



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING  
RECORDING**

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**WITTON HALL FARM, WITTON  
GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM**

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## WITTON HALL FARM, WITTON GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING

#### **Summary**

*Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) was commissioned by Ryder Architects, on behalf of their clients, to undertake a phase of archaeological building recording of two historic barns at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert, County Durham. Planning permission has been granted for the development of the site (Planning Ref DM/15/03889/FPA) subject to a condition requiring a programme of building recording and analysis being undertaken prior to the conversion. This report provides a Historic England Level 2 'descriptive' record of the Granary and Cart Shed on Witton Hall Farm, suitable to mitigate against the substantial harm to significance resulting from redevelopment.*

*Witton Hall Farm was, from c.1150, the site of a leper hospital. The hospital was managed by the almoner of Durham Priory, and his accounts from the 14th to the 16th century survive, giving valuable information about buildings, repairs and additions during this period (Fowler 1898-1901). Witton Hall farmhouse, part of the hospital grange, survives today (Grade II listed). It is likely that the Granary, recorded as part of this work, was also part of the late medieval farm, which served the leper hospital. It is a Grade II listed building, in recognition of its historic and architectural interest.*

*A tree-ring dating project, carried out in 1999, demonstrated a felling date of c.1462 for some of the timbers surviving in the Granary, supporting this contention. It appeared that a lot of historic material from this period survived, including thick rubble stone walls and timbers. This building was also extended to the south, and a loft storey added, probably during the 19th century; evidence for these changes survives in the building fabric. There was some evidence for historic use within the building, including timber chutes, ventilation slits and the loft storey.*

*The Cart Shed was first recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1857), but may have been earlier. The building was, at that time, part of a longer complex extending north. At the time of the survey, only the eastern wall seemed to have survived intact. The north and south gables had been rebuilt.*

**WITTON HALL FARM, WITTON GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) was commissioned by Ryder Architects, on behalf of their clients, to undertake a phase of archaeological building recording of two historic barns at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert, County Durham (NZ 23500 45500). Planning permission has been granted for the development of the site (Planning Ref DM/15/03889/FPA) subject to a condition requiring a programme of building recording and analysis being undertaken prior to the conversion.

1.2 This report provides a Historic England Level 2 'descriptive' record of the two buildings referred to as the Cart Shed and Granary, at Witton Hall Farm. The requirements for this work were discussed in advance with Durham County Council and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared and approved. All work was conducted in accordance with relevant standards and guidance as published by Historic England (2016), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014) and the Yorkshire, the Humber and the North East: A Regional Statement of Good Practice for Archaeology in the Development Process.

### **Project Aims and Objectives**

1.3 The principal aim of the project was to provide a Historic England Level 2 'descriptive' record of the historic farm buildings, suitable to mitigate against the substantial harm to significance resulting from the redevelopment of the heritage asset.

1.4 As such, the objectives of the building recording were to produce:

- An annotated site plan, based on architect's plans and elevations, depicting the form and location of any structural features;
- A written and photographic record of the barns and their structural features, providing details of their form, function, date and significance;
- A short illustrated report summarising the previous and current archaeological works; and
- An archive of additional photographs

- 1.5 This work has the potential to further understanding of the development of medieval vernacular architecture, which is one of the key research objectives identified under the North East Regional Research Framework (NERRF) (Petts and Gerrard 2006). Strategy MD3 recognises the evidential importance of buildings like Witton Hall Farm in development out ‘understanding of medieval vernacular architecture’. It states that ‘particular priority should be given to the chronological development of building types, including evidence for the origins of building forms’ (Petts and Gerrard 2006, 168).

### **Scope of the Project**

- 1.6 The survey comprised an assessment and record of the Cart Shed and Barn at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert. Access to the first floor level of the Barn was not possible, due to health and safety reasons. Access to the east and west elevations was limited due to these parts of the building being enclosed within other structures. A rapid assessment of the broader area was also made in order to understand the significance of the buildings within their local and regional context.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **Documentary Evidence**

- 2.1 A rapid review of previous studies (Roberts *et al.* 1999) was undertaken in order to inform the building recording.

### **Building Recording**

- 2.2 The building survey primarily comprised a photographic record of all accessible elements. General room shots were taken to establish context where possible. Any architectural features of note were photographed in more detail. All photographs were taken using a Canon digital camera at a resolution of 10 megapixels, and both RAW and JPG images were captured. Each photograph contained a graduated photographic scale where appropriate. A catalogue of photographs is included in the archive accompanying this report.
- 2.3 With the exception of very ephemeral modern features, all structures were recorded as existing. The final drawings and written account make a clear distinction between surviving *in situ* original elements and all later features. The plans show the form and location of any structural features of historic significance, such as blocked doors,

windows, internal arrangements and any evidence for fixtures or fittings of any significance.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Location**

- 3.1 The historic building survey recorded two buildings at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert (3.25 miles north-west of Durham City). The site is centred on NZ 23500 45500, and is located immediately south of Witton Gilbert and the A691 (Fig. 1). Within the site, the Cart Shed was located on the eastern boundary of the farm, with its eastern elevation facing Coach Lane (Fig. 2). The Granary was located centrally at the north end of the site (Fig. 2).

#### **Geology and Soils**

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

#### **Designations**

- 3.3 The Granary was designated as a Grade II listed building in 2011, in recognition of its architectural and historical significance (see Appendix 1). Its significance is recorded as relating to the survival of considerable original fabric, dating to the 15th century. The building also possesses group value, with the Grade II\* listed farmhouse (located to the south-east of the site) which was formerly the chapel or infirmary hall of the medieval hospital.
- 3.4 The Cart Shed is not a designated heritage asset, and is considered unlikely to meet the criteria for listing or scheduling.

#### **Previous Work**

- 3.5 A programme of archaeological recording was undertaken in 1992 by Martin Roberts, with a further programme of archaeological building recording undertaken by the North East Vernacular Architecture Group (NEVAG) in 1993. This work was published in the Durham Archaeological Journal in 1999 (Roberts *et al.* 1999).



#### 4.0 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE BARNS AT WITTON HALL FARM

- 4.1 The village of Witton Gilbert was purportedly named after Gilbert de la Ley, who was Lord of the Manor during the 12th century. It was, at this time, a small village of workers who laboured on the land surrounding the settlement. The church was built, and the cemetery established, c.1170, by the Bishop Hugh le Puiset of Durham, as is recorded in his charter of c.1190<sup>1,2</sup>.
- 4.2 Witton Hall Farm was, from c.1150, the site of a leper hospital. Around this time, many Christian people had become concerned with the suffering of lepers and wealthy benefactors had started to fund hospitals for the treatment of those suffering from leprosy. The hospital at Witton Gilbert was dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, and was situated on land given by Gilbert de la Ley, one such benefactor, who granted to the almoner of St Cuthbert's Abbey '60 acres of arable land in Witton Field, a rent charge of 30/-, free multure and common pasture'<sup>3</sup>.
- 4.3 The hospital was managed by the almoner of Durham Priory, and his accounts from the 14th to the 16th century survive, giving valuable information about buildings, repairs and additions during this period (Fowler 1898-1901). These records include references to farm buildings, such as: expenses for finishing the new barn at Wytton (15li 5s 9d); for roofing the same building (37s 6d) in 1347; for the purchase of stone and slate for repairs (20s 10d) in 1372; and stone for the outhouse (or buttress) of the barn in 1449 (*ibid.*).
- 4.4 At the Dissolution, the buildings were leased by the Dean and Chapter and the buildings survived as a large working farm, although the site's hospital function had ceased. Post-Dissolution leases refer to a number of farm buildings<sup>4</sup>.
- 4.5 The farmhouse (Grade II\*) has been identified as having been part of the medieval hospital grange. It is thought that this was rebuilt c.1400, and elements from this date survive in the building fabric, including a blocked 14th century window, with ball-flower ornament and quatrefoil (visible on the east elevation)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wittongilbert.durhamnorthteam.org/history/> [Accessed 18/08/2016]

<sup>2</sup> <http://parishes.durham.gov.uk/wittongilbert/Pages/History.aspx> [Accessed 18/08/2016]

<sup>3</sup> <http://fast-trax.50megs.com/wgHistory.html> [Accessed 16/08/2016]

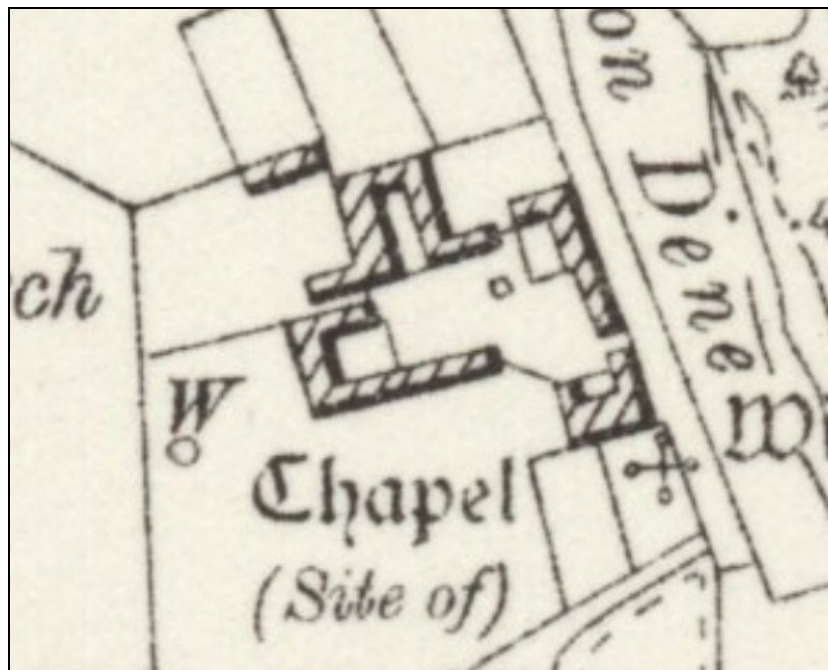
<sup>4</sup> Durham University Surveyors Deposits, Item 108, Dept of Palaeography, University of Durham. Durham College

<sup>5</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1120696> [Accessed 18/08/2016].

- 4.6 The Granary at Witton Hall Farm – recorded as part of this programme of work – is also 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).
- 4.7 The period following this was one of significant modernisation of farming methods, and subsequently of farm buildings and layouts. The 18th and 19th centuries saw considerable modernisation in farming processes and, subsequently, in farm buildings and their 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 change, and other new buildings constructed. It is likely that this period corresponded with the extension of the Granary observed in the building fabric, and the addition of a loft storey.
- 4.8 Accordingly, by 1857, as shown in the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (Plate 1), 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 for the buildings shown in historic mapping to have extended from its north-east and south-west corners.
- 4.9 The Cart Shed, or a building with a similar footprint, is also shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1857, indicating that part of this building probably dates to this period or earlier. The Cart Shed seems to have been part of a longer complex extending further to the north. Relatively little is known about the history and development of this building, apart from the relatively recent rebuilding of its north and south elevations (see below).
- 4.10 By the Second Edition Ordnance Survey, in 1895, the layout of Witton Hall Farm had changed only slightly (Plate 2). The small structure extending from the west of the Granary, at the north end, had been removed. A further structure had been built beyond the foldyard to the north-west.



*Plate 1: Witton Hall Farm in the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1857*



*Plate 2: Witton Hall Farm as it was in 1895, when the Second Edition Ordnance Survey was surveyed*

4.11 At the time of the survey, various parts of the layout shown on the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey maps – and many elements thought to be of medieval origin – survived (Plate 3). The Granary was enclosed on the east and west sides within modern barns, but its north and south elevations remained exposed. The Cart Shed was a smaller building that that shown in historic mapping, although its southern end seemed to survive in situ, and its north and south elevations had been rebuilt.



*Plate 3: an aerial photograph showing the layout of Witton Hall Farm at the time of the survey (Google Earth 2016)*

## **5.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

### **Cart Shed**

- 5.1 The Cart Shed (Fig. 3) was a rectangular, open-fronted structure, orientated north to south. It was predominantly built in random-course stone, with large stone quoins at each corner. The north, east and south walls were stone externally, although it seemed that the north and south walls had been rebuilt. The roof was timber-framed, seemingly a modern replacement, clad in corrugated asbestos.
- 5.2 The western elevation, was open, with the wall plate supported on five evenly-spaced cast iron columns, with a small stretch of stone wall to the south. This part of wall contained a window, with a stone lintel and sill. The window itself was modern.
- 5.3 The north gable appeared to have been rebuilt, with an interior skin built in concrete breeze block. It contained two windows with stone lintels and sills, and a brick chimney, which may have been added when the wall was rebuilt.



*Plate 4: the north gable and eastern elevation of the Cart Shed, showing the original random-coursed rubble stone eastern wall, in comparison to the rebuilt northern wall*



*Plates 5 and 6: one of the cast iron posts on the open, west elevation of the Cart Shed, and the interior of the Cart Shed looking north*

- 5.4 The southern gable had also been rebuilt, as indicated by wall scars on the east elevation (Plate 4), and later internal concrete breeze block skin (Plate 6). The elevation was blind, with the exception of a small brick dove-cote just below the ridge which, again, did not seem to be a historical feature.
- 5.5 Internally, the floor was concrete, at the southern end, and the remainder was earth. The roof was a timber king post structure, which seemed to be relatively modern. The north and south walls were concrete breeze block, and the eastern wall was original random coursed rubble stone.

## **Granary**

### *Exterior*

- 5.6 The Granary was a rectangular-plan building, located on the northern side of the site orientated north to south. The barn had one storey, with a loft above. It was built in random-coursed rubble sandstone, in which a number of phases of alteration were observed. There were dressed and margined stone quoins at the south end and in the upper courses of the north end. The east and west elevations were enclosed within modern sheds, and so were not visible in their entirety and were recorded in sections.

### *North Elevation*

- 5.7 The north elevation contained a small loft pitching opening at loft level. A large wall scar demonstrated the former lower, steeper roofline and was evidence that the roof had been raised at some stage.
- 5.8 Vertical wall scars on the east and west elevations (see below) were evidence that the southern end of the barn had been added or rebuilt at some point. It did not feature any sign of the lower, steeper roof and the rebuilding of this part of the structure may have been contemporary with the raising of the roof level. This elevation contained two windows, at loft level. These had tooled stone lintels and timber sills. The windows themselves were later inserts, which had been wedged with modern redbrick at either side. There was also a large doorway opening in the eastern side of this elevation, which was bordered by quoins and had a timber lintel. Directly beneath the ridge, there was a pyramid of ten pigeon holes, with slate shelving.

*West Elevation*

- 5.9 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 rebuilt. A vertical wall scar was visible between these two parts (Fig. 5). 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 blocked door 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 projecting west from the Granary on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (Plate 1). Within this outline, there were three slit vents close to ground level (Plate 7).



*Plate 7: an oblique photograph of the west elevation of the Granary, looking north-east, showing the later rebuild/extension part of the wall, containing wall scar of former building and three slit vents*



*Plates 8 and 9: the doorway with relieving arch above at the northern end of the west elevation and the vertical wall scar demonstrating the point from which the wall was extended/rebuilt at the south end*

5.10 At the northern end of the west elevation, and not enclosed within the modern shed, there was a stone staircase giving access to the loft level. It is likely that this was added when the building was raised to accommodate a loft level, probably during the 19th century.

#### *East Elevation*

5.11 The east elevation similarly contained a vertical wall scar demarcating the point from which the wall was rebuilt/extended at the south end. On this wall, it seemed that there had been two phases of extension or rebuilding, demonstrated by a further vertical wall scar (Plate 11).

5.12 The original part of the wall to the north contained three doorway openings. The northernmost was an inserted doorway which was not original to the building. It was accessed via four concrete steps and had a timber lintel. To the south of this, there was an original doorway, which had a timber lintel and jamb which seemed to be of an early – possibly medieval – date. The lintel was slightly curved. This doorway was partially blocked with stone at the time of the survey, leaving only a window opening at the top. A slit vent opening was positioned south of this, which was blocked



internally; this may have been original (Roberts *et al.* 1999). The third door of the original wall section was also inserted, and featured a timber lintel.

- 5.13 At the northern end of the elevation, within the original wall, there was a triangular wall scar showing the location and form of a former small building gable. It is likely that this corresponds with the building which was shown to have extended from the northern end of the east wall, on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1857; Plate 1). Within this area, an iron chute passed through a hole in the wall. The chute was probably in place to carry grain from storage in the granary loft above, down into a grain bin or similar on the ground floor of the building to the east, for processing or use. There were further chutes internally which transferred grain from the loft to the ground floor (see below).



*Plates 10 and 11: an original door on the east elevation, with timber lintel and jamb, and the vertical wall scar demonstrating the point at which the wall had been rebuilt/extended at the southern end*

- 5.14 At the southern end of the elevation, within the later rebuilt section, there was a window, which had a stone lintel and timber surround. This was probably contemporary with this part of the wall.

- 5.15 At a number of points along the wall, there were concrete patches, above the levels of the openings, which were the supports for joists for a structure which formerly projected east, supported by this wall.
- 5.16 At first floor level, the west and east elevations each contained six small window openings. These were not visible from ground level due to the elevation being enclosed within a modern shed. These were not original to the building, but are contemporary with the first floor loft level being added (see below). On the east elevation, these were blocked with stone and each contained two ceramic circular vents.

### *Interior*

- 5.17 Internally, the barn was an open rectangular space with a ground floor and loft level. The same openings were visible internally as those described on the east and west elevations. The floor was concrete, and stepped up, by approximately 1m, at the northern end (Figure 5). In the southern part of the building, where the floor level was lower, the foot of the wall was clad in concrete (possibly indicating that the concrete floor had been dug out in this space).
- 5.18 The loft level was supported by 13 varied beams. The central part of this featured four pairs of beams; early beams had been reinforced with later timber, presumably when the building was raised. A number of these beams were of late-medieval date and were seemingly reused tie beams from the original roof structure (see below).
- 5.19 The beams were not closely assessed during the survey due to health and safety restrictions, but were well-detailed by *Roberts et al.* (1999). Five of these beams were oak tie-beams which had been reused from an earlier roof structure. Mortises and peg holes were evidence of this (Roberts 1992). Four of these beams were slightly arched, but had been laid on their side when reused, to form a flat surface for the loft level above (beams D, I, J and K). Beam G was flat and was in its original posture, supported on the shelf between the two periods of wall construction.
- 5.20 Access to the loft level was limited due to health and safety restrictions. However, this space was assessed from the north-west corner, which was accessible via the external stone staircase. The loft had a queen post roof structure, built from nine relatively modern machine-sawn softwood trusses.



*Plate 12: the interior of the Granary looking north-east, showing the change in wall thickness towards the earlier part of the building and the paired beams supporting the loft above*



*Plates 13 and 14: the vertical scar demonstrating the point from which the wall had been extended or rebuilt, and the timber chutes at the northern end of the interior*

- 5.21 At ground floor level, there was evidence internally that the southern end of the building had been extended or rebuilt at some stage. Vertical wall scars were observed, north of which the walls were visibly thicker.
- 5.22 A number of features relating to the building's former use survived internally. A timber staircase, in very poor condition, was located at the eastern side of the interior (Figure 5). At the northern end of the interior, there were three timber chutes (Plate 14), which were evidence of former use as a granary or similar (marked onto Figure 5). One of the chutes passed through the eastern wall, on which it was visible externally.



*Plate 15: the loft of the Granary, looking south-east, taken from the top of the external stone steps*

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The building fabric of both the Granary and the Cart Shed provides some insight into possible development and phasing of the buildings, and of Witton Hall Farm.

### **Cart Shed**

- 6.2 The Cart Shed was first shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1857. It was, at this time, part of a longer north to south range; its historic form, beyond this, is not clear. At the time of the survey, only the southern end of this range survived. Of

this, only the eastern wall appeared to have survived intact. The north and south elevations had been rebuilt, possibly using stone from earlier parts of the building.

- 6.3 It is not clear whether the building was originally open-fronted, nor the age of the cast iron posts. However, the location of the structure in relation to the main historic entrance into the farm would support its historic use as a cart shed.

### **Granary**

- 6.4 The building fabric of the Granary showed evidence of two main periods of construction. The first of these consists of the northern two-thirds of the building at ground floor level, which was built in rubble stone with very thick walls. A number of original openings survive in these walls, including a door with timber lintel and a slit vent.
- 6.5 Four of the first floor joists observed in the Granary at the time of the survey seemed to have been reused tie beams from the building's original roof structure. Roberts *et al.* (1999) carried out tree-ring dating on these timbers, which produced a felling date of c.1462. This, and the type of rubble stone construction, supports the contention that this barn was built as part of the medieval leper hospital grange (Roberts 1992).
- 6.6 The surviving timbers also provide some information about the building's historic form. Roberts (1992) identified that their mortices and peg holes show these tie beams as the correct width for this building. Beams G and J (Fig. 5) were straight beams, and may have survived in situ, perhaps originally supporting a small granary loft. Both beams were pegged along their length, as if to support side partitions roughly central in the barn, in order to protect crop from vermin.
- 6.7 The historic form of the roof structure is not known, although the wall scar in the northern gable (Fig. 4) demonstrates its pitch. The reused tie beams did not contain mortices for a king or queen post structure. It is likely that they were, instead, part of a roof structure similar in form to that which survives in the Witton Hall farmhouse. Roberts (1992) refers to this as a truncated principal truss structure, which comprised principal rafters rising from a tie beam, until they were truncated by a collar which supported the upper purlins. This structure was common in the late-medieval period, and has been identified at a number of tree-ring dated buildings of a similar period locally, including Byers Garth, Sherburn House (c.1470), No. 1/2 The College Durham

(c.1532), No. 4 The College (c.1445) and Elvethall Granary, Hallgarth Street, Durham (c.1450).

6.8 Many barns of this period, with other elements indicating their use as a granary, have contained large opposing doors for hand threshing. There was no evidence of this on the Granary at Witton Hall Farm, however it is possible that there were previously double doors at the southern end – which was later rebuilt (see below) – which were lost due to collapse, or adaption for mechanised processes (Roberts 1992).

6.9 The second period comprised the extension, or rebuild, of the southern part of the building and the addition of the loft storey. Access to the loft was limited at the time of the survey due to health and safety restrictions, however the use of 3" handmade brick, and welsh slate, led Roberts *et al.* (1999) to purport an early 19th century date for this part of the building.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) was commissioned by Ryder Architects, on behalf of their clients, to undertake a phase of archaeological building recording of two historic barns at Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert, County Durham (NZ 23500 45500). Planning permission has been granted for the development of the site (Planning Ref DM/15/03889/FPA) subject to a condition requiring a programme of building recording and analysis being undertaken prior to the conversion.

7.2 This report is considered to be a comprehensive record of the Granary and the Cart Shed at Witton Hall Farm, which is sufficient to mitigate against the loss of evidential heritage significance as a result of redevelopment.

7.3 As part of the condition on the planning permission, there will also be a phase of archaeological monitoring, which will take place during the ground works for the redevelopment. This will primarily focus on the removal of floors and the excavation of service trenches.

## REFERENCES

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### **National Library of Scotland Maps (Online)**

First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1857)

Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1895)

## APPENDIX 1: BARN AT WITTON HALL FARM, LIST ENTRY SUMMARY

### List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: BARN AT WITTON HALL FARM

List entry Number: 1404129

### Location

CHURCH LANE, WITTON GILBERT, COUNTY DURHAM

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

District: County Durham

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Witton Gilbert

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 18-Oct-2011

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

### Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

### List entry Description

#### Summary of Building

The C15 barn at Witton Hall Farm is a remnant of a former medieval hospital belonging to the Bishop and Prior of Durham. It underwent early-mid C19 alteration.

#### Reasons for Designation

\* Significant original fabric: the surviving timbers of the original roof structure and the survival of significant original wall fabric pierced by original openings means that its original form is clearly illustrated; \* Historic interest: for its early date combined with its context as part of a well-documented pre-Dissolution estate of the Bishop and Prior of Durham.; \* Age: the established dendrochronology date of 1462, places it firmly in the period when all buildings that contain a significant proportion of their fabric are listed due to their rarity; \* Group value:



it has clear group value with the Grade II\* listed farmhouse, formerly the chapel or infirmary hall of the medieval hospital.

#### History

A leper hospital dedicated to St Mary Magdalene was founded before 1150 at Witton Gilbert on land given by Gilbert de la Lay, Lord of Witton. The hospital was controlled by the Almoner of Durham Priory and his accounts from the C14 to C16 survive and refer to buildings, repairs and additions over this time. At the Dissolution, the buildings were leased by the Dean and Chapter and although the hospital function ceased, the buildings survived as a large working farm. The present farmhouse (Grade II\*) has been identified as part of the medieval hospital. This barn, which lies within the area of the medieval hospital, is thought to have two main phases. Its original form was a thick walled single storey building with at least one pair of opposing doors and a steeply pitched roof formed of trusses with tie beams; dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) of these tie beams and the oak lintel of one of the original entrances, has produced a C15 felling date for the timbers (1462 (-10,+10)). Subsequently, the walls and roof of the building were raised to accommodate a loft, several new openings were added and external steps to a loft door were added. The south end of the barn was also rebuilt and probably extended. Softwood beams, 3" handmade bricks and welsh slate, all suggest an early-mid C19 date for this second phase. In the early-C20, the farm passed from the Dean and Chapter to private ownership.

#### Details

**MATERIALS:** The barn is constructed of random local carboniferous sandstone rubble with dressed and margined quoins and a pitched roof of Welsh slate.

**PLAN:** It is situated to the north west of a farm group at Witton Hall, on ground that falls away to the south. It is a rectangular building of seven bays, oriented north to south.

**EXTERIOR:** The barn has one storey and a loft and has six bays, the loft lit by six wide glazed openings directly under the eaves on both sides and by two on the south gable. The east elevation has a large pegged oak door frame with chamfered jambs and a slightly arched lintel with soffit holes, possible for harr-hung doors (pivoting on pintles set into the lintel and threshold rather than on hinges), now blocked. There is also a blocked slit vent and three inserted openings. The west elevation has a blocked doorway, whose quoins are considered to be the remains of an original doorway opposing that of the east wall; there are also a pair of inserted cart entrances and an external stair to a loft entrance at the north end. The north gable has a boarded loft pitching door, and the line of an earlier, steeper roof is clearly visible and there are larger and rougher quoins. The south gable has a group of ten pigeonholes with alighting ledges and a cart entrance.

**INTERIOR:** The interior has a concrete floor and a modern corrugated metal screen divides it into two parts. Walls are very thick with the exception of the southern two end bays. The loft

floor rests on thirteen wooden beams, five of which, displaying mortises and peg holes, are re-used tie beams from the original C15 roof structure; four of these are placed on their sides and one is in its original position. The tie beams had three pegs each for the principal rafters and one is notched for floor joists and a number have carpenter's marks. The loft has an early-C19 softwood roof structure and comprises nine trusses.

#### Selected Sources

##### Books and journals

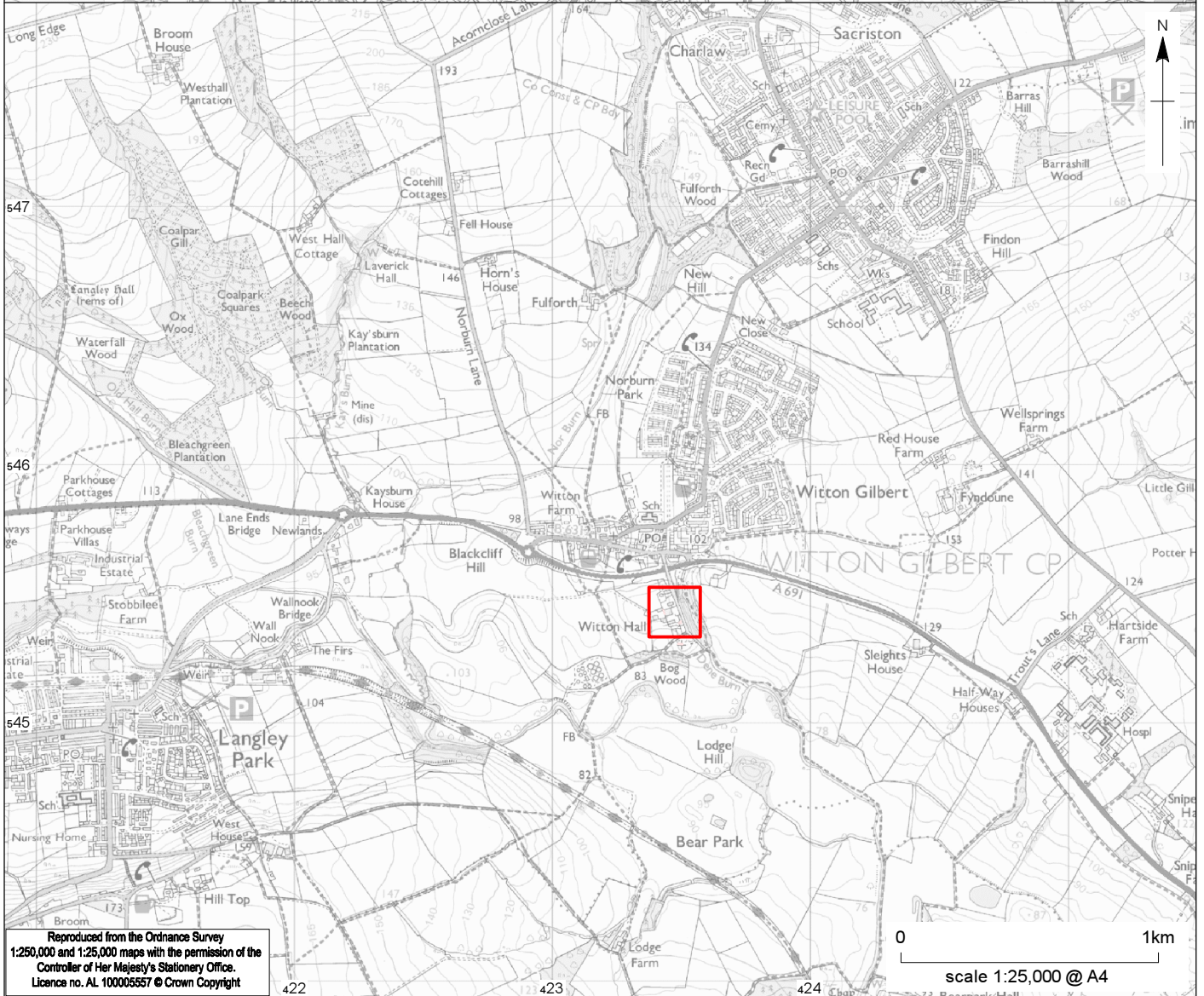
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##### Other

Roberts, M, *Barn, Witton Hall, Witton Gilbert, County Durham*, Report of a building survey,

National Grid Reference: NZ2343545429

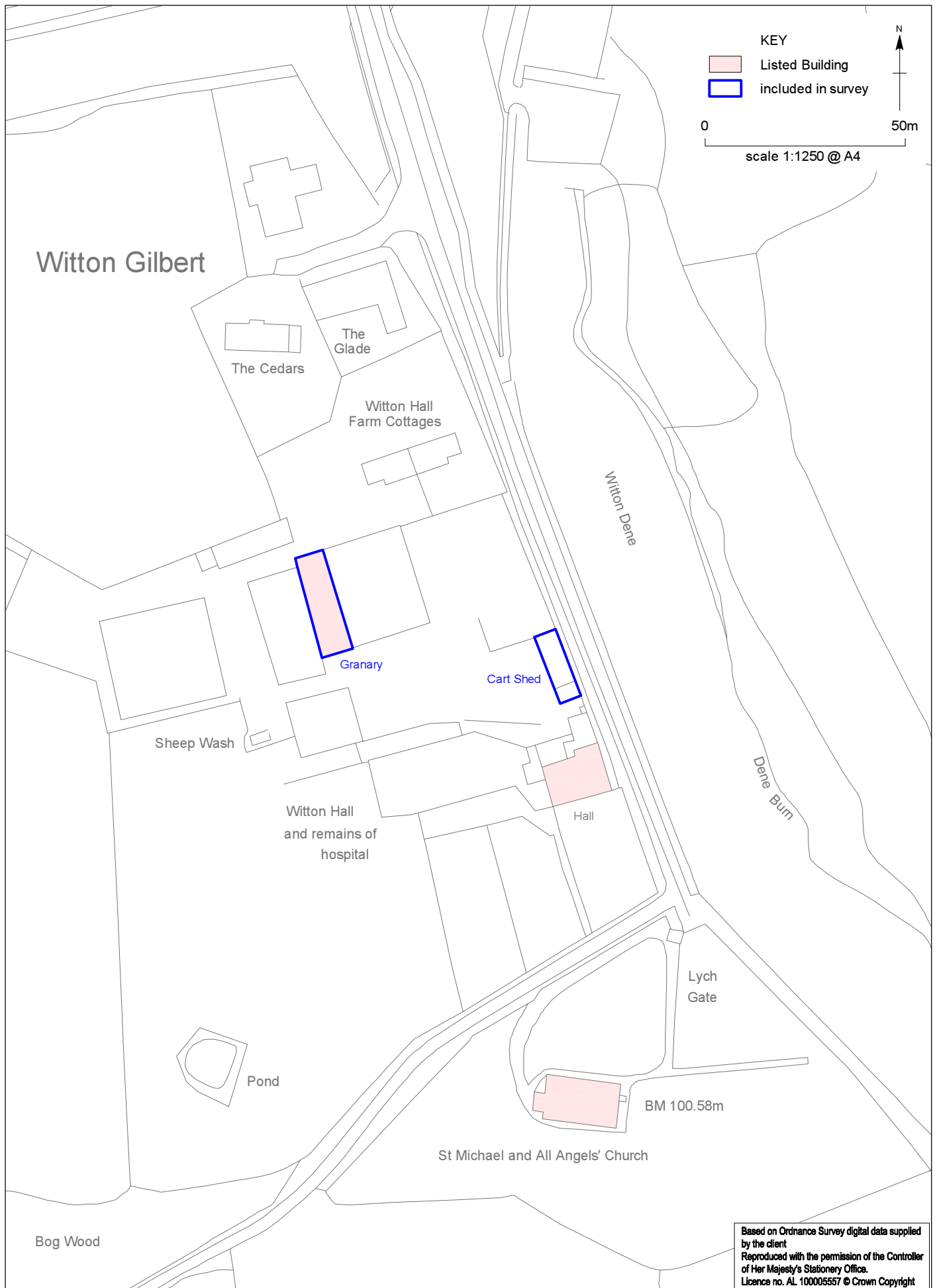


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Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: site location

Figure 1

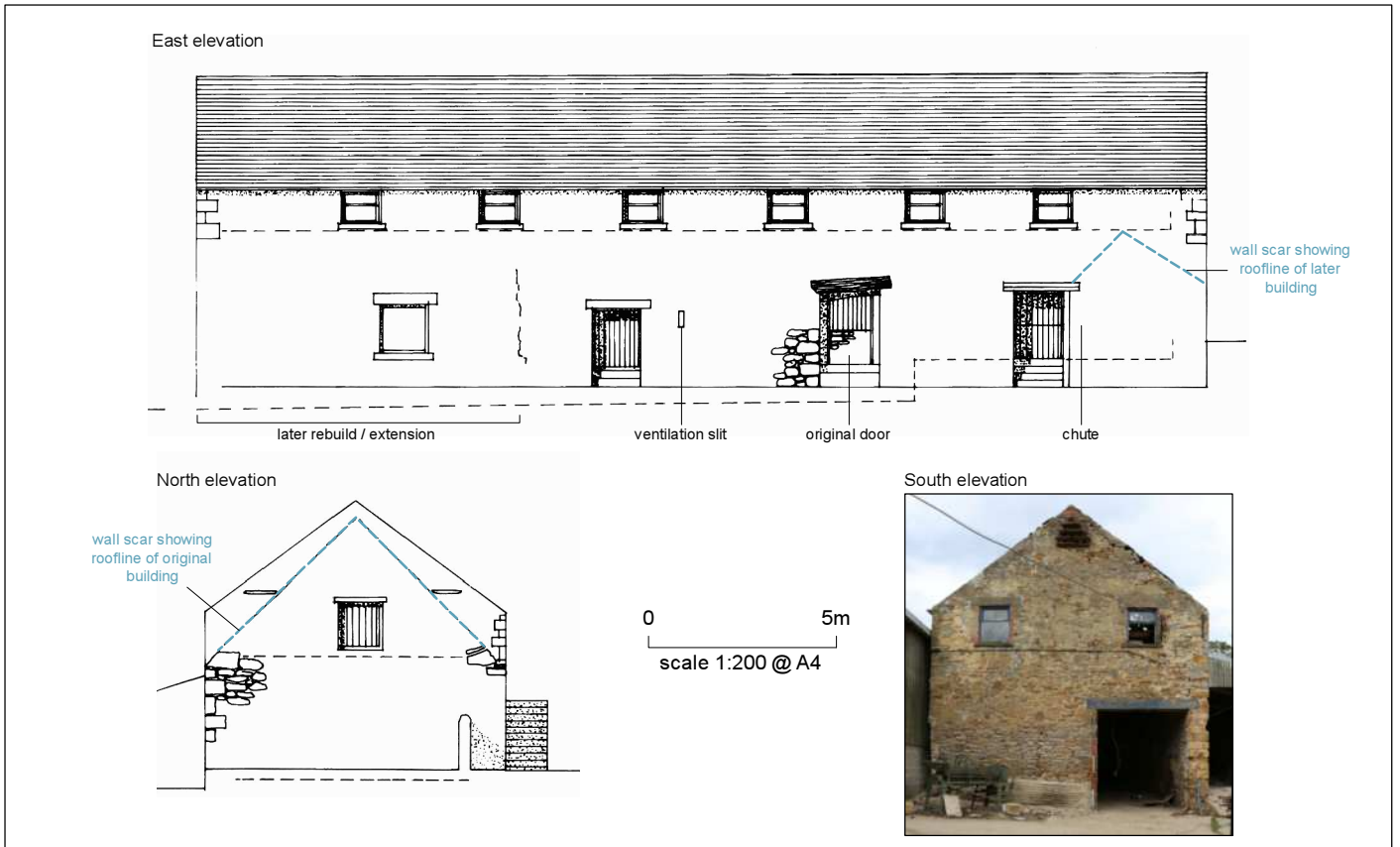




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Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: Cart Shed, plan and elevations

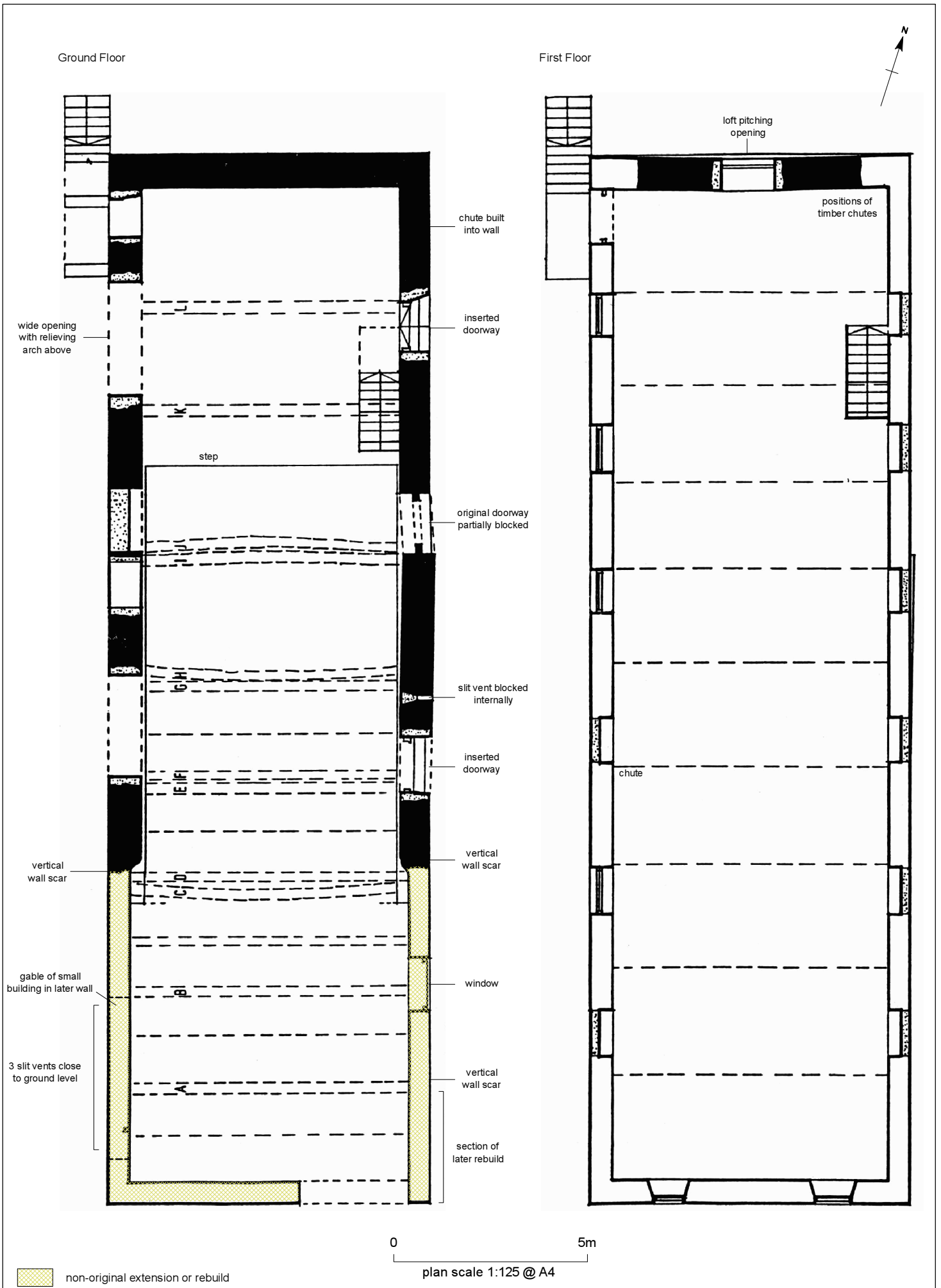
Figure 3



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Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: Granary, elevations (after Roberts et al. 1999)

Figure 4



Witton Hall Farm, Witton Gilbert: Granary, plans (after Roberts et al. 1999)

Figure 5