

Bepton New Barn/New Farm

Location

This is the site of a small ruined dwelling surrounded by a wall which is marked on the current ordnance survey maps as a ruin at NGR 849168 within Newfarm plantation. It is located immediately south of the ridgeline of the South Downs Way close to Bepton and Cocking Down. It lies within the Cowdray estate and is surrounded, to the east, west and south by the mainly conifer plantations of Linchball Wood, Venus Wood and West Dean Woods. It lay near the southern boundary of Bepton parish.

Geology and topography

The 'farm site' and the nearby woodland plantations are on the Seaford Chalk Member which consists of white chalk with flints. The remains of the buildings are sited at the beginning of the left fork of a dry valley which, at this point is very steep sided and totally encloses the site tightly. The dry valley is very obvious on the lidar image and shows as a dark shadow.

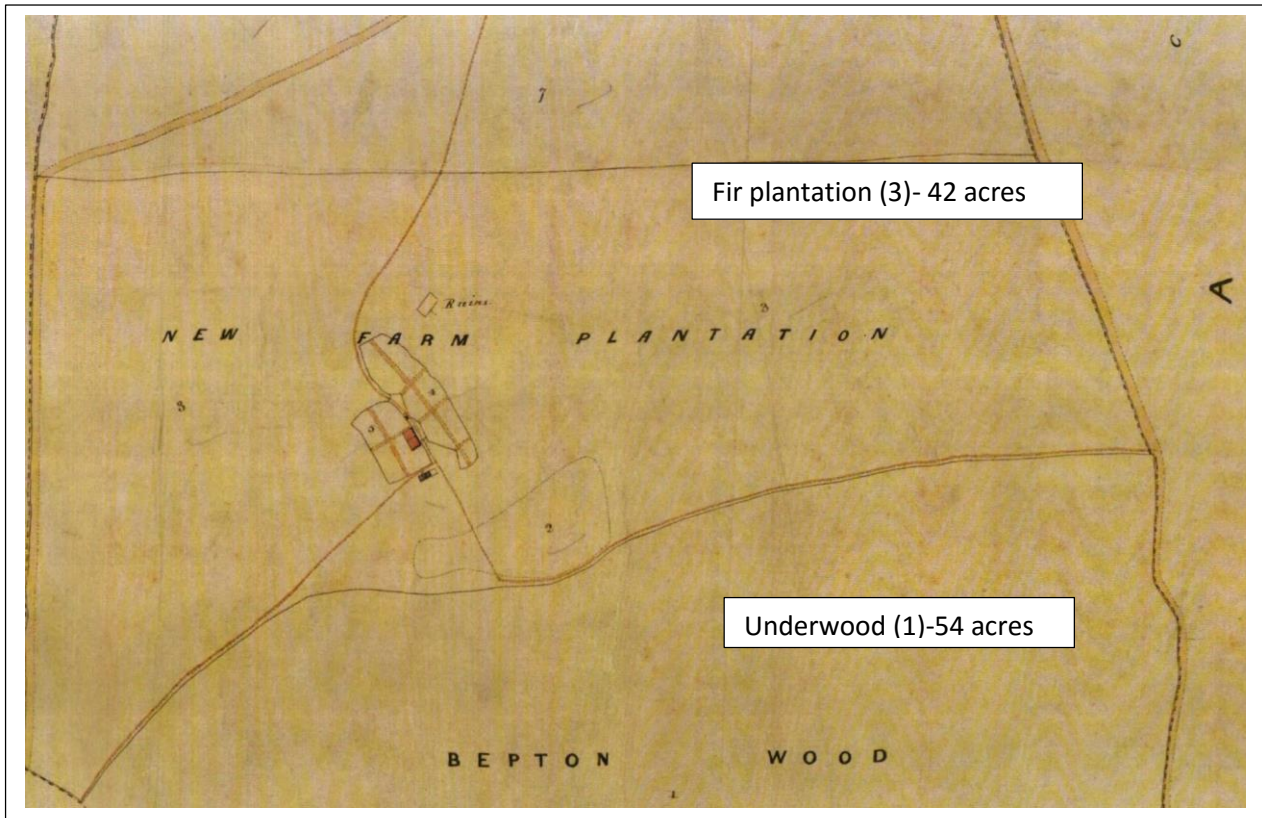
Historical Background

The first known historical resource about the New Farm buildings comes from a document in the Cowdray archives which is a measurement of Bepton New Farm, in the occupation of Robert Underwood, owned by William Stephen Poyntz Esq., giving a total acreage of land on Bepton Down, and names and acreage of three fields on Linch Down (in the former part of Linch, now in Bepton. It is dated March 1799 and May 1800 (*Cowdray Mss 1840*).

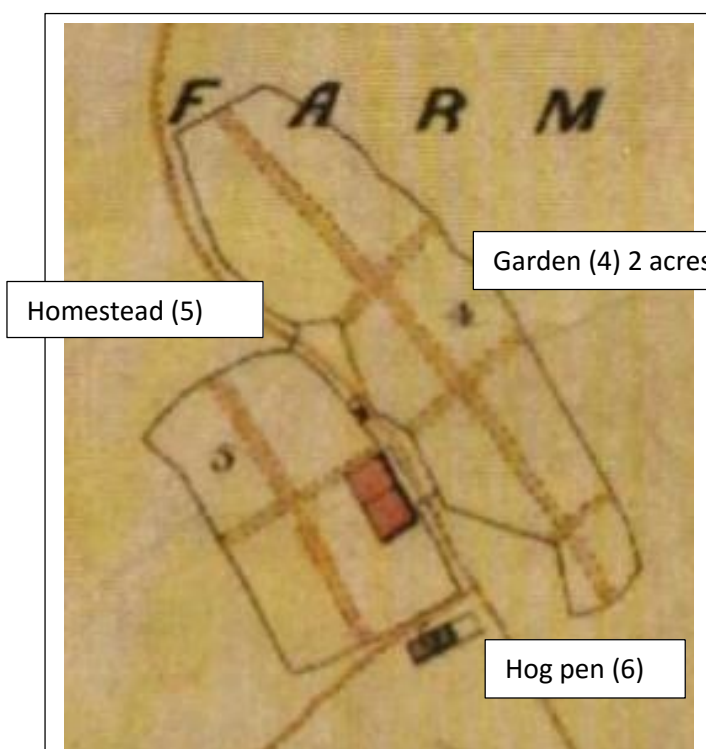
Measurement of Bepton new Farm in the occupation of Underwood belonging to Willm Stephen Poyntz Esq.

	Aable			Waste		
	A	R	P	A	R	P
On Bepton Down	41	3	30	0	0	0
House, Gate, Road, & Hedges	0	0	0	2	1	4
On Linch Down						
Bottom Field	2	2	2	0	0	9
Middle Field	6	1	15	0	0	32
Long Field	11	0	39	0	1	25
	62	0	6	2	3	30
	2	3	30			
Total in Statute Measure	64	3	36			

Unfortunately, no map has survived but the document mentions a house, gate and hedges on Linch Down followed by field names which describe their location as in Bottom Field, Middle Field and Long Field. However, the Tithe Map for Bepton shows the layout of the farm and its accompanying fields.



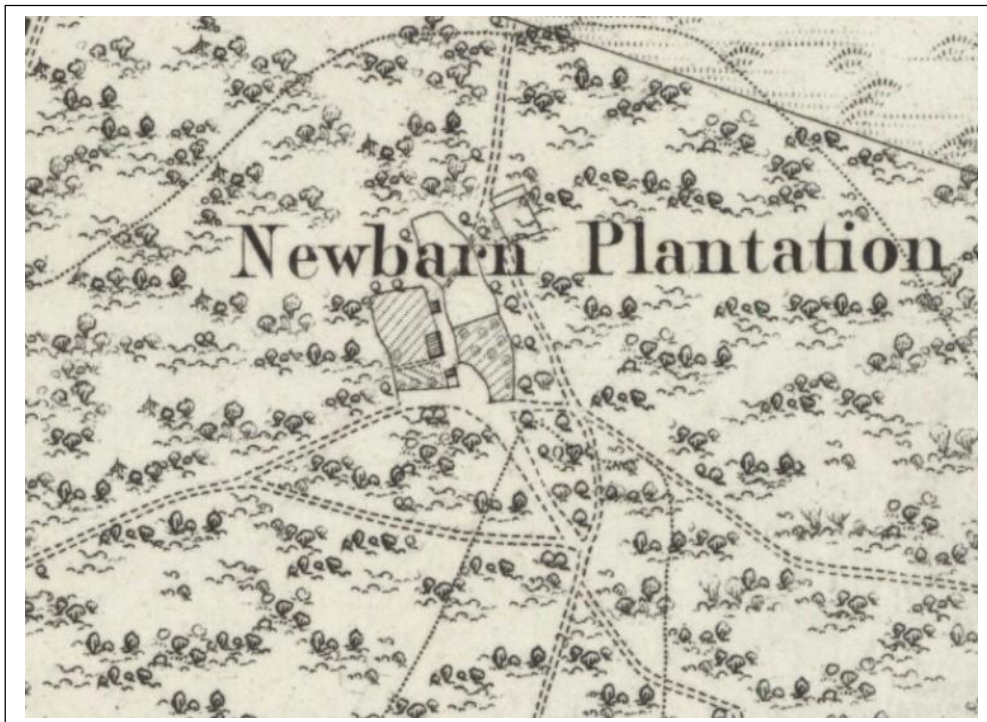
Bepton Tithe Map TDW11 surveyed 1838



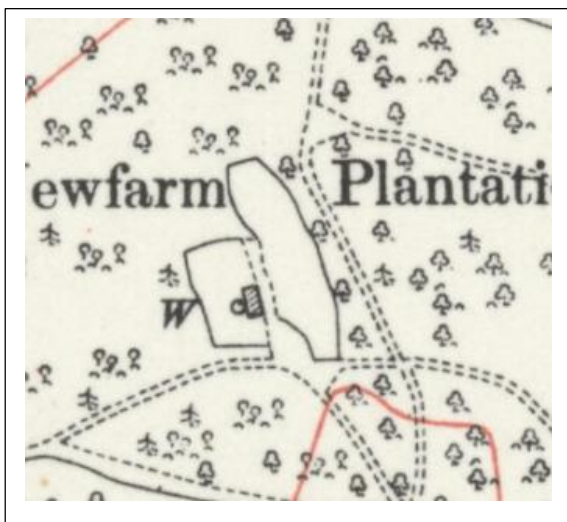
In the accompanying tithe apportionment, it records the owner and occupier as being William Stephen Poyntz, the same owner as in 1799. However, William Stephen Poyntz married the heiress to the Cowdray Estate in 1794 and was a Whig member of Parliament for various constituencies between 1800 and 1837. He was unlikely to be living in a cottage (5), with a hog pen (6) in the woods. Plot 4 was described as a garden with the rest of the land used a fir plantation and underwood. There were 54 acres of underwood and 42 acres of Fir Plantation with no arable or pasture lands whilst it was called new Farm plantation.

Later Maps

In 1874 the footprint of the building has little changed but the mapping gives good detail of the manged landscape immediately adjacent to the cottage. It shows a small roughly square building to the north-east which did not figure on the earlier tithe map. However, it should be noted that the plantation is called Newbarn and not Newfarm.

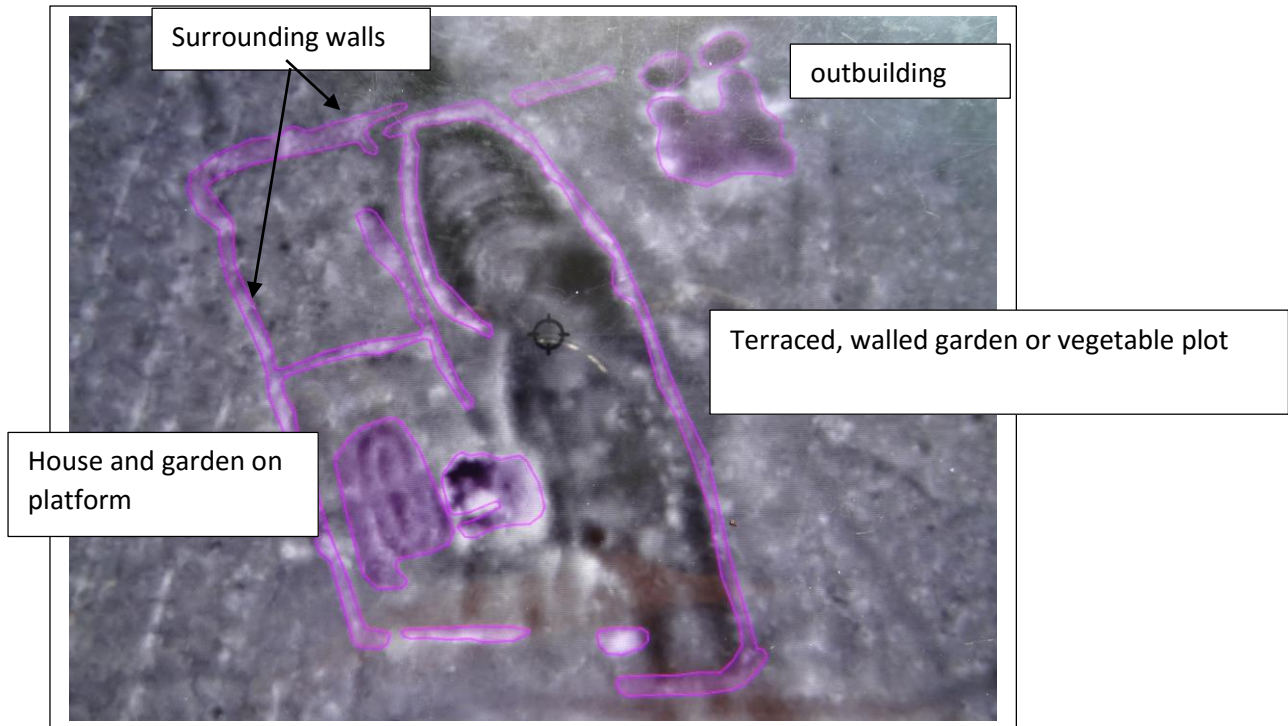


By 1896 the site appears to have been shrunk but possibly also mapped in less detail although a well is now shown to the rear of the cottage. In 1910 the hog pen and building to the north-east are no longer mapped, neither is there any detail within the garden. The plantation name has reverted to Newfarm.



Field work 17th February 2016

A screen shot taken from the field tablet of the LRM image, showing the NMP mapping shows there to be reasonable survival of this cottage in the woods, it can hardly be described as a farm in this location. It shows a wall surrounding the property to the north and west sides which was not shown on the historic maps. Otherwise the remaining footprint shows a remarkable similarity to the historic mapping including the remains of the outbuilding to the north-east.



On the ground a rough built flint wall survives, partially enclosing the property, in some places, to about a metre high, but generally lower, and is built against the sloping ground to the west and north which is not depicted on any of the maps. A curving wall to the east, part of the garden completes the enclosure on the eastern side. The cottage and adjacent garden were built up on raised platform.



The terracing within in this garden plot reflects the sloping nature of this ground and terracing is clearly visible, making small, up 1 to 1.5-metre-wide beds across the slope. Clearly a great deal of effort went into making this working plot surrounded by plantation and underwood.



Terracing in plot 4 (Tithe)

It was not possible to see whether any of the paths had survived, nor was the well located. Within plot five there was further evidence of a garden layout surviving, both in the lidar image and on the ground. Another possible survival from the time when this plot was a cared for garden were the snowdrops that were blooming in mid-February and emerging leaves promising a later show of daffodils. These were on a bank to the front of the cottage where standing walls survive.



Conclusion

From evidence on the ground and past mapping this 'homestead' or 'cottage within the woods' is somewhat of an enigma. Within the wider landscape of the early maps it is surrounded by the plantations of Linch Ball Wood, West Dean Wood, Bepton and Venus Wood in which there are no other dwellings. Someone had gone to considerable trouble to enclose the 2-acre house and garden plot with a flint wall, perhaps to keep deer and rabbits from entering what might have been a productive vegetable plot and garden. Lines of small terraces crossed within the garden boundaries from roughly east to west providing a series of narrow stepped beds. However, as elsewhere within the plantations, the soil was a thin chalky soil with flints. There cannot have been an abundance of natural light toward the back of the property, sited as it is at the top of the dry valley with plantations on three sides.

From the evidence presented in both the document of 1799 and from tithe apportionment details this was cannot have been a farm as it had no arable or pasture land and it seems unlikely that a cottage was built to manage the 100 acres of plantation and underwood, so its actual reason for being built in this location will remain a mystery.

Whilst the well was not located during the field work it is marked on maps, to the rear of the house, so the property and garden had its own water supply. Though if this supply had later failed it might have been a reason for the demise of the property. Below the house the dry valley flattens out and becomes less obvious and wider and is best represented in the lidar images. A forestry track runs down the length of this dry valley and on the eastern side were found a number of saw pits, testament to past management of these woods.

Sources

BGS Chichester/Bognor Sheet 317/332

West Sussex Record Office Cowdray Mss 1840 Bepton New Farm

West Sussex Record Office Bepton Tithe and Apportionment TWD11 Surveyed 1838

Historic Maps 1874, 1896 and 1910 <http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales/>

Sussex XXX1V (includes: Bepton; Cocking; Treyford; West Dean.)

Photograph of field tablet LRM image with NMP mapping (Secret of the High Woods)

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/poyntz-william-stephen-1770-1840>