

THE SMITHY, BATTISBOROUGH CROSS, HOLBETON, DEVON

(NGR SX 59887 48323)

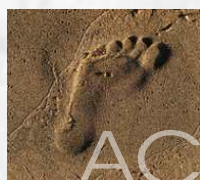
Results of historic building recording and an
archaeological watching brief

South Hams District Council planning reference
2850/17/FUL, condition 9

Prepared by:
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archaeology

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Acknowledgements

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The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

Historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AC archaeology between April and June 2022 on behalf of the private owner, at The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton, Devon (NGR SX 59887 48323). Historic mapping indicates that the building was constructed after 1842 and before 1887 as a smithy, replacing a cottage on a different footprint. In more recent years it was used as a barn for housing animals prior to it being abandoned.

The historic building recording found that a large part of the building, formed by the west and east rooms, comprise the surviving elements of the purpose-built smithy, and within that period was added to by a small extension on the west side. No internal fixtures or features relating specifically to the smithy were present or observed; however, the location of a louvered roof vent would suggest that the larger west room was the workshop with the smaller east room perhaps used for storage. The building was altered in the early-20th century with a doorway and window being blocked in the north elevation. The west extension was altered and enlarged by removing its north wall and extending the west wall to the northern boundary. This included a large doorway which was subsequently altered again in the late-20th century.

The archaeological watching brief found that the interior floor levels of the main building were all modern and sat on the natural subsoil. No archaeological features, deposits or finds were observed. A small area of a possible former earthen floor surface was exposed in the former western extension.

The historical records indicate that the building was also in use as a residence throughout the second half of the 19th century. Surprisingly, no material evidence for this use was observed, with no evidence for a fireplace or material remains indicating domestic occupation.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AC archaeology from 8 April 2021 to 14 June 2022 at The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton, Devon (NGR SX 59887 48323; Fig. 1). The investigations were commissioned by the private owner, and were required under condition 9 of the grant of planning permission (South Hams District Council reference 2850/17/FUL) for 'conversion of redundant barn to dwelling and construction of garage'. Guidance on the scope of works was provided by the Devon County Historic Environment Team (DCHET) in their consultation response to the application; no formal site-specific brief was provided.
- 1.2 The Smithy is located on the northwest corner of the road junction at Battisborough Cross. The building is situated within a small plot, with openings fronting onto a verge to the north of the highway leading west from the crossroads. It comprises a single-storey stone building (latterly a barn) under a pitched slate roof, with a wider but lower range on its western side. The latter has partially collapsed. The long axis of the building is aligned approximately northeast-southwest but for the purposes of this report will be regarded as east-west. The property also includes a small stone outbuilding, located over a well, and contemporary stone boundary walls. The property, along with the hamlet, is situated at a height of 100m above Ordnance Datum on a northeast-southwest aligned ridgetop between the River Erme to the southeast and the watercourse leading into Newton Creek to the northwest. The underlying geology consists of Devonian slate, siltstone and sandstone of the Dartmouth Group; there are no overlying superficial deposits (British Geological Survey online viewer 2022).

The Scheme

- 1.3** The scheme comprises the conversion of the building into a three-bedroom, single-storeyed dwelling utilising the existing historic building but with some subdivision of internal spaces. The western semi-derelict part of the building (known as the extension) is to be demolished and rebuilt. A new garage located to the west will be link-attached to the building.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The current built environment of Battsborough Cross is not ancient, and contains only a handful of historic buildings including a number of estate cottages dating to 1883 and 1884, The Smithy (Devon Historic Environment Record entry MDV45441) and a former Methodist chapel (Devon Historic Environment Record entry MDV45440).
- 2.2** The Holbeton tithe map of 1842 records a largely rural environment at what is now Battsborough Cross (Fig. 2). The Smithy is recorded as an L-shaped building in plot 358, which, along with plot 359, was owned by Harry Tonkin and occupied by Thomas Baker. It was described as a Cottage and garden, with plot 359 being an orchard. On the opposite, northeast side of the crossroads another building was also described as a cottage, again owned by Harry Tonkin and occupied by Thomas Dakar. The third developed property was an unnamed farm located further to the northwest of the crossroads, again owned by Harry Tonkin, and occupied by John Beer. (Ownership and use of the building in the 19th century are discussed further in Section 7 below.)
- 2.3** The Ordnance Survey First Edition 25-inch map of 1887 shows some changes to the character of Battsborough Cross (Fig. 3). The Smithy is marked as such and the associated building over a pump is also shown. The Smithy is depicted very slightly differently to the earlier tithe map, and located further to the northeast. These factors, and elements of its architecture, would indicate that the earlier cottage was rebuilt as a smithy. The map also records that the three pairs of estate cottages have been constructed to the northeast and southwest of the crossroads, and the farm has been rebuilt as *North Battsborough*.
- 2.4** The Ordnance Survey Second Edition 25-inch map of 1906 records no changes to The Smithy, but now also depicts the Methodist chapel to the west, and The Laurels to the northeast of the crossroads.

3. AIMS

- 3.1** The scheme will include changes to the property that will remove elements of the building, such as internal partitions and the western extension. It will also alter the internal character of the building. The aims of the investigations were twofold. Firstly, to prepare an historic building record of the property prior to works commencing, and secondly to monitor groundworks associated with the conversion that may have the potential to expose below-ground deposits associated with The Smithy or the earlier cottage within the property.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** All works were undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (Passmore 2018), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* and *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (both revised 2020).

Historic building recording

4.2 The historic building recording was undertaken in accordance with the guidance set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016), and undertaken to levels 2-3.

4.3 The recording comprised the following:

- A written description;
- A photographic record comprising a colour digital record (minimum 16 megapixels). Where appropriate, all photographs included a photographic scale. Details of photographs taken were made on *pro forma* record sheets; and
- Annotated as existing architect's drawings (plans, profiles and elevations) were updated to show the location of observed historic fabric and fixtures and fittings, along with information on the phasing and development of the building.

4.4 The recording considered the following:

- Date/period of initial build and subsequent alterations,
- Materials and method of construction (and differences in material and construction techniques/architectural styles in each identified phase),
- Fenestration and the design of elevations in relation to the function of internal spaces,
- Internal arrangements including evidence for alterations,
- Original fixtures and fittings,
- Subsequent fixtures and fittings, and evidence for change of use, and
- Ephemeral evidence of occupation and use, for instance any evidence of historic graffiti or signage.

Archaeological watching brief

4.5 All groundworks with the potential to expose archaeological deposits were monitored by the attending site archaeologist. All artefacts, features or deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology *pro-forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.

5. HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING by Stella Smith (Fig. 4; Plates 1-11)

External description

5.1 The building is constructed of rubble stone laid in rough courses bonded with an off white lime mortar and has brick detailing around openings (Plate 1). It has a gabled slate roof with a central louvered vent, and a skylight on the north side. At the west end is a range formed by an extension that has partially collapsed.

5.2 The south elevation features a window opening and two doorways. The larger of the two doorways is roughly in the centre of the wall and serves the west room. The eastern opening gives access to the east room; it is also wide and retains the remnants of a single plank and batten door fitted with plain strap hinges. The window opening has a wooden frame but no glass survives. There would have been a single pane to the west and three smaller panes set vertically to the east. Internally it can be seen that the opening has been narrowed on the east side with the insertion of concrete blocks (Plate 2). All the openings have large wooden lintels. The north elevation incorporates two window openings and a doorway (Plate 3). The doorway has been infilled with rubble stonework (Plate 4). The western window opening has

a wooden pegged frame with four upper glass panes surviving, whilst the eastern window opening has been blocked up with brick.

- 5.3** The east elevation has built-in Royal Mail post-box and a single window opening with the remnants of a wooden pegged frame (Plate 5); no glass remains. Above this are three ceramic pipes set in the wall providing ventilation. The west elevation incorporates a single doorway with a pegged wooden frame and pintles to hang a door (Plate 6); the opening is located within rebuilt masonry associated with the extension. To the north of the door is a crack in the masonry. The upper part of the gable has been rendered. However, internally it can be seen that there is a set of ceramic pipes formerly providing ventilation, and matching those in the east elevation.
- 5.4** The extension has partially collapsed and has no wall or roof structure to the north. The remaining walls are constructed of rubble stonework laid in rough courses with an off white lime mortar; the surviving southern pitch of the roof is covered with slates. In the west elevation are two door openings (Plate 7). The south opening has a wooden lintel and the remnants of a wooden frame but no door survives. The north opening is beyond the original line of the extension and is double width. A single vertical timber from a door frame survives on its south side. The opening has been altered and repaired with brick, blockwork and cement.
- 5.5** The plot to the west is bounded to the north by a stone wall of vertically set slate stone. Along the east end of the southern boundary is a rubble stone wall. This is in a very poor state of repair with areas of collapse. Some sections have the remnants of cock 'n' hen capping whilst another area has concrete capping. At the west end of the wall is a small pump house constructed of rubble stonework with a modern gabled slate roof (Plate 8). It has an entrance on the south side, onto the roadside verge, and covers a pump for the well located on the north side of the structure next to the boundary wall.

Internal description

- 5.6** The main body of the building is divided into two rooms by a primary rubble stone wall. In the upper part of the partition the end of an unhewn timber projects into the west room through a circular aperture. Below this various metal bars are set into the wall forming hooks. The larger area, the west room, has an earthen floor, and the roof is supported on three A-frame trusses with bolted applied collars (Plate 9). Two additional vertical timbers have been added above the collars of the eastern pair of trusses. Adjacent to the western truss is an additional horizontal beam at eaves level supported on vertical posts adjacent to the walls; it is structurally separate from the roof truss. The purlins are wedged in place on the back of the trusses with cleats and support the rafters and battens. The doorway in the north wall has an internal ledge above the current floor level. The reason for this is unclear. It does not appear to represent an earlier floor level as it is higher than the threshold to the south. The western window has an internal wooden ledge. In front of the window in the south wall is a wooden work bench. To its west set into the floor is a concrete base for a now-removed piece of machinery or motor.
- 5.7** At the south end of the partition wall is a doorway leading into the east room. The opening has brick step and a pegged wooden frame. The floor in this room is brick and there is a single truss of the same form as the in the west room. The area is divided by a wooden partition with some shelving to the north (Plate 10).
- 5.8** The extension, forming the western range, appears to have latterly housed an animal pen formed of concrete blocks; however, only the east, part of the north, and the base of the south walls remain (Plate 11). There appears to have been walkways to the south and west. The whole area contains building debris and vegetation.

6. **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF** by Paul Rainbird (Fig. 4; Plates 12-14)

6.1 The archaeological watching brief comprised the monitoring of groundworks for the preparation of the rebuilding of the western range and the reduction of floor levels within the west and east rooms as shown in Figure 4. All of the ground reduction was undertaken by machine.

Western range (Plate 12)

6.2 The monitoring of this area was conducted following the removal of the semi-derelict stone structure, modern animal pound and modern concrete slab. The groundworks comprised reduction of the level by 0.3m in an area measuring 7m long by 4m wide. Across the area was modern hardcore to a depth of at least 0.25m. In the south part of the area, located beneath the hardcore, was a deposit composed of mid greyish red clay with occasional sub-angular slate fragments. This was reduced to a depth of 0.05m. This deposit might represent the remains of an historic (19th-century) floor. No features or finds of archaeological interest were exposed.

West room (Plate 13)

6.3 The groundworks in the west room comprised reducing the floor level by 0.5m. The material removed was consistently composed of loose dark brown silty loam which was full of modern detritus, particularly pieces of plastic animal feed bags. In the eastern half of the room natural subsoil, comprised of dark red silty clay with abundant sub-angular slate fragments, was exposed. No features, deposits or finds of archaeological interest were present.

East room (Plate 14)

6.4 The groundworks in the east room comprised reducing the floor level by 0.4m. The brick floor had previously been removed and the deposit removed was consistently composed of loose dark brown silty loam. Across the whole room natural subsoil comprised of dark red silty clay with abundant sub-angular slate fragments was exposed. No features, deposits or finds of archaeological interest were present.

7. **DISCUSSION**

7.1 A large part of the building, formed by the west and east rooms, comprise the surviving elements of a purpose-built smithy, as indicated by the louvered vent, built between 1842 and 1887. The building appears to have been constructed after the cottage recorded on the tithe map was removed. No internal fixtures or features relating specifically to the smithy were present prior to works commencing or were observed during the watching brief. However, the location of the vent would suggest the larger western room was the workshop with the smaller eastern room for an unknown purpose. The location of the vent may indicate that the forge was free-standing within the room, rather than being a more solid structure with chimney located against one of the walls. The building was soon extended to the west and it appears that the south end of the west wall was rebuilt at this time. Due to the lack of internal fittings and poor survival of the extension it is difficult to determine its purpose.

7.2 The location of the building is typical of a smithy; located on the road and at a crossroads, it was of easy access and the blacksmith was probably largely involved in the shoeing of horses and fixing of agricultural tools. In the 1841 census Thomas Baker, the tenant of the cottage on the site listed in the 1839 tithe apportionment, is listed as blacksmith at Battsborough. He is aged 65 and in the same household is his son, also Thomas Baker aged 30 and also a blacksmith and also Elizabeth Baker aged 40 with no occupation or relationship listed. In 1850 Thomas Baker is listed in *White's Directory* as a blacksmith at Battsborough

Cross and is still listed as such in *Morris and Co.'s Directory* of 1870. The 1851 census records Thomas Baker (the son) as 'smith' employing two men and his wife, Elizabeth, who is 10 years younger than the Elizabeth in the 1841 census, so may not be the same one, but in the 1861 and 1871 censuses her age is shown as only six years younger and her birthplace swaps between Brixham and Holbeton. In 1871 they have a nephew, Edward Beer, only 4 years old living with them. They are not listed in the 1881 census, by which time Thomas would have been 74 years old. There is a gap in the available records until Richard Gill is recorded as a blacksmith at Battsborough Cross in the 1901 census, where he lived with his wife and two children, and the census records he was working 'at home'. With few other residences recorded in the hamlet of Battsborough Cross, and these all occupied by others, it is likely that that the Bakers and the Gills were residing in the same building as the smithy. This must have been poorly serviced accommodation, with no evidence for a fireplace for cooking and heating. There is no blacksmith recorded in the 1911 census, but Henry Chaffe already 64 years old is recorded as a carpenter at Battsborough Cross with his wife Priscilla, aged 74, and the blacksmithing business must have become defunct with the building used both as a residence and workshop. The mechanisation of farming and the mass production of tools led to many blacksmiths becoming redundant during this period.

- 7.3** The building was altered in the early-20th century, perhaps coinciding with the change of business activity, from smithing to carpentry, with a doorway and window being blocked in the north elevation. The west extension was altered and enlarged by removing its north wall and extending the west wall to the northern boundary of the property. This included a large doorway which was subsequently altered again in the late-20th century. In the late-20th century block partitions and feeding passages were added to the extension indicating livestock was being housed here during this period.
- 7.4** The groundworks within the west and east room exposed loose loamy soil which was heavily organic in the west room and in that area was probably heavily mixed by the known housing of pigs in the building in modern times. In both rooms the natural subsoil was exposed and no features, deposits or finds of archaeological interest were found. Within the footprint of the former western range a small area of possible former earthen floor was exposed, although there were no finds associated with this and it is undated.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the historic building recording and archaeological watching brief.
- 8.2** The historic building recording revealed that a large part of the building, formed by the west and east rooms, comprise the surviving elements of a purpose-built smithy erected between 1842 and 1887. Within the same period the building was added to by a small extension on the west side. No internal fixtures or features relating specifically to the smithy were observed. The location of a louvered roof vent would suggest that the larger west room was the workshop with the smaller east room perhaps used for storage. The building was altered in the early-20th century with a doorway and window being blocked in the north elevation. The west extension was altered and enlarged by removing its north wall and extending the west wall to the northern property boundary. This included a large doorway which was subsequently altered again in the late-20th century.
- 8.3** The archaeological watching brief found that the interior floor levels of the main building were all modern and sat on the natural subsoil. No archaeological features, deposits or finds were observed. A small area of possible former earthen floor surface was exposed in the former western range. No evidence of the previous cottage on the site was found.

8.4 The historical records indicate that the building was also in use as a residence throughout the second half of the 19th century. Surprisingly, no material evidence for this use was observed, with no evidence for a fireplace or material remains indicating domestic occupation.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

9.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. The digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **410903**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. SOURCES CONSULTED

Holbeton tithe map, 1842, and apportionment, 1839

Morris and Co., 1870, *Commercial Directory and Gazetteer*.
[Holbeton \(rootsweb.com\)](http://rootsweb.com)

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White, W., 1850, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Devonshire*.
<https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/DEV/Holbeton/Holbeton1850>

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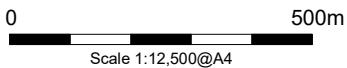
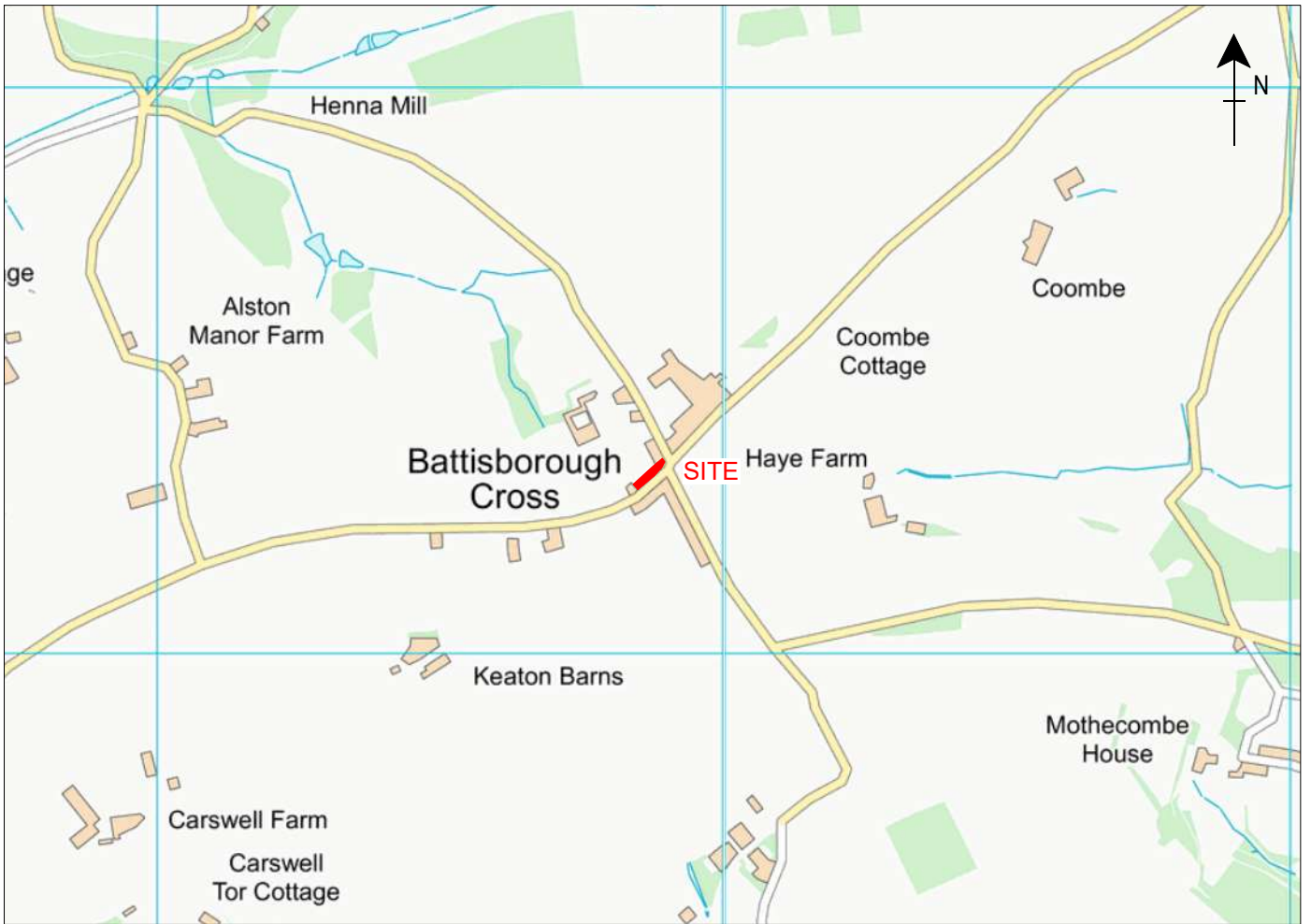
British Geological Survey
<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience>

Devon County Historic environment viewer
<http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer>

The Genealogist
<https://thegenealogist.co.uk>



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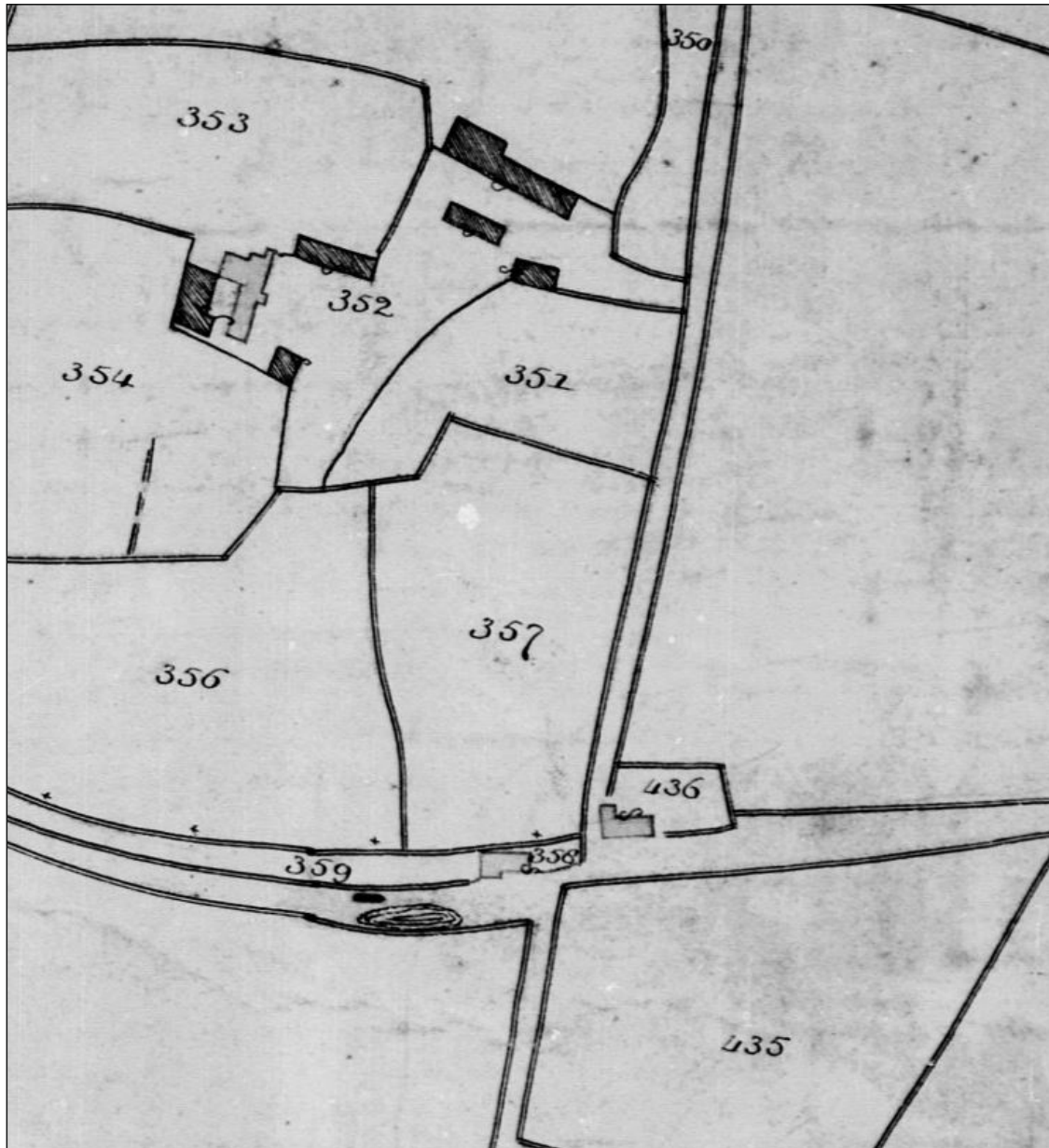


PROJECT

The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site

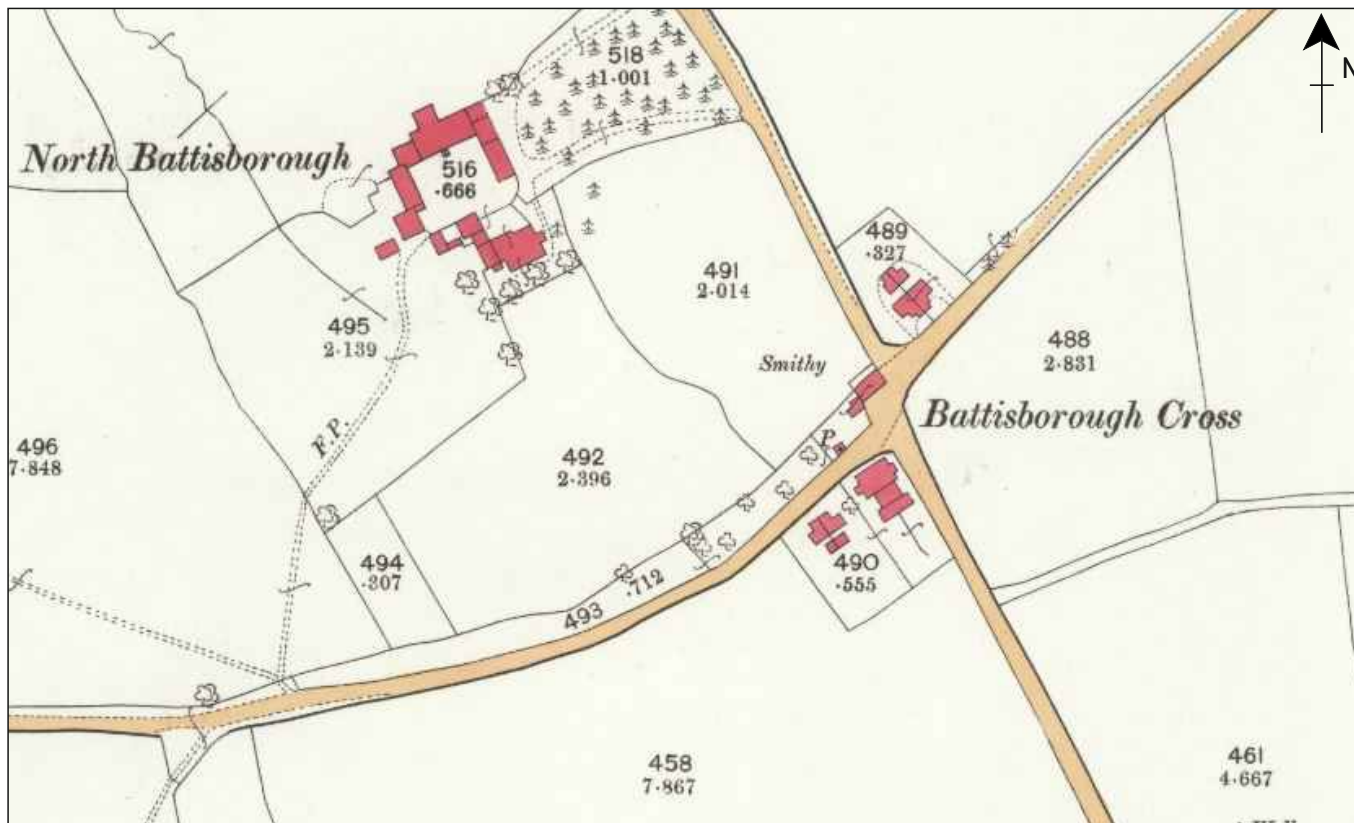


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The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton,
Devon

TITLE

Fig. 2: Extract from the
Holbeton tithe map, 1842

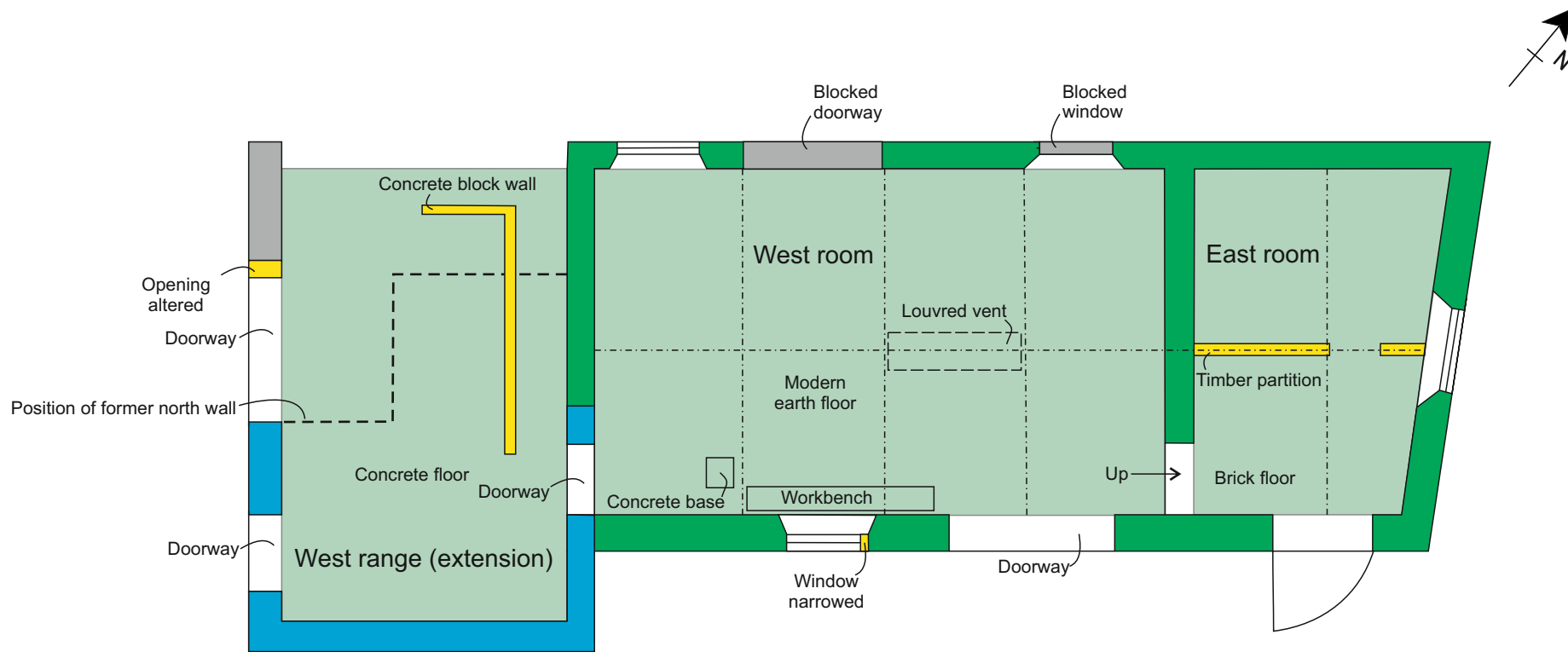


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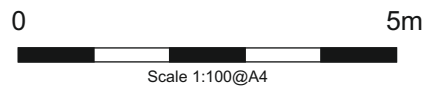
The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton, Devon

TITLE

Fig 3: Extract from the First Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1887



- Phase I - Mid 19th century (1842-1887)
- Phase II - Mid 19th century (1842-1887)
- Early 20th century
- Late 20th century
- Monitored areas
- Roof structure



PROJECT

The Smithy, Battisborough Cross, Holbeton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 4: Phased floor plan with areas monitored during the watching brief shown





Plate 1: South elevation, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 2: Internal view of south wall, showing the narrowed window, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 3: Northwest corner of the building, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 4: Internal view of north wall, showing blocked openings, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 5: East elevation, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 6: West elevation, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 7: West elevation of the extension, looking northeast (1m scale)



Plate 8: View of pump house and boundary wall, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 9: West room, looking northeast (1m scale)



Plate 10: East room, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 11: Animal pen in the extension, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 12: Area of watching brief in the area of the former western range, looking northwest (1m scale)



Plate 13: West room, following reduction of floor level, looking west (1m scale)



Plate 14: East room, exposed natural subsoil in the southwest corner of the room, looking southwest (1m scale)

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