

# The Lost Medieval Barn of Abingdon Abbey at Cumnor

EDWARD IMPEY and PAUL BELFORD

## SUMMARY

*Abingdon abbey's important manorial centre at Cumnor (formerly Berks.) is now known to have included a fittingly impressive barn. Part of the barn survives incorporated in the north wall of Tithe Barn House and as a now separate wall to the east, both on the south side of Cumnor High Street. Excavation in 2010 and seventeenth- and nineteenth-century sources show that the barn was 11.10 metres (36 feet 5 inches) wide and as much as 51.4 metres (168 feet 7 inches) long. The fabric and analogies with other buildings suggest that it had a raised-cruck roof, of up to 12 bays. A date in the first half of the fourteenth century is proposed. The barn lost two bays at the west end in the late seventeenth century, and in 1810–11 its southern and eastern walls were rebuilt in their present positions.*

Cumnor village, four miles west of Oxford and five miles north-west of Abingdon, lies at the heart of the great loop in the Thames between Bablock Hythe and Abingdon. By 1086 this formed the hundred of Hormer which was almost wholly owned and controlled by the monks of Abingdon.<sup>1</sup> Cumnor, itself, or 'an area of land that is to say thirty hides at the well-known place called by the name of *Cumanora*', had been granted to the abbey by King Edgar in 968.<sup>2</sup> From the eleventh century until 1538, Cumnor remained the abbey's most important landed property other than Barton, which occupied the remainder of the hundred to the south. The site of a long-established minster church,<sup>3</sup> by 1066 the abbey may have had a residence at Cumnor,<sup>4</sup> probably did in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries,<sup>5</sup> and in the 1330s, perhaps during the abbacy of William de Cumnor (1332–4), built an impressive courtyard house just to the west of St Michael's church (Fig. 6).<sup>6</sup> The scale and quality of the building, its adjoining park, and a statement of 1534 that the site was 'now held in hand by the abbot, as in the time

<sup>1</sup> VCH Berks. 4, pp. 391–2; C.J. Bond, 'The Reconstruction of the Medieval Landscape; the Estates of Abingdon Abbey', *Landscape History*, 182 (1979–80), 59–75, pp. 48, 62; Domesday 7.1–5; F. Stenton, *The Early History of the Abbey of Abingdon* (1913), pp. 47–8. A charter of Edward the Confessor which states that 'meo concessu et dono, libere habeant et possideant hundredum de Hornemere, in sua propria potestate in sempiterna secula' may be genuine, and if so dates from 1053x1055 or 1058x1066: J. Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie. The History of the Church of Abingdon*, 2 vols. (2002, 2007), vol. 1, no. 219, pp. 200–1 and n. 452.

<sup>2</sup> S. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Abingdon Abbey* (2 vols., 2000–1), vol. 2, no. 111, pp. 437–8: 'quandam telluris particulam, xxx. videlicet cassatos loco qui celebri aet Cumenoran nuncupatur vocabulo'; Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie*, vol. 2, pp. 124–5.

<sup>3</sup> Domesday 7.1. f. 58c; W.J. Blair, 'The Early Church at Cumnor', *Oxoniensia*, 54 (1989), pp. 57–9.

<sup>4</sup> G. Lambrick, 'Abingdon Abbey Administration', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 17 (1966), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Blair, 'The Early Church', p. 70; R. Bashford, 'Cumnor Parish Cemetery Extension, Cumnor, Oxfordshire', unpublished OA report (2006), p. 16; E. Impey, 'The Manor House of the Abbots of Abingdon at Cumnor, Oxon.', in preparation.

<sup>6</sup> On the fourteenth-century house: E. Impey, 'The Origins and Development of Non-Conventual Monastic Dependencies in England and Normandy, 1050–1350', University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1991), vol. 3, pp. 56–119, and Impey, 'The Manor House'.

of his predecessors, in case of illness or plague being afoot in the town of Abingdon<sup>7</sup> suggest it had a special status among the abbey's manor houses: very probably it belonged to the type of rural residence, used by abbots and their households for official purposes and recreation, possessed by all of England's greater monasteries by 1500.<sup>8</sup> When, as at Cumnor, such houses were placed at the centre of large consolidated and generally ancient estates, they were usually accompanied by the manor's main farm buildings, and sometimes a barn of exceptional size: ten of the eighteen largest barns known to have existed in medieval England stood at sites of this type, including the three biggest – Beaulieu's at Beaulieu St Leonards (Hants.), Reading abbey's at Cholsey (Berks.), and St Augustine's, Canterbury, at Minster Court (Kent) (Table 2). Examples on and approaching this scale form a distinct group amongst England's known medieval barns and are here referred to as 'great barns'.

In recent decades buildings such as these have attracted increasing interest from economic, agricultural and architectural historians, encouraged by the resurgent study of rural history led by Bruce Campbell and Christopher Dyer, amongst others,<sup>9</sup> and aided by improved understanding of historic carpentry and by dendrochronology. However, although its medieval landscape has been fairly intensely studied,<sup>10</sup> until recently no medieval barn had been identified at Cumnor, an absence noted in the only general field-based study of Abingdon's estates.<sup>11</sup> It is now clear, however, from existing fabric, small-scale excavation and antiquarian sources, that the remains of a very large example survive right at the heart of the village, in and adjacent to Tithe Barn House, on the south side of the High Street.<sup>12</sup>

This article describes the building's standing and excavated fabric, its plan, its probable roof-structure, and considers its date. It then briefly addresses its function, the manor's management regime in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to whom its revenues belonged, and the personnel and processes involved in using it. The form and size of the building is then briefly considered in the context of Abingdon's other barns and in relation to other major medieval examples elsewhere. A final section describes the barn's truncation in the seventeenth century and the creation of the existing building in 1810–11.

## THE BUILDING

### *Plan and Dimensions*

The most prominent remnant of the medieval barn (Period I) is the lower part of the north wall of Tithe Barn House, clearly distinguishable from later work by a prominent horizontal building break (Figs. 1 and 3) and its 1.10 metre thickness. The facing is of rubble mixed with ashlar, some up to 1.50 metres in length, almost wholly of Coral Rag but with occasional pieces of Wheatley Limestone and brown calcareous sandstone:<sup>13</sup> it rises to as much as 1.90 metres above the top of the broad chamfered plinth at the base of the wall, itself as much as 75 cm above present ground level at its lowest point, and (as exposed at its western extremity and

<sup>7</sup> BRO, D/P 45 3/10: 'reservantur in manibus nunc abbatis, ut in tempore predecessorum suorum causa infirmitatis sive plaga existentis in villa Abendon'.

<sup>8</sup> 'Greater' houses are taken to be those with an income of over £1,000 in 1536.

<sup>9</sup> B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigneurial Agriculture 1250–1450* (2000); B.M.S. Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region c.1300* (2003); C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages. The People of Britain 850–1520* (2002); C. Dyer, 'Peasant Farming in Late Medieval England: Evidence from Tithe Estimations by Worcester Cathedral Priory', in M. Kowaleski et al. (eds.), *Peasants and Lords in the Medieval English Economy* (2015), pp. 83–109.

<sup>10</sup> Notably by the late John Hanson, 'A Thousand Years: A Study of the Interaction between People and Environment in the Cumnor, Wytham and North Hinksey Area of (Former) North Berkshire', typescript held by Cumnor History Society (2000); Impey, 'The Manor House'.

<sup>11</sup> Bond, 'The Reconstruction', p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Impey, 'The Origins', vol. 2, p. 49 and n. 25.

<sup>13</sup> The authors are grateful to Philip Powell for advice on the stone types.



*Fig. 1. The north side of Tithe Barn House viewed from the High Street, looking south-east. Photograph by Peter Hamilton.*

revealed in Trench 3), c.75 cm above the medieval footings. The medieval inner face, of Coral Rag rubble, is raked outwards at an angle of c.5–7 degrees, clearly deliberately, as the outer face is vertical: it rises to as much as 1.48 metres above the level of the chamfer (up to 1.75 metres from existing internal floor level), terminating in a 40–45 cm deep flat-topped offset, above which the wall, 65–70 cm thick, continues vertically upwards. The medieval outer facing therefore survives to 40 cm higher on the outside than the inside.

In plan, medieval masonry continues beyond both gables of the existing building (Fig. 2). To the west, the chamfered plinth continues for 95 cm, and the courses below this – carrying a later wall – for a further 8.00 metres, terminating in the base of a buttress, a single block chamfered on the three visible sides (Figs. 2 and 3). A 0.90 by 0.80 metre trench (Trench 5) at this point showed that the wall returned southwards at 90 degrees, running under the single-storey seventeenth- or eighteenth-century (Period III) building abutting the west gable of Tithe Barn House; the buttress, 1.10 metres wide and projecting c.35 cm from the (main) wall face, was therefore a clasping buttress at the corner. Trenches 3 and 4, in the adjoining garden, confirmed that the barn did not extend that far west. At the other (eastern) end, beyond the existing gateway to the open area between Tithe Barn House and the Old School (a rick-yard in the early twentieth century), a 7.20 metre long length of wall of the same construction and thickness survives to show that the building extended at least 11.30 metres in that direction. Standing fabric therefore reveals that the barn was at least 36.5 metres long.

The site of the building's original east wall has been built over and cannot therefore be determined archaeologically, but it can be considered in the light of a written source, map-based evidence and its probable bay structure. The first of these is a footnote to the doggerel verse by the locally-based topographer and antiquary Thomas Baskerville (1630/1–1700), stating that 'The foundation of this Barn is about 65 yards in length'. It is clear that he was

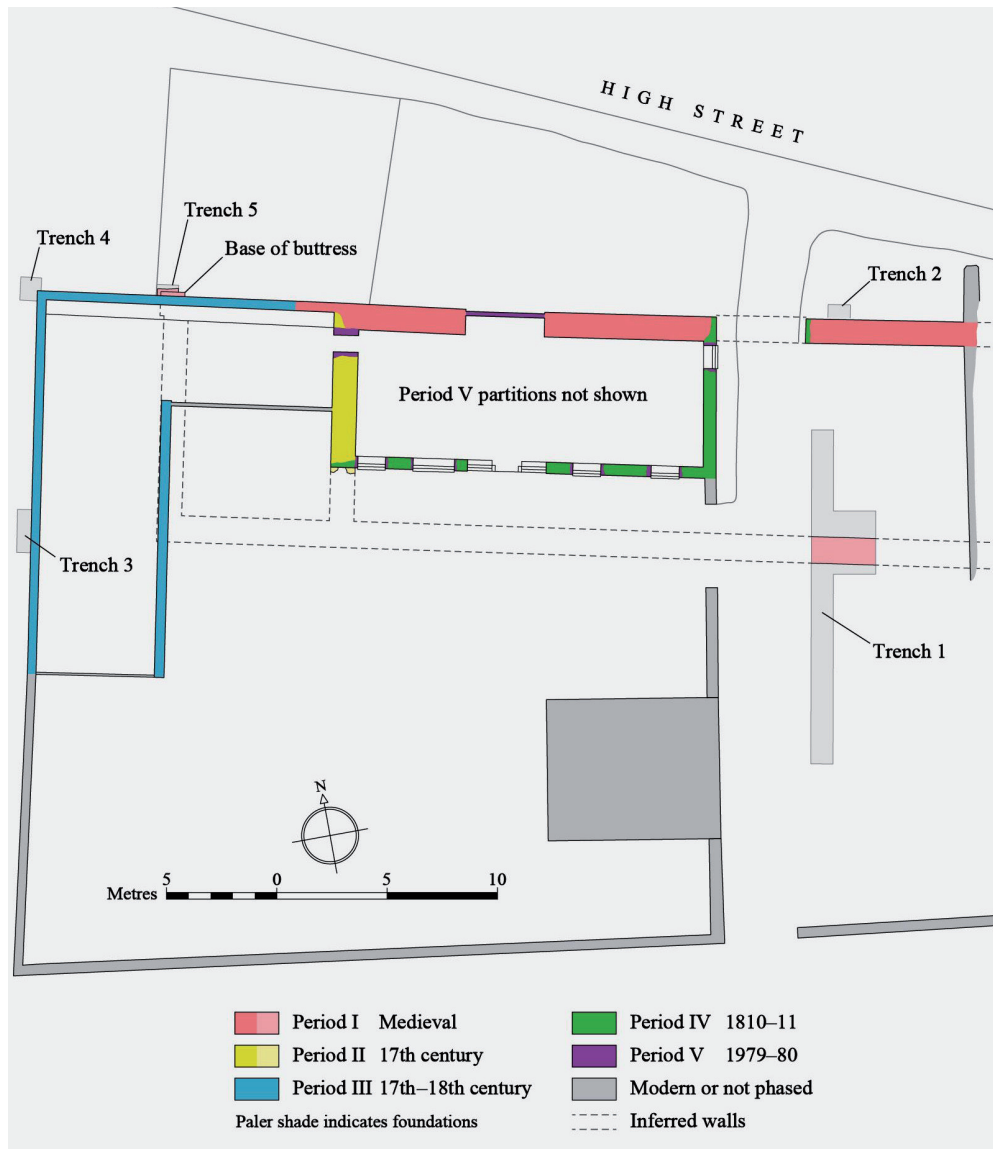


Fig. 2. Phased plan of standing and excavated remains. Survey by Edward Impey, drawing by Mark Fenton.

referring to the medieval barn, by 1693 (the probable year of writing),<sup>14</sup> ‘much shorter than before’, and that he had included in his measurement footings or foundations which had survived the building’s partial demolition (below).<sup>15</sup> If it was 65 yards (194 feet 6 inches, or 59.43 metres) long, its eastern end would have reached a point now marked by the west side of the former schoolmaster’s house (the east wing of the Old School complex, now a shop and

<sup>14</sup> BL, Harley MS 4716, f. 10r. The date appears five lines from the bottom, and appears to be that of the composition.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. f. 10v. On Baskerville: A. Warmington, ‘Baskerville, Thomas (1630/31–1700)’, *ODNB*.



*Fig. 3. The north wall of the barn at the extreme west end of the existing building. The westward continuation of the medieval plinth beyond the existing gable can be clearly seen. The vertical straight joint (below the existing gable) marks the corner of the building as reduced in length in the seventeenth century (Period II). The building to the right was built against it, and on top of the surviving medieval plinth, at a later date (Period III). In 1810–11 (Period IV) the side wall and part of the seventeenth-century gable was heightened, creating the building in its existing form. Photograph by Peter Hamilton.*

post office: Fig. 6). Other factors, however, suggest a slightly shorter building, starting with the accuracy or otherwise of Baskerville's figure: certainly, in stating that the barn at Great Coxwell, in fact 50 yards 1 foot / 46.33 metres long, '... for length is little lesse/Than 63 yards as I do guess',<sup>16</sup> he mis-measured or overestimated it by 38 feet (11.58 metres).<sup>17</sup> In addition, had it been as long as Baskerville suggests, it would have intruded into the outer court which, at least from 1572, intervened between the High Street and the medieval Cumnor Place.<sup>18</sup> These considerations, taken with the other evidence, suggest two main interpretations of the building's original length.

The first interpretation, A (Figs. 6 and 7), assumes that the barn had not been shortened at its east end before 1808, in other words that the estate map of that year (Fig. 4, no. 1) shows the building's east end in its original form. In this particular area, reconciling the 1808 map with today's topography<sup>19</sup> is aided both by pencilled annotations made to the map, which

<sup>16</sup> W. Horn and E. Born, *The Barns of the Abbey of Beaulieu at its Granges of Great Coxwell and Beaulieu-St. Leonards* (1965), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> BL, Harley MS, 4716, f. 10v.: 'This Barn for length is little lesse/Than 63 yards as I do guess.'

<sup>18</sup> Impey, 'The Manor House'.

<sup>19</sup> As surveyed by the late Matthew Bowden and Edward Impey, 1996.



Fig. 4. (1) Plan of 1808 (detail) Bodl.(R)MS C17: 13 (43), with the later school building pencilled in (in red oval), and (2), the plan of 1857 (TNA: PRO, C 54/15121/91/18), showing the building of 1812 as completed. Below (3), the evidence of both maps is combined and adjusted to situate the detail according to the modern topography. Note on the 1808 map the boundary walls to the east of the barn as shown (red arrows). Images reproduced with the kind permission of the Bodleian Library and the National Archives. Manipulation of plans and drawing, Mark Fenton.

show the approximate site of the first school building, put up in 1812,<sup>20</sup> and a plan of 1857<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 4, no. 2), showing the position of the 1812 building with great precision. The annotations also include the pencil shading to the east end of the barn as mapped in 1808, evidently to show that it had, by 1857, been long demolished (Fig. 4). Overlaying the 1808 representation of the barn, adjusted in relation to surviving fixed points at the west end of the building and the map of 1857, implies an original total length of 47.3 metres (155 feet), in other words that it extended eastwards roughly to a point today marked by the western elevation of the Old School (Figs. 4.3 and 6). This is consistent with multiples of a bay width of 4.1 metres (13 feet 6 inches), itself deduced from the subdivision into three of the known original length of the building's interior to the west of its surviving doorway (Fig. 7) – assuming, as in the case of Abingdon's fourteenth-century barns at Manor Farm, Tadmarton<sup>22</sup> and Shippon (Calcott's Barn),<sup>23</sup> no end-trusses. Within a total length of 47.3 metres, the remainder of the barn would have accommodated a further eight bays of 4.1 metres. As such, it would have resembled the eleven-bay structures at Monknash (Glamorgan) and Ely,<sup>24</sup> and the raised-cruck example of 1342 at Winterbourne (Glos.).<sup>25</sup>

The second 'longer' interpretation, B (Figs. 6 and 7), assumes that the barn had already been shortened at its east end before 1808 – for example, to make way for the sixteenth-century outer court. This interpretation is prompted by its closer proximity to Baskerville's measurement and a detail close to the east end of the barn as shown in 1808 (Fig. 4, no. 1), which can be located in relation to the modern topography using the material mentioned above. This is the line showing a boundary continuing eastwards from the barn, on the alignment of its north wall, and which then returns southwards at a right-angle for a distance approximately the same as the width of the pre-1808 barn (Fig. 4, no. 3, indicated by red arrows). An obvious interpretation is that the boundary perpetuates the footprint of a part of the building by then otherwise demolished. If so, this would imply a total length of 51.4 metres (168 feet 7 inches), which would have neatly housed twelve bays, as at Harmondsworth (Middx) and Waltham Abbey in Essex (Table 2).

The original width of the barn, however, was precisely determined by excavation. A 15 metre by 1 metre trench (Trench 1), opened in the former rick yard to the east of Tithe Barn House, revealed a wall footing 1.34 metres (4 feet 3 inches) wide, as little as 5 cm below existing ground surface (Fig. 5). An eastward extension of the trench then allowed another 2.00 metres of the footing to be recorded. The fabric was of carefully laid unmortared rubble, surviving for up to four courses in height. A sondage subsequently excavated through part of the wall revealed that a shallow foundation trench (0.25 metres deep) had been cut into the underlying natural silty clay subsoil, and lined with a levelling layer of fine sandy silt prior to construction. The footing ran exactly parallel to the detached stretch of medieval wall to the north, and, at below-plinth level, was of the same width. Whilst no stratigraphic link was established between the two walls, there can be little doubt that they belonged to the same building. The total external width and internal width of the barn were therefore 11.10 metres (36 feet 5 inches) and 8.90 metres (29 feet 2 inches) respectively, narrow enough to be roofed

<sup>20</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 91, Part II (Sept. 1821), p. 601; J.E. Oxley, 'The Story of Cumnor School', typescript (1987), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: PRO, C 54/15121/91/18.

<sup>22</sup> Bond, 'The Reconstruction', p. 66, fig. 3; for dating of Tadmarton and Shippon see below. On the abbey's acquisition of Tadmarton see Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie*, vol. 2, p. lxxvii and n. 403.

<sup>23</sup> Bond, 'The Reconstruction', p. 67, fig. 4; C.J. Bond and J. Steane, 'Calcott's Barn, Shippon', *CBA Group 9 Newsletter*, 10 (1980), pp. 93–4; D.R. Clark, 'Calcott's Barn', OBR report 294 (2017).

<sup>24</sup> For Monknash: *RCAHMW Glamorgan* (1982), pp. 262–66. The entry suggests no date, but John Newman in *The Buildings of Wales: Glamorgan* (1995), p. 45 notes that 'The most likely period for its construction would be the 13th C'. For Ely: R. Willis, *A Description of the Sextry Barn at Ely, Lately Demolished* (1843).

<sup>25</sup> D.H. Miles, 'The Tree-Ring Dating of Court Farm Barn, Church Lane, Winterbourne, Gloucestershire', unpublished English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report, 34 (2001); L. Hall, 'Barn at Court Farm, Winterbourne, Avon', unpublished report (1980).



Fig. 5. The footings of the barn's southern side wall excavated in July 2010, viewed from the south-west. Photograph by Paul Belford.

without aisles. This means that the Period I building overall measured either (A) 47.3 metres by 11.10 metres (155 feet 2 inches by 36 feet 6 inches), or (B) 51.4 metres by 11.10 metres (168 feet 7 inches by 36 feet 6 inches), with a footprint accordingly of 525 sq m or 570.5 sq m (5,651 or 6,140 sq ft and six sq inches) both of which would place the Cumnor building among the nineteen largest medieval barns known to have been built in England (Table 2).

The positions of the original doorways can be considered thanks to that of the 3.58 metre (11 foot 9 inch) wide opening on the north side of Tithe Barn House (blocked in Period V), which, as shown by the quoining and returns to the chamfered plinths on both sides, is original. Given that the building's length would have required at least one more doorway, if a symmetrical arrangement is assumed, this would have been in bay 8 or bay 9, depending on whether of eleven or twelve bays overall (Fig. 7, A and B). The absence of masonry door rebates, as in most medieval barns (including Abingdon's at Northcourt, Tadmarton and Shippon), implies that the doors were hung from timber posts, or that a timber porch was intended, with the doors hung on the outer frame.<sup>26</sup> Baskerville rather unhelpfully commented that 'I can not tell where [sic] it has a porch'. The north-facing doorways were probably mirrored by others to the south, as locally, at Church Enstone<sup>27</sup> and the three Abingdon examples above, and as in the case of eleven of the nineteen great barns listed in Table 2 of which the original plans

<sup>26</sup> On Shippon: Bond, 'The Reconstruction', pp. 65–6, fig. 3; and J. Fletcher, 'Crucks in the West Berkshire and Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, 33 (1968), pp. 80–1.

<sup>27</sup> R.B. Wood-Jones, 'The Rectorial Barn at Church Enstone', *Oxoniensia*, 21 (1956), pp. 43–8, fig. 15.

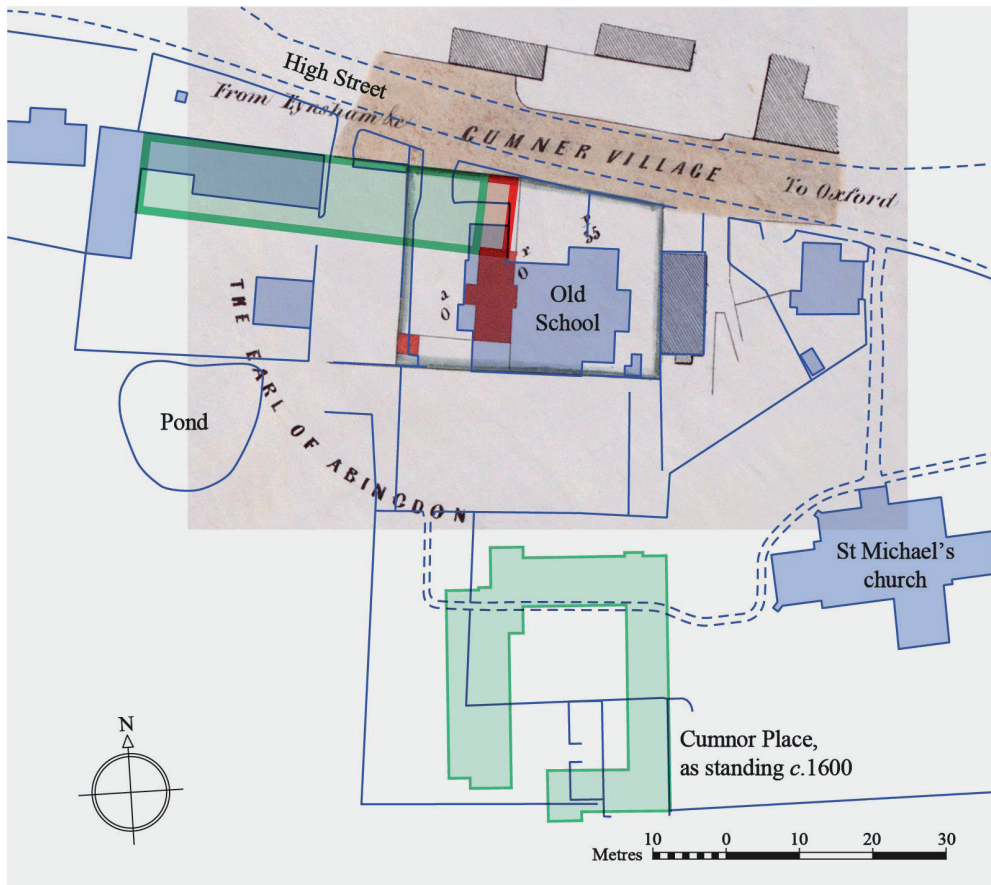


Fig. 6. The Period I footprint of the barn overlaid on the existing topography (in blue), showing the eleven- and twelve-bay interpretations (A, in green, and B, in red). The footprint of the medieval Cumner Place is shown to the south. Drawing by Mark Fenton.

are known: this was more practical than the single-sided arrangement, allowing laden carts or wagons to be driven into the barn, unloaded with the draught animals still harnessed, and then driven straight out; the known exceptions amongst great barns are Frocester, Harmondsworth and Waltham Abbey. If there were opposing doors at Cumnor, there could have been porches on both sides of the building.

#### *Roof Structure and Elevations*

As described above, the medieval side wall stands to a maximum height above the external chamfer of 1.90 metres externally and 1.48 metres inside (respectively 2.65 metres and 2.33 metres above the medieval footings) and carries the much thinner nineteenth-century wall on its outer (northern) edge; further medieval courses may have existed, although in heightening the wall the masons would presumably have wished to retain as much existing fabric as possible. The high quality and thickness of the medieval masonry, capable of resisting substantial outward thrust, combined with its modest height, suggests that the roof-structure was not of a tie-beam form. Specifically, it suggests the use of 'raised crucks', found in a large number of English medieval barns, ranging in scale from tiny, truly vernacular buildings to showy

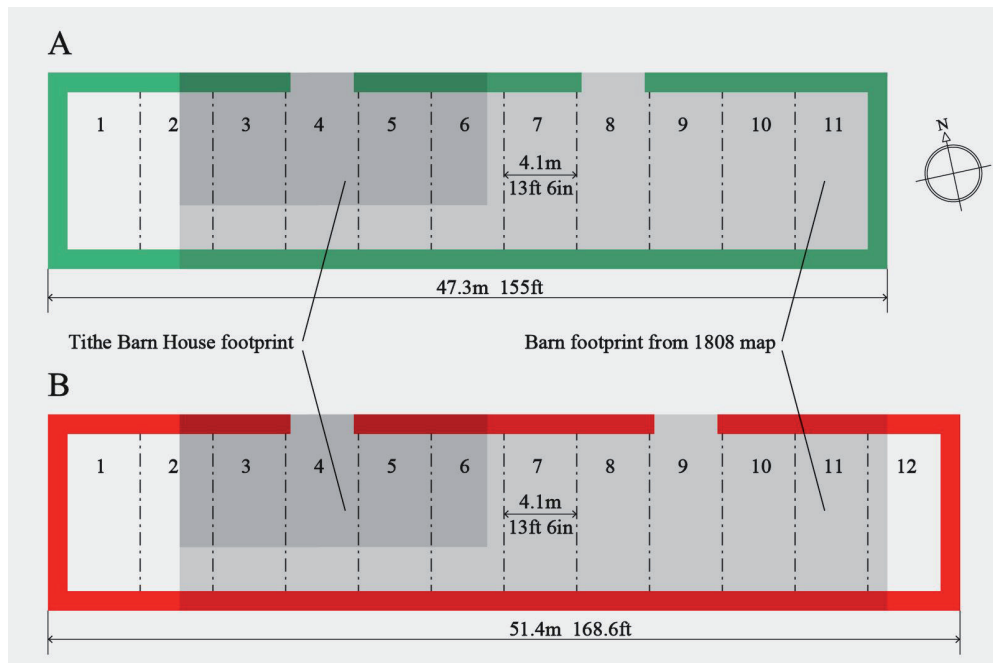


Fig. 7. Drawings showing the suggested original plan and bay structure of the barn if of 11 or 12 bays. Drawing by Mark Fenton.

leviathans such as Tisbury (Wilts.) or Middle Littleton (Worcs.);<sup>28</sup> a base cruck arrangement would not have required such massive masonry. In addition, as raised-cruck blades were typically deeply embedded in the inner face of the masonry, resting on timber pads, such an arrangement would also explain why the wall facing at Cumnor survives to greater height on the outside than on the inside: while removing the cruck blades would have left the exterior stonework intact, it could have seriously damaged that inside, requiring the masons to take it down to a solid and level base on which to rebuild. A raised-cruck arrangement would also be consistent with the rake or outward lean of the inner wall face, common to a number of raised-cruck barns, including Brockworth Court (Glos.) of c.1285–1310,<sup>29</sup> Church Enstone,<sup>30</sup> Shippon and Tadmerton (Fig. 8). That Abingdon's agents were content use this form is shown by its employment at the latter two, and given Baskerville's description of Fitzharris as 'built without story, or beams, to trouble the sturdy Pitcher', probably there too.

Of the masonry detailing all that can be said is that some or all of the building's corners may have had clasping buttresses, as was the case at the north-west (Fig. 2), and that there may have been vents in the gables only, as at Shippon, or in the walls as well, as at Tadmerton (Fig. 9).

<sup>28</sup> P.M. Slocombe, 'Tithe Barn, Place Farm Tisbury', unpublished Wiltshire Building Record report (2016); F.W.B. Charles and W. Horn, 'The Cruck-Built Barn of Middle Littleton in Worcestershire, England', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 25:4 (1966), pp. 221–39. The term 'raised cruck', in other words with cruck blades embedded in masonry walls, is accepted as 'useful' by N.W. Alcock, *Cruck Construction. An Introduction and Catalogue*, CBA Research Report, 42 (1981) p. 4. The profile of the blades, whether they continue to the apex of the roof and how the rest of the roof and superstructure are constructed, vary immensely. See also R. Brunskill, *Timber Building in Britain* (1985), pp. 41–3.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Impey's observation. For the felling dates 1285–1310: R.E. Howard, 'Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report 46/98' (1992).

<sup>30</sup> Wood-Jones, 'The Rectorial Barn', pp. 43–8, fig. 15.



*Fig. 8. Interior of the barn at Manor Farm, Tadmarton. Photograph by Peter Hamilton.*

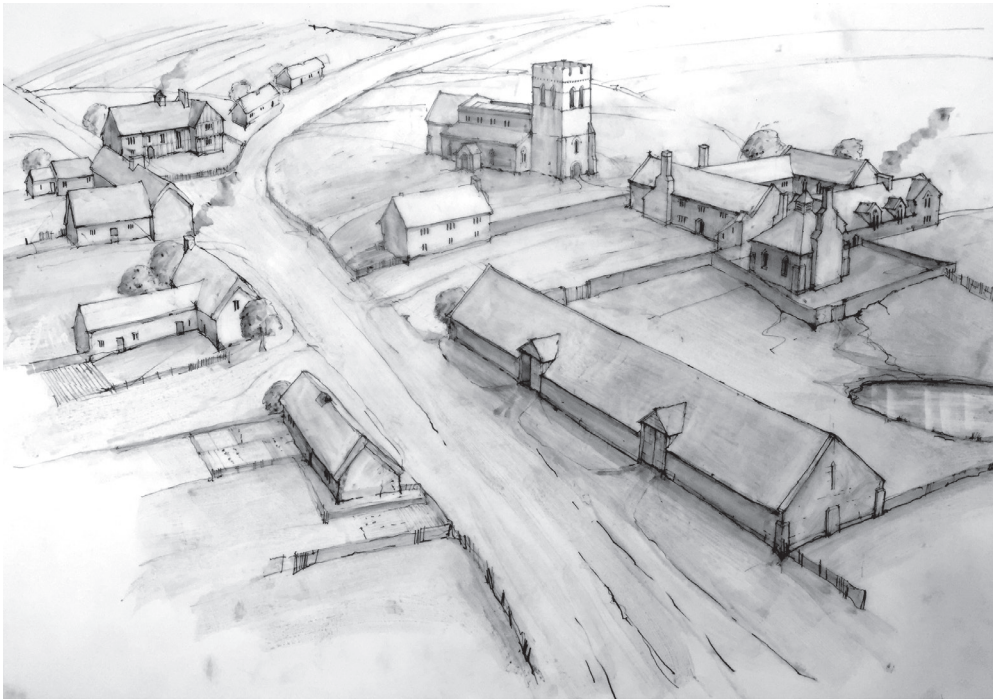


Fig. 9. Aerial reconstruction drawing of the barn in eleven-bay form and neighbouring buildings as they might have looked at the Dissolution, including Cumnor Place (destroyed 1811–12) to the right. The timber-framed building at top left is the vicarage house, and that to the east of the barn Church House. Both still stand in modified form. Drawing by Edward Impey.

#### Date

The date of the building is unknown. However, a medieval origin is clearly indicated by thickness of the walls and the massive chamfered plinth and ashlar, and would be consistent with the use of raised crucks, most examples of which belong to the period c.1250–1450.<sup>31</sup> A number of considerations, however, may help narrow the range within the Middle Ages. First, no English great barns, other than those later enlarged, can be shown to post-date the first half of the fifteenth century: Winchester College's creation of 1425–7 at Harmondsworth may well have been the last.<sup>32</sup> Second, it might be suggested that the barn was part of the abbey's massive building programme probably begun at Cumnor under Abbot William de Cumnor (in office 1332–4), which saw the wholesale replacement of the manor house and the addition of a substantial funerary chapel to St Michael's: certainly, there are other instances of barns being included in such programmes, including at Highnam (Glos.), where Abbot Wygmore (1328–37) built both 'a great barn from scratch' and largely rebuilt the house,<sup>33</sup> or Abbot

<sup>31</sup> Most dated examples belong to the period c.1250–1450: [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/vag\\_dendro/](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/vag_dendro/). Two late examples are at Welltown Manor, Trevalga (Cornw.), 1576 (*Vernacular Architecture*, 35 (2004), p. 85) and Low End Farm Barn, Sheen (Staffs.), 1671 (*Vernacular Architecture*, 27 (1996), p. 83).

<sup>32</sup> See E. Impey with D. Miles and R. Lea, *The Great Barn of 1425–27 at Harmondsworth, Middlesex* (2017).

<sup>33</sup> W.H. Hart (ed.), *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancte Petri Gloucestriae*, 3 vols., Rolls Series, 33 (1863–7), vol. 1, p. 36: 'Et magnam grangiam apud Hynham a fundamentis construxit, et cameram abbatis iuxta magnam aulam, cum parva aula sibi annexa et cappella ibidem perfecit.'

John de la Moote's building of an 'incomparable' barn and a new house at St Peter's, on the outskirts of St Albans.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the structural similarities noted above between Cumnor and Tadmarton, dendro-dated in 2015 to 1337–8,<sup>35</sup> and Shippon, dated in 2016 to 1338–40,<sup>36</sup> hint that it may belong to approximately the same period. These factors combine to suggest that the building was indeed one of the improvements made at Cumnor under Abbot William and/or his successor Roger de Thame (1334–61),<sup>37</sup> and perhaps part also of a wider programme to build or replace the abbey's demesne barns.

## FUNCTION AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

### *Principal Purposes*

The main purpose of barns such as Cumnor's, in arable areas, was the storage of cereal crops 'in the ear' (in sheaves), brought indoors after drying in stooks, ready for threshing as required throughout the winter. Sheaves of pulses 'in the stalk' were also stored in this way, and most barns were also used, at least occasionally, to store hay. While sheaves could be stored outdoors in ricks, barn storage meant that they could be taken down in any quantity at any time, whilst rick-stored grain risked spoilage once exposed.<sup>38</sup> Barns also provided sheltered space for threshing and winnowing, usually in the entrance bays, and could be locked.<sup>39</sup>

Most great barns, including the existing barn at Cumnor, are usually assumed to have been 'tithe barns', that is, intended for the storage of tithes in the form of every tenth sheaf from every parishioner with corn to give. At Cumnor, tithes were indeed due to Abingdon as corporate rector, and 'tithe barns', typically termed in contemporary documents 'grangia decimae/decimarum', and explicitly differentiated from the demesne or 'lord's' barn ('grangia domini'), certainly existed.<sup>40</sup> However, as their size was proportionate to the volume of the tithe crop, they were usually relatively small, and it is not surprising that not a single one of the medieval great barns in England can be shown to have been a 'tithe' barn (although, whilst the crops were separated, some may have stored both demesne and tithe produce).<sup>41</sup> The vast size of the barn at Cumnor therefore implies that it was not built as a tithe barn but, at least primarily, for storing the produce of the demesne.

### *Management Regime*

The non-demesne land of medieval estates such as Abingdon's was usually let to a variety of long-term tenants, including customary tenants owing labour services to the lord, the more substantial of whom had their own barns.<sup>42</sup> Depending on the period in question, instead

<sup>34</sup> T.H. Riley (ed.), *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, 3 vols. (1867–9), vol. 3, p. 445; R. Niblett and I. Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns* (2005), pp. 288–9.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication from D. Miles, Sept. 2015; *Vernacular Architecture*, 47 (2016), p. 96 and fig. 16 (a) and (b).

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication from D. Miles, Dec. 2016.

<sup>37</sup> D. Smith and V. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England & Wales, II, 1216–1377* (2001), pp. 16–18.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication from M. Serge Brard, Cernay (Normandy), 1988. See also N.D.K. Brady, 'The Sacred Barn. Barn-Building in Southern England, 1100–1550: A Study of Grain Storage Technology and its Cultural Context', Cornell University Ph.D. thesis (1996), pp. 65–8.

<sup>39</sup> Authors' observation.

<sup>40</sup> Brady, 'The Sacred Barn', pp. 5–6. Brady's gazetteer contains reference to five tithe barns: the 'grangie pro decimis' noted on the St Paul's manor of Kirby-le-Soken (Essex) in 1335 (p. 238), the 'grangiam ad decimas' noted on their manor at Tillingham (Essex) in 1299 (p. 252), the barn 'ad reponendum decimas ville' on their manor of Drayton (Middx) in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (p. 344), the 'grangia decimarum' at Harmondsworth (Middx) mentioned in 1405–6 (p. 354) and the barn 'pro blado decime' at The Deanery, Bampton in 1317 (p. 354).

<sup>41</sup> The authors are grateful to Prof. Christopher Dyer for advice on this point.

<sup>42</sup> For example at Dumbleton (Glos.) in 1433–4: R.E.G. Kirk (ed.), *Accounts of the Obedientars of Abingdon Abbey*, Camden Society, ns, 51 (1892), p. 154.

of being exploited directly by the lord's employees, the demesne too could be let out (or 'farmed'), usually *en bloc*, at a fixed annual rate for a fixed term to a single tenant, but in either case the demesne barn remained the repository of its produce. Generally speaking, direct demesne management was common from the late twelfth century and farming in or by the early part of the fifteenth, and Abingdon's practice elsewhere reflects this: the demesnes at Little Wittenham<sup>43</sup> and of the manor of Newbury in Shellingford,<sup>44</sup> for example, were in hand in 1394–5 and 1398–9 respectively, and in the former year reeves (and by implication demesne farming) are also recorded at Appleford and Milton.<sup>45</sup> Shellingford, however, was farmed by 1424–5<sup>46</sup> and Appleford by 1417–18, Dumbleton (Glos.) by 1433–4,<sup>47</sup> as were Blewbury Manor in Shellingford, along with Watchfield and Uffington by 1440–1,<sup>48</sup> Goosey (Berks.) by 1469–70,<sup>49</sup> and Lewknor by 1490–1.<sup>50</sup> This would tend to suggest that the barn at Cumnor, if of the period suggested, was built to serve a demesne managed directly by the abbey.

### *Using the Barn*

The exploitation of demesne land and the use of barns such as Cumnor's was managed by a series of officials with roles which differed little between operations of equivalent scale and nature, and is well understood from manorial accounts and a number of medieval treatises.<sup>51</sup> The Abingdon records in this respect are poor, but some individuals and their posts are named. The abbot's chief officer in managing the business affairs of the hundred was the bailiff ('ballivus'), a salaried official.<sup>52</sup> Answerable to him were manorial reeves ('prepositi'), Cumnor's being mentioned in 1375–6, Barton's in 1356–7 and 1417–18,<sup>53</sup> unpaid but relieved of all dues, rents and probably in receipt of rewards in kind, and in theory appointed annually but often in post for many years.<sup>54</sup> One of them, Robert Carter, 'formerly reeve of Cumnor', who by 1375–6 had set up on his own account as farmer of 'La Den' (Dean Court), is known by name, as are a few other Abingdon reeves.<sup>55</sup> Nothing is known about the reeve's staff, but standard practice<sup>56</sup> and the Shellingford account for 1398–9 suggest that they could include a harvest foreman ('messor/ius').<sup>57</sup> Practice elsewhere implies that the foreman would have been responsible for managing the mixed workforce of paid workers and customary tenants, who in addition sowing and tending the crop, reaped it, stooked it and carted it to the barn. On arrival, counting the crop and the arduous task of stacking it were normally managed by a granger, also responsible for having it threshed, usually over several months, and then for passing the grain to the granary manager for storage and issue. The senior officials or paid clerks kept detailed accounts of the quantities of grain threshed, transferred to the granary, and its end use or sale, and these were normally checked on the lord's behalf by professional auditors.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, pp. 143–5. On the manor and parish: *VCH Berks.* 4, pp. 382–4.

<sup>44</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 155, 157.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 163.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

<sup>51</sup> D. Oschinsky (ed.), *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting* (1971), *passim*.

<sup>52</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 15, 24, 150.

<sup>54</sup> Impey, *The Great Barn*, pp. 38–41.

<sup>55</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 24: the treasurer's account, 1375–6, other receipts: 'De Robert Cartere, quondam preposito de Comenor, pro ecclesia de la Den' et terra ibidem traditis ad firmam ad terminum vi annorum, hoc anno primo, £33, 6s. 8d. [Of Robert Carter, formerly reeve of Cumnor, for the church of Dean Court and the land there, handed over at farm for the term of six years, this being the first, for £33 6s. 8d.].

<sup>56</sup> Oschinsky (ed.), *Walter of Henley*, pp. 94–6, 269–80.

<sup>57</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 146. The 'messor' was John Frend.

<sup>58</sup> Oschinsky (ed.), *Walter of Henley*, pp. 97, 288–91.

The main beneficiary of Cumnor's produce in the suggested period of the barn's construction seems to have been the abbot, whose expenses included those of his household and building works – normal Benedictine practice since the late twelfth century having been for the superior's revenues and the monks' to be quite distinct.<sup>59</sup> At Abingdon this was the case by the mid 1180s,<sup>60</sup> and since the Conquest the convent's resources had been allocated to as many as thirty-four obedientars, all monks, for twenty-six of whom at least one annual account survives;<sup>61</sup> the remaining resources, reserved to the abbot, were accounted for by the abbot's own treasurer, although their accounts are lost.<sup>62</sup> Cumnor's allocation to the abbot, probably dating from the late eleventh century,<sup>63</sup> is suggested by the absence of any major dues from the manor to any of the obedientars for whom accounts survive,<sup>64</sup> although at least eight are missing.<sup>65</sup> More importantly, the gardener and pittancer's account for 1369–70, record that the 'Lord Abbot and the Bailiff of the Hundred of Hormer' jointly owed them £6 12s. 4d.,<sup>66</sup> leaving little doubt that the bailiff was acting for the abbot in respect of Cumnor, as also of Barton, the other major manor of the hundred, which is also omitted as a source of revenue in the other accounts. The 1291 *Taxatio* suggests the same thing, in listing Cumnor (with Wootton), Barton and twenty-four other manors under the abbot's name, and the remaining seven, including Abingdon itself, under named Obedientars.<sup>67</sup> The abbot's grain itself is likely to have been variously retained for seed, used in payment for services, consumed at Cumnor, at his other manors, at the abbey, or sold on the London market, to which it was easily carried from Abingdon down the Thames.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Sources of the Crop*

It remains to be considered how large an area of the manor, or which parts of it, the great barn was intended to serve. Firstly, it should be noted that the manor was very large, at Domesday and later being co-extensive with the northern half of Hormer hundred, although Wytham, Seacourt and the Hinkseys had become separate manors and parishes by the 1220s,<sup>69</sup> with a total acreage in 1876 of 7,730 acres and 7,453 c.1910.<sup>70</sup> By the early fourteenth century this area had been subdivided into the tithings (notionally supporting ten men or families) of Cumnor, Whitley, Hill End, Stroud, Chawley and Botley,<sup>71</sup> still extant as administrative units into the nineteenth century. Each tithing had its own field system, recently carefully reconstructed by John Hanson as it existed c.1300, in 1540 and in 1728.<sup>72</sup> Based on his particularly careful plotting of the Cumnor tithings (north and south) as in 1540 – very similar to that of 1300 – their arable area can be roughly calculated at 292 hectares (721 acres);<sup>73</sup> the figure is compatible with Cumnor tithing's 738 acres of 'common field' recorded in 1728, and

<sup>59</sup> D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (1963), pp. 404–6.

<sup>60</sup> Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie*, vol. 2, pp. lxxxiv–lxxxv; G. Lambrick and C.F. Slade, *Two Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey*, 2 vols. (1990 and 1991), vol. 2, pp. xlv–xlvi.

<sup>61</sup> A combined list of the obedientars at Abingdon, Bury and Glastonbury, given by Knowles (*The Monastic Order*, p. 713), indicates the full range of offices that probably existed at Abingdon in the twelfth century. See also Hudson (ed.), *Historie Ecclesie*, vol. 1, pp. clv–clvi.

<sup>62</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, pp. xi–xii, xlvi.

<sup>63</sup> Lambrick, 'Abingdon Abbey Administration', p. 161.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxiii. The hundred court of Hormer seems to have belonged to the convent, as its profits were divided between its several offices.

<sup>65</sup> Cellarer, almoner, hostilar, precentor, keeper of the works, the curtar, and (known from references in the accounts) the keeper of Cuddesdon.

<sup>66</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 21: 'Dominus Abbas et Ballivus Hundredi de Hornemere vi li. xiii s. iiii d.'

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* pp. lv–lvi; *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* (1802), p. 191.

<sup>68</sup> On sales to London: Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply*, pp. 51–3, 194–5.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/73/1a.

<sup>70</sup> J.M. Wilson, *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* (1876), vol. 1, p. 530; *VCH Berks.* 4, p. 398.

<sup>71</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/73/6; E 179/73/7; Hanson, 'A Thousand Years', pp. 32–4.

<sup>72</sup> Hanson, 'A Thousand Years', pp. 27 (1300), 81 (1728), and 67–9 (1540).

<sup>73</sup> The authors are grateful to Lyndsay Summerfield for calculating the acreages.

an undated annotation to the document stating 'The tythable lands of Comnor consist of c.764 acres, 2/3 annually sown with corn.'<sup>74</sup> The two-thirds figure relates to the manor's 'three-field' system, under which one-third was left fallow in any given year, an inheritance from the Middle Ages.<sup>75</sup>

Given the similarities between reconstructed field layouts in 1300, 1540 and 1728, and of the map-based acreage figure and that of 1728, it would be fair to suggest that Cumnor tithing's total arable acreage at the time of the barn's construction stood at between 700 and 800 acres, and the annually cultivated area at about two thirds of this, or c.470 to 530 acres. If it was clear how much of this was demesne in the early fourteenth century, it would be possible to compare the demesne acreage with the storage capacity of the barn, roughly estimated on the basis of its footprint, and determine whether the barn could have served part of, all of, or more than the Cumnor tithings: unfortunately, it is known only that there were nine demesne ploughs out of fifty in 1086, that in 1166 the demesne stood at six and a half hides,<sup>76</sup> and that in 1220 there were eight ploughs in the abbot's demesne and seventy-five and a half others.<sup>77</sup> Quantifying the acreage in question can therefore only be approached from the other end, by estimating how large an area would have been required to fill a barn with a footprint of up to 570.5 sq m. To take footprint alone ignores numerous variables, including the height of the building and to which it was filled (both of course unknown), and can never produce more than an 'order of magnitude' figure.

Nevertheless, given that recent calculations suggest that the great barn at Harmondsworth (Middx),<sup>78</sup> with a footprint of 668 sq m, was more than adequate to store the produce of 236 acres (each acre's produce requiring a storage footprint of 0.35 sq m) the Cumnor building could have housed that of 199 acres. This suggests, on the basis that demesne acreages were routinely smaller than the non-demesne, and that at a national level the demesne sector of total sown acreage in 1300 has been calculated at 25 per cent (and 19.5 per cent in 1380),<sup>79</sup> that the barn was intended to serve the demesne component of an annual arable area of about 1,000 acres (200 x 4). The implication is that it was not intended (in particular) as a collection centre for the manor's whole demesne produce, but was perhaps intended for that of more than the Cumnor tithings alone. If so, the likeliest candidate is that of Chawley, to the west. A further implication is that the other tithings in the manor must have possessed barns too, if on a smaller scale, the sites or traces of which all remain to be discovered.<sup>80</sup>

## ABINGDON'S BARNs AND OTHERS

As has been noted, among the nine local barns that Abingdon is known to have possessed, Cumnor was, if Baskerville is to be believed, the second largest (Table 1). The existence of the buildings at Fitzharris and Cumnor helps to answer a problem raised by James Bond as to whether 'their small size compared with many other Benedictine barns in southern England', implied 'some different purpose or management practice':<sup>81</sup> in fact, the abbey's use of barns was typical, not atypical, of normal Benedictine practice.

<sup>74</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Berks b 37.

<sup>75</sup> Although some of the tithings perhaps operated a two-field system: Hanson, 'A Thousand Years', p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie*, vol. 2, p. 388.

<sup>77</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/73/1a: 'Ad Cumenore Abbas in dominico viii carr(ucae); In Balia Ricardi p(re)positi xxx carr(ucae) et dim(idia); Ibid(em) in Balia Osberti xlv carr(ucae)' ['At Cumnor the abbot in demesne 8 ploughs. In the *ballium* of Richard Reeve, 30 and a half. There in the possession of Osbert, 45 ploughs'. The authors are grateful to Mark Bailey for advice on the interpretation of this entry.

<sup>78</sup> Impey, *The Great Barn*, pp. 13–15.

<sup>79</sup> S. Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth 1270–1870* (2015), p. 82, table 3.01

<sup>80</sup> Hanson, 'A Thousand Years', p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Bond, 'A Reconstruction', p. 65.

Table 1. Other Abingdon barns

Site	Form	Date	Dimensions	Footprint
Barton <sup>82</sup>	Timber-framed	Extant in 16th C		
Culham <sup>83</sup>	Unknown	Extant 1355–6		
Cumnor SP 461 041	Unaisled, stone walls, 11 or 12 bays, raised crucks.	1330s?	Up to 168 ft 7 in long x 36 ft 6 in Up to 51.4 m wide x 11.10 m	Up to 6,150 ft <sup>2</sup> Up to 570.5 m <sup>2</sup>
Drayton <sup>84</sup>	True crucks	Extant in 1355–6	Internal width 20 ft 10 in 6.35 m	
Fitzharris <sup>85</sup>	Crucks or raised crucks?	Extant in 1690s	Larger than Cumnor	
Northcourt <sup>86</sup> SP 502 983	Unaisled, stone walls, 6 bays. Original roof (destroyed) of tie-beam type.	c.1300; 17th–18th C roof	29 ft 6 in x 90 ft 8.98 m x 24.66 m	2,655 ft <sup>2</sup> 221.5 m <sup>2</sup>
Lockinge <sup>87</sup>	Unknown	Extant in 12th C	Unknown	
Tadmarton <sup>88</sup> SP 392 379	Unaisled, 6 bays, stone walls, raised crucks. Opposing doors.	1332–35	73 ft 2 in x 30 ft 2 in 22.30 x 9.21 m	2, 190 ft <sup>2</sup> 205.3 m <sup>2</sup>
Shippon <sup>89</sup> SP 485 980	Unaisled, raised crucks, 5 bays	1338–40	62 ft 8 in x 23 ft 4 in 19.1 x 7.10m	1, 475ft <sup>2</sup> 135.61m <sup>2</sup>

Where the Cumnor building stands, in scale, in relation to other large barns in England, is also worth briefly considering. A number of attempts have been made to classify barns by size, either on the basis of footprint or useable volume,<sup>90</sup> and have identified as ‘very large’ those with internal dimensions of over 25 metres to 40 metres in length and 8 to 9 metres in width (that is with a footprint of as much 360 sq m) as or a volume of over 2,000 cubic metres. With a probable footprint of at least 525 sq m, Cumnor clearly belongs, according to either classification, within the ‘very large’ category, but is not among the small group of

<sup>82</sup> J.M. Steane, ‘The Abingdon Monks’ Map’, *Oxoniensia*, 73 (2008), p. 21 and plate B. Grid references for destroyed buildings are approximate only.

<sup>83</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 9; Bond, ‘A Reconstruction’, p. 64.

<sup>84</sup> Kirk (ed.), *Accounts*, p. 8. This was presumably the barn at Drayton drawn by J.C. Buckler (BL, Add MS 36436, f. 605), reproduced in Alcock, *Cruck Construction*, front cover and pp. 20, 23, 38 n. See also J.T. Smith, ‘Cruck Construction: A Survey of the Problems’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 8 (1964), pp. 119–51 and plate 8.

<sup>85</sup> BL, Harley MS 4716, f. 10v.

<sup>86</sup> Standing building examined by Edward Impey, 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Mentioned in the context of a twelfth-century tithe dispute: J. Stevenson, *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, Rolls Series (1858), p. 203; Hudson (ed.), *Historia Ecclesie*, vol. 2, p. 284; C.J. Bond, ‘A Reconstruction’, p. 64.

<sup>88</sup> Measured on site September 2015; for dating, D. Miles and M. Bridge, ‘List 287’, *Vernacular Architecture*, 47 (2016), p. 96.

<sup>89</sup> Standing building. See C.J. Bond, ‘A Reconstruction’, pp. 65 and 66, fig. 3; personal communication from Dan Miles, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> J. Bond and J.B. Weller, ‘The Somerset Barns of Glastonbury Abbey’, in L. Abrams and J. Carley (eds.), *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey. Essays in Honour of the Ninetieth Birthday of C.A. Raleigh Radford* (1991), p. 83; Brady, ‘The Sacred Barn’, pp. 119–20.

Table 2. The nineteen largest amongst the known medieval barns in England: comparative data

Site	Builder	Form	Date	Dimensions	Footprint
Minster, <sup>91</sup> Kent TR 313 643	St Augustine's abbey, Canterbury	Nave and (?) two aisles, stone walls. Destroyed c.1700	Pre- Dissolution	352 × 47 ft 107 × 14.3 m	16,544 ft <sup>2</sup> ft <sup>2</sup> 1,530 m <sup>2</sup>
Cholsey, <sup>92</sup> Oxfordshire SU 583 871	St Mary's abbey, Reading	Nave and two aisles, 18 bays, stone walls and piers. Destroyed 1815	14th C? Substantially rebuilt, 1430s	303 × 54 ft 92.35 × 16.5 m	16,363 ft <sup>2</sup> 1,523 m <sup>2</sup>
Beaulieu St Leonards, <sup>93</sup> Hampshire SZ 406 983	St Mary's abbey, Beaulieu	Nave and two aisles, 7 bays, stone walls, timber piers. Ruined by 16th C	Early 13th C	224 × 67 ft 68.27 m × 20.42 m	15,008 ft <sup>2</sup> 1,394 m <sup>2</sup>
Ely, <sup>94</sup> Cambridgeshire TL 538 802	Cathedral priory of St Etheldreda, Ely	Nave and two aisles, 11 bays, stone walls. Destroyed 1842	Mid 13th C	227 ft 6 in × 47 ft 5 in 69.35 × 14.47 m	10,806 ft <sup>2</sup> 1,003 m <sup>2</sup>
Abbotsbury, <sup>95</sup> Dorset SY 577 850	St Peter's abbey, Abbotsbury	Unaisled, 23 bays, stone walls, arch- braced roof (replaced; 11 bays roofless)	Mid 15th C	282 × 37 ft 89 × 11.2 m	10,434 ft <sup>2</sup> 996.8 m <sup>2</sup>

<sup>91</sup> E. Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 12 vols. (1797–1801), vol. 10, p. 278: 'At a small distance from it [what] stood antiently a very large barn, sufficient to hold the corn growing on all the demesnes, being in length 352 feet, and in breadth 47 feet, and the height of the walls 12 feet, with a roof of chestnut. When the estate was divided, 154 feet in length of this building was carried to Sevenscore Farm, where it was burnt, by an accident unknown in 1700, and the remaining part here was burnt by lightning afterwards'. Presumably the buttressed south gable of the existing barn, aligned north–south, to the north of the Court (observed by Edward Impey, 1980s) is a remnant of it.

<sup>92</sup> W. Horn, 'The Great Tithe Barn of Cholsey, Berkshire', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 22 (1963), pp. 13–23; J. Hunt, letter printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 86 (Feb. 1816), p.105 and engraving opposite. J. Buckler's drawings (which must be in part reconstruction drawings) are BL, Add MS 36436, nos. 680 and 681.

<sup>93</sup> Horn and Born, *The Barns*.

<sup>94</sup> R. Willis, *A Description of the Sextry Barn at Ely, Lately Demolished* (1843). The eastern end was at an angle, so Willis gives 'the mean length of the interior as 219 ft 6 in'. Its 'breadth between the walls' was 39 ft 5 in. The side walls were 4 ft thick and 12 ft 8 in high. The thickness of gable walls is not given but plan (plate 11) indicates similar thickness.

<sup>95</sup> 'Abbotsbury', in *RCHME* (1952), vol. 1, pp. 6–7. For the form of the original roof and approximate date: M. Heaton, 'Roof of the Abbey Barn, Abbotsbury', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 28 (2007), pp. 120–3.

Table 2. Continued

Site	Builder	Form	Date	Dimensions	Footprint
Chislet, <sup>96</sup> Kent TR 224 644	St Augustine's abbey, Canterbury	Nave and two aisles, probably 13 bays. Destroyed 1925	12th and 13th C?	240 ft long. Est 40 ft wide 73.10 × 12.1 m	9,600 ft <sup>2</sup> 884 m <sup>2</sup>
Waltham Abbey, <sup>97</sup> Essex TL 382 009	Abbey of the Holy Cross and St Lawrence, Waltham	Nave and two aisles, 12 bays (at fullest extent), timber-framed Destroyed c.1840. Excavated	Two phases: 12th and 13th C	210 × 45 ft 64.00 m × 13.70 m	9,450 ft <sup>2</sup> 876 m <sup>2</sup>
Walton, <sup>98</sup> Essex TM 252 220 (approx.)	Canons of St Paul's Cathedral	Known only from 12th-C document	Described 1142–68	168 × 53 ft	8,904 ft <sup>2</sup> 826 m <sup>2</sup>
Monknash, <sup>99</sup> Glamorgan ST 918 707	Abbey of Holy Trinity, Neath	Unaisled, 11 bays, stone walls. Roofless ruin	13th C?	203ft 6 in × 42 ft 66.8 × 12.80 m	8,547 ft <sup>2</sup> 822.7 m <sup>2</sup>
Littlebourne, <sup>100</sup> Kent TR 211 579	Cathedral priory of St Andrew, Rochester	Nave and two aisles, 10 bays, missing 1.5 bays, timber-framed	1307–27; roof, 1525	202 × 39 ft 61.6 × 11.9 m	7,879 ft <sup>2</sup> 733 m <sup>2</sup>
Frindsbury, <sup>101</sup> Kent TQ 747 700	Cathedral priory of St Andrew, Rochester	Nave and two aisles, 13 bays (3 destroyed), timber-framed	1404	218 ft × 37 ft 6in 66.70 × 10.75 m	8,248 ft <sup>2</sup> 717 m <sup>2</sup>
Tisbury, <sup>102</sup>	St Mary's	Unaisled,	1289–1314	195 ft 6 in ×	7,429 ft <sup>2</sup>

<sup>96</sup> S. Rigold, 'Some Major Kentish Timber Barns', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 81 (1966), p. 19; idem, 'The Lost Barn of Chislet', in K.H. McIntosh, *Chislet and Westbere: Villages of the Stour Lathe* (1979), pp. 34–5. Rigold's informant knew the barn when it was standing. Rigold was unable to locate photographs or drawings.

<sup>97</sup> P.J. Huggins, 'Waltham Abbey. Monastic Grange and Outer Close Excavations 1970–72', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* (1972), pp. 56–61; J.G. Hurst, 'Rural Building in England and Wales: England', in H.E. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, II, 1042–1350* (1988), p. 895.

<sup>98</sup> Horn and Born, *The Barns*, pp. 365–9; W.H. Hale (ed.), *The Domesday of St Paul's of the Year MCCXXII, or Registrum de Visitatione Maneriarum per Robertum Decanum*, Camden Society, OS, 69 (1858), p. 130.

<sup>99</sup> RCAHMW Glamorgan (1982), pp. 262–66.

<sup>100</sup> R.W. Austin, 'An Architectural Survey of Littlebourne Barn', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 116 (1997), pp. 203–19; J. Arnold et al., 'Tree-Ring Analysis of Timbers from Littlebourne Barn, near Canterbury, Kent', unpublished English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report, 95 (2003). Measured on site by Edward Impey, 27 June 2012. Dimensions include the lost three bays (of which the sill walls survive).

<sup>101</sup> R.W. Austin, 'Manor Farm Barn, Frindsbury, Kent. An Architectural Description', unpublished Canterbury Archaeological Trust report (2005).

<sup>102</sup> For brief accounts: F.B. Andrews, 'Medieval or "Tithe" Barns', *Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions*, 26 (1900), p. 30; Slocombe, 'Tithe Barn, Place Farm Tisbury'. For the date: J. Arnold and R.E. Howard, 'The Tithe Barn, Place Farm, Tisbury Wiltshire. Tree-Ring Analysis of Timbers', unpublished report for the Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory (2016). The 1289–1314 date is the estimated felling date range.

Table 2. Continued

Site	Builder	Form	Date	Dimensions	Footprint
Wiltshire ST 951 298	abbey, Shaftesbury	13 bays, stone walls, raised crucks		38ft 59.5 m × 11.57	688.4 m <sup>2</sup>
Harmondsworth, <sup>103</sup> Middlesex TQ 056 777	Winchester College	Nave and two aisles, 12 bays, timber-framed	1425–7	192 ft × 37 ft 6in 58.52 × 11.42 m	7,200 ft <sup>2</sup> 668.29 m <sup>2</sup>
Great Coxwell, <sup>104</sup> Oxfordshire SU 269940	St Mary's abbey Beaulieu	Nave and two aisles, 7 bays, stone walled, timber arcades	1292	152 ft × 44 in 46.32 × 13.41 m	6,688 ft <sup>2</sup> 621 m <sup>2</sup>
Frocester, <sup>105</sup> Gloucestershire SO 786 029	St Peter's, abbey, Gloucester	Unaisled, 13 bays, stone walls, true crucks	c.1300. Roof 16th C	192 ft × 35 ft 6 in 58.52 × 10.82m	6,816 ft <sup>2</sup> 613 m <sup>2</sup>
Cumnor, Oxfordshire SP 461 041	St Mary's abbey, Abingdon	Unaisled, 11 or 12 bays stone walls, raised crucks	1330s?	Up to 51.4 m wide × 11.10 168 ft 7 in × 36 ft 6 in	Up to 570.5m <sup>2</sup> 6,150 ft <sup>2</sup>
Bradford on Avon, <sup>106</sup> Wiltshire ST 823 604	St Mary's abbey, Shaftesbury	Unaisled, 14 bays, stine walls, raised crucks	early 14th C	174 ft 6 in × 35 ft 53 × 10.6 m	6,017 ft <sup>2</sup> 561.8 m <sup>2</sup>
Hartpur, <sup>107</sup> Gloucestershire SO 779 236	St Peter's abbey, Gloucester	Unaisled, 11 bays, stone walls, post- medieval roof	14th C	161 × 36 ft 49.07 × 10.97 m	5,796 ft <sup>2</sup> 538 m <sup>2</sup>
Middle Littleton, <sup>108</sup> Worcestershire SP 080 471	St Mary's abbey, Evesham	Unaisled, 11 bays, raised crucks	from 1316	142 ft 3 in × 38 ft 10 in 43 × 11.88 m	5,467 ft <sup>2</sup> 510.84 m <sup>2</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Impey, *The Great Barn*.<sup>104</sup> Horn and Born, *The Barns*. For the date: J. Munby, 'Great Coxwell Barn', *Archaeological Journal*, supplement to 145 (1998), pp. 73–7; N. Alcock et al., 'Tree-Ring Date Lists 2014', *Vernacular Architecture*, 45 (2014), p. 123.<sup>105</sup> F.W.B. Charles and W. Horn, 'The Cruck-Built Barn of Frocester in Gloucestershire', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 42 (1983), pp. 211–37.<sup>106</sup> Andrews, 'Medieval or "Tithe" Barns', p. 27.<sup>107</sup> Visited by Edward Impey, 12 December 2014. On the date, see *VCH Glos.* 13, pp. 87–8.<sup>108</sup> For the building: F.W.B. Charles and W. Horn, 'The Cruck-Built Barn of Middle Littleton in Worcestershire, England', *Journal of the Society Architectural Historians*, 25 (1966), pp. 221–39; Andrews, 'Medieval or "Tithe" Barns', p. 22. For the date, based on historical sources attributing the barn to Abbot John of Brockhampton: C.J. Bond, 'The Estates of Evesham Abbey: A Preliminary Study of their Medieval Topography', *Vale of Evesham Historical Society Research Papers*, 4 (1973), pp. 16–18. For dendrochronology identifying a felling date after 1315, and thus that the barn was begun under Brockhampton but finished later: J. Fletcher, 'A List of Tree-Ring Dates for Building Timber in Southern England and Wales', *Vernacular Architecture*, 11 (1980), p. 34.

gigantic buildings exceeding the 25 metres to 40 metres category by over 100 per cent – those at Minster Court, Cholsey, Beaulieu, Ely and Abbotsbury.

## POST-MEDIEVAL HISTORY AND ALTERATIONS

### *Period II: Pre 1690s*

The medieval barn was reduced in size in the late seventeenth century (Period II) and again in 1810–11 (Period IV), on both occasions, presumably, to suit the needs of tenants farming a much smaller area than the medieval demesne. This was a common fate of medieval great barns and later ones: examples include the Waltham Abbey barn (shortened in 1650–1700 and again in 1740, before destruction c.1840),<sup>109</sup> the barn at Church Farm, Great Haseley, reduced from nine bays to seven in 1811, and St Leonard's, Beaulieu, where a (still large) post-medieval barn of 41.1 metres by 10.6 metres squats within the ruined thirteenth-century shell.<sup>110</sup> Closer to home, a seventeenth-century barn at Northcourt Farm, on the outskirts of Abingdon and originally of eight bays and measuring 36.08 metres by 13.72 metres, was reduced, probably in the nineteenth century, to five bays and a length of 24.19 metres.<sup>111</sup>

Demolition may also have been prompted by damage to the walls caused by the spreading of the raised-cruck trusses, as found for example at Tadmerton and Shippon.<sup>112</sup> But whatever the reasons, the order and form of the alterations is clearly indicated by structural evidence, by Baskerville's verse and by early nineteenth-century records. Baskerville's lines

But as to length in days of yore  
'Tis now much shorter than before

and his footnote that the barn had once been 'about 65 yards long' are a vital starting point. However, wholly compatible structural evidence of shortening appears on the exterior of the north wall at its west end, where a clear sequence is revealed, the first intervention being the cutting-down of the medieval side-wall to below offset level (presumably at least part of what Baskerville observed), the removal of two bays, and the building of a new 1.15 metre thick gable end further east (Figs. 3 and 5).

The possibility that the barn had been shortened at its east end, and perhaps as early as the sixteenth century is discussed above. The date of the more substantial shortening at its west end, other than that it preceded Baskerville's visit, also remains unknown. However, while it could have happened before the Dissolution or in the later sixteenth century, Baskerville's wording hints at a more recent event – one he had heard about, as well as observed. The work could have been the initiative of the owner or the tenants, the former, in the seventeenth century being Francis Norreys (1601–22), Edward Wray (1628–58), and from 1658 the Bertie family.<sup>113</sup> In the first decades of the century the best candidate among their tenants is William Lane, the highest tax payer in the manor and Cumnor tithing in 1611 and 1625, at £7 6s. and £4 10s. in 1625.<sup>114</sup> By 1635 the tenant was John Peacock, paying £50 for 'Comner Place; the Parke; the Lords Mead and the Tythes in Comner';<sup>115</sup> he was succeeded in 1645 by Francis Peacock, and in 1669 by Francis's son Henry (d. 1699). Probably, therefore the work was carried out under the ownership of the Berties and during the Peacocks' tenancy.

<sup>109</sup> Huggins, 'Waltham Abbey', pp. 56–61.

<sup>110</sup> *Vernacular Architecture*, 26 (1995), p. 67; Hasted, *The Historical and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, vol. 10 (1800), p. 278; Horn and Born, *The Barns*, p. 48.

<sup>111</sup> Observations on site, Jan. 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Observation on site.

<sup>113</sup> Impey, 'The Manor House'.

<sup>114</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/75/329 (assessed on goods and land); E 179/75/342 (assessed on land only).

<sup>115</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Gen. e 64, f. 3: 'Comner Leaseholders [sic] Mr Peacock Comner Place; the Parke; the Lords meade; and tithes in Comner £50'.

*Period III: Seventeenth or Eighteenth Century*

At some stage after 1693, probably in the eighteenth century (Period III) but clearly before 1808, the existing 'L'-shaped building housing a cowshed and an open-fronted cart shed were butted against the Period II gable, its north wall being built up from the medieval footings (Fig. 3, above). The remainder of the medieval barn still retained its original width. The tenants in this period, for one of whom or by whom this work was done, were, successively John Knapp from 1699 to 1713, and his son, also John, from 1713 to before 1763.<sup>116</sup> It was then let to Mr Rawlins, sub-let in 1770 to John King of Cumnor,<sup>117</sup> then let by Rawlins to Richard Stone, and then by him to his son or nephew William.<sup>118</sup>

*Period IV: Early Nineteenth Century*

The much more drastic reduction saw the shortening of the building at its east end (or according to reconstruction B above, a second shortening at this end) and its reduction in width. Evidence for this is provided by the 1808 map, which shows the building at the time of the survey extending well to the east of its existing building line, but on which the barn's eastern extremity was shaded when the map was brought up to date to show the school, completed in 1812 (precursor to the existing Old School of 1861: Figs. 4, 7).<sup>119</sup> As the work does not appear in the Abingdon estate accounts, otherwise both detailed and complete, it probably took place during the financial year 1810–11, for which the accounts are missing, and can be seen as one of a series of improvements, including the demolition of the medieval manor house, carried out by the Abingdon estate after the end of the Stone family's tenancy in 1811.<sup>120</sup> A possibility remains, however, that the completion of the barn in its present form (as opposed to preliminary demolition) took place after the making of a map in 1820, on which it is omitted, although necessarily before the preparation of the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, published in September 1821, in which the finished work is mentioned.<sup>121</sup>

The truncation of the building was followed by the building of the existing east gable and south wall and the heightening of the north wall, all identifiably of the same build. The Period II west gable, however, was retained, although correspondingly cut back to the south and heightened at its north end: its junction with the nineteenth-century south wall is as might be expected – the new facing neatly extended across the cut-off end of the earlier wall, but making an awkward joint with the earlier masonry on the return (Fig. 10). At ground level, facing stones belonging to the Period II west wall still project south of the 1810–11 building line.<sup>122</sup> This neatly corresponds with *Gentleman's Magazine* statement, regarding the 'the large barn, which stands to the North-west of the quadrangle [that is, of Cumnor Place]: . . . erected for the reception of the rectorial tythes' and whose 'present appropriation not demanding such an extent as it originally was, one side of it has been taken down, and its breadth contracted several feet'.<sup>123</sup>

*Period V: 1979–80*

In 1923 Manor Farm, to which the barn and adjacent land belonged, was bought from Montague Bertie, 7th Earl of Abingdon, by Frank Tyrell,<sup>124</sup> whose son Cedric sold it to the Impey family in 1969. Cedric Tyrell continued to use the barn and its annexes for stock and

<sup>116</sup> Berks. RO, D/ER T37; Hanson, *A Thousand Years*, p. 189.

<sup>117</sup> Berks. RO, D/ER T37.

<sup>118</sup> Impey, 'The Manor House'.

<sup>119</sup> TNA: PRO, C 54/15121/91/18; C 54/15121; Oxley, 'The Story of Cumnor School', p. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. b 207 (Abingdon estate accounts).

<sup>121</sup> [Benjamin Robert Perkins], 'Account of the Parish of Cumnor', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 91, Part II (Sept. 1821), p. 205.

<sup>122</sup> The authors are grateful to Peter Hamilton for this observation.

<sup>123</sup> Perkins, 'Account of the Parish', p. 205.

<sup>124</sup> Personal communication from Claire Tyrell-Williams and John Tyrell.



*Fig. 10. The south-west corner of Tithe Barn House, looking east.*

storage until they were sold in 1979 to Richard de la Mare. The buildings were then converted into a single house by Hayford Design and Restoration Ltd of 30 St Giles, Oxford.<sup>125</sup> Windows were inserted to the south and east, and the north doorway blocked with weather-boarded timber-framing leaving a row of lights at the top.

Today Tithe Barn House remains the dominant building on the village's short High Street, and other than the church incorporates the village's most substantial medieval fabric. As such, though 'much shorter than before', it remains the most prominent memento of Cumnor's six centuries of ownership by Abingdon abbey.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are very grateful to a number of people for their help with the research behind this article and in its compilation, in particular: Peter and Susan Hamilton for access to Tithe Barn House and its grounds for excavation and examination, and for photography; Robin and Katherine Noble for access to their garden; David Ramm, Dave Stepney and the governors of The Manor preparatory school, Abingdon, for access and assistance with fieldwork at Calcott's Barn, Shippon; Mark Fenton for Figs. 2, 3, 6 and 7, for manipulating the historic plan data

<sup>125</sup> Personal communication from Peter Hamilton.

and invaluable insights into its interpretation; the Oxfordshire Archaeological and Historical Society for a contribution to the costs of dendrochronology at Tadmarton and Shippon; Richard and Jane Asser for access and hospitality at Tadmarton; Lyndsay Summerfield for calculating the Cumnor arable acreages and other help. We are also grateful for help and advice from Mark Bailey, the late Matthew Bowden, James Bond, Emma Carver, Christopher Dyer, Jane Impey, the late John Hanson, Daniel Miles, Philip Powell, Stephen Priestley, John Tyrell, Claire Tyrell-Williams, and Esme Wyatt. The editor's anonymous referee provided a number of helpful suggestions.