



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**A Heritage Asset Survey of the former village bakery
at 38, Causin Way, Lower Benefield,
Northamptonshire**

Joe Prentice and Iain Soden

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Summary

Recording shows that this small Grade II Listed cottage of c1700 was much altered and enlarged when it became the village bakery between 1850 and 1864 a function it fulfilled c1903. Evidence survives for its structural alteration (set out below), but it lacks any all but a very few architectural details of note. It is dominated by its extraordinary baker's oven which gives the present cottage its character.

Topography and historical background

The village of Lower Benefield lies to the north-west of the town of Oundle and is a sister village to Upper Benefield a short distance away. Lower Benefield has early medieval origins and the earthwork remains of a motte and bailey castle exist at the western end of the village. The cottage which is the focus of this report lies at the north-eastern end of the village and is the last property on the east side of the meandering Causin Way, which today is cut in two by the main A427 to Oundle to the east (NGR: SP 9939 8901; Fig 1).

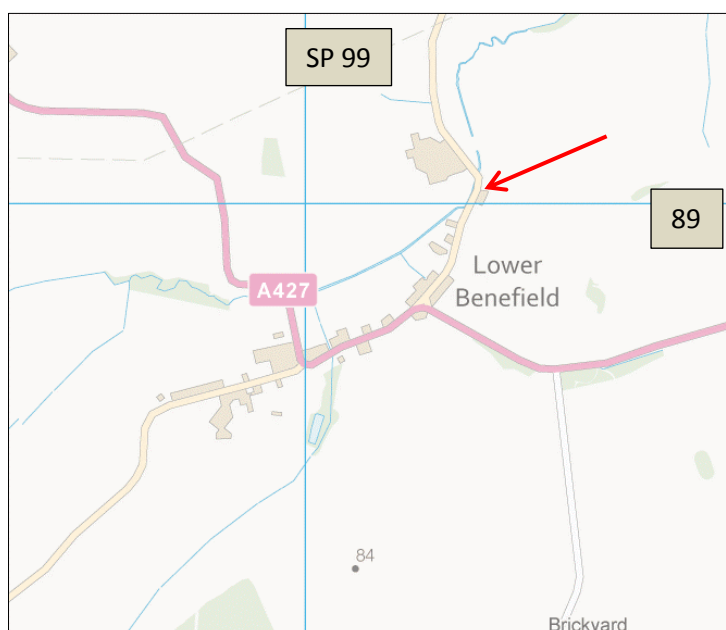


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed); Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown Copyright and database right 2015

Almost no documentary sources have been found which relate specifically to the cottage, perhaps unsurprisingly, since it was of low status and has little architecturally to commend it.

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It is listed in the English Heritage description as follows:

GV II Listing entry 1294489

House. Late C17, raised late C18/early C19. Squared course limestone with Collyweston slate roof. Originally 2 unit plan. 2 storeys. 2-window range of C19 casements under wood lintels. Central C19 plank door, also under wood lintel. Slit fire window to far left. Ashlar stack to left-hand end and brick stack to right. Right gable abutting road has two 2-light, ovolo moulded stone mullion windows, now blocked. Also evidence of C17 roof pitch in right gable. Rear elevation, to garden, is a similar 2-window range of C19 casements. Single storey outbuilding attached to left main front. Interior not inspected but said to have remains of open fireplace and bread oven.

No document was found at the Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO) which specifically refers to the building. Historic maps were consulted and these provide a reasonable chronology of its development though detail is such on all but the latest map to make any but the broadest conclusions impossible about changes to its fabric.

The first map which shows the building is that of 1747 (NRO map 5539). The scale of this map is small and therefore no detail other than the fact that a building appears to be present on the site of the present cottage can be discerned. At this date much of the village and parish were under the ownership of the Biggin Hall estate. Shortly after this date the house of that name was much extended. At the time the estate was held by the Joye family (Heward and Taylor, 1996). It appears that the cottage was also at that time part of the estate and it remains so today, now under the ownership of the Watts-Russell family, who acquired it in 1822.

The OS Surveyors drawing of 1817 (www.bl.ac.uk – Oundle Sheet), the inclosure map of 1824 (NRO map 2885, a and b) and the Tithe Map of 1850 (NRO map 4610) show the same, a simple rectangular building. No other buildings are present on the plot and it does not appear that later additions (see below) are present.

A Watts-Russell estate map of 1864 (NRO map 4652) shows that an addition had been made after 1850 (Fig 2). The cottage, highlighted in red ink, clearly has a smaller square addition towards the south-eastern end where a bread oven extension lies today. Where the current range of outbuildings is located is an un-shaded rectangular outline which suggests that they too had been built. Therefore it appears reasonable to conclude that the cottage was both extended and the service buildings constructed between 1850 and 1864.

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Fig 2 : Map of 1864 showing the property (NRO Map 4652)

On the Ordnance Survey 25-inch Second Edition map of 1900 sheet XVIII 3 (NRO map 1519) the property is depicted in essentially the form in which it survives today, the only addition since the 1864 map being the small coal shed located on the north side of the bread oven extension (Fig 3).

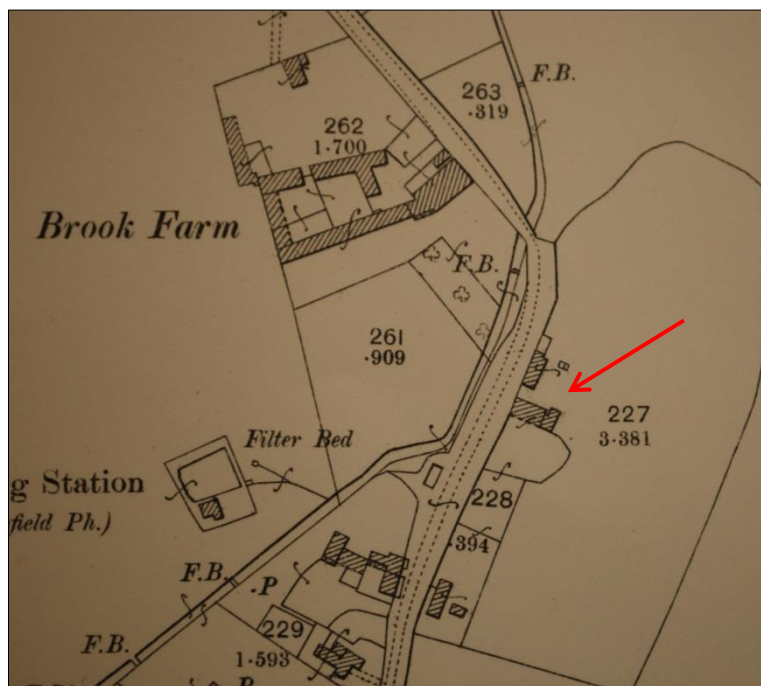


Fig 3: Ordnance Survey 25-inch Second Edition, 1900

In order to establish with more certainty that the cottage served as a bakery, since the bread oven is unusually large (see below), trade directories were consulted. The earliest edition held at the NRO is of 1854 and it lists Joseph Tyrrell as a baker in the village. He is also listed in 1869 but by 1885 the

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baker has changed to William Palmer. William is present in the 1894 and 1900 editions but by 1903 no baker is listed for the village nor is there any further listing after that date.

The 1881 census returns were consulted and at that date William Palmer aged 38 and his wife, Elizabeth, aged 36 with their six children are listed. William's occupation was baker. Although the smaller domestic properties were not numbered at that date when visited by the census enumerator, they were nevertheless visited in linear progression through the village and the previous property was named; it was Brook Farm and this is the same farm which survives across the road to this day (See Fig 3). Clearly no 38 Causin Way was the village bakery from c1854 to 1900/1903.

Building survey

The cottage lies at the north-east end of the village on the eastern side of the road and is aligned along its long axis approximately north-west to south-east; for ease of description within this report it is assumed that the long axis is east-west with the entrance located on the north side (Fig 4). To the north of the cottage is a range of outbuildings which are also included here for completeness though described in less detail.



Fig 4: The cottage in the background; outbuildings to the right. View looking west.

The cottage-exterior, west gable end

This elevation faces the road and lies parallel to it (Fig 5). Like the rest of the cottage, it is built of roughly coursed limestone bonded in lime mortar but with some surface pointing of modern cement. The main elevation is raised on a rough plinth which projects towards the road and raises the building level which is set against rising ground to the east. The main features of this elevation are two identical finely dressed ovolo moulded limestone mullion windows each comprising two lights although now both are blocked, also with limestone. Each has a simple hood mould above it.



Fig 5: The road-side (west-facing) gable, with blocked windows; note the early gable-lines (arrowed)

The quality of these moulded windows appears a little incongruous in a property of this size though it may be that they were built circa 1700 during a wider upgrading of Biggin estate properties. It is also possible however that they have been re-used from elsewhere and their superior quality was not reflected elsewhere in the building. Although both windows are now blocked it can be seen that there remains a slight groove cut into the inner surface of the mullion and jambs indicating that the windows were once fitted with leaded panels.

The remainder of the facade is essentially plain, although the ends of two oak timbers can be seen, one on each side, approximately half way between the level of the two ground and first floor windows. The other principal feature of this elevation is the ghost of the former, original, roof line which rose from the same level as the pieces of visible timber which suggests that they may be the ends of the original wall plates. This original roof line was at a steeper pitch than the current one but it is assumed that the original roof would also have been of tile-stones (Collyweston slates) although this cannot now be established; thatch is also a possibility. At the apex of this earlier pitch the base of a chimney stack can be seen subsequently incorporated into the raised gable. The current chimney stack is constructed of red brick and is a later re-build.

The cottage –exterior, north elevation

This elevation contains the current entrance to the building which is placed almost centrally along this facade, located between two windows of unequal size (Fig 6). The current doorway is fitted with a simple batten and plank door set within a painted frame beneath a timber, probably oak, lintel. It is furnished with a variety of modern locks and a letter box and is hung on simple strap hinges. The window to the east is a two-light timber casement, one fixed, the other opening. Each panel

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contains two panes of glass with timber glazing bars. To the east of this casement is a narrow slit window which lights the stairs (see below). It is currently unglazed.

The window to the west of the central doorway is broader, also set beneath a timber lintel and contains a three light window, each panel here comprising three panes of glass. The two outer lights are fixed, the central one being an opening casement. To the west of the window can be seen a horizontal timber, painted, which represents an earlier window lintel and the faint outline of the blocking indicates that this window was of a smaller size than the present one (Fig 6). Beneath the present window can be seen the outline of a blocked doorway which indicates that this was most likely the original entrance from this side.



Fig 6: The north face of the cottage, showing the old eaves line and original blocked window (arrowed)

At first floor level are two, two-light casements set beneath timber lintels. Both are similar in size and configuration and date to the period when the roof line was raised. Each contains one fixed and one opening casement of three panes each, the frames are of timber but the glazing bars of galvanised metal suggesting that they are relatively modern replacements.

Between the ground and first floor windows can be seen the scar of the original roof eaves level. The principal difference between the two phases of building is the size of the individual stones used, the heightened section utilising mostly larger and better-squared pieces of stone.

To the west of the original cottage is the north face of the secondary addition thought to date to the early 1850's. It is also built of coursed limestone beneath a Collyweston slate roof. There are no visible features in the north wall of this range which is itself partly obscured by a further addition comprising a small outhouse which appears to have been added to serve as a coal shed which is its most recent usage. This shed was also built of coursed limestone and contains no features apart from a door in the east wall (see below).

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The cottage-exterior, east elevation

The east elevation is partly obscured by the addition of the bake-house (Fig 7). It is constructed in a similar fashion to the other elevations and retains the scars of the original roof pitch in a similar fashion to the west gable. The line of the former chimney stack can also be seen although here the stack itself is of ashlar with finely cut details indicating it may be the original late seventeenth-century stack left in place when the roof was raised. Just visible above the roof line of the later addition is part of a timber lintel. Below that is the vertical scar of a jamb indicating the presence of a blocked window.

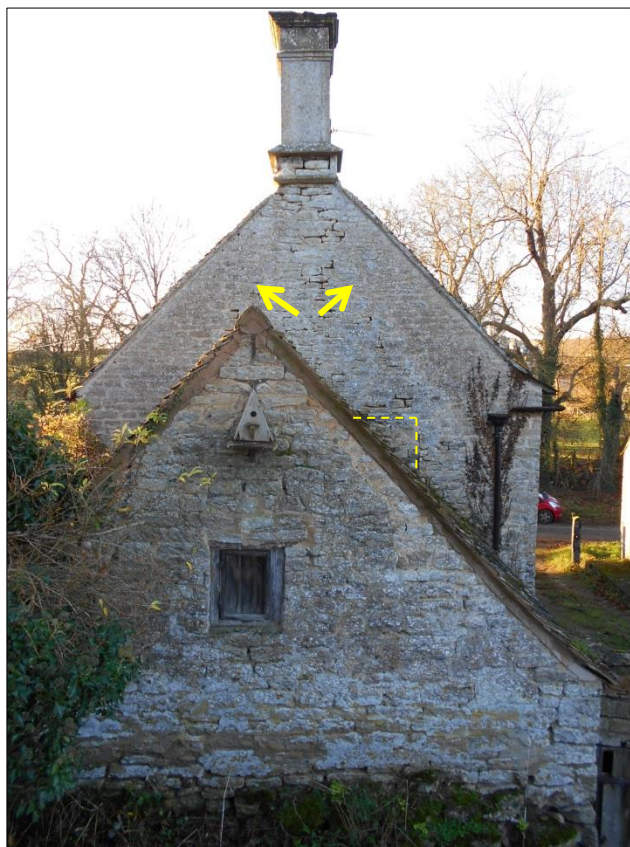


Fig 7: The eastern gable with added two-storey bake-house in the foreground; the original gable and blocked window are marked

The bake-house building is fitted into the rising ground against which the whole cottage lies, hardly apparent from the north but very evident from the east where the ground level reaches to almost the level of the lintels of the ground floor windows of the main cottage. Thus the lower part of the bake-house lies below ground and only the upper part can be observed. It too is built of coursed limestone and the only visible feature of the east gable is a small window at attic level fitted with an unpainted oak frame and shutter panel hung on simple iron strap hinges. On map evidence (above) the bake-house dates between 1850 and 1864 and contains the bread oven on its ground floor.

The later coal house is accessed via a doorway in the east elevation. It retains only a simple batten and plank door of unpainted timber. This appears to have been built after 1864 but before 1900 when it is depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of that date.

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The cottage-exterior, south elevation

This elevation is essentially the same as the north elevation although without the central doorway (Fig 8). Constructed of the same materials it contains on the ground floor two windows although in this elevation the three-light casement is at the east end and the two-light at the west end. The scar of the original eaves level can also be seen and the first floor windows are both located in the section of heightened walling. The only other visible feature in this elevation is a blocked fire window towards the eastern end of the wall, currently masked by undergrowth. The south side of the secondary addition is largely obscured by the rising ground level, more apparent on this side of the building.



Fig 8: the south-facing elevation of the cottage.

The cottage interiors

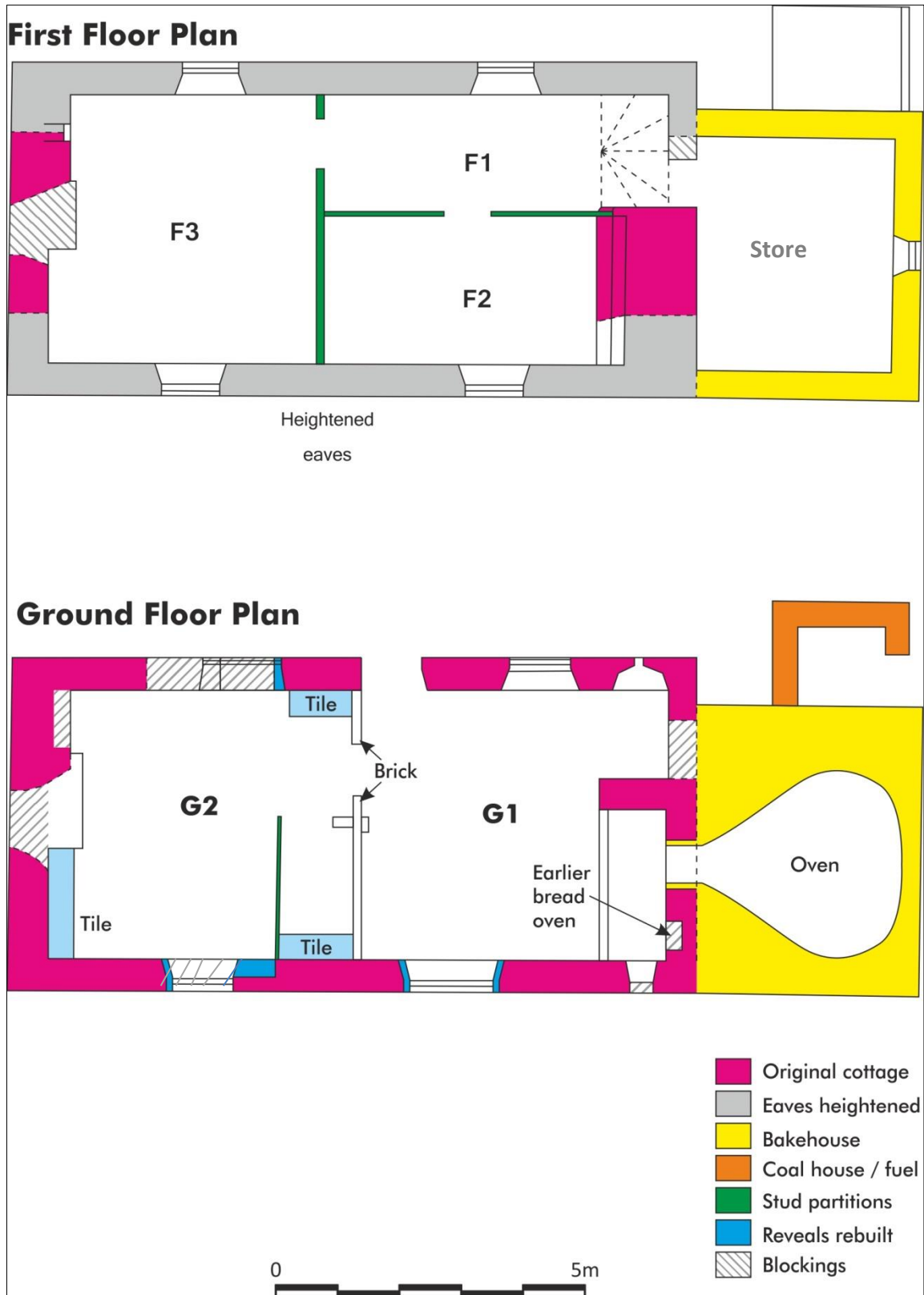


Fig 9: The cottage, plans phased (North is to the top of the page)

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The cottage-interior, room G1

Entered via the doorway in the north wall this room occupies the eastern end of the original cottage (Fig 9). In the north wall lies a two-light timber casement. Beneath it is situated a simple painted timber window seat set within the splayed reveal of the window embrasure. The present window opening is not of its original size as can be seen from nineteenth-century bricks set within the reveals. It cannot now be determined if this window is entirely later or was widened at that date.

The west wall, dividing this room to the one to the west (G2, see below), is built of oak box framing infilled with brick nogging. The bricks, of orange/red colour, are 230mm x 120mm x 68mm in size (9 x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches). All have horizontal skintlings which suggests that they post-date c1780 although such skintlings were present in some brick-types until the early years of the twentieth century; [The dating is based upon a survey of dated skintlings carried out in Norfolk in the 1990s]. The timber box frame comprises re-used oak, some of which retains grooves on two sides indicating that originally the pieces comprised horizontal rails in walling where the infill was wattle and daub. The grooves were created to allow vertical staves to be sprung and then interwoven with hazel wattles prior to being covered with clay or plaster (Brunskill 1971, 57). It is possible that the timber framing was re-used from this building, perhaps an earlier dividing wall, though it is equally possible that it was brought in from elsewhere.

The south wall contains the three light casement window previously described and also the narrow, splayed and currently blocked fire window set within the south wall of the inglenook which is located against the east wall.

The inglenook occupies almost two thirds of the east wall of the room (Figs 9 and 10).



Fig 10: The inglenook in G1 looking east. Stair and under-stair doors to left.

The north side is constructed of a projecting cheek of dressed limestone, the south side the south wall of the cottage. The rear of the fireplace opening is the east gable wall of the building and the whole is set beneath a roughly-cut oak bressumer, having a chamfered lower edge with a simple run-out stop on the north side and no stop on the south. The floor of the fireplace is a mixture of limestone, brick and concrete. Within the back (east) wall are two openings; these relate to the bread oven located within the secondary addition (Fig 9). The upper opening comprises a simple

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recess with splayed sides set beneath a brick arch set within a rough hole chopped awkwardly into this wall. It has a stone sill and set within the arch is a cast iron frame with a hinged cast iron door fitted with a simple sprung latch. Beyond the opening is a red brick bread oven of unusual size. Although it conforms to the standard shape, roughly teardrop in plan with a shallow, almost flat, arched roof its size is exceptional (Figs 9 and 11).



Fig 11: The bread oven, interior, looking east

Most bread ovens in domestic buildings measure c1m or three to four feet along their long axis whereas this is 3.6 metres across (11 feet 10 inches). This enormous bread oven lies centrally within the secondary addition built against the east gable of the original cottage and is partly buried within the natural slope which lies on that side. This appears to have been a deliberate design since the soil mounded against the external walls would provide additional heat retention.

Beneath the bread oven opening is a brick arched niche c. 0.9m deep, which at the time of the site visit, contained coal and appears to have been constructed as an interior fuel-store. It too has been chopped through the east gable wall and is partly set within the secondary addition. The side and back of this recess are also built of red brick, across the lower front edge is a shallow stone slab set there for the retention of the coal. To the south of the bread oven door is evidence of a blocked opening, the limits of which are indistinct but which suggest it might be the opening of an earlier (domestic-scale) bread oven although this cannot be determined with certainty.

To the north of the inglenook is the present staircase to the first floor with an integral under-stair cupboard (Figs 9 and 10). The staircase is a simple winding stair constructed of pine throughout and mostly painted. It is fitted with a batten and plank door which is hung on iron strap hinges and closed with a simple early twentieth century lock box furnished with later Bakelite knobs. The under-stair cupboard is also of batten and plank construction and is closed by a simple iron swivel latch. This stair and cupboard are not the original access to the upper floor since in the east gable wall can be seen a blocked doorway which must formerly have given access to the exterior before the secondary addition was constructed (Fig 9). The narrow slit window in the north wall currently lights the staircase but would have originally lit the recess by the doorway. A shallow groove down each side of the splayed inner surface indicates that at some date it had been glazed.

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The floor area of this room comprises red-glazed six inch quarry tiles set square to the walls, apart from that area within the under-stair cupboard which comprises stone slabs. The ceiling is of painted plaster. There is a principal beam aligned east-west, the east end set within the wall above the bressumer, the west end is supported by a plastered brick pier constructed against the box frame and brick nogged internal wall. The beam is of oak and has a broad plain chamfer; the end above the inglenook has a simple run-out stop.

The cottage-interior, room G2

Taking up the western half of the original cottage, this room is now accessed via the east wall from room G1 (Fig 9). Originally this room could also have been accessed via opposed doorways in both the north and south walls, at either end of a cross-passage. That on the north has previously been described, but internally there is evidence that there was a second doorway located exactly opposite in the south wall. Evidence for this is a vertical scar within the stonework infilled with both stone and red brick. Both windows have been previously described, that in the north wall has beneath it a timber window seat of the same width as the window opening. There is no window seat beneath the south window.

The internal dividing wall has previously been described and against it there remains a timber-framed cupboard comprising vertical studs, the outer surface of which has thin horizontal split laths which retain a thin coat of plaster on both internal and external (room side) surfaces. The cupboard retains two levels of elm shelving supported on simple curved elm brackets fixed against the dividing and south walls only; there are no shelves against the studwork wall to the west. The cupboard is fitted with a batten and plank door hung on thin iron strap hinges and furnished with a simple drop latch.

The west wall of the room retains evidence of the first phase of construction (Fig 9). The south side of the two-light mullioned window can be seen and to the north, built adjacent to the north-west corner can be seen the oak bressumer of a fireplace (Fig 12).



Fig 12: Room G2, looking north-west showing inserted chimney breast, blocked window (left) and blocked fireplace (right, both arrowed)

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Both have subsequently been blocked when a red brick chimney breast was built against this wall thus rendering both window and fireplace obsolete. The fire opening retains no grate. Both the original window and fireplace are infilled with limestone bonded in white lime mortar.

The floor of this room comprises six inch quarry tiles of alternate red and black tiles set diagonally to the orientation of the room, creating a diaper pattern. In the recess to the south of the inserted chimney breast, the north east corner adjacent to the linking doorway and the south side of the cupboard are three rectangular patches of earlier, unglazed 7 ½ inch quarry tiles; they lie square to the room, not diagonally. These remnants of earlier flooring presumably indicate the locations of former cupboards still present when the remainder of the room was re-floored, perhaps around 1900-1910.

The cottage- interior, store room

Accessed from the staircase through a doorway inserted in the east gable wall of the original cottage is a store room located above the bake-house oven (Figs 9 and 13).



Fig 13: Store room above bread oven, looking east

It lies off the stairs at almost a mezzanine level, taking account of the more diminutive dimensions of the bake-house addition. Situated almost entirely within the eaves, this room has only low side walls on the north and south; the west wall is the original east gable end of the cottage and the east

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wall contains the only opening to the exterior, a small timber shuttered window set in an oak frame. The floor comprises red brick laid flat throughout, timber being unsuitable here due to the heat from the oven which is located directly beneath. The roof has no trusses, simply one purlin on each side and a ridge plank. There is a modern breathable membrane laid on top of the rafters indicating that this section of the roof has been restored relatively recently. Purlins and rafters are of oak. The wall surrounding the doorframe into the room is infilled on the internal surfaces with red brick as is the space above the lintel which was formerly the upper part of the window observed from the exterior. Map-regression indicates that original fabric of this block dates between 1850 and 1864.

In conversation with a family member of long-dead baker it was noted that such a room existed above the bake-oven at Stevington, Bedfordshire. In that instance, the floor, also of brick reached such high temperatures that the room was all but useless for storage and was used on wash-days for drying laundry (Pers. Comm. Daphne Prentice).

The cottage-interior, Room F1

This part of the first floor comprises a large landing at the top of the stairs, although given that in 1881 there were eight occupants living in the house it seems most likely that this was in fact a walk-through bedroom at one stage (Fig 9). At the top of the stairs the stairwell is furnished with a simple banister rail with plain square-section wooden spindles and minimally shaped handrail. The north wall contains a two-light casement, one fixed, the other opening, each fitted with three panes of glass held in place with galvanised glazing bars. There is a plain catch and casement stay to the opening panel and the sill is painted timber.



Fig 14: Landing, F1, looking east towards the blocked window and store doorway; note the flimsy stud partition with F2 on the right

The north (outer) wall is plastered internally, while the south and west walls are flimsy timber partitions to adjacent rooms in an attempt to create some privacy. That to the south comprises simply horizontal pine planks nailed on to vertical studs which can be seen from Room F2. They have subsequently been papered over and painted. The west wall is lath and plaster, similarly finished. The floor is primarily of elm boards with some repairs in pine, the ceiling is lath and plaster painted white.

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The cottage-interior, Room F2

Located on the south side of the cottage this simple room retains few features not previously described (Fig 9). The window in the south wall is identical in size to that in F1, the only difference being that each light is fitted with two panes of glass rather than three. The east and south walls are of plastered and painted stonework although the majority dates from the period when the roof was raised and only the lowest 300-350mm dates from the first phase of the building. The east gable wall comprises a stepped profile since it forms the west face of the large chimney located above the inglenook below; when the roof line was raised the stepped profile was also extended outwards to meet the new eaves line. The west wall is lath and plaster, papered and painted, the north wall retains on this side the vertical timber studs which support the flimsy partition of horizontal timber planks. On this side they have been wall-papered (Fig 15). The floor is of elm and pine, some of the latter very modern patching. The door leading onto the landing is a four panel pine door, painted. Hung on butt hinges, it has an iron drop latch.



Fig 15: Room F2, and F1 through the doorway. This plain room is formed with flimsy partitions, latterly papered over.

The cottage-interior, Room F3

Situated at the west end of the first floor the north and south walls are of stone and, as previously described, comprise mostly the heightened section of walling on those sides (Fig 9). Each wall contains a two light window, identical to those previously described for Room F1. The west gable wall retains scars of the original steep roof line and the southern jamb of the blocked first floor mullioned window can also be observed (Fig 16). Against this has been added the inserted red brick chimney breast furnished with a simple timber surround and mantle shelf; the fireplace opening was boarded over and it is not known if the iron grate remains. To the north of the chimney breast a cast iron door with integral frame has been set into the wall to allow the flue to be swept from this level. The floor is elm and pine boards with some areas overlaid with metal sheeting, presumably covering worn or damaged areas. The door to the room is a painted pine batten and plank door hung on strap hinges with an iron lock box with brass knobs.



Fig 16: Room F3, western gable, showing the old roof line and the blocked window behind the inserted chimney and fireplace.

The cottage-interior, attic

The attic space was observed but not entered via a small opening made in the ceiling above the landing, F1. The roof is supported on two pine trusses each with raking struts of oak and what appear to be secondary king posts, also of oak, although one appears simply to be an unshaped plank with waney edges (Fig 17).



Fig 17: The roof truss and collar, looking west

Curiously neither truss reaches ridge height which therefore 'floats' un-supported above it. Purlins rest on pine cleats on the principal trusses but the rafters are set at a steeper angle than the sides of the trusses which explains why the top of the trusses do not reach the ridge. In between the trusses and the gable ends are what may be secondary collars. The underside of the Collyweston slate roof is torched, a usual feature of such roofing. The ceiling joists are pine. The whole roof has the appearance of a compromise with piecemeal repair and patching.

The outbuildings

A rectangular range lying parallel to the road and perpendicular to the cottage (Figs 2, 3, 18 and 19). Apart from the small privy at the north end the whole range appears to have been built at the same time, that is, between 1850 and 1864 on map evidence. The external walls are built of coursed, dressed limestone set beneath a Collyweston slate roof although some of this has been lost on the eastern slope and replaced with corrugated metal sheeting towards the north end. The west elevation is entirely plain with no openings; these are all located in the south and east facades. There are three rooms.



Fig 18: The outbuildings, viewed from Causin Way

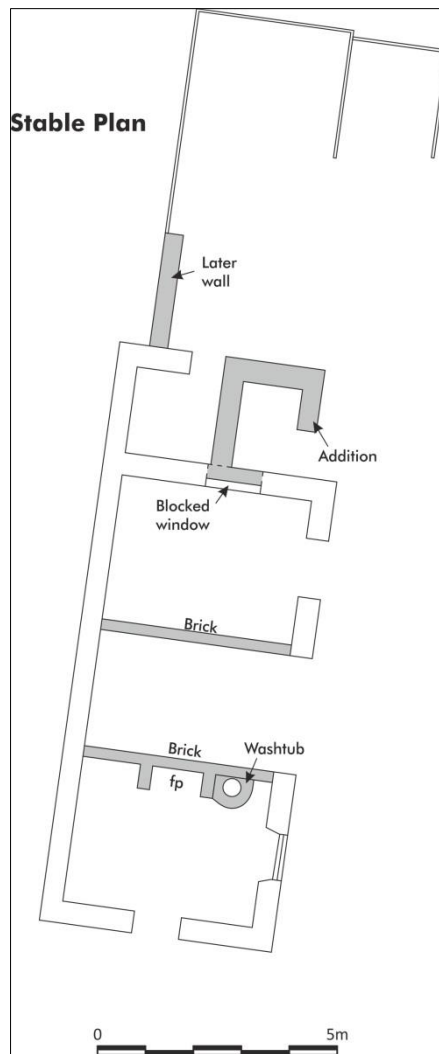


Fig 19: The wash-house, carriage-house and stable

The room at the southern end is a wash-house. It is entered through a batten and plank door set beneath a flat stone lintel in the south gable wall. The room has a single window in the east wall, a two-light, three-pane configuration, all in timber with iron catches and stays. The north wall (internal) is of red brick, against which is built a fireplace and chimney breast and integral water heater or 'copper', also of red brick (Fig 20). The latter retains its cast iron cauldron and iron door to the firebox beneath. The floor is of limestone slabs. The roof has no trusses, just rafters supported on a single purlin on each slope; the underside of the slates is torched.



Fig 20: The wash-house with its brick fireplace and copper

The central of the three rooms was a small coach- or cart-house; entered through a wide shallow arch, the whole width of the space (Fig 19). The room is featureless apart from a loft of planks supported on thin joists. Both internal walls in this range are of red brick.



Fig 21: The outbuildings, with (from l-r) wash-house, carriage house, stable; the privy and pigsty lie at the far end

The northernmost room was a stable; it retains its two-part stable door, each leaf of which is batten and plank. Both are hung on plain strap hinges with drop latches. Within the stable against the west wall is a timber manger and above it the remains of a hayrack, only the top rail of which survives (Fig 22).



Fig 22: The stable with surviving manger looking west; the hayrack has disintegrated

The north exterior wall is of limestone and retains a blocked window indicating that the privy located against this side is a later addition. To the west of the privy is a pigsty entered via a low doorway in the north wall.

There is a corrugated iron sheeting work-space to the north of this range and also a separate shed/garage located to the east. These are both modern ramshackle temporary structures and have not been further recorded.

Conclusions

The cottage at 38 Causin Way, Lower Benefield has undergone a number of changes which fall broadly into three phases:

The early cottage (c1700)

In the first phase, the cottage seems to have been a simple rectangular building with two rooms on the ground floor, divided unequally.

The eastern room had an inglenook built against the east wall and there was possibly a small domestic bread oven built into the back of it. This fireplace was lit by a slit window in the south wall. The room was separately accessed through a doorway in the east gable wall and there was also presumably an internal connection to the western room. It is also assumed that there were windows in both the north and south walls, both subsequently altered.

The western room was also accessed via external doorways, and it appears that there was a pair opposite each other in the north and south walls, the north doorway having an integral window on its western side. There was also a grander stone mullioned two-light window in the west wall facing the road, and between this and the north-west corner of the building a fireplace with oak lintel.

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The upper floor was a smaller space than at present and was lit by another stone mullion window in the west gable with a smaller window in the east gable, both at attic level. It cannot now be determined if there were dormers nor is the location of any original staircase certain, if indeed there was one. It is possible that the attic space could have been accessed via a simpler ladder and certainly the present staircase is a later insertion.

This phase appears to date to the late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-centuries. It is present on a map of 1747.

Conversion into the village bakery (Phase 2)

The second phase saw the building of an unusually large bread oven against the east gable, apparently to serve as the village bakery. This addition can be dated from map evidence between 1850 and 1864. Quite why the oven was so large is unclear. The author of this report has observed many bread ovens over the years but none have been anywhere as large as this. No published material has been found that records such a large structure, not even in great stately home kitchens or castles and most are between three and four feet along their long axis. A seven feet long oven is known to the author in Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire, but even though this was also a bakery and not a domestic oven that one was only slightly more than half the size of the Benefield example. No obvious explanation can be suggested; the village is not particularly large and there was also a baker in Upper Benefield according to the trade directories so this example is unlikely to have supplied houses there. It is possible that Biggin Hall was a customer but even the grand house there does not appear to justify such a large oven. Their kitchens there were considerable. Given the dearth of documentary material it may never become clear why it was built, but its' relatively short lifespan might suggest it was not economic.

Documentary evidence indicates that the oven was built during the early 1850's and it seems most likely that it was at the same date that the first floor of the cottage was raised to create additional bedroom space. At the same time it appears that the cross-passage door arrangement was altered and the central door inserted in the north elevation; the door in the east end had been made redundant by the addition of the bread oven there. Also at this time it appears that the two stone mullioned windows in the west gable were blocked, the chimney breast inserted and the present casement windows added. With the conversion of the small cottage into a bakery providing provisions for the village, and most likely also outlying farms and other properties, there would be a need for horses and carts to both collect raw materials and deliver bread after baking. Given the map evidence the outbuildings were apparently built at the same time.

Subsequent alterations

The final phase of stone building seems to have included the provision of the coal house and the privy. This last phase appears to have taken place between 1864 and 1900. It is possible that the building began life as a wood-shed, since the bakery oven would have been wood-fired; it is possible that coal was only used as a domestic fuel when the oven fell cold after 1903.

The various corrugated sheds on site are twentieth-century.

38 Causin Way, Lower Benefield

Current proposals

As part of ongoing conservation and re-ordering, there are current proposals to re-arrange the partitions in the bedrooms. These are flimsy affairs and are of no architectural or historical merit, making little contribution to the character of the building which is now well understood and dominated by its baker's oven. Whether these partitions are moved or replaced, the character of the building will be unaffected, and the current record means that by way of mitigation, they have already been recorded to the equivalent of the prescribed English Heritage Level 2.

References

Brunskill, R W, 1971 *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture*

Heward, J, and Taylor, R, 1996 *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*



IS Heritage, 27 February 2015