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Old Farmhouse Brackenridge

Building Recording and Archaeological Watching Brief

First Phase Report



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Building Recording and Archaeological Watching Brief at Brackenridge Old Farmhouse, Thrope Lane, Lofthouse, Harrogate.

Introduction

In 2005 the owners, Mr and Mrs Dunham, were granted by Harrogate District Council full planning permission (6.17.57.A.FUL 04/04941/FUL) and Listed Building consent (6.17.57.LB 04/04940/FUL) for the conversion of a redundant farmhouse at Brackenridge into a dwelling. A nearby barn, unlisted, was also granted permission for conversion into a dwelling. One of the conditions of granting planning permission was that a photographic building recording of both buildings should take place before work started, together with an archaeological watching brief on any disturbance to the floor levels, and on any ground disturbance during the installation of services.

Mrs Dunham commissioned Vivienne Metcalf of Archetype to undertake the project, which began in January 2007.

The project was always intended to be phased, with the work on the farmhouse to be completed before the barn was converted. In the event the project was put on hold in 2008, and only the first part (the major part) of the photographic recording was completed. This report, therefore, must be considered as incomplete for the purposes of the planning condition a full interim rather than a final report. The remaining work consists of the following:

Completion of the photographic survey of the first-floor details of the farmhouse when scaffolding is in place;

Completion of the indoor photographic survey of the barn; and

An archaeological watching brief during the removal of floors and any ground disturbance related to the provision of services.

Further work could be done on the documentary evidence if required.

Site and Situation

The farm building know as Brackenridge Old Farmhouse lies on the south side of Thrope Lane, Lofthouse, in the parish of Fountains Earth, Harrogate District. It is situated on the north side of the valley of the river Nidd at an altitude of 310m OD, at SE1024 7694, approximately 10m to the north-north-west of the present Brackenridge Farmhouse.

The land round about is limestone bedrock with a thin covering of soil. It lies on the edge of Masham Moor. The enclosed land is meadow land, used for hay and for winter grazing. The land north of Thrope Lane is mostly allotment pasturage.

Background History

The farm at Bracken Ridge was a part of the Summerstone Estate, and archive searches were done on-line for the names "Brackenridge" and "Summerstone". Websites visited were the Public Record Office and Archive to Archive (A2A)

The earliest reference to the Summerstone Estate is to its sale in November 1915, as part of the Estate of Eustace H Barlow deceased. These papers are now lodged with the Cumbria Record Office. It was not considered necessary to trace the history of the estate through the 20th century, as the name "Brackenridge" was not mentioned specifically anywhere, though further work could be done if required. The Summerstone Estate was broken up and sold off in the early part of the 21st century.

No reference was found for the place-name "Brackenridge".

The Old Farmhouse was Listed as a Building of architectural or historic importance in June 1987 (Listed Building 331288, Grade II). The listing description, obtained from the English Heritage website, reads:

Farmhouse, now farm building. 17th century with later alterations. Coursed squared stone, ashlar. Welsh slate roof. 2 storeys, 5 bays. Quoins. Central board door in chamfered surround, basket-arched head with hoodmould. To right a 5-light double-chamfered mullioned window with hoodmould. To right again a 19th century board door. Right-hand bay has casement window in chamfered surround originally with mullion. To left of central door stone steps up to board door on first floor. Left-hand bay has board door, to its right a chamfered mullion 2-light window. First floor: to left a double-chamfered 3-light mullioned window, to immediate right a smaller casement window. Above central door a small single-light chamfered-arched window. To right a 4-light double-chamfered mullioned window. To right again similar window of 3 lights, one mullion is missing. Shaped kneelers, stone coping.

The building is dated to the 17th century, with a date range given from 1600 to 1699. The main material is recorded as "stone" and "ashlar"; the covering material as "welsh slate".

Construction (Figs 1 & 2)

The house is constructed of roughly dressed and coursed local sandstone throughout, with quoins (ashlar) and window and door dressings of finer well-worked blocks. The stone copings and kneelers on the gable ends are of similar material. Some door dressings of softer yellow sandstone are present in the interior north wall, some with herringbone-type tooling, and fragments of this stone occur randomly elsewhere in the walls, but rarely.

The east and west gable walls are supported on sandstone block plinths up to 500mm in height.

The building has been completely re-roofed at some time in its more recent history, with new timbers throughout, and Welsh slate covering except for three rows of stone tiles on the north side of the west end of the building. The ridge tiles are ceramic. The stone copings and kneelers may be original.

The Photographic Record

Introduction

4 visits were made to undertake the photographic recording, as follows:

- 2007** 30th January. Preliminary visit by Vivienne Metcalf (VM)
19th July. First visit, VM and John Buglass (JB)
15th September VM and Don McLennan of the Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Group.
2008 4th February. VM and JB to record details uncovered by the work to the building.

Unfortunately the 35mm camera used was later discovered not to be working properly, and some photos, particularly of the dark interior, were not reproduceable. By the time the film was developed and the problem discovered, the interior of the building had been cleared and the photographs could not be retaken.

There was no mobile phone signal; for reasons of Health & Safety on such a remote site, and for assistance with measurements and holding scales, two people must be present at all times during archaeological work.

Observations

It was immediately obvious on the preliminary visit made by VM that the building had been greatly altered on the outside, as follows:

Four of the windows on the façade had been modified, and at least one, and possibly three, doors had been cut through the original fabric.

The roof, any chimneys, and all its timberwork had been replaced;

The west end 2-bay block was deeper, front to back, than the rest of the building, suggesting that one part was earlier than the other. The steps on the outside of the west block were a later addition giving access to a first floor hayloft; and the presence of a blocked window and a blocked door on the interior north wall of the central block and east bay indicated that a gap between the building and the rear slope had been filled in with earth, to first floor level and above, which must have coincided with the insertion of a rear door to the upper floor hayloft at the west end, level with the lane.

On the east gable end a door and a window had been filled in.

The west end had a fireplace on the ground floor (on the east internal wall), and on the first floor (against the west exterior wall).

The final use of the building was apparently as a fodder store and animal shelter, partly open and still used by the fell sheep. It had apparently not been maintained for some time; the first floor was only intact at the west end, and that was not necessarily structurally sound.

The Roof (Figs 3 &

At sometime during the use of the building as a barn the old roof had been removed, the stonework at the eaves made good or even raised slightly, and a completely new roof with simple trusses, purlins and rafters of sawn pine covered the whole building, supporting tiles of Welsh slate except on the wider section of the west end, where 3 courses of stone tiles were replaced on the northern edge. The shaped kneelers and stone copings may be original, but any chimneys have been totally removed. The re-roofing probably took place in the early to mid 20th century, during the barn phase.

The West End (Fig 4 to Fig 10, exterior. Fig 11 to Fig 16, interior)

The 2-bay block at the west end is deeper front to back than the rest of the building – 6.8m as opposed to 6.0m exterior measurement. This may suggest a different building date; this will be discussed below.

Externally the 2-bay structure has a board door towards the west end at ground floor level in the south elevation. The doorway is well finished and the threshold very worn, suggesting that the position is original, though the stone lintel may be a replacement and the stonework to the right has been much disturbed. To the right (east) of the doorway is a ground floor window which may originally have been a four-light mullioned window, but it has been altered, partly filled in and a small casement window inserted into the western light.

The mullioned window is masked by a flight of stone steps leading up to a board door accessing the first floor. The presence of a handrail, possibly on the top platform only, is indicated by a post bolted on to the outside stonework. There are 14 treads in the flight, the top two being concrete, and a number of the stone treads show signs of wear on the lower face, indicating that some at least may have come from an earlier staircase or from thresholds, and have been turned upside-down for re-use. The wall behind the steps bears a diagonal scar, apparently the roof line of an earlier lean-to building at right-angles to the main structure, of which no other trace remains. The area within/below the stairs contained a small recess, possibly to take a lamp, and may have been used for storage or as a dog kennel. The construction of the steps, and probably the creation of the doorway they give access to, may be 19th or early 20th century in date.

At first floor level the south elevation contains a double-chamfered 3-light mullioned window, with a smaller casement window, probably a later insert, to its immediate right.

The west elevation contains a single plain window 500mm wide and 600mm high internally, situated towards the north-west corner.

The north elevation is backed against the hill to first-floor level (but see Discussion below). A door has been inserted into the north wall at this level, not quite opposite the first floor door at the top of the steps on the south elevation

Internally the west end 2-bay block measures 5.5m N/S and 5.71m E/W, and has two floors. The original use of the ground floor is not clear; there seems to be no sign of a connecting door into the main house body at this level. However, an apparent blocked-up cupboard in the north-east corner of this room seems originally

to have been a door to the outside. Unblocking of the cupboard revealed the end of the north exterior wall forming a straight butt-joint against the infilling masonry, and there was no space for any but the smallest of humans to get past this wall on either side – either to the exterior or the interior of the main house block.

That the west end was once used for residential purposes is demonstrated by the insertion of a fine Victorian fireplace/hearth surround into the east internal wall at ground floor level. This may have been intended to take an iron cooking range rather than an open fire. The opening is approximately 1.5m high and 1.5m wide, and 700mm deep. It has pillars to either side, simply fluted, and similar carving on the horizontal mantle. The chimney breast above is supported on a massive stone slab approximately 2m long by 450mm high and 300mm deep. At first floor level the replaced stonework could be seen on the internal gable where the chimney for the fireplace below had been constructed. There was also a blocked-in fireplace on the east wall of this first floor room. The walls had been plastered up to purlin height, suggesting that there had at one time been a ceiling and a small triangular loft space. No other "domestic" features survived, and there was no sign of an internal stair giving access to the first floor. It is possible, though unlikely, that each floor could have been a single dwelling.

At first floor level there is access between the west end and the central block by a doorway through the thickest part of the wall. This may be an original feature; however, the lintels are timber, whereas those on all the other doors are stone. The doorway may have been knocked through as a secondary feature. Further work is required on this as the work progresses.

After the domestic phase the west end of the building was converted into stables. The fireplace was blocked in, and the room was divided by two plank partitions on the right-hand (east) side. The partitions were approximately 2m high at the head end but curving down to a height of approximately 1.5m at the tail. One was intact, the other had been lowered to an overall height of approx. 1.5m. These partitions are typical of 19th and early 20th century stabling, and would form stalls for three horses. Wooden hay racks were fixed against the east wall, across the blocked fireplace, and holes in the floor above allowed hay to be forked directly into the hayracks from the hayloft above.

The timberwork of the stabling and of the floor above is all sawn pine, which suggests that a new first floor was put in during the conversion to stabling. The internal staircase (if any) would have been removed, and the stone stairs constructed against the south elevation, and the first floor door cut through. The stone flooring of large rounded cobbles on the ground floor may also relate to this phase. The door on the north elevation may also have been cut through at this time. Outside it is at track level, and a hay cart could have been brought right up to the door for the hay to be forked in.

The final phase of use of this part of the building was for storage and possibly as a workshop. Latterly it had been more or less abandoned, and left open as a shelter for the fell sheep.

The Main House (Fig 18 to Fig 38; surviving timbers Fig 36 to 40; carpentry, figs 41 to 44)

The remaining 3 bays form the main house. All had been used by sheep; feeding racks and troughs in the central 2 bays suggest use as a hogg house. (A hogg is a female sheep between its first birthday and the first time it is sheared – in practice counted from the first January after it is born).

In the central 2-bay block (the main house place) the timbers supporting the first floor had rotted, and that floor was hanging at an angle from the rear wall, making access dangerous. There was no fireplace as such, but a smoke-hood had been removed from the west interior wall, leaving its supporting corbels and a sooted stain on the elevation to show where it had been. The bresummer beam to support the smoke hood at the front was evident amongst the collapsed timberwork of the joists for the first floor.

Two steps led up from the central block through the wall to the single bay east block, which was in use as a sheep shelter. The dividing wall is constructed to first floor level only, and may be a later replacement in stone of an original sturdy timber partition wall. In the east bay the single window in the north wall had been blocked, as had a window and door in the east elevation. The present single window in the east elevation may be a later insert.

The first floor of this part of the building is now open for the full length of the 3 bays, but may originally have had partitions dividing the space. The original roof timbers and beams, replaced at a later date, may have carried evidence to show where such partitions were fixed.

On the southern external elevation, at ground floor level, the main doorway (central to the building) contains a board door in a chamfered surround with a basket-arched head and hoodmould. The door itself carried some quite ornate iron door furniture, which may date from the domestic period of use. Above it, the centre of the arched lintel is a shield containing a daisy-type flower (top centre) flanked by two initials, the right hand of which might be the letter 'B'. Below is a date, 1676, which could be 1626, 1646, 1676 or even 1686. The carving is very weathered, and only shows even this amount of clarity in specific lighting conditions. The writer presently favours an earlier date but could well be wrong!

To the right of the door is a 5-light double-chamfered mullioned window with hoodmould. To the right again is a board door into the eastern single bay, with only a simple stone lintel. This appears to have been cut through the original window, which may have been a four-light mullioned window, similar to the west end and giving a symmetry to the south façade. A casement window has been inset into the original mullion.

At first floor level, a single-light chamfered-arched window is situated centrally above the main door. To the right is a 4-light double-chamfered mullioned window, and at the east end what was originally a 3-light double-chamfered mullioned window; one mullion is now missing.

On the east gable wall, at ground floor level, a mullioned window towards the north-east corner of the building had been blocked and the southern part of it cut through

to insert a doorway. This in turn had been partly blocked and a casement window inserted, which in turn was also blocked.

In the north wall of the east bay, approximately 600mm west of the east corner, a small rectangular window, 500mm wide by 250mm high internally, had been blocked by a single stone slab.

In the central 2 bays, also in the north wall, was a blocked doorway. This had been plastered over and details were obscured, but two carved yellow sandstone jambs supported a plain, more grey sandstone basket-carved lintel. Slightly off-centre to this, almost under the roof, was a partly-blocked louvred opening constructed of large, rounded slabby pieces of stone. This may be a later insertion to ventilate the hay loft. This was 700mm wide by 900mm high internally.

Some of the original internal features of the central two bays still survived, albeit in a partial state, giving some idea of the layout of the house place. Amongst the collapsing timbers of the first floor in the central two bays it was possible to identify a bresummer or hearth beam, a cross-beam which seems to have stretched the full width of the room, north-south, at a distance of 1.5m from the centre of the west wall. It would most probably have been supported from below by a number of spaced ground-fast posts.

On the west wall was a blackened triangular stain stretching up to the roof between four pairs of corbels. The corbels must have supported a smoke-hood to guide smoke from a hearth below through a chimney-cap above – a precursor to a chimney. The smoke-hood would have been of wicker construction liberally covered with clay, plaster and white-wash to render it fire-proof. Its outer edge would have been supported by the hearth-beam, which in turn would have been supported by a complex timber support structure which included a heck- a timber partition to keep the fire and the inner room from draughts from the door – and possibly a spiral staircase in the north-west corner.

This arrangement gives the original building a classic lobby-entry plan. Coming through the main door from outside, the visitor would be faced with the timber heck partition running west-east, and be forced to turn to the right in the small lobby thus formed, and walk round the heck-post (which supported the bresummer or hearth-beam) into the main room.

Beyond the main room space two steps at the south end of the wall led through into the unheated third bay to the east, which would probably have functioned as a store room, dairy or pantry. The hearth-beam supported the west end of an east-west beam situated approximately 300mm south of centre in the main house-place, which was supported at its east end on the wall which presently marks the third bay. This was constructed only to first-floor floor level. The ends of the timbers supported by this wall were in some cases sawn off, or turned over, or packed in place, suggesting that the wall is not an original feature and that some of the timbers have been re-used.

Many features of the house place were lost when it went out of use and was converted into a barn. No trace of a staircase was found in any of these 3 bays. Quite often a spiral staircase, of either stone or timber, was situated in the opposite corner from the heck, forming part of the structure that supported the smoke hood, but if this was so, all trace has been lost. Unfortunately the hearth end of this room

was cleared and the floor levels lowered without an archaeologist present, and many small details may have been lost. Equally, such details may well have been removed during the conversion of this part into an animal barn, which at some time involved re-flooring the whole area with concrete. Much evidence may have been lost during this operation, and in subsequent repairs to the floor.

In the farm building phase much of the interior of the building was re-plastered and whitewashed; the smoke-hood stain survived this, possibly because it was too difficult to whitewash over. It was noticeable, however, that the soot-stain did not extend to the lower part of the wall, although this too should have shown some sign of burning and smoke staining. The opening of the fireplace in the west end room, immediately behind the hearth under the smoke hood, suggested that when the west end gained a fireplace, the main hearth went out of use. The east side of the wall was blocked in level with the rest of that wall; the smoke hood was removed, and a proper chimney constructed up through the wall from the west side, showing in the stonework at first-floor level on the west side of the wall. In effect the insertion of the fireplace into the west room removed all trace of the original fireplace behind it in the main room.

It was probably at this time, with the removal of the smoke hood and its supporting structure, that a beam from elsewhere in the building, grooved to take a partition, was inserted along the wall under the smoke stain. The beam was not itself stained, indicating it was a later insertion. This beam would have been used to support the extended timbers of the upper floor when the frame for the smoke-hood was removed. This would always have been a weak spot, and is where the first floor finally collapsed.

The plans for the modern conversion require an entrance between the west end bay and the central two bays; on removing the wall to make a regulation-width doorway, the builders uncovered an extremely fine stone-built beehive-shaped bread-oven built into the thicker part of the wall between the entrance door and the fireplace. Its opening was on the fire side of the heck. Unfortunately Building Regulations required the removal of some of this feature, but much remains preserved *in situ*.

The single bay at the east end of the building may have originally functioned as a dairy or pantry-cum-store-room, and appears to have been unheated. The presence of blocked and altered windows and doors has been noted above; the present entrance door is undoubtedly a later insert, as is the casement window. The original entrance was through the main house, though the mullioned window on the east elevation was replaced at some time by a door, which was itself later blocked up. The room has timber hayracks of similar construction to those in the stables, but the wooden partitions are timber boskins of the sort used for tying cattle for the winter, and very different from those between the stalls for the horses.

The final use of this end of the building was as a sheep-shelter.

Some of the timbers which support the first floor at the east end appear to be original, as is the main east-west beam which runs from the hearth-beam to be supported on the north-south wall dividing the central bays from the east end. Other original timbers may survive in re-use, as does the timber at the west end, inserted horizontally into the west wall when the smoke-hood was removed. The timbers at the east end are in better condition than those which had collapsed, and more detail could be seen. Both the beams and the joists appear to have been adzed rather than

sawn, and the chamfers are wide, suggesting a date for the construction of the building earlier rather than later in the seventeenth century.

The North Side of the Building. (Figs 11, 24 to 28.)

The presence of blocked windows and a door in the north exterior wall of the farmhouse indicate that when first constructed, probably in the mid-17th century, it was a free-standing building. It is not known when or why the small triangle of land behind the building was filled in with earth to more-or-less the level of the track behind it. Perhaps the slope was slipping; perhaps the building itself was becoming unstable (there are some cracks in the façade), and the gap was backfilled to support it.

At the east end of the building a stone retaining wall running east-west supports the slope at that point. At the west end the slope is shallower, and a lower field wall may partly fulfil the same purpose in this area.

At some point during the completion of the archaeological work it may be possible to give a date to this infilling with earth. It has made the interior of the building damp and gloomy, but levelling off at the back to the same level as the track made getting the hay into the hayloft much easier during the barn phase. The louvered window in the central part of the first floor may have fulfilled the same purpose, though it is a little small for use as a fork-hole.

The Field Barn. (Figs 45 to 49)

Only the most basic external photographic survey of the field barn has been completed. It is included here for the sake of completeness, and because the date above its door - 1830 - may have some relevance to the history of the Old Farmhouse.

The house now known as Brackenridge Farmhouse stands down-slope approximately 10ms south-east of Brackenridge Old Farmhouse. It is not listed, and is undated, but appears to be of 19th construction. It may be that it and the field barn are more-or-less contemporary, and that this gives a date for the Old Farmhouse going out of domestic use when the new building was constructed.

The western two bays of the Old Farmhouse appear to have been updated at about this time, with the insertion of the new fireplace/hearth surround. Perhaps two families were working the farm at this time, one in the new house, one in the modernised end of the old. When only one family was left, the west end of the old building was converted into comfortable stabling for the farm horses.

Discussion.

Origins

There are as yet no documentary records, and no finds, to suggest that there was a building on the site before the construction of Brackenridge Old Farmhouse. The façade seems to have been designed to have a certain symmetry and the "original" building appears to be all of one build.

However, there is an anomaly at the west end. The building line on the south side is straight and of one build; yet the western two bays are approximately 800mm deeper, externally, than the remaining 3 bays of the building. There is also the problem that an apparent external door in the north-east corner of the ground floor room opens on to the end butt joint of the north wall, with no room for any but the smallest child to pass through either to the outside of the building, or to the interior of the next bay.

The simplest solution to this problem is that there was originally a two-bay building on this part of the site, details unknown, which has been incorporated into the five-bay building by alteration, and by rebuild of the front elevation as part of the new façade. Possibly a new 'skin' of the same masonry was added to the eastern elevation. Whether this 2-bay block was separate from the other accommodation, or how it functioned if incorporated into the whole, cannot yet be decided.

The Old Farmhouse can be dated stylistically to the 17th century, and there are some indications (the wide chamfers on some beams) that the date is earlier rather than later. The very weathered dated shield above the central doorway gives a choice of 4 dates – 1626, 1646, 1676 and 1686. 1646 could perhaps be ruled out for political reasons – the country was in turmoil at the very end of the first Civil War, only months away from the beheading of the King. Was this the time to spend a good deal of money on building a new house? Or perhaps the owner was a Parliamentarian and had already benefited financially from the chaos.

At whatever date it was constructed, the 17th century house had some features of the old and some of the new. By this time, a hearth with a smoke-hood instead of a chimney is beginning to be old-fashioned; on the other hand the building seems always to have had a first floor, which is a relatively new phenomenon, moving away from the medieval 'great hall' idea and more towards the 'modern' houses which were developing from the Tudor period.

Late 17th and 18th centuries

The Old Farmhouse seems hardly to have changed for the first 100 years or more of its existence, though much detail has been lost by later conversions as its use did change. At some time, possibly in the 18th century, the open area at the back of the house was filled in with earth and stones. This must have caused the building to become very damp very quickly, and perhaps this was one of the main reasons why it was abandoned as a dwelling.

19th century

Perhaps the main house-place with its smoke-hood and bread-oven became too awkward for use, or too damp at the rear when the external gap was filled in with soil. For whatever reason, at some time at the very end of the 18th or into the 19th century, the house at Brackenridge ceased to function as a dwelling, and possibly was even abandoned for a time. In the 19th century the west end became a dwelling, probably two-storey, with a fine fireplace and/or range downstairs and a small fireplace in the bedroom upstairs, though many details have been lost through later alterations. The rest of the building was used as a barn and for animal housing.

The 'new' farmhouse was built, possibly around 1830, at the same time as the field barn, and eventually the whole of the old farmhouse became a farm building, with stabling for 3 horses in the west end, livestock in the other three bays and the whole of the first floor used as a hayloft.

It may be that the earth removed to level the ground for the new farmhouse was used to fill in the area of land behind the old building. This may have been done to make it convenient for hay-carts to come close enough to the first floor at the north side to have their cargoes pitched straight into the first-floor hayloft.

Completion of the archaeological work as the conversion proceeds may find evidence to help fill out the sequence given above.

Sources:

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