
NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Report No. CP/240/05

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
BUILDING RECORDING
PROJECT AT A BARN ON
LAND ADJACENT TO
SYCAMORE HOUSE,
BLENCARN,
PENRITH,
CUMBRIA**

**FOR
Manning Elliott**

**NY 63640 31280
Planning Application Reference:
3/05/0323**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In August 2005 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by Manning Elliot to carry out a building survey of a barn located on land adjacent to Sycamore House, Blencarn, Penrith, Cumbria (NY 63640 31280). The work was carried out prior to the proposed demolition and reconstruction of the barn as part of a housing development.
- 1.2 Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service produced a brief for a building recording project, which was to be undertaken prior to the demolition of the barn. A 'Level 2' Building Survey was carried out as specified in *Recording Historic Buildings: A Descriptive Specification*¹.
- 1.3 The barn is regarded as being of archaeological interest and is recorded on the County Historic Environment Record (Reference 41161). The building is shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1865 (Figure 5), and therefore dates from at least the mid 19th century.
- 1.4 The barn, along with adjoining cart shed, is all that remains of outbuildings that appear to have been part of Blencarn Hall, a farm situated across the road to the north-west of the building that is the subject of this survey (figure 1). The more recent buildings on the site, which have been demolished, were modern sheds, a Dutch barn and wooden structures (pers.comm Mr I Blackett, Cumbrian Homes).
- 1.5 The survey was carried out on the 17th September 2005 by Fiona Wooler, BA, MA, PIFA.

2. SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The village of Blencarn is located approximately three kilometres to the west of the north Pennines (figure 2), mid-way between the villages of Skirwith to the north-west and Milburn to the south-east. The market towns of Penrith (to the north-west) and Appleby (to the south) are approximately 15 kilometres and 11 kilometres respectively from the village.
- 2.2 The barn that is the subject of the present survey is situated on an enclosed area of land to the north-west of the village, surrounded on three sides by roads, with the village green to the east (figure 1). Just to the east of the barn is the site of a 'Tumulus' or burial mound of unknown date (HER Ref. No.994) (figure 1).
- 2.3 The barn may be shown on the Hodkinson and Donald map of 1774 (surveyed 1770) (figure3), it is however, clearly shown on the Tithe Award map for the Township of Culgaith, Skirwith and Blencarn of 1850², along with a gin-case on the north-west facing elevation. Other buildings on the site are also shown (figure 4).

¹ RCHME, 1996

² Carlisle Record Office Reference No. DRC8/177

2.4 The area around the barn was, at the time of survey, already being developed with several houses under construction, and the ground around the barn itself has been levelled, with no evidence for the sheep pens or sheep dip that are indicated on the 1971 Ordnance Survey map (figure 1).

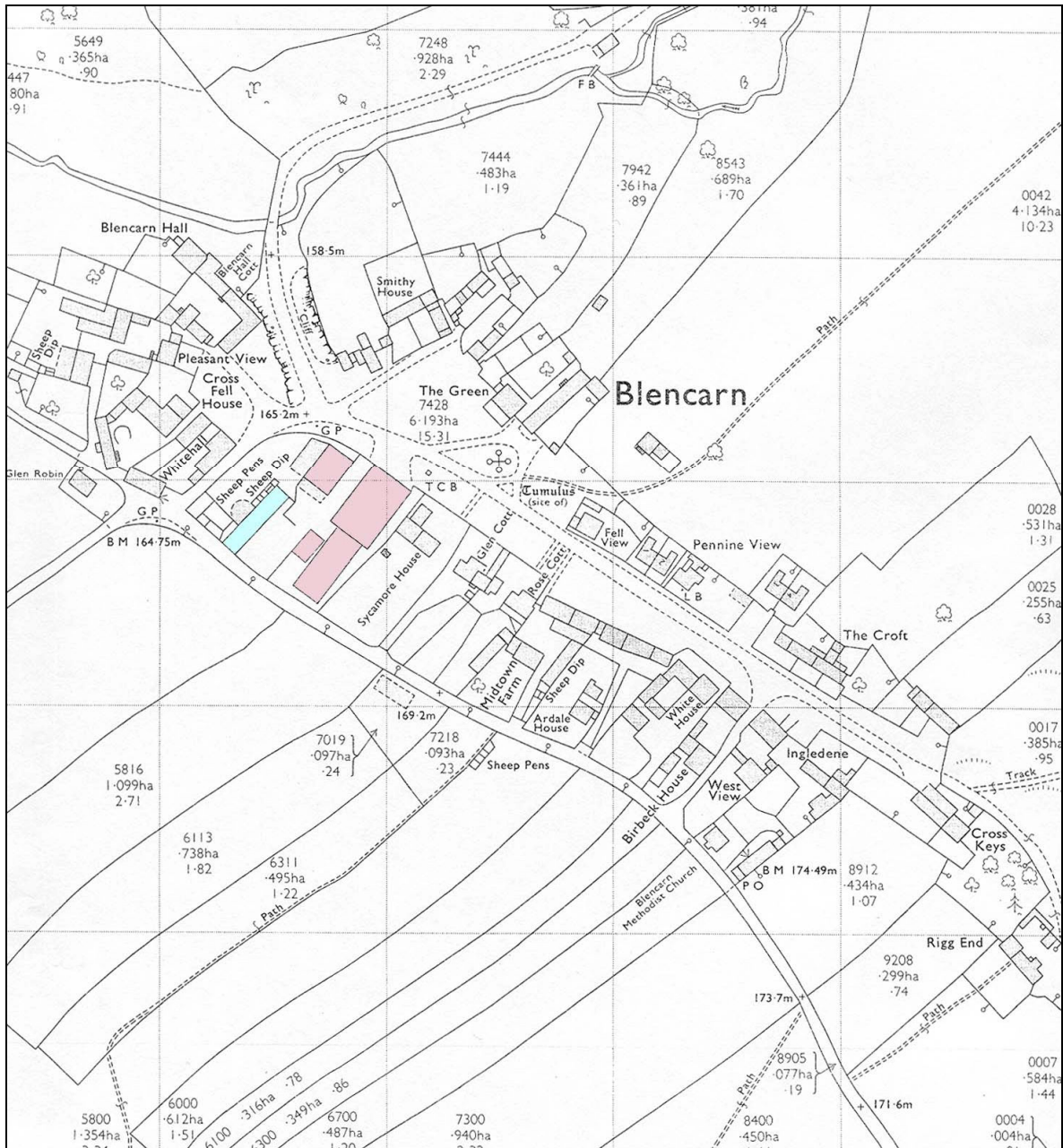


Figure 1 – 1971 Ordnance Survey Plan 1:2500. The barn that is the subject of the present survey is shown blue; the buildings shown pink have been demolished

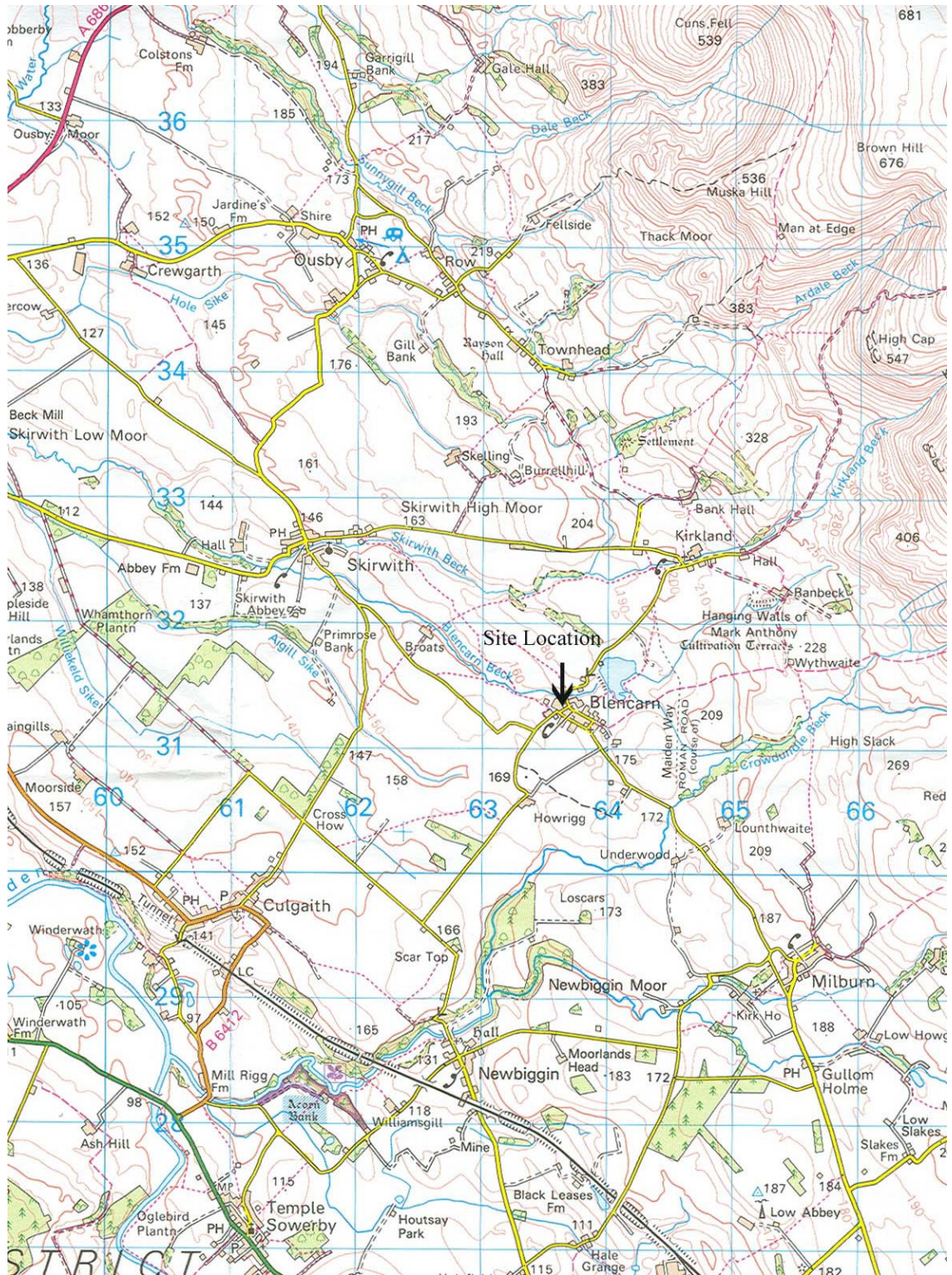


Figure 2 - Site location

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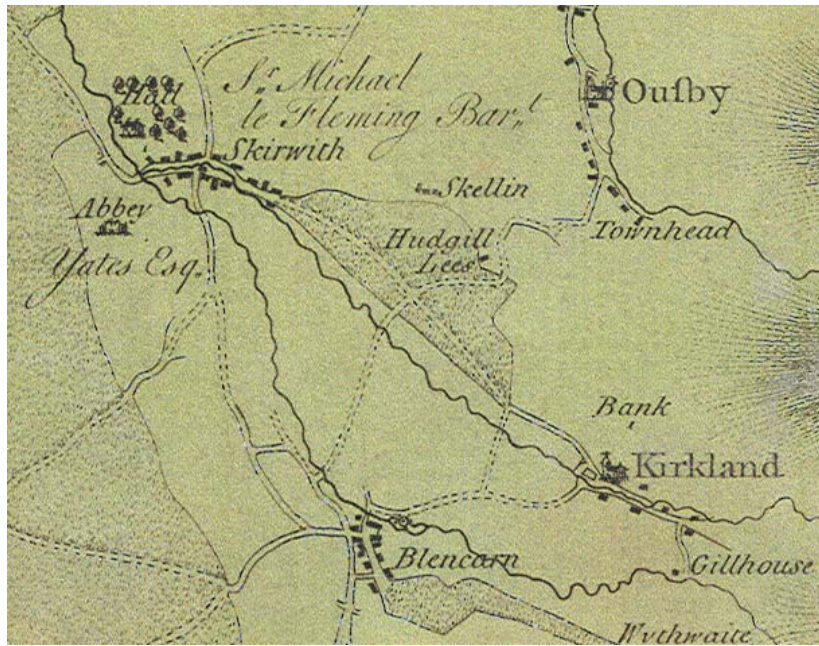


Figure 3 – Hodkinson and Donald map of 1774



Figure 4 – Tithe Award Map of 1850

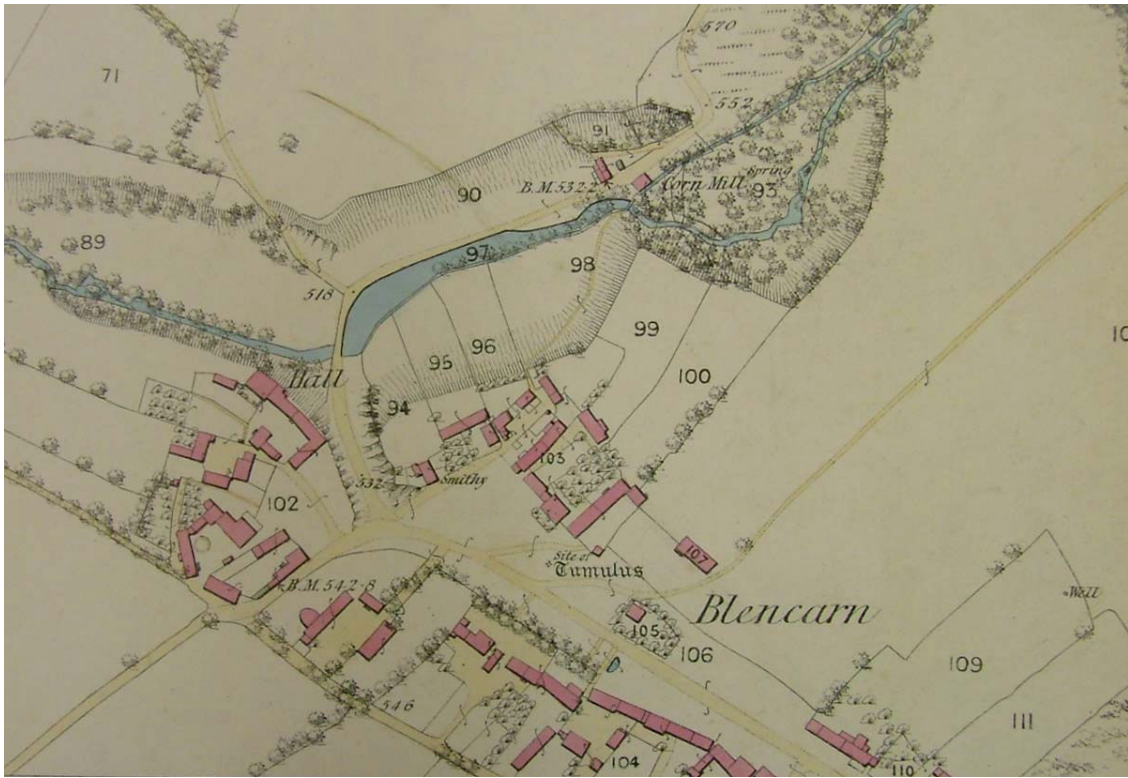


Figure 5 – First Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1865

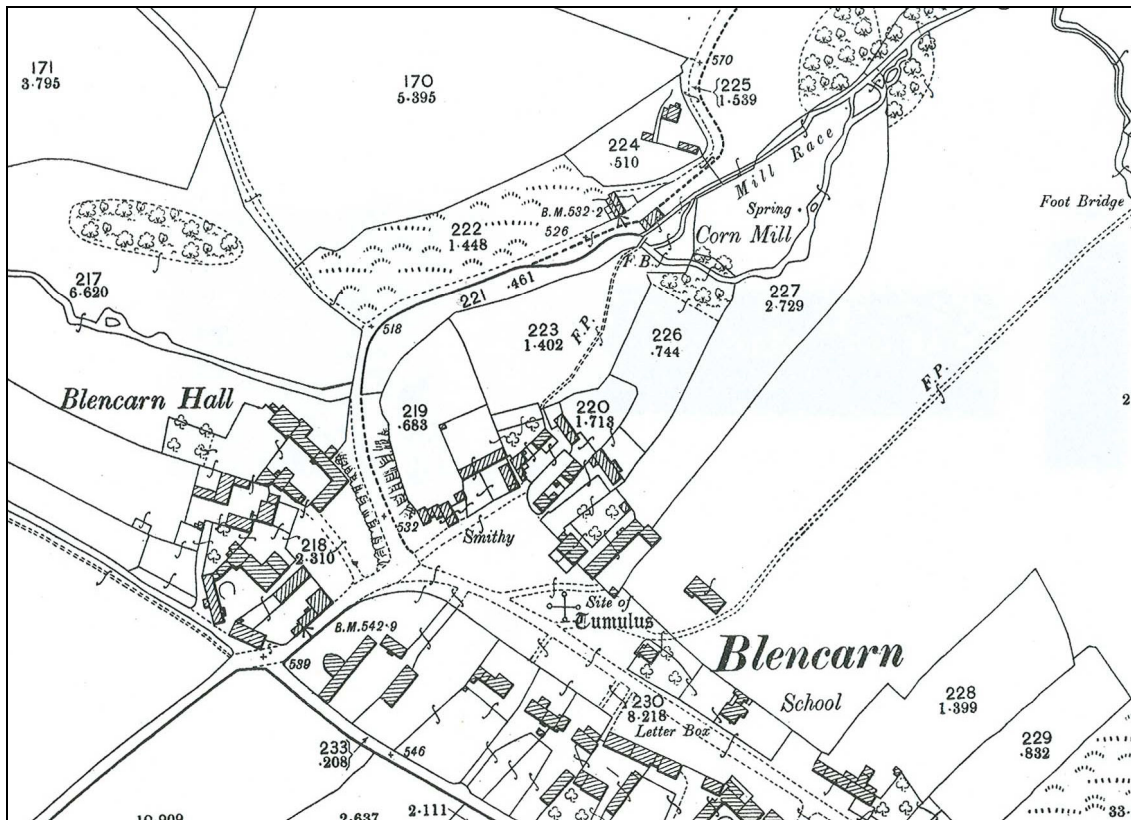


Figure 6 – Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1900

3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Building Survey

3.1.1 The survey consists of three basic elements:

- a written account, which includes information derived from documentary research;
- architect's drawings complete with annotations;
- a photographic record.

3.2 The Written Account

3.2.1 The written account is included in this document together with a selection of photographs, plans and appendix of documentary information.

3.3 The Photographic Record

3.3.1 The photographic archive consists of the following:

- a series of 35mm black and white prints, which included general views of the exterior of the buildings, elevations and part elevations, along with specific external details (e.g. doorways);
- a series of 35mm colour prints showing general views of the exterior of the buildings and their setting;
- a series of digital views of the exterior of the building, the interior of the building and specific internal details (e.g. roof structure) supplied on CD-Rom.

3.4 Project Archive

3.4.1 The full archive of the desk-based assessment and Level 2 building survey has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with the current English Heritage guidelines set out in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (MAP 2nd Edition 1991). The archive will be deposited within the County Record Office and a copy of the report given to the County Historic Environment Record, where viewing will be available on request.

4 PREVIOUS WORK

4.1 No previous archaeological work has been carried out on the site.

5 RESULTS

5.1 The building that is the subject of the present survey consists of two separate structures; a threshing barn with byres and haylofts, and a cart shed which is attached to the western end of the barn (plate 1 and figure 7).

5.2 The Threshing Barn

5.2.1 The threshing barn is constructed of dressed and coursed red sandstone masonry and measures *c.*26.5 metres in length by *c.*6.80 metres wide externally. The roof is laid to diminishing courses of Westmorland slate, with sandstone ridge tiles, and two courses of sandstone flags at eaves level, a common feature of recently recorded farm buildings; these large tilestones appear to have been used to prevent the roof blowing off. Both sides of the roof have three inserted skylights. The quoins on all four corners are of alternating red sandstone blocks.

5.2.2 All of the door jambs are made up of dressed alternating red sandstone blocks, with single pieces of dressed sandstone having been used for the lintels. The arches of the large double doorways, on both the northern and southern elevations consist of eleven voussoirs. All the doorways of the barn are rebated internally, indicating that all the doors opened inwards.

5.2.3 On the southern elevation there are two standard doorways, two ventilation slits and a central large double doorway (plate 1); there are corresponding doorways and ventilation slits on the northern elevation (plate 2). The eastern gable end has a pitching doorway at first floor level, used for transferring hay or straw to the loft, and a ventilation slit to the left (plate 3 and figure 8). The western gable end of the barn, which is mainly obscured by the cart shed (plate 4), has two ventilation slits at first floor level. There are owl holes in the apex of both gable ends of the barn; these would have allowed access for owls to hunt vermin.

5.2.4 Above one of the doorways on the southern elevation is a simple, and slightly crude inscription, which may not necessarily be original (plate 5): -

T L

AD 1763

Carved into the jamb of the western byre doorway are several initials and dates (plate 6), these include: -

J.B.B.B.C

1845

J N 1899

S E

1848

Aged 19



Plate 1 - South facing elevation of barn and cart shed



Plate 2 - North elevation of threshing barn



Plate 3 – Eastern gable end of barn



Plate 4 – Western end of barn and gable end of the cart shed

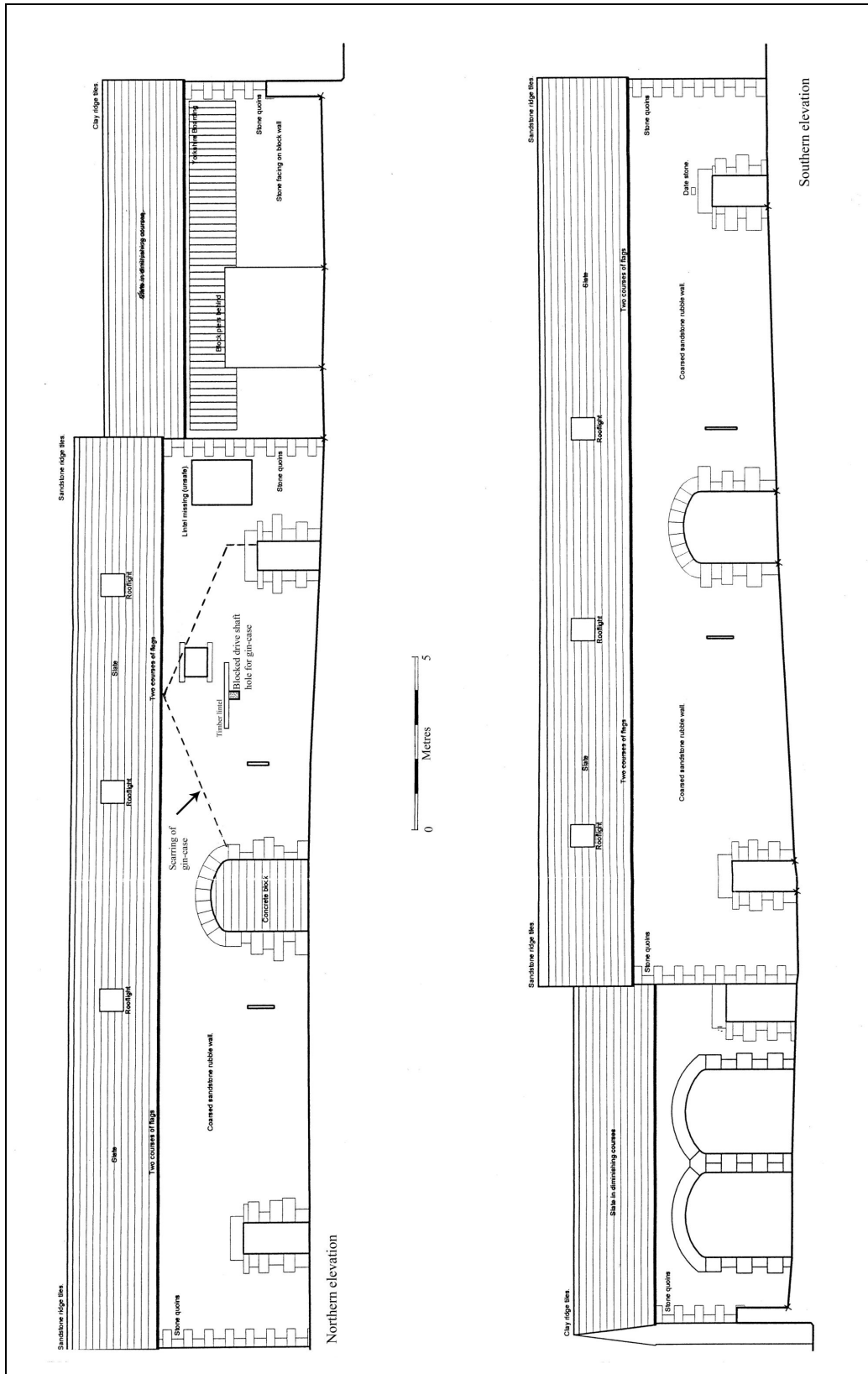


Figure 7 - North and south elevations of the barn and cart shed

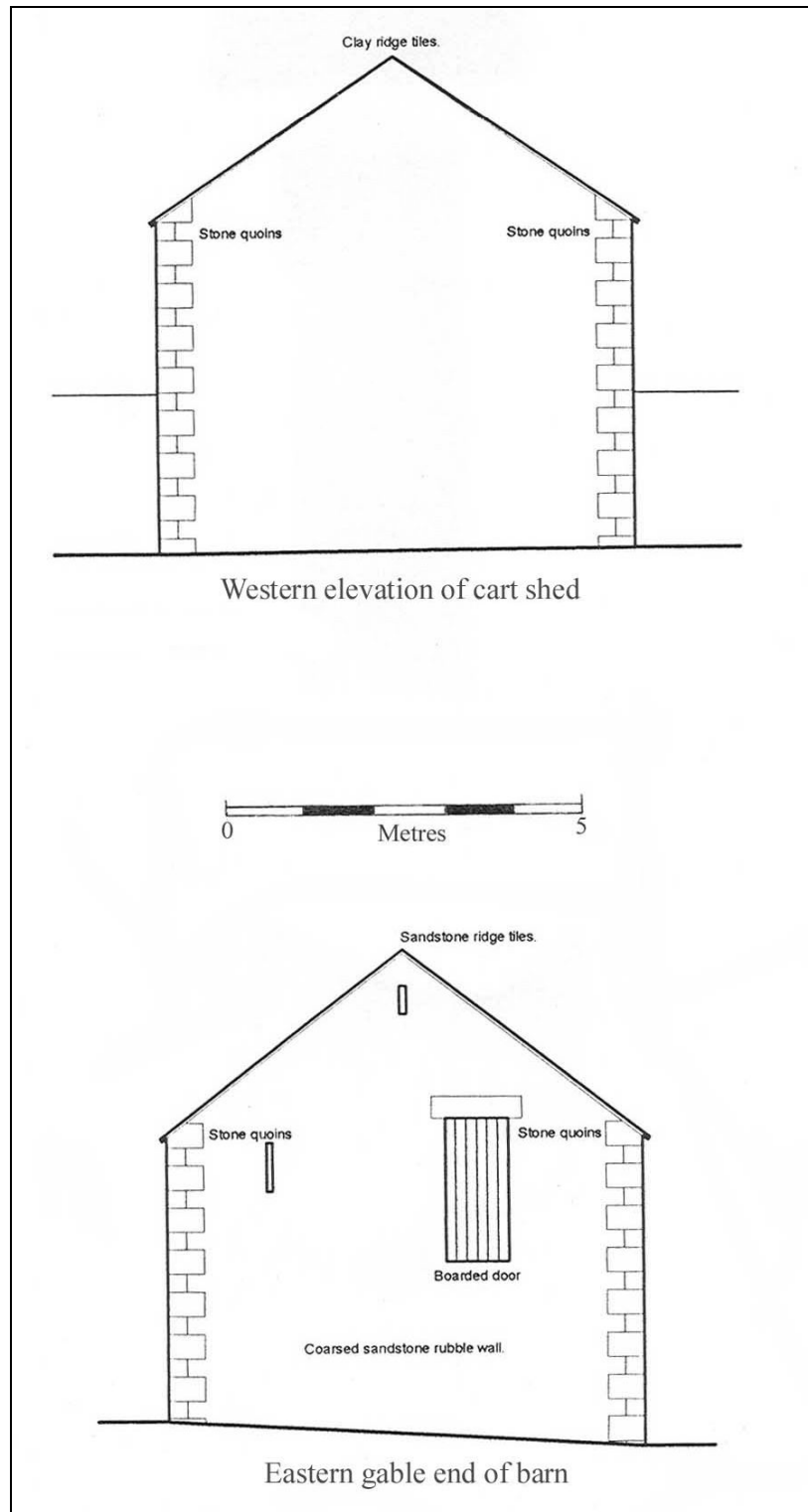


Figure 8 – Western gable end of cart shed and eastern gable end of the barn



Plate 5 – Inscription above doorway, south elevation of barn



Plate 6 – Initials and dates carved into the door jamb of the western byre



Plate 7 – Scar of the roof line of a gin-case

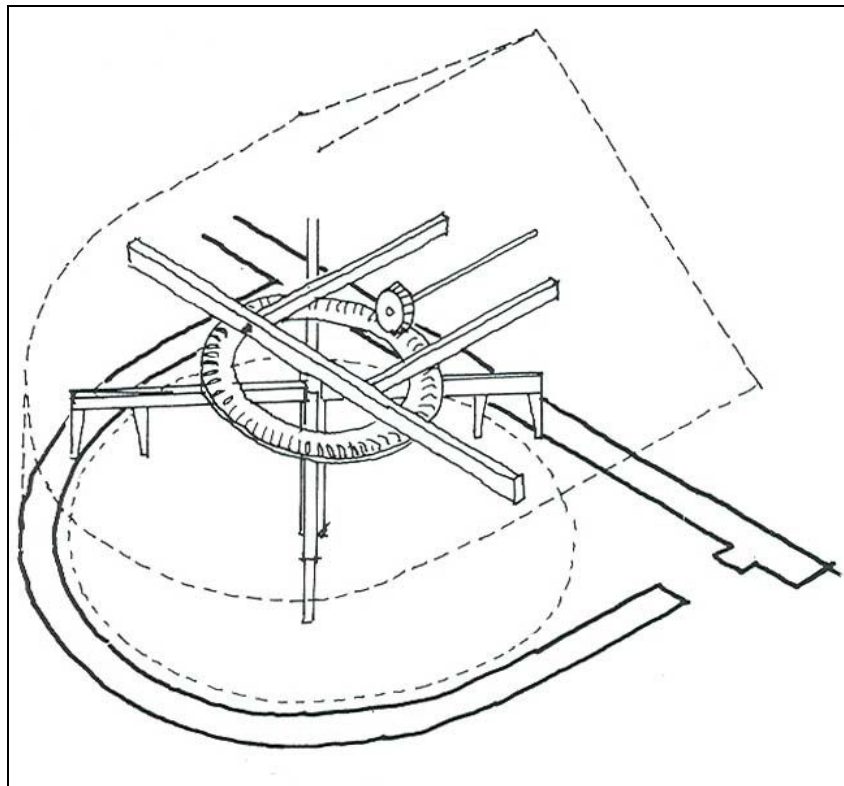


Figure 9 – Isometric sketch of an apsidal gin-case similar to that which would have existed at Blencarn (After Brunskill 1999, 52)

- 5.2.5 Just below eaves level, along the length of the northern elevation of the barn are several large holes (visible on plate 2). These presumably relate to a modern shed or 'lean-to', for which steel girders were bonded into the masonry of the barn, but which have subsequently been removed.
- 5.2.6 Also on this elevation is the scar for the roof line of the gin-case, or horse-engine house (plate 7 and figure 7), which is shown on the Tithe Award map of c.1850 (figure 4) and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps (figures 1, 5 and 6). The gin-case would have been used to house the horse-engine which powered a threshing machine located within the barn. A hole through the wall at a height of c.2.30 metres from ground level would have accommodated the drive shaft that transmitted the power from the horse wheel to the thresher (figure 7), either side of the drive shaft hole there appears to be two blocked-up holes, just below the timber lintel. These may have been the holes for the two horizontal timber beams either side of the drive shaft (figure 9). The gin-case itself would have been of masonry construction and from cartographic evidence it would appear it would have been apsidal in form (figure 9). The maximum diameter of the horse-engine inside would have been c.7.50 metres (allowing for wall thickness and based on the 1:2500 OS map), a diameter that would fit in with Brunskill's range of 24 feet to 26 feet (7.3m to 7.9m), as being the most common³. Gin-cases were prevalent in the fertile areas of Cumbria; the Eden Valley and West Cumberland, but sadly they are a structure that is disappearing from the landscape. The gin-case at Blencarn appears to have been demolished within the last thirty years. A similar gin-case existed at Sykeside Farm, Soulby, Kirkby Stephen, a farm of comparable acreage to that at Blencarn Hall Farm (i.e. around 330 acres in the mid-nineteenth century), but which was demolished c.1993 without being recorded⁴. The gin-case was constructed after the barn, as shown by the structure obstructing a first floor window and ground floor doorway.
- 5.2.7 The large doorway on the northern elevation has been filled in with concrete blocks (plate 2). Carved into the cement above the uppermost layer of these blocks are the initials and date: -

AWP EP NOV 1965

5.3 The Cart Shed

- 5.3.2 The cart shed is located at the western end of the barn (plate 4 and figure 7), and a clear construction break shows that it was built after the barn. It is constructed of coursed red and yellow sandstone masonry, with some granite. The corner quoins are of alternating blocks of red sandstone masonry. The northern elevation has at some point been rebuilt, as it now consists of a block wall with stone facing at the lower level and 'Yorkshire Boarding' of vertical timbers at the upper level (plate 8) with a large doorway inserted. In the southern elevation are two large arched doorways with nicely dressed red sandstone masonry blocks making up the door jambs and voussoirs. A further doorway to the right has alternating blocks making up the jambs and a single

³ Brunskill, R.W., 2002, 56

⁴ Cracknell, P.M., 2005

piece of sandstone for the lintel (plate 9). This doorway is the only one that has its jambs rebated externally; consequently the doors would have opened outwards. A single hinge from the door survives at the base of the doorway. It is possible that this was a stable door.



Plate 8 – Northern elevation of the cart shed showing stonework hiding a block wall



Plate 9 – Southern elevation of the cart shed

5.3.2 There is some evidence that, until fairly recently, there was either another building, or a roof projecting from the southern elevation of the cart shed. As with the northern elevation of the barn, there is a large hole below the eaves which again suggests that a steel girder had been bonded into the masonry. The presence of white paint over part of the elevation and the general clean appearance of the elevation suggests that there has been a 'lean-to' present here at some time.

5.3.3 The western gable end of the cart shed overlooks the road. A dry stone wall continues from this gable end to encircle the site, although sections are now missing due to the development work.

5.4 The Threshing Barn Interior

5.4.1 The interior of the threshing barn is divided into three sections at ground level, with byres (cowhouses) either side of the central threshing area (figure 10). Both of the byres extend the width of the barn and are accessed via opposing doorways on the northern and southern elevations.

5.4.2 The western byre has a concrete floor with a central manure passage. The stall divisions, or 'scale boards'⁵, are of timber (plate 10), and would originally have provided accommodation for 11 cows at one time, one of the stalls only having a single ceramic feeding trough. The walls are whitewashed, a common wall covering in Cumbria which acted as a wall coating and disinfectant. The height of the ceiling from the base of the manure channel is c.2.12 metres. The two ventilation slits shown in the western wall of this byre on the architects plan (figure 10) are actually at first floor level. There appears to have been at one time a doorway through the partition wall that separates this byre from the central barn area. A clear construction break is visible in southern end of this wall (plate 11). This opening of one metre in width has subsequently been blocked-up.

5.4.3 The eastern byre (figure 10) is very similar to the western byre, with a concrete floor and timber scale boards. Six ceramic feeding troughs remain *in-situ*, as well as some metal water troughs and tethering poles complete with chains.

5.4.4 The walls that separate the byres from the central part of the barn do not extend the full height; this has created haylofts above both of the byres which could be easily accessed from the central barn area or via the pitching doors at first floor level (plate 12). Haylofts above byres or cowhouses are common as they provided insulation for the cows through the winter months.

5.4.5 The central section of the barn can now only be accessed via the large double doorway in the southern elevation (figure 10), as the doorway on the northern elevation has been blocked-up.

⁵ Brunskill, R.W., 2002, 96

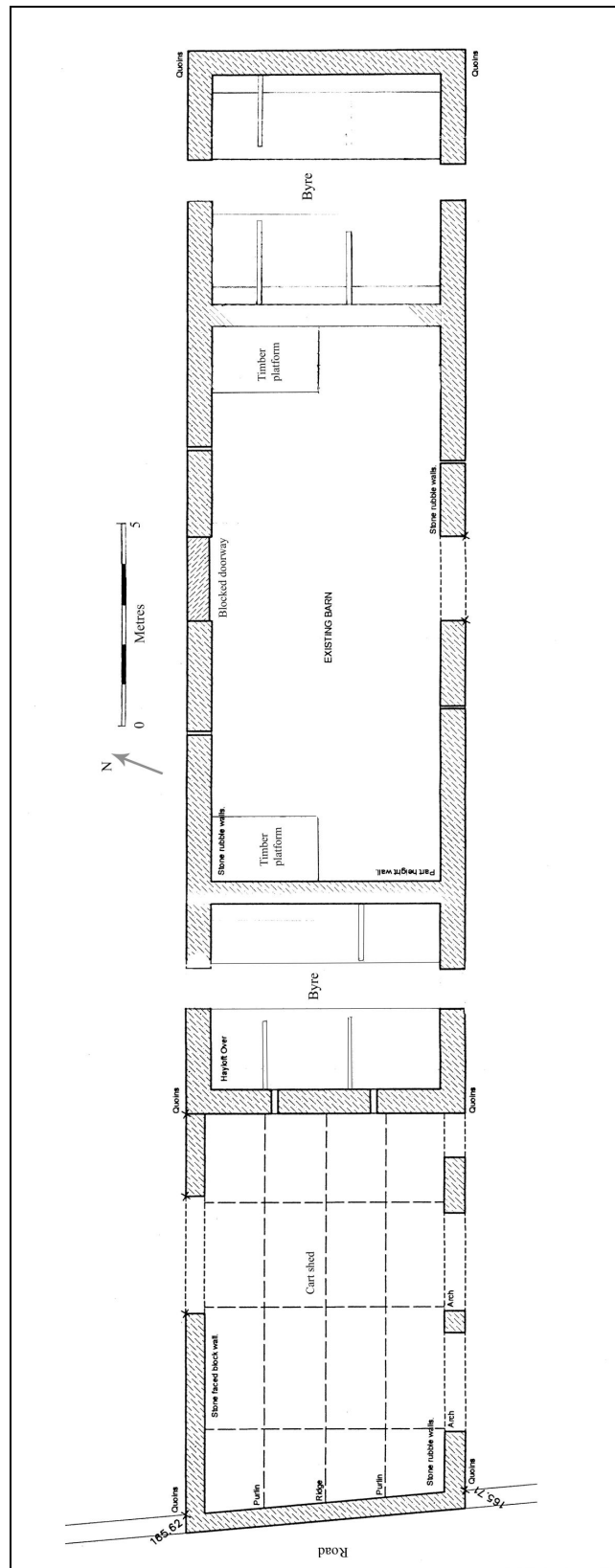


Figure 10 – Ground floor plan of barn and cart shed



Plate 10 – Interior of western byre



Plate 11 – Possible blocked doorway between western byre and barn



Plate 12 – View of the hayloft above the western byre as seen from the threshing area

- 5.4.6 From the central area of the barn it was possible to note that the length of the barn, including that over the haylofts, was nine bays, with the roof trusses being of principal rafters and tie beams with collars, and trenched through purlins (plate 13). The collars and tie beams are fixed to the rafters with wooden pegs. Six of the roof trusses, as well as the purlins and ridge beam, appear to have been hand cut, with bark still attached to several pieces of timber. The two trusses above the eastern hayloft are machine sawn. Carpenter's or assembly marks were visible on several of the trusses, with the following numbers being observed (in numerical order): -

II, III, IIII, V

- 5.4.7 The interior walls of the barn were noted to be of inferior quality to the external walls, with the stonework consisting of more rubble masonry than the squared and dressed masonry of the external walls. As the interior walls were unlikely to be seen generally, there may have been no reason to use the more expensive dressed stonework, which may have been as much for aesthetic purposes as practical.
- 5.4.8 The floor of the central area of the barn is of two materials. In line with the large double doorways the floor is constructed of sandstone flags, which may be the original hand-flail threshing floor (plate 14). To either side of this central axis, the floor is of concrete.



Plate 13 – Roof detail of barn



Plate 14 – Sandstone floor in central axis of barn

- 5.4.9 In the north-west and south-east corners of the central section of the barn, there are timber platforms measuring *c.* 1.60 metres by *c.* 2.60 metres and 0.16 metres high (plate 15). They appear to overlay the concrete floor, so they may be a fairly recent insertion. It is possible that they could relate to threshing machinery, however, they do not correspond with the location of the drive shaft from the gin-case, and generally there would only be one threshing machine.



Plate 15 – One of the two timber platforms in the barn

- 5.4.10 The blocked-up opening for the drive-shaft from the gin-case could be observed in the barn interior, although there was no evidence internally for the two horizontal timbers that would normally be situated either side of the drive shaft, to support the horse-engine (figure 9); these timbers were observed at Hall Farm, Morland⁶ (also an apsidal gin-case that has recently been converted to residential use) and Townhead Farm, Scotby, Carlisle⁷.

5.5 The Cart Shed Interior

- 5.5.1 The interior of the cart shed could be accessed either via the two large double doorways or standard doorway in the southern elevation or the large modern opening in the northern elevation (figure 10).
- 5.5.2 The cart shed is of four bays with the roof trusses being of king post construction of machine-sawn timber (plate 16).

⁶ Wooler, F and Jones, C, 2004

⁷ Cracknell, P.M, and Wooler, F, 2005



Plate 16 – King post roof trusses, cart shed

5.5.3 The western side of the cart shed floor is cobbled, while the eastern side has been concreted over. Although there was no substantial evidence for a partition, the eastern side of the cart shed may have been more recently used as a stable or loose box, as there was the remains of a manger on the eastern wall (plate 17).



Plate 17 – Remains of manger, eastern wall of cart shed

- 5.5.4 Within the southern wall of the cart shed, and beside the smaller doorway, is a niche that measures *c.*4.7m wide, 0.3 m high and 0.22m deep (plate 18). This may have either been used to house a candle or oil light, or may have contained grooming equipment or medicines for the horses.



Plate 18 – Doorway and niche, southern wall of cart shed

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Traditional farm buildings are difficult to date mainly because documentary evidence for their construction is rare. In Cumberland and Westmorland there appears to have been a period of rebuilding of agricultural structures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, caused by factors such as enclosure, the decline in border warfare and increased scientific knowledge, and many farm buildings date from this period. The barn at Blencarn was constructed to serve several functions; the storage and conversion of cereal crops and accommodating animals. Grain would have been threshed on the central threshing floor by hand-flail, possibly through the winter months, and the unprocessed or processed grain may have been stored in the lofts above the byres.
- 6.2 The date stone of 1763 above the eastern byre door on the southern elevation fits in with this general period of rebuilding, however the simple and unweathered appearance of the inscription does hint at it being a later insertion.
- 6.3 The gin-case on the northern elevation must have been constructed some time between the end of the eighteenth century (after the invention of the threshing machine in 1786) and 1850 (the date of the Tithe Award map). The earlier examples of horse-engines were housed in 'gin-cases' to protect the timber machinery. Later examples, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, were constructed of cast iron and therefore did not need to be housed in purpose-built structures⁸. At the date of the Tithe Award map (1850) the barn and gin-case were situated in the enclosure along with the stack yard, where cereals would have been stored prior to their conversion. This would have made the enclosed area of land on which the barn, stack yard and gin-case stood a self-contained grain processing area.
- 6.4 The cart shed appears to date between 1865 and 1900, as it is not shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1865 (figure 5), but it is present on the Second Edition map of 1900 (figure 6). There is some evidence for a small lean-to against the western wall of the threshing barn, which may be shown on the First Edition OS map. Above the manger in the cart shed several holes were observed, which may have once held timbers for a pitched roof (just visible above the line of plaster on plate 17).
- 6.5 As it still does today, sheep farming played a vital part in the agricultural economy of this part of Cumbria. The proximity of villages such as Blencarn to the eastern fells allowed farmers to utilise fell rights on the nearby common land. Sheep farming does not necessarily manifest itself in traditional farm buildings, but it is likely that the barn at Blencarn would have been used for activities such as sheep shearing. The Ordnance Survey map of 1971 (figure 1) shows several farms having purpose built sheep dips

⁸ Brunskill, R.W., 2002, 116

(introduced at the end of the nineteenth century), highlighting the importance of sheep farming in this area.

- 6.6 The barn and cart shed should not be seen in isolation, but rather as part of an organised farmstead. The buildings that occupied the site of the threshing barn at the dates of the Tithe Award map (figure 4), and the First and Second Edition maps (figures 5 & 6) no longer exist, and it is difficult to know what function these buildings served. Mr Blackett of Cumbrian Homes has mentioned a 'Meeting Hall' on the site, from which some of the masonry was retained for the development work. There was, however, no meeting house observed on any of the Ordnance Survey maps, so the original function of this building may have been agricultural.

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8 APPENDIX

A History, Gazetteer and Directory of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire – Parson and White 1829

'Blencarn is a village and manor, forming a township with Kirkland, and situated 9 miles E of Penrith. This manor was part of the large barony of Adam, son of Sweine, but it afterwards came to Edw. Boyville, who sold it to John, brother of Hercla, Earl of Carlisle, after whose attainder, Edward II granted it to one English, whose daughter conveyed it in marriage to the Restwol family, who sold it to Lough, ancestor of the late Lough Carleton, Esq, who by his will in 1792, enfranchised all the tenants. Near the village is a spring, the water of which is powerfully astringent. At Blencarn Gate is the Free School, which was erected in 1775, and endowed with 100 acres of land by the Commissioners appointed under an Act of Parliament, obtained in 1773, for enclosing Culgaith common. The land is now let for £42 per annum, for which the master (Rev. J. Chapelhow) teaches all the children of Culgaith and Blencarn without further charge'.

Farmers listed at Blencarn (those marked * are yeomen): -

John Atkinson	John Cannon*
John Cannon*	Thomas Clark*
Robert Clark	William Hunter
John Lightburn	Margaret Nicholson
Robert Pearson*	John Richardson
Isaac Sowerby	John Sowerby*
Andrew Turner*	

Mannix and Whellan 1847 Cumberland Directory

Farmers listed at Blencarn (those marked * are yeomen): -

Hannah Atkinson*	John Atkinson*
John Cannon*	Thomas Cannon*
Thomas Hall	James Laycock
Margaret Nicholson	John Richardson
John Pattinson	William Wadson
John Westmoreland	

History and Topography of Cumberland and Westmorland – W Whellan 1860

The manor of Blencarn formed, in ancient times, a parcel of the barony of Adam Fitz-Sweyn, and as such was held by the Neville family. A portion was subsequently held by the priory of Carlisle, in free alms. About the reign of King John we find the Whitbys and Thursbys as possessors, each family holding a moiety. In the year 1226 Evan de Vipont and Sibell Thursby, his wife, gave six bovates of land, in Blencarn, to Bernard Thursby; and in 1278 he granted a portion of the same to the priory of Carlisle. The remainder descended to Edmund Boyville, his second son, who sold it to John Hercla, but it became forfeited to the crown on the attainder of Andrew de Hercla, and was afterwards granted to William Langley, or English, whose heiress brought it to the Restwolds, from whom it passed by sale to the Lough family. The tenants were enfranchised by Lough Carlton, Esq., in 1792. The manor was divided between his two nieces, and co-heiresses, and is now held by Messrs Fydell and

Tufnell. The landowners of the township are Lady de Fleming, Messrs Fydell and Tufnell, Joseph Salkeld Esq., John Atkinson, Thomas Atkinson, William Clark, John Cannon and Sir Richard Tufton, Bart'.

Slater's Directory of Cumberland 1876

Farmers listed at Blencarn: -

John Atkinson	George Brown, Blencarn Hall
John Cannon	William Sowerby

T F Bulmer 1884 History, Topography and Directory of East Cumberland

George Brown, Blencarn hall

T Bulmer & Co History, Topography and Directory of Cumberland 1901

Farmers listed at Blencarn: -

Thomas Brown	Robert Brunskill & Son (John)
John cannon (yeoman)	Richard Cannon, Rigglands, yeoman and overseer
William Cannon, Cross Keys	
John Carrick (yeoman)	William Gillespie
Robert Gow, Pleasant view	James Laycock & Son (yeoman), South view
Wm Slack, Blencarn hall	William Sowerby, New House (yeoman)

Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland 1914

Farmers listed: -

John Atkinson, yeoman	Richard Atkinson, farmer and assistant overseer
Thomas Brown	John Brunskill
John Carrick	William Gillespie
Thomas Hutchinson, Wythwaite	
Goulding Roburn	William Watson, Broats
John Simpson, Rigglands	William Sowerby, yeoman
John Thompson	

Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland 1929

Farmers listed at Blencarn: -

Thos Arnison, Wythwaite	Wm Blas, Rigglands
Rbt & Wm Brunskill, Blencarn Hall [listed as farm over 150 acres]	
John Carrick	Edward Carruthers
Arth & Wm Elwood	Jsph Furness
Joseph Robinson	William Sowerby, yeoman
Geo Milburn & Jn, farmers and blacksmiths	
William Watson, yeoman, Broats [listed as farm over 150 acres]	

