

HIGHER COWLEY FARM KENTISBURY DEVON

Desk-top Study
&
Assessment of the remains of Middle Cowley Farmhouse



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1.0 Introduction

Location: Higher Cowley Farm
Parish: Kentisbury
District: Exmoor National Park
County: Devon
NGR: SS 637 469

Colin Humphreys and associates were instructed by Mr David Leeman of Higher Cowley Farm to undertake an archaeological assessment of the remains of a domestic building that now forms part of the complex of outbuildings to Higher Cowley Farm, Kentisbury.

Higher Cowley farmhouse dates from the early 17th century, although the existing fabric may contain remnants of an earlier structure, and is grade II listed.

The building in question has suffered severe storm damage (loss of roof etc.) late in 2001.

1.1 Methodology

A desk-top study was undertaken by Terry Green. Information was drawn from the DCC Sites and Monuments Register.

Visits were made to the County Records Office and the West Country Studies Library, both in Exeter and the Record Office in Barnstaple.

The collection of records assembled by MSC in the early 1980's were also consulted.

The fieldwork was undertaken during June and July 2002 when the remains of the building were subject to a measured survey.

2.0 Results of desk-top study (Terry Green)

2.1 Location

The parish of Kentisbury in North Devon has been described as a parish without a village (Hoskins 1954, 418). In this it is not unlike many another Devon parishes where the church and the manor house lie in near isolation amid a community of scattered hamlets. The parish lies on the eastern extreme of the Hundred of Braunton with East Down to its west, while to its east is Parracombe in the Hundred of Shirwell.

The A39, a former turnpike road, runs through the parish, but otherwise most of Kentisbury is off the beaten track in an area of moderate to high elevation between the sea at Combe Martin and the Exmoor upland. This is traditionally a farming community, though today only a minority of the inhabitants are directly involved in agriculture. The permanent resident population is small, having steadily declined since its maximum of 424 persons in 1851.

2.2 The Historic Context

The Domesday Book records that in 1086 the manor of Kentisbury was held by Baldwin the Sheriff and that before the Conquest it was held by Aelmer (Thorn and Thorn 1985). By the 13th century the manor was in the hands of the family of Wolfe or Lupus (Latin: wolf), known at the time by the Norman-French sobriquet le Lou. In 1244 it is recorded that William le Wolfe had one knight's fee at his manor of Kentisbury, but in 1275 it was Wiliam le Lou who was presented as patron of the rectory. From the early 14th century the family were called by their English name Wolfe, and remained in possession of the manor until the end of the 15th century when a female descendant and heiress married into the family of Randall. The manor was held by Randall until the first quarter of the 17th century when it was purchased by Richard Richards. Towards the end of the 18th century, the manor was bought by the family of Beavis who held it still in 1822 when Lysons detailed the descent of the manor. Subsequently – probably in 1825/26 - the manor was broken up, passing principally into the hands of the Fortescues and the Inledons plus a number of freeholders. In 1866 the Misses Inledon are named in Kelly's Directory as ladies of the manor.

2.3 The Landscape Context

Originally comprised within the manor of Kentisbury, Higher Cowley Farm is situated in the north-eastern corner of the parish, where it occupies a position on the traditional route from Parracombe to Combe Martin (Fig.1). Today quite isolated, it must in the past have seen at least a moderate amount of passing traffic, as, until the making of the turnpike road from Combe Martin to Parracombe in the late 18th century, the route from Parracombe via Middleton, Higher Cowley and Dean provided a principal access to the sea at Combe Martin or Ilfracombe.

We have little documentary evidence to cover the period prior to the early nineteenth century, and must draw inferences mainly from place and field names and topography. Cowley itself is not recorded in Domesday and was therefore not a manor. The first record of the name occurs in the mid-thirteenth century, in the Assize Rolls of 1244 and 1249 (Gover, Mawer & Stenton 1931, 50). Here the name appears as Colleg or Collegh.

Although this is the earliest record, the name must have originated at an earlier date, and would appear to signify a clearing where charcoal was burnt. The settlement's location in what is still quite heavily wooded countryside well away from larger settlements, lends support to the idea of a woodland industry which may not have been unconnected with the smelting of lead and silver at Combe Martin. In any case, the name does not imply an original farm settlement, and the fact that Higher Cowley sits below the edge of Kentisbury Down in a north-facing combe (ie. not a favoured location) suggests that it may have become a farm relatively late. It is reasonable to suppose that it is closely associated with Lower Cowley to which it is connected by a footpath. This path skirts a parcel of land which may once have been a single unit, in which case, Higher and Lower Cowley either arose through division of an original farm or as a hamlet linked to a single parcel of land. It is likely, in fact, to have been a three-farm hamlet, since a document of 1738 refers to Higher, Lower and Middle Cowley (DRO 2154M/T25); and, as examination of the history of occupation will show below, throughout much of the record, two families (two farmers) resided at (Higher) Cowley. Such an arrangement of farms in close proximity hints at earlier medieval land tenure, and signs of medieval agricultural practices are to be found in some of the field names listed in the tithe apportionment of 1840. Higher and Lower Coney Park (field numbers 414, 415) clearly suggest warrening, Higher and Lower Gratton (field numbers 422, 423) refer to the ancient practice of setting aside certain fields to be grazed after the harvest, and at Lower Cowley at least, the use of the term Lawn (Lower and Higher Lawn – field numbers 625, 626) suggests the long "lands" or narrow strip fields of medieval arable cultivation. Although, on the whole, the field shapes do not give much hint of these early practices, a small group of narrow fields immediately to the north of the Higher Cowley settlement (field numbers 457, 458, 434) suggests the land may once have been thus arranged. (See fig.3 for tithe map field numbers.) Furthermore, the tithe apportionment of 1840 lists holdings under the headings of both Cowley and Cowley Estate. Study of the distribution of fields and smaller plots belonging to Cowley and Cowley Estate shows the fields of Cowley Estate apparently intruding awkwardly between those of Cowley (fig.6). This is especially apparent with the plots numbered 459, 460, 628 and 629 which are directly adjacent to the buildings of (Higher) Cowley. This arrangement is unlikely to have arisen out of a wish to make life difficult, but instead probably reflects the co-operative methods of a medieval Devon farm-hamlet in which holdings would have been distributed to give each farmer an equal share of good and indifferent land. In this case, the holdings of Cowley Estate probably represent the land of the elusive Middle Cowley.

2.4 Higher Cowley Farm:

The existing house at Higher Cowley is grade 2 listed. Standing to one side of a quite complex range of buildings, it appears to be essentially a classic three-celled cross-passage house in the style of the 16th and 17th centuries. On an oak lintel over the door is carved the legend EH 1670, and we may assume that EH was the owner who commissioned either the building, or more likely the improvement of the house in the later 17th century. Also within the range is a ruined building which shows signs of having formerly been occupied domestically. The main house and a second building are both represented on the tithe map of 1840 where they are shaded in pink, the standard colour-code used by the tithe commissioners for buildings in domestic occupation. However, in the tithe apportionment, the House and Court, i.e. the domestic and farm buildings (fig 3 & 4, number 439) are ascribed only to Higher Cowley and to the occupancy of Phillip Burgess; Cowley Estate includes

no domestic buildings among the list of its holdings. The implication of the colour-code, however, that there was dual domestic occupation is borne out by other records which are set out below in detail.

The earliest detailed record is the Land-Tax return of 1782 which lists, under Cowley, the owner, John Nott and the occupier, John Pugsley together with Robert Thomas who was both owner and occupier of "his part of Cowley". With a change of personnel in 1791, this situation persists in the record until 1793, and is the earliest indication that the title Cowley comprises two dwellings in separate ownership and occupancy. From 1793 to 1805, Cowley was owned by John Nott and Henry Beavis (Lord of the manor?), but with a single occupant, Robert Blackmore. In 1806, John Nott was succeeded by Edward Lancey, who, in 1807 apparently moved in to occupy one part of Cowley himself. From 1807 until 1826, when the land-tax returns cease, Cowley was permanently in dual ownership and occupancy. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of owners and occupants.)

While the Land-Tax returns refer only to Cowley, the tithe apportionment of 1840 lists, as we have already seen, Cowley and Cowley Estate, as well as Lower Cowley, which, in 1840 was owned and occupied by William Tucker. The apportionment records that Cowley was the property of Robert Newton Incedon and was occupied by Phillip Burgess. This corresponds exactly to the land-tax return of 1826 in which R.N.Incedon Esquire is listed as one owner and Phillip Burgess as his tenant. The holding listed in 1840 as Cowley Estate was the property of John Nott, and was tenanted by James Lancey. This should be compared with the 1826 land-tax return in which Edward Lancey is recorded as the other owner with James Lancey (his son?) as occupier. In the intervening 13 years, Edward Lancey had apparently sold to John Nott, a name which had last been encountered in the land-tax return of 1805.

In the record of a levy for the assistance of the poor (the Poor Rate) made on 12th July 1830, both Phillip Burgess and James Lancey are listed under Cowley. Phillip Burgess was liable to pay 12 shillings, and James Lancey was to pay 10 shillings and sixpence, a difference which reflects their land holdings of 73 acres and 63 acres respectively. Twelve years later in 1842, a similar differential applied to the parish rate due from the two men, who were again listed under Cowley. The census returns of 1841 do not distinguish between the Cowleys, but list under Cowley William Tucker (farmer), William Hill (farmer), Phillip Burgess (farmer) and James Lancey (farmer). All except William Hill, who was aged only 20, have their families, servants and labourers. If we except William Hill, whose status is unclear, it is quite possible to associate William Tucker with Lower Cowley (with which he is identified in the tithe apportionment and the Land-Tax returns) and Phillip Burgess and James Lancey with Higher Cowley/Cowley Estate (Middle Cowley?). The census returns of 1861, moreover, also indicate the presence of two farmers with their families and servants at Higher Cowley, albeit by now no longer Burgess and Lancey.

A study of Kelly's Directory for the years from 1866 to 1939 reveals a story of changing ownership and/or tenancy and a continuation of the theme of dual occupancy. The entry for 1866 shows that Phillip Burgess had moved to Kentisbury Barton, the main Incedon possession in the parish, while Upper Cowley was now in the hands of Thomas Lerwill who is listed alone at this location (though the 1861 census has Jonathan Mogridge also in residence). We may identify this Thomas Lerwill,

aged 38 in 1861, as probably the son of Thomas Lerwill, freeholder of Waytown listed both in the 1830 Poor Rate levy and also in the 1840 tithe assessment. In 1873, Kelly's Directory lists both Thomas Lerwill and Jonathan Mogridge under Upper Cowley. By 1878, Jonathan Mogridge has disappeared from the list of farmers to be replaced by Hagman Brailey who in turn, by 1883, has been replaced by William Lynch. In 1890 and 1893, Richard Latham and John Smith are entered against Upper (in the 1890 version Higher) Cowley. And in 1902 John Smith has been replaced by John Charley. By 1914, Richard Latham has disappeared from the record and John Charley is listed as the sole farmer at Upper Cowley. Up to 1939, Kelly's Directory shows no change in this situation. Twentieth century census returns are not available, but the electoral roll of 1974, for example, shows only a family of Tuckers in occupation at Higher Cowley.

Historical considerations suggest reasons for this continued theme of dual occupancy, but it is difficult to work out the exact relationship between the occupants, which, at various times appears to have been one of equality or one of yeoman farmers and tenants or farm managers. In a sense, the tithe map of 1840 does not help. Here the domestic building at the south end of the range is represented as the smaller, and the fact that it is linked by a "sigma" symbol to the House and Court of Higher Cowley, appears to stress that the building is independently occupied, but is nevertheless of the same property, a fact which it is difficult to reconcile with the history of ownership detailed above.

3.0 Record of the remains of Middle Cowley Farmhouse and attached barn

The house and barn were inspected and recorded on the 12th & 14th June 2002.

3.1 The house:

The remains of the house stand at the south end of the farm buildings that it has been historically associated (fig 9 No.1, fig 4 & 6). It is attached to a barn to the north and is on a north-south orientation with the barn down -slope to the house (fig 10).

The house was two storey, probably gable ended with a chimney stack to the south and measures approximately 14m long by 6m wide.

3.2 Construction:

The construction is generally of lime bonded stone rubble, mostly shale and sandstone, both of which occur locally. The exterior has remains of lime rendering, the interior has been plastered. The first floor walls may have been of cob similar to the construction of Higher Cowley farmhouse (fig 10 & plate 1).

The walls to the west and south appear to be of consistent build, however the wall to the west shows several phases of build. The north end of this wall contains the remains of a brick clove oven which is finished to the north by stones quoins which suggests an opening at this point.

3.3 Layout:

As so little of the building remains and what there is shows several phases of rebuild it has not been possible to demonstrate the original layout. However it would appear that the final layout would have been a central doorway and passage with two rooms on the ground floor both of which were heated, the room to the north possibly a kitchen and to the south a parlour.

3.4 Condition:

Only parts of three walls remain, and these barely to first floor level, the wall between the barn and house having been completely removed. The position of this wall is uncertain but the change of wall thickness (X fig 10) and the partial cob construction (plate 7) would suggest that it ran between (X & X1 fig 10). A large opening has been made in the west wall and the east wall has been rebuilt.

The large majority of the woodwork is missing from the building including the roof timbers, the first floor structure and the window and door frames. A small piece of skirting board remains attached to the chimney breast at first floor level (plate 5).

The condition and construction of the ground floor could not be ascertained.

3.5 The Barn:

The building stands down-slope (to the north) of the ruined house.

The original function of this building is uncertain as a large piece of the east wall has been removed to increase the size of the doorway, however, features in the building would suggest an animal house with a hayloft above.

3.6 Construction:

The walls are constructed of stone rubble with a clay and lime bonding. The walls to the west and north rise to two storeys, to the east the wall is only single storey and to the south the wall is missing.

Lintels over all openings are oak.

A ledge can be seen internally along the west wall that would have carried a first floor and there are loading doors in the north and west walls at first floor level.

The blades of the current roof trusses are of different lengths. This is used to compensate for the difference in height of the east and west walls however it would appear likely that these are reused from another building. The roof is covered with corrugated-iron.

The junction between the house and the barn would suggest that the two buildings were built at different dates (plate 7).

3.7 Layout:

The barn measures approximately 11m long by 6.5m wide and has a small lean-to of similar construction, but of a later date, against the north wall. There are no extant internal divisions.

3.8 Condition:

Only three walls of this building remain (the south wall, between house and barn is missing) and the original roof has been replaced.

Part of the east wall has been removed and partially re-built in concrete block.

4.0 Discussion

On the basis of the documentation available and from a consideration of the landscape context, Higher Cowley Farm appears to be of at least late medieval origin. The distribution of land tenure around the farm, as represented in 1840, suggests that Higher Cowley was once one of two or three farms in a medieval hamlet arrangement. The recorded history of ownership and occupancy at the site variously known as Cowley/Upper Cowley/Higher Cowley strongly indicates the existence of two farmhouses in proximity, one of which may represent a former Middle Cowley. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the curtilage accommodated two families, who may or may not have been equal in status, but who must have worked co-operatively. Documentarily this situation can be shown to have persisted until the first decade of the twentieth century.

The map evidence (figs 3 & 4) shows that in 1840 the site was occupied by two domestic buildings, Higher Cowley farmhouse to the north-west and another domestic building, probably Middle Cowley farmhouse, to the south-east each with their attendant agricultural buildings. Middle Cowley is shown to have a barn attached to the north end and probably represents the structure still standing.

However, the domestic end of this range (fig 4, shown in red), is not the same plan layout as the remains of the building that currently stands on the site. This change in plan can be shown to have occurred between 1930 and 1950 (figs 8 & 9) and although it represents a change of layout it does not appear to interfere with the function of the building.

The large opening in the west wall of the house and the lack of wall between the barn and the house would suggest that the final use of this building was agricultural, possibly a cart or tractor shed.

5.0 Conclusions

Small groups of farms are known to occur in this area of North Devon and the whole of this complex probably is an example. How these groups develop is the subject of on-going research however, the ownership of the land as shown on the tithe map (fig 6) suggest that that the land has been divided between the two farms to give each equal amounts of similar quality land. This could be the result of the division and subsequent ownership of land that was once in communal use or the result of partial inheritance. The date at which this land division occurred could date the building of the first Middle Cowley farmhouse house.

It would appear highly probable that the derelict building that stands to the south of the farm complex known as Higher Cowley farm contains fabric from Middle Cowley farmhouse. It has been shown that this building was occupied at least by 1840 and ceased being in domestic use during the 20th century. The date that the first structure was erected could not be ascertained because of the lack of datable architectural details. However, the final domestic form of the building (between 1930 and 1950) probably was two storey with two rooms on the ground floor with a central doorway and passage.

The relationship of the barn with the house is not certain, although in existence in 1840, but the different build styles would suggest that they were not built at the same date.

6.0 Acknowledgements

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The staff of the Devon County records Office.
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6.1 Abbreviations

DCAS	Devon County Archaeological Services
DCC	Devon County Council
DCNQ	Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries
DRO	Devon Record Office
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record

6.2 Bibliography/Sources

- Gover, J., Mawer, A. & Stenton, F. 1931: The Place-Names of Devon, Cambridge.
- Hoskins, W.G. 1992: edition: Devon, Tiverton.
- Thorn, C. & Thorn, F (eds). 1985: Domesday Book: Devon Parts One & Two, Chichester.
- Collection of records assembled by MSC in the early 1980's.

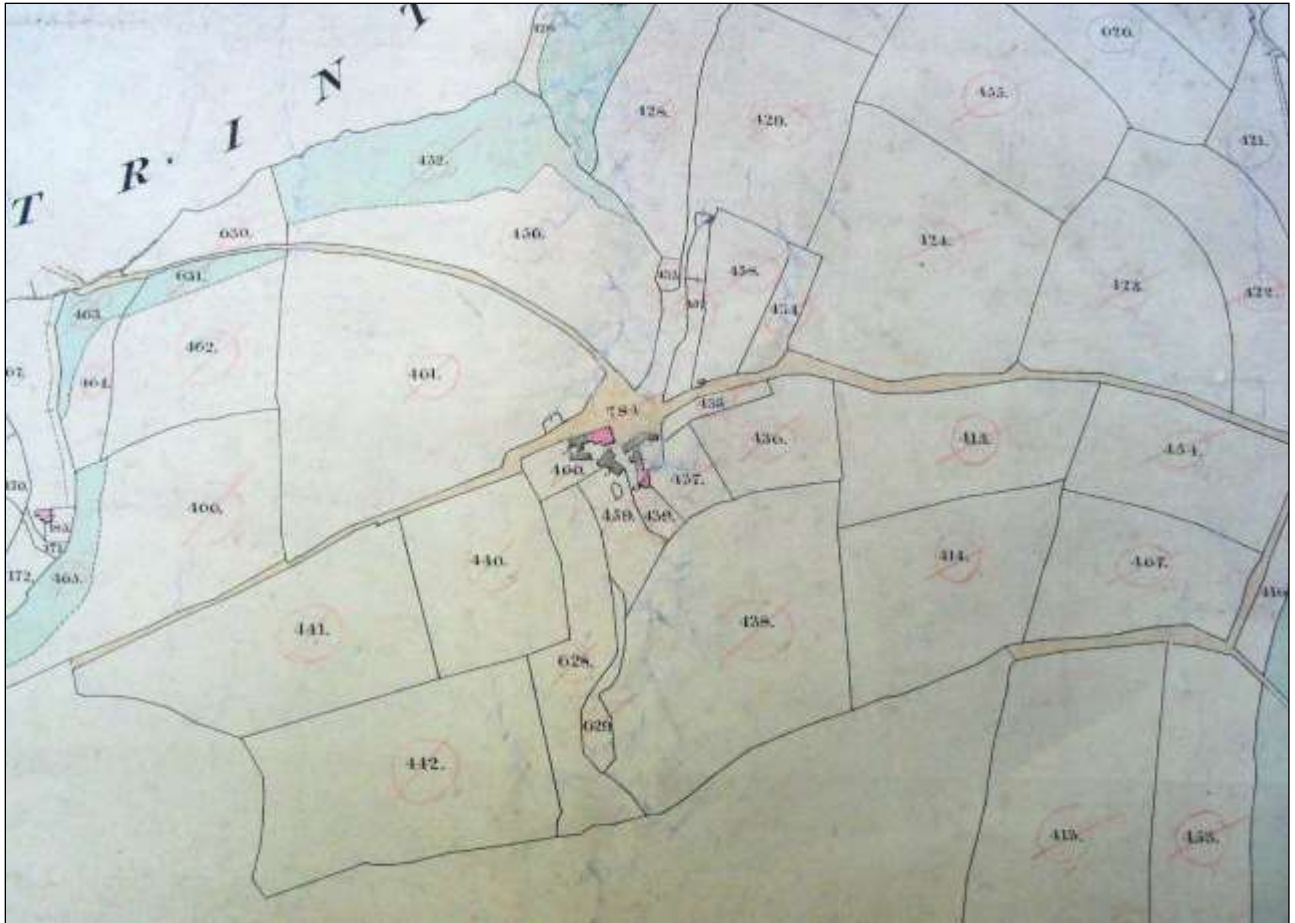


Fig.3: Extract from the tithe map of 1840 (Courtesy: Devon County Records Office)

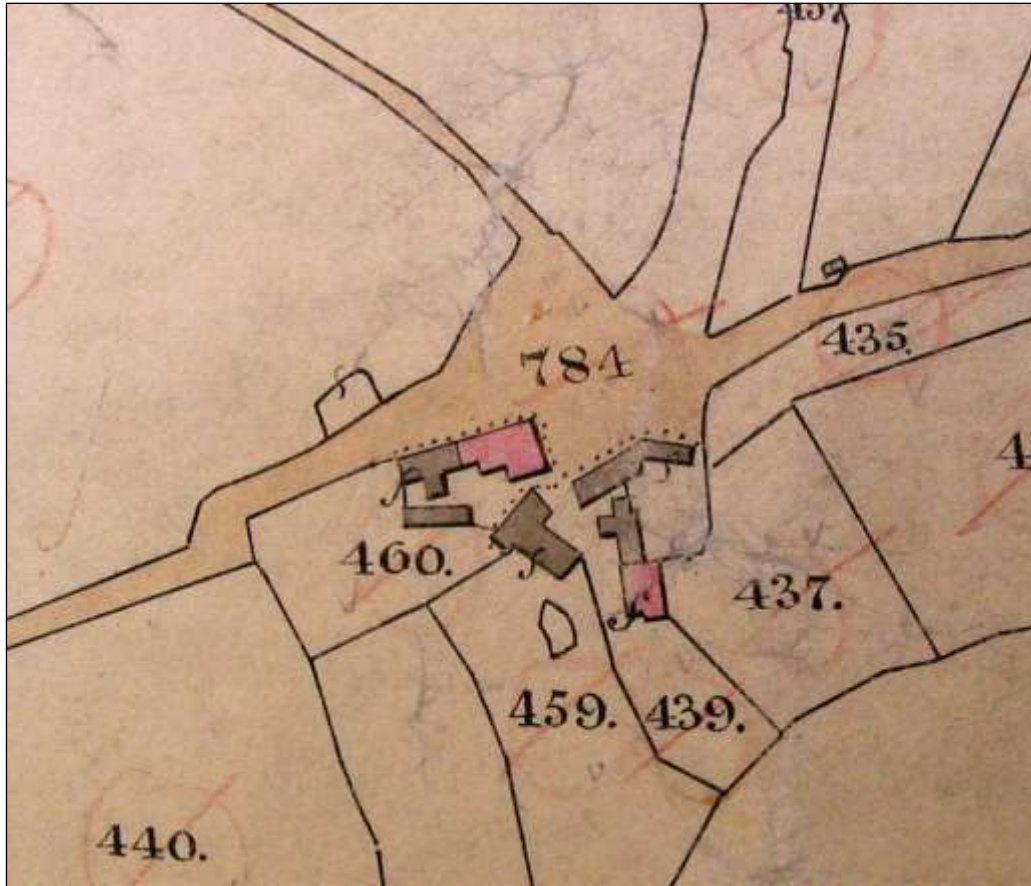


Fig.4: The range of buildings at Higher Cowley as depicted on the tithe map of 1840. Shading in pink indicates a domestic building. (Courtesy Devon County Records Office)

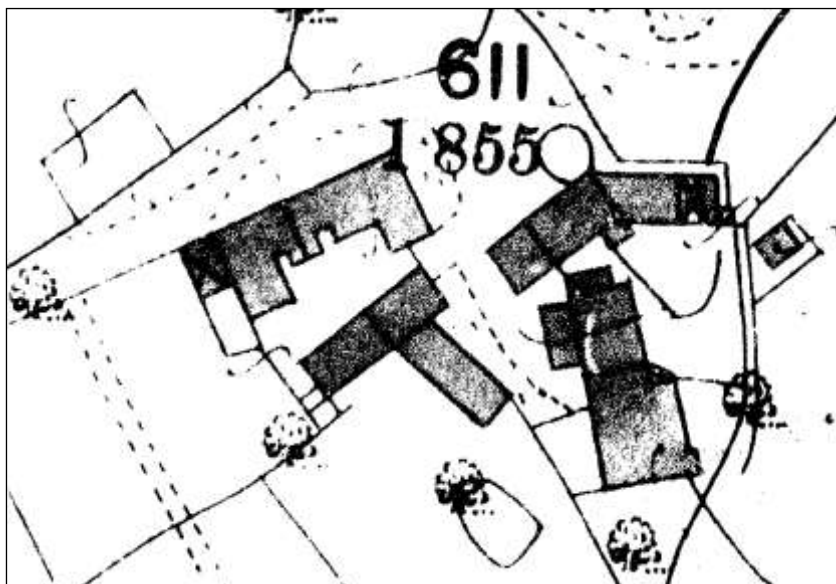


Fig.5: The range of buildings at Higher Cowley as represented on the First Edition 25" OS map produced in 1889. (Here not to scale) (Courtesy North Devon Records Office).

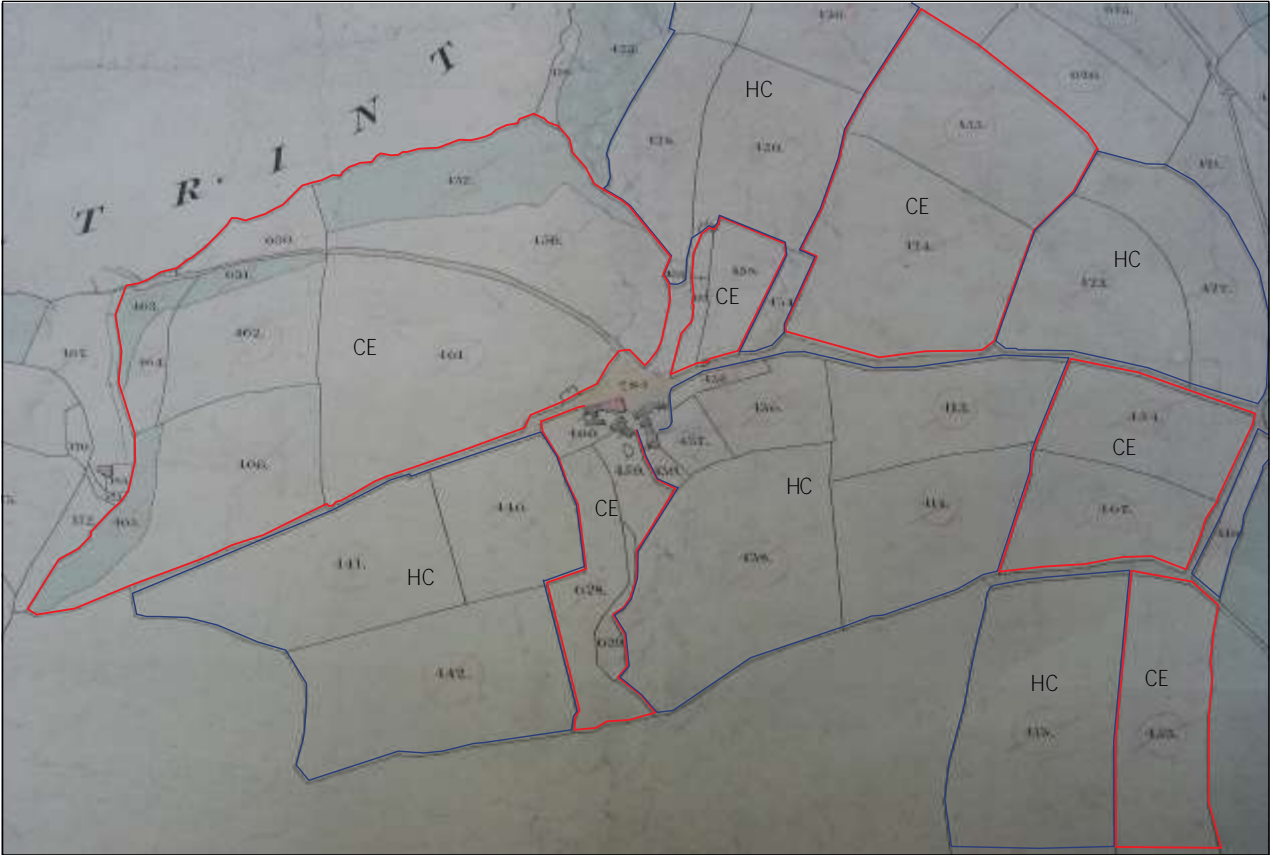


Fig 6 The holdings of Higher Cowley (HC outlined in blue) and Cowley Estate (CE outlined in red) based on information from the title apportionment of 1840

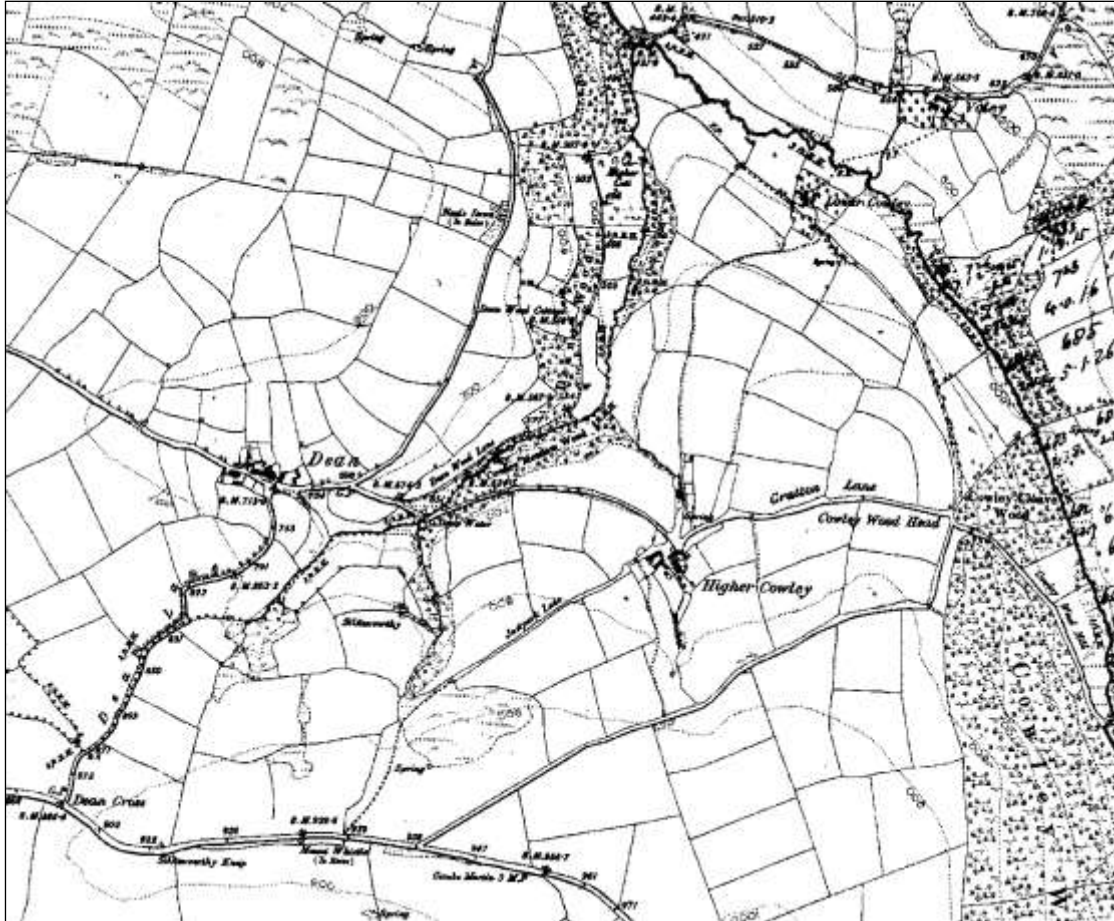


Fig.7: Higher Cowley, Lower Cowley and Dean as shown on the First Edition 6" OS map of 1890. (Here not to scale)
(Courtesy North Devon Records Office)

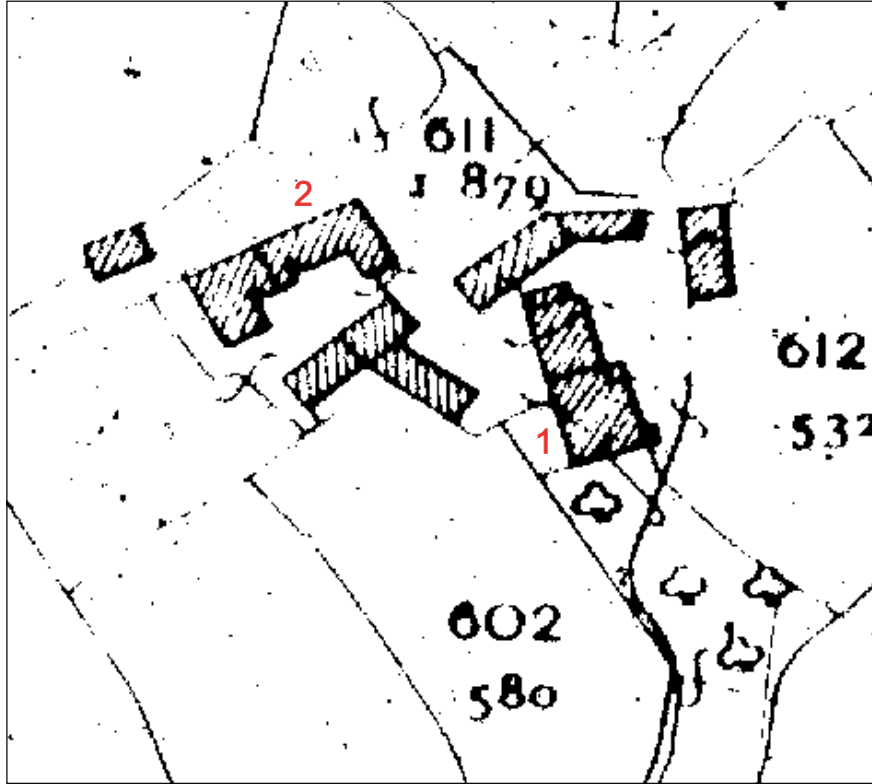


Fig 8 Higher (2) and Middle (1) Cowley as shown on revised 1930 OS map (Not to scale).

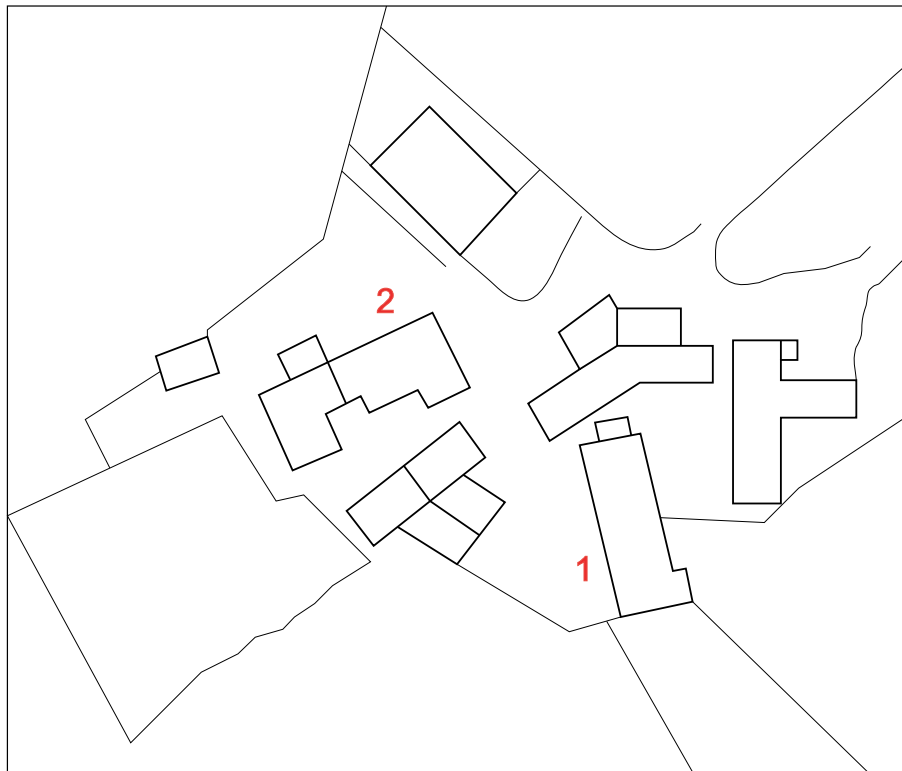


Fig 9 Higher (2) and Middle (1) Cowley shown on 1950 OS map (Not to scale).

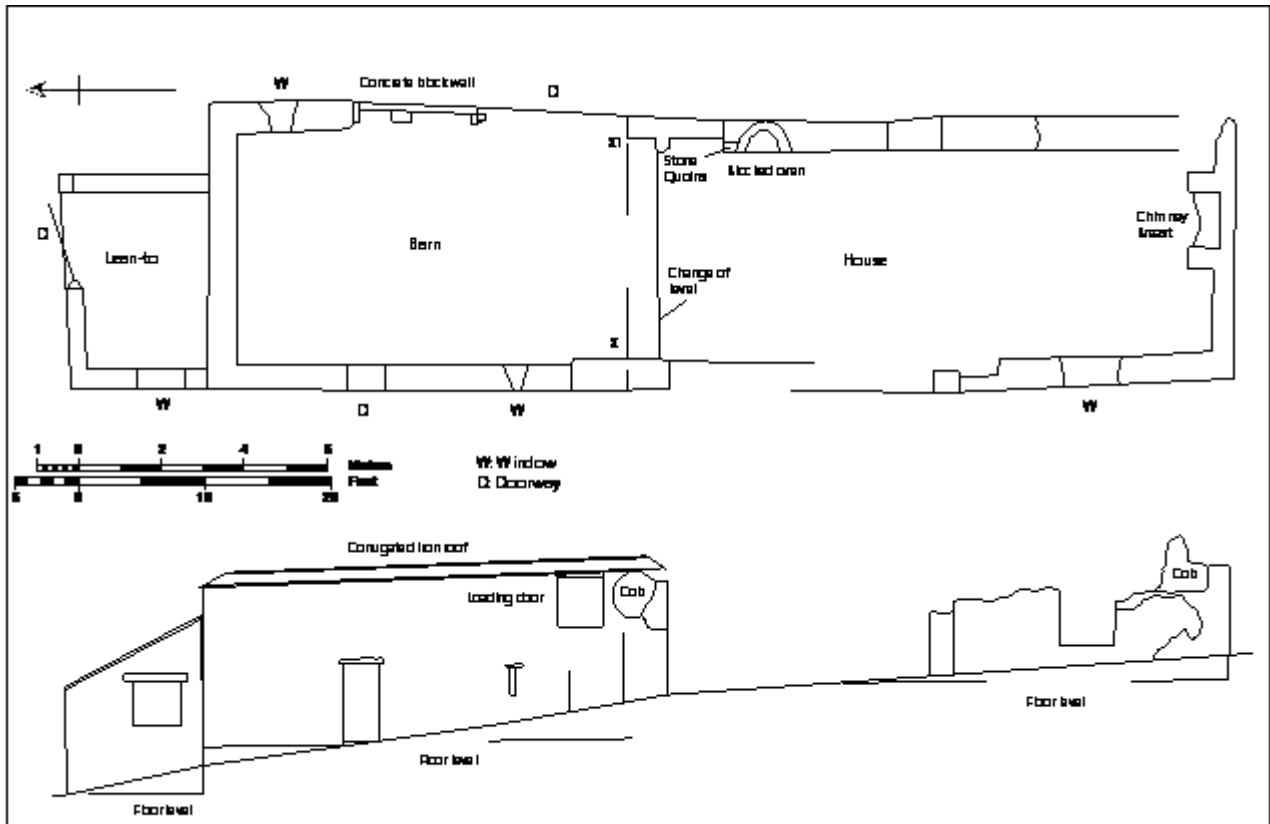


Fig 10 Plan and west elevation of the remains of Middle Cowley Farmhouse and attached barn

8.0 Plates



Plate 1 West wall of the remains of Middle Cowley Farmhouse



Plate 2 General view of the remains of Middle Cowley Farmhouse from east



Plate 3 Interior of east wall showing remains of oven



Plate 4 General view from north



Plate 5 View of chimney stack in south wall. Note skirting board at first floor level.



Plate 6 View of exterior of south wall.



Plate 7 View of junction between the barn and the remains of Middle Cowley farmhouse.



Plate 8 View of west wall of barn.

Appendix 1

Land-Tax returns, 1782 – 1826

Year(s)	Owner	Occupier
1782 to 1790: <i>Cowley</i>	John Nott	John Pugsley
<i>His Part of Cowley</i>	Robert Thomas	Himself
1791 to 1792: <i>Cowley</i>	John Nott	Elizabeth Thomas
<i>Cowley</i>	Henry Beavis	Robert Blackmore
1793 to 1805: <i>Cowley</i>	John Nott	Robert Blackmore
<i>Cowley</i>	Henry Beavis	Robert Blackmore
1806: <i>Cowley</i>	Edward Lancey	Robert Blackmore
<i>Cowley</i>	Henry Beavis	Robert Blackmore
1807 to 1811 <i>Cowley</i>	Edward Lancey	Himself
<i>Cowley</i>	Henry Beavis	Robert Blackmore
1812 to 1825 <i>Cowley</i>	Edward Lancey	Himself
<i>Cowley</i>	Henry Beavis	Naboth Priscott
1826 <i>Cowley</i>	Edward Lancey	James Lancey
<i>Cowley</i>	R.H.Incledon Esq.	Phillip Burgess

Levy for the assistance of the poor 1830

<i>Cowley</i>	Phillip Burgess	James Lancey
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Parish Rate 1842

<i>Cowley</i>	Phillip Burgess	James Lancey
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Tithe Apportionment 1840

<i>Cowley</i>	R.N.Incledon	Phillip Burgess
<i>Cowley Estate</i>	John Nott	James Lancey

Census 1841

Cowley (Higher and Lower not differentiated)

William Tucker, farmer	70 years old
Elizabeth Tucker	60 years old
Ann Tucker	20 years old
William Hill, farmer	20 years old
Phillip Burgess, farmer	50 years old
Elizabeth Burgess	45 years old
9 children	aged 1 – 20
James Lancey, farmer	40 years old
Mary Lancey	55 years old
James Lancey	18 years old

Census 1861

Higher Cowley

Thomas Lerwill, farmer	38 years old
Sarah Jane Lerwill	29 years old
Mary Jane Lerwill	1 year old
Maria Turner, farmer's widow	71 years old
Jonathan Mogridge, farmer	53 years old
Elizabeth Mogridge	52 years old
Ann Dovell	55 years old
2 children	aged 18 and 15

Kelly's Directory

Listing farmers in the parish of Kentisbury, under Upper or Higher Cowley, the Directory has:

1866:	Thomas Lerwill
1873:	Thomas Lerwill and Jonathan Mogridge
1878:	Thomas Lerwill and Hagman Brailey
1883:	Thomas Lerwill and William Lynch
1890:	Richard Latham and John Smith
1893:	Richard Latham and John Smith
1902:	Richard Latham and John Charley
1914:	John Charley
1919 to 1939:	James Tucker