



**Historic building appraisal at Fenacre Farm,  
Burlescombe, Devon**



*on behalf of*  
**Mr John Kearns**

**Report No. 15-10**

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# OAKFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

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## Summary

Oakford Archaeology were commissioned by Property Plans Southwest Ltd in August 2015 to undertake an archaeological buildings appraisal at the site of Fenacre Farm, Burlescombe, Devon (ST 0696 1784). The archive and documentary research indicates that the site has been in continuous occupation probably since the late 11<sup>th</sup> century and that the current house was probably laid out in the late-17<sup>th</sup> century. The layout of Fenacre Farm is clearly defined with the agricultural elements concentrated to the south of the house with its ancillary structures and yards to the north.

Along with the main house, which dates from the late-17<sup>th</sup> century, the south section of the farm consisted of a yard at the front of the house with the remains of a former chapel, possibly dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, on the south side. Beyond this was a second yard surrounded by buildings utilised as lincay, dairy, cottages and threshing barn. The area to the north of the main house also included an orchard. The surviving farm buildings to the south of the house appear to have been built between the early- to mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the time of survey there were, in addition to the house and chapel, three standing buildings on the site. These included a large lincay and dairy, threshing barn and horse engine house. All major walls were built from local Westleigh stone. Modern blockwork partitions were also present. Eight phases of structural development have been identified during the survey.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for Mr John Kearns and sets out the results of an archaeological building appraisal and documentary research carried out by Oakford Archaeology (OA) in September 2015, at Fenacre Farm, Burlescombe, Devon (ST 0696 1784). The work was carried out in support of an upcoming planning application to Mid Devon District Council for the conversion of the existing buildings. The archaeological works were undertaken at the request of the Mid-Devon Conservation Officer.

Although the main farmhouse fell beyond the scope of the works required by Mid Devon District Council it was felt by OA that the significance of the farm buildings could not be fully understood and discussed properly without referring to the historic development and importance of the main house.

### 1.1 The site

Fenacre Farm lies in the parish of Burlescombe, in a remote location less than a mile to the north of the village (Fig. 1). The farm buildings are approached by a long driveway from the main road and lie on flat ground overlooking the River Lyner. The buildings include a large historic farmhouse. To the south-east of the farmhouse are a group of farm buildings surrounding a yard, including a former chapel, a lincage and cow-house, horse engine house and a threshing barn. These farm buildings had fallen into a severe state of disrepair and ruin, and are no longer required for agricultural use, and are in desperate need of a sympathetic new use.

### 1.2 Geological background

The geology of the area belongs to the Aylesbeare Mudstone Group, sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 246 to 251 million years ago in the Triassic Period. The overlying sequence consists of alluvial clay, silt and sand (BGS 1995).

## 2. AIMS

The aims of the archaeological buildings appraisal were to assess the significance of the structures standing on the site at the time of survey. The recording methodology adopted during this survey was in accordance with Historic England guidelines. The survey aims were to assess the form, function and phasing of the standing buildings, to understand the development of the settlement and to recommend buildings or structures for further recording and analysis.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Building survey

Recording of the buildings was undertaken by a historic building specialist in accordance with specifications applicable to Level 3 in the English Heritage 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practices*. The building recording consisted of:

- A detailed written description of the buildings and more general record of the main building.
- A detailed photographic record of the buildings in colour (digital) format, and basic record of the main building.

- A limited drawn record of the buildings, consisting of annotation of, and additions to, the architect's 'as existing' plans and elevations, to show the locations of any fixtures and fittings, building breaks, blocked openings or architectural detail.

#### 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

by Lucy Browne

##### 4.1 General background

Fenacre is a small, former farmstead lying a short distance to the north of the village of Burlescombe. The site of Fenacre, listed as *Vennacre* or *Wennacre* in Domesday, was probably owned by the Lamprey family.<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Henry I (1100-1135) it belonged to Nicolas Lamprey and then passed through successive male heirs until by the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century it became part of the manorial lands owned by the Clavil family, becoming part of Canonsleigh priory on its foundation by Walter Clavil, owner of the manor of Burlescombe. The place-name probably derives from the Old English words *fenn* - and *æcer* meaning cultivated land by the marsh.<sup>2</sup> Fenacre is mentioned again in 1272.<sup>3</sup>

Originally founded as a house of Augustinian Canons in 1161, Canonsleigh Priory was refounded in 1284 as a nunnery by Maud de Clare, the widowed Countess of Gloucester and Hertford. Although it inherited all of the endowment of the priory, as well as being endowed by the countess with a yearly income of £200, this was inadequate to support the forty Augustinian nuns originally envisaged by the pope. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century the number of nuns had fallen to 10, although this was rising again by the time of the Dissolution. The nunnery was finally dissolved in February 1539 and the priory lands were sold piecemeal. By the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, Canon Leigh and Fenacre were owned separately.

*“At Canonsleigh in [Burlescombe] was a monastery founded in the reign of Henry II., by Walter Claville, for a prior and Austin canons, who were changed in the reign of Edward I., by Maud de Clare Countess of Gloucester, for an abbess and nuns or canonesses of the same order. Its revenues were estimated at the time of the dissolution at 197l. 3s.1d. clear yearly income. The site was granted in exchange for other lands to Sir George St. Leger whose son sold it to Hugh Columb, Esq. It continued to be the seat of that family till 1658, since which time the abbey estate has passed by successive purchasers to the families of Smith, Breton, and Browne. The late Mr. Browne much improved the house and grounds. It is now the property of his son Thomas Browne, Esq. There are some small remains of the abbey in Mr. Browne's pleasure grounds”.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The history of the manors, church, chapels, families and of other matters belonging to and connected with the Parish of Burlescombe in the County of Devon* by Rev. Thomas Tanner 1813 p.53, rev by Rev. Ernest Bramwell 1912 (DHC reference: sB/BUR/0001/TAN) [p.53] “The Chapel of Fenacre Farm: Some remains of this domestic chapel may now be seen in the outbuildings in front of the present farmhouse [which was the home] of the ancient family of Lamprey.”

*Collections towards a description of the County of Devon* by Sir William Pole, (1791)

[p 208] “Fenacre of great antiquity belonged unto the family & name of Lamprey. In Kinge Henry I tyme Nicolas Lamprey had this land; & successively after hym, William his sonne, Simon, William, Benedict, William.”

<sup>2</sup> Gover 1932.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Fees*, 3 vols, London 1920-31.

<sup>4</sup> *Magna Brittanica* 1822 Volume 6.

## 4.2 Fenacre Farm

Nothing is known of Fenacre Farm in the immediate post-dissolution period and the farm is not mentioned again until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The land tax assessment for 1780 shows that the estate was owned by John Lethbridge Esq., who became Sir John Lethbridge, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet of Sandhill Park, Taunton in 1804 and MP for Minehead in 1806. The Lethbridge family were prominent land owners across Devon in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and Fenacre was leased at the time to John Martin and John Corner. It was subsequently leased to John Pring from late 1780 to 1798. The output of the farm at the time was not solely agricultural with an advert in the Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette in 1780 describing the sale of timber. Unfortunately no details of the property were given.<sup>5</sup>

Fenacre farm was purchased in 1799 by Thomas Browne Esq. The Browne family had lived at Canonsleigh for several generations. Thomas's father died in 1794, leaving money in trust for Thomas to be inherited after his mother Margaret died.<sup>6</sup> Margaret was buried in Burlescombe on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1797,<sup>7</sup> which might have created the necessary funds for expanding the estate.

The farm was leased from 1799 to John Harwood and Fenacre and its attached chapel are mentioned for the first time in 1811 Samuel Lewis in his *Topographical Dictionary of England* "attached to the [Canons Leigh] priory were the chapels of St Thomas and All Saints' at Westleigh was a chapel ... and the remains of an ancient chapel are discernable on the farm of Fenacre near the site of the abbey" ... "...Three ancient mansions in this parish [Burlescombe] namely Ayshford Court... Pugham and Fenacre have all been converted into farm houses."<sup>8</sup>

The land tax assessments for the early 19<sup>th</sup> century show that John Harwood remained at Fenacre until at least 1815 and that the lease was subsequently acquired by Benjamin James in 1816. Benjamin is mentioned in the land tax assessments for Fenacre until 1832, although John Harwood is mentioned in a conveyancing document between Thomas Browne and the Grand Western Canal in 1822.<sup>9</sup>

Originally part of a scheme to link the Bristol Channel with the English Channel, the Grand Western Canal was meant to transport goods, including coal from South Wales, into Somerset and Devon. The section from Tiverton to Westleigh was completed in 1814, but the costs had escalated hugely, delaying the construction of the next section to Taunton. This was not completed until 1838 and by then any plans to link the Canal with the English Channel had been abandoned. The advent of the Bristol and Exeter Railway, took much of the trade from the Canal, and in 1865 the section from Lowdwells to Taunton was sold to the railway company and abandoned.

The 1822 conveyancing map (Fig. 2) shows Fenacre or Vinegar Farm for the first time. The large rectangular farmhouse with the chapel and lincay on the south side of the yard, while the threshing barn, with a projecting range of buildings to the east is to the south of these.

<sup>5</sup> Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette - Thursday 14 December 1780.

<sup>6</sup> Will of John Browne of Burlescombe (PCC) 9<sup>th</sup> January 1794

<sup>7</sup> Burial registers for Burlescombe

<sup>8</sup> *A Topographical Dictionary of England, Volume 1*, Samuel Lewis 1811, p.382.

<sup>9</sup> "Thomas Browne Esquire to the Grand Western Canal Company: Conveyance of Land in Burlescombe. Enrolled 15<sup>th</sup> October 1822 [including] Fenacre alias Vinegar Farm situated in the parish of Burlescombe... now in the occupation of John Harwood as tenant to me the said Thomas Browne"



The tithe survey of Burlescombe parish in 1841 (Fig. 3) clearly shows the main house with its new rear extension, the chapel with a small outbuilding to the north, the lincage, the threshing barn and horse engine house, a building range to the east of the barn, as well as a smaller agricultural building further east. The property, along with the orchard to the north, and the gardens and fields to the south and east was occupied by James Benjamin.<sup>10</sup> He was listed in the Burlescombe burial registers as living at Fenacre Farm when he was buried on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1859 aged 84.

By the 1860's Fenacre had been acquired by William Carew Rayer Esq. of Holcombe Court, and although mortgaged in 1870 (Fig. 4) to Richard Clarke and Thomas Carew as security on a loan, the property was reacquired in 1903 by Mrs C Rayer.<sup>11</sup>

The area was mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1889, when the property was shown in the greatest detail thus far (Fig. 5). The east end of the Lincage had been extended southwards to presumably provide a covered cow house. The map also shows a now demolished range to the west and east of the threshing barn, as well as a small building immediately adjacent to the river but with no indication of the building's function. The northern end of the site remained an orchard.

The property remained remarkably unaltered throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as is evidenced by the 1905 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6). Fenacre Farm started suffering from neglect and a severe fire in the 1930's and by 1970 (Fig. 7) the horse engine house and range of buildings to the east of the threshing barn were either in a ruinous state or had been demolished.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. THE BUILDING SURVEY

### 5.1 Introduction

The removal of internal and external render, partitions and stud walls during refurbishment of the house permitted closer inspection of the historic building fabric, while the outbuildings were recorded prior to any work commencing, allowing the identification of areas that contained original features and areas where these had been replaced. Although Fenacre Farm has been greatly altered it nevertheless retains features dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 5.2 The main building

#### EXTERIOR

##### *Yard wall*

The house is set back from the access track behind a low wall constructed of coursed stone rubble. The wall does not appear on the 1822 plan but is shown on the tithe map of 1841. It was presumably constructed after a realignment of the access track in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is considered probable, given the presence of a chapel at the site and the known documentary history of the farm, that there was an important medieval house on the site. The location of

<sup>10</sup> Burlescombe parish tithe apportionment Nos 76-93.

<sup>11</sup> *Mortgage 1870 - Eastbrook, Fenacre; parts of Canonsleigh and Gadd's. Endorsement 1903* (DHC reference: 1936 M/T/11).

<sup>12</sup> *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser - Wednesday 05 February 1936, Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser - Saturday 03 December 1938, Western Times - Friday 02 December 1938.*

this structure and the reasons for its replacement with the present building, are unknown. Buried remains of a medieval house may yet survive on or near the site of the present building.

### *Main façade*

The house is a two-storey structure, constructed of coursed stone rubble covered with painted render. The original core of the house is a rectangular range, aligned north east-south west, and crowned with chimney stacks on each of its gables (Figs. 8-9, pls. 1-2). A two-storey extension projects from the east end of the original building, along the yard, and represents an early extension to the house, possibly dating to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. To the north of the main range a single storey extension in the form of a lean-to or outshut was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The south-west elevation of the house is its principal façade, presenting a two-storey elevation to the yard under a steeply-pitched slate roof. The ground floor is entered through a door to the left of the elevation which would originally have opened onto a small lobby, providing access on either hand to the hall and a further room on the ground floor and to the stair leading up to the first floor. Light is provided by a single window to the left of the doorway, and a single larger window to the right. The main part of the elevation is constructed of stone rubble, while a building break is visible from halfway up the first floor windows, suggesting that the roof line has at some period been raised above its original level. There are two windows on the first floor mirroring the arrangement below. The steeply-pitched roof is gabled to the north-east and south-west.

### *The extensions*

The east elevation of the main building presents a simple two-storey elevation in line with the original building. The early 18<sup>th</sup> century extension is built of stone rubble and lit along the main elevation by a further ground-and first floor window providing light to the rooms on each floor. The north-eastern gable end was lit by a window on the first floor. The extension is entered from the east elevation through a doorway. The roof of the extension is steeply pitched and gabled, matching that of the earlier building.

At the rear of the main range was a single-storey extension built of stone rubble and brick reveals for the doorways and windows. The orchard elevation consisted of four windows and a single doorway. The roof was gently pitched and came off the main range below first floor window level. This range appears to date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## INTERIOR

### *The ground floor* (Fig. 8, Pls. 3-4).

The interior of the main range had been severely altered by the time of the visit to form a large open plan room. These alterations included the complete removal of the internal partitions defining the original rooms, which has unfortunately resulted in the loss of the historic plan of the building. Some traces of the original interior arrangement remained in the form of wall scars allowing a reconstruction of the original layout.

The most likely reconstruction of the original plan form of the ground floor of the early house had two large rooms. The rooms would have been separated by a lobby and stone wall partitions (G01) flanking the staircase.

The western ground-floor room (G02) may have functioned as a service room within the original house; it was heated by a large stone fireplace in the west gable wall. This would originally have had a large timber lintel supported by the surviving stone jambs concealed within the plaster, although this had been replaced with a brick lintel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The large opening was successively reduced in size between the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries before being finally blocked-up during the modern period.

The room to the east of the lobby (G03) probably represents the original 'hall', the main room of the house. This contained a large painted plaster-decorated fireplace in the north-eastern wall, part of the primary construction of the building, which displayed fragmentary false ashlar on the rear face and on the internal faces of the jambs (Fig. 10, Pls. 5-6). The design represented on the jambs and on the rear face – false ashlar - is a common pattern found in combination with other designs, at Gotham, Tiverton, at Nos 44-6 Magdalen Street and 21 The Mint, Exeter, at Honiton Barton, South Molton and at Chivelhayes, Clyst Hydon (Adams 2015), although these 17<sup>th</sup> century examples are generally more ornate. The decoration on the fireplace jambs and rear therefore fits well into the kind of 'faux' architectural painted decoration popular at this period. Such painted schemes have been found at No. 41-42 High Street, Exeter, including the jamb of the parlour fireplace which was painted red with white lines in imitation of brickwork (Thorp 2015). This kind of ornamentation is also used on walls where these are sometimes painted as panelling, studwork or as woven hangings (John Thorp *pers. comm.*). The Fenacre House example is likely to belong to the period after 1660-1690 and represents a late development of the sgraffito fireplace tradition (Richard Parker *pers. comm.*). It is unclear if the decoration is part of the primary construction of the building and unfortunately at the time of the visit the timber lintel had been removed making it impossible to date the fireplace more closely by analysing any surviving decoration and thereby refining the date of the primary fabric of the main range and the painted plaster decoration. Two small doorways in the north wall lead to room G05.

#### *The extensions* (Fig. 8, Pl. 7)

The extension to the east of the main range belongs largely to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century expansion of the property. The vertical building break can be clearly seen in both the front and rear elevations and the extension was built using smaller roughly coursed stone rubble.

The extension is entered through a door on the left of the eastern gable end which leads into a large room (G04) with a staircase in the south-western corner providing access to the upper floor. The timber lintel above this door was formed of the remains of an ovolo-moulded timber. It is unclear if this was contemporary with the existing house or whether it had come from the earlier manor house.

Room G04 was the main kitchen within the new service wing and contained a large, early 18<sup>th</sup>-century stone fireplace built against the rear of the existing fireplace in room G03. The original oak lintel had been removed and the large opening was successively reduced in size between the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries before being finally blocked-up in the modern period. The room was originally lit by a single window in the south elevation, while a doorway, partly knocked through the primary fabric in the north elevation, would have provided access to a service corridor along the north side of the main house.

The large extension to the north of the main range consisted of coursed stone rubble and brick and was built sometime between 1822 and 1841. Room G05 is entered through two doorways

located in the centre (G03) and eastern end of the main building (G04). The room was unheated and was lit by four windows. Two doorways, one in the north elevation and a further one in the east elevation provided access to the orchard and yard. Little of this extension now survives.

#### *The first floor* (Fig. 8, Pl. 8)

Much of the early fabric of the building was lost with the removal of the first floor. Although the external walls survived, the original stair, some of the floor beams and all the joists, as well as the internal partitions had been removed prior to the site visit. The first floor would originally have been reached by a straight stair rising from the entrance lobby, dividing at a half landing to communicate with the chambers above. A small window, located in the north elevation, would have provided light for the stairs.

The staircase opened onto a modern landing (F01) which provided access to the large room above the hall (F02), reflecting the layout of the ground-floor rooms below. Surprisingly in a house of this period, the room was originally unheated; a small fireplace was inserted into the existing hall fireplace stack rising through the chamber at a later date. Evidence for laths on the lower trusses suggests that the room was not open to the roof but instead had a primary ceiling. A small room (F02) was located immediately to the west of the stair. The room was lit by a single window in the south elevation and contained a small fireplace in the west gable. This was also a later addition and had been blocked-up in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both fireplaces would originally have contained small cast-iron fireplaces and grates.

The stripping of plasterwork provided a small glimpse of the house prior to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century re-building, exposing the height of the original eaves, at a lower level than the later extension. The stone rubble walls contained a timber plank in places and the height of the wall above this had been further extended with coursed stone rubble. This alteration raised the eaves level and allowed for the heightening of the first floor rooms and the insertion of a new roof in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The room was lit by a single large window in the south elevation. The original partitions were removed at the start of the works prior to the site visit.

#### *The extensions*

The first floor of the extension was originally approached by a winder stair, although this had been removed prior to the site visit. The stair was located in the southwest corner of the ground floor room adjacent to the fireplace. The first floor contained a single room (F04). It is unclear when the wall separating the extension from the main house was demolished but it seems likely that the room was originally independent of the accommodation in the main range. It is unclear if the room contained a fireplace but evidence from F02 and F03 would suggest that it probably did. The room was lit by a single window in the south elevation.

Although the position of the windows lighting both the original building and the later extension were identified, the frames had all been removed prior to the site visit. The openings, long horizontal openings suggestive of mullioned windows rather than sashes, are more typical of the late 17<sup>th</sup>- or early 18<sup>th</sup> century than later 19<sup>th</sup> century openings.

#### *The roof*

The roof has been rebuilt, but some of the original trusses and purlins survive. The roof was a single phase construction dating to the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century. It was supported on eight A-frames with collar beams and pegged halved-jointed apices, and extended over both the main house and the rear extension. Most trusses also have a lower, secondary applied collar. These

trusses divide the roof space into 7 roughly equal bays, each approximately 2.5m wide, and two shorter bays, approximately 1.3m wide, at the gable ends. The feet of the main trusses at the eaves are notched and rest on the top of a timber wall plate within the front and rear walls. The collar beams are generally very simple, applied to the south-western side of the trusses with wooden pegs. There is a single set of purlins on either side of the roof, resting on the tops of the principals. These are pegged and nailed to the principal rafters. The common rafters are linked at the apex by a ridge purlin.

### 5.3 The Chapel (Fig. 11, Pls. 9-14)

The chapel is a small, originally single storey building situated along the southern edge of the courtyard in front of the main house. Constructed of coursed stone rubble the building is aligned approximately WSW-ENE.

The chapel is entered through a door to the west of the north elevation with chamfered segmental sandstone arch and jambs and a depressed relieving arch over. This would originally have opened onto a small single cell interior. To the left of the doorway is the remains of a later stone stair and doorway providing access to the first floor. This was probably inserted in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century when the first floor structure was inserted. Light is provided by a single small square-headed window in the south elevation. Closer inspection of the elevation suggests that this window is a later insertion within an earlier opening with a depressed segmental relieving arch over. The east elevation contains a large central opening with a depressed relieving arch. The masonry at the base of the wall has been removed, probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to provide access between the outshut and the chapel. The lower remains of a further blocked window are visible in the west elevation although the western gable has been partly rebuilt and there is therefore no evidence for a relieving arch.

No evidence of the original window tracery for the windows was found, either in the chapel or any of the other buildings, and very little dateable evidence survives within the building. Although depressed arches are generally assumed to be late medieval or even post-medieval in character, these forms can also occur in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries both in church and vernacular architecture (Parker *et al.* 2016). It is suggested that these depressed arches, rather than reflecting the form of the openings below, might just as easily have served as relieving arches over groups of two or more lancets or over larger plate or early bar tracery openings just as easily as over square-headed late-medieval lights (Richard Parker *pers. comm.*). The use of red sandstone rather than Beer stone over the arch of the doorway and the absence of drip-stones might indicate a 13<sup>th</sup>- or 14<sup>th</sup>-century rather than a late-medieval date (Richard Parker *pers. comm.*).

The gently-pitched roof is gabled to the north-east and south-west.

#### *The ground floor* (Fig. 11)

Originally a small chapel, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the building was functioning as an agricultural outbuilding. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had been converted into a cider house; the remains of the cider press are still visible on the ground- and first-floor. The ground-floor was accessed through a doorway with red stone dressing forming a segmental arch, but behind this the door was hung an internal arched timber doorframe, located in the west side of the north elevation. This may well be to original door frame. This lead to a large single room lit by a small window in the south wall. This would originally have been a larger window, before being partly blocked in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. The large opening in the east wall, originally the location of the east window, had been widened at the base to form a doorway opening upon

the 19<sup>th</sup>-century outshut. A small niche, originally for a holy water stoup, is located to the right of the entrance. A number of putlog holes are visible in both the north and western elevations, while traces of plaster survive on parts of the internal walls. No areas of original flooring were identified during the visit and it must be assumed that the cobbled floor now visible is of 18<sup>th</sup>- or 19<sup>th</sup>-century date.

*The first floor* (Fig. 11)

The first floor was inserted in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century and would have been reached by an external stone stair. Light would initially have been provided through the east window. The window tracery has been removed, and close inspection of the internal opening suggests that the window may originally have had a stone rere arch. Following the construction of the outshut in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only light would have been provided by the doorway. The internal opening of the south window is visible in the south elevation.

*The roof*

The roof structure of the chapel is visible from the first floor doorway. Access to the roof area was difficult and a detailed inspection could not be made due to the uncertain condition of the floor. The following description is based on inspection from a position just within the present doorway.

Nothing of the original roof survives and the building has probably been reduced in height through neglect, with very little masonry surviving over the top of the relieving arch in the south elevation. Internally the roof dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century with two common rafters with lapped and pegged collar trusses, halved, crossed and pegged at the apex. The roof at this time would have been thatched as is evidenced by the survival of some of the thatching battens and thatch. The roof lately suffered some fire damage and a corrugated iron roof replaced the thatch.

#### **5.4 The Linhay**

The Linhay is a 2-storey structure measuring 32m long, and is aligned north-east/south-west (Fig. 12, Pls. 15-18). It is situated along the north side of the farmyard, with further buildings located to the north and south, one of which was demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building incorporates an enclosed milking parlour at its eastern end, and an open-fronted linhay facing south, with a loft over. Dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the linhay is constructed of roughly coursed stone rubble west, north and south walls, with square stone rubble piers.

*The ground-floor* (Fig. 12)

The south front of the linhay is supported by five piers of stone rubble, each pier extending across the width of the building, at ground-floor level only, to divide the interior into bays. Sockets for horizontal timbers forming a bressumer to the first floor are housed in a rectangular chase in the side face of each pier. The cattle shelters have been blocked at the front to form cow houses, although these walls had collapsed by the time of the site visit. There is no evidence of original furniture in the interior of the linhay. It is clear that there were formerly cattle stalls here although these were of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, and had been largely removed.

The central wall rises to the roof and it is likely that the western layout of 6 bays was mirrored in the eastern half of the linhay. The remains of a stone pier with the low wall removed and a stone pier and wall with a later inserted doorway were located immediately to

the east of this. The remaining three piers were removed when the eastern part of the linhay was converted to a fully covered cowshed probably in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the eastern half of the linhay was converted to provide a covered livestock shelter and store. The low wall separating bays 7 and 8 was removed, the front of bay 8 was filled in and the low wall partially raised to form an enclosed space. Probably at the same time the remaining three eastern piers were removed and a new south wall built to create a large cowshed or dairy. The building was accessed through a wide doorway and lit by two large windows. A doorway connecting the store and cowshed was inserted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the dairy was rebuilt. The south wall was partially rebuilt, while the western wall raised to the level of the roof with breeze blocks. The building received a new concrete floor with a large drainage channel and feeding troughs at this time.

#### *The first-floor* (Fig. 12)

At the western end of the building the loft over the linhay is accessed by an external stone stair leading to a first floor doorway. A further doorway with a plain timber lintel was located in the central wall. Access to the first-floor and roof was difficult and a detailed inspection could not be made due to the uncertain condition of the floor. The following description is based on inspection from a position just within the present doorways.

A gap in the floor on the north side near the back wall would have served bays 3-6. The hay could have been pulled through the gap directly into the hayracks underneath.

#### *The roof* (Pls. 17-18)

The roof structure over the centre and western section of the linhay presents a unified appearance, being hipped at either end and consists of lapped and pegged collar trusses, with the common rafters set horizontally like purlins to avoid the need for thatching battens. Secondary collars survive at a lower level, while the trusses are simply built of the piers and rear wall. Some thatch survives underneath the later corrugated iron sheet roof on the south side.

The eastern part of the range has been rebuilt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is supported on three A-frames with collar beams and lap-jointed nailed apices. The feet of the main trusses rest within the masonry on both the south and north side. There are three sets of back purlins on the south side and two sets on the north side of the roof. These are nailed to the principal rafters.

## **5.5 The Threshing Barn and engine house**

### *The threshing barn*

The barn is a substantial structure measuring 19.5m long and is aligned north-west/south-east (Fig. 13, Pl. 19-25). It is situated along the south side of the farmyard, with the remains of further buildings, which were demolished or fell into disrepair in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, located to the east. Dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building is built of roughly-coursed stone rubble and follows the classic plan of a threshing barn with two large opposing doors centrally placed within the long elevations; a central threshing floor and opposed doorways designed to create a through draught for winnowing. The walls survive to a height of approximately 4.50m, with the west gable 5.25m high and the east gable 7.10m high.

To the east of the north door is a blocked first-floor doorway, suggesting that the eastern half of the barn contained a loft for storage. Processed straw was probably stored in the eastern part of the barn and grain in the loft above. The large window in the western gable and the small slit window in the north elevation provided additional light and ventilation to an otherwise un-storeyed western half. The floor of the barn consisted of a fairly even concrete surface. Although the barn has no surviving datable features it is assumed to be contemporary with the linhay.

#### *The horse engine house*

A single-storey, round horse-engine house (Fig. 13, Pls. 25) is attached to the north side of the threshing barn. Examination of historic mapping shows no trace of the horse engine house on the 1822 conveyancing map, at which time threshing was presumably still undertaken by hand. The tithe map of 1841 shows the present building as a solid building. We may thus presume that the horse engine house was added in the period after 1822 at a time when mechanised threshing techniques were introduced to the county.

The construction technique and phasing of the elevations is not entirely clear, partly due to poor preservation and the overgrown nature of the remains. Initially the building appears to have been partially open-fronted, with a roof supported on pillars. The open sides were probably infilled with stone rubble shortly afterwards as the horse engine house is represented with solid lines on the 1841 tithe map suggesting solid walls to the roof. The blocked hole for the transmission shaft into the threshing barn is visible in the north wall of the barn.

#### **5.6 The outbuildings**

The building range to the east of the threshing barn first shown on the 1822 conveyancing map appear to have remained in use until the 1970s. It is difficult to be certain of the form and function of these building as little now remains. Some of the range may have functioned as labourers' cottages as the 1889 Ordnance Survey map seems to indicate small gardens at the rear of the two distinct properties, while the building between these and the threshing barn may have functioned as a store.

At the north-western corner of the threshing barn a further building projected to the north. Very little of the building now remains; it appears to have opened onto the farmyard through a doorway and it is possible that this was some kind of agricultural store.

#### **6. EARTHWORKS**

During the site visit three infilled earthworks (Pls 26-27), one to the north and two to the south of Fenacre Farm were identified. As these are not shown on the 19<sup>th</sup> century historic mapping it must be assumed that they precede this period. In view of the importance of the medieval manorial settlement with its detached chapel and its location within a bend of the river Lyner, it is possible that they relate to water management often associated with moated sites.

#### **7. DISCUSSION**

##### **Phase I The chapel (?14<sup>th</sup> century)**

The earliest structure on the site is the chapel. Nothing is known of the location of the medieval house and it is possible that this was located away from the later farmhouse. The



chapel was probably built as a freestanding single-cell structure, probably in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike similar chapels at Ayshford, Fardel (Cornwood) or Bury Barton in Lapford parish, very little now survives of the original building beyond the walls.

It is unclear whether the chapel had the status only of a private chapel, serving the adjacent manor house, providing a convenient place of worship for the family and for the domestic and other staff of the house and the estate, or whether it, like the chapel at Fardel (Allan 2007) may also have been intended to serve as a parish church, allowing for the attendance of those who could not reach the parish church in Burlescombe. The surviving building is an ambitious structure with evidence for some high-quality architectural features. Its association with Canonsleigh Priory may suggest that the farm functioned as a Grange, or monastic farm. The status of the chapel is uncertain. While it is possible that it originated as a private, manorial chapel, it might also perpetuate the site of a still earlier church, chapel or shrine, perhaps one that was later eclipsed by the granting of parish status to the Church of St Mary at Burlescombe. Its survival is a clear indication that Fenacre was a high-status, possibly manorial site.

### **Phase II The primary building (?late-17<sup>th</sup> century)**

Although the house has been substantially rebuilt it is certain that, in its original form, the building had a simple rectangular plan with thick walls of stone on all four sides. Evidence of the plan of the earlier house survives in the line of the putative passage, dividing the building into two rooms, and the arrangement of the fireplaces on the ground and first floor. Thus the nucleus of the house appears to be of the two-room and passage plan.

The building was storeyed from the beginning as is evidenced by the fact that the partition walls and stair are part of the primary construction of the building. Both the rooms on the first floor were unheated at this stage and there is no evidence for primary fireplaces on the first floor. Although unusual, this is not altogether uncommon for this period.

The large stone fireplace in the eastern gable end at ground-floor level is primary, and displays fragmentary remains of painted plaster decoration typical of the period after 1660-1690. This feature, together with the plan form and the probability that the majority of the house was storeyed, may suggest an early post-medieval, perhaps late-17<sup>th</sup> century, date for the house.

### **Phase III Rebuilding (early 18<sup>th</sup> century)**

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the house was extensively remodelled. Evidence from the ground and first floors would suggest that the eastern end of the building was extended to create a new symmetrical façade on the line of the existing house, with regularly-spaced windows. The original front door and lobby were retained, while a new doorway provided access to the service range and a separate staircase provided access to the living quarters above. As this room was not directly connected to the main house until a later date, this accommodation may perhaps have been provided for senior servants.

The height of the first-floor was raised to provide more commodious living space. The existing building retains some constructional features of this period, including elements of the roof structure and stone elevations.

**Phase IV Alterations and additions (18<sup>th</sup> century)**

Throughout this period small alterations took place in the main house. Small cast-iron fireplaces and grates had been inserted into the upstairs rooms and the ground-floor open fireplaces were successively reduced in size.

**Phase V Alterations and additions (early 19<sup>th</sup> century)**

Sometime before 1841 the house was greatly altered with the addition of a single-storey rear extension, and it is possible that the roof structure was entirely renewed at this period.

The development of the farm buildings also displays a complex history of alterations and additions. Nothing is known of the location and arrangement of the early post-medieval farm buildings. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a complex of purpose-built farm buildings were constructed in a single phase. The buildings, several of which have since been demolished, were set around a farmyard to the south-east of the main house. The large building to the north, is a lincay, while a threshing barn and ancillary structures were located on the southern edge of the yard. The barn is relatively large for a vernacular farm building, the production of wheat was clearly an important part of the agricultural history of the site, though the size of the farmhouse also reflects a prosperous farming establishment. A projecting structure to the north of the barn, which was added in the period after 1822 represents a horse-engine house providing power for mechanical threshing.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the chapel was probably converted to a cider house, attested by the presence of a large cider press on the ground- and first-floor, while a small outshut was built against the eastern elevation. It is unclear if the insertion of the floor and infilling of the south window date to this period.

Other buildings, to the east of the threshing barn, were later used as labourer's cottages and no evidence now remains of their original function. A further building was located on the eastern side of the farmyard by the river Lyner, although its function is not fully understood.

**Phase VI Additions (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century)**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of consolidation and the use of the farm buildings remained much the same as before. The horse engine house was probably fully enclosed by this time.

**Phase VII Later alterations (late-19<sup>th</sup> century)**

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a change in the use of the agricultural buildings. The use of the lincay seems to have changed at this time and half was eventually converted into a store and fully covered cowhouse.

**Phase VIII Later alterations (modern)**

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century the threshing barn, horse engine house and eastern building range seem to have declined in importance and were allowed to fall into their current state of disrepair and ruin, while the buildings at the northern end of the lincay was rebuilt as a dairy.

**8. CONCLUSION**

The redundant buildings proposed to be converted were appraised in September 2015 by Oakford Archaeology in order to determine the archaeological interest of the referred buildings. The appraisal was conducted in order for the Mid Devon District Council

Conservation Officer to prepare an archaeological mitigation strategy, if required, and help to inform the future development of the site.

There has been a settlement at Fenacre since at least the Norman Conquest, and it is clear from the documentary and cartographic evidence that there must have been a manor house on the site. The high-status of the property is clearly shown by the chapel, which probably dates to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the presence of earthwork remains to the north and south of the main farm complex may suggest the site was originally moated. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the earlier house may have fallen into disrepair, or was perhaps destroyed in a disaster (of which no record is known) and was then replaced by the current house.

Fenacre Farm is an important historic farmstead, its size reflecting a large and prosperous farming establishment. The layout of the house perpetuates that of an earlier house which was probably first constructed as a two-room and lobby house in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The building was fully storeyed and had become a farm of some pretension as is attested by the presence of a painted plaster fireplace in the main range.

The most extensive alterations were carried out in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century when the house was extended by the addition of service rooms. Despite many later alterations, the building remains substantially as it was at this time.

The development of the farm buildings also displays the complex history of enlargement and alterations of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century farm. The earliest buildings, some of which have been demolished, were set around a farmyard to the southeast of the house. The earliest of the surviving agricultural structures, are the 19<sup>th</sup>-century lincage and threshing barn. The barn is not uncommon in having double threshing floors and the provision of a horse engine house in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a common addition to the threshing barn.

## SITE ARCHIVE

Details of the building recording, including a pdf copy of the final report will be submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (oakforda1-233434).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was commissioned by Gareth Anderson (Propertyplans (SW) Ltd) on behalf of Mr J. Kearns and administered by Marc Steinmetzer (OA). The building recording was carried out by M. Steinmetzer, the desk-based research was carried out by Lucy Browne and the drawings for this report were prepared by M. Steinmetzer. The author wishes to thank R.W. Parker, J. Thorpe, S. Blaylock, S. Brown and J. Allan for their assistance throughout the project.

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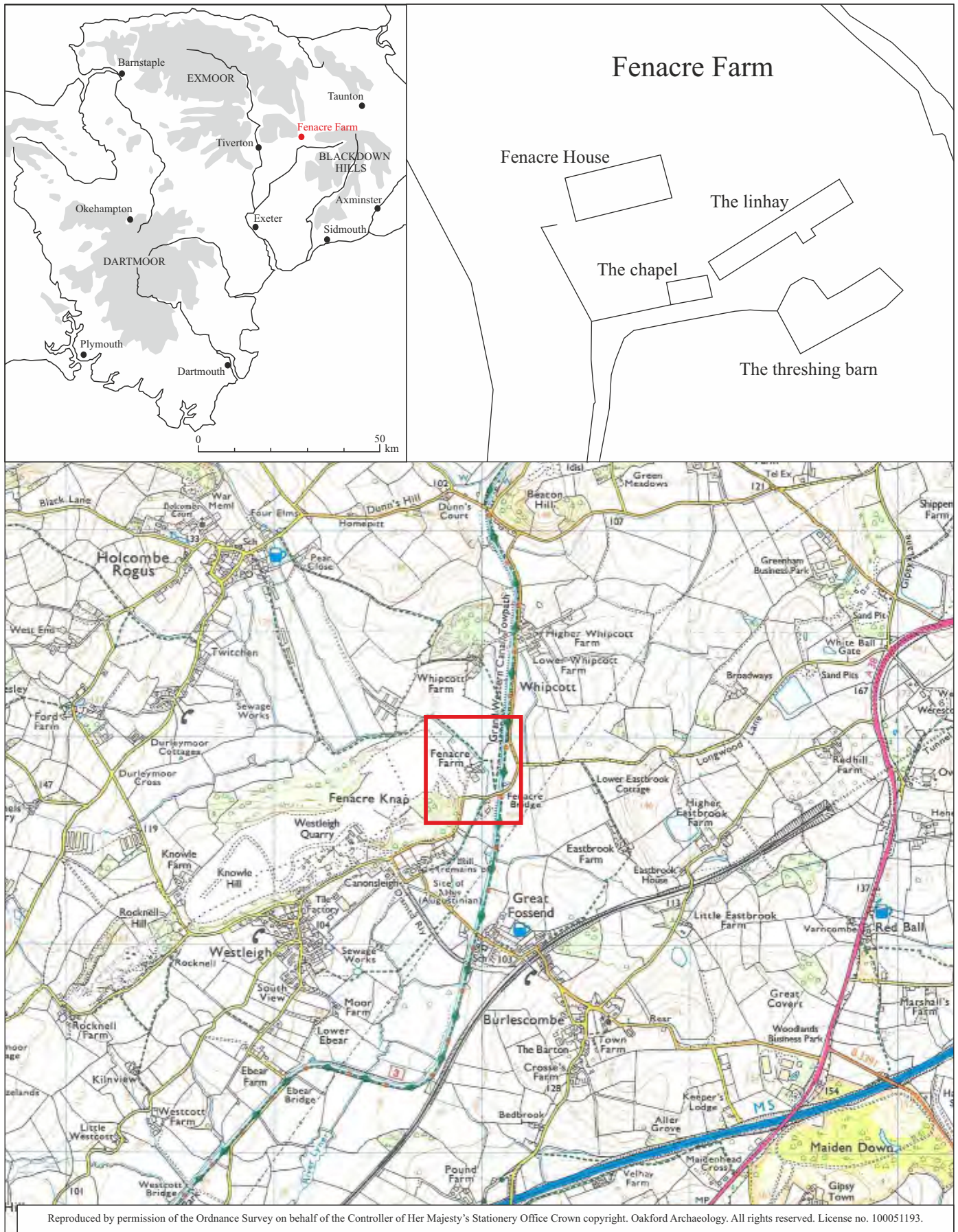


Fig. 1 Location of site.

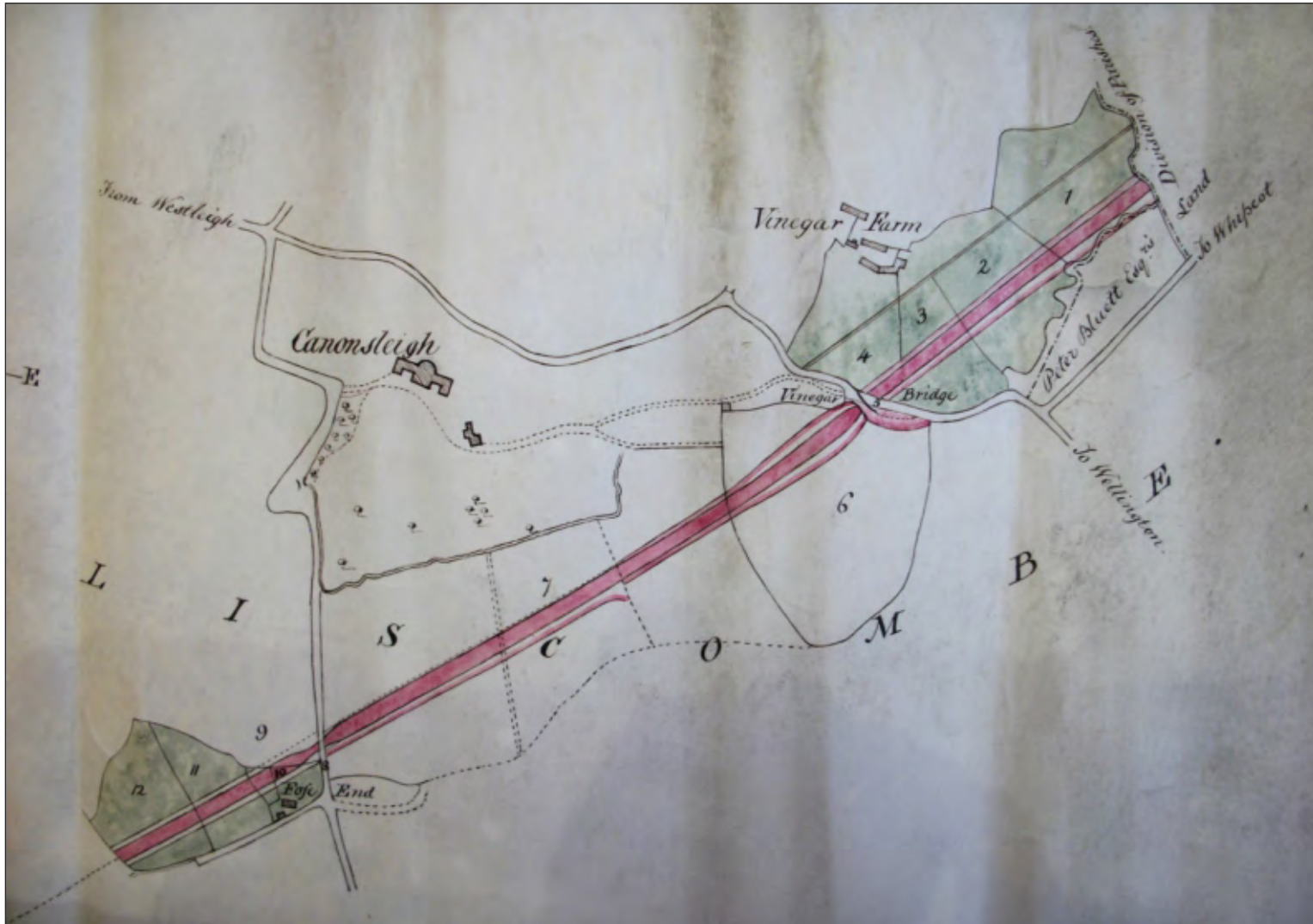


Fig. 2 Detail from the 1822 conveyancing map showing the lands of Thomas Brown (DHC QS/44/14).



Fig. 3 Detail from the 1841 Burlescombe Tithe map.



Fig. 4 Detail from the 1870 mortgage document (DHC 1936 M/T/11).



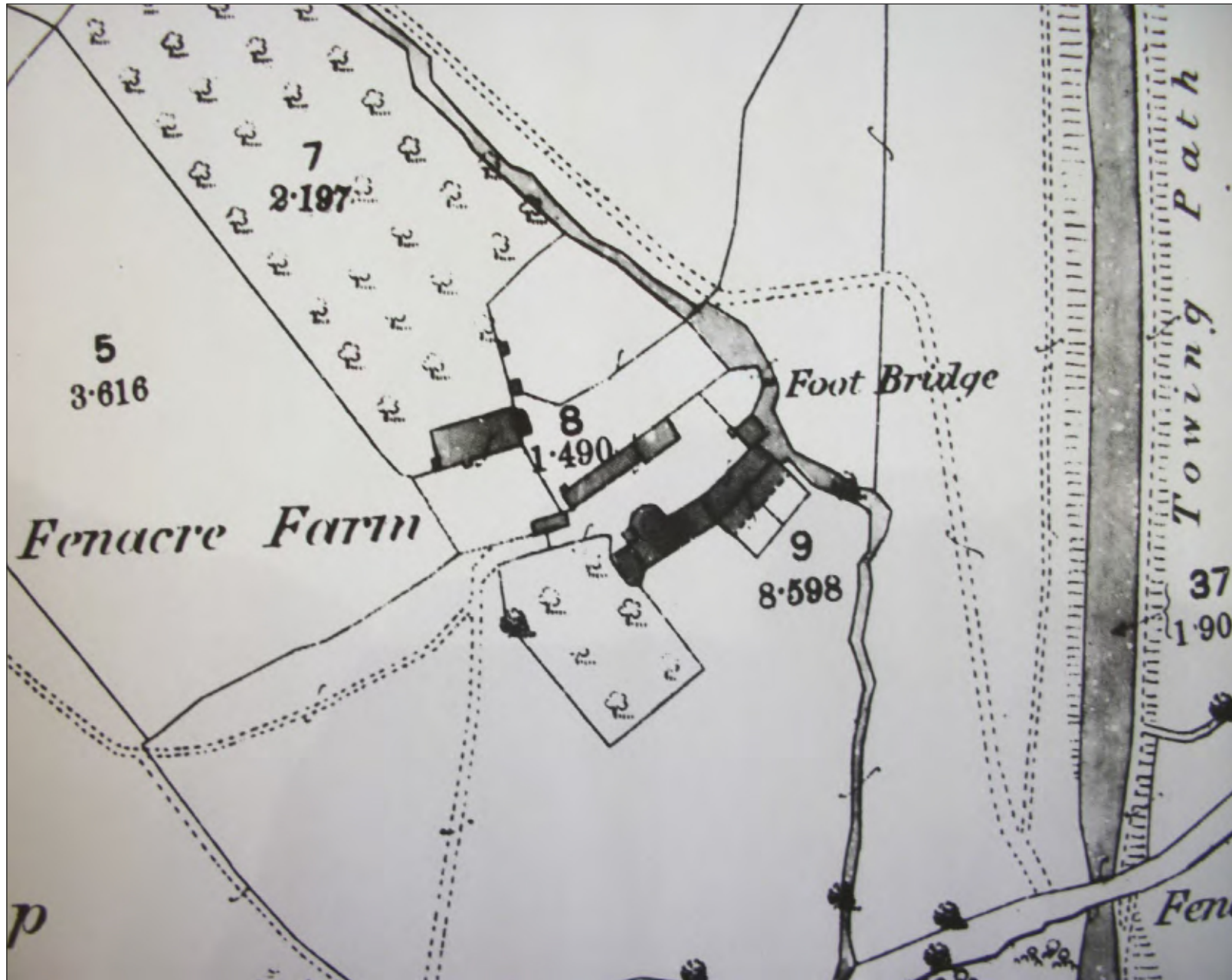


Fig. 5 Detail from the 1889 1st edition Ordnance Survey map Devonshire Sheet XXXV.8.



Fig. 6 Detail from the 1905 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map Devonshire Sheet XXXV.8.

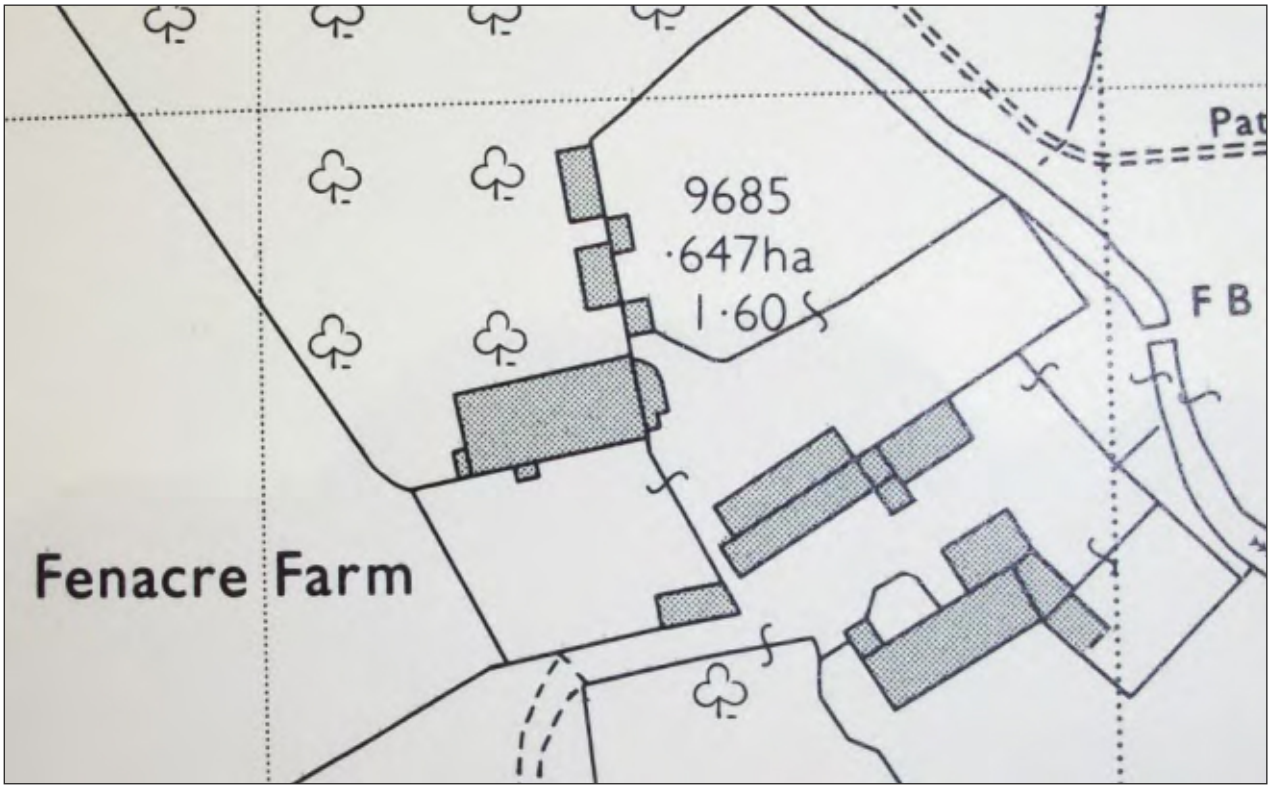


Fig. 7 Detail from the 1970 Ordnance Survey map.

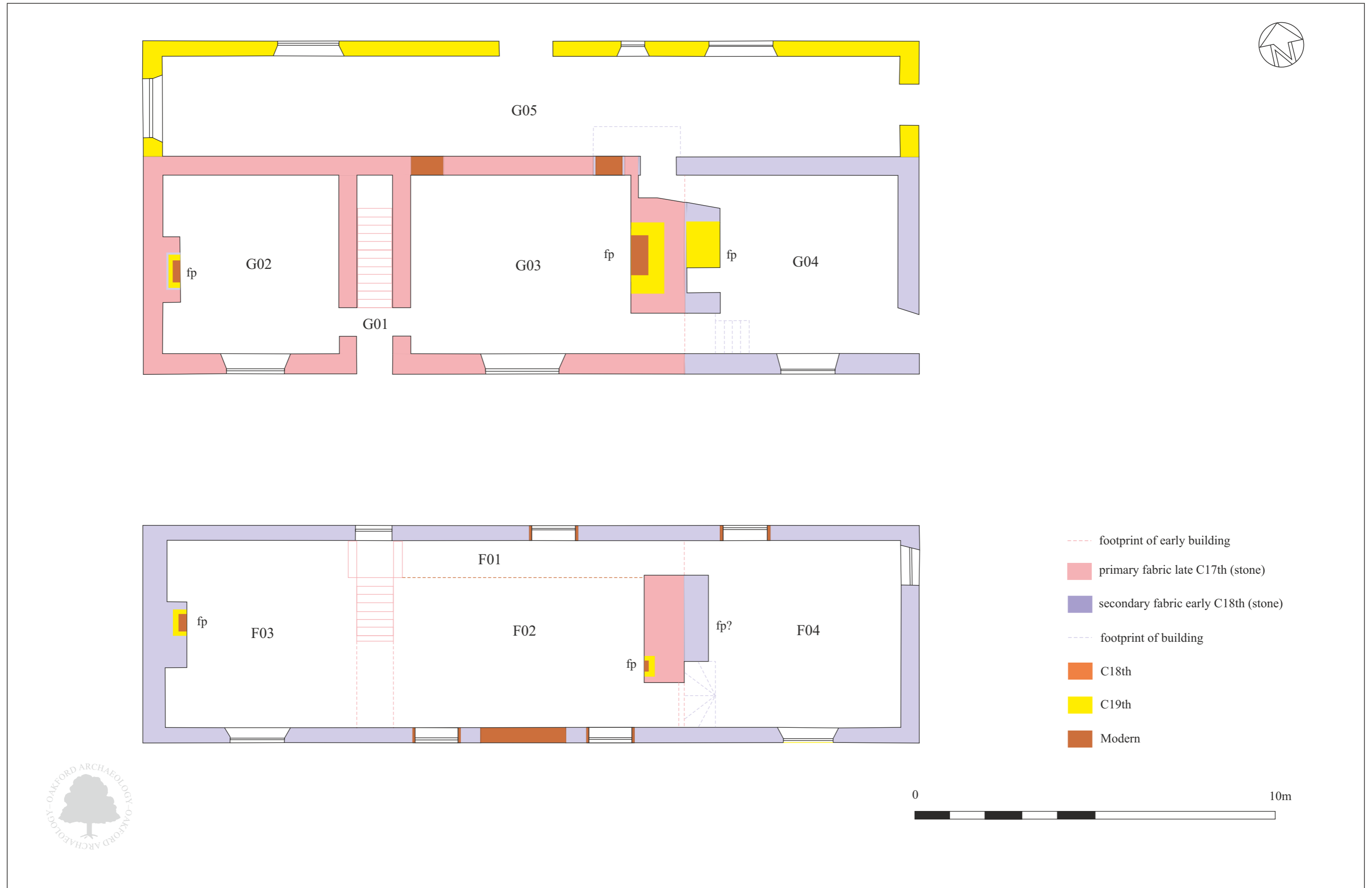


Fig. 8 Plan of ground and first floor showing location of observations and suggested phases of development.



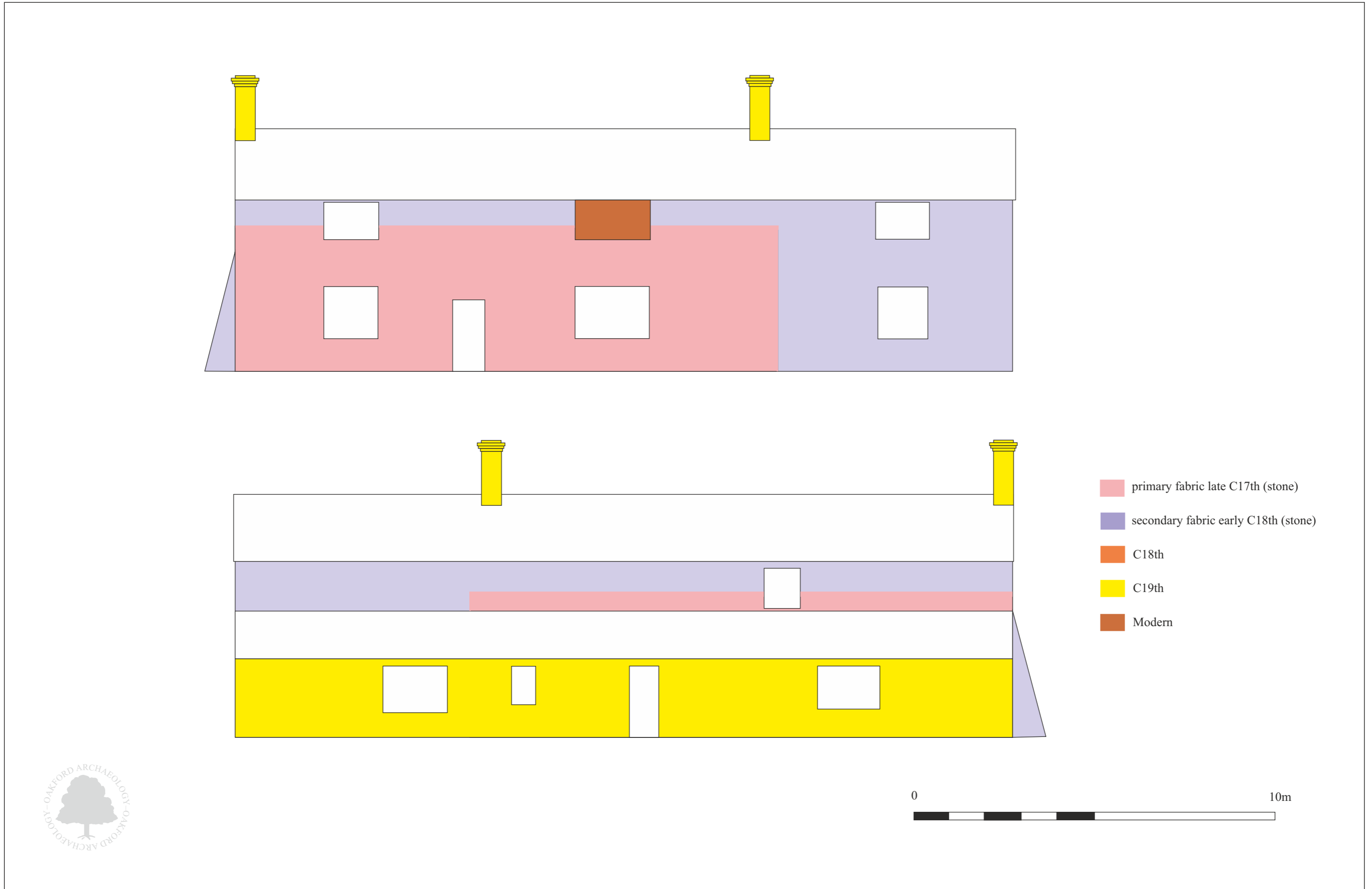


Fig. 8 Elevation of main farmhouse showing location of observations and suggested phases of development.

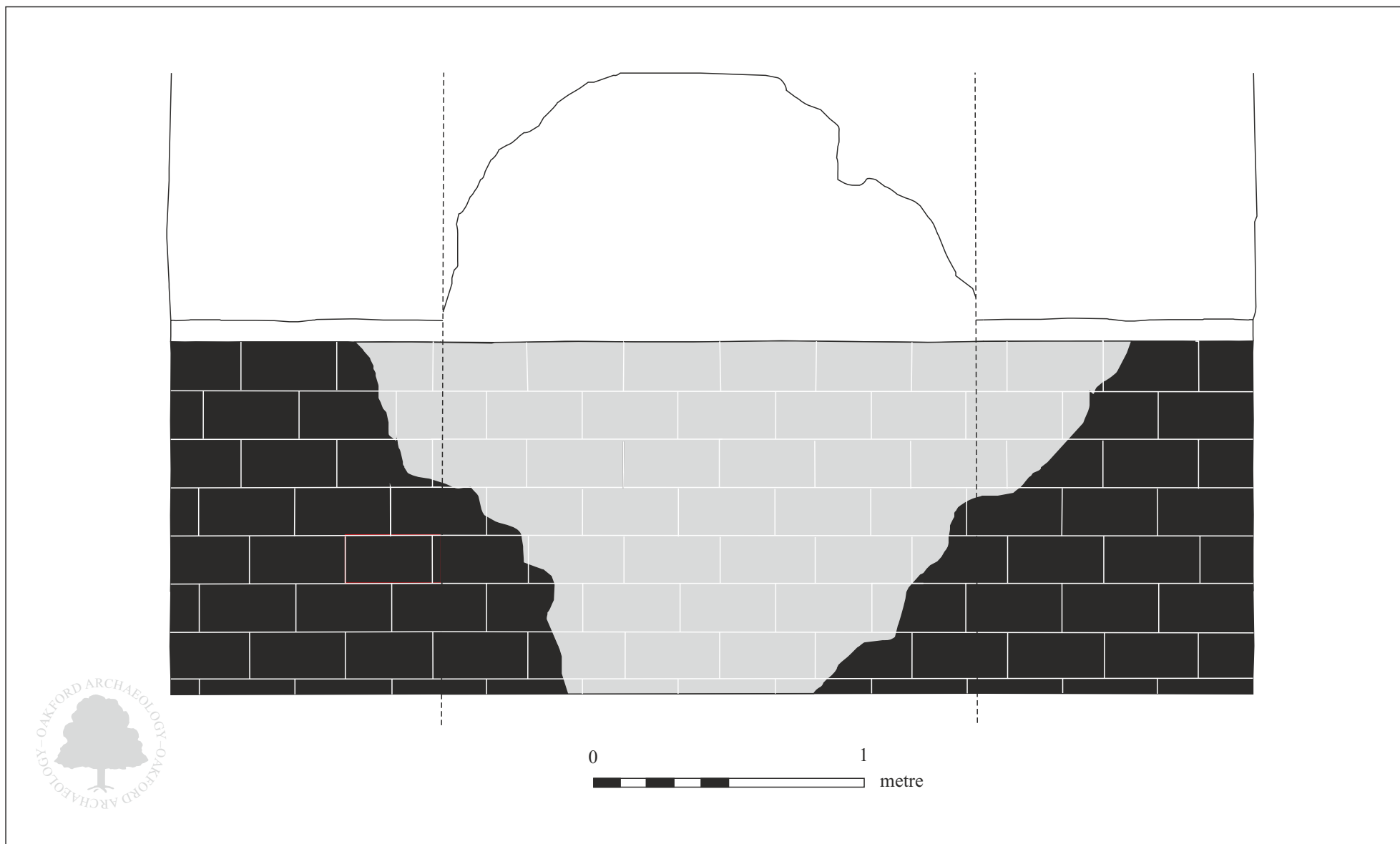
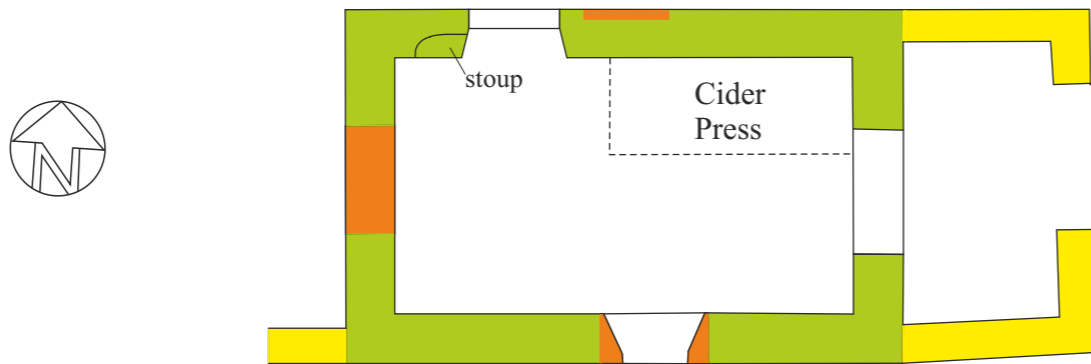
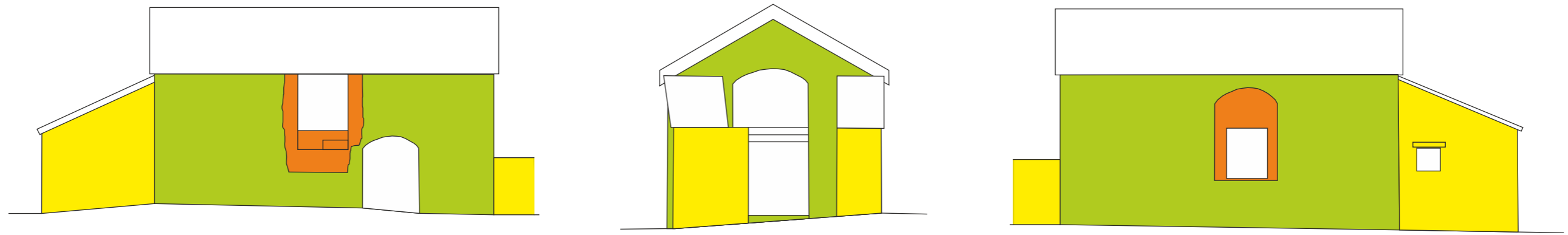


Fig. 10 Ground floor, Room G02 reconstructed sgraffito fireplace with false ashlar on the back and on the jambs.



- primary fabric C14th
- C18th/19th
- C19th



Fig. 11 Plan and elevations of chapel showing location of observations and suggested phases of development.







-  early C19th
-  late C19th
-  Modern
-  footprint of building



Fig. 12 Plan and elevation of Linhay showing location of observations and suggested phases of development.



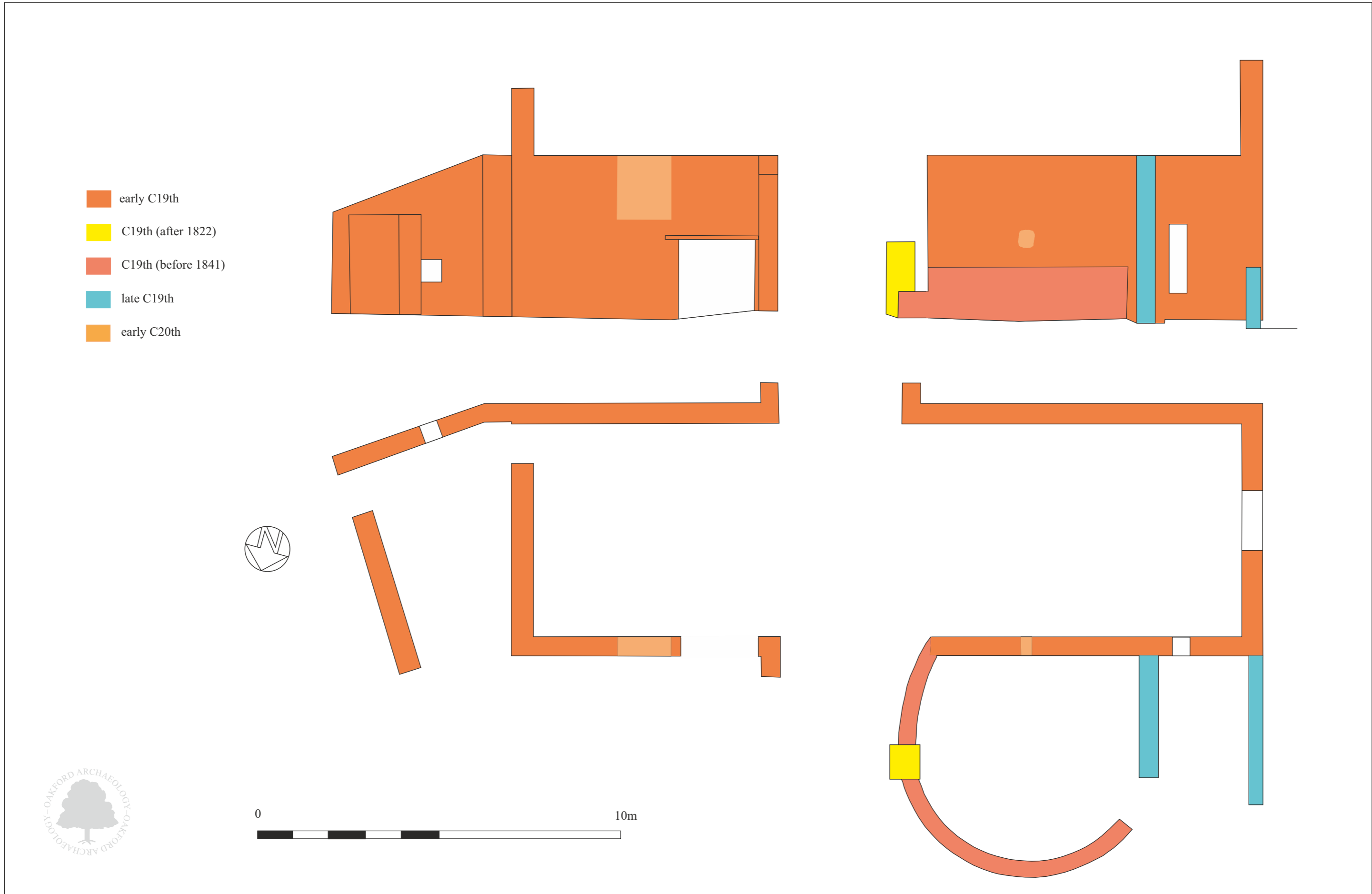


Fig. 13 Plan of threshing barn showing location of observations and suggested phases of development.



Pl. 1 General view of main elevation of Fenacre House. Looking northeast.



Pl. 2 General view of rear elevation of Fenacre House. Looking southwest.



Pl. 3 General view towards room G02 after removal of solid cross walls. 2m scale. Looking west.



Pl. 4 General view towards room G03 after removal of solid cross walls showing fireplace with sgraffito decoration. 2m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 5 Detail of painted plaster decoration on jamb. 1m scale. Looking north.



Pl. 6 Detail of painted plaster decoration on jamb. 1m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 7 Close-up of fireplace in room G04. 2m scale. Looking west.



Pl. 8 Close-up of later fireplace room F02. 1m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 9 General view of chapel with C19th extension (left). 2m scale. Looking southwest.



Pl. 10 Close-up of C15th chapel entrance and C18th first floor stair and doorway. 2m scale. Looking southwest.



Pl. 11 General view of chapel with partially blocked south window. 2m scale. Looking northeast.



Pl. 12 Close-up of south window showing arch and C18th blocking. 2m scale. Looking north.



Pl. 13 General view of rear elevation of east window. Looking southeast.



Pl. 14 General view of east window. 2m scale. Looking northwest.





Pl. 15 General view of Linhay. 2m scale. Looking northwest.



Pl. 16 General view of cow house. 2m scale. Looking north.



Pl. 17 General view of first floor showing roof construction. Looking west.



Pl. 18 General view of cow house interior. 2m scale. Looking west.



Pl. 19 General view of threshing barn and horse engine house. 2m scale.  
Looking southwest.



Pl. 20 General view of threshing barn. 2m scale. Looking north.



Pl. 21 Close-up showing C19th outbuildings attached to east end off threshing barn. 2m scale. Looking northwest.



Pl. 22 Close-up showing blocked doorway to hayloft. Looking south.



Pl. 23 General view of threshing barn interior showing large window in west gable. Looking west.



Pl. 24 General view of threshing barn interior showing doorway to outbuildings in east gable wall. 2m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 24 Close-up of horse engine house. 2m scale. Looking southwest.



Pl. 26 General view of possible earthwork defined by differential vegetation growth in foreground. Looking north.



Pl. 27 General view of possible earthwork in north orchard. Looking southwest.