



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological building record of a
Listed former barn at Knuston Home Farm,
Knuston, Northamptonshire**

Knuston Home Farm Barn

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORD OF A LISTED FORMER BARN, KNUSTON HOME FARM, KNUSTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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Summary

A stone, Grade II-listed former threshing barn at Knuston Home Farm originates in the middle decades of the 18th century. It was little-altered and became the centre of a complex of buildings, almost all of which were lost after c1970. The barn is architecturally very plain, and alterations made to the large entrance doorways previously may have made the walls of the long axes unstable.

Introduction and background

Knuston Home Farm is a diversified farming complex which lies between Irchester and Rushden, near Wellingborough, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 93750 66351). The former threshing barn which is the subject of this report now lies amidst a variety of industrial units and storage buildings which have replaced the farming functions of the complex one by one within a period of approximately 30-40 years.

Associated with the nearby listed Home Farm Farmhouse, the barn is a Grade II Listed Building for its group value. The official English Heritage listing is as follows:

IRCHESTER ROAD

SP96NW (North side)

Knuston
GVII

Barn. Early C18. Regular coursed limestone and ironstone with corrugated metal roof. Single-unit 3-bay barn with central cart entrances under wood lintels, that to east elevation has been modified. Ashlar gable parapets and kneelers and C19 owl holes. Roof structure retains original trusses and purlins. Included for group value.

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Fig 1: The barn north-east/north wall and addition to right. Limewash on the left denotes a former adjoining building



Fig 2: The barn south-west/west wall, a modern lean-to removed, enabling a clearer view

Historical background, maps and plans

Knuston comprises the remains of a hamlet which can be traced to Domesday (1086), when it was called Cnutestone or Cnut's Farm, a name which implies Danish influence (Brown and Taylor 1975). However in the early post-Norman Conquest period the hamlet was dependent upon nearby Irchester, of which it was a component chapelry.

Of the hamlet of Knuston, little remains today, the settlement having been deserted, possibly because of private land inclosure long before the majority of land in the area was enclosed by

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parliamentary act in 1769 (Hall 1995, 299-300; NRO: YZ 8037; NRO: Map 832). When Irchester was inclosed in 1773, documents infer that Knuston had been depopulated long before. Irchester and Knuston remained separate, discernible settlements in documents as late as 1432 (ibid).

In 1970 the earthworks of the former Knuston hamlet were surveyed and the results published (Brown and Taylor 1975, 178-98; RCHME 1979, 96-7, figs 92, 93, pl 22). The earthworks lie north-east of the present barn at SP 938 662 at about 60m above Ordnance Datum (Fig 3, after Brown and Taylor). Some to the south were lost when the present main road was put in at about that date.

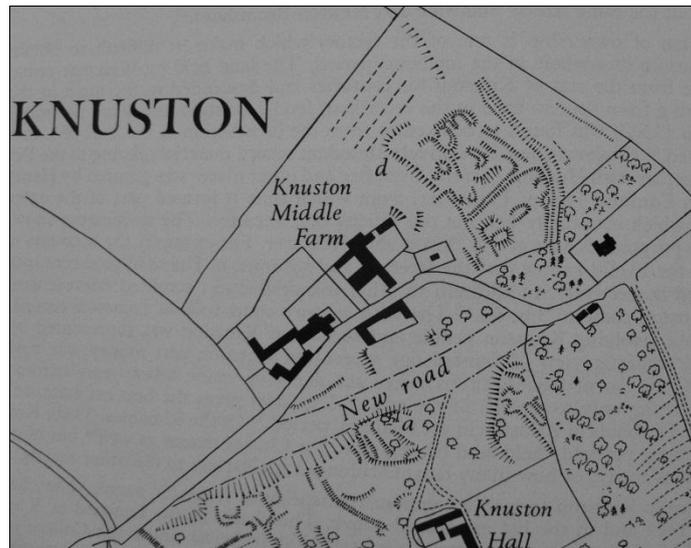


Fig 3. Home (Middle) farm and DMV earthworks surveyed in 1970. The listed barn lies at the centre of the central group

The medieval history of the former hamlet, what became the Deserted Medieval Village of Knuston has been set out by the County Historian John Bridges, writing in the 1720s (1791, II: 182-3). It has also been summarised in the Victoria County History (Salzman 1937, 22-3).

The earliest map on which the barn appears is that of 1769 indicating that it either pre-dates Inclosure or was put up in order to meet agricultural demands anticipated at Inclosure. However, its form is unlikely to be much earlier. It is likely to have been built for Harvey Sparkes, who bought up most of the land in Knuston hamlet in the early 18th century and whose majority-ownership facilitated the process of wholesale Inclosure (Brown and Taylor 1975, 191).

Unchanged for a while thereafter, the best early map which shows the barn very clearly is that of 1791, drawn to depict a variety of nearby land transactions on an adjacent estate (NRO Map YZ 8056). Neither the barn nor the farm is named but the barn is very clearly the biggest building of its group (Fig 4).

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Fig 4: Map of 1791. The barn is the largest building just to the right of the number '17'

The barn appears on all the Ordnance Survey editions from the First Edition (1880s) onwards and by the time of that first OS map, it had already acquired a variety of accretions and lean-tos which obscure it from view, exacerbated by a small scale of 1:10,560. They are not reproduced here (cf Fig 3, which shows the group before subsequent losses). There is no indication of what all these may have been used for, and there is very little on the outside of the building, but for patches of lime-wash (Fig 1) to indicate how or where they were attached. Subsequent OS editions show that this configuration changed somewhat during the 20th century up to about 1970 when it had reached its greatest extent. For much of that time, the farm name was Knuston Middle Farm, not Home Farm.

Fig 5 shows the remaining accretions which survived to 2012 with their approximate dates.

Building record

The barn is a simple rectangle, roughly aligned east-west onto which have been added modern buildings at the south and south west, with an older accretion on the north and an added but truncated wall on the west.

The barn interior measures 18.255m long (59.89 feet). In width its long axes have bowed very slightly so that in the northern half it measures 6.399m across (20.99 feet) and in the southern half it measures 6.449m across (21.15 feet). It thus seems to have been conceived on a simple plan of proportions 3:1 (60 x 20 feet). It contains very little architectural or structural detailing.

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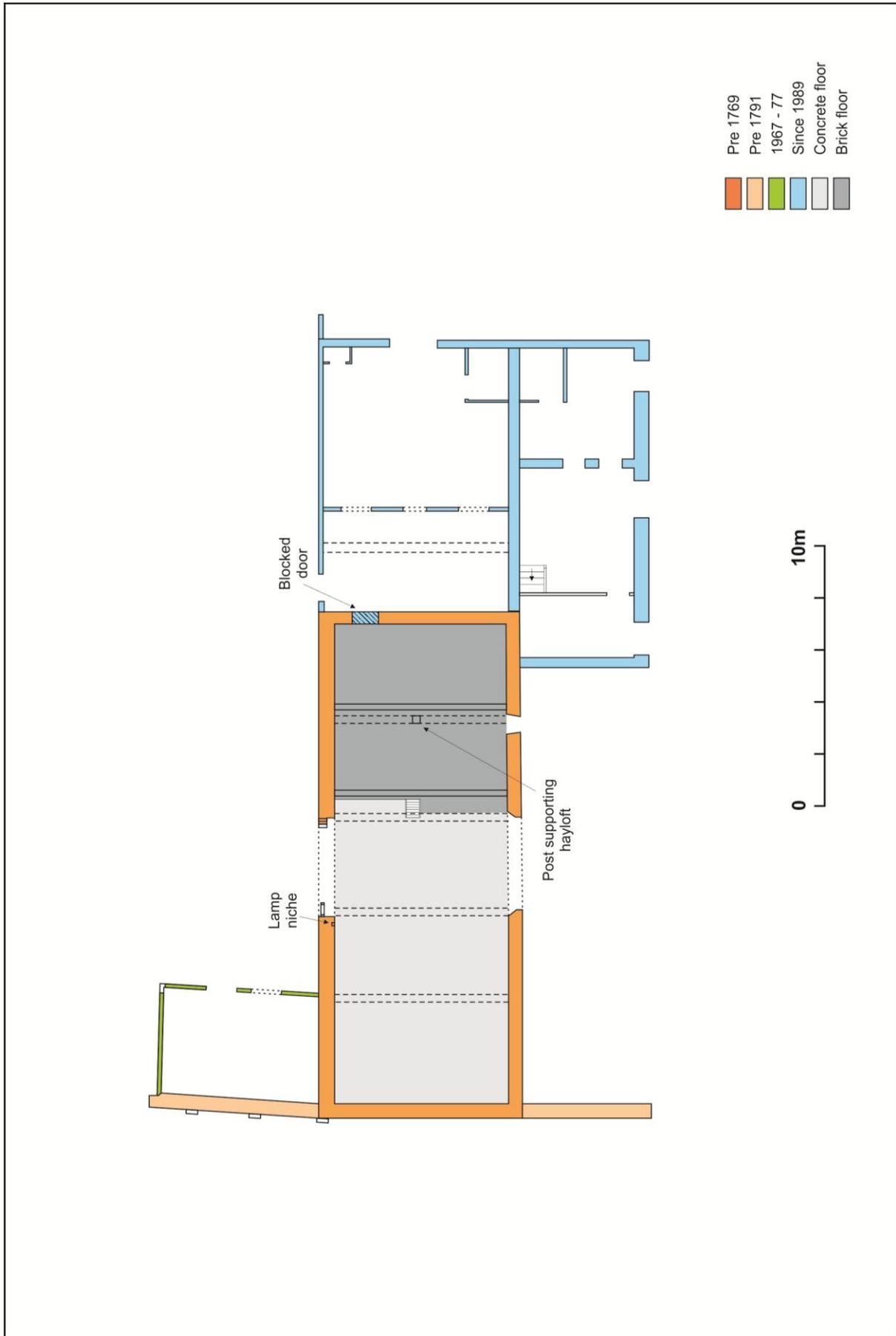


Fig 5: Plan of the barn with accretions in 2012

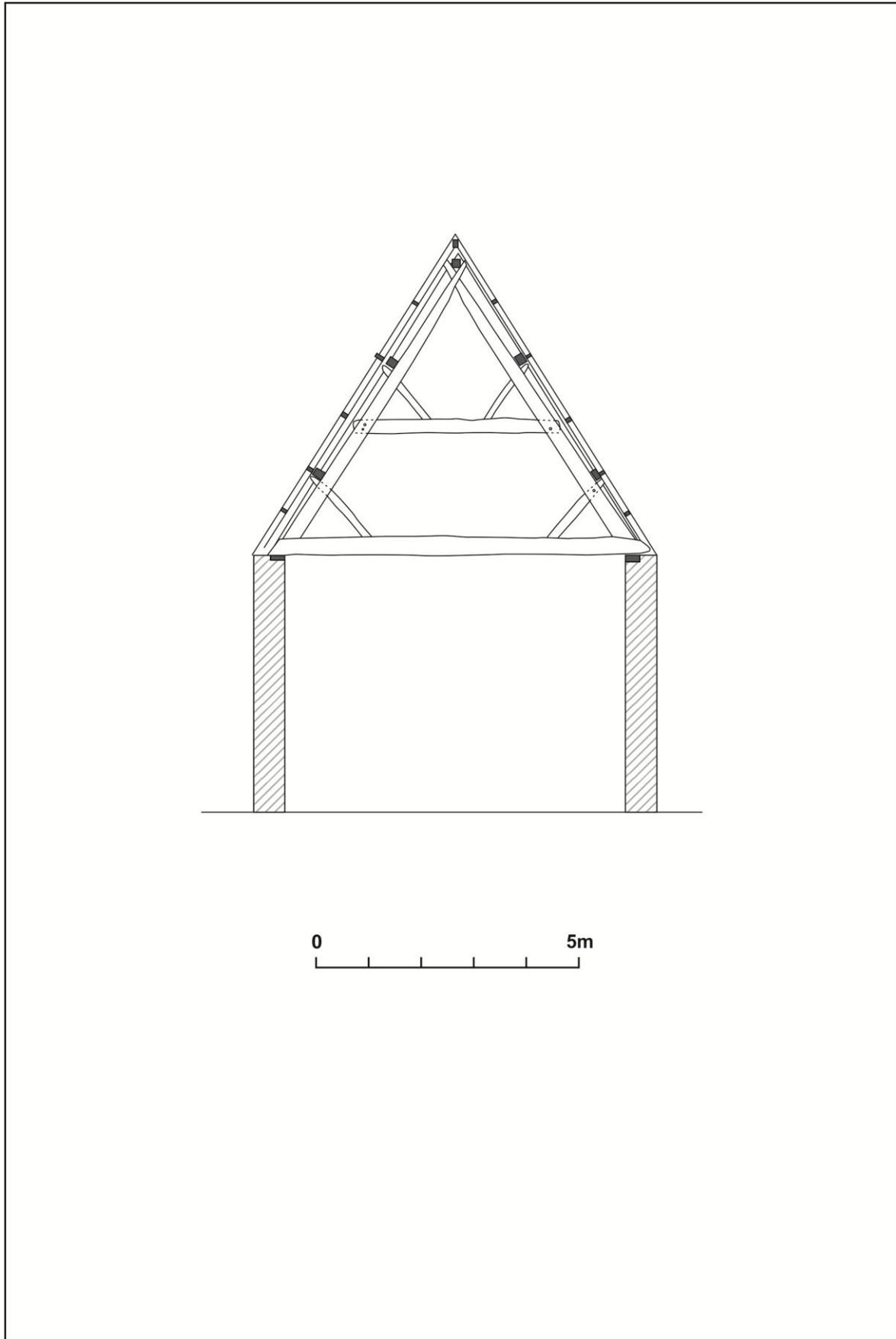


Fig 6: Measured section through the barn

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The walls are of roughly coursed, squared local limestone, with occasional blocks of Northampton Sand with Ironstone, especially for the stressed quoins. The walls are 600mm thick (2 feet).

The roof comprises five bays of oak trusses with tie beam and collar at the mid-point, both with raking struts angled to the principal rafters (Figs 6-8). Two sets of back purlins rest on the upper side of the principals, wedged on the ends of the threaded raking struts. At the apex there is a ridge purlin lying where the ends of the principals cross over each-other.



Fig 7: Interior view towards hayloft



Fig 8: Interior view from hayloft

The height at the underside of the oak tie beams is c5.0m (16.4 feet), while the apex is c11.2m (36.75 feet) from the final floor, which is partly of concrete (about 60% of the area) and, under a hayloft, mainly of brick (about 40% of the total area).

The present roof covering is corrugated iron, but the original on the steep roof angle may have been thatch. This is a very high barn in an exposed position and clay peg tiles would have needed a lot of maintenance and replacements in high winds.

At the south-east end is the 20th-century, inserted hay-loft (Fig 7). This was supported upon a single central post (Fig 9). Just inside the north-easterly main door there is a lamp niche in the body of the wall (Fig 10).

The two main doorways, central in the opposed long walls of the barn, contain no original or early timberwork. Indeed all timber at ground level had been replaced. However, in the uppermost portion of the superstructure is evidence for agricultural change which began in the later 19th century. Above both original doorways the openings had been extended right up to the eaves (Fig 11). Although later filled in with perspex (one side) or timber boarding (the other side), these spaces are probably related to the change from backing in wagons loaded with crops for hand-threshing, to the higher space needed to back in a steam-driven threshing machine, which was generally loaded from on top. On both sides the extended opening was given corners in brick, marking them out from

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the original stone quoins (Fig 12). Taking out these large portions of stonework at the midpoints of the building seems to have had a deleterious effect on the stability of the walls of the long axes. There is very slight bowing observed, which may have been arrested by the attachment of iron straps through the walls, fixing the outer surfaces to the tie-beams of the roof structure (Fig 15).



Fig 9: Post supporting the hayloft (Scale 1m)



Fig 10: Lamp niche by doorway

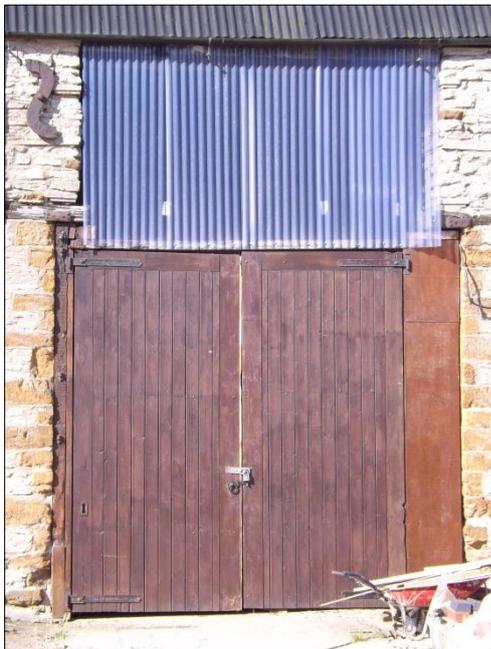


Fig 11: Extended door reveal

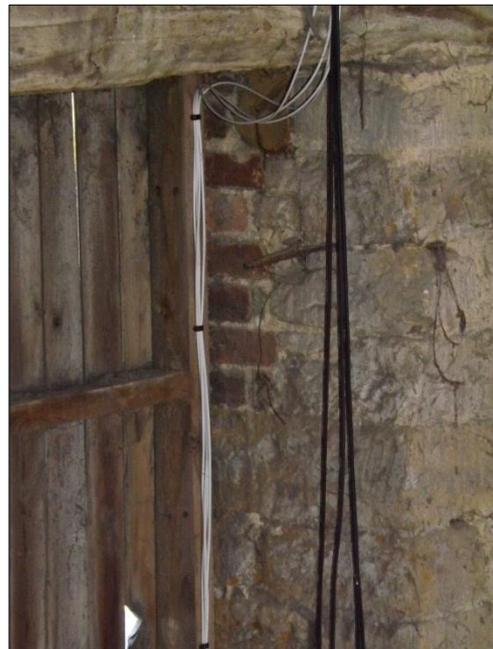


Fig.12: Brick quoins on extended reveal

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High in both gables are owl holes (Figs 13 and 14). At the south-east the hole is a simple opening, while that on the opposite gable comprises a bull's eye in brick with an insert of stone.



Fig 13: Owl hole in brick



Fig 14: Owl hole in stone



Fig 15: One of the iron bolts and straps fixing the wall to the tie beams

Onto the north-eastern corner of the main barn has been attached a stone wall off which lies a timber and block-work stable/store building of two bays (Figs 5, 16 and 17). While the stone rear wall is of indeterminate age, it probably was there as early as 1791. It has subsequently been buttressed in brick, the block-work and timber, which includes reused railway sleepers, is probably dated to the period between 1967 and 1977, on the basis of its first depiction on OS maps of those dates.

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Fig 16: The added stable/store



Fig.17: The stable/store interior roof truss

The office-extensions to the south/ south-eastern end of the barn are all brick and blockwork, and of one or two storeys. They are largely cement rendered, and are of modern build. A doorway through into the barn has been blocked up in relation to their use and a window, put through the south-western aspect of the barn, is probably of the same period, lighting the dim space beneath the hayloft.

Conclusions

This cavernous threshing barn was probably built around 1769 and its surviving walls and roof structure have been little altered. Otherwise it became the core of a complex of ever-changing buildings serving Home Farm, at their greatest extent when mapped in 1970. However, it seems always to have been extremely plain and lacked detail which marked it out as anything but ordinary. Alterations to the doorways, probably in relation to advances in farm-machinery, may have had a deleterious effect on the structure, forcing iron strapping to be put in to steady the walls. From the 19th century, a complex of farm buildings grew up around the barn but almost all have been lost since 1970.

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September 2012