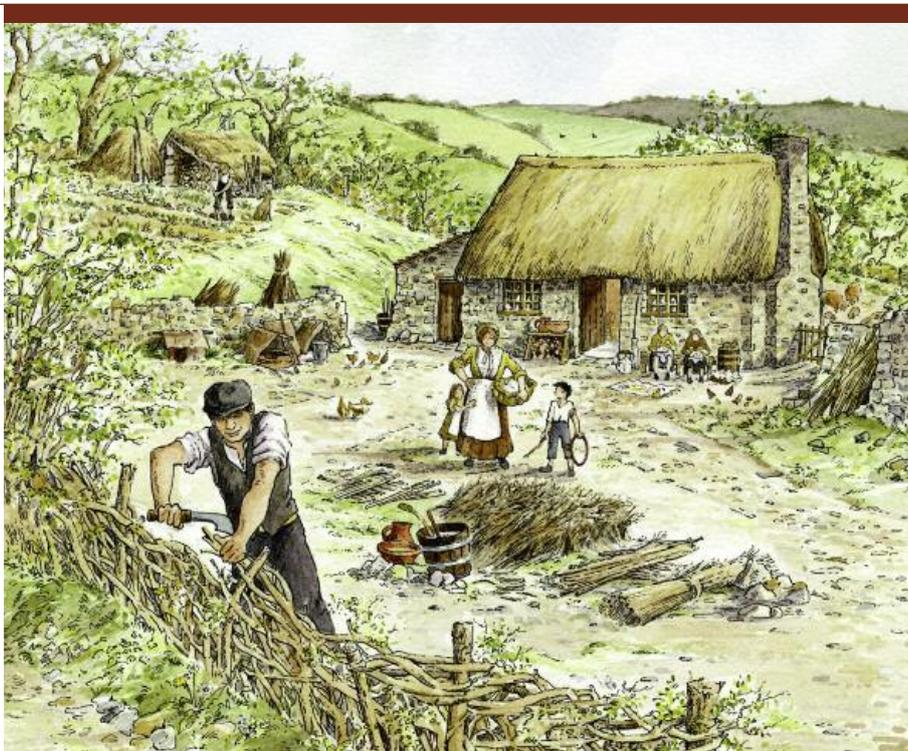


# Parishscapes Project 2007–2010

BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE

## Excavation of a Deserted Cottage at Summerdown Farm, Northleigh, Devon



By **Hazel Riley** with  
contributions by  
**Philippe Planel,**  
**Richard Sandover**  
and **Ron Woodcock**

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## SECTION 1

# Abstract

**A**N ABANDONED cottage near Summerdown, Northleigh, Devon, was the subject of an excavation carried out in March 2010 as part of the Parishcapes community project. The earthworks of the cottage and its plot of land were surveyed before the excavation commenced and most of that plot, together with an adjoining field, were the subject of a geophysical survey.

The cottage was a single storey building with heated kitchen/living room, perhaps partitioned to provide a bedroom. A large fireplace and bread oven occupied the east end of the kitchen. A small store room had been added to the west wall of the cottage.

A section through a boundary bank was excavated, together with three trial trenches. The finds were virtually all from the nineteenth century. A study of the documentary evidence showed that the cottage was occupied by several families in the course of the later part of the nineteenth century and was abandoned by the 1870s. It was part of a wider landscape of small farms which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had been deserted.

## SECTION 2

# Introduction

AS PART of the Parishscapes community project, a joint initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, East Devon District Council and Natural England ([www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk](http://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk)), a group of volunteers have been investigating ‘disappeared houses’ in the parishes of Northleigh and Offwell. These are buildings which are marked as dwellings on the tithe map but are now no longer lived in.

One of these sites, occupied by Richard Mellish in 1840 (tithe map and apportionment for Northleigh), was chosen as the site for the Parishscapes community excavation in March 2010. At the beginning of the excavation the only link with the building and a person was from the tithe map, hence the site was called Mellish's Cottage (MC). As work progressed Ron Woodcock identified the site as ‘Lees’ or ‘Lees Cottage’ (see documentary evidence).

## LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Lees Cottage lies at some 155m OD, in the valley of an unnamed tributary stream of the River Coly, between Honiton and Colyton, at NGR SY 190 971. It is in the parish of Northleigh and lies within East Devon AONB (fig. 1).

The deeply incised valley is one of a number of such valleys in the area – across the ridge top to the west is the valley of the River Coly and to the east is the valley of the Offwell Brook. The ridge top (or plateau), here marked by land above c.180–200 m, is formed from rocks of Cretaceous age, mudstones, sandstones and limestone of the Gault and Upper Greensand formations.

The valley sides and floor expose older rocks of Triassic age, comprising mudstones, siltstones and sandstone (British Geological Survey – [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)). The junction between the Greensand and the older rocks is marked by a spring line.

The area is characterised by three landscape types: open, inland planned (i.e. more recently enclosed) plateaux; steep wooded slopes, and upper undulating farmed and wooded slopes (East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONBs and East Devon District 2008), Lees Cottage lies at the junction of the latter two landscape types. It is now in an area of unmanaged woodland, part of Summerdown's holding. The woodland is mostly hazel, holly, ash and oak, with a field of permanent pasture immediately to the southwest.

#### PREVIOUS WORK

There are no recorded archaeological excavations on the site and no entries in the Devon HER in the immediate environs.

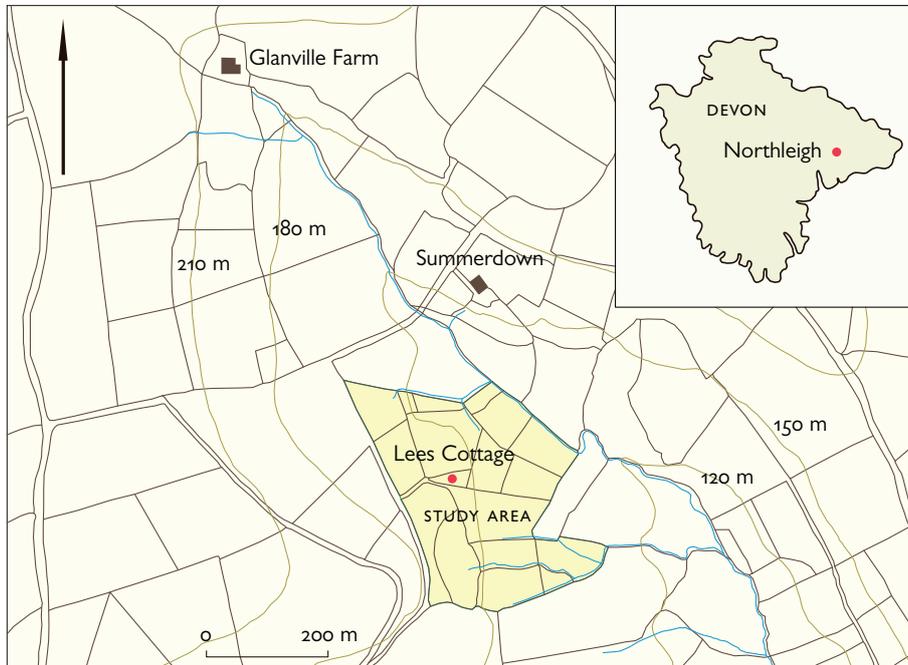


FIGURE 1  
Location map

## SECTION 3

# The Survey and the Site Before Excavation

A SURVEY OF THE SITE and its immediate environs, at a scale of 1:500, was undertaken before the excavation took place. The survey was carried out using a total station and tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using survey grade differential GPS. The survey showed that the cottage stands in a small triangular plot of land, some 0.116 ha (0.287 acres) in area (fig. 2). The plot is oriented west/east and its maximum dimensions are 65 m E/W by 28m N/S. The plot is enclosed by a bank, 1m high and 2 m wide, composed of earth and stone, with the remnants of an unmanaged hedge growing on its top.

The cottage was built on a small, level platform, measuring 15 m N/S by 8 m E/W, defined on the west by a steep scarp some 2 m high and to the east by a more gradual scarp 1 m high. A smaller triangular plot of land is formed by the western end of the building platform and the apex of the main plot. At its apex is a disturbed area where recent material has been dumped. A rectangular hollow, 4 m SW/NE, 1.5 m NW/SE and 0.75 m deep may be the remains of a small building, although the later disturbance has made interpretation of this area rather difficult.

The remains of the cottage are defined by a rectangular area of tumbled stone, measuring 14 m E/W by 6.5 m N/S (external measurements), with some wall tops and wall faces visible (fig. 3). The building appeared to be divided into two: the main building, 6 m E/W by 3 m N/S (internal measurements), with a small room 2 m E/W by 6 m N/S (internal measurements) adjoining the western end of the main building. The best preserved wall face visible before the excavation was the inner face of the northern wall of the main

building, which stands to a height of 0.8 m and is constructed of coursed blocks of undressed chert with decayed lime mortar visible in the interstices (fig. 4).

The eastern end of the building is defined by a large mound of tumbled stone, containing a number of fragments of burnt brick, with a marked concentration of these bricks at its northern end, suggesting that this was the location of the fireplace and chimney. Two ash trees are now growing just to the north of the north wall of the cottage; they are of a size to suggest that the cottage has not been inhabited for at least 150 years.

The cottage faces south, with an entrance gap 1 m wide in the southern wall, positioned centrally to the main building. Access into the plot and so to the cottage was in three or four places. A small gap 2 m wide at the apex of the triangular plot provides access to the top of the plot, but access down to the cottage is rather awkward. A gap 4 m wide in the northern boundary bank gives access to the plot and to the back of the cottage, but, again, access to the front of the building

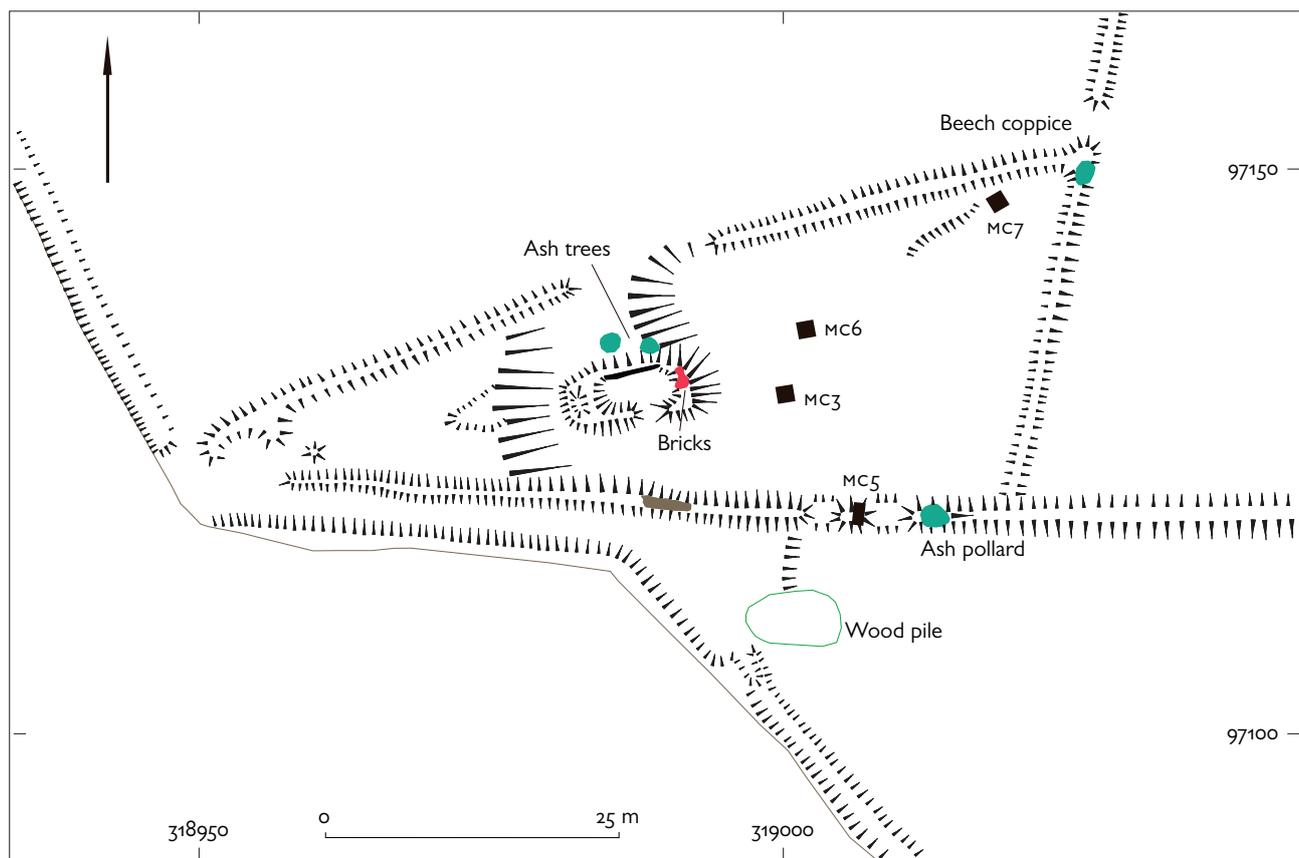


FIGURE 2

1:1000 survey of the site before excavation  
and location of trenches MC3, MC5, MC6, MC7

is awkward. This gap does open directly from the plot onto a track shown on the tithe map (fig. 27).

Towards the southeast of the plot a 6m wide gap in the boundary bank, now partially in filled and the site of one of the excavation trenches, allowed access to both the plot and the cottage from the track which linked the neighbouring Lees Cottage House to the common. On the boundary bank opposite the cottage doorway is a lower area with a large amount of stone visible on top of the bank. This could be in filling of a former access point, and is most likely to be of quite recent origin, resulting from curious visitors scrambling across the bank to view the ruins.



FIGURE 3  
Lees Cottage  
before excavation



FIGURE 4  
Detail of the north wall

## SECTION 4

# The Geophysical Survey

## by Richard Sandover

A GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY was carried out at the beginning of the excavation as part of research work for a PhD thesis for the University of Exeter. The survey was undertaken using a Bartington/Grad/-601-2 magnetic gradiometer and the data was processed using Geoplot software.

Two areas were the subject of a magnetometer survey (fig. 5). Area 1 was the ground immediately to the east of the cottage, carried out to investigate the potential of this area in terms of features such as buildings, paths/tracks, garden plots or other boundary features, middens or areas of burning.

The survey around the cottage was conducted using a 10 m × 10 m grid pattern aligned N/S. Traverses were parallel with each traverse heading south. Gradiometer resolution was set to 0.25 m. The data is presented as raw data because of the uneven muddy terrain and a desire not to lose any data through excessive processing. There are four small areas with low potential, all of which were investigated using a metal detector and small metal objects were discovered in each location, supporting both the identification of an anomaly and its classification as 'minor'.

Area 2 was in the field immediately to the southwest of the cottage, undertaken to assess the potential of an area adjacent to a busy eighteenth and nineteenth landscape of farming and farmsteads (see documentary evidence), yet apparently devoid of any archaeological remains.

The survey of the field was conducted using a 20 m × 20 m grid pattern aligned N/S. Traverses were zigzag with the first of each grid

being to the north. Resolution was again set to 0.25 m. Several relatively small anomalies are visible (fig. 5A). These may be similar to those investigated around the cottage, and are probably caused by small amounts of metal such as nails. The strong anomaly on the eastern edge of the plot (B) is caused by a metal gate lying in the hedge close by. The southwest corner of the plot (C), as well as containing anomalies similar to those in the areas marked A, has a possible diffuse linear feature lying E/W in the southwest corner. There is no visible disturbance of the ground in this area, the feature may indicate disturbed earth, such as a pit, but there is nothing really distinctive about it.

A linear anomaly running NE/SW across the centre of the plot (D) marks the line of a former field boundary with a track to the south, shown on both the tithe map and the OS first edition map (1888). Two or three linear anomalies (E) run N/S and parallel to the field boundaries, perhaps representing ploughing.

The tithe map (fig. 27) and apportionment show that the field was earlier divided into five fields, all of which were then recorded as being arable. The geophysics has not detected any form of drainage system within the field and most of the field boundaries are indicative of post-medieval enclosure of an open area of land that is interpreted as being possible former common land, probably associated with a larger, contiguous field to the west.

The intention of this survey had been to cover and analyse only the complete 20 m grids and move onto the partials to complete the field if the results merited expanding the search. This was not considered to be the case and so a full survey of the field covering the periphery was not conducted.

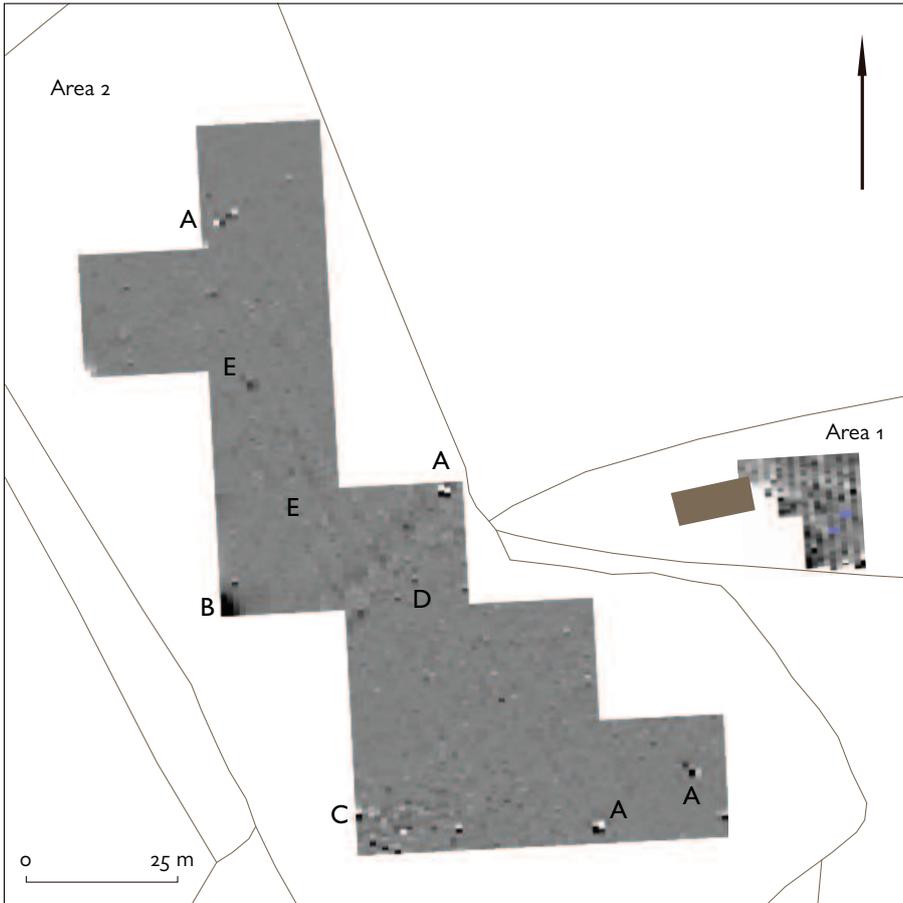


FIGURE 4  
The geophysical surveys

## SECTION 5

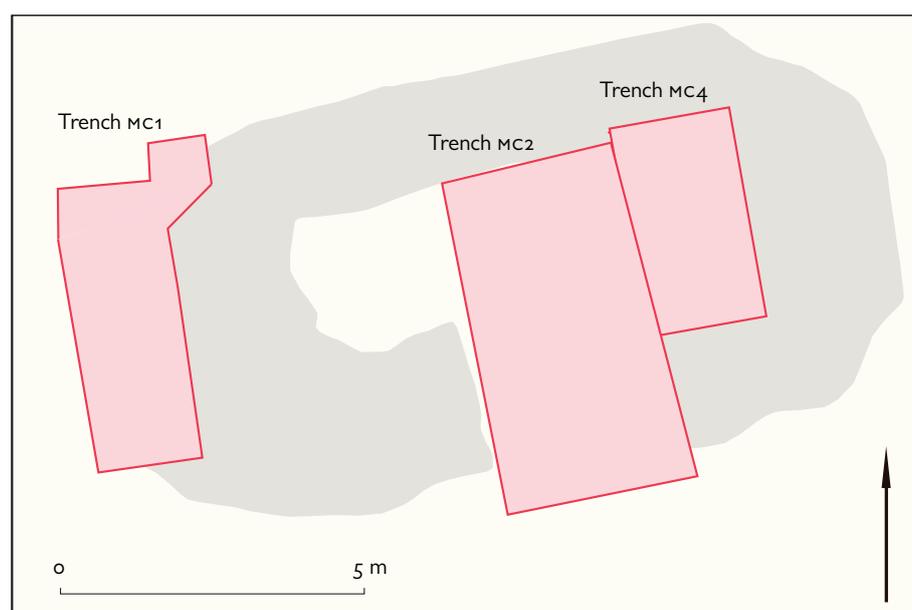
# The Excavation

**T**HE EXCAVATION was carried out in order to explore the structure, function and date range of the building known as Lees Cottage. Seven trenches (fig. 6) were excavated between 24 March 2010 and 1 April 2010. All of the work was carried out by volunteers under the supervision of two professional archaeologists.

## TRENCH MC1

This trench took in the interior of the small room on the western end of the building, together with a small area to the north of its northern wall. The excavation was carried out by hand.

The upper layer of tumbled stone from the walls of the building was removed and the fill of the room was taken down by hand. The



**FIGURE 6**  
Cottage and trench layout  
before excavation

finds were all recorded three dimensionally. A layer of very dark material, at least 0.15 m deep, comprising a soil rich in decayed leaf mould, immediately underneath, and mixed with, the building stone tumble was excavated (context 1). It contained a high proportion of the total number of finds from the whole excavation, including a virtually complete stoneware storage bottle.

Areas with substantial amounts of decayed mortar were noted close to the walls, no coherent pieces of mortar were recovered, suggesting that the interior of this room was not finished, but perhaps just lime washed (compare the main building, below). In the northeast corner of the room a lens of pinky brown clay (context 13) lay below the dark brown soil. The clay lens was at least 0.1m deep. The dark brown soil and the clay lens were not fully excavated.

The excavation revealed a small room, 2.8 m long and 1.4 m wide (internal measurements) (fig. 7). The walls stood to a height of 0.45 m and were quite narrow, only 0.3 m wide (compared to 0.55 m in the main building, below). The entrance was narrow, only 0.5 m wide, and utilised the west end of the main building as its east side. The west side was finished with roughly dressed chert blocks; a flake found in the area of the doorway suggests that the dressing was carried out very close to the building.

The distribution of finds, a stone weight for keeping the door open or closed (fig. 22), and a quantity of nails, found in and around the doorway, suggests a simple wooden plank door. There was probably a small window, perhaps in the western wall: a small amount of window glass was recovered from context 1 close to the western wall. The room



FIGURE 7  
The store room (MC1)  
after excavation

was single storey, given the thin walls and amount of building stone tumble, and had a roof of clay pan tiles, suggested from the large pieces found in the interior.

The exact relationship of the small room to the main building remains unclear, but it was probably built after the main building, utilising the main western wall as its eastern wall and interpreted as a store room.

#### TRENCHES MC2 AND MC4

This area of the excavation examined about half of the interior of the main room (MC2) and the eastern end of the building (MC4). Tumbled building stone intermixed with a very dark brown soil rich in leaf mould (context 3) was removed by hand. One metre square (the northwest corner of the trench) of this material was sieved (fig. 8). The material recovered from the sieving included a metal button (see Section 7, *The Cu alloy objects*, fig. 20) and a substantial quantity (800 g) of lime mortar (building materials below).

Very few finds came from context 3, particularly in comparison to those which were recovered from the adjoining store room. A stone weight, like that found in the store room, was found very close to the doorway, and, as in the store room, functioned as a simple way of keeping the door open or closed. A fragment of the bowl of a clay pipe, dating from the mid nineteenth century, was found near the northern wall (fig. 23 and 17).



FIGURE 8

Context 3 under excavation:  
sieved metre square

Below context 3, which was some 0.25 m deep, was a lime ash or composition floor (context 6). The floor was well preserved, with some superficial cracks and a small patch of slightly different material where the floor has been repaired.

Lime ash floors were relatively common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and four 'recipes' for use in 'plain country habitations' are given in the Builders' Dictionary of 1734. These range from the standard recipe for the 'best Floors for Houses' (a recipe which uses no lime but loam, fresh horse dung and coal ash, which is more suited to cottages, barns and other small houses), a recipe for more beautiful floors which involves a large quantity of egg whites, and a recipe for smooth and glittering floors which uses ox blood and fine clay. Although the floor at Lees Cottage has not been subject to any analysis (it remains intact), its colour and finish suggest that the recipe used is probably the first given in the Builders' Dictionary:

*Take two thirds of lime, and one of coal ashes well-fitted, with a small quantity of loamy clay; mix the whole together, and temper it well with water, making it up into a heap, let it lie a week or ten days, in which time it will mellow and digest. Then temper it well over again, and be sure that your quantity of water does not exceed, but rather that it may obtain a mellow softness and toughness from labour. Then heap it up again for three or four days, and repeat the tempering very high, till it becomes smooth and yielding and glewy.*

*Then the ground being levelled, lay your floor about two and a half to three inches thick, making it smooth with a trowel, the hotter the season is, the better, and when it is thoroughly dried it will continue Time out of Mind.*

(Quoted in Beacham 2001, 31).

The tumbled building stone was removed by hand on the eastern end of the building. It soon became apparent that the concentration of burnt brick to the northern end was lying on top of a structure which was actually only a few centimetres below the remains as they survived before excavation.

The base of a bread oven, constructed of dressed sandstone blocks surrounding a brick hearth lay in the northeast corner of the building, with a fireplace occupying the rest of the eastern end (fig. 9). An iron handle, probably from a kettle, and a chain with a hook were found on the base of the bread oven, and an inscribed stone lay to the north of it (fig. 18, 19, and 24). The stone has the inscription 'R Lee 18 ...' and

the top has been dressed and shows evidence of being used for sharpening, suggesting that it had once been part of the fireplace, perhaps conveniently on the edge of the bread oven.

The material infilling the fireplace was not excavated, but the back of it was marked by a line of fire blackened bricks and dressed stone blocks, giving a fireplace which measured 2.05 m by 1.24 m (fig. 10).

#### THE LAYOUT OF LEES COTTAGE

The excavations showed that the internal measurements of the main building were 8.06 m E/W by 3.1 m N/S, with an additional room, interpreted as a store room, to the west with internal measurements of



FIGURE 9  
Detail of the bread oven



FIGURE 10  
Kitchen after excavation

1.7 m N/S by 3.2 m E/W. The southern wall of the main building was 0.55m thick, that of the store room slighter narrower, 0.3 m thick.

The excavation did not examine the whole of the interior of the main building, but it may have been divided into two rooms, probably by a wooden partition as there seems to be no evidence of any tumbled stone in the interior, marking the site of a dividing wall. Such a plan would give a living room and kitchen to the east, with an unheated bedroom or service room to the west.

Although the rooms given by this subdivision seem very small by today's standards, Great Well Cottage in West Chinnock, Somerset, measures 7 m by 3.5 m in ground floor plan and was divided into two rooms, the smaller being only 1.7 m wide (Penoyre 2005, fig. 3.7). The store room was unheated and was accessed by an external door; access through the west wall seems unlikely but cannot be ruled out without further excavation.

The cottage was probably single storey, with further sleeping accommodation in the loft space accessed via a ladder stair off the kitchen or, more likely, the service room. The loft was probably lit by a window in the gable. An upper storey seems unlikely given the amount of stone remaining on the site before excavation, although the possibility remains of a low upper storey.

Surviving examples of this sort of cottage are rare, most have been extended upwards and outwards, but some historic photographs show buildings surviving in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which compare with the suggested layout of Lees Cottage. Jolly Lane Cottage, Widcombe in the Moor, photographed in about 1885, was a single



FIGURE 11  
Lees Cottage after excavation

storey cottage, with a thatched roof, a central doorway and one chimney at the end of the building. An early eighteenth-century farmyard cottage at Lower Netherton, Stoke-in-Teignhead, photographed in 1987, is a two-storey building, with a very low upper storey, thatched roof and one chimney with an external stack (Cox and Thorp 2001, 115; plate 23).

The roof of the store room was of clay pan tiles, the main building would have been thatched – the only slates found during the excavation were from around the fireplace and bread oven where they were used to level courses of stone and brickwork.

#### TRENCHES MC3, MC6 AND MC7

Three trial trenches, each 1.5 m square, were excavated in the plot immediately to the east of the cottage (fig. 6). MC3 was located on one of the strongest anomalies found on the geophysical survey; MC6 was located close to MC3, and MC7 was located close to the northeast end of the plot, where the trees precluded geophysical survey but the build up of material against the boundary banks suggested the site of a midden.

All three trenches were excavated to bedrock, a pale grey limestone with weathered bedrock above. The material from trench MC3 was sieved. Most of the artefacts came from MC3 and MC6, the trenches nearest the cottage, with nothing to suggest that the area around trench MC7 was a midden. The earliest dateable find from the excavation came from trench MC7, a finely retouched end scraper, of

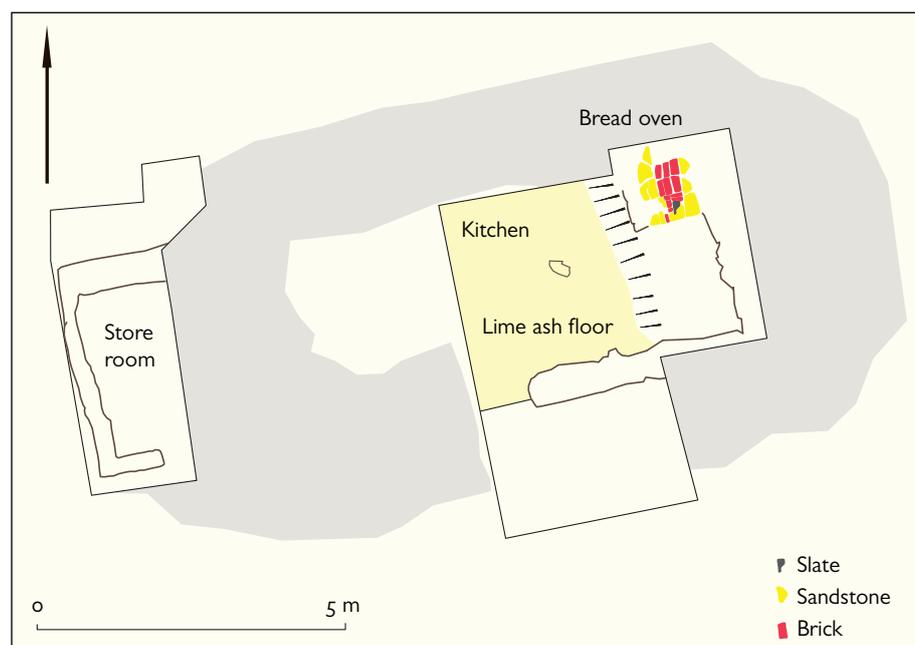


FIGURE 12  
fig 12 1:100 plan of  
cottage after excavation

black flint, probably from the Beer Head area, dating from the Neolithic or Bronze Age. The finds from MC3 were remarkably numerous. Most notable were a metal button with an inscribed floral decoration, dating from the nineteenth century, and a sherd of blue and white transfer printed pottery. The piece is from the base of a plate and is stamped with the word 'SIRIUS', dating from the mid nineteenth century (see fig. 16).

The trial trenches and the geophysical survey suggest that the plot of land surrounding the cottage was used in what can be termed an informal way. There is no evidence of a dedicated midden, or of laid out garden plots, enclosures and buildings for animals, paths or tracks.

#### TRENCH MC5

A section across the bank on the south side of the cottage plot was excavated (fig. 6), in an area which appeared to have been infilled with material, probably blocking access to the plot and cottage (the survey and the site before excavation above). An area 2 m × 1 m was excavated by hand and all finds were recorded in three dimensions.

A layer of brown topsoil (context 15), 0.2–0.3 m deep, lay above the core of the bank which was made up of chert in a matrix of sandy clay with a high proportion of small chert fragments (context 17). The chert core of the bank was 0.7 m high and 0.9 m wide, and the excavation showed that there was a rounded end to the bank here (fig. 13), where there had been access to the plot and cottage.

There was no evidence for a ditch on either side of the bank. Below the bank was a shallow layer of stony clay (context 21) which overlay a layer of very dark brown, humus rich soil (context 23). This material was interpreted as the buried land surface on which the bank was built; it was not excavated.

The material above the bank contained a relatively large number of artefacts, including several sherds of an earthenware storage vessel stamped with an unclear mark, but with the name 'R WILLMAN' on the top line. Towards the top of the stone core of the bank was a piece of a whetstone.

Some of the trees on the bank have been managed at some time in the past. A large ash pollard lies on the bank just to the east of the trench and a very large beech coppice stool lies at the northeast angle of the plot, both of these trees mark access points and are perhaps 250–300 years old.

FIGURE 13

Section of the bank MC5 showing the chert core



## SECTION 6

## The Pottery

**A**N ASSEMBLAGE of 154 sherds of pottery, with a total weight of 1536 g, was recovered from the excavation. The assemblage is tabulated and described in the site archive. Most of this (30 per cent) came from unstratified contexts, either from locations on the surface found during the excavation, which were three dimensionally recorded, or from the southern boundary bank of the cottage plot, which seems to have functioned as a repository for ‘found’ objects in the recent past.

Two of these pieces are large rim sherds from a glazed earthenware jug or storage jar and a large bowl, typical of the sort of crockery used in the kitchen in the nineteenth century (fig. 14A and B).

Some 29 per cent of the pottery came from trench MC1, the store room, suggesting that this room was not kept as clean and tidy as the cottage kitchen or that material was left in this room after the cottage

## POTTERY ASSEMBLAGE BY TRENCH AND WEIGHT

Trench	No. of sherds	Weight (g)
MC1	19	449
MC2	2	6
MC4	9	36
MC3	53	220
MC6	31	130
MC7	12	87
MC5	15	149
U/s	13	459
<i>Total</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>1536</i>

was abandoned. The most complete vessel recovered came from this room: a cream stoneware storage jar, dating from the nineteenth century (fig. 15).

Three sherds from a blue and white transfer printed plate came from just outside the northern wall of the room. One has a pattern mark indicating that it came from Enoch Wood and Sons, Burslem, and was produced between 1818 and 1846 (information from Ron Woodcock). The rest of the pottery is fragmentary in nature and can be broadly attributed to the nineteenth century.

In contrast to trench MC1, trench MC2 contained only two small sherds of pottery, suggesting that the cottage kitchen was kept clean and tidy, and perhaps that possessions were taken from the kitchen when the building was abandoned. The pottery from the material over the bread oven and fireplace (trench MC4) comprised only 2 per cent of the assemblage, most of this was five sherds of a jade patterned creamware jug or bowl, again broadly attributable to the nineteenth century, and found in the material over the bread oven.

The three trial trenches, MC3, MC6 and MC7, contained 28 per cent (437 g) of the pottery assemblage, with most, 14 per cent (220 g), coming from MC3, the trench closest to the cottage. The assemblage from MC3 included the only closely dateable pottery from the excavation.

This is the base of a blue and white transfer printed plate with the pattern mark 'SIRIUS' on the underside (fig. 16). This pattern comes

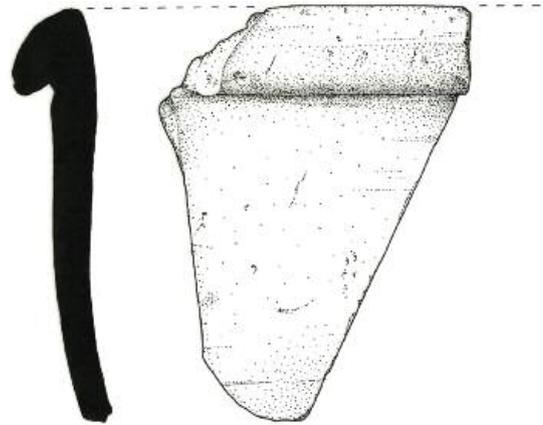


FIGURE 14A  
Earthenware storage jar  
(50%)

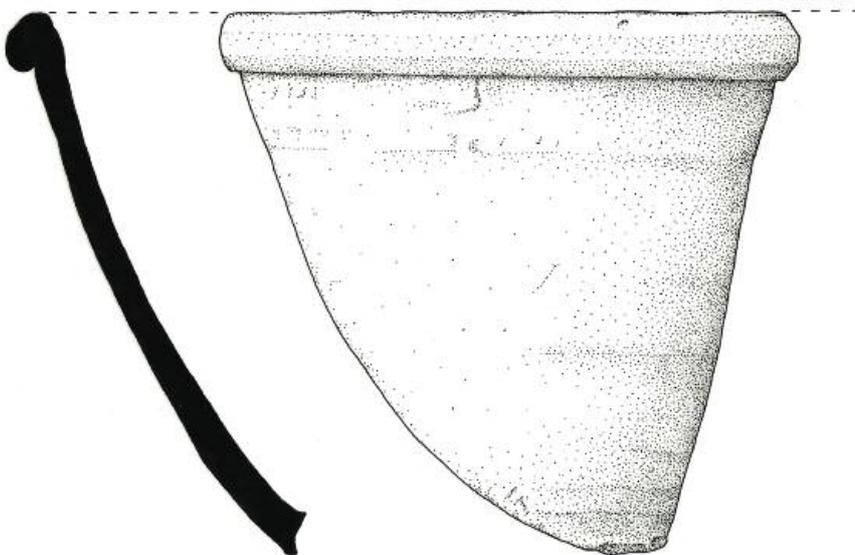


FIGURE 14B  
Earthenware bowl  
(50%)



FIGURE 15  
Storage jar from store room  
MC1 (jar is 10 cm high)

from the Llanelly Pottery in south Wales and was produced between 1839 and 1855 (Bebb 2004, 31).

The pottery from all three trenches comprised glazed earthenware storage and kitchen vessels, willow pattern and blue and white plates, creamware vessels and some unglazed earthenware (probably flower pots). All of the material can be attributed to the nineteenth century, with the exception of three sherds which are probably from the first half of the twentieth century.

The pottery from these trenches was very fragmentary: an average sherd weight of 4.5 g. This is the result of recent land use at the site, as pigs were kept here about fifty years ago.

The section through the bank, trench MC5, contained 10 per cent of the assemblage, including the base of a glazed earthenware storage vessel with the stamp 'R WILLMAN' and the base of a blue-striped creamware bowl. Part of the same vessel was found in context 4, outside the store room. All of the pottery from the section can be attributed to the nineteenth century.



FIGURE 16  
Sirius pattern mark  
(cartouche 14 × 11 mm internal)

## CLAY PIPES

Two clay pipe stems were found in the trial trenches MC3 and MC6 and a fragment of a bowl came from the material above the floor in the kitchen, context 3. It is decorated with a fine, ribbed pattern, typical of pipes made between 1830 and 1860 (fig. 17).

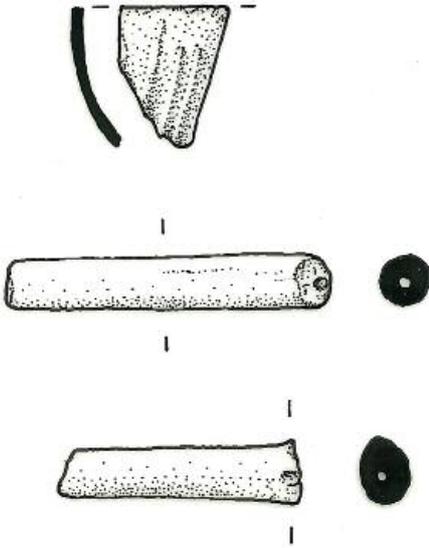


FIGURE 17

Clay pipes from Lees Cottage:  
fine-ribbed bowl and two  
stems (full size)

## SECTION 7

# The Metalwork

**T**HE METALWORK ASSEMBLAGE from the excavation comprised forty-four iron objects (the term iron is here used to describe objects made from mild steel, ie iron with a small amount of carbon) and four Cu alloy objects. The assemblage is tabulated and described in the site archive. 75 per cent of the iron objects were hand forged and there was a certain amount of evidence for curation of metal objects, consistent with a farm labourer supporting a large family in a small cottage.

## THE IRON OBJECTS

Over half (66 per cent) of the iron objects were nails. One was a workshop made clout nail, probably used for a horse shoe, there were four small wire nails, again workshop made, probably came from an upholstered piece of furniture. The rest of the nails were all hand forged and were probably made locally at the blacksmiths in Northleigh or Colyton.

## IRON OBJECTS BY NUMBER AND WEIGHT

Trench	No. of objects	Weight (g)
MC1	3	44
MC2	8	62
MC4	9	966
MC3	8	419
MC5	1	62
U/s	15	255
Total	44	10808

Most of the larger nails had been driven into masonry. A group found near the door and south wall in MC2 and, judging from the corrosion near the nail heads, came from fixing the oak door frame and window frame. A group of large nails from around the bread oven were used to support cooking vessels and perhaps for hanging meat for smoking in the chimney.

A chain and hook and the handle of a kettle were found on the base of the bread oven (fig. 18 and 19), indicating that the bread oven base was probably used as a hob for the kettle and that most cooking was done in a large pot suspended over the fire. The chain was workshop made but the hook was hand forged, suggesting curation and recycling of materials.

A small key, perhaps from a wooden chest, came from the sieved metre square (context 3) in MC2, as did part of a buckle, probably from horse tack; part of a door latch was found in the trial trench MC3.

Apart from the end of a twelve bore cartridge case and two pieces of pressed iron from a wheel rim, all of the iron objects can be attributed to the nineteenth century. Some of the larger nails may have been made from recycled pieces and the hook was reused.

#### THE CU ALLOY OBJECTS

Three of the four Cu alloy objects are buttons (fig. 20).



FIGURE 18

Iron chain (19 cm long) and hook (10 cm long)



FIG 19

Iron kettle handle (14 cm wide)

One came from the sieved metre square of context 3, inside the cottage. The button is 25 mm in diameter and is electroplated, with an unusual design of a sun rising above the clouds. The sun is shown with a happy face. Although it has affinities with the Sun Fire Office marks, and could be a livery button from that company, it does not match any of the published marks ([www.fireworks.co.uk](http://www.fireworks.co.uk)).

The smiling sun has similarities to Victorian children's picture buttons, like the *Man in the Moon* (Vocelle 2009). The obverse has the legend 'BEST QUALITY WARRANTED'. The button is die struck and is probably best described as a livery button dating from the mid- to late nineteenth century.

The second button was found in the trial trench MC3. This button, 22 mm in diameter, is electroplated with an inscribed floral design, and the legend '... QUALITY ...' on the obverse. It is made of pressed metal, in two pieces, and is a dress button dating from the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

The third button, 22 mm in diameter, is the back of a two piece, pressed button, which probably also dates from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The final Cu alloy object is a small piece of plate with two holes drilled in it.



FIGURE 20

Left button: floral design (22 mm diameter)

Right button: sunrise (25 mm diameter)

## SECTION 8

# Building Materials, Glass and Faunal Remains

## BUILDING MATERIALS

**T**HE WALLS are made from locally available chert, roughly coursed and bonded with lime mortar. There is no evidence for any exterior finish on the walls, but a large amount of lime mortar fragments were recovered from the sieved metre square (context 3), which was close to the northern wall of the kitchen.

This material has no animal hair in it and so is best described as mortar which was used lavishly to point the interior walls, with the excess smoothed across the stonework (some pieces show that they were pushed into interstices on one side and floated smooth on the other). The interior walls were then probably limewashed. There is no evidence of such material from the store room. Two large pieces of pan tile were found in the interior of the store room.

The openings for the doors and windows were finished with dressed chert and limestone, both being locally available. The use of brick seems to have been restricted to the fireplace and bread oven. The bricks are all of a similar size, 22 cm high × 11 cm wide × 6 cm deep, and have no manufacturer's stamps. They probably came from local brickworks, such as those at Colyton or Streethayne.

## GLASS

Eight pieces of window glass came from the area inside the store room, indicating a glazed window in the western wall. The base of a thick glass

bottle came from above the bread oven, and small pieces of drinking glass came from both the store room and above the bread oven.

#### FAUNAL REMAINS

The faunal assemblage recovered from the excavation was small: two vertebrae and four other fragments of bone, weighing a total of 115g. The interior of the store room, MC1, contained a fragment of the lower leg bone of sheep/goat, with evidence of marrow extraction at the lower end, and a fragment of cattle rib bone.

One sheep/goat vertebrae and a fragment of sheep/goat rib bone came from the sieved metre square from inside the kitchen (MC2, context 3). The only other bone from the kitchen was a fragment of avian bone. A single cattle/horse vertebrae came from the core of the boundary bank (MC5, context 17).

#### IRON OBJECTS BY NUMBER AND WEIGHT

Trench	No. of objects	Weight (g)
MC1	2	38
MC2	2	7
MC4	1	2
MC5	1	68
Total	6	115

This assemblage is consistent with a thrifty family, subsisting on a diet of stews and vegetables cooked over the fire, and making full use of the small amounts of meat – mutton and beef – they could afford.

## SECTION 9

# Worked Stone and Flint

**A** PREHISTORIC FLINT TOOL was found in the trial trench MC7. It is a small end scraper, made on a flake of black flint and dating from the Neolithic or Bronze Age (fig. 21). The flint probably came from the Beer Head area. The Farway and Broad Down barrow cemeteries are only a few kilometres from Northleigh (Simpson and Noble 1993).

The flint tool may have found its way to the garden of Lees Cottage through natural processes but it is also possible that the tool was picked up from elsewhere and brought to the site. Two pierced stone objects came from the material infilling the store room and the kitchen (contexts 1 and 3), both from similar locations by the doorways in each room (fig. 22 and 23). Both are made from local sandstone. The hole through the object from the kitchen shows a high amount of wear, presumably from a rope. These objects are interpreted as weights for holding the doors open or closed.

A piece of sandstone with an inscription came from the tumble around the bread oven (context 14). The piece is inscribed with the characters 'R Lee 18 ...'. The top is dressed smooth and has some cut marks which suggest that it was used for sharpening knives (fig. 24). The stone may have been set on the edge of the bread oven where it was used for this purpose.

This inscribed stone is an example of a small datestone and may have been originally set in the chimney breast or hearth. Although they are unreliable as a source of dating evidence, as they can be reused, this stone seems to tie together the information we have from other sources (see documentary evidence) to suggest that our site is Lees Cottage and that a Lee may

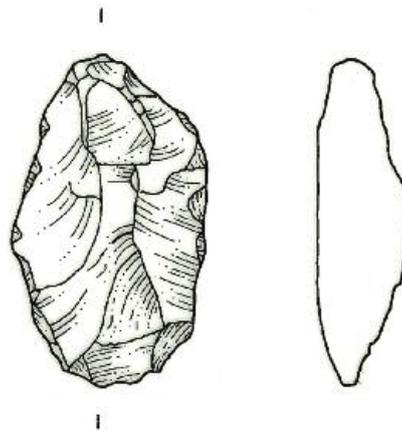


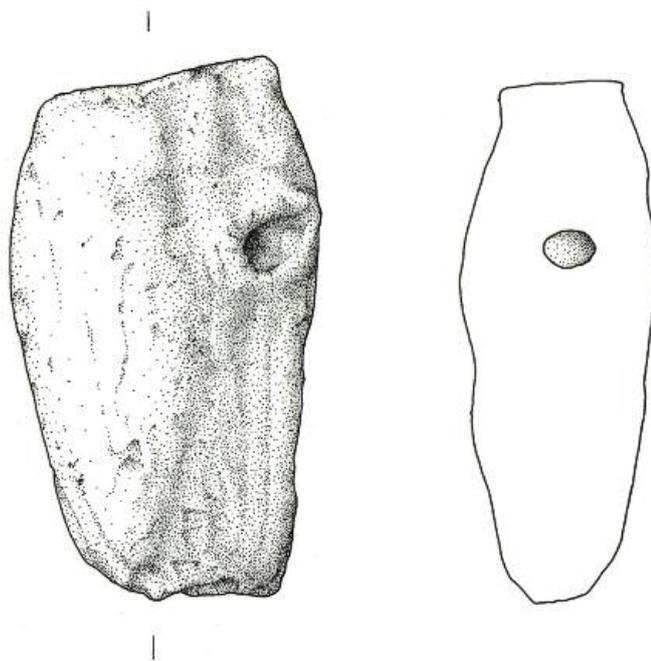
FIGURE 21

Flint scraper found in a trial pit at Lees Cottage (full size)

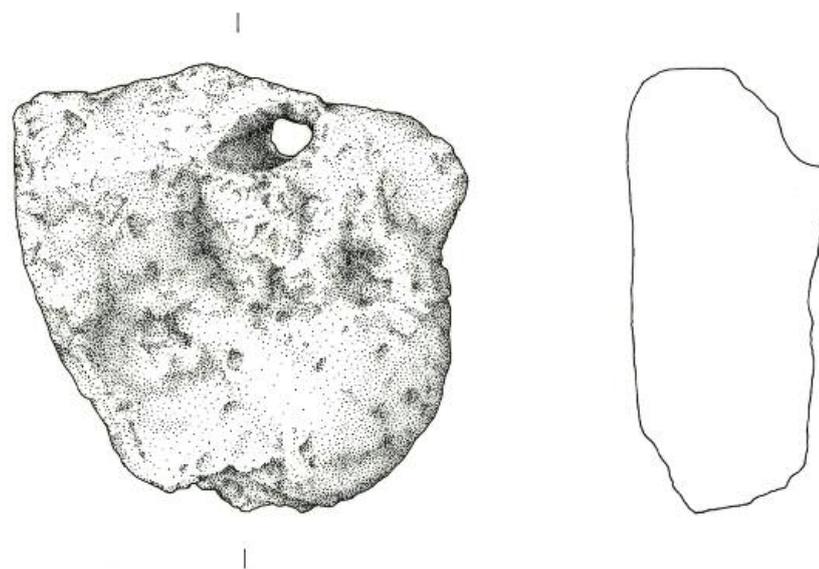
have lived here in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. The stone may mark an event such as the rebuilding of the chimney, or it could mean that the cottage was built in the nineteenth century.

The parish records show that Richard Lee was born in the parish of Northleigh in 1807. He may have lived here in the early part of the nineteenth century and so given the cottage its name. Alternatively, the name Lee could refer to the builder of the cottage.

A fragment of whetstone, with evidence of use of one face (fig. 25), was found in the chert core of the boundary bank (MC5, context 17).



**FIGURE 22**  
Pierced stone weight  
from the store room at  
Lees Cottage (50%)



**FIGURE 23**  
Pierced stone weight  
from the kitchen at  
Lees Cottage (75%)

The hard, fine grained sandstone probably came from the Blackborough whetstone mines, on the Blackdown Hills, northeast of Honiton, which provided high quality whetstones for sharpening edge tools in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ([www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/parishchests/blackborough](http://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/parishchests/blackborough)).

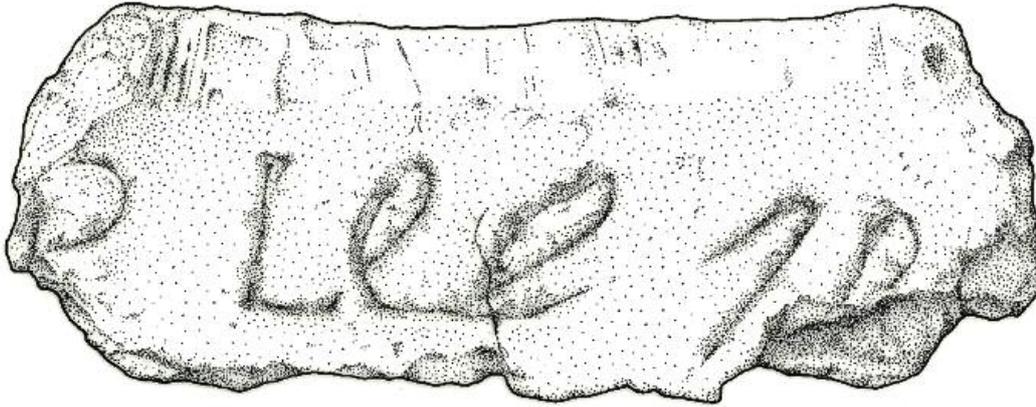


FIGURE 24  
Datestone from  
Lees Cottage (75%)

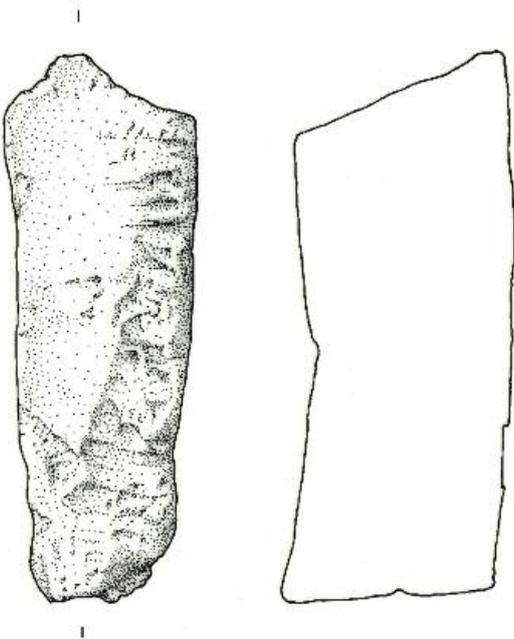


FIGURE 25  
Whetstone from the section  
of the boundary bank (75%)

## SECTION 10

# The Documentary Evidence by Ron Woodcock and Philippe Planel

**T**HE TITHE MAP (1840) and apportionment (1839) for the parish of Northleigh show that Lees Cottage stood in a busy agricultural landscape of small farms in the mid nineteenth century (fig. 26 and 27). The area was divided into five small holdings. John Stocker, a tenant of Thomas Melliush, occupied the house in plot 29, together with the land parcels 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, and 36.

The house is clearly shown on the tithe map and the remains can be identified on the ground today (fig. 28). John Tucker owned and occupied the house in plot 46, together with its holding of plots 47–53. His house, although clearly shown on the tithe map, is very difficult to identify on the ground today.

Gideon Ware held plots 37–45 from William Henry Baptist. His house is clearly shown on the tithe map in red (red meant inhabited) and there are ruins there today, although the footprint and existing walls are of a different shape. Gideon Ware was also tenant of Summerdown so it is not clear who was living on plot 37 in 1840. William Drewe was the owner and occupier of plots 54–59.

The apportionment lists plot 54A as ‘Cottage and Garden’, and plot 54 as ‘Orchard’, but neither is depicted on the tithe map. However, there is a building on the OS first edition map (1888) where William

Drewe's house should be, both as regards the numbering sequence and its position in an orchard – the other three farmsteads are also set in orchards (fig. 27). We can only conclude that the tithe map was wrong in this case, concentrating as it did on its principal aim of assessing titheable land rather than depicting houses accurately.

By modern standards these were all very small holdings, although around 1840 small farmers in Northleigh may have had access to common grazing, a valuable resource. Surprisingly, given the state of the land today, plots 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 43, 44, 49, 51, 52, 53, and 56 are all described as arable in the apportionment – though arable may mean ploughable rather than actually under the plough at the time. Plot 50 is described as 'arable and brake', and its name, 'bog plot' certainly ties in with the state of the land today.

Although each of the farms consisted of several fields, their total acreage is in fact tiny. John Tucker was farming just over six acres, William Drewe slightly less, whilst John Stocker was only farming just three acres, one rood, and twelve perches. Gideon Ware occupied six



FIGURE 26

Reconstruction of the landscape around Lee Cottage in the 1840s

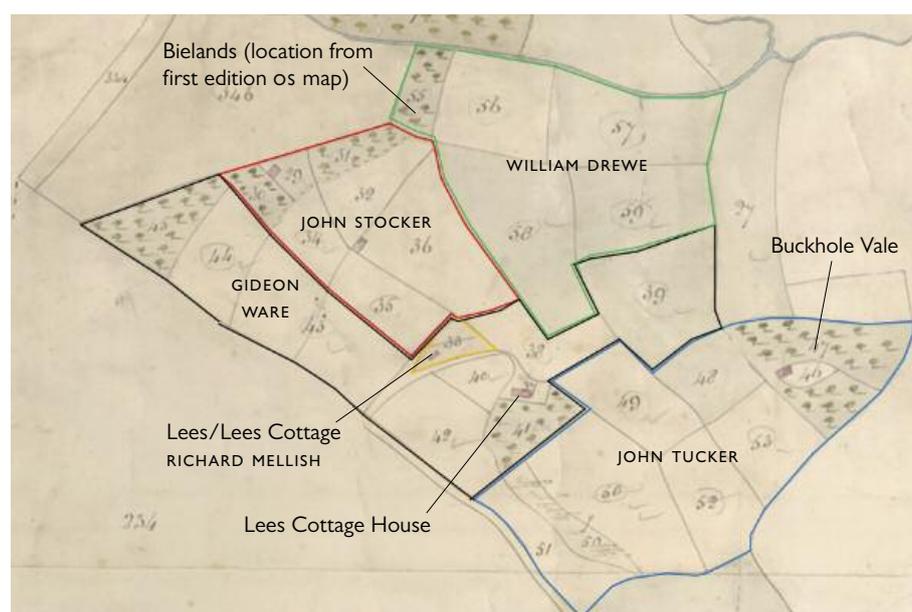
acres here but, as we have seen, also occupied other plots in the parish. The cottage in plot 33, selected for excavation in March 2010, was tenanted by Richard Mellish from Thomas Melliush. This holding was too small to furnish a living, although it was provided with enough land for a large garden.

Since 1840 this area has gradually reverted to woodland. Was this originally a medieval assart into the waste and with time has now come full circle, over 500 years later? In conjunction with more recent maps and photographs it is possible to plot over 150 years of landscape change in this remote valley.

The tithe map (1840) shows an active farming landscape, with few trees apart from those in orchards and hedgerows. Most of the smaller plots are classed as arable on the apportionment, together with larger plots of pasture sloping down to the valley bottom. This high proportion of arable land suggests that animals were grazed outside the study area, presumably on common land which was probably to the west and north of Summerdown Farm.

The OS first edition map (1888) shows that there are no longer any domestically occupied buildings in the area, the buildings shown are depicted as either buildings or ruins, suggesting that the valley has been hit by the late nineteenth century agricultural depression. The loss of common grazing at this time was also a factor in the abandonment of these sites. The first edition map also shows that a large area of probable former common land to the north and west of the study area has been enclosed between 1840 and 1888.

A document of land conveyance for the sale of Summerdown in 1925



**FIGURE 27**

The tithe map (1840) for the study area, showing the four small holdings and Lees Cottage

(held by the owner) classifies all the plots as rough pasture. RAF air photographs show that by 1946 woodland is beginning to take over the small fields and air photographs taken in 2005 show that dense woodland now covers nearly all of the previous farmland (Air photographs held at East Devon AONB). On the ground, it is clear that not only have these fields reverted to woodland but the lower lying areas are impenetrable bog; huge amounts of labour must have been expended in the drainage of this land.

#### LINKING PEOPLE AND PLACES

The main problem in linking people with the four farm holdings and one cottage in the study area is the difficulty with linking families and house names to the houses on the tithe map, accompanying apportionment and house remains on the ground. Names of the houses do appear in the 1841 and 1861 census, but they are floating names, not anchored to any map. However, we can make deductions by a process of elimination, checking the enumerator's route and back referencing.

The house listed on plot 55 (not actually on the tithe map but shown on the OS first edition map (1888) must be Bielands. William Drew, the tenant of this farm (54a, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, and 59) in the tithe apportionment, subsequently appears on the 1841 census for Bielands. Drew, aged 40, was listed as a farmer and lived with his wife Betty, 37, his sons William (cordwainer), 19 and James, 7.

The house on plot 29 and tenanted by John Stocker on the tithe map, along with its holding of seven parcels of land, cannot be linked to the census, nor is there a spare house name or family from 1861 onwards to attribute to it. We can only assume that this house was abandoned shortly after 1839. This would tie in with the remains on the ground, which are very hard to identify.

The house on plot 46 was owned and occupied by John Tucker in 1839, together with its holding of eight plots of land. John Tucker appears on the 1841 census as a farmer, aged 76, along with his wife, 67 and Edward Evans, aged 19, farm labourer. This must be Bucknole Vale (1861 census) because the farm labourer, Edward Evans, had become the principal occupant by the 1851 census, hardly surprising given John Tucker's age in 1841.

By 1861 Evans had a wife and five children, aged 7, 6, 4, 2, and 1. Samuel Evans was aged 2 in 1861. In the 1871 census he appears as a 12-year-old servant at Bucknole. Bucknole Vale lies below Bucknole Farm (a surviving farm just outside the study area) and is listed immediately before Bucknole Farm by the 1861 census enumerator. The remains of Bucknole Vale have been identified on the ground and the plot is part of Bucknole Farm today.

The house on plot 33 is tenanted by Richard Mellish in the tithe apportionment and is not linked to any other parcels of land. It cannot be directly linked with the census evidence but the strong presumption is that this is Lees, occupied by William Spurway with his wife and two children in 1841, and known as Lees Cottage in the 1851 census. Living at Lees Cottage in 1851 were William Spurway and his wife, aged 40 and 33, with their five children. Edward at 13 was a plough boy and Mirah and Mary, aged 10 and 8, were lace makers.

The reason for this presumption is twofold: its position on the enumerator's route – Summerdown, Lees Cottage, Lees Cottage House, Bucknole Vale, Bucknole (1861 census), and the fact that it was occupied by a tailor, Charles Dunning, aged 56, his wife and son, in the same census.

The other properties in the study area are occupied by farm labourers or farmers; in other words it seems they were, either on a full or part-time basis, farming at least some of the parcels of land associated with the property in the tithe apportionment. Lees Cottage is the only house not encumbered in 1839 with surrounding fields, hence suitable for a full-time artisan, a tailor, in 1861.

Why was Lees Cottage so called? The only male Lees born in Northleigh in the right time frame are: Richard Lee (1807) and Francis Lee (1811). There are twelve female christenings between 1700 and 1812. No-one by the name of Lee is listed in the census for Lees Cottage. Richard Lee was living elsewhere in the parish in 1851 and was a



FIGURE 28

Remains of the farmstead  
occupied by John Stocker  
in 1840

labourer. Francis Lee's father was called Robert Lee. We do not know his age as he was not born in Northleigh.

The house on plot 37 was tenanted in 1839 by Gideon Ware and associated with plots 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45 in the study area. Gideon was also a tenant of Summerdown. The house on plot 37 is probably Lees Cottage House which only appears as a named dwelling in the 1861 census. It is clearly shown as inhabited (coloured red) on the tithe map but does not seem to feature in the 1841 census.

In the 1861 census it is occupied by James and Elizabeth Underdown, 41 and 37, farm labourer and lace maker respectively, and their three children. The evidence for this attribution is again twofold – Lees Cottage and Lees Cottage House must surely be close to each other and only two of the five properties do indeed lie very close to each other; the enumerator's route, in 1861, sandwiched between two surviving farms is Summerdown, Lees Cottage, Lees Cottage House, Bucknole Vale, Bucknole, the logical route.

The only family in the census data not mentioned so far is that of John and Elizabeth Marwood, 56 and 52 in the 1851 census, farm labourer and lace maker respectively and their four daughters, aged 20, 15, 11, and 11, also listed as lace makers – a total of six breadwinners, five of them working from home. The likely house, from the enumerator's route is Lees Cottage House.

By 1871 Lees Cottage is no longer listed. Lees Cottage House has become Bucknole Hill House, still occupied by Elizabeth Underdown (now widowed), aged 47, a lace maker, and her three sons, one of whom, Edward, 21, is a farm labourer. In 1881 Bucknole Hill is occupied by Henry Lakeland, an unemployed man of 36 with his wife and mother-in-law. These marginal people are the last occupants of the study area, a fact confirmed by the enumerator's route in subsequent censuses, which changes and no longer passes through the vale between Bucknole and Summerdown.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in this area of wet marginal land, two small farms (Bielands and Bucknole Vale) seem to have been broken up and henceforth the inhabitants relied on farm labouring, the lace industry and artisanal skills to survive. Two further farms may have already disappeared by 1850 – that tenanted by John Stocker in 1839 (with two buildings shown on the tithe map) and that tenanted by Gideon Ware, already part of Summerdown in 1839. Significantly, the last remaining head of household in the vale was, in 1881, unemployed.

SECTION 11

# Lees Cottage and the Surrounding Landscape

THERE WERE FEW finds from sealed contexts, but the overall assemblage dates the final phase of occupation and abandonment to the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The almost complete lack of material from the twentieth century fits well with the documented later history of the site – rough pasture in the 1920s and a gradual reversion to scrubby woodland in the post-war years.

The layout of the boundaries and the age of the trees on them suggest that the Lees Cottage plot was inserted into the corner of a larger parcel of land at some time in the eighteenth century. Features such as the lime ash floor and the bricks from the bread oven would fit well with such a date. The farms around Lees Cottage, with their small holding size and straight field boundaries suggest that they are themselves relatively late comers to the landscape, perhaps dating from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, when there was little choice for those wishing to expand the agricultural land other than to enclose and reclaim the poorest land on the steep valley sides.

The documentary evidence and the finds assemblage combine to give a date for the abandonment of Lees Cottage in the last decades or so of the nineteenth century. By this time the small farms in the valley had been broken up or abandoned, suggesting that such small farms were no longer viable in the face of the loss of the commons and the general agricultural depression of the later nineteenth century.

William Spurway, the agricultural labourer who lived at Lees Cottage in 1851 with his large family, had to move away from the area,

like many others, to seek work elsewhere on the land, perhaps on one of the larger farms, or in one of the rapidly expanding towns and cities. In 1871 he had moved to Honiton, but in 1881, now in his seventies, William Spurway moved back to the parish of Northleigh.

Lees Cottage is just one of hundreds of deserted cottages and small farms which lie at the end of forgotten lanes, hidden in the valleys of Devon and West Somerset (for example, Riley and Wilson-North 2001, 125-132; Riley 2006, 131-4). The excavation at Lees Cottage has shown that their humble outward appearance conceals a wealth of information, both about the buildings and about the people who lived in them and worked on the land.

## SECTION 12

# Acknowledgements and References

### THE SITE ARCHIVE

The finds and archive will be deposited at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.

### ACCESS

There is no public access to the site or to the surrounding abandoned farms and fields.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my thanks to the following people and organisations. The current owners of Lees Cottage: for enthusiasm, allowing access, and for finding a tractor large enough to extract a Land Rover from the mud.

The volunteers who manned the excavation, often in the most atrocious weather, and provided help with research into the site and the artefacts recovered: Phyllis Bennett, Gill Cobley, John Griffith, Richard Sandover, David Seward, Martin Smith, Ron Woodcock, Chris Wakefield, and Laura Whittock.

The Devon Archaeological Society, for the loan of the tools used on the excavation. Richard Sandover, for carrying out the geophysical survey, excavating the field boundary and organising the loan of the tools. Richard Cobb commented on the metalwork.

Anne Leaver, archaeological illustrator, who translated our ideas about the cottage and its inhabitants into reconstructions, and Elaine Jamieson who drew the artefacts illustrated in this report.

Phil Planel, whose enthusiasm for the landscape of this undiscovered corner of Devon was the catalyst for the excavation.

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# Visiting the Summerdown Dig

Poem by John Torrance

This valley wilderness of seemingly  
millennial woods is a dark tangle of lies.  
Now, what's this? A crime scene? Investigators  
have pitched a tent, taped off a suspect area,  
and dig and sieve the claggy soil for clues.  
Here's a brass button with a merry sunburst  
stamped upon it; there's a broken stone  
carved with a name and half a date—'Lee,  
18 ...' So meaning what? Living or leaving?

Bread-oven, chimney—one of a dozen, once,  
which on a cold spring day like this would send  
their wood-smoke signals round the neighbourhood.  
When tithe surveyors were pacing out these hedgerows  
(banks tumbled now, brambled and wrecked by roots)  
they walked through orchards, among cows and sheep,  
and saw wheat standing in the tended fields.  
They drew a tidy web of little holdings—  
Lee's cottage too, in this triangular close.

But each tenth year enumerators found  
more farmsteads derelict, and in the fields  
wild daffodils already under scrub,  
until, with none to count, they ceased to come.  
Searching goes on: stone with a hole—why this?  
Why that? Why any of this? Mankind, for sure,  
were losers here, yet what defeated them  
was not just oak and ash, hazel and thorn,  
but something more. So what unleashed this cleansing?

A landlord's greed? Factory wages? Gold Rush?  
Abstractions drift in the air like small snow—  
the Great Depression, History, Time itself.  
Was it the common tale of suffering here—  
hunger, squalor, children dying and dying?  
A trowel which scrapes and probes will often strike  
the hardest question, beyond why this or that—  
why anything? Or why not nothing?—but finds  
no answer here. Tomorrow always beckons.



**East Devon**

*Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

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