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Modern living in an historic environment

A Heritage Asset Survey of former farm buildings at Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton, Oxfordshire

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Summary

The farmyard attached to Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton, is derelict and some is already ruinous. Plans to convert some farmyard buildings into residential property and others to become the site of new residences are welcome, so long as they respect local vernacular building traditions and perpetuate the general layout and massing of the former core farmyard complex as the frame and setting for the Grade II listed farmhouse.

Introduction

Crockwell Farm is being considered for the demolition, or conversion or rebuilding of some of its buildings to form new residential property by the owner Mrs L Bywaters, and early plans have been prepared by the agent and architects Roger Coy Partnership, Eydon Northants.

Crockwell Farm lies on the northern edge of the village of Great Bourton, near Banbury, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 45536 45685; Fig 1). It has occupied this edge-of-settlement location, close to the former Manor House, since at least the late 17th century, when the farmhouse was constructed. This location is distinctive and its command of fields to the north and north-east, with commanding downslope views towards the neighbouring village of Cropredy. The Registered Battlefield of Cropredy Bridge (1644) has no bearing on the farmyard nor does the farmyard relate to the battlefield in any way (Historic England- Battlefields Register: 10000008). Neither is discernible from the other.

Crockwell Farmhouse is listed Grade II. The following is its legacy list-description (Historic England - National Heritage list- no 1215873):

BOURTON MANOR ROAD SP4545 (North side) Great Bourton 17/5 Crockwell Farmhouse 08/12/55

GV II Farmhouse. Late C17. Ironstone ashlar. Steeply pitched slate roof. Stone-coped gables with moulded kneelers, Brick ridge and end stacks. 3-unit plan, 2 storeys plus attic. 3-window range. Entrance off-centre to left has doorway with a moulded stone basket arched head and C20 door. Hood mould with diamond shaped label stops. Entrance is flanked by 3- and 4-light stone mullions. An 4-light similar window to right. Between the floors on the right is a 2-light stone mullioned stair window. First floor has three 3-light stone mullioned windows. Staircase light in attic floor said to have once been gabled. Right gable has 2-, 3- and 4-light stone mullioned windows with hood mould and label stop. Sundial. Interior said to have stop-chamfered beams, inglenooks and original staircase. Interior not inspected. (VCH: Oxfordshire: Vol X. p176).

Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton

Crockwell Farmhouse and Crockwell Farm have been disconnected since 1975. The farmhouse has been in separate ownership for that 41-year period and does not function as a farmhouse.

Although none of the outbuildings of the farmyard are statutorily listed, they have here been treated as if they are listed by curtilage, affording them a level of scrutiny which they might not otherwise get. This report considers them in the light of prescriptive documents: English Heritage 2011 *The setting of heritage assets*; Historic England 2015 (a) *Making changes to heritage assets*; Historic England 2015 (b) *Farmstead assessment framework*.

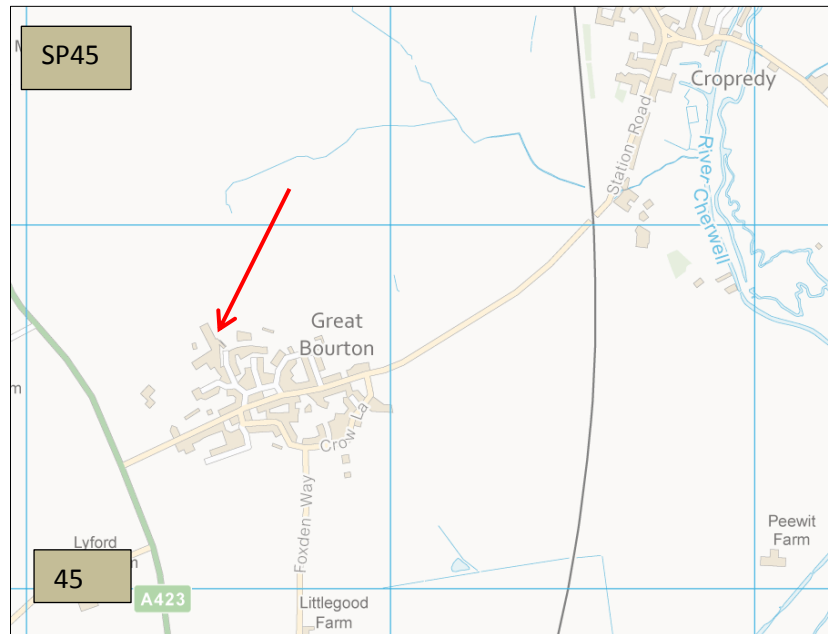


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2016

The farmyard and farmhouse lie on an east-facing slope which has been enhanced by the creation of a small bowl-like scarp to create a level plat on which the farmyard has been laid out. It has grown organically, with 19th-century additions, since the 17th century, seeing the last expansion northwards in the 1970s, since when decline has been rapid. The farmyard is entirely derelict and many buildings are in an advanced state of decay or complete ruin.

There is very little public view of the farmyard or the listed farmhouse, both glimpsed through the farmyard gate on Manor Road, or from a distance from a public footpath to the north-west. Both views are of overgrown dereliction and ruin as the frame for the listed building.

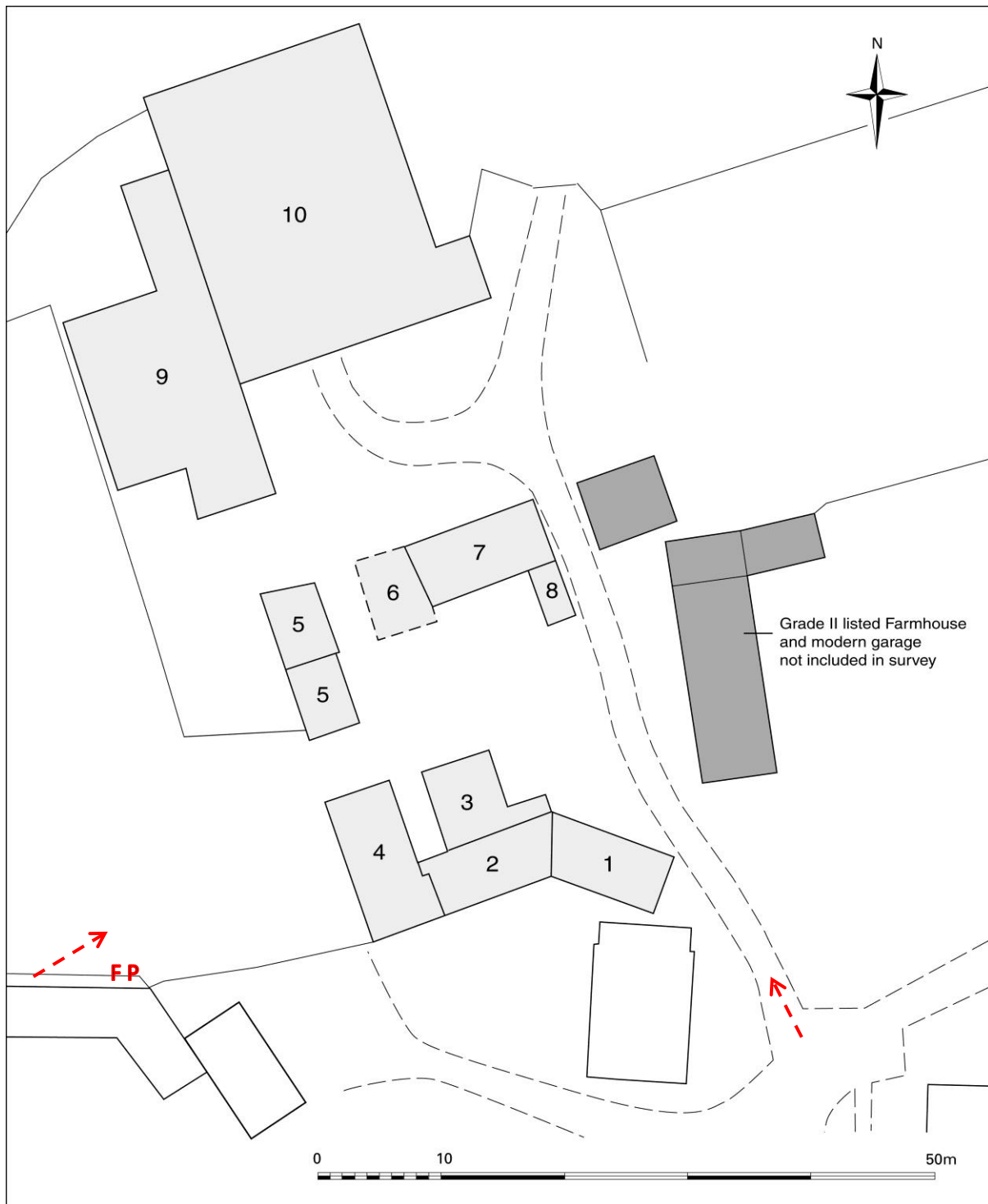


Fig 2: The layout of the farmyard (Andy Isham after Roger Coy Partnership); Building 11 lies 30m west of Building 5, out of the frame. The dashed red line shows the restricted public views.

Assessment of Heritage Significance

The buildings ensemble

Building 1

An open-fronted cart shed of three bays. It is constructed of ironstone rear, gable and dividing wall. The front edge of each north-facing wall is finished off in smooth-faced bull-nosed red brick of early 20th-century type. The floors are of brick or concrete. The roof is of machine-sawn pine and late 19th-century or early 20th-century assembly, and has a modern covering in blue engineering tiles stamped 'FINWOOD', with occasional modern skylights. Scars of a manger and hay-rack indicate that it enjoyed a previous use as an animal shelter.

Positively identified in plan on 1882 Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 Map, so pre-1882 in layout



Fig 3: Buildings 1 (left) and 2 (angled to right); scale 1m



Fig 4: Scars of former manger and hay rack in Building 1 dividing wall; scale 1m

Building 2

This is a building continuation north-west from Building 1 and is part of the same structure. However it appears never to have been used for anything but livestock, undivided for cart/vehicle storage, unlike Building 1. Original front wall-plate supported on oak uprights on chamfered sandstone/ironstone plinth-blocks to hinder rot.

Positively identified in plan on 1882 Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 Map, so pre-1882 in layout



Fig 5: Building 2 interior, looking west at the roof angle; scale 1m

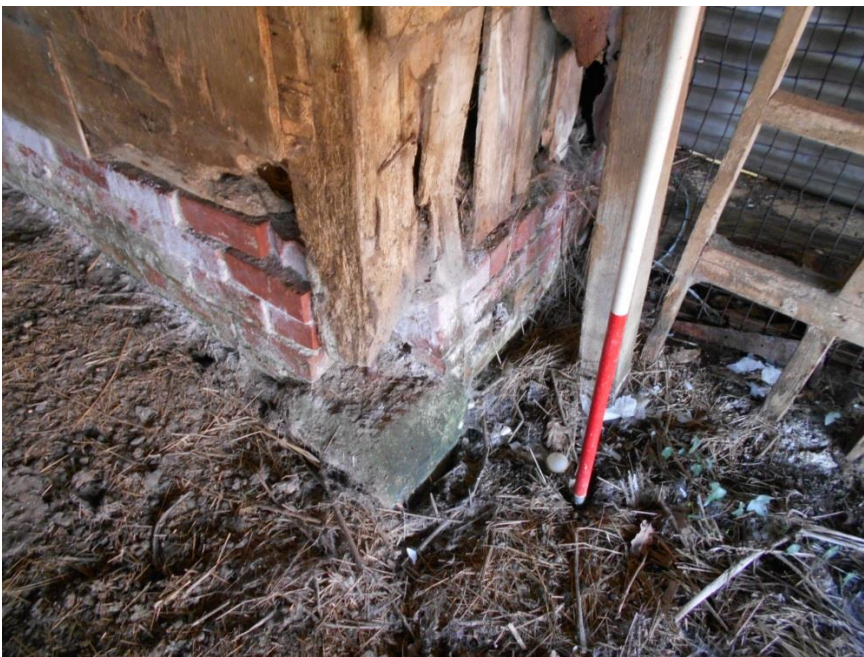


Fig 6: Original front chamfered plinth block on which rested the former open front of Building 2;
scale 1m

Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton

Building 3

A ramshackle out-shut formed entirely of re-used railway sleepers, telegraph poles and miscellaneous timbers around original front and wall-plate of Building 2. Covering is a mixture of corrugated iron sheet, Trafford tile sheet and similar re-used sheeting. Sides are equally haphazard.



Fig 7: Building 3 interior, looking south into Building 2 (old open front is dashed)

Building 4

Formerly an open-fronted shed with rear and gable ends of Hornton ironstone ashlar, similar to the 17th-century farmhouse. One gable widened and heightened during its life. The east-facing front was filled-in with brick and the interior provided with pig-pens. A date scrawled into the wet concrete floor indicates this was in 1962. The roof is of machine-sawn pine in common with Buildings 1-2. The same blue engineering tiles cover it.



Fig 8: Building 4, looking south-west; scale 1m



Fig 9: Building 4, looking east, farmhouse beyond; viewpoint is halfway to Building 11, adjacent to a footpath (at far right).

Building 5

This is of two halves, north and south.

The northern half seems to have been a building of ironstone coursed rubble, clay-bonded. The north gable has collapsed and the rear wall has had to be strengthened with the addition of a red bull-nosed brick buttress.

Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton

The southern half may have originally comprised simply a portion of a western perimeter wall to the farmyard, lined to the north half, but against which a building was constructed in two phases: firstly a narrow lean-to in ironstone, then an out-shut in brick, which by this time mirrored the plan of the northern half, doubling its area.

All of the timber work throughout this building was configured using re-used railway sleepers and corrugated tin sheeting of various shapes and sizes.



Fig 10: The southern half of Building 5, looking west; scale 1m; the footpath can be seen on top of the rise at far left



Fig 11: The northern half of Building 5, looking south, collapsed gable; scale 1m

Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton

Building 6

This structure is a roofless ruin, once of coursed ironstone rubble, but its southern gable has been lost, replaced in stretcher-bond brick in a mixture of Victorian or Edwardian brick (the lower half), and Fletton bricks of 1930s-80s (the upper half). It formerly had a single-fall roof, of which only the profile of the gables and a single principal rafter survive. It was formerly open-fronted on the west, but this front face was subsequently (partly) filled in with ironstone and brick. The floor was of brick.

Immediately to its north side lies a sheep dip.



Fig 12: The ruinous Building 6, looking south-east. Sheep-dip out of view at bottom left; scale 1m

Building 7

This building is of modern blockwork under a corrugated tin roof. Its west end is built off the east wall of the now ruinous Building 6. It has metal-framed windows and a concrete floor supports metal pig or calf-pens with a proprietary electric Alfa-Laval liquid feed system. Each pen contains a trough and the floor drains into a concrete drain. The back of the shed includes a narrow feeding passage divided off from the pens. The building is first encountered on the OS map of 1974, so is probably of late 1960s or early 1970s construction.



Fig 13: Building 7 of the 1970s, looking north; scale 1m. To the left is the ruinous Building 6 and to the right Building 8.

Building 8

This building is a small structure containing two small rooms. One room contains the small generator and pump system for the liquid feed system in Building 7, to which it adjoins at the eastern end of its south wall. The building is of blockwork under a corrugated tin roof. It has a concrete floor. The building is first encountered on the 1:2500 OS map of 1974, so is probably of late 1960s or early 1970s construction.



Fig 14: Building 8, looking east, the farmhouse beyond; to the left is Building 7

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Building 9

This building is a modern steel-framed agricultural shed with numerous haphazard elements of adaptation and conversion. It was formerly multi-purpose and is now derelict. It has an earth floor. It adjoins Building 10. It was not present on the 1:2500 1974 OS map, so derives from after that date.



Fig 15: Building 9 looking west, Building 10 to right. At far left in the distance is the ruin Building 11.

Building 10

This building, like Building 9, is a modern steel-framed agricultural shed with a variety of similarly-constructed out-shuts to north and south. It has a concrete floor at its core, although its out-shuts have earth floors, and is currently used for miscellaneous storage, including redundant towed sheep-feeders. It was not present on the 1:2500 1974 OS map, so derives from after that date.



Fig 16: The interior of Building 10, a post-1974 steel-frame shed, looking west; Building 9 to left rear

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Building 11

Is a former open-fronted animal shelter in brick, which is entirely ruined. The red clay tiled roof has collapsed in on top of the overgrown interior. It was present on the 1882 OS map, so may be considered mid-late Victorian. Extensive use of bull-nosed bricks indicates it is unlikely to pre-date c1850. It lies a full 30m west of Building 5 and the current proposed development area (beyond the scope of Fig 2), but has been noted as it was once the furthest-flung member of the overall farm buildings ensemble.



Fig 17: The ruined Building 11, its roof collapsed in

Statement of significance

The current owners of Crockwell Farm have been farming here since 1975. When they bought the farm that year, they did not buy the Listed Farmhouse, which has descended in separate ownership unrelated to the farm it once oversaw. The two have been disconnected in terms of both ownership and function therefore for 41 years.

Due to changes in farming the old farmyard core no longer functions as Crockwell Farm.

Of the eleven buildings, seven - Buildings 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10 - appear to have been used for penning livestock or storing machinery in the recent past.

The dereliction of the farm has been relatively rapid. From a farm which could afford new general-purpose *At-cost* sheds from c1975, the entire farming ethos of the buildings ensemble has gone. It will not return.

Of the eleven buildings of the greater farmyard ensemble, all eleven are now derelict, with only happenstance storage utilising perhaps 5% of space.

Crockwell Farm, Great Bourton

There is no evidence that the buildings have received any maintenance or upkeep for some years. The last maintenance appears to have been the tile re-covering of buildings 1, 2 and 4, perhaps 20-30 years ago (judging by weather damage to cement edge-flaunching and loosened tiles). This was broadly speaking at a similar time to the construction of Buildings 9 and 10, before the decline of traditional farms. The *raison d'être* of all eleven buildings has gone.

Buildings 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 have no historic or architectural merit and no longer make any worthwhile contribution to the setting of the Listed Building.

Buildings 6 and 11 are in ruins. Both date from before 1882 when they appear on the First edition Ordnance Survey map. Building 5 is approaching ruin.

Building 4 is constructed of Hornton (ironstone) ashlar, and for this reason may, at its core, be of a similar date to the Listed farmhouse. It is the only older farmyard building to have any historic merit, although its original use is now lost, having been converted to pig-pens in 1962.

Capacity for change

Clearly the current buildings are in an advanced state of decay and are never going to be used for agricultural purposes again. They have been disconnected from the farmhouse since 1975.

Buildings 1, 2 and 4 have some longevity to them and their plan has been fixed in the farm-scape since before 1882. Building 4 in particular may have much greater longevity due to similarities of construction with the late 17th century farmhouse and therefore retains some historic merit in terms of its plan and its method of construction. It has since become closely linked and physically joined to Buildings 1 and 2.

None of the other buildings have any architectural or historic merit and due to the mix of former uses and general dereliction, now present no coherent setting for the listed farmhouse.

There is clearly great capacity for change in terms of the building ensemble in order to re-enhance the setting of the listed farmhouse and compliment it with good quality construction in sympathetic local vernacular materials and building heights (single storey) and non-standard layouts which would not look amiss in an 'organic' farmyard setting.

The existing 41-year disconnection between farmyard and farmhouse provides an unusual historic opportunity to formalise the layout of the former farmyard in a new use and layout which will preserve an historical part of the village plan.

Siting and design conclusions

Local vernacular materials of relevance in this farmyard setting are:

The oldest outbuildings (1, 2, 4, 5, 6) all began life as open-fronted, but were mostly later infilled, often with contrasting materials.

Hornton/ironstone construction, either ashlar or coursed rubble (all buildings demonstrably of pre-1882);

Red brick construction also occurs; (the adjacent Building 11 of c1850-1882);

Red brick finishes/facings (most of the older buildings have been finished or altered using red-brick, including the infilling of some open fronts);

Red or blue engineering tile roof coverings (harking back to buildings 1, 2, 4, 11).

Blockwork has been considered used in the recent past, although this perhaps does not enhance the setting of the listed farmhouse. Its future use might require appropriate render or other covering, or the limitation of its use to internal walls.

The current distances of buildings to and from the farmhouse have been static for at least 40 years. The first edition OS map of 1882 shows that the current size of the inner farmyard has existed for much longer. If plans for redevelopment of the farmyard aim to simply replace buildings with structures of broadly similar locations and of broadly similar heights, related issues over the setting of the listed farmhouse, with views of it and out from it, will be rendered neutral.

That neutrality will turn to clear enhancement of the setting if the plans reverse the current downward trend to dereliction and ruin by using local vernacular materials and re-use of existing sites which mirror the farmyard's past.

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Fig 18: The public view of the listed farmhouse (right) and farmyard from Manor Road; a glimpse of Buildings 7 and 8 through the gate. The ivy-clad gable to the left is Building 1.



Fig 19: The public view of the farmyard from a footpath to the south-west; Building 5 is in the centre, Building 9 to the left; Building 4 to the right blocks views of the farmhouse.



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