

ABBNEY FARM, THETFORD

An Historical Assessment

by

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

- 1.1.1 This report outlines the results of a recent historical analysis of Abbey Farm, Thetford. The project was carried out by the Historical Analysis and Research team of English Heritage (HA&RT) on behalf of the Management Board of the Priory Ruins & Abbey Farm Project Team of English Heritage. The fabric analysis was undertaken by Richard Bond of the Historical Analysis and Research team of English Heritage (HA&RT). The historical research was carried out by Rowan Ellis of East Midlands Region of English Heritage in association with Dr. Stephen Priestley of the Government Historic Buildings Advisory Unit of English Heritage. The dendrochronological (tree-ring dating) analysis was undertaken by Robert Howard of Nottingham University Department of Dendrochronology.
- 1.1.2 Abbey Farm stands immediately to the north-west of the ruins of the 13th century Cluniac priory of St Mary, Thetford, a Scheduled Ancient Monument owned by the Secretary of State, and managed by English Heritage as an unstaffed site. One of the most complete survivals of a Cluniac house, St Mary's owes its partial survival to its continued occupation following the Dissolution. Initially the priory buildings were remodelled and served until the early 19th century as a farmstead. The Prior's Lodging provided domestic accommodation for the farm whilst the two monastic buildings within the former priory precinct (later renamed as Abbey Farm Barn and Abbey Farm Cottage) were retained for agricultural use.
- 1.1.3 During the 19th century the domestic accommodation within the Prior's Lodging was abandoned in favour of a new house, Abbey House, which was constructed close to the priory ruins. Now relieved of any functional use, the ruins became the focal point of a new park and gardens, which were created as a setting for the new house. At the same time the Abbey Farm was again remodelled, the result being a picturesque planned farm with thatched roofs and Jacobean detailing.
- 1.1.4 Abbey Farm was transferred to the Ministry of Works in the 1930's and is presently owned by Breckland District Council. The site includes the former Gatehouse to the Priory, taken into Guardianship in 1967, and the two surviving monastic buildings, Abbey Farm Barn and Abbey Farm Cottage. Collectively these buildings are considered to be a fine example of monastic planning and a rare survival of their type, and the site is partly Listed Grade I. Since the closure of Abbey Farm as a works depot in the 1970's, however, the Barn and Cottage have stood empty and neglected, and the buildings are now urgently in need of structural repair.
- 1.1.5 The aim of the present building analysis is to elucidate the historical development of the site, from its origins as curia, or outer courtyard, of the medieval Cluniac priory, to its redevelopment in the sixteenth century as a farm estate, to its final use as a local authority works depot. This report is an outline study aimed at bringing together in a single document all the existing historical, archaeological and scientific evidence relating to the site. The information will be used by the Management Board of the Priory Ruins & Abbey Farm Project Team of English Heritage to assess the significance of the surviving monastic buildings and assist in the drafting of detailed design proposals for the future use for the site.

1.2 *Previous historical research and recording at Abbey Farm*

- 1.2.1 The current Official Guidebook for Thetford Priory was first published in 1979 by the (then) Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings Inspectorate of the Department of Environment. In describing the barn-yard at Abbey Farm, the guide states that 'though none of the buildings surrounding it is certainly medieval, it probably represents the Outer Curia (agricultural yard) of the Priory'.
- 1.2.2 A research project was undertaken by Glyn Coppack in c.1972 aimed at recording and looking at possible options for presenting the extensive collection of carved fragments then at the Cluniac Priory. The loose archaeological material is now stored in a warehouse at Beeston with Bittering, Norfolk.
- 1.2.3 Two articles by Stephen Heywood on Abbey Farm Barn and Abbey Farm Cottage were published in 1992, one on the barn entitled 'A Timber-Framed Cluniac Conventual Building in Thetford', *The Annual. Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group*, 1992, pp.40-44; and on the cottage entitled 'Abbey Farm Cottage', *The Quarterly. Journal of the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group*, 8, 1992, pp.10-17. Both reports are illustrated with measured drawings prepared by Robert Smith. The buildings are described and suggestions made as to their possible original functions and construction dates.
- 1.2.4 Simon Heald undertook a further survey of the site in c.1998. It is uncertain at present exactly what this work entailed.
- 1.2.5 A metric survey of Abbey Farm Cottage was undertaken by R.W. Selwood in c.1990. The work was carried out under contract to the Survey Section of English Heritage. The drawings were not taken through to completion and remain in draft form as pencil drawings on tracing paper. The drawings are at 1:20 scale based on instrument control, and show details such as joints, pegs, nails, etc. of the framing of the Cottage.

1.3 *Previous dendrochronological analysis at Abbey Farm*

- 1.3.1 A dendrochronological (tree-ring dating) analysis of the Barn and Cottage at Abbey farm was carried out by Sheffield University in 1992. The analysis provided a probable date of construction for the additional eastern end of the Barn, but failed to establish a primary construction date for either the Barn or the Cottage.
- 1.3.2 The tree-ring analysis of the Barn revealed that three of the four extant tie beams within the additional eastern end of the building were produced from trees felled in the period AD 1532 - *c.* AD1540. Nevertheless, given the piecemeal structural development of the building, and the large number of reused (or repositioned) timbers present in the eastern extension, it could not be said with certainty whether the beams represented a group of primary (and original) elements in their present context, or had themselves been reused from another building.
- 1.3.3 The tree-ring analysis of the Cottage found that the western end of the lower arcade plate on the north side, sample C2, and the tie beam of the central cross frame, sample C4, cross matched with a t-value of 6.2, and were combined to form an undated 71 year master sequence, COTT/T2. No other conclusive matching was obtained, although tentative cross matches were noted between COTT/T2 and sample C6, taken from the south upper wall plate 70 cm west of the south arcade post of the central cross frame, and sample B4, taken from the north end of the tie beam of the central crown post roof truss of the western (earliest) end of the Barn building. None of the surviving components of the former aisle cross frame at the eastern end of the Cottage was listed in the Sheffield report as having been sampled.

2 Documentary Research

2.1 Historical Background

- 2.1.1 The origins of Thetford can be traced back to the Iron Age and the occupation of the area by the peoples of the Iceni tribe. During the Roman occupation the town may have developed into an urban settlement or 'civitas'. There is archaeological evidence of further urban growth during the Anglo-Saxon period. Thetford was probably a thriving town by the early eleventh century when it was sacked by Danish raiders (in 1004 and 1010). It had a mint before the Conquest.¹
- 2.1.2 In the 1070's, Roger Bigod, Sheriff of Norfolk, raised a motte and bailey castle at Thetford. During the period 1072-1075, Bishop Herfast moved the see of East Anglia from North Elmham to Thetford. The exact date and the underlying motives for the removal of the see of Norfolk from North Elmham to Thetford are open to dispute. It is not known whether William the Conqueror influenced the transfer of the see from its pre-Conquest location at North Elmham. It seems more likely that Herfast either acted on his initiative, or was acting in accordance with the Council of London in 1075 which ordered the transfer of sees from rural locations to towns.² It has been argued that the move was part of a wider ploy by Herfast to get his hands on Bury St Edmunds – the site of the holy relics of St Edmund, and central to the Diocese of East Anglia – Thetford only being intended as a temporary cathedral 'on another man's estate' as the First Register says.³
- 2.1.3 In 1103-4, Roger Bigod established a community of Cluniac monks in Thetford on the site of the old cathedral. Bigod was sheriff of Norfolk by c.1080, and was a prominent landholder in Norfolk at the time of Domesday Book (1086). According to the chronicle of Thetford Priory, written in about 1350, Roger had formerly made a vow to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but was allowed to commute this vow by founding a monastery with his unspent pilgrimage money. As a Cluniac house, Thetford was (theoretically) immune from royal jurisdiction and the authority of the diocesan bishop. Its only ties of dependence were with the mother house of Cluny and its patron (initially the Bigod earls of Norfolk, later the Mowbray and Howard dukes of Norfolk).⁴
- 2.1.4 In 1107, the Cluniac priory abandoned its former old cathedral site and moved to its present site on the north side of the river (Roger Bigod died a week after work began on the foundations). Apart from the Cluniac priory, four other religious houses had been established at Thetford before the Dissolution of the Monasteries. A Benedictine nunnery (c.1160), a priory of Augustinian canons (1260) a Dominican friary (1335) a house of Augustinian friars (c.1389) and at least seven hospitals (including the hospital of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre founded c.1147).
- 2.1.5 The Priory served a multifunctional role: officially a place of prayer, it also provided accommodation for visiting royalty and titled dignitaries (it owned The Angel Inn in the town for such a purpose) and was a centre for local administration. The court sessions of the manor of Halwick (which included the site of the Priory) were held in the fourteenth century Priory Gatehouse.

¹ For the history of Thetford, see T Martin, 'The History of the town of Thetford.....' 1779.

² (M. Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (1979); F.Barlow, *The English Church 1066-1154*; *Norwich Episcopal Acta 1070-1214* ed. C. Harper- Bill). SP

³ See Barbara Dodwell, 'The Foundation of Norwich Cathedral' *Trans. Roy.Hist. Soc.* 5th series,7,1957, pp 25-48; *ibid*, 'The Honour of the Bishop of Thetford/Norwich in the late C11 and early C12', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 33, 1965, pp 185-99. Thetford was a springboard for nearby Bury but was foiled by its clever Abbot.

⁴ On the arrival and organization of the Cluniac order in England, see B. Golding, 'The Coming of the Cluniacs' (*Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo Norman Studies*, 1980).

- 2.1.6 The ecclesiastical community, at its height in the 13th century had some 24 monks, this number dropped but there still remained a number of novices, apprentice boys as well as a steward, lay servants and employees ranging from a chamberlain to a kitchen boy. The steward occupied the highest position on the domestic scale and may have lived in one of the Abbey Farm buildings. Approaching the 1530's, with the prospect of the dissolution pending, the Priory battled to survive in the guise of a different institution such as other priories had attempted, but it did not succeed. But, still being under the patronage of Bigod's descendants, the Dukes of Norfolk, it was one of the last monasteries in England to surrender to the crown. Fortunately, the good name of Howard reigned supreme after a troubled period in relations with the monarchy in which two members of their family were executed. The Priory (and other lands) was bought back from the crown and given to Richard Fulmerston, the Duke's 'Master of the Horse' (in exchange for £1000 and several manors in southern England) not long after the suppression. The ownership was maintained until 1558 when lands were equally shared between the Dukedom and Mr Fulmerston.
- 2.1.7 The last hundred years has seen the demise of Abbey Farm as part of an urban agricultural estate. It is unclear how quickly it ceased its duties: it was still under the land agent William D MacKenzie in 1897 and according to two pictures taken by local photographer Mr Ashley in 1957 the farm cottage was still in use. It is known that Field Marshall Haigh used the buildings as a military camp during the first world war and that Breckland District Council took the property over in 1940, using it as a Works Depot. It must also have been an important shooting estate if the larder with its rows and rows of game hooks are anything to go by.

2.2 *Chronology of ownership of Thetford Priory & Abbey Farm*

The following time line represents the development of the Abbey Farm from twelfth century to late nineteenth century in terms of its ownership from ecclesiastical to urban agricultural estate. This information was researched through the identification of deeds of tenants, wills and historical texts and confirms the farm's connection with the day to day running of the Priory/estate site and transfer of management responsibility to the farmer tenants in the nineteenth century. The availability and indeed survival of estate accounts, bills and surveys being limited, it has been a slow process in building up a picture, however a list of further possible sources and scope for future research is included at the end of this section. Each date has a reference in brackets, which refers to where it was found: a key of Records Offices is given below.

Key to References

AHM	Ancient House Museum, Thetford
BL	The British Library, London
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DN	Arundel Castle Archive, West Sussex
NMRC	National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon
NRO	Norfolk Records Office, Norwich
*	Documents to be researched
p	Photocopies Available

Pre-Conquest:

In post-Dissolution documents relating to the Abbey Farm estate the land upon which the property stood is referred to as belonging to the manor of Halwick. As one of the most common Anglo-Saxon place name elements, the term 'wick' can be interpreted as having a number of slightly different meanings. Since the word was often used to describe settlements situated next to a winding river (Norwich, Ipswich, Dunwich, Harwich) it is possible that the medieval manor of 'Halwick' was centered on the original Anglo-Saxon port of Thetford. In its widest sense the word can simply mean 'settlement' and could therefore signify the existence of a farm in the area since this period (CUL syn.4.73.7). The word 'wick' is the Old English form of the Latin word 'vicus', a term used in Roman Britain to denote a local

administrative centre. The place name element 'hal' or 'halh' is an Old English term referring to a water meadow or piece of low lying ground by a river. In view of the close proximity of the Priory to the river, it seems likely that the term 'Halwick' meant 'settlement by a water meadow'.

Early 12th Century:

Roger Bigod, founder of Thetford Priory and old Norman soldier of William the Conqueror, acquires Manor of Halwick and gives it to the Prior at Thetford Priory in exchange for the protection of two footmen from the Kings Army. (CUL syn.4.73.7)

1286:

Annual rent for Halwick Manor was 20 Marks at this time. (CUL syn.4.73.7)

1510:

'Manors of Thetford In Insula et al'. 1 roll. (DN M940)*

1537:

'The house, site and possessions at Thetford Priory to Sir Richard Fulmerston in 1537'
(From Victoria County History: Norfolk Vol.2)

Late 1530's:

Letters from Henry VIII to Richard Fulmerston (friend and loyal subject to 1st Duke of Norfolk) re: dissolution. (T/NS/1-33)*

1540:

Royal Deeds (with remnants of seals) relating to Dissolution of Thetford Priory. (DN NR Box 9) (1540)*

1547-8:

Priory and estates leased by Duke of Somerset to Richard Fulmerston on 21-Year Lease. (PRO CPR Pg 129)*

1547-73:

Series of rentals for the manor of Halwick (including the Abbey Farm estate). Contains reference(s) to a 'curia', at term which at this date is usually understood to mean a courthouse, and in the case of its relating specifically to a building on the Abbey Farm estate, possibly referring to the original medieval jettied structure which forms the present western end of Abbey Farm Barn. It may be important to note, however, that in a monastic context, the term curia is synonymous with the terms cloister and close, and in this sense could equally refer to any enclosed area within the former Conventual Precinct.

1549:

Richard Fulmerston given outright grant of Halwick and other manors of the former priory (in return for manors in Suffolk) (PRO CPR 1548 Pg 298)

1558:

Copy of Agreement between Thomas, 2nd Duke of Norfolk and Richard Fulmerston to share certain estates, including 'the house and site of the Priory of Thetford, the site of Halwicke Manor' amongst other properties in Norfolk and Suffolk (NRO PTR 1/148 757)

1560:

'Account of Richard Fulmerston, receiver from John de Mowbray, late Duke of Norfolk, in diverse'. 1 roll (DN A1921)*

1566:

The death of Richard Fulmerston.

1567:

The will of Sir Richard Fulmerston, Knight to Thomas, Duke of Norfolk. (PRO PCC Ref 33)*.

1567:

'License for Edward Clere and Frances, his wife, daughter of Richard Fulmerston to enter upon his lands, issues from Richard's death'. In Richard Fulmerston's will it mentions 'a preacher to preach at the Church of St. Mary, four times a year'. (PRO C66 Catalogue of Patent Rolls Item 958)

1603:

'In 1603 Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, and Henry Howard Earl of Northampton settled on John Holland (possible farmer tenant) and other Trustees, the Manors of Westwick and Halwick...' (CUL syn.4.73.7)

1638:

Thomas Marsham's deeds for Abbey Farm (NRO PTR 1/141 4). 'In 1638 these properties and the Abbey site and the manor of Halwick were leased for 99 years by the Right Hon. Thomas, Earl of Arundel and Surrey and others to Thomas Marsham. The lease then passed Marsham, Kendall, Kerrington until in 1718 Roger Kerrington's widow and executor of his will assigned the remainder of the term of 99 years over to the freehold owner, then the Duke of Norfolk'. (NRO Text)*

1649:

'Copies of Surveys of Lands in Thetford, Co. Norfolk, by Jo. Harrison with rentals of Lands' (including Priory site). (DN A943). 'The site of the Abby with a dwelling house, Orchard Garden, yards and outhouses...there to belonging'.*

Survey of lands in Manor of Hallwick, under the ownership of Osmond Clark, details 'yards and outhouses'. (DN A943).

1652:

Rent and maintenance of 'Halwicke in Thetford', in ownership of Osmond Clarke, gent (DN A944 & A945). 'Rents for Earle Pitt Meadow and One Orchard In Lease to Swellyn with the Mills... Otter Meadow, Site of Monastery, foulds, Castle Hill and Meadow etc. totalling £134.00'.*

1653:

Indenture 'for Courts keeping at the Abby for the mannour of Halwick in Thetford'.

Documentary reference to a rental agreement relating to lands held by the Duke of Norfolk being signed at 'the courthouse', situated at, or close to, the site of Abbey farm. (NRO PTR 1/141 6)*

John Kendall's deeds for Abbey Farm (NRO PTR 1/141 8)*

Deeds from John Marshall, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm for 'courts keeping at the Abby for the mannour of Hallwick in Thetford' (NRO PTR 1/141 6)

1666:

Thomas Marsham, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm's will (NRO PTR 1/141 10)*

1672:

John Kendall, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm's will (NRO PTR 1/141 11)*

1679:

Roger Kerrington's deeds for Abbey Farm (NRO PTR 1/141 13)*

1702:

Roger Kerrington, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm's will (NRO PTR 1/141 14)*

1720:

John Miller's survey map of Abbey Farm details 'cows yard, steeple (chimney) yard, saffron yard, pond yard, cows yard' (DN) p

1738-9:

'Manning, Widow for the Abbey Farm' (NRO PTR 3/6)*. '195:00:00 rent from Michelmas 1738 to 1739'.

1768:

Mrs Murrell, rental of Abbey Farm (rental book) (NRO PTR 3/32).

217:11:06 from 10th October 1768

Mr Snare	laying barn floor	06:18:00
Mr Newboy	glazier	01:05:00
Mr Brook	blacksmith	00:10:03
Mr Denton	bricks	02:19:05
Poors cloath for 1768		08:10:00
Cash for Ld. Petre		30:00:00"

18th century:

Drawing of Abbey Gatehouse, by Edward Blore showing attached almonry and unidentified building to the north west, possibly part of the Abbey Farm site. (BL MS 42018 Vol XX)

1781:

John Kettle, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm (NRO PTR 1/146 757). '210:06:08 rent per year'.

1773:

Thomas Aylott, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm under 21 year lease, starting 1770 (NRO PTR 3/33). '253:13:06 rent at Michelmas'.

1781:

Joseph Welds, farmer tenant at Abbey Farm under Lord & Lady Petre, copy of mortgage (NRO PTR 1/146 757)

1834:

William Pike Salter, farmer at Abbey Farm. From 'White's 1834 Directory' (NRO)

1845:

Thomas Featherston under 'farmer' in *White's 1845 Norfolk* (AHM).

1883:

John Johnson, tenant farmer at Abbey Farm. (P) (NRO MC114/2/2). 'John Johnson, farmer, agent to W D MacKenzie Esq., land and Estate Agent and Valuer, the Abbey Farm'. From *White's 1883 Norfolk* (AHM).

1897:

Account for Re-Thatching of Roofs at Abbey Farm details 'nag stable, laundry cottage, cart stable, granary, fowls house, carts lodge, corn barn, head stable, coal and hay houses, cart lodge' (NRO PTR 1/141 7) p

1898:

Draft deeds and correspondence relating to the lease of Abbey Farm to Arthur Vickris Pryor. Solicitors Houcher & Houcher. (P) (NRO MC114/2/5) p

Rent	£125 per annum (1st and 2nd years)	21 Year Lease
	£300 per annum (up to 7th year)	
	£400 per annum (remainder)	

G. Mortimer farmer tenant at Abbey Farm, from *Norfolk Almanac* (AHM)

1957:

Photograph of Abbey Farm Cottage (half thatched) with Abbey House in background. Taken by H Ashley. (NMRC NK 1682) *p*

1957:

Photograph of Abbey Farm Cottage (from the south). Taken by H Ashley. (NMRC NK 1679) *p*

1957:

Photograph of Abbey Farm Barn (from the south). Taken by H Ashley. (NMRC NK 1680) *p*

2.3 *Recommendations for Further Research*

Further research is needed to inform our understanding of the immediate post-Dissolution period, in terms of both the gradual decline of the Priory and the subsequent rebirth of the Abbey Farm as part of an urban agricultural estate. Obtaining a more accurate picture of the Farm as a whole is essential in order to explain the changing structure and usage of the Cottage and Barn. Aspects of this picture have already been gleaned from the dendrochronology and fabric analysis carried out on the standing structures, however further information should be sought from later census returns, the deeper reading of legal documents and latin registers. Further documentary information may exist in the Public Records Office, London; Norfolk Records Office, Norwich; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford; (references to this material are asterisked in the previous list). The following list describes additional archival material recommended for further reading:

12th to 13th century:

The founding of Thetford Priory, by Roger Bigod. (BL Cotton Vitellius FIV Folios 153-177)

14th to 15th century:

Series of rentals for Thetford Priory. (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

16th century:

Court Rolls for Edward VI, Philip & Mary and Elizabeth I. (Institute of Documentary Research).

1482 –1540:

The Thetford Register (series of accounts). (CUL Add MS 6969)

1537:

List of suppressed monasteries, items and possessions. (PRO21 Vol XII Part 1 Item 510)

1537:

Valuation of religious houses, '*the names of certain religious houses with the valuation of the same and such like*'. (PRO Vol XII Part II Item 1314).

1538:

Leases of lands to Richard Fulmerston, by King Henry VIII. (PRO21 MSX 941. Vol. XIII Part I).

1540:

Historic manuscripts detailing the exchange of lands between King Henry VIII and the Duke of Norfolk. (PRO21 MSX 941 43).

1567:

The will of Sir Richard Fulmerston, Knight to Thomas, Duke of Norfolk. (PRO PCC Ref 33).

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Norfolk Archaeology Vol. 34, 1969 (extract on Richard Fulmerston's properties)

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Norwich Episcopal Acts 1070-1214 ed. C. Harper- Bill

Wade Martin, S. *Farm Buildings before the Agricultural Revolution in Historic Farm Buildings*, 1991. London.

3 Abbey Farm Cottage

3.1 Architectural description

- 3.1.1 The present standing building comprises a four-bay rectangular structure, aligned E-W. The building lies immediately to the east of Abbey Farm Barn, and SW of the Abbey Gatehouse. For the purposes of this report, the individual bays have been numbered one to four, from east to west, with the series of three internal timber-framed cross frames dividing the bays numbered one to three accordingly (fig).
- 3.1.2 The walls of the building are of a mixture of flint and clunch, with gauged gault brick door and window arches and quoins. The wall construction is similar to that of the Barn, and probably dates from a major redevelopment of the two buildings in the early nineteenth century. The quality of the door and window detailing stands in contrast to the otherwise overtly vernacular construction of the building.
- 3.1.3 Set into the flint work of the walls at various points around the building are fragments of medieval moulded masonry, presumably taken from the Priory site.⁵ At the NW corner of the building is a flint and ashlar buttress, described by Heywood as also being of medieval date.
- 3.1.4 The roof over the western half of the building is clad in corrugated metal. The eastern end has a higher ridge line and a slate roof covering. Two matching dormers on each side of the roof light the first floor rooms inside the taller, eastern, end of the building.
- 3.1.5 The building has three sets of matching chimney stacks. The stacks are constructed in white gault brick and have square shafts rising from a plain, rectangular plinth, and oversailing caps.
- 3.1.6 The interior of the building is sub-divided into four bays of approximately equal size by three transverse partition walls. The partition walls contain the remains of a series of three timber-framed aisle trusses that survive from an earlier building on the site. Each cross frame included a pair of vertical arcade posts joined together at their tops by a horizontal tie beam. To judge from the few remaining carpenter's marks to be seen on the timbers,⁶ it would appear that the cross frames were originally numbered from east to west, i.e. with the easternmost cross frame between bays one and two being marked number one, and the westernmost cross frame, between bays three and four, marked number three.
- 3.1.7 Cross frames No.2 and No.3 are linked by a set of lower/inner and upper/outer arcade plates. The lower/inner plates are housed between the posts and tie beams in the usual manner, whilst the upper/outer plates sit over the ends of the tie beams, which project outwards beyond the line of the arcade posts. The plates were connected to the posts by a series of curved arcade braces, which divided the interior space into a central nave and a flanking aisle on either side. Along the south side of the roof only, the upper plate is braced to the tie beams at each end with curved angle ties. Both cross frames carry a queen post roof truss above the tie beam. The trusses are comprised of a pair of queen posts that rise up vertically from the tie beam and a horizontal collar. The posts have jowled heads and are linked to the collar with curved braces. The posts carry square-set purlins, which are housed between the posts and collar. The purlins are linked to the queen posts with straight windbraces. It is interesting to note that at cross frame No.2 (cross frame No.3 is presently encased inside a later flint render to above tie beam level) the mortice and tenon joint between the feet of the queen posts and tie beam is unpegged, suggesting that the roof trusses might not be original to the building, but introduced

⁵ Apparently the reuse of medieval stone for house building was widespread in Thetford during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries.

⁶ The overall numbering sequence was deduced on the basis of a single carpenter's mark (a number 6) used to number the arcade brace (now missing) where it intersected with the western face of the southern arcade post of the westernmost cross frame. The actual number of the brace (a number 6) can be taken as an indication that the arcade bracing did not continue up to the ends, but terminated instead at the end cross frames. This in turn suggests that the original building had either masonry gables, or included a terminal (i.e. return) aisle at each end.

at some later date.⁷ Similarly, it may be significant that the windbraces are not pegged to the purlins, but are simply halved over their inner faces and nailed.

- 3.1.8 Encased inside the present partition wall between bays No.1 and 2 are the remains of two arcade posts which originally formed part of the easternmost of the three aisled cross frames, cross frame No.1. The easternmost bay, bay No.1, is currently inaccessible, and it is not known whether the face of the truss is exposed on this side or not. On the western side of the partition wall, the brickwork has been built flush with the sides of the timbers, so that the original configuration of the cross frame can still be made out. Of the original cross frame all that can now be seen are the two arcade posts, and the post stud⁸ and sill beam on the northern side. It is possible that the southern post stud and sill beam may also survive behind the existing cement render at the southern end of the partition wall.⁹
- 3.1.9 From an analysis of the surviving timbers, it is possible to obtain a fairly clear idea of the original appearance of the easternmost cross frame, at least up to tie beam level. From a design point of view, the cross frame was characterised by the use of angled, or cranked, arcade posts, and the inclusion of short vertical basal timbers (referred to here as 'post studs') which linked the posts to the sill beams, and transferred the loading from the roof, via the arcade posts, directly to the ground. The plain butt joint used to connect the post stud to the arcade post, although unpegged, was extremely well cut and remains tight and secure, and in itself gives no cause to suspect the timber being a later addition, in fact rather the contrary. The post stud was tenoned and pegged to the inner end of the aisle sill beam, and this would have been sufficient to ensure that the timber was held in an upright position, in line with the arcade post. At present it is not clear whether the post stud stood directly on the floor surface, or was set some distance into the ground.
- 3.1.10 The southern arcade post of cross frame No.1 includes a halving for a former passing brace, at the very top of the timber, close to the point at which the post was truncated. The halving is on the western side of the post, a short distance above the point of intersection of the former arcade brace. The northern arcade post was truncated at a lower level, roughly at a point in line with the bottom of the arcade brace mortice, and therefore all evidence of the passing brace on this side of the cross frame has been lost. In the outer face of each arcade post (i.e. the side facing the external side walls of the building) at a distance of some 620mm below the arcade brace is a vertical mortice indicating the position of the two former aisle tie beams, which originally would have linked the posts with the tops of the aisle walls.

3.2 *Fabric analysis and dendrochronology*

- 3.2.1 The recent dendrochronological study of the Cottage has proved successful in producing felling dates, or date ranges, for a number of timbers throughout the building. The initial results suggest that a large proportion (possibly the majority) of the existing timbers were felled in or around the opening years of the fifteenth century. The work is not yet completed and some of the dates given here may be refined pending further analysis.

3.2.2 Summary list of tree-ring dated timbers:

Note: 'LMR' = date of last measured ring in the core sample. The sample may or may not include the H/S boundary; 'H/S' = heartwood/sapwood boundary. If present in the core sample, a felling date range can be provided from an estimate of the number of missing sapwood rings.

⁷ There are also a number of empty halvings and mortices along the top of the tie beam, which may also signify the existence of an earlier truss.

⁸ This is a newly coined term for a feature which, at present at least, appears to have no known parallels in aisled buildings in East Anglia.

⁹ The use of a similar 'post stud' construction has been recorded at Grange Farm barn, Ingham, Norfolk, by Stephen Hayward. They are also known in Kent.

Easternmost cross frame (cross frame No.1)

69/81 S arcade post LMR: AD 1391 (H/S = last ring in sample)

The post stud to the N arcade post of the easternmost cross frame (70/81) was sampled but did not produce a date; the associated sill beam on the N side (71/81) has a LMR of AD 1431 (no H/S boundary).

Arcade plates within bay No.2 (between cross frames Nos.1 and 2)

76/81 S upper plate (reused timber) LMR: AD 1393 (H/S =last ring in sample)

The timber includes on its inner face an empty halving for a diagonal passing brace, suggesting it could be a reused length of arcade post or aisle tie beam taken from the earlier building.

Central cross frame (cross frame No.2)

75/81 Brace from N post to tie beam LMR: AD 1393 (H/S = last ring in sample)
77/81 N arcade post LMR: AD 1383 (H/S = last ring in sample)

Arcade plates within bay No.3 (between cross frames Nos.2 and 3)

78/81 S lower plate LMR: AD 1392
79/81 S upper plate undated

Westernmost cross frame (cross frame No.3)

72/81 N queen post undated
73/81 Collar undated
74/81 S queen post undated
80/81 S arcade post LMR: AD1389
81/81 Sill beam to S arcade post LMR: AD1389

3.3 *Interpretation*

- 3.3.1 The results of the tree-ring analysis suggest that all three of the extant cross frames, together with the upper and lower arcade plates over bays 2 and 3, are of the same date, i.e. of those timbers sampled, all have their last measured ring (LMR) in the date range AD 1383-1391, and were therefore probably felled in the period AD 1400-1450.
- 3.3.2 The aisle sill beam on the north side of the easternmost cross frame (cross frame No.1) was found to have a LMR of AD 1431. Since the sill beam is tenoned and pegged to the arcade post and post stud, and clearly formed an integral part of the overall assemblage, it must follow that the sill beam, the arcade post and the post stud are all of the same date.
- 3.3.3 Given that the easternmost cross frame was itself an integral part of the original aisled structure, and indeed has been shown to correspond almost precisely with the westernmost cross frame in terms of the relative positioning of its arcade braces, aisle tie beams and sill beam, etc, it may be concluded that the entire building was constructed in its original form at a date after AD 1431. Although perhaps somewhat later than might have been expected, the date would nevertheless still appear to fit within the collective estimated felling date range for the building of AD 1400-1450.
- 3.3.4 It should be possible to confirm whether or not the two end aisle cross frames are of the same date by opening up the present wall around the sides of the southern arcade post of cross frame No.3 and inspecting its eastern face for evidence of a former passing brace in the same position as its counterpart at the opposite end of the building, in cross frame No.1. If there is a halving for such a passing brace, then the extant tie beam braces (together with those of the central cross frame) are clearly secondary, and must point in turn to the present roof structure (including the tie beams and upper plates) having been reconstructed. If there is not a halving for a passing brace, then the conclusion must be that all of the present structure up to and including the tie beams and arcade plates is of the same date, i.e. of between AD 1431-50.
- 3.3.5 Although undated by dendrochronology, there is evidence to suggest that the present queen post roof structure is of a later date than the rest of the timber-framed structure.
- 3.3.6 Although the estimated felling dates of most of the dated timbers were consistently found to lie within the date range of c.AD1400-1450, it is clear from the structural evidence within the building that the timber-frame has been considerably altered since it was first constructed. However, whereas in his earlier report on the building, Stephen Heywood concluded that the present structure consists of two separate phases, i.e. with the cross frame at the easternmost end (cross frame No.1) representing the earlier, and original, phase of construction, it is clear from the latest research that the two end cross frames (Nos.1 and 3) are in fact of the same date and structural form, and formed part of an original four-bay building which conformed to more or less the same plan as the existing building.

3.4 *Recommendations for further research*

3.4.1 *Documentary research:*

Together with tree-ring dating and the stylistic analysis of architectural features, the main tool for elucidating the historical development of the site is documentary research. In the case of the 18th and 19th century especially, where there is much work still to be done in tying the different episodes of alteration and repair to particular periods of ownership and occupation of the site, the use of documentary sources will clearly be of crucial importance to furthering our understanding of the historical fabric. Having arrived at a broad working chronology for the site, there is now a need for someone to carefully sift through all of the written and drawn documentary information and, where possible, try to relate it to the existing historical and archaeological evidence for the site. Allied to this is the need to compile a site archive of

historical maps, drawings, photographs, etc, and the physical task of gathering and collating the material into a single, useable report. On the strict issue of planning consent, there will be an obligation on the part of the owner of Abbey Farm to ensure that a proper building analysis watching brief is maintained over the site during the course of any future structural works, i.e. the historical analysis (including documentary research) of the site should be continued throughout the duration of the repair/restoration works, in order that new evidence can be assessed and recorded as and when it comes to light, and informed decisions made as to its historical significance.

3.4.2 Measured survey:

It is essential that the building be properly recorded and understood prior to any final decisions being taken over its restoration and future use. The immediate need is for a complete set of accurate metric survey drawings showing the building as it exists now, preferably in CAD format, to serve as a basis for recording detailed structural and archaeological information, such as the phasing of the timber frame and external brick and flint walls. The metric survey information could be used to generate a series of reconstruction views of the buildings, showing how the Barn and Cottage structures developed through time. In addition, the metric survey drawings would also provide a basis for showing detailed repair proposals and recording further historical information as it comes to light during the course of the works.

3.4.3 Archaeological excavation:

Depending on the conclusions of the preliminary stage of the building analysis, it may be desirable to ascertain the precise form of the original aisled cross frame at the easternmost end of the building (cross frame No.1). It would be interesting to know, for example, whether the 'post studs' (i.e. the short vertical members which were scarfed on to the bases of the arcade posts) were originally designed to be earthfast timbers, or were surface-mounted members which stood directly off the floor surface of the building. It is generally recognised that, prior to the introduction of newer and sophisticated timber framing methods in England in the 12th and 13th centuries, most timber buildings would have been of earthfast construction, i.e. with wall posts embedded firmly in the ground. As carpentry methods developed there was a gradual shift away from the more primitive earthfast tradition towards to use of 'box framing' in which the external walls of timber-framed buildings were set upon a stone rubble, or brick, plinth. Nevertheless the rate of change would not have been constant for all buildings in all parts of the country, and among utilitarian and humble structures especially it is probable that the earlier methods would have persisted for far longer. Today, it is mainly to the study of such buildings that we owe our knowledge of early medieval carpentry in England.

3.4.4 Fabric analysis:

In addition to establishing the original form of the Cottage building, it is important that we develop a much clearer understanding of the later development of the building, and its conversion to part domestic, part stable accommodation in the late-18th or 19th centuries. An accurate drawn record should be made of the fixtures and fittings throughout the building, including the joinery, ceilings, floors and wall finishes. There may be scope for a paint research project, to assist with the phasing and interpretation of the interior decorative schemes. The fabric evidence should be assessed in the light of the documentary research (and vice versa) and combined into a single, integrated matrix for phasing the building.

4 Abbey Farm Barn

4.1 Architectural Description

- 4.1.1 Abbey Farm Barn is a long, rectangular building aligned E-W and situated on the south side of the former farmyard. The building lies immediately to the west of Abbey Farm Cottage. Most of the building is encased in flint with gault brick dressings and a corrugated asbestos roof.
- 4.1.2 The building is divided into two storeys. Internally, the exterior walls appear to have been completely rebuilt up to first floor level, probably at some time during the 19th century. The first floor is open to a crown-post roof that extends the entire length of the building. The roof is divided by seven crown-post trusses into eight bays. In addition, there is a gable truss at each end. For the purpose of this report, the roof trusses have been numbered 1 to 9 from west to east, starting at the west gable and ending at the east gable.
- 4.1.3 The present eight-bay structure comprises two separate phases of construction. The western half of the building pre-dates the eastern half and contains the shell of an original four-bay timber-framed building dating from around the middle of the 15th century. The eastern half represents a four-bay extension of the earlier building in around AD1540. Included within the frame of the eastern addition and forming an integral part of the c1540's work is a large group of re-used elements from an earlier, high-quality building of probable 15th century date.
- 4.1.4 The original mid -15th century building forming the present western half of the building was a two-storey, timber-framed structure, with a high-quality crown-post roof. The building was jettied at first floor on its south side (i.e. the side facing the main Conventual buildings). Behind the exterior flint wall cladding the first floor wall framing is largely intact, preserving such evidence as the original window positions and shutter arrangements. The roof itself is almost completely intact, with the rafters still arranged in their original sequence according to the pattern of carpenter's marks present on the timbers. At first floor, the building appears originally to have been divided into two, with one very large chamber occupying the easternmost three bays and a much smaller chamber at the west end. The central section of the tie beam of the former cross frame partition (roof truss No.4) has been cut away and new tie beam braces inserted, yet preserves evidence of a possible door opening at its south end. The roof trusses above tie beam level are numbered 1 to 3 from east to west. The tie beam braces are numbered 1 to 3 from west to east along the north side of the building, and 4 to 6 from east to west along the south side (with braces 3 and 4 from roof truss No.4 now missing and having been replaced).
- 4.1.5 Within the phase 2, four-bay eastern addition, the tie beams and their braces are numbered in similar fashion to the numbering system adopted in the phase 1 western end of the building. The beams and braces are numbered at each end of the tie beam, the numbering running from 1 to 4 from east to west along the north side of the building, and 5 to 8 from west to east along the south side. The numbering sequence extends up to the tie beam of the eastern gable (where there is a number 8 at its south end), suggesting that the gable, although now a masonry wall, was originally timber-framed, with braces between the wall posts and tie beam.
- 4.1.6 By contrast, it would appear that in the phase 1 construction at the western end, there were originally no braces in the former eastern gable (removed following the construction of the phase 2 addition). Again, this observation is based on the sequence of carpenter's marks found on the tie beams and braces, and the fact that the numbering is complete, even though the end tie beam is now missing. Indeed, the same is also true of the present western gable, where, although there is a tie beam, there are no carpenter's marks present at either end (or indeed, pegs/peg holes) to indicate there were ever any tie beam braces.

4.2 *Fabric analysis and dendrochronology*

- 4.2.1 A total of 69 samples were taken from the building. The work has built on, and largely confirms, the findings of the earlier Sheffield study carried out in 1992; however, again it should be stressed that the current tree-ring dating work is not yet completed and is open to revision pending further analysis.
- 4.2.2 The samples taken from the west end of the building, i.e. the original, phase 1, four-bay jettied range, produced a set of estimated felling dates pointing to a date of construction in around the middle of the fifteenth century. The dates may be capable of further refinement as the analysis progresses.
- 4.2.3 Three of the samples taken from the rebuilt east gable of the eastern extension produced felling dates in the early to mid seventeenth century.
- 4.2.4 Summary list of tree-ring dated timbers:

7/81	W end of N wall plate in E addition	LMR: AD 1301 (no H/S)
12/81	E end of N wall plate in original W range	LMR: AD 1336 (no H/S)
16/81	E end of N wall plate in E addition	LMR: AD1525 (6 sapwood rings)
19/81	E end of S wall plate in E addition	LMR: AD 1523 (6 sapwood rings)
50/81	Collar of rafter pair 38, E addition	LMR: AD 1536 (complete sapwood)

4.3 *Interpretation*

- 4.3.1 It seems most probable that the four easternmost bays were added following the change of use of the site to a farmyard soon after the Priory was dissolved in *c.*1540. The lack of any evidence of a late/post-medieval floor structure within the eastern extension suggests that the original four-bay addition was open from ground floor to roof. The walls of the extension were timber-framed with brick infilling between the framing members. It is possible that the enlarged late-sixteenth century building functioned as a combined barn (east end) and stable/store (west end).
- 4.3.2 The roof and wall framing of the eastern addition was constructed using a large amount of second-hand timber salvaged from an earlier building or buildings. The wall plates, most of the crown posts and at least two of the wall posts are all reused timbers. In addition to the housings for the extant roof timbers, the reused wall plates include an second, alternating series of redundant rafter seatings, showing them to have served as wall plates in their previous use. Along the underside of the wall plates, the reused timbers retain the mortice evidence for a series of long, frieze windows. The crown posts were produced from a series of timber window sill beams. The posts are morticed along their length for a series of moulded timber mullions. The sill beams are themselves moulded timbers and heavily weathered on their formerly external faces. The shape of the individual mullions can be clearly made out in outline around the empty mortice holes. The size of the re-used wall posts (roof truss No.7) and quality of their construction suggests they originated in a building of considerable scale and quality. The posts have wide chamfer mouldings with pyramidal run-out stops and are morticed on their inner faces for a pair of deep-section former arch braces.
- 4.3.3 Another possible interpretation is that the existing post-1540's construction represents a rebuilding of an earlier (i.e. pre-*c.* 1540) timber-framed structure on the site of the eastern extension. According to this theory, the extant wall plates and group of former window sill beams now serving as crown posts would have been salvaged and reused from the original

building when the walls and roof were rebuilt during a post- c.1540 remodelling of the structure. However, whilst the existence of a pre-c.1540's phase to the eastern extension may seem reasonable in theory, there are equally strong indications that the wall plates and window sills/crown posts originated in a different building altogether. For example, whereas the group of reused/repositioned wall plates and window sills/crown posts indicate an origin in a high quality, storied structure, there has as yet been found no evidence that the eastern addition was a storied structure prior to the insertion of the existing first floor in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the building would only have been standing some ninety years before being taken down and rebuilt as a barn. Not only would this have meant the loss of an otherwise perfectly good domestic building in favour of a purely utilitarian structure of decidedly lesser value and status, the actual rebuilding of the structure would have expensive operation in itself.

4.4 *Recommendations for further research*

- 4.4.1 As with the Cottage and landscape setting of the site as a whole, there remains much to be done in the way of detailed documentary research, fabric analysis and recording, before we can be confident that we have a full understanding of the historical development of the building. As will be appreciated from the above summary account of the standing structure, the building has a complex and unusual history, and even at this stage remains open to various interpretations. Establishing the date of construction of the phase 2 eastern extension especially will be of crucial importance to how the building as a whole will be perceived and should be presented to the public, i.e. was alteration carried out before or after the Dissolution. Again, the evidence as it stand is still somewhat contradictory, and may change as more and more evidence comes to light during the course of the proposed repair works. As in the case of the Cottage building, there will also be a statutory obligation to maintain a proper Watching Brief over the work to record and assess the fabric through the duration of the Project.

5 Acknowledgements

- 5.1.1 The project benefited greatly from the earlier study of Abbey Farm carried out by Stephen Heywood in 1992. The set of survey drawings by Robert Smith which accompanied the published report were equally useful in terms of explaining the site and recording dendrochronological and historical information during the course of the project. The project team is grateful to Dr. David Robinson of English Heritage for reading and commenting upon the text of this report. The brief for the project was provided by John Ette of the East Midlands Region of English Heritage and the work was facilitated by the Project Team of the Priory Ruins & Abbey Farm Management Board of English Heritage. Thanks are also due to Alex Bayliss and the staff of the English Heritage Ancient Monuments Laboratory for their input in commissioning and monitoring the dendrochronology project. Finally, thanks to Paul Rudkin and his colleagues at Thetford District Council for providing assistance with site access throughout the course of the project.

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