

## = Dovecot at Blackford Farm =

The Dovecot At Blackford Farm in Selworthy on Exmoor within the English county of Somerset was probably built in the 11th century . It is a Grade II \* listed building , and scheduled monument .

The cylindrical stone dovecote has a cone shaped roof . It contains over 300 nest boxes . The pigeons would have been domesticated for food , possibly by Montacute Priory or by the local lord of the manor . It is now owned by the National Trust and used as a store for the neighbouring farm .

## = = History = =

The earliest written record of the dovecote was in 1393 although the exact date of construction is not known . It was attached to a mansion house which burnt down in 1875 . The manor previously belonged to Montacute Priory , a Cluniac priory of the Benedictine order , founded between 1078 and 1102 although it is not known if the construction of the dovecote was undertaken by the priory or the Lovel family who later held the manor . Pigeons and doves were an important food source historically kept for their eggs , flesh ( squab ) , and dung .

The dovecote which forms part of the property of the Holnicote Estate , was donated to the National Trust by Sir Richard Thomas Dyke Acland , 15th Baronet in 1944 . It was scheduled as an ancient monument in 1949 and designated as a Grade II \* listed building in 1969 . Repairs were undertaken to the dovecote in 1993 . The building is used as a store by the neighbouring farmer .

## = = Architecture = =

The building is cylindrical with an external diameter of 23 feet 6 inches ( 7 @. @ 16 m ) and is 15 feet ( 4 @. @ 6 m ) high to the eaves . The walls , which are 4 feet ( 1 @. @ 2 m ) thick , are built of Devonian sandstone . The doorway was widened to its current height of 6 feet 3 inches ( 1 @. @ 91 m ) high and 3 feet 6 inches ( 1 @. @ 07 m ) wide in the 19th century replacing a much smaller door which would have been present when it was used as a dovecote .

It contains over 300 nest holes . These are arranged into 11 tiers with an irregular pattern . Each of the boxes is approximately 11 inches ( 280 mm ) wide and 20 inches ( 510 mm ) wide but the opening is smaller than the interior of the box . The lowest boxes are about 2 feet 6 inches ( 0 @. @ 76 m ) above the earth floor which kept them above the damp and away from brown rats which became common in the area in the 18th century .

The original hole in the roof for the entry of the pigeons was covered by a flat stone and is now covered with glass to keep the interior dry . The interior of the roof has putlog holes rather than nesting boxes but may also have been used by pigeons .