

THE WHITWELL TITHE BARN

By M. J. DOLBY

IN the grounds of Whitwell rectory, at a distance of 100 ft. south of the rectory, stands an ivy-covered ruin. The ruin is that of a building, constructed of local limestone, which is said to have once been the rectorial tithe barn of the parish of Whitwell.

At the present time, all that remains of the structure is the western end. The gable end wall of the building is aligned in a north-south direction, and is complete in its length (some 20 ft.), but the top of the wall has been trimmed horizontal at a height of approximately 14 ft. above the present ground surface. This wall is pierced by triangular-shaped vent holes, which are aligned horizontally, but not vertically. At right angles to the gable end wall, from each end, a stretch of wall runs eastwards for almost 15 ft. Both walls abut on the gable end wall, and each has a doorway, at the western end of the north wall, and 6 ft. from the western end of the south wall. In the south wall, above the doorway, and at the present top of the wall, is the lower portion of a window opening (plate VII).

In 1960-1, the area inside and around the building was cleared of the trees and shrubs which then grew there in profusion. A considerable amount of dead ivy was removed from the walls at this time. During the clearance of ivy a fine timber upright, standing to a height of nearly 18 ft., was discovered, built into the south-western corner of the ruin, and towering above the surviving stonework. The upright, which is of oak of approximately 1 ft. square section, stands upon a massive base of limestone, and is undoubtedly in its original position. It was realized that this upright was a vestige of an earlier, timber-framed building, which for some reason had become incorporated into the later stone-built barn, the remains of which are still to be seen.

During August 1966 the upright was measured, and the mortices were plotted as accurately as the present state of the timber would allow.¹ The measured drawing shows the probable layout of the timber framework of the original barn adjacent to the upright (fig. 22). Grooves for horizontal weatherboarding were found on the north side of the upright between the top of the lower tie-beam and the base of the mortice for the raking strut to the main tie-beam, and three further grooves were found in the same face, directly above the raking strut mortice. Above these three grooves were six circular

¹ In July 1966, the area inside and around the ruin was cleared in preparation for a visit to Whitwell by the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire. During this visit, Mr. M. W. Barley inspected the ruin and informed the writer that the timber upright represented one of the main uprights of an aisled timber-framed barn, and was important enough to warrant full recording.

hollows, spaced at regular intervals, which could be locating holes for wooden rails or louvres. The end of the eastern raking strut, i.e. the one supporting the wall-plate, was found in position in its mortice, but its outer end had been sawn off (fig. 23).

At the northern extremity of the gable end wall, the limestone base for the corresponding main upright of the western end of the barn was found in position, giving the width of the central body of the barn at its western end as 21 ft. 6 in. (measured to base centres). No traces were found of the aisle post bases when trenches were projected along the line of the gable end wall in both a north and south direction. Trenching at intervals across the presumed line of the north and south walls of the barn likewise failed to reveal

THE WHITWELL TITHE BARN PLAN OF THE SITE

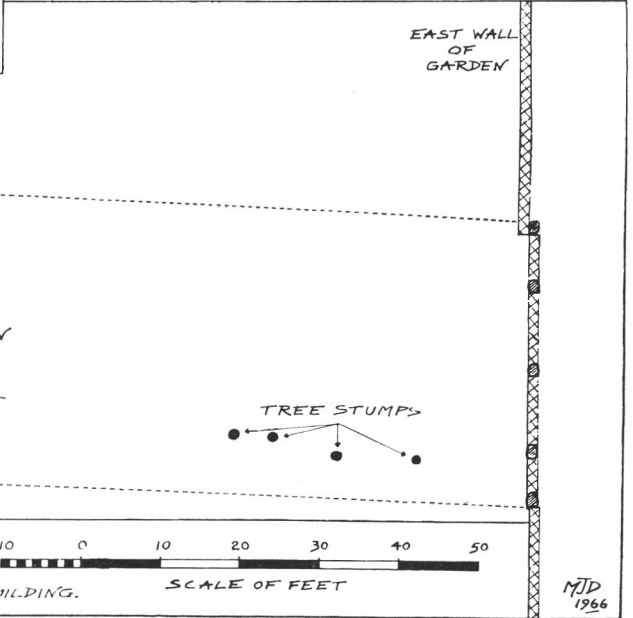
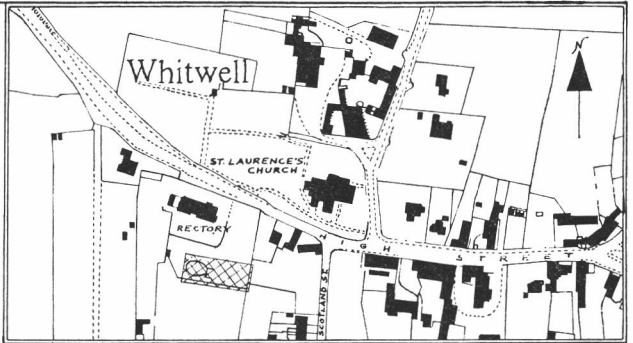


FIG. 22.

any stone bases in position for either main posts or aisle posts. In fact the ground was found to have been thoroughly disturbed as if a deliberate attempt had been made to raze all except the western end of the barn to the ground.

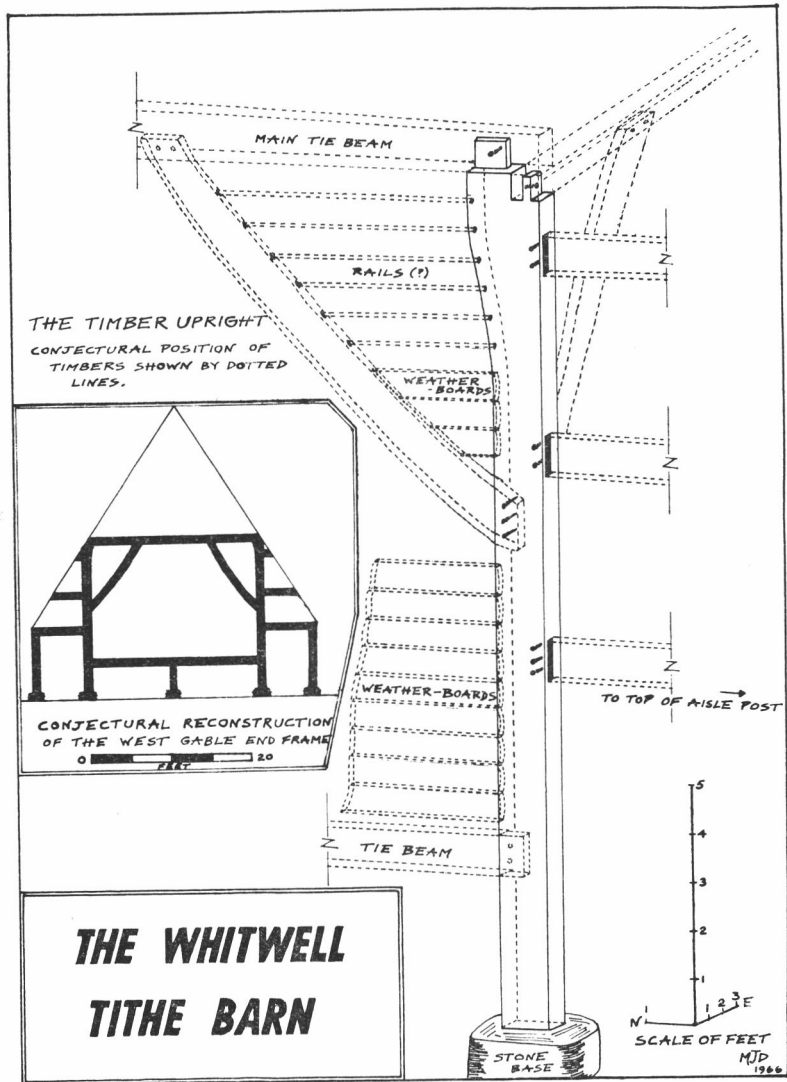


FIG. 23.

During further work in the rectory garden, four of the stone bases for the eastern gable end of the barn were found still in position, incorporated in the base of the east wall of the garden. These bases represent, from south to north, firstly, the southern aisle post, secondly, the southern main upright,



a. General view of the S.W. corner showing the timber upright.



b. View to the W. along the line of the S. wall showing the upper portion of the timber upright.

WHITWELL TITHE BARN.

thirdly, the central upright, which, by analogy with the western end, probably supported a tie-beam joining the main uprights at a height of about 4 ft. above the level of the top of the bases, and, fourthly, the northern main upright. The finding of these bases in position has made it possible to assess the overall length and width of the timber-framed barn, and to confirm that it was originally an aisled barn with aisles between 6 and 7 ft. in width.

The dimensions of the timber-framed barn, which can be calculated from the evidence available, are as follows:

- Overall length — 91 ft.
- Overall width (eastern end only) — slightly in excess of 33 ft.
- Width between main uprights (western end) — 21 ft. 6 in.
- (eastern end) — 20 ft. 7 in.
- Width of the aisles (eastern end only) — 6-7 ft.
- Height of the main uprights — 18 ft. to tie-beam.
- Overall height (estimated) — slightly in excess of 33 ft.

Since the overall length of the barn was slightly over 90 ft., it might be suggested that the building consisted of six equal bays of about 15 ft. in length.

When the bases for the eastern end of the barn were discovered, a moss-covered heap of stones was noticed piled up against the east wall of the garden several yards to the north. Many of these stones, from their size and shape, appear to have once been the base stones of a timber-framed building. They could possibly be the bases upon which the barn rested, which were removed and piled here when the barn was demolished.

The History of the Barn

The Whitwell timber-framed barn was of post and truss type, possibly dating from the 15th century, although there was an example of an aisled barn of similar type dated as late as 1604 at Rempstone, Notts., until quite recently.² The early history of the Whitwell barn is, in fact, obscure, for documentary evidence of the building is non-existent from the time of its construction until it is mentioned in a church terrier of 1824.³ At that date, the barn is merely listed with the other buildings in the Whitwell rectory complex — “The Rectory House, *Barn*, Dove Cote, four Stables, Chaise House, Fodder Room, Cow House with a Granary over them, two small gardens, one hard Pleasure Ground . . .” — and was then probably still used for its original purpose, i.e. the storage of the rectorial tithes in kind. The Whitwell enclosure award map of 1814⁴ shows the barn as a rectangular structure, with the oval ornamental pond at the western end already in existence.⁵ By 1883,⁶ however, the barn had contracted in width at its

² T. H. Rickman, “An Aisled Barn at Rempstone”, *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 1962, 6-8.

³ “A Terrier of the Lands and Tenements belonging to the Rectory of Whitwell in the County of Derby” (13 October 1824). In the possession of the rector of Whitwell.

⁴ Fairbank Collection, Sheffield City Libraries.

⁵ The earthworks of the pond can still be defined at the present time.

⁶ The 1883 edition of the 6-in. series Ordnance Survey.

western end. It thus appears that, between 1814 and 1883, and very probably soon after 1814 by the style of the moulding on the wooden frame of the southern doorway (if the frame is contemporary with the rebuilding of the barn), the western end of the barn, possibly two or three bays in length, was replaced in stone, but without the aisles. At the same time, the timber upright would have been shrouded in stonework, and the wooden lintels of both doorways, which are of re-used timber, would probably have been made from timbers of the demolished section of the barn.⁷ There is no conclusive evidence available to show whether the eastern end of the barn was rebuilt in stone or not during the 1814-83 period, but it is suggested that the western end of the barn, by the somewhat haphazard nature of its construction, was rebuilt in stone rather hurriedly when the condition of this part of the timber-framed barn made major renovations necessary.

After the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, when tithes in kind were replaced by an annual rent charge, the barn would cease to be used for its intended purpose, and would then presumably have been used as a more general storage building.

The barn appears to have remained in existence until 1884, when the old rectory was demolished, and the present rectory was built to the design of J. Lathrop Pearson, R.A., on the same site, but at a higher level than its predecessor. The problem outstanding appears to be why the ruins of the western end of the barn were allowed to remain at the rebuilding of 1884, when the rest of the barn and all the other outbuildings in the old rectory complex were so completely destroyed. There is no doubt that the western end of the barn was left as a ruin at the rectory rebuilding, for a photograph of the rectory taken from the south shortly after 1900 shows in the foreground the tithe barn ruins in the same state as at the present time.⁸ The most credible explanation, in the writer's opinion, is that the portion of the barn remaining today was deliberately left standing as a romantic ivy-covered ruin in 1884, as an ornament in a landscaped garden visible from the drawing-room of the new rectory. In support of this explanation, there were found during clearance work at the site in 1966 the rotten sawn-off stumps of several trees, which had been planted, probably soon after 1884, on the line of the south wall of the barn to the east of the ruin. These trees could not have existed in their present position prior to 1884, when the 1883 edition 6-in. series Ordnance Survey map shows the area in question covered by the barn, so the most likely explanation is that the trees were planted as a screen, and date from the landscaping of the garden soon after 1884.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to the rector of Whitwell, the Rev. F. J. Brabyn, for his unflinching assistance and co-operation during the whole period of work

⁷ The lintel of the north doorway is, by the position of mortices upon it, almost certainly the upper portion of a main upright.

⁸ Photograph in the possession of the rector of Whitwell.

at the site. I wish to thank Miss Vanessa Parker for her assistance in surveying the barn and for reading the manuscript of the report. I am also greatly indebted to Mr. Michael Jackson for his assistance at the site, and without whose help the task of compiling this report would have been much more difficult. Finally, thanks are due to my brother, Mr. Trevor Dolby, who was responsible for much of the initial clearance of ivy from the ruin and vegetation from the surrounding area of the garden.