

West Bradley House, West Bradley, Somerset

Archaeology Appraisal

Introduction

- 1.1 This archaeological appraisal has been prepared by BSA Heritage Limited on behalf of Richard Parr Associates in support of a planning application for redevelopment of parts of the curtilage of West Bradley House, West Bradley, Somerset. Our advice has informed the proposals for the site. Separate research and a site visit by Justin Ayton relate to the built heritage aspects of the proposals, including to the Grade II* listed West Bradley House itself.
- 1.2 The appraisal has been informed by consultation with the Somerset Historic Environment Record and online sources including historical mapping and secondary sources. The heritage appraisal prepared by Justin Ayton has also informed this appraisal.
- 1.3 The site consists of the Grade II* listed West Bradley House itself, as well as a number of ancillary structures to its north and north east and the wider grounds of the house as shown in Appendix 1. This area is centred at NGR ST 5580 3690 and is largely level at circa 30 metres Above Ordnance Datum. There is a slope downwards in the north towards the Bradley Brook which runs from south west to north east on the northern edge of the area affected by proposals. The geology is recorded as Langport Member Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone Formation, with no superficial deposits by the Hydrock Phase 2 Ground Investigation Report prepared to support the application (2023, Hydrock ref. 28421).
- 1.4 This appraisal is informed by current legislation, policy and guidance as it relates to the historic environment and archaeology in particular. This includes the 1990 and 2023 Acts and 6th edition of the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF 2023) and related practice guidance. Historic England guidance has also been considered, where relevant. Current local policy, including retained policies of Mendip District Council Local Plan, broadly echoes the NPPF in relation to archaeological matters.

Baseline Summary

HER Records

- 1.5 Only four HER records lie within or close to the site itself. These include records relating to both the Grade II* listed West Bradley House and the Grade II* listed parish church to its south (HERs 21296 & 24823). Recent work by Justin Ayton indicates a 16th century date for the likely earliest fabric within the house, although the site may have been that of an earlier manor house.
- 1.6 The church, which does not appear to be dedicated to a particular saint, is thought to have 14th century and later fabric. Undesignated, but likely medieval remains of a cross lie within the churchyard.

- 1.7 Two other HER records apply to the site itself, but their location and extent are poorly defined. HER 24827 relates to the site of a possible medieval moat, but this entry seems to be based purely on an entry in the Victoria County History and circumstantial and it remains unproven. Indeed, having checked the reference provided by the HER, Volume 2 of the Victoria County History, it is not clear why a moat is postulated.
- 1.8 HER 36302 records an 18th century 'ornamental garden' around West Bradley House documented to have been laid out in 1726 by the Dutchman Mr Long and to have included: 'canals, waterworks, walks and knots'. The HER record indicates that, other than the canals, designed elements have largely been lost since.
- 1.9 The HER does not hold a large number of records for the wider study area, a kilometre's radius centred on the site. The largest number of records in this area are to listed farmhouses and other residences which confirm the dispersed nature of the area's post-medieval, if not medieval settlement. In the far west of the study area, HERs 24825 and 24828 record large areas where deserted medieval settlement is thought to have lain, given that faint earthworks are apparent on the ground or on aerial photographs.
- 1.10 Of greater use in assessing the archaeological potential of the areas of the site which may be affected are the results of extensive fieldwork completed in the 1990s within West Bradley and its adjacent parishes. In particular, HERs 12236 and 15067 record the recovery of a concentration of medieval pottery during fieldwalking approximately 150 metres east of the site and north west of Higher Farm.
- 1.11 It is unsurprising that this area held medieval settlement, but HER 15067 indicates that the more than 300 sherds of pottery recovered indicated a higher status site and may therefore have been the site of an earlier manor house. HER 25513 between the site and this possible earlier manor site records further fieldwork in 1995 which appears to have identified the site of further medieval settlement south of the lane.
- 1.12 The closest fieldwalking east of the site also recorded one piece of prehistoric worked flint (HER 12236). Approximately 300 metres north east of the site area, HERs 12235, 15052 & 15066 record the results of further fieldwalking in the 1990s. This recovered more than eighty pieces of worked flint as well as nearly five hundred sherds of Roman pottery. These finds have been taken to indicate a Roman settlement site, as well as earlier activity. However, the concentration of Roman material was more than half a kilometre from the site.
- 1.13 On the eastern edge of the study area, HER 25502 records a further area where a concentration of flint and chert, including some worked pieces, was observed in the mid-1990s. On the north west edge of the study area, a metal detecting rally in 2011 covered an extensive area, but found very little of interest, albeit two Roman coins were recovered (HER 30683).
- 1.14 The only other record of interest within the study area is located circa 200 metres south east of the site. This records a mound on the 'highest' ground locally which is recorded by the HER as a windmill mound, but the entry mentions also the possibility that it is a burial mound, or even a small castle motte subsequently reused (HER 24822). Confusingly, this location lies at a lower elevation than the site and other land north of the putative mill mound.

Historic Land Use

- 1.15 Volume 9 of the Victoria County History covers the small parish, which was part of East Pennard historically (Dunning 2006). West Bradley House and the church sit in the centre of the parish, with West Bradley documented from the mid-8th century, indicating settlement from the Anglo-Saxon period. The VCH mentions that the dispersed settlement pattern may reflect a lack of areas free for settlement given the layout of medieval fields and streamside meadows, although this is an unusual inference.
- 1.16 The earliest useful map available online is the circa 1840 Tithe map (Appendix 2). The only building shown within the current site area is the octagonal main house, in parcel 159. An irregular boundary east of the house divides this area from parcel 158, which is shown as being planted with trees. A much larger parcel, 156, to the north, would contain the northern edges of the site. Three ovoid features marked south of the house on the Tithe map are presumably the three waterbodies which survive to this day and are presumably Mr Long's early 18th century canals. These may have been shown schematically on the Tithe map as not of direct concern to its surveyor.
- 1.17 The first edition OS map dates to 1885 and shows the house enlarged by extension to its north as well as a small barn to the north, now known as 'Little Stone Barn' (Appendix 1). A smaller structure is shown to the east in deciduous woodland. Indeed, the area surrounding the house is well wooded with both deciduous and conifer trees. The large field to the north, parcel 156 on the Tithe map, remained largely open.
- 1.18 To the south of the house, three waterbodies have much the same form they retain to this day: a straight east to west aligned 'canal' south of the house, a longer curved canal to the east and an irregular pond to the south west (Appendix 1). However, the eastern canal extended much further eastwards, beyond the site boundary and the western waterbody had a narrow arm extending to its north east. A small structure lay north of this pond and south of Bradley Brook. West of the house lay a circular driveway, with access from the south passing west of the church, as today. There was also access from the house to the churchyard.
- 1.19 By 1902 and the second edition OS map, the only substantive changes were the construction of three structures north and east of the main house, including a large barn. Justin Ayton's report confirms that this survives, albeit extended thereafter. The 1902 map indicates that trees in the north west and east were actually orchard fruit trees.
- 1.20 By 1929 and the third edition map, the western and eastern waterbodies had been partially infilled to their current extents. Smaller structures away from the main house had been lost, but the barn first shown in 1920 had been extended and a new east to west range lay north of it. These elements survive to this day, with that to the north being garaging, with walled structures at each end, but largely open, with posts supporting the roof. A tennis court had been constructed between the house and the western pond.
- 1.21 A large post-war agricultural structure which survives east of these ancillary buildings is thought to be post-1962 in origin. The area surrounding the outbuildings east and north east of the main house is now all hard surfaced.
- 1.22 Geotechnical trial pits and boreholes completed in 2023 as part of the ground conditions work by Hydrock indicate some 'made ground' related to building construction and sub-base for roadways and hardstanding, with topsoil elsewhere.

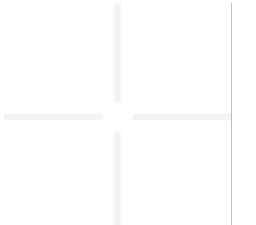
Archaeological Potential

- 1.23 Although the rural nature of West Bradley parish would normally lead to there having been limited past investigation, extensive fieldwork has actually been completed as part of research completed in the 1990s. As might be expected in Somerset, this has identified some areas where prehistoric worked flint was concentrated, as well as the likely site of a Roman settlement half a kilometre east of the site. However, there is no particular indication that the site area itself contains pre-medieval archaeology.
- 1.24 The current pattern of dispersed settlement is likely to date from the Anglo-Saxon period or later, with settlement recorded in the 8th century. The current church may well reflect a medieval rebuilding on an earlier site.
- 1.25 It is uncertain if the site was the location for the manor house historically, with recent fieldwork suggesting this may have lain to the east. The current structure appears to have 16th century origins.
- 1.26 There is no indication whatsoever for a medieval moat around West Bradley House. It is likely that the record of this in the HER stems from the survival of post-medieval waterbodies. It seems unlikely that so much of a moat would have been filled in when the landscape around the house was laid out in the 1720s, but the section of canal to its south may be its surviving arm.
- 1.27 As well as any evidence of medieval or earlier activity on site, remains of the post-medieval designed gardens would also be of local significance. Map evidence does not indicate where any of these lay beyond the three waterbodies. However, the shape of the western pond, with a narrowing north eastern arm suggests it may have been designed to act as a duck decoy.
- 1.28 These typically early post-medieval sites were constructed to lure ducks onto an open pond, but would have side arms which would be covered by nets so that the waterfowl could be scared into them by specially bred and trained dogs and trapped. Sub-surface remains of small buildings marked on later 19th century maps would not rate as of any special archaeological significance.
- 1.29 The archaeological potential of the site and its environs depends on a combination of the likelihood and likely significance of remains and also the processes which may have affected them post-deposition. As well as likely cultivation of much, if not all of the site historically, it is certain that much has been wooded and the roots of fruit and ornamental trees will have disturbed and reduced the significance of any sub-surface remains.
- 1.30 Much of the proposed change is to be located where late 19th and 20th century structures are located and their construction, which may have included reworking of the natural ground to provide a level base, is likely to have affected any sub-surface remains within remodelled areas. However, the foundations of these structures would have had a relatively limited impact in themselves.

Conclusions

- 1.31 Available information suggests the site has relatively low archaeological potential. It is possible that sub-surface deposits relating to the development of the site as a medieval manor lie within the areas affected. Elements of an early 18th century designed landscape may also have lain within these areas. However, it is clear that any remains will have since been affected by tree roots and construction activity north and east of the main house.
- 1.32 Although sub-surface deposits may remain to be found, it is very unlikely that they would rate as of greater than local significance. It is also the case that likely proposals will have a limited impact, with the siting of new buildings and a swimming pool in the footprints of existing structures and boreholes likely to provide ground source heat, rather than more disruptive horizontal arrays. A tennis court would lead to a relatively superficial impact. New planting would occur in areas which have been orchard or wooded previously. However, one or two areas of hitherto unaffected ground may be levelled as part of the proposals.
- 1.33 In light of the site's unexceptional archaeological potential and nature of proposals, it is suggested that any further archaeological requirement could be limited to a watching brief during construction. This could be secured through a planning condition and the methodology would be confirmed ahead of fieldwork, with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed. This approach would accord with current policy and guidance.

Appendix 1: Existing Site Layout



This drawing is to be used for planning purposes only. Not for construction.

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Checked by

Drawn by

Date

Description
Rev

Job No

315

Project

West Bradley House

Title

Location Plan

Dwg No

315-P-SP-001

Scale

1:1250 @ A1

Date of First Issue

22.12.16

Rev

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Status

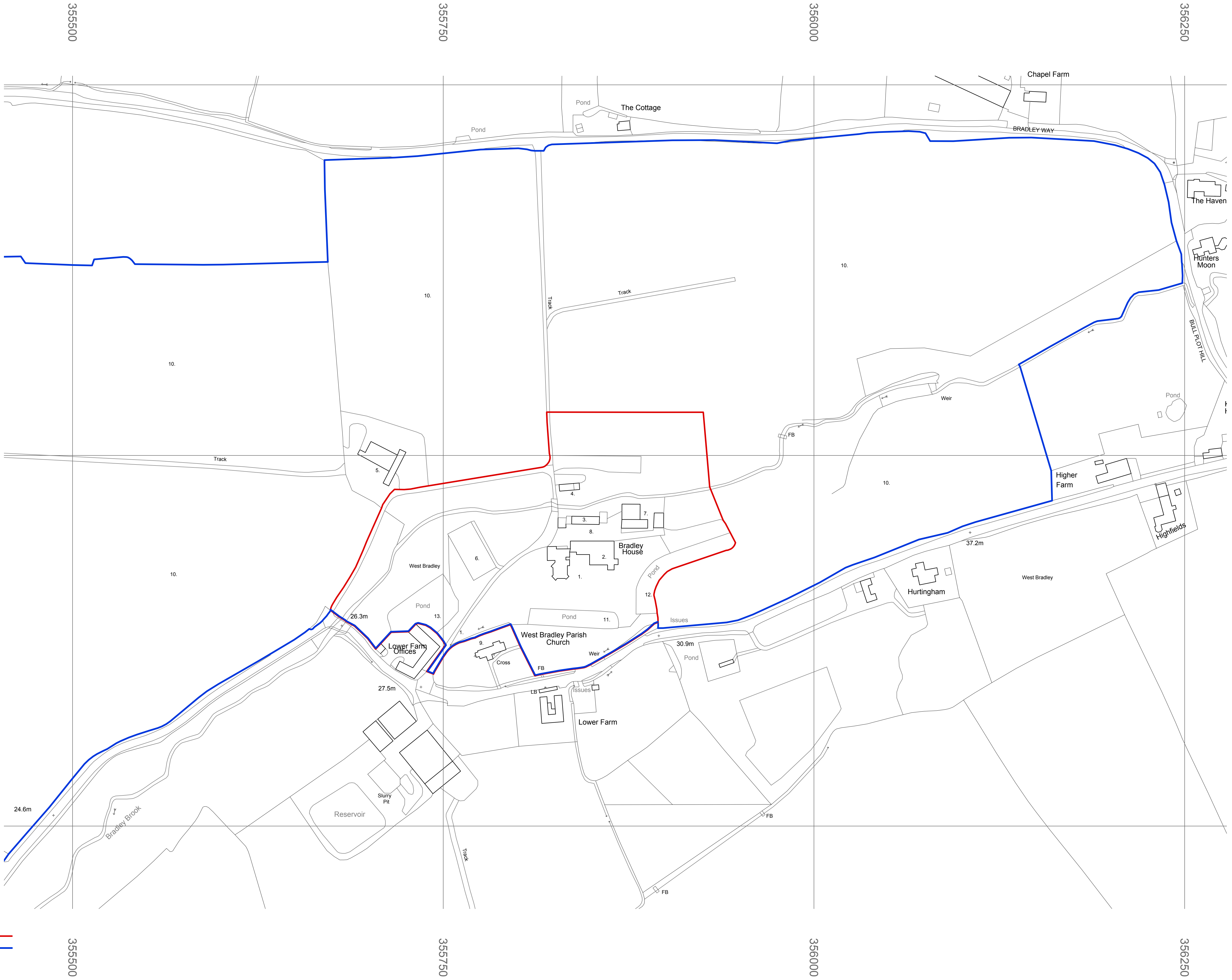
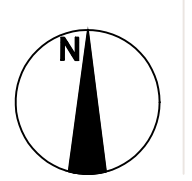
Planning

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Buildings Schedule

- 01 - Main House
- 02 - Apple Barn
- 03 - Cart Shed
- 04 - Red Brick Barn
- 05 - Modern Farmyard
- 06 - Tennis Courts
- 07 - Tractor Sheds
- 08 - Courtyard
- 09 - Parish Church

Gardens

- 10 - Apple Orchards
- 11 - Lower Canal
- 12 - Upper Canal
- 13 - Lower Pond

Application Boundary ——— Red
Ownership Boundary ——— Blue

Location Plan 1250@A1



Appendix 2: Historic Map extracts from Heritage Appraisal

WEST BRADLEY HOUSE.

OUTBUILDINGS.

BACKGROUND.

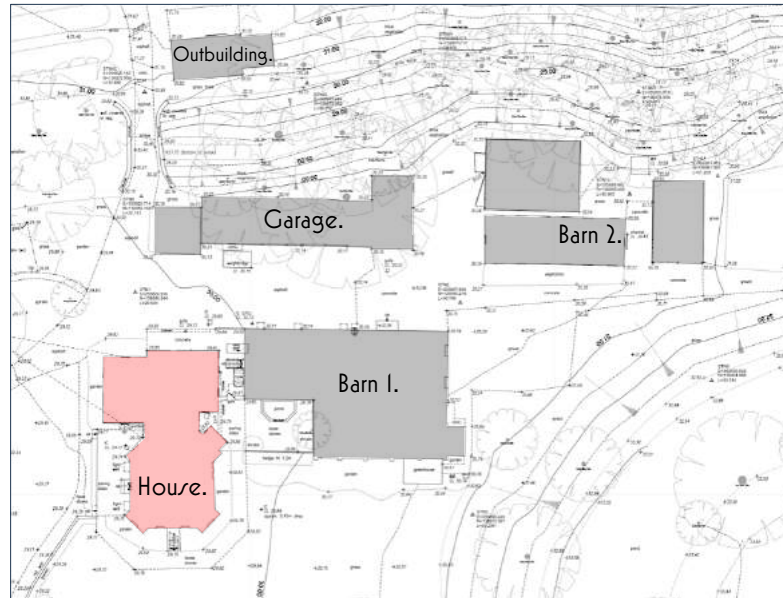


Figure 113 Current site plan.

- 5.113 There are a number of outbuildings to the north & east of the house, which fall within its setting & potentially its curtilage.
- 5.114 Map regression shows that the small Outbuilding to the north, on the further side of the stream, is the oldest, being the only one depicted in the 1885-6 O.S. map.



Figure 114 1840s tithe map.

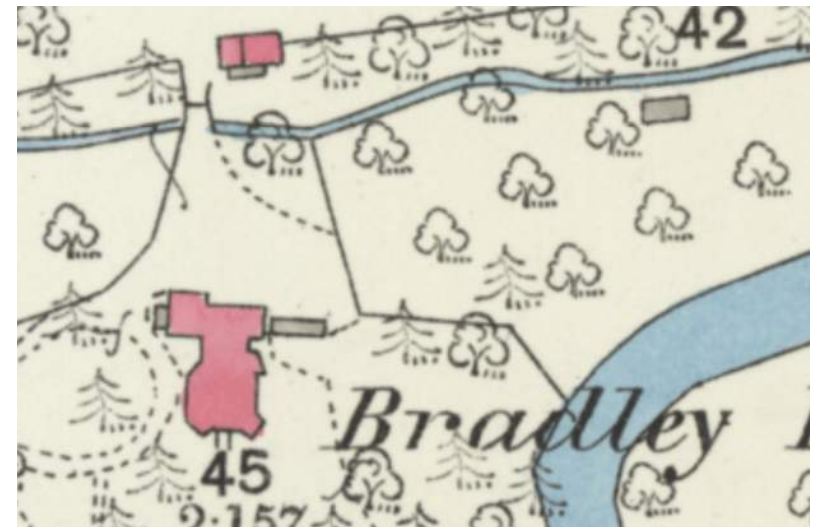


Figure 115 1885-6, 1:25" Ordnance Survey map.

WEST BRADLEY HOUSE.

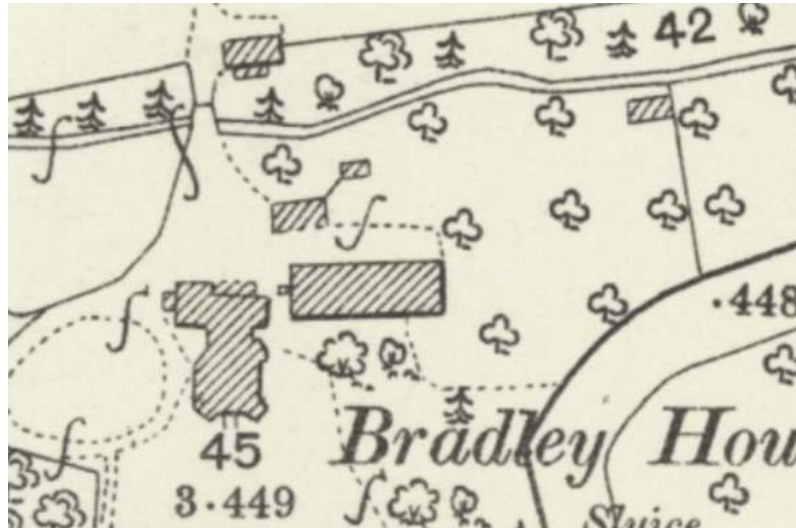


Figure 116 1902-4, 1:25" Ordnance Survey map.

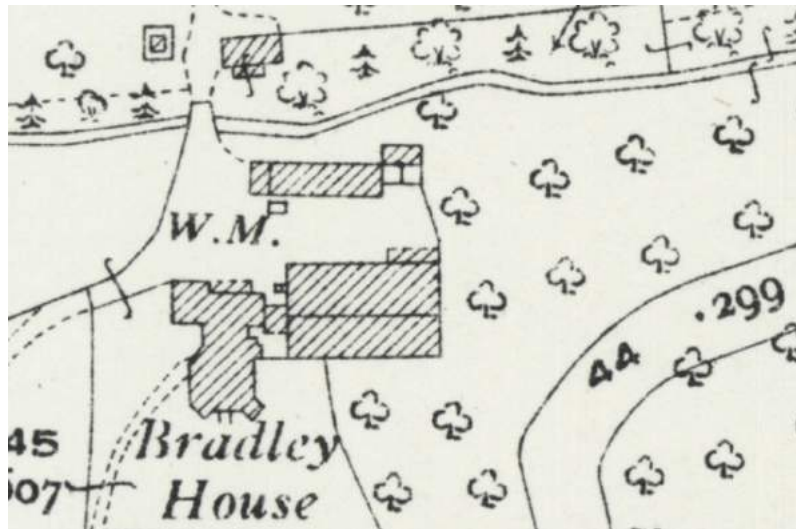


Figure 117 1921-43, 1:25" Ordnance Survey map.



Figure 118 1962, 1:10,000

- 5.115 The northern range of Barn 1 had appeared by the time of the 1902-4 map; a small structure has also appeared upon the site of the Garage, but its orientation appears to differ from the Garage, by which it appears likely to have replaced.
- 5.116 The Garage, in its current orientation, had appeared by the time of the 1921-43 map, as had an additional parallel range on the south side of Barn 1.
- 5.117 The 1962 map confirms that Barn 2 had not appeared by this date, & is thus entirely modern, & too recent to be considered curtilage.