

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

BUILDING ASSESSMENT

ON

THE OLD STABLE BARN, THORPE FARMHOUSE,

ASTON UPTHORPE, OXONFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 55900 86150

On behalf of

Domus Designs

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THE OLD STABLE, THORPE FARMHOUSE

Building Assessment

SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services was asked to write a report on the Old Stable (NGR SU 55900 86150) at Thorpe Farmhouse. It is a building that lies within the curtilage of that farmhouse. The building contains two distinct parts with varying significance. The oldest part of the structure is a traditional frame of at least the early 18th century but possibly older. This frame has been patched over years leading to a number of facades and internal partitions that are of very little merit in comparison to the timber frame. Planning applications are still current on the building, but these are not considered viable.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

The proposal site, variously called The Old Stable or Cow Shed, is located on the curtilage of Thorpe Farmhouse which is located in the village or hamlet of Aston Upthorpe (NGR SU 5590 86150). Aston Upthorpe lies adjacent and to the west of Aston Tirrold, and prior to 1862 Aston Upthorpe formed a hamlet in the historic parish of Blewbury (see below). The village was located in the historic Hundred of Blewbury in 1086 (Morgan 1979, 6.1) and was later attached the Hundred of Reading as an isolated unit, and lay in the historic county of Berkshire.

The Old Stables lies in an area of ground occupied principally by Thorpe Farmhouse, which lies on the eastern side of the plot of land. On the east side of this plot of land attached to Thorpe Farmhouse, the plot is bounded by a road and trackway, on the opposite side of which is the chapel. On the south side of the plot of land is a threshing barn, and in the southwest corner the Old Stable. The south side of the plot of land is bounded by a trackway. On the west side the property is bounded by a path. To the north the plot is garden and bounded by a property boundary wall.

Topographically the site is located on the east facing lower slope of Blewburton Hill. The height is from 68m to 70m Ordnance Datum.

The underlying bedrock is West Melbury Marly Chalk Formation which is a chalk sedimentary bedrock created 94 to 99 million years ago in the Cretaceous (mapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html). Just up slope from the site there is Totternhoe Stone Member, a further chalk sedimentary bedrock created 94 to 99 million years ago in the Cretaceous.

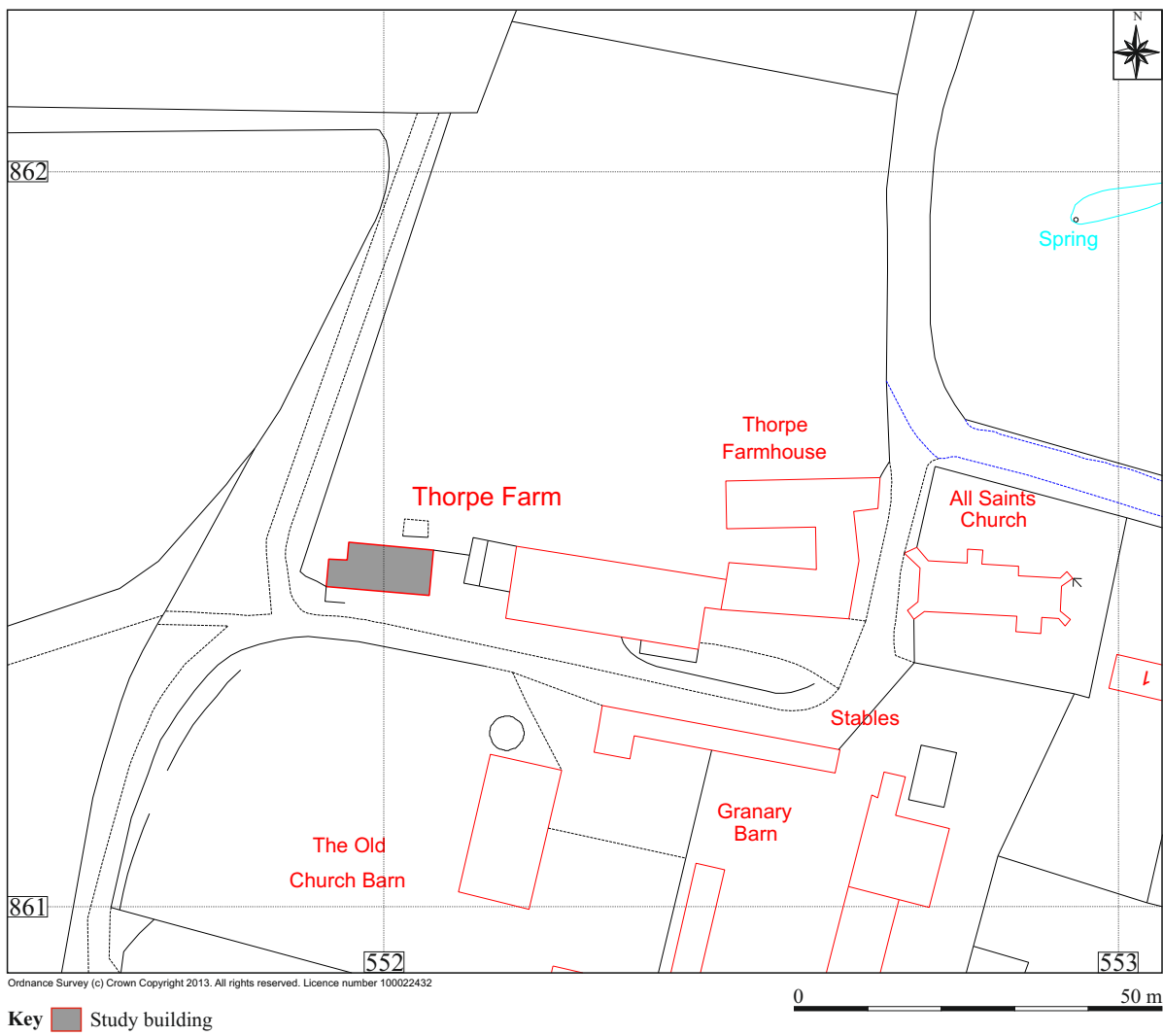
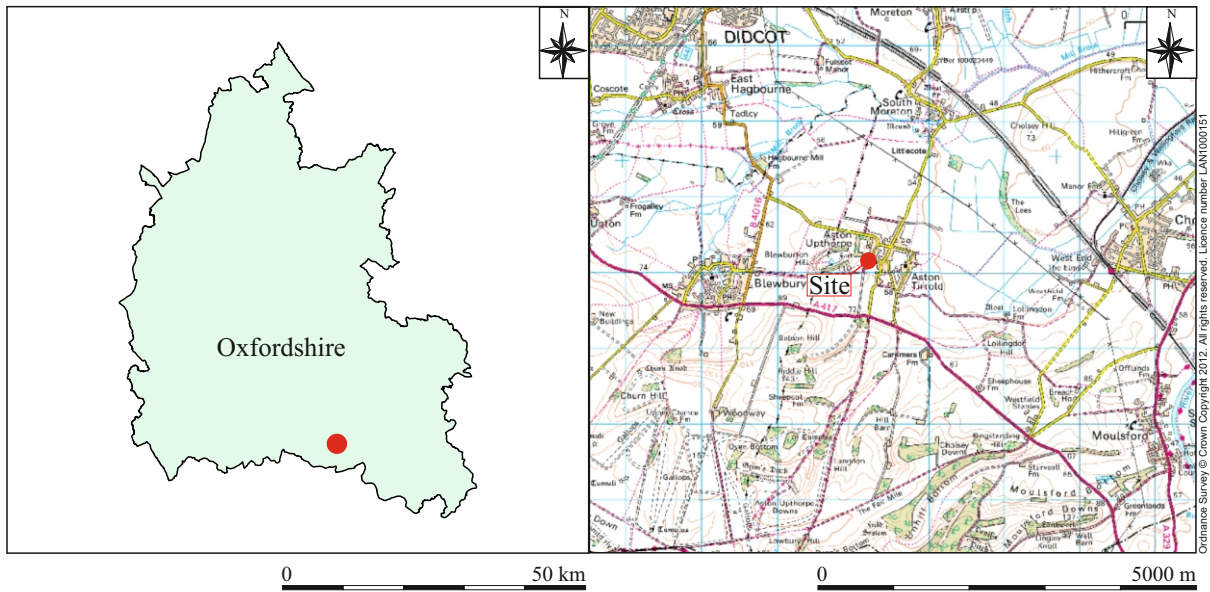


Figure 1: Site location

1.2 Commission

The report was commissioned by Jeremy Price of Domus Design on behalf of their clients Mr and Mrs S Falle. Planning applications were previously passed on this building P04/W0072 and listed building consent P04/W0071/LB. This was for conversion and a rear single storey extension to form a single dwelling. A decision has now been made that it is better to apply for further planning permission for demolition of the structure.

1.3 Aim of Investigation

The aim of the investigation is to carry out an architectural and historical back ground research on a building variously called the Old Stable or the Cow Shed at Thorpe Farmhouse, Aston Upthorpe. This study has involved a site visit and a visit to the Berkshire Record Office to consult antiquarian maps and earlier Ordnance Survey maps.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Designations

The Old Stable or Cow Shed is not a listed building in its own right, but is noted under the curtilage of the listed farmhouse and adjacent threshing barn (UID 247938: SU 55259 86145). The building was listed on 9th April 1965, and the most recent alterations to this occurred on the 13th January 1986. The listing record (list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1059278) has three sections of which the first three are called 'Summary of Building', 'Reasons for Designation' and 'History' all have a reference to '*Legacy Record – This information may be included in the list entry details*'. The last heading is 'Details', which has the following description attached.

Farmhouse, now house. C17 with C19 alterations and additions. Roughcast, probably on timber framing; old plain-tile roof; red brick stacks. U-shaped plan with cross-wings to rear. 2-storey, 4-window range. Plank door and overlight to left of centre with hipped plain-tile hood. Irregular fenestration of casements except angled wood bays on brackets with casements to ground and first floor centre. 3 cross-gables to roof. Shaped ridge stack to right with diagonal set flue. Large timber framing with painted brick and rendered infill to right return. Extensive beaming to interior. Double queen-post roof construction. Barn to rear left. Probably early C18. Red brick base; large timber-framing; weatherboarding; old plain-tile half-hipped roof. 5-bay barn aisled to both sides. Central hipped midstrey with double plank doors and double plank doors to rear. Curved-principal roof.

The group of buildings are not noted in the early *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (Pevsner 1966, 73-75). The structure lies in the conservation area of Aston Upthorpe.

2.2 History of Development

In 944 a charter of King Edmund gives 100 mansae at *Bleoburg* (Blewbury) to Ælfric, which is free of all the common dues and replaces an earlier but lost grant (Gelling 1976: 751, 758-61; 1979, no.48). The bounds of the charter are detailed and describe the modern parishes of Blewbury, Aston Upthorpe, Aston Tirrold, and North and South Moreton. This indicates that the land was, prior to 944 and during that year, held by the

Bishop of Ramsbury.

In 964 King Edgar granted 10 mansae at Aston Upthorpe to his queen Ælfthryth (Gelling 1976: 752, 766-7; 1979, no. 101). This is again preserved as an Abingdon charter. The bounds cover the current parish and indicate that there were distinct divisions between Aston Upthorpe and Aston Tirrold that had emerged in at least the 10th century, but that both of them in the 10th century had ties to Blewbury.

Aston is first recorded as a written form in 964 as *Eastune* (Gelling 1974, 511-2). The etymology of this name is **ēast tūn**, the east farm or settlement, and in this case the relationship is with the more significant settlement of Blewbury. The term *Aston et Upthrop* is recorded from 1316, with Upthorpe having an etymology of **upp prop**, the higher village, being a reference to its position relative to Aston Tirrold.

In 1066 the manor of Aston Upthorpe was held by Aelfeva and contained 10 hides (Morgan 1979, 61.2). In 1086 the manor was held by Reinbald, a priest from Cirencester, who had an estate of 6 ½ hides with 10 villagers, 12 cottagers, 3 slaves and 41 acres of meadow land (Morgan 1979, 61.2).

After Reinbald's tenure of the estate the manor came to Henry I who awarded it to Cirencester Abbey (VCH 1923, 280-91). This held the manor in free alms until the dissolution of the monasteries c. 1540. The manor returned to the crown in 1564 when it was granted to Sir Francis Knolly and his wife. Their son was the Earl of Banbury who held the manor in 1623 and 1628 when there are grants from James I and Charles I. In 1650 William Lord Craven was holder of the manor, who forfeited the manor after the Civil War. It is apparent that he held about 40 acres in Aston Upthorpe at this time.

Thorpe Farm appears to be the original location of the manor as it is known that Thorpe Farm was held under a renewed lease from Cirencester Abbey dated to 1533 when a John Slade held the site (VCH 1923, 280-91). There was a lease of the manor of Aston Upthorpe from Sir Francis Knolly, which implies that the owners of the manor were not resident but leased the property out to be farmed. A John Slade died in 1611. In 1627 Bartholomew Slade purchased from the Earl of Banbury the rights to Upthorpe Manor. In 1650 Lord Craven held the manorial rights and a small part of land. This in essence means that the manorial rights had been held onto, but that most of the assets and the site of the manor itself had been sold off, thus why the name Thorpe Farm is used instead of Thorpe Manor. The last of the Slade family line, John Slade, died in 1832. The farm was then sold as a freehold estate of 867 acres to a Robert Harris. In 1906 the estate was sold to J G Morris of Blewburton House. Thorpe Farm, an old listed building, is in an area with a significant local name (Berry Croft) and site location adjacent to the church, which is indicative of the area around being the location of the early and later medieval manor.

The chapel which lies adjacent to the farm and earlier manorial complex retains some of the earlier manorial ties. The church of Blewbury is mentioned in the foundation charter of Salisbury Cathedral, and it is presumed that the chapels of Upton and Aston Upthorpe were annexed to that church at that time (VCH 1923, 280-91). The chapels are documented for the first time in surviving recognised texts of 1227, and were dependent on Blewbury Church until separation of the parish in 1862.



Figure 2 Rocque's map of 1761



Figure 3 Inclosure map of 1793

There are a number of pre-Ordnance Survey maps of the village of the 18th and 19th century. The earliest of these is Rocque's map of 1761 (BRO PM78), which shows the farmhouse opposite the church, with a farmyard to the northwest, with a range of buildings on the south side and a range of buildings on the north side, but nothing on the west side of the farmyard. The building range on the south side extends further than that on the north side (a feature apparent in later maps), which implies that this mark

on the map represents the current threshing barn and the stable barn, and is indicative of the basic timber frame of the stable barn being at least of an early or mid-18th century date.

The Inclosure Map of Aston Upthorpe is dated to 1793 (BRO CPC/20B/20/1B), is one of the most detailed maps of the village to survive. This shows the chapel alongside the church, with the threshing barn and stable barn as part of a long line of linked buildings. There are two other building ranges on the north and west sides of a large yard, with the northeast side of the yard remaining partially open, perhaps due to prevailing south-westerly winds and the wind flow around the threshing barn. The field to the south is called Berry Croft and there is a pond to the northeast of the farmhouse called Berry Pool. Such place-names as those using the term Berry are often derived from beorg, a hill, or burg or burh, a fortification. In this instance it is the case that the site is probably being used in reference to the manor site as a defended location, probably dating back archaeologically to the early medieval period.



Figure 4 Greenwood's map of 1829

Greenwood's map of 1829 (BRO D/ERu P5) shows buildings in the location of the farmhouse, threshing barn and stable barn, but the detail is not refined enough.

A map of 1833 is described as showing Thorpe Farm (BRO D/ETY P1), which shows the whole of or practically the whole of Aston Upthorpe parish or chapelry. The name and the representation implies again that Thorpe Farm was the location of Aston Upthorpe Manor and that at this time most of the earlier manorial holdings were still tied to the farmhouse. Some buildings are shown on this map including the farmhouse. The threshing barn and stable barn are omitted as block buildings, however, part of the building is shown in outline if not coloured in. This is probably to do with the compilation of the map when one considers that this map is out of step with the other sequence of maps.

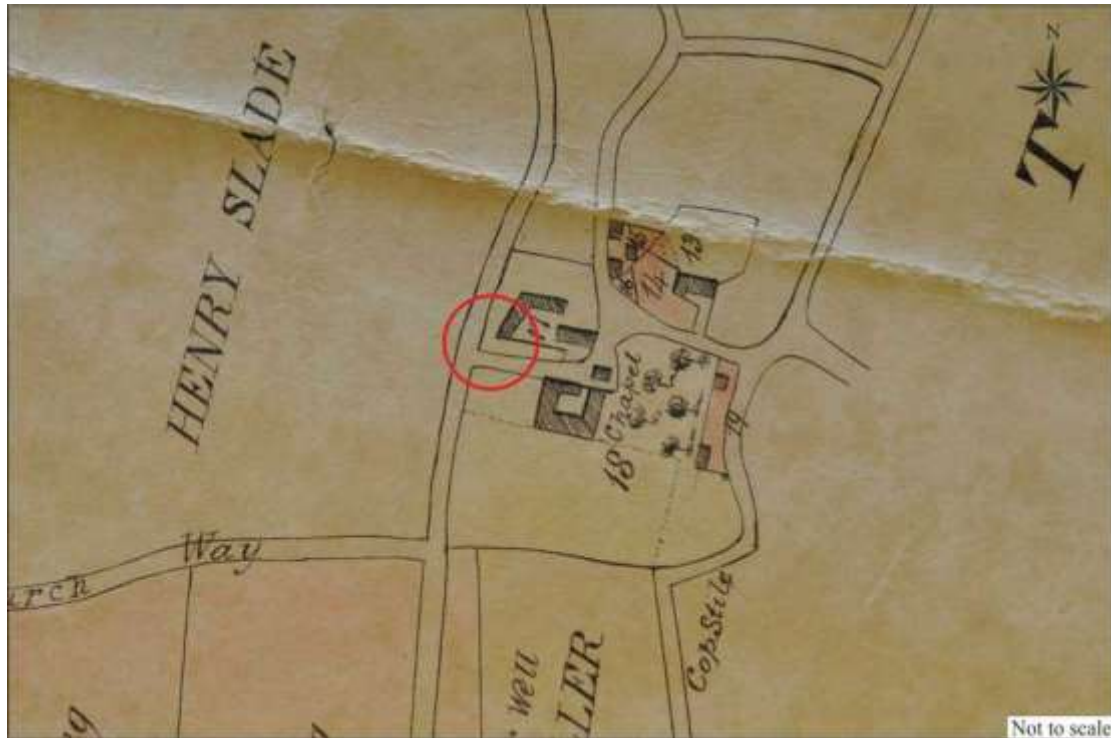


Figure 5 Map of Thorpe Farmhouse 1833



Figure 6 Tithe Map of Blewbury dated 1838

The Tithe Map of Blewbury of 1838 (BRO D/P20/27B) includes the hamlet of Aston Upthorpe, which reflects the ancient early medieval ties. The plot is labelled as 159 and shows the farmhouse, threshing barn and stable barn, with a further building located on the west side of the yard, which has now gone. The building on the north side of the yard has already been removed.

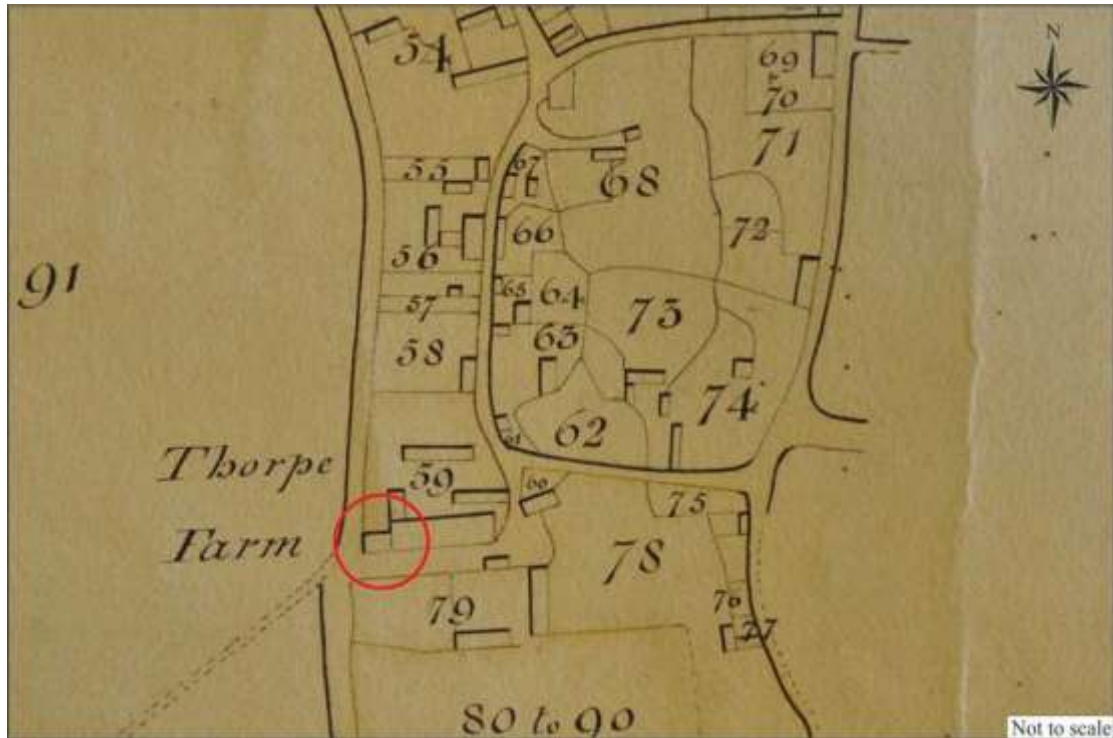


Figure 7 Parish Map of Blewbury dated 1842



Figure 8 OS First Series map (1: 2,500) of 1877

The final pre-Ordnance Survey map is a map of the parish of Blewbury dated 1842 (BRO D/EM P7), which included the hamlets of Aston Upthorpe and Upton. Plot 59 shows the farmhouse, threshing barn and stable barn. The arrangement is more stylised and perhaps less accurate than some of the other maps. This shows a building on the west side and north side of the farmyard. The map is described as a copy of earlier

maps, so it could be suggested that the northern range of buildings around the farmyard were inserted on this map due to their existence on an earlier map, rather than their existence at the time.

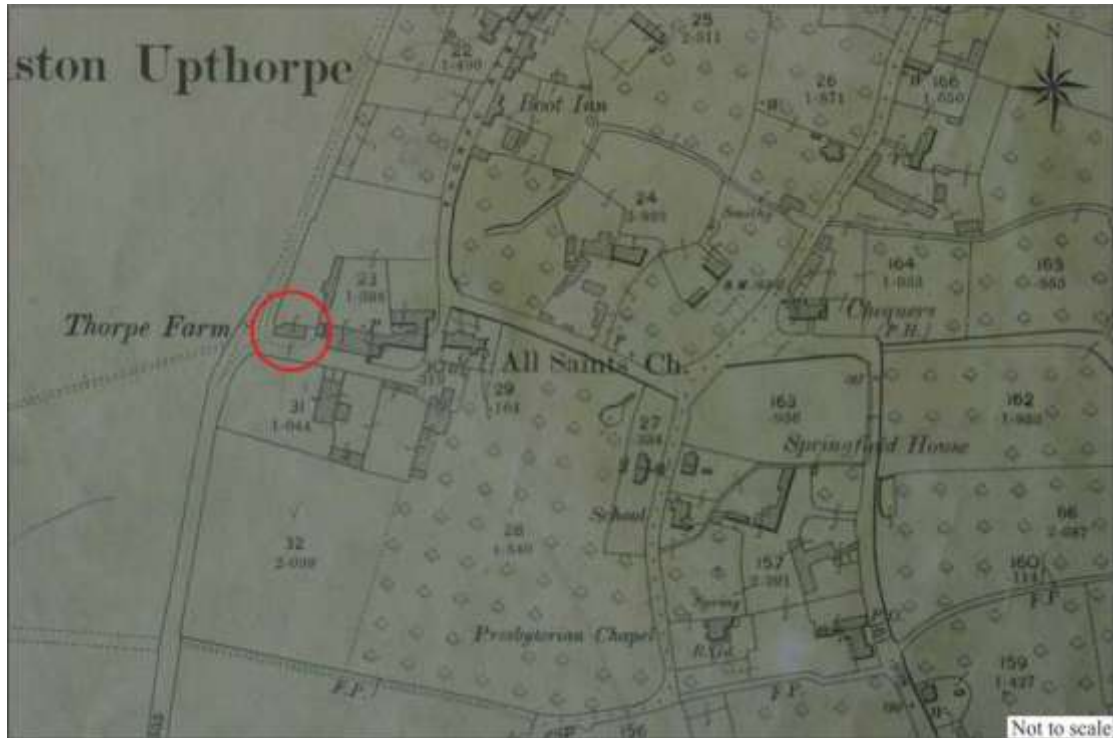


Figure 9 OS Second Series map (1: 2,500) dated 1899



Figure 10 OS Third Series map (1: 2,500) dated 1912

The first series Ordnance Survey map at 1: 2,500 of 1877 (Berks XXI.4) shows the

chapel, farmhouse, threshing barn and stable barn as they exist now. To the north of these there is a building on the west side of the yard. The second series map of 1899 (Berks XXI.4) shows the same basic arrangement, but with the building on the west of the yard there is a west wing. The third series map of 1912 (Berks XXI.4) shows a similar arrangement of buildings to that of the earlier two Ordnance Survey maps.

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE OLD STABLE

3.1 Introduction and General Description

The stable barn is basically a sub-rectangular unit containing four bays and an aisle divided into six cells on a staggered level (Fig.11 plan). The structure is constructed around an old timber frame which uses in places branches and timbers that show minimal signs of working. This has been enhanced with the use of brick dwarf walls, brick and flint dwarf walls, and traditional weatherboarding techniques. These later components have been altered over time and some have been patched with new materials. There is an aisle on the north side and the roof is gabled and covered with red clay tiles.

3.2 The Elevations

The east elevation (Fig. 12, E3) is a gable end, with a north aisle to the barn, extending the roof line on that side. The majority of the wall is weatherboard clad, but there is a small part of a brick wall on the left hand side. Centrally there are two plank stable doors, while on the right of these there is a double planked door for a low opening.

The south elevation (Fig. 12, E2) is the main or front elevation of the building, which contains a stepped dwarf wall along its base and a central brick column or pier. The wall above this is covered with traditional weatherboarding. In the right hand part of the façade there are double plank door at the left hand side of the column and with two six light timber framed windows. These are of unequal sizes. On the left hand weatherboard part of the façade there are two single plank doors, both of which have a six light window to their left, similar if not identical to those in the right hand part of the façade. To the right of the right door there is a smaller window casement with two lights.

The west elevation (Fig. 12, E4) is a gable end with a brick and flint dwarf wall. Above this is a weatherboard wall which fills the rest of the gable end. On the left hand side there is a brick wall at the end of the aisle.

The north elevation (Fig. 12, E1) has a staggered wall with the aisle running for three of the four bays of the barn; the west bay has no accompanying aisle. The visible walls here are mainly weatherboarded externally, but internally are brick. There is a small section of the structure where there is no aisle that contains timber framing in-filled with brick (plate 1).

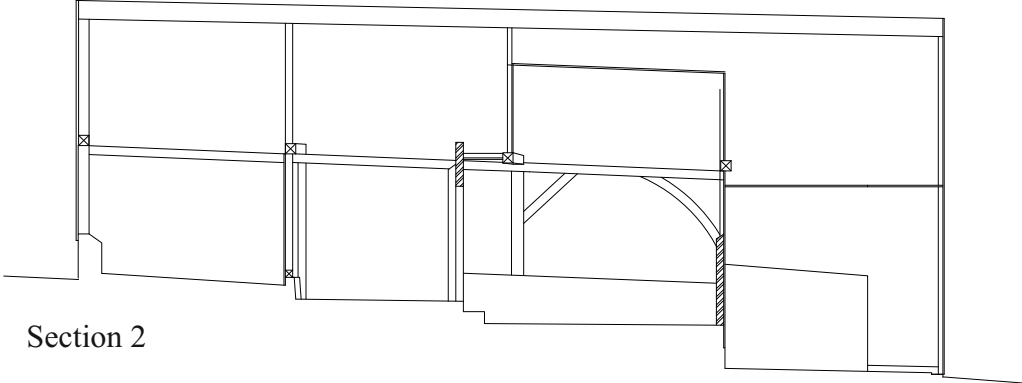
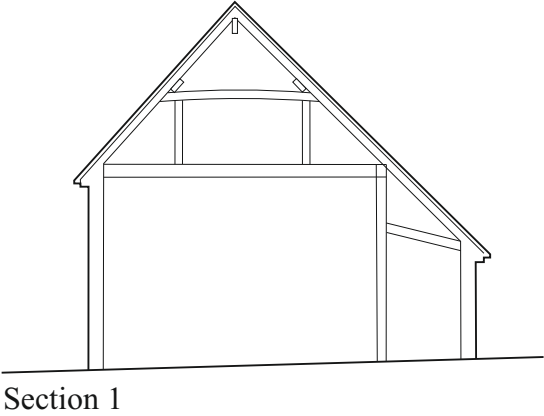
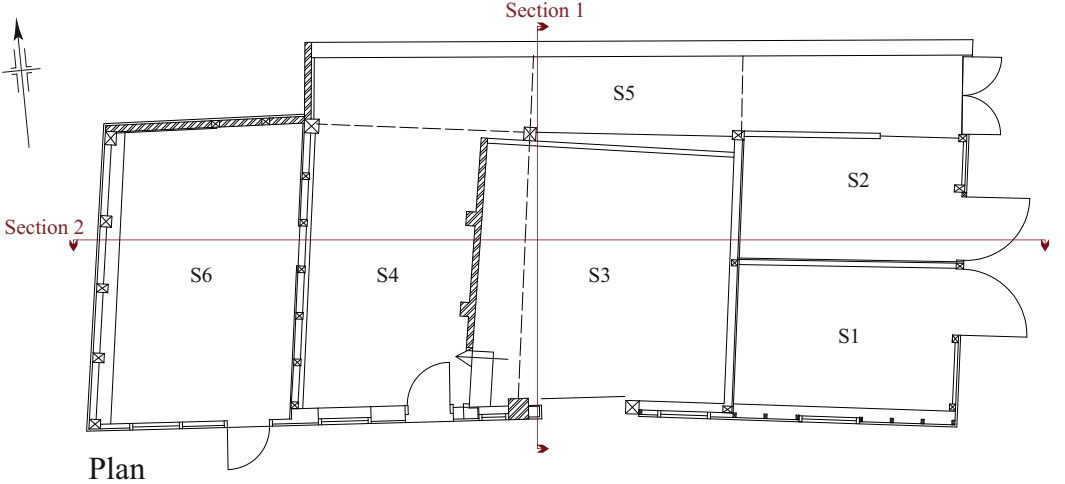
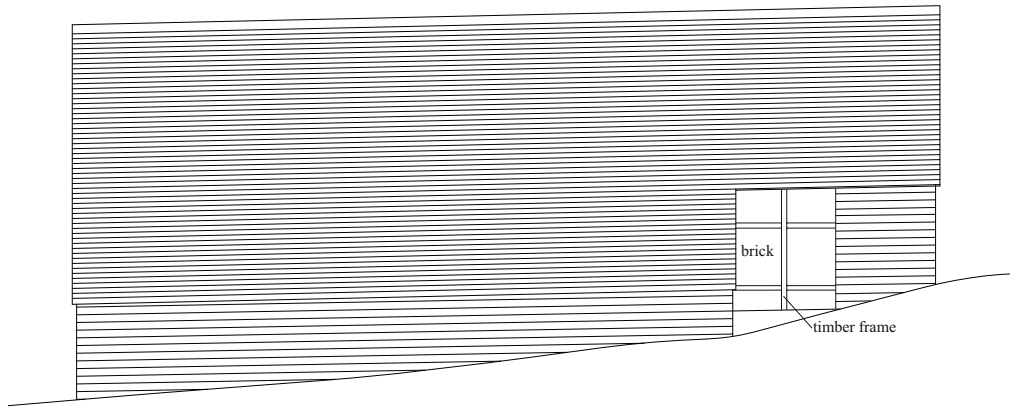


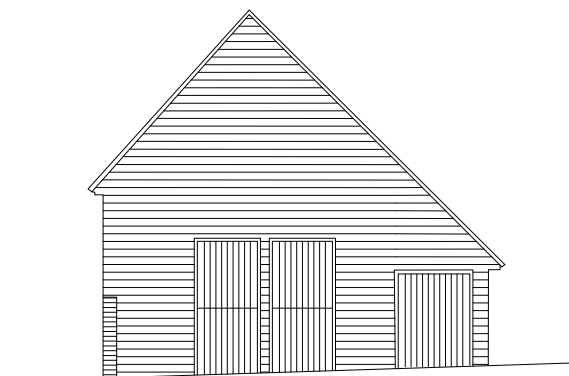
Figure 11: Plan and sections



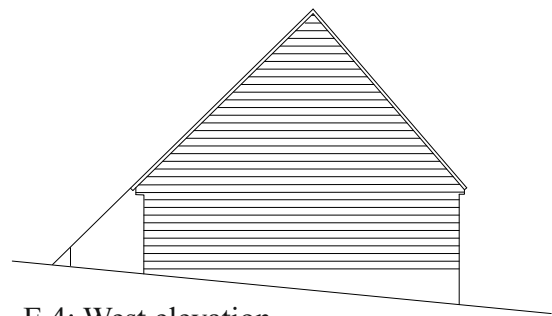
E.1: North elevation



E.2: South elevation



E.3: East elevation



E.4: West elevation

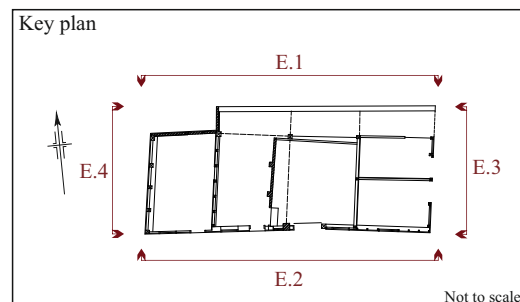


Figure 12: Elevations



Plate 1 Timber framing and brick infill wall in north wall

3.3 The Interior

Interior unit S1: is one of the stable eastern components that uses the left hand stable door of the east elevation (Fig. 12). The south wall is of brick and has a weatherboard upper part with a six light window. The west and north walls have vertical planks and high plain skirting and an animal feed trough located in the angle between them, while the east wall has a stable door and weatherboarding. The ceiling is made of board, which is rotting and above which the remains of common rafters and purlins can be noted. The east end truss is visible through the holes in the ceiling which contains a cross beam at purlin height with queen struts (Plate 2). There is further timber framing in the space between the queen struts. Above the collar beam is a (king) post reaching to the ridge beam.



Plate 2 Unit S1 view of the end gable roof truss

Interior unit S2: is the second unit at the east end that is accessed through a planked stable door. This is located in the east wall with plank walls around the south and the west sides. There is a food trough in the corner between these two walls. There is a

plank partition on the north side, but this is half wall height and does not cover the whole length. There is a bench in front of this half wall.

Interior unit S3: is entered through a double plank door in the south wall, set within a dwarf lower wall and a timber frame upper wall. There is also a six light window casement. In the corners of this unit there are a series of four posts that support tie beams and wall plates, and contain braces (Plates 3 and 4), most are straight, but one contains a wave created by the natural bends of the wood. This feature is one that implies that the timber framing or parts of the timber framing could pre-date the 18th century. The tie-beams, although there is some chamfering, mainly take on the shape of the cut timber, which is also an indication of a date for the frame possibly being earlier than the 18th century. In the east wall of this unit there is timber framing with whitewashed infill. The ceiling rises up into the loft space of the stable barn just above the purlins. There is a food trough against the north wall. The west wall ceiling space is supported by a tie-beam, but the wall below this is stepped out of line with the main timber frame (Fig.11, Section 1). There are steps and a plank door on the south side.



Plate 3 Unit S3 part of the timber structure



Plate 4 Unit S3 part of the timber structure



Plate 5 Truss between units S3 and S4

Interior unit S4: is entered through a plank door on the south side. The south wall is of brick in its lower courses and weatherboarding above. The wall also had a six light window internally to the right of the door. The east wall is a breezeblock wall with a plank door in its right hand end. Above there is evidence of timber framing extending up into the roof space fitted into a queen post truss with cross beam on which the purlins sit (Fig.11, Section 1 Plate 5). Here the purlins, common rafters, braces and ridge beam are not cut by saws but are worked timbers but which take on the waves and bows of the wood and in some place bark remains (Plate 8). Though the roof timbers are mainly visible here in S4 and S6, it is apparent that this type of construction runs the length of the stable barn. The west wall has a dwarf base with a timber frame above with weatherboarding. The timber framing contains two posts of the stable barn main frame, a tie-beam with curving braces, and queen post truss, with cross-beam (Plates 6 and 7).



Plate 6 Timber frame between units S4 and S6



Plate 7 Timber Truss between units S4 and S6



Plate 8 Common rafters and ridge beam

Interior unit S5: is a continuation of space S4 and covers the northern aisle (Plate 9). This is a long narrow space with braces from the main bay posts of the stable barn to an internally whitewashed wall, built beside the weatherboard outer wall. The ceiling space has also been plastered or rendered and whitewashed.

Interior unit S6: is entered through a plank door in the south wall, which is a dwarf brick and weatherboard wall with a six light window casement. The east wall which lies between this unit and unit S4 is a timber framed structure with tie-beam and truss with queen posts as described above. The west wall is the end wall of the structure, which has a dwarf wall of flint and brick quoins, which is evident outside. Above this there is a box timber frame wall with braces on the central post, with a weatherboard lap exterior (Plate 10). The end truss has a collar beam with queen struts, set differently to the other visible trusses, in this case the collar beam is above the line of the purlins, with an interrupted beam crossing the truss at roughly the same height from the purlins. There are a series of rafters from tie-beam to tie-beam, which are of a more recent later 18th century to 20th century date. The common rafters, purlins, ridge

beam, and braces are of a far more ancient origin, as described above. The north wall has part of a dwarf wall, and has been boarded up above, behind this externally can be seen an area of timber framing with a brick infill.



Plate 9 Braces in north aisle



Plate 10 Timber frame in west wall

4 ASSESSMENT

4.1 Phases

The building consists of one major architectural phase, followed by a series of minor

ones that on the whole are repairs to the basic structure. There was a stable barn on the site as early as the early to mid-18th century as demonstrated by the representation of the building on 18th century maps (BRO PM78, CPC/20B/20/1B). This date is supported by the timber framing in the stable barn. This framing forms part of a four bay barn. The timber framing in the roof and posts creating each bay, and the west wall may all contain parts of this Phase 1 structure. The frame and rafters are planed and chamfered from irregularly shaped timbers, a feature that implies the structure is old, and few square and straight parts can be noted. A similar style of timbers were noted at the threshing barn, Road Farm, Great Missenden (Yeates 2011, 3.7.4) where the style of timbers was believed to denote an earlier date than the one conservatively given. The timber frame wall that survives in the north wall, with brick infill is also of this probable date. The pitch of the roof is steep implying that it could have once been thatched or contained wood shingle (indeed there is an inter-war photograph that shows the barn with thatch).

How and when the other phases occur is more difficult to say, but one thing that could explain the absence of the buildings on the map of 1833 (BRO D/ETY P1) is that the structures may have been ruinous in their nature at this time with new barns being added to the south of the earlier farm complex. The weatherboarding and internal partitions may date to the mid to late 19th century or the early part of the 20th century. The south dwarf wall and east and south wall in general may be of this date. The reworking of the north wall of the aisle can generally be attributed a date in this range as can the insertions of the two stable units at the east end.

The breezeblock wall interior is clearly of a later date in the 20th century, and can on present visible evidence be classed as later than the other alterations.

4.2 Listed Status

The building is not listed in its own right, but is on the curtilage of a listed building, which is Thorpe Farm.

4.3 Historic and Architectural Assessment

The outside of the building is not overly appealing and has very little architectural merit in its later south and east elevations. Internally it is quite different as the timber frame is a structure of at least an early 18th century date, which shows many aspects of traditional timber working, of the 16th to the early 18th century.

5 THE CURRENT PROPOSAL

Existing permissions for the building (P04/W0072) and (P04/W0071/LB) are still current, but their execution, it is felt' would leave the building so degraded that little of the old structure would be left with any integrity.

The earlier consents for the conversion to a dwelling explicitly approved the cutting through of the roof trusses and several of the existing rafters, the complete removal and replacement by modern construction of the ground floor and almost all of its internal partitions, and the insertion of a new first floor structure. On their own these interventions would be severe enough, but the effect of having necessarily horizontal

new floors within the sloping alignment of the existing structure would leave original elements hanging in space; at the north western end of the building the new ground floor level would be almost 2.4m lower than the current floor level, giving posts and wall plates nothing to sit upon.

The more recent consent has confirmed that the existing brick plinth can be demolished and replaced with a modern cavity wall and retaining wall. The existing roof structure is not adequate for the modern loads imposed by insulation, lining, etc. and will require much strengthening and additional material adding that the original roof would no longer have any validity.

The current proposal is to demolish the barn or shed and replace it with a similar sized and proportioned modern timber framed structure housing an indoor swimming pool.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Old Stable or Cow Shed is a mixed bag architecturally. Map evidence indicates that there has been a structure on the site since 1761 and the Inclosure map of 1793 clearly shows the same outline of the stable barn with the north side partially aisled. This gives the first indication that the timber framed structure of the barn is datable to the mid 18th century at the latest by maps.

Inspection of the timber framing found that the frame contained planed and chamfered timbers from irregular shaped timbers. This feature would mean that the frame is old because it lacks few square and straight timbers, an early 18th century date is the latest a frame of this type could be placed on style alone, but such a date probably is being conservative. The west wall and parts of the timber and brick framing in the north wall may also be of at least a mid-18th century date.

The walls of the building as they now stand are largely of a later date representing rebuilds and replacements of a later date. These rebuilds have very little merit architecturally.

Overall the effect of the existing consents, if implemented, would be so to degrade those remaining elements of interest in the building that little of architectural or historic merit would be intact.

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Historic Maps

BRO PM78 1761 Rocque's map

BRO CPC/20B/20/1B 1793 Inclosure map of Aston Upthorpe

BRO D/ERu P5 1829 Greenwood's map

BRO D/ETY P1 1833 Thorpe Farm

BRO D/P20/27B 1838 Tithe Map of Blewbury

BRO D/EM P7 1842 Parish map of Blewbury