Historic building recording at Langabeer Farm, Alcester Farm, Wythall, Worcestershire

Martin Cook BA MIfA

10th January 2014 Revised 13th February 2014

WSM 49806

The School House Church Lane Tardebigge Worcestershire B60 3AH

07850 918755

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Introduction

Historic building recording of a building known as Langabeer Farm at Alcester Farm, Wythall, Worcestershire (SP 0799 7463; Fig 1) was undertaken at the request of Mr Edward Walden according to a written scheme of investigation provided by Martin Cook BA MIfA and approved by Aisling Nash, archaeological planning officer for Redditch and Bromsgrove, of Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service.

The project was undertaken in advance of the proposed demolition of the building.

The documentary material

Documentary research at the Worcestershire County Record Office took place on the 25th October 2013 and a search of the Historic Environment Record was received on the 22nd October 2013. Only an inadequate transcription of the King's Norton tithe map is held at either of the above locations (few buildings are shown) and a request was made to the Birmingham Archives on 9th November 2013 regarding its availability in their collections. An affirmative response was received on the 7th January 2014 and a visit was paid to the Birmingham Record Office on 8th January 2014.

Historic mapping

The earliest available map was the King's Norton tithe map of 1840 (BDR TM 1/2; Fig 2.1). The image is indistinct and may be stylized but appears to show the three principal elements of domestic accommodation, together with the north-eastern extension to the original cottage, identified as Phases 1 to 4 inclusive below. Editions 1 to 3 of the Ordnance Survey mapping cannot be reproduced for reasons of copyright. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884-1888 shows that by this date the agricultural buildings to the east had been added (Phase 5 below). No significant changes are shown on the 2nd edition of 1904 but the 3rd edition of 1918 shows additional agricultural buildings to the south-east. The 4th edition Ordnance Survey map of 1938 (Fig 2.2) shows further agricultural buildings on the south-eastern side of the complex.

The Worcestershire Historic Environment Record

An HER search was carried out on a 500m search area around the proposed development. In the immediate vicinity of Langabeer Farm the following historic buildings are recorded:

At Tanners Green Farm, Wythall (WSM 11076) is a timber framed building of the 17th century AD and there is a coach house and stable (WSM 30637)at The Coach House, Inkford Lodge Farm Alcester Road, Wythall, both of post medieval date. Finally, there is a 19th century stable and a 19th granary (WSM 44770) at Tanners Green Farm, Wythall.

Information from the client

King's Norton Co	ensus of 1841	
Name	Age	Profession
Daniel Moore	45	independent n
Sarah Moore	35	
Amelia James	20	
Mary Griffin	15	
Jane Caswell	12	
Maria Busby	20	independent n
-		-

Relationship

head

wife

King's Norton Census of 1851

Name	Age
Daniel Moore	62
Sarah Moore	49
Ann Matilda Newbold	22
Mary Louisa Merry	20

means

means

Profession gentleman school mistress teacher teacher

Caroline Neale	18	house servant
Thomas Garrett	16	servant
Ann Lee	13	scholar
Ellen Griffiths	12	scholar
Joseph Griffiths	10	scholar
John Chas Wyatt	8	scholar
Samuel Hale	9	scholar
Edwin Laurence	9	scholar
Edward Suckling	7	scholar
John Page	7	scholar
Theodore Pratt	7	scholar

Birmingham Gazette; edition of 21st July 1856 An advertisement taken out in the above newspaper reads:

> Wythwood Villa Wythwood Heath Eight miles from Birmingham ESTABLISHMENT FOR YOUNG LADIES Mrs Moore begs to inform her friends and the public that the duties of her school will be resumed this present Monday July 21st

King's Norton Census of	f 1861		
Daniel Moore	42	head	gentleman
Annie Frances Moore	40	wife	school mistress
Louisa Busby	11		boarder
Georgina Scruton	11		boarder
Victor(ia) Scruton	5		boarder
Louisa London	10		boarder
Elizabeth Haydon	10		boarder
Martha Harris	19		servant

Birmingham Gazette; edition of 20th August 1864 An advertisement taken out in the above newspaper reads:

> IMPORTANT SALE AT WYTHWOOD VILLA About seven miles on the Birmingham and Alcester Road, and one mile from Inkford Brook CATALOGUE OF THE MODERN AND SUPERIOR HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

Comprising four post, French, Tent and other Bedsteads, with damask and white dimity furniture, five capital Feather Beds, Blankets and Counterpanes, mahogany Chest of Drawers, Carpets, Toilet services, Tables, Washing Stands and Dressing Tables, Chairs and useful Chamber Appendages, splendid mahogany Sideboard, marble top, mahogany Chairs, massive mahogany Dining and Loo Tables, fine old OIL PAINTINGS, PIANO-FORTE in mahogany case (by Tolkein of London), valuable Carpets, China, Breakfast and Dinner Services, Cut Glassware, Plated Articles, Clock, Kitchen Requisites, Brewing Utensils, handsome four-wheel Pony Basket Carriage, set

of Harness and other useful effects.

WHICH WILL BE SOLD BY AUCTION By Mr J B Phillips on Wednesday the 31st day of August inst upon the premises at

Wythwood Villa, by direction of Mrs Moore, who is leaving the place. Sale to commence at Eleven o'clock in the morning

King's Norton Census of	f 1871		
William Busby	51	head	paper maker
Ann Busby	59	wife	no occupation
Louisa Jane Busby	20	daughter	no occupation
Annie Frances Moore	50	border	assistant
Kate Evans	26	servant	domestic servant

Birmingham Daily Post; date unknown

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL STATIONERY AND PAPER HANGINGS WAREHOUSE 88 SMALLBROOK STREET BIRMINGHAM WILLIAM BUSBY (late with Mr R C Tomkinson, Edgbaston Street) RESPECTIVELY announces to the Trade and the Public that he has opened extensive Premises at 88 Smallbrook Street with an entirely new stock of Stationery of every description - The PAPER HANGINGS DEPARTMENT. A liberal allowance the Trade

King's Norton Census of	of 1881		
William Busby	61	head	paper dealer
Mary Busby	53	wife	
Mary Matilda Timms	23	servant	domestic servant

Birmingham Daily Post; edition of 14 February 1893 An advertisement taken out in the above newspaper reads:

WYTHALL - Wythall Villa, country residence: bath room, wc; garden. Moderate rent - Smith and Wilson, Cannon Street

King's Norton Census of 1	911		
William Dennis Richards	38	head	fruit salesman and commission
			agent
Charlotte Richards	39	wife	
Dennis Kirkby Richards	3	son	
Robert Richards	72	father	retired ironmonger
Jane Advent Richards	75	mother	
Charlotte Augusta Davies	21	niece	
Thomas Davies	14	nephew	scholar

Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire 1916 William Dennis Richards Withwood, Inkford, Alvechurch, Birmingham

Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire 1921 William Dennis Richards Withwood, Inkford, Alvechurch, Birmingham

Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire 1924

William Dennis Richards Withwood, Inkford, Alvechurch, Birmingham

The fieldwork General

Fieldwork took place on the 28th October 2013. It comprised a walk-around survey, with asexisting architect's plans and elevations which were annotated with historic information relating to the construction and sequence of development of the building. Photographs were taken as appropriate.

Langabeer Farm - description and commentary

Phase 1 -mid to late 17th century

The earliest surviving phase of construction was a small (two-up, two down), south-east-facing cottage with a privy and cesspit on its north-western side, opposite its rear door (Fig 3.1: ground floor, north-west elevation and south-east elevation; Fig 3.2 first floor). It faced south-east and was built in Flemish garden wall bond (English garden wall bond at the rear) with a red tile roof. The interior (both ground and first floors) comprised two rooms of unequal size. On the ground floor these opened directly off one another (Figs 3.1, 20 and 21); on the first floor a corridor gave access to both rooms off of a stairwell (Figs 3.2, 33 and 34). The stairwell was located in the south-western corner of the cottage (Figs 3.1 and 32). The location of the privy and its associated cesspit is probably contemporary with the cottage, as is suggested by the proximity of the cottage's rear door, but it seems likely that both have been substantially rebuilt. The cesspit is extraordinarily large for such a small building and was probably enlarged to serve a much more substantial establishment.

True cottages were built for humble people such as labourers and those with little or no land. Many were self-build structures, improvised from whatever materials were to hand and any strict classification is impossible (Powell 1996). By the mid-19th century the sanitary conditions of much of the stock of cottages was causing concern to the government (Woodforde 1970). In 1842 the government first fully realized that at least three-quarters of all rural labourers' cottages were slums. Official reports became numerous and all were lists of horrors. Their most important effect was to shame bad landlords and to stimulate voluntary enterprise. The Builder magazine began printing designs for cottages, a service it continued for about forty years.

Although most cottages were little more than shanties, intended to be rebuilt every generation, this is clearly not the case with the example at Langabeer Farm which, even in Phase 1, was a well-found building and was probably the home of a yeoman or husbandman (Cunnington 1980). Typically, the ground floor of cottages was partitioned into two main rooms, one heated and one not, and this is so at Langabeer Farm. Original windows in cottages were few and small. Those at Langabeer Farm are of good size, even by 21st century standards, but later frames have replaced the original windows of the 17th century. Only one room on each floor is heated, in the case of the ground floor this being the kitchen/parlour, the fireplace and chimney being positioned on the northwest elevation. However, it may be that the cottage at Langabeer Farm was an example of those dwellings built in response to the clamour in the mid-19th century against poor quality housing.

Phase 2 – late 17th century

Extensions were built on the north and east of the Phase 1 structure (Fig 3.1; ground floor plan). These comprised a stable and tack room (south-east elevation), built in Flemish garden wall bond, which was somewhat carelessly aligned upon the cottage and an enclosed area to the north, also in Flemish garden wall bond (north-west elevation). The stable (Fig 16) would have provided accommodation for a single horse or two ponies. Since the tack room (Fig 17) has surviving fittings for two animals (saddle trees and harness hooks; Figs 18 and 19) it is clear that the original design was for two animals. These were probably employed, alternately, to pull a two-wheeled trap for the convenience of the inhabitants.

The enclosed area on the northern side of the cottage is difficult to interpret as it was substantially collapsed at the time of the visit (Fig 9). However, since it included widely spaced brick columns with bull-nose bricks on their corners (Fig 3.1; north-west elevation), it is likely that it was originally a shelter shed or an implement store.

The economy of Phases 1 and 2 is unknown, beyond it being a modest agricultural holding with a couple of ponies and possibly a few cattle.

Phase 3 – early 18th century

In Phase 3 the cottage was substantially extended to the south-west, providing additional domestic accommodation.

This accommodation was attached to the south-west wall of the cottage, through which two doors linking the two structures were provided (Fig 3.1: ground floor and Fig 3.2 first floor). The phase 3 structure was built with a diagonal northern corner to accommodate the existing privy which must have continued in use, albeit with an enlarged cess pit. Built in stretcher bond (Figs 3.1; north-west and south-east elevations, 5 and 8), it is possible that the combined structure was re-orientated, the new front entrance now facing the north-west, although this is not certain.

The new domestic accommodation provided (at ground level) a living room with a bay window (Fig 26), a sitting room (Fig 23) and three smaller rooms at the front. The central room was clearly a dairy (Fig 24) and the other two (Figs 22 and 25) were probably of a utilitarian nature. One may have been a study or office. The two eastern-most ground floor rooms originally had windows in the contemporary eastern external wall. At first floor level (Fig 3.2) it seems likely that four additional bedrooms were provided (Figs 35, 36, 37 and 38; the sub-division of one into a bathroom and toilet being a recent change). The only access to the first floor was provided by a spur stair off of the original cottage stair.

The economy of this phase is also unknown. It seems likely that the extension relates to the growing prosperity of the owner and his ability to employ domestic servants who were presumably accommodated in the Phase 1 cottage.

Phase 4 – early to mid 18th century

In Phase 4 a substantial extension was added to the eastern side of the developing complex (Figs 3.1; ground floor plan and 3.2). This is finished in rusticated stucco (grooves imitating masonry courses) over English garden wall bond (Figs 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 4, 5 and 8). At first floor level on the south-west elevation (Figs 3.4 and 4) the windows are symmetrically disposed above a string course. On the ground floor there is a central entrance with a bay window to its north-west. The roof is of hipped form in red tile.

The ground floor was of three unequal bays: an entrance hall, aligned upon the axial passage of Phase 3 and two flanking rooms (Figs 27, 28, 29 and 30). At first floor level the axial passage of Phase 3 was continued onto the Phase 4 landing (Fig 39) and the proportions of the flanking ground floor rooms are reflected at first floor level (Figs 40 and 41).

Little by way of interior features survive. However, the staircase does and it is this that provides the date for this part of the complex. In the early Georgian period balustrades were usually paired upon a tread; later in the period being set in threes (Yorke, 2007). At Langabeer Farm they are paired (Fig 27). In addition the, stair is of the 'cut-string' variety (the treads projecting slightly; Cunnington 1980). These two elements suggest that Phase 4 at Langabeer Farm dates to the early to mid 18th century.

This phase is the only one to have a cellar (Figs 3.3 and 31). The absence of the suspended floor over this part of the Phase 4 structure made photography somewhat easier. The floor of the cellar was formed of brick setts and it was sub-divided to provide storage for coal at its northern end (where there was a chute) and, presumably, for foodstuffs in its southern (where a plinth was provided for this purpose).

The economy of the early use of this phase is still unknown. However, by the time of the King's Norton tithe map (1840; Fig 2.1) it is clear that there are few, if any farm buildings. It seems that by this time farming on the site had ceased and it had become the home of a gentleman, his family and servants (King's Norton census: 1841). Ten years later it had become a school. This endured until 1864 when the *Birmingham Gazette* recorded a sale of goods at Wythwood Villa.

The typical layout and use of the Georgian house

The plan of the smaller Georgian house was largely standardized and this provides clues to the way in which modest houses were occupied (Cruickshank nd). Compact plans included miniature openwell stairs, modest newel staircases and dog-leg stairs. The plan of the house itself had also reached a standard form by c 1720 with a room at the front and a room at the back and, very often, the addition of a third small room per floor, in the form of a narrow closet reached off the back room. At Langabeer Farm the Georgian element of the building was an addition and re-modelling of an existing building that would have already provided the functional elements of a desirable country house (ie the service areas and accommodation for its inhabitants and servants). All that was required was the addition of a fashionable frontage and appropriately proportioned rooms for entertaining; all provided by Phase 4.

Typically, the various rooms and floors would be used in the following manner (<u>http://janeaustensworld</u>):

Ground floor: the drawing room was placed near the front door so that it was easily accessible (Fig 3.1; ground floor). The smaller of the two ground floor rooms is thought to have fulfilled this function. Drawing rooms were a place to greet visitors and where the women of the house could retreat after dinner. Furnishings in the drawing room were generally more feminine than those in the adjacent dining room. Double doors would lead to the dining room, which was more austere and masculine in nature. After dinner the men would remain there to enjoy conversation over port and cigars, while the women retreated to the drawing room. The closer the dining room was located to the kitchens, the warmer the food remained when it arrived at the table. At Langabeer Farm the front room next to the entrance must have been the drawing room (Fig 3.1; ground floor) with the dining room with the larger dining room accessed *via* the stairwell. This seems odd at first but it must be remembered that this stairwell was ornate for this class of house, having a curving wooden handrail and moulded decoration on the string (Fig 27).

The first floor: this could feature a large room for entertaining on a grand scale, such as dancing, card playing, or other fashionable pastimes. In the smaller class of house, particularly rural examples, such as Langabeer Farm, this floor often held the principal bedrooms, which were generally placed in front of the house.

It is possible that the large rooms on the ground and first floor were an attractive feature to a family who were contemplating opening a school as these would provide ample space for teaching, administrating the business and accommodating the principals. Similarly, the attached buildings of Phases 1 and 3 would have provided accommodation and facilities for the pupils and staff.

It is known that the school had ceased to function by 1864. By the time of the census of 1871 Langabeer Farm (then known as Wythwood Villa) was occupied by a William Busby, his family and servants. He was the proprietor of a wholesale and retail stationery and paper hangings business in Smallbrook Street, Birmingham. It is possible that he was one of a class of businessman who, having made their fortune in trade, sought to acquire the trappings of gentility by ceasing to live on or above their business premises. This social mobility was recorded by Arnold Bennett (1910) in his novel, *Clayhanger*.

Phase 5 – late 19th century

By the time of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884-1888, the existing cattle shed (and what is presumably a cart or waggon shed) had been added to the east of the Phase 1 to 4 buildings (Fig 3.1. It is clear that the site was being taken back into agricultural use.

The introduction of new winter fed crops and the improvement of existing pasture by seeding and draining meant that the number of cattle kept was no longer dependent on the hay crop (Peters 1969). This seems to have become general in the Staffordshire by 1817. The cattle were also being improved.

The incentive for these improvements came from two sources. The first, and perhaps most important, was the development of the Black Country and Birmingham, providing two large and nearby markets. Secondly, from about 1790 there was a growing demand for meat and dairy

products which affected the whole country. It is from this period that the beginning of the change from arable to mixed farming appears to date in western lowland Staffordshire and in neighbouring areas such as Worcestershire. One consequence of this was that large cow houses appeared.

The example at Langabeer Farm falls into type 2 of Peters' classification which is the oldest surviving type of cow house in Staffordshire, the earliest surviving examples dating from the 17th century. They provided complete shelter for the animals which were tied facing along the building. The Phase 5 cow house at Langabeer Farm provided accommodation for twelve animals.

The cow house could be used to house milking cows or fatstock. Initially it seems to have been used for the former. The use of the cow house for fatstock was a late development: in 1812 Loudon (an agricultural pundit of the time) suggested that they were still kept in the open although by 1842 he was advocating housing all the cattle, the increased warmth enabling them to fatten faster on less food.

The advantages and disadvantages of type 2 cow houses were discussed at some length during the first half of the 19th century. It was suggested that as the cattle breathed on each other disease could spread much more readily than if they were tied in a single line. As a result of its compartmented nature cleaning out was less easy than in other designs, where it could be done in a single run with a barrow. The need for good ventilation had been noted as early as 1770. Other pundits, referring to stables, objected that only the outer horses received adequate ventilation if they faced along the building and the same will have been true of the cow house. For these reasons the use of the type 2 plan declined in favour of types in which the animals faced across the building.

Phase 6- mid 20th century

This comprises an extension to the east of the Phase 5 cow house, providing extra accommodation utilizing the same layout. The extension provided shelter for an additional eight animals.

The roof structure

The roof is constructed entirely of sawn timber (Figs 42 and 43) which is clearly of modern date. It appears that the roof covering the entire complex was renewed in a single operation, probably around the middle of the 20th century.

Assessment of the buildings' significance

Langabeer Farm demonstrates the development from a small cottage to a medium to large farmhouse and then to a polite country residence between the mid to late 17th century and the early to mid 18th century. Many early farm houses have probably passed through such a development but generally the earlier structures have either been demolished, entombed within later additions or altered beyond reasonable hope of identification. Langabeer Farm is unusual in that the transformation has been linear, the earlier phases being reused as service accommodation.

The particular circumstances of the site (its use as a school and then as a home for a well-to-do Birmingham merchant) have also led to the diminution of its importance as an agricultural holding and then, subsequently, to its re-emergence as a site for rearing cattle. This can probably be associated with the need for cattle products in the adjacent town of Birmingham. It is unfortunate that none of the early farm buildings that must have existed did not also survive.

Summary

Historic building survey was undertaken at Langabeer Farm at Alcester Farm, Wythall, Worcestershire. The project demonstrated that a small agricultural cottage, of a two-up and two down configuration, of the mid to late 17th century was extended to become a medium to large farmhouse by the early 18th century. Subsequently, in the early to mid 18th century it was further extended in the style fashionable at the time. It appears to have continued as a farm for some while until it was first recast as a school in the mid 19th century and then as a wealthy businessman's residence some 20 years later. It appears to have returned to being a farm in the late 19th century with the construction and extension of a substantial cow house.

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Acknowledgements

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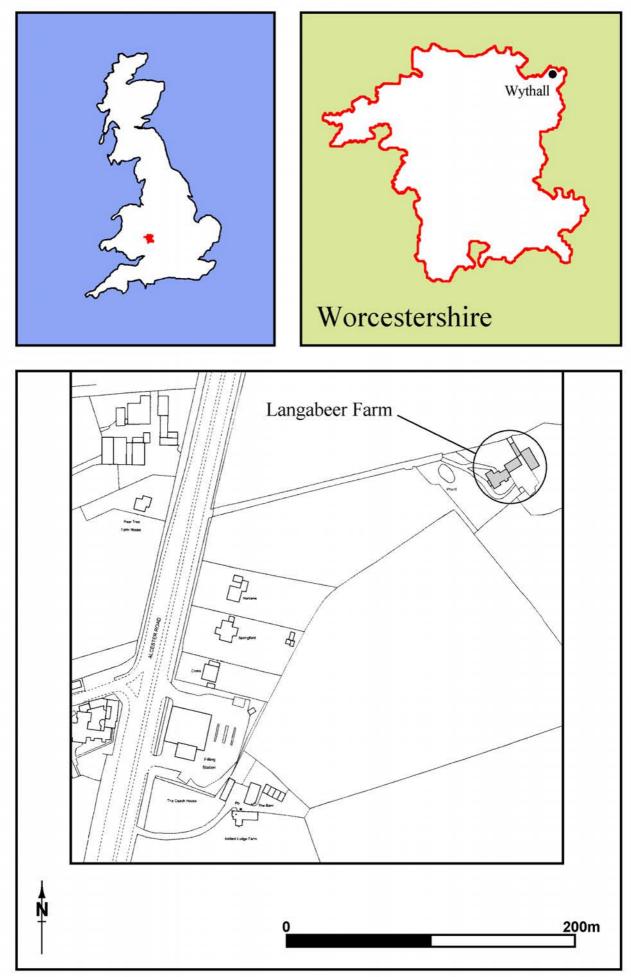
Archive

The archive consists of:

3 Annotated scale drawings

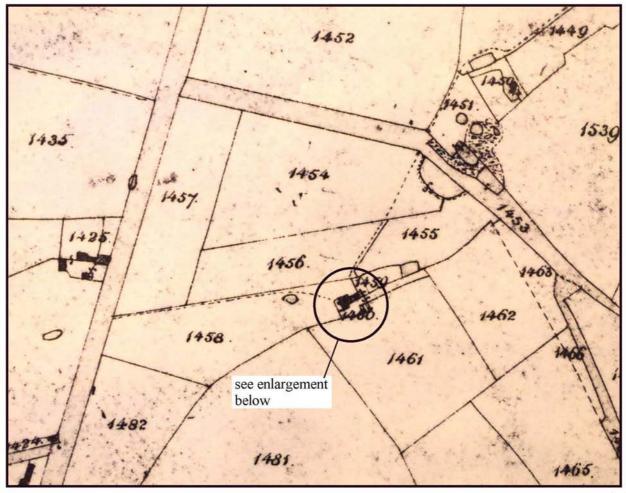
1 DVD-ROM on which are recorded: the text of the report the illustrations for the report

It has been deposited at Worcestershire County Museum, Hartlebury.

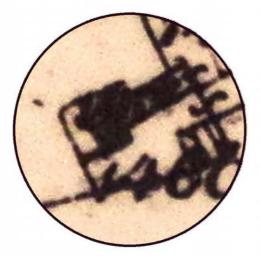


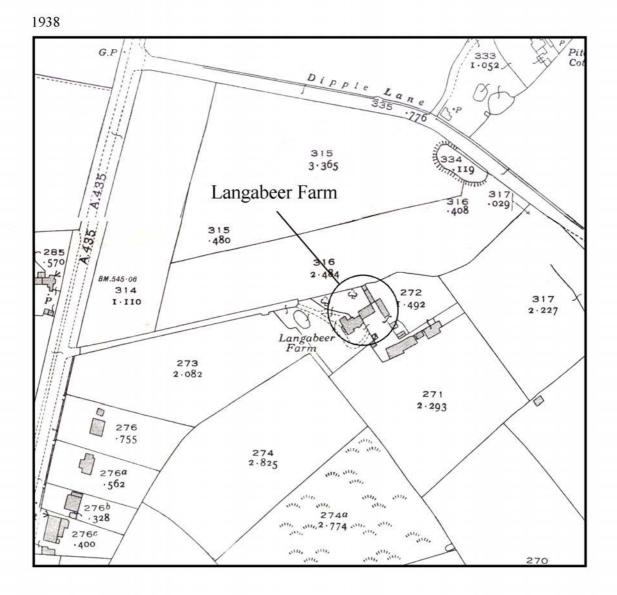
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Fig 1: Location of site



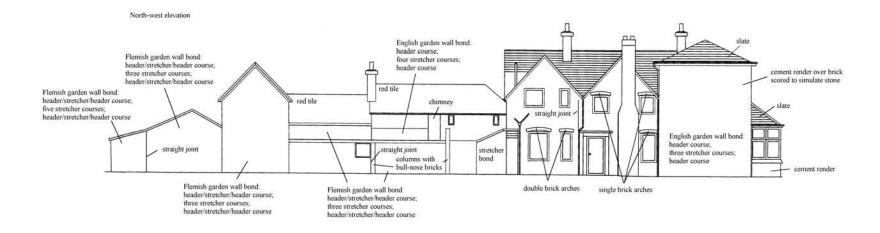
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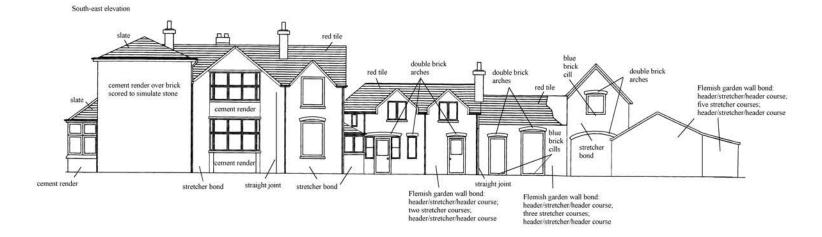


Fig 4 🛏

Fig 3.1: Ground floor, north-west and south-east elevations



Phase 1: Mid to late 17th century

Phase 2: Late 17th century

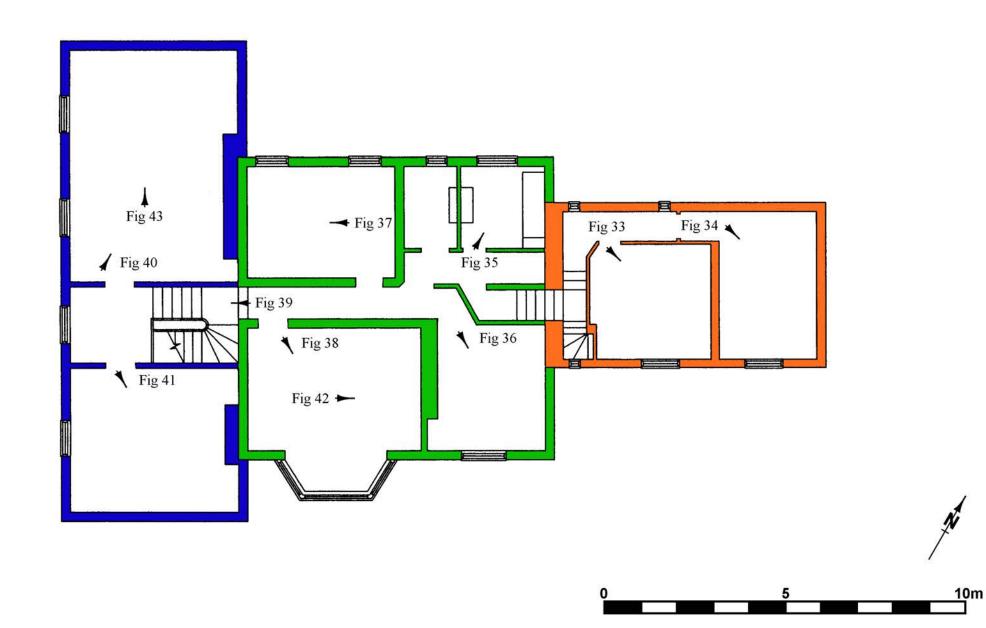
Phase 3: Early 18th century

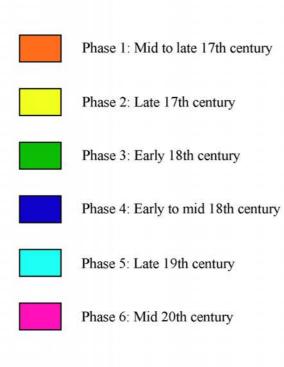


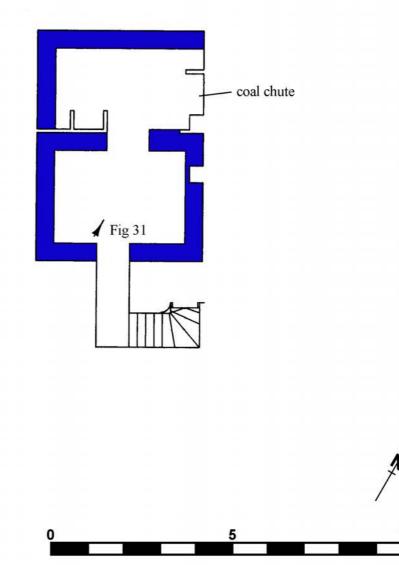
Phase 4: Early to mid 18th century

Phase 5: Late 19th century

Phase 6: Mid 20th century

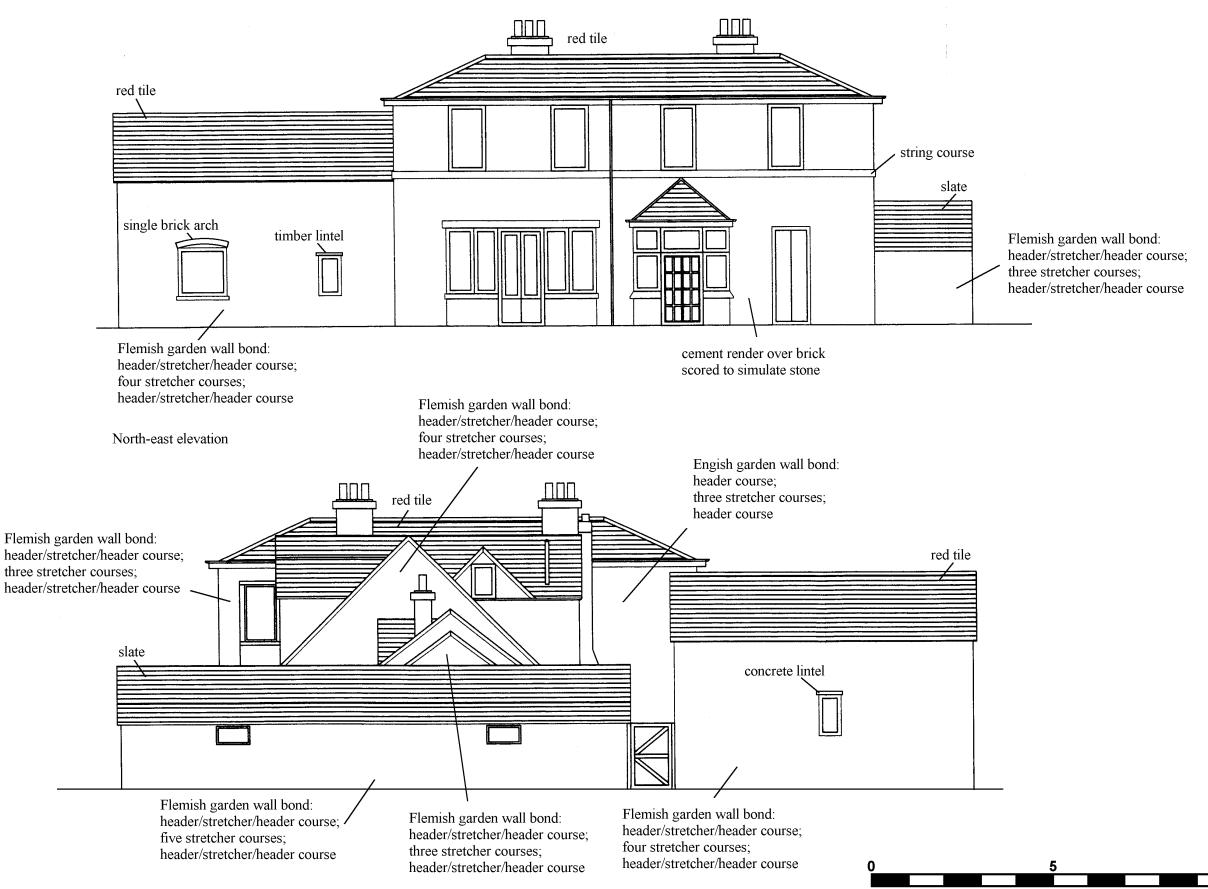






10m

South-west elevation



10m



Fig 4: South-west elevation



Fig 5: South-east elevation



Fig 6: South-east elevation





Fig 8: North-west elevation



Fig 9: North-west elevation

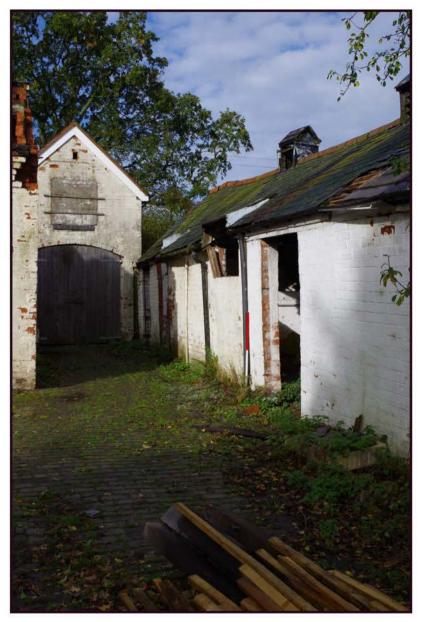


Fig 10: View of cattle and cart sheds from south-east

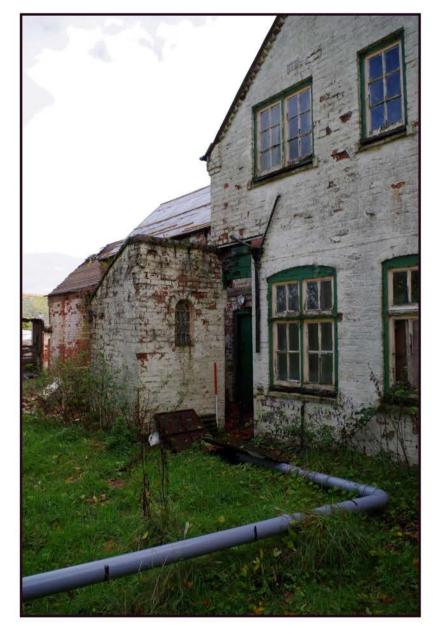


Fig 11: View of privy



Fig 12: Part of cattle shed

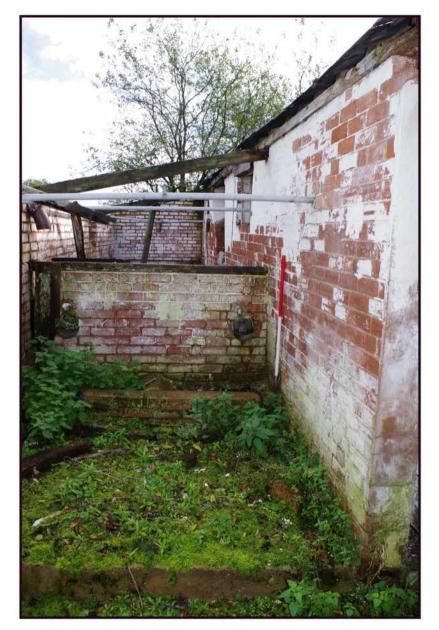


Fig 13: Stalls of cattle shed



Fig 14: Stalls of cattle shed



Fig 15: Stalls of cattle shed



Fig 16: Stable

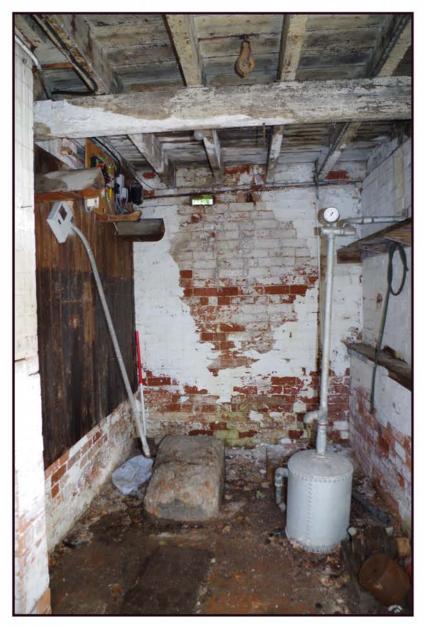


Fig 17: Tack room, subsequently generator room



Fig 18: Tack room, saddle tree



Fig 19: Tack room, harness hook



Fig 20: Phase 1; cottage, ground floor



Fig 21: Phase 1; cottage, ground floor showing door to privy



Fig 22: Phase 3; farmhouse, ground floor



Fig 23: Phase 3; farmhouse, ground floor



Fig 24: Phase 3; farmhouse, ground floor, dairy



Fig 25: Phase 3; farmhouse, ground floor, kitchen



Fig 26: Phase 3; farmhouse, ground floor, living room



Fig 27: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, ground floor, entrance hall



Fig 28: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, ground floor, parlour or living room



Fig 29: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, ground floor, parlour or living room - detail of blocked phase 3 window



Fig 30: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, ground floor, dining room



Fig 31: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, cellar

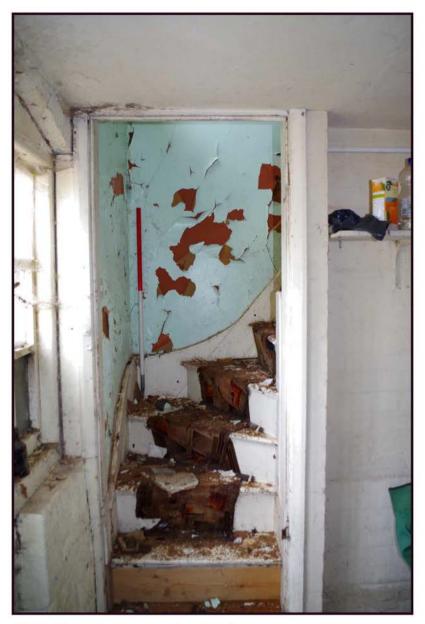


Fig 32: Phase 1; cottage; stair to first floor

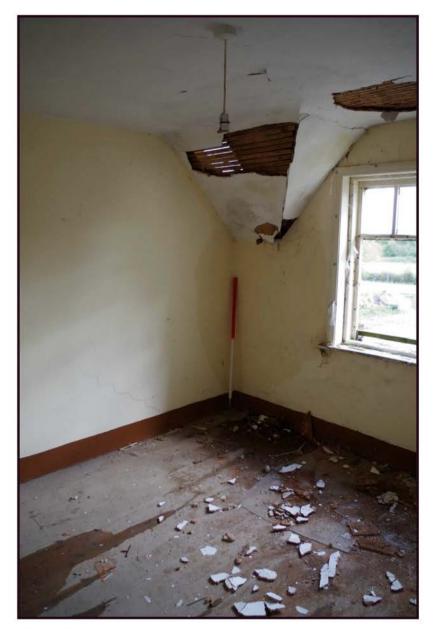


Fig 33: Phase 1; cottage, first floor, secondary bedroom



Fig 34: Phase 1; cottage, first floor, primary bedroom



Fig 35: Phase 3; farmhouse, first floor, probably originally a bedroom



Fig 36: Phase 3; farmhouse, first floor, bedroom

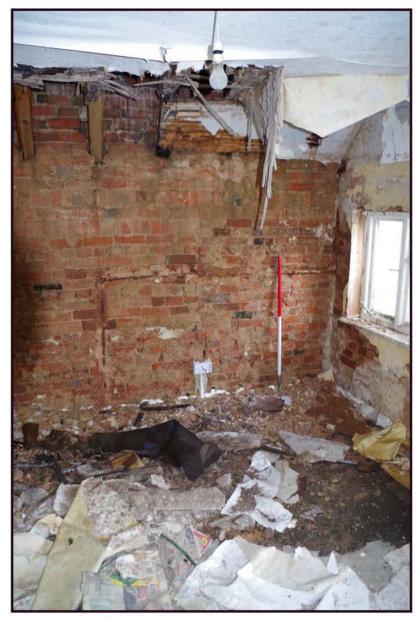


Fig 37: Phase 3; farmhouse, first floor, bedroom



Fig 38: Phase 3; farmhouse, first floor, primary bedroom



Fig 39: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, first floor, landing



Fig 40: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, first floor, primary bedroom



Fig 41: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, first floor, secondary bedroom



Fig 42: Phase 3; farmhouse, detail of roof structure



Fig 43: Phase 4; Georgian farmhouse, detail of roof structure