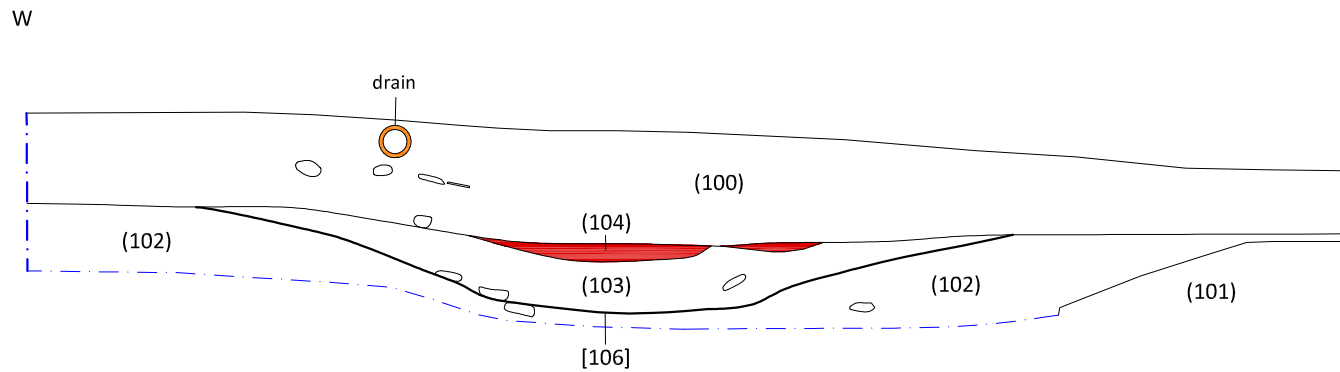


Figure 5: South-facing section of foundation trench.

**Heritage Impact Assessment  
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment  
Historic Landscape Survey  
Written Scheme of Investigation**

**Geophysical Survey  
Trial Trench Evaluation  
Archaeological Excavation  
Archaeological Watching Briefs**

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