

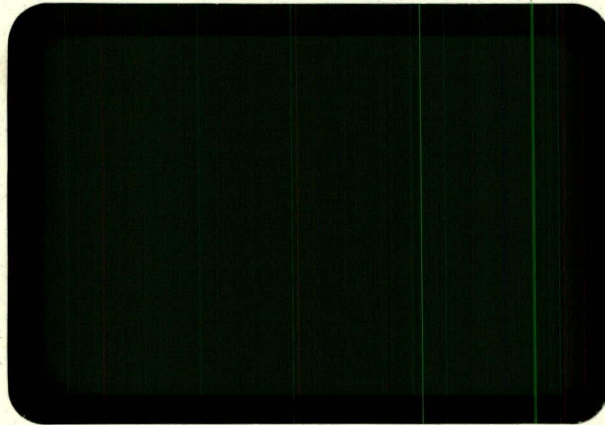
K468

SDV 347385

SS 70SE/13/4

K E Y S T O N E
HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANTS

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SX 70 SE/13/4

The Barn
at
Whelmstone Barton
Colebrooke
Devon 1996

[1996]



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Colebrooke
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OS ref. SS 750 006

Report K468

Grade II listed building

The Brief

Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants is contracted by Devon County Council to record the barn from an historic and archaeological point of view. The drawings which accompany this report (Drawings K468/1-2) comprise a plan, front elevation and long section at scale 1:50 along with a cross section at 1:20 and detail of southeast side threshing floor doorway at scale 1:10. This report includes a description of the standing building and its historic development with a photographic record. Some documentary material is included but there was no detailed documentary research; simply a skim through the most obvious sources in public archives. Where colour photographs are used to illustrate this report Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants have archival monochrome copies of the same subject. The survey was entirely hand-measured with the aid of a dumpy level.

Setting

Whelmstone Barton lies in the hilly countryside between Coplestone and Bow, close to the western boundary of the parish. The steading is built on the springline on the southwest side of a valley carrying one of the tributaries to the River Yeo. Here the hillslope slackens from the steep valley side to more gentle rolling countryside on the hilltop. It is good farmland on the red clay and the area contains a number of relatively large historic farmhouses. For instance the other big house in the parish, Paschoe, is less than 1k further up the same valley and Thorne, a large 14th century house in Clannaborough parish, is only a little more than 1k to the west. The fields are large in general but are still enclosed by earth banks crowned with hedges and oak trees. It is an attractive countryside with the narrow lanes taking the traveller from close and private valleys to grand panoramas on the hilltops.

Whelmstone Barton backs onto the southwest side of a quiet lane. It is a relatively grand house and farmed nearly 280 acres in 1846, the time of the tithe award (Fig.1), Appendix 1) much more than most mid-Devon farms at that time. The former manor house faces southeast onto a cob-walled garden (Plate 2). Its layout suggests medieval origins but, it seems, that the whole place was massively rebuilt in the early 17th century, possibly shortly after 1615-16 when William Spurway acquired the place. The main house has an L-plan with a kitchen crosswing projecting a short distance forward from the southwest end. The main feature of the front is an elegant 2-storey gabled porch built of purple-coloured volcanic stone ashlar. It too dates from the early 17th century and the superior stone gateway through the southwest side of the front walled court is in the same style. There are various service buildings to rear of the house.

The farmbuildings lie a short distance to southwest beyond a late 19th century weatherboarded shed. The barn is the longest and the largest of the group. It is built down the gradual slope on a southwest-northeast axis (Plates 3 & 4). It has a 2-bay cob-walled shed on the northeast end which was originally open-fronted onto the yard to the southeast. In fact the ground also falls away to the southeast and this yard is a little lower than the floor of the barn which forms its northwest side. The long southeast side is made up of a cider house flanked by open-fronted cattle linhays, all facing northwest onto the yard. Formerly the cider house was thought to be older than the linhays but the map evidence appears to suggest that the whole range was built as one at some time between 1846-1889, the dates of the two earliest maps of the steading. There is a 3-bay linhay to

northeast of the cider house and 7 bays to southwest returning with another 5-bay lincay to enclose the southwest end of the yard. The cider house and 3-bay lincay were converted to a dwelling house in the spring of 1996 but their form in 1986 is described in more detail in the DOE list description. There is another 4-bay lincay, this one probably early 19th century in date set forward from the northeast end lincay but on the same axis and also facing northwest.

Of the existing buildings only the barn, its adjoining 2-bay shed and the 4-bay lincay are present on the 1846 tithe map (Fig.1). The small block projecting from the northwest side of the barn was a horse engine house, and evidence still remains of its existence. At that time there were some other buildings off the east corner of the house's front court and another further southwest and over the road. By the time of the 1889 map (Fig.2) the cider house and lincays had been built replacing a couple of small buildings there in 1846. The isolated building to the southwest had gone and a small building erected close by the back of the house. The service buildings behind the house had also increased in size.

Documentary History

Introduction

Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants carried out a quick scan through readily available documentation relating to the farmstead in the hope of identifying any occupant who could have been responsible for building the barn.

Medieval Origins and Early Owners

In the medieval period land was held in a rather different system from modern ownership. Property could not be owned outright. Medieval landholding involved a pyramid of overlords (with the monarch at the top), above the effective owner, with various obligations, rights and duties, as well as various fines and rents, owed at every level of the pyramid. The effective owner might sub-let the property to an undertenant, who might sub-let in turn. This means that the 'owner' shown in documentation of any date was not necessarily the occupant of the property, and there is no guarantee that the owner's under-

tenant, where the name is known, was not sub-letting in turn. This does not mean that there was no security for the occupying tenant families, but that they held their land as part of an accepted system that included overlords and attendant obligations. It is most likely that these owners did not actually occupy the place.

The eminent Devon historian Lysons, summed up the history of Whelmstone Barton with an exasperating lack of dates: 'Wolmerstone, or Wolmston, passed at an early period from Peverell to Hungerford by marriage. It was sometime in the Fortescue family, and afterwards successively in Northleigh and Helyar; by the latter it was sold to the Hamlyns of Paschoe'. Polwhele contributes one of the dates, 1741, for the sale to the Helyars¹.

The first reference to the existence of the place is from the 1249 Assize Rolls, cited in *Devon Place-Names* - these are in the Public Record Office and are not published. The next is from circa 1285 at which time a Hugh Peverel 'de Cornubia' held the fourth part of a fee in 'Wolreston' from a Hugh Peverel of Sanford, and that Hugh held of the Bishop of Exeter, and the bishop from the king². By 1303 this interest had passed on to the heirs of Hugh Peverell³ and in 1346 James Peverell held it, apparently heir to another James⁴. In 1357 property including 'Wolmeston near Colbrok' apparently belonged to William de Filleigh and his wife Isabel, but perhaps as tenants of Peverel. The Peverells were evidently a grand family in the 14th century. In 1374 Thomas Peverell and his wife Margaret (a Courtenay) were licensed for a chapel dedicated to St Mary. Their daughter and heir Catherine married Sir Walter Hungerford, Lord Treasurer of England. Sir Walter (d. 1449) was a distinguished Lancastrian and had three sons by Catherine. His public career makes it extremely unlikely they would ever have resided at Whelmstone⁵. Robert, their second but eldest surviving son, was created Baron Hungerford, and died in 1459. His son, Robert, Lord Moleyns and Hungerford, was attainted in 1461 and executed 1464. His property was vested in trustees to the use of his mother. Wolmeston, with Sutton Lucy and Colwell, had been demised to the use of his son Thomas and his wife, but they were also attainted and expelled⁶. Sutton Lucy and Colwell were granted by the king to John Dynham in 1464, but

¹ Cited in Vyvyan Hope, *Copy of manuscript notes on the history of Colebrooke by Richard Ebbels* (1952), typescript in West Country Studies Library.

² *Inquisitions and assessments relating to Feudal Aids preserved in the Public Records Office 1284-1431*. Vol.1 (1899).

³ *Ibid.*, p.356.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.423.

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography*

⁶ *Inquisitions Post Mortems* TS transcripts in West Country Studies Library

the *inquisition post mortem* does not refer any further to Whelmstone. Thomas was executed in 1469; his only child, Mary, married Lord Hastings.

According to Lysons, Whelmstone should next belong to a Fortescue. This is a large Devon family and to quite whom it belonged has not been verified. Because the tenants' names are unknown, it has not been possible to use the various early Tudor tax returns.

The Spurways in the late 16th and early 17th century.

In 1615 the messuage and tenement called Wolmeston, in Colebrooke, was in the tenure of John Spurwaye of Okeford, gent, in right of Joan his wife. It was sold, by Christopher Pollard of Tamerton Follyett to William Spurwaye of Colbrooke, gent, on 8 December 1615⁷. William Spurwaye was son of John. John made his will and died soon after in 1616⁸. These transactions are a little difficult to understand but they possibly represent a method of securing the succession from father to son by involving Christopher Pollard in a form of a sale. 'Of Okeford' implies John did not then live there, but 'of Colebrooke' suggests William already might. It is also interesting that a John Spurwaye was assessed for goods worth £3 in Colebrooke in 1581⁹. The acquisition of the place by the William in 1615 might well be the occasion for a major rebuild of the house and its farm buildings. Such a date is very good for the porch and gateway, and maybe also for the barn.

The churchwardens' receipts include payments of 6s 8d for graves in the parish church, and these include one from 1643 for a Mr Spurway.

Later History

The next positive information suggests the house was owner-occupied in the 1660s. A volume of churchwardens' accounts¹⁰ is mainly of expenditure, but it does include some church rates from 1662-70, and the last of these includes property names. James Northleigh paid 2s 6d for Wolmeston. In the preceding years he was paying 3s or a similar sum and the

⁷ J.C. Tingey, *Calendar of Exeter Castle MSS, Calendar of Devon Deeds unrolled*, Vol.III, no.1552 (1930). Typescript in West Country Studies Library.

⁸ TS wills Second series in the West Country Studies Library

⁹ T.L. Stoate (ed. and publ.) *Devon Taxes 1581-1660* (Bristol 1988).

¹⁰ Percy Morris. *Colebrooke Parish Accounts 1618-1737*, copy of 1943 typescript in West Country Studies Library

inference is for Whelmstone: In 1665 he is called gent. He paid tax on 5 hearths in 1662¹¹. Although Stoate edits the 1674 hearth tax, the entry for Colebrooke is in fact a survival of 1662. Daniel Hamlyn paid for only 4 hearths at Paschoe, but there were 2 other houses of 6 hearths in Colebrooke parish. Northleigh does not appear in the Protestation returns. The churchwardens' accounts received payments for graves in the parish church for a Mrs Northleigh in 1671 and Mr Northleigh in 1682

As mentioned above it was acquired by the Helyars in 1741. Land tax assessments show William Hellier Esq. as owner 1780-89, and the Hamlyn family (of Paschoe) from 1790 on. Occupiers were Charles Tozer 1780-85, Roger Eastabrook 1784-96, Edward Turner 1797, James Turner 1798-1819, Mrs Turner 1820-32. The later occupiers can be easily discovered by reference to the census returns and the trade Directories.

The West Country Studies Library Parish Cuttings File has an article from the *Express & Echo* of 25 October 1950 about sale of the Paschoe estate on the 20 October 1950: this included Whelmstone Barton with 241 acres, its arch and reputed well. On 20 July 1995 it was advertised for sale in the *Express & Echo* with 9 acres,. The well is also referred to in *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries*, Vol.21, p.178.

Building Materials

Apart from the stone ashlar of the porch the walls of the main parts of the house are plastered. There is no reason to suppose that they are not built of cob like those of the farmbuildings around the farm courtyard. Most of the buildings have low footings of local stone rubble but the barn does not.

The barn has two phases of cob. Both are very similar in composition being a clayey red cob containing a high proportion of tiny fragments of shillot, gravel and small stones. The secondary cob has more shillot whilst the original stuff has a number of larger stones in the lower walls. Both contain a high proportion of straw. In general the lifts or raises cannot be detected but inside, where plaster has fallen off, small patches still adhere. These patches appear in horizontal lines set between 750-1.15m apart which might represent the lifts.

¹¹ T.L. Stoate (ed. and publ.) *Devon Hearth Tax Returns, Lady Day 1674* (Bristol 1982).

Neither phase of cob in the barn has any footings, except where they have been inserted later. Instead the cob sits on upstands of the sandstone bedrock which is exactly the same colour as the cob (Plate 5). This varies in height from 300mm to just over 1m. It is highly improbable that the barn was built like this. Presumably the ground level was somewhat higher when the barn was built, and indeed when it was extended. Also it was apparently terraced a little into the natural slope on the northwest side and southwest end. It seems that the former ground level has since been degraded which happens quite often to walls where the adjacent area of the farmyard is unsurfaced and has been used as a stockyard. This process can leave upstands of natural bedrock. It would seem that the cob walls of both major historic phases were built directly onto a platform of natural bedrock.

Whole sections of the walls have been underbuilt on the outside face and there are a few low external buttresses. The nature of these and their dating will be described in more detail below. The process of insertion is clear since there are a series of short lengths of oak laid horizontally along the top of the inserted stone rubble between it and the cob. Most are set along the wall but some are laid through them. These are the sort of timber baulks and needles which are commonly associated with inserted secondary footings. When the cob and bedrock was dug away it was done in small sections and the upper cob was propped on timbers before the stone rubble was inserted. As the stone was laid the props were removed but the top horizontal plates were left in.

There are various other 18th and 19th century patches and mends using stone rubble and brick whilst those from the 20th century use concrete blocks. Again most of these will be dated and described in detail below, but it is worth mentioning here the rebuild of the southwest end of the northwest wall. In the mid or late 19th century this was rebuilt in neat roughly squared rock-faced stone, vaguely snecked in appearance, and rusticated on the end corner. It is bonded in pale red-brown mortar containing white flecks of lime.

The barn was probably plastered formerly. None now remains on the outside but the inside walls are covered by at least four phases of lime plaster which, like the stone patching, will be described in more detail below. The roof of the barn is now covered with corrugated iron which replaced the thatch. The main house is still thatched.

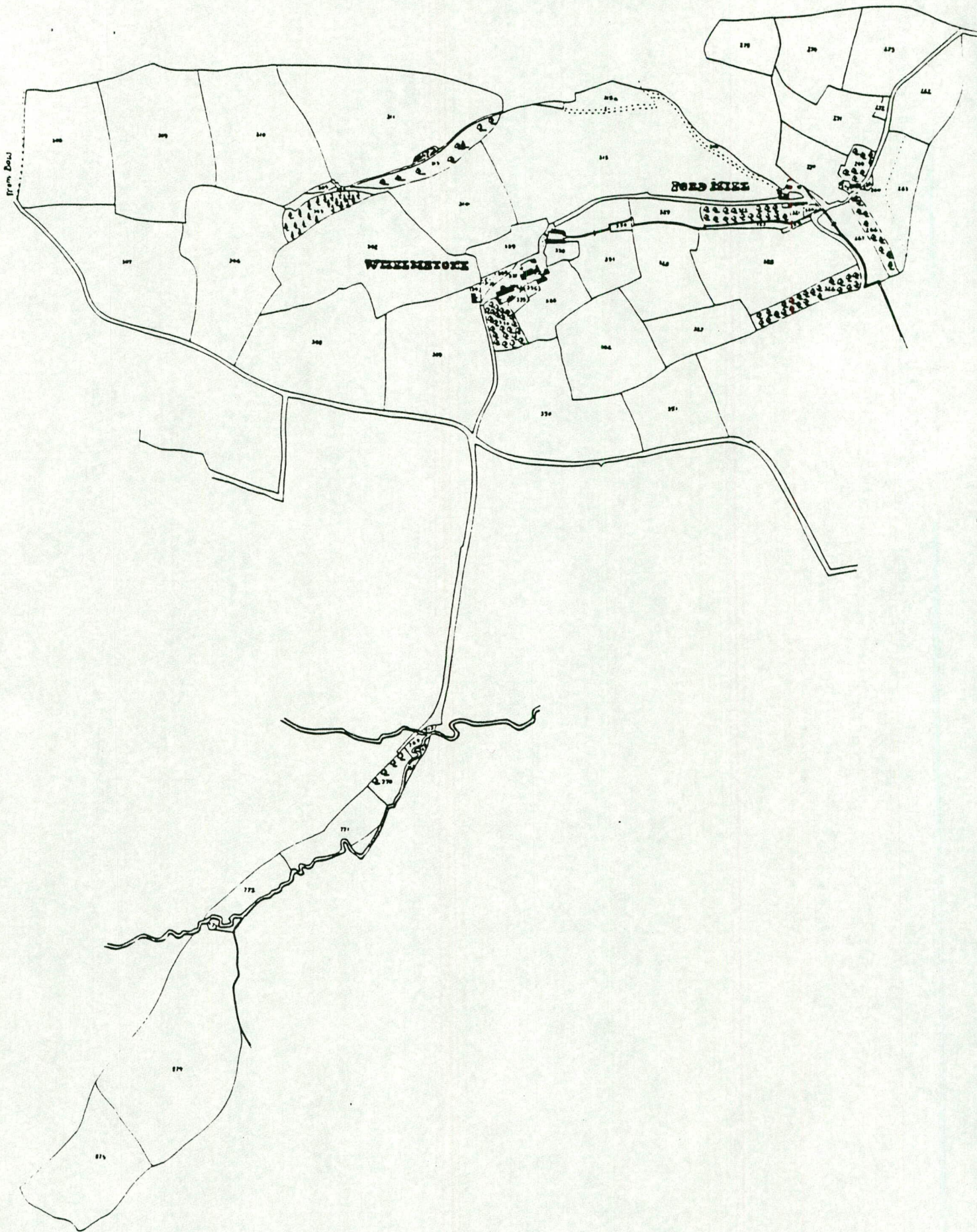


Fig.1 The Whelmstone Barton holding in 1846 from the Colebrooke parish tithe map.

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15.792

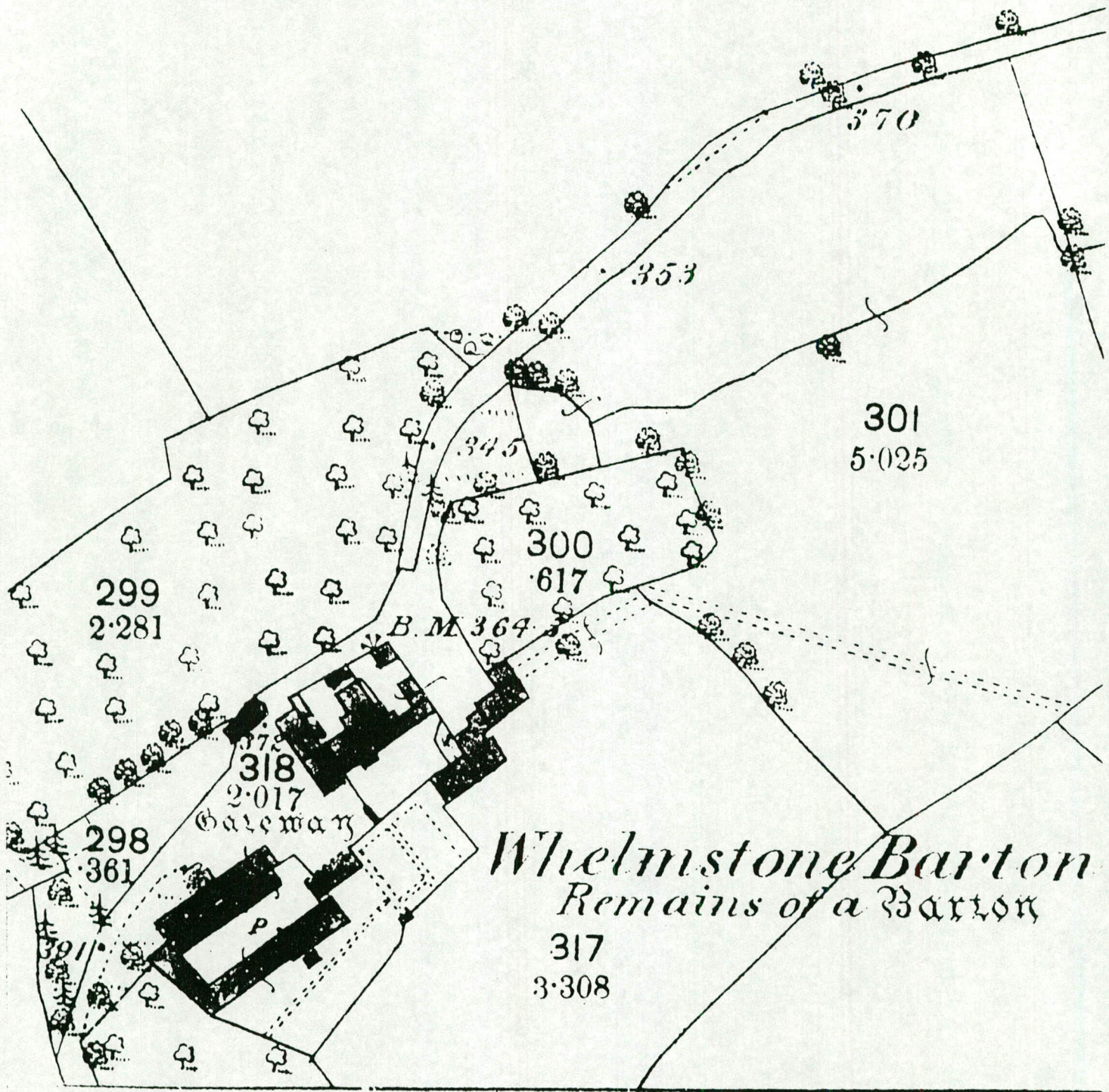


Fig.2 The stading on the OS map of 1889.

The Barn

The barn is close on 36m long (but was probably some 500-700mm shorter before the southwest end wall was rebuilt) and varies in width between 5.6m and 6.3m, all measured internally. The narrowest part is the southwest end extension. The original part of the barn is all wider than 6m, the widest point being at the northeast threshing floor. Built down a gentle slope the walls are tallest at 4.35m at the downhill (northeast) end.

It is 9 bays long with two sets of large opposing double doorways onto the former threshing floors. These are symmetrically arranged in bays 3 and 7, counting from either end, and there are blocked opposing doorways representing a third former threshing floor in the central bay. The blocking of the northwest of these doorways and the adjacent walling was pierced and patched in the 19th century for the construction of a horse engine house against the outside. The tiny ventilation window close by and under the eaves was inserted at the same time. There is an inserted loading hatch high in the northwest wall to left (northeast) of the northeastern doorway.

Phase I The 16th Century Barn

The original barn was 20.6m long, 6 bays long and occupied the northeast and centre parts of the present barn. The northwest and southeast long walls and the northeast end wall still remain. The stub of the southwest end wall, which was demolished when the barn was extended, can still be seen inside on the southeast side. The surviving northeast end wall rose to a full gable. There were, it seems, two pairs of opposing doorways onto two threshing floors. The largest was the present northeast pair of doorways in the third bay from the northeast end, whilst the other pair are blocked up in the fifth bay. There were no other original windows. The jointed cruck roof is original but has been jacked up higher than it was originally.

The walls were of red cob built directly onto the natural bedrock, now upstanding. The walls were some 400-500mm lower than they are today. The stub of the demolished southwest end wall shows clearly on the southeast side (Plate 12). They contain no original openings apart from the two pairs of opposing doorways. The blocked ones, in bay 5 (counting from the northeast end), have cob sides and plain oak lintels (Plate 10). These are relatively small by barn standards but larger than man-doors, being 1.6-7m wide and about

2.8m high . The other (northeast end) pair of doorways are largely original. They are 2.3m wide and 2.7m and both have original oak lintels which suggests that they have always been the same size. The northwest doorway has masonry sides (Plate 6). The outside of the northeast side is obviously 20th century, being built of concrete blocks, but the inside edge is cob suggesting that this doorway had originally been like the doorways to the other threshing floor. The other (southwest) side of the doorway is lined with stone rubble bonded in red mud mortar. This is an insertion but was apparently built before the adjacent inserted footings.

The southeast doorway is relatively fine as if it was the show side as it would have been seen from the front courtyard of the house. Here the doorway is flanked by two tall raking buttresses rising from ground level to support the plain oak lintel. Because these buttresses are so tall and their slope so slight that they give the impression of being flanking pilaster buttresses, which commonly flank the midstrey (threshing floor) doorways of many of the old barns in Devon. Both are built of stone but they are very different. The right (northeast) one is an original, the other a replacement. The right one is noticeably more vertical, more pilaster-like, and is built of coursed volcanic ashlar and squared local mudstone with a neat chamfered plinth (Plate 9). It is also set at a slight angle, canting outwards as it were. This may have been a device for encouraging a good through-draft across the threshing floor. The inserted left (southwest) buttress is plain and built of roughly squared blocks of local mudstone brought to rough courses (Plate 8). Both buttresses are bonded in a red clay mortar containing flecks of lime, but the mortar of the original buttress is grittier and paler in colour. It was pointed up in pure lime mortar. The clayier bonding of the replacement buttress is much more like the bonding of the inserted footings nearby.

Both of the doorways to the northeast threshing floors contain the remains of very early, if not original, oak doorframes. Both are evidently identical but the southeastern one remains substantially intact (Drawing K468/2, and Plate 7 shows northwest one). Built of oak the frames had external chamfers with carpenters' mortises on the corners where the upright jambs meet the headbeam (pegged mortise-and-tenon joints). In the centre of the headbeam the chamfer is step stopped each side of a short length which is square in section. The soffit here contains a slot for an upright post, a removable stay against which the double doors could be secured shut. The northwest doorway has no doors and those of the southeast doorway date from the late 19th century or even the early 20th century.

The roof is considered to be original but the whole structure has been jacked up a short distance, apparently as part of the alterations associated with the phase 2 extension to the barn (see discussion below). The roof survives more or less complete, including original common rafters, in five of the original six bays (Plates 15 & 16). The original timbers have gone from bay 6 which was the southwest end bay of the original barn.

The five trusses are side-pegged jointed crucks. Their general form and construction is of the type standard throughout most of Devon, particularly mid and east Devon, and much of Somerset from the late 15th century through to the mid 17th century, but details of the construction put the roof into a smaller sub-category which can be dated stylistically to a tighter date-range.

The posts now rest some 300-400mm above the top of the natural bedrock standing on small piers of stone rubble filling chases in the cob (which are described and discussed in some detail below). They have no pads or spreader plates beneath them. As is usual the principal rafters were fixed onto long tenons protruding upwards from the top of the heads of the posts which curve and widen inwards to form the 'elbow' of the jointed cruck (Plate 17). The cheeks of the long mortises on the underside of the principals are set back a few millimetres from the main soffit to provide a notch or rebate for the tip of the post. The front face of the post does not run continuously into the soffit of the principal - it is wider and is rounded into the notch. The joints are held by between five and seven pegs, most have seven. The principals vary very slightly in size but on average measure 285 x 140mm. At the apex the principal couples are held together by a notched mortise-and-tenon joint fixed by two pegs, except for truss 4 (counting from the northeast end). This has a different type of joint which was probably created because the timbers were not quite long enough to manage the usual mortise-and-tenon arrangement. Here the timbers butt join on a vertical line but were held together by a narrow yoke mortised and tenoned into the principals and held by two pegs one side (southeast) and three the other (Plate 18). The collars, made up of timbers a little narrower than the principals, are mortised and tenoned into the principals and held by two (or occasionally three) pegs each side. They arch upwards with low-pitch cranks and have narrow chamfers to their soffits. Such chamfered edges are commonly found in barn roofs since, when full, men would be working this high and the chamfers were less painful to bang against than the sharper square corners. There are three sets of butt purlins, all 195 x 95mm on average, with bare-faced tenons edge-halved to their neighbours. The ridge is unusual. It looks as though a threaded ridge was intended, and it is threaded through the unusual apex of truss 4. On the others it is slotted into a

deep trench at the top of the main principal – the one the other is jointed into. The common rafters are halved together at the apex and pegged onto the purlins. In all cases the peg-holes show on the middle purlin and in several bays the lower purlins have peg-holes too. In bays 2 and 3 northwest it is all three purlins whilst bays 4 and 5 southeast the upper purlins have a central peg only.

The chases into which the cruck posts are fitted are 100-150mm wider than the posts and they are packed with stone rubble (Plate 13). However the top lift of cob (300-400mm high) has no chase; it butts up to each truss on both sides. This evidence seems to indicate that the trusses were set into chases cut into older cob and that the top lift of cob is the only one contemporary with the trusses, at least in their present positions. It is usual to raise the crucks at an early stage of construction and then build up the cob around them so that the cob butts right up to the cruck posts. Here, it seems, that the walls were raised (probably at the same time the barn was extended) and the old roof was jacked up to a slightly higher level. This would explain the chases which extend right down to the old bedrock. They would have been cut to free the trusses so that they could be raised off the bedrock and up to the new height. The chases below and alongside were packed with stones and the new cob wall tops built up against the raised trusses.

Early plaster survives in patches of various sizes on the inside walls. There was not the time in this survey to undertake a careful archaeological analysis of the various plaster finishes and their relationships to each other. Moreover it is impossible to prove whether any surviving section of plaster is original. Perhaps the oldest sections occur in bay 6 both sides (Plate 12). Neither of these plaster patches extend onto the cob of the raised wall tops or over the front of the truss 5 cruck posts and its associated stone rubble-filled chases. These patches of plaster have a backing layer of mud plaster, pale red-brown in colour with a little gravel aggregate and a high proportion of white lime flecks, and is bonded with fine (goat's?) hair. It is faced up with a 5mm or so skim of coarse lime plaster which is light grey in colour with large lumps of white lime and is also bonded in fine hair. This is finished with a skim of fine lime plaster. These sections are covered with inscribed charms or sigils (Plate 14). There are similar patches elsewhere notably either side of the blocked doorways in bay 5.

However the composition of clearly later plaster, like for instance that used in the blocking of the bay 5 doorways was visually little different, except perhaps that it used less hair bonding. The stones which pack the chases and underpin the lifted cruck post are

bonded in a pale red-brown earth plaster containing white flecks of lime. This is covered by a base layer of similar mud plaster except that it contains a high proportion of lime and is bonded in hair. This was finished with a skim of lime plaster. Similar phase 2 plaster occurs here and there throughout the older section of the barn and directly covers the masonry associated with the rebuild of the southwest side of the northeast threshing floor southeast door. This secondary plaster also has been inscribed with some charms or sigils.

Dating and Discussion

The earliest barn was built of cob directly onto the natural bedrock. It was gable-ended with a 6-bay roof of side-pegged jointed cruck trusses. All these survive but apparently they were jacked up a short distance when the barn was extended. There were threshing floors in bays 3 and 5. The former had larger doorways which still contain the remains of possibly original doorframes and the southeast doorway retains one of its original external cheeks.

The dating of vernacular farm buildings is notoriously difficult since there is usually a minimum of decorative detail and the structure usually employs plain, utilitarian and long-lived techniques. The barn at Whelmstone Barton is a very important example for Devon. Even though a remarkable number of small mansions and farmhouses dating from before circa 1650 still remain in the county there are very few barns with their roof structures intact from the same period. On many farmsteads the barn can be recognised as the earliest farmbuilding on the site but it has usually been massively altered in the 18th and 19th centuries. At Lower Chilverton, Coldridge, for instance, the cob barn still has a 15th century doorway and frame but the roof has been replaced. Alternatively, at Membury Court in East Devon, a medieval barn preserves only a couple of jointed cruck posts, and at Portmore Farm, Landkey, in north Devon, a single couple of raised jointed crucks of considerable span are all that remain from the probably 16th century roof. The survival of the odd post or truss is by no means unusual. On Dartmoor barns with massive granite ashlar walls, like those at West Chapple in Gidleigh and Batworthy, Chagford, for instance, are thought to go back to the 16th century at least but none have early roofs.

Of the surviving historic barns in Devon the one at Bishops Clyst in Sowton, near Exeter, is the most important. It is the largest, in terms of width and height, the oldest, dating back to the late 13th century, and has the most sophisticated carpentry with a base cruck roof. Both the two surviving medieval monastic barns in Devon are longer than any other historic barns in the county. The longest is at Buckland Abbey, Buckland Monachorum in west Devon, at 20 bays, and the other is the so-called Spanish Barn at

Torre Abbey with 16 bays. The two are very similar with buttressed stone walls, slit ventilators, single central threshing floors, and late 15th-early 16th century roofs of arch-braced trusses. No historic domestic barns known from Devon survive this large and few are as early. Here and there odd trusses survive from probably 14th century barns as at West Challacombe in Combe Martin or Hele farm in Tawstock for instance. There are only a few early barns that survive with their roof structures reasonably intact. Most of these are small, like the late medieval 3-bay true cruck barn at Shamland, Abbotsham near Bideford.

There are only a handful of larger barns from before circa 1650 which can be compared with the one here at Whelmstone. Up until its collapse in 1995 there was the extensive remains of what was probably an 9-bay barn at Ayshford Court, Burlescombe, in the Blackdown Hills (Keystone Report K393). This too appears to have had two sets of opposing doorways to the threshing floors. However it was larger and the roof was of superior construction; side-pegged jointed cruck trusses with three sets of butt purlins and single sets of windbraces. It probably dates from the first half of the 16th century. The (possibly truncated) barn at Glebe House, Whitestone, has a 5-bay roof of side-pegged jointed cruck trusses, butt purlins, and windbraces possibly dates as early as the late 15th century. At Fishley Barton, Tawstock, the stone barn retains the remains of three of the original six raised cruck trusses with cranked collars, two sets of butt purlins and evidence of a lower set of windbraces - probably from the early 16th century. Lastly there is the impressive barn at Wellesley Farm, Bishops Tawton, which has six raised cruck trusses with small triangular yokes at the apex (like those at Glebe House, Whitestone), and arch-braced collars from the late 15th-early 16th century¹². These are the only domestic barns surviving in a reasonably complete state known to Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants in Devon which certainly predate the one here at Whelmstone.

The details of the Whelmstone Barton barn roof carpentry suggest a construction date from the second half of the 16th century or from the early 17th century. A date of 1615, as possibly suggested by the documentation, is just about acceptable, by comparison with the carpentry of contemporary farmhouses in mid Devon. It is unlikely to date from after 1650 since jointed crucks tends to die out in favour of A-frame trusses after that time. Also lap-jointed collars are increasingly more common than mortise and tenon-jointed collars in mid and east Devon in both jointed cruck and A-frame roofs from around 1600 onwards.

¹² Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants are grateful to James Moir for pointing out the north Devon examples.

However the relatively small scantling of the timbers and the rounded tip of each cruck post as it joins the underside of the principal are a stylistically late details, that is to say from some time after circa 1550.

The only other comparable barn known to Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants is the interesting T-plan cob barn at Prowse, Sandford. It retains six side-pegged jointed cruck trusses with two sets of butt purlins and a ridge, and mortised joints to cranked collars. Here the elbow of the cruck post runs continuously to the underside of the principal so this barn is thought to date from the mid 16th century. There are a number of North Devon barns which may be roughly contemporary, but they are more difficult to date since they are raised crucks. However, these tend to be smaller than these mid Devon barns and, since they also have threaded purlins, they are mostly considered to date from the first half of the 17th century although some could easily be from the late 16th century. The only two of comparable size, both 7 bays with 6 trusses, are at Eastleigh Manor House in Westleigh, and Westcott in Marwood. Most historic barns of similar or larger size date from well after 1600, like the mid-late 17th century double barn at Widhayes Farm, Uplowman, or the cruciform-plan 8-bay barn at Bremridge Farm, Filleigh, of about the same date.

A Note on the Charms

The older plaster is packed with geometric incisions mostly representing multiple circles or hexafoil sigils (six-petal motifs) which were believed to be magical marks or talismans put there to protect the farm produce (Plate 14). Such symbols, particularly the six-petal motifs, are found throughout Devon dating from the medieval period into the 19th century. They are often associated with barns or found in plank-and-muntin screens in houses. Their significance has only recently been recognised due to the work of Timothy Easton in Suffolk, who is working on a taxonomy of the marks he has found in Suffolk. He has not yet published his findings but has sent Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants a long letter summarising his conclusions in relation to examples formerly noted by Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants.

According to Timothy Easton, similar inscribed motifs are very common in the Suffolk area in houses, barns and other agricultural buildings. As well as plank-and-muntin screens they occur on ceilings and walls, particularly in dairies or cheeselofts. However Easton has found that motifs in houses are heavily outnumbered by those in agricultural buildings. In barns he stated that they usually occur around the entrance to the threshing floor although

this is not the case here – they occur wherever old plaster survives. Some of the motifs appear incomplete. This too is by no means uncommon. It seems likely that the making of the sigil was more important than what it ended up looking like. According to Easton, the great majority of Suffolk examples date from the late 17th century and 18th century, and some can be traced to contemporary books on magic and charms.

Easton claims that these motifs served as magical talismans intended to protect produce. They are certainly not accidental doodles as was once thought. They are far too common and far too widespread. Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants have noticed examples as far north as Co. Durham. The number of sigils here on the old plaster suggest they were produced over a long period of time, maybe every harvest time. The number of them certainly implies some kind of charm or protection from more superstitious times.

A Building against the Southeast Wall

Three vertical posts are set into the cob of the outside of the southeast wall in bay 6, each set approximately 1.4m apart. Their purpose is unknown. They have no visible mortises and tenons but all seem to have been cut off at the top. There has been so much disturbance in this area in terms of underbuilding, patching and general decay of the cob that it is impossible to determine whether or not these posts were original features. However they were embedded in what are considered relatively early footings (bonded in a red clay mud mortar containing white flecks of lime). There is just about room for a fourth post to the southwest – it would have been right on the corner of the original barn. Maybe these posts are the remains of a cartshed.

Early Patches and Underbuilding

The underbuildings on the outside walls look like inserted footings but the masonry does not extend right through the wall. Those sections under the cob of the original barn, notably the sections along the whole of the southeast side and the section on the northwest side between the two doorways, are all bonded in a red clay earth mortar containing white flecks of lime. This is slightly different from any of the mortars used in the extension and therefore may be earlier, but this cannot be proved.



Plate 1 The steading from the southeast. The barn is on the far side of the yard beyond the 19th century linhay and cider house (with scaffolding) and only the top of its roof can be seen.

Plate 2 The front of the house from the same vantage.



Plates 3 & 4 The northwest front of the barn from the north and west.



The Northwest Side

Plate 5 The northeast end where the break between the cob and the natural bedrock has been picked out.

Plates 6 & 7 The northeast midstrey doorway and detail of the doorframe headbeam.



The Southeast Wall

Plates 8 & 9 The flanking buttresses either side of the northeast midstrey doorway.

Plate 10 The blocked central doorway.

Plate 11 The southwest midstrey doorway in the extension.

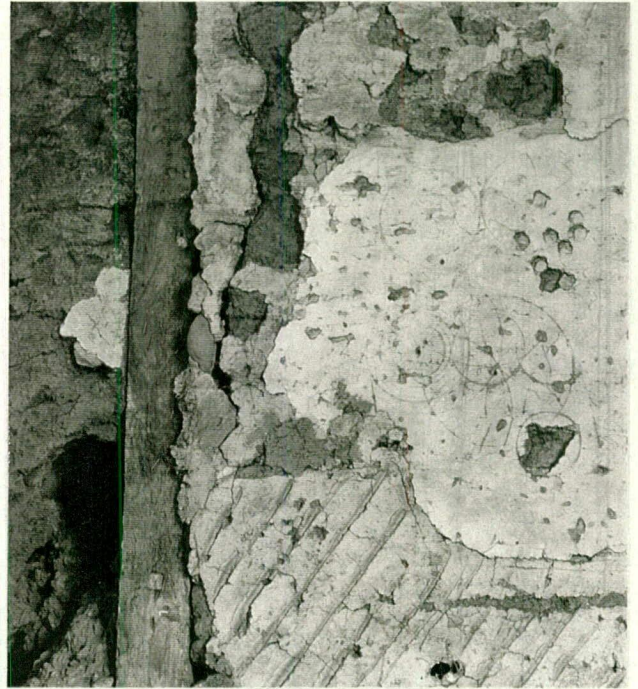
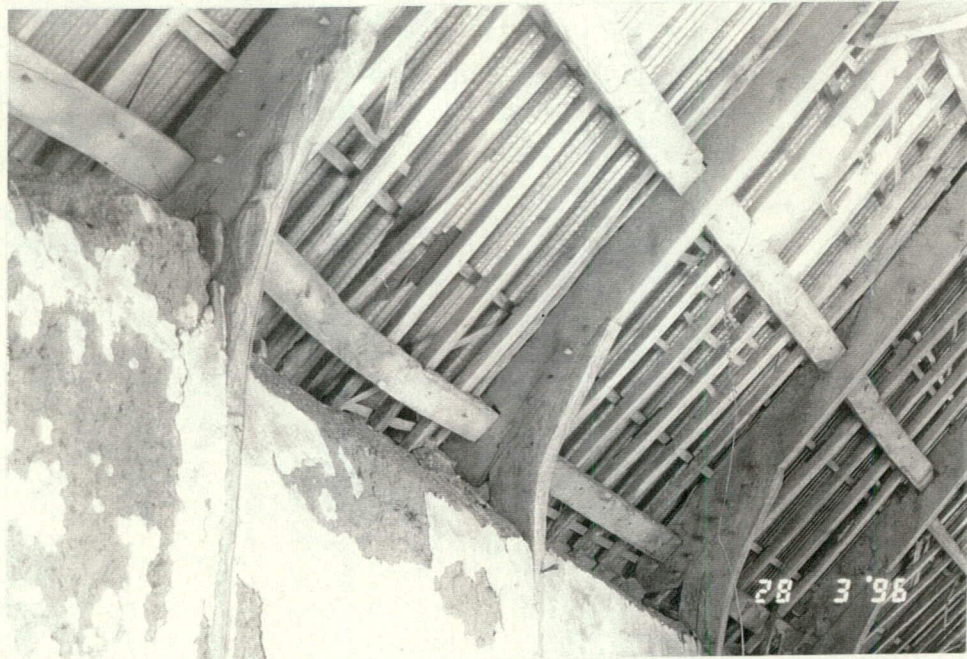


Plate 12 The stub of the original southwest end wall shows on the southeast side.

Plate 13 Detail of part of the cruck post of truss 5, southeast side, showing both post and rubble infill to right filling the chase cut in the cob.

Plate 14 Detail of inscribed charms or sigils on the plaster of bay 6, southeast side.



Plates 15 & 16 The old roof from the southwest.

Plate 17 The elbow joints of trusses 3-5 on the southeast side.



Plate 18 The yoke apex joint of truss 4.

Plate 19 The roof over the southwest extension.

Phase 2 The Late 18th - Early 19th Century Extension

At this time the barn was extended southwestwards 3 bays (9.25m) and the walls of the older part were raised some 3-400mm. It might have been at this time that the smaller of the original threshing floors went out of use and its midstrey doorways were blocked up. Nevertheless a new threshing floor was provided between large opposing doorways in bay 7. There was also a smaller man-side doorway through the northwest wall but no windows.

The new cob walls, like the old ones, are red cob built directly off the natural bedrock which now stands as low upstands. The original surviving parts of all three doorways shows that they were simple cob-lined openings with plain oak lintels; all that is except the northeast side of the doorway on the southeast side. This one was built in a stone rubble bonded in a buff-coloured earth mortar containing flecks of white lime. The masonry is neatly presented to the exterior (Plate 11). The masonry here is bonding the new work into the older cob at the junction between the two. This doorway also contains what seems to be its original doorframe since it is set into the cob of the southwest side. It is a sturdy oak frame with two pegs to each of the mortise-and-tenon joints as the posts join the head. The head is chamfered with runout stops each side. There is still a central closing stay or strut but it is now fixed top and bottom to replacement timbers which hide or have destroyed the original arrangement. The sides were chamfered but any stops have worn away. The double doors could possibly be contemporary – they are plain plank-and-ledge affairs hung on wrought-iron strap hinges. The opposite doorway was altered in the late 19th century and the man-door, close by, has been blocked up leaving only its northeast side and the slot for its removed lintel.

The roof structure over the extension is of 3 bays on 3 trusses (Plate 19). The southwest end truss is certainly a late 19th century replacement but the other two may be originals. However they are pretty rough-and-ready in terms of carpentry. They are A-frame trusses with upper and lower collars lap-jointed and spiked to the principals. The principals sit on spreader plates lid along the wall tops and are notched, halved and spiked together to form X apexes. The purlins simply rest on the backs of the principals.

Historic floor surfaces survive towards the southwest end and may date back to the time of the extension. The new threshing floor, the space between the opposing doorways is laid with pitched stone. There survives a large granite kerbstone along the southwest side

where more of the floor may survive under later material. On the northeast side of the threshing floor there is a limeash floor which survives full width and extends just over 7m to the northeast beyond which it has been removed.

The horse engine house possibly went in at the same time that the barn was extended. This cannot be proved but the two were added in the same vague quarter century or so. The horse engine house has gone from the northwest side but there remains the stub of a large beam set near the middle of the wall (the massive beam across the horse engine house which stabilised the axle and crown wheel), a tiny ventilation window under the eaves, and various blockings in the area, one of which must have been provided for the driveshaft.

Other changes which probably date from around the same vague period are the horizontal timbers projecting out over the head of the northeastern midstrey doorway on the northwest side. These are held on the inside by large tusk tenons. They supported a hood over the doorway. Another horizontal timber, set half way up in the northwest wall between the blocked central doorway and the southwest doorway, projected inside with a tusk-tenon on the outside presumably braced some agricultural machinery inside the barn.

Some buttresses and underbuilding were inserted into the extension but before the late 19th century rebuilding notably the shallow buttresses on the northwest side, one to the southwest side of the new doorway and the other to the surviving side of the man-door.

Dating and Discussion

The main dating evidence comes from the carpentry style of the surviving two trusses and certain element of the layout. The construction of the trusses is relatively crude and therefore cannot be dated very closely. A-frame trusses with simple flat lap joints and X apexes employing iron spikes occur throughout the 18th century and into the 19th century. However the earlier ones tend to use spikes and wooden pegs together. Thus a 19th century date might be considered. If so it must be early into the 19th century or even into the end of the 18th century since the extension included a threshing floor which indicates that it was designed for hand threshing with flails. The engine house had been built by 1840, the time of the tithe map, and these were introduced to Devon farms from the 1780s onwards. Thus it seems reasonable to suppose that the barn was extended near the end of the 18th century and the horse engine house built a short while later.

The barn was extended and improved at this time representing the general improvement of agriculture in the late 18th century and early 19th century. Indeed many Devon barns were rebuilt and enlarged at this time. It is perhaps fortunate that here the builders chose to retain the old jointed cruck roof and took the trouble to jack it up rather than replace it.

Phase 3 Later Changes

These changes were relatively minor and most take the form of running repairs and masonry, several of which have been mentioned in passing above. Perhaps the most significant was a late 19th century repair to the phase 2 extension section of the northwest wall. The doorway to the southwest threshing floor was enlarged. The old southwest cob side remains intact but the former lintel was removed and the doorway raised to full height. The old slot was filled up with stone rubble bonded in the same pale red-brown mortar containing white flecks of lime as was used in the rest of the masonry associated with these alterations. At the same time the northeast side of the doorway was completely rebuilt in squared blocks of local mudstone rubble arranged to give the impression of rock-faced snecked masonry. The rebuilt doorway contains a plain doorframe made up of square-section pine. The same style of masonry and type of mortar was used to rebuild the southwest end of the wall which involved dismantling and blocking up the man-door. The corner is neatly rusticated. It is not clear whether this rebuild extended round the corner since the end wall was rebuilt in the 20th century using concrete blocks.

July 1996

Text and photography by John R.L. Thorp
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Appendix I

Colebrooke Parish Tithe apportionment 1845

Owner: Calmady Pollexfen Hamlyn Esq.

Occupier: George Wills

Whelmstone Barton & Ford

			A	R	P
262	Five Acre Hill	Arable	4	1	21
263	Little Hill	Arable	2	-	27
264	Part Little Hill	Arable	2	-	38
266	Pound House Orchard	-	-	3	30
268	Lower Ford Meadow	Meadow	1	3	23
269	Walters Orchard	-	-	3	19
270	Higher Meadow	Meadow	3	-	17
271	Hatchet Close	Arable	4	2	16
272	Plot	Nursery	-	-	37
273	Plum Down	Arable	5	3	30
274	Six Acres	Arable	5	-	19
275	Three Acres	Arable	3	-	1
308	Higher Oxen Park	Arable	9	2	14
309	Lower Oxen Park	Arable	12	3	35
310	Middle Park	Arable	1	2	18
311	Ladywell Park	Arable & Meadow	14	2	29
312	Pond	-	-	-	28
313	Ladywell Mead Coppice	Timber & Underwood	2	1	30
314	Little Yeanery Close	Arable	7	1	23
315	Great Yeanery Close	Arable	20	1	33
315a	Part Yeanery Close	Meadow & Timber	1	3	3
316	Part Yeanery Close	Timber	-	3	18
322	Ford Orchard	-	1	2	15
323	Holes Mead	Meadow	-	1	33
324	Road	-	-	-	15
325	Lower Ford Field	Arable	8	3	29
326	Long Ford Orchard	-	1	3	-
327	Little Ford Field	-	3	3	11
328	Higher Ford Field	Arable	5	2	19
329	Whelmstone Mead	Meadow	1	2	36
330	Nursery	Orchard & Garden	-	-	30
331	Hill	Pasture	4	3	5
332	Little Ley	Arable	7	1	37
333	Fore Orchard	Pasture	3	-	33
334	Horse Orchard	-	1	1	13
335	New Garden	-	-	-	34
336	Fore Garden	-	-	-	23
337	Houses and Yards	-	1	3	-

338	Pond Orchard	-	-	2	12
339	Back Orchard	-	2	-	37
340	Mowhay and Plantation	-	-	1	23
			A	R	P
341	Barn and Mowhay	-	-	-	23
342	Gratton	Arable	13	2	8
343	Ladywell Coppice	Fir Plantation	1	3	9
344	Road and Waste	-	-	1	36
345	Pond	-	-	-	36
346	Lower West Wood	Arable	11	3	34
347	Higher West Wood	Arable	12	-	19
348	Landsend Close	Arable	11	2	19
349	Barns Close	Arable	11	-	5
350	Great Ley	Arable	11	3	30
351	Ferny Park	Arable	5	3	10
413	Part Waterford Garden	Coarse Pasture & Orchard	-	-	13
769	Waterford Garden	Coarse Pasture & Orchard	-	-	32
265	Garden	Orchard	-	-	14
268	Houses and Yard	Orchard & Garden	-	-	22
320	Garden	Orchard	-	-	18
321	Houses and Garden	Orchard	-	1	6
767	Part Whelmstone Bottom	Timber & Pasture	-	-	24
768	Part Whelmstone Bottom	Timber & Pasture	-	-	11
770	Lower Bottom	Coarse Pasture & Timber	1	-	11
771	Middle Bottom	Arable & Furze	2	3	31
772	Higher Bottom	Coarse Pasture & Timber	1	3	30
773	Part Bottom	Pasture	-	-	30
873	Higher Moor	Furze, Coarse Pasture & Timber	8	3	5
874	Lower Moor	Furze, Timber & Coarse Pasture	18	2	18
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Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to Mr Mitchell for his help and co-operation with the recording project, and for the loan of ladders from his contractors.

Aidan Matthews was site supervisor and Colin Humphreys was on-site linesman.

Rupert Ford prepared the finished drawings.

Sophie Sharif copied the tithe map, supervised the report production and produced the site archive.

James Moir, Peter Child and Eric Berry provided useful comparative material on Devon barns. We are particularly grateful to James Moir for providing information on the north Devon barns.

Sandi Ellison input the text.

Eva Searle for typesetting the drawing legends.

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