



Chris Butler MIFA Archaeological Services



An Archaeological Watching Brief at the R.N. French Building, The Street, Sedlescombe, East Sussex.

TQ 7805 1813

Project Number CBAS 0099

by
Keith Butler PIFA
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the groundworks associated with the construction of two houses at the site of the R.N. French Building, The Street, Sedlescombe, East Sussex on the 15th February 2010.

No archaeological features were discovered and a small number of artefacts recovered, all of a late 19th or early 20th century date. All of these would appear to be associated with the construction and recent demolition of the R.N. French Building that appears to have occupied the site since the early 20th century.

Chris Butler MIFA Archaeological Services

Prehistoric Flintwork Specialist

**Rosedale
Berwick
Polegate
East Sussex
BN26 6TB**

Tel & fax: 01323 871021

e mail: chris@reltub.fsbusiness.co.uk

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Historical & Archaeological Background
- 3.0 Archaeological Methodology
- 4.0 Results
- 5.0 Finds
- 6.0 Discussion
- 7.0 Acknowledgements

Figures

- Fig. 1 Site Location map
- Fig. 2 Development plan
- Fig. 3 1st Edition OS Map
- Fig. 4 4th Edition OS Map
- Fig. 5 Site plan showing location of works
- Fig. 6 Photograph showing ground reduction

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services was commissioned by Mr Wayne Littler of Connected Developments Ltd to carry out an archaeological watching brief at the site of the R.N. French Building, The Street, Sedlescombe, East Sussex TQ 7805 1813 (Fig. 1) during the landscaping and excavation of footings for two new houses which are being built on the site.
- 1.2** A planning application was submitted (RR/2009/2643/P) for the demolition of the former R.N. French building, and the erection of two three-bedroom dwellings with off-road parking (Fig. 2). However, as a result of the site's location, and the archaeological potential of the area, the local planning authority have put a condition on the planning consent for the development, requiring an appropriate programme of archaeological work to be undertaken.
- 1.3** Sedlescombe can be traced back at least as far as the Domesday Book, and must have been a reasonably substantial settlement throughout the Medieval period. It continued to grow through the 17th and 18th centuries, probably as a result of the iron and other industries in the area. Sedlescombe has been designated an Archaeologically Sensitive Area, and the site is just to the north of the Sedlescombe Conservation Area¹.
- 1.4** The site is located on the eastern side of The Street (A 229) in Sedlescombe village. The site slopes down gently to the street frontage to the west, and had boundaries of wooden fencing and hedges on both the north and west sides, with the east side having a wall of concrete blocks and bricks. The area at the southern end of the site with its frontage on to The Street was hard standing covered in a mixture of concrete and tarmac, and the R.N. French building had been demolished prior to any groundworks commencing.
- 1.5** The geology, according to the British Geological Survey Sheet 320/321 is predominantly Ashdown Beds, but there are thin bands of Clay in Ashdown Beds, whilst in the River Brede valley there is Head and Alluvium.
- 1.6** The archaeological watching brief took place on the 15th February 2010. The fieldwork was carried out by the author, with the project being managed by Chris Butler MIFA.

¹ Rother District Council 2004 *Sedlescombe Conservation Appraisal*

2.0 Historical and Archaeological Background

- 2.1 There is some evidence for Prehistoric activity in this area; a flint hollow-based arrowhead and Mesolithic flintwork, including microliths, were found at Combe Wood (TQ77511928). Two Neolithic stone axe heads were dug up at Oak Cottage (TQ78491712) in 1945, whilst a Neolithic axe was found at Jacobs Farm (TQ796189) in 1825. A scatter of flintwork was encountered to the south-west of Sedlescombe on the route of the Mountfield to Hastings pipeline².
- 2.2 A Roman bloomery site is known at Oaklands Park to the south of Sedlescombe, (TQ78501750)³, whilst other ironworking sites are known from the immediate area, including the site Footlands where iron ore pits have been found in association with Roman pottery⁴.
- 2.3 A hoard of between two and three thousand Saxon coins dating to Edward the Confessor was found at Sedlescombe in 1876, and it has been postulated that this was part of the bullion reserve of Hastings mint, that was dispersed at the time of the Norman invasion⁵. The find spot for these coins is shown 50m to the west of the site on the 3rd and 4th Edition OS maps.
- 2.4 At the time of the Domesday Book, Sedlescombe was held by Walter son of Lambert; it had 6 villagers with 2 smallholders have 5 ploughs; 7 acres of meadow, woodland for 6 pigs and a small church. One villager was held by the Count of Eu, whilst Canon Geoffrey held ½ hide⁶.
- 2.5 There must have been a significant Medieval settlement at Sedlescombe, as there are numerous Listed Buildings with 15th century origins within the village and its immediate surroundings, whilst further buildings survive from the 16th century. A tannery associated with the monks of Battle Abbey was situated to the south of the village, and was in use in the 1380's⁷.
- 2.6 A sketch map⁸ showing Sedlescombe in the 16th century shows the site to be located within a plot of land labelled 'Motkins' which is listed as a tenement at Sedlescombe on the court roll for the Manor of Battle in 1652⁹. A building is shown in this plot, although this appears to be situated to the south of the site.

² Jones, G. 1985. 'Archaeological observations of the Mountfield to Hastings Water Pumping Main Pipeline, East Sussex.' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **123**. 243-246.

³ Cleere, H. & Crossley, D. 1995. *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, Cardiff, Merton Priory Press.

⁴ Hodgkinson, J.S. 1987. 'Footlands Ironworking site, Sedlescombe'. *Bulletin of the Wealden Iron Research Group*, 2nd series, **7**. 25-32.

⁵ Dolley, R.H.M. 1960. *Brit. Num. Journal*. **30-31**. 76-81.

⁶ Morris, J. 1976 *Domesday Book*, Chichester, Phillimore.

⁷ Searle, E. 1974 *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its Banlieu* 301

⁸ Rother District Council 2004 *Sedlescombe Conservation Appraisal*

⁹ ESRO – AMS1563

- 2.7** Further expansion of the village took place in the 17th and 18th century, with further Listed Buildings dated from these dates. A Gunpowder works (TQ781176) is recorded at Sedlescombe on the site of a former furnace site¹⁰ from the 17th century. It was still present on the 1st Edition OS map (1878) but has gone by the 1900 2nd Edition OS map.
- 2.8** Two brickworks were operating at Sedlescombe in the 19th century, the first near Footland Wood (TQ763198) and the second on Castlemans Farm (TQ783194), both of which are marked on the 1843 Tithe Map¹¹.
- 2.9** The 1st Edition OS map (1878) shows the site to be a field at the corner of The Street and Long Lane (Fig. 3), and this situation is unchanged through to the 4th Edition OS map of 1910. The 4th Edition 1:2500 OS map (1929-30) does however show a rectangular building within the site and fronting onto Long Lane, and labelled 'Club' (Fig. 4). This is on the same footprint as the main existing building on the site.
- 2.10** During the Second World War Sedlescombe (and Cripps Corner to the north of Sedlescombe) became a Nodal Point, although there are no surviving remains of the former. A Cold War Royal Observer Corps monitoring post is extant in a wooded compound to the north of Sedlescombe village at TQ7814918572.

¹⁰ Straker, E. 1931 *Wealden Iron*, 341-4.

¹¹ Beswick, M. 2001 *Brickmaking in Sussex*, Midhurst, Middleton Press.

3.0 Archaeological Methodology

- 3.1** On arrival at the site on the 15th February 2010, the former R.N. French Building had already been demolished. The area of the ground reduction had been levelled and the surface had been cleared of the rubble from the demolition. During this process and the original construction of the R. N. French Building, most of the top soil had been removed.
- 3.2** An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the reduction of an area measuring 13.3m north to south and 17m east to west (Fig. 5). The area of the reduction was marked out by the contractor. The depth of the reduction was up to 1.2m in depth, with this being less at the southern end of the reduction, where it was graded down to the level of the hardstanding at this end of the site. The spoil from this process was piled up at the southern end of the site. The spoil was then used to level up the area to the north of the reduction or removed from the site by tractor and trailer (Fig. 6).
- 3.3** The area to the south of the site fronting The Street was at a lower level and under tarmac and concrete hardstanding to a depth of 200mm, and due to the amount of disturbance to the area from a drain sunk to a depth of 1.2m and associated drain pipes this area was not included in the watching brief after consultation with Greg Chuter of ESCC.
- 3.4** The watching brief was also maintained on the area at the north end of the site which was levelled using some of the spoil from the earlier reduction. At the north-western edge of the site an 'L' shaped trench for the water supply to the new houses was excavated (Fig. 5); this was 500mm wide with a depth of 1m. As the ground reduction had reduced the level to below the natural, it was agreed that monitoring of the footing trenches would not be required.
- 3.5** All the excavations were carried out using a 16 ton 360° tracked JCB using a 1.5m wide toothless bucket, or in the case of the water supply trench a 500mm wide toothless bucket. The spoil heap and machined surfaces were visually inspected for artefacts and also scanned with a precision gold metal detector. A temporary bench mark was established on ground level on the inside edge of the eastern gate post.
- 3.6** All archaeological deposits, features and finds were excavated and recorded according to accepted professional standards. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart
- 3.7** A full photographic record of the work was kept as appropriate and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently held by Chris Butler Archaeological Services. A site reference FBS 10 of has been allocated.

4.0 Results

- 4.1** Three layers were apparent in the area of the reduction. Context **1** was a mid brownish grey silty clay with a loose to firm consistence. This layer had a very variable depth which ranged from 100mm to a maximum of 400mm at the eastern side of the reduction. The inclusions in this layer were of pebbles up to 35mm (5%), concrete (5%) and ceramic building material (5%), with artefacts being recovered of flint and a sample of ceramic building material was taken. The layer was very disturbed from the recent demolition of the former building.
- 4.2** Below Context **1** was Context **2**, which was a layer of silty clay of a mid grey colour with buff mottling, with a depth of up to 500mm. The inclusions were of sandstone pieces up to 60mm (1%). This layer was undisturbed subsoil, with no finds being recovered from this layer.
- 4.3** Context **3** was below Context **2** and was a layer of the silty clay natural, and was an orangey buff colour with a firm consistence. The inclusions were of sandstone pieces up to 300mm (75%).
- 4.4** Context **5** was an area of topsoil to the north-east of the reduction, and was not fully excavated, only levelled out. This was a layer of dark brown silty clay loam topsoil with a loose consistence. The inclusions in this layer comprised rooting (5%), sandstone pieces up to 40mm (<1%) and ceramic building material (1%). No artefacts were recovered from this layer.
- 4.5** Context **4** was within Context **5**, and comprised a concrete base with the dimensions of 1.2m by 1.8m with a thickness of 110mm. It was situated to the north of the area of reduction (Fig. 0), and had been laid on top of two courses of red frogged bricks and associated ceramic drains. This feature was most likely the base of a shed or outside W.C. in association with the demolished building.
- 4.6** In the 'L' shaped trench excavated for the water supply to the new building, two layers were apparent. Context **6** was a layer of mid-brownish grey silty clay with a firm consistence, and was the same as Context **1** in the area of reduction but with only a depth of up to 100mm. This layer had inclusions of sandstone pieces up to 40mm (1%) and ceramic building material (1%). No artefacts were recovered from this layer.
- 4.7** Below Context **6** was Context **7**, which was the same as Context **2** in the main area of reduction. The layer was a mid grey with buff mottling silty clay subsoil with a firm consistence. The inclusions in this layer were of sandstone pieces up to 50mm (1%). No artefacts were recovered from this layer.

5.0 The Finds by Chris Butler

- 5.1** A small assemblage of finds was collected from Context **1** during the watching brief. The assemblage is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis. This is due to the assemblage's small size, the lack of good sealed context groups and its relatively recent date. The assemblage does not warrant retention in a museum.
- 5.2** The only pottery recovered comprised two sherds of plain china (52g), probably deriving from a large bowl or dish and dating to the late 19th or early 20th century.
- 5.3** Although there were numerous fragments of ceramic building material in Context **1**, only a representative sample was collected. Two fragments of 19th century brick weighing 33g were recovered, whilst other bricks noted were frogged, and likely to date from the late 19th or early 20th century. Two fragments of a glazed ceramic drain (570g) of 20th century date were also found.
- 5.4** Four fragments of glass weighing 93g were found. These comprised two fragments from the same clear glass bottle, a fragment from a brown bottle, and a fragment from a clear glass drinking tumbler.
- 5.5** Other artefacts found comprised two pieces of Post Medieval Welsh slate (22g), a single fragment of Post Medieval blast furnace slag (13g), and a metal tap handle (290g).

6.0 Discussion

- 6.1** During the archaeological watching brief no archaeological features were discovered and very few artefacts were recovered. The lack of any features would most likely be due to the levelling of the site for the construction of the original F.N. French Building and the more recent demolition and levelling of the site after.
- 6.2** The artefacts recovered from the watching brief were all of a recent date, and would appear to be in association with the demolition of the R.N. French building
- 6.3** The artefacts recovered and lack of features from this watching brief would appear to confirm the evidence from the maps, that the site between the 1st Edition OS (1878) map through to the 3rd Edition OS map of 1910 was a field. This situation had changed by the time of the 4th Edition (1929-30) which shows a rectangular building with the same footprint as the R.N. French building, although then labelled as a 'Club'.
- 6.4** The early map evidence shows that the main centre of the village of Sedlescombe was situated to the south of the site around The Green, although there seems to have been some settlement just to the north of the site as well since at least the 16th century. However the fields between these two areas, including the site, only appear to have been built on in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

7.0 Acknowledgements

- 7.1** I would like to thank Mr Wayne Littler for commissioning this archaeological watching brief and the assistance and co-operation of his on-site contractors. The project was managed for CBAS by Chris Butler, who also reported on the artefacts, and monitored for ESCC by Greg Chuter.

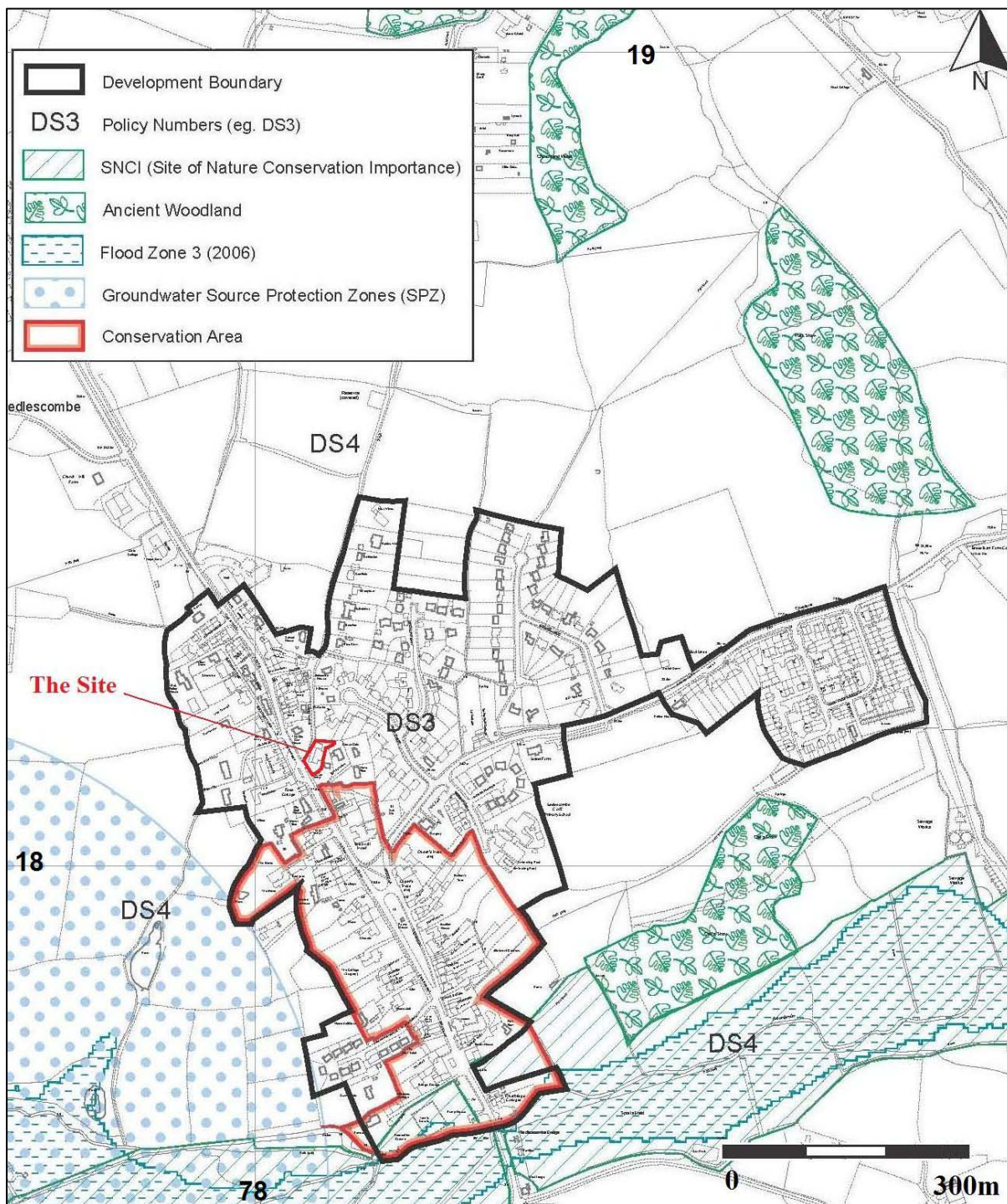


Fig. 1: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: Location of the Site
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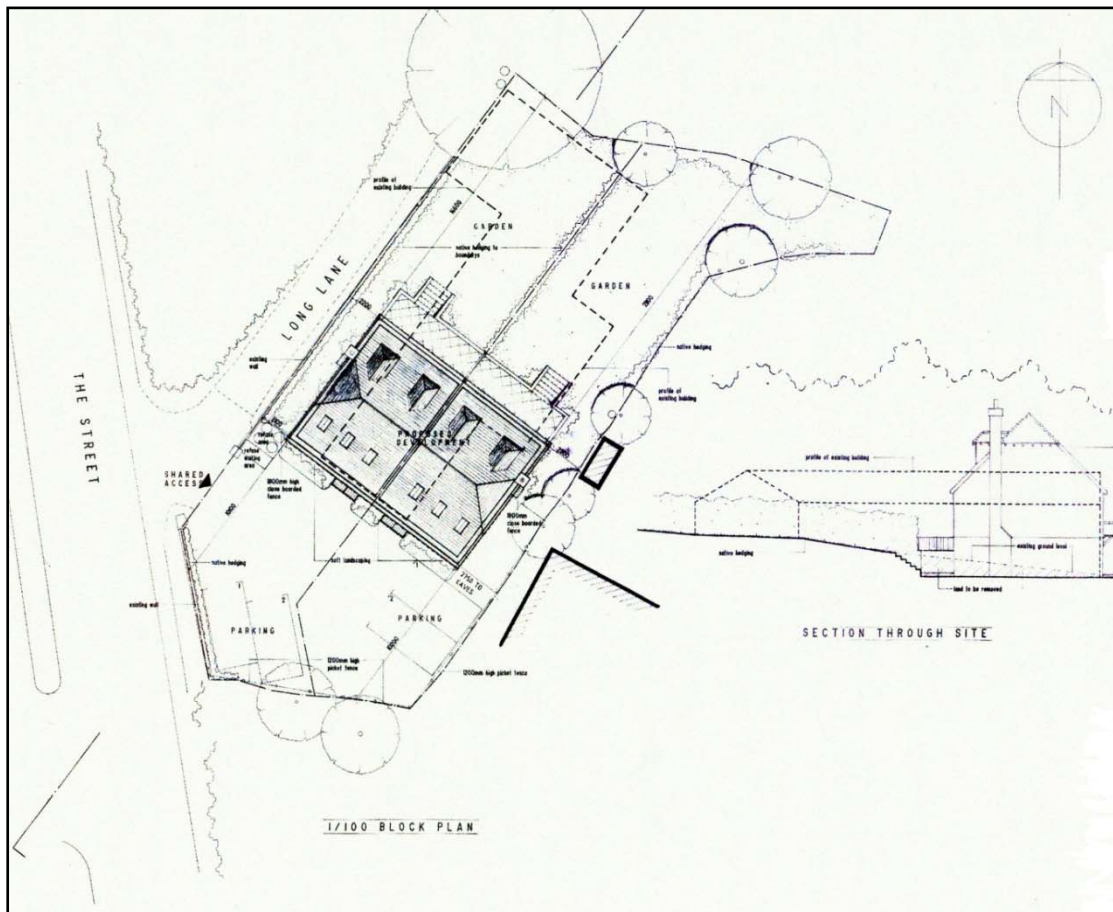


Fig. 2: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: Site Plan
(Adapted from architects drawing)



Fig. 3: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: 1st Edition OS Map (1878)

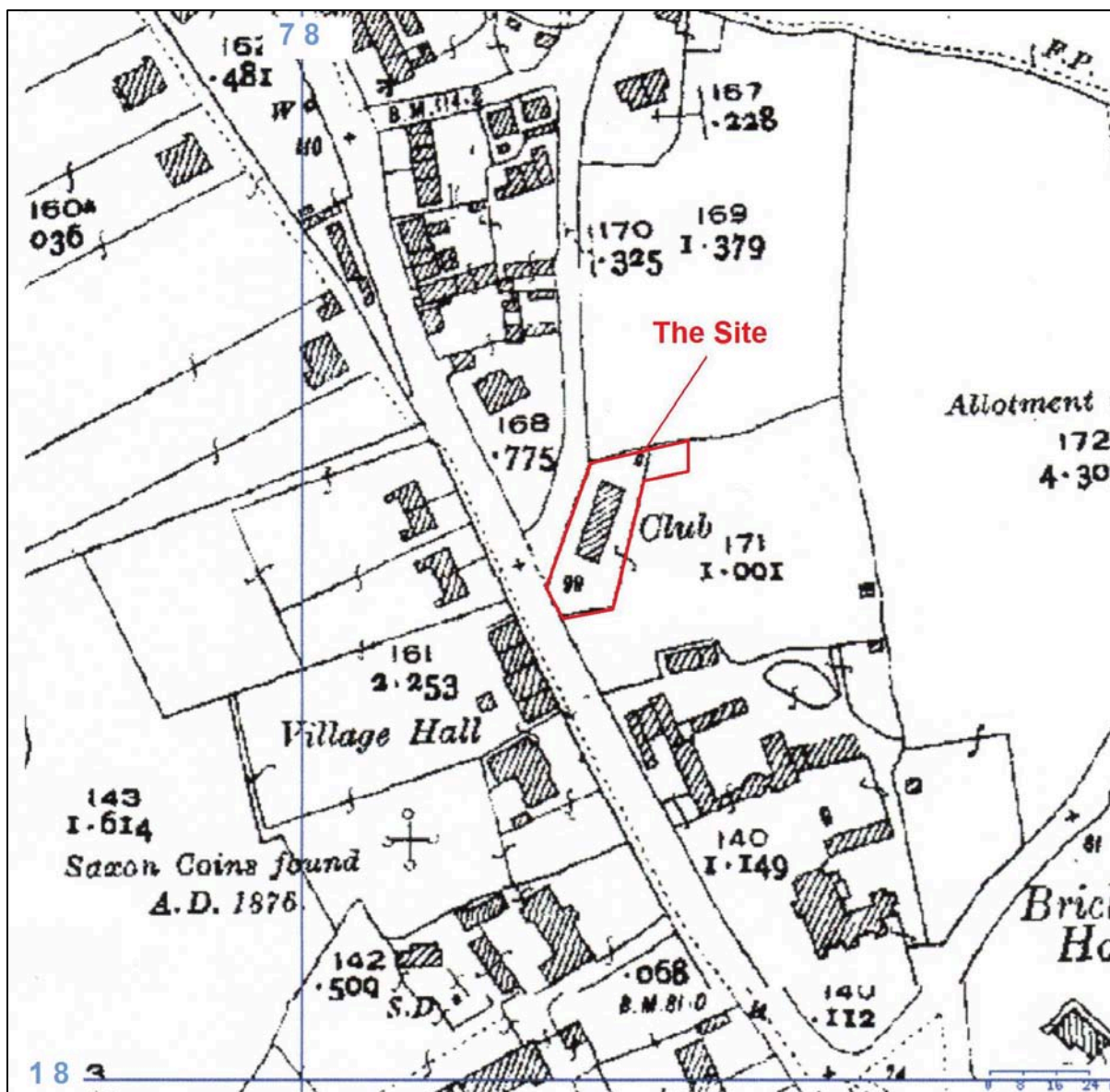


Fig. 4: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: 4th Edition OS Map (1929-30)

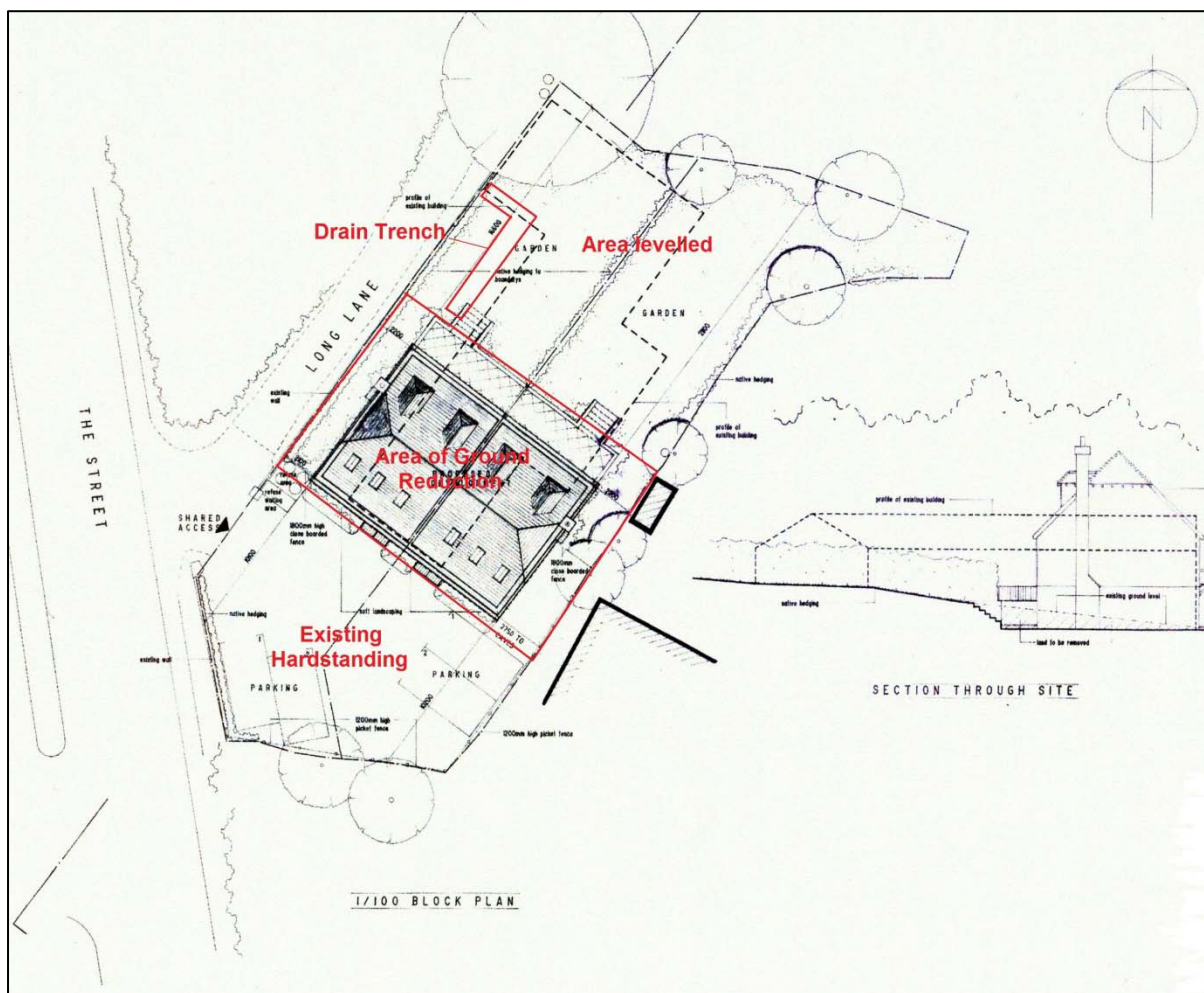


Fig. 5: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: Site Plan showing location of works
(Adapted from architects drawing)

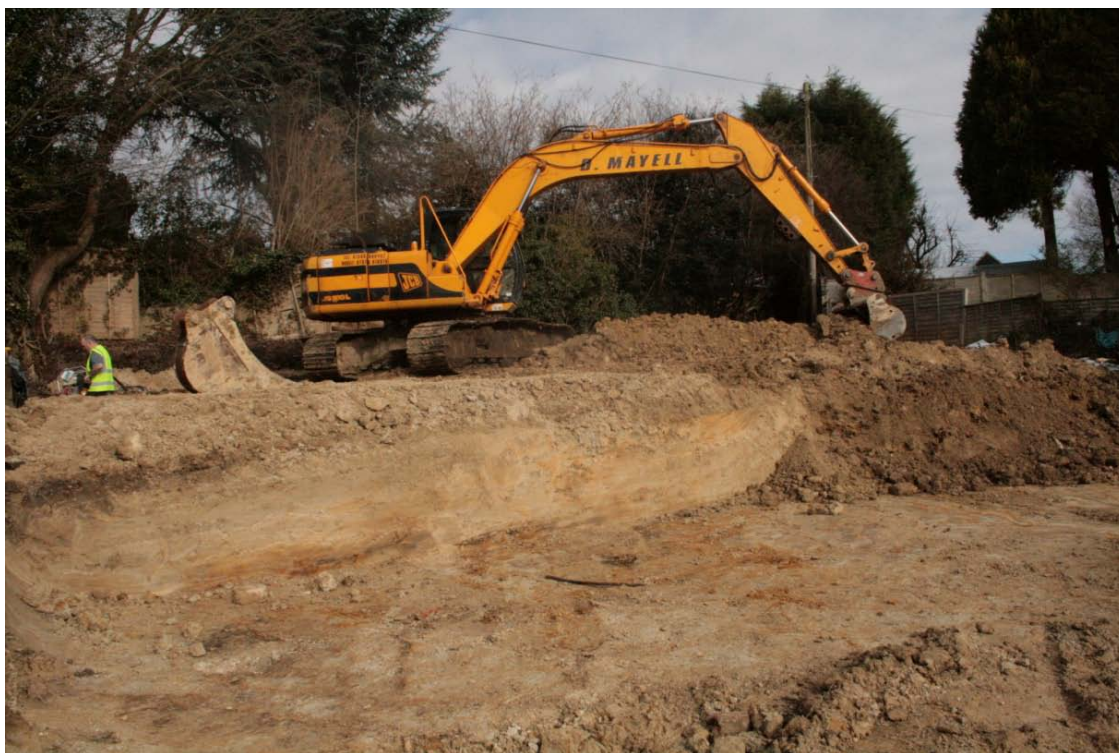


Fig. 6: R.N. French Building, Sedlescombe: Photograph showing ground reduction

HER Summary Form

Site Code	FBS 09					
Identification Name and Address	R.N. French Building, The Street, Sedlescombe, East Sussex.					
County, District &/or Borough	Rother District Council					
OS Grid Refs.	TQ 7805 1813					
Geology	Ashdown Beds with thin bands of clay					
Type of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	Watching Brief X	Standing Structure	Survey	Other
Type of Site	Green Field	Shallow Urban X	Deep Urban	Other		
Dates of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	WB. 15.02.10	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Mr Wayne Littler					
Project Manager	Chris Butler MIFA					
Project Supervisor	Keith Butler PIFA					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED	PM X	Other		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p><i>An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the groundworks associated with the construction of two houses at the site of the R.N. French Building, The Street, Sedlescombe, East Sussex on the 15th February 2010.</i></p> <p><i>No archaeological features were discovered and a small number of artefacts recovered, all of a late 19th or early 20th century date. All of these would appear to be associated with the construction and recent demolition of the R.N. French Building that appears to have occupied the site since the early 20th century.</i></p>						

Chris Butler Archaeological Services

Chris Butler has been an archaeologist since 1985, and formed the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in 1987, since when it has carried out numerous fieldwork projects, and was runner up in the Pitt-Rivers Award at the British Archaeological Awards in 1996. Having previously worked as a Pensions Technical Manager and Administration Director in the financial services industry, Chris formed **Chris Butler Archaeological Services** at the beginning of 2002.

Chris is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, a committee member of the Lithic Studies Society, and is a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex. He continues to run the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in his spare time.

Chris specialises in prehistoric flintwork analysis, but has directed excavations, landscape surveys and watching briefs, including the excavation of a Beaker Bowl Barrow, a Saxon cemetery and settlement, Roman pottery kilns, and a Mesolithic hunting camp.

Chris Butler Archaeological Services is available for Flintwork Analysis, Project Management, Military Archaeology, Desktop Assessments, Field Evaluations, Excavation work, Watching Briefs, Field Surveys & Fieldwalking, Post Excavation Services and Report Writing.

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Rosedale
Berwick
Polegate
East Sussex
BN26 6TB

Tel & fax: 01323 871021

e mail: chris@reлтub.fsbusiness.co.uk