



## WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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WITTON HALL FARM  
WITTON GILBERT  
COUNTY DURHAM

prepared for

Ryder Architects

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**WITTON HALL FARM, WITTON GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

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**WITTON HALL FARM, WITTON GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

***Summary***

*This document presents the results of archaeological monitoring undertaken at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert, County Durham. This work was undertaken prior to the conversion of two barns at the farm, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and local policies.*

*The principal objectives of the archaeological monitoring were to record any element of historic interest associated with the medieval barn and to identify the existence, nature and extent of any sub-surface archaeological remains that may have been encountered.*

*The archaeological monitoring of the removal of a concrete floor to the west of the granary was successful in identifying the remains of an adjoining barn structure that was tied into the southern wall of the granary. Two phases of construction were identified within the barn, with the later phase concerned with the insertion of a barn door on the western end of the structure.*

*In addition to the remains of the barn, two further wall foundations were recorded. These were of a later post-medieval date compared to the adjoining barn, and ran parallel to it. The northern most wall foundation was butted by a small brick built man hole and was probably associated with a washfold thought to be in the area.*



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This document presents a report on the results of archaeological investigations carried out at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert, County Durham (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) for Ryder Architects between 14th and 17th July 2017. A Historic Building Survey (NAA 2016a) was carried out to support the planning application for the development, which highlighted the presence of significant medieval remains on the site, and advised that archaeological monitoring took place during groundworks.
- 1.2 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken to help inform the planning process by determining the presence or absence of any archaeological remains within the site and ascertaining the extent (including surviving levels), condition, character and date of any such remains.
- 1.3 All archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with a separate Written Schemes of Investigation (NAA 2016b). The monitoring works were completed to relevant standards and guidance published by English Heritage (2008), Historic England (2015) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014a; 2014b; 2014c).

## **2.0 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

- 2.1 The site was centred on NZ 23500 45500, and located immediately south of Witton Gilbert and the A691. Access to the site was via Coach Lane, leading south out of Witton Gilbert.

### **Geology and soils**

- 2.2 The geology across the site comprised Pennine Middle Coal Measures overlain by glacial till (BGS website). The soils within the development site are unmapped.

### **Topography and land-use**

- 2.3 The site lay within a roughly rectangular yard and was accessed via Coach Lane on the eastern side of the development area. At the time of the watching brief, the yard was surfaced with concrete and sloped generally downwards to the east. The development comprised three small residential units, a medieval granary (which was under renovation at the time of monitoring) and a number of barns associated with recent farming activity.

### **3.0 SUMMARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been discussed at length in the Historic Building Survey (NAA 2016a), and only a summary of information relevant to the archaeological investigations are given here.
- 3.2 The Granary at Witton Hall Farm was thought to have been part of the medieval leper hospital grange, with some elements of this period surviving today. Evidence for this was gained from a tree-ring dating project, which produced a felling date of 1462 (plus or minus 10 years) for the tie beams and east elevation door lintel (Roberts et al. 1999).
- 3.3 The period following this, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, was one of significant modernisation of farming methods, and subsequently of farm buildings and layouts. The mechanisation of processes such as threshing, which had previously been carried out by hand, was developed – powered by either horse engine or steam – necessitating the adaptation of farms, such as Witton Hall Farm. Many farm buildings were rebuilt and altered to accommodate these changes, and newer, purpose built buildings were constructed. It is likely that this period corresponded with the extension of the Granary, which is observed in the building fabric, and the addition of a loft.
- 3.4 By 1857 this Granary appears to have been incorporated into a foldyard. This layout became common from the 1750s onwards, providing well-lit farm buildings, enclosed outdoor spaces to house loose livestock and increased manure production (Brunskill 1982). Although the Granary was the only surviving part of the foldyard at the time of the survey, evidence survived in the building fabric which indicated that the buildings shown in historic mapping extended from its north-east and south-west corners.

#### **Granary**

- 3.5 The northern parts of the west elevation were original random-coursed rubble sandstone. The southern part of the wall was considerably narrower and seemed to be a later extension or rebuild. A vertical wall scar was visible between these two parts. The original part of this wall contained a large doorway, with a timber lintel and brick header relieving arch above. This opening had a tooled and margined stone jamb. South of this were two blocked doorways, both with timber lintels. These appeared to have been early, if not original, openings. The northernmost of these blocked doors



had a tooled and margined stone surround. A further partially blocked doorway, with a timber lintel, was located south of these; this appeared to have been a later insertion. It was blocked with breeze block, leaving only a small window opening at the top. At the southern end of the west elevation, within the later rebuilt section, there was a triangular wall scar delineating the former roof line of a small building. This may be the outline of the eastern gable of the building, which projected west from the Granary on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map. Within this outline, there were three slit vents close to ground level.

#### **4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

4.1 The principal objectives of the archaeological monitoring were:

- To record any element of historic interest relating to the fabric of the barns; and
- To establish the presence, nature, extent and significance of any archaeological remains and provide a detailed record subsequent to their loss.

#### **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

##### **Watching brief**

5.1 The Historic Building Survey of the site (NAA 2016a) identified extensive, well-preserved archaeological features dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods. There was evidence of a wall scar on the western elevation of the barn, which suggested that a smaller structure may have been tied into the barn on its south-eastern corner.

5.2 In compliance with the planning condition attached to this development, a professional archaeologist monitored all intrusive groundworks during the development. This comprised solely of the breaking out of the existing concrete flooring to the west of the barn. No services, such as drainage or utilities, crossed the proposed area.

5.3 The removal of overburden (loose stones, rubble, made-ground, tarmac, concrete, hardcore, building debris, etc.) and the levelling of the building footprint were undertaken using a JCB operating under the supervision of the monitoring archaeologist.

- 5.4 The JCB was fitted with a ditching bucket, although when appropriate, a toothed bucket was used to break thick sections of concrete. Once the concrete was broken, a ditching bucket was used to expose the area. The mechanical excavator removed modern overburden down to a level at which significant archaeological deposits were identified or down to the required formation levels for the development, whichever was reached first (NAA 2016b).

### **Archaeological recording**

- 5.5 Where structures, finds, soil features or layers of archaeological interest were exposed or disturbed by the groundworks, mechanical excavation ceased, and the archaeologist was provided with the opportunity to observe, clean, assess, excavate by hand, sample and record these features and finds (NAA 2016b).

## **6.0 RESULTS**

### **Watching brief**

- 6.1 The principle objectives of the archaeological monitoring were to ensure that any archaeological remains beneath the concrete flooring were recorded prior to being buried by the construction of a new garden area to the west of the existing Medieval Granary. The area monitored measured approximately 15m by 30m and comprised the area beneath a modern barn, which was demolished as part of the renovation.
- 6.2 The main feature recorded during the watching brief was a north-east to south-west aligned barn (05; see Plate 1 and Figures 2 and 3) which was tied into the medieval granary on its north-eastern corner. The feature appeared on first edition OS mapping of the area dating from 1861 and was likely constructed prior to this, although it was clearly a later addition to the medieval granary.



Plate 1: Barn **05** looking south-west towards the entrance.

- 6.3 The barn itself measured 11.5m by 6m with a large entrance on its south-western face. The outer walls (**09**) were constructed from sandstone blocks, identical to the granary building, and were constructed two courses wide with an internal rubble core. The north-western wall survived two courses high, while the south-eastern wall survived to only a single course high. The north-eastern wall of barn **05** was not visible, as the concrete butting against the barn was left in situ to avoid damaging the existing structure. It was not clear whether the building included the western wall from the granary. The corners of the south-western wall survived to one course high and incorporated a cobbled threshold (**06**) with three padstones (**12**), which likely formed an entrance into the structure.
- 6.4 The internal flooring of the barn consisted of a brick border (**01**) lining three sides of the structure with an internal cobbled surface (**08**) that appeared to have been patched several times. The bricks were handmade, of a fairly uniform size, and were unstamped /unfrogged. Thus, they are likely to be of a post-medieval origin.
- 6.5 Along the north-western edge of surface **01** were four evenly spaced square settings (**13**). These looked to be deliberately set within the bricks, rather than holes cut into

- the border, and were probably settings for posts, supporting beams or shelving. No square settings were visible on the south-eastern wall of the barn.
- 6.6 The central cobbled surface (**08**) consisted of rounded, oval shaped cobbles arranged in various patterns, which likely represented numerous patching phases. Two large square padstones (**11**) were recorded within cobbled surface **08** on the north-west and south-east walls. These were likely to support beams; however, no other padstones were visible within the building.
- 6.7 Butting both the cobbled and brick surfaces on the south-western side of the barn was a cobbled threshold (**06**) containing three padstones (**12**), two of which had square recesses visible. The threshold was likely a later addition to south-western wall **09** and was probably contemporary with surfaces **01** and **08**.
- 6.8 A large rectangular stone setting (**07**) was recorded as built into the north-western wall of the barn and likely formed a small doorway, probably original to the barn. A similar sized doorway was depicted on the south-eastern wall in earlier photographs of the structure provided by the client (Plates 3 and 4). This doorway was not visible during the investigation, as the eastern corner of the building was missing.
- 6.9 There were likely two phases of construction of the barn, the first of which was the exterior sandstone walls, with small doorways on the north-western and south-eastern walls and the pre-existing granary doorway on the north-eastern wall, which still survives. The later phase of construction included the addition of the cobbled threshold (**06**), forming an entrance on the south-western corner, and the construction of surfaces **01** and **08**.
- 6.10 To the north of barn **05**, two further structures were recorded (**02** and **03**, Figure 3). Structure **02** consisted of a northeast to south-west aligned section of wall foundation measuring 0.7m long. The foundations were aligned parallel to the north-western wall of barn **05** and were probably related; however, none of the above ground structure survived. A long section of land drain was cemented on the south side of the wall foundations, which was cut in half to form a gutter. The foundation itself was constructed of the same type of bricks as the interior of barn **05** but set within thick concrete. It was likely that the wall foundations were later than barn **05** but re-used the same bricks.

- 6.11 A further wall foundation was recorded to the north of the foundations of structure **02**. This set of foundations (**03**) were constructed in the same manner, with re-used bricks set in concrete, and formed an L-shape. The north to south aligned portion of the wall foundations formed a rectangular shape, with the material inside (**14**) containing butchered animal bone and bottle glass. A small section was dug through this material to record the depth of the wall foundations, which were in excess of 1m deep. On the south side of the foundations was a small square brick structure (**04**; Plate 2) that visibly butted up against **03**, and was clearly a later addition. The structure measured 1m by 1m and was constructed using machine made bricks that were markedly different to those within barn **05**. It was likely that this structure was a small manhole.



*Plate 2: Manhole **04** abutting wall foundations **03**.*

- 6.12 Abutting foundation **03** on the south-western corner was a small section of brick foundations (**10**). This was aligned northwest to south east, measured 1m long and could have formed a corner with foundations **02**; however, this relationship has been lost.
- 6.13 It was not clear what wall foundations **02** and **03** related to, as they do not appear on historical mapping of the area. Through conversation with the land owner, who remembered the barn when he was a child, it is possible these structures related to a washfold, which could have been in the area.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION**

### **Watching Brief**

- 7.1 The watching brief achieved all the principle objectives for the monitoring of ground works at Witton Hall Farm. The anticipated remains of a small north-east to south-west aligned barn were recorded beneath the modern concrete floor. The archaeological investigation of this structure showed that there were likely two phases of construction probably related to changing activities or mechanisation at the farm. The north-eastern corner of the wall clearly demonstrated that barn **05** was a later addition to the medieval granary, given that the sandstone wall ties into the fabric of the medieval barn.
- 7.2 In addition to the anticipated remains, two further sections of wall foundations were recorded. These were unanticipated remains, as they do not appear on earlier historic mapping of the area; however, from examination of the fabric of the foundations, it was concluded that these were later than barn **05**.

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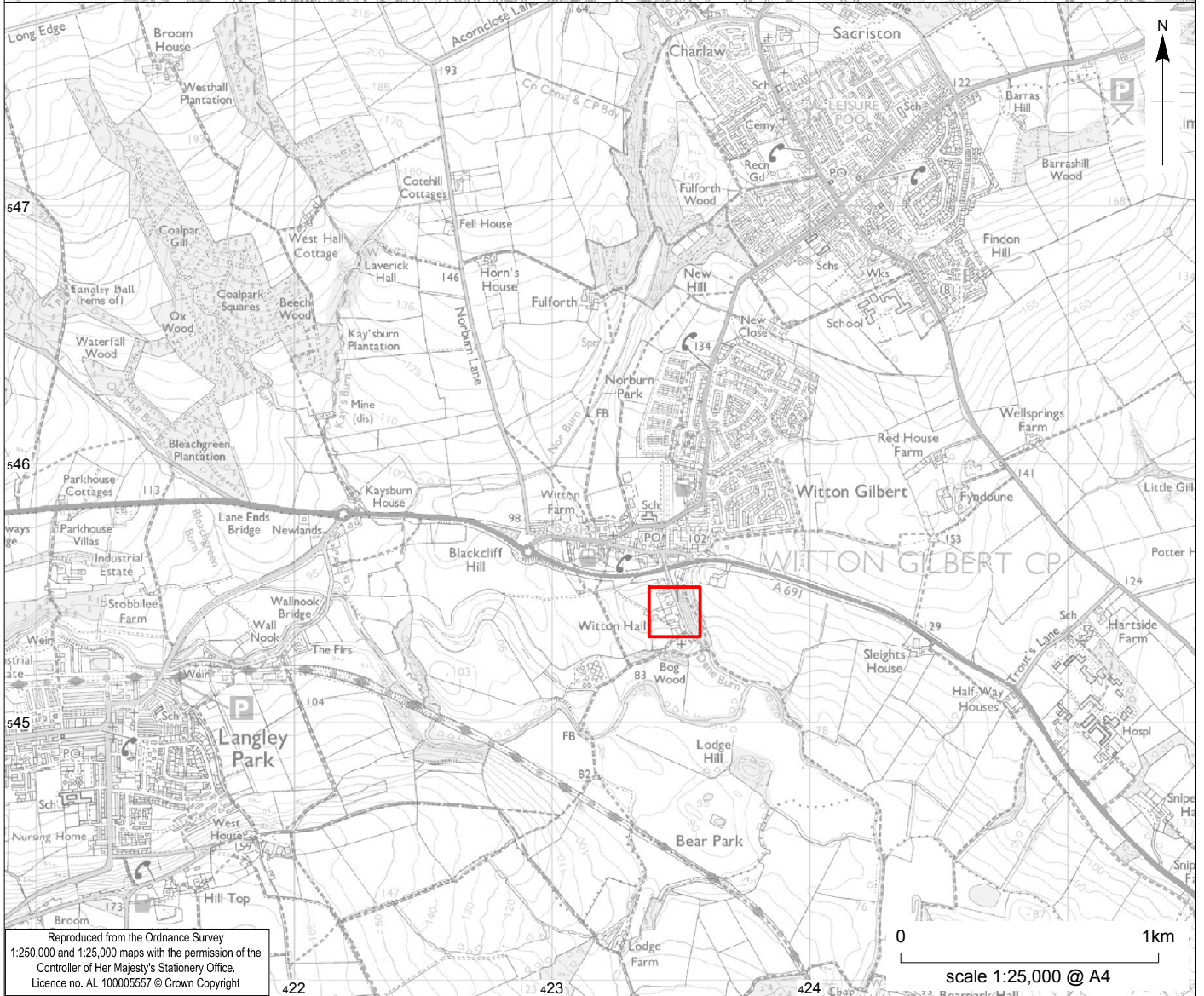
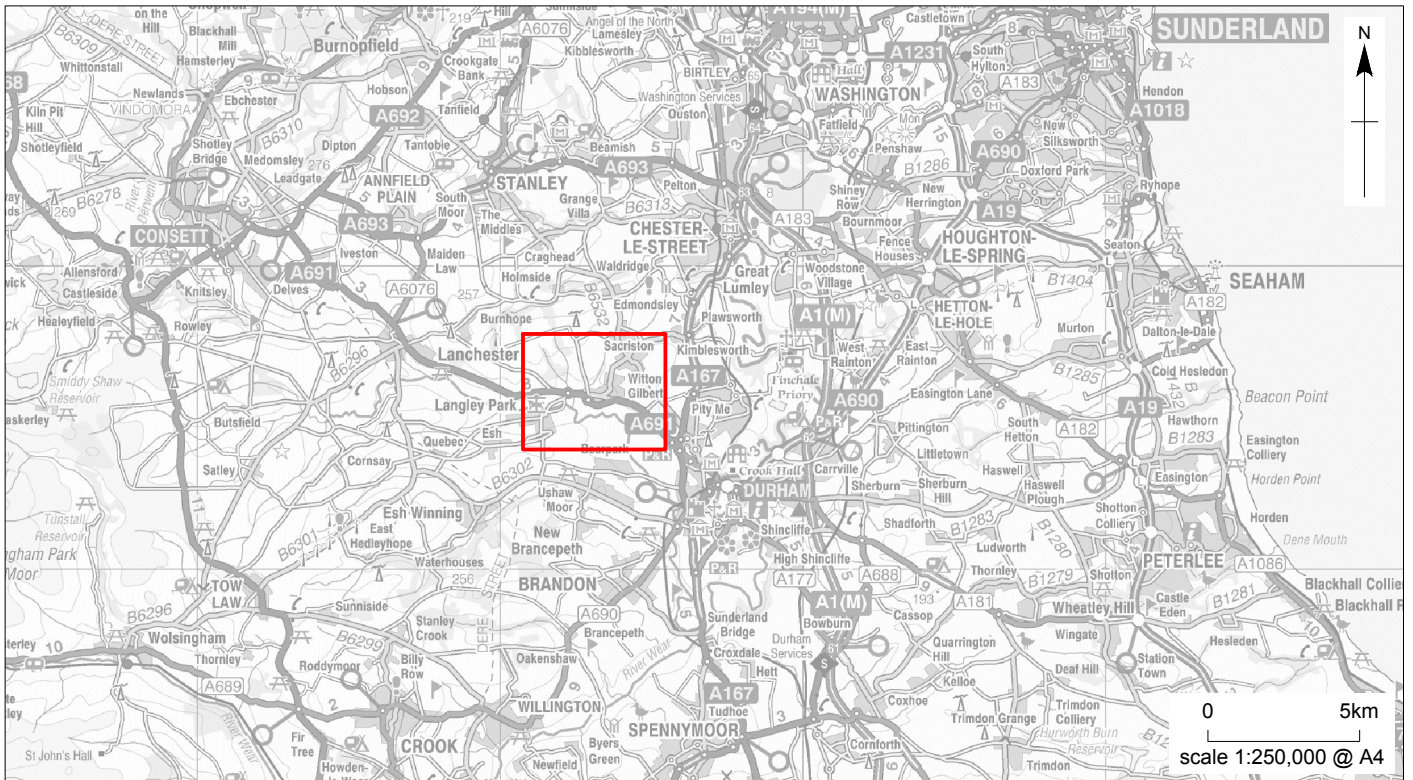
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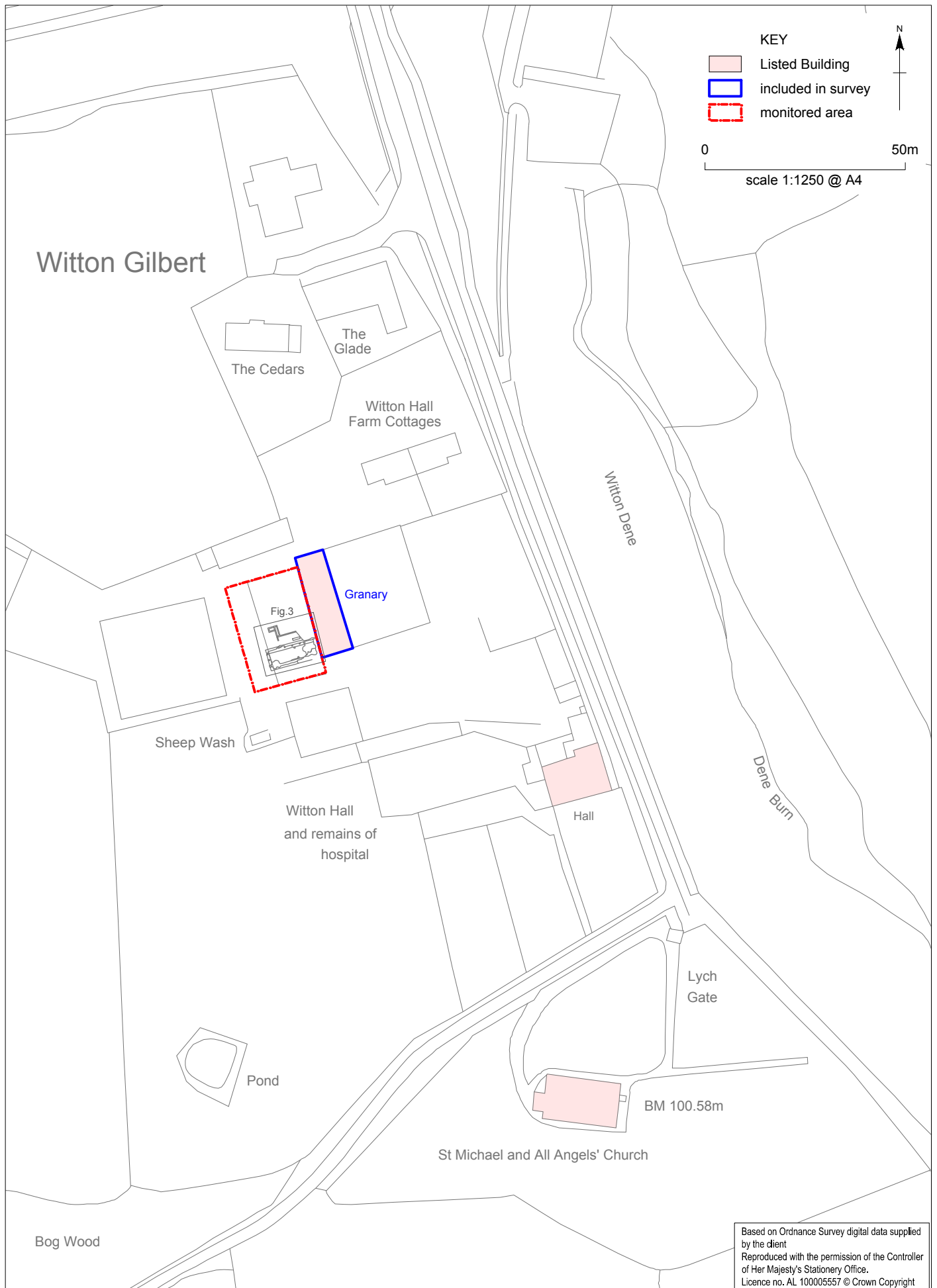
**APPENDIX A**  
**CONTEXT AND FINDS CATALOGUE**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1	Brick floor border within barn <b>05</b> .	Brick sample taken.
2	Wall foundation north of barn <b>05</b> .	
3	L-shaped wall foundation with brick structure <b>04</b> butting on south side.	
4	Three-sided square brick structure butting wall foundations <b>03</b> .	Brick sample taken.
5	Barn	Roof tile, metal fragments.
6	Threshold	
7	Step	
8	Cobbled floor within barn <b>05</b> .	
9	sandstone outer wall of barn <b>05</b> .	
10	Small brick wall foundation butting foundation <b>03</b> on south corner.	Could join onto <b>02</b> .
11	Two padstones within cobbles <b>08</b> .	
12	Three padstones on western end of barn forming entrance	
13	Four square holes built into brick border <b>01</b> on north side of barn.	
14	Material inside of foundations <b>03</b>	Butchered animal, bone bottle glass



Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: site location

Figure 1



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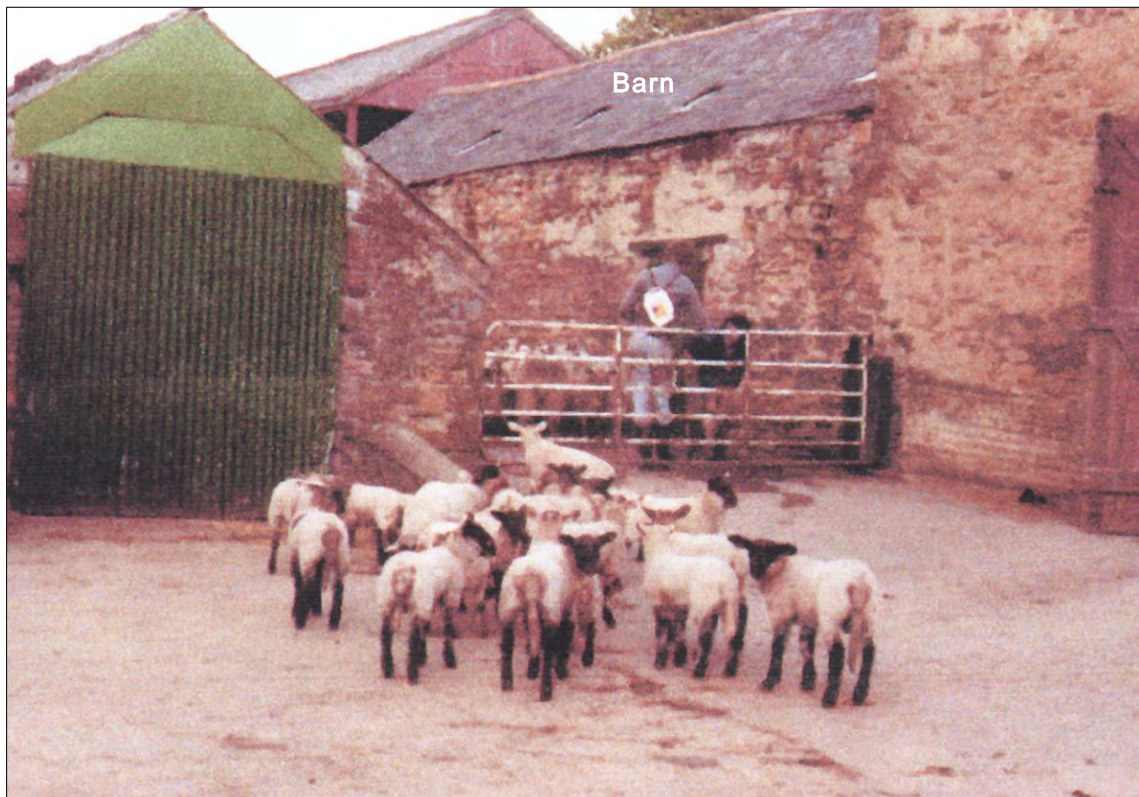
Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: scaled orthophoto of Barn (05) foundations.

Figure 3



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*Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: photograph showing Barn 05* Plate 3



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*Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: photograph showing Barn 05* Plate 4