



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**A building recording survey at Highfields Farm,
Newnham, Northamptonshire**

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Summary

Archaeological building recording recorded a post-Inclosure brick field barn possibly of the 18th century, with a group of later brick and ironstone additions, much altered and repaired. There were no historic fixtures or fittings. An apotropaic or 'witch-' mark was noted but is probably a reused stone .

Introduction

A level 2 building recording survey was undertaken at Highfields Farm which is located to the south of the village of Newnham Northamptonshire, NN11 3EZ (NGR: SP 5790 5880; Fig 1). The work was carried out for Mr Hyatt, as a planning condition of proposed plans to renovate the group of farm buildings located there in order to provide holiday lets. (Application DA/2015/0510; condition 10). A further group of modern (late twentieth-century) farm sheds adjacent was not considered as part of the survey.

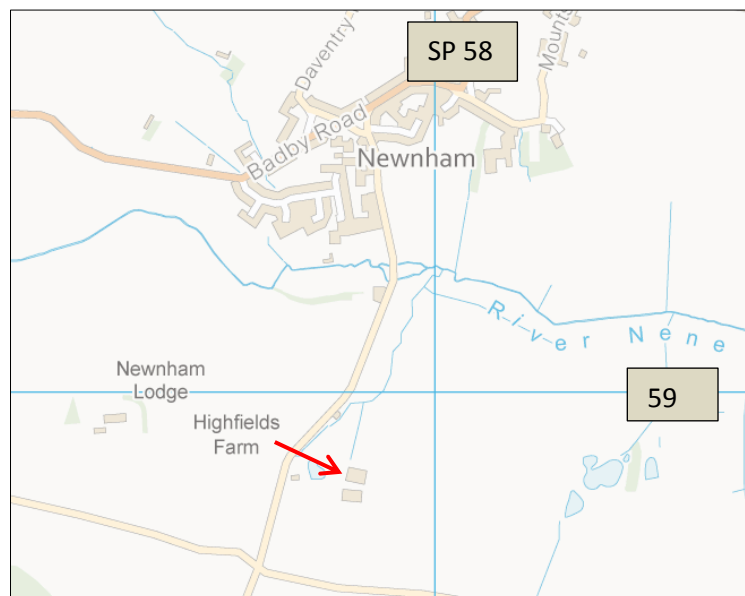


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2016

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

None of the buildings within the complex are statutorily listed.

The work was carried out on 12 May 2016 in fine weather conditions. Some of the buildings are still in use as animal shelters whilst others are unused and semi-derelict. Access to most structures was available apart from a single upper floor/loft which had no access and appeared from visual inspection from beneath as likely to be unsafe (see below, animal shelter). A former row of late-19th-century milking stalls along the east side of the group were inaccessible as the roof had collapsed onto them.

A conversation with the current farmer indicated that, whilst located close to the south side of the village of Newnham, east of the Preston Capes Road, the farmyard is actually located just within the parish of Everdon (Figs 1 and 2).

Background

A search of historic maps was made to establish an historic framework for the development of the site. This included maps held at the Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO) as well as images of maps online and copies held by the author of this report.

The earliest image available is the c1815 Ordnance Survey preparatory map which shows buildings in the location of the current survey area but at insufficient detail to be certain as to what is present.

There is no Inclosure map listed under 'Everdon' at the NRO although it is elsewhere recorded that the open fields were enclosed in 1763 (RCHME 1981). The tithe map (NRO T205) dated 1816 shows only part of the parish, but not that area in which the buildings are located.

The earliest available map held at the NRO is the 1889 Ordnance Survey 6 inch edition which shows a group of buildings arranged around a stockyard bounded by a wall on the south side with the structures located on the east, west and north sides. The buildings are located in the midst of large, mostly regular, fields such as are common after parliamentary enclosure. There is a track leading east from the north side of the group which then turns south to connect with the road aligned east-west which leads to the village of Everdon.

The same layout is depicted, but in greater detail, on the 1900 Ordnance Survey 25 inch edition (Fig 2).



Fig 2: The farm barns depicted on the 1900 Ordnance Survey, 25 inch edition map. The single dotted line is the Newnham (left top)/Everdon (right bottom) parish boundary

No further maps are held at the NRO but a search online revealed a sequence of Ordnance Survey maps dating from the late nineteenth- to late twentieth-centuries (www.old-maps.co.uk). These revealed that the barns remain in the same layout from the late nineteenth-century until the edition of 1971. An edition of 1973 shows that additional buildings have been added to the group to the west and south of those previously shown and this layout is present on the last available image which is dated 1985. The barns are still shown as being isolated field barns with no other access than the track shown on the 1900 edition which leads from the Everdon road to the south.

This map evidence indicates that the present access from the west on the road that leads south from Newnham to Preston Capes is a very modern creation. This is further supported by discussion with the current landowners who related that his family bought the farm c1980 after previously renting the land. Shortly after that they built the current domestic farmhouse situated to the west close to the Newnham-Preston Capes road and also made the present access to the farm buildings from that side.

The building survey

The names used to describe the buildings are those given by the author of this report and may not reflect their historic or recent usage. Modern buildings arranged close to the group were not recorded as they are not part of the application for alteration.

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

The field barn-exterior

This is the largest single structure of the group and is situated at the north-east corner of the complex (Fig 3).



Fig 3: Plan of the farm buildings phased (Andy Isham after Roger Coy Partnership).

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

It is constructed of red brick bonded in white lime mortar and its long axis is aligned almost exactly east-west (Fig 4).



Fig 4: The field barn, looking north-west.

The bricks are laid fairly regularly in courses which are composed usually, but not exclusively, of two stretchers and a header but this varies around the building. Such bonding most closely equates to Mixed Garden Bond, a variation of Flemish Stretcher Bond in which headers do not lie above each other in any regular pattern (Brunskill 1990). In many, but not all, cases the headers are flared although they do not appear to have been used in any part of the building to form a deliberate pattern. On the east gable end there is a single pitching- or hayloft door, the base of which is slightly lower than the eaves. This small door was almost entirely hidden from the exterior by the corrugated metal roof of a modern shed built against that end but could be clearly observed from the interior (see below). Close to the ridge an owl-hole is present created from placing two bricks at an angle to form a triangular arch above a square opening.

The gables are surmounted with ironstone copings resting on ironstone kneelers, surprisingly well carved and decorated for an isolated field barn. At some stage, the coping stones have been inverted and currently their chamfered upper edges face downwards with the former drip grooves of the undersides of the stones facing upwards. It is assumed that the stones were turned over when the existing, corrugated asbestos roof was installed, although the reason is unclear. Previously the barn may have been tiled or thatched.

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

The north elevation of the barn contains large double sliding doors (Fig 5).



Fig 5: The north elevation of the field barn, looking south; 1m scale.

The sliding double-doors are not an original feature but most likely date to the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century. The top and bottom of each door panel respectively hangs and sits on iron rails. These rails are located in rebated panels to allow the doors to be drawn back so that their outer faces are flush with the external elevation of the barn. The faced-off brickwork of the two recessed panels has been covered with a cement render. It is assumed that such effort has been taken so that the doors and their supporting rails are protected by the overhang of the eaves. It is also assumed that these doors replace an earlier, smaller pair of double doors although there is now almost no evidence for these. However, just to the left of the top edge of the boarding that covers the top rail of the sliding door rail on the east side a section of brickwork perhaps indicates the former position of a lintel. If this is the case it seems that the original double doors were placed centrally within this long axis. Just below the eaves a line of edge-laid bricks lies above a section of re-laid brickwork which spans the full width of the sliding door opening and recessed panels; here the bricks are laid in English Bond.

To the east of the sliding doors is a vertical ventilation slit which appears to be part of the original design of the building. There may have been a corresponding slit to the west of the original doors but if so it was lost when the sliding doors were inserted.

The majority of the west gable is obscured by the later animal shelter which was built against it. However, an owl-hole identical to that in the east gable exists just below the ridge (see Fig 11).

The south elevation of the field barn contains only one pedestrian doorway located towards the west end of that elevation (Figs 3 and 6).



Fig 6: The south elevation of the field barn showing doorway into the barn (and later animal shelter to the left) looking north; 1m scale.

Built in the same materials as the rest of the structure this elevation reveals most clearly on the external elevation that the lower section of the barn is built of ironstone up to, and in places slightly above, the level of the internal floor. This construction extends around the entire building but is most visible in this location due to the downward slope of the ground from east to west (see Fig 11). It appears to be a contemporary feature.

The doorway into the barn from this side has been heightened but not widened; this is apparent from the presence of closers down both sides of the door opening and the faint scar of a setting for a lower lintel. The present doorframe is of pegged oak set beneath a shallow oak lintel; neither are painted. The present door is a simple plank door ledged and braced internally. It is hung on two plain strap hinges and closed with a hook and staple; there is no lock.

The only other feature on the exterior is a ventilation slit located opposite that described in the north wall.

The field barn-interior

Internally the field barn is a single large space, the most common configuration for such buildings so that they could be used for a variety of different activities throughout the farming year as necessary. It was not intended for threshing since there is only one large double door and would need to have

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

opposing doors to provide a through-draught (Fig 3). The walls are of red brick throughout with just the upper few courses of ironstone base footing visible. The floor is of modern concrete.

The east gable wall contains the pitching- or hayloft door used to load and unload hay or straw as necessary (Fig 7).



Fig 7: The field barn interior, east gable wall looking east; 1m scale.

The walls have been lime-washed to roughly head height, partly for cleanliness and also perhaps to reflect daylight into an otherwise fairly dark space. The hayloft door is fitted with a simple plank door, ledged but not braced. Due to its height in the wall it was not possible to determine whether or not it is original, but it seems more likely to be a replacement given its exposed position. The evidence for a hayloft floor is equivocal; there are a few blocked sockets, but these are only the sizes of individual headers and as such appear to be too small for joists. Also there is no evidence for any former socket of a principal cross-beam which would also be expected in either of the north or south walls.

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

The north wall contains the sliding doors previously described. Internally the only other features are two attached piers to either side of the door opening added to provide additional strength to the jambs which took the weight of the doors (Fig 3). The narrow ventilation slit has splayed internal jambs, an oak lintel and sloping sill.

The west gable originally had only the owl-hole positioned close to the ridge. However, since the animal shelter was added against the external wall, a loft door was inserted (Fig 8).



Fig 8: The west internal elevation of the field barn, looking west; 1m scale.

The loft door is a simple planked door set in an oak frame. The brickwork on all sides shows signs of being crudely chopped out to accommodate this new opening. There is a large structural crack rising from the floor and extending all the way to the level of the lower purlin. At some point an iron tie bar has been fitted in an attempt to alleviate this problem. The south end of the tie bar is fitted to a circular plate on the exterior of the south wall (see Fig 6), the north end of the bar has no plate and is simply bolted onto the outer surface of the beam above the sliding door rail.

The south wall contains the pedestrian doorway, previously described, and the ventilation slit which is the same as that described in the north wall. To the east of the doorway, set within the south wall, is a lamp niche (Figs 3 and 9).



Fig 9: Lamp niche in the south wall, looking south-east; 1m scale.

The niche, built into the wall to hold a lamp or candle, is a standard feature of such barns built at a period prior to the installation of electric lighting. In a building where the risk of fire was high such a recess was an important feature, providing a relatively safe location for a naked flame. The internal surface retains sections of plaster lime-washed white to reflect the light outwards. It has an oak lintel.

The roof comprises a single, central, truss which appears to be of oak (Fig 10).



Fig 10: The roof of the field barn, looking east.

The truss comprises a principal tie beam, principal rafters and a single collar. On both the east and west sides at the upper level the original purlins remain, the lower purlins have been replaced although the filled sockets for the originals can be seen. All of the secondary rafters, laths and roof covering are modern.

Animal shelter

This building is located against the west gable end of the field barn (Figs 3 and 11).



Fig 11: The animal shelter, looking south-east, with field barn beyond.

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

The north wall has partially collapsed along its outer face and only the inner skin remains. This reveals that the wall was originally built in ironstone rubble. There is an oak lintel within the inner section of stone walling which indicates the location of a former doorway (see Fig 3). The west end of the wall has been rebuilt in both stone and brick in at least two phases.

The whole of the west wall has been rebuilt in Fletton brick; no original fabric remains.

The south elevation survives largely intact with only the quoins of the rebuilt west gable end being replaced (Fig 12).



Fig 12: The south elevation of the animal shelter, looking north; 1m scale.

There is a single doorway fitted with a narrow oak lintel and beneath, an oak door frame. The doors are now missing but four iron hinge pins indicate that the doorway was fitted with two-part stable doors.

Internally the shelter comprises a single space with a partial hayloft floor above (Figs 3 and 13).



Fig 13: The animal shelter looking east with hayloft floor above; 1m scale.

The hayloft occupies the eastern half of the space and is supported on a single north-south principal tie beam. The west ends of the joists rest upon this and the east ends are set into the former external gable wall of the field barn. There is a small, square hatch in the north-east corner of the floor fitted with a trap door. The west end of the loft has a low, vertically boarded rail (Fig 14).

The floor of the shelter comprises a mixture of cobbles, plain blue brick and at least two patterns of moulded blue brick paviments indicating extensive repair after c1850.

There is no indication of any hay racks or mangers, but a fragmentary drain aligned north-south roughly beneath the principal beam of the hayloft suggests that any stalls were located against the west wall. Since that wall has been entirely rebuilt any former evidence there has been lost.

The roof is supported on a single truss which appears to be of late nineteenth-century date (Fig 14).



Fig 14: The roof truss and hay loft rail, looking north-east.

The truss appears to be of machine sawn pine and comprises a tie beam, principal rafters and a vertical iron rod from ridge to tie beam. Raking struts support the principal rafters at the point at which they support the purlins. The secondary rafters, laths and roof coverings are modern; the covering is corrugated asbestos sheeting.

The stable

This building lies at the north end of a row of single storey shelters which form the western side of the group (Fig 3). The stable has been largely re-built with perhaps only part of the south wall being original. The whole of the east gable has recently been rebuilt (pers comm. current landowner) and the west side comprises Flettons indicating a likely post-Second World War date. The north side was entirely open with a central post but is now half closed by laminated timber sheets (Fig 15).



Fig 15: The stable, looking south-west.

The east wall is of blockwork internally with a brick external skin. There is a small window in the gable, without frame or glazing.

The south side contains a stable door of standard two leaves; it is modern as is the majority of the surrounding wall.

Animal hovels

The remainder of the west range appears to have comprised open sided animal hovels or shelters but now the east (formerly open) side has been mostly infilled. The southern part of the west elevation is of ironstone as is the south gable end (Fig 3). The north wall of the current passage which allows access through to the west side is also of ironstone; these walls may delineate the size of the original building. The east wall is of modern horizontal timber planking and appears to be a simple infill of the open hovel facing the central stockyard (Fig 16).



Fig 16: The west range of former animal hovels, looking west.

To the north of the cross-passage, and once part of the same range of hovels, is a single room, called here a loose box (Fig 3). It too appears to have been open to the east since the east wall is now built of modern blockwork. The west wall is of Fletton brick and the north wall is what may be nineteenth century brickwork, lime-washed. All fixtures and fittings are modern.

The whole roof of this range is of corrugated asbestos and much of the roof framework appears also to be modern.

At the south-west external corner of the range is what appears to be a re-used quoin with finely incised concentric circles (Fig 17).



Fig 17: Decorated stone at south-west corner of the west range, looking north; scale 30cm.

The decoration has the appearance of folk art. These are probable apotropaic or ‘witch-’ marks. Such decoration was regarded as being helpful in warding off evil or unwelcome spirits and was usually placed close to doorways or other openings. Its position here suggests that the stone has been re-used since its location on an external corner away from any access routes is incongruous. There are other obviously re-used stones around the farm complex and so it might not even originate from the complex.

Not recorded as part of this exercise but probably part of the nineteenth-century layout is the simple brick south wall of the stock yard and remnants of a range of single storey shelters on the east side of that yard. These correspond to buildings depicted on the late nineteenth-century maps. Both have been much altered and the east range is ruinous.

Conclusions

The farm buildings of this report appear to be the remains of a group of field barns of varying dates set in open farmland but not associated with a farmhouse or other domestic building.

Their layout within the surrounding field boundaries suggests that they can only relate to the post-enclosure period when such buildings would have been erected by the landowners to service the needs of the new outlying field areas at a period when old, existing farms found themselves ill-placed to cover new land-block ownerships. This would indicate that the earliest building is likely to post-date 1763 when the parish open fields were enclosed.

The large field barn is the earliest on stylistic terms. It is possibly present on the Ordnance Survey preparatory map of c1815 although lack of detail precludes conclusive identification. Of the group of buildings on the east side of the stockyard it is the earliest since all other building there are built against it.

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

Of the remaining buildings all would appear to date, in their earliest forms, to the third quarter of the nineteenth century from examination of the materials used and general styles. They all appear on the Ordnance Survey map of 1889 and remain, at least in terms of mapping outline, unaltered until the early 1970's.

Like most farm buildings they might have been erected with one main use in mind but would have also been built to serve a number of varying needs throughout the farming year and as farming practises changed over longer periods of time.

All can best be described as generic farm barns or animal shelters and there is no indication that any were part of a designed group but appear to have been added to and altered as farming needs, and probably owners, changed over time.

In modern terms they are essentially redundant since they are too small to be economic to house the numbers of livestock necessary at which to make a living and are too small to house modern farm machinery.

All of the buildings, with the exception of the recently re-built stable, are in need of attention to their fabric as all show varying signs of decay.

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Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

Glossary of architectural terms (taken from Brunskill, Maclean and Scott, Friar)

Bullnose brick – A brick with one (though occasionally two) rounded edge/s. Used primarily in agricultural buildings on corners, door and window jambs to prevent livestock damaging itself on sharp corners.

Collar – In a roof, a horizontal member tying together a pair of inclined members, usually a principal rafter, common rafters or sides of a truss.

Flared brick – Usually headers (see below) which have darkened, often shiny, surfaces through being placed close to the source of intense heat in a clamp or kiln. Sometimes used to form decorative patterns in the brickwork.

Flettons – Common bricks made from the Oxford clays of the Peterborough area and widely used in the London and Midlands areas.

Gable – The triangular upper part of a wall supporting the end of a ridged roof.

Gable coping – A coping to a gable wall projecting above the roof. It sits on top of the kneelers.

Gable springer – An overhanging stone, brick, or tile corbel at the base of a gable. It carries the bottom kneeler.

Header - A brick laid to expose one end (or in a 9 inch wall, both ends) for the purpose of bonding or making a pattern.

Jamb – The side of a doorway, window or fireplace.

Kneeler – The sloping topped, level bedded stones in a gable coping, above the gable springer.

Lintel – A horizontal stone or timber beam spanning an opening and supporting the wall above.

Paviour – A purpose-made paving slab, often of hard-fired clay to provide a hardwearing surface. In the nineteenth century engineering brick was predominantly used from mid-century onwards.

Purlin – A horizontal beam running parallel to the ridge of a roof and carrying the common rafters.

Quoin – The external angle of a wall or building, quoins or quoin stones are the dressed stones forming the angle. Where brick and stone is used the bricks can be laid in regular patterns to form the same.

Rafter - A sloping timber beam within the framework of a roof rising from the eaves to the ridge. Principal rafters are those which carry the purlins. Common rafters rest on the purlins and carry the laths supporting slates or tiles.

Stretcher – A brick placed on bed to expose one long face

Highfields Farm, Newnham (Everdon), Northamptonshire

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Highfields Farm, Newnham
OASIS ID	Iainsode1-252846
Project Type	Building Recording
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Farm
Development type	Change of Use
Reason for investigation	Planning Condition
National grid reference	SP 5790 5880
Start/end dates of fieldwork	12 May 2016
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	600 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

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