Historic Buildings Survey

at

WEST FORDE FARM,
CHERITON FITZPAINE, DEVON

By R. W. Parker

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Fig. 1 Location of West Forde Farm (circled) taken from the OS 1st-edition 6 inch to one mile map Devonshire sheet LV. NE, 1891.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an historic building survey undertaken at West Forde Farm, Cheriton Fitzpaine, Devon (SS 8774905228). The survey was commissioned by the current owner of the property, Mr Stephen Waldron, through his architect, Edward Holden, in advance of the submission of applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for alterations to the farmhouse and an adjacent barn, which are grade II Listed Buildings. The works were undertaken at the request of the Mid Devon District Council Conservation Officer to aid understanding of the historic development and significance of the buildings prior to the determination of the applications.

The proposed alterations are for the extension of the domestic accommodation into the former barn by the creation of a new kitchen and pantry within the ground floor, linked to the older house by a new opening in its north wall, and the subdivision of the existing kitchen to form a new entrance hall scullery and lavatory. The first-floor area of the barn is to be converted into additional bedrooms, a bathroom and a closet, linked to the older house by reopening a former doorway in its north gable wall, reconfiguring the partitions at this end of the house and extending an existing first-floor corridor northwards.

1.1 **Method**

The archaeological recording was undertaken by Richard Parker in June 2012. A rapid, non-invasive survey was made of the historic farmhouse and the adjacent barn, which form the east range of a quadrangle of agricultural buildings. The other ranges, though currently undergoing careful conservation, were not directly affected by the current proposals and were not included in the survey area.

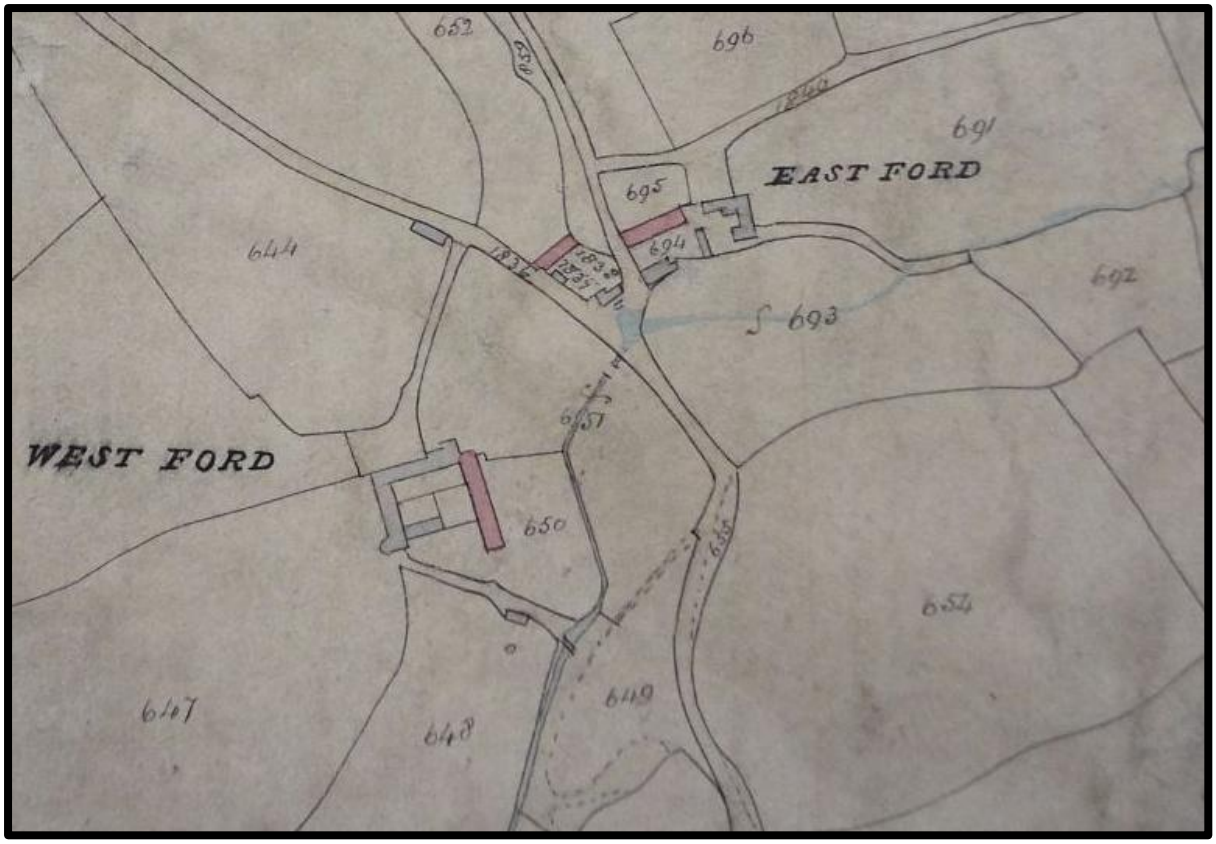

Fig. 2 Extract from the 1839 tithe map of Cheriton Fitzpaine, showing the buildings at 'East Ford' and 'West Ford'. The whole of the east range at West Forde is shown pink, and thus identified as in residential use.

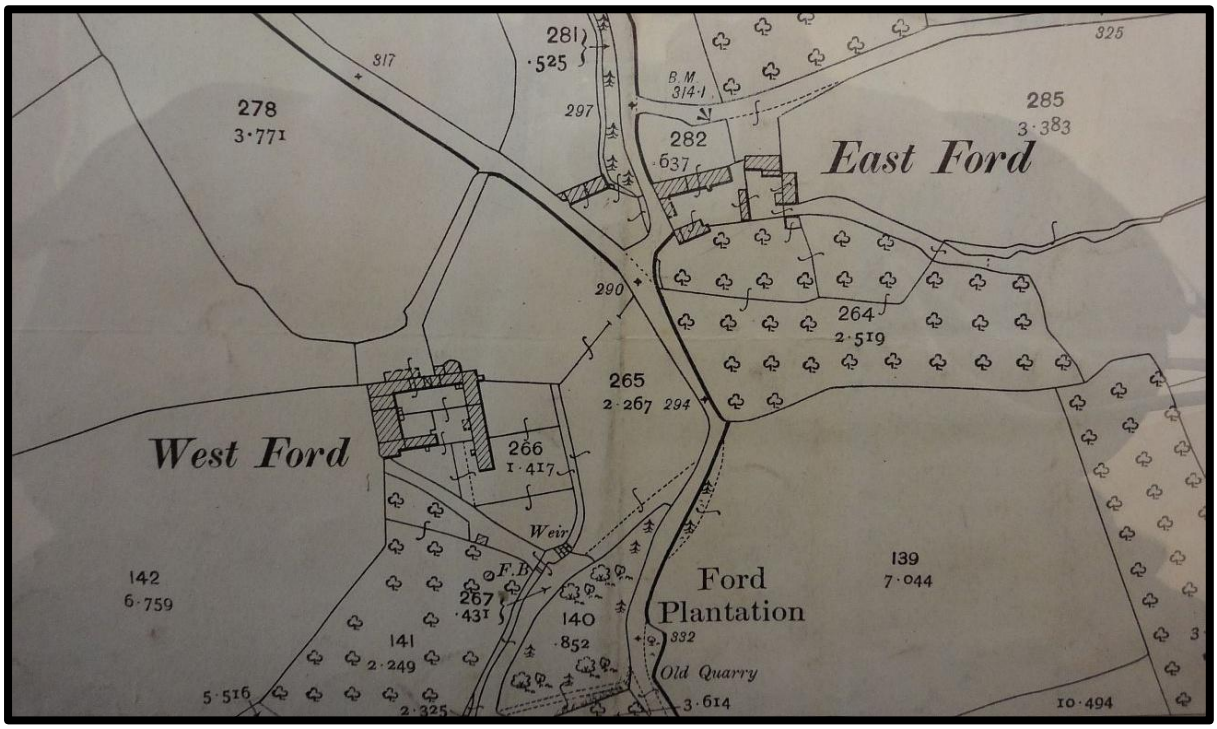

Fig. 3 Extract from the OS 2nd-edition 1:2500 map Devonshire sheet LV. 8, surveyed 1887, revised in 1903, showing 'East Ford' and 'West Ford' little changed since the tithe survey of the 1830s.

The survey aimed to understand the development of the farmhouse by determining its probable date and original plan form. Analysis of the building fabric, where dateable features or relationships could be identified, sought to establish how the building had been altered subsequently, and at which periods. Manuscript notes were produced and limited documentary research was undertaken. Plans drawn by the architect were employed to create phased sketch plans illustrating the suggested development of the building.

As the project did not involve any stripping of modern plaster and decorative finishes, it is likely that many important historic features remain concealed. The conclusions of the present report thus remain provisional, and may need to be revised in the light of any further archaeological works undertaken at the site. The present report, photographs and phased plans constitute the project archive and copies may in due course be deposited at an appropriate archaeological record centre. With the consent of the client, a digital copy of the completed report will in due course be uploaded as a 'grey literature' report on the 'OASIS' project website hosted by the Archaeology Data Service.

2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

West Forde Farm lies just to the south east of Cheriton Fitzpaine, at Forde Cross, on the western bank of the Shobrooke Lake. The farm buildings are regular and extend around four sides of the farmyard. The greater part of the buildings seems to be of late 18th- or early 19th-century date. They are a remarkable example of a prosperous farm of the period, with almost all the buildings contained under one long, continuous and level roof. Even the farmhouse, which is evidently an older building, was contained beneath this roof. The only building projecting above this level is a large threshing barn of impressive scale and height.

The layout of the buildings

The complex is entered from the north through a covered way at the centre of a long two-storey range of linhays. This has a cob and stone wall to the north, but is open to the yard through an arcade of timber posts on the south. The eastern end of this range formerly had a horse engine house within a projection to the north, and was utilised as a poundhouse or cider barn. At the north-western corner the roof was formerly hipped, but now turns unbroken into the western range, at the centre of which the continuous roofline is broken by the threshing barn. This barn is typical of the period in having a low ground-floor storey, possibly a shippon, with a series of segmental arches towards the yard, and a very tall upper storey under a hipped roof. At the southern end of this barn is the remains of a further horse-engine house which must have powered a threshing machine at the southern end of the barn.

The south range does not fully enclose the yard. This is a two storey structure with a low-pitched, slated roof, which is currently utilised as a poultry house, but seems originally to have served as a range of pigsties. The farmhouse occupies the southern part of the east range of the complex and extends southwards from the yard into a large garden. It is a long, stuccoed building with a low-pitched slate roof. The eaves level on the east side of this building has clearly been raised, but the ridge level is continuous, North of the farmhouse, within the east range is a long barn, currently used as a store and in an almost derelict condition. It is this building into which the extension is proposed.

Documentary and map research

Examination of the Cheriton Fitzpaine tithe map of 1839 (Fig 2) and later OS maps (Fig. 3) shows that the layout or footprint of the farm buildings has not significantly changed since the 1830s. Unfortunately the functions of the buildings are not usually identified on such maps, beyond differentiating between agricultural and residential use. The tithe map, for

example, shows the entire east range of the buildings as coloured pink, signifying that both sections of the range were then in residential use. The accompanying apportionment, dating from 1838, lists Thomas Pitt as both landowner and occupier of the farm.

The valuation survey notebooks, dating from 1910-1915 and held at the Public Record Office at Kew, provide further information about the functions of the farm buildings by the early 20th century. They show that, by this time, the northern part of the east range had ceased to be a domestic building. The property is described as 'a mixed farm in good condition with ample buildings in very fair repair'. The house was of 'cob, stucco and slate, containing kitchen, pantry, dairy, dining room, drawing room, hall and five bedrooms': the accommodation is very similar today. Adjoining this to the north, in the other formerly domestic part of the range, was a 'cellar, store over, (of) cob, stone and thatch'. The eastern part of the north range was a 'pound house, cob, stone and thatch and the rest of the range was employed as 'calf houses, shippons and stables, with a tallet (loft) over' (PRO IR 584508). The house and the pigsties were the only parts of the complex which were slated, presumably as a result of 18th- or 19th-century improvements in these areas. The other buildings were all thatched; this has since been replaced with corrugated iron.

3 SURVEY OF THE EAST RANGE

The historic fabric of this building is almost entirely obscured by render and by alterations to its roofline and fenestration. The current appearance of the building suggests an early 19th-century remodelling of a much older building, and this is proved by close examination of its interior, particularly the roof structures.

3.1 Exterior

Western façade

The western elevation (Fig. 4) is currently the main façade of the house and, at first floor level, is of five regular bays. The first-floor window at the southern end of the façade is now blocked, but all of the other windows at this level feature 19th-century casements or modern replacements in the same style. It is almost certain that evidence of earlier and wider window openings will survive beneath the modern render, particularly in the more important parts of the house.

The ground-floor fenestration is much less regular. There are three main entrance doorways, leading into the present kitchen at the north end of the house, the lounge or sitting room adjoining this, and, further south, to a narrow passage or hallway containing the main staircase. This latter doorway has a portico supported on columns with oddly placed annulet rings; it is uncertain whether these are intended to convey a Gothic or Chinese appearance. The southern part of the house has the grander architectural treatment and seems to have been contained the most important rooms, lit by taller, sash windows, whereas the northern part was humbler and may have contained the kitchen, pantry and dairy described in the early 20th-centuy valuation survey. These rooms have casement windows, some of which are modern replicas. As before, evidence of earlier window openings may survive beneath the modern render.

The adjoining barn has a very plain façade with small two-light windows on each storey. These openings do not appear to have been altered and their splayed embrasures seem intact. The plain, unmoulded window frames and mullions might date from the late 17th to the early 19th century. A narrow doorway with a good plank door hung on strap hinges with expanded ends opens onto to the south end of the barn and a wider entrance has been broken through the west wall close to its junction with the north range, on both storeys (Fig. 5).

Fig. 4 View of the western elevation of the farmhouse, showing the great length of the building and the relationship between the roofs of the house and the adjacent barn (extreme left).

Fig. 5 View of the west wall of the barn to the north of the house, showing the roofline and the modern brick jambs of the enlarged ground-floor opening. (Domestic scale window openings at the centre of the barn are obscured, here, by a tree).

Fig. 6 View of the eastern elevation of the farmhouse showing the formal treatment of the south end and the configuration of the chimneys betraying the probable position of the original cross passage.

Fig. 7 View of the eastern façade of the barn from the gardens, showing the raised eaves of the main house and the small two-light windows

Eastern façade

The eastern elevation of the house is somewhat grander and faces the pleasure gardens. The best detailing is reserved for the southern end, which may have been its 'polite' façade in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The important ground-floor rooms on either side of the main doorway are lit by large sash windows and there are three sashes at first-floor level. This part of the house appears to have been conceived of as a double-fronted building with rooms disposed symmetrically on either side of a central doorway and entrance hall (Fig. 5). The more irregular northern parts of the house were less important and were not given this formal treatment. The doorway has a very handsome porch with fretwork spandrels and trellised sides. This formerly had a flat roof, but a modern pitched roof has been added above.

The doorway opposes another doorway on the western side of the house and the two doors are linked by a narrow hallway or passage. Two chimneys very close together on the apex of the roof show that the fireplaces heating the main rooms to north and south back onto the passage, rather than appearing at the end gables as might be expected in a newly-built house of this type. This is an unusual arrangement which is strongly suggestive of adaptation and betrays the earlier origins of the house. The passage between the two doors may well have originated as a cross passage and is an important indicator of the original plan form. The walls and chimney stacks defining the north and south sides of the passage may well have been inserted in place of earlier timber partitions or screens when the house was remodelled in this form.

Towards the north end of the house the fenestration becomes more irregular, with wide window openings suggestive of broad, mullioned windows typical of the 16th or 17th centuries. No such window survives; the present casements all date from the 19th century, or replicate 19th-century windows. It is thus difficult to be certain that the window openings have not been either narrowed or widened to receive the present window frames. One of these windows, in the end cell of the main house, has a low sill and might conceivably have been converted from a doorway.

The eastern façade of the barn (Fig. 7) has a lower eaves level than the house, but it is clear from internal inspection that the eaves of the house have been raised and that the original eaves level and the pitch of the earlier roof matched that of the barn. The upper parts of some of the first-floor windows preserve traces of lath and plaster 'hoods', visible from the roof space internally, which may show that the first-floor windows formerly projected above eaves level and that the thatch swept over the windows in the form of 'eyebrow dormers'. Inspection of the wall tops from within the roof space, all along the length of the house, shows that much of the upper part of the east wall, perhaps as much as 1-1.5 metres in height, has been rebuilt very recently in red cored brick and concrete blockwork. This must replace earlier fabric, but of what period it is now impossible to say. The most likely interpretation is that the wall was heightened in the 19th century, perhaps in the context of replacing a formerly thatched roof with slate.

The east wall of the barn is of cob construction and has a number of small, square window openings preserving two-light timber window frames with plain, square mullions. None appear to retain glazing or casements, but it is probable that these are the original windows, since they fit perfectly their embrasures, and these do not appear to have been altered. Towards the northern end of the barn a wall projects eastwards to form a boundary with the garden and behind this, jutting out over a ditch or streamlet, is a low, square projection with a lean-to roof. This appears to represent a privy. It was formerly entered from the barn by a primary doorway, and from the gardens by a further doorway, now blocked. Adjoining the latter doorway, in the garden wall, is a small recess with an arched head which appears to represent a small slit window for lighting or ventilation. A larger window adjoining this looks eastwards along the ditch towards the Shobrooke Lake. Above the

roofline of the privy is a blocked window in the east wall of the barn, which is only visible internally. The barn is generously provided with such windows, which might reflect its origin as a domestic building, though few other features suggesting a domestic use are now evident.

3.2 Interior,

Ground floor

The former main entrances to the house lie near its southern end and are emphasised by the portico and porch on each of the main elevations. The doors both open upon a narrow hallway. This appears to represent the cross passage of the original farmhouse, but the original appearance of the area has been transformed and most of the architectural details in this area date from the 18th- or early 19th century. The hall is dominated by a staircase rising against the north wall to a first-floor landing. The staircase has stick balusters and turned, columnar newels supporting a mahogany continuous handrail. On the south side of the passage immediately within the western door is a low oval or four-centred timber arch, spanning a recess containing the door to the drawing room. At the east end of the hall, beyond a further arch, is a built in china cabinet within a domed-headed curved recess, with elaborately shaped shelves. This may well be infilling a doorway. Its position in the hallway is unusual, since such a feature is usually found within the main dining room. All the architraves are broad, flat and unmoulded, and many openings contain six-panelled doors with raised-fielded panels. These doors and the china cabinet appear to be of 18th-century date, but the staircase has an early 19th-century appearance. Some of its details are eccentric and it may well have been modernised.

The drawing room at the south end of the house has also been much altered. Unfortunately the ceiling is a modern plasterboard replacement and there is no visible evidence of early joists or beams. The room is lit by three large windows, all of which have shutters with raised-fielded panels, possibly of 18th-century date. The fireplace is a plain marble fireplace with corner blocks which, if it has not been imported from elsewhere, may date from the early 19th century.

The dining room, north of the cross passage, is also ceiled and has delicate plaster mouldings. This ceiling conceals the beams and joists, making analysis of the structure difficult. The shutters to the windows are plainer than those of the drawing room, with simple moulded panels perhaps dating from the early 19th century. The chimneypiece is a modern replica. No features earlier than the 18th or 19th century are visible.

A partially glazed early 19th-century door opens to the north through a surprisingly thick partition wall from the dining room into the present sitting room. This wall contains unusual cupboard recesses and may be of masonry or cob construction, but does not appear to rise above first-floor level. The sitting room has almost certainly served as the farmhouse kitchen. This room has a large fireplace in its north wall, which may be an early feature, though it has been extensively rebuilt. A large cupboard with an 18th-century plank door adjoining the fireplace may have been created within part of the original fireplace recess, or possibly within part of an earlier stair recess alongside the fireplace. Unfortunately the clavel or lintel of the fireplace appears to have been replaced and none of its details are authentic. A number of ovens have been formed in the rear of the fireplace recess, but these are probably of 19th-century date. The ceiling is crossed by a large beam, covered in plaster and bearing a couple of ancient meat hooks, which runs across the building from east to west. The joists presumably run from north to south and presumably rest on the top of the thick south wall. They might formerly have projected beyond the wall to form a jetty, but this could not be verified without lifting boards in the upstairs rooms. Any stops or mouldings on the beam and joists are concealed by the plaster finishes and it is difficult to assess their date and character.

Fig. 9 detail of the china cabinet at the eastern end of the entrance hall.

Fig. 8 Detail of the early 19th-century staircase within the entrance hall, looking east.

Fig. 10 View of the sitting room, looking east, showing the alignment of the ceiling beam, the meat hooks, the panelled window seat, fireplace and wall cupboard.

Fig. 11 View of the kitchen, looking south west, showing the massive ceiling beam, the enclosure for the service stair (centre) and the scar of a partition across the ceiling.

One of the broad, low windows is magnificently appointed with a panelled window seat and shutters, all of raised-fielded panels. Alongside it, one of a number of glazed wall cupboards may betray the position of an earlier window, or perhaps a spice cupboard.

To the north of this room is a narrow lobby or passage which opens upon the present kitchen. This occupies a large room which does not appear to have been served by a fireplace. The ceiling is plastered, concealing the joists, but is crossed by a very large and heavy beam running from north to south. This is one of the few early features now visible in the farmhouse interior. It has bold but rather crude chamfers and straight-cut stops which are visible behind a later enclosure housing a narrow and steep staircase. This is a rather basic structure and was almost certainly intended to serve a service stair. It must be an insertion since it cuts into the room and through the early ceiling. The position of any earlier staircases serving the first floor is uncertain: a stair may have existed off the cross passage at the south end of the house, or alongside the sitting room chimney, in the position of the large walk-in cupboard off the lobby linking the two rooms. It is possible that there were several stairs within the house.

The continuous chamfers on the ceiling beam show that the room was designed as a single space; however, close examination of the beam, and of the ceiling plaster, shows that it has been divided subsequently into several smaller rooms. There is evidence of crude sockets in the side and underside of the main beam which shows that a partition formerly ran for some distance along the length of the beam and then turned to the east to enclose a small square room in the south eastern corner of the present volume. This subdivision accounts for the presence of two unequally-sized windows in the east wall. The original function of the room is not certain, but it seems likely to have been a service room. As it had no chimney it might be identified as the dairy described in the early 20th-century valuation notes. The smaller room within it might well have been the pantry.

To the north of this room, separated from it be a thick cob wall, is the lower part of the barn, described as a ‘cellar’ in the early 20th-century valuation notes. The term cellar is often used generally for a storage facility but, given that the upper storey is described as a ‘store’ and that the poundhouse lay close by, it seems reasonable to assume that the lower part of the barn was used at that time for storing cider. In the 1830s, however, the building is marked on the tithe map as residential. There is little trace today of any residential occupation of this building. There are no fireplaces, no evidence of internal partitions and little trace of points of ascent or descent between the floors. The building does seem to have been linked directly to the main house at first-floor level, but no corresponding link is evident on the ground floor.

At the present time the lower storey of the barn is a single volume, almost 16m long and approximately 6m wide. The room has a worn concrete or mortar floor and a ceiling of exposed beams and joists which have never been lathed and plastered. The ceiling is divided into six bays by seven large, crudely-squared ceiling beams, linked in each bay by thirteen plank joists; the timbers being perhaps of 18th- or early 19th-century date. The end beams butt against the end walls, as do the joists at the extremities of each bay. The floor boards of the first-floor, which are of considerable antiquity and uncertain condition, are exposed to the room below. Empty sockets in the sides of the beams reveal that almost all the existing or former voids in the ceiling are secondary: originally the ceiling was unbroken by stairs or ladders, except at the south end where one socket is absent; this might have allowed access by a narrow ladder. The present openings are all cut in; one appears to be circular, as though for passing barrels between the storeys; others are blocked with domestic doors possibly derived from the main house. The walls do retain some plaster, but none of the windows are now glazed. The room is lit by small two light windows, as previously described, and there are doorways to the yard, to the poundhouse (now blocked) and to the garden and the

presumed privy on the east. Several good plank doors with hinges having expanded ends survive, *in situ* or loose in the building.

First floor and roofs

The staircase at the south end of the house rises to a first-floor landing lying against the east wall. On the landing, the staircase can be seen to have ill-matched newel posts, suggesting that it has been modernised, though both types of newel would be characteristic of the early 19th century. From the landing a doorway with a door having four raised fielded panels opens onto the chamber above the south end of the house, now the master bedroom. This room may have a fireplace in its north wall, but this has been blocked. One of the roof trusses beaks into this room through the ceiling, but this is now clad in plaster and details of the truss cannot be observed. Most unusually, the room does not extend the full width of the house, but is encroached upon by a narrow closet off an adjacent bedroom. This closet has been extended further to create a modern '*ensuite*' bathroom, but its original purpose is enigmatic: could it have originally housed a narrow staircase rising from the cross passage?

The foot of the truss previously noted is also visible within the closet, and this is of a gently curving form suggestive of a jointed cruck. Investigation above the ceiling revealed that this truss is of late-medieval date (Fig. 12). It consists of a pair of principal rafters linked by a high, straight collar secured with two pegs, the pegs being left protruding. The principal rafters are tenoned and pegged together at the apex, which is notched to support a diagonally-set square ridge tree. This timber remains *in situ*, extending to the south to meet a trio of hip rafters rising behind the modern south gable (which has been rebuilt in concrete blocks) and also to the north as far as the chimney on the south side of the cross passage. The purlins are slightly trenched into the backs of the principals, so that the common rafters could have been independent of the bay system, an unusual feature of a roof of this date. The trusses were evidently very widely spaced. All the primary timbers are very large in scantling, well squared and without any moulding or decoration of any kind, which is not to imply that this roof was not, in its original form, a very impressive, if not ostentatious structure. Unfortunately the roof has been partially removed and many of the timbers are not in their original positions. The early timbers can be distinguished because they are lightly smoke-blackened, implying either that this end of the house was originally open to the hall, perhaps divided only by a low screen, or that there was an open hearth in this part of the house. The existing roof overlying these fragments is now largely a modern structure, but presumably replaces an 18th- or 19th-century roof structure which had become too decayed to preserve. It is interesting that there is no evidence of later ceiling on the medieval truss. It seems likely that this room was either ceiled at the present level, or left open to the roof until a late date. This may imply that this was a lower status chamber than those at the other end of the house.

North of the chimney stack the roof over the cross passage appears to have been wholly removed and replaced in the late 17th or 18th centuries. No trace of the original medieval trusses has been preserved, with the exception of a few reused timbers which are noticed by their smoke staining. Some of the purlins, for example, have survived and might, if closely examined allow the original form of the roof to be determined. The existing roof structure is modern, but this overlies an earlier roof of much cruder 'A'-frame trusses, their principal rafters only roughly squared, halved and crossed at the apex and linked by applied collars. Some of these collars are reused timbers, but not from the original medieval roof. They have curved ends and might have been either principal rafters with curved feet or long cruck posts with jowled heads. They are not smoke-blackened and might have been derived from a different building. This roof is considered to date from the 17th or 18th century.

Fig. 12 View of the sole surviving late-medieval roof truss over the southern end of the house, looking south, showing its relation with the modern roof above.

Fig. 13 View of the roof over the centre of the original house, probably the hall, looking north, showing the (reused) cranked, smoke-blackened collar of an impressive late-medieval roof and the remains of a tertiary partition beyond it relating to a chamber.

Fig. 14 View within the former chamber, looking north, showing the high-level of the former ceiling, the plastered chimney breast and a reused cruck or wall post with a curved foot added as an additional tie.

Fig. 15 View of the loft over the barn at the north end of the house, looking north, showing the plastered walls and the absence of any evidence of ceilings.

The first-floor rooms north of the staircase and landing occupy what would almost certainly have been the upper part of the medieval hall. This was the central volume and most important room of a medieval house, and would have been covered with a very handsome open roof. Although in this case the roof has been destroyed, its existence is known from its fragmentary remains. These include a massive cambered collar beam in the form of a low, triangular or four-centred arch, decorated with chamfers and smoke-blackened by an open hearth. The collar beam was formerly tenoned into principal rafters at either end, but these joints are now exposed as the principals have been removed and the collar beam has been reused as an applied collar in a later truss. Although its original position within the building is uncertain it is unlikely that a timber of this size and impressive detailing could have come from anywhere other than a hall.

The collar beam came from an open truss which was later infilled with a timber partition. The underside bears traces of small sockets, cut into the earlier chamfers, for small vertical studs connected with the infilling of the panels of this partition. The most likely context for its closure is the provision of a first-floor chamber at one of the two ends of the house. The collar beam must therefore have come from one of the trusses over the ends of the hall. As the enclosure of the truss was secondary, it is possible that the whole roof was formerly open, the central bays over the hall perhaps being distinguished by different detailing. Some reused purlins also survive, smoke blackened and of very large scantling. Further analysis of these might enable a reconstruction of the roof, since they are likely to bear sockets for wind braces, scars of the principal rafters and peg-holes for fixing the common rafters. It is possible that some of the principal rafters have been reused also, though none were observed.

The reason for the replacement of the medieval roof is uncertain. It is possible that it was destroyed when the hall was floored over to create a first-floor chamber, perhaps because it had structural or decorative timbers at a low level which would have interfered with the headroom. This explanation seems unlikely, however, given the amount of headroom still available today. It is possible that the roof was simply replaced because it had begun to fail, or because of some other disaster such as a thatch fire. The replacement trusses are crude 'A'-frames formed by principal rafters halved and crossed at the apex, with high, applied collars. They probably date from the 17th- or 18th-century, at which time the area may have been a single large chamber. This had a very high ceiling with canted sides, and was ceiled with lath and plaster. Traces of this lath and plaster still remain at a high level, well above the present ceilings of the first-floor bedrooms (Fig. 13). Evidence of notches in the feet of the trusses on the western side of the house, within the existing bedrooms may show that a corridor formerly ran along the western side of the room from the small closet, which has been interpreted (above) as the remains of a staircase.

Unfortunately the area was heavily altered in the 18th or 19th century when the chimney stacks on either side of the cross passage were inserted to provide heating for the improved rooms at this end of the house. Most of the area seems to have remained a single chamber until the 19th century, when it was subdivided to form several rooms approached by a new corridor running along the east side of the house, with lower ceilings just above eaves level. These rooms are accessed from a trapezoidal landing, entered by a four-panelled door from the stair landing to the south. Several 18th-century doors remain in this area, each with two raised-fielded panels, hung on 'L'-hinges' but these are not *in situ* and could have come from any part of the house. Many of the present doors to cupboards and bedrooms have four panels and would seem to be of 19th-century date.

To the north of the hall, the area above the present kitchen was originally another chamber, much of the structure of which survives. The partition between this room and the chamber over the hall appears to rise over the very thick wall separating the present dining

room from the sitting room, and extends into the loft space, where its surface retains plaster and whitewash (Fig. 13). This is not a medieval closed truss; it is not smoke blackened, and was probably not aligned on any of the earlier roof trusses, but must date from the rebuilding of the house in the 17th or 18th century when the existing historic roof structure was added. A small void in the centre of the partition allows access to the upper part of the chamber which, like the hall chamber, formerly had a high ceiling with canted sides, ceiled with lath and plaster. Most of the ceiling joists remain, bearing traces of lathing, and the plaster remains to the full height on the northern wall and chimney breast (Fig. 14). The existing ceiling is much lower than the original and, after the new ceiling was inserted, one of the trusses was braced with a long timber with a curved head or foot, probably a cruck post or principal from a demolished farm building. This chamber remains undivided but for the corridor running along its eastern side. The large chimney breast from the kitchen rises through this room and alongside it is a small closet, now converted into an '*ensuite'* bathroom. This has an 18th-century two-panelled door, hung on 'L'-hinges, which has been disguised as a four-panelled door by the addition of extra fillets of timber. The closet may well originally have housed a staircase rising alongside the kitchen chimney.

The first-floor rooms to the north of this may also have originated as a single chamber, but have now been subdivided to form an additional bedroom and a bathroom. The service staircase rises within this area, and is separated from the chamber by a timber-framed partition with a central doorway at the head of the stairs. This partition does not extend above the present ceiling and is unlikely to pre-date the 18th or 19th century. The partition between the bedroom and the bathroom appears to be modern. The roof trusses above this part of the house are similar to the 'A'-frame roofs to the south, braced with applied collars, and seem to be of the same period as these. It is unlikely that this represents the original roof of this part of the building, which retains a much older chamfered and stopped beam. There is a blocked doorway in the north gable wall, which communicates with the adjacent barn.

The upper storey of the barn is a single, undivided space with an open roof which shows no trace of ever having been ceiled. The roof is supported by five rude, 'A'-frame trusses with high-level applied collars, inconsistently braced to the principals by additional timbers. There are two levels of purlins on each side, though these seem to have been reset when the present corrugated iron roof was added, replacing thatch. The wall surfaces at the north end of the building retain some plaster, and there is evidence of a partition across the north end, which does not appear to have risen into the roof. There is no evidence of any other division. As before, though the building is known to have been domestic in function, there is no evidence of fireplaces or any other features of domestic character. The building appears to have been built in a single phase and its character suggests that it dates from the late 18th or nearly 19th century.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Plan form

West Forde farmhouse is an unusually long and narrow building: if the barn is included with the house, the length of the whole building is something like 44 metres. Because of this great length and the extent of alterations to the façades and interior features, it is difficult to identify the nucleus of the house.

The house is presumed to have originated as a typical medieval vernacular house, one room deep, with a cross passage and three main rooms: a service room below the cross passage, a hall at the centre of the building (probably lit by an open fire) and an inner room or parlour at the end of the hall. Such houses usually began as single-storey dwellings, with all

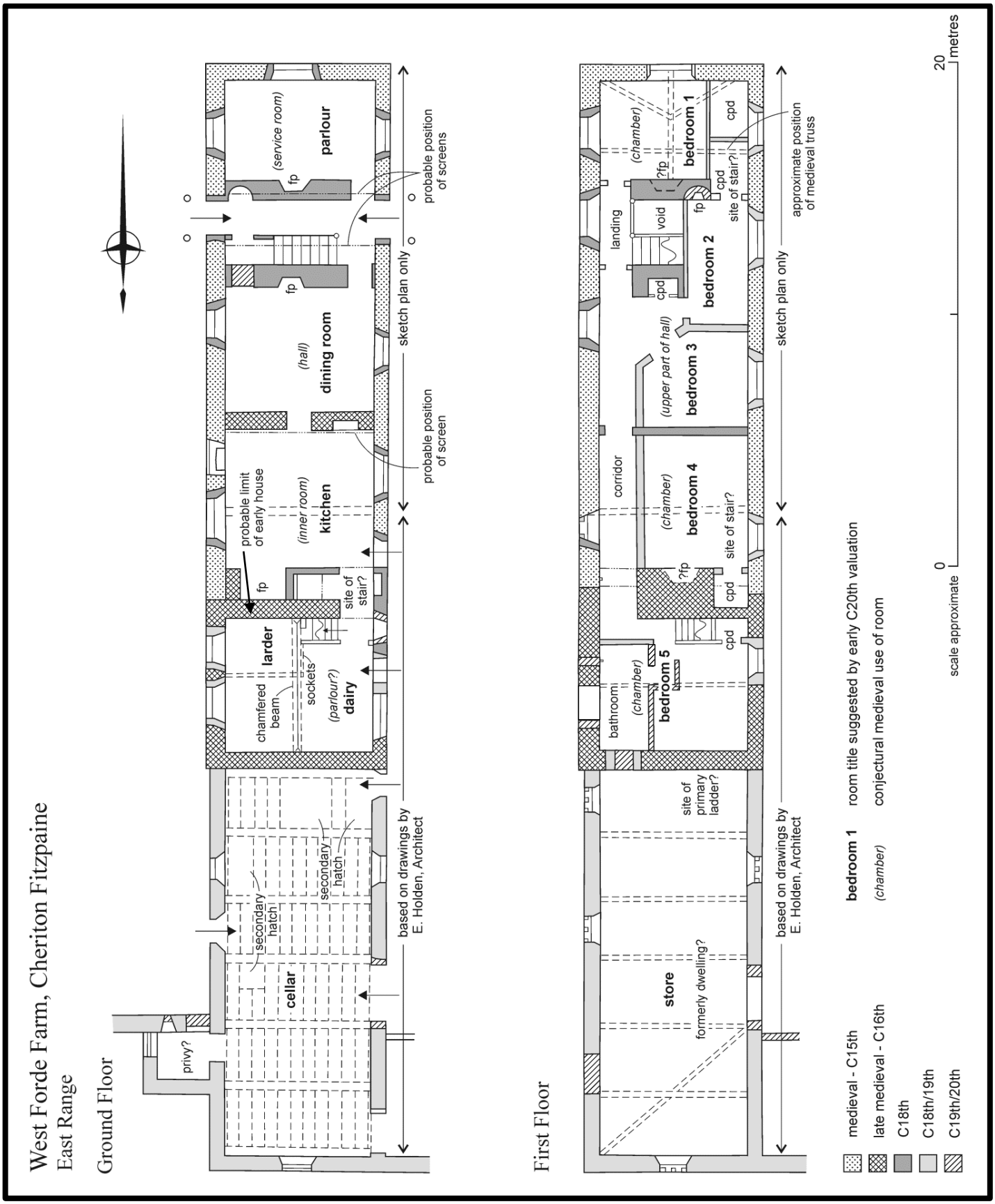

Fig. 16 Plans of the ground and first floors, based upon measured drawings by E. Holden and sketch plans by R. Parker, showing the suggested phasing of the building (digitised by Jane Read).

the rooms open to the roof. Such houses were often gradually floored in during the 16th and 17th centuries, initially by the creation of chambers over the end rooms, and finally by the horizontal division of the hall and the addition of chimneys. The addition of other rooms, such as lean-to structures against the rear wall, cross wings containing additional accommodation and porches sheltering the main door could result in highly picturesque and irregular compositions.

As there is evidence of smoke blackened timbers in the roof at West Forde (discussed below) there can be little doubt that the house did originally have an open hall and that the typical pattern of development outlined above has occurred here. The great length of the present house seems to have resulted from the accretion of additional structures on the same alignment as the main house, and the continuation of this pattern through successive phases of development over centuries.

Phase I: the primary house- 15th century?

The two opposed doorways at the south end of the house strongly suggest a cross passage, and it is assumed that this was the main entrance to the original dwelling, with the service room to the south, in the position of the present drawing room, and the hall immediately to the north. This end of the house may thus be assumed to be a primary part of the building, rather than an addition. This interpretation is confirmed by the survival of a lightly smoke-blackened late- medieval roof truss over this part of the building, of a plain and undecorated form suitable for covering a service room or chamber. The chimney stacks on either side of the cross passage are evidently insertions, and it may be assumed that the service room was not originally heated The position of the truss in relation to the later chimneys, close to the southern face of the southern stack, and the survival of several lengths of purlin of very large scantling, would seem to show that the roof had very wide bays. The service end and passage were probably accommodated within two and a half bays of roof, the half bay allowing for a hip at the south end. The smoke blackening of the sole-surviving medieval truss, though relatively light, may show that the upper volumes of the house were not originally enclosed except by low screens. Unfortunately, no evidence of the screens or any partitions above them is now visible.

The hall at the centre of the house was originally open, and seems to have had a more richly ornamented roof than the southern bays. This roof had shallow but pronounced cambering of the collars and chamfered decoration, and is very likely to have had other decorative structural elements, such as wind braces, for which evidence may yet be recovered. The hall was originally heated by an open fire, which blackened the roof timbers and there may have been further timber screens at the north end, separating the hall from a parlour or inner room.

The inner room beyond this, represented today by the sitting room, is also likely to have been open to the roof, and may not initially have had its own hearth or chimney. It is likely to have been the northernmost room in the original house. No trace of the medieval fenestration is now visible, but evidence of window openings pre-dating the present ones and also the positions of the crucks of the original roofs may be revealed should the render or internal plaster ever be removed.

Phase II: construction of chambers- 16th century?

It is probable that earliest significant phase of alterations to the house involved the flooring over of the original end rooms and the division of the roof space by partitions to create first-floor chambers at each end of the hall. Evidence for this is provided by the secondary sockets cut into the underside of the surviving collar beam of one of the former hall trusses. Although these could admittedly have been made in the context of full-height enclosures alone, it is

considered that the creation of first-floor chambers is more likely. The very large, thick wall between the hall and the sitting room may have been introduced at this period, replacing a timber screen, perhaps to take the weight of a substantial structure. The new beam in the northern room lies across the house, which would permit the joists to extend southwards from it to rest on the top of, and possibly project over, this wall to form a jetty into the hall. A similar jetty may have been introduced at the south end of the house when a new chamber was created there, perhaps by jettying over the earlier screens of the cross passage and service room. Unfortunately none of the joists are visible and thus their character and date remains uncertain. Access to the new chambers may have been by stairs at each end of the house, one opening off the cross passage and the other perhaps in the north-western corner, perhaps alongside a new chimneystack in the north wall.

A further alteration in the 16th or early 17th century may have been the addition of an extension at the north end of the building, providing two storeys of accommodation, a ground-floor room and a chamber over. The only dating evidence for this structure is the large, chamfered beam with straight cut stops. This seems likely to be of late-medieval of early post-medieval date. The chimney at the north end of the house may have been added at the same time as this addition. As there does not seem to have been provision for a staircase in the new addition, the new first-floor chamber may have been approached by a staircase adjoining the kitchen chimney, or directly from the northern chamber within the earlier house. The house was now perhaps four rooms long and one room wide, with three first-floor chambers.

Although no evidence remains, the hall may have been floored over slightly later in the life of the house, and may have been provided from this time with its own fireplace and chimney. This does not survive: it may have been accommodated in a lateral stack constructed against one of the main elevations of the house, which was removed in later alterations.

Phase III: rebuilding of the roofs and chambers- Late 17th or 18th century?

The next major intervention involved the removal of the medieval roofs of the north end of the house and all the earlier partitions associated with these, and the provision of a new roof and partitions in their place. As there appears to have been no significant increase in the accommodation provided, it is probable that this phase was necessitated by some disastrous event; perhaps the structural failure of the roof, or a fire affecting the northern parts of the building. The new roofs probably date from the 17th or early 18th century. They are of very simple construction and, unlike the medieval roofs, were not intended to be exposed. The new rooms were ceiled at collar level and had high, canted ceilings within the roof space. It is interesting that the surviving bays of the medieval roof to the south do not appear to have been ceiled at this period: the thatch may have remained visible here until the present ceilings were inserted in the late 18th or 19th century. The house was now four rooms in length and one room wide, with four first-floor chambers.

Perhaps in a separate phase of activity, later in the 18th century, the southern part of the house appears to have been remodelled. This upgraded the southern rooms at the expense of those at the north end of the house. New chimneys were added on either side of the cross passage. This allowed the rooms at the southern end of the house to be heated and also, perhaps allowed the removal of the putative lateral stack serving the hall, thus ‘improving’ the appearance of the façade. The fenestration is likely to have been regularised at the same time. The survival of 18th-century raised fielded panelled doors and shutters throughout the house shows how the vernacular character of the building was completely excised, at this time, by new, classically-inspired features. The domed-headed china cabinet in the passage is a fine example of this kind of furnishing.

Phase IV: further improvements and additions- late 18th and early 19th century?
In the late 18th and early 19th century there is some evidence of further remodelling. It is likely that the main staircase was inserted or improved at this time, rising to a new corridor running along the eastern side of the first floor. Lower ceilings were inserted into the first-floor chambers and the hall chamber was subdivided to provide two smaller rooms. The rooms at the northern end of the house, which are presumed originally to have been high–status apartments, had been downgraded. The former parlour had become a kitchen and the room beyond it had been subdivided into two rooms, later a dairy and a pantry.

The most significant alteration at this period, however, seems to have been the remodelling of the farm buildings and the addition of the barn to the north of the house. Nothing is known of the earlier farm buildings, but there can be little doubt that these were entirely replaced when the existing ranges of buildings were added to surround the farmyard in what must have been a dramatic re-planning of the site. The long ranges of open-fronted linhays and very large, two-storey threshing barn with its basement supported on segmental arches would be typical of the late 18th or early 19th century and imply a period of great prosperity at Forde.

The character of the barn to the north of the farmhouse would fit a date in the late 18th or early 19th-century. It seems to have been conceived of as a continuation of the farmhouse range, under the same roof, but with much less 'polite' detailing. The function of the building is obscure and there is little evidence by way of furnishings or fixtures to show its use. Unless there were partitions, now vanished, independent of the structures of the roofs and ceilings, the interior appears to have been open from end to end on each storey, with only a single partition at the north end on the first floor, which did not rise into the roof.

As it is marked upon the tithe map as residential building and was physically linked to the northern part of the farmhouse by a first-floor doorway, we may perhaps conjecture that it served as a dormitory for the farm hands or dairymaids employed on the farm. The upper storey may have been reached by the service stair from the northern, service end of the house, and then by passing through a chamber at the head of the stair, perhaps occupied by an overseer or senior staff member. The lower storey may have been a milking parlour or store. Alternatively the two storeys may have been used to segregate the sexes, with male farmhands occupying the ground floor and females the first.

Similar accommodation for milkmaids is described at Thomas Hardy's fictional dairy farm of Talbothays, in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', where 'quite a little battalion of men and maids' were employed under the supervision of Dairyman Crick. Tess Durbeyfield and some of her fellow milkmaids slept within the dairyhouse, in 'a large room over the milk-house, some thirty feet long, the sleeping cots of the other three indoor milkmaids being in the same apartment' ('*Tess of the D'Urbervilles'*, Chapter XVII). The use of the building as a dormitory might explain its relation to the farmhouse and its treatment as a residential building on the tithe map despite its very basic appearance and absence of domestic comforts.

Phase V: late 19th-century and modern alterations.
In the later 19th and early 20th-centuries alterations to the buildings have included the raising of the eaves on the eastern side of the house and the replacement of the thatched roof covering with slate. By the early 20th century the barn north of the house was serving as a cellar and store, probably associated with the poundhouse which had been established in part of the linhay range to the north east. Several doorways or windows appear to have been blocked, including the linking doorway between the house and the barn.

Later alterations have included the replacement of the 19th-century roof structure, the rebuilding of the southern gable and eaves of the roof in cored brick and concrete blockwork. and the removal of the partitions dividing the dairy and the larder.

5. IMPACT OF THE PROPOSALS

The proposals for alterations to the house and barn include the extension of the present dwelling into the barn with the provision of a very large new kitchen on the ground floor and new bedrooms and a bathroom on the floor above. As the barn was evidently a domestic building for a period, this would effectively be a reinstatement of a former use, though obviously to a much higher degree of modern comfort than the building originally provided.

Within the present farmhouse, the proposals involve the creation of a new bathroom and hallway by subdividing the existing kitchen and inserting a new partition under the large ceiling beam. This intervention would effectively reinstate an earlier partition under the beam and is unlikely to have a significant impact on the historic fabric. A new doorway would be inserted through the north wall of the house at ground-floor level, to create a link between the two buildings. This would necessitate the removal of a small part of the north gable wall. On the upper floor the impact of this intervention can be minimised by reopening the earlier doorway between the two buildings.

The partition between the bathroom and bedroom at the north end of the first floor is probably modern and of little historic merit. The extension of the corridor as far as the north wall would necessitate either opening (or reopening) a doorway in the partition to the north of the service staircase. At the earliest, this partition is considered to date from the 18th or 19th century; it may have been inserted when ceilings were provided in the first-floor rooms. This is unlikely to have a significant impact on the historic fabric.

The proposals for the new kitchen on the ground floor of the barn would preserve it as a single volume but the floors, wall surfaces, ceilings, windows and doors would inevitably need upgrading. On the first floor it is proposed to provide new bedrooms and bathrooms by subdividing the space into separate areas. The historic floor surfaces would of necessity have to be upgraded or renewed, as would the roof structure, roof coverings and the windows. These alterations would inevitably affect the character of the interior and might involve the replacement of fixtures such as window frames and doors, and the subdivision of the roof space with ceilings and partitions.

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