

**Archaeological Building Recording at
the former Blurton Farm Depot
Church Road
Blurton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
NGR SJ 89845 41935**

Site Code: BFM 09

Museum Accession Number: 2009.LH.66

Produced for
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
by

Clare Henshaw
of

Stoke-on-Trent Archaeology

Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire ST1 3DW

Tel: 01782 235413

Fax: 0172 232500

Email: jon.goodwin@stoke.gov.uk

Website: www.stoke.gov.uk/archaeology

Report No. 257

September 2009

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Non-technical summary

Stoke-on-Trent Archaeology carried out an archaeological building recording at the former Blurton Farm Depot, Church Road, Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent (NGR SJ 89845 41935). The building recording took place between the 21st and 24th July 2009 and identified a complex of farm buildings built in the third quarter of the 19th century. These were constructed in a U-shape around a central courtyard, an arrangement typical of 'high farming' in this era.

Whilst all the original fixtures and fittings had been removed from the buildings, the original layout had been little altered and was distinctive enough to indicate how each part of the complex had originally functioned. The original farm complex was equipped with accommodation for cattle, horses, carts and machinery and included a threshing barn in the western range, suggesting a mixed arable and fatstock estate. Subsequent changes to the complex can largely be associated with its use as a council depot in the mid-late 20th century. Some earlier alterations, however, seem to suggest a shift in farming practice from mixed arable towards a fatstock regime, likely associated with a general downturn in arable farming experienced during the late 19th century. Alterations may also have resulted from early 20th-century modernisation and mechanisation in farming.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As a result of an options appraisal regarding the redevelopment of the Former Blurton Farm Works Depot, Church Rd, Stoke-on-Trent (NGR SJ 89845 41935) (Fig. 1), the city's Planning Archaeologist requested a programme of works in the form of archaeological building recording be completed. Stoke-on-Trent Archaeology was subsequently commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council to undertake the archaeological building recording of the remaining buildings of Blurton Farm.

1.2 Blurton Farm is located adjacent to St. Bartholomew's Church within the Blurton Church Conservation Area. The buildings that formed part of the survey comprise three rectangular ranges, arranged around three sides of a central yard (Fig. 2). The buildings encompass a total area of *c.*541m².

2.0 Scope and aims of the project

2.1 The recording programme was carried out in accordance with a design brief prepared by the City's Planning Archaeologist (Boothroyd 2009) and the Written Scheme of Investigation (Goodwin 2009) that was produced for the project in response to this brief. The brief required that the building recording should be carried out to Level 3 standard of the English Heritage guidelines *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (2006), and should comprise drawn, written and photographic elements.

2.2 The primary purpose of the project was to carry out the archaeological recording of the farm site. This programme would record structural elements and phasing evidence illustrative of the development and changing function of the site. This was to be achieved through visual inspection and written description, a measured survey, and photographic survey.

2.3 The survey and report were undertaken in accordance with guidance laid down in the Institute for Archaeologists' (IFA) *Standards and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings and Structures* (revised October 2008) and the English Heritage publication *Management of Archaeological Projects* (2nd Edition).

3.0 Historical background

3.1 Blurton is situated towards the southern edge of the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

Formerly a township in the parish of Trentham, it is now a suburb of the modern city.

For at least the last 200 years, most of Blurton was owned by the Marquises of Stafford, who became the Dukes of Sutherland after 1833.

3.2 A farmstead has existed on the site of Blurton Farm since at least the early 19th century, albeit in a different form to that which survives to the present day. A map of the estates of the Marquis of Stafford, dated 1809 (Fig. 3), shows the site occupied by a group of three structures, presumably a house and outbuildings, set within a small plot of land (number 87) to the north west of the site of St Bartholomew's Church (which is not indicated on the plan). Unlike many of the other land parcels on the estate, the plot, and some of those adjacent to it, is not referenced to a landowner or tenant. The estate plan appears to pre-date the construction of the neighbouring farms of Blurton Green and Blurton Grange.

3.3 An estate plan of 1815 (Fig. 4) shows the three buildings on the site of Blurton Farm unchanged, although the survey now indicates that the farmstead lay within the lands of Blurton Hall (denoted by a letter 'N'). The land parcels farmed by the hall correspond to some of those apparently unclaimed on the 1809 map. The map seemingly indicates that the three buildings on the Blurton Farm site actually constitute part of the hall itself. Blurton Green and Blurton Grange Farms are both absent from the map. A complex labelled as 'Blurton Farm' is shown on the map, but is located some distance to the east of, and is unrelated to, its later namesake.

3.4 Hargreaves' map of 1832 (Fig. 5) illustrates only two buildings within the site of Blurton Farm, with the southernmost of the two outbuildings shown in 1815 having been removed. To the north, Blurton Green Farm is shown with the 'U'-shaped arrangement of outbuildings that it maintained until its demolition between 1924 and 1937. Blurton Grange Farm also appears on the map in a 'U'-shaped configuration, but is marked as 'Blurton Farm'. As the nearby farm of this name recorded on the 1815 survey is absent from Hargreaves' map, it is possible that Blurton Grange Farm was originally constructed as its replacement.

3.5 Plans of the Sutherland lands produced in 1835 and 1849 (Staffordshire Record Office D593/H/3/44) display few changes to the estate or its farms. Produced almost 30 years later, another survey of 1878 (Fig. 6) indicates a similar lack of development on the estate. The 1878 Ordnance Survey (OS) map of the estate (Fig. 7), however, illustrates a number of changes, most notably the remodelling of the outbuildings at Blurton Farm into the ‘U’-shaped configuration that survives to the present day. The earlier farmhouse appears to remain, positioned with its own yard or garden to the south east of the outbuildings. The discrepancy between the two maps could suggest that the estate plan was produced a short time before the redevelopment work at the farm, the results of which were captured on the OS edition. This would tightly date the construction of the outbuildings to the year 1878. Alternatively, it is possible, however, that if the estate plan simply wished to show land allocation, it could have simply reproduced the building layouts contained on the earlier maps and, in this respect, was out of date at the time of its production.

3.6 The 1878 OS map shows a small building of uncertain function at the eastern end of the southern range. The site of this structure is presently occupied by a modern extension.

3.7 The Sutherland archive contains a set of architect’s drafts for Blurton Farm (SRO D593/H/12/2/13; Fig. 9 shows the floor plan of the outbuildings), which, although undated, include the name of their creator, a Mr J. Roberts, and his client, a Mr Toft. This is probably John Toft, who is listed in a trade directory of 1870 (Harrod) as a farmer in Blurton. Census records show that he was a farmer of 90 acres in 1871, and that, in 1861, his mother, Kate Toft, was a farmer of 89 acres. These almost identical acreages strongly suggest that John inherited the tenancy of his mother’s farm, probably that of Blurton Hall. Kate Toft first appears as a farmer in Blurton on the census of 1841.

3.8 The 1881 census firmly places the Toft family in a residence explicitly recorded as Blurton Farm. It is unlikely that this relates to the farm of the same name shown by Hargreaves in 1832, as this had been renamed as Blurton Grange Farm by the time of the 1878 OS map. John Toft appears on the 1881 census, but with the occupation of ‘traveller’, no doubt providing a reason why his sister Ann, a governess, is recorded as the head of the household. None of the family was involved in farming at this time,

suggesting that another of the estate's tenants was farming the lands around Blurton Farm. By the time of the 1891 census, the Tofts had vacated Blurton Farm and were resident at 'The Hollies'. Again, it is unlikely that any of the family was engaged in farming by this date and in the 1901 census, John Toft is listed as a retired farmer. The identities of subsequent tenants of Blurton Farm are not known, as the farm does not appear in trade directories after 1900.

3.8 The OS maps for the period 1900 to 1950, show very little change in the configuration of buildings at Blurton Farm. Between 1950 and 1970, however, the farmhouse was demolished, and the outbuildings utilised as a council depot (Fig. 8). The small structure positioned at the eastern end of the southern range was also demolished during this period and replaced by the present extension.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 The building survey was carried out between the 21st and 24th July 2009. It comprised a photographic record including the context of the buildings, external views, internal views and significant details. Photographs were taken on 35mm monochrome print and with a digital camera, using 2.0m, 1.0m and 25cm scale bars as appropriate. A measured survey was made using 30.0m and 5.0m hand tapes, and a Leica Disto D2. Field notes were made of all structural elements with particular attention to those that provided evidence of alterations and additions. The archive is stored at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent (site code **BFM09**, museum accession number **2009.LH.66**).

4.2 During the survey, each room or area was assigned a unique reference number (100+ for the ground floor and 200+ for the first floor). These numbers are used in the descriptions below and are reproduced on the floor plans provided by Figs. 10 & 11.

5.0 Description and analysis of buildings

5.1 General description

5.1.1 The Blurton Farm complex comprises a range of outbuildings forming three sides of a square and enclosing a yard with open access to the south east (Figs. 2 & 10). The buildings are all single storey with the only second-storey area found at the eastern extreme of the northern range (rooms 200-201) (Fig. 11). A single-storey brick extension

has been added to the east end of the southern range in the mid-late 20th century.

5.1.2 The ranges are all constructed in red brick in an English Garden Wall bond with flush mortar jointing. All the original window apertures and pedestrian doorways display the same architectural detailing in the form of segmental brick arches and protruding sills; the double livestock/vehicular doors, however, have straight timber lintels with no decorative brickwork. Most double doorways show evidence of retouching/rebuilding suggesting they are later insertions or have been re-modelled. Similar modification is found around some windows. With the exception of those within the extension, door apertures are now closed with ledged, braced and battened wooden doors hung on modern timber frames and iron hinges. All double doors have metal latches with finger holes. Similarly, all window apertures have timber frames and are all rectangular varying in width from single to triple fixed lights.

5.1.3 Further architectural themes on the elevations are the double course of oversailing eaves directly below the roofline and a pitched roof structure of blue grey clay-tiles hung in a break joint arrangement and topped with ridge capping tiles of the same material.

5.2 *The Southern Range (Rooms 104-109, 119)* (Fig.10, Plates 1 & 4).

5.2.1 This NW-SE aligned range comprises seven rooms latterly used as workshops and stores. A small extension has been constructed on the eastern end of the range (Plate 3) (see below section 5.3). All walls are brick, with whitewashed interior elevations. All internal doorways have straight timber lintels with no arching or decoration. In terms of the roof truss supports, the northern and southern walls of the range differ; in the former, the timber roof trusses sit upon brick pilasters and along the south are supported by a stepped brick arrangement (Fig. 13, Plate 10). Floors within the range are concrete.

5.2.2 The range appears to have originally comprised two small compartments located to either side of a larger, central room. Of these smaller rooms, the eastern example is now sub-divided into 104, 109 and 119, whereas the western example, 108, remains as a single space. The former central room is now subdivided into 105 (Plate 10), 106 and 107 by two transverse walls. Initial subdivision of the space is indicated by the brick wall between rooms 105 and 106, continued during a later phase with the construction of the breeze block wall now dividing rooms 106 and 107.

5.2.3 Externally, rooms 105 and 107 are accessed through double doors from the courtyard, with the former providing internal access to 106 and the latter to both 106 and 108. Room 108 originally featured an external doorway in the western elevation, but this is now blocked. The wall between 107 (Plate 11) and 108 initially featured a doorway at its southern end, which was subsequently blocked. A second doorway to the north also shows signs of alteration, having been made narrower by a breeze-block stub wall built against its northern side. Access between rooms 108 and 110 in the western range (see below 5.3) would originally have been possible via a now blocked doorway in the dividing wall between the two areas.

5.2.4 At the eastern end of the range, a now blocked doorway in the eastern wall of 105 would have originally facilitated internal access between the central and end rooms. Internal access between these areas is not possible in the present layout. Of the rooms located at the eastern end of the range, 109 is accessed via an inserted doorway in the southern elevation and leads into 119 to the north. Room 109 has most recently been used to house a boiler, which appears to have utilised an earlier, possibly original chimney flue positioned between rooms 104 and 109 (Plate 9). Room 104 is presently entered through the extension, although evidence of a blocked external doorway indicates that it was once possible to enter this area from the central courtyard. This doorway had been bricked up and a small window and vent placed across the top of the aperture (Plate 4). Room 104 is isolated from the other two spaces within this area. The ceiling of 104 is of the same material and set at the same height as those within the eastern extension, suggesting contemporaneous construction. The low ceiling of 104 has effectively created an open loft space above the room, which is accessible from 119.

5.2.5 The windows within the northern elevation are all apparently original apertures, although in the southern elevation, only that located in room 108 can be related to the building's initial form. Windows located in the southern elevation in rooms 109 and 105 are later insertions. Each of these windows, and the external doorway into 109, feature concrete lintels, a material type seemingly indicative of later insertion. The northern elevation features a small wooden hatch in room 119. This appears to be a later feature.

5.3 Extension (Rooms 100-103) (Fig. 10, Plate 3).

5.3.1 This eastern extension to the southern range is a brick-built rectangular structure constructed in stretcher bond. The building has a flat concrete roof covered in bituminous felt. The extension contains four rooms, previously used as offices (100 and 101), male toilets (102), a kitchen/canteen (103) and changing area (104). The extension is split into two halves, with rooms 100 and 101 to the east and 102 and 103 to the west. There is no internal access between the two halves, with both accessed separately through doors in the northern elevation. The western half of the extension provides access to room 104 in the southern range. All windows and doors within the extension have concrete lintels. The windows have wooden frames and sills, similar to most of those present in the rest of the complex. It seems probable, therefore, that the majority of windows were replaced when the extension was built. Floors within the area are concrete and, in the case of rooms 100 and 101, are carpeted.

5.4 *The Western Range (Rooms 110-112)* (Figs. 10 & 12, Plates 1, 2, 5 & 8).

5.4.1 This NE–SW aligned, connecting range, contains three bays most recently used as workshops. All original walls are brick and are whitewashed on their interior elevations. Internal doorways have straight timber lintels with no arching or decoration. In this range both the eastern and western walls support the timber roof trusses on brick pilasters. The floor is concrete, which, at least in room 111, has been laid over an original red brick surface.

5.4.2 The original layout of the range is preserved in the present configuration, with a central room (111), flanked by two larger spaces (110 and 112). Three large external entranceways feature in the eastern elevation, providing direct access from the courtyard to rooms 110, 111 and 112 (Plate 5). The entranceways to 110 and 112 are closed with wooden double doors, whilst that to 111 features a metal roller shutter. These doorways, however, have either been modified or are later insertions, with the only original entrance in the eastern elevation being the pedestrian doorway located in room 112. External access through the western elevation was originally made through a doorway in room 111, but this has since been blocked and converted into a window. Internal access is possible between 110 and 111, but 112 can only be accessed externally from the central courtyard. Originally doorways were located at the western end of both the southern and northern walls of the central bay, but both of these have been subsequently bricked up. The northern and southern walls of 111 also originally each featured a large, 3.0m high,

centrally located rectangular aperture, positioned approximately 1.0m above floor level. The example in the dividing wall between 111 and 110 has been completely knocked through to create a large entranceway (Plate 13). The aperture in the dividing wall between 111 and 112, however, has been partially closed using breeze blocks, leaving only the upper third open.

5.4.3 Three ground-floor windows feature in the western elevation, none of which are part of the range's original fenestration (Fig. 12 & Plate 8). The central window of the range, located in bay 111, occupied the location of a former doorway. These windows share common dimensions and similar architectural detailing in the form of concrete lintels and brick sills flush with the main brick wall. Although a single-storey structure, two windows are located at a first-floor level (in bays 110 and 112), each within one of two gables present in the western elevation of the range. It is likely that both windows are original features.

5.5 *The Northern Range (Rooms 113-118, 200-201)* (Figs. 10 & 11, Plates 2, 6 & 7).

5.5.1 This approximately NW-SE aligned range houses six rooms, most recently used as workshops or storage areas. The range is the only part of the complex to have a dedicated first floor, in the form of a loft (200-201) over rooms 115 and 116 at its eastern end. All original walls are brick, whitewashed on their interior faces. The floors are concrete.

5.5.2 The range once comprised five rooms of varying sizes. Rooms 117 and 118 within the present layout originally formed a single large space, which has subsequently been subdivided. The dimensions of the other rooms in the range appear to be unchanged. Access to all of the rooms is via external entrances only, as no internal doorways between rooms are present, or indeed, appear to have ever featured within the range. Rooms 117 and 118 (Plate 16) are, respectively, entered through one and three double doorways located in the northern elevation. Unlike all other double doorways in the complex, these appear to be original, with each aperture edged by chamfered brickwork and all sharing a single square-sectioned timber lintel. Rooms 113-116 are entered from the central courtyard: in the cases of 113, 114 and 116, via inserted double doorways in the southern elevation. The latter room originally featured a pedestrian doorway in the southern elevation, but this is now blocked, with the upper part of the aperture converted into a window (Plate 6). Access into 115, however, is still provided by an original

pedestrian doorway located in the southern elevation.

5.5.3 The north range has two windows in the southern elevation and one in the eastern gable end. This latter window and that within room 115 in the southern elevation are original. The third window, located in the southern elevation within room 116 is a later feature occupying a former doorway.

5.5.4 Some of the rooms within this range feature indicators of their original functions. In room 113 scarring, observed approximately 0.50m from ground level along the whole of the eastern and western walls, suggests that troughs for livestock once stood here (Plate 14). Similarly, opposing 2.20m high scars on the eastern and western walls of room 114, indicate the former presence of a hay-rack (Plate 15). Comparable scarring was observed on the eastern and western walls of room 116. Within 116, scarring on the pilasters that support the central ceiling beam, indicate the position of a former partition, the installation of which would have divided the space into two similarly-sized units. It is not clear if this represented a later modification of the space, or an original feature to temporarily partition the room.

5.5.5 The loft at the eastern end of the range is accessed via a fixed metal ladder in room 116 (Plate 17). The loft comprises a main area (200), situated above 116, connected to a second smaller space (201), positioned above 115, to the west. The loft includes an external loading/pitching door, located in the eastern gable (Plate 18). Ventilation for the loft was originally provided by three rows of slots, visible at first-floor level in the northern elevation of the range (Plate 7). Similar slots are also present at ground-floor level and would have offered a means of ventilating rooms 113-116. All slots, on both ground- and first-floor level, are now blocked with plaster, and ventilation, at least for rooms 115 and 116, seems to have been subsequently provided by a series of ceramic grilles.

5.6 Roof Structure (Figs. 13 & 14, Plates 12 & 18)

5.6.1 The roof trusses throughout the complex are all original and probably date to the late 19th century. This dating is supported by the presence of mechanised circular saw marks on the main members. The original design of the roof structure comprised transverse trusses, connected longitudinally by wall plates on each side; the latter were

observed to consist of separate timbers connected by scarf joints. Each truss comprises a tiebeam, supporting a square-sectioned king post, jointed at the top to the principal rafters on either side. The purlins are braced below with softwood chocks. Most joints are of the mortice and tenon type with the king-post and tie-beam joint further strengthened by an iron thread bolt and plate. Carpenters' marks survive very clearly on the western face of the main members, although the numbers do not progress linearly through any of the ranges. The roof truss of the first floor loft is different in form to the other trusses in the complex in terms of its situation and bracing. It comprises a collar-beam connecting the principal rafters, which rest against two small brick pilasters to either side. Further bracing is given to the truss by means of diagonal struts which continue through the floor and are presumably connected to the ceiling beam of room 116. Two ties, resting on the brick pilasters connect the struts with the principal rafters. All timbers are connected with iron square-headed bolts.

5.6.2 The areas of greatest modification to the roof structure are located where the western range meets the southern and northern ranges. Here, some original purlins have been removed, and either replaced with new purlins at different heights, or not replaced at all. Several of the rafters in rooms 108 and 118 appeared to have been removed, with the stubs left in the slots in the northern and southern walls of each room respectively (also visible in rooms 110 and 112). The rafter slots as seen in rooms 110 and 112 may also have taken joist ends, thereby creating a loft over each end of the western range. The lack of slots or other suitable resting places for the opposite ends of the joists, however, makes this less likely. The location of the modifications to the roof suggests that the 'valleyed' areas where each range meets have been repaired or remodelled.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 The outbuildings at Blurton Farm achieved their present form at some point between 1849-1878, with a possibility that they perhaps belong to the latter end of this period. The outbuildings were constructed to a 'U'-shaped plan already adopted by farms on the Sutherland estate, including the neighbouring Blurton Green and Blurton Grange Farms. The 'U'-shaped configuration for farm buildings was highly regarded in the 19th century and, as such, was a common type of the period. In his volume on the farms of western Staffordshire, J.E. C. Peters (1969, 49) classifies this configuration as a type 3 farmstead, examples of which accounted for 34.4% of farms within his survey area,

representing the largest single principal type. The form appears to have risen to prominence by 1815, becoming more popular than, although not replacing entirely, the earlier 'L'-shaped configuration of out buildings (Peters 1969, 54-55). Such was the widespread adoption of the 'U' plan by the 19th century, that Arthur Young claimed it to be the national vernacular for farmsteads (Peters 1969, 54).

6.2 The development of the 'U'-shaped arrangement of outbuildings owed much to the ideals of 'high farming', a system prevalent during the third quarter of the 19th century, which advocated systematic agricultural methods, undertaken within efficiently-designed farmsteads (Peters 1969, 9). The 'U' plan was considered to be particularly effective in this latter area, offering a considered layout of units connected by complementary processes. Blurton Farm stands as a typical example of how this layout functioned in a middling, mixed arable and fatstock enterprise. The southern arm of the 'U' plan at Blurton Farm was used to house cattle (see below 6.7.1), whereas its northern counterpart functioned as a cart shed, cattle shelter and stable for horses (see below 6.7.5-8). The connecting western range was used to process the arable crop and was linked to the fodder bay of the cowhouse, allowing straw produced as part of the threshing process to be passed through as feed and litter (see below 6.7.3). The central courtyard, flanked on three sides by the farm buildings featured a fold yard and mixen (dung heap). One of the perceived advantages of the 'U' plan, was its ability to shelter the fold yard from the elements, thereby protecting and improving the health of the livestock (English Heritage 2006b; Peters 1969, 48). To this end, the ideal orientation of the buildings was to position the open end to the south (Peters 1969, 52). This was not, however, strictly observed at Blurton Farm, or indeed Blurton Grange Farm, both of which had the open end of the central yard positioned to the south east.

6.3 The main farmhouse was usually situated adjacent to the open end of the 'U' plan, overlooking the central yard. Nineteenth-century writers such as J. C. Loudon and G. A. Dent advocated this arrangement; Dent claimed that the potential scrutiny offered by the nearby house encouraged farm employees to work harder (Peters 1969, 59). Others, such as R. Beaton and J. Newlands, whilst agreeing with this general principle, believed that the farmhouse should stand at a little distance from the yard, perhaps separated from it by its own small garden (Peters 1969, 59). Historical map evidence suggests that the farmhouse at Blurton conformed to this latter view, overlooking the fold yard, yet

positioned back from it, and featuring a dedicated yard or garden.

6.4 Although Blurton Farm conformed to a broad ‘U’-plan farmstead, the architect’s drafts for the outbuildings suggest that some variations in the basic design were possible. The original plans produced by the architect, J. Roberts, appear to show adaptations to the basic design, of which the extant hayloft (rooms 200-201) was one. Some proposed changes that feature on the drafts were seemingly not enacted, such as the construction of gables on the courtyard side of the western range. Quite who proposed these changes is unclear, although the drafts are addressed to the tenant, Mr Toft, rather than to the Sutherlands as landowners. This could suggest that the tenant had some involvement in the process, perhaps acting as agent for the landowner. Regardless of who was involved in the design process, however, it was almost certainly the Sutherland family that footed the bill; as Peters notes ‘by the mid-19th century within the survey area the cost of the provision of new buildings for tenants was borne by the landowner’ (1969, 212).

6.5 Although the design of Blurton Farm appears to have been heavily influenced by the mid-late 19th-century principles of ‘high farming’, there is no evidence to suggest that it was conceived as a ‘model’, or ‘example’ farm. Large estate owners keen to set models of good practice to tenants (Bettey 1993, 125) often created such establishments. The Shugborough estate in south Staffordshire, for example, included a model farm designed for Lord Anson, by Samuel Wyatt in the early 19th century, whereas an earlier, 18th-century example featured on the Sandwell lands of the Earl of Dartmouth (Bettey 1993, 128). Landowners were ultimately motivated by a desire to obtain increased rents from improved farms. For example, the land agent of the Earl of Ducie’s 1839 model farm at Whitfield, stated that through improvements, ‘the tenant would have a better chance of secure and ample profits on his outlay of capital, and the landlord of his rent’ (Bettey 1993, 130).

6.6 The Marquises of Stafford, later the Dukes of Sutherland, do appear to have had an interest in improving standards on their estates. In 1820 the Marquis’ farm manager, James Loch, published a series of plans of improving farmsteads on the Marquis’ Staffordshire estates, amongst which was Newstead Farm, located just to the south of Blurton (Peters 1969, 155). Furthermore, the Sutherland estates in Scotland featured a state-of –the-art industrial stead, Clynelish Farm, built in 1867 (Wade Martins 2004, 93).

This does not, however, suggest that any dedicated model farms were established on the estate at this time or in the following decades. The widely adopted ‘U’ plan seems to be present on the estate by at least 1832 and was the chosen form for both Blurton Green and Blurton Grange Farms. Blurton Farm was constructed no earlier than the late 1840s, but could easily post-date this period by over 20 years. As such, Blurton Farm did not form part of a contemporaneous group of farms, model or otherwise, with Blurton Green and Blurton Grange. Its form could quite simply have followed a type already well established on the estate.

6.7 A more detailed discussion of the original layout and use of the Blurton Farm complex, based on Roberts’ plan (Fig. 9), historical map evidence and the surviving structural evidence continues below.

6.7.1 *The Cowhouse (Rooms 105-108)*. The basic design of the cowhouse corresponds to Peters’ type 4b (1969, 150-154), examples of which in Staffordshire mostly date to after c.1850. In such houses, cattle were accommodated within one large space (represented by rooms 105-107 at Blurton Farm), at one end of which was a feed preparation area (room 108 at Blurton). Such accommodation was increasingly adopted by farms on the Marquis of Stafford’s estates from the early 19th century onwards (Peters 1969, 154). Many of the improved farms that featured on Loch’s list of 1820 incorporated type 4 cowhouses.

6.7.2 Roberts’ plans of Blurton Farm illustrate a series of free-standing stalls positioned along the central axis of the main room, in which the cattle would have been arranged facing south. Two passages along the southern and northern sides of the room provided access to either side of the stalls for feeding and dung clearance respectively. The feeding passage offered easy access to the fodder bay and turnip house at the western end of the range, whereas the doors in the northern elevation would have facilitated the removal of dung from the cowhouse onto the dung heap in the courtyard. A separate calves’ house is located at the eastern end of the range (rooms 104, 109 and 119). The chimney that survives in this area to the present day, may have once served as a fireplace or stove used to heat the calves’ house (Plate 9).

6.7.3 *The Threshing Barn (Rooms 110-112)*. Roberts’ plan of the threshing barn within the western range of Blurton Farm, shows a building of three bays, with a central barn

(room 111) flanked to the north and south respectively by a straw (110) and corn bay (112) with a corn hole. The unthreshed corn was probably stored in a separate rickyard and in the corn bay (112), into which it must have been loaded via the central barn (111), through the large aperture in the dividing wall (Plate 13).

6.7.4 The threshing process progressed from north to south through the bays (Fig. 10). After removal from the northern bay (112), the grain was threshed from the stalk in the central bay (111) upon a specially constructed brick threshing floor. The threshed straw was then stored in the southern bay (110), where a doorway in the southern wall provided access to the adjoining fodder bay (108) in the southern range. The position of the corn hole entrance shown on the architect's plan appears to correspond with the location of the now blocked pedestrian door in the wall between 111 and 112. The presence of a corresponding door in the wall between 111 and 110 may suggest that an additional corn hole once featured in the southern bay, to allow faster threshing. A corn hole was a small room designed to store grain after threshing, but before winnowing (Peters 1969, 65). The presence of a corn hole at Blurton Farm suggests that threshing was undertaken by flail, as mechanised threshing machines also included apparatus for winnowing that made corn holes unnecessary. Such machinery was available after 1850, and, as such, the corn hole at Blurton Farm appears somewhat old-fashioned (Peters 1969, 98). Finally, the central threshing barn (111) featured two opposing doors in the eastern and western walls, positioned to provide a through-draft to aid winnowing. The threshed and winnowed corn may have been stored in bins, or sacks within the barn. No evidence, however, remains to indicate which part of the barn was used for this purpose.

6.7.5 Cartshed (Rooms 117-118). Assuming that Roberts' plan is correct in showing the cartshed open along its front or northern side, the structure corresponds to Peters' type 1a (1969, 189). These areas were often used for storing not just the working carts, but the farm trap and farming implements such as tools, ploughs and harrows. The original design has provision for a maximum of four carts.

6.7.6 Shelter Shed (Room 113). This open-fronted shed offered shelter from the elements to the cattle, whilst giving open access to the combined fold yard, where the mass of the dung pile was tramped down as well as added to by the cattle (Peters 1969, 136). The fold yard adjacent to the shelter shed on Robert's plan is blocked off along the

eastern side by a now absent wall, which prevented cattle from straying out of the area.

6.7.7 Loosebox (Room 114). In the 19th century, the loosebox would have served a variety of functions, providing accommodation for calves, bulls, fatstock or sick animals. As Roberts' plan shows a dedicated area for calves located off the cowhouse, it is unlikely that the loose box at Blurton Farm would have been used for this purpose. In addition, scarring on the wall of 114 (Plate 14) may well denote the location of a hay-rack and, if so, this was positioned too high for calves to reach. It is likely, therefore, that the box housed horses in foal, a bull or was perhaps used as a sick bay. It is interesting to note that the door indicated on Roberts' plan that connects rooms 114 and 115 (the hay bay) does not seem to have formed part of the structure as built.

6.7.8 Stable (Room 116), hay bay (Room 115) and loft (Rooms 200-201). The stable corresponds to Peters' type 2b (1969, 119), the main characteristic of which is housing of horses in a single line along the length of the building, rather than in several rows across its width. Scarring on the northern wall of 116 may indicate the former presence of a hay-rack, the location of which within the room also appears to be evidential of the adoption of this method of accommodating horses at Blurton Farm. As with the cowhouse in the southern range, additional rooms were provided for feed storage or preparation; in this case the adjacent hay bay (room 115). Roberts' plan shows the hay bay and the stable were intended to be connecting via an internal door, however separate external access into each of these rooms was favoured in the finished building. The loft above the stable provided a convenient space for the storage of hay and possibly grain, ventilated by slots in the external wall. Loading was facilitated by the pitch door in the eastern wall of the loft.

6.7.9 Roberts' plan indicates provision for four horses within the stable, which, in conjunction with the provision for four carts in the cartshed, would suggest that working horses were stabled in the building, rather than hackney or riding horses. Agricultural theorists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, such as Young, recommended four horses for 80 acres of arable (Peters 1969, 112), which is just below the 90 acres assigned to John Toft by the 1871 census.

6.8 Although, ultimately, significant changes to the buildings at Blurton Farm came as a

result of its use as a council depot from the mid 20th century, some of the modifications observed during the survey may have been undertaken at an earlier date, probably during the farm's active life. For example, the possible removal of the corn hole (or holes) in the western range has no obvious connection with the reuse of the complex as a works depot (see below 6.9). This could, however, be related to a shift in the emphasis of the farm, perhaps indicating a move away from an arable and livestock mix, towards a dairy or fatstock focused enterprise. Such a move may have been connected with the decline in the fortunes of arable farming that occurred in the late 19th century (Peters 1969, 10). Changes such as the partitioning of the cartshed, to create a smaller room (117), and formerly the partitioning of the stable (116), suggest a requirement for fewer horses and carts and may also indicate a down turn in farming. These changes however, may equally well be associated with increased mechanisation on the farm or indeed the conversion of the building for use as a council depot.

6.9 By 1970, the main house at Blurton Farm had been demolished and the outbuildings utilised as a council depot. The extension at the eastern end of the southern range no doubt belongs to this period, as do many of the adaptations to the original buildings, notably the insertion of vehicular doorways.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 Blurton Farm is a relatively well preserved example of a formally-planned farmstead, constructed in the third quarter of the 19th century to a well established 'U'-shaped design. In this sense it was a typical mixed arable and fatstock estate holding of the 'high farming' era. There is no evidence to suggest that it stood as a 'model' farm; indeed some elements of its layout were somewhat anachronistic even at the time of its construction. If, as the architect's plans for the complex suggest, the buildings included at least one cornhole, this was an addition not entirely concordant with the prevailing practise of the time. After 1850, cornholes became increasingly redundant due to the introduction and widespread use of portable threshing and winnowing machines (Peters 1969, 98). The inclusion of such a feature at Blurton Farm, could be indicative of a backward looking attitude on the part of the farmer.

7.2 Prior to the changes brought about by its conversion to a council depot during the mid-late 20th century, the farmstead appears to have undergone some earlier alterations to

its original form. Some of these changes, such as the removal of the corn hole, may indicate a shift from a mixed arable and fatstock regime, to one more orientated towards livestock, influenced by the wider problems of falling grain prices and poor harvests experienced on arable farms during the late 19th century (Peters 1969, 10). Subdivision of the building in the cartshed and stable may, however, be associated with increased mechanisation in the early 20th century.

8.0 Acknowledgements

8.1 This report was written by Clare Henshaw and illustrated by Zoë Sutherland. Fieldwork was supervised by Zoë Sutherland, assisted by Clare Henshaw. The project was managed by Jonathan Goodwin. Valuable assistance was provided by Thomas Davies of the Neighbourhood Renewal Team, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Noel Boothroyd, Planning Archaeologist Stoke-on-Trent. Thanks are also due to Andrew Sargent and the staff of Stafford and Lichfield Record Offices.

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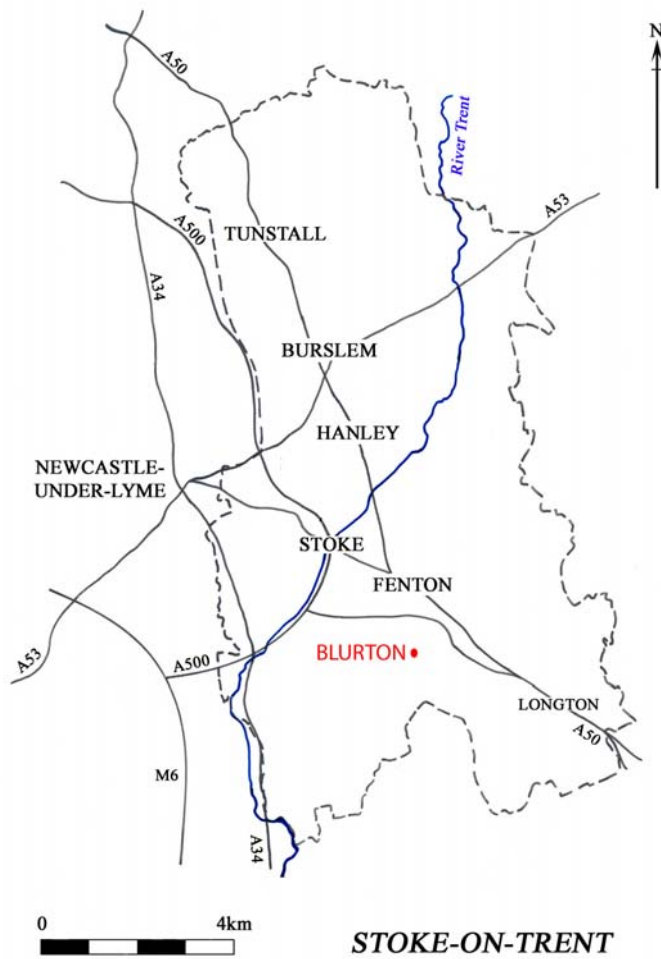
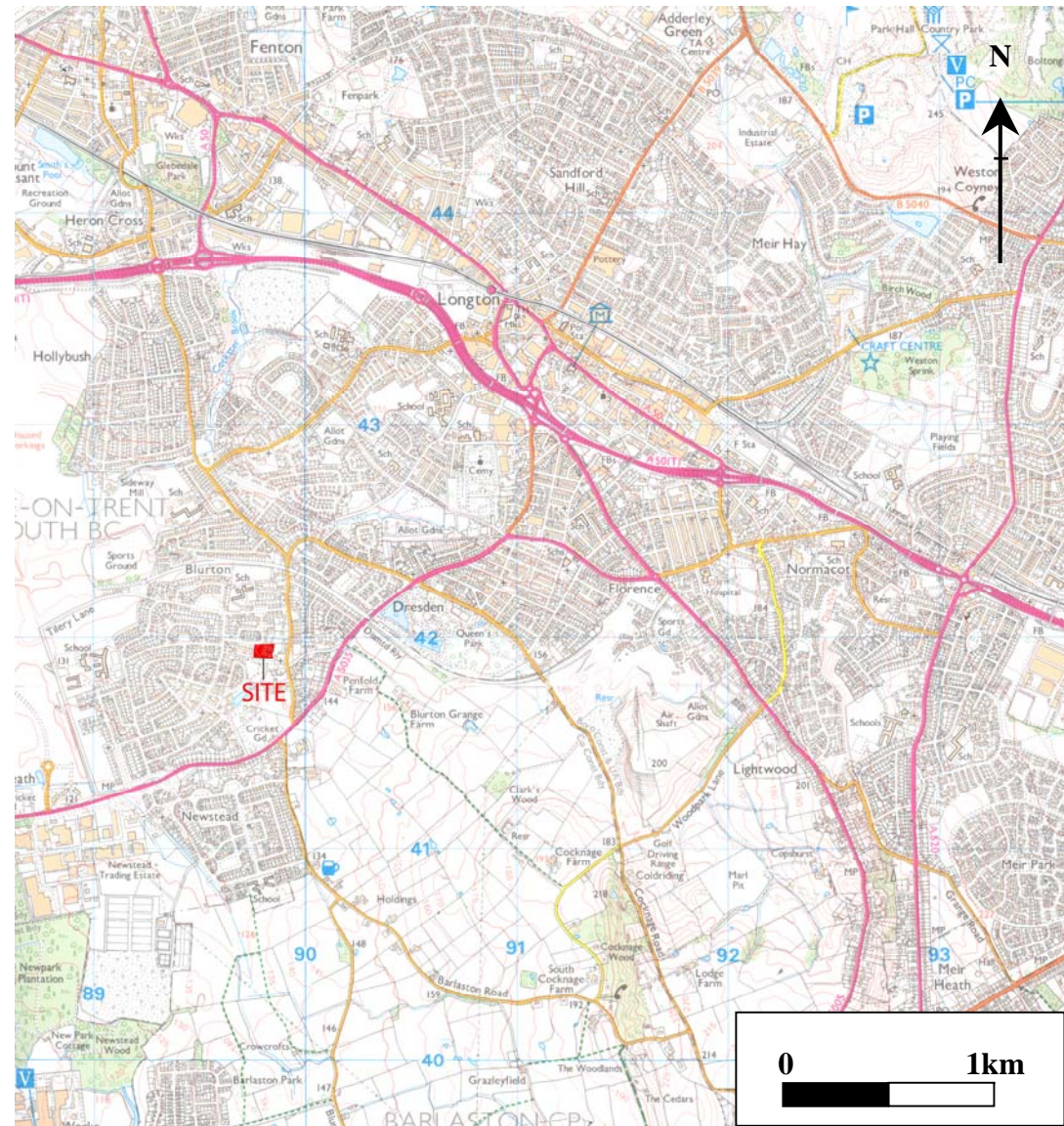


FIG. 1
Site location



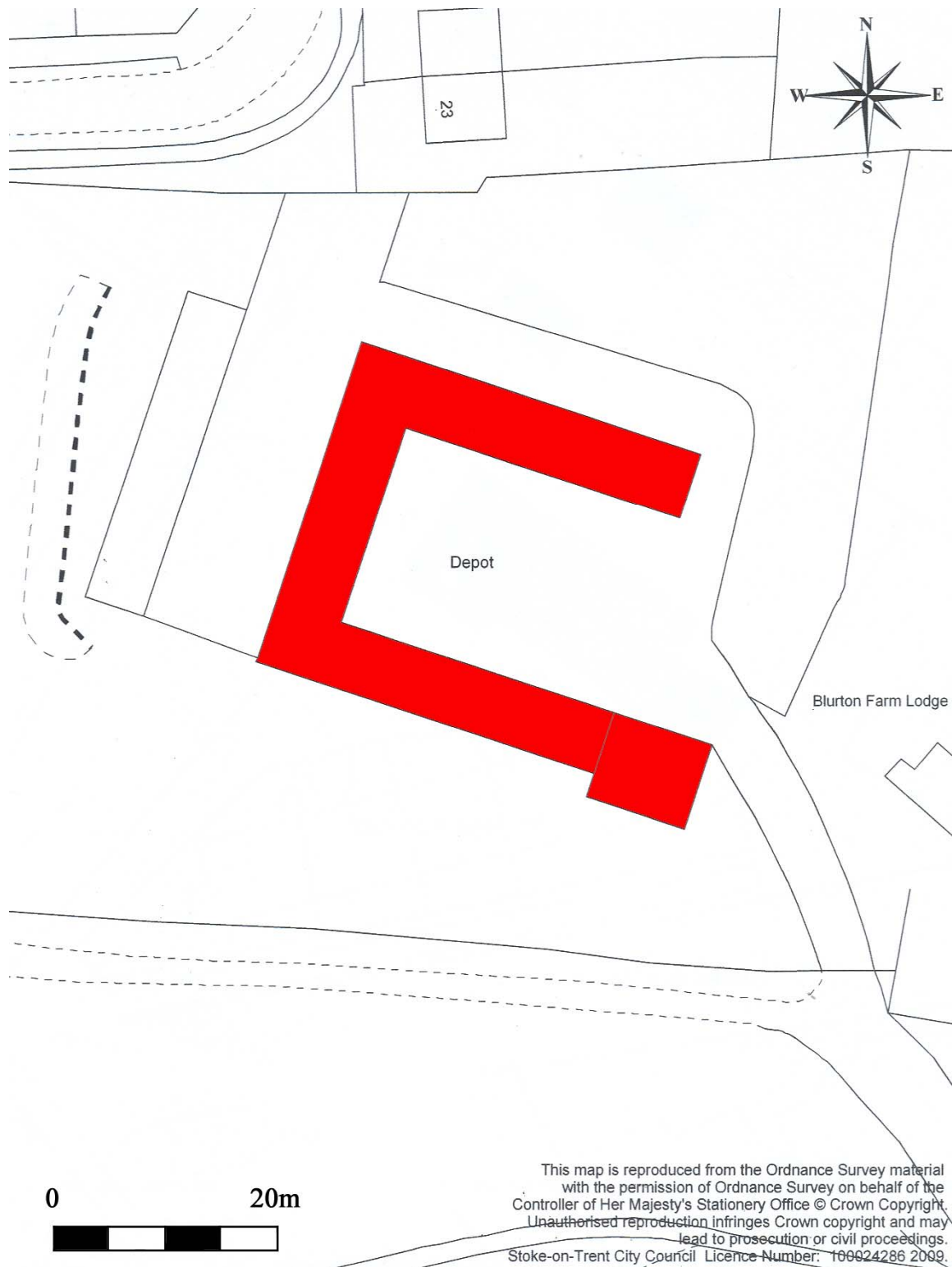


FIG. 2
Site plan



indicated.



21

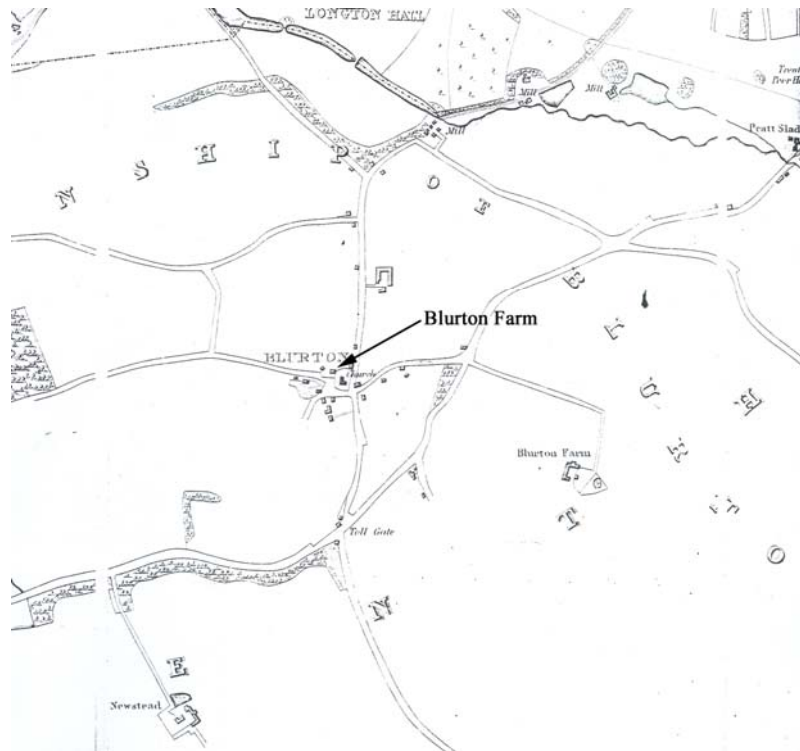


FIG. 5

Hargreaves' map of 1832, with Blurton Farm indicated .

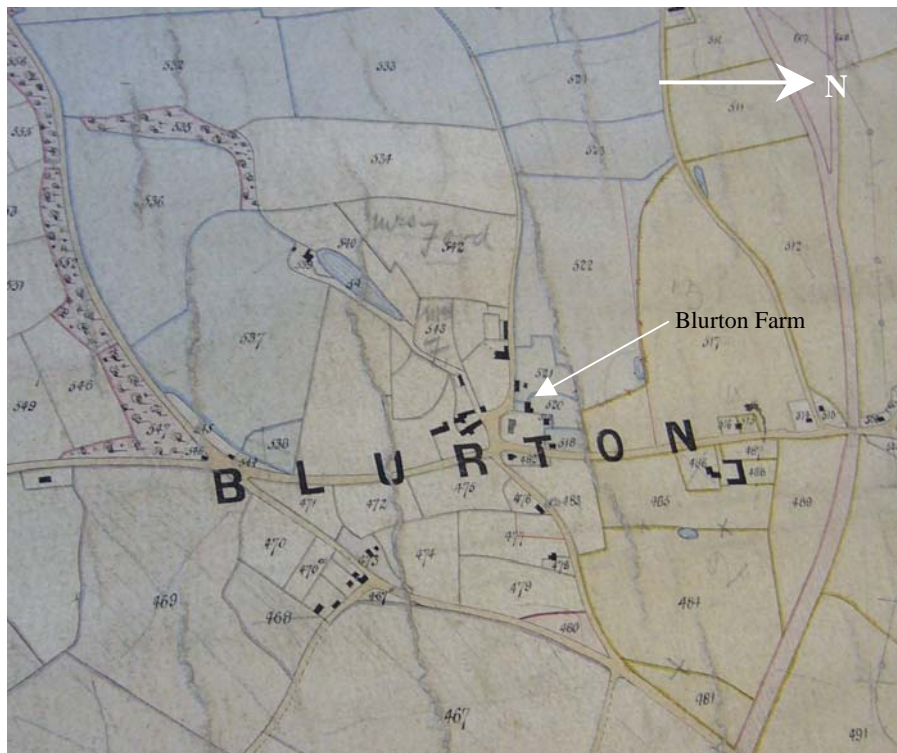


FIG. 6

Plan of the Sutherland estate, 1878, with Blurton Farm indicated.



FIG. 7

1878 OS map, showing Blurton Farm as the NW-SE aligned 'U'-shaped farmstead just to the north west of St. Bartholomew's Church.

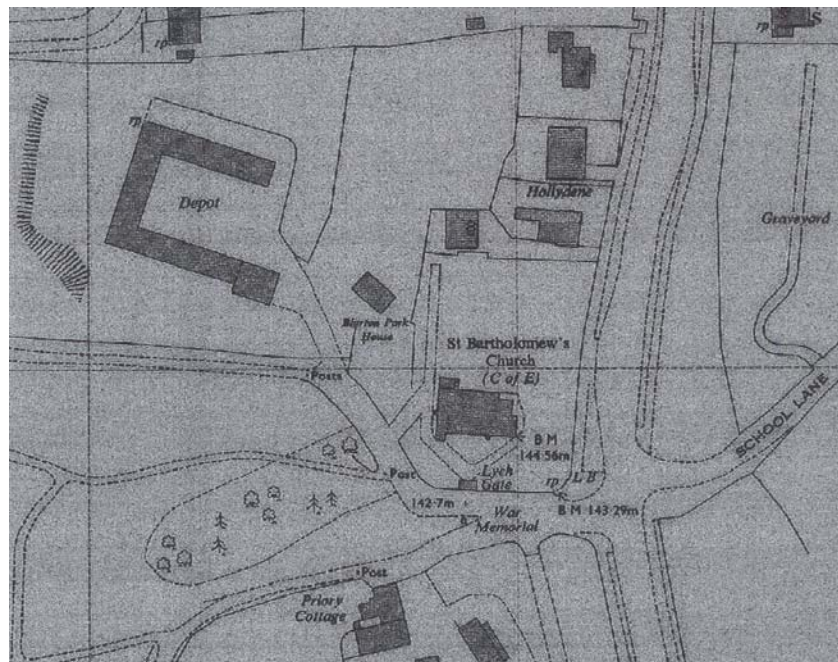


FIG. 8

1950 OS map, showing Blurton Farm in use as a council depot. The farmhouse that once stood to the south-east of the outbuildings has been demolished and replaced with Blurton Park House.

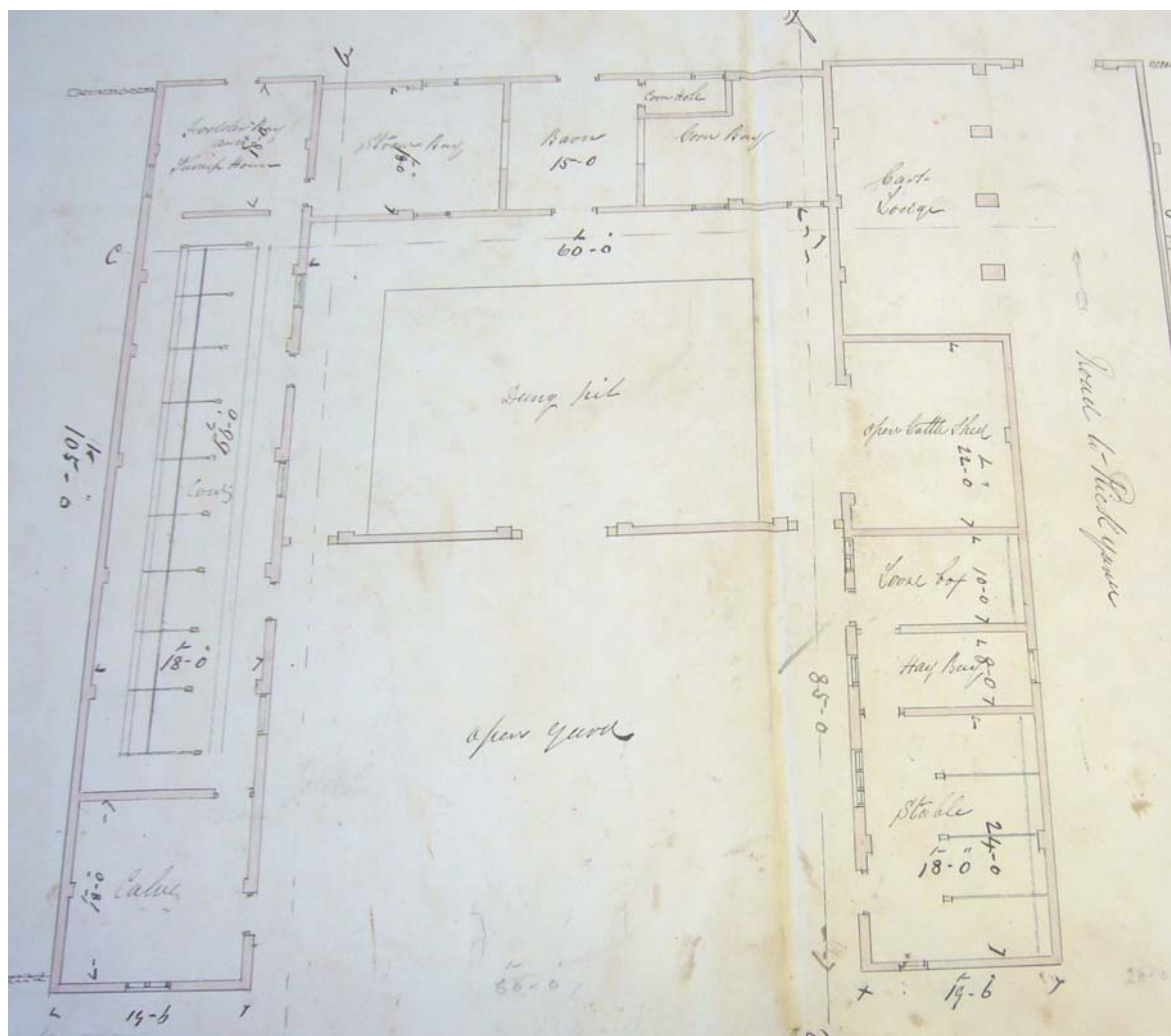


FIG. 9

19th-century plan of Blurton Farm produced by J. Roberts.



FIG. 10
Ground floor plan

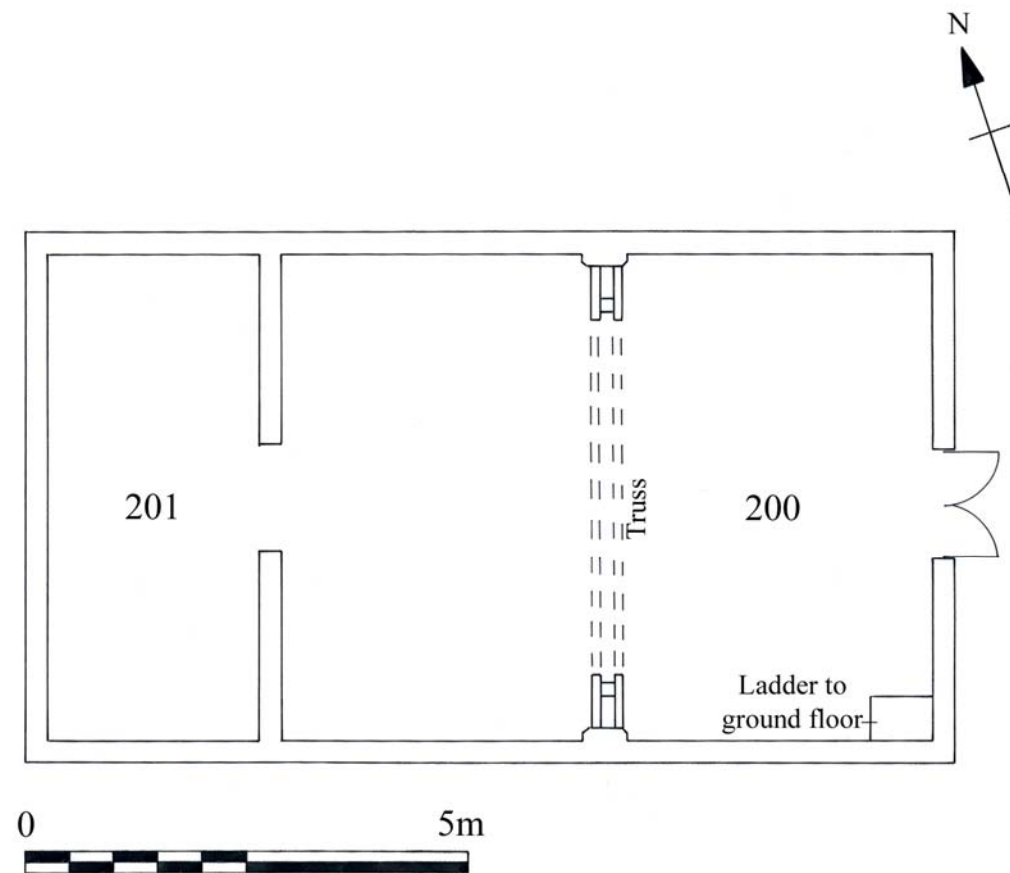


FIG. 11

First floor plan - the loft over ground floor rooms 115 and 116.

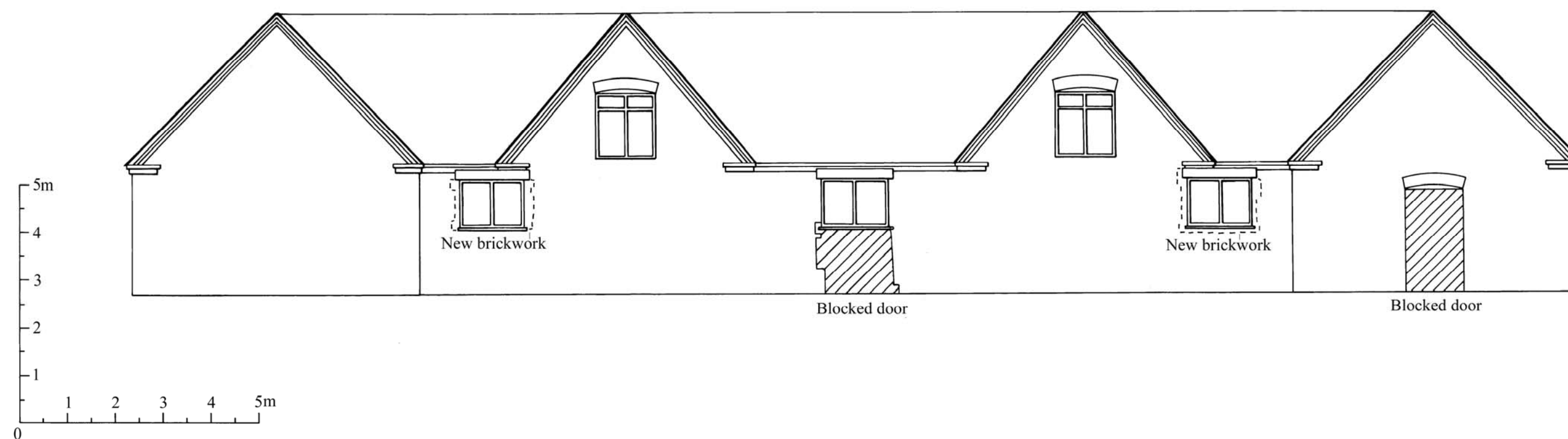


FIG 12

Western range, west-facing elevation

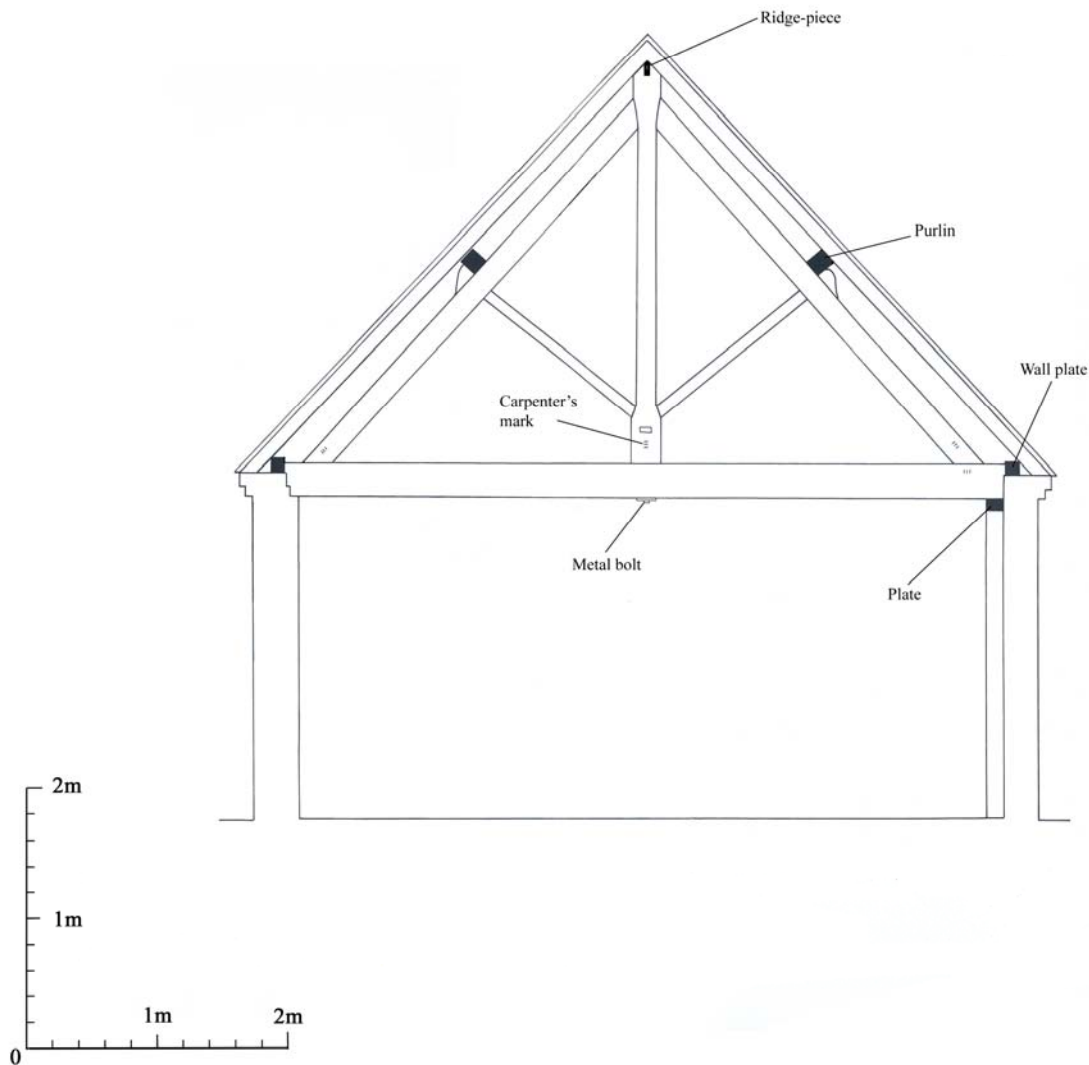


FIG. 13

East-facing cross-section through southern range.

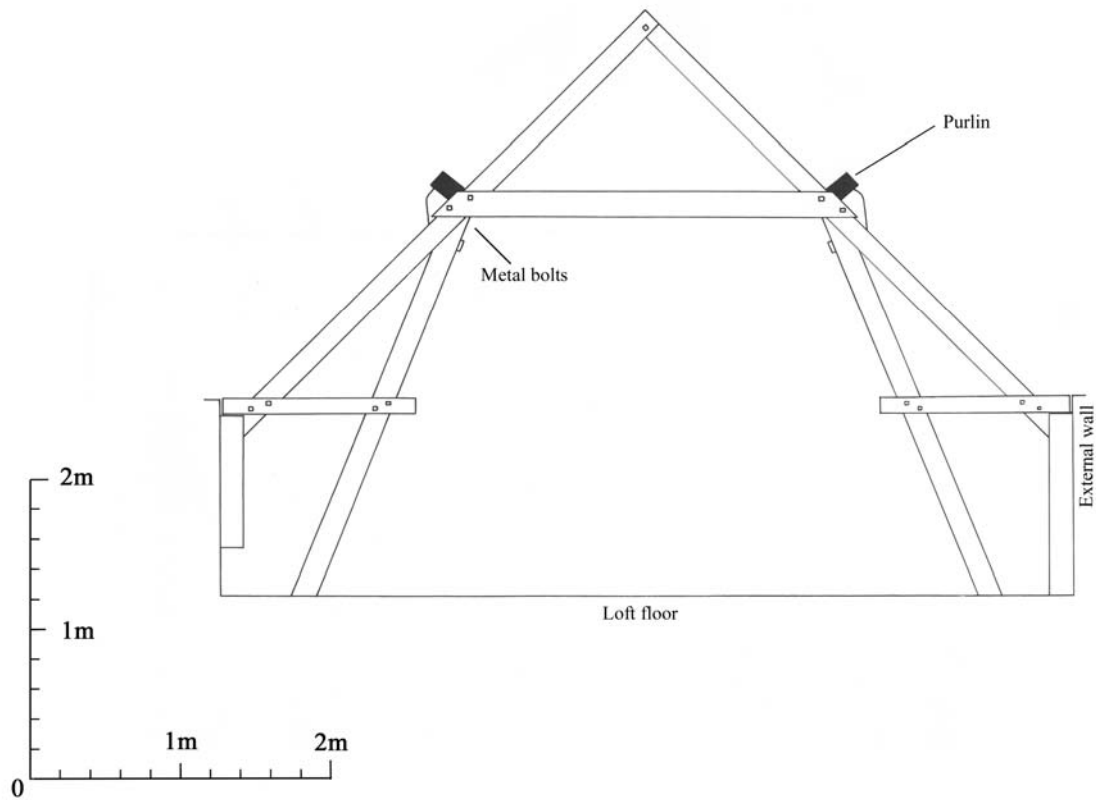


FIG.14

East-facing cross-section through roof structure in loft, northern range



PLATE 1

The southern and western ranges, looking south west.



PLATE 2

The northern & western ranges, looking north west.



PLATE 3

North-facing elevation of the extension to the southern range



PLATE 4

North-facing elevation of the southern range,
showing the blocked door at the eastern end.



PLATE 5

The modified or inserted doorways in the east-facing elevation of the western range.



PLATE 6

South-facing elevation of the stable and loft in the northern range



PLATE 7

North-facing elevation of the northern range.



PLATE 8

North-facing elevation of the stable, showing blocked ventilation slots.



PLATE 9

West-facing elevation of the western range



PLATE 10

Room 109, looking east



PLATE 11

Room 105 showing the stepped wall, looking south east.



PLATE 12

Room 107, looking north west.



PLATE 13

Room 110, looking south.



PLATE 14

Room 110, looking north into room 111



PLATE 15

Detail of the scars indicating the presence of a trough in room 113.



PLATE 16

Scars indicating the presence of a manger or rack in room 114.



PLATE 17

Room 118, looking east



PLATE 18

Room 116, looking south east



PLATE 19

Room 200, looking east