


The Old Rectory Letcombe Bassett



**Historic Buildings Recording and
Watching Brief**

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Historic Building Recording Watching Brief

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The Old Rectory, Letcombe Bassett

Historic Building Recording Watching Brief

Summary

The Old Rectory is a Grade II listed building and was the residence of the incumbent since construction, however, by the time of listing in 1951 it had passed into private hands.

The current house was constructed in the 17th century, extending an earlier building. A truss comprising cusped principal rafters and a cranked tie-beam in the roof structure suggests that the origin of this earlier building may lie in the early-14th century, although this early phase had already been considerably altered by the 17th century.

In the late-18th century, a single-storied brick extension was constructed to the rear of the house and the older building remodelled. In turn, this extension underwent alteration a century later when the roof was raised and the upper rooms were added. Throughout the 20th century, minor improvements were undertaken, with the construction of a conservatory and the fitting of a modern kitchen and utility room occurring around the time of the turn of the current century.

The programme of work which necessitated the watching brief focussed on structural repairs to the building caused by water ingress and the use of inappropriate materials such as the cement-based render to the timber-framed frontage. The timber frame was exposed during the removal of the cement render, revealing the external frame had suffered severe decay due to the render and required major repairs and substantial replacement. Other work included the installation of a damp-proof membrane to the ground floor and considerable repairs to the roof structures which had suffered some decay due to water ingress.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Following an Historic Building Assessment and Heritage Impact Statement for The Old Rectory, Letcombe Bassett, Oxfordshire in May 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) was further commissioned by Lockinge Estate Building Services on behalf of Mr Nicholas Ashe to carry out a watching brief and historic building survey during the repair and alteration work carried out beginning in December 2014 and throughout 2015.
- 1.1.2 The initial assessment concluded that the building was of considerable historic significance due mainly to its evidential, aesthetic and communal value. This assessment drew on original documents kept by the Berkshire Record Office and other secondary sources of local information.

1.2 Aims and objectives

- 1.2.1 The principal aims of this report are:
- to meet the requirements of Condition 4 of the Grant of Listed Building Consent P14/V1999/LB which states: “Prior to the commencement of any works (including demolition works), a building watching brief shall be organised. The watching brief shall be carried out in accordance with a written specification prepared by a competent archaeologist/building recorder and shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved watching brief shall be maintained for the duration of all works to the building. Reason: To enable the inspection and recording of any items of historic or architectural importance (Policy HE5 of the adopted Local Plan);
 - to investigate, record and interpret for posterity the areas of the building impacted by the proposed works;
 - to enhance understanding of the nature of the structure;
 - to make the record publicly accessible through a report (a public document) and a project archive deposited with a public institution.

1.3 Methodology

- 1.3.1 Having carried out historic building recording work during the site visit to inform the preparation of the aforementioned Assessment, the property was visited during the repair and alteration work in order to record and interpret the fabric of the building as it was uncovered. The recording concentrated on the areas which were directly impacted by the work, although consideration of the wider context of the building allowed a fuller understanding of how the house developed.
- 1.3.2 The watching brief and recording covered the exterior and interior of The Old Rectory, with outbuildings and associated structures photographed to provide context.
- 1.3.3 The work comprised three principal elements: a photographic, a drawn and a written survey.

The *photographic survey* consisted of general external and internal photographs and specific details and was initially undertaken prior to the repair and alteration work as part of the preparation of the Historic Building Assessment using an 8 megapixel camera; the watching brief recorded the elements of the structure uncovered during the work using 35mm black and white print film and an 8 megapixel camera.

For the *drawn survey*, architect's drawings supporting the planning application were made available to OA. These drawings were used as a basis for the archaeological recording;

locations of features being verified and the addition of further annotations for the purpose of phasing.

The *written survey* consisted of notes and annotations that complemented the photographic and drawn surveys and added further analytical and descriptive detail.

- 1.3.4 This report should be read in conjunction with the Historic Building Assessment and Heritage Impact Statement (OA2014). The room-naming convention in this report has adopted the room names used prior to the start of the works so as to be consistent between the two documents. These are shown on each floor plan.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Letcombe Bassett

- 2.1.1 The village of Letcombe Bassett is situated in the Berkshire Downs, approximately two and a half miles (c4km) south-west of the town of Wantage and within The Vale of White Horse, now in Oxfordshire, but in Berkshire until 1974 (Fig 1).
- 2.1.2 The village is sited upon two chalk bedrock formations with no superficial deposits with sand and gravel and alluvial superficial deposits outside of the village, to the north, east and west. This lack of locally available building stone accounts for the earlier buildings in the vicinity being of timber-framed construction, with later buildings being of brick or stone brought in from, probably, the calcareous sandstone formations to the north.
- 2.1.3 Archaeological features in the immediate vicinity range from possible prehistoric to medieval earthworks, cropmarks and field systems. An Iron Age Hillfort, Segsbury Camp, also known as Letcombe Castle, is approximately three quarters of a mile (c1.25km) to the south east.
- 2.1.4 Letcombe Bassett is widely acknowledged to be the inspiration for Cresscombe in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, stemming from the village's fame for growing watercress in the beds to the north of the village.
- 2.1.5 The Church of St Michael and All Angels is approximately 100 yards (c91m) to the south west of the Old Rectory and has a 12th-century chancel and nave and a 13th-century tower. It was restored in the early 1860s.
- 2.1.6 The Old Rectory is situated on Gramp's Hill, at the south of the village of Letcombe Bassett. The house is Grade II listed and lies within the Letcombe Bassett Conservation Area. Within the grounds of the house are several outbuildings, most notably a Grade II* listed cruck barn with 14th-century origins, formerly the tithe barn, and an unlisted coach house.

2.2 The Old Rectory

- 2.2.1 The surviving primary sources and the secondary sources of information were studied as part of the preparation of the Heritage Impact Statement and the subsequent section of that report has been drawn upon here.
- 2.2.2 The Advowson of Letcombe Bassett is detailed from the 13th century in the Victoria County History volume for Berkshire. In 1297, the whole of the advowson was possessed by William Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and later the de la Poles, and was sold and passed down repeatedly until eventually passing to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. A list of the rectors in the early years of the construction of the house is not available, although it is notable that the major phases of work to the rectory corresponds with periods when the church is not altered.

2.3 Archive and map evidence

- 2.3.1 An early probable reference to the property is the Hearth Tax Return of 1663 which states that the Rector, Timothy Stevens, has five 'fires, hearths and stoves' in his property.
- 2.3.2 The earliest map available in the Berkshire Record Office which shows the property is an unlabelled map which has been catalogued as probably being a draft for the enclosure and dated c1774. This map, although an obvious draft, can be considered to be reliable; it still displays the triangulation marks in setting out the fields and the buildings compare well with the later Ordnance Survey maps. This map, as well as demonstrating the changes in outbuildings, shows a 'U' shaped plan of a hall with cross wings, as noted in the listing details, and demonstrates the layout prior to the construction of the brick extension to the rear. The Tithe Map of 1851 does not include the building.
- 2.3.3 By the time of the 25 inch First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1879, and through to the Third Edition of 1912, the house is largely in its current form; the brick extension is clear and the potting shed (then a dairy) is present (Fig 2). There is still a longer extension to the north-western corner than there is currently. A building bridging the gap between the house and the stable is also shown, which also features in the sketch plan and specification of sanitary improvements in 1912 (Fig 3). The Ordnance Survey maps illustrate the unchanging footprint of the building and so do not reflect any changes in the roofline to the brick block, nor would they necessarily show the porch.

2.4 Outbuildings

- 2.4.1 Attached to the north-west corner of the house, not accessible internally at the time of the initial survey, is a single storey, single pitched potting shed, formerly the dairy until at least 1914 when an inventory of the rectory was produced.
- 2.4.2 Until it was demolished – with planning permission – in 1993, a three-roomed extension was adjacent to the former dairy. The scar in its former location was visible at the time of the initial survey. These planning permission documents [P92/V0733/LB] state that it was built in the 1950s and it does not appear on the sketch plan of 1912. The plans accompanying the planning application are dated January 1958 and include the extension, with the rooms labelled as scullery, larder and fuel store; it is not clear if these plans were originally used for the construction as the planning permission details are no longer available for the potential 1950s application. The scullery and larder were accessible via a doorway to the north west of the fireplace in the westernmost room, most recently a library. This blocked doorway became visible during the recent works when the external render was removed; it does not appear on the 1912 plan and so can be assumed that it was cut specifically for the extension and blocked when the structure was demolished. The 1992 planning application documents state that the extension contained a disused kitchen.
- 2.4.3 To the north of the house is a thatched open fronted cart shed and a further, smaller, coach house and harness room.
- 2.4.4 To the east of the house is an early to mid 18th-century coach house and stable with hayloft over. Following several unimplemented grants of planning permission to convert the building to a dwelling, the floor has, in recent years, been replaced with a concrete floor over a damp proof membrane and the timbers appear to have been cleaned and replaced in part.
- 2.4.5 To the south-east of the house stands the Grade II* listed thatched and weather-boarded former tithe barn, with the earliest cruck-framed bays dating to the 14th century, with 17th-century additions.

3 OUTLINE DESCRIPTION PRIOR TO THE REPAIR AND ALTERATION WORK

- 3.1.1 The house, a Grade II listed building, is aligned north-west to south-east. The front of the property, the south-west elevation, consists of the original hall and cross-wings; the rear elevation is dominated by the late 18th-century brick-built extension.
- 3.1.2 Described in the listing description as 17th-century, the front elevations of the wings are not identical, although the windows, which are contemporary with the brick extension, tie-together the general appearance of the house. The central portion has a stone tiled M-shaped roof, while the gabled roofs of the wings are tiled. Before the work, the majority of the front elevation was finished in a cement-based roughcast with the front elevation of the southernmost wing being of painted brick; the gables of both wings were covered with hung tiles (Pls 1 & 2). The floor plans of the house and the room names used in this report are in Figures 4-8.
- 3.1.3 To the rear of the building, the north eastern range, is a one and a half storey brick-built late 18th-century extension with a late 19th-century roof, dormer and windows to each side of the extension (Pls 3 & 4). That the windows to the earlier range are contemporary with the first phase of the brick-built extension demonstrates the extensive updating of the interior and exterior of the whole building at the time of the extension.
- 3.1.4 The listing details of 1951 give the name of the building as 'The Old Rectory and Parsonage Flat', although there is no surviving evidence within the internal layout that a portion of the building providing all of the necessary facilities was formerly a separate dwelling, nor does it appear on the 1912 plan. The re-used 1958 plans associated with the 1992 planning permission application contains no evidence within the overall layout of the flat being completely separate from the house, other than the labelling of the western bedroom as 'Bedroom 1 (flat)', and there also being a Bedroom 1 within the main house in the southern wing. Detailed in the previous Assessment report, it would be possible to create a set of rooms by locking the doors between the Library in the westernmost corner of the ground floor and the Reception Hall, Bedroom 3 and Bathroom 2, and the door between the corridor and the lobby to Bathroom 3. This would form a private set of rooms, but not a separate dwelling.
- 3.1.5 The layout of the former 'flat' does emphasise the presence of an earlier building: the location of the Library's fireplace indicates the rear of the original building, as well as the rear of the intermediate phase of the building prior to the brick extension, and the partition walls and change of floor level between the rooms of the 'flat' emphasises the south eastern boundary. There are probable blocked windows in this former rear wall in Bathroom 3 and the adjacent stairwell. The south west facing front elevation of the northern wing has been extended forwards, with the beam in the library indicating the original frontage.

4 MATERIAL UNCOVERED DURING THE REPAIR WORK

4.1 Exterior

General

- 4.1.1 The failed cement-based roughcast and renders were removed from all elevations. Rigid cement-based renders crack as the timber frame naturally moves, allowing moisture through the render and into the timber frame, but not allowing it to evaporate, causing the timber frame to rot. The majority of the timber frame had irretrievably decayed due to the inappropriate render, the bricks of the infill panels, or nogging, had begun to laminate and the lime mortar joints had started to fail. The stonework had fared a little better.
- 4.1.2 Some pieces of the removed cement render contained the remnants of the former haired-lime render. Each of the phases of render would have been applied to laths nailed to the timber frame, although in some areas, gouges in the timber frame have been added to act as a key for the render and the render applied directly to the wall.
- 4.1.3 There is no visible surviving evidence of how the panels were infilled prior to the brick nogging.

South western, front, elevation

- 4.1.4 The earliest, northernmost, wing of the front south-west elevation is of stone, extending into the second storey to the eaves of the northernmost pitch, with timber framing above (Pls 5 & 6). Brick nogging is up to the level of the eaves of the southernmost pitch with hung tiles fitted over the bare timber frame above this to the apex. Areas of brick repairs are around the parts of the later sash windows which are set into the stonework (Pl 7).
- 4.1.5 The front elevation of the southernmost wing, as discussed, had been largely rebuilt in brick in the late 18th century; the northernmost return between the façade and the recessed bays is of timber frame with brick nogging (Pl 8). The timber frame of the first floor is more substantial than the ground floor, which has largely been replaced by brick.
- 4.1.6 The central bays, set back from the two side wings, are timber frame with brick nogging, although, like the southernmost wing, the ground floor is now predominantly brick. There is evidence of several instances of substantial repairs and replacement of material to this area, particularly the area of mid 20th-century brickwork surrounding the central window, above the porch. The brick patching around the windows to either side of the upper floor of the central bays confirms that the windows are later replacements (Pls 9-11).
- 4.1.7 The timber frames within the apexes of the two side wings were in better condition, having been boarded externally and tiles hung, and thus allowing moisture to evaporate from the timber, however, some of these elements may be replacements.

South eastern elevation

- 4.1.8 The south-east elevation was revealed to be of brick and stone (Pls 12-14). The majority of the brickwork is likely to have been introduced as repairs and alterations to the formerly stone wall, and has gradually become more prevalent, particularly with the addition of the brick-built chimney. There is no timber frame or evidence of timber frame in this elevation.
- 4.1.9 The ground floor windows, which were added in c1993, have concrete lintels and have been cut into the existing stone and brickwork (Pl 15). The upper stairwell window, just

below the eaves, was re-opened at the same time. The frames were made to match the existing lower stairwell window.

North eastern, rear, elevation

- 4.1.10 The earlier part of the north-east, the rear, elevation was revealed to be timber frame with brick nogging, laid on edge, to the majority of the first floor and brick and stone infiling to the ground floor with some modern brick and block repairs (Pls 16 & 17). The gable had had hung tiles to the outside and the rear of the lath and plaster of the internal finish was visible when the tiles were stripped (Pl 18).
- 4.1.11 A large brick buttress had been constructed against the southernmost end of the wall which had been concealed by the modern conservatory. This was removed following correct repair of the wall (Pl 19).
- 4.1.12 The brick-built extension was little-changed, other than necessary repointing and the roofline alterations described later (Pl 20). Plans to extend one of the windows to create a doorway were discarded and the openings remained as they were. The original mortar of the later upper courses of brickwork of the later side dormer was examined following the raking-out and the mortar was observed to be a hard grey lime mortar with inclusions of, what may be, reused lime (Pl 21). The mortar of the original extension is of cream-coloured lime mortar.

North western elevation

- 4.1.13 Once uncovered, the earlier part of the north-west elevation was revealed to be of stone (Pl 22). Some later brickwork indicates the location of the doorway to the former scullery blocked in the late 20th century, and the reworking of the window and door of the former library (Pl 23). There is no evidence of timber frame having been used in this elevation, and the rebuilding and reworking has replaced much of the original detail.
- 4.1.14 As with the rear elevation, this elevation of the brick-built extension was not altered and has received the necessary repointing as part of this project.

Conservatory

- 4.1.15 The conservatory, built c1999, was completely replaced (Pl 24). There were no features of historic interest within this structure.

Summary

- 4.1.16 Following the removal of the cement render it became apparent that the earlier phases of construction, which could be interpreted when the walls were covered, consisted of several smaller phases of work. For instance, the wings of the front elevation are roughly the same, but the subtle differences in the pattern of the timber frame may indicate that the work was carried out in a more piecemeal manner than previously thought, however, there is not enough surviving evidence for determining any definite sequence of construction due to repairs, alterations and decay. Even if the members of the timber frame had not rotted, it would not have been suitable for dendrochronological dating due to the low number of rings and lack of sapwood.

- 4.1.17 The walls of the half-timbered range of the house were lime-rendered (seen in Pl 24). The brick extension range was repointed.
- 4.1.18 A new brick-built entrance hall was constructed in place of the demolished conservatory, relocating the main entrance to the rear of the building.

4.2 Roof structures

Northernmost wing – former roof structures

- 4.2.1 Following the removal of the roof tiles, the phases of alteration of the roof of the northernmost wing became apparent, revealing an earlier, narrower roof with the front-most pair of principal rafters being of cusped timbers (Pl 25). These cusped timbers and the cranked tiebeam form a principal rafter truss, demonstrating the potential of a reasonably high-status medieval building as the origin of this house. There is no visible smoke blackening to any of the timbers, suggesting that the structure was ceiled early-on in its life.
- 4.2.2 This one surviving early principal rafter truss is set back slightly from the front of the 16th-century phase of the building, aligned approximately with the westernmost end of the library window on the ground floor and the partition wall between bedroom 3 and bathroom 3 on the first floor (Pl 26). It does not align with any further features or identifiable phases in the building, nor does it appear to demarcate a bay's width from any point in the current layout. The ceiling of the bedroom to the front of this truss is higher than that of the bathroom to its rear, the higher ceiling not having to respect the height of the cranked tiebeam (Pl 27).
- 4.2.3 The northernmost cusped rafter is extended downwards towards the current wallplate by a length of timber which is tapered to accommodate the thickness of the rafter. Two pairs of common rafters abut either side of this.
- 4.2.4 Visible only on the northernmost pitch, supported by the purlin extending to the rear of the cusped timbers, is another phase of timbers, possibly cut-down rafters, extending from the purlin downwards, and not extending upwards to the apex. These have redundant sockets for a collar, however, these are lower than the tie beam on the early truss and do not correspond with the current roof and so this may relate to the 16th-century phase of the rectory (Pl 28).
- 4.2.5 It may be argued that the cusped timbers and the cranked tiebeam are reused timber, as only one principal truss remains, and simply material repurposed from an early 14th-century building nearby. The timbers do show signs of possible alteration, however, this may also be attributed to damage caused by decay or the phases of alteration of the roof of this wing (Pls 29-31).
- 4.2.6 Church Farm in Lewknor, Oxfordshire has stylistically comparable elements and was a medieval hall house constructed in the second quarter of the 14th century (Fig 9). Even if the timbers are re-used and altered and no other elements survive, they undoubtedly originate in an impressive medieval structure. Further documentary research may prove or disprove this theory; it is doubtful that the timbers would be suitable for dendrochronological dating, although this avenue could be explored if required.

Northernmost wing – current roof structure

- 4.2.7 The present roof structure is fairly informal and its current form appears to be the culmination of ad-hoc repairs and alterations and the initial accommodation of the earlier building phases.
- 4.2.8 The current roof structure has a ridge plank, albeit heavily decayed (PI 32). The common rafters of the northernmost slope have been replaced in one major repair, some of which have Baltic timber marks, indicating that they are imported from that area, a common source of softwood from the 17th century following the decline of available oak due to the demands of both house and ship building (PIs 33 & 34). The marks are scribed into timber before it is cut to size, hence the appearance of a series of random lines once in use.
- 4.2.9 There is what could be described as a principal rafter truss in the approximate centre of the roof, aligned with the front of the central bays, however, this consists of a beam of pit-sawn timber, later reinforced with an iron strap, a purlin to only the southernmost side and a collar bracing between the northernmost principal and the aforementioned purlin (seen in PI 25).
- 4.2.10 Consistent with the haphazard nature of the roof, timber has been affixed to the back of the northernmost principal and abutting the face of the cusped timber of the older roof, the current rafters are fixed to the back of this. Two pieces of timber, roughly spliced together, have been fixed roughly parallel to this and has been accommodated into the northernmost joint of the principal and tie beam, presumably to implement a structural repair (seen in PI 25).
- 4.2.11 An additional beam abuts the face of the beam of the haphazard principal. It is possibly shaped by adze and has two redundant peg holes for which there is no visible former function. Joists of fairly roughly-shaped timber are mortice and tenoned into either side and in turn support the laths for the ceiling below (seen in PI 25).
- 4.2.12 Several of the common rafters of the southernmost pitch have been formed from timbers which have been roughly spliced, or simply nailed together, to form a makeshift full-length rafter, and not necessarily with the join supported by the purlin (PI 35). This is not uncommon where flexibility is required to follow the gradient of the roof, but in this case it is likely to be to conserve or reuse timber. Some of the rafters have nail holes to adjacent sides, indicating prior reuse (PI 36).
- 4.2.13 There are further signs of the inclusion of reused timbers. The southernmost wallplate contains redundant mortices in the uppermost which would have accommodated vertical timbers in the previous use (PI 37).
- 4.2.14 In the apex of the front gable, behind the hung tiles, is a simple arrangement of vertical timbers, some of which show signs of reuse, infilling the spaces in the end truss to support the battens for the tiles, which have since been replaced by modern horizontal boards. A brace between the purlin and beam has been added at some point (PI 38).
- 4.2.15 No carpenters' marks were visible which pertained to the current or to former roof structures and only one was visible which related to a former use of a piece of timber (PI 39).

Southernmost wing

- 4.2.16 The roof structure of the southernmost wing was inspected from the second floor following the stripping of the roof tiles and battens and removal of the ceilings.

- 4.2.17 The roof and associated timber framework is of a single phase and contemporary with the 17th-century extensive extension and remodelling of the building. The blind dormer and similar link dormer behind the chimney are later, although their roof construction is similar (Pl 40). One carpenters' mark was visible in the link dormer, but the remaining timbers were not marked (Pl 41).
- 4.2.18 There is no ridge piece; the rafters are joined at the apex with pegged bridled joints and supported on the back of the purlin. Some are lapped right over left and some vice-versa. There are timber fillets to the backs of some of the rafters to correct the level for fixing the battens. In this wing, collars between the upper purlins act as ceiling joists to provide usable space on the second storey; the rafters between the upper and lower purlins are lath and plastered to form a sloping wall and the area below the lower purlin has been boxed-in to form a vertical wall (Pl 42).
- 4.2.19 The rafters are of oak and include carpenters' marks to the north eastern face, close to the apex (Pl 43), the exception is number eight which is numbered on the south western face. The clearly scribed Roman numerals begin with 'I' at the first common rafter from the front elevation, the timber of the south west gable is not marked, and continue to 'XX'. After 'XIII', the usual manner of writing 14, the 'V' following the X is written as an extension of the downward stroke of the 'X', combining the two letters (Pl 44). The final numeral, or the V, in some cases, on the north western rafter also includes an additional tag to indicate to the men assembling the structure which side the timber should be placed (Pl 45). The timbers of the frame of the north east wall in the study have carpenters' marks which are not related to those on the rafters.

Central bays

- 4.2.20 The rear roof structure of the central bays was viewed via the Victorian roof of the extension which abutted it and via the gable of the front elevation of the northernmost of the two bays (Pl 46).
- 4.2.21 The original rear roof of the central bays, which ran north west to south east, consists of a ridge plank, now very decayed, with common rafters nailed to it on either side which in turn are supported on a purlin (Pl 47). In some places, the purlin consists of several lengths of timber, braced in several places by posts supported on the beams or other members as necessary (Pl 48). Some of the bracing gives the appearance of raking struts, however, these are not part of a truss or directly associated with a principal or a truss (Pl 49). The limited visibility of the stone-covered roofs indicate that the structures of the two sides of the valley are the same. A combination of pegging and nailing has been used throughout, including to similar elements, and occasional reused timber is visible. These roofs display numerous repairs and additional timber bracing, as expected for structures of this age. There are a few surviving fragments of battens, but all traces of previous roof coverings have been removed.

Victorian roof of the rear extension

- 4.2.22 The Victorian slate-covered roof is a later addition to the extension, added when the roof was raised and the upper storey altered. It was stripped to allow repair and the addition of two dormers, one to either side of the existing dormer just off-centre in the north east elevation. Within the roof space, the lath and plastered ceiling and wall structure of the rooms below could be seen (Pl 50).

- 4.2.23 The simple roof structure consists of a ridge plank with the common rafters nailed to it on either side, each supported on the back of a purlin and nailed to the side of the corresponding ceiling joist (Pl 51). One pair of principals, not acting as rafters, are located one third of the way along the length of the roof from the rear, corresponding with a join in the ridge piece (Pl 52). The principals have a pegged bridled joint at the apex, around which the ridge piece is simply cut and rested upon the principal, being supported by the common rafters. The purlin is tenoned into the sides of the principal and pegged. All other joints are nailed. The rafters are of various sizes between 450mm and 800mm in width and over half consist of two pieces of timber nailed together at the purlin; it is not uncommon for joists to be cut to allow for adjustment to fit the angle of the roof, but these appear to be for the purpose of utilising smaller pieces of timber, possibly recycled, as several of the timbers are a different size to its pair. Jack rafters nailed to timber of the same type as the ridge plank act as hip rafters to form the rear hip of the roof. The timber was machine-sawn softwood and no carpenters' marks were observed, as would be expected in a roof of this age.
- 4.2.24 The differences between the elements with carpentered and non-carpentered joints may reflect reuse of the timbers of the original roof of the brick extension.

General

- 4.2.25 The roof tiles and lead flashings were renewed and chimneys repaired as necessary.

N.B. The cellar has not been altered during this work and so does not appear in this report.

4.3 Ground Floor Internal Materials Exposed

Rooms not listed had little to no intrusive work carried out to the historic material, or that work carried out did not expose any as-yet unseen material. Room names reflect those used in the Historic Building Assessment for continuity.

The Reception Hall

- 4.3.1 Due to considerable deflection, holes were cut into the plaster of the ceiling and the plaster covering the beams and their junctions to assess the condition of the timber. These confirmed that the decorative 'beams' consisted of laths and hair plaster over the structural timber beams (Pl 53).
- 4.3.2 The floor was excavated to allow damp-proofing and revealed shallow brick footings below the existing walls and some timber framing in the southernmost partition wall between the door to the rear hallway and the newly opened door to the downstairs study. Hardcore had been laid before the site visit, but no former features were observed by the builders (Pl 54).

The Utility Room

- 4.3.3 The removal of the cupboards in the southernmost wall revealed an alcove which had been boarded over (Pl 55). The alcove may have originated as a blocked door or window,

however, the external face of the wall has been rebuilt in brickwork, obscuring any indication of any potential former opening.

- 4.3.4 The north east to south west beam in the ceiling had been lathed and plastered over and the beam visible above the partition to the staircase partially painted
- 4.3.5 The ceiling had partially collapsed due to water damage prior to any work starting, the lath and plaster of the ceiling and the underside of the modern flooring of bathroom 1 above was exposed.
- 4.3.6 Behind the boxing-in of the pipes behind the WC and sink, the wall retained some wallpaper with yachts and cliffs in a scenic design and the splashback of the previous sink. Beneath the window, the wall was covered with horizontal boards and tiled over. Following the removal of the partition between the utility room and the back door, a narrow area of the brickwork infill of the rear wall was revealed (Pl 56).
- 4.3.7 All fittings, which were modern, were removed.

The Kitchen

- 4.3.8 Following the removal of the modern kitchen fittings, it was apparent that there was little remaining historic material in the room following the major refit in 1993 which included the insertion of two new windows in the southernmost wall to either side of the chimney breast. The floor is modern concrete and the walls have been replastered. The ceiling had been re-skimmed, but it could not be ascertained from the small holes left by the removal of the downlights whether the ceiling was lath and plaster or a modern replacement, however, the cornice, which is also fitted alongside the beam in the centre of the ceiling, pre-dates the replastering and does not appear to have been disturbed by the installation of a new ceiling, and so the ceiling may be original.
- 4.3.9 Some of the modern plaster was removed from the southernmost wall where it had failed, revealing the stone internal face of the wall with at least three phases of alteration to the fireplace, indicated by the infill of two distinct phases of brickwork following the cutting of the timber lintel (Pl 57).

The Study

- 4.3.10 The doorway from the reception hall, which had been blocked sometime after 1912, was unblocked; 20th-century materials and shelving were removed.

The Library

- 4.3.11 The mid 20th-century parquet flooring and earlier quarry tiles were removed and the floor excavated to allow damp-proofing. No features were visible in the excavated floor area, although a slight difference in the colour and compaction where the earlier façade had been extended forward was observed, although obscured by the use of the room since excavation as a through-route.
- 4.3.12 Very shallow footings were just visible in the external walls, and a brick base was in the location of the former Victorian column (Pl 58).
- 4.3.13 The ceiling was removed and exposed the beam and joists. The beams have received additional timber to the underside to correct a severe slump in the frame which

necessitated the Victorian softwood column, no longer extant, previously used to prop the ceiling at the junction of the beams at the location of the earlier frontage (Pls 59-60).

The Side Entrance and WC

- 4.3.14 The partition between the library and the small lobby to the WC was removed. The 1912 plan of the building is stylised and displays inaccuracies in this area and so it is unclear if this partition existed in 1912; the door was reclaimed with no indication of its origin.
- 4.3.15 The half-brick-thick walls of the WC, a scullery in 1912, were insulated to the internal faces.

4.4 First Floor Internal Materials Exposed

Rooms not listed had little to no intrusive work carried out to the historic material, or that work carried out did not expose any as-yet unseen material. Room names reflect those used in the Historic Building Assessment for continuity.

Bathroom 1

- 4.4.1 The floor is also visible via the hole in the ceiling of the utility room beneath, proving that the chipboard flooring is the only floor covering material remaining.
- 4.4.2 The removal of the shower cubicle and panelling to the south west wall exposed the blocked doorway adjacent to the existing which was blocked sometime after 1912 when the bathroom and WC were combined into one room. The timber frame visible on the face of the wall to the landing is visible behind the frame for the former panelling.
- 4.4.3 Former decorative schemes of wallpaper with pink and green sailing boats to the south east wall and lime-washed plaster panels between the timber framing to the south west wall survive (Pl 61).

The Central Hallway

- 4.4.4 The deal cupboards were removed and the ceilings were replaced, revealing the structure of the late 19th-century roof previously described.

Bathroom 3

- 4.4.5 The fittings were removed, revealing lath and plaster to the dividing wall to bedroom 3 (Pl 62). This wall is set a short distance back from the likely location of former frontage of the 16th-century phase and a wall finish which relates to an earlier phase was visible from the roof, below the wallplate and behind the internal frame supporting the lath and plaster for bedroom 3 which is in the extended frontage (Pls 63-64).

The Extension Landing and Bedrooms 4, 5 and 6

- 4.4.6 The partitions of the landing and bedrooms constructed above the brick extension were reconfigured to create a separate suite with an additional bathroom. The short flight of steps was renewed.
- 4.4.7 The ceilings were taken down and the rafters exposed from the internal and external faces; the ceilings were replaced with plasterboard. Much of the wall plaster was

removed and the internal face of the north eastern, the rear elevation, brickwork was exposed. Notably, the rear of the course of bricks laid on edge, with cant bricks extending from the face as part of the cornice, was visible (Pl 65).

4.5 Second Floor Internal Materials Exposed

Room names reflect those used in the Historic Building Assessment for continuity.

Bedroom 7

- 4.5.1 The lath and plaster ceilings were taken down, exposing the roof structure as previously described.

The Study

- 4.5.2 Late 20th-century cupboards were removed. Some of the plaster in the blind dormer had failed and exposed laths to the timber-framed gable and stone and brickwork to wallplate-height in the blind dormer (Pl 66).
- 4.5.3 The lath and plaster ceilings were taken down, exposing the roof structure as previously described. The carpenters' marks to the frame of the north eastern frame, detailed in the initial assessment, were confirmed as being unrelated to those on the rafters.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1.1 The accepted interpretation of the current form of the building is that the hall with cross-wings was constructed in the 17th century, extending an earlier building of similar construction to form the northernmost wing. Analysis of the layout of this wing during the production of the Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment prior to the major repair work supported this interpretation, however, during the repair work to this roof, remains of another earlier roof were discovered. The cusped timbers in that roof demonstrate the potential of a reasonably high-status early 14th-century building being the basis of this house. Although only one pair of principal rafters incorporating these cusped timbers survive, they are contemporary with the age of the three 14th-century cruck trusses in the adjacent tithe barn, although these are unadorned (Pl 67).
- 5.1.2 In the late-18th century, a single storied brick extension was constructed to the rear of the house and the older building remodelled. In turn, this extension underwent alteration a century later when the upper rooms were added. Throughout the 20th century minor improvements and changes of use occurred, mostly to the sanitary services and service rooms, this included the construction and later demolition of three service rooms to the north west end of the house.
- 5.1.3 The majority of the alterations in this project affected secondary elements of lesser significance, however, upon commencement of the extensive repair work, the deterioration of the timber frame was found to be severe, in no small part due to the cementitious render. The detrimental impact of the work was mitigated by the recording of the uncovered historic structure and the evident benefit to the structure by the halting of the water ingress, renewal of the aged plumbing and electrical services and the structural repairs to the roofs and consolidation of the unsound external walls.

APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ARCHIVE SOURCES

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APPENDIX B. LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: THE OLD RECTORY AND PARSONAGE FLAT

List entry Number: 1198563

Location

PARSONAGE FLAT
THE OLD RECTORY

Grade: II

Date first listed: 25-Oct-1951

Details

LETCOMBE BASSETT SU38SE 10/125 The Old Rectory and Parsonage 25/10/51 Flat. GV II

House. C17, remodelled late C18. Roughcast with tile clad gables to front, over timber frame; tile roof; brick stacks. Hall with cross-wings. 2 storeys; 6- window range.

Fenestration 1:3:2 to gabled wing, recessed and double-gabled centre, and gabled wing. Late C20 porch to central C20 door, late C18 sashes: gabled roof; end stacks.

Interior: late C18 dog-leg with landing stairs; panelled doors; stone floor to hall; timber framed partition to first floor right; 3-bay C17 collar truss roof with butt purlins to right wing; left wing slightly lower and probably earlier, but not inspected.

Late C18 block to rear left: Flemish bond brick, slate roof; 2-unit plan with access to house; 4-bay garden front gauged flat brick arches over sashes, each recessed in a semi- circular gauged brick arch.

Late C19 brick cornice, central dormer and hipped roof; end stacks.

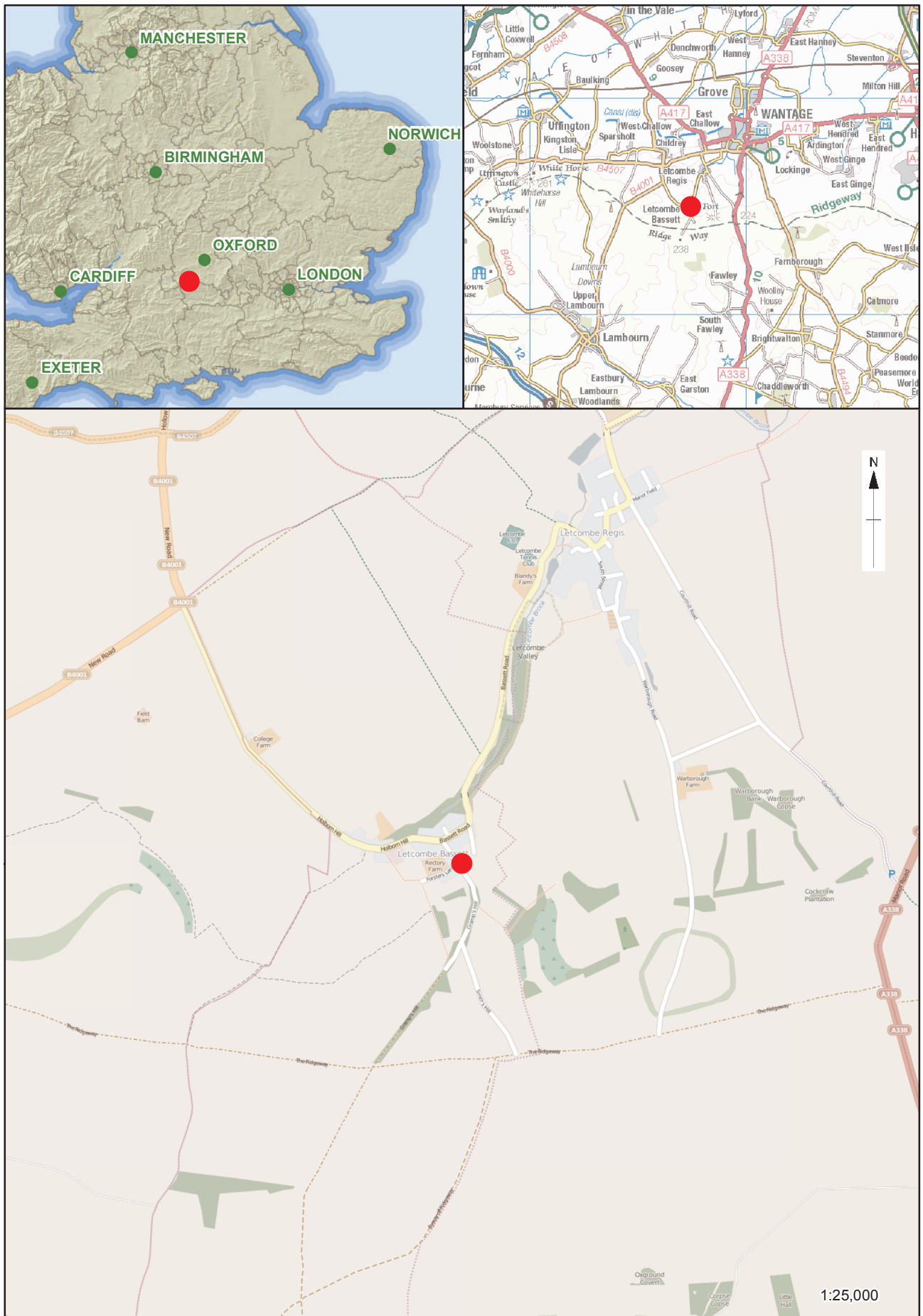
Interior: late C18 fireplaces in two rooms.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) stayed here in 1714, where he wrote "Verses on Himself" and "Some Free Thoughts on the Present State of Affairs." (Frederick T. Barrett, Letcombe Bassett Then and Now, 1950 (reprinted 1980), pp. 16-18).

Listing NGR: SU3745084987

Selected Sources

1. Book Reference - *Author:* Barrett, F T - *Title:* Letcombe Bassett Then and Now - *Date:* 1980 - *Page References:* 16-18



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Figure 1: Site location

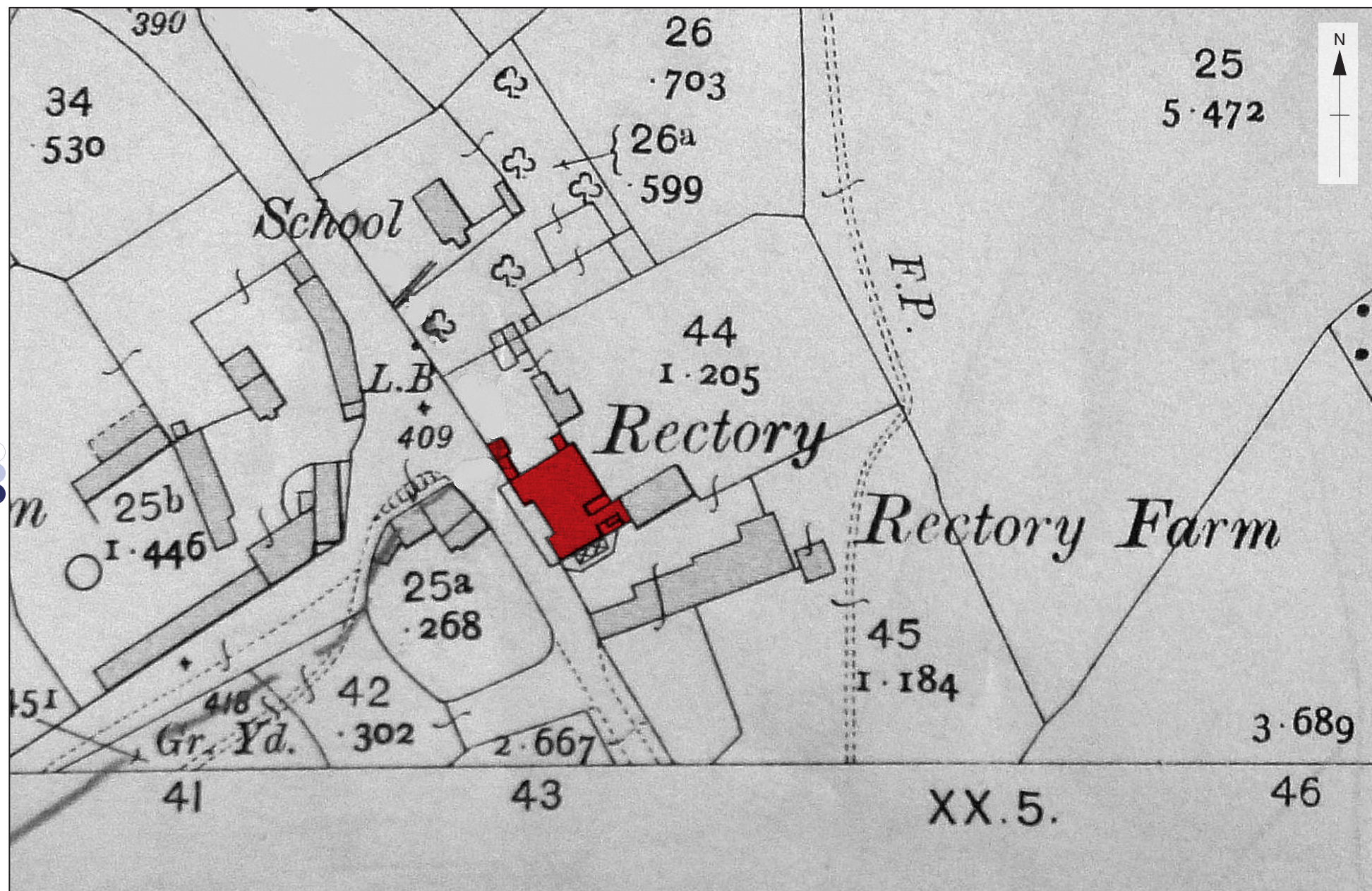


Figure 2: Extract from the 25 inch Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1912)

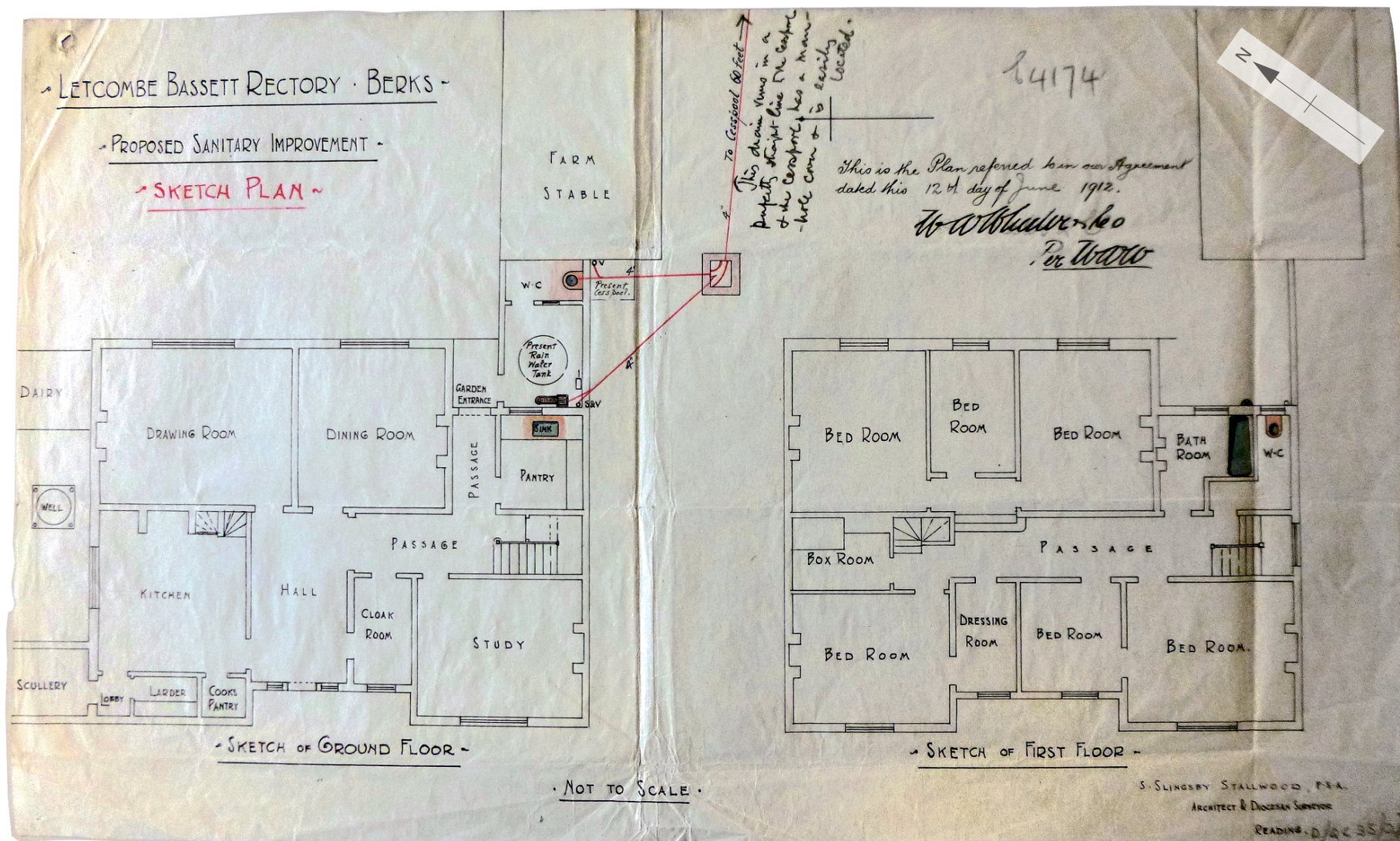


Figure 3: Sketch plan of proposed sanitary improvements (1912)

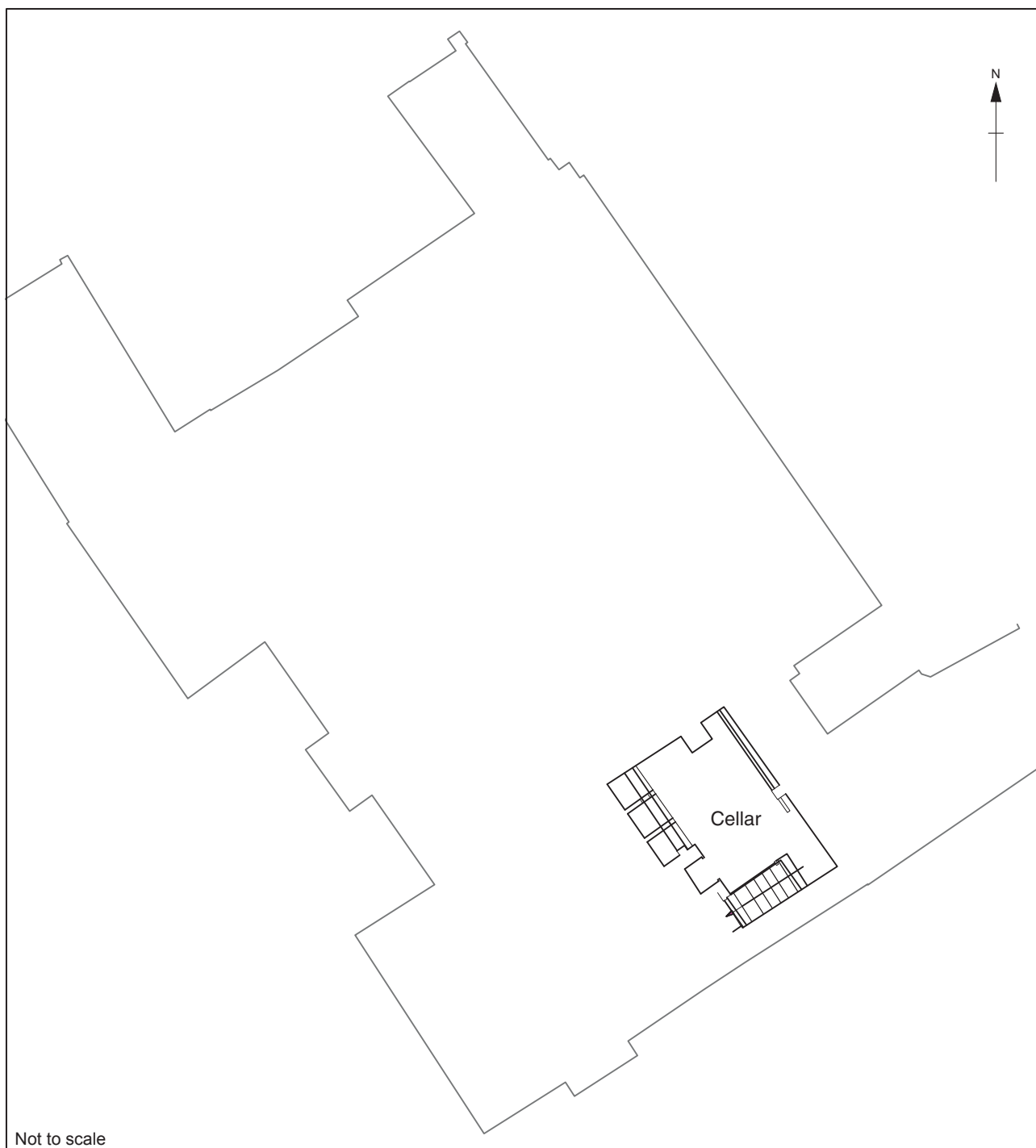


Figure 4: Plan of the cellar, reproduced from the survey drawings by Digital Terrain Surveys LLP.
For information only - unaltered by this work



Figure 5: Phased plan of the ground floor, based upon the survey drawings by Digital Terrain Surveys LLP



Figure 6: Phased plan of the first floor based upon the survey drawings by Digital Terrain Surveys LLP



Figure 7: Phased plan of the second floor, based upon the survey drawings by Digital Terrain Surveys LLP

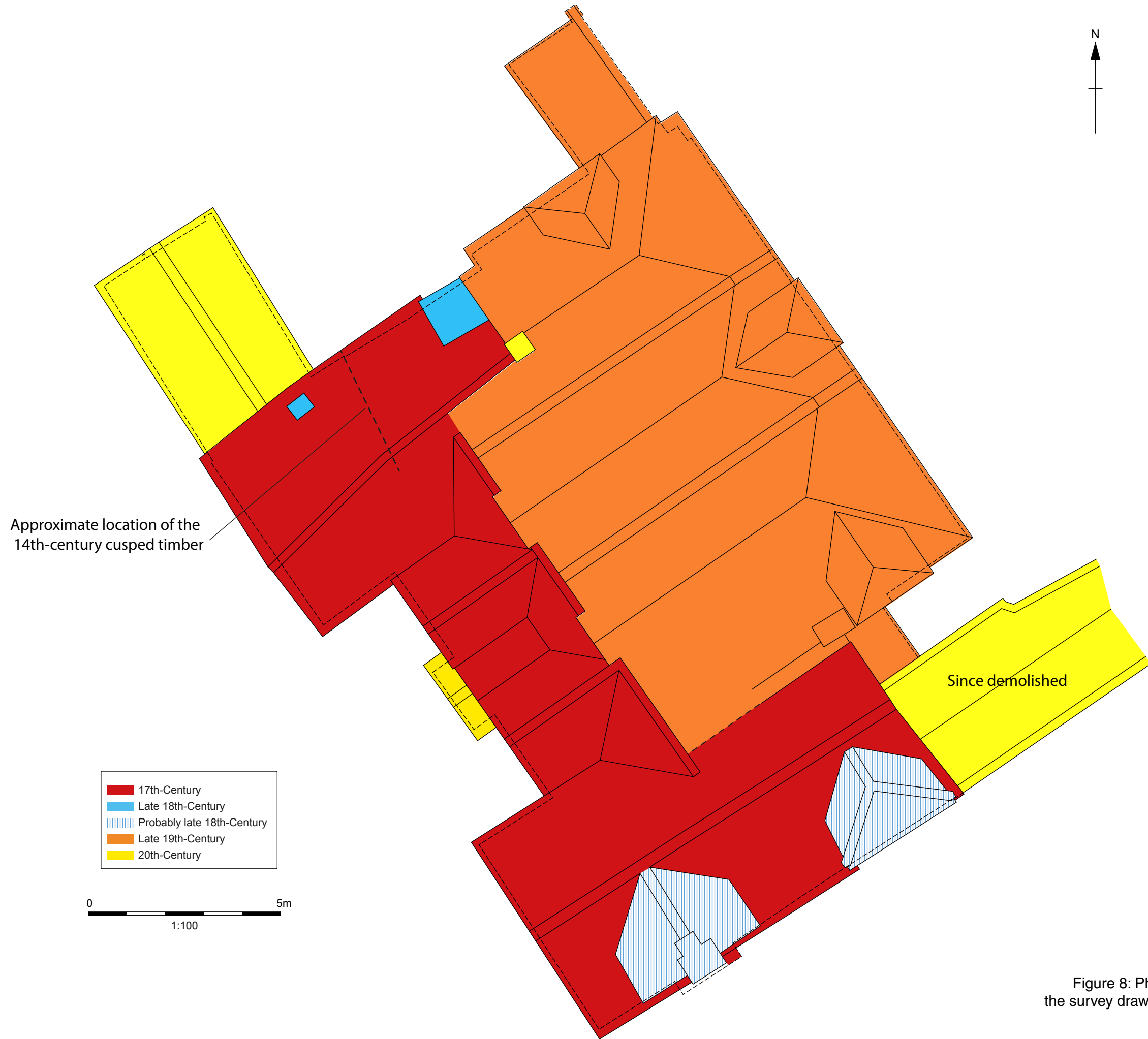
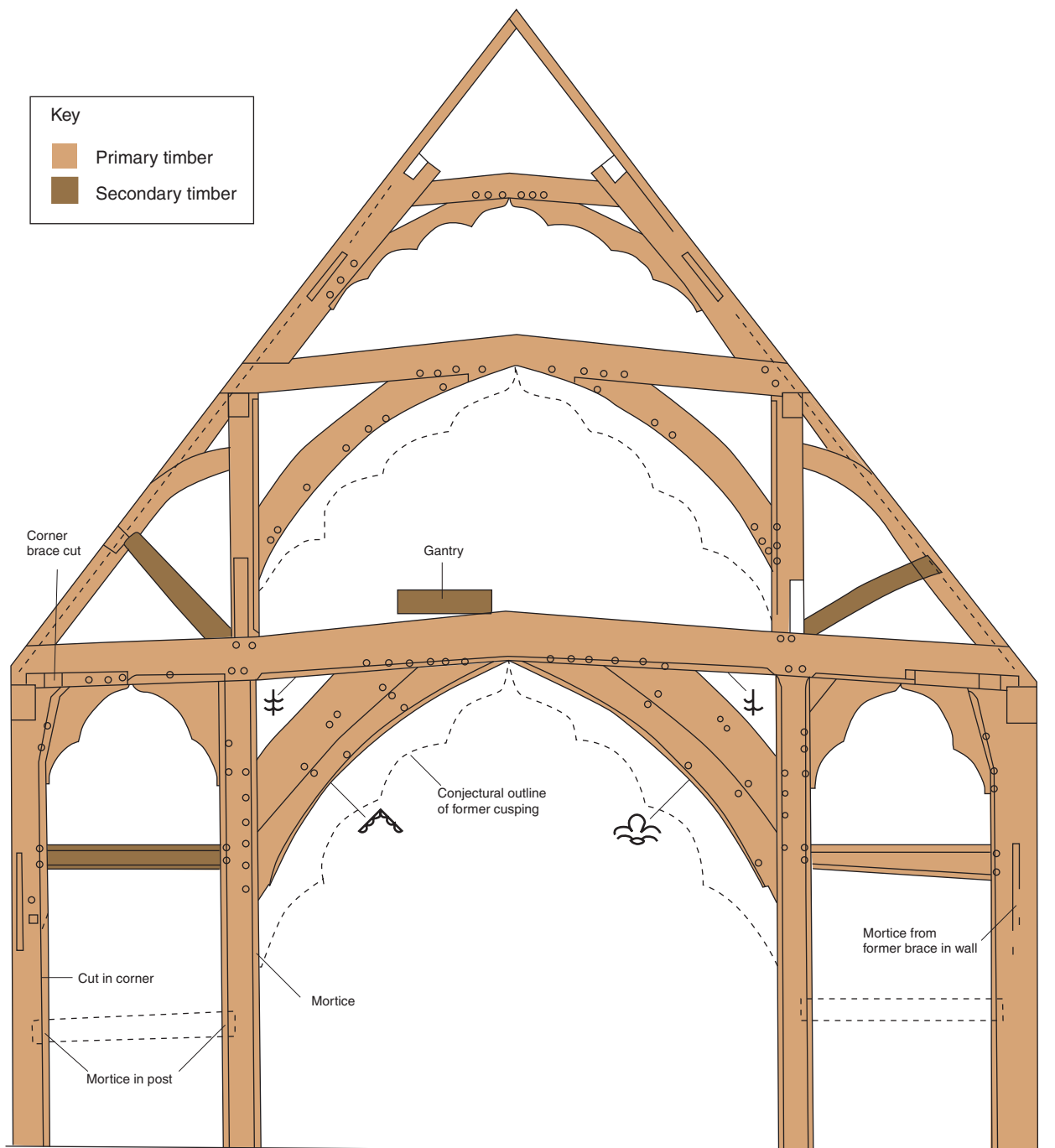


Figure 8: Phased plan of the roof based upon the survey drawings by Digital Terrain Survey LLP



Not to scale

Figure 9: An example of the early 14th-century cusped timbers in the barn at Church Farm, Lewknor (OA 2009)



Plate 1: The south west, front, elevation



Plate 2: The south east elevation



Plate 3: The north west elevation



Plate 4: The north east elevation of the 18th-century extension



Plate 5: The south west elevation of the northernmost wing after removal of the render



Plate 6: The southernmost return of the northernmost wing



Plate 7: The stone and timber frame of the south west elevation of the northern wing

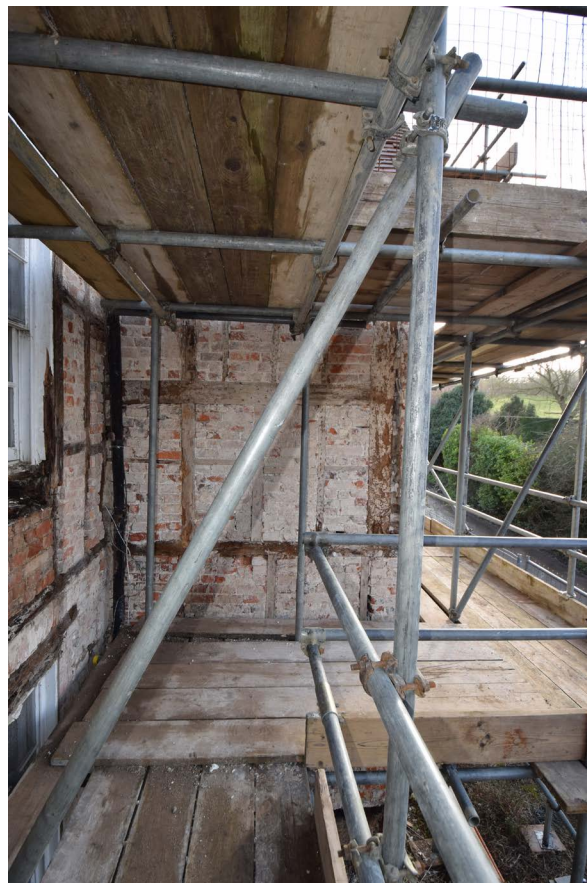


Plate 8: The northernmost return of the southernmost wing



Plate 9: The south west elevation of the central bays



Plate 10: The south west elevation of the northernmost bay, gable



Plate 11: The south west elevation of the northernmost bay, first floor



Plate 12: The south east elevation after removal of the render



Plate 13: The north east end of the south east elevation, ground floor



Plate 14: The north east end of the south east elevation, second floor blind dormer



Plate 15: The south west end of the south east elevation, ground floor



Plate 16: The north east elevation of the southernmost wing



Plate 17: The north east elevation of the southernmost wing, first floor



Plate 18: The north east elevation of the southernmost wing, second floor



Plate 19: The north east elevation of the southernmost wing, ground floor



Plate 20: The 18th-century extension after construction of the new dormers. Photograph provided by Nigel Hutt, Clerk of Works



Plate 21: The exposed original mortar of the 18th-century extension before repointing



Plate 22: The south west end of the north west elevation after removal of the render

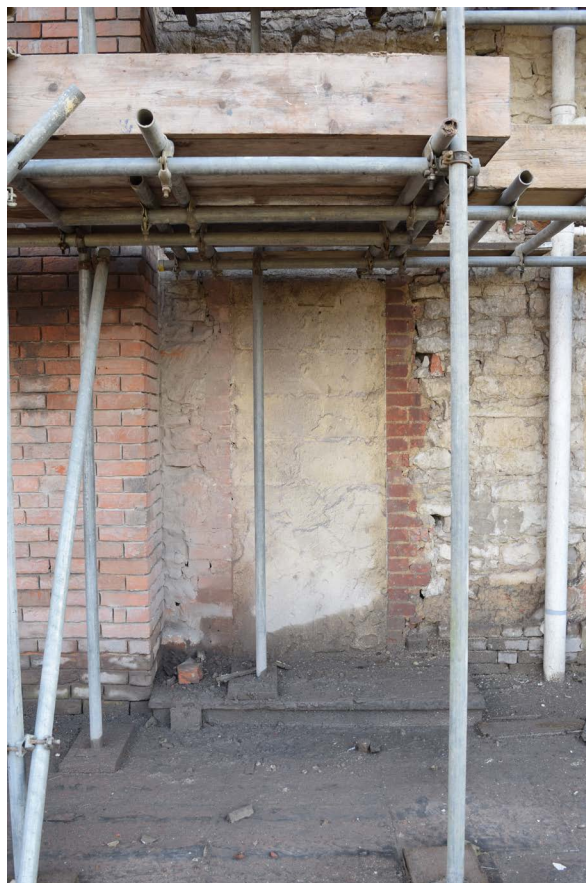


Plate 23: The exposed blocked scullery door



Plate 24: The construction of the new conservatory and new lime render. Photograph provided by Nigel Hutt, Clerk of Works



Plate 25: The roof structure of the northernmost wing and 14th-century timbers, looking north



Plate 26: The (thicker) 14th-century timber in the northernmost wing, looking south east



Plate 27: The 14th-century timbers and ceiling structures in the northernmost wing



Plate 28: The redundant sockets in an earlier phase of roof timbers in the northernmost wing



Plate 29: Damage or rework to 14th-century timbers, northernmost edge of principal rafter



Plate 30: Damage or rework to 14th-century timbers, southernmost join of rafter and tiebeam



Plate 31: Damage or rework to 14th-century timbers, north eastern face of tiebeam



Plate 32: Southernmost rafters of the northernmost wing



Plate 33: Northernmost rafters of the northernmost wing



Plate 34: Baltic timber marks in one of the northernmost rafters of the northernmost wing



Plate 35: Joined timber to form rafters in the southernmost pitch of the northernmost wing



Plate 36: Reused rafters in the southernmost pitch of the northernmost wing



Plate 37: Reused timber used as a wallplate in the southern return of the northernmost wing



Plate 38: The timbers of the 17th-century northernmost wing extension



Plate 39: A carpenters' mark in a reused piece of timber in the northernmost pitch



Plate 40: The roof structure of the link dormer of the southernmost wing



Plate 41: A carpenters' mark on a rafter of the link dormer of the southernmost wing



Plate 42: An example of the roof structure of the southernmost wing



Plate 43: The joints and carpenters' marks in the rafters of the southernmost wing



Plate 44: The joints and carpenters' marks in the rafters of the southernmost wing



Plate 45: The joints and carpenters' marks in the rafters of the southernmost wing



Plate 46: The roof structure of the northernmost central bay



Plate 47: The roof structure linking northernmost wing and central bays, looking south west



Plate 48: The roof structure linking northernmost wing and central bays, looking north east



Plate 49: The roof structure linking northernmost wing and central bays, interior



Plate 50: The roof structure of the 19th-century roof extension, looking south



Plate 51: The roof structure of the 19th-century roof extension, looking east



Plate 52: The principal rafter in the southernmost 19th-century roof



Plate 53: The investigation work to the beams in the Reception Hall



Plate 54: The base of the front wall of the Reception Hall



Plate 55: The south east wall of the Utility Room after removal of fittings



Plate 56: The north east wall of the Utility Room after removal of fittings and partition



Plate 57: The south east wall and fireplace of the Kitchen after plaster stripping



Plate 58: The base of the front wall of the Library after floor excavation



Plate 59: The investigation work to the beams in the Library



Plate 60: The old repairs to the Library ceiling joists, after plaster stripping. Photograph provided by Nigel Hutt, Clerk of Works



Plate 61: The south west wall of Bathroom 1 after removal of fittings



Plate 62: The south west wall of Bathroom 3 after removal of fittings



Plate 63: The surface of the south west wall of an earlier phase of the northernmost wing



Plate 64: The space between the northernmost external and internal walls of Bedroom 3



Plate 65: The exposed internal face of the brickwork in the north east wall of the extension. Photograph provided by Nigel Hutt, Clerk of Works



Plate 66: The visible brickwork and stonework in the south east wall of the second floor study



Plate 67: The 14th-century crucks in the adjacent tithe barn



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