

In 1838, John was appointed Land Tax Commissioner for Eastern Essex (www.essex-family-history.co.uk). The parish of Woodham Mortimer is described as '*a small parish of scattered houses*' consisting of 1380 acres, 3 roods and 29 poles of land, 78 acres of wood and 25 acres of roads and waste (*White's Directory 1848*).

By 1846 the farm was taking a good income from the sale of timber and in 1847 John married Louisa Durant and began work on the house, improving the entrance, building a new drawing room and library and raising it by another storey; Whites directory of 1848 describes it as 'a neat and pleasant mansion' and makes no reference to the farm, possibly because the farmland that joined Woodham Mortimer Place only equated to 255 acres of the 2500 he farmed. It is possible that at this time he also overhauled the farmyard and stables, as there is a marked change from the 1838 Tithe Map and the 1874 OS Map. However John was soon to discover that agriculture was a harsh enterprise.

1848 brought a bad harvest, the land was drenched by the wet weather and as a result the sheep became diseased. The population was recorded as three hundred and eight, even less than in 1831 and 1850 saw a year of rent abatements. In the census of 1851 John describes himself as a Magistrate and Landowner of 2500 Ac. employing 50 men.

In the house there is a Footman, Coachman, Ladies Maid, Housemaid, Nurse and Nursemaid presumably to help with the three children under the age of three.

1852 brought another bad harvest when the weather was so wet and stormy that the reaping machine pulled up the barley by its roots. In this year he joined the bank Sparrow, Tufnell & Co, a position gained by the investment of £10,000.00 from his father-in-law. This is confirmed in the census of 1861 in which John again describes himself as a Magistrate but is now also a Banker and a Farmer of only 1000 Ac. Clearly he has transferred his efforts into Banking, which is probably more lucrative, however, he is still employing fifty men and has added to this with twenty-five boys. He now has seven children and the house staff has changed to suit the new growing family – a Butler, Governess, Nurse, Cook and three Housemaids.

In 1865 there was a long, drawn out cattle plague, with which, according to his diaries, John was very involved (*Parker O.D. 1925*); he notes the symptoms, the deaths and his visits with the vets. He bred Shorthorn Cattle and South Devon Sheep and allegedly, the Sheds at Woodham Mortimer Place were filled with Prize Cards (*Parker Unknown 193?*).

He always acted as Director of the yard at The Agricultural Society Show, and in 1868 at the Chelmsford show, he was President.

In the 1871 census he continues as a Magistrate, Banker and Landowner and has increased his farming to 1250 acres employing seventy-two men and twenty-two boys. He has only two daughters at home but his household, though changed, has not reduced – Butler, Governess, Groom, Cook, Housemaid, Ladies Maid and Kitchen Maid.

By 1874 the population of Woodham Mortimer had barely grown to three hundred and twenty-four people, spread across sixty-six houses (*Kelly E.R. 1874 p.273*). Woodham Mortimer Place, Woodham Mortimer Hall and Woodham Mortimer Lodge remained the chief residences.

In 1876, John considered giving up the farm as he was struggling to find tenants. He notes that he would rather let tenant farmers continue to farm the land without paying rent than to have farms go empty (*Parker O.D. 1925*). This is confirmed by P.J. Perry's analysis of agricultural bankruptcies in the years 1871-3 which shows relatively high levels in Essex. It seems that land farmers in Essex may already have been in serious difficulties and delays in rent were commonplace; by 1877 adverts were appearing in Scottish newspapers in search of tenants to fill the numerous vacant farms (Thirsk, J. & Collins E.J.T 2011).

By the 1881 Census, John describes himself as a Justice of the Peace and Banker and his farming had again reduced to only 800 Ac., as had his labour force to forty-eight men and twelve boys. These difficult times may have had an impact on his health, as among the reduced household of Cook, Housemaid, Kitchen Maid and Groom is an 'Attendant on Invalid'; at this time his four daughters are also back at home.

Over a seventy-year period, Christopher Comyns Parker and his son John Oxley-Parker administered more than twenty different estates in Essex. In his personal diaries John claimed that he always asked himself two questions regarding his prospective tenants; '*Was he an energetic farmer? Did he know his job and use his initiative in doing it?*' (*Davidoff, 1995 L. p.197*)

John had a fervent interest in agriculture but his passion was horses. He bred them, hunted them and rode them on a daily basis. It was not unusual for him to do 30-40 miles a day in one of his carts or carriages (*Parker Unknown 193?*). He was a Partner at Sparrow, Tufnell & Co Bank, Chairman of the Essex Equitable Insurance Society (*Ogborn,*

M.E. 1962), Justice for the Peace, Deputy Lieutenant and High Sherriff of Essex; a tradition that continued in the family. He was a good landlord, known for paying fair wages and for holding a rural fete at Woodham Mortimer Place every other year with steam engines, roundabouts, aunt sallies, coconut shies, races and for the two cricket matches held each year at Woodham Mortimer Place, but mostly for the beer that he gave freely by the keg to his labourers at 8am every morning and to anyone else after that. In reminiscences from C. J. Goodwin in the Essex Chronicle 5 March 1909, John was remembered for his duties as churchwarden at St Margaret's Church, his distribution of bread to the poor from a corner under the gallery on Sundays and for visiting the parishioners frequently. When he died his funeral was attended by hundreds of people, the local people lined the streets and the labourers and bailiffs from the farm formed up four-a-breast for the procession to the church.

9.7 On his death, Woodham Mortimer Place passed to his son Christopher William Oxley-Parker (1853 – 1929) but it seems that either the farming was no longer viable or that Christopher was not well enough to continue and he followed his father's profession in banking; in the 1891 Census he describes himself as Justice of the Peace and Banker, but is also noted in brackets as (sick). The household had a Professional Nurse, a second Nurse as well as two Housemaids, a Cook, Groom and a House Key. He clearly made some attempt to continue in the agricultural vein, as at the Chelmsford Auctions in August 1896, through Hibbard & Son, he is selling 150 Southdown Lambs (www.findmypast.com/Chelmsford Chronicle). However, by September 14, 1900 GB Hilliard and Son have been instructed by CW Parker Esq. to:

'sell by auction on the premises the live and dead farming stock comprising 10 cart horses, a broodmare, three well bred nag colts, two donkeys, 11 milch cows mostly fresh calved, 59 steers and heifers, three calves, 216 Southdown ewes and three rams being the entire and well-known long established Woodham Mortimer Place flock of Southdown sheep, 10 fat and 54 store pigs, poultry, and the usual assortment of agricultural implements, two stacks of capital Meadow hay, two stacks of wheat straw and other effects' (www.findmypast.com/chelmsfordchronicle).

9.8 Christopher removed to the family seat of Faulkbourne and despite the fact that he has a son, the 1901 and 1911 Census' show that Woodham Mortimer Place, a house of 21 rooms, is occupied by his sisters Maria (Maria Louisa) and Francis (Emily Francis), both living on their own means, with a small household of a Footman, Cook, Housemaid and Kitchen Maid.

Maria was a Churchwarden of St Margaret's Church for over 40 years and

Superintendent and Committee Member for the Essex Convalescent Home at Clacton for 38 years. Emily Francis Parker was the voluntary organist of St Margaret's Church, involved with the choir and the local school and a skilled archer.

In 1905, while the ladies were in residence, the chimney was struck by lightning during a heavy storm that damaged the roof and dislodged a swarm of bees, scattering the honeycomb (www.findmypast.com/ChelmsfordChronicle).

The two ladies were active in the local community and continued the tradition at Woodham Mortimer Place of holding cricket matches and the Woodham Mortimer Show, a day of competitions for arranged flowers, needlework, sports and maypole dances. They regularly hosted the Women's Institute meetings and garden parties right up to the point of their deaths in 1939 (aged 90) and 1929 (aged 79) respectively and were buried in St. Margaret's Church with their parents and grandparents. They were remembered for their "*great public, self-sacrificing service*" (www.findmypast.com/chelmsfordchronicle 21st July 1939).

9.9 The property remained in the ownership of Christopher until his death in 1929 when it passed to his son, John. After Emily's death in 1929 (aged 79), Maria continued to live there until her death in 1939 (aged 90) when an advertisement in the Chelmsford Chronicle dated July 21 offered *'The antique furniture and the usual household effects including interesting 17th and 18th century items, Old China and porcelain, Plate and plated articles, 1000 volumes of antique books, oil paintings and other pictures, outdoor effects and pot plants, also a seven-seater Wolseley, Landaulette to be sold by auction by CM Stamford and son'* (www.findmypast.com/ChelmsfordChronicle)

9.10 This appears to be where the occupation of the Oxley-Parkers ended, but the family retained the lease and the Oxley-Parker were remembered as always being ready to help 'in need and sickness' (www.findmypast.com/ChelmsfordChronicle).

9.11 Following Miss Parker's death, the army took up residence in 1939 for the period of WWII. In 1942, a fire was reported at the house and, though soon brought under control, it had damaged the roof. By 1944, a Mr. Coates seems to be in residence as he is advertising personal items for sale from that address. Finally in the Chelmsford Chronicle, June 8th 1945 (www.findmypast.com) an advert appears: *'F.S. Daniell has been favoured with instructions by J. Oxley-Parker, Esq., to sell by auction, at the Corn Exchange, Chelmsford on Friday, July 20, 1945 at 4p.m., Woodham Mortimer Place Estate, including four farms, valuable accommodation land, smallholdings, woodlands, 25 cottages, in all 574 acres, in 36 lots. Land agents Messrs.*

Strutt and Parker, Barclays bank, Chambers, Chelmsford Solicitors Gepp and Sons, 66 Duke Street, Chelmsford.
Auctioneers office: Headgate, Colchester phone 3336'

9.12 Major Andrew Carden (1910 – 1996), a Royal Engineers veteran of WWII and architect of Westminster School; Ashridge College, Hertfordshire; Worcester College, Oxford and Fishbourne Roman Palace, purchased part of the farmyard and buildings (*The Peerage.com*). He converted the main barn to residential accommodation and renamed it Crodons Barn. On his death in 1996 the property passed to his son who now plans to convert the Barn (Area 1) into a live/work unit and to reconstruct the Ancillary Building as a storage area adjacent to a new single storey dwelling.

10.0 DESCRIPTION OF STANDING BUILDINGS

10.1 Generally

Imperial measurements were used for the description, as historically, the timber was measured and cut in feet and inches. Metric measurements are provided in brackets.

10.2 The Barn (Area 1)

The Barn is a rectangular box-framed timber building with a midstorey projecting from the east elevation. It sits on a red brick plinth of English bond that continues into a black weatherboard walls and finishes with a red peg-tiled pitched roof with rounded ridge tile. Asbestos guttering and rainwater pipes have been added sometime in the 20th Century. The north elevation is the gable end and has a pitching window in the roof space. The south elevation joins Strelley Barn. The east elevation has a set of double doors with borrowed light above on the north side and a midstorey with a single stable door entrance, a window set to the south at ground floor level and a second window set directly above at first floor level. The west elevation has a new window on the ground floor that serves the workshop and a small window just below the eaves.

10.3 North Elevation

The barn rests on a brick plinth; originally constructed in English bond from handmade red brick 9" (23cm) in length, by 2" (50cm) in height, by 4" (10cm) in width. The brick that was loose and could be viewed in its entirety had no frog and no makers mark. The wall is 9" (230mm), the length of a single brick and there are nine courses visible above

current ground level finishing in a chamfered plinth-brick both internally and externally. The wall continues in the same bond but in single skin for a further four courses. The bond has been disturbed and the brickwork has suffered damage and patch repairs. The areas affected appear to be around the points where the horizontal support timbers for the manger have been cut into the wall, suggesting that the manger may have been a later addition. Incidentally, the nearby brick building appears to be built from the same brick and has English bond in some areas above the plinth which may suggest that there is some correlation between the two buildings; that they were built or renovated/repared at a similar time.



Plate 2. The Barn (Area 1) North Elevation, 1st Floor, Internal (facing north)

The north elevation is the gable end of the pitched roof and the surviving post and truss frame is probably the most reliable source for the original construction as according to the Ordnance Survey maps it is the only elevation that has not been altered or adapted. The 6" x 6" (c.15 x 15cm) sole plate rests on the brick plinth, supporting two 12" x 6" (c.30cm x 15cm) jowled outer posts and one 4" x 4" (c.10 x 10cm) central post that join into the wall plate. The posts are braced diagonally on each side with 6" x 4" (c.15 x 10cm) timbers and three studs ranging in size 5"x3"/4"x 4"/4"x 3" (c.12.5 x 8/10 x 10/10 x 8cm) slot into the diagonal brace above and below, but offset from each other. Two

3"x 2" (7.5 x 5cm) central rails meet at the centre post, providing further bracing. The studs continue upwards to a 8"x8" (c.20 x 20cm) tie beam, on which sit the 5"x3" (c.12.5 x 8cm) Queen posts with the 5"x3" (c.12.5 x 8cm) collar above. At each corner is a complex jointing system; the wall plate meets the jowl post with a lap joint and the tie beam slots in with a dowelled mortice & tenon. The principal rafters 4"x 4"(c.10 x 10cm) rest on the tie beam with a birdsmouth joint and meet at the ridge beam in a mortice & tenon joint. The purlins 4"x 3" (c.10 x 8cm) are set into the collar beams with a double birdsmouth joint. Major and minor rafters make up the rest of the roof and these are supported by a 8" x1" (c.20 x 2.5cm) diagonal brace. The ridge beam set on its corner point, is still in situ but is broken at the fifth rafter. The rafters meet at butt joints and dowelled lap joints and are cut to fit the ridge beam with a birdsmouth joint. There are two trusses separating the barn into three bays and these are supported by a hammer brace.



Plate 3. Example of empty slot for nogging still visible in vertical timber

Dowel holes, 4" cuts for noggins and empty slots in the tie beam are still visible. The most common joint is the mortice & tenon and both wooden and metal dowels are used throughout, as well as nails and metal nuts and bolts to secure the hammer brace to the tie beam and jowl post. The bolts are square-head $\frac{5}{8}$ " and $\frac{3}{4}$ " or $\frac{1}{2}$ " round headed dowels. Most of the timbers are hand-sawn and square-cut and some are chamfered quarter-logs. Many of the studs on the east and west elevations and several of the roof timbers, particularly towards the south have been replaced and a modern ceiling has been installed to separate the barn into two storeys.



Plate 4. The Barn (Area 1), first floor, Internal view, facing northwest - Corner joint, combining jowled post, wall plate, tie beam and diagonal brace to northwest corner

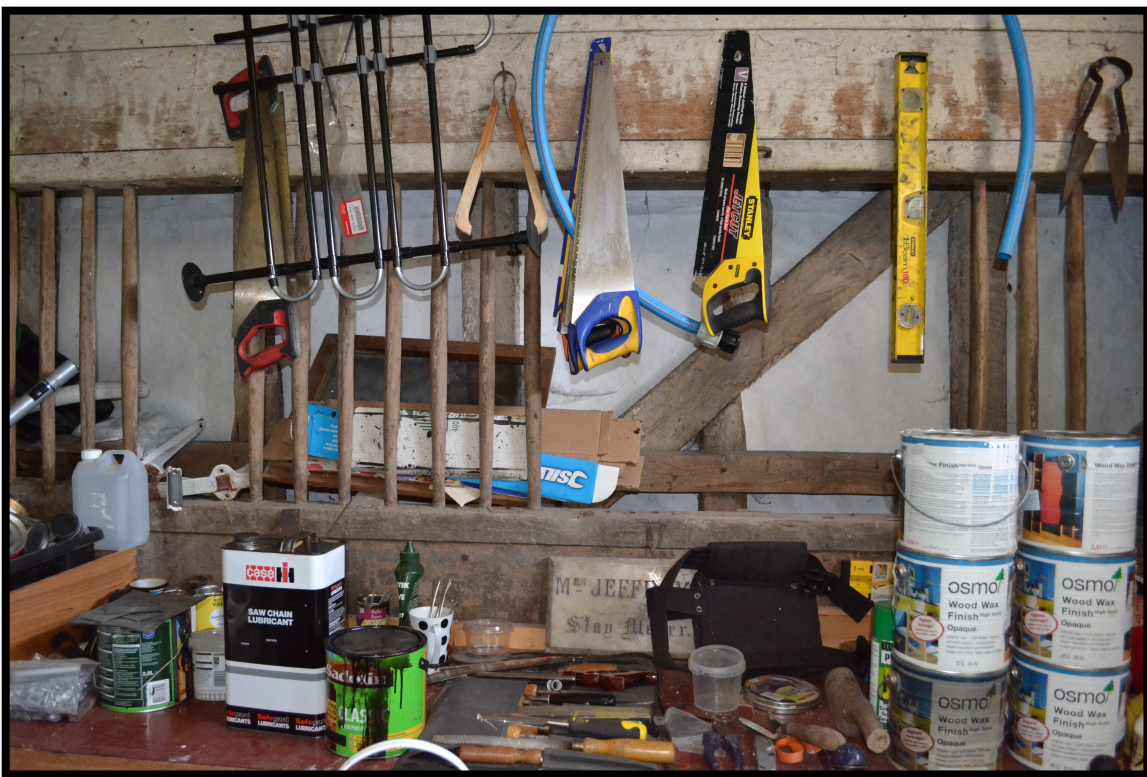


Plate 5. The Barn (Area 1), ground floor, north elevation, - Feeder still in situ behind the modern workbench and beyond the north elevation framework (facing north).

In order to create the manger and feeder a false wall was created 26cm from the outside wall frame. The feeder wall begins at a 4" x 2" (10 x 5cm) vertical rail at ceiling level and continues with three levels of close boarding 7"/9" x 1" (18/23 x 2.5cm) to