

Suffolk County Council  
Archaeological Service

**The Barn,  
Homestead Farm,  
Low Common Road,  
Ashill, Norfolk  
NHER 51882**

Suffolk County Council  
Archaeological Service

**Historic Building Record**

**OASIS Ref: c1-53682**



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**December 2008**

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**(TF 8906 0511)**

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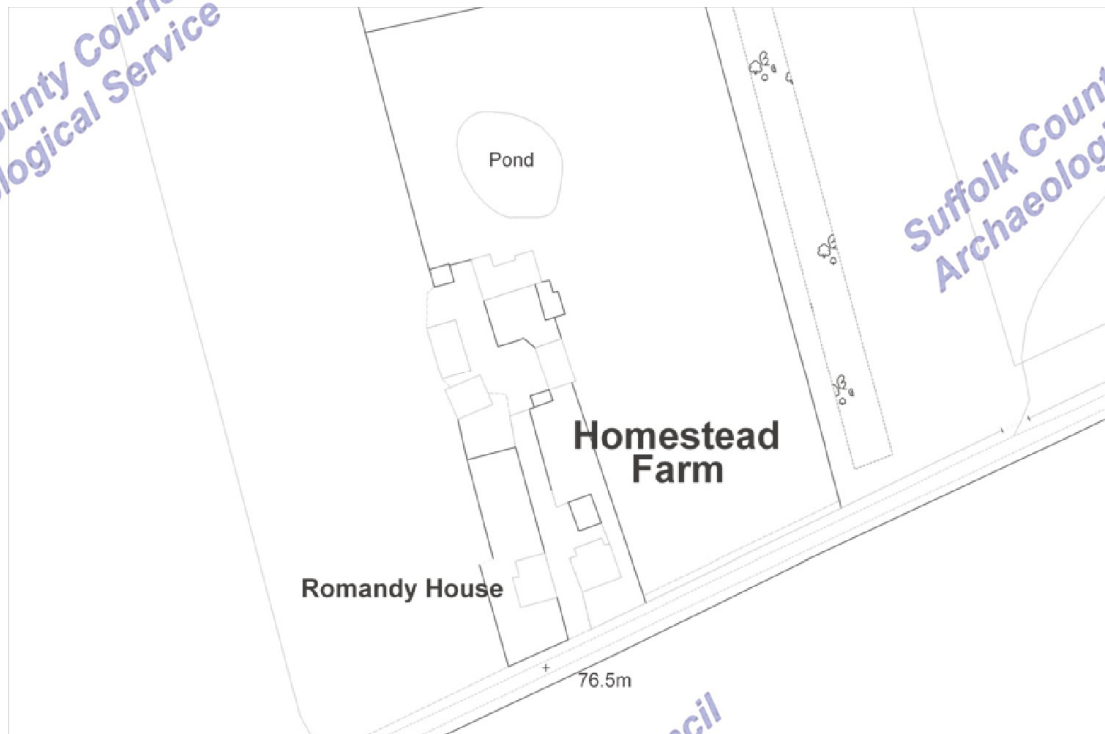
*This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a redundant barn and yard complex. The report has been prepared to a brief issued by Ken Hamilton of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and Stephen Heywood of Norfolk County Council dated 15 October 2008 (NLA Reference CNF41994). It relates to a planning application for domestic conversion to Breckland District Council (ref. 3PL/2008/0805/F).*

**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 to illustrate the text (Appendix 2). An archive of black-and-white negatives and prints has also been prepared. 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 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

**Summary**

Homestead Farm lies in open countryside to the east of Ashill village, within 75 metres of Ashill Common. The barn forms part of a clay-lump cattle yard that originally belonged to a smallholding of approximately 12 acres and served a herd of cattle grazing the common and the adjacent paddock. The farm is conspicuous by its absence from the tithe map of 1841, but remains largely unaltered from the layout shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1883; it was probably a new creation of the 1850s or 1860s, reflecting the economic boom in animal husbandry during that period. The buildings are of unusually small proportions, with the barn extending to just 8.5 metres in length and rising to 3 metres at its eaves (28 ft by 10 ft), and the adjoining neathouse (cowshed) and first-floor granary to just 4.75 metres in length by 2.75 metres in height (15.5 ft by 9 ft). A range of single-storied loose boxes forms the eastern side of an enclosed yard to the south of these buildings, but a western shelter shed has been demolished. The complex is a rare and historically interesting survival from the bottom end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century agricultural scale, illustrating that smallholdings possessed buildings as sophisticated in layout and function as the contemporary model farms of the Norfolk gentry.



**Figure 1**  
**Existing Ordnance Survey Site Plan**

**The barn & yard complex is shown at the rear of the site, immediately south of the pond**

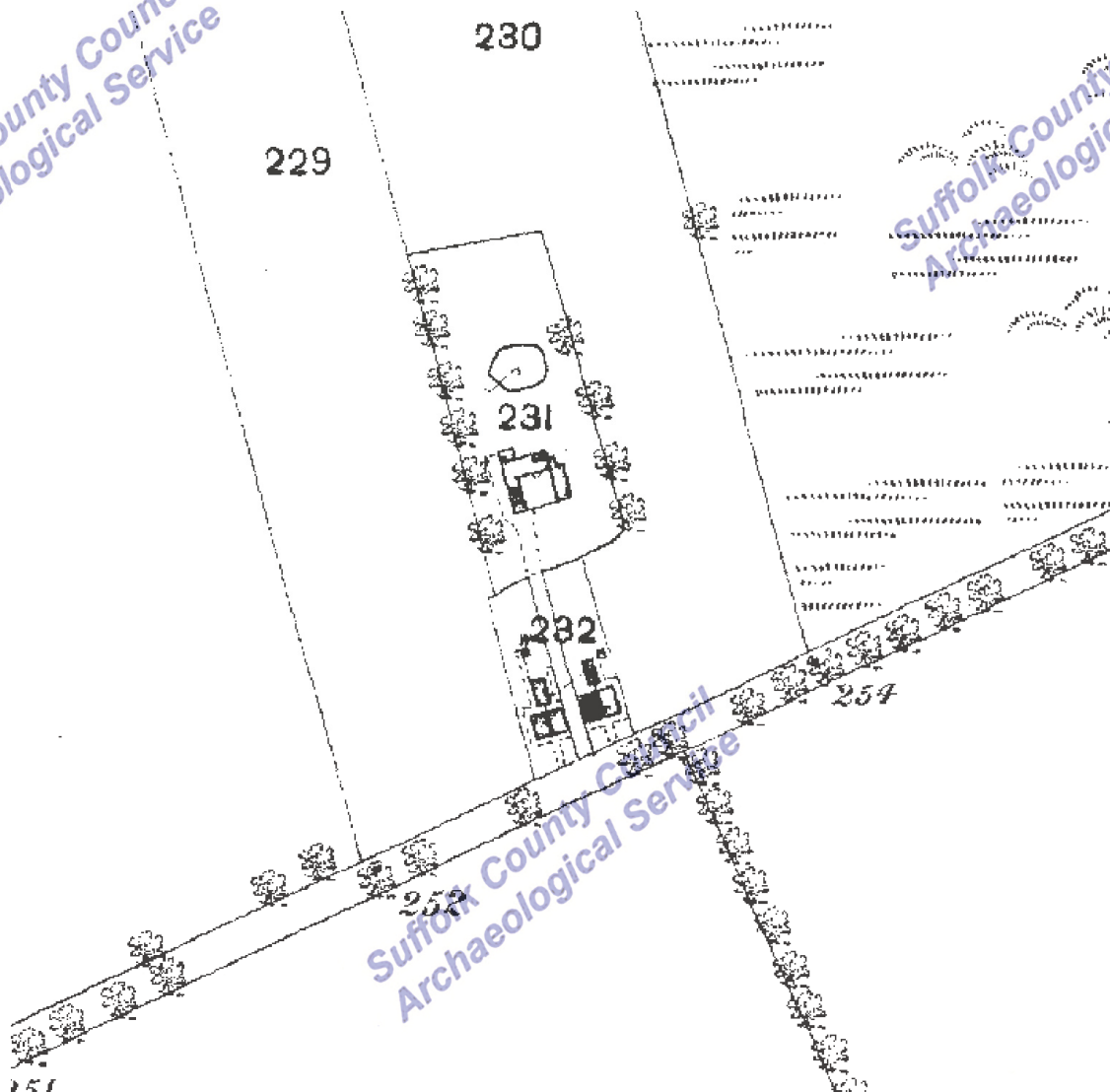
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## Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Homestead Farm lies in open arable countryside to the east of Ashill village and approximately 1.1 km north-east of the parish church. The farmhouse is a brick structure of late-19<sup>th</sup> century appearance which adjoins the northern side of the single-track road leading to Ashill Common, and the barn lies 70 m to its rear.

Both the farmhouse and barn appear on the first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1883 (figure 2), but neither is shown on the Ashill tithe map of 1841 (NRA DN/TA 432 - not reproduced here) and the farm was evidently a relatively late creation. The tithe map shows only the small rectangular field surrounding the pond, as in figure 2, and the rectilinear pattern of the adjacent boundaries suggests the surrounding land had recently been enclosed from the common. The Ashill Enclosure Act dates from 1785, and the western edge of the remaining common, as marked on the 1883 Ordnance Survey, lies only 75 m to the east of the site.

It is understood from the present occupant of the farmhouse, Mrs Scott, whose family has lived in the area for several generations, that Homestead Farm was never more than a smallholding of 12 acres. The barn and adjoining buildings housed a small herd of cattle grazing the common and the adjoining paddock. Such a purpose is entirely consistent with the nature of the buildings, which can be dated on stylistic grounds to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. They were probably erected in the 1850s or 1860s as part of the county-wide diversification of agriculture from cereal production to mixed animal husbandry (in response to lower grain prices after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the opening-up by the railways of new urban markets for beef and dairy products). Where the famous brick and flint 'model farms' of Norfolk's gentry estates illustrate the upper end of this revolution in farming practise, the small and inexpensive clay-lump structures of Homestead Farm illustrate the bottom.



**Figure 2**

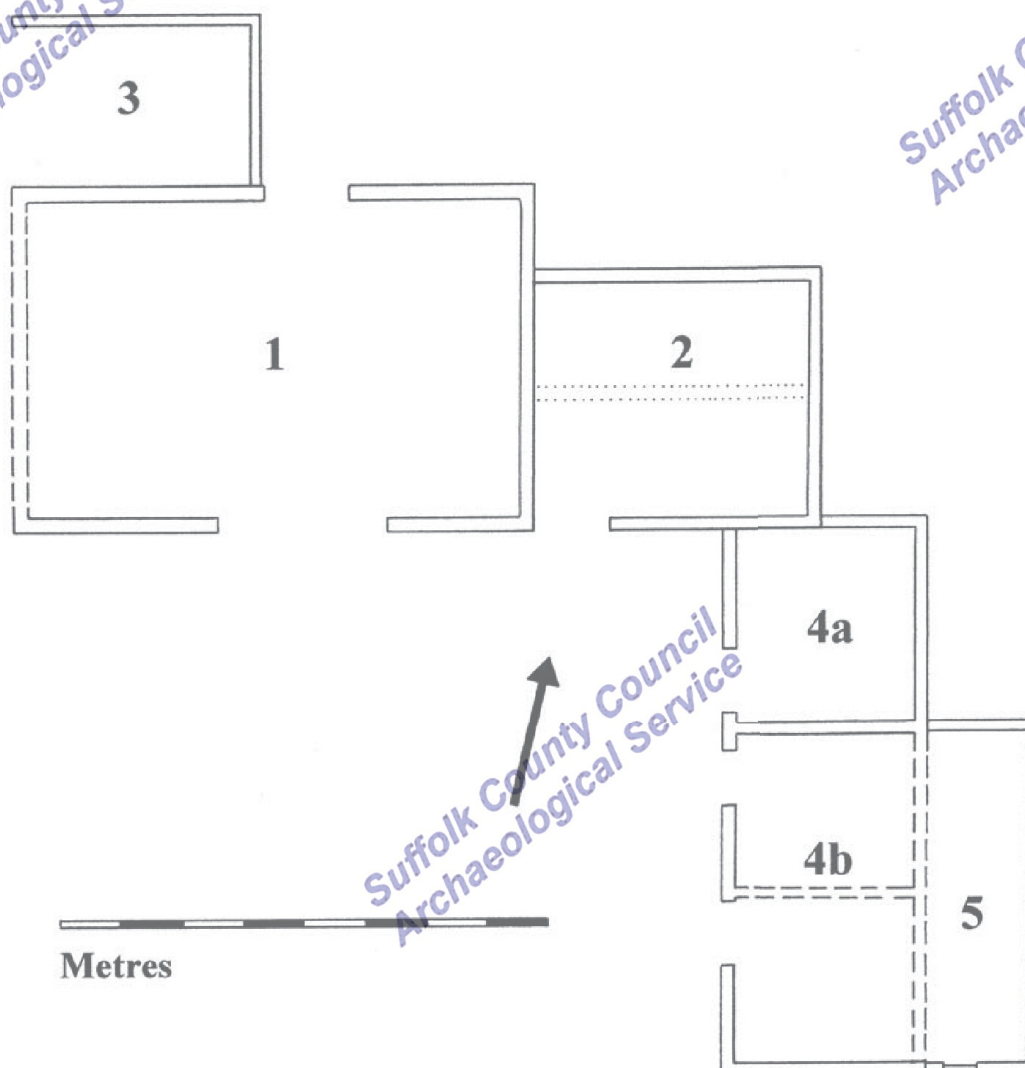
**Homestead Farm on the first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1883**

The outline of the barn, neathouse and loose boxes to the east had altered little at the time of inspection, but the building to the west of the yard, which probably formed a shelter shed, no longer survived. A structure to the north of the neathouse had also disappeared, as had the eastern boundary of the paddock to the north of the site (it now lies open to the adjoining field). Ashill Common, indicated as rough pasture, is shown to the right. This ancient common still exists, its outline probably unaltered since the Ashill

Enclosure Act of 1785, and represents a rare survival.



## Building Analysis



**Figure 3**

Schematic block plan of historic buildings, showing their original layout and numbering each for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. Broken lines indicate walls that have been removed or rebuilt

### Key

1. Small clay-lump barn with wide central entrance to southern yard and smaller opposing door to northern paddock. Western gable rebuilt in brick. Pantiled. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Small clay-lump neathouse (cow shed) with granary loft entered by ladder from the barn. Pantiled. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Lean-to clay-lump shed adjoining northern elevation of barn, with which it is contemporary. Originally entered from the west, but this elevation has been rebuilt in 20<sup>th</sup> century corrugated iron. Pantiled. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
4. Low, single-storied clay-lump range of three loose boxes, later converted into two (4a & 4b). Replacement roof of corrugated iron. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Lean-to extension to building 4, consisting of concrete blocks with a corrugated iron roof. Apparently designed to form a large, single shed with area 4b. Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

*N.B. A lean-to shed or similar structure which adjoined the northern external elevation of the neathouse (2) had been demolished before inspection, as indicated by an area of metal sheeting. The outline of this feature is shown on both the modern and first edition Ordnance Surveys (figures 1 and 2 above).*

## **1. Barn**

### **Proportions and Structure**

The building in the north-western corner of the enclosed yard forms an open barn extending to 8.5 m in length by 5.7 m in overall width and rising to 3 m at its eaves (28 ft by 19 ft by 10 ft respectively). The original walls are of unfired clay blocks on a red-brick and flint plinth of 45 cm in height (18 ins); each block is approximately 45 cm in length by 15 cm in height and 25 cm in thickness (18 ins by 6 ins by 10 ins) and laid in clay mortar. The internal surfaces are untreated, but the outer walls are rendered in clay and tarred. There is some evidence that the building was originally whitewashed externally, with the tar applied at a later date. The roof structure consists of machine-sawn softwood rafters laid on a ridge-plank with side-purlins supported by raking queen-struts from two tie-beams (with additional tie-beams at both gables). The shallow pitch of approximately 30 degrees is consistent with its present covering of unglazed pantiles. These various structural features are consistent with a date in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as is the cartographic evidence above: the yard appears on the Ordnance Survey of 1883 but not the tithe map of 1841.

### **Original Layout**

The barn was originally entered from the southern yard by a wide door of 2.75 m in width and 3 m in height (9 ft by 10) lying slightly to the east of its centre – the wall to the west is 3.3 m long and that the east 2.4 m (11 ft as opposed to 8 ft). This asymmetry relates to the former presence of a shed which formed the western side of the yard and adjoined the barn's southern elevation; a timber which probably indicates the shallow pitch of its roof (sloping downwards from east to west) remains attached to the wall, as shown in photo A2.4. The position of the door suggests the two structures were contemporary, and the demolished shed probably formed an open-sided cattle shelter. Its outline remains clearly visible in the concrete floor of the yard. The barn door was reduced in size with concrete blocks during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A smaller door of 1.4 m in width and approximately 2.2 m in height lay immediately opposite in the northern elevation, and opened onto a narrow paddock with a large pond (as shown on the Ordnance Survey). This door also lay slightly east of centre to accommodate a contemporary lean-to shed which still survives, and was reduced in width with Fletton brick in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The western gable was entirely rebuilt in the same material to incorporate two new entrances (A2.5).

## **2. Neathouse and Granary**

A two-storied clay-lump building with a low-pitched pantiled roof adjoins the barn's eastern gable, as shown in figure 3. This extends to 4.75 m in length by 4.25 m in overall width and rises to 2.75 m at its eaves (15.5 ft by 14 ft by 9 ft respectively). It is entered from the yard by an original door of 1.2 m in width (4 ft) in its south-western corner and contains a low original ceiling of softwood joists lodged on an axial joist of roughly hewn pine. This ceiling lies 1.8 m (6 ft) above the floor. An axial partition of 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete blocks now divides the unlit interior into two pens, but there is no evidence of original partitions or fittings. The loft is entered by a gable door from the barn, which cuts its tie-beam and clay-lump fabric and appears to be a later insertion. The interior lacks fittings, but its internal walls are rendered and whitewashed, and the space was presumably a granary or feed store. The original deal plank door contains a blocked cat hole, and the roof is a simple structure of softwood rafters with a ridge-plank and side-purlins embedded in the wall fabric. The building is probably contemporary with the barn, which lacks any evidence of render to the lower part of its eastern external gable, despite the secondary appearance of its entrance; the loft may have

been entered initially by a ladder stair from within, although there is no obvious evidence of this. The ground-floor ceiling is far too low for horses, and this structure was undoubtedly designed to accommodate cattle, despite the presence of a loft (more usually found in Neathouses). There is no evidence of any ceiling vent to serve a hay rack.

### 3-5. Single-storied sheds

A lean-to shed of clay-lump adjoins the northern external elevation of the barn, to the west of its central door. This lies beneath the same roof as the barn, with which it is clearly contemporary as the barn's clay lump fabric is not rendered where exposed within the lean-to. The shed was entered from its western gable, but no evidence of an original door survives as the same gable was rebuilt in corrugated iron during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; it now operates as a vehicle and tool shed, with numerous nails driven into the clay walls to serve as hooks. A similar lean-to may have adjoined the northern elevation of the neathouse, where metal sheeting indicates the removal of a structure which appears to be shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey.

A single-storied range of clay lump sheds extends by 8.9 m from the southern elevation of the neathouse to form the eastern side of a cattle yard, as shown in figure 3. This range has been re-roofed in corrugated iron, along with a lean-to eastern extension of concrete blocks, and appears to slightly post-date the neathouse as the latter's external wall preserves traces of tarred render (tar was normally applied only to external surfaces). It extended to 3.3 m in width (11 ft) and was originally divided into three compartments, of which two survived at the time of inspection, to form a series of loose boxes. The clay blocks in the roof gable of the remaining lateral partition are set on edge, and are considerably taller and thinner than the standard examples found elsewhere, extending to 45 cm in length by 30 cm in height by 18 cm in thickness (18 ins by 12 ins by 7 ins). A number of concrete cattle pens and iron hurdles remained at the time of inspection, along with fragments of a brick floor and a longitudinal drain of 19<sup>th</sup> century appearance.

### Historic Significance

Despite the loss of the western range shed the buildings form an unusually complete mid-19<sup>th</sup> century cattle complex which has altered little since the first edition Ordnance Survey of 1883. Relatively few farmyards in East Anglia escaped major reconstruction during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and well-preserved examples in clay lump are particularly uncommon. The complex is of special historic interest given its diminutive size, and represents a rare survival from the lower end of the economic scale which illustrates the nature and materials of buildings on Norfolk's smaller 19<sup>th</sup> century farms. Most farms of this size have long since been absorbed into larger holdings, and their outbuildings demolished. Despite their rarity and academic interest, the various structures are not of sufficient age, or sufficiently well-preserved (given the loss of the western range and the lack of original fixtures and fittings) to merit listing.

## Appendix C (on accompanying CD): Full Digital Photographic Record

### Description of Photographs in Appendix 1

#### Photograph no.

1. General view of site from north-west showing barn (1) left and Homestead Farmhouse right.
2. General view of site from north-east showing barn (1) right and Homestead Farmhouse left.
3. General view from north showing close proximity of pond to barn complex.
4. Entrance to site from north, showing Homestead Farmhouse left and Romandy House right.
5. 20th century shelter shed to west of site entrance.
6. 20th century shelter shed to east of site entrance.
7. General view of site from south showing 20th century shelter left and barn (1) right.
8. General view from south-west showing barn (1), neathouse (2) and loose boxes (4) left to right.
9. Southern external elevation of barn (1) showing neathouse (2) right.
10. Southern external elevation of barn showing blocked central entrance.
11. Southern external elevation of neathouse showing entrance with loose box (4a) right.
12. North-eastern corner of yard showing barn (1) left and loose box (4a) right.
13. Western external elevation of loose boxes (4), showing blocked central door & neathouse (2) left.
14. Southern external gable of loose boxes (4) showing lean-to rear extension (5) right.
15. Exterior of rear extension to loose boxes (5) from south-east showing yard entrance to left.
16. View of site from paddock to north-east showing neathouse (2) in centre and barn (1) to right.
17. Northern external gable of loose boxes (4) with extension (5) left and neathouse (2) right.
18. Eastern external gable of neathouse (2) showing loose boxes (4) left.



19. Detail of external eastern gable of neathouse (2) showing granary window & eroded clay lump fabric.
20. Northern external elevation of neathouse (2) showing metal cladding with barn (1) right.
21. Northern external elevation of barn (1) showing partly blocked central door and lean-to (3) right.
22. Detail of partly blocked door in northern external elevation of barn (1) with shed (3) right.
23. Exterior of barn (1) from north-west showing lean-to shed (3) in foreground and neathouse (2) left.
24. Rebuilt western external gable of barn (1) showing 20th century brickwork and shed (3) left.
25. General view of site from north-east showing barn (1) left and entrance to paddock right.
26. Interior of barn (1) from west showing secondary ladder to granary in eastern gable.
27. Detail of secondary access to granary over neathouse (cutting tie-beam of barn's eastern gable).
28. Internal elevation of western gable of barn (1) showing 20th century brickwork.
29. Roof structure of barn (1) from west, showing softwood side purlins and raking queen struts.
30. Internal southern elevation of barn (1) from west showing partly blocked central entrance.
31. Internal southern elevation of barn (1) from north showing partly blocked central entrance to left.
32. Northern internal elevation of barn (1) showing partly blocked entrance to right.
33. Northern internal elevation of barn (1) from south-west showing partly blocked entrance to left.
34. Interior of neathouse (2) showing entrance from yard at in south-western corner.
35. Interior of neathouse (2) from east showing 20th century axial partition to left.
36. Interior of neathouse (2) from west showing axial partition to right.
37. Interior of neathouse (2) from west showing axial partition to left.
38. Interior of neathouse from southern entrance showing axial partition right and stall door left.

39. Internal northern elevation of neathouse (2) showing clay lump construction & barn gable left.
40. Detail of pine axial ceiling joist in neathouse (2) from west.
41. Detail of common joists meeting northern elevation of neathouse (2) from west.
42. Interior of granary above neathouse (2) showing window in eastern gable.
43. Interior of granary above neathouse (2) showing entrance from barn in western gable.
44. Detail of door to granary above neathouse (2) showing blocked cat vent.
45. Interior of lean-to shed (3) from west showing nail hooks to northern wall of barn (1) right.
46. Interior of lean-to shed (3) from east showing 20th century entrance doors.
47. Detail of northern elevation of barn (1) from lean-to shed (3) showing clay lump construction.
48. Northern internal elevation of shed (3) showing clay lump construction.
49. Interior of loose box (4b) from north showing southern gable with lean-to extension (5) left.
50. Western internal elevation of loose box (4b) showing blocked door to right.
51. Interior of loose box (4b) from south showing clay lump partition to northern box (4a).
52. Interior of loose box (4a) from north showing entrance from yard to right.
53. Interior of loose box (4a) from south showing roof structure and wall of neathouse (2).
54. Detail of clay lump fabric in southern gable of loose box (4a) showing pine tie-beam above.

## Appendix 2 (pp. 11-15): Selected Printed Photographs



A2.1 General view of site from north-west showing barn (1) left with 20<sup>th</sup> century vehicle shelter in centre and Homestead Farmhouse to right



A2.2 General view from north showing the proximity of the pond to the farm buildings (the neathouse (2) is shown in the centre, the barn (1) to the right and the loose boxes (4) left





A2.3 General view of the yard complex from the south-west showing the barn (1), neathouse (2) and loose boxes (4) from left to right respectively



A2.4 Southern external elevation of the barn (1) showing its partly blocked central entrance with scar of demolished shelter shed to left and door of neathouse (2) to right





A2.5 General view of complex from north-east showing the barn (1) to left, with neathouse (2) beyond, and the entrance to the site from Low Common Road to right



A2.6 Detail of the inserted access in the eastern gable of the barn (1) to the granary over the neathouse (2) interrupting the tie-beam and clay-lump fabric



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A2.7 Interior of the neathouse (2) from its southern entrance showing its low ceiling height and 20<sup>th</sup> century axial partition to the right

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A2.8 Detail of the pine axial ceiling joist and lodged common joists in the neathouse (2) seen from the west





A2.9 Interior of the granary above the neathouse (2) from east showing the entrance door in the eastern external gable of the barn (1)



A2.10 Detail of the clay lump fabric in the southern gable of the loose box (4a) showing its pine tie-beam above

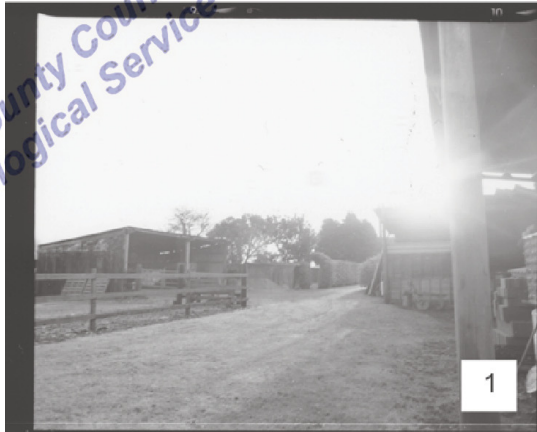
## Appendix 2: Black and White Film Photographic Record

List of Black and White photographs, see contact sheets for images.

1. General view looking south east
2. General view of the building from the south west
3. Barn(1) /Neathouse(2); exterior, south side )
4. Loose boxes(4); exterior, west side.
5. Barn(1); exterior, west gable
6. Barn(1); exterior, west gable
7. Neathouse(2)/Barn(1); exterior east gable and rear of attached single storey range.
8. Neathouse(2)/Barn(1); exterior east gable
9. Neathouse(2)/Barn(1); exterior from the north showing outshot
10. Neathouse(2)/Barn(1); exterior from the north showing outshot
11. Barn(1) ; outshot east wall exterior
12. Loose boxes(4b); exterior south gable wall
13. Loose boxes(4b); exterior south gable wall
14. Loose boxes(4b); interior, partition wall, south side
15. Loose boxes(4b); interior, partition wall, north side
16. Loose boxes(4b); interior south gable wall
17. Barn(1) ; interior looking west from loft door )
18. Barn(1) ; interior looking west from loft door – underexposed
19. Barn(1) ; interior general view from west end
20. Barn(1) ; interior south wall and entrance )
21. Barn(1) ; interior looking east. Partition wall with Neathouse(2) showing loft door and stair/ladder
22. Barn(1) ; interior north wall west end )
23. Barn(1) ; interior looking west from loft door)
24. Barn(1) ; interior roof detail
25. Neathouse(2); loft interior north wall and roof
26. Neathouse(2); loft interior roof detail
27. Neathouse(2); loft interior looking west
28. Neathouse(2); loft door, looking west
29. Neathouse(2); loft interior, looking east
30. Neathouse(2); interior, ground floor, east end



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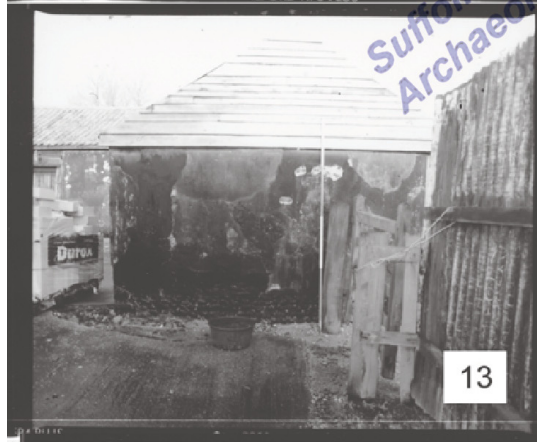
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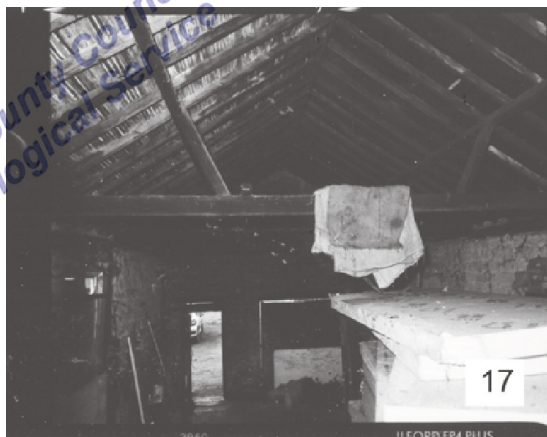
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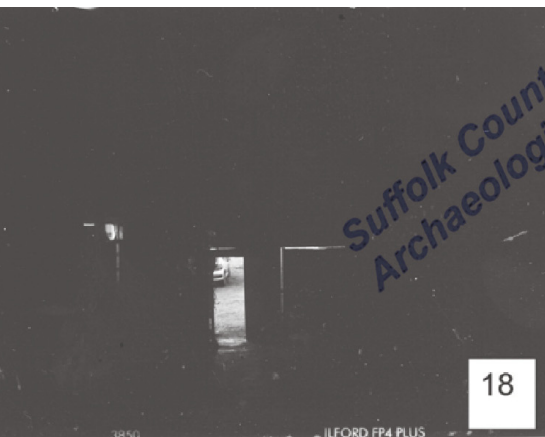
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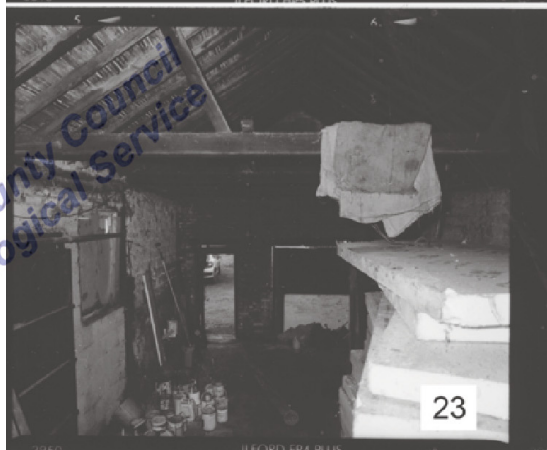
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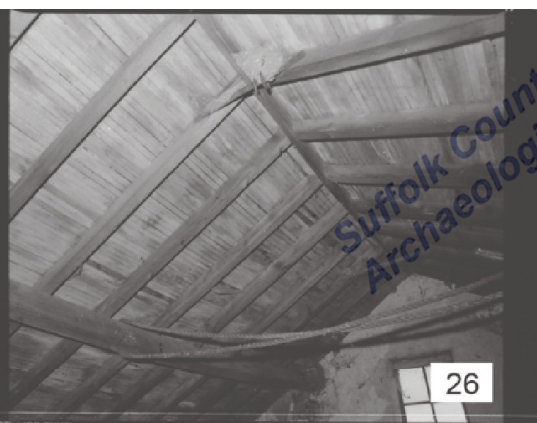
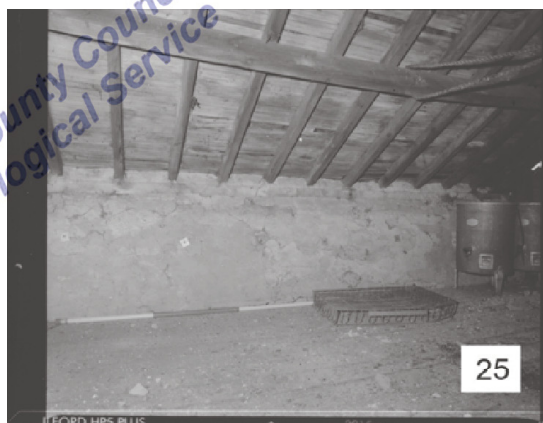
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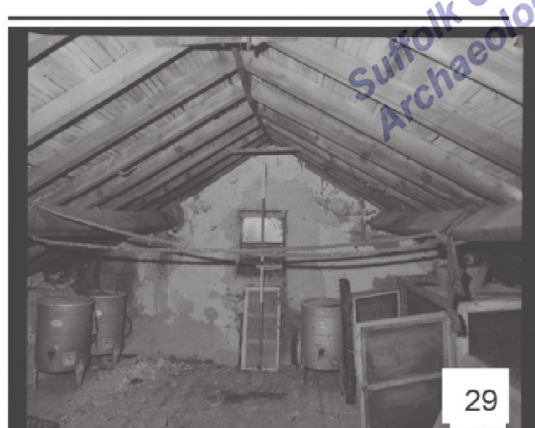
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