Court Barn

COURT BARN by John Pinch

Estimated reading time: 24 minutes



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The Street
Stinchcombe
GL11 6AR

Introduction

I apologise to those historians who may have been expecting a detailed account of the long history of Court Barn, but this account is more subjective and is of an architectural nature. This is mainly because this medieval vernacular building has never been a domestic dwelling until now. The history of this fine building is scarce, as it does not have any previous paperwork associated with deeds, census, or registers etc.

Nevertheless, according to Historic England, the owners of Lamport Court had the barn built in the C18 at a similar time as the house itself. However, research has shown that the house (and therefore possibly the barn) originally date back to the 11th century with extensions in the 15th and 18th centuries. Hence the date of construction of the barn remains unclear, but there is evidence that alterations to the building were synonymous with styles and characteristics of the C18, suggesting the building pre-dates this assertion.

Further, because the building is classified as a combination barn and unusual to this area of the country, (often seen on hillsides in the Lake District) it is believed to date from medieval times.

Nevertheless, the barn is a grade II Listed building, situated c100 m north-east of Lamport Court and was ***formerly listed as***;

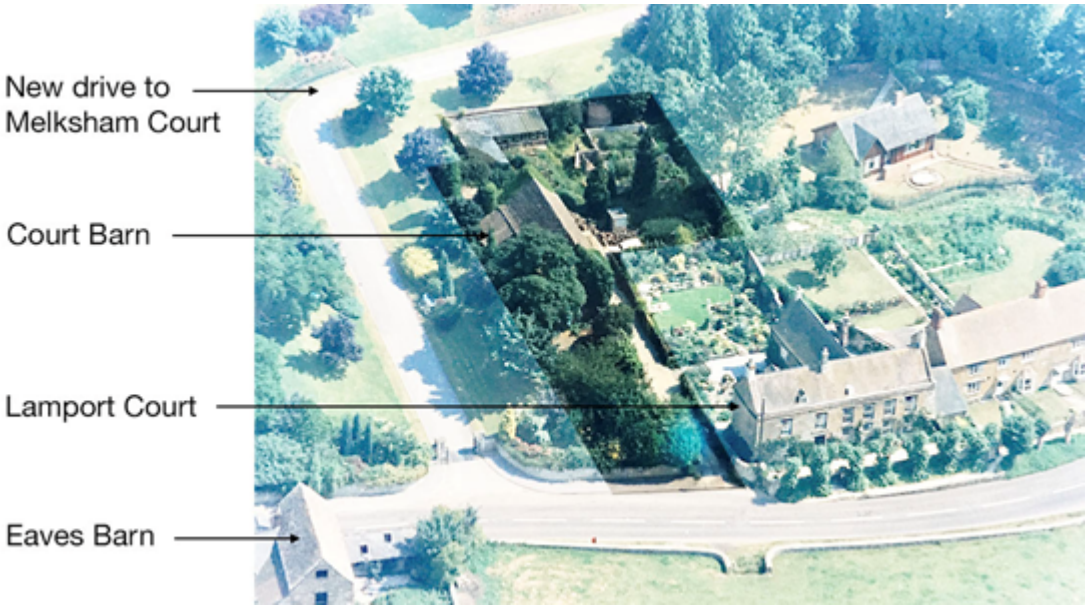
Hence, because the barn was part of the Lamport estate, details of previous owners of the barn can be found in my account of the history of Lamport Court, which will follow this explanation of buildings in our village.

As can be seen from the listing description in 1984, the barn now belonged to Melksham Court. It is believed that this happened when Sir Maxwell Joseph who was living at Melksham Court, bought Lamport Court from Dr Leighton. Despite being in rather poor condition and in urgent need of significant improvements and renovation Lamport Court included some lovely pine panelling and other architectural features that may have caught Sir Max's eye?

So my account of the history of the barn starts with previous owners of Melksham Court beginning with ***Sir Maxwell Joseph***, 1959 – 1969, who was a millionaire businessman and sold Lamport Court to Pam and Bob Heard in 1969.

Maxwell Joseph made good use of the barn during his ten years in the village. He had greenhouses built at the rear of the

property within the walled garden. This is where he grew all the flowers for the tables in his Grand Metropolitan hotels and restaurants.



An aerial photograph taken some time in the 1950s

Sadly, the greenhouses were all sold and only one corner structure remained, that I later relied on to secure planning permission so that I could design and build a painting studio for Joyce.



I can only assume that it was Sir Maxwell Joseph who also had

a semi-circular wall built on the round stone steps adjacent to the listed wall as a backdrop for a statue that could only be viewed from the Melksham Court side. From our side it resembled a gent's urinal. It did not stay put for long!

Mr Holding, 1969 – 1973

The next to own our barn was Mr Holden, who I believe bought Melksham Court from Sir Maxwell Joseph. Mr Holding met with some opposition from villagers to his plans to convert the barn into staff accommodation in 1973. I don't think he owned Melksham and the barn for long but he might have been responsible for starting building work on the structure. Possibly because of this opposition, the barn remained unconverted.



STINCHCOMBE IN CRITICAL MOOD ABOUT PLAN

MORE THAN fifty Stinchcombe residents — a few of them born and bred in the village — crowded into the meeting room of the village hall on Wednesday evening.

They were there to discuss what Mr. Jim Holding, a newcomer to the village, should be allowed to do with his own property.

Mr. Holding is the owner of the Elizabethan manor, Melksham Court. He has been given planning consent to convert oneof the two barns on the property into living accomodation for domestic staff.

The barn is of Cotswold stone adjacent to Lamport Court and is a listed building of architectural interest.

to 1939 and his wife was born in the village.

He explained that the barn with its ivy concealed dovecote originally went with Lamport Court.

He had arranged a meeting on Saturday with Mr. Holding, he said, and the owner had been "only too happy to meet any architecutural amendment."

safety of the proposed occupants whom they'd never met.

Since the barn is a listed building consent for its change of use has to come from the Department of Environment.

The resolution demanding refusal or a public inquiry was made on

Despite having permission, there was serious opposition from villagers to Jim Holding's plans to use the barn for living accommodation for domestic staff. County Gazette November 1973

McFadyen Walsh -1970s

There is no evidence of the impact of this ownership on the barn.

Lionel Amos – Transport company owner and entrepreneur, late 1970s – 1983

Lionel Amos applied for planning permission to erect a transmitter mast at the top of Stinchcombe Hill, behind the barn. The mast was never erected, but the excavations are still evident today. Reference to an 'aerial' is made in a deed of conveyance in Roger Batty's possession. Planning permission was granted in 1981 with a proviso that the mast should not exceed 100 feet in height. Amos also used the big barn at Melksham Court to sell remnants of cloth and fabrics that he bought from bankrupt stock from mills in the north of England. One of his companies was Black and White Coaches.

Around this time, Lionel Amos, was approached by Mr Roy Watson who was an Australian director and interested in buying Melksham Court and the barn. Mr Watson wanted to take over Melksham Court and our barn as a camp for young people. In a Gazette article it explains that he decided against buying the property, bowing down to local public opinion.



The County Gazette, Saturday, February 26, 1983.

SECT SCRAPS MELKSHAM COURT PLAN

INTERNATIONAL religious organisation, the "World of Life Fellowship UK Ltd." who had planned to take over Melksham Court in Stinchcombe as a 'camp' for hundreds of children, will not buy the property after all, it was revealed this week.

Bowing down to public pressure Roy Watson decides against

buying Melksham Court and the barn. County Gazette February 1983

Richard Leslie Arnold

– no information, except that he probably owned the barn for a very short length of time.

Mr George Molyneaux, 1983 – 1985

We bought the barn in 1985 from George Molyneaux at the same time as George and Mavis Clarke bought Melksham Court from him. Totally naive and ignorant, we bought the barn without full planning permission in the hope that we could convince the locals and planning committee of our passion to convert the barn into a family home.

Pam and Bob Heard had sold Lamport Court to Kate and Andrew Longstaff in 1982 but had significant dealings with the residents at Melksham Court who were owners of the barn at that time. The main issue was the access onto the main road. Whilst Lamport Court already had pedestrian access over the barn drive, all parking was limited to the lay by at the side of the road. Many letters exchanged hands between Lionel Amos and the planning department at Stroud District Council via Harold Willott, Pam and Bob's solicitor and resident at Combe House. It seems the issues were resolved when Kate and Andrew moved in to Lamport Court.

John and Joyce Pinch, teachers, 1985 – still here! (2021)

We were living in North Nibley at the time when Joyce came to Lamport Court for one of her book group meetings, hosted by the owners, Kate and Andrew Longstaff. Towards the end of the evening, Kate announced that 'the barn' was once more on the

market. Questions ensued and in the fading light on a warm summer evening, the small group of women ventured outside to see the barn that had previously gone unnoticed, camouflaged by the copious cladding of ivy.

Although we had completely renovated and built three extensions to Rose Cottage on Barrs Lane in Nibley, we were conscious that the garden was quite small and both Joyce and myself needed a studio and workshop.

Joyce arrived home after the meeting, very excited and urged me to return with her first thing the next day to see the building that she had told me so much about.



Knight Frank & Rutley

A FINE DETACHED COTSWOLD STONE BARN FOR CONVERSION

Thought to date from the 14th Century and built of natural Cotswold stone under a slate roof Nelsham Court Barn is beautifully situated on the lower slopes of the Cotswold escarpment on the edge of a small country estate of Nelsham Court in the charming small village of Stinchcombe, just over a mile from the town of Dursley. Planning consent for conversion into a substantial family home of 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms has been obtained.

The original description of the sale of Lamport Court Barn

I was hooked! Joyce’s enthusiasm was contagious and our minds raced imagining where the kitchen could be positioned and which features of the lovely brick internal walls could be

retained and how to incorporate all the other vernacular architectural gems.

Sadly, the euphoria waned as reality kicked in. We would need to sell Rose Cottage to afford to buy the barn and where would we live during the conversion? No, the only option available to us would have been to live in a caravan behind the barn, but for a nine year old daughter and eleven year old son, that was too much to expect.

We had almost given up on the whole idea when we had a visit from Di Eley, the owner of ***Nibley House***. She came to commission us to design a commemorative mug for the village and while she was having a cuppa, she asked what else we were up to. We told her about the barn, but that the prospect was impossible because living in a caravan was completely out of the question.

“Come and live with us,” she said.

“What, at Nibley House?” I replied.

“Yes, you could have the whole of the west wing and there are rooms where you could store all your furniture. I will go back and ask John what he thinks.”

Within ten minutes of her departure the phone rang.

“John says is it possible for you to come round now and we can discuss the details?”

There was a proviso to our tenancy insomuch that John Eley wanted me to draw plans of Nibley House and some of the outbuildings and barns to apply for planning permission for conversion into apartments. I agreed to their proposal as I would be on site and could use the evenings to carry out the surveys and drawings, once I had finished the plans for our barn.

We placed Rose Cottage on the market immediately and sold it

the next day. I was so incensed when I received the estate agent’s bill that I contested it with Hubert Tarr, the estate agent in Wotton, and managed to get a 50% reduction for a quick sale!

Our new acquisition

It has struck me that many of us in Stinchcombe live in buildings that were designed for another purpose and we have chosen to adapt the structures to suit contemporary living.

There are various barns, stables, pigsties and even shops that have since become homes in our village. I firmly believe it is not only the convenience of having a structure to begin designing within, but also the valuable link to the past and hopefully to preserve the time and effort that went into building these wonderful structures in the first place.

And so, we had moved out of a very comfortable cottage in the lovely village of North Nibley and exchanged it for a derelict barn with holes in the roof, a building site of a garden with no soil, no water, no electricity, no drains, no gas, basically a stone shell. After a mild panic, I immediately insured my hands, and visited the local planning offices at Kingshill House in Dursley to reassure ourselves, that we had not been totally reckless and irresponsible!

With planning consent having been granted for converting the barn into living accommodation for domestic staff, I asked the planner if I might see the previous sets of drawings, many of which had been rejected. On inspection, we could see exactly why none of the previous applications had not met with approval. One design had brought the roofline down to make it look like a Swiss chalet; another had divided the interior into numerous small rooms such that the internal character of the building was completely lost.

I had previously submitted one or two drawings for planning

permission including extensions and the like, but nothing on this scale. I spent evenings while I was teaching drawing the plans on a drawing board at Nibley House. Finally, the day came to submit the plans for Building Regs and Listed Planning Consent.

We sat in a small meeting room in a terrapin at the council planning offices at Kingshill House in Dursley while the officer cast a glance over my attempts. He liked it. Further, he asked if Joyce and I might like a coffee while he suggested some annotation to be added to the drawings. I guess he thought that this naive pair was something of a novelty?

We were eager, determined, and passionate to maintain the character of the building, as this was to become our house. We were not interested in the commercial aspect of adding value, we merely wanted to create the home of our dreams.

The original structure

The building has been modified on various previous occasions since its erection which I now believe to have been sometime in the C14.

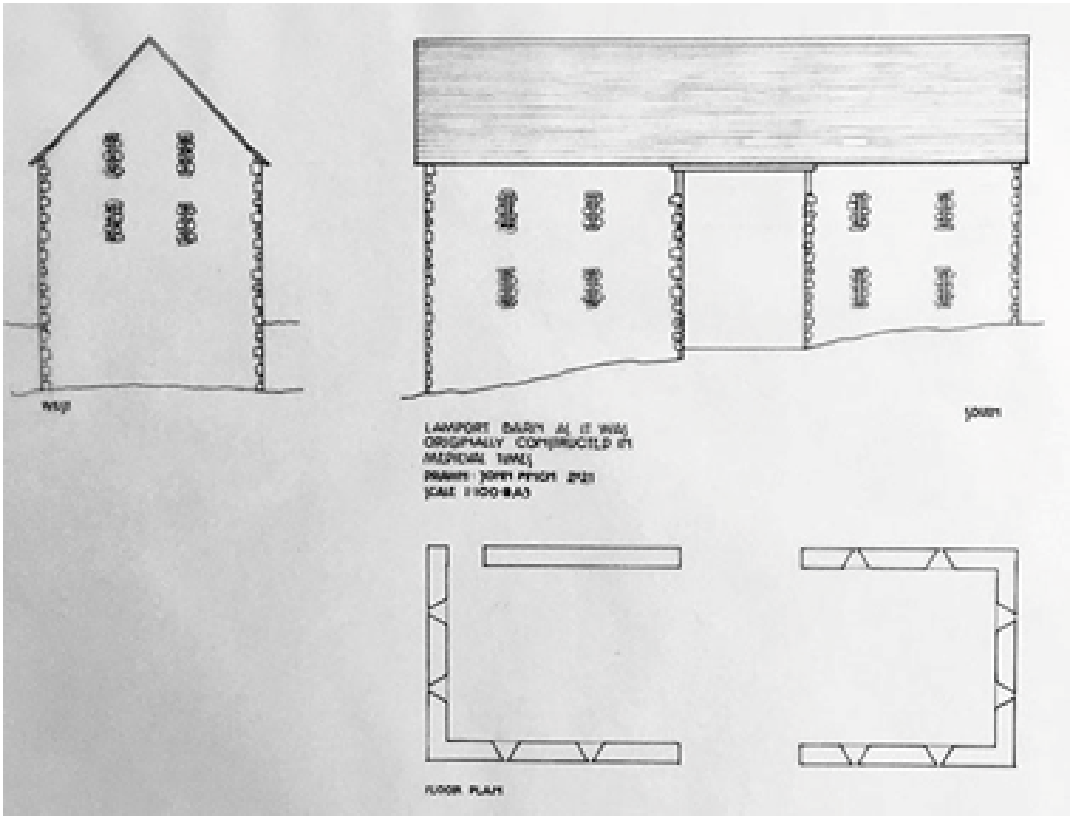
The building would have been classed as a combination barn. This is confirmed by the description on the '***Historic England National Farm Building Types***'.

I can only presume that originally, the barn had no internal walls and was simply one large open space with a sloping floor inside similar to the external contour of the land. It comprises five roof bays with a 2-purlin collar truss and originally, it had two wide central openings in the north and south walls that were vital for threshing. There were scattered slit window openings, rather like arrow slits in a fortress but in this case, designed to provide maximum sunlight and wind to enter the threshing barn but with minimum rain. There might have been a floor resting on the main beams

of the rear three bays of the building to form an attic, but this would have required a very long ladder to gain access. It is more likely there was no first floor originally.

However, my supposition of the original large empty space conflicts with the description of a combination barn above. Conversely, it appears to be completely the opposite, as the stable was a later addition. It is strange that the floor must have sloped downhill from back to front but there is no evidence of any original internal walls that might have been used to create a terraced floor.

I have created a drawing of how the barn might have looked originally.

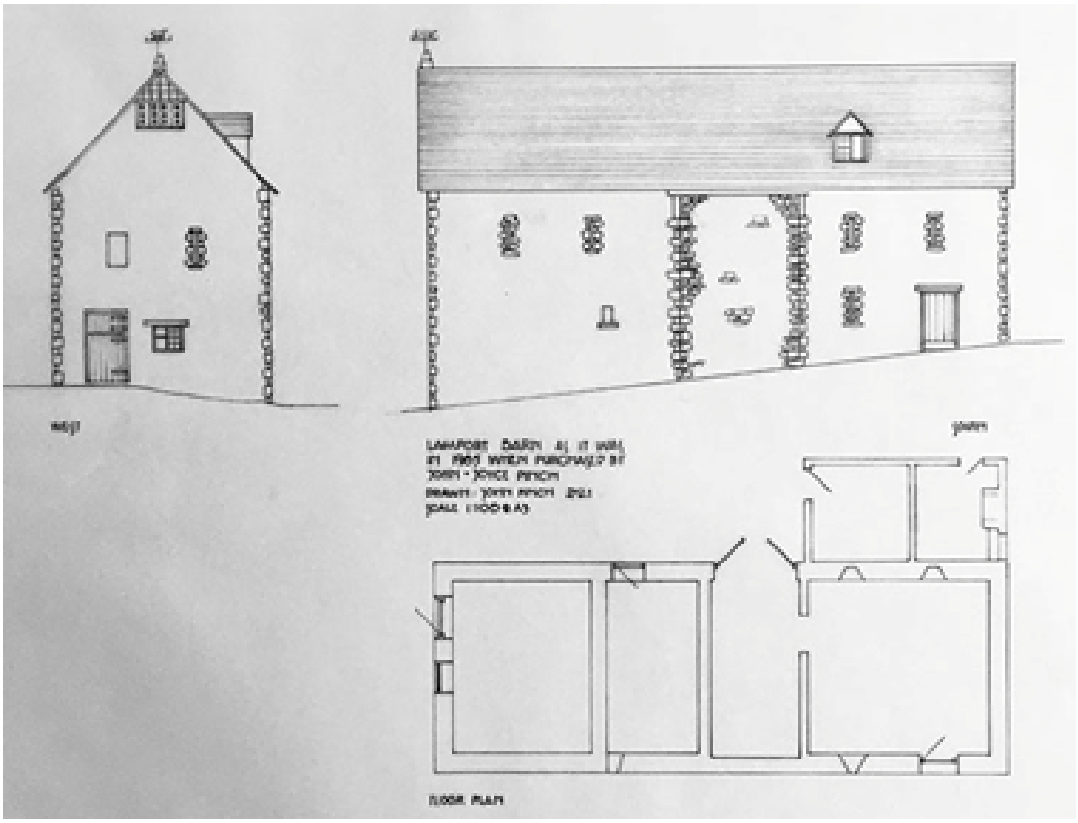


Drawing of my interpretation of the original barn

Description of the building when we bought it

The building in 1985 comprised three floors at the front and two floors elsewhere. Two thirds of the roof of the barn had

been re-roofed with under felt and using the existing stone tiles. There was lots of ivy on all the walls.



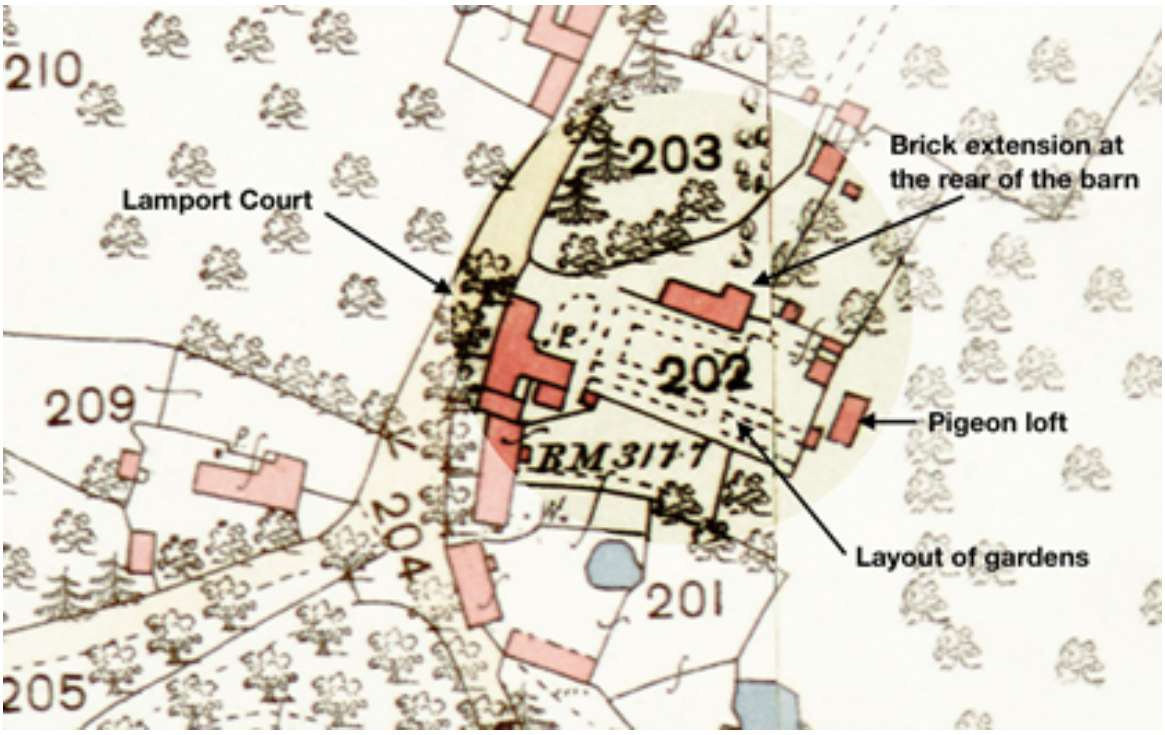
Drawing of the barn when we bought it in 1985



Ivy covered most of the walls
Following years of neglect
The stonework was in reasonably good condition but in some need of pointing. All the joists and floorboards upstairs were rotten. A dividing wall between Lamport Court and our barn was under construction. There was a concrete drive running downhill on the south of the barn to the main road.

With changes in farming practices, the barn underwent several alterations, most likely during the 18$_{th}$ century, when Lamport Court also benefitted from improvements. This is evident in the barn by the blocking-in of several of the slit windows and the erection of internal walls.

A brick lean-to with a stone tiled roof had been added at the rear of the north side. This must have been built around or before the mid C19 as it is evident on the 1873 map, along with an outline of the gardens behind Lamport Court and proving that this barn belonged to Lamport Court and not Melksham Court.



1873 map showing the barn in the grounds of Lamport Court
There was a small stable on the lowest level facing the main road that had one small casement window in the front gable end

and one stable door.

Behind a transverse wall at the back of the stable was a small space on a higher level with access via a low door in the north wall that housed a small wooden winding staircase up to a suspended floor above. This led to a room above with wooden partitioned walls.

The rest of the building showed significant structural changes. The threshing area had been blocked in on the south side using oolitic limestone as opposed to the softer marl or mudstone of the original building. The surround of the opening in the opposite wall that had been partially blocked in using marl, but with new double doors incorporating a rather grand segmented voussoired head in dressed stone above. Two more transverse walls from floor to under the beams were built on each side of the new doorway. Presumably, this new space was used to store a carriage or cart. We demolished one of the walls to open up the barn again but left a nib return to suggest a former wall.




The arched doorway on the north side as we found it in 1985 and as it is today

The room at the rear of the building comprised an entrance door in the south wall and there was evidence that work had already started to form a new opening in the east gable end. Presumably, the previous owner was hedging his bets that his application would be accepted for full planning as he had also purchased other materials that were present on site when we

took possession. In this rear room were two wooden racks that had been suspended from the large beam above by a thick steel pole, probably for drying onions and the like. I left the sawn-off steel rods as an indication of a previous use. There were no windows, simply slit openings but the four on the north wall had been bricked-in. This was because the brick lean-to had been built on the other side.



The room at the back of the barn showing the racks and closed slits

The brick extension comprised two independent rooms. The rear part included a chimney and fireplace, possibly a gardener’s room? The other room had a large piece of concrete buried in the middle of the floor. This was possibly used to mount an engine of some description on? There was no direct access from either of these rooms into the barn.

The conversion

One of the conditions when buying the barn was the stipulation to build a dividing wall to separate the barn land from the garden of Lamport Court. A previous owner, possibly George

Molyneaux, had already purchased sufficient Bradstone imitation stone blocks and had started to build the wall. The short length that had already been built looked totally out of place against the natural stone of the barn. I demolished this new wall and used the blocks to lay on the floor to form a new entrance drive. I also took one of the remaining new blocks from the sixteen pallets that were littered around the site and asked the guys at Jotcham and Kendall's builders in Wotton to sell them for me and they could have 10%. They sold the lot, and in their place I bought bricks that were much more sympathetic to the setting, as the garden was already surrounded by a brick perimeter wall. I laid all nine thousand six hundred bricks and capped the wall with copingstones, before starting work on the conversion of the barn.



We sold a small piece of land to the new owners of Lamport Court, Nigel and Yvonne Cant and gave them right of access over our drive for them to gain vehicular access to their garden.

During the design of the conversion of the barn it was necessary to make openings for windows since there was only one existing window in the stable. I used this casement style to inform all the others but we wanted something special to add yet more character to the barn. I made several scale oak models of the widow and door designs and finally took

inspiration from the gothic revival style of the early C18. In the holidays I used the school workshops to make the oak staircase and all the windows and doors that incorporated double-glazing.

We created a large entrance window with double doors in the south wall that had been blocked in and built a small landing with stone steps outside.




The previously blocked-in south wall of the threshing bay and as it is today

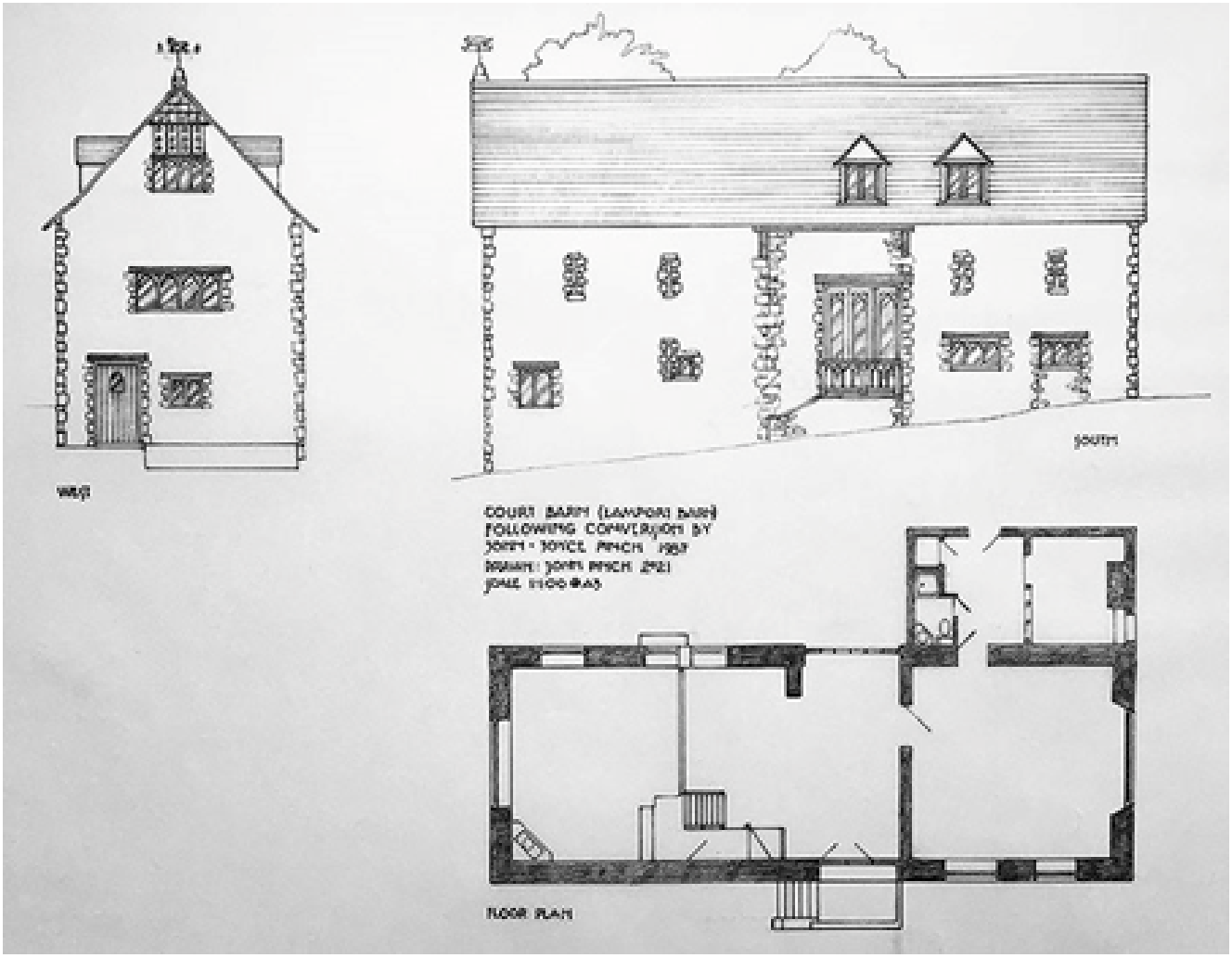
The old stable became my workshop and retains features that I have preserved for posterity. Completely unsatisfactory though it is for my purpose, the floor of the room comprises flagstones, sloping towards a central gully that would have exited the liquid waste through a hole in the south wall. There also remains, the stout double pivots where a wide stable door was hinged when we bought the barn. I have plastered around wooden lintols in the walls that currently have no purpose but were presumably over openings or as wall plates to rest secondary beams on. I replaced the existing timber casement with a new oak window.

There remains evidence of a previous door opening on the adjacent north wall. Interestingly, as I set about making all the doors and windows for the barn, it struck me that many of the ancient openings were not imperial, but metric measurements!

The beam supporting the floor above my workshop was rotten and I sourced another in Hillesley and enlisted the help of the strapping Eley boys and their truck to deliver and help me install the beam. As we lowered the beam onto their truck with the help of a large digger, the weight of it tipped the truck forwards lifting the rear wheels completely off the ground!! After several attempts to get the balance just right, we eventually arrived in Stinchcombe and positioned the beam to where it is today.

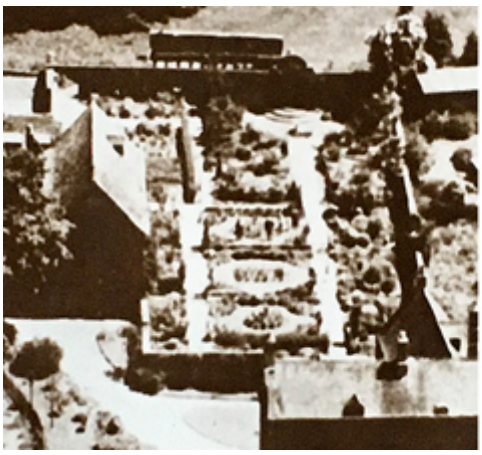
One of our major design considerations was that, internally, we should be able to provide an uninterrupted view of not only the entire length of the barn but also view the height from floor to apex. We achieved this at the expense of losing a planned fifth bedroom but have never regretted it. Because all the bedrooms and ensuite are effectively in the roof space, we had to compromise in order to provide a range of bedroom sizes that had some decent headroom. This was improved by creating three small dormer windows. The conservation planners were not happy with this, but when I showed them a photograph of the barn with a dormer in the roof from the early C20 they had to agree!

The room at the very top of the front of the building became a bedroom from what was a pigeon loft. We kept the original iconic pigeon loft apertures and created a four-pane casement window below. Only at this stage did we discover two more slit windows that had been blocked in. The wooden lintols that remained buried in the wall were so hard that I blunted three saws in the process of cutting through the petrified wood. A beam in the kitchen is so hard I could not drill it with tungsten tipped wood or masonry bits.



Court Barn following conversion by John and Joyce Pinch 1987

And then there is the garden – or what was described as a garden. Because Sir Maxwell Joseph had owned the barn – and Lamport Court in the 1950s, he had discarded all the formal gardens of the early C19 and replaced them with greenhouses for growing the flowers for his Grand Metropolitan Hotels. After he sold Melksham Court and Lamport Court the garden fell into disrepair.





Aerial photograph of the garden at Court Barn C1920 and C1960
A subsequent owner of Melksham Court, possibly Lionel Amos sold all the greenhouses and glass, leaving one small corner structure. Fortunately, this provided all the evidence I needed to replace it and so I designed and built a studio for Joyce to match the old barn.



Joyce’s studio and the arched doorway in the listed brick wall
At the back of the walled garden is an arched doorway with a rather grand portico, styled on the Elizabethan gable.



The incongruous brick wall hiding the sculpted gateway and the

state of the garden after selling the greenhouses
There is a shed in the walled garden on the north side of the property, which had a rather uneven floor. In an attempt to make the floor level I smashed the higher concrete portion, only to find a void of about .5M beneath. This was very intriguing and so I decided to continue digging out the whole of the evidently backfilled chasm. Bed pots, old glass bottles, clay pipes, terra cotta plant pots had all been used to fill the hole. Two metres down I finally struck a more solid base. I invited various professionals to inspect the two metre wide, three metres long and two metres deep stone lined subterranean room, but to this day I have no idea why it is there or what it was used for. The only rational solution I can think of is that perhaps there was a boiler down there, rather like at the palm houses of the large stately home gardens, which was used to heat water to circulate and warm the greenhouses. There is evidence of cast iron pipes leading from the void into the garden and in very dry weather we can make out the line they took to deliver warm water to the greenhouses. However, I think this was a more recent application for the void. I still have no other suggestions for the original construction, that is, until I read Roger Batty's account of his reservoirs in the back garden of Combe House. Maybe…?

We decided to call the building 'Court Barn' since it is located between the two Courts of Melksham and Lamport.

In our endeavour to preserve the intrinsic fabric of the barn we hope we have added to the character of this former agricultural building. Features include from top left;

- retained rafters and purlins in dormer windows
- preserved the original door to the pigeon loft
- used all the old elm floor joists to make the first floor stud partitions
- sculpted the existing chimney in the lean-to
- retained the pigeon loft façade as a feature from the

front bedroom

- designed and made a window to replace the barn doors under the segmented voussoired head in dressed stone
- used Jacobean wood panelling from Nibley House to form room dividers
- retained the saddle racks and brick infill wall
- utilised old oak floor boards from Berkeley Castle for window sills



I have many more anecdotes including digging the drains by hand and crawling on my stomach under the main road the find and tap into the main sewer, but these stories are now the

property of our children, and their children documented in my autobiography. I hope that through this account of our involvement with this lovely old building in Stinchcombe, in years to come there will now be some evidence of ‘who did what and when’!