

Decoy Farm, Melton, Suffolk

Archaeological Record

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**Decoy Farm,
Old Church Road, Melton,
Suffolk**

(TM 2931 5125)

An Archaeological Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a complex of farm buildings at Decoy Farm. The report has been prepared to a brief written by the Archaeological Service of Suffolk County Council (Dr Jess Tipper, 4th June 2008, Ref. /DecoyFarm_Melton2008) and is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for commercial redevelopment (Suffolk Coastal District Council application DC/07/1500/FUL).

Introduction

The following report is accompanied by a CD containing a full photographic record in the form of 54 8.2 megapixel digital images (Appendix 1) but also includes printed photographs of key features (Appendix 2). Each image is separately described in the report, and a white metre scale rod with centimetre sub-divisions was included wherever possible. The site was inspected on 6th November 2008.

Summary

Decoy Farm occupies an isolated site on the western slope of the Deben valley approximately 150 metres west of old St Andrew's church and 200 metres from the river. The name of the farm derives from a rectangular pond 100 metres to the east which is shown as a 'Coye' or decoy pond on a rare early-17th century map. The pond was formerly divided into three separate areas and may represent a series of medieval fish ponds belonging to a lost manor house or settlement in the vicinity of the church. The grade II-listed farmhouse is depicted with adjoining barns on both the 17th century map and another of 1725, but the present red-brick farm buildings date only from the mid-19th century. These buildings formed a cattle yard to the east and a horse yard to the west of a central barn, and until recent years would have represented a good example of a small High Victorian 'model' farm. Their historic integrity was lost, however, when the eastern yard was replaced by a car park and the barn converted for commercial purposes. A probable granary in the western yard is now in separate ownership, and the only recognisable historic structure in the development area is a former stable which has been stripped of its original roof covering, ceiling and hay rack.

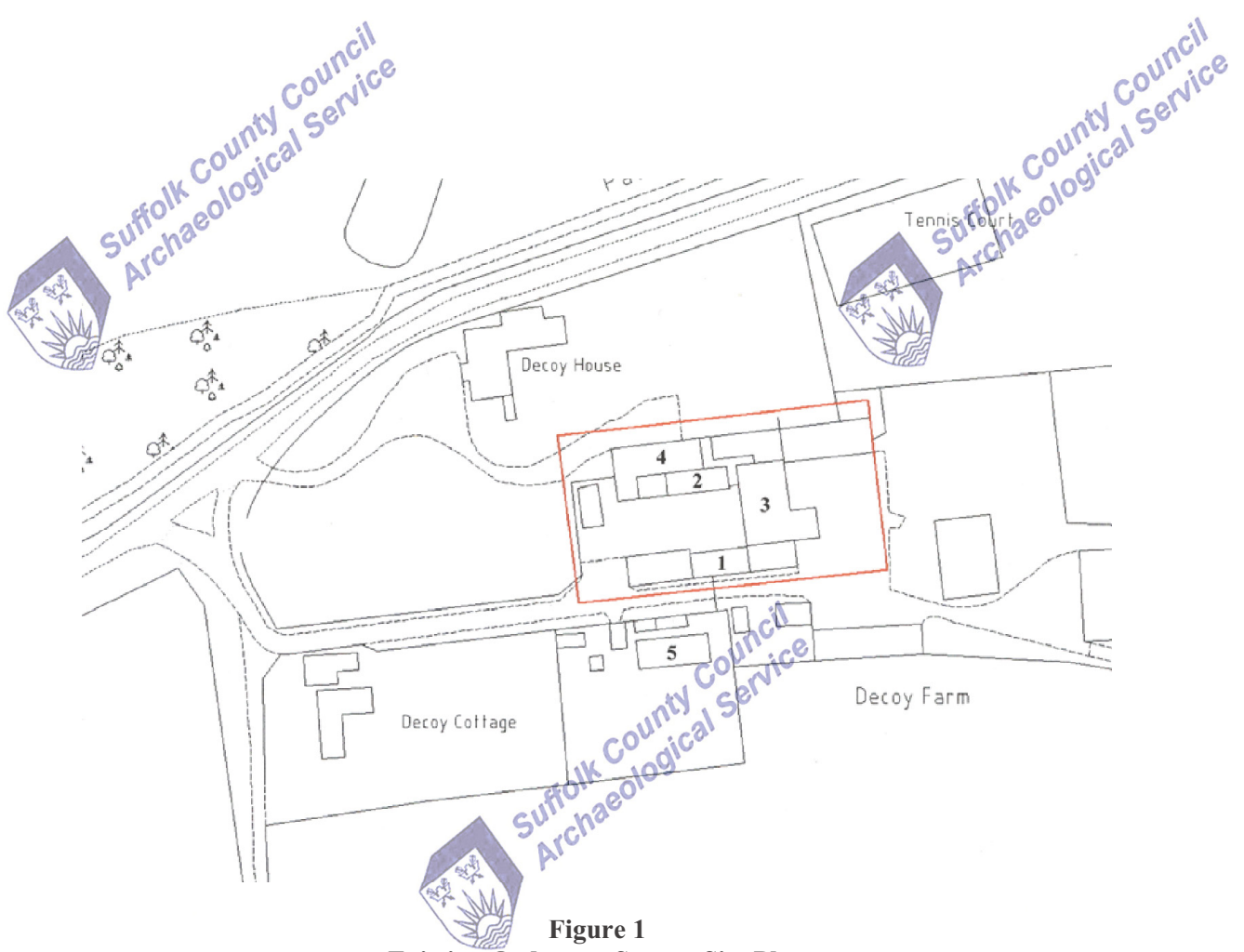


Figure 1
Existing Ordnance Survey Site Plan
*Showing the mid-19th century farm complex outlined in red,
 and the key buildings numbered as follows:*

- 1. Brick stable**
- 2. Open-sided shelter shed (rebuilt mid-20th century)**
- 3. Barn, previously converted into office accommodation**
- 4. Brick shed (possibly a granary) now in separate ownership**

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Decoy Farm lies on the western slope of the Deben valley at the eastern edge of Melton parish, approximately 150 metres west of old St Andrew's church and 200 metres from the river. The name of the farm derives from a rectangular pond 100 metres to the east which is marked on the Ordnance Survey of 1881 as a decoy pond. The site occupies an isolated rural location on the lane to Lower Ufford as the main settlement of Melton lies on the B1438 1km to the south-west. This settlement developed in the late-18th and 19th centuries as a suburb of Woodbridge, and housed the Suffolk Lunatic Asylum. The present church of St Andrew in the village centre was erected in 1868 to serve the new population, and the 14th century old church, which contains Anglo-Saxon long-and-short work in its tower (according to the Schedule of Listed Buildings), was converted into a mortuary chapel.

Decoy farmhouse is a grade II-listed building which lies to the north-west of its farm yard, and contains a 17th century timber-framed rear wing behind its early-19th century front (western) range (Schedule of Listed Buildings). The only other historic building nearby is the early-18th century mill house at the former site of Melton Mill some 50 metres north-east of the church. The lack of any rectory or manor house in the immediate vicinity of the medieval church is unusual, and suggests other buildings may have been lost. The rectangular decoy pond to the south is not characteristic of such ponds elsewhere, which normally possess long, tapering arms into which ducks were driven to be netted, and was originally divided into three sections; it has been artificially created by damming a spring feeding the Deben, and may

have been designed as a series of fish ponds serving a medieval manor house or settlement in the field south of the church. The manor of Melton belonged to the Abbot of Ely at Domesday, and early records may well survive in the Ely archives in Cambridge (which have not been consulted for the purpose of this level 2 report).

Decoy Farm has undergone extensive development in recent years, including the construction of two new domestic houses, and the ownership of the farm buildings has been separated from that of the farmhouse. The listed farmhouse is known as Decoy House, and a 20th century house to the south of the farm yard is now Decoy Farm (indicated as no.5 in figure 1). Another 20th century house at the entrance to the farm yard bears the name Decoy Cottage, and a new office building with the external appearance of a traditional weatherboarded barn has been constructed to the south-east of the yard (reportedly replacing a 20th century shed). The historic farm buildings date from the mid-19th century and form an enclosed yard as shown in figure 1, but the former barn to the east has been converted into office accommodation and the brick shed to the north remains in the same ownership as Decoy House; neither the barn nor the shed were available for inspection accordingly.

A rare manuscript map of the farm in the Suffolk Record Office bears no date but is stylistically consistent with the early-17th century (figure 2). It shows a substantial holding of 140 acres along with the church and mill together with a second mill further downstream. The farmhouse is depicted with a central chimney and a fully enclosed eastern courtyard at the junction of the present road and a track marked 'the way from wellford bredg to melton Church' which is now a public footpath. Two barns form a farm yard adjoining the house to the south, and the pond is shown as three separate areas of water divided by narrow baulks with the westernmost labelled 'Coye' (i.e. decoy). The field to the south of the house is marked 'Stack yard pittell' (i.e. pightle), adjoining 'Church Close' to the east and 'The Hemplond' to the south. The list of field names refers to the ponds as 'The Coye and Ponds', suggesting that only the westernmost of the three (which tapers to a point) operated as a decoy. The map lacks its original title, but is inscribed 'A Mapp of The Decoy Farme in Melton' in an 18th century hand on the reverse.



Figure 2
Manuscript map of early-17th century (Ipswich SRC HD80/1/1). North to right



Figure 2a

Detail of figure 2 showing the house to the right and an adjoining farmyard formed by two barns on the south and west (the stylised buildings are shown with both gables flanking their elevations). The building at the eastern end of the farmhouse courtyard is depicted upside-down.



Figure 2b (left). Detail of the three ponds, with the westernmost labelled 'Coye'. An obelisk is shown on a circular island or platform in the centre of the central pond.



Figure 2c (right). Detail of the downstream mill, east of 'Fulling mell close', curiously depicted with an external chimney and a small wheel against its left-hand gable. Melton mill is shown in the same distinctive manner.

A second manuscript map of 1725 is entitled 'A Plan of an Estate lying in Melton belonging to Daniel Vickers Gentleman', with a later inscription: 'now of John Jeaffreson Gentleman' (SRO HD80/1/1). The farm contained 154 acres, and included two rectangular 'ponds' in a 'Decoy Yard'. Only the western barn of the earlier map had survived, and the farmhouse had lost its eastern courtyard and is shown with the L-shaped profile it still possesses. A later note to the reverse reads: 'Plan of Mr John Jeaffreson's Estate taken by Kirby in 1725, now much alter'd from lands sold to ye Corporation of Loes & Wilford Hundreds by the late Rev. C. Jeaffreson with other changes.' The workhouse for the parishes of Loes and Wilford Hundreds was built in Melton in 1765 and converted into the Suffolk Lunatic Asylum in 1827 (according to Whites Trade Directory of Suffolk for 1844).



Figure 3
Kirby's map of 1725, with detail of house and barn below





Figure 4
Melton Tithe Map of 1838 (SRO P461/171)



Figure 5
First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1881

The difference between the Melton tithe map of 1838 and the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1881 is striking. The former shows what appears to be a single barn with a west-facing central porch to the south-east of the farmhouse, while the latter shows the existing complex of brick buildings on approximately the same site. Agricultural redevelopment of this kind occurred on many Suffolk farms in the 1840s and 1850s as intensive cereal production was replaced by mixed animal husbandry in response to the collapse in grain prices and the arrival of the railways (which opened-up new urban beef and dairy markets). The existing barn (building 3 in figure 1) appears to be identical in construction to the rest of the yard, and it is not clear whether the barn of 1838 was the same as that depicted in 1725; the barns are shown much closer to the farmhouse on the two earlier maps, but manuscript surveys of this type were not always fully accurate.

The tithe apportionment records the size of the farm at 140 acres in the ownership of John Jeaffreson and the tenancy of John Hunt, but Jeaffreson owned another 37 acres to the south in separate occupation (including 'Soap House marsh'). The area of the ponds (99) was described simply as 'Decoy ponds' and the house and farm buildings (103) as 'Homestead, yards and gardens, stackyard, etc.'. The field to the east of the house (102) was Granary meadow and that to the south (101) barn field, while 'Church piece' lay between the ponds and church (100).

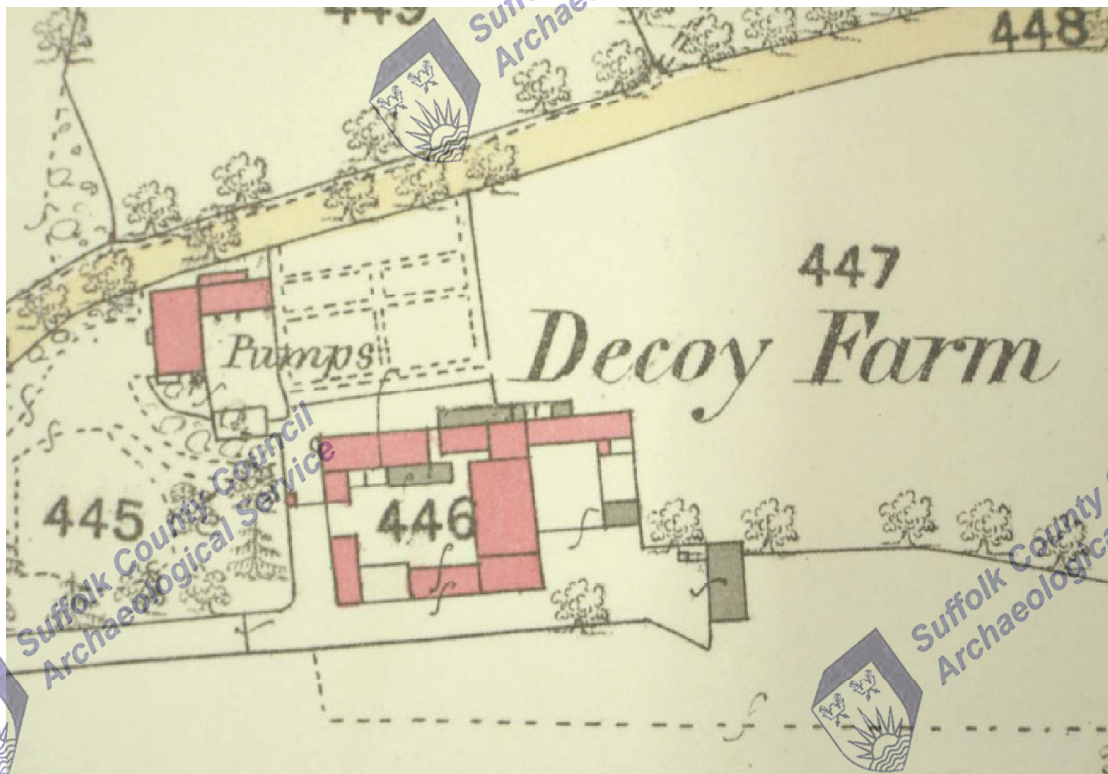


Figure 5a
Detail of First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1881

The complex of buildings shown in 1881 and 1905 (figure 6) is still recognisable but has been much altered. The stable in the centre of the southern range (no. 1 in figure 1) is largely unchanged, but the open-sided shelter (2) was rebuilt in the mid-20th century as was the lean-to in the angle of the barn and stable. The barn (3) has recently been converted into office accommodation and the large shed to the north (4) is no longer in the same ownership and appears to have been converted into garaging. The eastern yard, which probably contained cattle in contrast to the western horse yard, has been demolished, although its northern shed is part of the office complex.

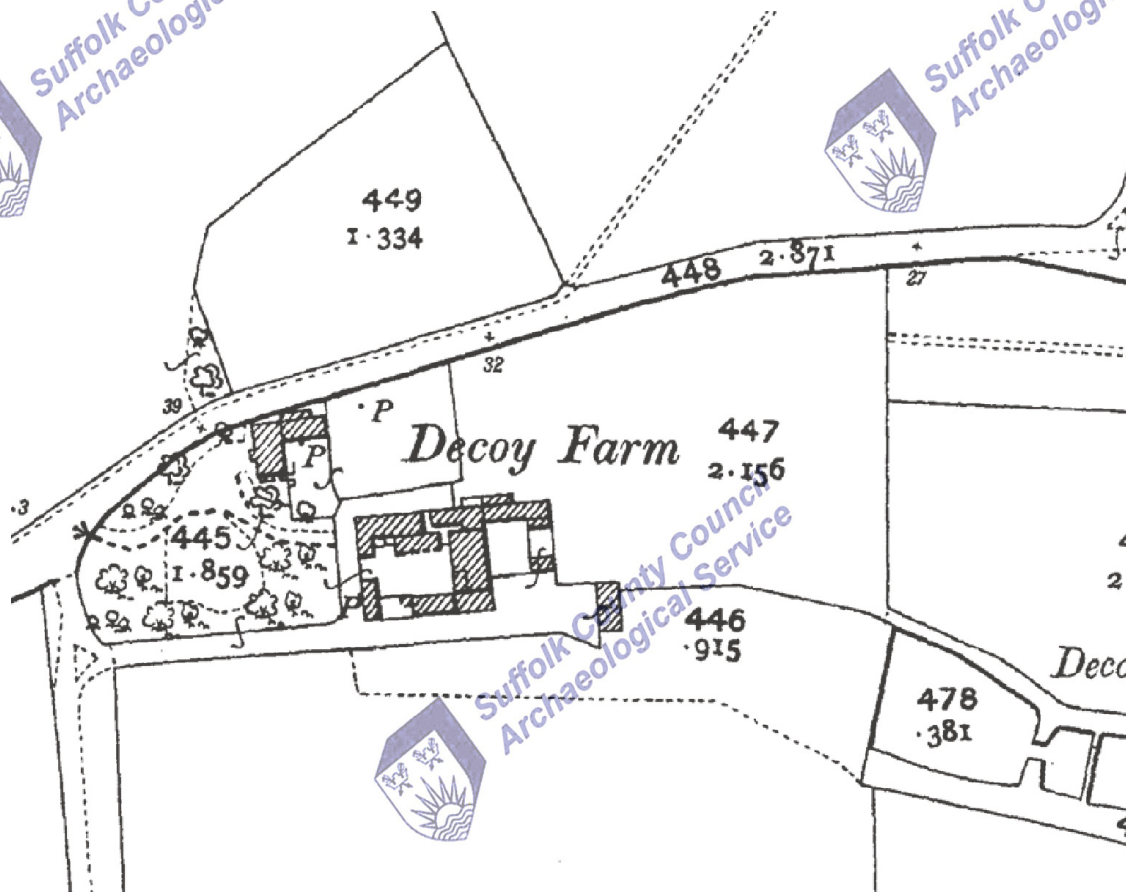


Figure 6
Second Edition Ordnance Survey of 1905

Building Analysis

The agricultural buildings at Decoy Farm consist of a mid-19th century red-brick yard complex together with a number of mid-20th century steel-framed sheds of no historic interest. An additional building resembling a traditional weatherboarded barn is a recent erection which houses four business units. The eastern half of the 19th century complex, including the central barn (building 3 in figure 1), has been converted into office accommodation and a car park. A large, two-storied brick shed to the north of the western yard was probably designed as a granary (building 4) but is in the separate ownership of Decoy House and accordingly was not inspected. An open-sided animal shelter (building 2) attached to the southern elevation of building 4 was rebuilt in the mid-20th century and is not discussed below, although internal photographs are included in the photographic survey. A number of ancillary lean-to sheds were rebuilt or converted in workshops and garages in the late-20th century, and only a redundant stable to the south of the western yard survives in its original form (building 1).

Mid-19th Century Brick Stable

The former stable at Decoy Farm is the only historic farm building within the proposed development area to survive in its original form, and even this has been much altered. It extends to 14.9 m in overall length by 4.9 m in width (49 ft by 16) and its 23 cm (9 inch) thick walls rise to 4 m (13 ft) at the eaves. The individual red bricks are laid in Flemish bond and average 23 cm by 6.5 by 11 (9 ins by 2.5 by 4.5). The roof consists of recent corrugated

metal laid on new horizontal rails, but the original principal trusses remain *in situ* with bolted knee-braces to alternate collars. These trusses are typical of the mid-19th century, as is the brickwork, and the building was probably constructed in the 1850s or 1860s as part of a unified yard complex. Only the northern shed (building 4) retains its original covering of Welsh slate.

The building contained a ceiling of tall-sectioned common joists notched over a pair of lateral binding joists, but this has been removed to leave only the binding joists and a small number of common joists in place. The binding joists contain irrelevant pegged mortises in their lower surfaces and were re-used from a 16th or 17th century structure. The loft was entered by a loading door in the western gable and lit by a window in the opposite, eastern gable. Additional access was provided by an internal ladder of nailed rungs against the northern elevation. The ceiling lay 2.6 m (8.5 ft) above the present brick floor and there is evidence of a hay rack against the rear, southern elevation which lay 1.8 m (6 ft) above the same floor. This evidence takes the form of diagonal scars in the old whitewash of the brickwork and binding joists. The rack was open to the hay loft as the principal joists lack common joist notches at their northern ends. The height of the hay rack indicates the building was designed as a stable for working horses rather than a cow shed, and this is confirmed by the presence of a hay loft and tack rooms at both ends of the building. The western tack room is wider than its unusually narrow counterpart to the east (at 2.4 m as opposed to 1.5). The stable was entered from the yard to the north by a central door flanked by two windows, with a third window lighting the western tack room. The windows retain their original vertically hinged casements but the door has been renewed. A secondary door and first-floor window have been inserted into the southern elevation of the eastern tack room, and the surrounding brickwork rebuilt.

Historic Significance


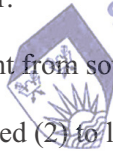


The farm complex at Decoy Farm was designed a single-build 'model farm' with a horse yard to the west of a central barn and a cattle yard to the east, and was of considerable historic interest until its recent partial demolition and piecemeal conversion. With the exception of the northern shed, which appears to survive largely intact but is now in separate ownership, the various buildings have been extensively altered and their historic integrity lost. Only the southern stable retains its original façade, but even this has been stripped of its roof covering, ceiling and all internal fixtures and fittings.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Description of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from east showing decoy pond to right.
2. General view from site to east showing decoy pond with church to left.
3. Decoy pond from south showing proximity of church to north.
4. General view of site from east showing 20th century shed in foreground.
5. General view from east showing roof of Decoy House to right and Decoy Cottage to left.
6. General view of site from west showing stable (1) in centre.
7. Farm buildings from south-east showing converted barn (3) to right and stable (1) to left.
8. General view from site to east showing modern 'barn' to right and church to left.
9. Decoy Farmhouse from north (included for site context).
10. Decoy Cottage from west showing entrance to farmyard to left.
11. Entrance to site from public road to north showing Decoy Cottage in centre.
12. Decoy House from north-west (included for site context).
13. Northern elevation of brick shed (4). Included for site context.
14. Exterior of previously converted barn (3) from east.
15. Exterior of modern 'barn' from north (included for site context).
16. Eastern gable of stable (1) showing scar of earlier lean-to above 20th century shed.
17. Southern external elevation of stable (1) showing inserted 20th century door & window to right.
18. Detail of brickwork in southern external elevation of stable (1).
19. Northern gable of stable (1) showing loading door to hay loft with barn (3) to left.
20. Stable yard from west showing converted barn (3) in rear with stable (1) to right.
21. Stable yard from east showing stable (1) to left.
22. Shelter shed (2) from south-west showing shed (4) in rear.

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23. Shelter shed (2) from south-east showing shed (4) in rear.
24. Passage between shelter shed (2) left and barn (3) to right from south.
25. Eastern gable of shed (4) showing rear wall of shelter shed (2) to left.
26. Iron posts of shelter shed (2) from east.
27. Interior of shelter shed (2) from west showing scar of original roof.
28. Interior of shelter shed (2) from east showing scar of original roof.
29. Interior of shelter shed (2) from west showing boarded wall of shed (4) to left.
30. Interior of shelter shed (2) from south showing boarded wall of shed (4).
31. Interior of shelter shed (2) from east showing boarded wall of shed (4) to right.
32. Stable (1) from yard to north showing modern shed to right.
33. Northern facade of stable (1) showing tack room window to right.
34. Exterior of stable (1) from north showing entrance door to right.
35. Detail of entrance door to stable (1) from north.
36. Interior of stable (1). General view from west.
37. Interior of stable (1). General view from east.
38. Stable (1). Detail of roof structure showing loading door in western gable.
39. Stable (1). Detail of roof structure showing window in eastern gable.
40. Stable (1). Roof structure from east showing knee-braces to alternate collars.
41. Stable (1). South-western corner showing scar of former hay rack against southern wall to left.
42. Stable (1). Interior from west showing scars of hay rack against rear wall to right.
43. Stable (1). Interior from east showing scar of hay rack to binding joist.
44. Stable (1). Interior of northern elevation showing entrance to right and tack room door left.
45. Stable (1). Interior of northern elevation showing loft ladder to left.
46. Stable (1). Detail of loft ladder and ceiling joists.
47. Stable (1). Detail of loft stair showing step wear to brickwork.
48. Stable (1). Detail of re-used binding joist of loft ceiling.

49. Stable (1). Interior of western tack room from north.

50. Stable (1). Interior of western tack room from south.

51. Stable (1). Detail of door to narrow eastern tack room showing northern wall to left.

52. Stable (1). Interior of northern entrance showing loft stair to right.

53. Stable (1). Interior of narrow eastern tack room from south.

54. Stable (1). Interior of eastern tack room from north showing secondary external door.

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Appendix 2 (pp. 14-18): Selected Printed Photographs



A2.1 General view of site from east showing decoy pond to right



A2.2 General view from site to east showing proximity of decoy pond (right) & church (left)



A2.3 General view from east showing from left to right Decoy Cottage, Decoy Farmhouse, recently erected weatherboarded 'barn', 19th century yard buildings, roof of Decoy House (the original farmhouse) and 20th century farm sheds



A2.4 Mid-19th century farm buildings from south-east showing converted barn (3) to right and stable (1) to left





A2.5 Stable yard from west showing converted barn (3) in centre with stable (1) to right and open-sided shelter shed (2) to left



A2.6 Shelter shed (2) from south-east showing brick shed (4) in rear





A2.7 Northern facade of stable (1) showing entrance door to left & tack room window right



A2.8 Interior of stable (1). General view from west, showing remaining joists of removed hay loft with entrance to left and evidence of hay rack against southern wall to right



A2.9 Interior of stable (1). General view from east showing entrance to tack room against western gable to left and scar of former hay rack to left



A2.10 Stable (1). Detail of roof structure showing loading door in western gable