

FARM BUILDING AT WICHENFORD COURT,  
WICHENFORD, WORCESTERSHIRE -  
DESK-TOP ASSESSMENT

WCM 47464



**Mike Napthan Archaeology**  
3 Hamilton Road, Worcester, WR5 1AG [mikenapthanarchaeology@o2.co.uk](mailto:mikenapthanarchaeology@o2.co.uk)

## Farm building at Wichenford Court, Wichenford, Worcestershire - desk-top assessment

WCM47464

24<sup>th</sup> January, 2013

Mike Napthan MIFA

### *Summary*

*A desk top assessment was undertaken to determine the history and architectural significance of a range of brick buildings forming the eastern side of the foldyard at Wichenford Court Farm (NGR SO 7871 5990). Wichenford Court is a property of great archaeological interest, dating in parts to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier. A proposal is being drawn up for conversion of the listed granary, carthouse and stable block to residential use. The project comprised of documentary research, a study of cartographic sources and an assessment of the building on the basis of a photographic survey undertaken by the architects. The building stands within an important and well preserved multi period farmyard range that encloses a foldyard on three sides. Beyond the originally open side (now occupied by a later building) there stands an important Listed and timber-framed dovecote, now in the ownership of the National Trust*

*The present building range is stylistically dateable to between circa 1795 and circa 1830 – the cartographic sources indicate that it was built at some time between 1813 and 1839 when it first appears on the Tithe map for the parish. The actual construction date of the majority of the building is likely to have been around 1820-25, though there is cartographic evidence that may indicate that the granary was not completed until after 1839, there is however no clear break in construction. The building while well built has no un-necessary or decorative details and is plainly constructed in local red brick commons, with a common flat tile roof of traditional design. A small area of the roof is extended to cover an adjoining (originally open sided) store with a catslide roof, the remainder is of two storeys. The form of the building indicates that the northern end was designed as a cart house (accessed originally through the arcade to the west but now from the gable end) with granary over. Opening off the cart house through the open arcade is a slightly later single storey implement shelter. The granary floor is accessed by a stair located between the cart house and an earlier timber framed barn. This portion of the building is covered by an extension of the barn roof pitches. The southern end of the building formerly served as stabling, but has been thoroughly stripped out in the past and retains very few features that reflect its original function. Over the stable there is a former hayloft, the floor of which is much decayed and has been significantly modified by insertion of steel joists in lieu of the original bridging beams. The hayloft has loading doors to the eastern elevation only. To the western elevation (within the foldyard) there is a modern lean-to building of no architectural merit or interest. The fenestration of the building has been much altered, with the windows of the ground floor reduced in size during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, several of the doors also appear to be secondary replacements. Floors within the building all appear to be modern concrete. The roof structure remains very largely intact at built, consisting of pegged trusses of imported Baltic softwood. Some incised Baltic timber merchants marks are visible on the trusses. The first floor structures appear to be also of softwood. The building while significant for its substantial contribution to the setting of the surrounding Listed Buildings and its group value as a key part of the historic farmstead, moat and court complex is internally lacking in period fixtures and fittings, and shows evidence of substantial previous internal alterations.*

*The building is presently largely redundant other than use for casual domestic storage, and is not readily adaptable to modern agricultural practices or machinery. The present proposals therefore offer an opportunity to remove unsightly modern accretions and to ensure long term survival of the building envelope.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 A desk-top assessment was undertaken by Mike Napthan Archaeology to inform an proposal for domestic conversion of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century agricultural range at Wichenford Court Farm, Wichenford, Worcestershire (NGR SO 7871 5990; Figs 1 and 7). The project has been requested by Mike Taylor of Taylor & Co. Architects as part of pre planning documentation. The development proposals are being drawn up on behalf of Mr Adam Barwell (the Client) The project design has been prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and English Heritage's Understanding historic buildings – a guide to good recording practice (2006). The property is Listed Grade II and located within a group of Listed buildings that include both II\* Listed Wichenford Court itself and a II\* dovecote now in the custodianship of the National Trust.
- 2.2 The building is currently partially disused and partially used for domestic storage.

## 3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the building assessment were to gather, record and analyse information relating to the standing structure. The project aimed to identify the general extent of the historic building fabric and determine the principal stages of development of the present buildings. Architectural features of intrinsic interest and those which relate to the construction and subsequent uses of the building were individually noted and recorded. The purpose of this is to inform the formulation of a strategy for the conservation, alteration, demolition, repair or management of a building.

## 4 Methodology

- 4.1 The principal features of the building were photographically recorded by the architects, and the present desk-top assessment descriptions are based on the photographic record. The photographic record made by Taylor & Co. Architects is presented on a DVDROM enclosed with hard copies of the report, selected images are reproduced here as Figs 4-6.
- 4.3 A documentary search was undertaken at the Worcestershire Record Office for primary records relating to the property and secondary sources including the trades directory listings. This information was subsequently augmented from Census returns 1841-1911. Searches at WRO found no primary estate records relating to Wichenford Court, but local history booklets and the VCH indicate that at least until relatively recently the estate archives were held by the Britten family who owned the property until 2003. The present location of the archives has not been pursued at this stage. The property falls within one of the manors that was historically property of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester Cathedral, and earlier records may be located in either the Cathedral Archives or the archives of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, possibly both. This research lies outside the scope of the present assessment. An Historic Environment Record Search was undertaken to assess the archaeological significance of the site. Very little record of below ground deposits in the area of Wichenford Court appears to exist, and the majority of records in the vicinity relate to the standing buildings, none of which appear to have been previously formally recorded.

## 5 Historical and archaeological background

- 5.1 Wichenford Court was historically the residence of the Washbourne family; *“their seat at Wichenford is reduced to a farmhouse, this was inspected by the politeness of Mr Hatch the occupant...the old moat that surrounded the original court house still remaining”* (TWNFC 1847-96, 101). By 1866 it was only a farm-house, but the remains of the moat are still in existence (WSM 42162). The present house (WSM03401) is in the main a red brick building of about 1700, with wood mullioned and transomed windows and leaded

lights with good wrought-iron fasteners. The east room on the first floor contains early 17th-century panelling and a plain but good carved mantel. When Wichenford Court was visited by the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club on 7 June 1866, around two sides of a panelled room under the ceiling were a number of carved grinning heads with teeth, said to be human (TWNFC 1847-96, 101). The middle room on this floor is also panelled, and has a carved frieze, used as a skirting board, all now painted. The stair has good 18th-century balusters. Among the farm buildings is a fine timber and wattle barn put up in 1695. There is also near the house a half-timber dovecote (WSM06099) on a red sandstone base, surmounted by a glazed lantern (VCH III).

- 5.2 The manor at Wichenford held by the Poer family of the bishop's manor of Wick Episcopi seems to have originated in a virgate of land there given by Samson, Bishop of Worcester (1096–1112), to Illi de Turre. This land probably passed with Norton in Bredon to Hamo de Turre, and towards the end of the 12th century was like Norton in the possession of William Poer. Richard Poer, who may perhaps be identified with the Richard who was holding half a knight's fee of the bishop in 1196–7, was holding 4 hides at Wichenford, Norton and Hill in Fladbury early in the 13th century. The date of Richard's death is not known, but he was still alive in 1220, and a Richard Poer was holding land at Lemington, co. Gloucester, in 1241. Richard was succeeded, according to the pedigree of the family given in the visitation of 1569, by his son John, who in 1244 agreed with the Bishop of Worcester as to an exchange of land at Fladbury and Wichenford. James Poer was in possession of the manor in 1299. Roger son of John Poer died about 1342, leaving John his son and heir a minor. Maud wife of Roger held the manor until her death in 1362, when livery was made to her son John. John Poer of Wichenford is mentioned in 1404–5, but the exact date of his death is not known. He left two daughters Margaret and Agnes his co-heirs. Wichenford evidently fell to the share of the former, who became the second wife of John Washbourne, for in 1428 her son Norman Washbourne held the manor. He died before 1480, and his son and successor John died in 1517, leaving as his heir his grandson John son of Robert Washbourne. John died in 1532, leaving this manor to his widow Margaret, who afterwards married John Kettleby of Cotheridge. Anthony son and heir of John Washbourne and Margaret died at Wichenford in 1570 in the lifetime of his mother. The exact date of Margaret's death is not known, but before 1598–9 the manor had passed to John eldest son of Anthony. He died in 1633–4, leaving as his heir his great-grandson John, who married Elizabeth Childe in 1639, while still a minor. He was an ardent Royalist, and compounded for his estates in 1649–50. He probably took part in the battle of Worcester in September 1650, as he was among those present before the battle at the review at Pitchcroft. He disappeared from that time, and his fate is not known, but he was dead before 1653. His son William succeeded to the manor and died in 1702 (VCH III).
- 5.3 It would seem that the manor passed to his son and heir William during his lifetime, for in September 1695 William Washbourne the younger made it over to George Dowdeswell for five years at a peppercorn rent in return for the latter's services in helping him meet debts amounting to £800. At that time the property included a thatched gatehouse. Three months later George Dowdeswell leased the manor and its appurtenances to William Rider for three years at a yearly rent of £108. The lease permitted Rider to use four acres as a hopyard, and part of the agreement obliged Dowdeswell to erect a “*good and sufficient barne, consisting of three bayes of building before 1<sup>st</sup> August 1697*”. Dowdeswell was also to bear the upkeep of the thatching of the barn from time to time, and Rider was not required to maintain the gatehouse. William Washbourne re-entered the property and in 1702 inaugurated extensive alterations to the house, effectively re-casing the earlier building, but the works were sufficiently extensive for Hester Washbourne (writing to her brother John Kyrle Ernle) in 1710 mentioned in a letter the “*new house at Witchenford*”. The cost of the renovations and improvements crippled Washbourne financially – he sold land to Richard Longford in 1703, and more of his estate in 1710 to John Baxter. Financial problems evidently continued and in 1712 William Washbourne sold the manor to Edmund Skynner. The latter was Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1726. He was succeeded on his death in 1727 by his daughter, Anna who was married to Plukenett Woodroffe. Anna Woodroffe bequeathed Wichenford Court to her third but eldest surviving son Skynner Woodroffe who inherited on her death

in 1787. Skynner died in 1822, and was succeeded by his younger brother George, who, dying in the same year, was followed by his son Skynner George Woodroffe who died in 1848 and was succeeded on his death in 1848 by his son George William Plukenett. G W Plukenett sold Wichenford Court in 1856 to Daniel Britten. Rear-Admiral Richard Frederick Britten, J.P., son and successor of Daniel Britten, died in 1910, and the manor then belonged to his widow, the Hon. Mrs. Britten. Several generations of Brittens let the property, but in 1969 the property was again taken in hand and a major programme of repairs and modernization undertaken which lasted until 1975 when Lt Col Britten and his family finally re-occupied the house. The property was sold in 2003 (sources VCH, WRO, Beach & Beach [nd]).

- 5.4 For much of its history Wichenford Court was occupied by tenant farmers. The 1744 list of Freeholders in the parish lists Mr Williams at the Court, with a household of 10 persons. Possibly the same person was commemorated in a 1768 memorial in the church as “Richard Williams of Wichenford Court”. A John Groves “of Wichenford Court” died in 1797. His daughter married John Surman, presumably the parents of Thomas Surman “farmer of Burying Town Farm and also Wichenford Court” recorded in Billings Directory of 1855. During the period 1834-46 the Rev George Williams, rector of the parish, occupied the Court in preference to the vicarage, and shared the house with his churchwarden Mr Unett Hodges until 1846 when Williams married and resigned the living, Hodges appears as the occupier on the Tithe Apportionment of 1839 so presumably farmed the land. Billings (1855) notes the owner of the Court as George Skynner Woodroffe, which conflicts with the dates given by the Victoria County History. William Holder was listed at Court Farm in the 1851 Census. Cassey’s Directory of circa 1860-61 names the occupant of Wichenford Court as Thomas Heach, farmer. When the Worcestershire Naturalists Club visited in 1866 their host was a Mr Hatch [sic] probably the same person, as Thomas Heach appears in the Post Office and Littlebury’s Directories up to and including 1873. Heach was succeeded as tenant farmer by George Hill who appears in Directories between 1879 and 1892. Subsequently Miss Bullock was recorded as farmer at Wichenford Court in 1896, 1900, 1904 and 1908 (Kelly’s Directory), and is named as Mary A Bullock aged 58 at the 1901 Census. Arthur Probert appears as the farmer in the 1912 Directory and was followed by John Delahay (Kelly’s Directories 1916-1924) and Thomas Boaz (Kelly’s Directories 1928-40). No subsequent Directories were found for this area. A Mr Pugh was the last tenant farmer until his untimely death in 1969 due to a tractor accident (Beach & Beach [nd]).
- 5.5 Early mapping for the area is somewhat limited – a sketch plan of 1729 showing the extent of the Bishop’s manor of Wichenford shows the relative position of the various farms, court and church, the principal buildings are shown in elevation in a fairly diagrammatic manner. The house at Wichenford Court is shown, but none of the farm buildings (WRO 6134 parcel 44 ref f261.4.). The draft Ordnance Survey mapping of 1813 (Sheet 215) held by the British Library shows the farmstead as then consisting only of the east-west range (ie the present brick built range was not shown) – this map is not particularly detailed but does tend to suggest that construction of the present building had not been completed by 1813 (Fig 2). The first published Ordnance Survey mapping for this area (1832) also omits the present building, but as the 1832 map was based on the 1813 survey at smaller scale with only minor amendments it is not surprising to find the farmstead shown only in a very sketchy form (Fig 2) which does not disprove the presence of the buildings at this date. The earliest available detailed map appears to be the 1839 Tithe Map (Fig 2), which shows the present main farm yard ranges as all already established including the building which is the subject of this report. The granary, however does not appear to extend north beyond the line of the earlier barns, so it seems possible that the granary was extended post 1839, though no building joint is readily apparent in available photographs, and the brickwork appears continuous – it is possible that the 1839 mapping is erroneous. The moat by this time was much reduced in size, and the thatched gatehouse had disappeared. The apportionment of the Tithe awards of 1839 lists the following field names around the farmstead in all cases the owner was George Skynner Woodroffe and the occupier Unett Hodges: Plot 297 Cherry Orchard - meadow ; Plot 298 The Walk – pasture; Plot 299 House, Fold, Garden & Road; Plot 300

Dovehouse, Orchard & pool – pasture; Plot 301 Old Hop Yard Orchard- arable; Plot 302 The Green – pasture.

- 5.6 The 1884 Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig 3) shows only one significant change to the farmstead since 1839 – the granary had by this date apparently been extended to its present full length and the implement shelter added. The 1903 mapping shows very little change, but by 1927 (Fig 3) the dutch barn had been constructed between the stables and dovecote, and a building erected in the area of the present lean-to structure against the west wall of the stables.
- 5.7 There has been some antiquarian interest in the house, including the 1866 visit by the Worcestershire Naturalists Club (who then included antiquarian interests). More recently there has been little fieldwork at Wichenford Court, though several discoveries (including early wallpaper) made during the early 1970s remodelling and repair of the house did make it into the public domain. The Britten family also appear to have made some of the estate documents available to previous researchers, though the location of this archive is not presently known. Archaeological works in recent years have been limited to a 2006 watching brief undertaken during alterations to the house (WSM35071; Sworn 2006) - Excavations for two foundation trenches revealed mainly areas of modern disturbance that relate to the construction of a now demolished brick extension to the south of the main building, with associated exterior surfaces and existing services. Close to the rear of the present building a small and partially exposed brick wall was observed, aligned north-south, which appeared to be a continuation of the present west wall of the main building. The brick dimensions indicate a possible construction date of late 17th-early 18th century, which suggests that the wall may be associated with major refurbishments documented in 1712. Otherwise only modern features were observed elsewhere. An earthwork survey was also undertaken near the house in 2007 (WSM 37606) and identified several earthworks near the church. No archaeological excavations have taken place within the immediate vicinity of Wichenford Court, although Roman coins dating from the time of Victorinus (AD 268-270/1) and Constans (AD 337-350) have been found nearby (VCH III, 562). A fieldwalking survey, carried out 1 mile to the west of Wichenford Court, located a number of flint artefacts from the late Mesolithic to the later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. Pottery possibly relating to low level occupation from the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods was also recovered (Bryant 2004).

## 6 Building descriptions

- 6.1 The farmyard at Wichenford Court consists of three linked principal historic building ranges around a central foldyard (Figs 1 and 7). Extending into the foldyard there is also a linked open sided cattle shelter, which completed the “E” shaped building footprint recorded by the 1839 Tithe Plan (Fig 2). The fourth side of the foldyard was historically formed by a pond in the area of the present dutch barn, and on the other side of this stands the historic dovecote. The barn range WSM45401 is Listed, and the Listing description is as follows: *GV II -Barns and granary. Barns: c1679 with C19 and C20 additions. Timber-framed, lower panels have brick infill, upper panels wattle infill, sandstone rubble and brick plinth, tiled roofs. L-shaped plan of 8-framed-bay barn on south-west/north-east axis with a 5-framed-bay barn adjoining south-west gable end. Framing: 4 square panels from sill to wall-plate, long straight braces at lower corners; 8-bay range has a wagon bay with opposed, square-headed cart entries in the fifth bay from its north-east end; large double doors face roadside, blocked with inserted small door in farmyard side. Five-bay range has central wagon bay with opposed square-headed cart entries, large double doors in south-west elevation, farmyard entry blocked with inserted small door. Interior: 8-bay range has single, trenched purlins, queen strut trusses at gable ends and to bays either side of wagon bay, other 5 trusses having raking struts. The 4 bays to the north-east of the wagon bay are floored and there are stalls for livestock at ground floor level. A small open doorway in the south-west gable end leads into the adjoining barn. Five-bay barn has double, trenched purlins, end queen strut trusses and 4 intermediate raking strut trusses. At north-east gable end of 8-bay barn is a C19 brick, tiled granary; 2 storeys with dentilled eaves cornice, 5 bays, its main north-east elevation having 6 ground floor windows, 2 first floor casements and 4 hoist doors, and 3 planked doors, all with*

*cambered heads. There is an outshut in the angle with the barn at the north-east end. To the farmyard side of the larger barn are further C19 and C20 additions. It is probable that many of the timbers in the barns are reused from the former timber-framed medieval manor house, on the site of the present Court (qv), which was demolished in the late C17. Listing NGR: SO7870359913.*

- 6.2 The Dovecote WSM06099 (Figs 6 and 7) is separately Listed as GV II\* : Dovecote. C17, restored mid-C20. Timber-framed, rendered wattle-and-daub infill on coursed sandstone rubble plinth, tiled roof. Square plan. Four square panels from sill to wall-plate; slightly curved long braces across lower outer corners except for front elevation where they occur in the upper 2 rows of panels, gable end trusses have queen struts from tie-beam to collar and V-struts above collar in apex. Front elevation to east has a small central planked door and left door in gable. Small, glazed lantern at centre of ridge with pyramidal roof and finial. Interior: 557 wooden nesting boxes. Floor paved with cobblestones. The dovecote was recently presented to the National Trust. Listing NGR: SO7871959876.
- 6.3 *The house (Wichenford Court WSM03401) is also Listed - GV II\* House. C15 origins, rebuilt in early C18, restored mid-C20. Brick on partly coursed sandstone rubble plinth, hipped tiled roof, 2 brick ridge stacks with oversailing cap courses to rear wings. Two storeys, cellar and attic with dormers; 3 course band between main storeys and dentilled eaves course. U-shaped plan of front range with 2 rear wings at each end and also 2 small wings at centre of rear. Seven bays; all windows are wooden cross casements with leaded lights; ground floor windows have flat, gauged brick arches; 2 gabled dormers with casements. Central panelled timber door, rectangular fanlight with central glazing bar, and flat canopy on 3 carved brackets. Windows in side elevations have cambered heads. Interior Roof timbers mainly reused from former timber-framed structure on site. East room on first floor has early C17 panelling and a carved overmantel. The central front room also has panelling, now painted white. A cupboard at the top of the stairs is lined with wallpaper c1735, in good condition and a rare survival. Many of the windows retain their wrought iron fasteners. C18 staircase replaced by mid-C20 one but balusters reused in rear extension above cellar stairs and in outbuilding (qv). A substantial medieval manor house originally stood on site, complete with moat, drawbridge and gatehouse. From early C15 to late C17 the house belonged to Washbourne family and it is alleged that during the wars between Henry IV and Owen Glendower, a French nobleman was held captive in the house and subsequently murdered by Margaret Washbourne; a bloodstain is maintained on the landing to this day. The major rebuilding took place c1710. By the early C20 building had deteriorated and was sub-divided for farming purposes. The mid-C20 restoration included several rear additions and recreation of a formal garden. Listing NGR: SO7878859839*
- 6.4 The present study considers only the eastern range, which is a brick built block in contrast with the other ranges (Fig 7) which are primarily of timber framed construction. The eastern range is alongside the driveway to Wichenford Court farmhouse, and historically served as stable block and cart/waggon house with haylofts over the stables and granary storage over the cart house.
- 6.5 The building is of typical very late 18<sup>th</sup> –early 19<sup>th</sup> C construction, and incorporates a number of features recommended by agricultural improvers at this date, most particularly the provision of high ceilinged, well ventilated and well lit stabling for the valuable farm horses. The brickwork is generally very plain and unornamented, with a single course of dentilation at the eaves. The openings (other than the main carthouse doors) are spanned by plain low brick arched heads, and the windows have no projecting sills. The roof is clad in common flat tiles, and is currently undergoing a programme of repairs. The northern end of the range is occupied by the carthouse/granary block, and the southern end by the former stables/hayloft block. These are described in more detail below.:
- 6.5.1 *Carthouse/Granary/Implement shelter*  
The cart house doors are spanned by a single large scantling timber lintel. The doors appear to be lightly framed in softwood and are probably early 20<sup>th</sup> C replacements as they are hung on mass produced iron strap hinges. Immediately to the west of the carthouse doors there is a formerly open-sided implement shelter under a catslide roof –

the open sides are now infilled with a waney edged board cladding over studwork. The raking roof trusses of this implement shed are of Baltic softwood and pegged construction with wrought iron strapping to the restrain the spread of the wall plate. The floor is of mid 20<sup>th</sup> C or later concrete construction. This shelter is clearly secondary (probably mid 19<sup>th</sup> C) as it blocks the original vehicular access to the cart-house. A fine brick triple arched open arcade separates the implement shed from the carthouse. The carthouse is bridged by a substantially framed floor of Baltic softwood construction which retains evidence of rectangular former grain drop openings - a design which tends to confirm the function of the upper level as a granary, it being a common and practical design to have grain storage directly over the carts which were used to transport it. The cart-house floor is modern cast concrete. There are no significant surviving internal fixtures or fittings. At the upper level the granary is approached by a wide softwood staircase from the foldyard – the stair is external to the granary and placed between the granary and barn, covered by an extension of the barn roofline. The underside of the stair opens to the implement shelter. The granary is lit by two 6 pane softwood windows to the eastern elevation. The roof structure is of pegged Baltic softwood trusses of shouldered kingpost with raking queen strut design. The kingpost appears to be bolted to the tie beam, and iron strap restraints are used at the wall plates. A number of the truss timbers bear what appear to be Baltic timber merchant's marks inscribed with the raze knife; this is characteristic of timbers imported between circa 1740 and 1860, and several examples have recently been recorded in Worcester (eg Napthan 2011).

#### 6.5.2 *The stable block/haylofts*

This portion of the range appears to have built all in one with the cart-house granary as there is no readily visible break in construction, but site inspection would be needed to confirm this. The even spacing of the first floor fenestration suggests a single predetermined design for the whole range. The stable block has suffered considerably more modern alteration than the northern end of the range, reflecting the lack of adaptability of a typical stable interior to mechanised farming. It would appear likely that there were originally three stables and provision for perhaps ten horses. The internal divisions, hayracks and other stable fittings have been removed to create a single open area in the main stable and so the original arrangements are now unclear. As is very often the case the hayloft floor above the stabling has extensively decayed as the result of moisture rising from the horses combined with the warmth created by the hay. The boarding appears to be very widely decayed, and most of the bridging beams have been replaced or supported by inserted steel girders. Many of the stable ceiling joists do however survive in possibly re-useable condition. There are fairly small iron high level ventilation grilles in the wall facing the foldyard, and hopper vents to the eastern windows of the stable. The stable window openings have all been reduced in size (probably in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C) and the present windows are clearly not original. There is a probably inserted and later blocked former window opening to the foldyard elevation – the use of blue engineering bricks for the arched head marks it out as not original. The wide opening between stables and cart-house, spanned by a steel lintel also appears to be an insertion, but might be a widened original doorway. The hay loft is accessed from the southernmost bay of the stable by a softwood stair of late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> C date which appears to have been relocated to its current position, as the ceiling opening is crudely finished and cut. The presence of a lath and plaster ceiling in this room suggests that it was possibly used for the more valuable horses – it does not appear to have been a tack room as there is no provision for heating nor bars on the windows to prevent theft. The hayloft itself is fairly featureless (as is the nature of such storage areas). It is lit by a south facing window in the gable end, and there are loading hatches provided on the eastern elevation. The loading hatch doors retain typical very late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> C wrought iron strap hinges.

#### 6.5.3 *Modern lean to shed*

A modern lean-to structure clad in corrugated sheeting adjoins the foldyard side of the stable block (Fig 4 – it appears to be mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century in origin (and first appears on the 1927 Ordnance Survey mapping) and is of no historic interest. The present dutch barn by the dovecote also first appears on the 1927 mapping, but the present structure may be a couple of decades later. The adjacent open sided cattle shelter (in the middle of the foldyard, linked to the barn) is however of interest and does appear on the 1839 Tithe Plan – its present corrugated infill panels detract greatly from what appears to be a significant

structure. The barns, dovecote and other buildings are not here considered, but overall the farmstead forms a very complete and well preserved group.

## 7 Discussion and conclusions

- 7.1 The stable block/granary/carhouse range at Wichenford is externally a very well preserved example of a building that was constructed following the advice of the agricultural improvers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Adequate ventilation and lighting was considered important for stables with “sashes or large casements for sake of letting in air enough” (Loudon 1831), the recommended ceiling height for stables was 12 feet, and the Wichenford Court stables only fall a little below this requirement. There appears to be provision here for about ten horses, which was the number used by a landowner of 330 acres (with 159 acres under cultivation) at Lea Castle, Wolverley in 1807 (Pitt 1813). The haylofts above accommodated fodder for the horses, and the capacity of the lofts would need to reflect the 1.5 tons of hay required per horse per annum for working horses in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C (Loudon, 1831). The granary and cart house also represent a substantial capacity, reflecting the size of the farm – recorded as being 318 acres in the Census of 1851, one of the larger holdings in the parish. The cartographic evidence suggests that the northern end of the granary may be an extension – This does not seem to be the case from the available photographs, but a more detailed survey would be needed to confirm whether there was actually a break in construction. The arcade of the carhouse clearly originally opened to the exterior as the original cart entrance, but the materials and construction of the implement shelter that now stands here appear not to be later than the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, so it is likely that the implement shelter was constructed within a generation or so of the construction of the cart house. The northern entrance to the cart house possibly was inserted as replacement access at this time, but if the lintel over the cart house doors is an insertion it was achieved extremely neatly. The present interpretation is limited to the available photographs, and it is probable that the actual sequence of construction would be revealed by more detailed survey.
- 7.2 The building forms part of a very impressive traditional foldyard group which developed around the earlier timber framed barns in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the presence of the moat, listed dovecote and house adds considerably to the group value. The present stable-granary building may be dated stylistically to circa 1795-1820, but the cartographic evidence suggests that the dating may be refined to circa 1813-20, though positive evidence for the existence of the building is found only on the 1839 Tithe Awards plan, which does not show the northernmost bay, suggesting that the range was possibly not fully completed until circa 1840-50, though the brickwork suggests an earlier date. Should the estate records become available the date may be further refined to a specific year. Tree-ring dating would not be appropriate for the present building as all structural timbers appear to be softwood.
- 7.3 The interiors of the implement shed, cart house/granary and hayloft are as devoid of interior fittings as is usual with these building functions – the stables however would originally have boasted stall divisions, mangers and other fittings now all lost. The loss of much of the original fenestration is also to be regretted, but these changes reflect the long period since the buildings served the function for which they were designed. Whilst the hayloft and granary have been used relatively recently for agricultural storage the lower floor has long served for general domestic storage, being unsuited for the parking of modern agricultural vehicles or storage of palletized feeds etc. The building clearly is largely redundant in the modern agricultural operation and an alternative financially viable usage is needed to ensure long term survival of the building envelope.
- 7.4 The site may be considered sensitive to any substantial changes to the massing and materials used. The present inappropriate modern buildings and use of corrugated sheet cladding detract substantially from the fine timber and brick buildings, and the proposed development offers an opportunity to address these problems and restore the visual amenity of the foldyard as viewed from the publically accessible dovecote. The building which is intended for potential conversion has had inappropriate window replacements in the past and the scheme will also offer the opportunity to re-open the window reveals to

their original size and to restore appropriate traditional styled frames within them. The doors on the ground floor level appear to be mostly replacements, and are of little interest. The loading doors to the hayloft do however appear to be original, and with a little thought might possibly be retained as internal shutters to new glazed windows in traditional frames. There is very little by way of surviving interior fittings and so the present spaces within the building are readily adaptable to almost any use. Given the condition of the hayloft floor some major structural repairs may be needed to restore this floor to useable condition, and this may provide an opportunity to replace the inserted steel girders with replica bridging beams of composite timber construction. Given the extent of repairs needed it may be possible to alter the present balance of headroom over the stables slightly so as to give better clearance on the upper floor – this appears to be achievable without externally visible alterations. The granary/carthouse upper floor by contrast appears to be in good repairable condition and should be retained as far as possible. It is not anticipated that the proposed works would affect any of the main structural elements of the roof, and where possible the trusses should be left exposed as a feature. Some additional natural light may be required on the upper level, and this would best be achieved by the use of low profile conservation type rooflights on the pitch facing west rather than cutting additional window openings through brickwork. At ground floor level re-opening the blocked and partially blocked windows should provide adequate light levels, however natural lighting of the granary and cart house is likely to prove problematic due to the small number of original openings. Possibly this might be largely resolved by removing the infill of the original openings of the implement shed.

- 7.5 The below ground archaeology of the site remains largely untested, but there appears to be only a low probability that any archaeological deposits would be further disturbed by conversion works within the building footprint as the building already has largely modern replacement concrete floors. No earlier farm buildings appear to have stood on the present building footprint, and the site is outside the moated area of the main habitation, where domestic related deposits may be encountered. Any major groundworks required outside the building footprint (eg new main sewer connections) might require some archaeological input, but the intended conversion itself will have minimal below ground impact on a probably very low level of archaeological resource.

## 8 Bibliography

Beach, A J and Beach, E M [nd c1980s] *The story of Wichenford*

Bryant, V, 2004 *Fieldwalking to the south of Buryendtown Farm, Wichenford, Worcestershire*. Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, report 1246

Loudon, J C, 1831, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.)

Napthan, M, 2011, *Former hop and seed warehouse at 13 Angel Street, Worcester - historic building assessment* WCM 101901 Mike Napthan Archaeology Report

Pitt, W, 1813, *General view of the agriculture of the County of Worcester, with observations on its means of improvement* Board of Agriculture County Reports

Sworn, S, 2006, *Archaeological watching brief at Wichenford Court, Wichenford, WSM 35071* WHEAS Report 1423

VCH III 1924 *Victoria County Histories- Worcestershire*

## 9 Acknowledgements

The following persons are thanked for their input: Mike Taylor (Taylor & Co. Architects), Tegan Cole (WAAS HER section) and Alison Derrick (MNA)

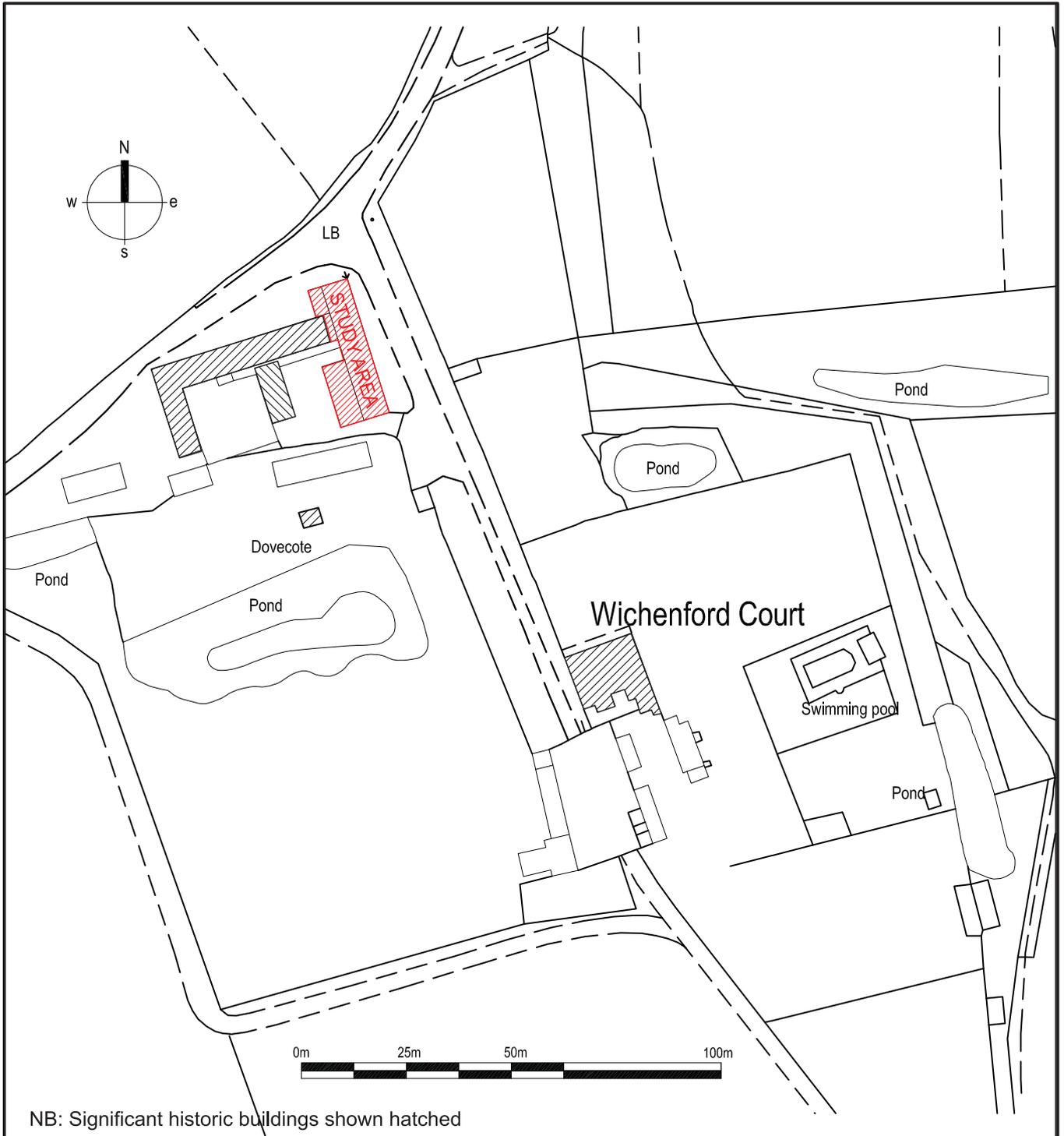


Figure 1: Location of farm building at Wichenford Court



1813 Ordnance Survey draft survey plan (British Library Collection)

1832 "Old Series" OS mapping



1839 Tithe Awards plan

Figure 2: Early 19th Century mapping of Wichenford Court

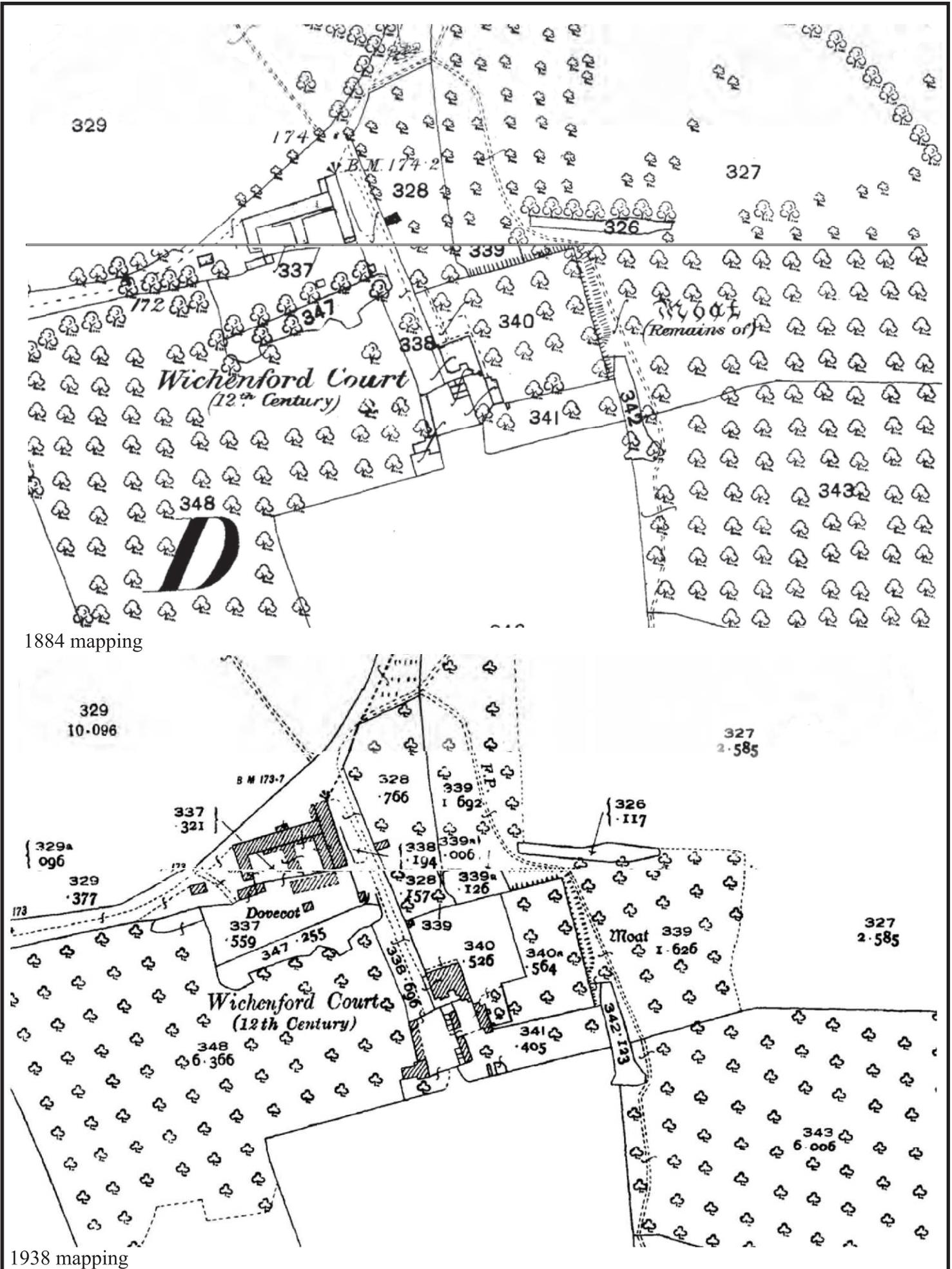


Figure 3: Ordnance Survey mapping of Wichenford Court



View facing north along eastern elevation



View of western elevation and modern lean-to



View facing south west along eastern elevation



View of northern gable end and adjoining implement shed

Figure 4: Stable, Granary and Cartshed range at Wichenford Court



View of hayloft and roof structure



View into implement shelter from cartshed (facing west)



Detail of inscribed Baltic timber merchant's marks on truss (and common rafter above truss)

View of granary floor structure from cartshed - facing north



Figure 5: Interior views



Detail of interior of hayloft window - note proximity of timber framed dovecote just beyond dutch barn



View of former stables facing south

Inserted staircase in southern end bay



View of former stable facing north



Figure 6: Interior views of stable block

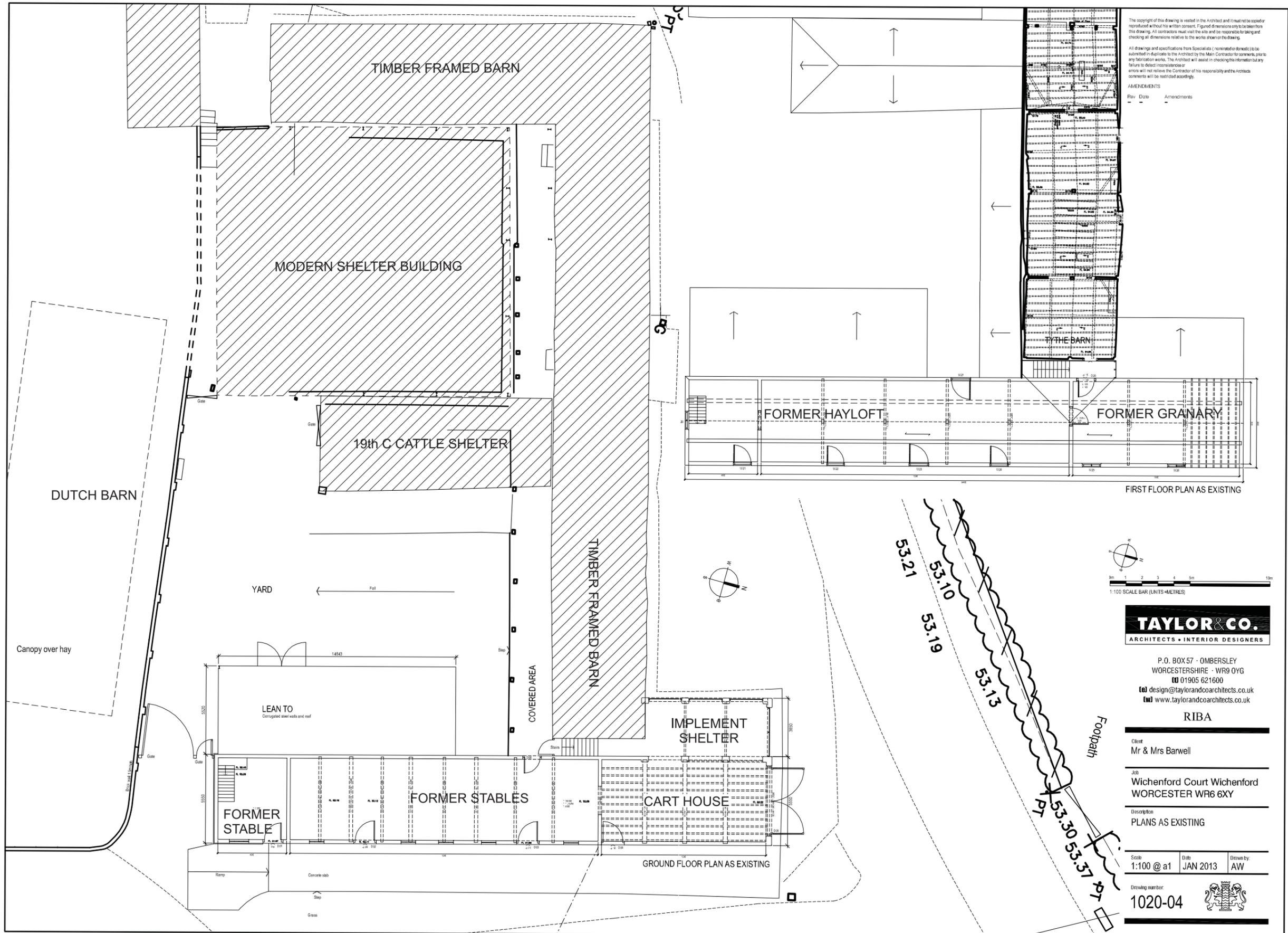


Figure 7: Plan of building as existing