

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING
AT CHERRYCOMBE,
LUTON, NEAR IDEFORD, DEVON**

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Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological building recording carried out by Exeter Archaeology (EA) at Cherrycombe, Luton, Devon (NGR SX 9020 7717) in April 2008. The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Ware in fulfilment of a condition attached to the grant of planning permission (07/04920/COU) for the conversion of a disused barn to form residential accommodation. The work was undertaken on the advice of the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES), in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation supplied by EA and approved by the Local Planning Authority, Teignbridge District Council.

1.1 The site

Cherrycombe is a small former farmstead lying a short distance to the north of the hamlet of Luton, on the edge of Haldon Forest, near Chudleigh, Devon (Fig. 1). The buildings consist of a group of two cottages aligned at right-angles to each other, with a barn projecting from the south-eastern corner of the western cottage (Fig. 2), deeply terraced into the hillside. The cottages are Listed Grade II and, as the barn falls within the curtilage of the Listed Buildings it thus has the same level of statutory protection. The remains of fireplaces at the western end of the barn and blocked doorways communicating with the adjacent cottage reveal that it was at one time in partial domestic use. After its conversion into an agricultural building, the barn was severely altered by the removal of its internal floor structures and the replacement of its roof with a mono-pitched roof of asbestos. By the late 20th century the building had become redundant for farm use and had fallen into disrepair. At the time of the recording project it was in use as a workshop and store for the neighbouring house.

The redevelopment proposals involved the reinstatement of domestic accommodation within the barn, including a new pitched roof and first-floor structure. The accommodation in the western part of the refurbished building would be attached to the adjacent house and a separate dwelling would be created in the eastern part of the building for use as a holiday let. This conversion was identified by DCHES as having a potential impact on both the historic structure and on any buried archaeological remains, and a programme of archaeological recording was thus made a condition of the planning consent for the development.

2. PROJECT SPECIFICATION AND METHOD

Specifications for a recording project were supplied by DCHES (Reed 2008). These required that an initial appraisal of the building be undertaken in order to establish the probable date, character and significance of the structure and to determine an appropriate level of recording to mitigate the impact of the proposed conversion upon the historic fabric.

Appraisal

The appraisal was undertaken by EA in February 2008 and consisted of a rapid written description of the building, in the form of manuscript notes, supplemented by a basic photographic record of the building and its context. The appraisal formed the basis of the Written Scheme of Investigation (Valentin 2008), which was agreed by DCHES, outlining the scope of the archaeological works to be undertaken on site.

Building recording

The building recording project was undertaken by EA in April 2008, prior to the commencement of the refurbishment works. The project involved the production of a drawn record (Fig. 7) of the fireplaces at the western end of the barn, in elevation and section, at a scale of 1:50. Annotated

plans at ground- and first-floor level were also produced, at the same scale, showing the location of significant features within the building and the probable date of the fabric. It should be noted that the commonplace convention of using only cardinal points with regard to the orientation of the walls is employed in the underlying text descriptions; thus, in this instance, north for north west etc. The existing photographic record was augmented with additional digital photographs and with a record in black-and-white print format.

Watching brief

The aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any surviving below-ground archaeological artefacts or deposits exposed by the proposed development, and to allow further recording of any new exposures in the built fabric made during the course of the works. An archaeologist was therefore present during all the relevant groundworks, particularly the reductions in ground level within the barn. The excavations were observed down to the formation level of the new floors when, due to the absence of any significant archaeological deposits likely to be affected, monitoring was abandoned.

3. BUILDING SURVEY

3.1 Description of the exterior

North elevation (Fig. 3)

The north elevation of the barn looks onto a small courtyard garden between the buildings, and may possibly have been its principal elevation. The lower part of the wall is mostly of limestone rubble, rising to approximately the height of the first floor and without any signs of redundant openings, whether doorways or windows. At the western end of this wall is a single opening combining both a window and a doorway. The western jamb of the doorway has been partly rebuilt in concrete blocks and a metal 'Crittall' window has been inserted alongside. This may conceivably replace an earlier window opening.

The upper part of the elevation is of richly-coloured red cob and also contains no signs of blocked openings suggesting first-floor windows. At the centre of this part of the elevation is a large first-floor door which must have served as a loading door (Fig. 4). The doorway and frame are in the final stages of decay but appear to date from no earlier than the 19th century, with an insubstantial lintel and door posts and long, narrow unadorned strap hinges supporting a plank door. An unusual feature survives below the door. This appears to be a beam socket containing the end of a large squared beam, but its sides are, most unusually, lined with oak boards, while the base of the socket is formed by a further squared timber. The reason for this reinforcement of the socket is unclear. It is perhaps possible that the socket supported a cantilevering feature, either internally or externally, which needed extra reinforcement to prevent its pulling out of the cob wall. This feature might perhaps have been a projecting external structure such as a loading platform; however, against this conjecture is the absence of a corresponding socket on the other side of the opening which seems to preclude such a platform. An internal structure is also possible. It has not been possible to resolve this uncertainty.

East elevation

This must formerly have been one of the two gabled elevations of the barn. It has been very severely altered and very little early fabric remains. The main ground-floor opening has a modern sliding door with a large modern window alongside. Above first-floor level the entire elevation has been demolished and rebuilt with a timber-framed structure of undressed softwood poles clad in corrugated iron sheeting. The only area of possible preservation of early fabric lies below the

window where parts of an early rubble stone wall survives, cut by the modern doorway (Fig. 2, left)

South elevation

The south elevation is almost entirely concealed by foliage and, in part, by the rising ground levels on this side of the building, which rise well above first-floor level towards the west. The wall is largely stone-built, of local limestone and cob, traces of cob below the present eaves showing that the building has been lowered by at least a storey. At the centre of the building the masonry rises to the present modern eaves level and shows traces of blocked openings associated with internal wall plaster, suggesting that it may be a surviving part of the original domestic building. A later opening in the west part of the wall has also been blocked. Against the eastern part of the south wall is a long range of low buildings, possibly pig sties, roofed with 19th-century Bridgewater 'triple-angled' tiles. These buildings were not inspected or recorded in any detail during the current works.

West wall (Fig. 5)

This is the best preserved and most easily identified part of the original building, though the greater part of the wall is deeply buried by the rising ground. From the exterior the early masonry can clearly be distinguished from the later fabric by the greater width of the early walling. This survives as a roughly triangular area of masonry with much-eroded clay bonding rising steeply to the north to butt against the southern gable wall of the adjacent cottage. The wall has been partially demolished, exposing the shafts of two chimney flues. The present roof of the building is supported by a narrower wall built over the early masonry and aligned with its inner face rather than the full width of the chimney, so that the shafts of the former chimneys are now simply open to the sky. Above the existing roofline of the barn, in the end gable of the house, part of the jamb and lintel of a doorway may be seen (Fig. 6). This doorway must formerly have linked the first floors of the house and barn, and this clearly shows that the barn must have been a full storey higher than at present. The original roof and upper storey have been removed, either at the 19th-century rebuilding of the barn or during 20th-century alterations when the present roof was constructed.

3.2 Description of the interior

West wall (Fig. 7, bottom left)

The interior of the west wall is the area of greatest interest since this preserves two fireplaces relating to the earlier structure. The ground-floor fireplace has un-moulded jambs of stone rubble and a massive, chamfered timber lintel. The chamfer on the lintel is wider than the opening, which suggests that the fireplace has been narrowed by rebuilding the northern jamb to the south of its original position. No breaks in build are visible to show the limit of this rebuilding and an alternative possibility is that the lintel has been reused or that it was simply too large to begin with. The lintel has straight-cut stops respecting the original width of the opening and is scored for plastering. The hearth has been truncated and it is evident that floor levels within the building were lowered to their present level during the 20th-century alterations by the removal of earlier surfaces.

Above the fireplace, at first-floor level is a further small fireplace with plastered reveals and an un-moulded timber lintel. The plastering survives both within the fireplace opening and on the wall face surrounding it. Neither fireplace is easy to date stylistically; fireplaces of this type were common from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Both fireplaces are domestic rather than industrial in character.

A break running down the centre of the wall just beyond the southern jamb of the lower fireplace clearly shows that the southern part of this wall has been rebuilt or refaced. The original mud-bonded walling is visible at the base of the wall. Above this masonry is bonded with white lime mortar and a building lift or break in the work can clearly be distinguished. This secondary masonry is clearly separate from the fabric of the chimney breast alongside and must relate to a phase of rebuilding. It rises as high as the roofline where the remains of cob walling which once rose still higher above this, are visible just below the modern corrugated-asbestos roof. This suggests that the rebuilding of the walling pre-dates the present roof; the truncation of the building to its present height was presumably a 20th-century development.

North wall

In the north wall of the room, immediately adjoining the two fireplaces and at both levels, are blocked doorways on both floors which communicated with the adjoining cottage (Figs 6, 7; bottom right). These doorways are mostly concealed by a large modern oil tank and are completely blocked in stone. No detail of their door-frames is visible and they are therefore difficult to date. Their proximity to the fireplaces is also unusual; however, given the configuration of the two ranges, it would be impossible to place the doorways in any other position. The upper doorway was a tall opening whose timber lintel can still be traced in the wall above the roofline.

To the east of these doorways the join between the corner of the cottage and the north wall of the barn is clearly visible. The wall of the barn is mainly of cob and appears to butt against the stone wall of the house. It is likely that this part of the wall was rebuilt at the conversion of the structure to an agricultural building, which would explain the absence of any primary window openings or domestic features. Above the present modern window a series of joist sockets are visible, showing that some form of first-floor structure was maintained after the rebuilding of this wall. The joist sockets are irregular- they are not even level (Fig. 8) and thus it is highly unlikely that they relate to the original first floor; they must have been inserted when this part of the structure was rebuilt.

Towards the eastern end of the barn two projecting beam ends survive in the north wall. These have been sawn off flush with the wall, but show as the stumps of two very substantial timbers without stops. One of these beam ends corresponds with the reinforced joist socket which has already been noticed externally. The absence of stops may show that these timbers were perhaps reused in this context when the north wall was rebuilt in its present form. The levels of these beam ends in relation to the sockets in the western parts of the building were substantially lower, suggesting that the rebuilt building was divided into two areas, on different levels. The footings of a projecting structure of mud-bonded masonry at the centre of the building may represent part of a dividing wall between these areas, but this does not survive; the interior is currently divided by a modern timber partition.

East wall

As previously noted the east wall of the building had been completely reconstructed in the 20th century with the exception of a small area under the window alongside the main entrance doors. This was of mud-bonded rubble and may have been primary fabric (fig. 9). At first-floor level the entire frontage of the building had been replaced with timber framing, clad with corrugated iron. None of these timbers showed any sign of reuse and it is probable that this part of the structure dates from the modern rebuilding when the present roof was constructed.

South wall

This wall was of great interest because the phases of its construction were exceptionally clear (Fig. 10). The lower part of the wall could be seen to be constructed from mud-bonded rubble representing the footings of the original structure. Within the western room, close to the dividing partition, this mud-bonded masonry rose higher, almost to roof level, and retained evidence of wall plaster similar to that above the fireplaces in the western wall. This must represent a further upstanding part of the original building, perhaps preserved on account of the pigsties abutting it to the south. A blocked opening with a timber lintel is just visible, bisected by the modern partition dividing the building. This may represent an original window opening.

Cutting through the primary masonry to the west of the window and clearly distinguishable from it by the colour of the mortar is a large area of secondary masonry bonded with white lime mortar. This is presumably 19th-century fabric added after the building was rebuilt for agricultural use. A window in the upper part of this wall was partially blocked with timber boarding, perhaps part of a shutter or doorway originally hung within one of the openings. The shutter retained an ill-matched pair of strap hinges which appeared to be of 19th-century date.

First-floor and roof structures

In the eastern room the lower part of the south wall was almost entirely of mud-bonded rubble and must have been part of the original structure. The western part, above first-floor level was of cob construction and may relate to the 19th-century conversion of the building to agricultural use. The original first floor appears to have been removed and a secondary floor inserted at this time, supported by new floor beams. These un-squared timbers retain much bark and show no sign of the marks of laths or plaster. They must therefore relate to a phase in which the building was no longer in domestic use. The floors associated with these beams were later removed, probably when the present roof was constructed in the 20th century. A modern mezzanine floor survives at the eastern end of the building.

The existing roof is of undressed softwood poles supporting corrugated asbestos sheeting. There was obviously a pitched roof originally, and this must have had a much higher eaves level than the present roof, to comfortably accommodate a first-floor structure at the level suggested by the fireplace and the doorways to the adjacent cottage. The roof may have turned at an angle at the west end to form a cross roof linking the building with the adjacent cottage. No part of this roof now survives and its character is uncertain.

4. WATCHING BRIEF

The main area of impact during the building works was the ground reduction within the barn. The likelihood of significant deposits surviving below the formation levels of the present floors was regarded as slight, since it is clear that the building had been terraced into the hillside. The stripping of the barn floor began at the eastern wall and measured 6m long and 5m wide. The existing concrete floor and the fragmentary remains of an earlier cobbled floor at the eastern end of the barn were removed to a depth of 0.3m. The floor of the western area had been reduced below the historic floor levels in the 20th century, to allow for the modern concrete floor. This was confirmed by the evidence of truncation in the hearth of the fireplace. The deposits exposed beneath the floors consisted of loose red silty clay, containing brick and limestone rubble and also much modern material. These deposits presumably represented a make-up layer for the modern floors. No archaeological deposits or features pre-dating the present buildings were observed; any such remains which might have existed in this area had probably been removed by the terracing of the building into the hillside.

A septic tank was dug into a deep pit in the ground to the south east of the barn. This pit could not be inspected in any detail; however a brief visual inspection during the excavation of the pit revealed only natural deposits and no signs of earlier human activity.

5. DISCUSSION

The form of the buildings at Cherrycombe, with three ranges of buildings surrounding a small yard, is an unusual configuration for a rural house. It is not immediately clear whether the complex represents a single house, now divided, or whether it originated as a group of dwellings. The main house in the west range and the adjoining property in the north range were not surveyed as part of the current project and their origins and date and the functions of their rooms remain uncertain. The main house appears to have contained prestigious rooms; one of the ceiling beams in the main ground-floor rooms has elaborate mouldings suggestive of a possible 16th- or early 17th-century date, though this might conceivably represent an inserted floor structure within an earlier open hall. This range is probably the earliest part of the complex.

The frontage of the west range to the yard is unusually narrow, most of the façade being concealed by the north range as though this had been built against it. The appearance of the north range is that of an entirely separate and later structure, but the ridge line of the main house rises to meet its ridge, which suggests that the roof structures are related structurally. This north range may have originated as a cross wing of the main building and was perhaps rebuilt or remodelled in the 19th century before or during its conversion into a separate dwelling.

The south range seems also to have been a domestic cross wing. This range is not aligned with the other buildings, but lies at an angle to them, which could be taken to imply that it is a later addition. The butt joint of the west wall with the south wall of the main house may also show that the range is later than the house, though this relationship could well be misleading; it could equally result from the reconstruction in stone of an earlier cob gable, against which the stone chimney would naturally have butted. No dating evidence survives in the south range due to the extent of later alteration, though the character of the surviving fireplaces may be consistent with a date in the 17th-century. The original building survives only in fragmentary form, the principal areas of preservation of early fabric being the west and south walls. These areas reveal that the original building was a domestic structure with heated rooms on two floors. The building must have had a pitched roof at a much higher level than the present roof, with gables or hips facing east and west. Only one potentially original window opening remains, in the south wall, and this is now blocked. The other doorways or windows seem to relate to later phases of the development of the building and provide no evidence of its date or character.

The rooms on both storeys were formerly approached by doorways from the adjacent cottage. These doorways may confirm that the range formed part of the accommodation in the house rather than a separate dwelling. However, the relationship of the doorways to the surviving fireplaces is awkward; both doorways opened immediately adjacent to the fireplaces, which would be highly inconvenient if the fireplaces were put to any domestic use other than heating. If direct communication between the buildings had been planned from the start it is likely that the chimney would have been positioned away from the doorways, which occupy the only possible point of communication between the ranges, perhaps in the opposite, south-western corner. The position of the chimney is also significant in that it cannot have served any other rooms in this range, as it might have done had it stood in the centre of the building. No evidence of further chimneys or hearths to the east has been recovered and thus it seems that only the western part of

the building was heated. The floor levels may well have changed through the length of the range, reflecting the falling natural ground levels, though this conjecture could not be confirmed due to the extent of 19th- and 20th-century rebuilding.

6. CONCLUSION

The original function of the former farm building at Cherrycombe remains unclear. It may have originally been constructed in the 17th century as a 'detached' service room such as a kitchen, scullery or washhouse, perhaps with accommodation on the first floor for farm servants. The range was later linked to the main house by two doorways to improve access. In the 19th century the range was abandoned to agricultural use and the linking doorways were filled in. Much of the building was rebuilt at this period in cob and stone rubble, after which rebuilding the structure may have served as a stable or shippon (cow shed) with lofts over. Further rebuilding in the 20th century resulted in the loss of the roof structure and internal floors and the truncation of the building to its present height.

SITE ARCHIVE

The site records have been compiled into a fully integrated site archive which is currently held at Exeter Archaeology's offices under project number 6423, pending deposition at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (159/2008). Details of the excavations, including a pdf copy of the final publication will be submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (exeterar1-77670).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological recording was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Ware at the request of Teignbridge District Council and the Devon County Historic Environment Service. The project was administered for EA by J. Valentin. The site works were carried out by A. West, the building survey by R. W. Parker and the drawings prepared by T. Ives. We are grateful to the building contractors and to the residents of Cherrycombe for assistance on site during the appraisal and the subsequent recording works.

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- J. Valentin (EA) Method Statement for Archaeological Building Recording and Watching Brief at Cherrycombe, Luton, near Ideford, Devon. EA ref 6423 MS.

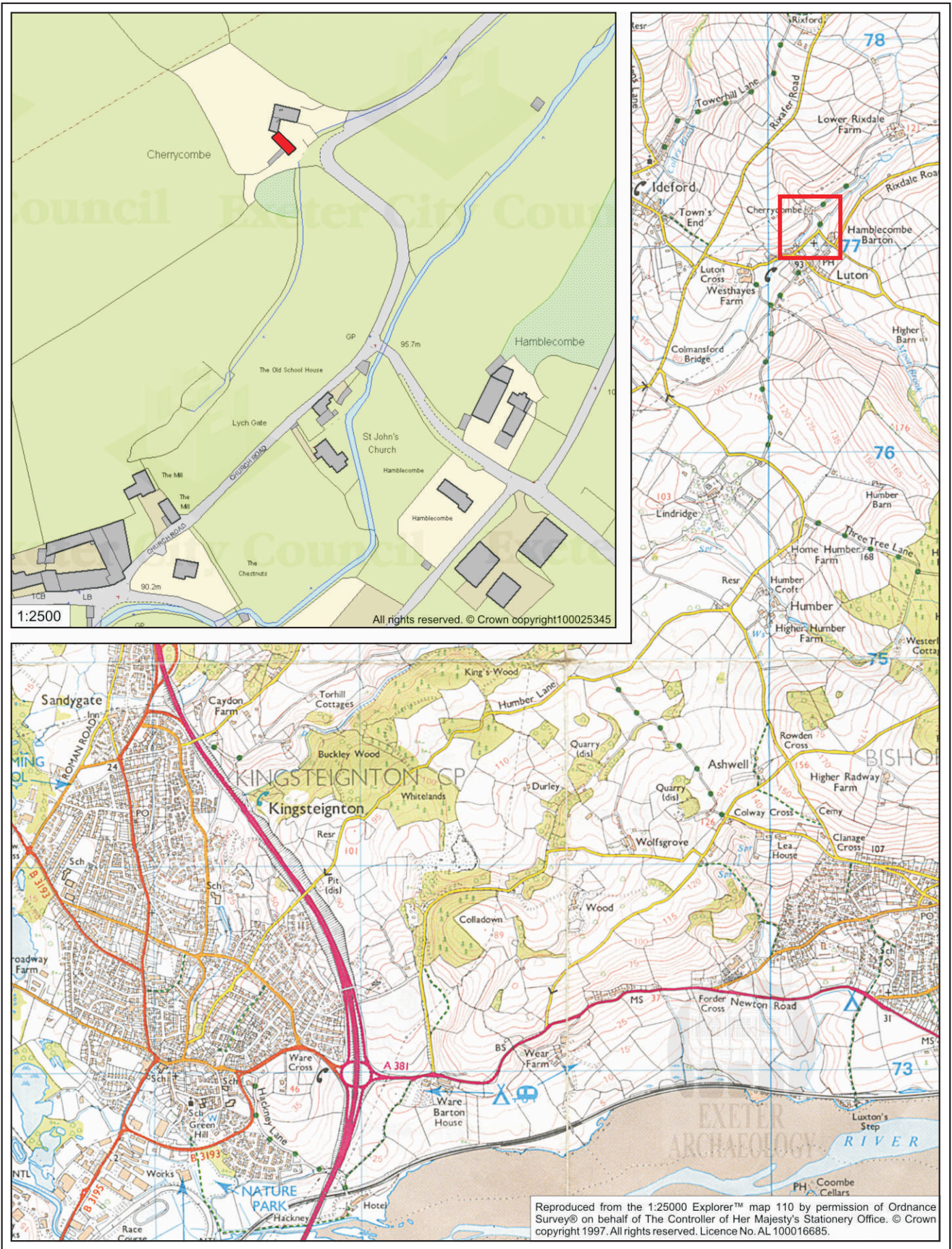


Fig. 1 Location of site.



Fig. 2 General view of the buildings, showing the barn (left) main house (centre) and north wing (right).



Fig. 3 General view of the north elevation of the barn.



Fig.4 Detail of the first-floor loading door in the north elevation showing the reinforced socket below the doorway.



Fig.5 External view of the west wall showing the remains of the original building overlaid by 19th-century masonry relating to the rebuilding of the structure for agricultural use.



Fig. 6 View of the gable end of the cottage showing the remains of the communicating doorway in the upper parts of the gable.

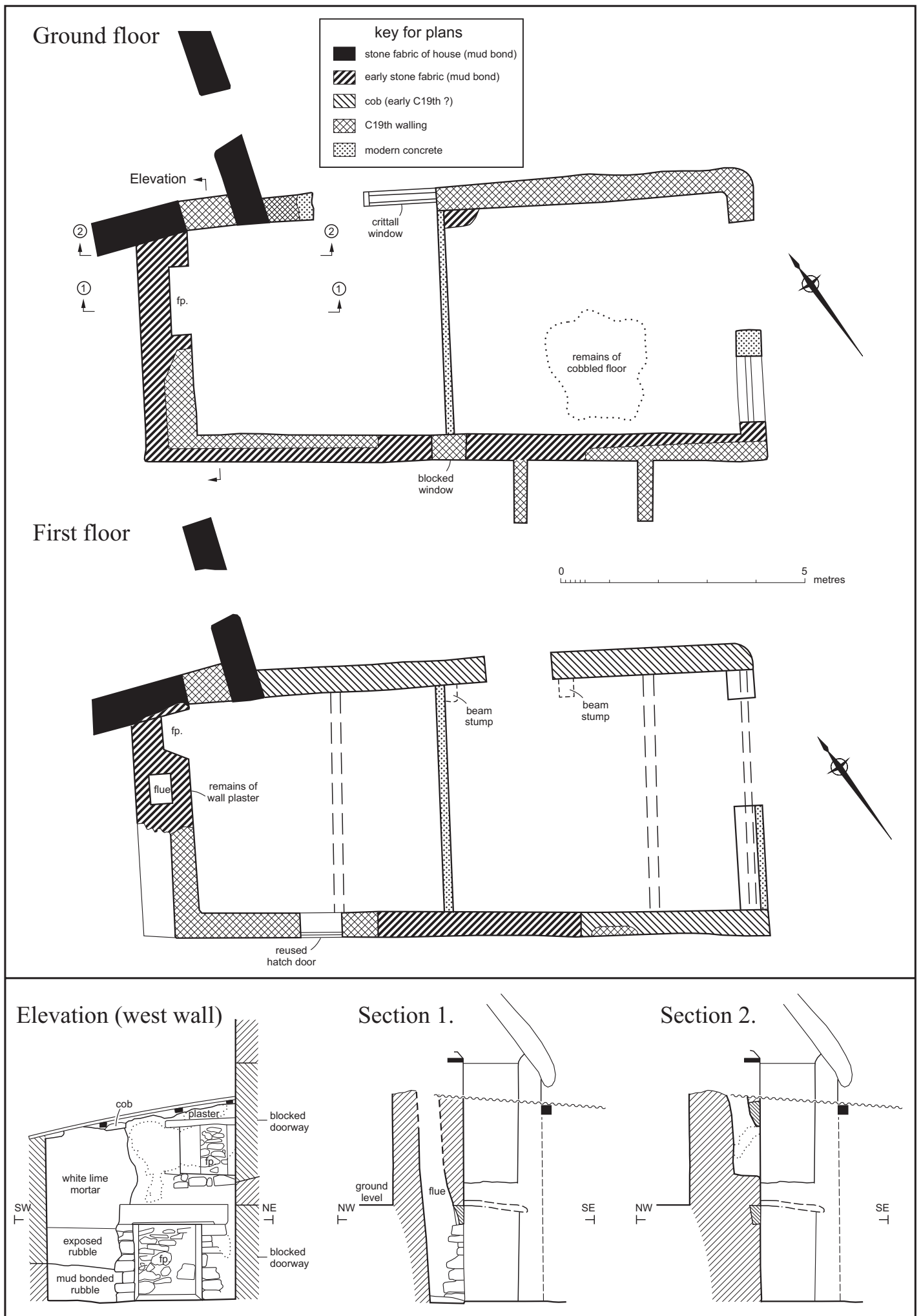


Fig. 7 Phased plans of the building, at ground and first-floor level, showing the probable date of the fabric. Elevation and sections through the fireplaces.



Fig. 8 Internal view of part of the north wall showing the sockets for vanished beams.



Fig. 9 Detail of the interior of the east wall showing the possible early fabric below the window.



Fig. 10 Internal view of the south wall showing building breaks and features in the western part of the structure.