



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

Building Recording at Noborough Farm, Norton, Northamptonshire

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Summary

Noborough Farm comprises the remaining three stone ranges of disused farm buildings, two of which date from the eighteenth century and one from the nineteenth. A number of other former buildings have been lost during the twentieth century. The whole complex is well mapped back to 1812 and it had reached its maximum size and complexity by 1884. One surviving range, containing a former stable, contains three *in situ* Upper Cruck first-floor/roof trusses in good condition.

Introduction

Noborough Farm, also sometimes called (erroneously) *Norborough* Farm, lies off Weedon Lane, Norton, NN7 4LA, 1km south of the village of Norton, where it stands isolated in rolling open countryside (NGR: SP 609 627; Fig 1). It is midway between the A5, the Roman Watling Street to the east, and Daventry's Borough Hill, an Iron Age hill fort to the west. To the north lies the Roman town of Bannaventa (Whilton Locks), with its cemetery just inside Norton Parish. For each of these see RCHME (1981,149-58). At 1km -2km distance, none of these is close enough to have any obvious direct influence on the choice of this site for a farm.

Consultation of the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record indicates that there are no relevant archaeological discoveries in the vicinity, except that vestigial earthworks of medieval ridge and furrow plough cultivation survive across an adjacent field to the north-east of the farm (HER: 9939/0/6: Information collated by the Midland Open Fields Project 1995-9).

The farm itself lies near the southern edge of Norton Parish where it meets Dodford parish. Historic maps make it clear that the farm lies outside the former Norton Hall estate to the north and that of the Brockhall estate to the east.

Noborough Farm is not to be confused with the former Norborough Lodge Farm, which lies to the north-east close to the A5, and which was sold at auction in 2018.

Noborough Farm, Norton

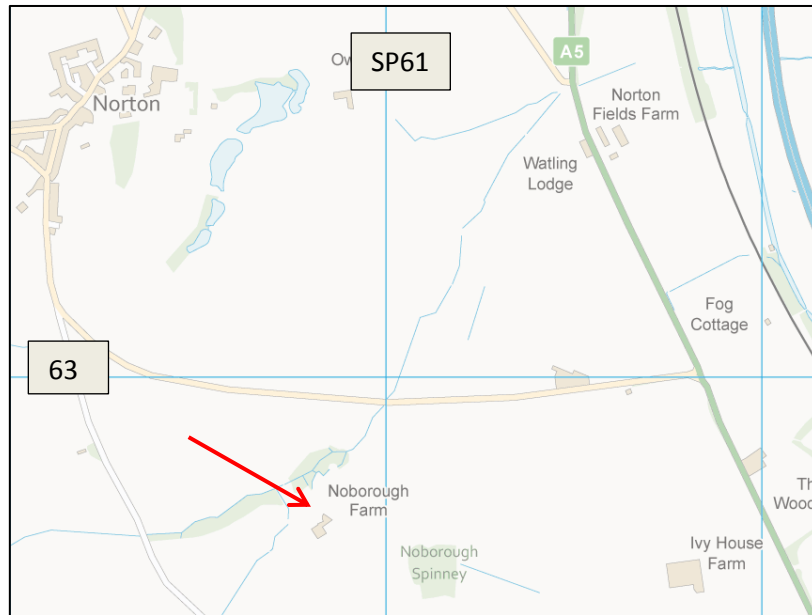


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2020

It was a condition of a planning consent from Daventry District Council that the farm buildings be recorded in accordance with a low level of Historic England-compliant record before conversion to domestic accommodation (DDC; Consent PD/2018/0028). Accordingly, an aspiration to a Historic England level 2 record was approved by the Assistant Archaeological Advisor in Northamptonshire County Council, advising Daventry District Council, with the agreement that while the record would aspire to level 2, some parts of the buildings were known to be degraded and potentially unsafe, where the lesser level 1 might only be possible. Therefore the record at the outset was characterised as level 1-2, but mainly level 2. In the event all but a small area has been recorded at least to level 2.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Iain Soden Heritage Services on 1 June 2020 in dry bright and sunny conditions. The work was carried out by Iain Soden, along with Will Soden, who took the site photographs for this report.

Report photographs were taken using a Nikon D40 digital SLR fitted with a Nikkor AF-S 18-70mm short zoom lens, with the unusual addition of a Samsung Galaxy S10+ 'phone-camera (16MP) where additional wide-angle was adjudged advantageous. Archive photos were taken with a Nikon F60 SLR fitted with a Nikkor AF 28-80mm short zoom lens, and using Ilford FP4 125ASA film.

Historic mapping

The site first appears on the 1812 Ordnance Survey Surveyor's map (Towcester sheet - 228), which shows the east and south ranges, which both survive today. Neither range is wholly distinct but their presence is confirmed. The site does appear to be enclosed on the remaining two sides, probably by a wall or other boundary.

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Fig 2: 1812 Ordnance Surveyors edition, Towcester sheet (228), detail. Noborough Farm arrowed.
North to top left (approximately).

By the 1880s the site had become a full four ranges enclosing a central farmyard, with an entrance to the west (Figs 3-4). A single building had also been constructed against the north end of the west wall, outside the enclosure (Fig 4). The brick foundations of this building, which was not demolished until the period 1958-64, can still be seen poking through the turf.

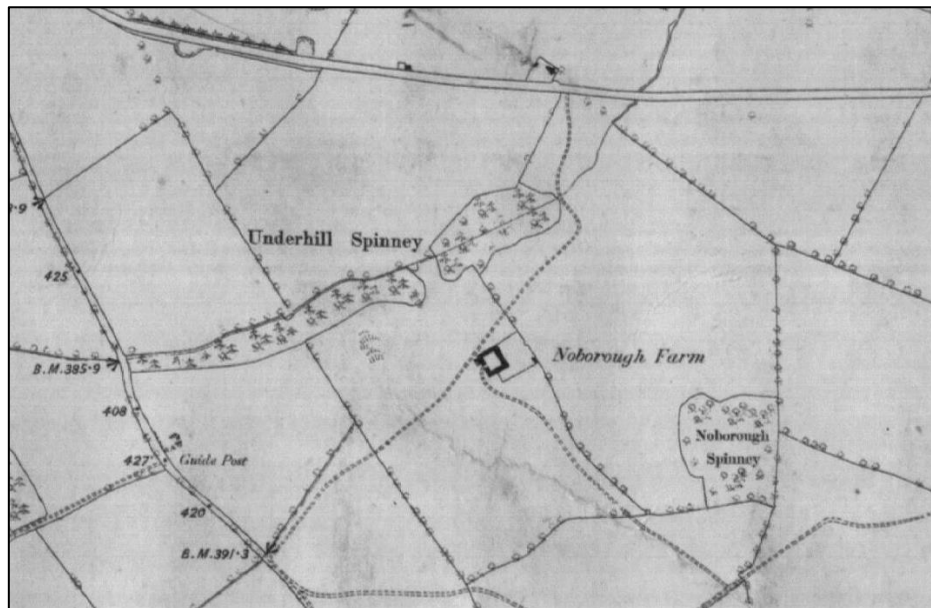


Fig 3: 1884 1st edition Ordnance Survey - detail (sheet 43 NE). The farm buildings have reached their apogee, and the access track marked is that which still leads to it. North to top.

Noborough Farm, Norton

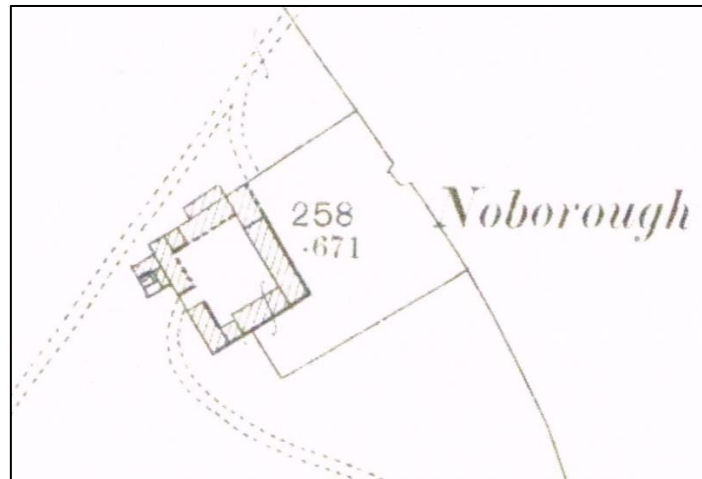


Fig 4: Extract from the 25-inch 1884 First edition OS map, showing the buildings in detail at their apogee. The surviving buildings comprise the east and south ranges and the southern part of the west range. The outer wall of the north range and the northern part of west range still stands as a stockyard enclosure. North to top.

The building record

The early barn and cart hovel (north range)

On the basis of the historic mapping, the barn was already standing prior to 1812. It comprises a single stone-built structure c15m x c5m in plan, with opposed high double doors for threshing purposes. Inside, a later brick wall has divided off the eastern end, while a timber hayloft has been created in the remainder of that east end, supported upon stout timbers. The queen-post type trusses are later nineteenth-century replacements and support two pairs of purlins under a slate roof with a blue engineering-tile ridge. The floor is of a mix of patches from cobbles, through brick, to concrete.

There are the remains of a small brick-built room in the south western corner of the barn, which also once created a useful mezzanine floor on top. This brick box may once have been for a shepherd or cowman to sleep in when livestock needed attention, such as in spring during lambing etc. It neatly encompassed about a third of the western end of the barn and included within it an original lamp niche which is located just inside the western leaf of the southern barn door.



Fig 5: North side of the barn, looking south-west; scale 2m

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Fig 6: Barn interior with east end hayloft; scale 2m



Fig 7: Barn interior with scars of shepherd's hut and lamp niche; scale 2m

The lower half of the far eastern end of the barn has been separated off from the main portion of the barn by way of a substantial brick wall, probably in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and which helps carry the weight of the hayloft above. The resultant room is linked to the farmyard by way of a pedestrian door and a similar one up a short flight stairs to the corner room of the north and east blocks. This room is little bigger than a short corridor and is unlit. It is likely that its use was ancillary to the barn and the other room to which it connected. It may have been merely for storage.

Adjacent to the barn on its western end is an outward (north-) facing cart hovel of three bays. Also of the original build (there are no joins in the stonework), it is open-fronted, and while it would formerly have had the eaves of the open front supported upon timber posts, these were replaced no earlier than the third quarter of the nineteenth century, by a pair of brick piers made from bull-nosed red brick. The building would have provided garaging for up to three carts, wagons or other wheeled vehicles, (as usual) facing north so that no direct sun dried out and split the iron-rimmed wheels and their component parts (Joe Prentice, pers comm). A pair of surviving, angled timbers in the south face of the (very dilapidated) slate roof indicates the location of the former pitched roof of the lost west range (which stood pre1884-1958/64).

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Fig 8: Cart hovel outer (front) face; scale 2m



Fig 9: Rear (farmyard) face of cart hovel; Note the angled timbers of west range roof; scale 2m

The early stable/cow house and fodder store/granary (east range)

The two-storey east range is integral to the same initial build as the barn, demonstrably mapped in 1812. Including the individual corner rooms between the two, it measures c18m x c5m and is built of the same stone as the barn under a slate roof.

The corner rooms, one above the other comprise: on the ground floor a single room accessed by a pedestrian door in the north wall leading to a plain room with a brick-blocked door in its far wall, and an inserted doorway in its west wall, which leads down a short flight of stairs into the unlit 'corridor' room within the barn space. A boxed-in flight of timber stairs stands against the west wall, while along the south side of the room are the mountings for a drive-shaft (bearing in the east wall, stirrup affixed to a ceiling joist) which would have been attached either to a traction engine (outside) for threshing around the end of the nineteenth-century, or a small stationary steam engine for powering a hoist to lift produce/fodder/hay/straw into the upper room, - or possibly both as the need arose.



Fig 10: South wall of the corner room with bearing at left and hanging stirrup visible. Note blocked door and secondary doorway to the right. Scale 2m

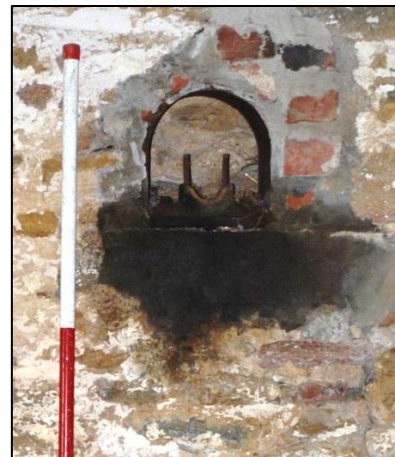


Fig 11: Wall-mounted bearing; scale calibration 50cm.

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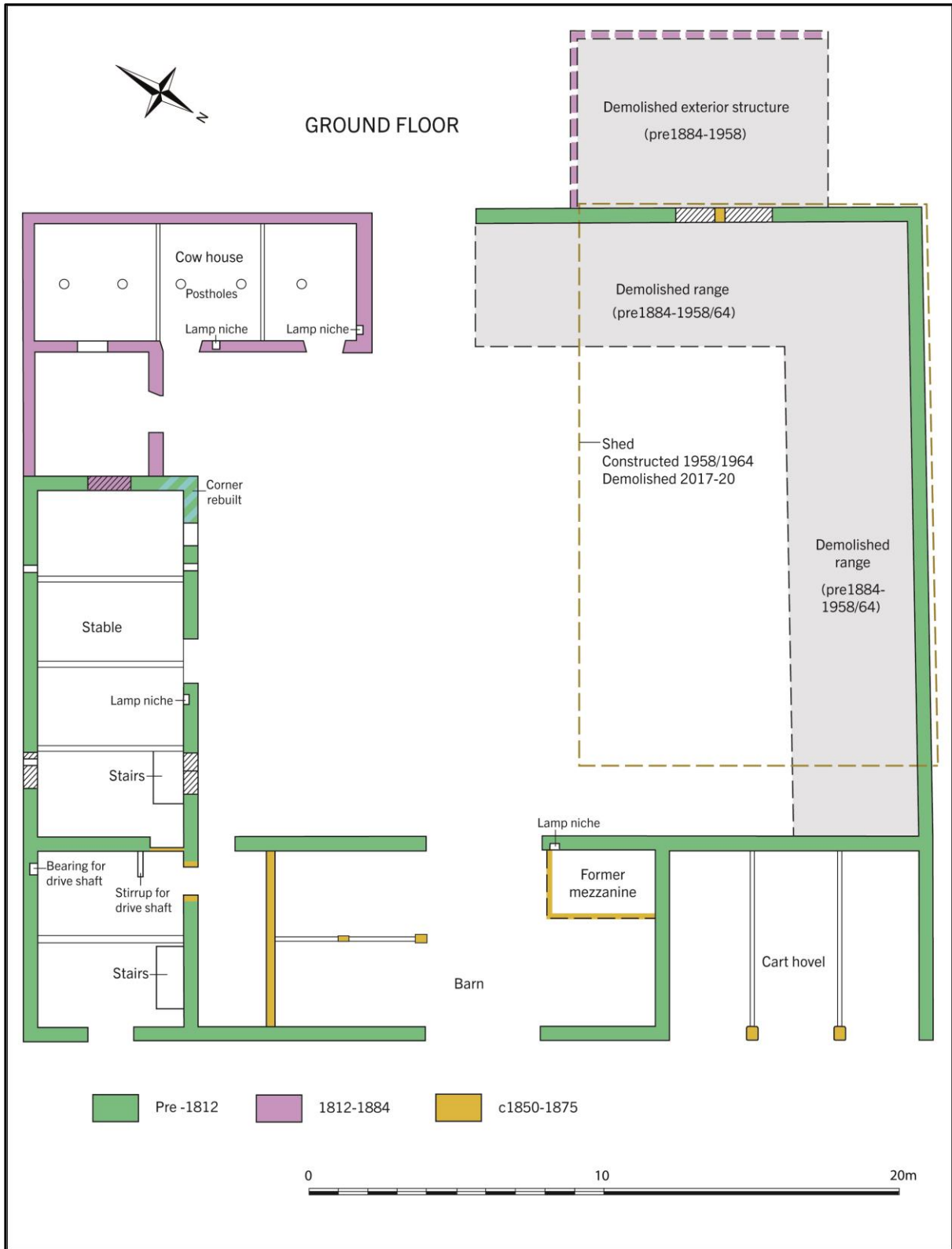


Fig 12a: Layout of the farm, phased after historic map evidence and detail on site (Andy Isham, after survey by Roger Coy Partnership, with thanks)

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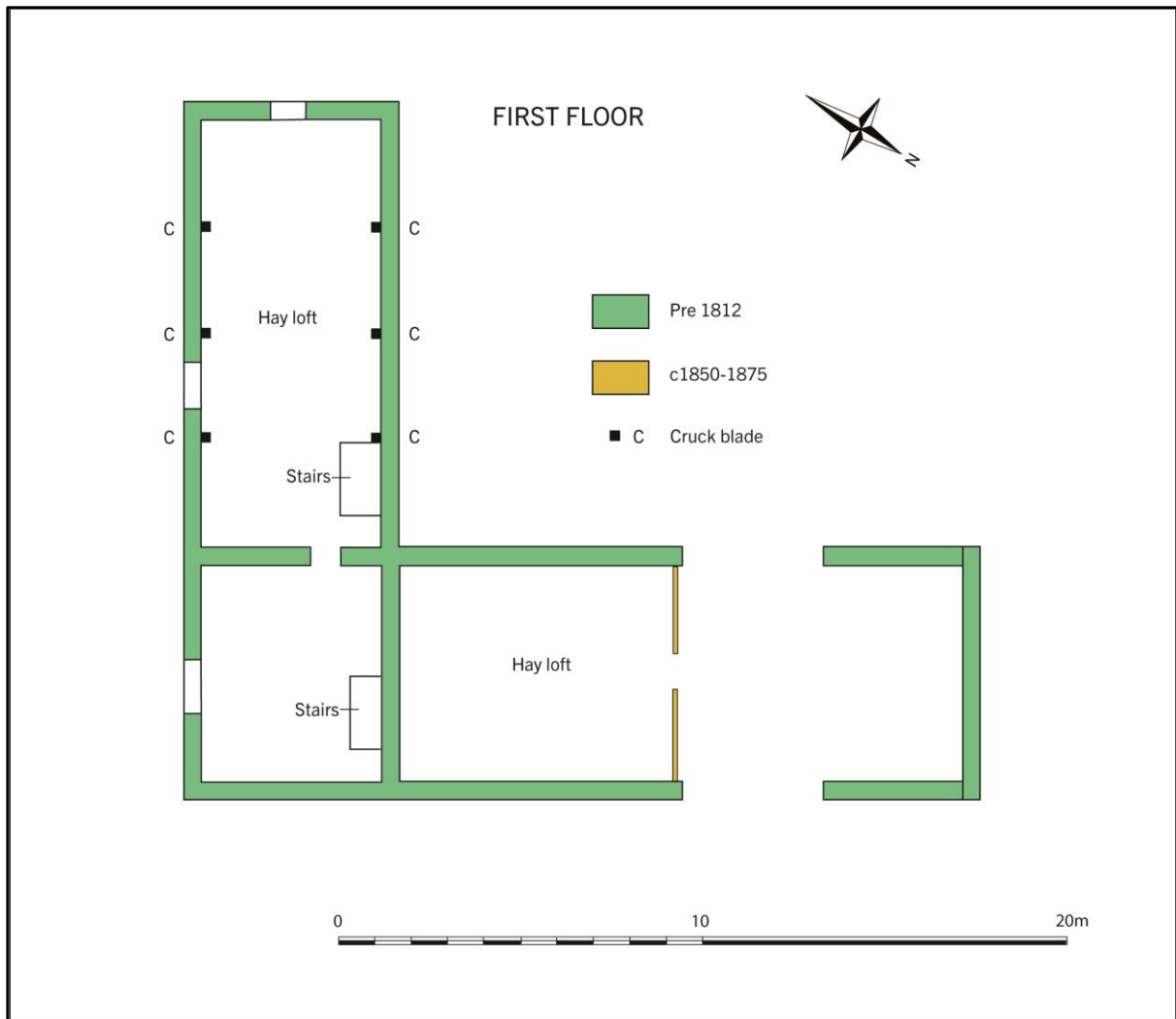


Fig 12b: First floor plan, phased after historic map evidence and detail on site (Andy Isham, after survey by Roger Coy Partnership, with thanks)



Fig 13: The first floor corner room connecting with the floor over the stable, looking south from the stairs. Note how the walls are plastered to about 70cm high. Unusually, the photo was taken from the stairs with extreme wide angle on a phone-camera for coverage and to avoid treading across the floor.

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The c6m x c5m corner room at first floor level is a simple floored space open to the roof, with a pitching door in the east wall (Fig 13). It does not connect with the barn but does connect with the first floor of the stables in the east range. The walls at this high level are plastered or rendered from the floor to a height of about 70cm. In first-floor granaries this is to defray damp in the storage of crops and is noted as such as a peculiarity in other counties (Grundy 2004, 26-7).

The majority of the early east range is taken up by the stables at ground floor, with a hay-loft or fodder store on a purpose-built first floor above (Fig 12a, b). The stables measure c11.5m x c5m internally and were originally divided up by timber travisses, of which some of the parallel ground beams survive on the floor, with empty mortices. A dilapidated timber manger with tethering rings stretches the length of the east wall, with a hayrack above. At just below ceiling height are two ventilation holes in each long wall, while the west wall, looking into the farmyard, is pierced by a central door flanked by two small square windows, the southern example being formed out of a second, original blocked door into the farmyard. An opposed blocked door stands in the east wall out into the fields.

The range is divided into four equal bays by three distinctive 'Upper Crucks' (Alcock et al 1989, 26 [type C]). Cordingley calls them 'Through-purlin Open Cruck Trusses' (Cordingley 1961, 93 [fig 14, type VIe]- thanks to Joe Prentice for drawing my attention to this definitive work and the correct classification). Three pairs of cruck trusses are equally jointed into the floor beams of the first floor and sunk into the thickness of the stone side walls at the same level. This is a distinctive feature of some of the last of the tradition of cruck-construction and is likely to be of the second half of the eighteenth century (Harvey 1984, 98 and 114-116). They have been recorded in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Staffordshire, with a very late example from Shropshire (Grundy 2004 27-8 & n25). The use of crucks in this way provides exceptionally good headroom (and storage) at first floor level. To obviate the need for a restrictive low tie beam across the first floor space, sling-braces have been added to the cruck blades where they curve out from the wall-tops, lending them additional stability (Fig 14).

Due to the very degraded first floor joists and floorboards the first floor was not accessible, so a number of photographs were taken where gaps in the ceiling permitted. An opening and a trimmer joist in the northernmost bay indicate where a stair had lain, but this has been lost. Meanwhile a huge metal water tank above the southernmost bay makes up to some extent for the apparent absence of a well in the farmyard (Fig 14). The south-west corner of the building had once been rebuilt, possibly to get this tank into position. A pitching door lies in the outward (east) facing long wall, while a second one in the south gable, had been reduced in size and converted to a (brick-edged) high window when a later cow-house was put up against the gable (by 1884), obscuring its lower half and preventing access. The floor was not visible beneath detritus.

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Fig 14: View of the southernmost Upper Cruck truss from the south end of the stable. Note the water tank and a sling-brace visible just above the wall. Unusually, the photo was taken with extreme wide angle on a phone-camera for coverage given the inaccessibility of the subject and to maximise the view of the crucks.



Fig 15: Looking south at the northernmost Cruck Truss, collar and sling-brace, through the redundant stair aperture. The morticed timber lies there loose by chance.

The farmyard-facing elevation of the stable is perhaps the most interesting since it includes elements of the early building and of additional elements. The central doorway is original, but to one side was formerly another door, subsequently blocked. Of the two windows, one is original, while the other was configured within the door-blocking. The two square ventilation holes mark the approximate height of the first floor, while a row of blocked former joist sockets and stone damage against the adjacent barn indicates where a former pentice once ran the length of the range to

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prevent the farmer getting wet while working between the barn and stable/cowhouse (Fig 16). It may have run all the way to the end of the range, but the rebuilding of the south-west corner has removed the evidence.



Fig 16: The farmyard elevation of the stable/cowhouse. The original door blocking and row of blocked joist sockets indicated; scale 2m

A cow house at the south-east corner

With its construction dated by historic maps between 1812 and 1884 this single-storey stone building under a modern replacement asbestos roof contains the smallest spaces in the farm. However it is unusual as the original floor of pitched stone survives, still with a row of empty post-holes along its centre-line where the stalls would have been seated.



Fig 17: Cow house, looking east, post-holes arrowed; scale 2m



Fig 18: Cow house, looking south-east, post-holes arrowed; scale 2m

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The building has no windows and is simply-constructed of coursed ironstone rubble. Only the principal trusses survive of its original roof. Its construction has made a pitching door in the south gable of the bigger stable/cow house redundant, which has been part-blocked and reduced to a high window.

There is a small room with a single door between the main cow house range and its earlier neighbour. However, this was full of demolition debris and was not accessible. It links to the cow house-proper via a high-level doorway in its gable, which would have needed a short stair to access, and suggests that the smaller room had a first floor, perhaps for fodder.

The building has three simple planked doors, and beside the two into the main cow house range are two lamp niches. Only a hay rack survives of the former interior fittings.



Fig 19: The cow house from the farmyard



Fig 20: The cow-house exterior. Note the original pitching door above the stable which was made into a window when it became inaccessible; scale 2m

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The vestiges of other buildings (west range and west half of south range)

The remainder of the south range stood across the south entrance to the farmyard, and adjoining this was a former west range along that entire side, all looking into the farmyard. Both appear from the detail of the 1884 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4, above), to have been open-fronted, and as such were probably simple livestock shelters. Only their outer wall survives today, which has been much increased in height on at least two occasions – it was probably about 2-2.5m high originally, as an eaves-height long axis to the ranges. A pair of brick-blocked doorways survives in the south wall, but otherwise this wall is devoid of distinguishing features.

These ranges were lost (on mapping grounds) between 1958 and 1964, when a large Atcost-type livestock shed was constructed across both former ranges. This too was demolished in recent years but appears on the most recent aerial coverage of *Google-earth*.

Additionally, historic maps also indicate that a building was erected against the south wall before 1884, which was demolished around 1958. The brick foundations can still be seen in the turf, although an absence of any scars in the adjacent standing stone wall suggests that the superstructure may have been of timber. Its purpose is unknown, but its deliberate location outside the farmyard may suggest it was not directly related to animal husbandry. Similarly the same OS map (Fig 4) shows that a small structure was once built up against the west wall of the farmyard on the outside, but no sign of this now exists. It may have been a timber lean-to.

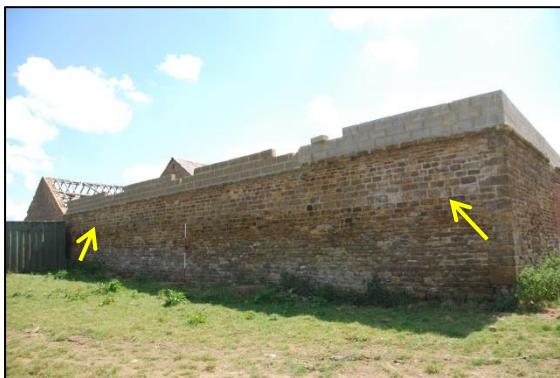


Fig 21: The featureless and much-heightened west wall, exterior. The original probable first eaves-height is arrowed; scale 2m



Fig 22: The south wall exterior. The two blocked door-heights probably relate to the original and a heightened wall. The 2m scale lies along surviving brick foundations of a demolished building.



Fig 23: Vestiges of the missing west and south ranges. The uppermost blockwork and interior troughs were entirely related to the modern At-cost type shed; scale 2m

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Conclusions

This isolated farm (but lacking any early farmhouse) dates from the later eighteenth century, for which origin there is good historic mapping evidence from 1812. Unusually it preserves in a stable with first floor store a rare complete set of three-pairs of Upper Crucks, part of the last gasp of the cruck-building tradition. A simple barn stands adjacent, of similar age but with a more standard roof configuration and a traditional layout. A Victorian cow-house survives with its original pitched stone floor largely intact, while vestiges survive in one corner room to indicate the late nineteenth-century changeover to steam-power in farming.

Otherwise, the surviving buildings retain few pre-modern features and are very dilapidated. Two whole former ranges survive only as a now improbably-high farmyard enclosure wall.

No obvious water source is apparent on the site, such as a well or former pump. A tank on the former stable's first floor seems to have provided water latterly. A stream runs down the valley adjacent (to the north-west) which might have provided most water.

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Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Noborough Farm, Norton
OASIS ID	396290
Project Type	Building Recording
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No/no
Current land use	Redundant farm buildings
Development type	Conversion to domestic accommodation
Reason for investigation	Planning Condition
National grid reference	SP 609 627
Start/end dates of fieldwork	1 June 2020
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	2500 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

11 June 2020