

The Barn, Netherdowns Farm, Weare Giffard, Devon

Heritage Assessment



Heritage Consultancy
SOUTHWEST ARCHAEOLOGY

The Barn, Netherdowns Farm, Weare Giffard, Devon

Historic Building Recording

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a heritage assessment undertaken at Netherdowns Farm on behalf of a Private Client (the Client) instructed by Sam Nolan Architects (the Agent), by South West Archaeology Ltd (SWARCH). The property is a small farm building of stone rubble with a timber-covered cart shed attached, across the road from the Listed GII farmhouse and courtyard at Netherdowns Farm.

Netherdowns Farm consists of a courtyard of agricultural buildings terraced into a shallow west-facing slope south of Bideford, above Weare Giffard in the River Torridge valley. The farmstead is truncated by a road, with two large modern farmyards to the north-east and south-east. The farmhouse is Grade II listed, as are two of the farm buildings upslope to the east; two of the ranges of farm buildings have already been converted into holiday-let accommodation.

This document was drawn up to inform proposals to rationalise and convert a small barn and cart shed into a domestic dwelling.

Client	Private Client
Agent	Sam Nolan Architect
Parish	Weare Giffard, Torridge
County	Devon
NGR	SS 47168 23403 (centroid on roof of barn)
Site Code	WGNF25
Report No.	250407
Version No.	01
Date	190525
Status	Final
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Approved By	S. Walls BA MA PhD. MCIfA
Data Location	SWASERVER/Swarchfiles/ActiveJobs/SwarchLtd/Weare-Giffard-Nethdown-Farm-Barn
OASIS No.	southwes1-534003
Acknowledgements	The owners Sam Nolan (The Agent)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

South West Archaeology Ltd. was instructed by Sam Nolan Architects (the Agent) on behalf of a Private Client (the Client) to undertake a heritage assessment in advance of a proposed planning application for the conversion of a farm building alongside the road at Netherdowns Farm.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The site was visited on the 8th April 2025 by E. Wapshott MCIFA. The assessment was undertaken in accordance with CIfA (2014) and Historic England (2008; 2015; 2016) guidance. Information was recorded on proforma record sheets and located on the current plans. Photographs were taken, both of the exterior elevations and of internal details.

1.3 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Netherdowns Farm consists of a courtyard of agricultural buildings and linear, traditional farmhouse terraced into the upper shallow slopes of the west-facing side of the River Torridge valley, 3.48km south of Bideford, 1.36km north-east of the parish village of Weare Giffard. The soils of the site are the well-drained fine loamy soils over rock of the Neath Association (SSEW 1983), which overlie the sedimentary sandstone of the Bude Formation (BGS 2025).



FIGURE 1: SITE LOCATION. CONTAINS ORDNANCE SURVEY DATA © CROWN COPYRIGHT AND DATABASE RIGHT 2025.

2 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

2.1 DOCUMENTARY BACKGROUND

The site is located in the parish of Weare Giffard, in the hundred of Shebbear and deanery of Hartland. Weare Giffard is a medieval settlement whose origins were speculated upon by 16th century historian and traveller Tristram Risdon as being due to the granting of a licence for a fish weir on the river in antiquity. In fact, records show the village was a fairly prosperous and large settlement by the Domesday Survey of 1086, with 27 households. It was held in 1066 by Ordwulf of Tehidy (Cornwall) and by Roald Dubbed in 1086. Indeed, fisheries are recorded here in this period, as well as meadow, pasture and woodland.

The village had acquired its current name in around the 1200s, as the manor had passed to or been purchased by, the Giffard family¹. A Sir Walter Giffard built its impressive Hall, a partly surviving walled and moated site with large manor house, as well as the Church of the Holy Trinity, of similar date. In the church town settlement there are a few 16th and 17th century cottages and a few small farms and cottages of similar date are scattered south and south-east of the church town but the two satellite settlements further down the valley, at Jopes Bridge and Quayash, largely developed in the Post Medieval period, as the river provided water power for several large mills. A lime burning industry also developed and the population of the village peaked in the 1840s-1860s.

The manor descended through Sir Walter Giffard's daughter to the Trewin (de Wear) family to the Densylls and then the notable Devon Fortescue family². Lady Elizabeth, the daughter of the 5th Earl, who inherited the estate after his death in AD 1958 sold the manor in 1960s. Much of the land on the east side of the wider area belonged to the Rolle family of nearby Petrockstowe; the

Fortescue family had married into the local ancient Yeo family, all of whom are represented by some fine tombs in the church at Weare Giffard.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) for this area documents the high pastures above the valley as being *medieval enclosures* and the steep wooded slopes as *ancient woodland*, again likely originating in the medieval period. The larger fields in the river valley are recorded as *post-medieval enclosures*, laid out in the 18th and 19th centuries. The HLC also records the loss of historic orchards in the valley bottom near Quayash and medieval enclosures and 'other' woodland on the west bank of the river.

2.2 CARTOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

The site is first recorded on the 1804 Hartland OS surveyors draft map, this identifies a small settlement at Netherdown and indicates at least three separate enclosures, both west and east of the main road, with multiple buildings set around staggered cross-roads. A small block, coloured red is located next to the road in the broad location of the barn.



FIGURE 2: 1804 HARTLAND OS SURVEYORS DRAFT , THE FARMSTEAD IS INDICATED (BL).



FIGURE 3: 1839 TITHE MAP, CROPPED TO SHOW BUILDINGS OF THE FARMYARD, IN DETAIL (TNA).

The 1839 Weare Giffard tithe map provides more detail on individual buildings. It shows an approximately east-west oriented linear building south of the road. The 1837 tithe apportionment shows that the current farm was formed from two historic farmsteads *Higher Netherdown* and *Lower Netherdown*. Higher Netherdown was part of the Rolle estates, Lower Netherdown part of the Fortescue estates. Each farm was also subdivided into several tenancies.

The tithe apportionment information has been transcribed into the table below (Table 1), the highlighted sections relate to the land-ownership map included above (Figure 4). Plot 230, which encloses the barn subject to this study was described as *house & garden* and noted as *garden* under the cultivation column. It was rented by William Alford who held much of the land to the north and west of the farmstead and south of the road, to the west, as well as the farmhouse –all part of the *Lower Netherdown* holding, held in part by both the Fortescue and Rolle estates.

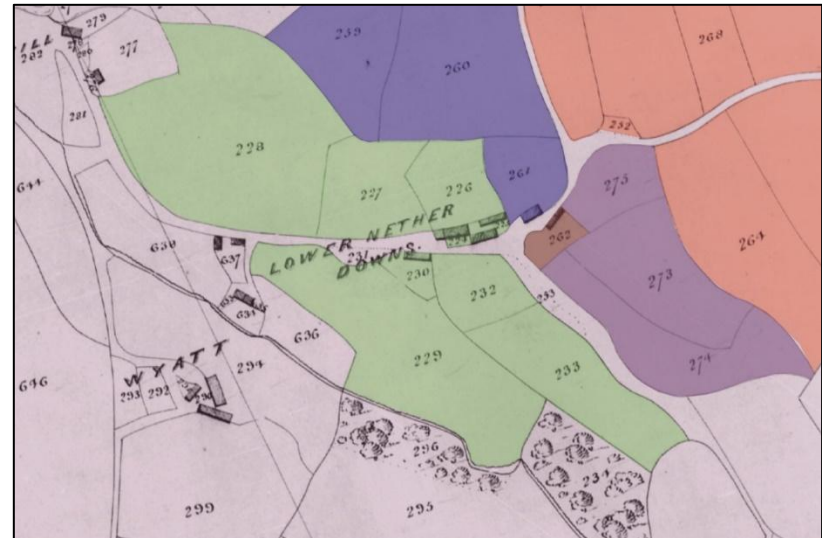


FIGURE 4: TITHE MAP DETAIL OF THE LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE FARMYARD. THE OWNERS ARE: EARL FORTESCUE, TENANT WILLIAM ALFORD, LORD ROLLE, TENANT WILLIAM PARKHOUSE, LORD ROLLE, TENANT WILLIAM SPEARMAN, LORD ROLLE, TENANT WILLIAM ALFORD (TNA, ANNOTATED BY SWARCH).

TABLE 1: 1837 TITHE APPORTIONMENT INFORMATION.

Plot No.	Landowner	Occupier	Holding Name	Plot Name	Cultivation
224	Right Honourable Earl Fortescue	William Alford	Lower Netherdown	Houses and Courtledge	--
225				Houses and Courtledge	--
226				Higher Orchard	Orchard
227				Lower Orchard	
228				Ley	Arable
229				Ley Park	Meadow
230				House and Garden	Garden
231				Waste	--
232				Little Meadow	Meadow
233				Ley Meadow	
245	Town Park	Arable			
252	Right Honourable Earl Fortescue	William Spearman	Lower Netherdown	Waste	--
259	Lord Rolle	William Alford	Higher Netherdown	Hoary Meadow	Pasture

2.3 CENSUS OVERVIEW

Netherdowns is recorded in the 1841 census, as a farming hamlet of several households, one being occupied by William Alford and his wife Susannah and his four children and three live-in farm servants. Thomas Bryant is also recorded as living in a separate household. In 1851 *Netherdown* is still shown as occupied by the Alford family and several farm staff.

In 1861, there are two entries for *Higher Netherdowns*. One household is under John Shortridge, a farm labourer and his wife Ann and two children. The other household is Grace Beer, a widow, who is a glovemaker and her three children. *Lower Netherdowns* is listed separately, occupied by William Alford's son, also William, with his wife Eliza and their son John. William's mother, lived with them; the Alford's were still at Lower Netherdowns in 1871.

A separate household of *Netherdowns Cottage* is noted on the 1871 census record, lived in by William Warman, a bargeman and his wife, Mary, a char woman. '*Part of Higher Netherdowns*' was occupied by Grace Beer, widow and glove-maker, with her children. The other '*part of Higher Netherdowns*' was occupied by Thomas Hartnoll and his wife Mary Anne and their daughter.

In 1881 *Netherdown Cottage* is occupied by John Luxton, farm labourer and his wife Rosina and six children. Grace Beer and Thomas Hartnoll were both recorded living at *Bryant's Cottage*, instead of '*part of Higher Nertherdowns*', this is of note as Thomas Bryant is recorded as occupying Higher Netherdown farmhouse on the tithe apportionment and 1841 census so may suggest a colloquial reference to the same building. Neither Lower Netherdowns or Higher Netherdowns are listed separately, but it is to be noted that a lot of new names of properties seem to be added to this census.

In 1891 a farmstead recorded as *Halspill-Netherdown* was occupied by Charles Friend, noted as a farmer. He lived with his wife Rachel, three children and three live-in farm servants. In 1901, the holding of *Netherdown* is shown as occupied by Thomas Grigg, 29, a farmer, the current owner's ancestor. Thomas lived at the farm with his wife Minnie, their daughter and three farm servants.

The census suggests the 'house' noted on the tithe apportionment in plot 230 may have been occupied by a farm servant and been grouped in with Lower Netherdowns holding, possibly briefly becoming *Netherdowns Cottage*, as a separately tenanted entity and then falling out of use and being remodelled in the later 19th century back into an agricultural building, post 1880s in the agricultural depression.

It also confirms a fairly typical regional narrative of a small hamlet, with several households slowly reverting to a single farm holding, over time, historic dwellings becoming abandoned and eventually reverting to use as farm buildings, now derelict.

2.4 HISTORIC AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The garden depicted on the title apportionment survived into the 20th century and was extant on mid 20th century aerial images (not illustrated). The wedge-shaped domestic character garden, enclosed by hedge-banks can be seen to survive until the late 1970s on other aerial photographs held by the family. On the 1999 aerial photographs, the bank can still be seen even though the hedge has been removed (Figure 7), and the garden reverted to pasture – the site is now largely levelled and ploughed out – opened-up to the field.



FIGURE 7: 1999 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH (GET MAPPING: MILLENNIAL MAPPING).

2.5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Netherdowns Farm is recorded on the Devon HER as a farmstead recorded on the 19th century mapping. Netherdowns Farmhouse is also individually noted so on the HER (MDV96614) and Grade II listed (UID: 1105109). The farm building to the south-east of the

farmhouse is also Grade II listed (UID: 1105110), as well as the former dwelling to the east, upslope, which is also Grade II listed (UID: 1305511). A Mesolithic artefact scatter (MDV11849) was recovered from the orchard fields immediately behind the farmstead in the 1970s and included cores, unretouched blades, flakes and scrapers. It is recorded as being presented to Torquay Museum.

This suggests a fairly typical regional tale of a relict prehistoric landscape and relict medieval farming landscape surviving in part beneath the post-medieval landscape of enclosure. There has been substantial terracing around the farm to build on flat surfaces, and it is likely that in and around the buildings earlier deposits were lost long ago, although more recent occupational deposits, like rubbish pits might survive.

For the barn specifically, the cart shed clearly exposes the bedrock within its footprint and the stone building has been cut down into the bedrock with a lime and concrete floor, possibly some cobbles, but there is likely to be little to no overburden of soil to contain archaeological deposits. The ground behind in the historic garden has been built up and is likely to contain soil and debris from kitchen midden 'spreading' activity. The archaeological potential of the site is therefore considered to be relatively low.

3 HERITAGE ASSESSMENT OF THE FARM BUILDINGS

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE FARM BUILDINGS

3.1.1 PLAN OF THE FARM BUILDINGS

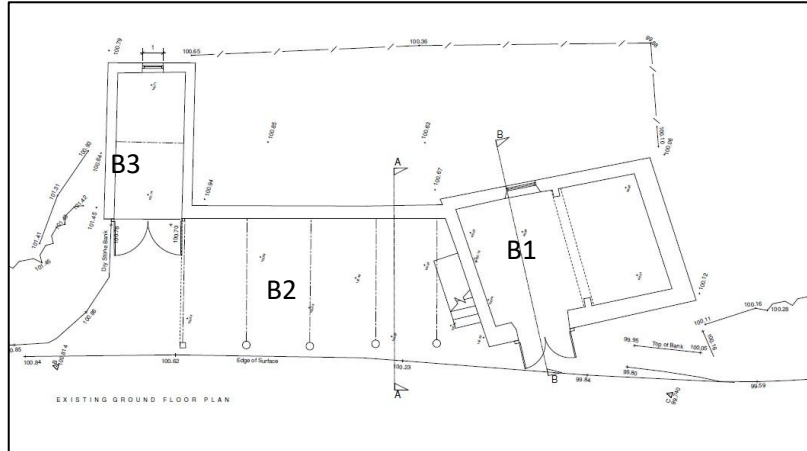


FIGURE 8: EXTRACT OF THE EXISTING FLOOR-PLAN, BY DEBORAH SOMERVILLE CHARTERED ARCHITECTS, ANNOTATED BY SWARCH.

3.1.2 SUMMARY OF THE BUILDINGS

The complex of buildings comprises an irregular L-shaped range, to the west is a small two storey building, which now presents as a granary (B1) but has relatively complex structural phasing within its stone rubble walls. This is served by a good set of late 19th century granary steps. To the middle is an open-fronted cart shed (B2), framed by a stone rubble wall to the rear. Perpendicular to B2 and projecting into the field, a small stone rubble garage, with timber front is vernacular in appearance but 20th century in date.

3.1.3 B1 – TWO-STOREY GRANARY FARM BUILDING

Two storey, stone rubble and cob-built farm building, now presenting as a granary.

3.1.4 EXTERIORS

The north wall is of two phases of stone rubble, the lower build to the west is a heavier, denser packed build, shaped slabs, semi-coursed, in an earth and lime mortar, with a slight batter to the profile. The base of the wall is thicker than the raise above, forming the impression of a slight ledge, this lower level is also slightly battered to the north-west corner.

The lower stonework has remnants of limewash or whitewash. The stonework above is of a looser, platey build, in a whiter, lime-dominant mortar. This ‘newer’ build frames the forced double cart door in the north wall. There is a straight line at first floor suggestive of an altered opening within this build as well.

There is a large structural crack on the north-west corner, which is reflected in cracking in the roof and slipped slates. The roof is of graded slates, with terracotta ridge tiles.



FIGURE 9: THE NORTH WALL OF B1; FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



FIGURE 10: THE WEST AND SOUTH ELEVATION OF B1; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

The west elevation is again of heavier build, this elevation even more pronounced than on the north elevation, with definite battered profile, bracing onto the slope. The older semi-coursed build is the same wrapping around from the north – representing earlier fabric, in an earth bond, with lime pointing. Once again this is raised in looser stone rubble, in a whiter lime mortar, later repointed in cement.

The earlier ground floor stonework has two straight lines and therefore maybe a rebuilt/infilled opening, on the first floor there is a later window, with brick reveals and segmental lintel, which is low and wide and is clearly altered from a larger window, with loose repairs above. The south-west corner has a large crack which has fairly recently been stitched-repaired. The eaves have been replaced with folded tin to waterproof the first floor. The upper part of the gable is repointed in cement mortar.

The south elevation retains some older fabric to the ground floor west end, but more of this elevation has been rebuilt in the newer style of stonework. Within the newer stonework there is a small window with brick reveals and segmental brick lintel, at ground floor, at the east end. The slate roof is patched here with corrugated sheets, repairing several holes. The south-east corner has ragged toothed stones which suggests the wall of B2 beyond is a rebuild of a linear range.

The east elevation is enclosed within B2, the open-sided cart shed. It is of external rubble stone, but the internal face shows the upper portion is at least partly cob. The lower portion of the wall is of heavier build, once again of neater semi-coursed build, of shaped stones.

3.1.5 INTERIORS

The ground floor interior has historic limecrete floors, patched with cement, laid directly on the bedrock. The walls have historic lime

plaster and lime wash in places but is now mostly exposed stone. A large historic chamfered beam of massive form braces the loft floor, set on brick piers, which project out from the walls, in cement mortar – this timber is likely reused from another building on the farm, of older patina and adze shaped, its scantling much heavier than usual – it may well be reused from a horse engine. The joists of the floor above are onside and machine sawn, as are the even-width floorboards – all generic late 19th or early-mid 20th century form. No other fittings survive in this space, and it is currently used as a storeroom.

The first floor is accessed via an external stone granary stair on the east elevation of B1, clearly abutting the east wall, a secondary phase feature, whilst this is predominantly stone and slate, it also has some brick in the build. This leads to a doorway forced in the upper apex of the gable, with a narrow timber lintel and pegged doorframe. The A-frame trusses have an iron bar kingpost, the collars morticed into the chunky blades, with bolted joints, of generic later 19th century form. The slates of the roof sit on chunky battens directly on the back of the rafters. Within the roofline, the eaves have been built up internally with clear build line to the tops of the walls and the top of the apex of the west gable is also clearly raised and rebuilt. The east wall is of lime-plastered cob at first floor, again raised in a loose rubble. There are a lot of historic hessian grain sacks stored in the loft, of interest, but no surviving historic fittings.

3.1.6 B2

A single storey, open-fronted cart shed, with heavy, vernacular, adze shaped timber posts alongside the road which sit on shaped stone peds, with heavy plank wall-plate above. The first, third and fourth posts are particularly authentic, hand-shaped and may again have been recycled from elsewhere on the farm, the second and fifth posts are machine sawn, planed smooth and with chamfered

edges. Rag slate roof, with terracotta ridge tiles, carried on A-frame trusses, of slight scantling with bolted joints. The rear wall is of loose, platey stone, a mix of sandstones and shales-mudstones, in a lime-dominant mortar. This is of two clear phases of build but both about the south elevation of B1 and B2 appears to be a rebuild of the east end of the original range.

To the west B2 abuts B1, enclosing the granary steps, to the east, the gable is enclosed above by elm plank boarding, of replacement 20th century date.



FIGURE 11: B2, THE OPEN-FRONTED CART SHED; FROM THE NORTH-EAST.

3.1.7 B3

Stone rubble, single storey garage, with shallow sloping mono-pitch roof. Timber plank boarded pair of doors to front. Concrete floor. Window in rear wall recycled a two light 19th century window frame. Very loose, haphazard build, thick lime and cement mix mortar, brick quoins to south-east and south-west corners.



FIGURE 12: B3, THE LONG EAST WALL, SHOWING BRICK QUINS AND CORRUGATED TIN SHEETING FOR ROOF; FROM THE EAST.



FIGURE 13: THE INTERIOR OF THE GARAGE, B3; FROM THE NORTH.

3.2 SIGNIFICANT FEATURES IN THE FARM BUILDINGS

The granary steps of **B1** are common in traditional farm buildings in this region but these are a good example. Their relatively late date – presumably developed in the later 19th century, is shown by the presence of bricks in the build. The massive, chamfered beam, which now carries the granary loft in B1 may well have been reused from some of the earlier buildings on this farmstead, several of which date to the late medieval or 17th century. It is of interest but reused in this location – associated with the conversion of this former dwelling into a granary, post-1850.

The posts in **B2** are of good vernacular form, sat on large sandstone pads, the first, third and fourth posts are likely original. The second and fifth posts are obviously machine-sawn, so are likely later replacements, but still sit on the historic stone pads. The carpentry of B2 is treated with traditional agricultural bitumen-tar for waterproofing, being next to the road, which is a good aesthetic element. There are no features of interest to be found in **B3**.

3.3 NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARM BUILDINGS

B1 contains the earliest fabric in the range – the north-west corner and base of the north and west walls contain the remains of a much earlier post-medieval building (Phase 1) – of unknown form or function, but seemingly once a ‘house’. This appears on the 1804 surveyors draft map and so is likely a pre-1800 workers cottage.

The rest of B1 represents a later 19th century phase (Phase 2), forming a granary and store. This change dates to the post-tithe period, as it is still recorded as a house on the 1841 census and tithe apportionment, it may still be a house in the 1870s. The south-east corner has toothed stones suggesting this part of the building was once part of a longer range.

B2 is a wholly mid-late 19th century rebuild (Phase 3), likely post 1870, as it abuts the altered raise to B1 – it is unclear if it is represented on the tithe map, or First Edition OS map – only the First Edition details the open front, with its dashed lines, so we know it definitely existed by 1886, when this map was surveyed.

The raise on this building (Phase 4), and therefore presumably the alteration to the roofline occurred sometime after it was built and before the garage was built, providing a broad span of time c.1870s – 1946, but the use of lime mortars and retention of vernacular build would suggest a date before or around c.1900.

B3 is not present on the 2nd edition OS map of 1904 but is possibly on the 1946 aerial photography (Phase 5).

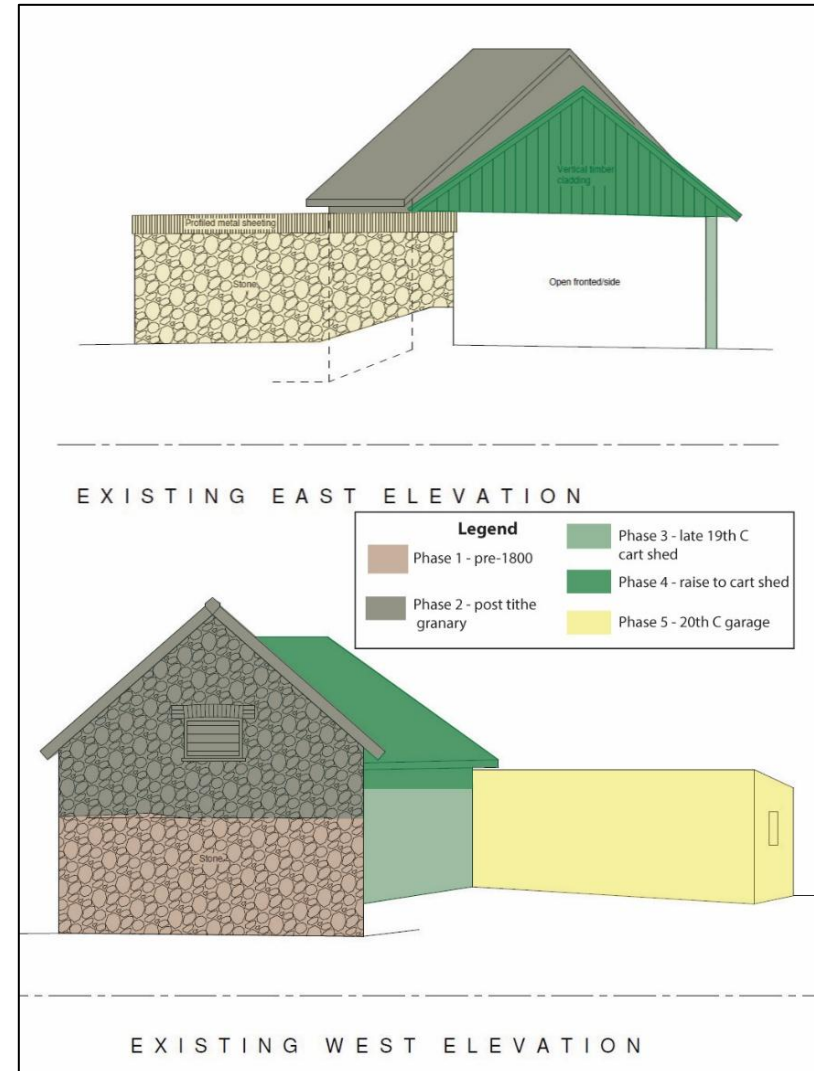


FIGURE 14: EAST AND WEST ELEVATIONS, BLOCK-PHASING, ANNOTATED BY SWARCH BASED ON DEBORAH SOMMERVILLE PLANS.

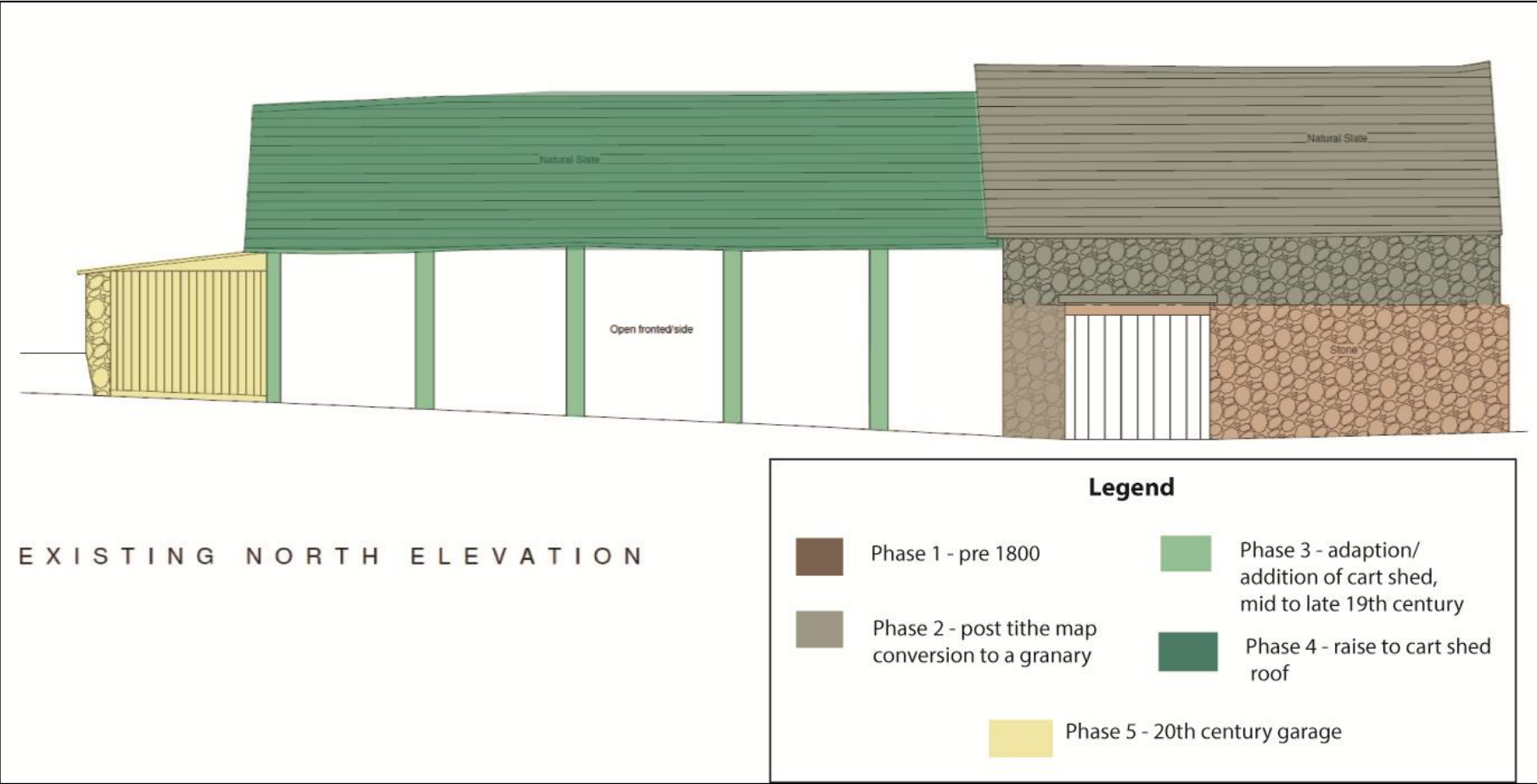


FIGURE 15: INTERPRETATIVE BLOCK-PHASED DIAGRAM OF THE NORTH ELEVATION OF THE FARM BUILDINGS, SHOWING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RANGE, OVER TIME (PLANS BY DEBORAH SOMMERVILLE ARCHITECTS, ANNOTATED BY SWARCH).

4 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of a heritage asset as defined by NPPF is defined as *'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic, or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.'* (NPPF). Historic England describes significance through four values: evidential, historical, aesthetic, and communal (Historic England 2008).

This building can be classified as a non-designated heritage asset, as it is present on the 1804 and 1839 tithe maps, at least elements of the building are of pre-1800 date and is of local, traditional form. The timber-framed cart shed, B2, is of particularly good form with some surviving adze cut vernacular posts.

The building has relatively good agricultural aesthetics, appearing authentic, even if its current appearance reflects significant phases of change and not its domestic dwelling origin. The current building has a high level of integrity, but no internal fittings remain. The building also contributes positively to the setting of the Listed farmhouse and other farm buildings. It has no known individual historical-associative value but does have illustrative value – clearly identifiable for its various functions, cart-shed, and granary.

4.2 SENSITIVITY TO CHANGE

The building positively contributes to the agricultural character of the farmstead, as it frames the roadside and curates the experience

as one drives through the site. Therefore, the aesthetics of the barn are important, as well as its character. Even if it is to be converted it should remain visibly a barn in origin, *"whilst a barn can become a home, it should never look like a house"*. Key to this will be finding a way to practically glaze the cart shed space, whilst reasonably balancing for stone clipping from passing traffic, ideally any glazing would be set back behind the posts, which must be retained, to maintain the visual appearance.

With regards to footprint, size and rooflines, if it is to be developed, it would be expected that this would be enacted within the current footprint and spatial mass of the building, any subsequent dwelling being of proportionate size – the accommodation must respond to the existing building - a small percentage of space could be gained on the rear field-side, if carefully designed, to link the cart shed and garage buildings, so that all of the space can be effectively used. The break in rooflines between the various elements of the building must be retained to ensure the narrative of development through time.

Otherwise, although some of the fabric in the building is of some age, surprisingly even pre-1800 in places, it is substantially altered, indeed reconverting this into a home, will in some way 'restore' its earlier function. Significant features should be engaged with positively to ensure retention of character in any design but there is significant flexibility for change within the envelope of the building, as long as the facades are respected. There may be flexibility to recreate a ground floor opening to the west elevation and discussion with some level of non-domestic character opening to the south wall of B2.

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<https://maps.nls.uk/>

6 PLATE-LIST FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE BELOW:

Plate 1 – B1-3, shown as an L-shaped range; from the south-east.

Plate 2- B1 – south elevation, showing window with brick reveals; from the south.

Plate 3 – B1 – the west gable end, with first floor window; from the west.

Plate 4 – B1 – the east elevation, seen enclosed by B2; from the east.

Plate 5- The stone granary steps of B1; from the north.

Plate 6 – Interior GF of B1, showing recycled heavy beam carrying loft floor on brick piers; from the north-east.

Plate 7 – The window in B1, south wall at GF, showing remains of frame and shutters, from the north.

Plate 8- The first floor of B1, with the first-floor window and timber shutter; from the east.

Plate 9 – The narrow timber lintel and pegged doorframe, with iron pintles, leading to the first floor of B1, within the cob east upper wall; from the south-west.

Plate 10 – The two-phase south wall of B2; form the south-east.

Plate 11- The inner face of the south wall, again showing the phasing; from the east.

Plate 12 – The A-frames over B2; from the east.

Plate 13 – The exposed bedrock which forms the ‘floor’ of B2; from the east.

Plate 14 – The mix of historic and replacement timber posts, the sit on stone pads supporting the wall plate at the front of B2; from the east.







¹ Lysons, D. and Lysons, S. 1822: Magna Britannia Volume 6: Devonshire.

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² Ibid

