

**CANONSLEIGH BARTON
BURLESCOMBE
DEVON**

**HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL
OF REDUNDANT FARM BUILDINGS**

December 2011

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Cullompton
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Project CBB206/2011

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Contents

Introduction	1
Location	1
Historical background	1
General description of the buildings	2
Discussion and dating	4
Requirement for further recording	4
Acknowledgements	4
References and sources	4
Figures	5
Photographs	9

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Introduction

This appraisal has been compiled to form an historic building evaluation of two disused agricultural buildings at Canonsleigh Barton, Halberton, at the request of Ben Webb of Randell Burton Architects, on behalf of the building owners. It is based on the method statement submitted to Devon County Council Historic Environment Service on 5 October 2011 (DCC HES ref ARCH/DM/MD/18196)

A site visit to examine the buildings was made by Martin and Sue Watts on 1 November 2011. Background and other relevant information have been compiled from a variety of sources, which are referenced and acknowledged.

The barns, which have unusual arched entrances facing each other across a small yard, are sited to the east of Canonsleigh Barton Farmhouse, which is listed Grade II. The Grade I listed priory gatehouse is some distance away, to the north-east. The principal objective of this assessment is to evaluate the barns in order to determine the impact of any subsequent development and alteration works upon their historic fabric and any archaeological works required in mitigation for this impact.

A digital copy of the evaluation will be uploaded onto the OASIS (Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS) database under the reference martinwa1-111350.

Accession number 11/61 has been obtained from the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, for future deposit of the site archive.

The drawings attached are based on a survey made by Tor Surveys Limited in January 2011, for Randell Burton Architects and are used with their permission.

Location (Figure 3)

The barns are situated to the east of the former Canonsleigh Priory, now Barton, farmhouse, on the south-east side of an open yard, NGR ST 0668 1739. They form part of Canonsleigh Farm and are currently disused. The buildings stand on level ground at a little over 95m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is limestone and there are extensive quarries immediately to the north of the site.

Historical background

No detailed historical work has been undertaken for the preparation of this appraisal. The priory of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist was founded as a house of Augustinian canons by Walter de Claville in about 1161. In 1284 it became a house of Augustinian nuns. There were an abbess and 17 nuns when the priory was dissolved in 1539 (DCC HER 1465; Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 152; 279). The buildings were largely destroyed and a manor house built on the site after the dissolution. By the end of the 19th century the ruins of the priory had fallen into considerable decay, much building material having been removed for re-use. Little now survives of the priory buildings, other than the gatehouse and the reredorter (identified on OS maps as 'Mill', Figure 2) to

the north-east of the present farm buildings and the ground plan of the claustral buildings, including the position of the church, has not been fully resolved.

In 1800 the ruins were visited by the antiquary, the Reverend John Swete, part of whose description is relevant to the farm buildings which form the subject of this appraisal: *'South west from the Ruin, forming an office in the farm yard I discovered the antient Gateway... now, no longer employed in the functions of its designation, but blocked up on its western side by a shed of modern date, for the reception and feeding of cattle, into whose several stalls there was admission by apertures of circular arches, excepting in a portion of somewhat greater elevation where there was a doorway, whose arch was pointed, and in unison with the windows of the gateway. Much is it to be regretted, at least by those who are Amateurs of antient Architecture, that so fine a Specimen as this must have appeared to be in its perfect state, should have been... yet so injured and defaced by the mean buildings attached to it.'* (Gray (ed) 2000, 193-4).

An accompanying watercolour by John Swete illustrates a range of single-storey farm buildings which are of comparable appearance to those described below (see Figure 4).

General description of the farm buildings (see Figure 7)

The buildings that form the subject of this appraisal comprise two single-storey animal houses. They are orientated north-west – south-east; for the purposes of this report they are referred to as the west and east ranges, their orientation being simplified as north-south. Their principal elevations both have three semi-circular headed arched openings with stone voussoirs, facing each other across a small yard. Both buildings are of similar construction and appearance, with coursed squared stone walls of Canonsleigh limestone bedded in a clay/lime mortar. Both buildings are now roofed with corrugated metal sheeting with a formed metal ridge. On plan the west building is about 18.3m x 3.5m internally, the east 20.3m x 3.5m; both are divided into three bays by stone cross walls. The yard between them is about 6m wide. It was formerly enclosed by a wall at the south end and short walls and wide gates at the north end (see Figures 5 & 6). The remains of the walls are standing at the south end and at the north end both barns show where the wall has been removed and the masonry on the corners roughly made good. At the south end both barns have low walls projecting from their gable ends, with modern gates hung between them. There is no evidence of hinges or door mountings in any of the arched openings.

West range

Exterior:

The west external wall of the west range was not accessible and its north end was partly inaccessible and covered with ivy.

Interior:

Bay 1 (south) has a raised concrete floor divided into two animal pens by a concrete blockwork partition. The stone walls are whitewashed. A modern lightweight roof structure has replaced the original structure, with a central triangular softwood frame, with purlins carrying corrugated metal sheet. The wall head on the west side has been built up with plasterboard and foam.

Bay 2 (middle) has a concrete floor, not stepped up as in bay 1, but sloping up quite steeply, in a rounded curve, from yard level. The bay is divided into two by a central concrete block wall and there is a metal water trough on the east side at its south end.

The original roof truss survives, comprising a tie beam 17cm deep x 15cm wide, which bears above centre of arch on yard (east) side and on top of rear wall, on which the feet of the principals sit. The form of joint between the tie beams and principals was unclear. The principals are of rustic appearance, being sparingly converted from small trees (hardwood), lapped and notched at the apex. There are two rows of purlins to each slope; the purlin timbers are in short sections splay-scarfed together and run over the backs of principals. There are remains of common rafters and some battens, the slopes being clad with corrugated metal sheeting, with a clear plastic panel close to the ridge on the west slope. The lower part of the west slope has been repaired with plasterboard and foam.

Bay 3 (north). The floor is largely obscured by timber and debris, but appears to be concrete. There is an oil tank on concrete block piers against south wall. A doorway opening in north gable end, east side, 80cm wide, with a plain timber lintel some 30cm above east wall head level, appears to be a later insertion. An inserted blockwork wall which projects southwards from the north gable, adjacent to door opening, formerly supported a framework for a storage loft area. The walls are whitewashed. There is a central truss similar to bay 2, but the tie beam has been sawn off close to the walls at both ends. The principals are of hardwood, sparingly converted, about 17cm deep x 11cm wide. A secondary collar, 14cm deep, has been neatly pegged on north face of principals. There are two rows of purlins to each roof slope, in short lengths scarf jointed together, as in bay 2. The ridge purlin is of square section, set on the diagonal. There are seven common rafters to the west slope and six to the east. There are also remains of cleft battens on the west slope. The feet of the rafters on east slope sit on a chamfered timber plate that projects beyond the wall face, a neat detail. This is extant on bays 2 and 3, but bay 1 has lost its original roof completely.

East range

Exterior:

In general terms, this range is in better structural condition than the west. The elevation to the yard is built of larger squared stone blocks than the barn opposite, particularly around the entrance to the middle bay. Against the north gable of the east range is a double-sided mounting block. There are timber barge boards to the eaves on the north gable. The exterior east wall is obscured by Virginia creeper/Boston ivy, and the south gable is also partly obscured by ivy. There is a gutter board along the eaves on the east side, otherwise this elevation appears featureless. The south-east corner is rounded, to prevent damage to and from stock and vehicles.

Bay 1 (south) has a concrete floor that slopes down to the yard. The arched opening has been partly closed in blockwork, timber stud and plywood, with a half stable-type door. There is a central timber partition of stud and plywood under the tie beam. The walls are whitewashed. The roof truss construction is the same as that of the west range, with two rows of purlins and some of the original rafters still in place under corrugated metal sheet cladding.

Bay 2 (middle) has a concrete floor sloping down to the yard. The arched opening has been partly closed in blockwork, timber and plywood, with a modern stable-type door. The walls are whitewashed. The roof truss has a tie beam and a collar pegged to the south face of principals. There is a clear panel forming a skylight in the cladding on east slope at the north end of this bay. On the west side, the rafter feet are carried on a projecting timber plate, the same as that on the west range, but a gutter board has been nailed to the projecting edge of the plate.

Bay 3 (north) has a modern galvanized pipe gate on the outside, hinged on the north side, with a tongued, grooved and v-boarded door in a timber frame. The arched opening has again been partly closed, externally with squared stone blocks, with blockwork internally. The walls are whitewashed. The floor of this bay is covered with fibre board. The roof truss is similar to that in bay 2, with a tie beam and a collar nailed to north face of principals. Both roof slopes are insulated and lined with foam board.

Discussion and dating

The two buildings are of similar dimensions and construction and are considered to be contemporary. There is some slight variation in the stonework of the principal (yard) elevations, with the east range having some larger squared blocks. The surviving roof structure (bays 2 and 3, west, and 1, 2 and 3, east) is similar, all of the principals having a rustic appearance and being cut from relatively small trees. The degree of artistic licence used by John Swete in his watercolour of c.1800 is difficult to quantify, but the general form of the buildings he shows in front of the gatehouse and records as being ‘of modern date’ is similar to that of the barns under discussion. His watercolour appears to show the roofs as being thatched, and the survival of cleft battens on some parts of the roof slopes could be either from thatch or slate. A further detail from Swete’s painting is the use of hurdles to close the arches and it has been noted above that there was no clear evidence of hinges or gate or door hangings in the openings. The written evidence of Swete and the structural details of these two small buildings combine to suggest that they were built as animal houses in the late 18th century. They are clearly shown on the tithe map of c.1837 (Figure 1). The roofs have been covered with corrugated metal sheeting since at least the mid 1970s (see Figure 6). Contrary to John Swete’s opinion, these small agricultural buildings may now be considered to have architectural merit.

Requirement for further recording

The external appearance and surviving roof structures in some parts of these two small buildings are considered to be the most important surviving original features. It is understood that these features are to be retained in any future development and, as they have been described and illustrated in this assessment, it is considered that no further recording of these elements is required.

Martin Watts
December 2011

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the building owners for providing access and background information, including sight of the aerial photograph; to Ben Webb for providing copies of the survey drawings of the buildings, and to Sue Watts for her help with the site survey and in the preparation of this report.

References and sources

DCC HES: Devon County Council Historic Environment Service

Gray, Todd (editor). 2000: *Travels in Georgian Devon*. 4

Knowles, David & Hadcock, R. Neville. 1971: *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*

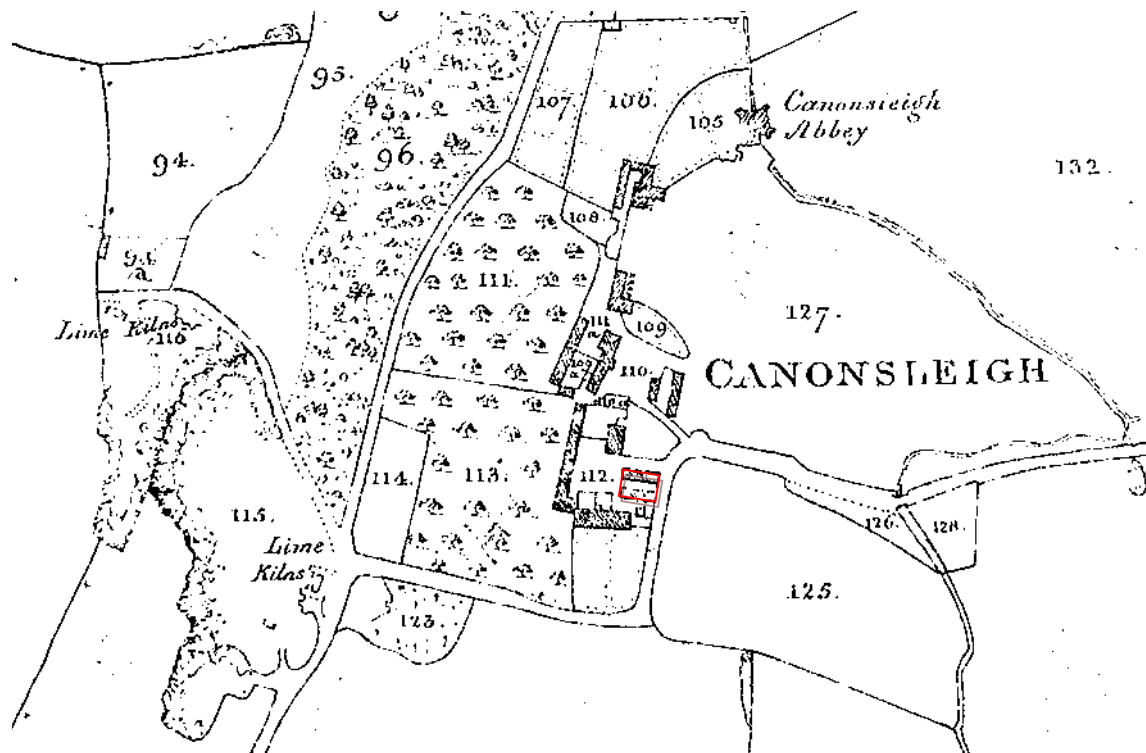


Figure 1. Canonsleigh, from the Burlescombe tithe map, c.1837 (Devon Record Office)

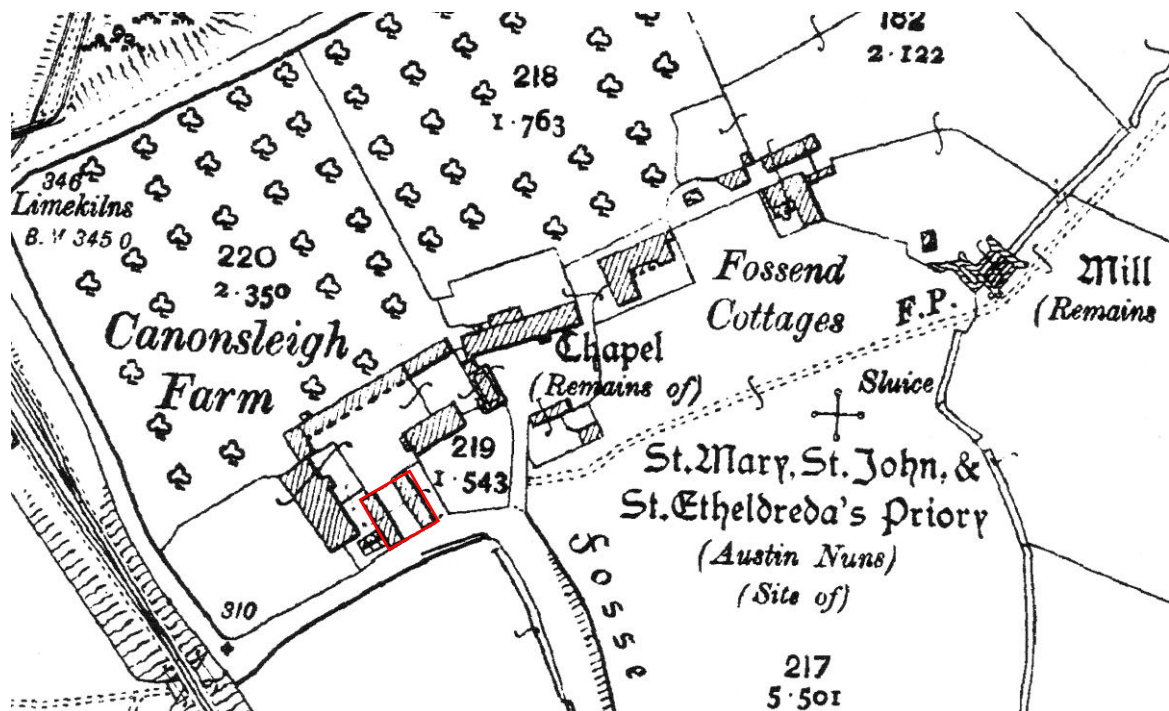


Figure 2. Canonsleigh Farm, Burlescombe, from OS 1:2500, 2nd edition, c.1904-6
Not reproduced to scale

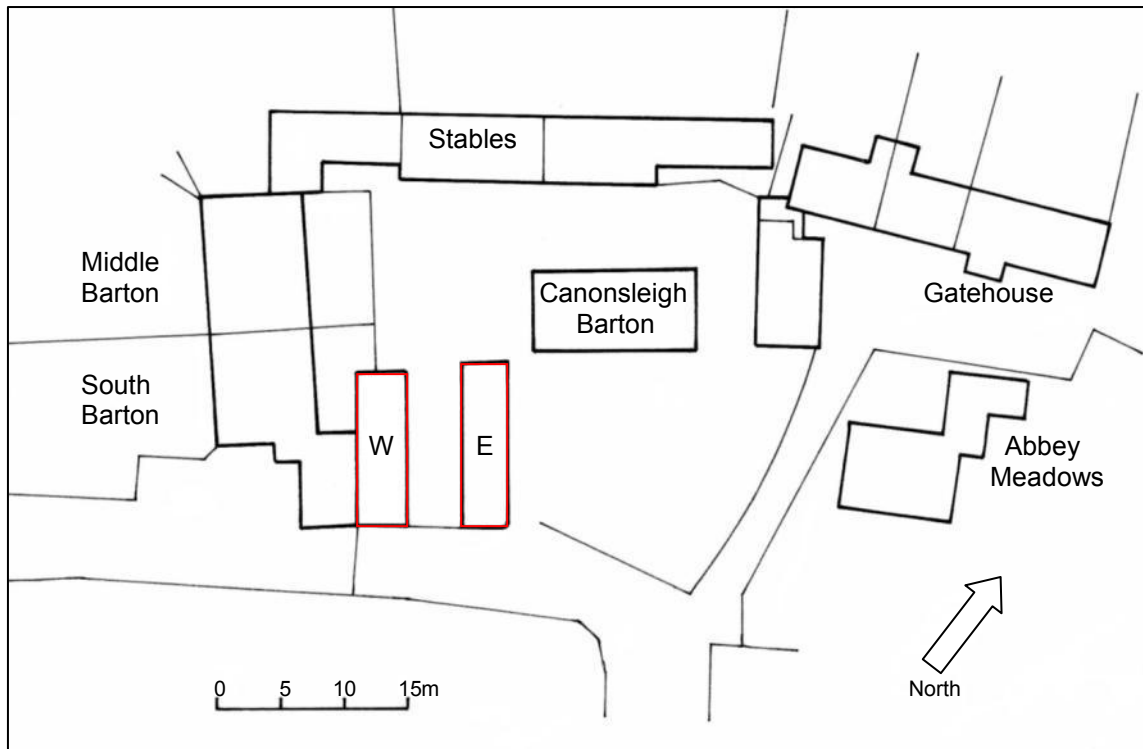


Figure 3. Canonsleigh Barton. Site plan



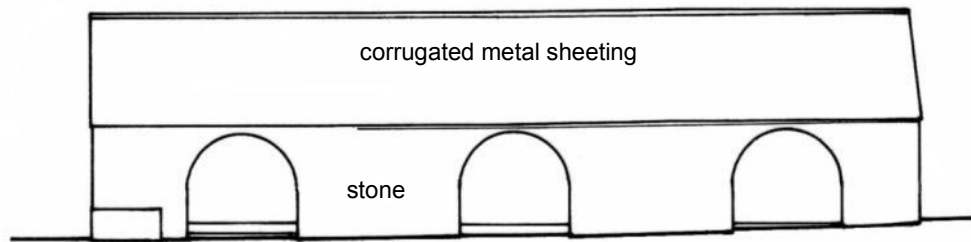
Figure 4. The gatehouse and farm buildings at Canonsleigh, c.1800, from a watercolour by the Reverend John Swete (DRO. 564M/F17/103) (reproduced in Gray (ed) 2000, 194)



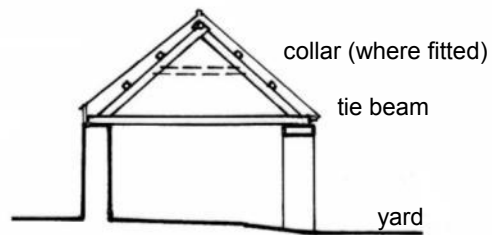
Figure 5. Canonsleigh Barton and farm buildings, c.1976



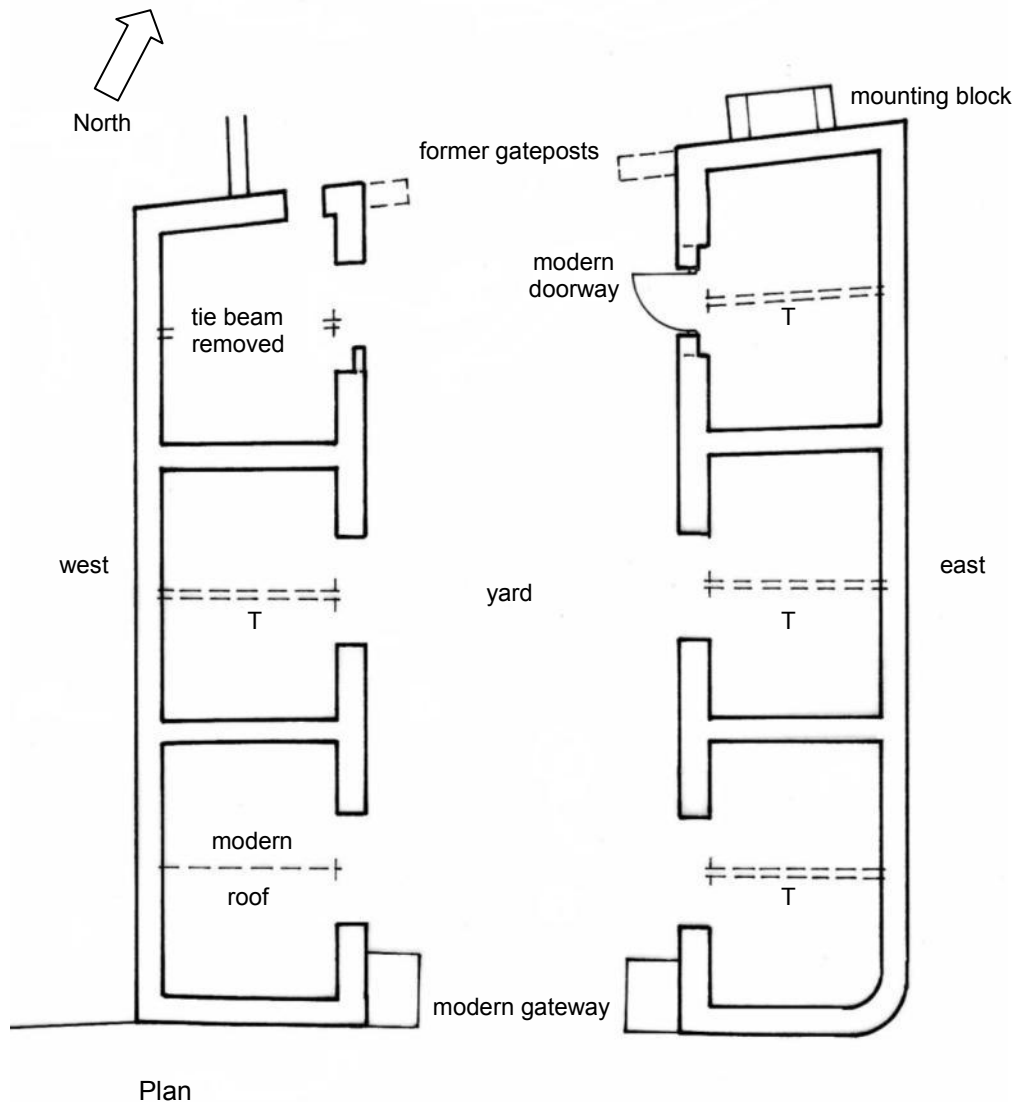
Figure 6. Detail from aerial photograph to show farm buildings



East (yard) elevation of west range



Section, showing typical roof truss



Plan

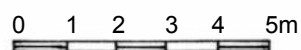


Figure 7



South east corner of east range



North east corner of east range



West and east ranges, from south



West (yard) elevation, east range, from SW



East (yard) elevation, west range, from SE



West elevation, east range from NW



East elevation, west range, from NE



Mounting block at north end of east range



Arched opening, bay 3, west range



Modern roof structure, bay 1, west range



Arched opening, bay 2, east range



Original roof structure, bay 2, west range



Infilled doorway, bay 3, east range



Roof structure, bay 2, west range



Gatepost scar, NW corner of east range



Tie beam and principal foot, rear bay 2, W



Blockwork infill and roof structure, bay 2, W



Principals and rafters, bay 1, E



Truss with collar, bay 2, east range



Purlin scarf joint, bay 3, west range



Truss with collar, rafters and battens, and loft platform, bay 3, west range



Roof structure, bay 3, east range