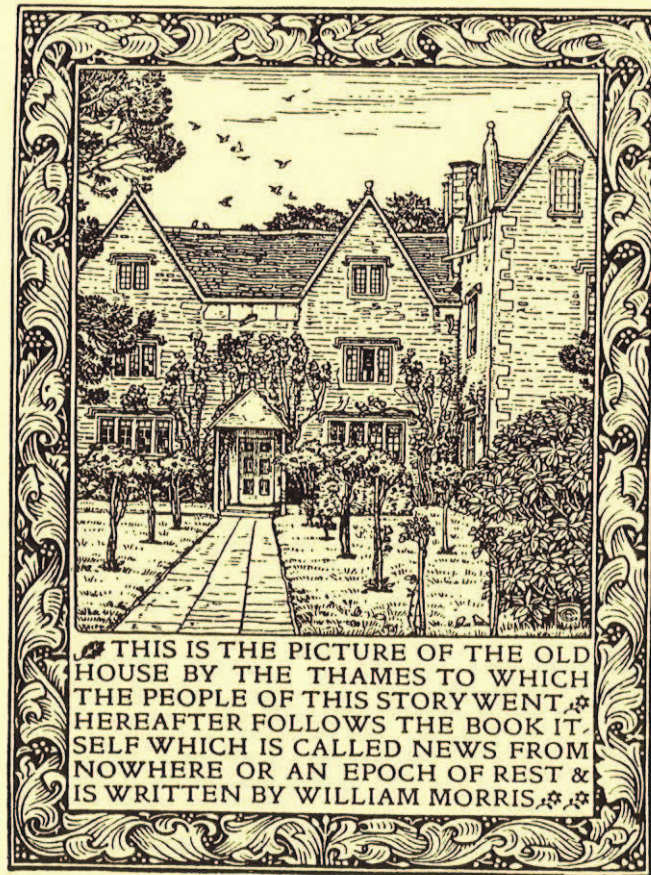


Society of Antiquaries

KELMSCOTT MANOR BARN KELMSCOTT OXFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING

NGR: SU2510 9891



Oxford Archaeological Unit
August 2001

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KELMSCOTT MANOR BARN, KELMSCOTT, OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING

Summary

Kelmscott Manor is best known as the country home of William Morris, where he lived from 1871 until his death in 1896. A programme to refurbish one of the main barns at Kelmscott prompted a programme of archaeological building recording by the Oxford Archaeological Unit prior to and during the refurbishment. Although it is an impressive and attractive building it is of significance more for its historical association with Kelmscott Manor and for forming part of a good group of buildings constructed in the local Cotswold vernacular style than for any particular intrinsic architectural significance held by the barn.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Tom Hassall, Chair of the Kelmscott Management Committee of the Society of Antiquaries, to undertake a programme of archaeological building recording on a barn at Kelmscott Manor (NGR: SU2510 9891) in Oxfordshire. The barn is one of the principal buildings of the manor complex, located c.50 m to the south-east of the manor house, and the recording was undertaken in advance of and during a programme of restoration to the barn

1.2 Aims and objectives

1.2.1 The principal aim of the current recording programme was to make a record of the barn before its restoration, concentrating particularly on features to be lost in the restoration such as the first floor towards the southern end of the barn.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The recording consisted of three main elements:

- i) a drawn record (plan and cross section);
- ii) a general photographic record (black and white prints, colour slides)
- iii) further descriptive notes to complement the other two elements

1.3.2 The initial site recording, before the start of restoration works was undertaken on 10/10/00 and further recording during site works was undertaken on 10/3/01. Although a plan and a section through the barn were drawn the relatively large scale of the recording (1:50 plan, 1:20 section) reflected the fact that the barn was being refurbished rather than demolished and that this was not a full measured survey of the barn. Some elements of the survey are therefore schematic and some measurements were assumed.

1.3.3 A limited programme of documentary research was also undertaken to provide an historical context for the recording of the barn. This was undertaken at the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and the Bodleian Library and consisted of the main secondary sources on Kelmscott Manor and the available historical maps. There exists an enclosure map but the only copy is at the Public Record Office and has not been seen. It is likely that a fuller programme of documentary research would uncover some further evidence relating to the barn. A full bibliography is included at the end of this study.

1.4 Current development

1.4.1 In recent years the barn appears to have been used for little more than small temporary exhibitions and although its shell appeared to be basically sound it was in need of refurbishment and some strengthening. The current work to which the recording related consisted of a number of main elements including a general overhaul of the roof covering, various internal reinforcement works within the main barn including the insertion of steel braces and the insertion of two upper floors in the annex at the southern end of the barn. The new upper floors replaced partially surviving floors which had deteriorated to a dangerously poor condition and which were unusable.

1.5 Historical background

1.5.1 Kelmscott Manor is best known as the home of William Morris at the end of the 19th century but the main part of the house was constructed over three hundred years before Morris in about 1570. The house was enlarged in c.1670 by the construction of several structures towards the northern end of the house and again in the 18th or 19th century with an adjoining utility wing to the south-west of the house. Morris took a joint tenancy on the house with Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1871 and continued to rent it until his death in 1896. This was Morris's most active period and Kelmscott Manor was depicted on the front of *News from Nowhere* published in 1892.

1.5.2 The condition of the house declined seriously in the 20th century before being passed to the ownership of The Society of Antiquaries in the early 1960s. The society then proceeded with the substantial restoration of the house by Donald Insall and Associates which was completed in 1968.

1.5.3 Due to the limited historical significance of the barn in relation to the house little specific reference is made to it in the main documentary material consulted. Little indication of its age has therefore been gained from historical sources although there may be other more useful maps which have not been seen. The barn is shown on both the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1876) and 3rd edition (1922) with broadly the same layout as that existing but on both maps the south-western projection is shown to have been wider than the current projection. There appears to have been a structure immediately to the north-west of the current projection which would have enclosed the entrance to the staircase and to Area 2. The previous structure projected slightly beyond the extent of the current projection (See Fig. 2).

2 DESCRIPTION

2.1 External description

- 2.1.1 Kelmscott barn is constructed in a typical vernacular style with uncoursed limestone walls and dressed stone quoins. It has an L-shaped plan with a five-bay main body to the barn, orientated north-south and a small western projection at the southern end (Pl. 6). It is c.20 m long by c.7 m wide (in the main barn) and c.10 m wide at the projection. Its roof is gabled and clad in Stonesfield 'slates' which diminish in size towards the apex similarly to other buildings locally including the Manor House. A moulded stone parapet, which is again similar to those on the Manor house but without ball finials, projects above the two main gables and above the gable fronting the western projection (Pl. 1). Another feature similar to those on the Manor House are two windows with moulded hoods (described below). At the southern end of the barn there is a small fold or yard, enclosed by a tall stone wall and incorporating a set of 20th-century pigsties.
- 2.1.2 The barn is located c.50 m to the south-east of the manor house, in a prominent location immediately to the west of the road through the village and to the south of the main entrance to the manor complex. It forms the east range of a small yard.
- 2.1.3 The gabled *north elevation* has four narrow vertical openings, three of which are at roof height and the other is central at ground floor. Each opening is beneath a small semi-circular dressed stone arched lintel. The *south elevation* is broadly similar to the north with three narrow vertical vents echoing the pitched roof line and each one beneath a small arched stone lintel. There are two ground floor doorways beneath concrete lintels one of which is within the western projection and both of which open into an enclosed yard with pigsties.
- 2.1.4 The *east elevation* has a large pair of barn doors in the second bay from the north (indicating the location of the threshing floor) and three square-headed vertical slit vents in each of the other bays in the main barn. Although the barn doors are secondary (C20th) the opening is almost certainly primary and is has dressed stone quoins. There are two circular cast-iron tie-bar plates towards the eaves height aligned with the northern gable and the stone cross wall dividing the main barn (Area 1) from Area 2. At the southern end of the elevation (enclosing Area 2) there is a blocked doorway beneath timber lintel and a square-headed window beneath moulded hood broadly similar in style to those existing in the Manor house. The window itself is a modern softwood insertion. The elevation is continued to the south by a tall sloping wall which, again of uncoursed limestone, which abuts the dressed stone quoin at the corner of the main barn.
- 2.1.5 The *west elevation* is similar to the east consisting of secondary barn doors, three narrow vertical openings and two circular tie-bar plates. In addition there are two doors towards the southern end (immediately north of the projection) allowing access to the ground floor of Area 2 and to a staircase up to the first floor of Area 2. The only feature in the gabled projection is a narrow vertical

vent towards the apex while in the adjacent northern face of the projection there is a first floor square-headed window with moulded hood similar to that on the east elevation. Again the window itself is secondary with a 20th century softwood frame.

2.2 Internal description

General

- 2.2.1 The interior is divided into two areas: a four-bay main open barn (Area 1: see Fig 3) towards the north and a single bay wide storied tack room/storage block (Area 2) in the southernmost bay of the barn which continues into the western projection. The two areas are divided by a thick stone wall but both appear to be of the same phase.

Area 1: Main barn

- 2.2.2 The main barn is four bays wide with a single threshing floor located in the second bay from the north. Although the threshing floor was obscured at the time of the survey by matting (together with the rest of the north half of the barn) it was apparent that it is not raised as is frequently the case. There is a step close the central line of the barn with the floor raised to the south formed of large irregularly shaped stone flags (Pl. 4).
- 2.2.3 The internal faces of the walls are all of exposed stone, similar to the external faces, and each of the narrow slit openings referred to above has splayed jambs to maximise the amount of light allowed into the room while controlling the ventilation. Each is beneath a timber lintel as are the main barn door openings either side of the threshing floor. There is a small mid-height recess in the west wall, immediately to the south of the western door, with a ledge on which threshers and farm hands would presumably have rested their implements or logging book.
- 2.2.4 There are three put log holes in the inner face of the north elevation, which would have supported a scaffolding frame during the construction of the wall, and there are similar features in the north face of the cross wall dividing Areas 1 and 2. The holes are all towards the apex presumably because at the lower levels it was possible to rest the scaffolding on the side walls.
- 2.2.5 The Stonesfield slate roof above the main barn is supported by three simple trusses, each one of which is similar to the other two and the main members of which are all tenoned (Pl. 2, 3, 8). Each truss consists of tie-beam, principal rafter, two collars and raking struts beneath the lower collar. There is a softwood ridge piece and three butt purlins to each slope each of which is set at the angle of the roof and is tenoned into the principal rafter (1 peg). Thus the principal rafters directly support the roof battens as do the common rafters. The purlins are inconsistent in size and show some evidence of reuse. The upper two purlins are directly above the two collars. The purlins appear all to be slotted with deep mortices cut in each end which slot over free tenons passing through the principal rafters. There are 10 regular (non-waney)

common rafters per bay and each of these runs directly over the purlins without notches. The rafters support battens over which is a plastered layer and the Stonesfield slate covering. The tie beams rest on the stone walls (on thin wooden pads c.5 cm thick) and at each end of the building the purlins are built into the walls. Each of the main roof members appears to be primary and of elm. The common rafters appear to be softwood. The roof is further braced by intermediate 'collars' inserted between the two upper tiers of purlins at the approximate mid-point between each of the trusses. These have 'birds mouth' ends and are wedged between the purlins.

Area 2

- 2.2.6 Area 2 consists of a ground floor room, a partially surviving first floor in a dangerously poor condition and evidence of a former second floor. The first floor is reached by a stone staircase at the south-west corner of the main barn (although enclosed and separated from it by a stone wall) which curves towards its head onto a small first floor landing. The stairs are accessed via an external door in the west wall immediately to the north of the door which provides access to the ground floor of Area 2. As part of the current renovation works the floor was replaced and extended over across Area 2 and a second floor was also added.
- 2.2.7 The **ground floor** is formed of large rough cobbles and the walls are of white-washed stone. The window in the east wall has chamfered, dressed stone jambs and there are two diagonally-set diamond holes in the underside of the stone lintel for bars no longer in-situ. The window itself is a simple single pane modern window and is beneath a long (2.5 m) elm lintel. The length and unbalanced location of the lintel suggests that there may have been a further opening immediately to the south of the window. Immediately to the north of the window is a former doorway, infilled with concrete block, again beneath an elm lintel. There are two doorways in the south wall both of which are beneath concrete lintels.
- 2.2.8 It is apparent from a series of projecting brackets on the north wall that the ground floor room was a tack room. Although only a single bracket remains entirely intact there is evidence for a further six brackets from which saddles would have been hung. The intact one is 85 cm long and is strengthened with iron bracing at the point where it enters the wall. The brackets would have been only very broadly in line and were of a rough utilitarian nature.
- 2.2.9 The **first floor** to be partially removed in the current development consists of a single north-south elm principal joist (24 cm wide by 27 cm deep) along the spine of the main building, supported at each end by the stone walls, and with nine common joists (11 cm by 8 cm @ 44 cm centres) extending east from it to the external wall (see Fig. 3). The common joists are of elm and are painted with no evidence of laths. Empty mortices in the west face of the principal joist confirm that the first floor formerly continued across the first floor. The empty mortices would have housed bare-faced soffit tenons within diminished shoulders. The surviving floor was in a very poor and dangerous condition and there was a substantial sag in the common joists towards their centre. The

common joists are being replaced in the current development but the principal joist is being retained and reused. A further north-south elm principal joist survived in Area 2, again with empty mortices to both faces, approximately in line with the main west wall of the barn. It is again being reused in the current development.

- 2.2.10 Three secondary common joists survive to the west of the principal joist, at the northern end of the room, which forms a small first floor landing at the top of the curved staircase.
- 2.2.11 The walls at first floor were white washed similarly to those at ground floor and there was a blocked doorway (blocked with stone) in the south wall in the western half of the main body of the building and where there is no first floor (Pl. 10). The doorway within the stone cross wall at the head of the curved stone stairs is formed by a long reused elm lintel set at a substantial slope.
- 2.2.12 The western projection is illuminated by a single-light window in the north wall with chamfered stone lintel and jambs. The window itself is a relatively recent insertion with softwood frame. In the west wall there is a mid-height recess beneath timber lintel c.25 cm deep with a plain timber sill.
- 2.2.13 A north-south principal joist survives at **second floor** in line with the spine of the building and with the first floor principal joist. The joist is c.25 cm x 25 cm and is again of elm with chamfered edges to the underside. Seven common joists survive tenoned into the east face of the joist, at the south-east corner of the building, but no floor boards survive. The east ends of the common joists are lapped over the upper face of the lowest purlin. Empty mortices in the west face of the joist confirm that the second floor formerly continued across Area 2 and this is being reinstated in the current development reusing the existing principal joist.
- 2.2.14 The walls were again white washed and there were three vertical slit vents in the south gable with splayed jambs similar to those in the main barn (Pl. 11). There was a single similar opening towards the apex of the north wall, dividing Areas 1 and 2, with the wider splayed side to the north face of the wall.
- 2.2.15 The roof was open at second floor with the exposed timbers white washed. The roof consisted of two main elements: the north-south continuation of the main body of the building and the western projection. The main roof was supported by three purlins to each slope and as Area 2 is a single bay wide the ends of the purlins were built into the gable and stone cross wall with no intermediate support. The purlins were irregular, of inconsistent size (average 23 cm²) and other than the central purlin to the east slope (which was a secondary addition) they were diagonally set at the angle of the roof slope. The softwood common rafters (13 to each slope) ran directly over the purlins. A simple horizontal brace with birds-mouth ends had been inserted between the two uppermost purlins and a near-vertical prop had been added between the second floor principal joist and the uppermost purlin on the east slope.

- 2.2.16 The roof of the western projection (Pl. 12) is supported by a single purlin to each slope over which run softwood common rafters some with small notches. A single simple truss, consisting of tie-beam and rafters provides intermediate support.

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1.1 The barn at Kelmscott Manor is an attractive but modestly sized building of limited intrinsic significance but of great interest as part of the group of buildings at Kelmscott. The association with William Morris lends all the buildings at the manor an historical significance but the constructional similarities between the barn and other structures at the manor and village, including the house itself, give the barn a greater aesthetic and architectural importance.
- 3.1.2 The L-shaped barn is convincingly of a single phase, shown by the consistency of the construction throughout the structure and the integral nature of the design, with minor later amendments such as replacement of the barn doors.
- 3.1.3 Dating the barn is slightly uncertain due to the unchanging nature of many of the constructional techniques employed locally. However the two moulded hoods over the windows, together with other details, are similar to those in the main part of the house which is believed to have been constructed in c.1570. It may therefore be that the barn was constructed in the later 16th century as part of the original complex but the trusses are suggestive of a slightly later date and it may have been constructed in the 17th century. The listed building description suggests a late 17th century date. Only a very limited programme of historical research has been undertaken as part of the current study and it is possible that a broader programme of research, particularly of any pre-19th-century estate maps, would shed a more conclusive light on the date of the barn.

Jonathan Gill
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August 2001

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Maps

- Ordnance Survey 1st edition (1876) Oxfordshire Sheet XLIII4
Ordnance Survey 3rd edition (1922) Oxfordshire Sheet XLIII4

Other sources

Department of the Environment List of Buildings of special architectural or historic interest

SUZANE
5/90

KELMSCOTT

12.9.55

6V

Barn approx. 20m SE of
Kelmscott Manor
(Formerly listed as part of
Kelmscott Manor with Barns to
SE and S of house and
Dovecote)

II

Barn. Late C17 with minor later alterations. Uncoursed limestone rubble with alternating angle quoins; stone slate roof with moulded coped verges. L-plan. Farmyard side has wide double doors to left with narrow rectangular air vent to left and 2 to right. Paired plank doors to right in angle with narrow projecting gabled range, which has rectangular window with dripstone to left side on first floor and narrow rectangular air vent to apex. Narrow rectangular round-headed air vents to gable ends. Road side has opposing entrance to wide double doors on right and infilled doorway with wood lintel and rectangular window with dripstone to far left. Interior. Left of paired doorways has semi-winder stone staircase leading to former left in right bay. This is separated from remainder of barn by a full-height stone wall with air vent to apex. Main part of barn has triple-purlin collar and tie beam roof in 4 bays with raking struts from tie beams to principal rafters. Remains of C20 pigsties attached to right gable end are not of special architectural interest.

[2385]

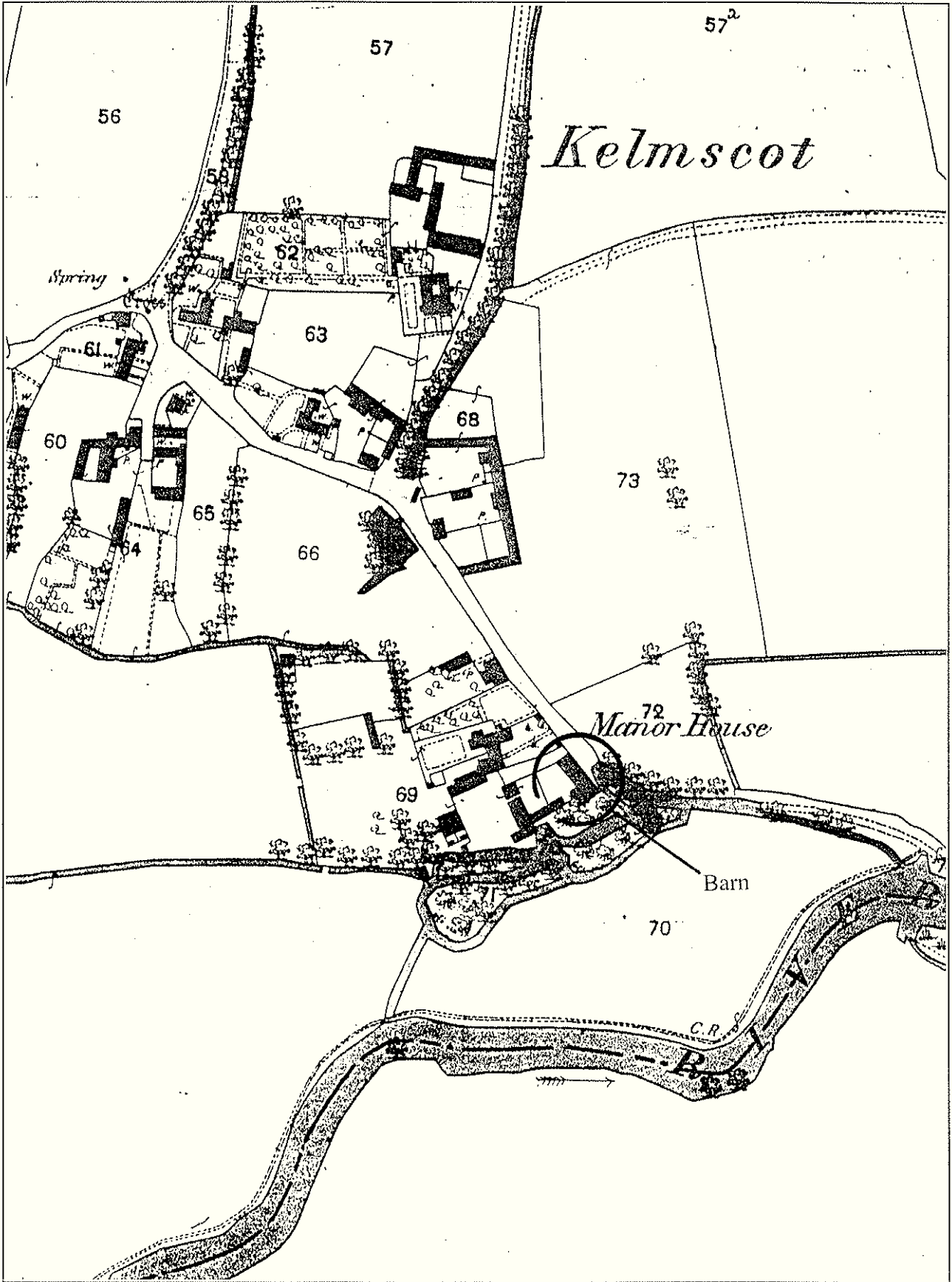


Figure 1: 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1876)

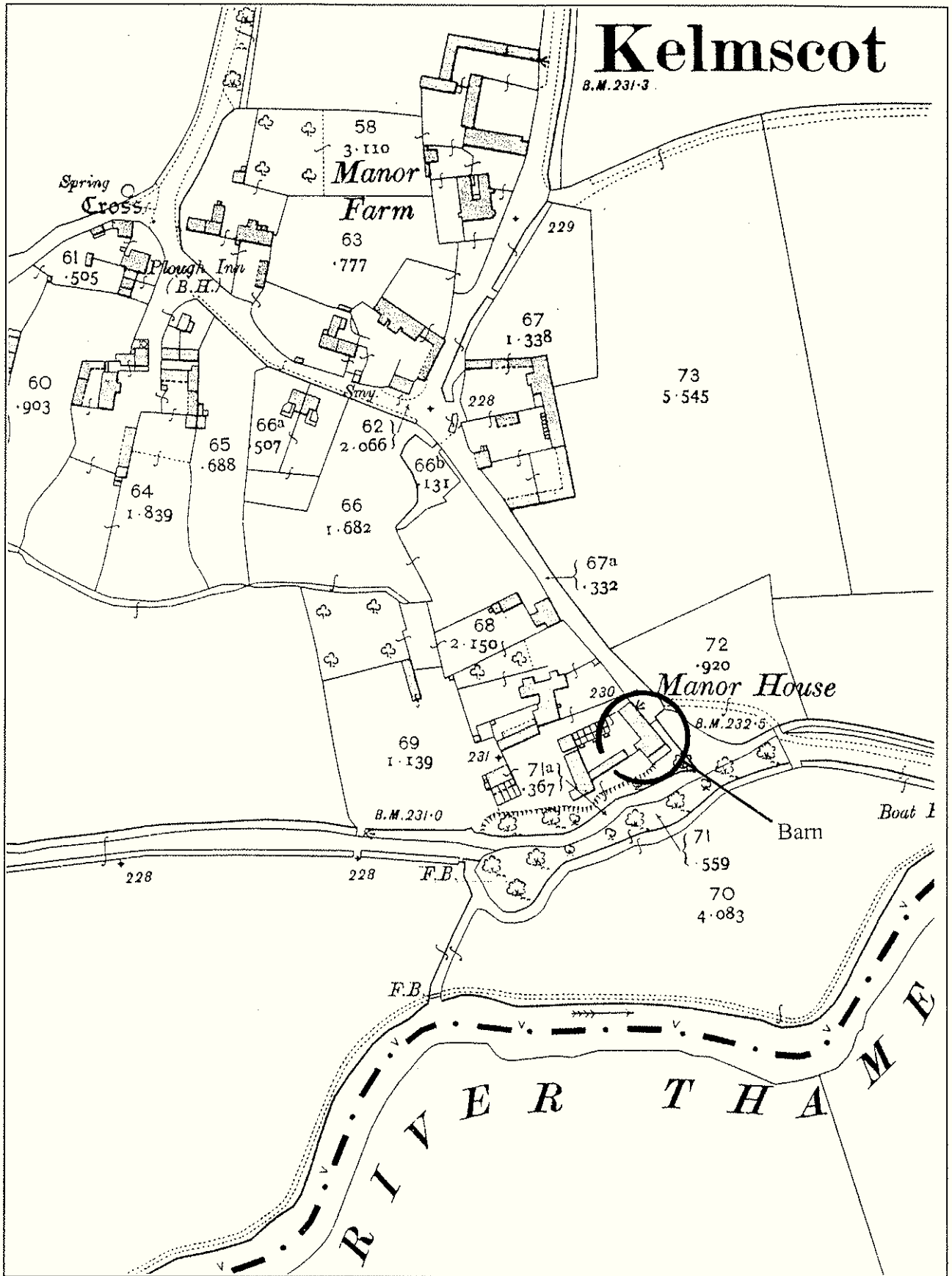
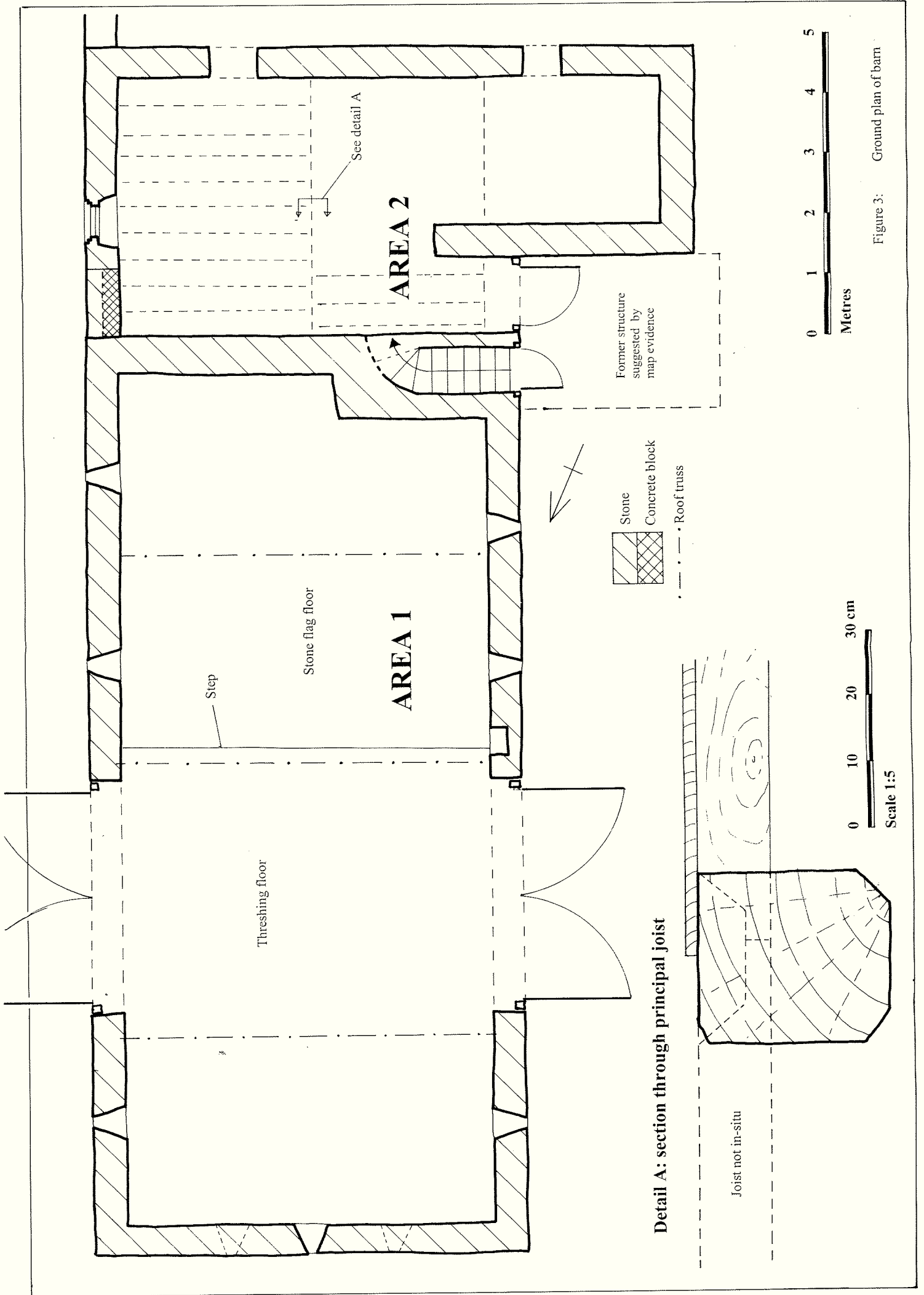


Figure 2: 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map (1922)



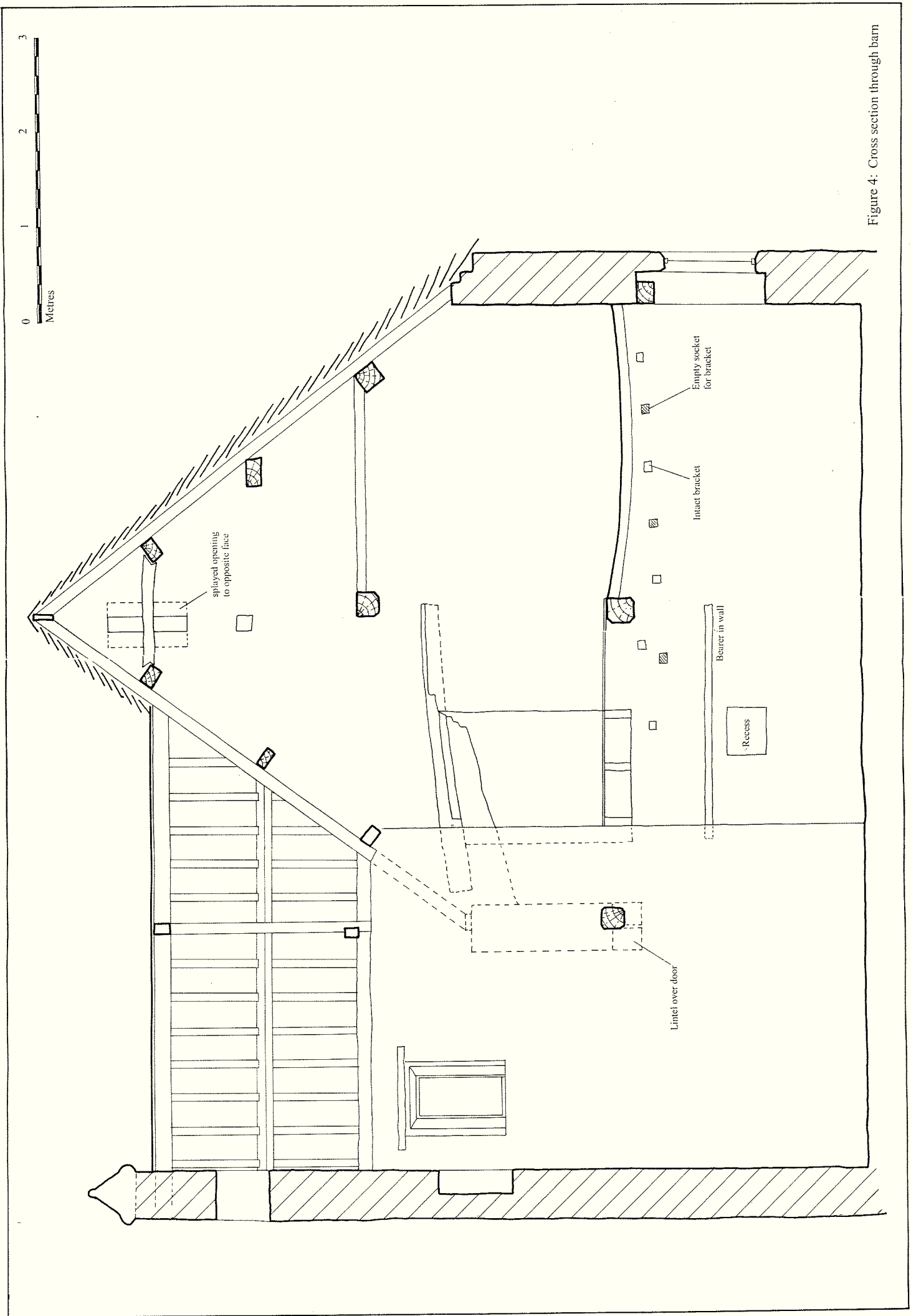


Figure 4: Cross section through barn

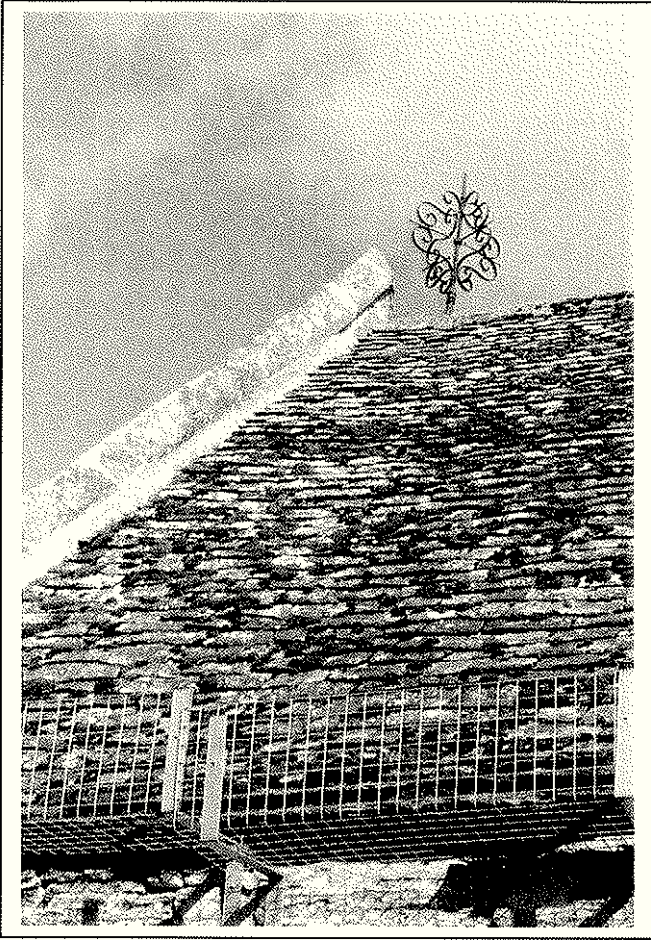


Plate 1: parapet raised above north gable

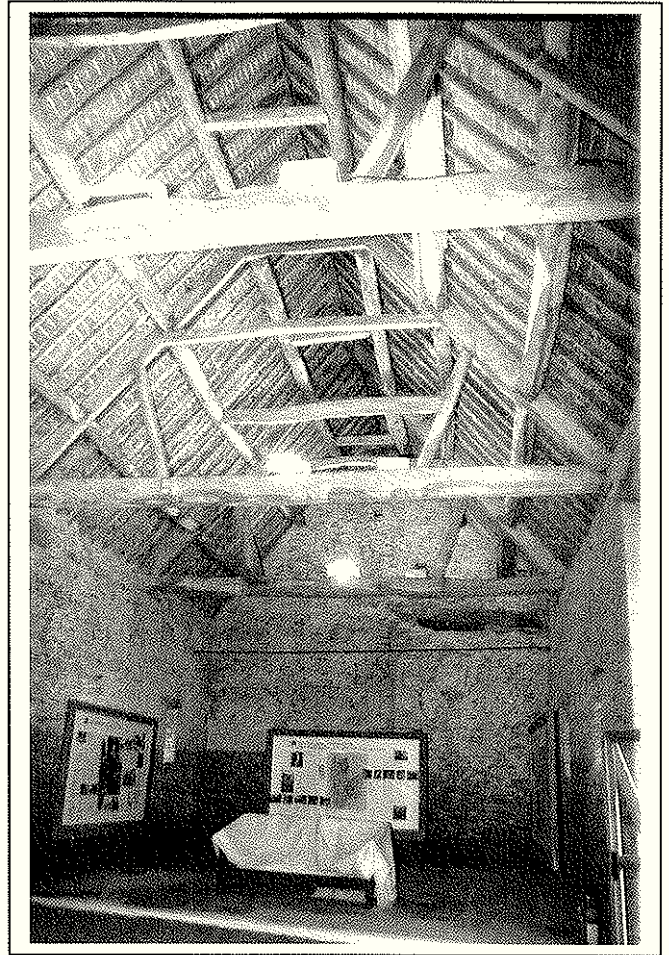
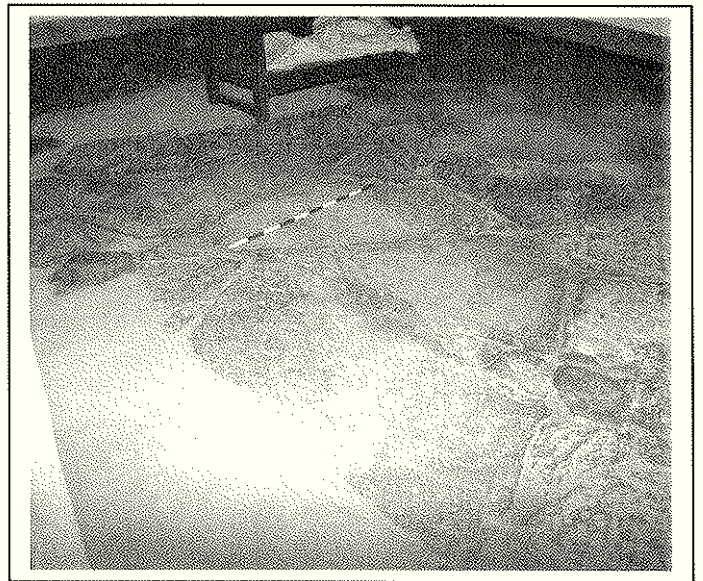


Plate 2: roof in main barn looking south

Plate 3: barn roof looking north



Plate 4: stone flag floor in main barn



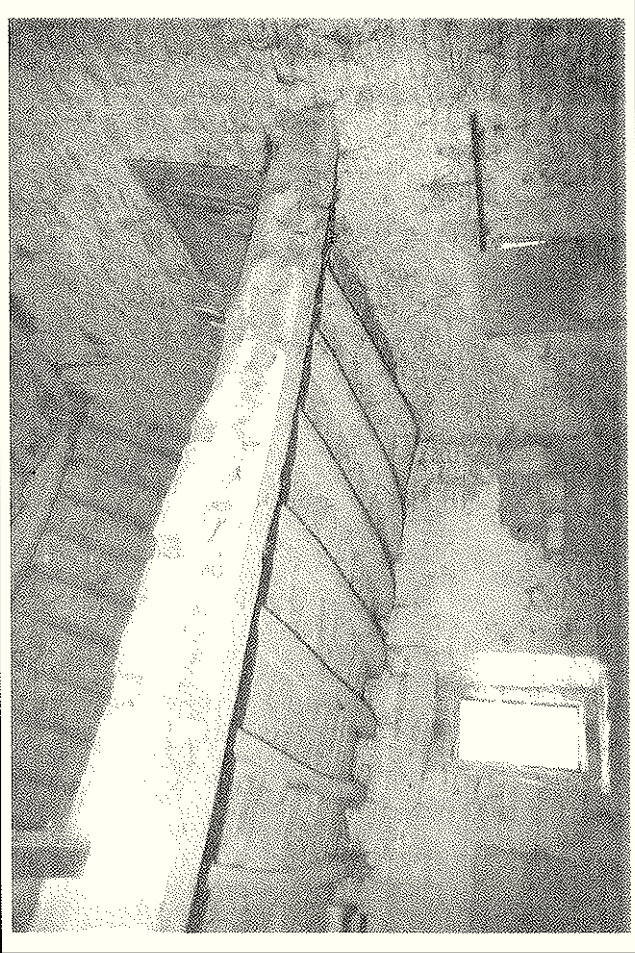


Plate 5: first floor joist with empty mortices in Area 2 looking east

Plate 7: partially surviving first floor in Area 2

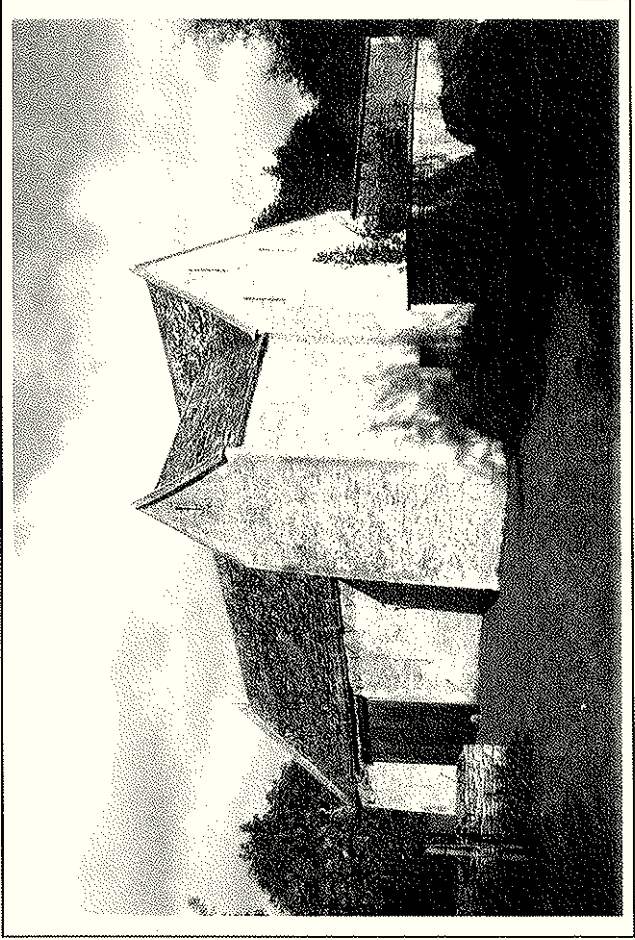
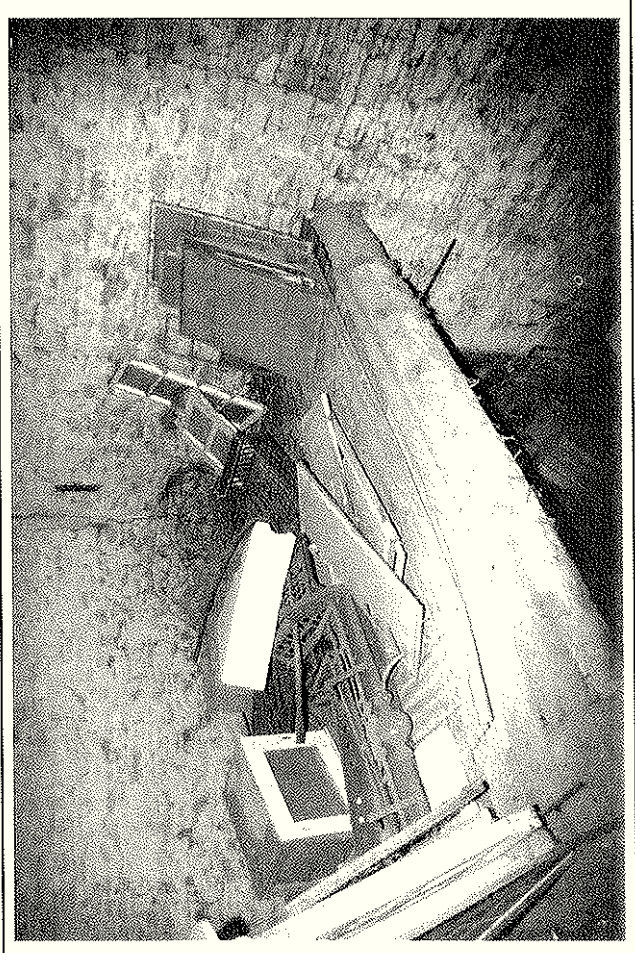


Plate 6: General view of barn from south-west

Plate 8: Roof truss over main barn looking south

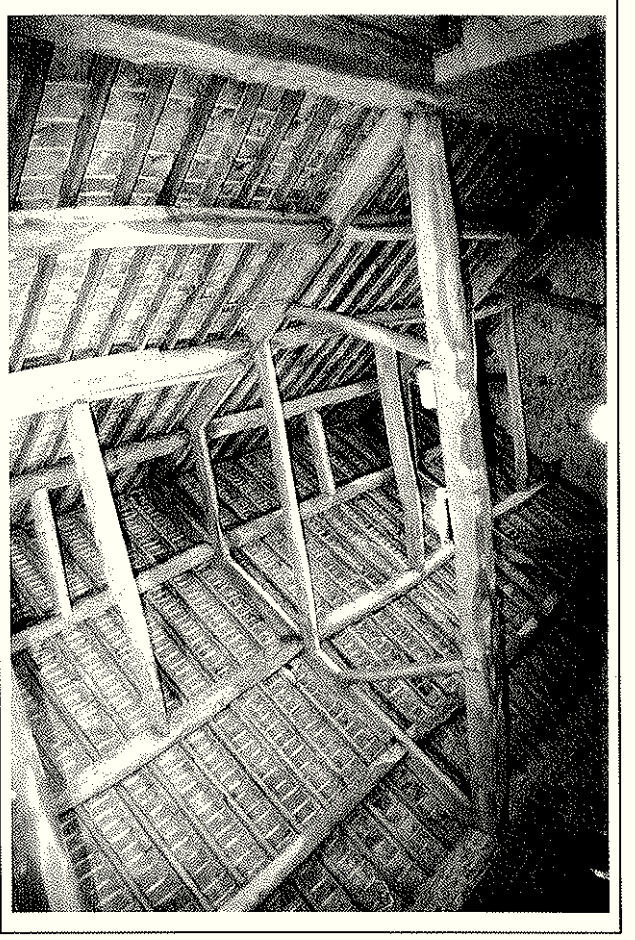




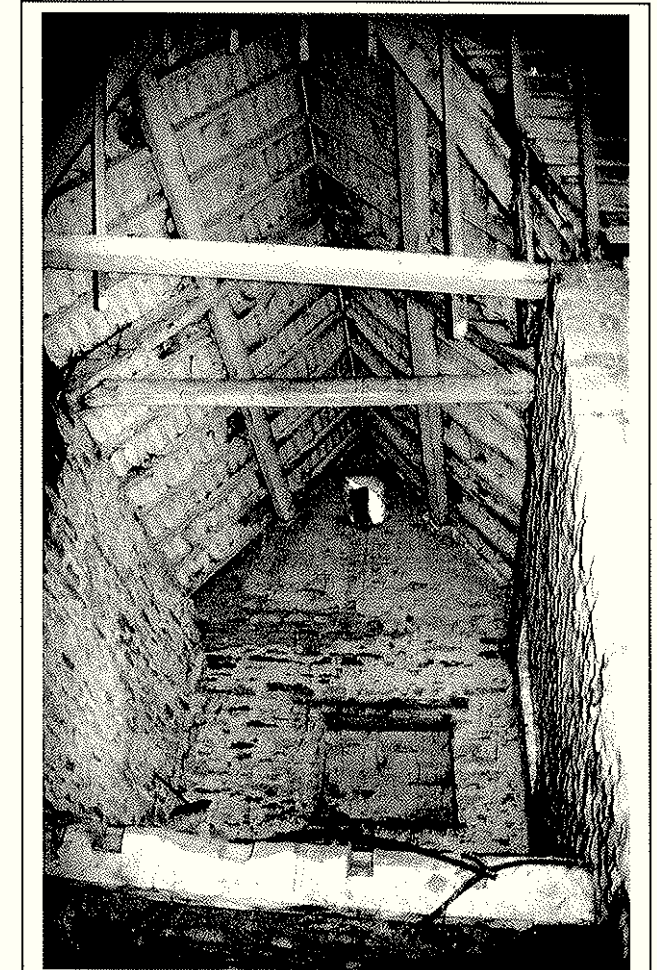
Plate 9: View of upper part of Area 2 looking north showing primary principal joist and later landing



Plate 10: South gable of Area 2 showing partially surviving second floor

Plate 11: Southern gable and second floor principal joist

Plate 12: Western projection





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