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Archaeological Services Ltd**



**Archaeological Watching Brief
at
The Sheiling,
Rotherfield, East Sussex**

(WD/2011/0724)

CBAS0282

by
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for a new house at The Sheiling, Rotherfield, East Sussex. Excavations were carried out using a 4.5 tonne machine and used 900mm and 1.5m toothless ditching buckets to excavate to a depth of between 900mm-1m. The excavations were cut into the natural deposit of the Ashdown Beds. No archaeological features were encountered during the watching brief although a small assemblage of late 19th to mid 20th century material was recovered from the interface between the topsoil/subsoil deposits along with three sherds of mid-13th to mid-14th century medieval pottery, one of which was unstratified, with the other two coming from the subsoil.

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Contents

1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Archaeological & Historical Background	4
3.0 Archaeological Methodology	7
4.0 Results	8
5.0 Finds	9
6.0 Discussion	11
7.0 Acknowledgements	12

Figures:

- Fig. 1 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Location of Site
- Fig. 2 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Archaeological Notification Areas
- Fig. 3 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Sites on the HER
- Fig. 4 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Rotherfield Tithe Map 1839
- Fig. 5 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: 1st Edition OS Map (1875)
- Fig. 6 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: 4th Edition OS Map (1931)
- Fig. 7 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Development Plan
- Fig. 8 The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Areas monitored

Appendices:

- Appendix 1: HER Summary Form

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd were commissioned by Mr Peter Miles (The Client) to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks associated with the construction of a replacement dwelling and new double garage at The Sheiling, Church Road, Rotherfield, East Sussex (Fig. 1).
- 1.2** As a result of the site's location, and the archaeological potential of the area, the local planning authority put a condition on the planning consent for the development (WD/2011/0724), requiring an appropriate programme of archaeological work to be undertaken.
- 1.3** The site is centred on TQ 5539 2970 (Fig. 1) in Church Road, on the west side of Rotherfield, and is one of a number of properties arranged along the south side of Church Road that were built in the early 20th century. The site is located at around 147m OD, with the existing house (to be demolished) situated on the southern edge of the property, and a small outbuilding on the Church Road frontage.
- 1.4** The site is within an Archaeological Notification Area (ANA) defining the Medieval and Post Medieval village of Rotherfield (Fig. 2), and is also adjacent to the Conservation Area for Rotherfield.
- 1.5** The geology of the site, according to the British Geological Survey (sheet 303), shows the site to be situated on Ashdown Beds, with Wadhurst Clay and outcrops of Tunbridge Wells Sand to the south.
- 1.6** The appropriate programme of archaeological work comprised an archaeological watching brief as specified in a brief issued by the Archaeology Team at East Sussex County Council. A written scheme of investigation covering the watching brief was approved by the local planning authority¹
- 1.7** The watching brief was required to monitor the excavation of the foundation trenches for the house and garage, together with any other associated groundworks, and was carried out by the author on the 4th and 5th April 2012.

¹ Butler, C. 2012 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief at The Shieling, Rotherfield, East Sussex.*

2.0 Historical & Archaeological Background

- 2.1 There is a great deal of evidence for Mesolithic hunter-gatherer groups exploiting the resources of the High Weald woodland for hunting and gathering throughout the Mesolithic period. These include sites associated with rock outcrops, such as those at Eridge (TQ554358)². These sites are thought to have been short-stay hunting camps, and are mainly associated with the Later Mesolithic³. A single piece of Mesolithic flintwork has been found at Rotherfield (MES4780) and there have been many discoveries in the wider landscape⁴.
- 2.2 Ironworking became a major industry during the Romano-British period, with large numbers of iron working sites across the Weald⁵. There are a number of Roman ironworking sites in the wider Rotherfield area, together with numerous undated bloomery sites which may be Roman in date⁶. A Roman ironworking site has recently been excavated at Little Furnace Wood (TQ 5910 2430) to the south of Mayfield, revealing two furnaces and an ore roasting pit⁷.
- 2.3 The name *Rotherfield* is recorded from the 8th century and is likely to relate to the area and to predate any nucleated settlement. The Old English form – *hrȳðera-feld* – means ‘open country of the cattle’⁸. The abbey of St Denis at Paris claimed to have established a *monasterium*, or alien priory, at Rotherfield c.790, although it is not certain whether this was actually the case. The later history of the putative priory is obscure, although it is referred to in a charter of 960 recording the restoration of property at Rotherfield to St Denis by King Edgar⁹.
- 2.4 In 1086 Rotherfield was held by King William from the holding of the Bishop of Bayeux. It had land for 26 ploughs, 14 villagers with 6 smallholders, woodland at 80 pigs and a park¹⁰. Rotherfield was situated within Rotherfield Hundred which was within the Rape of Pevensey. In 1093-1107, the church dedicated to St Denis at Rotherfield was given by Gilbert of Clare to the cathedral priory at Rochester. The Parish Church of St Denys is mainly 13th century, with some later features. It has wall paintings of 1300 circa, and is a good example of a medieval church; not much restored (MES4765).

² Greatorex, C. & Seager-Thomas, M. 2000 ‘Rock Shelter Stratigraphy’ *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **138**, 49-56.

³ Jacobi, R.M. & Tebbutt, C. F. 1981 ‘A late Mesolithic Rock-shelter site at High Hurstwood, Sussex’, *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **119**, 1-36.

⁴ Tebbutt, C.F. 1974 ‘The Prehistoric Occupation of the Ashdown Forest area of the Weald’, *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **112**, 34-43.

⁵ Cleere, H. et al. 1995 *The Iron Industry in the Weald*, Cardiff, Merton Priory Press.

⁶ WIRG Iron Site database (www.wirgdata.org/)

⁷ Butler & Hodgkinson forthcoming

⁸ Harris, R.B. 2008 Rotherfield: Historic Character Assessment Report, Sussex Extensive Urban Survey

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Morris, J. 1986 *Domesday Book: Sussex*, Chichester, Phillimore.

- 2.5** Evidence for Medieval iron working was found when the Wealden Iron Research Group excavated three bloomery sites close to the 16th century blast furnace at Maynards Gate (MES2959). They were dated to the Medieval period by pottery finds.
- 2.6** Rotherfield was granted a weekly Wednesday market in 1318, and an annual fair held on the feast of St Denis (9th October) is recorded in 1376, providing evidence for a growing settlement. Gardiner has suggested that there is evidence of a triangular-shaped open space, or former market place at Rotherfield, which runs west from South Street, High Street and the Square, forming a funnel shape measuring a maximum of 560m x 150m¹¹.
- 2.7** The 1296 lay subsidy roll which lists 41 taxpayers, suggesting a population of perhaps around 205, similar to the 42 taxpayers of neighbouring Wadhurst. In the roll for 1327 there are 49 taxpayers and in that for 1332 there are 39 taxpayers. This suggests a population for the parish comparable with that found for other large Wealden parishes with small towns¹².
- 2.8** The population of Rotherfield appears to have grown slowly at this time, with the average annual conception rate for 1621-1640 being 1.9, lower than many other market centres in the north-eastern Weald¹³. A map of 1597 shows that there was no substantial change in the plan of Rotherfield during this period, with the settlement clustered in the vicinity of the Square as it still was in the early 19th century. One possible change hinted at by the 1597 map is that the eastern part of the funnel-shaped area south of Church Street was infilled during this period¹⁴.
- 2.9** The largest industry of the area continued to be iron production. The industry expanded rapidly in the 16th century, thereafter declining to the point of extinction by the end of the 18th century. There were 37 ironworks of this period within 10km of Rotherfield¹⁵. Maynards Gate furnace (MES2959), situated to the south-west of the site, was operating in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, whilst Hamsell furnace was casting guns in the 16th century. This latter furnace was leased by John Baker in 1677, and the Baker family leased Birchden Forge by 1553 and then owned it from 1617 to 1737¹⁶.

¹¹ Harris, R.B. 2008 Rotherfield: Historic Character Assessment Report, Sussex Extensive Urban Survey

Hudson, W. H. (ed.), 'The three earliest subsidies for the County of Sussex in the years 1296, 1327, 1332', *SRS* 10 (1910), 31, 188-9, 300-1.

¹³ Brent, C.E 1978 'Rural Employment and Population in Sussex between 1550 and 1640: Part 2', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **116**, 41-55.

¹⁴ Harris, R.B. 2008 Rotherfield: Historic Character Assessment Report, Sussex Extensive Urban Survey

¹⁵ Cleere, H. & Crossley, D. 1995 *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, Merton Priory Press.

¹⁶ Harris, R.B. 2008 Rotherfield: Historic Character Assessment Report, Sussex Extensive Urban Survey

- 2.10** The Tithe map of 1839 (Fig. 4) shows the location of the site to be situated in a field to the south of Church Street. The north-east corner of the property is within a small rectangular plot (3142), resembling an animal pound, which juts out into Church Street.
- 2.11** The 1st Edition OS map (1875) shows the site to be largely unchanged, although the field is now divided up with a new boundary installed, which subsequently becomes the western boundary to The Sheiling. The small enclosure jutting out into Church Street is still shown (Fig. 5). There is little change on the later OS maps of 1898 and 1910, although there is a small enclosed area in the south-east of this new field, but outside the site. The graveyard for St Denys Church is shown extending up to the eastern boundary of the field.
- 2.12** The 4th Edition OS map (1931) shows a similar layout, although the enclosed area in the south-east corner is now shown smaller. The Sheiling has been built in the southern part of the site (Plate 1), and an outbuilding occupies the frontage with Church Street (Fig. 6). Other properties have also been built to the west of the site long Church Street. By the 1971 OS map the eastern part of the field has been separated and a house (Feldings) has been built on this new plot.



Plate 1: The Sheiling

3.0 Method Statement

- 3.1** The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with ESCC's *Standards for Archaeological Fieldwork, Recording and Post-Excavation in East Sussex* dated April 2008 (Recommended Standards).
- 3.2** All topsoil on the footprint of the new house and driveway was removed before the excavation of the north-south footing was carried out. This was followed by the southernmost east-west footing although work ceased when a water-pipe was punctured by the excavators bucket in the south-east corner of the footing trench.
- 3.3** Work then resumed after a repair had been effected on the water-pipe. Work then continued apace on the westernmost north-south footing, followed by the northernmost east-west footing. These footing trenches were excavated to a depth of approximately 1m. No archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the ground-works.
- 3.4** The area of the garage had been reduced during the initial topsoil strip, and as the foundation for the garage was to be a concrete slab, and no further excavation was required, no further monitoring was required.
- 3.5** The spoil from the excavations was inspected at regular intervals to recover any artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest. A Garrett ACE150 metal detector was also used to scan the spoil derived from the excavations.
- 3.6** All deposits were recorded according to accepted professional standards. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.
- 3.7** The archive is presently held by Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd. A site reference of TSR12 has been allocated, and the archive will be offered to Lewes Museum.

4.0 Results

- 4.1 Context 1 was a soft the topsoil/lawn deposit. It was 20mm - 140mm in depth across the site and comprised a dark brown clayey-silt. It contained ceramic building material (CBM) at 2%, coal/clinker at <1% and modern window and bottle glass at <1%.
- 4.2 Context 2 lay underneath Context 1 and was interpreted as a typical Ashdown Beds silty clay subsoil, which was mid yellowish-grey in colour with streaks of orange with mottling in places. It was made up of a silty-clay matrix containing manganese at <1% and was 400mm in depth. Two sherds of Medieval pottery were recovered from this context.
- 4.3 Below Context 2 lay the soft-firm, mid-grey, deposit of the Ashdown Beds (Context 3). It was excavated to a depth of 360mm to the limit of excavation. It was a sandy clayey-silt and contained manganese at 3%.
- 4.4 In the southern east-west footing, below Contexts 2 and above Context 3, lay Context 4 (Plate 2). This was a thin deposit, some 100mm in depth, made-up of a very firm, mid-yellow silty-clay that ran for some 2-3m mid-footing before petering out. Manganese was present at <1% and no finds were recovered. This deposit was interpreted as geological rather than as an archaeological deposit.
- 4.5 No archaeological features or deposits were noted during the watching brief



Plate 2: Section in east-west footing trench

5.0 Finds

5.0.1 The watching brief produced a small assemblage of artefacts that are summarised in Table 1 below.

5.0.2 The assemblage is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis and, with the exception of the medieval pottery, all is recommended for discard.

Table 1: Quantification of finds (no/weight in grams)

Context	Pottery (by chronological period)	Ceramic Building Material	Other	Comments
U/S	1225-1350 – 1/8g	-	-	c. 1275-1350
1/2	1750-1900+ - 9/143g	Brick 3/1,390g Peg tile 4/126g	Slag 1/1g	c. 1875-1925
2	1225-1350 – 2/20g	-	-	c. 1250-1350

5.1 The Pottery by Luke Barber

5.1.1 The archaeological monitoring produced a small assemblage of pottery from the site. Two distinct periods are represented. The earliest pottery consists of two somewhat abraded and/or weathered sherds of High Medieval date. An oxidised cooking pot bodysherd tempered with medium sand and rare iron oxide inclusions was recovered from unstratified deposits. Context **2** produced the down-turned expanded rim from an oxidised brown/grey cooking pot tempered with medium sand and very rare shell inclusions (voids) to 1.5mm. Medieval pottery from Rotherfield has to date been somewhat elusive so any material is of interest. The current sherds suggest activity between *c.* 1250 and 1325/50.

5.1.2 The remaining pottery is all of the late post-medieval period, the assemblage fitting into a late 19th to early 20th century date range. Unsurprisingly this material is in much fresher condition than the earlier pottery. The interface between Contexts **1** and **2** produced sherds from a glazed red earthenware dish (1/98g), an unglazed earthenware flower pot (1/13g), a refined white earthenware bowl (1/9g), a refined white earthenware plate with blue sponged decoration (4/11g), a transfer-printed willow pattern plate (1/3g) and a ribbed English porcelain saucer (1/10g).

5.2 The Ceramic Building Material by Luke Barber

5.2.1 A small assemblage of CBM was recovered from the interface with Contexts **1** and **2**. The largest piece (830g) is from a crudely finished hard-fired coarse brick with well-defined flat-bottomed frog. The brick is tempered with rare siltstone (to 5mm) and abundant slag (to 11mm) along with a few white calcareous inclusions to 3mm. A later 19th century date is probable. A much smaller piece (35g) from a better made brick was also recovered. This example, probably unfrogged, is tempered with sparse fine sand and abundant black iron oxides/ferruginous siltstone to 5mm. The brick is well formed and medium fired, with some self-glazing apparent. All in all a later 18th to mid 19th century date is probable.

5.2.2 The final fragment is from a well formed and fired semicircular coping brick (78mm tall by 73mm wide by 59mm deep). The piece is tempered with sparse fine sand with occasional iron oxide and white inclusions (marl?) to 2mm. Although the brick could be placed anywhere in the 19th to early 20th century the adhering grey cement bonding agent suggests a date in the latter half of this range.

5.2.3 The few pieces of peg tile from the site are all well formed and hard-fired. Tempering consists of sparse fine sand with sparse to moderate iron oxides to 2mm. These types are typical of the 19th to early 20th century.

5.3 The Slag by Luke Barber

5.3.1 The interface between Contexts **1** and **2** produced a single piece of black aerated clinker of late post-medieval type.

5.4 The Glass by Chris Butler

5.4.1 A small assemblage of 20th century glass was found in Context **1** during the watching brief. The glass comprised both fragments of window glass and bottle glass, but was not retained for analysis.

6.0 Discussion

- 6.1** Some small scale excavations such as this can sometimes be informative, unfortunately on this occasion, no significant archaeology was noted. There was a surprising lack of material recovered during the watching brief, with only the small assemblage of CBM and glass dating from the mid-19th to the 20th century being recovered and the even smaller assemblage of medieval pottery.
- 6.2** This paucity of any older archaeological material from either a secure stratigraphic context or as residual background finds in topsoil presents us with the possibility that past land use at this site has been very limited, perhaps confined solely to use as pasture with the main focus of activity been confined to the nucleus of the village as suggested by the Tithe Map of 1839 and 1st Edition OS map (1875).
- 6.3** The three sherds of medieval pottery recovered from the site, broadly speaking, fit in well with the expansion of the formal structuring of the rural economy with the establishment of a market at Robertsbridge in 1318, and perhaps reflect an increase in activity in the area at this time.
- 6.4** The evidence for post-medieval activity is strangely lacking and can only be explained by the land been either used as pasture as noted above. If it had been regularly ploughed and utilised for arable agriculture then one would expect more material to be incorporated within the plough soil through manuring, however this is sorely lacking and it is only when we get to the late 19th to early 20th century that we encounter dateable evidence. The presence of the CBM ties in nicely with the building of the house in the 1920s, as supported by the 4th Edition OS map (1931).
- 6.5** However, it must be noted that the area monitored was, given the wider landscape, very small, and there may be archaeological features that survive outside the area covered by this watching brief.
- 6.5** The methodology adopted for this watching brief proved to be satisfactory, and the confidence rating should be considered to be very reliable.

7 Acknowledgements

- 7.1** I would like to thank the client, Mr. Peter Miles for commissioning the archaeological watching brief and the builder, Alan Miles for his co-operation. The project was managed for CBAS by Chris Butler, and monitored for ESCC by Greg Chuter.

Appendix 1 HER Summary Form

Site Code	TSR12					
Identification Name and Address	The Sheiling, Church Road, Rotherfield, East Sussex					
County, District &/or Borough	Wealden District Council					
OS Grid Refs.	TQ 5539 2970					
Geology	Ashdown Beds.					
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. 04.04.12- 05.04.12	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Wealden District Council					
Project Manager	Chris Butler MIFA					
Project Supervisor	David Atkin					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED X	PM X	Other		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p><i>An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for a new house at The Sheiling, Rotherfield, East Sussex. Excavations were carried out using a 4.5 tonne machine and used 900mm and 1.5m toothless ditching buckets to excavate to a depth of between 900mm-1m. The excavations were cut into the natural deposit of the Ashdown Beds. No archaeological features were encountered during the watching brief although a small assemblage of late 19th to mid 20th century material was recovered from the interface between the topsoil/subsoil deposits along with three sherds of mid-13th to mid-14th century medieval pottery, one of which was unstratified, with the other two from the subsoil.</i></p>						



Fig. 1: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Location of Site

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100037471

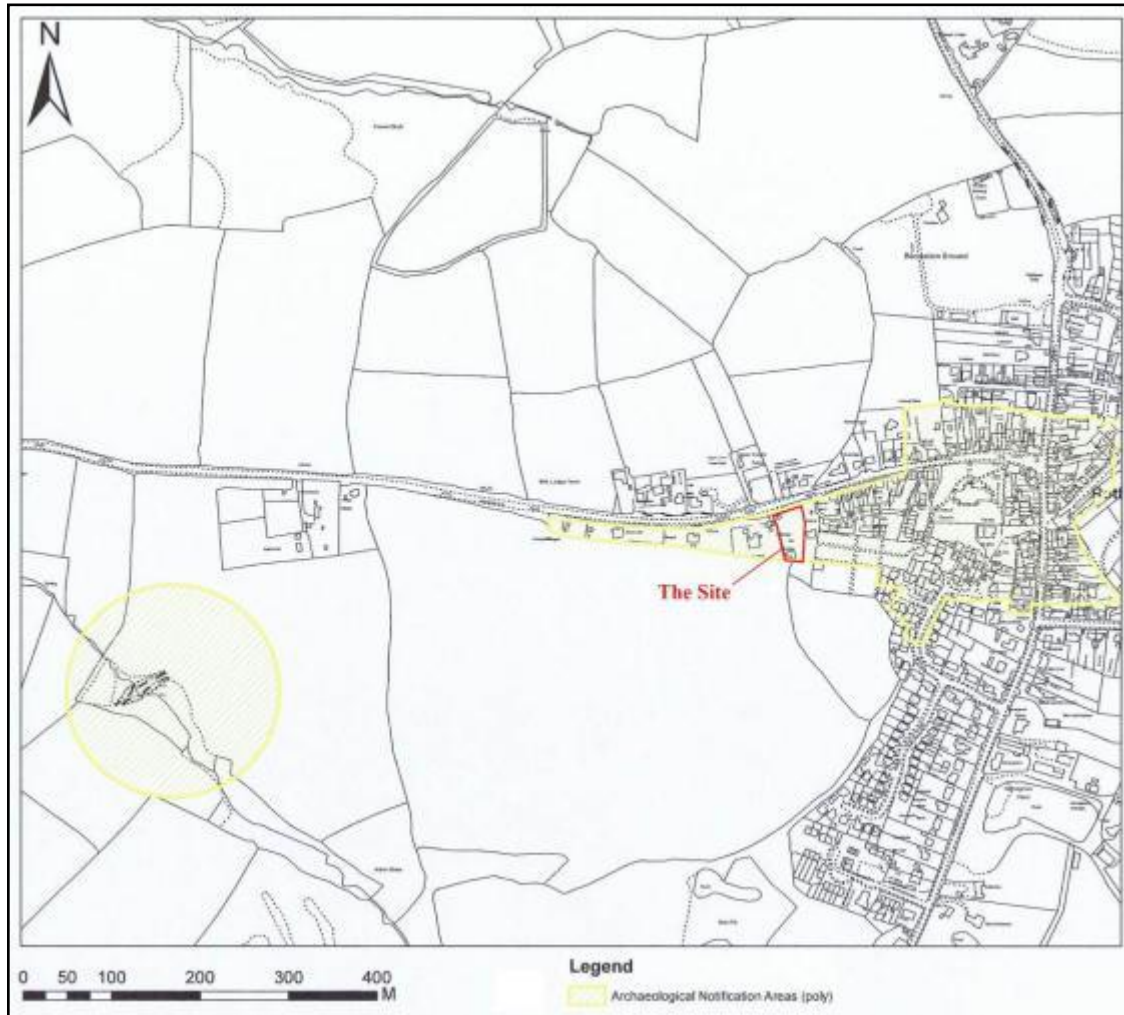


Fig. 2: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Archaeological Notification Areas
(adapted from map provided by ESCC)
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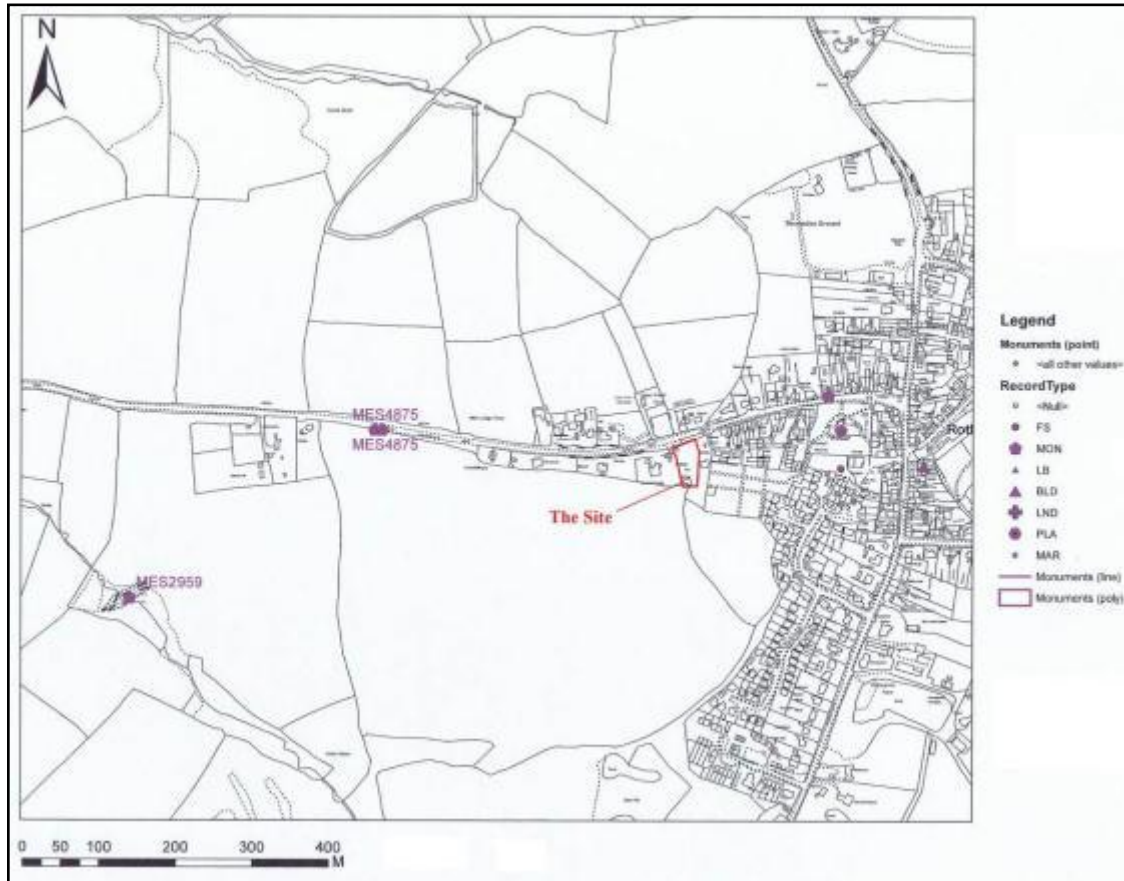


Fig. 3: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Sites on the HER

(adapted from map provided by ESCC)

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Fig. 4: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Rotherfield Tithe Map 1839
(adapted from map provided by ESCC)

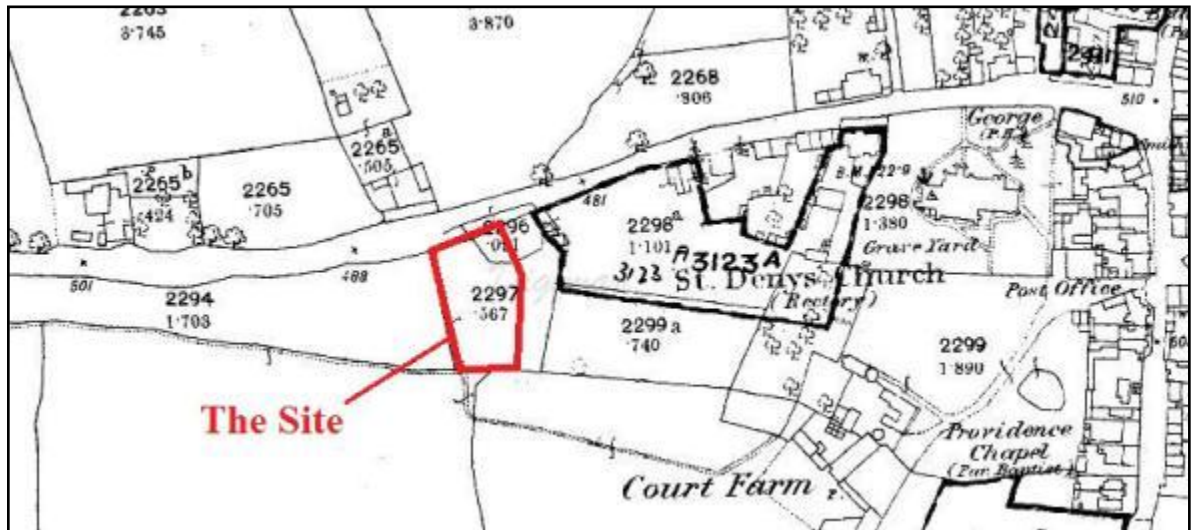


Fig. 5: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: 1st Edition OS Map (1875)

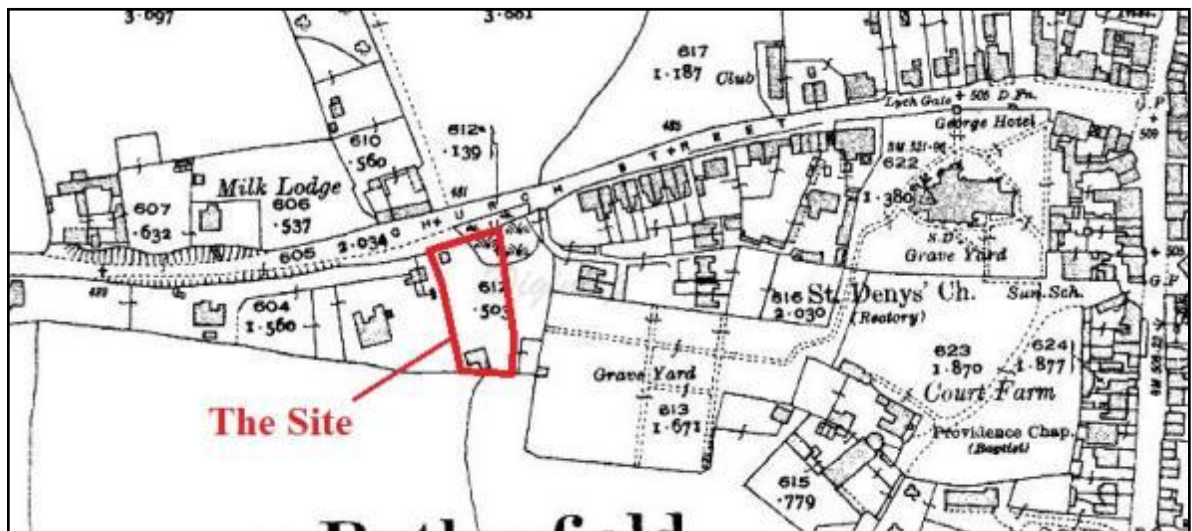


Fig. 6: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: 4th Edition OS Map (1931)

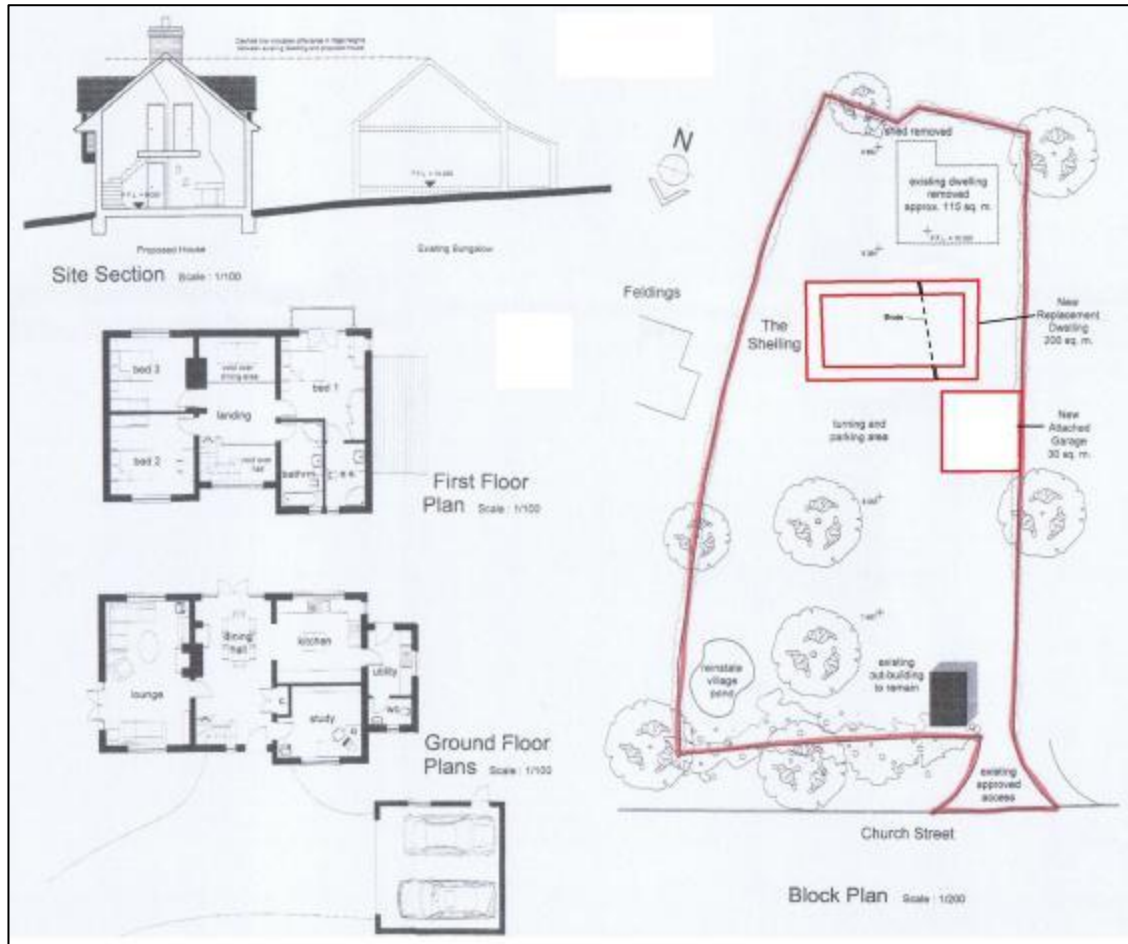


Fig. 8: The Sheiling, Rotherfield: Areas monitored (in red)
(adapted from architects drawing)

Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd

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, and a committee member of the Lithic Studies Society. He is a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex, and until recently taught A-Level Archaeology at Bexhill 6th Form College having qualified (Cert. Ed.) as a teacher in 2006. 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. He has recently undertaken large landscape surveys of Ashdown Forest and Broadwater Warren and is Co-Director of the Barcombe Roman Villa excavation project.

His publications include *Prehistoric Flintwork*, *East Sussex Under Attack* and *West Sussex Under Attack*, all of which are published by Tempus Publishing Ltd.

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

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