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*Historic Building Recording at
Structons Heath Farm, Great Witley,
Worcestershire*



A Historic Building Recording at Structons Heath Farm, Great Witley, Worcestershire

A report for Mr N.J. Birkmyre

July 2004

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Project: PJ 122

WSM:33631

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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Structons Heath Farm is located at the end of an unadopted lane off the A443 Worcester to Tenbury Wells road, on the eastern edge of Great Witley (NGR SO 7721 6592). The farm lies around 6 kilometres to the south-west of Stourport-on-Severn and 14 kilometres to the north of Worcester (Figure 1). Structons Heath is too small to be described as a hamlet and consists of the farm, agricultural buildings and a scatter of cottages along the single track road.

1.2. Development Details

A planning application has been made to Malvern Hills District Council by Mr N.J. Birkmyre of Structons Heath Farm, via his agent Wood, Kendrick and Williams Ltd, for conversion of existing farm buildings to provide domestic accommodation and associated infrastructure (reference MH/04/0633). The planning process determined that the proposed development was likely to affect a building listed on the County Sites and Monuments Record (WSM 30494). As a result, the Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, placed a 'Programme of Building Recording' planning condition on the application, for which a brief of work was written (WHEAS 2004).

1.3. Reasons for the Historic Building Recording

The data contained within the Sites and Monuments Record suggested that the building conversion work would affect a building (WSM 30494) contained on the local list of historically important buildings. The brief of works states that:

'Buildings of this type form an integral and significant part of the counties agricultural heritage' (WHEAS 2004).

In such circumstances a programme of archaeological work is attached to planning conditions for any development. In this instance, an historic building recording was suggested to record the building prior to its conversion.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The project conforms to the Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures (IFA 1999).
- ❑ The buildings were recorded to at least Level 1 as defined by the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments of England (RCHME 1996).
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Section, Worcestershire County Council (WHEAS 2003) and for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology 2003).
- ❑ The project conforms to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the Mercian Archaeology Service Manual (Williams 2003)

2.2. Aims of the Project

The aims of the historic building recording were to compile an archive of the building within its topographical setting. This was to consist of both written and photographic records. The results of the fieldwork were to be used to produce a report chronicling changes and development within the building and where possible, to attach relative dates to individual phases of building. The documentary survey was to be used to assist the chronological phasing of the complex and also, to ascribe function and use to the building(s).

2.3. Background Research

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork all the relevant available cartographic sources were consulted and a search of the County Sites and Monuments Record commissioned. However, the SMR search produced no useful results.

Documentary research was carried out at Worcestershire Record Office (WRO) and the following sources were specifically consulted and were of use:

Cartographic Sources

Source	Reference Number
Plan of Great Witley Manor (1732)	WRO BA 3925
Tithe Map and Apportionment of the Hamlet of Hillhampton in the Parish of Martley (1841)	WRO BA 1572, AP r760/345

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

2.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The building recording was undertaken on 13th July 2004 prior to any development work being carried out at the site.

The photographic survey was carried out using digital photography. A 2-metre scale was used where possible.

Proforma Building Record Forms were used to record the structure in tandem with site notes and reference to site photographs, to produce the final record contained within this report.

The methodology adopted and the favourable working conditions meant that the aims and objectives of the brief could be fully met and the fieldwork was successfully concluded.

3. The Documentary Research

3.1. Background

Structons Heath Farm lies at around 76 metres above sea level in the shadow of the ruinous manor house of Witley Court and the heavily wooded Abberley Hills to the north-west. It cannot be overlooked that the economy of the farm will have, in the past, been influenced by its proximity to the court.

The present farm buildings are mainly of modern build, although the subject buildings are older and may have once formed part of a larger complex of buildings surrounding a central farmyard, as is common across the region. The sandy-clay soils of the region have led to a traditional background of pastoral farming, with much land turned over to orchard and hopyards.

3.2. Cartographic Evidence

A plan of the lands of Lord Foley, surveyed in 1732 (Figure 2), indicates that at this time the site did not belong to the Foley estate, although it appears to have shared a common boundary.

In 1836 the Tithe Commutation Act was passed by Parliament, resulting in an extensive survey of land across England in order to produce a series of Tithe Apportionment Maps that relayed information about land ownership and use, aimed at converting the commutation of tithe in kind to land taxation (Hoskins 1972, 37). Structons Heath came under the auspices of Martley Parish, for which a map and apportionment was produced in 1841 (Figure 3). The map shows a 'barn and yard,' being L shaped in plan and belonging to The Right Honourable

William Lord and occupied by Josiah Croyden. Croyden paid 6d tithe rent on the plot to the Rector of Martley (WRO BA 1572, AP r760/345). It is likely that William Lord referred to in the Tithe Apportionment is actually Lord William Ward (see below), as general mistakes were often made in apportionment documents. The tithe plan is also useful in comparing the nature of land use compared with the modern day. The map shows areas of small cottage garden plots in multiple ownership with larger areas of pasture, orchard and hopyard surrounding them, mainly in the ownership of the largest landowner in the parish, William Ward.

The late 19th century 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25" map of the area was not available at the Worcestershire Records Office. The 2nd edition, which was published in 1903, shows the subject buildings to take the same plan form as today, with the exception of a small detached square building at the northern end of the range, which has been demolished (Figure 4).

3.3. The Historic and Archaeological Background

The documentary research proved problematic for this site. The index system at Worcestershire Records Office makes no reference to Structons Heath, as does another starting point for research, The Victoria County History volumes. The Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record contains no entries for the immediate vicinity around the farm.

The place-name Structons Heath is said to derive from Tryxton, as it first appears in documents dating to 1256. It is later corrupted to Throckeston (1275), Truxton (1537) and Thruxtons by 1603. The place-name probably originated from a personal name, 'Throcc's Farm' and is an Old English derivation from before the Norman Conquest (Mawer and Stenton 1969, 52). However, this does not indicate how the suffix 'Heath' relates to the name. The word 'Heath' means the same today as it did in the Anglo-Saxon period, referring to underscrub plants, especially heather (Rackham 1986, 282). Typically, heathland would be an area of low vegetation of heathers, furze, bracken and grasses on an acidic soil, often encroached upon by woodland. Unfortunately, heathland was not recorded as such in the Domesday Book, but rather as pasture (Rackham 1986, 291), so research into heathland generally relies on later records of assarting and enclosure (inclosure) and environmental archaeology. At Domesday, Hillhampton Manor had 124 acres of arable and 117 of pasture (VCH IV, 289), much of which may have been heathland.

No enclosure maps or plans of the area were located during the research, but it can be assumed that much of the area remained heathland until the 17th century, when piecemeal enclosure and improvement by the larger land-owners (such as Foley) transformed the landscape.

In 1655 Thomas Foley had purchased and extended the manor house at Witley Court. Foley was the son of a wealthy Stourbridge Ironmaster. In 1718 Foley purchased further estate in the area from Alan Cliffe (VCH IV, 289) this is shown in a survey of 1732 (Figure 2), although the site at Structons Heath is not on the plan.

In 1837 Foley sold much of his estate to William, 11th Baron Ward (who later became the first Earl of Dudley in 1860). Lord Ward was also an Ironmaster who had made his fortune from mining, smelting, chemical manufacture and investment in the railway. In 1833 he inherited the assets of John William Ward, Earl of Dudley, allowing him to purchase the Witley Court estate for £890,000, the equivalent of over 32 million pounds today (VCH IV).

The tithe map of 1841 shows that Lord Ward had estate in Structons Heath, including the subject buildings and the yard in which they stood. It was commonplace for large landowners

of this period to buy up plots of land and holdings around their estate in order to enlarge their overall holding within a parish and demonstrate their power and wealth.

3. The Results

The Fabric Survey

The subject buildings could be easily divided into two separate structures for ease of recording. They are a barn, which is aligned approximately north-south and stands on the western side of the site and a block lately used as stables, which butts onto the north-eastern end of the barn and runs off to the east at an angle of around 75 degrees (Plates 1-5).

The Barn

External

The barn is constructed of 9" solid brick walls with a clay tile roof cover. The bricks used are mainly 2 ¾" hand made orange bricks, probably from a locally sourced clay. There are, however, areas where 2-2 ¼" bricks are used (see discussion below). The bricks are bonded with a whiteish sandy lime mortar in a Flemish Facing Bond, with two courses of stretchers interrupted by a single course of headers.

Externally the barn has a steep pitch to the roof and the gables have parapets with brick copings supported on gable shoulders, with a dentilated cornice at the eaves only on the eastern elevation, which would have faced into the farmyard. The barn is built into a slight slope, with a drop of almost 2 metres from end to end. The southern end is built onto large sandstone blocks (Plate 6) levelling the structure down the slope. The blocks extend along the eastern elevation and it is possible that the foundations for the barn are totally of similar sandstone blocks. There has been some movement at the southern end resulting in limited subsidence, this no doubt would have been worse if the foundations were totally of brick and mortar, suggesting the builders understood the local ground conditions.

The southern end of the barn has a lower ground floor, with two cart bays approached beneath a pair of gauged brick retaining arches with inposts set above timber lintels. The northern end of the building has an inserted upper floor, which is approached from outside via steps and a door in the gable end. There are owl holes in both gable ends, the one at the southern end is original, but the northern hole has been punched through the wall at a later time. Owl holes were often constructed into the highest points of gable ends in order to encourage Barn Owls to nest and help keep down the level of vermin within the barn.

Ventilation to the barn is provided by three tiers of slit vents along both elevations and in the southern end elevation and gable end. The positioning of these vents is critical in understanding the development and use of this building and is further discussed below. Doors and window openings are also important when studying the development of a building. Two pairs of opposing floor to wall plate timber doors stand either side of the former threshing bay in the east and west elevations. The threshing or 'thrashing' bay is where the threshing process would take place to separate the wheat from the chaff, or the grain from the stalks of the crop.

This process involved thrashing the crop on the floor with hand flails. After the separation had taken place, the threshed crop would be thrown into the air to separate out the chaff. This was known as winnowing and the bay doors would be opened to allow a through draught, which would aid the process as the heavier grain would fall to the floor and the waste would be blown away. It has been logically suggested, that for this reason the barn, which was the most important building on the early farmstead, would be aligned to take advantage of the locally prevalent wind (Wade-Martins 1991, 167). However, little research has been carried out with respect to this suggestion. Winnowing was a lengthy process and may have taken several weeks a year to complete.

Blocked up doorways at the northern end of the eastern elevation indicate that the abutting brick structure is later than the barn. Plate 7 clearly shows that the stables have been built across the door apertures. Inspection of the northern gable indicates that the entrance door to the upper floor was originally a pitching eye. Eight courses at the bottom of the former pitching eye have been cut away to form an external door (Plate 8). At ground floor level there is a blocked opening to the west of the existing entrance. This is set low for a window, and does not resemble any of the other window openings in the barn, which are set below rough segmental arches, with the exception of a later insertion into the eastern elevation. It is possible that the aperture in question (Plate 9) is related to the square building that seemingly abutted the gable end in this position. This is shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map (Figure 4). It is likely that this opening was punched through the barn wall to allow access between the two buildings and that the building may have housed a small steam engine, which may have been used to supply power for a portable threshing machine or animal feed processor, although there is no remaining evidence for this above ground.

Internal

The internal space of the barn is divided into three distinct areas, with upper floors at both ends of the barn and a single floor to roof space centrally. The roof structure comprises two types of truss between wall plate and ridge piece, with two sets of trenched purlins, each section being angle scarf jointed and nailed together, the north-eastern end purlin is fractured near the gable end. Long slender wind braces strengthen the rafters. Counting from the southern end, there are 7 trusses between the gable end walls. Trusses T1, T4 and T7 (ends and centre) are king post with two queen struts supporting the principal rafters. T2, T3, T5 and T6 are simple collar trusses (Plate 10). This arrangement seemingly is so that produce could be easily be stacked up into the rafters in the storage areas, to where the collar trusses are unique. The timber used to construct the trusses appears to be machine sawn.

Inside the barn there was evidence for the reuse of earlier bricks, many of 2" width and areas where 2 ¼" bricks are used (Plate 11). There is no evidence to suggest that these sections of the barn are from an earlier period (thinner bricks being dateable to earlier).

At the northern end there are two stories, the upper floor being approached from an external doorway and stairs. The entrance was formerly a pitching eye into the upper level. The alteration of the entrance indicates a change of use for the upper floor and also that the floor has been inserted in place of an earlier one, which was lower. There are other pieces of evidence to support this: there are slots for earlier bridging beams to support a floor, in the walls below; the slit vents have been blocked in this area (Plate 12), showing they were not necessary (the new floor cuts through them) and on the western elevation there has been disturbance of brickwork indicating where the new bridging beam has been inserted into the inner skin of the structure (Plate 13). The lintel above the entrance door (lower) is a rail re-used from a timber-frame structure. It has a pair of mortises and peg holes and the under side

has a groove cut in, where wattles would have been sprung into place ready for daubing, indicating that this was an upper face (Plate 14). The spacing between the mortises and the general girth of timber indicates that it was probably used on a building of the 17th century or possibly early 18th.

Originally the upper level would have stored feed for animals that would have been housed in the space below, which may have been used as a calving area or loosebox for animals. It is difficult to put an accurate use on a space within a farm building, as there is sometimes frequent change in farming processes. The upper floor has lately been used as storage space.

The lower floor was originally constructed without slit vents, which were to allow a draught through the barn to keep the produce healthy, but was not required where animals were kept.

The central and southern areas of the barn were the production and storage areas. The threshing bay sits off centre with doors to the east and west elevations. The floor is still partly intact, with large stone flags repaired in places with brick and small cobbles (Plate 15). The threshing bay is semi-partitioned off from the storage area by brick walls, with timber bracing to the tie-beams. The northernmost support timber shows evidence of reuse, with a pair of rebates cut in for lap joints, together with peg holes. The northern two-storey section is divided from the central area with a full height brick wall.

At the southern end, the upper floor is at dividing wall height with a door and steps to the space below. The upper floor would have also been used for storage of crop. The two cart entrances into the lower area suggest that this end of the barn was used as the 'goods out' section of the building. It is likely that crop was brought in from the fields on carts loaded high, into the threshing bay. The produce was then loaded into the northern end for storage and the carts exited via the opposing doors and into the cart bays below the southern end. The threshing and winnowing process was carried out in the threshing bay and the processed crop was stored in sacks on the upper floor at the southern end and lowered into the carts below when required.

The Stable Block

External

The current stable block structure is chronologically later than the barn and has been built onto the north-eastern corner at an angle of around 75 degrees. It is a brick structure coursed in Common Bond with lime mortar below a handmade clay tile pitched roof. The cornice is dentilated and the gable end has parapets, copings and shoulders in an attempt to keep the architectural detail of the barn throughout.

The building abutting the barn at the northern end has lately been used as a stable block, but shows evidence of alteration and adaptation from its former use as an animal shelter shed, which originally had 6 openings beneath elliptical arches in the southern elevation. All the openings have been altered (Plates 16 and 17), the easternmost two having had the external arches removed, although there are still traces of the arches in inner skin of the build. The space has been divided into 3 stables and a tack room with stable doors to the southern elevation and a personnel door to the tack room from the north. Additional light has been encouraged by the insertion of rectangular windows. There is evidence for blocking of 3 doorways, two at the eastern end of the northern elevation and one in the gable end.

Internal

As outlined above, the former open plan shelter shed has been altered to form a space encompassing three stables and tack room. The original purpose of the building would have been to house stock animals overnight. It is often difficult to distinguish between a cart shed, to protect carts and farm implements from the elements and a shelter shed designed for animals, and often the former was used for the latter. The key indicators here are the size of entrance, at only 2 metres between piers and the width of the building, which is not wide enough to accommodate a cart. There are also curved bricks in the lower sections of the unaltered piers. These bricks, often called Bull Nose bricks, were used as edging where animals may rub against angled bricks and possibly cause injury.

The easternmost stable has a corner manger of brickwork built in to the inserted partition wall to the tack-room. The floor of the tack-room is raised by a single step and there is a half height brick partition wall, with timberwork above, allowing viewing into the stable. The large central space has been split with a corrugated iron partition, to form stables 2 and 3.

The roof-trusses are all collar trusses with the tie-beam and collar close together.

4. Phasing of the Buildings and Dating

Discussion of the Fabric and Dating Evidence

Accurate dating of farm buildings is often problematic as dateable architectural features are often changed, modified or re-used. This is usually more pronounced within commercial or agricultural buildings than in domestic architecture. It may also be that architectural fashion takes longer to manifest itself within the fabric of buildings reserved for animals or produce. Consequently, any evidence for close dating is problematic.

The barn is the earliest standing building, although re-use of timber and early 2-2 ¼" brick indicates that it is possible that there were earlier buildings on the site. The timber may date from a 17th century timber-framed building, based on the use of wattle and daub, distance between mortises and girth of timber (scantling). This ties in with the size of bricks, which probably date from the same period. On the opposite side of the farmyard to the stable block (adjacent to the southern end of the barn), there is a distinct platform in the ground (Plate 18), which may represent the buried remains of a former southern range to the buildings complex, although this is speculative.

The positioning of the slit vents is important in understanding the use of space and development of the barn. Barns were vented to allow a through draught around the stored crop and help prevent fungal growth. The un-vented area at the lower level of the northern end of the barn, was therefore, never intended for crop storage. The conversion of the upper floor from a grain storage area (granary) to a storage area is marked by the insertion of a new floor and critically, blocking of the vents. This may have coincided with the farm utilising root

crops to process their own fodder and possibly the addition of a steam engine in a small building at the northern end of the barn.

It is often argued that a building can be dated from the size of bricks used in its construction. The implementation of a brick tax in 1784 designed to make bricks a uniform 3", suggests that smaller bricks are earlier, a fact generally proven and accepted. However, it is undoubtedly the case that slightly smaller bricks were still being used, especially on agricultural buildings, well into the 19th century.

Architectural style may also be a good indicator of approximate date of construction, although where for example and as in this case, the styles of two buildings of different phases have a similar style, we can assume that either the dates of construction for both are close together or the latter mimics one from much earlier. The style adopted at Structons Heath Farm would be more at home in East Anglia, especially in Norfolk, where the majority of agricultural buildings have steeped pitched roofs with gable end parapets and shoulders. The style is less common in Worcestershire, with a few examples surviving in the north of the county and the Wyre Forest area. The style used at Structons Heath is typically 18th or early 19th century. The kingpost trusses were probably a mass-produced item; these can be readily dated to this period. The timber or the trusses is machine sawn, a process that generally dates from after 1775.

The Tithe Apportionment Map of 1841 shows the barn and an attached building as L shaped in plan. The existing stables, in fact shoot off at an angle from the barn, as depicted on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1903 (Figure 4). We must therefore ask if the building depicted on the tithe map is in fact the stable block, or an earlier building, which was replaced by the current stable block. There is no physical evidence on the ground for an earlier building and so we may assume that tithe plan was slightly schematic in this area, although this is conjecture.

Based on the evidence we are able to suggest the following phases and dates for the buildings at Structons Heath Farm: -

PHASE	FABRIC of BUILDING	DATE
I	The barn	Mid 18 th to early 19 th century
II	The animal shelter shed (now stables)	Early to mid 19 th century,

5. Conclusion

The results of the historic building recording at determined that the brick built barn at Structons Heath Farm originally had two cart bays at the southern end and a hay loft over a loose box or stable at the northern end. The upper room was later converted for storage when a new floor was inserted and external stairs added. The current stables were originally an animal shelter shed, which was probably converted in the early 20th century. The Barn is likely to date from the mid 18th or early 19th century and the stable block from a little later, probably early to mid-19th century.

6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mr Birkmyre of Structons Heath Farm. The excellent plans and elevations were kindly provided by Wood, Kendrick and Williams, Chartered Architects. These have been used for the basis of Figures 5 and 6, with additional annotation. Thanks are also due to Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, and Deborah Overton for carrying out a search of The County Sites and Monuments Record.

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Plates

Plate 1



The barn eastern elevation (Scale 2 metres)

Plate 2



The barn western elevation (Scale 2 metres)

Plates

Plate 3



The barn north gable end (Scale 2 metres)

Plates

Plate 4



The stable block southern elevation (Scale 2 metres)

Plate 5



The stables eastern gable (Scale 2 metres)

Plates

Plate 6



Sandstone plinth at southern end of eastern elevation of barn (Scale 1 metre)

Plate 7



Blocked up doorways in barn eastern elevation showing that the stable block is later (Scale 2 metres)

Plates

Plate 8



Brickwork cut away at the bottom of former pitching eye, to form new doorway

Plate 9



Blocked up doorway in north gable of barn (Scale 2 metres)

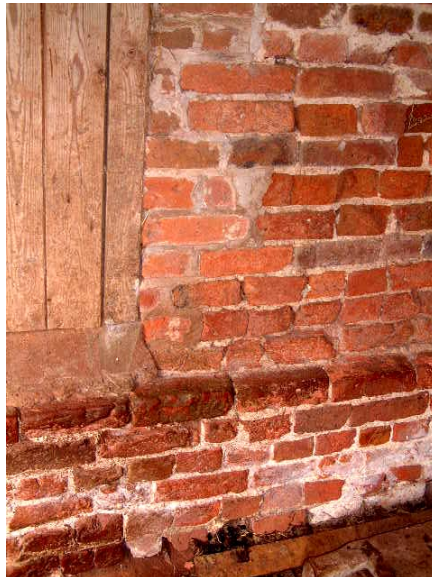
Plates

Plate 10



Kingpost truss above storage room at the northern end of the barn (red on scale is 0.50 metres)

Plate 11



Re-used 2-inch bricks at lower level of partition between cart bay and threshing bay

Plates

Plate 12



Slit vent blocked when the new floor was inserted at the northern end of the barn

Plate 13



Inserted bricks where the support beam for the new upper floor at the north end has been inserted

Plates

Plate 14



Re-used timber-framing above entrance door in northern gable

Plate 15



The threshing floor in the barn (Scale 1 metre)

Plates

Plate 16



Blocked up entrances inside current stables (Scale 2 metres)

Plate 17



Blocked entrance inside the tack room (Scale 2 metres)

Plates

Plate 18



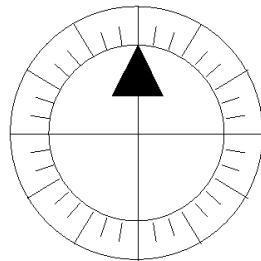
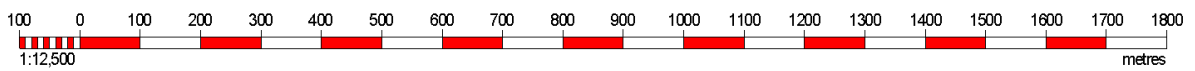
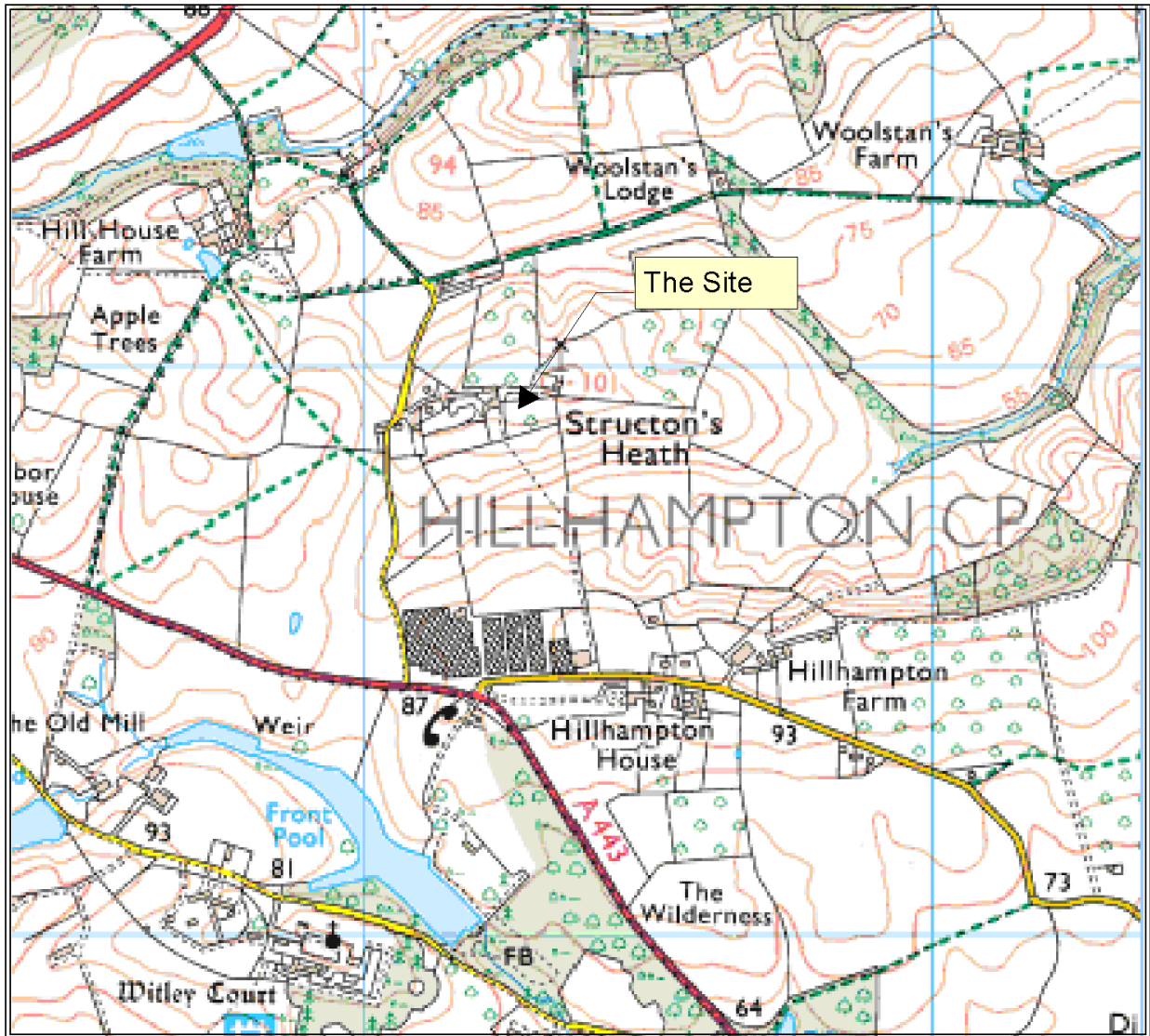
Platform on southern side of the former farmyard, which may be the demolished remains of a southern range, although this is conjectural

Plate 19



The barn set against a backdrop of the hilly landscape

Figure 1: Location of the Site



Location of Structons Heath, Great Witley, Worcestershire

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Figure 2: Extract from A Plan of Great Witley Manor (1732)



The early 18th century plan of Great Witley Manor indicate that the site is not yet held by the landed gentry. However, there appears to be several strips around the core of the estate now in the hands of the lordship.

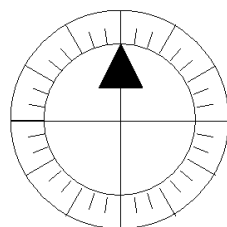


Figure 2: Extract from the Martley (Hillhampton Township) Tithe Map (1841)



The tithe map of 1841 depicts the barn and stable block at right angles to each other. This is possibly a mistake on the plan, although it cannot be ruled out that the stable block replaces an earlier building that was on a slightly different alignment.

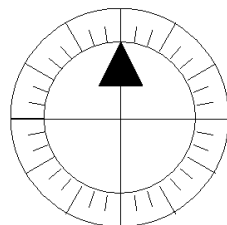
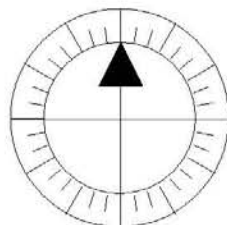
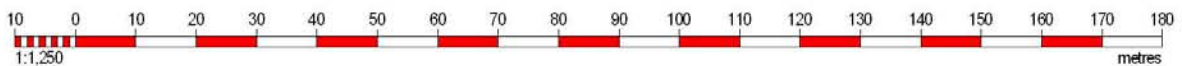
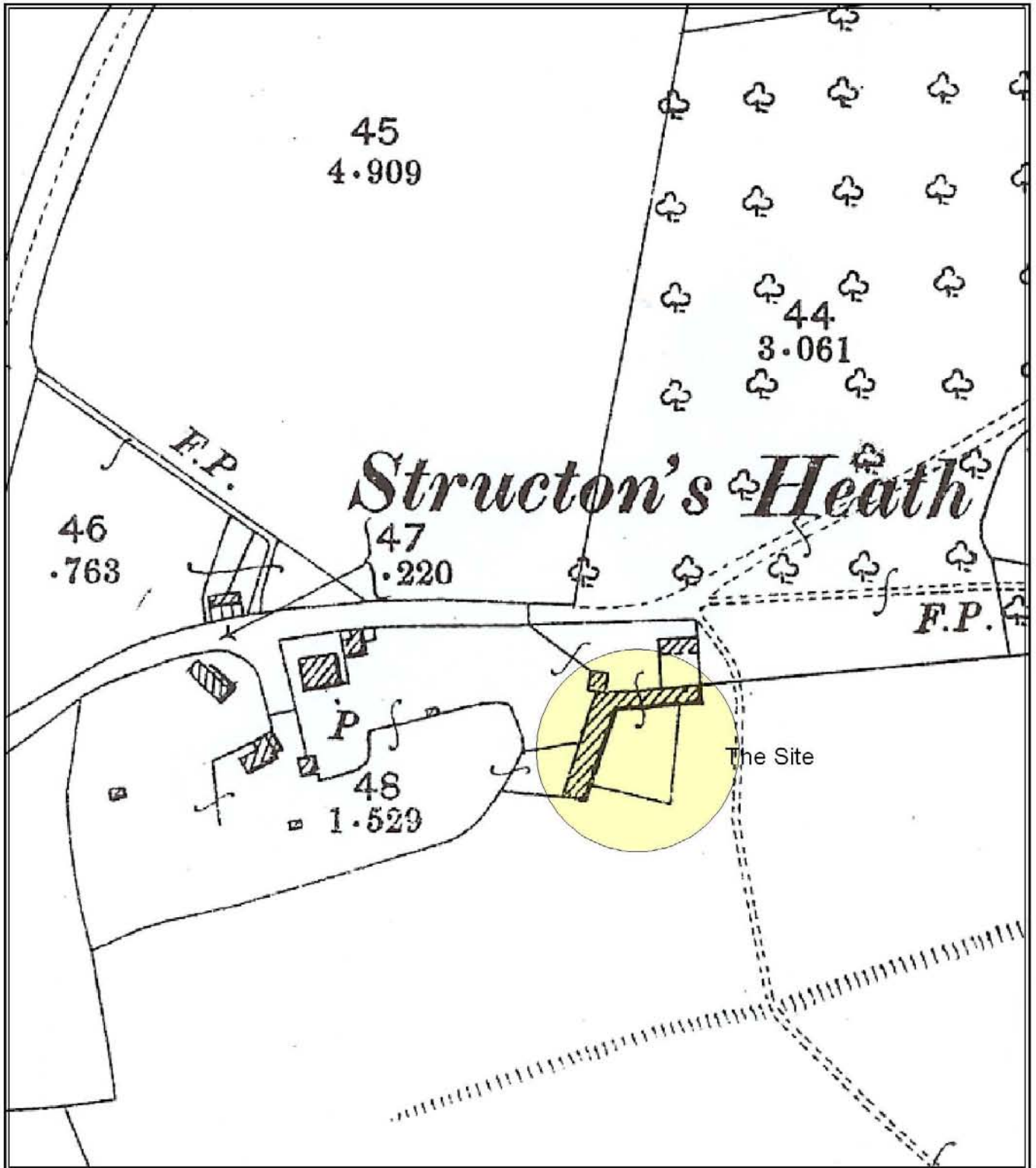


Figure 4: 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1903)



The 2nd edition map of 1903 shows the subject buildings in the same plan form as today. Note the small rectangular building at the northern end of the barn (left), this is no longer standing.

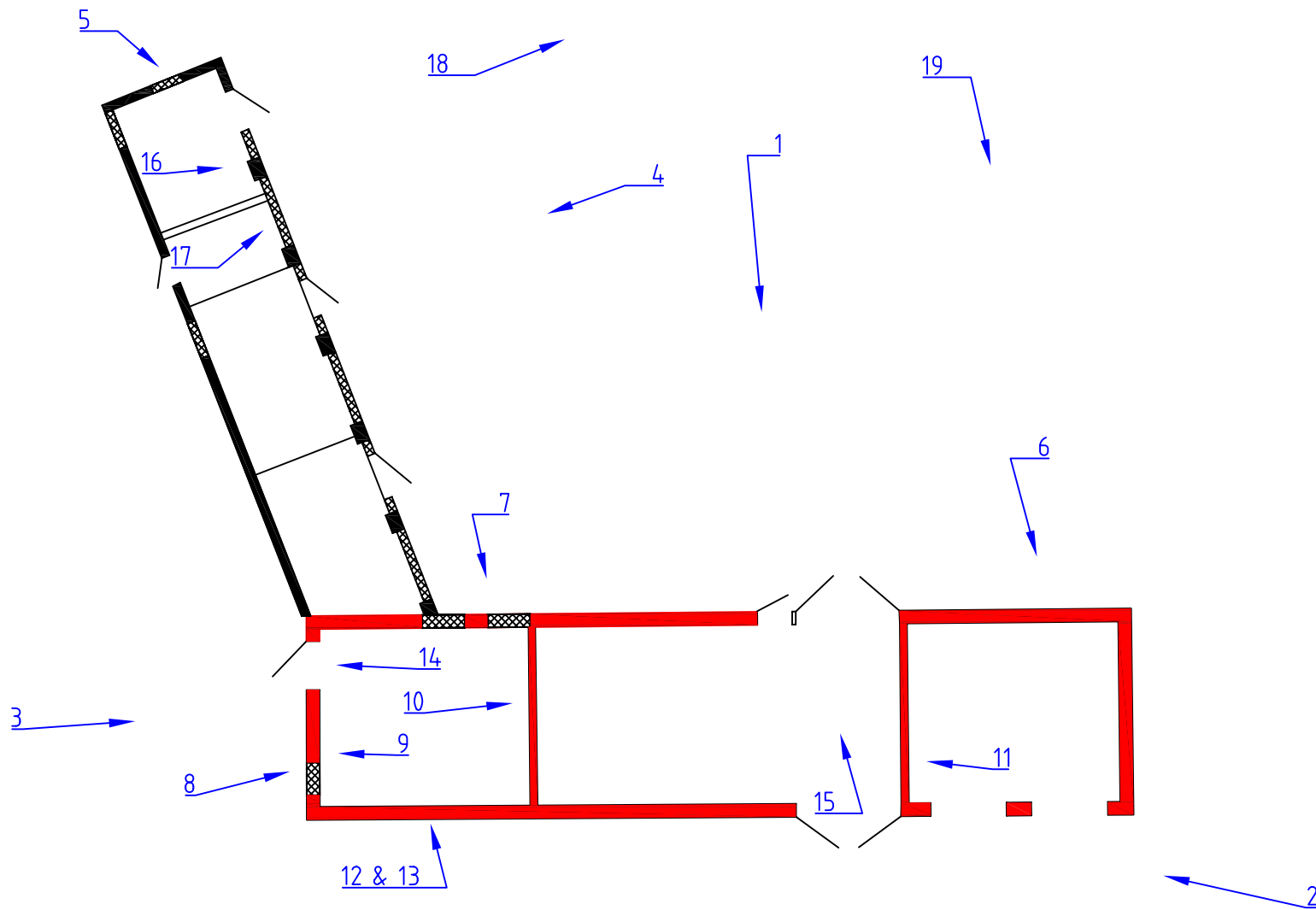


Figure 6: Direction of Photographs Used in Report

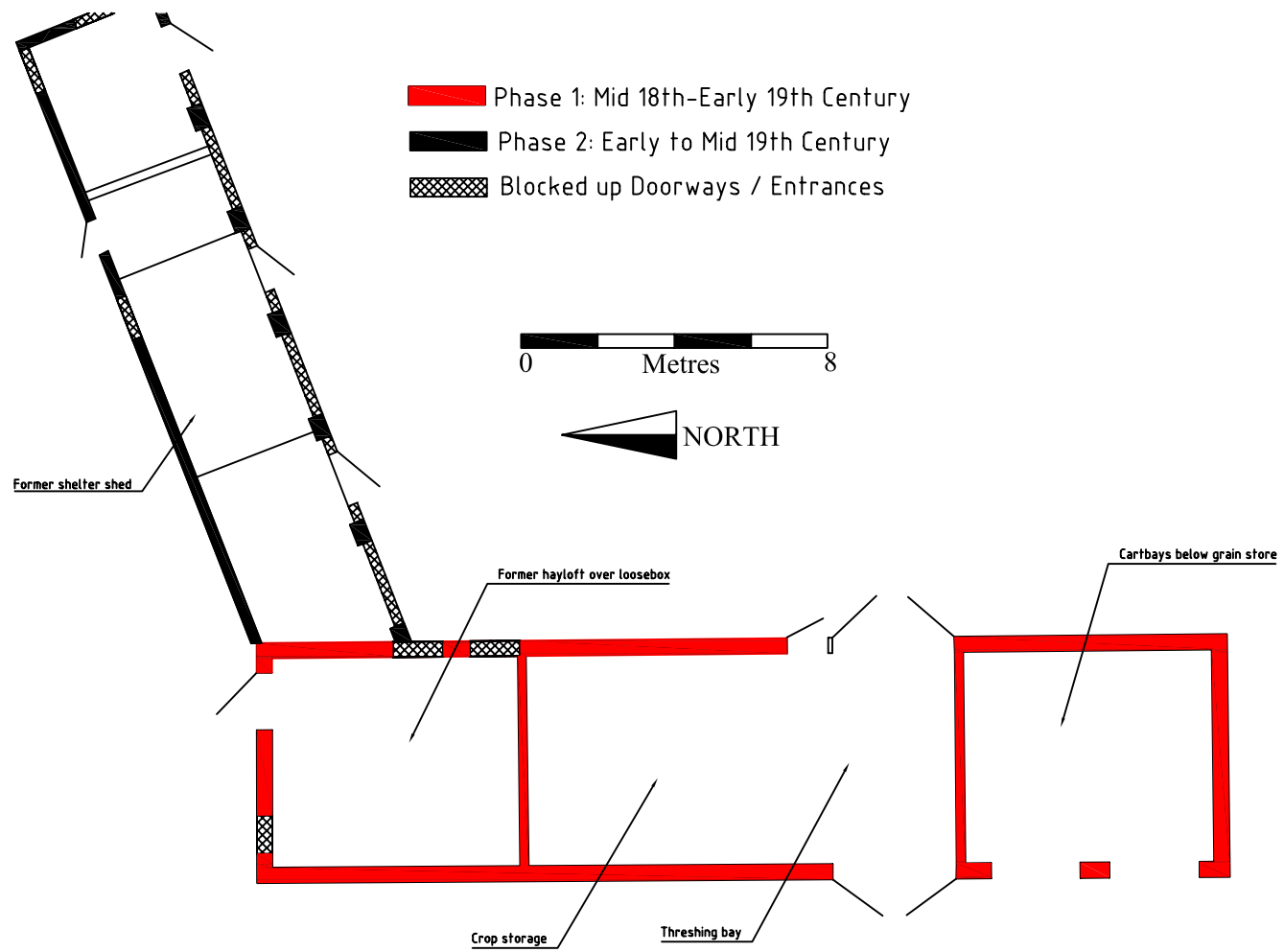


Figure 5: Phase Plan of the Buildings