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Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological building recording and  
evaluation at Manor Farm Barn**

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# Manor Farm Barn, Bozeat

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## Archaeological building recording and evaluation at

### **Manor Farm Barn, 7 Dychurch Lane, Bozeat, Northamptonshire**

Iain Soden BA MIfA

#### **Summary**

Level 2 recording showed that Manor Farm Barn may be 17<sup>th</sup>- or 18<sup>th</sup>-century and began life as a single open space, but by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had been converted into a stable and farm office downstairs, with a spacious hayloft floor above. During the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ground floor was also inhabited on a semi-permanent basis. More recently the stable had been used as a workshop.

Trial excavation showed that the area south of the barn had been levelled to build a cart shed, probably in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A soak-away, probably for the stable drain, and a vestige of the cart-shed foundations were uncovered. There was no other archaeology present.

#### **Introduction**

Planning and Listed Building consents have been granted for the conversion of a small agricultural barn at the Grade II – listed Manor Farm, Bozeat, Northamptonshire (Listing NGR: SP 90789 59037; Fig 1) to be converted into a home, with the addition of a modern extension on its south side (Application no WP/2011/0015,0016).

The barn formerly belonged to Manor Farm, a Grade II Listed building. The majority of the farm buildings have all previously been sold off and demolished or incorporated into adjacent housing, only the barn remaining. It is not listed in its own right but is considered to be listed by curtilage as related to the former Manor House. The Manor House listing makes no mention of the barn, which is believed to be of 17th century origin, contemporary with the Manor House. There is no other dating evidence available. The English Heritage Listing description is as follows:

*BOZEAT DYCHURCH LANE*

*SP9059 (North side)*

*24/6 No.7 (Manor Farmhouse)*

*02/08/72*

*- II*

*Farmhouse. Mid C17 and C19. Regular coursed limestone with original plain-tile roof. Originally 4-unit plan. 2 storeys. 6-window range of C19 casements under wood lintels. Two C19 panelled doors under wood lintels between window ranges.*

*Brick and stone stacks at ends. Fire insurance plaque to right. Rear has large lateral projecting stack and C19 kitchen extension. Interior has open fireplace with bressumer, spine beams, some panelled window reveals and an early C19 staircase with stick balustrade.*

*Listing NGR: SP9078959037*

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Building recording and trial excavation took place as a result of a Planning Condition required by both Wellingborough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. The fieldwork was carried out on 27 and 28 December 2012 in mostly clear, dry weather conditions.

## Historical Background

The Bozeat Inclosure Map of 1799 (NRO: Map 2839) depicts Manor farm, but at very small scale, and it is unmarked, and consequently is unhelpful. The recognisable farmhouse lies equidistant between three numbered labels, '*Homestead &C, 3 cottages and gardens*', and '*Homestead and Orchard*' and its main north-south range seems to have extended further south than its current footprint. None of the three labels sit easily with Manor Farm and the barn itself is indistinguishable, lying within a larger configuration of un-labelled buildings. Consequently it is not reproduced here.

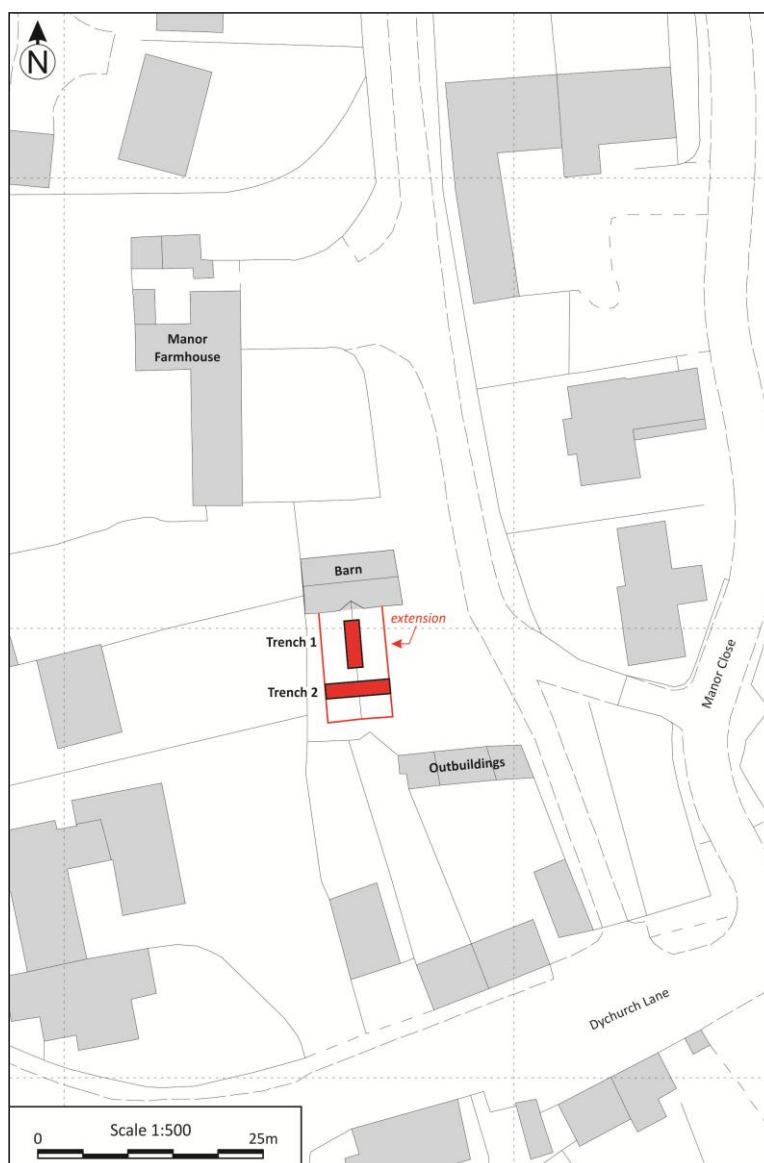


Fig 1: the barn, extension and evaluation trenches

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The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1885) shows the barn as it is exactly in plan today, but with the addition of a simple rectangular building to the south, occupying a similar footprint to the extension now planned. In conversation with Mr Brown, the last of the farming family to live in Manor Farmhouse, this was a cart-shed (tractor-shed in his day) and was open fronted. At its north end stood an above-ground agricultural diesel tank, while in front was a telegraph pole. Ordnance survey maps show the shed standing until the 1970s

There is a record of some sort of major earthwork enclosure east of the farm which may at one time have been related to the farm (RCHME 1979,4), viz: 'East of Manor Farm in the east of the village is (SP 9090 5908) a rectangular enclosure bounded on the east by a large bank 1m high and 9m wide and on the north and south by much slighter banks only 3m wide and 0.25m high, and is surrounded on the east, north and south by ridge and furrow and has ridge and furrow within it. All of these were devoid of buildings in 1799 (*referring to the Inclosure Map of that date*); RAF VAP CPE/UK/1994, 3190-1'.

An inter-war book about the village (Marlow, J H, 1936 The history of Bozeat village) adds nothing to understanding the farm and is a limited record, centred on ecclesiastical documentation.

Further documentation has been consulted for the farm generally and the barn specifically (NRO: ROP2738- pictorial history of Bozeat, 1968; X2959-village memories; YZ530- village scrapbook; A1293 – Parish council minutes 1895 – 1927). However, this simple agricultural building, once immensely common in all rural landscapes, merits no mention anywhere.

## The Barn

The barn measures 9.2m east-west and 5.9m north-south. It is currently divided into two rooms downstairs and a single storage floor upstairs, accessed by a ladder.

The building is constructed of local limestone, with blocks poorly-coursed and roughly laid, with a variety of phases of pointing repairs. The walls generally are 600-700mm thick. The building stands under a roof of corrugated iron, but was once almost certainly thatched, given the steep pitch of the gables.



Fig 2: The bare and featureless south wall of the barn; scale 1m

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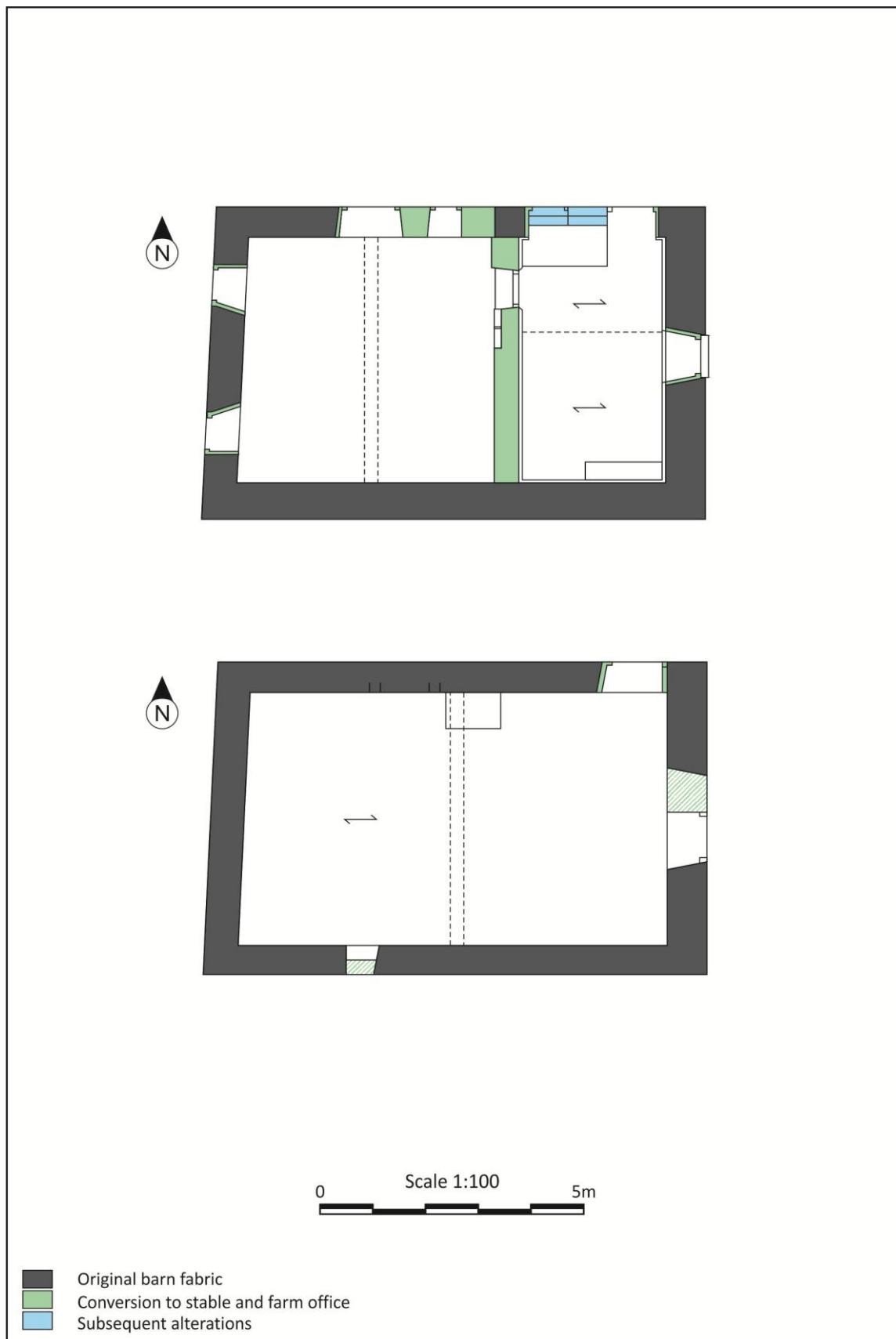


Fig 3: The barn, floor plans: Ground floor (top); First floor (bottom)

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The building began life as a crop barn, a single storage space open to the roof, which was and is supported on a single truss and principal rafter dividing it into two bays. This identification derives from the almost window-less south face (Fig 2). Such almost un-pierced walls were designed to stop the grain inside from being lit and warmed by the sun (which caused stored grain to sprout) and this configuration can be seen on barns and crop warehouses throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>- to the 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries (such as the just pre-World War I Southbridge rail depot warehouse, Northampton). Such buildings deliberately face away from the sunshine.

The only opening on the south is a tiny, inaccessible window under the eaves, which may have been an owl-hole. It has since been blocked in limestone although the blocking could not be inspected closely as the current first floor is unsafe.

In the north wall stood the original entrance, a relatively low central doorway but wide enough to push a barrow or carry a sack through. This has since been blocked and today has a window in its blocking. The lintel remains in place but which has probably been shortened at the west due to later alteration and the insertion of a higher door to the right.



Fig 4: the barn, north wall

Both gables probably began life as relatively plain. The west gable, which looks into an adjacent property, has two later windows in it at ground-floor level.

The original barn probably also had a hay loft at its east end was supplied with a first floor doorway at its east end, subsequently narrowed by half. A similar door at first floor level beneath the north-facing eaves is probably later.

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## Conversion to stables and office

It is not known why the building became redundant as a barn, or when. It appears not to have been a threshing barn, its single doorway being too small, so the advent of threshing machines may have meant it needed replacement, either because such a process usually called for a through-doorway (not possible on this naturally sloping site) or it may simply have been too small for a loaded wagon.

The answer was to convert it to another use. Therefore the downstairs was divided unequally, approximately 60% becoming a stable, and 40% (straightway or soon after) becoming a small office. Between the two was inserted a limestone dividing wall, not keyed in on either side. Onto this was laid a new first floor with simple cogged joists, with such a restricted headroom above (beneath the truss) that it could never have been sensibly used for anything but storage.

The stable was provided with windows in the west gable, and bars to prevent the horses putting their noses through the glass. A split stable door was put into the north wall. The gently-sloping floor was made of pebbles and water-worn cobbles and a drain-grille was incorporated into the foot of the new dividing wall, believed to connect to a soak-away outside (see The Excavations, below).



Fig 5: The northern stable door and blocking



Fig 6: West gable windows and trough-marks



Fig 7: Dividing wall with drain at its foot



Fig 8: South wall, former travis-fixings

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The stable probably supported two stalls for two or four horses in total. The mortices in the wall survive where both the feeding trough survived along the west wall was fixed, together with those for the travises which lined one stall on the south side and divided the two stalls, above the feeding trough. There is no evidence of former fixings for separate hay-baskets.

A selection of tools and accessories strewn about are redolent of the former stable's use and wider farming needs.



Fig 9: Yoke and harness parts in the stable; scale 300mm

Next door at ground floor level, the smaller of the two rooms was converted to a farm office. This use was confirmed by Mr Brown, the last of the farming family at the site. The walls were plastered and the lower portions were additionally clad in tongue and groove pine boards. Initially this may have doubled as a tack-room, since this method of cladding is common for this purpose. The upper walls are battened and may have supported further panelling-type insulation over the rough plasterwork. The horned sash of the inserted east gable window suggests that this took place after the 1850s, probably somewhat later.



Fig 10: Office/tack-room, view south; scale 1m



Fig 11: Office/tack-room, view north; scale 1m



Fig 12: the inserted east gable window



Fig 13: window close-up to show sash

The door is probably that originally put in when the office was created. The floor was of floorboards on joists to maximise warmth and it is said that the concrete base at the north end in the floor once supported a stove, necessary for either an office or a tack-room. A ventilator was put into the south wall. A telephone connection can be seen high on the east gable exterior.

In conversation with the last farmer, Mr Brown, it came to light that this room had for a while been inhabited as a home. Before the Second World War, in the years of the Great Depression, a young couple had lived in it, and even brought up a baby there. Thereafter, during the Second World War, a Prisoner of War lived in it, while employed on the land. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore that its use as a farm office may have been either relatively short-lived or intermittent.

Some of the windows in the stable (west) and the farm office (north) have metal frames. As such they suggest the approximate date of the last overhaul being the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. At the north end of the office the front wall has been completely re-built in recent years, and the window put back, incorporating both brick and block-work in the surround, but with a matching limestone exterior. The stove has been taken out.

No part of the barn has probably been used for any of the purposes for which it was intended for at least a generation.

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## The excavations

Two trenches were dug, one east-west aligned and the other north-south, using a JCB machine with toothless ditching blade. The trenches totalled c11m x 1.6m. Originally one trench was envisaged but this was divided into two as the JCB machine access was restricted by nearby boundary walls.

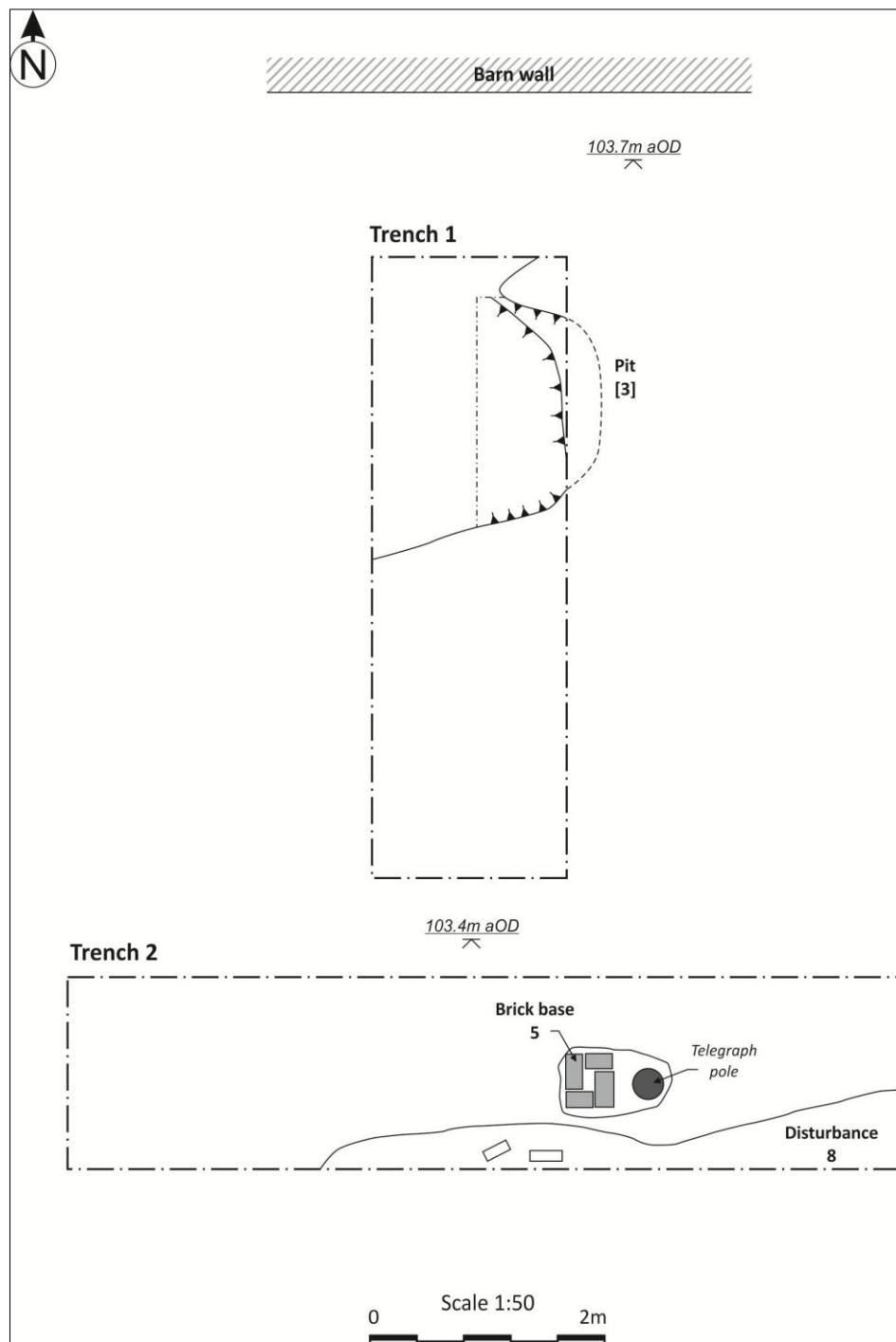


Fig 14: Trenches 1 and 2, plans.

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*Trench 1* measured c5m x 1.6m and lay north-south, approaching the south wall of the barn to a distance of c1.5m. This gap was left in order not to destabilise the barn foundations. Under the turf the top 20mm of the topsoil was stained black and smelled of petrochemicals, probably from use of a former diesel tank which is said to have stood above ground adjacent to the barn. This was confined to the northern end of the trench. Beneath and elsewhere the topsoil was little more than 200mm thick and on removal the natural geology, comprising well-bedded and blocky limestone, was exposed throughout.



Fig 15: Soak-away pit [3] with the south wall of the barn behind; scale 1m. Looking north



Fig 16: the same pit, showing depth and shelf under 1m scale; looking east

At the north end of the trench a large, deep pit [3] had been dug into the natural limestone. The sides were vertical to steep-sided (but raggedly-cut) and the fill comprised numerous limestone chippings in a matrix of well-drained, stony black soil. The pit extended north toward the barn and west, in both directions beyond the trench. Pieces of brick (not retained) from the pit date it to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and its location suggests it is a soak-away for a drain at the base of the stone cross wall, put in when half the ground floor of the barn interior was converted to the stable (see above).

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Trench 2 measured c6m x 1.6m and was aligned east-west. The topsoil was slightly shallower than in Trench 1 and like that trench it lay immediately on top of the natural geology, which hereabouts possessed a dirty, much-fragmented stone surface. Along the south edge of the trench was a strip of disturbance from which came three Victorian or early 20<sup>th</sup>-century bricks [8]. In the centre of the trench was a setting of similar bricks forming a square and neatly lime-mortared together [5]. One course was removed by machine and another lay mortared below. Adjacent to this was the sawn-off and half-decomposed remains of a cylindrical post. In conversation, Mr Brown, the last of the farming family to live at Manor Farm, noted that a telegraph pole had stood about here, and that at the back of the barn had stood a tractor shed. These remains are in keeping with both these assertions, the tractor shed probably beginning life as a Victorian, open-fronted cart-shed, its eaves supported on brick pillars. It is depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885.



Fig 17: the eaves-supporting pillar base of the cart-shed and telegraph pole; scale 300mm.  
North is at the foot of the photograph.

### Conclusions

#### The barn structure

This simple, small barn has been noted as being of 17<sup>th</sup> -century build. However there is nothing in its form which precludes an 18<sup>th</sup>-century date. It is not discernible on the 1799 Inclosure Map of the village, but on that it may lie within a larger mass of buildings. It was converted to become a stable and farm office in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the office space even became a home during two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is architecturally plain but its subsequent numerous uses have made it of passing social interest in addition to its status as being considered listed Grade II by curtilage.

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## Adjacent archaeology

The relatively flat ground to the south of the barn is notable on what is otherwise a sloping plot of land. The remains found include a square brick pillar base which looks like the footing for a pillar supporting the eaves of an open-fronted cart shed, noted by the former farmer, Mr Brown and plotted in early Ordnance Survey maps. The ground preparation needed for the construction of this cart shed probably entailed flattening the ground and this process removed any earlier material, if there had ever been any.

The large and raggedly-cut pit in Trench 1 is consistent with a soak-away and coincides with a drain location within the building and the slope of the land. The drain was probably put in when the stable was created within the former barn, probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, by stratigraphic association, before the cart-shed was added on before 1885.



The barn viewed from the north-east, 27 December 2012.



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