

**AN HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD OF  
A FORMER THRESHING BARN  
NEAR ILTON FARM,  
MALBOROUGH,  
SOUTH DEVON**



## SUMMARY

- On 17 October 2012 Trent & Peak Archaeology carried out an historic building survey on a former threshing barn near Ilton Farm, Malborough, South Devon.
- The former threshing barn is located between Ilton Farm and Ilton Castle Farm in a rural setting area rich in medieval earthworks. It is centred at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SX 7241 4024. The building is not listed but lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument 1019947 *Medieval settlement, site of quadrangular castle and relict garden between Ilton Farm and Ilton Castle Farm*.
- The site is now part of a small development that proposes to convert a number of the agricultural fields around the barn into a campsite and use the barn as a recreational area for the campers.
- The barn is orientated northwest to southeast. It is built into the slope which runs behind the building. The earliest part of the building is the central portion which has nine modern trusses forming ten bays. The building has a further element extending to the northwest which comprises three modern trusses forming four bays. The barn originally had a further phase to the southwest and potentially to the northeast, both since removed. Modern sheds have been added to the southwest, northeast and southeast elevations.
- Originally the building stood within a complex of agricultural buildings. Map evidence indicates a construction date prior to 1803, the general architectural appearance of the building and the materials present suggesting that it dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- The building is a bank barn, principally functioning as a threshing barn with the smaller northwest element originally being a shippon which was altered for the storage of agricultural equipment. The modern sheds were used for livestock, the storage of farm machinery and as a workshop. There was no supporting evidence to suggest that any of the materials used in the construction of the barn originated from the medieval castle demolished in 1780.

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M. Hurford

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### **Acknowledgements**

Fieldwork was directed by M. Hurford. The project was managed by R. Sheppard. The drawings were reproduced and amended by P. Webb and were amended versions of plans and elevations provided by P. McCann-Downes of Cornwall Geo-environmental Ltd.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by Cornwall Geo-environmental Ltd to undertake a Level 2-3 building record of a former threshing barn, near Ilton Farm, Malborough, South Devon (Figures 1). This was carried on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012. The barn is located between Ilton Farm and Ilton Castle Farm, to the north west of Salcombe, South Devon in a rural agricultural setting rich in medieval earthworks Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SX 7241 4024.

The building is of stone and cob construction with an extension to the northwest and modern sheds added to the northeast, southwest and southeast. It lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument 1019947 *Medieval settlement, site of quadrangular castle and relict garden between Ilton Farm and Ilton Castle Farm*. This includes building platforms, a hollow way, two large fishponds and cultivation terraces (Figure 2). A medieval quadrangle castle is present in the vicinity of the barn which was licenced in 1335 and stood until its demolition in 1780. Earthwork terraces relating to the castle's formal gardens also survive. The barn is not listed.

### *Building Recording*

Where specific briefs are supplied by relevant planning authorities with regard to buildings they may require a survey based on classifications as outlined in English Heritage's guide *Understanding Historic Buildings* (2006). In this instance a Level 2 / Level 3 survey of the building was required. The methodology employed also follows advice from the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings and Structures* (2001).

Where an existing building / structure is not protected by listing and permission is sought or granted for demolition or major alteration, the local authority may require that a full archival record be made first, in order to 'preserve by record'.

The building recording has involved a detailed examination of the former threshing barn both externally and internally. This has allowed for a brief written description (building type, materials used, likely date of origin, changes and development etc) and the compilation of a photographic record. Basic plans and elevations were kindly provided by Cornwall Geo-environmental Ltd and many of these are included here, redrawn with additional detail.

## **2. SITE BACKGROUND**

The barn and immediate area surrounding it are part of a small proposed development occurring within the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) to convert the area into a campsite. As part of the overall development the barn is to be refurbished, with the current walls, roof and floor levels being retained, for use as a recreational building for campers.

## **3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

On the opposite side of the stream to the barn several earthwork platforms are located along the slope, with at least three small rectangular buildings present within them. A hollow way is located to the west which runs south towards the barn. Cultivation terraces extend across both the north and south sides of the valley.

A medieval quadrangle castle, licenced to Sir John de Cheverston in 1335, stood on a terrace towards the eastern end of the SAM. The castle was sub-rectangular with square towers at the corners. It was demolished in 1780. Earthwork terraces of a formal garden are located to the north, west and east of the castle.

To the south of the castle and at the west end of the garden, are the remains of two sub-rectangular fish ponds once used as an ornamental lake, this creates the impression of a moat in front of the castle. Buried beneath Ilton Castle Farm is the earthwork former dam of the second pond.

The British Library Online Gallery has a copy of an Ordnance Survey drawing from 1803 by Richard Searle, a Royal Military Surveyor and Draftsman, showing the threshing barn and northwest extension, with three further buildings. This is suggestive of the barn having once been part of a former farmstead immediately to the southwest (Figure 3).

The barn is present on the 1885 First Edition Ordnance Survey 1:25 inch scale map (Figure 4). The main threshing barn is present, together with the shippon at the northwest end of the building. An entrance is indicated in the southwest elevation, which corresponds to where the large doorway is currently located. Extending down the northeast side of the barn are a number of small add-ons. The buildings to the southwest have by this time disappeared.

## **4. DESCRIPTION (*Figures 5-10*)**

The former threshing barn is a single storey stone and cob building which is orientated northwest to southeast (Plate 1). It is terraced into the slope which runs behind the building. The earliest part of the building is the central portion which has nine modern trusses, one by the northwest wall, forming ten bays. The roof is covered by corrugated metal. There is a short northwest extension which comprises three modern trusses forming four bays. It too has a corrugated metal roof. Modern sheds constructed of timber posts encased in corrugated metal have been added to the southwest, northeast and southeast elevations.

The northeast elevation of the threshing barn was constructed of a cob wall resting on a high stone plinth, with a single central winnowing doorway (Plate 2). Adjacent stonework and reused softwood lintel indicate that it has been modified, or is a later insertion. Mangers associated with the modern shed extend along the wall to the southeast. A building join shows that the northeast wall of the northwest extension is later than that of the threshing barn (Plate 3).

The cob wall at the north end of the threshing barn was used as the back wall of the northwest extension. Holes in this wall for a ridge and three floor beams indicate that the barn had an adjoining two story shippin, used for animal shelter with feed and bedding stored above, extending to the northwest. There had been no access from inside the threshing barn as no doorways were present in the cob wall (Plate 4). The remains of stone mangers were present at the back of the building.

This extension was substantially altered by the rebuilding of its northwest wall and the lowering of the roof, making the building single storeyed with a single large entrance. The extension was then used for the storage of farm equipment. The trusses rest upon the cob wall and on a later modern softwood timber lintel. Two metal ties were inserted through the northeast and southwest walls to prevent them from splaying. The north eastern corner of the building was rebuilt with breezeblocks to support the increased stress imposed upon the wall by the addition of a gate.

The southwest elevation of the threshing barn was predominantly stone built, probably due to this elevation being exposed to the prevailing wind. Here there was no building join present between the threshing barn and the northwest shippin (Plate 5). Two doorways are present, the smaller of the two appearing original. The stonework around the larger cart door suggests that alterations have been undertaken (Plate 6). To the southeast of the larger door the walling is cob on a stone plinth, (as on the northeast elevation), with a window opening set within the cob walling. A stone wall extending to the southwest from the corner of the building is likely to be a boundary wall both retaining the bank and protecting the entrance from the weather. (Plate 7) The

presence of two holes above the large door suggests the presence of a former projecting canopy or porch.

Much of the original southeast elevation had been altered by later building works and obscured by the erection of the modern shed currently used as a workshop (Plate 8). The original loading bay door is likely to have been located here.

Internally, the threshing barn has nine trusses, one against the northwest end, forming ten bays. The trusses comprise two principal rafters, tie beam and two struts. The tiebeams rest directly upon the walls (Plate 9). All the timbers present within the roof are machine sawn softwood of modern date. The internal walls were whitewashed. No evidence was present to suggest the barn ever had an upper floor. The cobbled threshing floor is placed slightly off centre towards the northwest end of the building. The floor to the southeast is level with the threshing floor and is of concrete and the one to the northwest lower by 0.45m. The large partially blocked opening in the back southeast wall is probably the original loading doorway (Plate 10). All the lintels within the building are reused timbers with the exception of the one over the small door in the southeast elevation.

It has been suggested that the barn may have been constructed of materials salvaged from the castle demolished in 1780. However, a thorough examination of the barn uncovered no supporting evidence for any of the stonework or timbers originating from earlier buildings.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The barn at Ilton Castle originally once stood within a wider complex of buildings, possibly including a former farmhouse and other farm buildings. The barn would have been used to store the corn sheaves brought in from the fields, loaded into the building through an entrance at the top of the bank at the rear of the building. The crop would have then been beaten by flail on the threshing floor to remove the grain. The grain would have been winnowed in the cross draft created by the opposing doors, thus separating the grain from the chaff. The straw produced after threshing would have been stored in the barn and the grain in a separate granary. Farm implements and other crops may also have been kept within the barn.

At the northwest end of the building there was a two floored shippon which would have housed livestock at ground level, usually cows, below with fodder and bedding stored above. The evidence suggests that this was contemporary with the barn. The shippon was altered, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to store farm equipment. The 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed the construction of modern sheds to the northwest, northeast and southeast.

The barn is typical of bank barns within the South Hams district, and Devon as a whole, with local examples found at Lower Diptford (Images of England 1011139), at Zeal Farmhouse, South Brent (IoE 99353), East Peek, Ugborough (IoE 99374) and Haredon Farm, Ugborough (IoE 99379). The barns predominantly date to the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century though 17<sup>th</sup> century examples have been recognised including the one at Haredon Farm. Nationally, the first appearance of bank barns dates to the 1660s in Cumbria (Lake 1989 99). Ilton Castle Farm barn was probably built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is unusual as the majority of bank barns in Devon are fully stone built. The materials used in its construction were locally sourced, with no evidence for the stonework, such as worked ashlar or carved timbers, suggestive of having come from the castle. This lack of supporting evidence might suggest that the barn was built before the castles demolition on 1780.

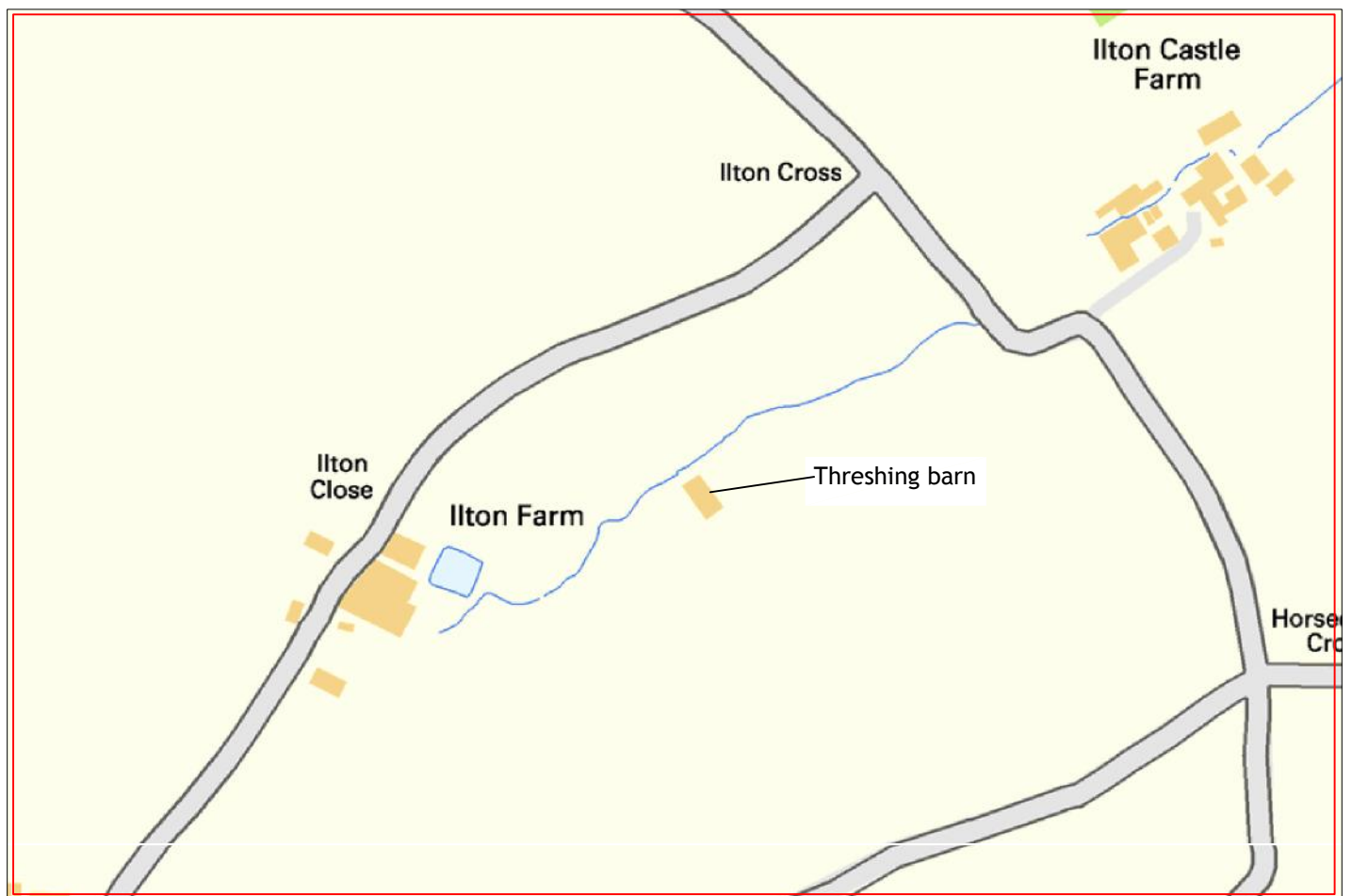
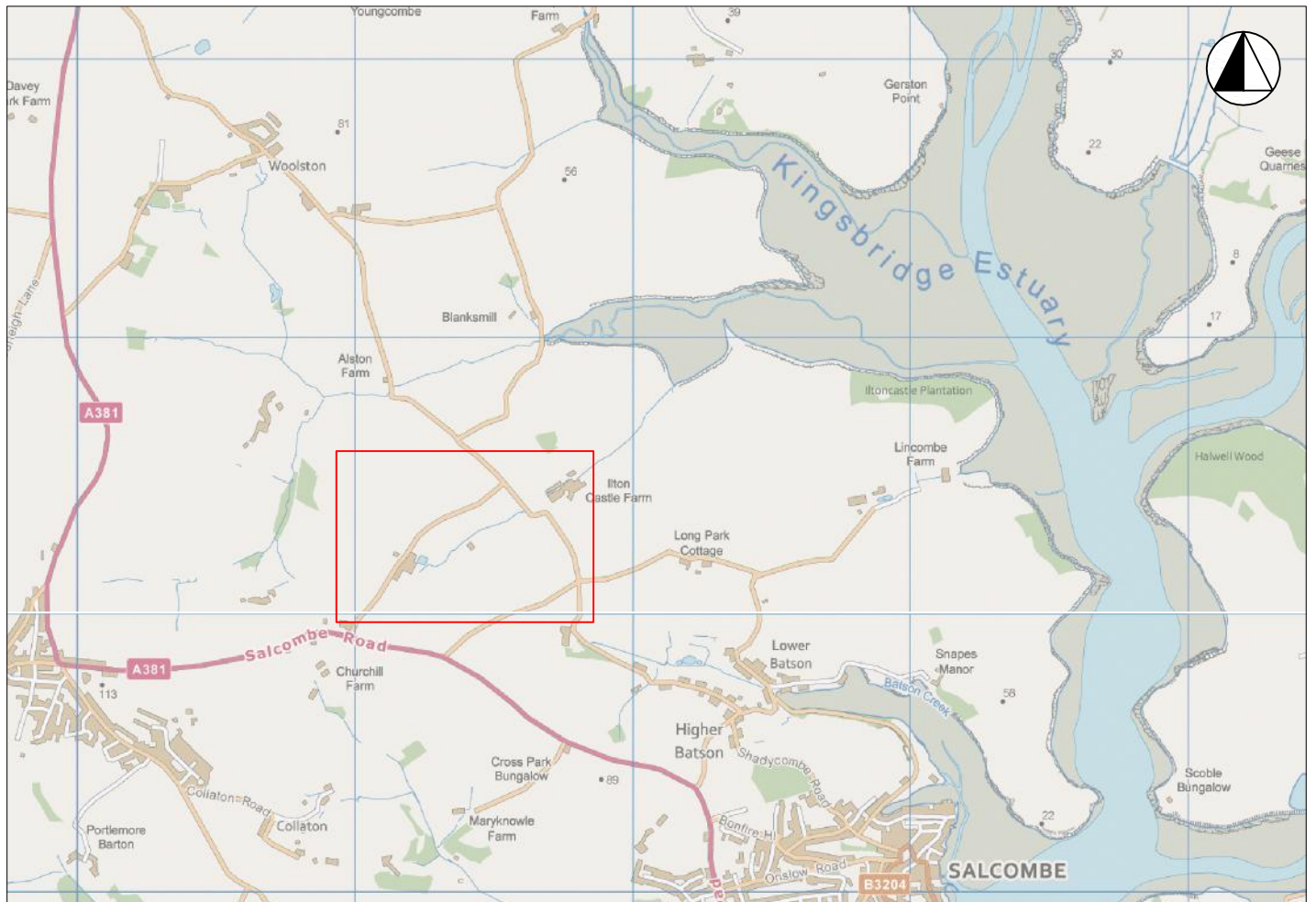
The proposed scheme of work on the building is very low impact with any monitoring of alterations made to the building during its development unlikely to add to our understanding of the building. However, further research into the estate papers of Courtney of Powderham held at the Devon Record Office may elucidate more clearly the likely date of its construction. A watching brief on any ground works may well be required as the building lies within a SAM. Any trenching within the vicinity of the building may assist with characterising the nature of the additional former buildings located to the southwest and help to place the barn within its context.

## **6. REFERENCES**

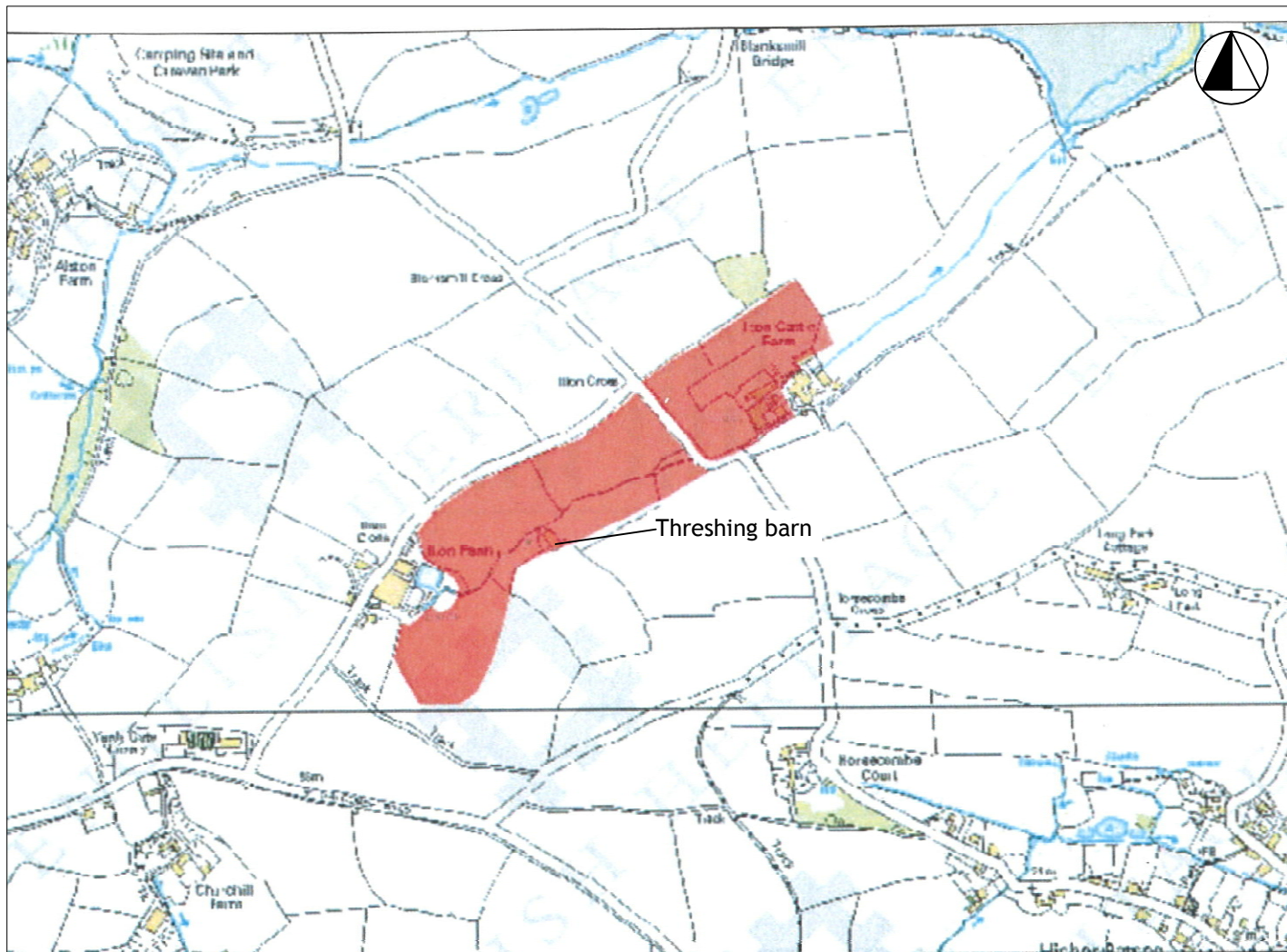
Lake, J., 1989. *Historic Farm Buildings* London

Tanner-Tremaine, V., 2005. *Life into Landscape - South Devon Historic Environment Project Research on Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the South Hams*

# ILLUSTRATIONS



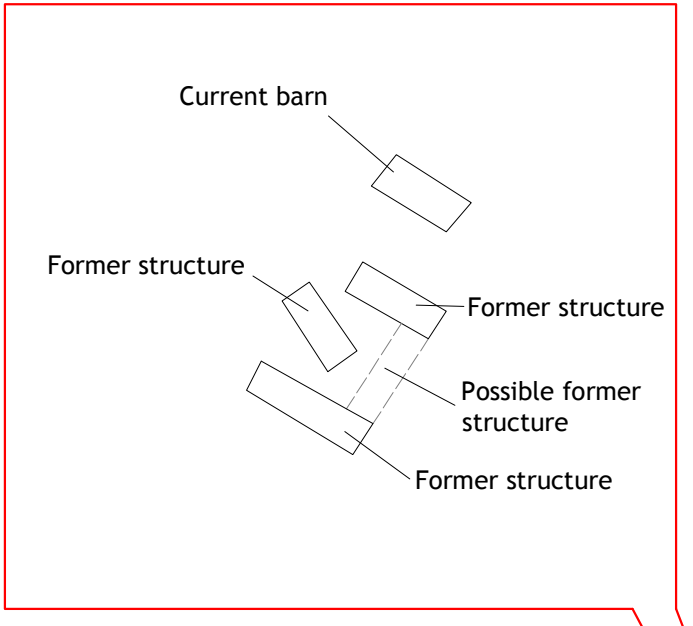




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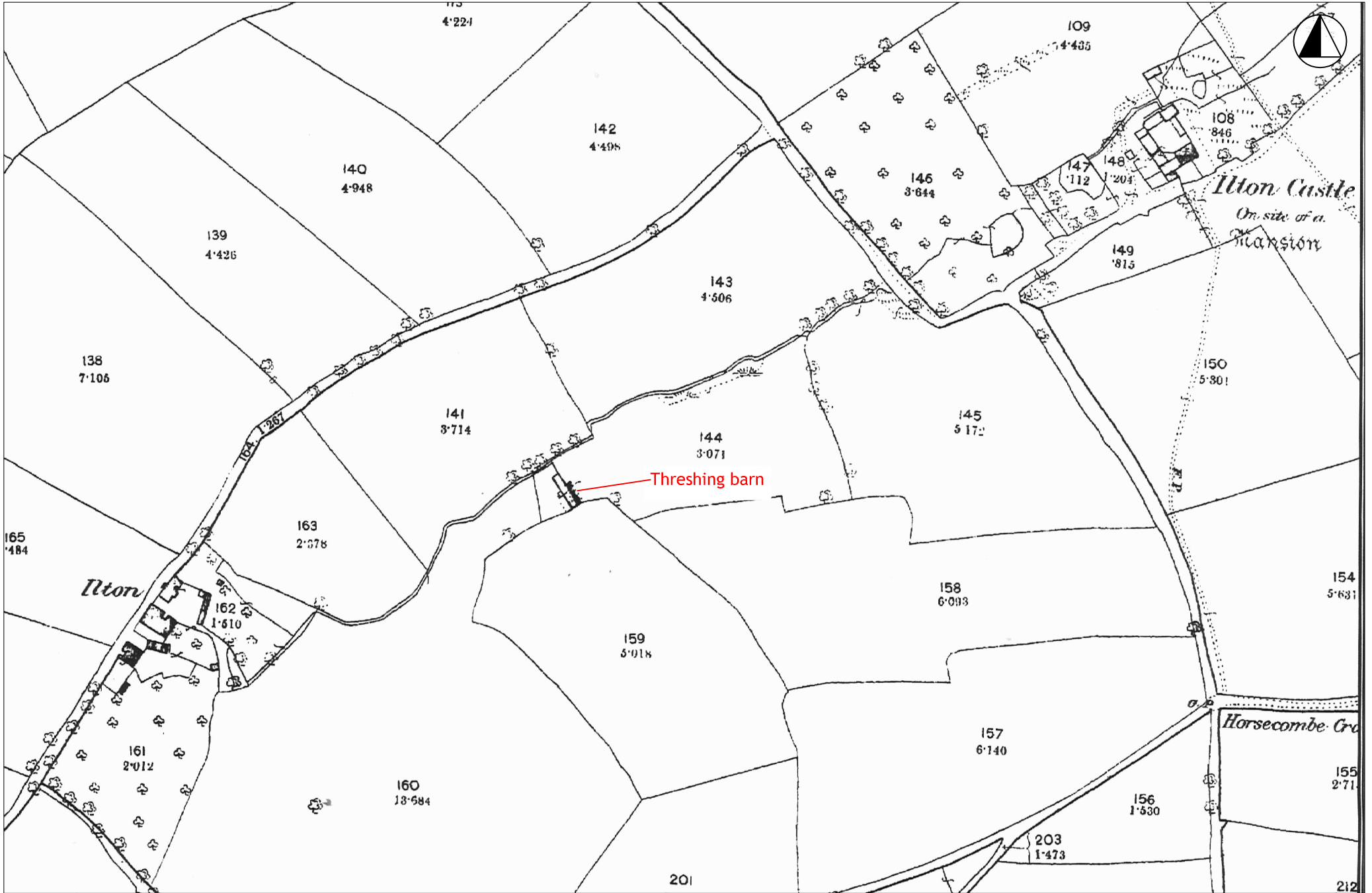



Suggested layout of former farm buildings



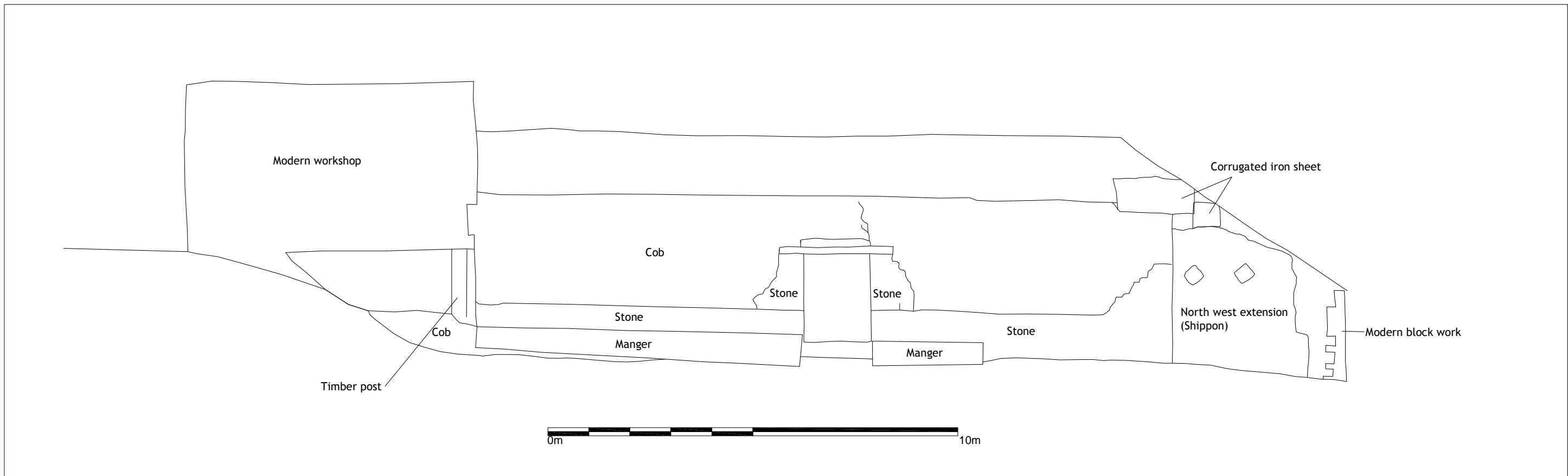
Ilton  
Castle  
Farm



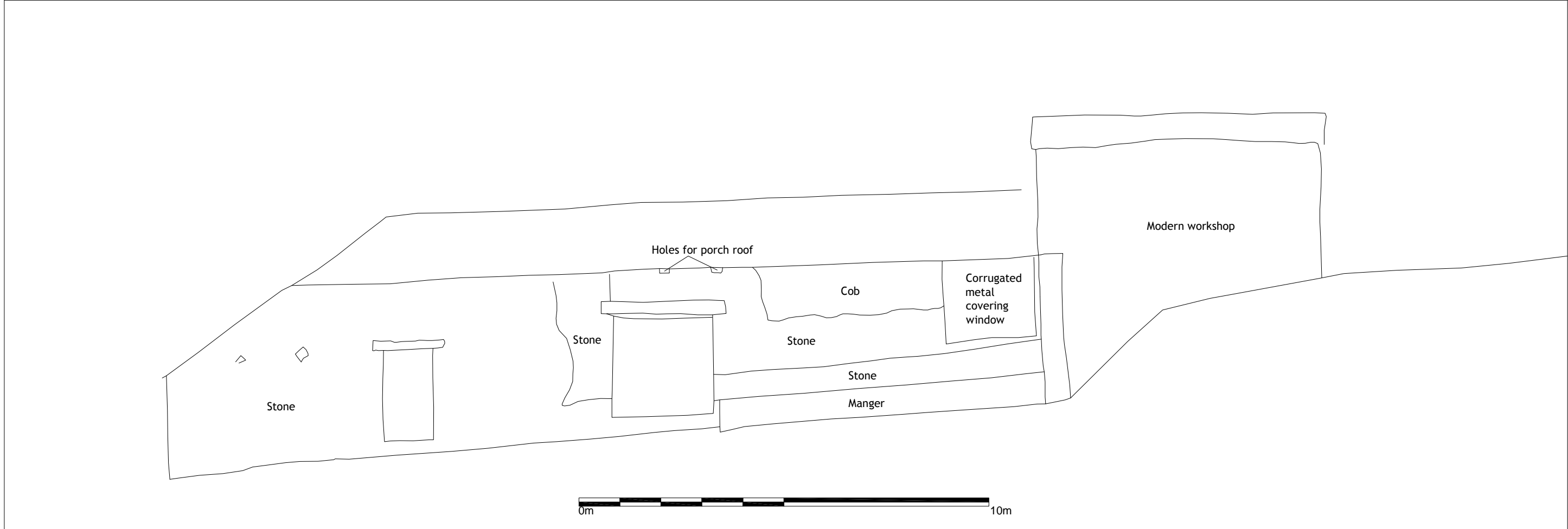



 IMS Ilton, Devon  
 Figure 4 Extract from 1885 First Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch scale map  
 Scale at A4 1:2,500

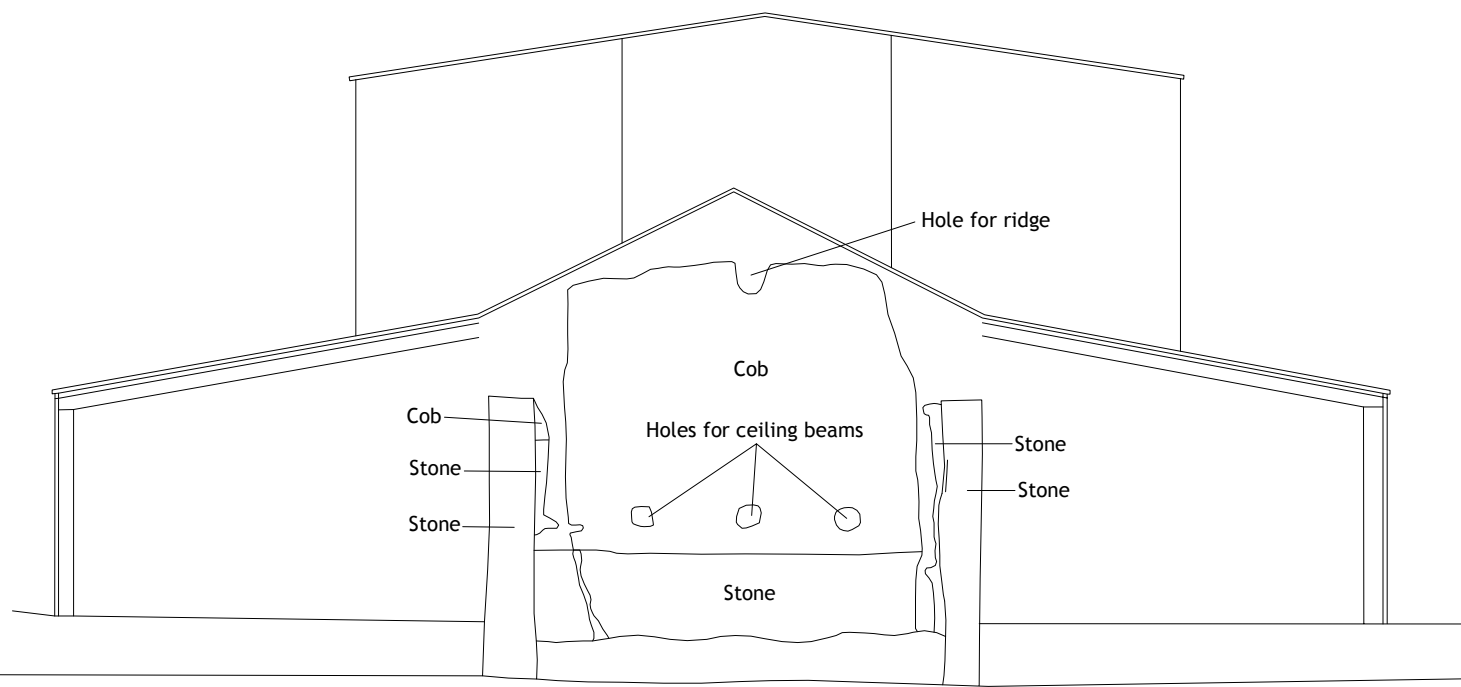


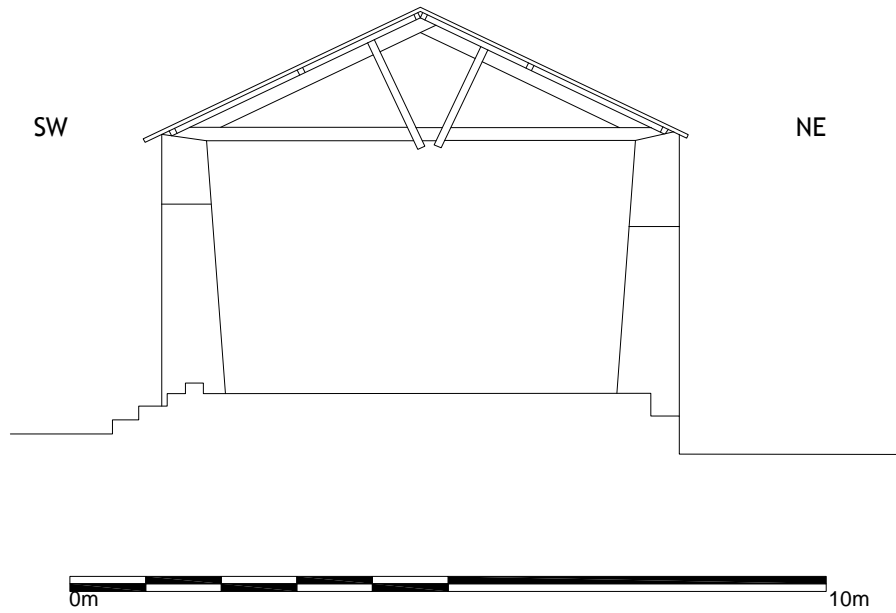


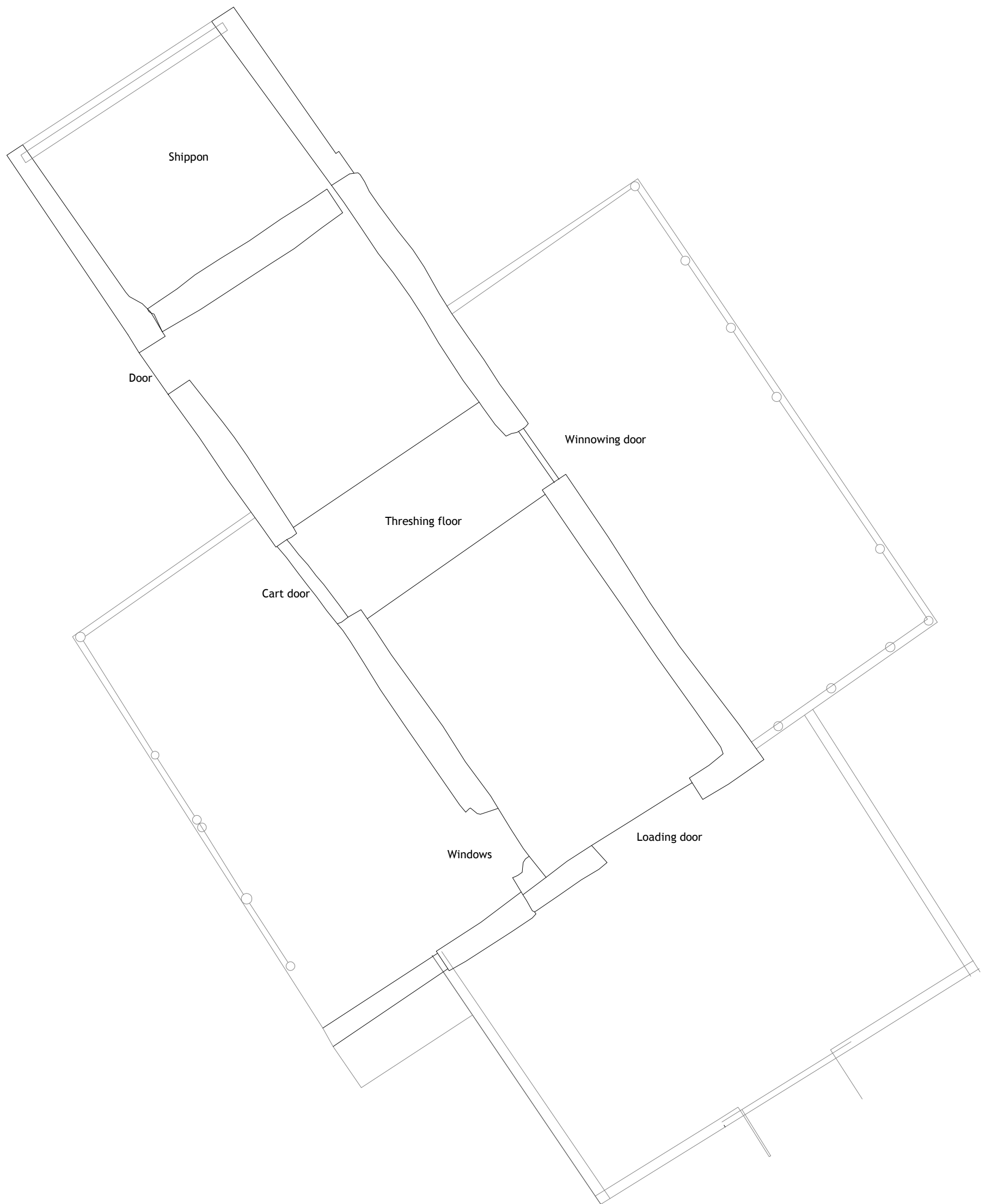
IMS Ilton, Devon  
 Figure 6 Northeast elevation with modern northeast shed removed  
 Scale at A3 1:100



IMS Ilton, Devon  
 Figure 7 Southwest elevation with modern southwest shed removed  
 Scale at A3 1:100











**Plate 1:** General view of the barn, viewed looking north northeast



**Plate 2:** Northeast elevation of the threshing barn and shippon, viewed looking southwest





**Plate 3:** Building joint between the threshing barn and shippon on the northeast elevation, viewed looking southwest



**Plate 4:** The northwest back wall of the shippon containing holes for a ridge and ceiling beams, viewed looking southeast.





**Plate 5:** Southwest elevation of the threshing barn and shippon, viewed looking northeast



**Plate 6:** Cart door in the southwest elevation, viewed looking southeast



**Plate 7:** Stone wall extending southwest from the southwest corner of the threshing barn



**Plate 8:** Southeast elevation of the threshing barn from the interior of the modern workshop





**Plate 9:** General view of the roof, viewed looking northwest



**Plate 10:** General view of the barns interior, viewed looking southeast