

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING OF THE
FARM BUILDINGS AT VENMORE FARM,
WOODBURY, DEVON**

**Prepared for
Mr. R. House**

By A.J. Passmore

Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Mr. R. House and presents the results of archaeological building recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology on 2 June 2008 at Venmore Farm, Woodbury, Devon. The work was required by East Devon District Council, as advised by the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES), as a condition of planning permission for alterations to, and change of use of, the building (planning ref: 08/0109/COU and 08/0108/LBC).

2. THE SITE (Fig. 1)

Venmore Farm (SY 0031 8652) is located 750m southwest of the village of Woodbury on generally flat land at a height of 33m AOD. The farm fronts the road between Woodbury and Lymptone and is surrounded by arable farmland. The underlying geology of the area is Permian Exmouth mudstone and sandstone overlain by alluvium and valley head (Bristow *et al* 1985, figs 1 and 2). The soils are stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the Whimble 3 association, typically used for dairying and stock rearing and cultivation of winter cereals (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

The range of farm buildings fronting the road are listed Grade II (no. 88577). The farmhouse is listed separately (no. 88576).

3. METHOD

The recording was undertaken in line with a method statement prepared by Exeter Archaeology and approved by DCHES, and also in accordance with the specifications applicable to Level 2 in the English Heritage 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practices*. The following method was employed:

- A detailed written description of the buildings prior to alterations,
- A detailed photographic record of the fabric in black and white print and digital format,
- A limited drawn record entailing the annotation of existing plans to show locations of fixtures and fittings and significant structural detail and evidence of phasing.

4. THE FARM (Figs 2 and 3)

4.1 *General description (pls 1 and 2)*

The farm buildings including the house were constructed as an improved farmstead in the mid 19th century. The farm buildings are located to the northwest of the farmhouse and are grouped around a yard. There is a second, smaller yard to the northwest of the main farmyard. All of the buildings are attached to each other, with the exception of the north and east ranges (barns 1 and 2), which are separated by the gateway into a small yard. The south range (barn 5) is connected to the farmhouse.

The buildings are constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond with a pinkish-brown slightly off-white mortar, and set on limestone foundations that incorporate sandstone jambs at the door openings. The foundations on the road frontage have chamfered upper edges. Where original windows survive they have wooden frames, and are generally unglazed with two lights. Most windows have two iron security bars within each light, and some windows retain

or display fittings for removed internal shutters. Many of the windows have slate cills. The windows, and other roof timbers that are on display, are painted black, although this may not represent the original finish since later steel lintels have the same finish. The windows and doors are rectangular but with slightly-arched brick voussoirs, and jambs using both regular and bullnose bricks. There is no distinction between the different uses of these two brick types.

With a couple of exceptions the roofs of the buildings are all of the same style with principle rafters resting on ties attached to the top of the walls (pl. 3). These rafters are supported by diagonal braces flanking a central vertical iron 'king post'. There is a single row of either through or trenched purlins on each side and a ridge purlin set within a yoke. The roof coverings are slates nailed to batons, with small ceramic wedges used to support their lower ends. It is unclear whether these wedges are contemporary or later than the original roof.

The buildings are described individually below using the barn numbers depicted on the architect's plans. (Note a barn 6 is not shown on these plans.)

4.2 *Barn 1*

This barn forms the east range of the yard and is attached to the east end of barn 2. The range is single storied, and has been converted into three workshops that appear to respect three original 'rooms'. The north room has a central door flanked by windows on the west elevation. In the middle room the west elevation has been infilled and now incorporates a loading door and a window. In the adjacent foundations there are sandstone jambs indicating this room was originally open fronted. The south room has been heavily altered. There is a single surviving window, now partially blocked, in the west elevation, along with sandstone jambs for a former doorway in the southwest corner. The south gable elevation has been rebuilt, and probably represents a shortening of the building. The building may have extended as far south as the gate from the farmhouse drive, and could have been identical in plan to room 1. This end elevation may have been initially rebuilt with an open front, and subsequently infilled with the addition of the present double doors. There are no openings on the east elevation that overlooks the front garden of the farmhouse, and no historic fixtures or fittings within the range.

4.3 *Barn 2*

This barn forms the north range of the yard and fronts the road. The range is two storied. Towards the east end of the range there is large arched opening from the road, forming the original primary entrance through a covered way into the yard. The arch is supported on projecting piers with simple Portland stone capitals. The inner edges of these capitals have been removed along with the inner courses of brick, indicating the opening has been widened, possibly to allow access for tractors or machinery. The opening contains large wooden doorways.

To the east of this archway are two ground-floor rooms. The north room has an external door into the yard, and gives access to the southern room. This room has a glazed window in the north elevation. The southern room has a glazed window in the west yard elevation. On the first floor is a loft with a large semi-circular opening from the courtyard and an opposing window with shutters in the east elevation. The roof of this loft, along with rest of barn 2, differs from the other roofs of the farmyard in that on the single truss there are no ties or diagonal braces. Instead there are two scissor braces. The side purlins are trenched, and the

ridge purlin rests between the top of the rafters. The roof of the adjacent covered way is of the standard type described in section 4.1 above (pl. 3).

To the west of the covered way this range contains a large room, with a smaller room at the west end. On the ground floor there are a series of open and blocked door and window openings facing the farmyard (pls 4-5). Within the east room there were originally five doorways, and at least two windows. Two further doors have been added, one of which is blocked. At the east end of the room there are two large openings with rolled steel joist lintels. The west opening has been blocked and the east opening is opposite a blocked opening on the north elevation. There is a similar opening with rolled steel joist lintel in the west room, blocked in two phases (initially to form a smaller door), along with a blocked window. There is also a blocked opening into the east room in the east elevation from the covered entrance way. The west room has a wide arched opening in the east elevation providing access from the small yard. This has been blocked in two phases, initially to provide a central door. There is an interconnecting door between the two rooms. In the north elevation the only original openings are a series of small iron vents serving the east room. Modern doorways have been added to facilitate access to both rooms.

The first floor has been removed over much of the range, and only survives at the east end. Originally the plan appears to have mirrored the ground floor comprising two rooms or lofts with a connecting door in the dividing wall. Access to the loft was via doors in the east and south elevations, the former still in use. There is also a window in the west elevation lighting the west room, as well as an opening in the north elevation also serving this room, which has a secondary lintel dividing the opening into two sections. Internally, no historic fixtures and fittings survive.

4.4 **Barn 3**

This building is located in the centre of the yard, and was originally an open-fronted structure with the roof supported on eight large brick piers. Three sides have subsequently been infilled with concrete blocks, the north side remaining open providing access for storage. Fittings on the southeast corner pier indicate that prior to this infilling there was some form of division or enclosing of at least part of the building. The roof is a version of the standard design described above, but with the addition of queen posts and further diagonal braces reflecting the wider span of the building. The roof has two rows of trenched purlins. The gables of the north and south elevation are weather boarded. The central section of the roof in the southern bay has been boarded over to create a loft. The sides have wooden boards, with a slatted front. Access was via a removed ladder to an opening in the east side of the loft.

4.5 **Barn 4**

This building forms part of the west side of the yard, and is structurally integral to, and under the same roof as, barn 8. The building is two storied. In the east elevation there is evidence for one primary door and two windows, all now blocked. Later double doors and a large opening may have removed evidence for further openings. The latter was provided to allow vehicular access to the farmyard. There is a similar opening on the west elevation of the barn. There is a blocked door in the south elevation providing access from the north return of barn 5, and a blocked central door into barn 8. There are four windows serving the first floor loft (pl. 6), two of which are blocked, along with a door that is entered by a modern flight of stairs. Internally, there is a wooden loft ladder in the southern bay. Attached to the south gable is a weathervane.

4.6 *Barn 5*

This building forms the southern range of the yard, with its west end returning to the north to join barn 4. There are buildings at the east end of the range that connect to the farmhouse; these were not recorded. All of these buildings are single storied. The south range was originally divided by brick walls into three rooms, comprising a large central room flanked by smaller rooms. The western part of the building was originally a single room. The building is currently used as stables and has been divided into seven stalls and a store. The end rooms were originally brick fronted, whereas the central room may have been open or timber fronted. All rooms have been altered to form the stables with new concrete block dividing walls, infilled north walls and doors. In the south elevation are blocked low windows; the east room has a door instead of a window. The north part of the north return has been removed to create access into the yard. The west opening has subsequently been blocked, with the east opening retained for use providing access to stalls. The stub of the east wall of the north return contains a two-part window. The lower part of the window has a wooden frame with rounded heads, and moulded transoms. This is an earlier (?medieval) window that has been reused in the 19th-century farm.

4.7 *Barn 7*

This building forms the west side of the small western yard. The building is L-shaped and two-storied in height but designed with a tall ground floor open to the roof. The building has slightly staggered large opposing entrances in the east and west elevations, the latter being blocked, and having granite corbels and sockets for a removed canopy or porch. The opening is flanked by two windows, one of which is blocked (pl. 7). In the north elevation fronting the road is the remains of a high-level rounded-head window, which has been truncated by the insertion of a large modern opening allowing vehicular access. In the south elevation are two high-level windows of different sizes (pl. 8). In the eastern part of the building there is a door and a window in the north elevation. These share the same arch, the only example in the complex to have such an arrangement. In the east elevation there is a blocked doorway giving access to barn 8. Two large timbers have been inserted through the archway of this door. These support a horizontal beam onto which is attached a small axle bearing containing part of a driveshaft. To the south of this door were joist sockets, possibly for a mezzanine floor associated with machinery.

4.8 *Barn 8*

This building is attached to barns 4 and 7 and forms the northwest side of the main yard and the south side of the small yard. The building was originally divided into two rooms, but the internal wall on the ground floor has been removed, along with the first floor joists creating a large space (pl. 11).

The west room is entered through two large round-headed openings in the north elevation that would have provided access for carts from the small yard (pl. 9). There are also two doors in the south elevation, one of which had been blocked. The first floor had been removed, but remains of a central large beam survive, as do sawn-off joists in the west elevation. At first floor level there is a door and a window in the south elevation, the former entered by a flight of external stairs of which only the top limestone step survives (pl. 10). There is a single window in the north elevation. Attached to the roof at the west end of the building is a drum for a hoist with a rope/belt drive at one end (pl. 12). The drum has a hand-operated brake; the chain to operate the brake is missing. The only other fitting is a small metal drinking trough attached to the west elevation. The concrete floor, which is raised above the 19th-century floor level, has sockets for removed vertical posts.

The east room has what appears to be a narrow opening in the east elevation at the junction with the west room, as well as a blocked doorway in the south elevation into barn 4. The east elevation has been altered with the insertion of a large doorway. Adjacent to this doorway is a tall, thin original window. As in the west room the first floor has been removed. At this level there are two windows in the east elevation, a blocked door into barn 4 in the south elevation and a blocked door onto the external stairs in the west elevation, the latter partially truncated by alterations associated with the insertion of the doorway through barn 4.

4.9 *The Farmyards*

The main farmyard has a 20th-century concrete surface that slopes downhill from south to north and incorporates several drains. The small yard had an entrance from the road, with gate piers, and is now blocked. The yard, which could also be entered from the northwest corner of the main farmyard has a concrete surface that incorporates three footings. At some stage the yard had been enclosed by three buildings, roof scars and joist sockets being present on barns 2, 7 and 8. Two buildings are depicted on historic maps, the third may have been of post-war date.

5. DISCUSSION

The current complex of historic buildings at Venmore Farm was constructed as a planned farmstead in the mid 19th century. The planned farmstead appears to have replaced earlier buildings whose layout was much less formal than the 19th-century buildings. The listing descriptions for both the farmhouse and farm buildings give the date of this rebuilding as being in the 1840s. The same date has also been published by Brighthouse (1998, 164).

However, there is some evidence to indicate that farm was constructed at a later date, perhaps in the 1850s or 1860s. The whole complex is constructed in brick, and the use of bullnose brick is not common until the second half of the 19th century. In West Devon, it has been shown that brick was used in the rebuilding of farmhouses on the Maristow Estate from the late 1850s, one reason given being the abolition of the brick tax in 1852 (Wakeham 2004, 115, 143).

The listing description for the house suggests the farm was one of the first to be rebuilt by the Rolle Estate as part of their improvements in the 19th century. Research by Ford (2001) on the rebuilding undertaken by the landowner Mark Rolle does not mention Venmore Farm, and from this it is concluded that the farm was constructed before his phase of farm rebuilding that commenced in the late 1860s.

The architecture of Venmore Farm is comparable to the other late 19th-century Rolle Estate farms in, for example, the use of brick, roof construction, and fenestration and styles of windows. However, there are some differences, in the lack of corbels supporting the gable ends of roofs, and the taller design of the two-storey ranges that negated the need for dormer windows and tall, projecting entrance ways. It is also noted that Venmore Farm is constructed entirely of brick, whereas stone is used in other farms. This may however, simply reflect the lack of suitable building stone at Woodbury. The style of roof is also identical to other late 19th-century estate farms on the Blackdown Hills (C. Wakeham, pers. Comm.).

The layout of the farm is a classic example of a 19th-century planned farm, and as such it may have formed the model for later rebuilding of the Rolle Estate farms in East Devon. The

layout is typical of 19th-century farm improvement with a small (by national standards) yard that makes efficient use of space.

Although most of the buildings have been heavily altered and very few historic internal and external fittings survive, the design of the buildings provides some information as to their original uses. Barn 1 probably had a symmetrical appearance with a central open-fronted cartshed flanked by stables, the latter characterised by windows on either side of the doors providing light to the stalls. The last agricultural use was as a shippon.

Barn 2 was designed as a shippon, with most of the ground floor used as such. The west room of the range would have functioned as a root store where food for the cows was stored. Access into this room was via a large opening in the west elevation, tall and wide enough for carts to enter from the small yard; the door in the east elevation gave direct access to the shippon. The functions of the two rooms at the east end of the building have not been identified, but since they are located next to the stables they could have been harness and tack rooms. The first floor was a hay loft. The last agricultural use of the building was as a dairy and stores.

The use of barn 3 – the open-fronted structure in the middle of the farmyard – has not been established. The building could have been a cartshed or a dung store.

Barn 4 was also a shippon, although the ground floor has been heavily altered. The first floor was a loft and this function remains in use today, although a ladder between the two floors has been decommissioned.

Barn 5 may have had a variety of uses. In plan, the south range is similar to but smaller than barn 1. The central area may have been open-fronted, but could have been infilled with timber framing and been used as pigstyes. The presence of doors in the east room indicates a non-husbandry function, perhaps as a store. The door into barn 4 from the west range may indicate this room was used as another root store serving the shippon in the adjacent barn 4, although the room is quite large and could have been divided into two rooms.

Barn 7 was designed as a threshing barn. Although its architectural style is consistent with the rest of the planned farm the building displays the distinctive large central loading doors associated with (earlier) threshing barns, the west door also originally having a canopy or porch. The building is situated on the west side of the range and receives the southwesterly winds that would have aided threshing. These factors indicate that threshing was undertaken by hand when the building was constructed. The remains of an inserted driveshaft survive passing through the east wall. What this powered and the layout of machinery is unclear. However, it seems likely that a small steam engine was inserted into the eastern part of this building (as evidenced by the alterations to the masonry) that could have powered a threshing machine, as well as machinery in building 8 (see below).

Barn 8 probably had several functions. The west room is open-fronted to the north fronting allowing access for carts from the small yard. The hoist above indicates that the loft was used for storage. This hoist may at some stage have been powered using the driveshaft from barn 7. Hay, or other crops, could have been directly hoisted from carts below into the loft. The function of the ground floor of the east building is uncertain. The building appears to be too large for housing animals, although could have provided further stables. Another possible interpretation is that the building was a pound house containing an apple crusher. Such

machinery could have been powered by the driveshaft from barn 7. Historic 20th-century maps depict orchard in several fields around the farm.

In summary, Venmore Farm is a planned farm of the mid 19th century, probably a precursor to the later 19th-century farms on the Clinton Estate. Although to a certain extent heavily altered by later improvements reflecting changes in agricultural practices and machinery the layout of most of the original farm can be discerned and a range of practices, as is typical with Devon farms, identified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix 1: Photographic Record

The full photographic catalogue (colour digital) is listed below. Identical views were taken in black and white format. The photographic catalogue forms part of the project archive, to be deposited at RAM Museum, Exeter.

| EXETER ARCHAEOLOGY | | PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER: DIGITAL | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Site name: Venmore Farm, Woodbury | | Date: 2 June 2008 | Project no: 6541 |
| No. | Description | View to | |
| 1 | View from road showing barn 2. | Southeast | |
| 2 | View from road showing barn 2. | Southwest | |
| 3 | View of farmhouse and south end of barn 1. | South | |
| 4 | Barns 1 and 2, junction of buildings. 1m scale. | North | |
| 5 | Barn 1, west (farmyard) elevation. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 6 | Barn 1, south elevation. 1m scale. | Northwest | |
| 7 | Barn 1, east elevation. | North | |
| 8 | Barn 2, east elevation, first floor window. | North | |
| 9 | Barn 1, west (farmyard) elevation. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 10 | Barn 2, roof truss in east loft. | Northeast | |
| 11 | Barn 2, entrance into yard showing covered way viewed from inside yard. 1m scale. | Northwest | |
| 12 | Barn 2, blocked door into shippon from covered way. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 13 | Barn 2, roof truss over covered way. | Southwest | |
| 14 | Barn 2, north elevation showing entrance from road. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 15 | Barn 2, north elevation, west end. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 16 | Courtyard wall to west of barn 2. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 17 | Barn 2, south (farmyard) elevation. 1m scale. | West | |
| 18 | Barn 2, south (farmyard) elevation. 1m scale. | Northwest | |
| 19 | Barn 2, south (farmyard) elevation. 1m scale. | West | |
| 20 | Barn 2, west elevation. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 21 | Barn 3, north and east elevations. 1m scale. | South | |
| 22 | Barn 3, east elevation. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 23 | Barn 3, north elevation. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 24 | Barn 3, west elevation. 1m scale. | North | |
| 25 | Barn 3, north roof truss. | Southeast | |
| 26 | Barn 3, loft in roof. | East | |
| 27 | Barn 4, view of south end. 1m scale. | West | |
| 28 | Barn 4, weathervane above south gable. | West | |
| 29 | Barn 4, blocked door in south elevation. 1m scale. | Northwest | |
| 30 | Barn 4, east elevation showing openings. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 31 | Barn 4, east elevation showing openings. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 32 | Barn 4, loft showing roof trusses. | Northwest | |
| 33 | Barn 4, west elevation showing openings. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 34 | Barn 5, south section, north elevation. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 35 | Barn 5, west section, east elevation. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 36 | Barn 5, roof of west section. | Southeast | |
| 37 | Barn 5, window in west section. | South | |
| 38 | Barn 5, internal view of stalls. | South | |
| 39 | Barn 5, east building. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 40 | Barn 7, north elevation. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 41 | Barn 7, west elevation. | Northeast | |

| EXETER ARCHAEOLOGY | | PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER: DIGITAL | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Site name: Venmore Farm, Woodbury | | Date: 2 June 2008 | Project no: 6541 |
| No. | Description | View to | |
| 42 | Barn 7, close-up view of porch details on south elevation. | North | |
| 43 | Barn 7, east elevation. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 44 | Barn 7, north elevation at east end. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 45 | Barn 8, north elevation. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 46 | Barn 7, door into barn 8 showing timber and driveshaft. 1m scale. | Northeast | |
| 47 | Barn 7, internal view. 1m scale. | Southeast | |
| 48 | Barn 7, roof trusses. | Southeast | |
| 49 | Barn 7, south elevation. 1m scale. | North | |
| 50 | Barn 8, south elevation. 1m scale. | North | |
| 51 | Barn 8, door into barn 4. 1m scale. | North | |
| 52 | Barn 8, east elevation. 1m scale. | West | |
| 53 | Barn 8, east elevation. 1m scale. | Southwest | |
| 54 | View of farmyard. | South | |
| 55 | View of farmyard. | West | |
| 56 | Barn 2, close-up view of farmyard gate. 1m scale. | n/a | |
| 57 | Barn 4, close-up view of window. | Southwest | |
| 58 | Barn 2, roof truss. | Southwest | |
| 59 | Barn 2, roof truss. | Northeast | |
| 60 | Barn 2, first floor internal door. | Northwest | |
| 61 | Barn 8, south elevation internal view. | Southeast | |
| 62 | Barn 8, internal view. | East | |
| 63 | Barn 8, west elevation showing blocked door and driveshaft. | West | |
| 64 | Barn 8, roof truss in east room. | North | |
| 65 | Barn 8, hoist in west room. | West | |
| 66 | Barn 8, west elevation showing blocked door and driveshaft. | West | |
| 67 | Barn 8, east elevation internal view. | Northeast | |
| 68 | Barn 8, hoist in west room. | Northwest | |
| 69 | Barn 8, dividing wall between rooms. | South | |
| 70 | Barn 8, first-floor doors in east room. | South | |
| 71 | Barn 8, hoist in west room. | Northwest | |

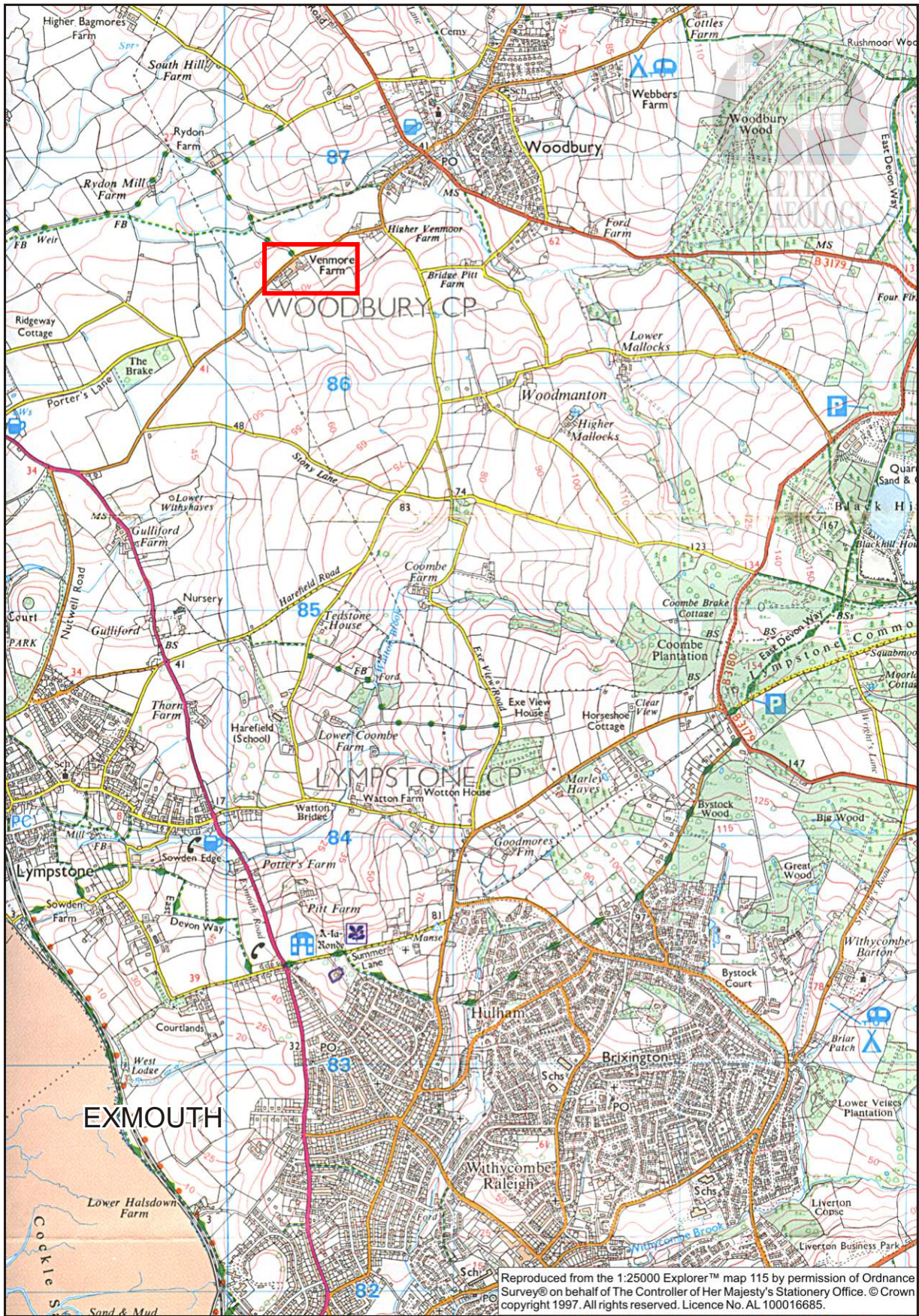


Fig. 1 Location of site.

Ground floor

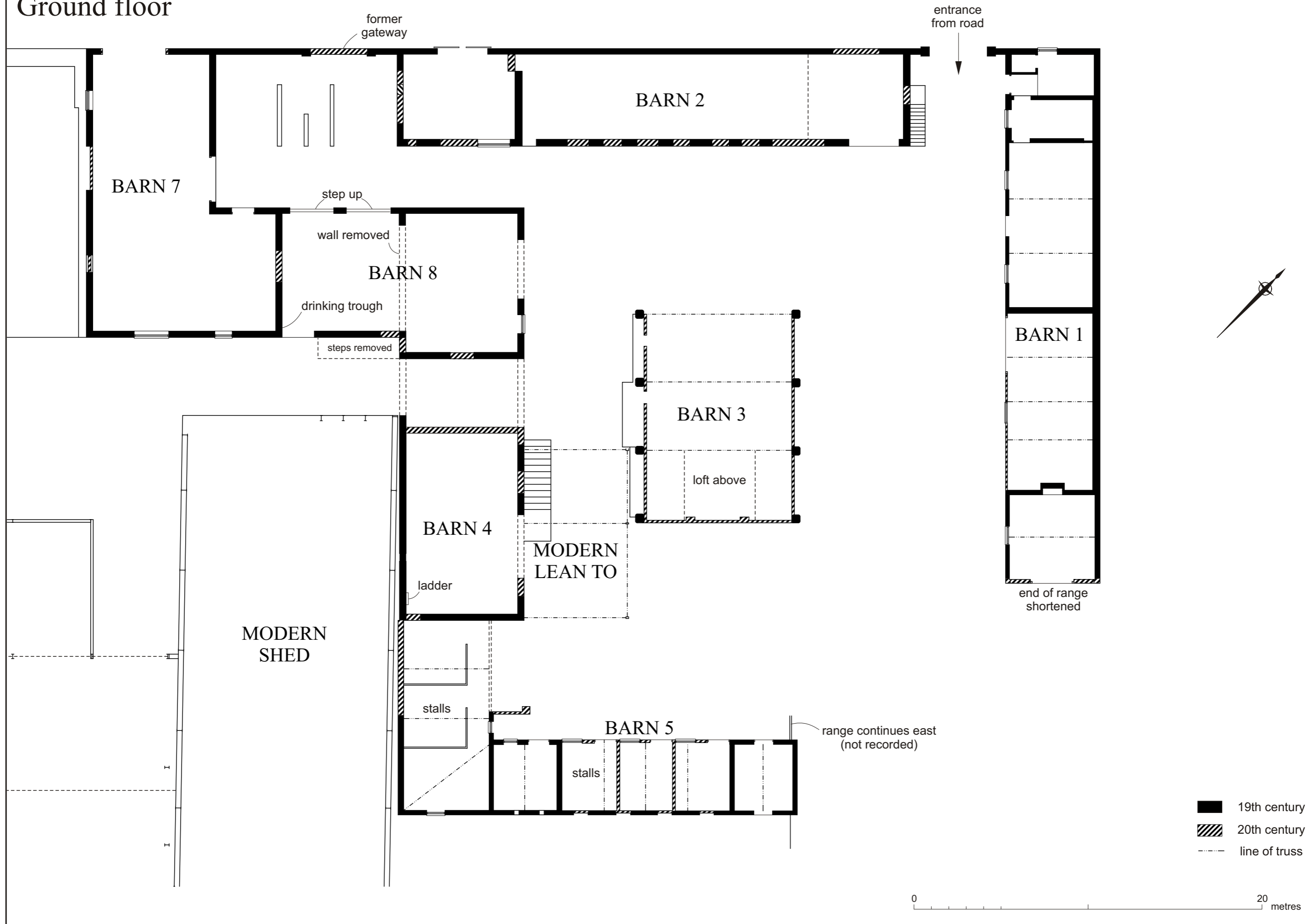


Fig. 2 Ground plan of farmyard buildings (based on ARA architect's plan 5812-20).

First floor



Fig. 3 First floor plan of farmyard buildings (based on ARA architect's plan 5812-20).



Plate 1 View of the farm from the road showing barn 2. Looking southwest.



Plate 2 View of the farmyard showing barn 3 (centre) and barn 2 (right). Looking northwest.



Plate 3 The roof over the entrance of barn 2. Looking southwest.



Plate 4 Barn 2, south elevation showing blocked openings, looking west. 1m scale.



Plate 5 Barn 2, south elevation showing blocked openings, looking northwest. 1m scale.



Plate 6 Barn 4, close-up view of first floor window, looking southwest.



Plate 7 Barn 7, south elevation, looking northeast.



Plate 8 Barn 7, south elevation, looking north.



Plate 9 Barn 8, north elevation. 1m scale.



Plate 10 Barn 8, south elevation showing former steps, looking north. 1m scale.



Plate 11 Barns 7 and 8, south (inside) elevation showing removed wall (left) and beam (right) looking southeast.



Plate 12 The hoist in barn 8. Looking northwest.