UNWINS FARM BARNS, SPAINS HALL ROAD
FINCHINGFIELD
ESSEX

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

August 2008

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report.

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HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Client: Mr Sam King
FAU Project No.: 1912
NGR: TL 6725 3536
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Planning Application: BTE/0953/07
Dates of Fieldwork: 23rd–24th April 2008

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A programme of building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on two 18th-century barns at Unwins Farm, Finchingfield, prior to conversion to mixed residential and commercial (B1) use. The work was commissioned by the owner/developer, Mr Sam King, and carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the Historic Environment Management team of Essex County Council (ECC HEM), who also monitored the work.

Copies of the report will be supplied to ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be stored at Braintree Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at *http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm*.

Today the farm complex consists of two redundant timber-framed barns and modern pre-fabricated buildings that form the focus to the modern farm. None of the buildings is listed.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description (fig.1)

Unwins Farm (TL 6725 3536) lies to the north-west of Finchingfield village, along Spains Hall Road, which is a minor road leading towards Helions Bumpstead.

The redundant farm buildings (fig.1, barns 1 & 2) surround two sides of a central yard and are the remains of an 18th-century farmstead. It is clear they have not been used since they were abandoned. Their outward appearance is poor through neglect and modern repairs, though internally much of the building fabric is original and sound. The farm was traditionally controlled by Belcumber Hall, on the opposite side of the road, but is now part of the Spains Hall estate.

The farm is surrounded by open countryside, with fields on all sides growing a mixture of cereal and fodder crops.

2.2 Planning background

A planning application for conversion of the farm buildings for residential and commercial use was submitted to Braintree District Council (BDC) in 2007 (BTE/0953/07). Mindful of the impact of conversion on the historic integrity of the remaining farm complex and the importance of farming in the East Anglian region in the post-medieval and Victorian periods, ECC HEM advised BDC that a full archaeological condition should be attached to the planning consent, based on advice given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (DOE 1990).

2.3 Farming from the medieval to modern periods

Medieval farm buildings tended to adopt an unplanned plan form, scattered around the farm house rather than around a central courtyard. Farms were ‘mixed’, producing cereals and livestock and frequently consisting of a barn (where crops were threshed and stored), granary to store the grain (or else the farmhouse) and stable, often built with internal hay lofts. Except for horses, animals were kept outside or in temporary shelters, while implements (ploughs, etc) and wagons were stored in sheds or on the threshing floor of the barn. Arable and livestock farming were mutually dependent: cereals were produced as a cash crop and as animal feed while the animals provided power and manure for the crops, as well as wool, meat and dairy products.

Improved farming techniques and increased demand from urban markets, particularly London, improved the wealth of farmers considerably between 1500 and 1750, leading to expansion and the building of new larger farmsteads (Lake 1989).

The Agrarian Revolution began in earnest in the late 17th century with improvements in crop rotation and increased yields. At the same time, improvements in animal husbandry meant

larger animals could be bred, and increased winter feed crops meant that more could be kept for fattening.

Between 1750 and 1813, agricultural improvement, increasing enclosure of marginal land open fields, a growing population and high corn prices led to the first wave of improved farm design (Lake 1989). Larger, more organised and efficient 'planned' farms were established, based on the courtyard layout, usually one or more enclosed yards with an entrance to the south and a barn to north for shelter. Improving landlords began replacing the earlier scattered farmsteads with the new form, the peak exponent being the 'model' farm, established on the more wealthy estates.

The new farms introduced an intensive approach to agriculture, employing industrial principles to the traditional crop cycle. Farms became 'muck factories' where cattle were fed in the yards and their manure was trodden into threshed straw and the mixture spread onto the fields, increasing crop and straw yields.

Such improvements accelerated between the 1840 and 1870, the so-called 'Golden Age of Agriculture' based on an increased demand for milk, meat and bread by growing urban centres, aided by the growing railway network. Great debate was had in High Farming circles on the merits of different husbandry techniques and efficiency/labour saving devices such as mechanised threshing and ploughing machinery.

The expense of the model farm in its purest form was a barrier to smaller landowners. So, rather than demolish and build afresh, many Essex farmers remodelled their farms around a central yard, retaining the larger buildings, inevitably barns, with new housing for livestock.

Poor British harvests in the 1870s, cheap American grain imports and the effects of a world-wide recession led to a depression in agriculture which continued into the early part of the 20th century. As a result, land was turned over to market gardening and orchards and there was a greater emphasis on beef and dairy farming. Thanks to new feeds, farms could now specialise in cattle and between 1864 and 1876 the number of cattle increased by a third.

Many Essex farmsteads today are composites of post-medieval buildings (generally barns) integrated into a 19th-century courtyard layout and augmented by 20th-century pre-fabricated structures, usually to one side of the traditional farm core. Inevitably, Britain's entry into the EEC (now the EU) in the 1970s accelerated the move to more intensive agriculture, amalgamation of estates and a shift away from mixed to arable farming. With larger

economies of scale through bigger machinery and crop yields, traditional farm buildings and farmsteads have become redundant and new uses sought.

2.4 Historical background & development

Cartographic and documentary research was undertaken at the Essex Records Office, Chelmsford (ERO), to understand the development of the farm. Secondary sources were also studied. The results are presented below with their accompanying ERO references. Historic map extracts have been enlarged to create figures 2-4.

Although Thomas Unwyn (alias Onyon) is mentioned in 1559 in relationship to Finchingfield (Reaney 1969), it is the farmstead of 'Cockfields' that is recorded on the site of Unwins Farm in the late 18th century (fig.2, Chapman and Andre's map of Essex, 1777). A Richard Cok is mentioned in 1255 and there is also another character called Richard of Cockfield (probably Cockfield in Suffolk) that may have lent his name to the early farm (Reaney 1969). Figure 2 shows a square plot with three structures aligned north to south on a fairly regular layout. One of these is probably barn 2, which is likely to have been built by this time, but there is no clear indication of barn 1, which probably post-dates the map. The roadside structure may be a farmhouse, no longer remaining, which may explain the incorporation of reused medieval timbers in both barns. This is a common feature of most 18th-century barns due to an increasing shortage of good timber at the time.

Little is known of the farm in the proceeding years, but by the second quarter of the 19th century the Cockfields farmstead has been rebuilt or 'improved' (fig.3). Finchingfield Tithe Map of 1834 (D/CT 139B) shows an unusual curving layout partly enclosing an irregular-shaped yard. Barns 1 and 2 are certainly shown as part of the farm, the latter with an extension to the south, no longer present. Other structures, perhaps forming part of a late 18th century expansion, exist as two ranges along the north side of the yard and two others to the south, the latter not incorporated into later layouts. The Tithe Award (D/CT 139A) gives a fairly large, mainly arable holding of approximately 233 acres, plus 27 acres of grassland and 20 acres of wood, though the land seems indivisible from the home farm at Belcumber Hall (fig.3). Thomas Whitehead of Belcumber Hall is listed as owner and occupier of Cockfields.

By the middle part of the 19th century, Belcumber Hall was occupied by Samuel Unwin, his wife and their six children (1861 Census from Clark & Unwin family trees at *www.jbsoul.supanet.com/-jbsoul/webpages/clark.html*). They farmed 250 acres and employed 12 men and 4 boys.

The farm was improved by the Unwin family between 1834 and 1880, during the Victorian 'golden age'. The first edition OS map from 1880 and the second edition OS map of 1897 (fig.4) show a consolidation of existing and new structures around two yards open to the south. Barns 1 and 2 stand on the corner of the east yard and a western range, attached to barn 1, provides protection from the north. The west range included a stable and open-sided shed, included on the modern OS map (fig.1), the remains of which were noted during the survey. A small shed-type structure stands in the north-west corner whose presence on the same map suggests it was standing until recent times. Another range stands close to the farm entrance, consisting of an open-sided cart shed or shelter shed for cattle facing south, with outbuildings at either end (fig.4). Although not clear, it may have incorporated elements of the pre-1834 range, but was probably taken down when the modern shed in figure 1 was built.

A letter dating from 1910 contains details of crops grown at 'Unwins Farm, Cornish Hall End', comprising fodder crops: maize and mangolds, plus wheat, hay and mustard, indicative of a mixed farm. The farm was under the ownership of Mr. Ruggles-Brise of Spains Hall (D/F 35/12/96). Unwins is probably referenced to Cornish Hall End because of its relative proximity (fig.1).

The wooded triangular plot to the north (fig.4) was developed for a labourer's cottage in the early years of the 20th century (1924 New Series OS map) and is believed to have been incorporated into a modern house outside the farm boundary. Otherwise, according to the maps, the farm layout remained the same until after 1949 (Provisional Edition OS map).

The present Unwins Farm is based around the modern grain store and machine shed (fig.1) and continues to be owned by the Spains Hall estate, farmed beside the Belcumber Hall farm. According to the current farmer, the thatched roofs of the barns were removed in the late 1940s. Large grain bins, an elevator and conveyor machinery were installed inside barn 1, the larger of the two, in the early 1980s, probably when tin-clad shed 3 was built, which may have had a connecting role. The threshing floor was either removed at the same time or earlier. The main barn became redundant when the present grain store was built in the 1990s, while barn 2 may have continued in use for storing straw bales. The redundant western range may have been blown down during the 1987 storm.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the historic building survey was, as outlined in the brief (ECC HEM 2008), to 'preserve by record' the buildings prior to conversion and assess the significance of the farm as a whole. The survey follows guidelines set out by English Heritage for a level 3 record (2006).

In addition, the record was required to address the following: plan form of the site, materials and method of construction, building chronology and phasing, function and internal layout, fixtures and fittings, additions and modifications and the context of the farm within its contemporary landscape. The study of the development and impact of the Agricultural Revolution and Victorian High Farming are regarded as important subjects for further research by the Regional Research Agenda (Brown and Glazebrook 2000, 42 & 45).

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Background research was undertaken to investigate the origins and development of the farm. During the survey, the standing buildings were recorded using drawings (floor plans, frame survey and elevations) supplied by the client. A block plan was produced to show the location of the structures within the survey and the main structures given a reference number (fig.1).

External and internal architectural descriptions were made with reference to general texts by Alcock (1996) and Curl (1999). Building function was assessed, along with its relationships to others as part of the traditional working farm. Other more modern structures are included in photographs and given outline descriptions to complete the record.

A series of photographs (digital and 35mm black and white print) were taken to record the main buildings internally and externally. Specific shots were taken of any important areas of joinery, architectural detail, fixtures or fittings. A representative selection of photographs is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-20. The remainder can be found in the archive.

5.0 HISTORIC BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

The farm complex lies on a roughly north-west to south-east alignment but for ease of reference is referred to in the text as west to east. The two barns represent the only standing remains of a traditional farmstead which underwent periods of improvement and rebuilding during the 18th and 19th centuries. The larger of the two contains elements to identify it as a threshing barn, while the smaller of the two is likely to have functioned as a hay barn.

During an earlier site visit, the ECC Historic Buildings Advisor, Pippa Colchester, suggested barn 2 was built in the early 18th century and barn 1 in the latter part (ECC HEM 2008). This is supported by the map evidence and the fact that barn 2 has some earlier construction features.

Since the barns became redundant, the surrounding area has become badly overgrown, and stinging nettles, ivy and elder are now rampant on the north sides of the buildings, obscuring the walls and potentially damaging the historic fabric.

5.1 General description

The farmyard is entered from the road to the west. On the north side of the entrance an overgrown post-war shed stands on the boundary with the house next door (fig.1). An unmade track then leads to the east between the two modern pre-fabricated tin structures (grain store and machine store, plate 1) and onto the historic timber-framed and weatherboarded barns and modern shed 3, standing in the north-east corner of the old yard (plate 2). The yard is un-surfaced and contains none of the stock fences or walls that defined the Victorian yards (in figure 4). A gate behind barn 2 led out onto the fields.

The two barns (plates 2 & 3) are joined by a large modern shed and overgrown with vegetation, mainly brambles and ivy. They have brick plinths, timber frames and degraded weatherboarded exteriors. Basic repairs have been carried out to the exteriors that have kept the insides in fairly good order, especially barn 1. The roofs are clad in ubiquitous corrugated asbestos sheeting, a common feature of modern farm buildings.

Three 19th century structures appear on recent OS maps (fig.1) but are no longer standing. The outline of the stable range is still visible by its brick plinth and discarded horse furniture (harness fittings, etc) and the outline of the adjacent open shed can be seen against the western gable wall of barn 1. Any foundations to the small shed in the north-west corner of

the yard are likely covered in vegetation. It would appear that these were all timber-framed structures in keeping with the barns.

5.2 **Barn 1** (threshing barn)

The larger of the two barns is the threshing barn, where grain was processed and stored after harvest. This continued into the modern period in mechanised form and the barn adapted to suit. Fortunately this has had minimal impact on the historic fabric. Although the modern grain bins were removed before the survey, the silo hoppers, elevator pit, wall hopper and overhead conveyor mechanism remain and are featured in the accompanying plates.

The barn is a medium-sized building standing on a north-west to south-east alignment. It consists of five bays in an asymmetrical layout with an odd off-centre porch facing out onto the fields at the far end of the yard (fig.5). It is built with a primary-braced weatherboard-clad timber frame, brick plinth (9" Flemish-bonded reds) and a half-hipped roof. Ground floor area is a rectangular 18.5 x 6m with a height of almost 9m. The floor around the main modern working area is concrete, though part of an earlier clinker floor remains at the eastern end.

Modern shed 3 is built onto the barn and completely conceals its southern elevation (plate 2).

5.2.1 External description

The exterior boarding has deteriorated through neglect and parts are rotten and fallen away. Large areas are covered in 3' wide galvanised steel sheeting, the same material that shed 3 is constructed from.

Ivy covers the porch and weatherboarding on the west side of the north elevation (plate 4). A cylindrical corrugated tin grain silo has been placed in front of the sealed side doorway into the porch (fig.5). The cart doors to the porch are set low on iron pintels and strap hinges and are typically ledged, braced and battened in their construction. This is the only intact door to survive. The threshold leap, used to create a through-draft for winnowing the grain, has been retained below and there are fixtures for door bars inside. Much of the weatherboarding on the other side of the porch is in a poor state and the lower part has been repaired in steel sheeting. Boards are missing above and openings have been cut through for modern air intakes (fans), hopper feeds and a steel window inserted between the studwork (plate 5).

The two end gables have been clad in steel sheeting to seal the interior, in particular the eastern end, which is completely covered. The west end has sheeting to the eaves that

surrounds the outline of the former 19th-century shed (plate 1), confirming its relatively-recent demise. Above it is a modern steel window inserted into a former pitching hatch (fig.5).

Modern steel sheeting has been fixed to four of the five bays of the south elevation but the exposed top section has a historic band of lath and plaster nailed onto the frame (plate 6). Many Essex barns were part-plastered in this period and this is a relatively rare survival. The tall cart doors in the central bay have been removed and a new low lintel built using a light frame covered externally in steel mesh (plate 8) and replaced render to blend in with the historic plaster. Leap slots remain either side of the threshold.

The unaltered eastern bay of the southern elevation (plate 7) has a connecting doorway into the threshing barn and a rotten wall plate to a possible former outshot shed to barn 2, on the north side of its porch, though there is no map evidence for this. This timber helps support part of the boxed-in area in shed 3 connected with grain storage or processing (plate 7).

5.2.2 Internal description

The internal area (plates 8 & 9) comprises five bays: two narrow western bays, a midstrey and the eastern bays (fig.5). The western bays are just over 2.5m wide with an incomplete truss between them, possibly removed when the silos were inserted. The central (midstrey/porch) bay is roughly equivalent in size at c.5m. In comparison, the eastern bays are more regular at 4m apiece. This leaves the porch 3m off-centre (fig.5), which is rather unusual. The reason for this anomaly is unclear but has more to do with maximising the available timber during construction rather than later extensions or rebuilds.

The doorway at the eastern end appears to be a recent insertion to link the two barns, but the side entrance into the porch appears to be older. There is evidence for pitching hatches on either end (fig.5) one of which has been adapted to carry a high steel window. Such hatches provided a means of pitching corn or hay up into the barn from a cart outside and also provided light and air to the barn (Peters 2003).

Wall framing is consistent on both ends and the porch. The timber used appears to be mainly oak, with some elm, and the framing is largely intact, even the sills, which is unusual, unless the plinth was built at the same time. There are some reused studs, common for a barn of the period, and some of the older timbers have been turned so the worn side faces inwards. The studwork is consistently primary-braced, with a distinctive pattern of braces falling to the centre (plate 9). Braces and studs are consistently straight and of good size for the period.

Scantling varies from fresh studs (10 x 6cm), some with bark, to larger reused studs of 13 x 10cm. Reused studs have a pitted appearance from exposure and about 40% are reused. Some have historic rebates for tension braces typical of medieval buildings. The western side has five studs per bay and the eastern bays, being wider, seven and eight. The gaps between vary but most are c. 30cm, which is quite narrow, again showing a good supply, or ability to pay for it. Studs are nailed to braces but morticed to plates and midrails. Invariably, only the braces and complete studs are pegged, though some others are too. Studs to the lower and upper registers are all 'in-line' and most of the rafters are also.

The main members are double-pegged and well-finished, apart from some small areas of bark. All were inserted new to the build, with an average width of 20cm. Some (both posts and beams) have a distinctly cambered or curved profile; especially the middle posts in the two gables (plates 8 & 9). To overcome this, with regards to the sill plates, the top course of plinth bricks (which are likely to be contemporary to the barn) has been laid on edge to close the gaps. This is apparent along the northern wall either side of the porch (plate 9). Long lengths of timber have been used in the construction of at least two bays length (maximum 9m) and the longest timber is the tie beam on the eastern side of the midstrey that passes all the way to the end of the porch, some 9.5m in total (fig.5, plate 8). Wall plates are often one bay's length and scarfed-in over the bay post, while sills are often longer. Because of the long lengths used in this construction, there are very few scarf joints. Those that were recorded (fig.5) are of the face-halved and bladed type typical of post-medieval barns.

Porch framing is identical, but with single-pegged main timbers (plate 10). A chiselled assembly mark (XX) was found on the outer face of the north-east midstrey post (fig.5) where boarding has become displaced. Other marks will be exposed when the weatherboarding is removed, but no others were observed inside the building.

The trusses are basic, consisting of straight bay posts connected by bolted knee braces to the tie beams. Timber struts are tenoned onto the midstrey tie beams and nailed to the principal rafters and may be secondary features. Roof collars are pegged to the main rafters and there are intermediate collars between the bays. It is likely the knee-bracing is part of the original build, a form introduced in the late 18th century and remaining prevalent in the next. However, there is no such bracing (or tie beam) between the two western bays. These may have been removed when the silos were built, or, given the relatively short span this end (5.5m) and additional strength gained from the half-hipped roof, may have been constructed without. Certainly the apparent lack of bolt holes at the top of the bay posts would suggest the latter.

The roof is a butt-purlin type, developed in Essex in the 17th century but more common in the 18th (plate 11). There are wind-braces either end. The rafters are quite slender like most later butt-purlin roofs, but are tenoned to the purlins (or even notched) rather than individually pegged like in more impressive roofs. Running longitudinally along the tie beams are the remains of a dislocated overhead grain conveyor that transferred grain between the silos in the western bays, elevator in the porch and grain chute at the eastern end (plates 8 & 9).

5.3 **Barn 2** (hay barn)

Barn 2 is a five-bay barn set at 90º to barn 1, enclosing two sides of the traditional yard. It is smaller than the first, at 15.5 x 5m and 6.5m high, with a porch facing westwards into the yard rather than to the fields (fig.1). At some point in the past it may have had a small out-shot shed built onto it, but there is no cartographic evidence to support this. The barn's construction is similar to the main barn in many ways, using primary-braced timbers and a butt-purlin roof, but the inclusion of jowled bay posts and curved bracing suggests a slightly earlier date. Judging from the interior, its last use was to store straw bales and there are no signs of adaptation to any other function.

Like barn 1, the exterior has suffered from neglect but the surviving original framing is in good condition, despite large areas of rebuild due to racking. Indeed, the whole southern end is racking to the east and in recent years large areas of framing have been rebuilt and much of the plinth replaced.

5.3.1 External description

The western elevation (plate 12) is overgrown with brambles and partly obscured by shed 3 on the north side of the porch. Cartdoors to the porch have been removed and the opening sealed with modern studwork and boarding. A diesel tank stands in an elevated position, whose pipe runs into the upper studwork inside for filling farm vehicles. The two bays to the north are now enclosed in shed 3 (plate 7). The rotted wall plate to a possible outshot passes from the porch to barn 1 and part of its northern wall built up against barn 1 with a doorway between (plate 7, fig.5). A more recent opening has been formed by removing the boarding over two panels to form a crude doorway into shed 3 (fig.5, plate 7).

Much of the wall on the southern side of the porch is obscured by brambles (plate 12). The wall here is consolidated on a modern brick plinth, the former of which was probably damaged through past movement of the structure. The extent of this movement can be appreciated on the rebuilt southern gable elevation where the inserted folding door (to allow

farm vehicles/machinery inside) is straight whilst the walls slope to the east (plate 13) In addition, a prop has been added under the eaves in the south-east corner.

Parts of the eastern elevation have been re-clad in steel sheeting over the existing weatherboard (plate 14). Wooden stabilisers are original features fitted between the two north bays and one side of the filled-in former low cart door (fig.5). Stabilisers prevented damage by livestock and are often found on shelter shed posts. In this context, they suggest that cattle were being herded behind the barn and through the gateway to the north (fig.5).

The northern gable is virtually indistinguishable because of the surrounding vegetation (plate 14). Steel sheeting clads much of the elevation up to the eaves and the boards above are greenish in hue from damp and lack of sunlight. An off-centre pitching hatch has been retained, though it is better seen from the inside (fig.5, plate 15). Any evidence for a pitching hatch on the southern gable was lost in the rebuild.

5.3.2 Internal description

The interior (plates 15 & 16) comprises five bays, two either side of a central midstrey on a symmetrical layout. The bays are regular in size at around 2.8m, with the wider midstrey (at 3.5m) to admit carts. The smaller size would be more suited to a hay or animal feed barn. The floor is partly made of concrete and partly unmade of earth and straw. Prior to the survey the interior's lower register had been lined out in corrugated tin sheeting, which when removed exposed chaff between the studs.

Trusses in barn 2 are formed by jowled bay posts and slightly curved braces (plate 17), very different to the plain knee-braced ones seen in barn 1. The jowls are fairly crude, mainly 'gunstock' types (plate 18). Bay posts and rails are slightly narrower than the main barn at c.18 x 12cm, although the rails have the same slightly cambered appearance. Bracing remains to most of the trusses, double-pegged to ties and posts. The wall plates are in shorter, mainly one-bay lengths, connected by edge-halved and bladed scarf joints immediately above or close to the heads of the bay posts (fig.5, plate 18).

Wall-framing has four studs per bay except for the midstrey which has five. Unlike barn 1, only the upper register is primary-braced, with braces falling to the centre on the west wall and north gable, but only on the outer bays and midstrey on the western side. Pegging commonly occurs to the brace itself and the full length stud in front, otherwise they are tenoned only. The lower studs tend to be better quality, around 16 x 12cm, some of which are reused. Some of the others are thin and waney, c. 9 x 8cm, with patches of bark.

Some of the main timbers are reused, particularly in the eastern wall plates of the north and south bays, which show wattle grooves to the soffits. Other timbers cut for its construction, have no such features and show the barn was originally boarded, or at least partly plastered like barn 1. Most of the ground sill has been replaced by modern planks or simply concreted in (fig.5) and obvious areas of modern infilling and rebuilding occur on the eastern side on the former cart doors to the porch and midstrey (plate 19) and penultimate southern bay (fig.5). The cart door this side would have been only 1.7m high while the main cart doors in the porch (designed for fully-laden hay carts) were probably around 3m.

Assembly marks are chiselled to parts of the main frame forming an incomplete series that suggests the barn was assembled from south to north (fig.5).

Roof trusses have high pegged collars to each of the bays and pegged rafters at the apex (plate 16). Timber struts have been nailed between tie beam and rafter either side of the midstrey, like in barn 1. Otherwise, most of the timbers are original, including the butt-purlin roof, which is slightly cruder than the other barn. Here the purlins are single-pegged to the principle rafters but unlike barn 1 have a roughly triangular profile. The common rafters are nailed to the purlins rather than pegged. Many of the old hand-cut thatch battens remain in the roof (plate 20) while there is wind bracing at irregular intervals, not just the ends. The porch is built in the same manner.

5.4 Modern shed 3

The shed has been added during the past 10 years between the two historic barns to provide storage space for farm machinery and a sheltered entranceway into the grain processing area. It is built from steel sheets (same as those used to repair the barns) on a light timber frame, with a single-pitched corrugated tin roof that reaches across the front of barn 1 and to barn 2. Between the porch of barn 2 and facing wall of barn 1 an enclosed platform has been created, either to contain machinery or grain, whose timbers are suffering badly from damp (plate 7).

6.0 PHASING AND DISCUSSION

The traditional farmstead has origins dating to the early 18th century at least, and possibly the medieval period with its associations with Cockfields. Indeed there are timbers in both barns from medieval buildings, which was a common practice in the 18th century when good timber was in demand. The post-medieval layout may have included a house and buildings

from the medieval period retained in part as the site developed during the 18th century. Buried remains of the early farm may still lie around the present complex. The main barn was used for threshing and storing straw, grain and fodder crops, with high cart doors facing the yard to bring in the laden harvest carts and pitching hatches either end. The smaller barn may have been used as a hay barn and contained similar features to a smaller scale.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries the house and other structures were demolished and the farm expanded in a fairly irregular fashion, presumably under the ownership of Belcumber Hall, virtually opposite, which used the site alongside the home farm. In the mid to late 19th century, during the Victorian High Farming era, the farmstead was reorganised around two yards with a new stable range and shelter shed for cattle, to diversify into stock rearing, and latterly as a cushion against the downturn in grain prices caused by the late 19th century agricultural depression. At some stage an open-sided outshot was built against the porch of barn 2. Like many other Essex farms, the barns were retained when the farm was improved and new timber-framed structures added to form a more organised layout.

Few structures remain from the farm's 19th century heyday to assess how the farmstead functioned alongside Belcumber Hall farm. It would appear to have been run as a separate functioning unit with its own yards, barns, stable and shelter shed. The emphasis appears to be on arable production, to which the soil is suited, rather than dairy/beef farming, though the provision of yards and fodder crops shows this was an important element. A glance at the maps to Belcumber Hall farm shows a much larger concern with a single large barn, shelter and carts sheds and a probable stable range.

From their construction and obvious relationship to one another, it would be reasonable to assume that the two barns are contemporary. The only real differences are in the style of bay posts and form of bracing. Indeed, each has broadly the same main constituents in terms of wall and roof-framing and a mixture of reused and new studwork. It may even be assumed that the two were built at a time when the two different styles of bracing and earlier form of post were overlapping and both in use. However, the earliest map evidence, if it is to be relied upon, only shows barn 2.

Barn 2 contains elements that belong to a slightly earlier construction style, represented by its jowled bay posts and slightly curving braces. Although largely a medieval and early post-medieval feature of Essex buildings, jowls remained a feature in farm buildings into the 18th century (Brenda Watkin, ECC Historic Buildings pers. comm.) and crudely-cut types like

these are more likely to found in barns of the later period, along with reused timbers and irregular, though still robust, main framing members. In contrast, barn 1 contains straight posts and bolted knee braces, which are more a feature of late 18th-century buildings and the cartographic evidence would tend to support this.

Timber had been in short supply since the 17th century and barns from the 17th and 18th centuries often have primary-braced frames and a high percentage of reused timbers, mainly used for studs but also for wall plates and midrails. Generally, many Essex barns of the period have cambered, roughly finished main members and thin, waney studwork, grubbed up from hedgerows and the like. Barns 1 and 2 have slightly curved profiles but are better finished and the studs are thicker and straighter. The longest and best timbers have been used on the main threshing barn, which seems reasonable given its greater size and structural needs.

The butt-purlin roof used in the two barns contrasts with the relatively good quality of the wall-framing. These basic forms are very different to those seen in quality 17th century barns where each rafter is pegged to the purlin. The hay barn in particular has a cruder form, though this does compliment its more ‘rustic’ feel.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The two barns at Unwins Farm are significant relics of a post-medieval farmstead whose origins may go back to the medieval period. They represent the process of 18th century improvement in agricultural practice by a gradual redevelopment of the existing farmstead followed by more intense improvement during the Victorian period.

Unwins Farm appears to have had a more complicated development than most Essex farms, but is typical in adopting the improved courtyard layout in the Victorian era and utilising its two earlier barns. Unlike other farms, it continued to concentrate on arable farming, probably because it was suited to the soil. The use of good timber in both structures at a time of scarcity is presumably indicative of the wealth of the Belcumber Hall estate in the 18th century.

Weatherboarding, lime render and thatch are part of the vernacular Essex farming tradition and the barns, together with their contemporary structures, would have formed an attractive group. Unfortunately, the focus away from traditional building materials and the availability of

cheap low-maintenance materials in the 20th century has harmed their appearance and character. In the present environment of large modern farm buildings, the barns form an isolated group, divorced from their historic setting. Like many Essex farms, the barns have been adapted for modern usage, though not dissimilar to their original roles. Low maintenance and neglect during the years of redundancy have contributed to decay but sympathetic repair and conversion should restore their position as important historic buildings within the countryside.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The client, Sam King, is thanked for commissioning the works and supplying drawings. The assistance of staff at the Essex Records Office is also acknowledged. Fieldwork, recording and photography were undertaken by the author. Illustrations were prepared by the author and produced by Andrew Lewsey. The site was monitored by Teresa O'Connor of ECC HEM on behalf of the LPA.

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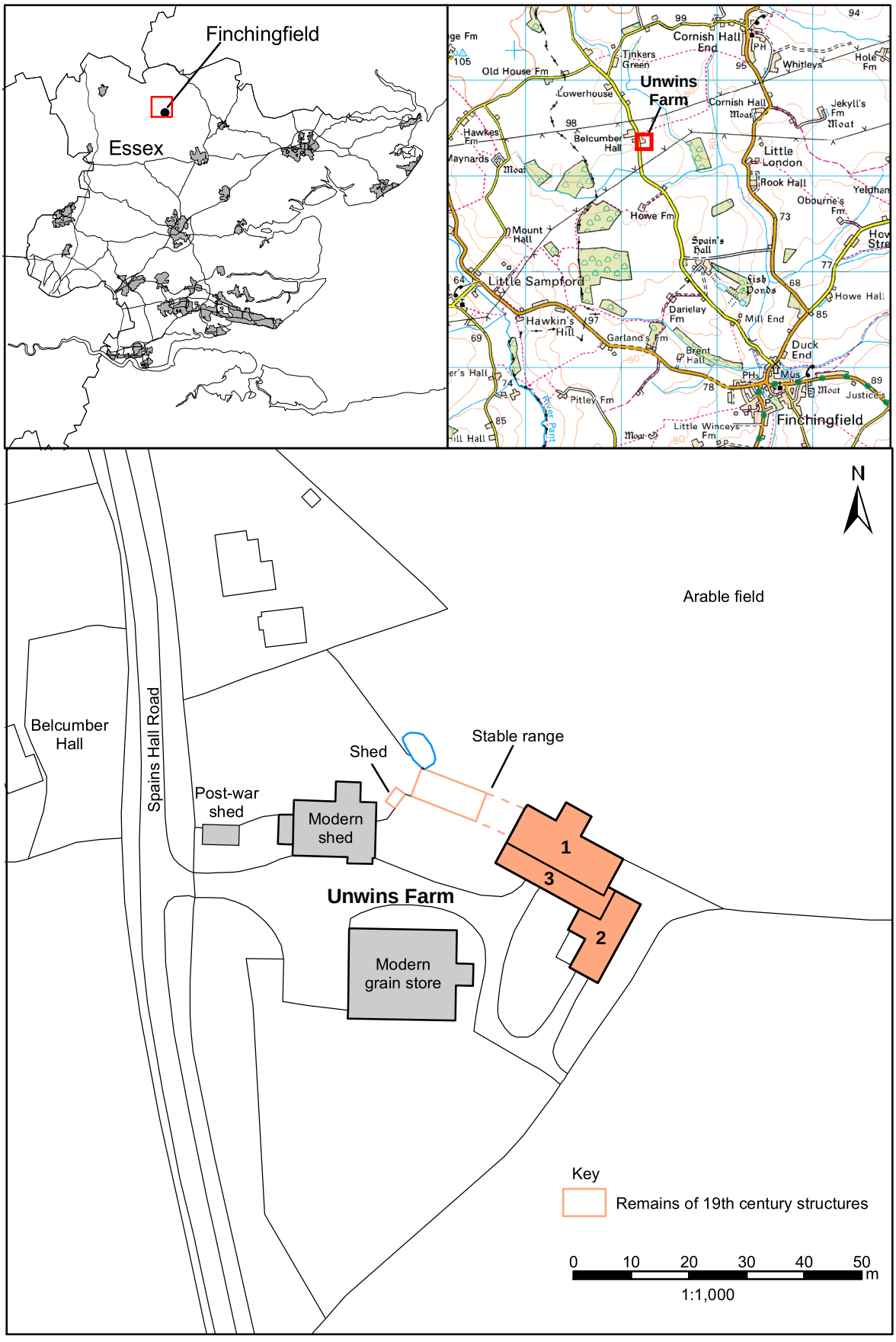

Fig.1. Site location and block plan

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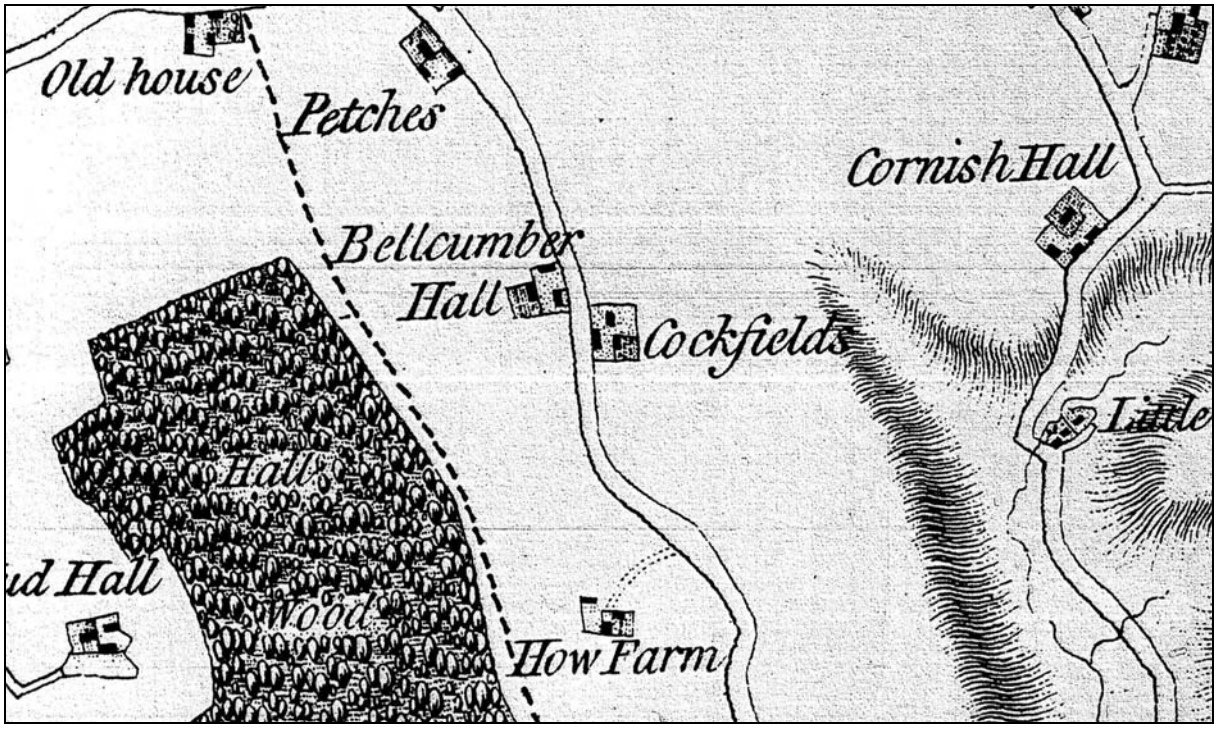

Fig. 2 Chapman & Andre map of Essex, 1777 (plate 2)

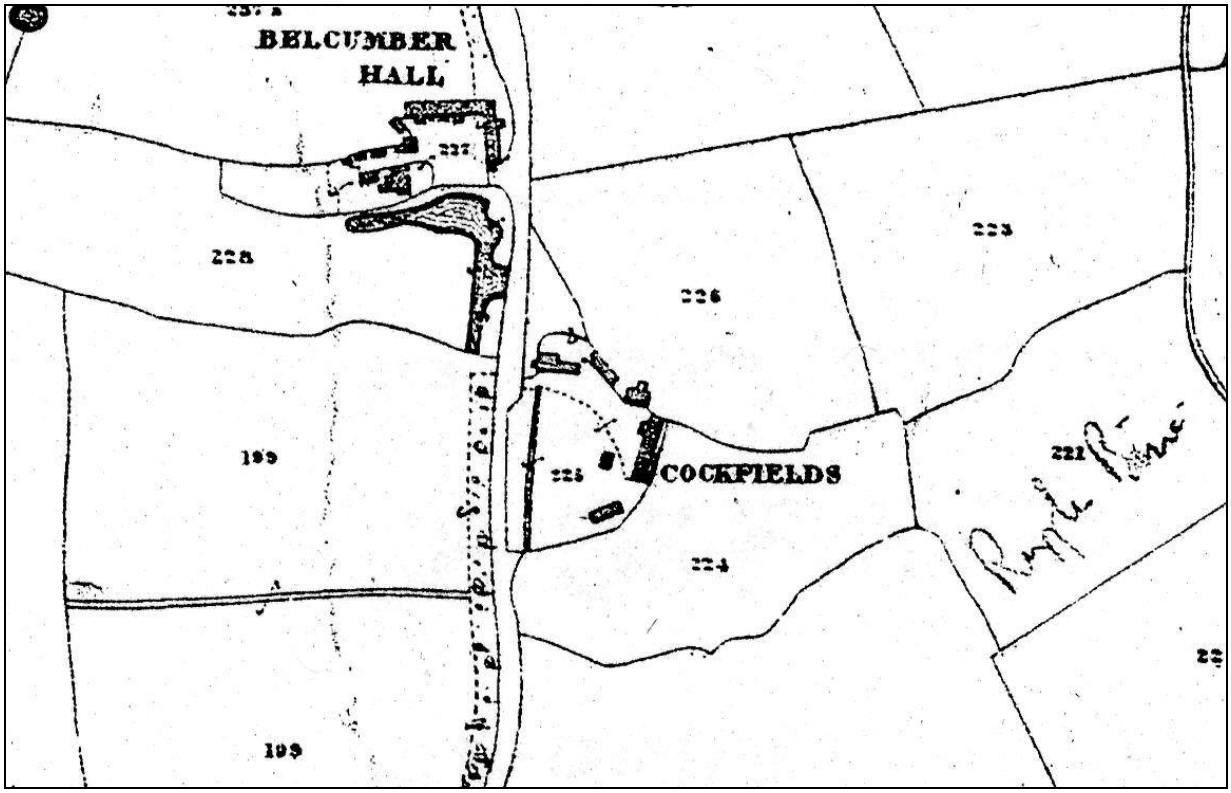

Fig. 3 Finchingfield tithe map, 1834 (D/CT 139B)

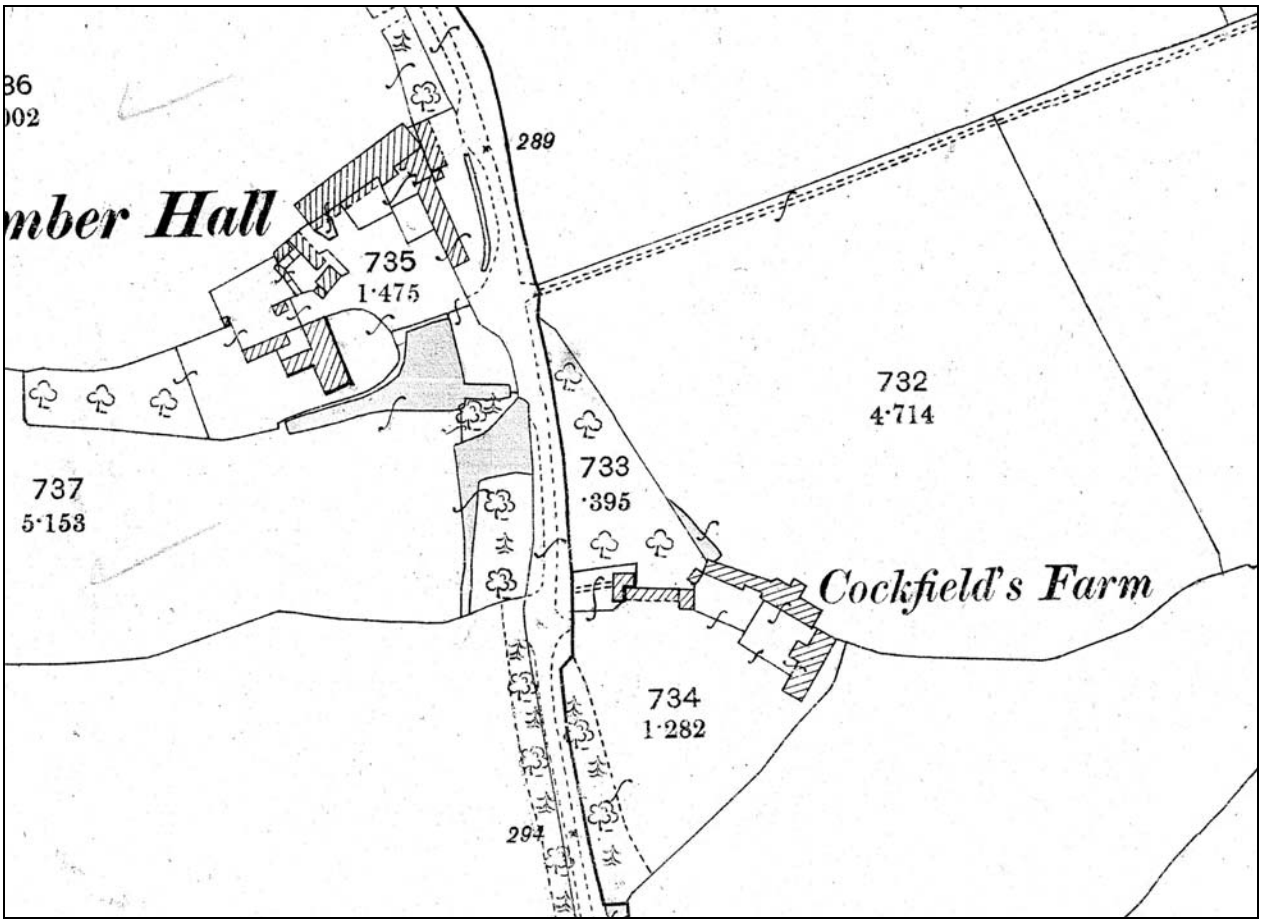

Fig. 4 Second edition 25” OS map, 1897 (sheet 10.15)

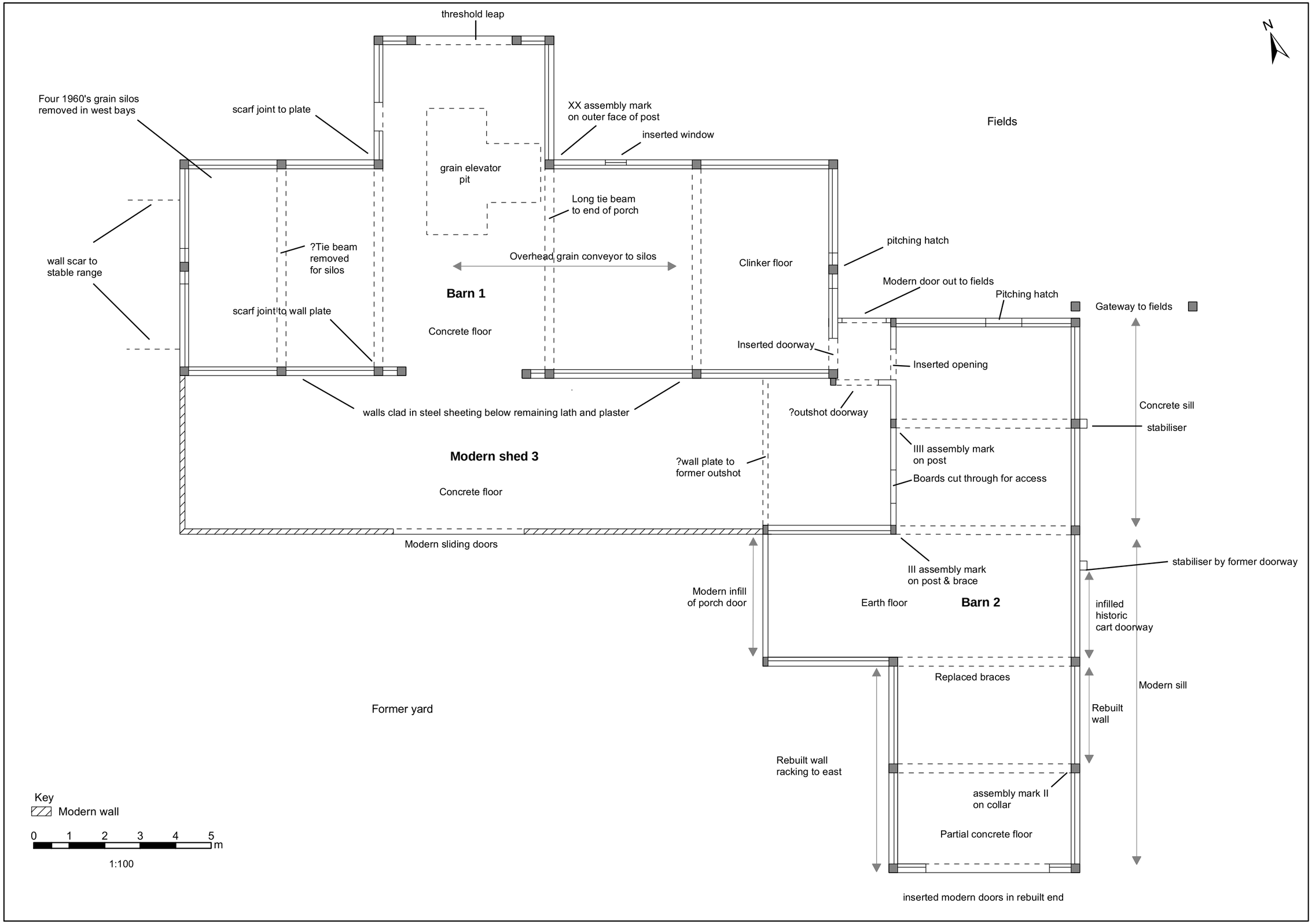

Fig.5 Plan of surviving structures

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Plate 1 Modern farmstead viewed from road

Plate 2 Barns around the traditional farmyard

Plate 3 Barns viewed from north-east

Plate 4 Barn 1 viewed from north-west

Plate 5 Barn 1 viewed from north-east

Plate 6 Enclosed south elevation of barn 1 viewed from west

Plate 7 Interior of modern shed 3

Plate 8 Interior of barn 1 viewed to east

Plate 9 Interior of barn 1 viewed to west (former silos)

Plate 10 Barn 1 porch

Plate 11 Butt-purlin roof detail and grain conveyor inside barn 1

Plate 12 Barn 2 viewed from south-west

Plate 13 Rebuilt western gable of barn 2 with shed 3 in background

Plate 14 North and east elevations of barn 2 disguised by vegetation

Plate 15 Interior of barn 2 viewed from south

Plate 16 Interior of barn 2 viewed from north

Plate 17 In-filled former cart doorway to barn 2 porch

Plate 18 Detail of typical gunstock jowl and bracing in barn 2

Plate 19 In-filled former door opening in barn 2

Plate 20 Detail of butt-purlin roof in barn 2

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

Site name: Unwins Farm Barns, Spains Hall Road, Finchingfield, Essex
Project no.: 1912

Index to the Archive:

Document wallet containing:

1. Introduction

1.1 HEM design brief
1.2 FAU written scheme of investigation
1.3 Client/archive report
1.4 Unbound version of report
1.5 CD containing digital photographs & copy of report, pdf-formatted

2. Site Archive

2.1 Photographic record (digital prints & monochrome 35mm prints & negatives)
2.2 Photographic registers
2.3 Site notes & annotated survey drawings
2.4 Hand-drawn architect's survey

Appendix 2: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Unwins Farm Barns, Spains Hall Road, Finchingfield, Essex	
Parish: Finchingfield	***District:*** Braintree
NGR: TL 6725 3536	***OASIS record No.:*** essexcou1-47129
Type of Work: Building recording	***Site Director/Team:*** Andrew Letch ECC FAU
Dates of Work: 23rd–24th April 2008	***Size of Area Investigated:*** N/A
Curating Museum: Braintree	***Funding Source:*** Mr Sam King
Further Work Anticipated? None	***Related LB Nos.*** Not listed
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: 18th-century & modern	

SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:

Recording works were undertaken on two 18th century barns at Unwins Farm in advance of their conversion to residential/business use. They form the remains of a post-medieval farmstead known as 'Cockfields' with probable medieval origins. In the post-medieval period it was farmed from the nearby Belcumber Hall but now forms part of the Spains Hall estate.

The farm has had a complicated development, resulting in many of the earlier buildings being lost over time. The most recognisable form today is the post-improvement 19th century farm into which the older structures, i.e. the two barns, were incorporated. This included two yards, a stable range and shelter/cart shed. Much of the evidence comes from cartographic sources, but remains of the former stable range, no longer standing, were viewed during the survey. Apart from the two barns, all the other standing buildings are modern prefabricated structures.

The barns are timber-framed and boarded with corrugated asbestos roofs, formerly thatched. They have a similar though not identical construction and for this reason it is believed they were not built at the same time. Although the timbers and construction of each are comparable in their good-quality primary-braced framing and butt-purlin roofs, the earliest, the hay barn (2) has jowled bay posts and slightly curved bracing, suggesting an early 18th century date, while the threshing barn has plain posts and bolted knee braces, more typical of a late 18th century date.

Both structures have suffered from poor repair and maintenance externally but are internally fairly good. Particular survivals on the threshing garn are the lime render on the southern elevation and an exceptionally long 9m tie beam/wall plate along the midstrey. The smaller barn has a more rustic feel with its jowled posts and curved braces and lower quality timber.

Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: A. R. Letch	***Date of Summary:*** 26th August 2008