



Stephill House

Stockwood Lane, Morton Underhill, Inkberrow, Worcestershire

one ten archaeology

Stephill House

Stockwood Lane, Morton Underhill,
Inkberrow, Worcestershire.

Historic buildings survey

NGR: SP 1763 6923

WSM 66230

Site code: SHH14

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SUMMARY

In November 2014 historic building recording was carried out at Stephill House, Morton Underhill, Inkberrow, Worcestershire in advance of re-ordering including internal and external alterations.

The focus of the early settlement at Morton underhill can be identified from the remains of the surviving moat situated to the south of the farm. The position of the later farmhouse (Stephill House) shows that its location had shifted to the north of the farm a pattern reflected within this part of the county where there are the remains of a number of moated sites adjacent to working farms.

Stephill House, formerly the farmhouse for Morton Underhill Farm is an 18th century rebuild, and probably replaces a late medieval structure. This is suggested in the layout of the building as can be seen in the stone basement (characterised by heavily worn steps; see plate 8) and also evidenced by some re-used timbers within the fabric of the later brick building.

The timber-framed south building which adjoins the main house, is a tudor structure, probably erected during a period of prosperity as an extension to the existing medieval building, in-filled with brick during refurbishment when the main house was re-built towards the end of the 18th century. Elements of the dismantled timber-framed house were clearly re-used in the roof of the south-wing probably the west barn and possibly in the east barn, a boarded timber-frame, incorporating significantly a cruck blade (observed during the survey in 2013) which appears to be associated with the moated site.

The details of the outhouse are contemporary with the rebuilding of the house and refurbishment of the south-wing. The former cider press/house was likely to have been built in the same style.



Fig. 1; site location

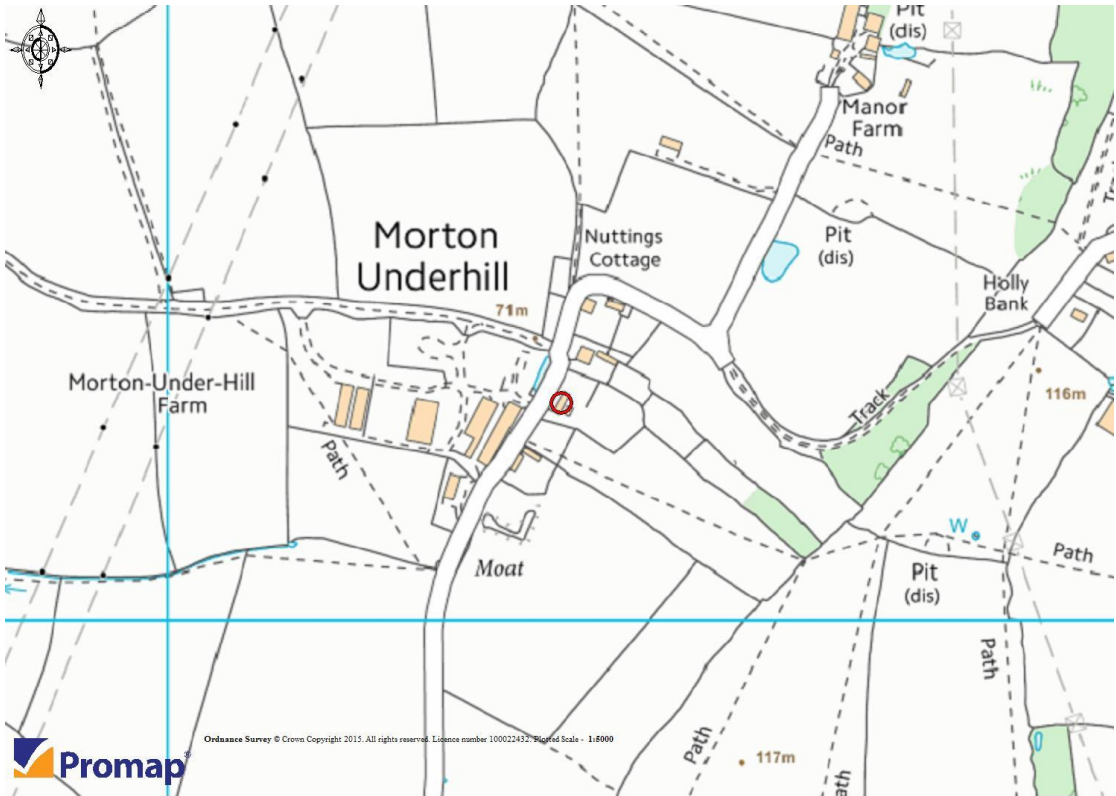


Fig. 2; area of study

INTRODUCTION (Figs. 1 & 2)

Location and scope of project

This document sets out the results of a programme of historic building recording carried out at Stephill House, Stockwood Lane, Morton Underhill, Worcestershire (SP 0133 5918) in November 2014 at the request of Mrs B Walker. The development is for the reordering of the residence including internal and external alterations and was carried out under planning permission granted by Worcester County Council (planning ref: W/11/1601) conditional on a programme of approved archaeological work in accordance with a brief (Mike Glyde 16th September 2014) issued by Worcester County Council. (planning ref: W/14/0002). The brief required the implementation of a programme of archaeological building investigation and recording prior to the conversion of the existing buildings as outlined in this document.

Topography and geology

The parish of Inkberrow is situated on the eastern boundary of the county, east of Worcester. The soil is sand, clay and marl, with a subsoil of Keuper Marl with occasional bands of sandstone. The chief crops are wheat, barley, oats, roots and beans. The land rises from about 70m above the ordnance datum in the west of the parish to 150 at New End on the Ridge Way. Brandon Brook forms part of the northern boundary, and another brook, unnamed, runs through the parish from north to west, finally joining Piddle Brook in the south. From the Ridge Way, which forms the eastern boundary of the parish, the Salt Way runs west through Edgiock and Shurnock to Droitwich.

From the village of Inkberrow, which lies in the centre of the parish on undulating ground, roads branch off to the hamlets of Edgiock and Holberrow Green in the north, to Stockwood in the west, and to Cookhill in the east.

There are moats at Holberrow Green Farm and Dragon Farm, and at Morton Underhill and Thorne. There is also a moat in good preservation on the glebe at the foot of the hill, below the vicarage. Cookhill Priory, about 3 miles to the east of Inkberrow, stands on the site of the nunnery founded in the 13th century. Of the original buildings all that remains above ground are portions of the east and north walls of the chapel and probably the nucleus of the adjoining range, which is of half-timber cased with brick.

MORTON-UNDER-HILL FARM

The farm and site topography

Morton Underhill is part of the Stockwood hamlet and is located about 2km north of Inkberrow, and Feckenham, on the Salt Way, lies about 1.5km beyond the west flowing Brandon Brook to the north-west. The farm buildings are arranged either side of the road that runs along the foot of the scarp-slope and in view of the court and farm on the crest of the hill to the north-east.

The Farm-House

The farm-house is located to the north of the eastern yard, beyond a little stable with hay-loft and the site of a pair of lost pig-houses which were attached to the west corner of the house. This part of the building consists of a two-bay timber-framed south-wing and the three-storey brick house has a stone cellar at the north end which suggests the footprint of an earlier cross-wing.

At the rear of the south-wing is a two-bay brick bake-house and store formerly connected to the house, and behind that along a paved path an *in situ* cider press which is all that remains of the small building, and privy just north of it, shown on the 1st Edition O.S. 1885.

The West Yard

On the west side of the road the three-bay timber-framed barn forms the core for a number of subsequent additions. In 1885 it had a northern extension, now lost, but presumably contemporary with the surviving southward extension; an eight-bay brick range containing a three-bay loose-box at the north end and an open-shed to the south.

By 1954-5 buildings had been erected either side of the north-bay of the barn (?to replace the lost north-addition) and the open-shed was enclosed with brickwork, pierced by a door and window in each bay. The old loose-box at the north end was divided and had a new doorway formed within a window embrasure.

Over the next twenty years a new range of buildings enclosed the western yard; a huge barn dwarfing the old one opposite and a cow-house to the south. New open-sheds were constructed against the back-wall of the old open-shed and a triplet of pig-houses was built across its south end to replace those, now lost, at the south end of the farm-house. Another significant change to the topography was the infilling of two ponds, one at the south corner of these buildings which restricted road access and another, to the south on the other side of the road

which appears to be the north-west corner of the moat, isolated when the central part of the western arm had been backfilled. A large open-sided shed and two smaller buildings which were added to the north of the west-yard have been removed and three huge sheds built to the west in more recent decades.

The Eastern Yard

Opposite the south-east corner of the western yard, and to the north of the old moat, was another small yard bounded on the west by a surviving boarded timber-framed barn and on the north by an open-shed. The shed which had been erected in the yard against the east wall of the barn, between 1954 and 1974, was removed when the barn and open-shed were converted for residential use in recent times. A brief visit had been made when the barn opposite had been surveyed and details observed contemporary with the rebuild of the other barn. Numerous re-used timbers were noted including what appeared to be a cut down and modified cruck blade.

THE FARM-HOUSE (*Step Hill House*) and OUT-BUILDINGS (figs. 3-10)

The Brick House

When the farmhouse (WSM50001) was rebuilt in brick two existing timber-framed bays at the south end were retained and incorporated into the new scheme. This can be seen in the prominent brick projection on the front. This encloses a winding stair at the north end of the south wing and displays the same details, notably the denticulations, as the main house.

The three-bay brick house has three full storeys and a cellar at the north end originally accessible from the front. There are six steps to reach the central doorway due to the slope of the site and the lowest parts of the walls around the north corner and to the end of the south wing are constructed of large squared blocks of sandstone. Investigations at the south wing showed that the masonry blocks sat on earth in front of loose backfill. The wall had been pushed out and had been repaired in brick when the house was rebuilt. The masonry wall a couple of feet under the little south window of the stair block. This method of construction differs from the barn opposite where the masonry sits on a raft of brickwork common with the attached (denticulated) open-shed.

The three-light windows have segmental heads, the cornice is denticulated and the gables have projecting 'sawtooth' bricks under the roof tiles. The chimney at the south end is larger than that on the north, serving also the large fireplace in the south-wing. On the east side of the north end there is a short two-storey

wing and to the south of this the main-stair under a shed-roof. This rear stair block was extended to the end of the brick house in modern times to accommodate a rear porch and WC with a bathroom over.

Under the north-east wing the cellar has a brick vault and its west wall carries the back wall of the house, all this brickwork has been inserted into the remains of a stone cellar extending east to the end of the north-east wing. The stone steps, under the main-stair, are heavily worn. The exposed main-joist in the western end of the cellar is chamfered with lambs-tongue stops and the common-joist ends appear to be housed like those, both original and re-used in the south-wing. The floor is paved and the doorway in the front wall has been blocked with modern brickwork.

In spite of the three-bay façade, internally the two ground floor rooms, the smaller to the north, the rear door opposite the front-door, the large fireplace (with exposed lintel) are very suggestive of a medieval layout underlined by the 'boxed-in' principal-joists. Considering the obvious movement of the south-wing it is unlikely that any ancient fabric survives above the masonry and the king-post roof is built of fresh timber. However a single piece of re-used timber (with lathe-groove) in the cellar and another (lathe-holes) used as a lintel in the south wall suggests there may be other fragments, possibly including principal-joists.

The South-Wing

When the main house was rebuilt the two-bay one-and-a-half-storey south-wing was refurbished. The back wall was completely rebuilt and the storey-post cut back at the bottom, the distorted masonry wall at the front was patched and the stair was encased with brick, complete with denticulated cornice. The redundant transverse-frame at the junction of the two buildings was removed, nailed iron-straps fastened at key points and the western purlins were replaced with re-used principal-joists. Other changes in the frame have some age, notably the blocked doorway in the middle frame, near it are the remains of a cockscomb-hinge next to an inserted window-frame on the front.

Most of the frame is Elm and restoration work in recent decades has included the introduction of oak pieces, and the complete rebuilding of the south gable, the brick infill appears to date from this time.

Numerous carpenters' numbers survive on the south side of the middle frame; long and some with spurs. The outer walls are divided into square panels with struts from the principal-posts. The underside of the wall-plate at the head of the, brick encased, back-stair is cut back but the empty mortice, for an upper rail, in the adjacent stud suggests that the stair is not an original feature.

The principal-joists are chamfered with lambs-tongue stops and the common joists have narrow chamfers with dying-stops and have bare-faced-soffit-tenons with diminished haunches, the ends are lapped into chamfered lodging-beams fixed to the outer frames.

The roof is double-framed with a ridge-tree, single wind-braces from the middle frame and the eastern purlins have a bridle-scarph like those on the cill and wall-plate.

The re-used western purlins are almost complete (5.5m) principal-joists simply lapped at the middle frame; each has lambs-tongue stops terminating the broad chamfer at one end only, due to modification at the time of its re-use, and the mortices have housings for diminished-haunches.

In modern times a wall was constructed to the south of the middle frame and a garage formed in the south bay with a new large opening in the east side. On the first-floor a bathroom was built in the north-east corner of the south bay using 'old timbers' and an old door, with pintles.

The lintel of the fireplace in the north wall has stops on the east but the chamfer continues over the western cheek and has clearly been cut-down possibly to improve access from the south (service)-wing to the main house in the north-east corner.

The Out-House

This small two-bay two-storey tile-clad brick building (WSM30721), detailed like the main house, has a chimney at each end; that to the north has a single flue serving a first-floor fireplace and that to the south has two flues for the (ground-floor) fireplace and oven.

The lower rooms are entered from a pair of doors in the middle of the west wall. The south room, lit by a window near the door is open to the roof and has a large fire place against the south wall. To the east of this are the remains of an oven which formerly extended south of the main structure, this has been lost, however the iron door-frame, part of the oven and the line of the outer wall survives. Excavation to the east uncovered a blocked opening which would provide access to remove ash. The brick footings exposed nearby sit on a single course of small squared sandstone blocks.

On the north side it has a steep utilitarian stair, with handrail and stanchions, giving access to the room over the north store. The fireplace has been replaced by shelving but both east and west windows retain their original metal frames.

The northern store, three steps down, is provided with numerous built-in timber brackets for two upper levels of shelving and there are two extant brick walls for a lower cold-shelf, the room is lit from the east and west. Both the bake-house and the store floors have staggered rows of square tiles.

At the end of the 19th century the out-house was connected to the north bay of the south-wing, but the door here was partly blocked and a window inserted when the connection was removed, sometime between 1954 and 1973.

The Cider-Press

On the sloping ground behind the house a level rectangle locates the site of the cider-house, the cider-press survives in the middle together with a large stone trough in the south-east corner, the door was presumably in the south part of the wall, near the remains of a paved path from the house.

The 'Lost' Pig-Houses

These were located under the existing drive at the south west corner of the south-wing and a small amount of the late 19th century brick footings were observed in the trench-side here during the current renovation.

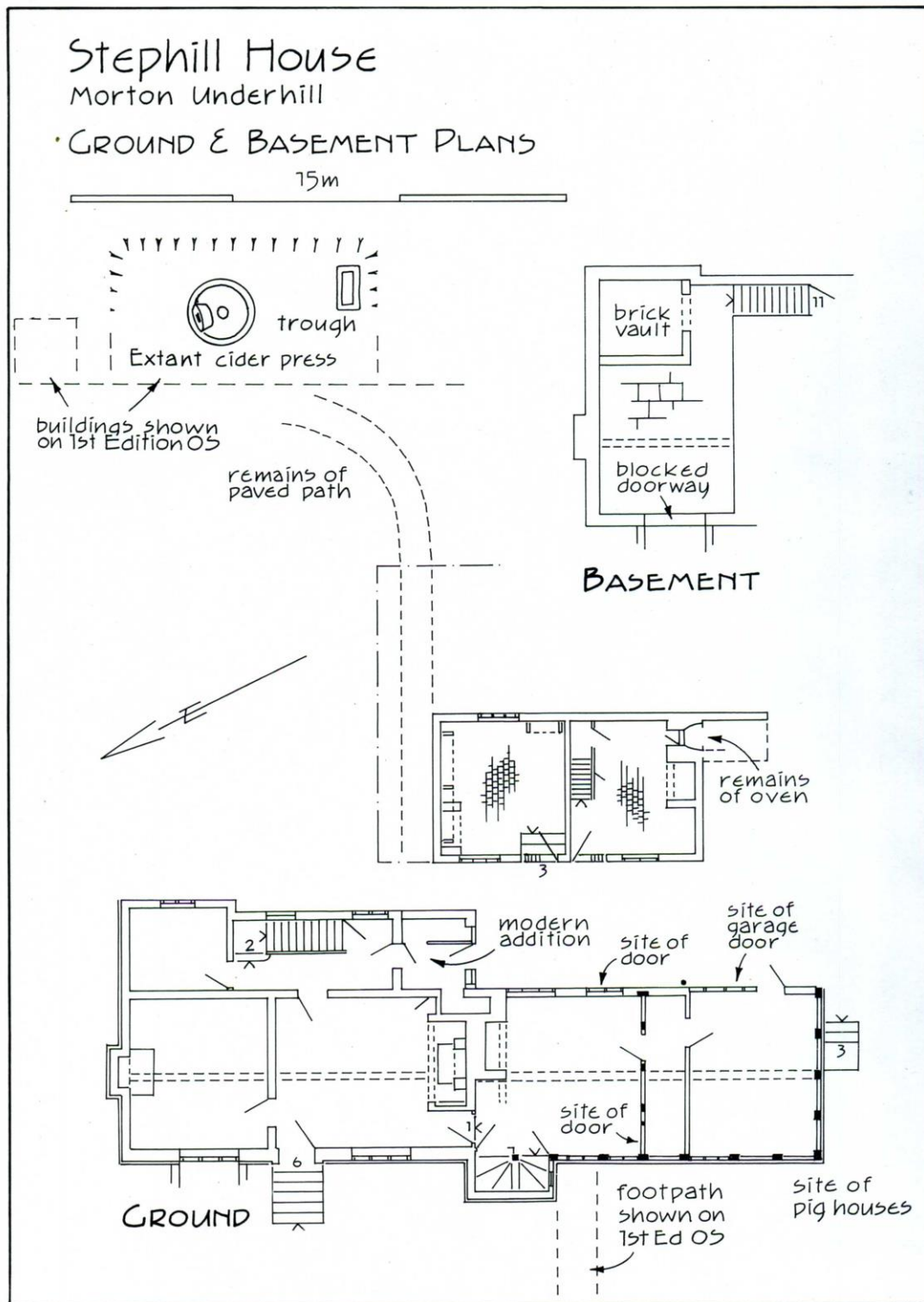


Fig. 3; ground and basement plans

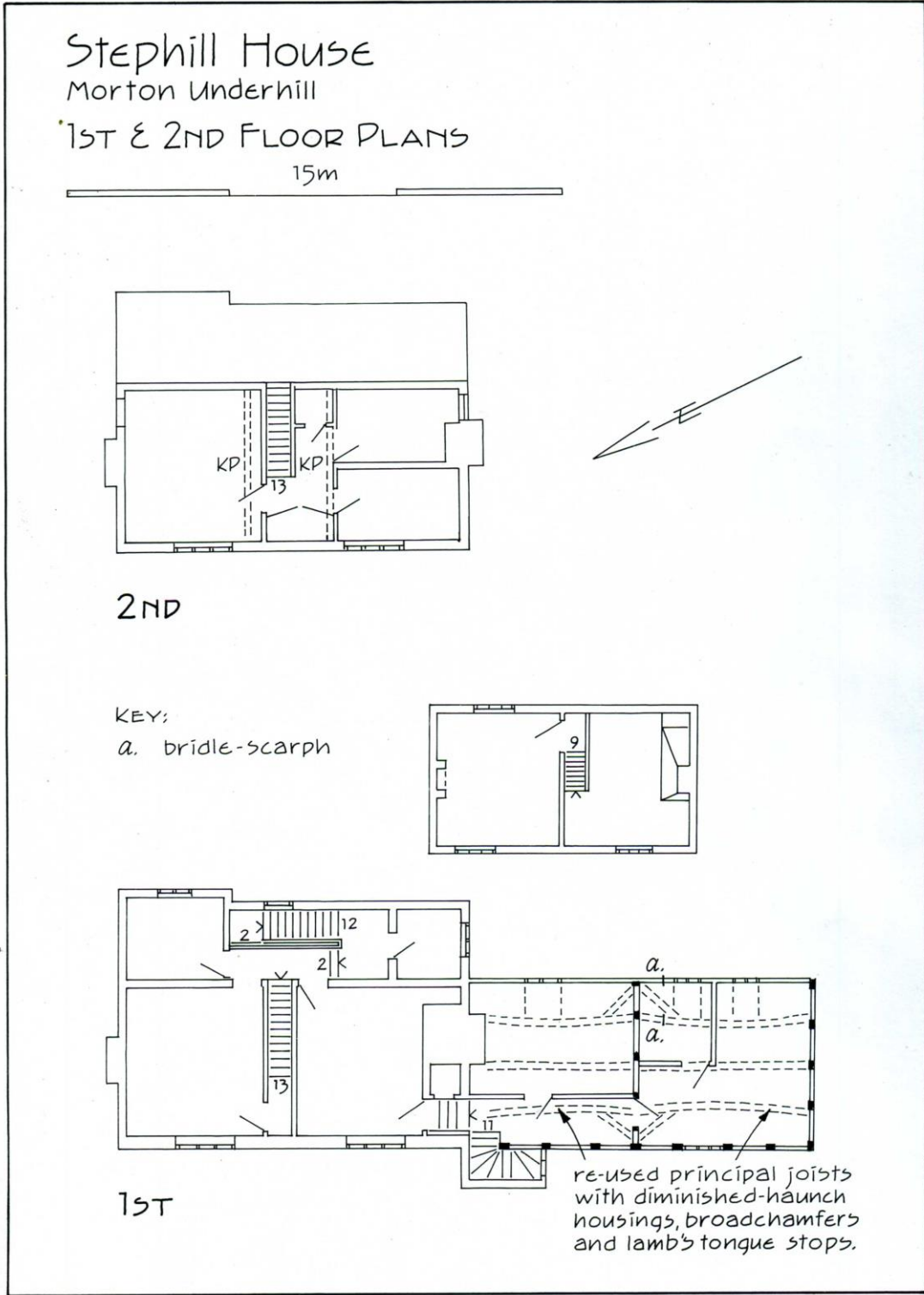


Fig. 4; first and second floor plans



Fig 5; west and south elevations

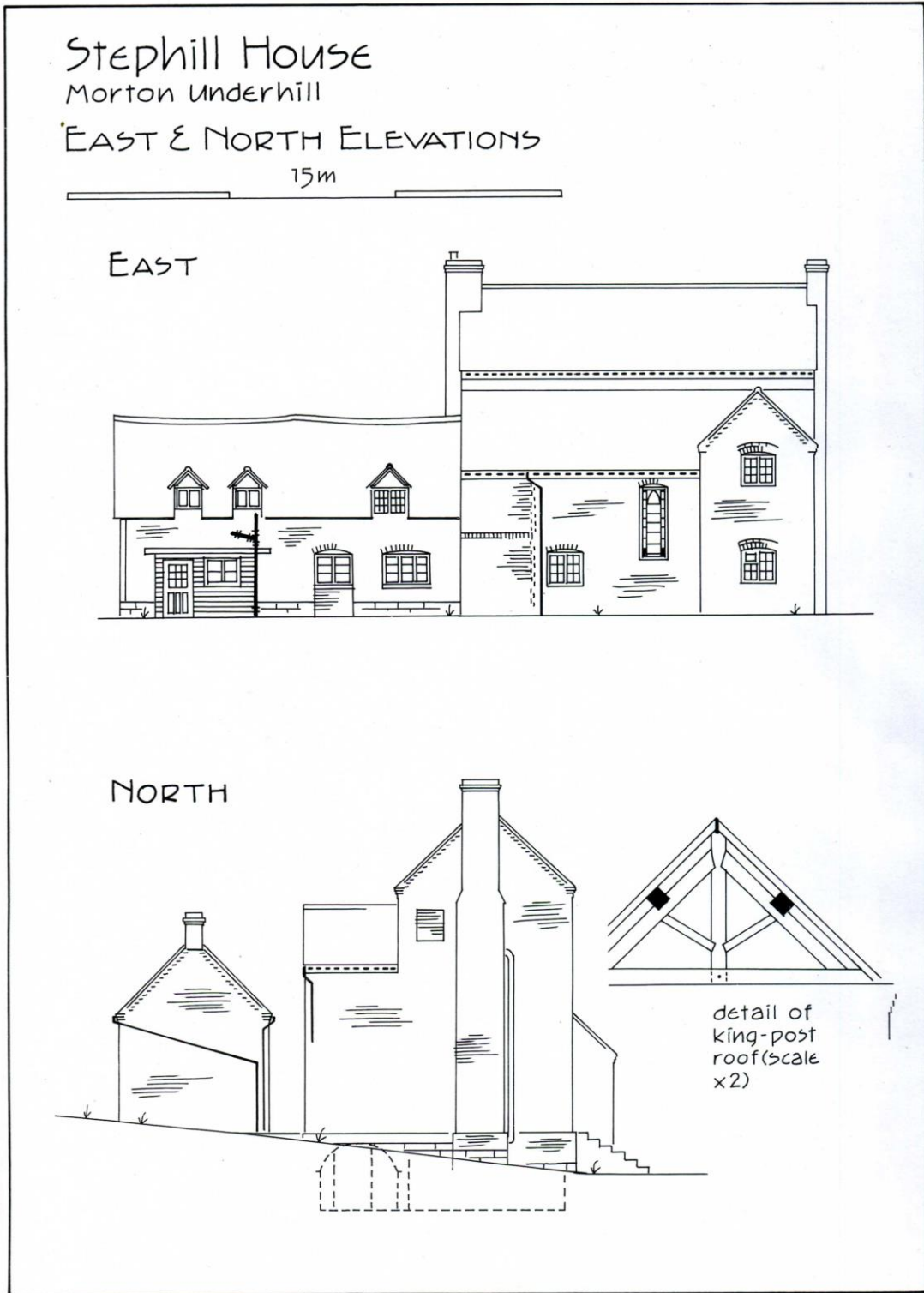


Fig. 6; east and north elevations

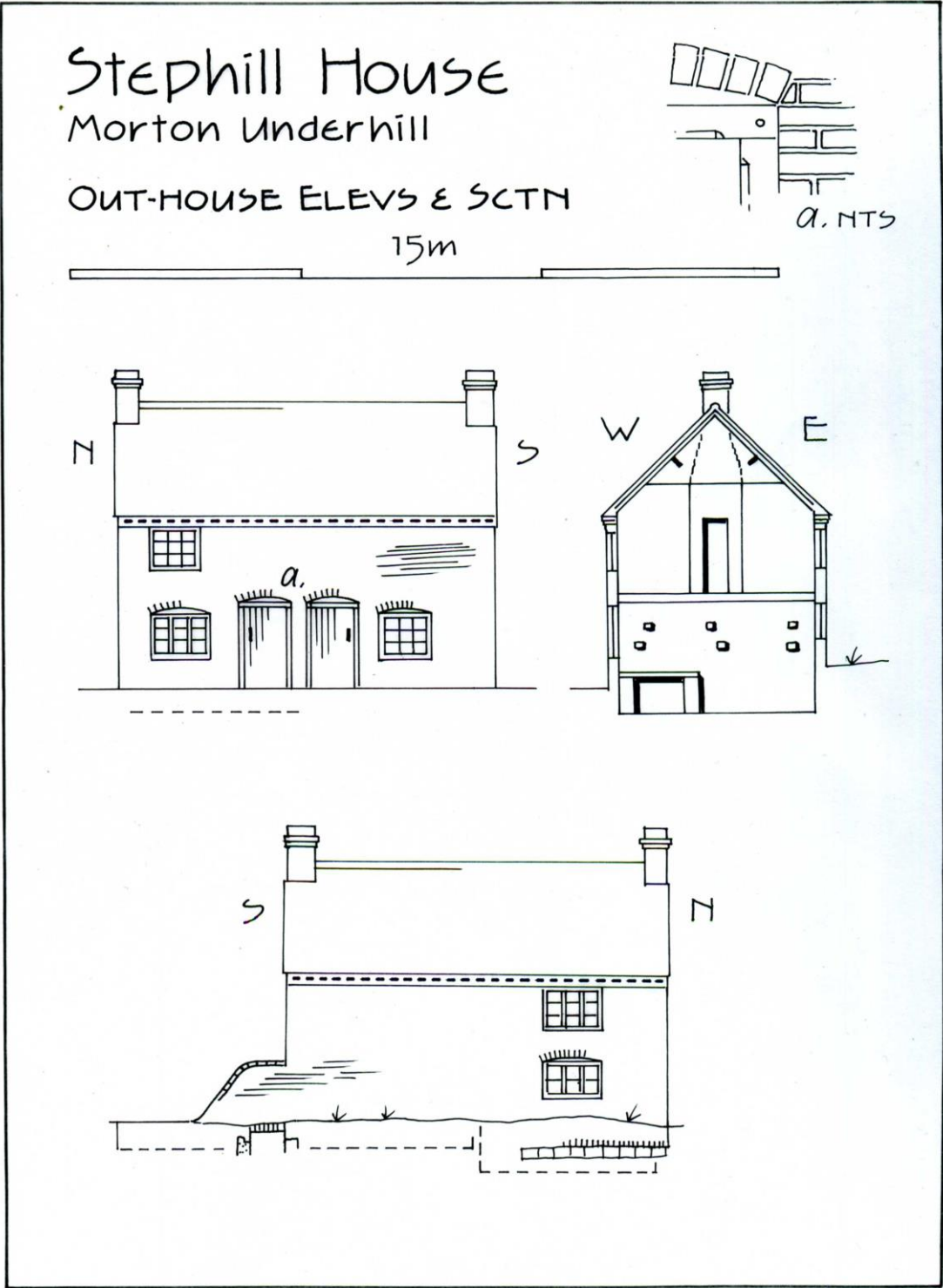


Fig. 7; out-house elevations and section



Fig. 8; south-wing elevation

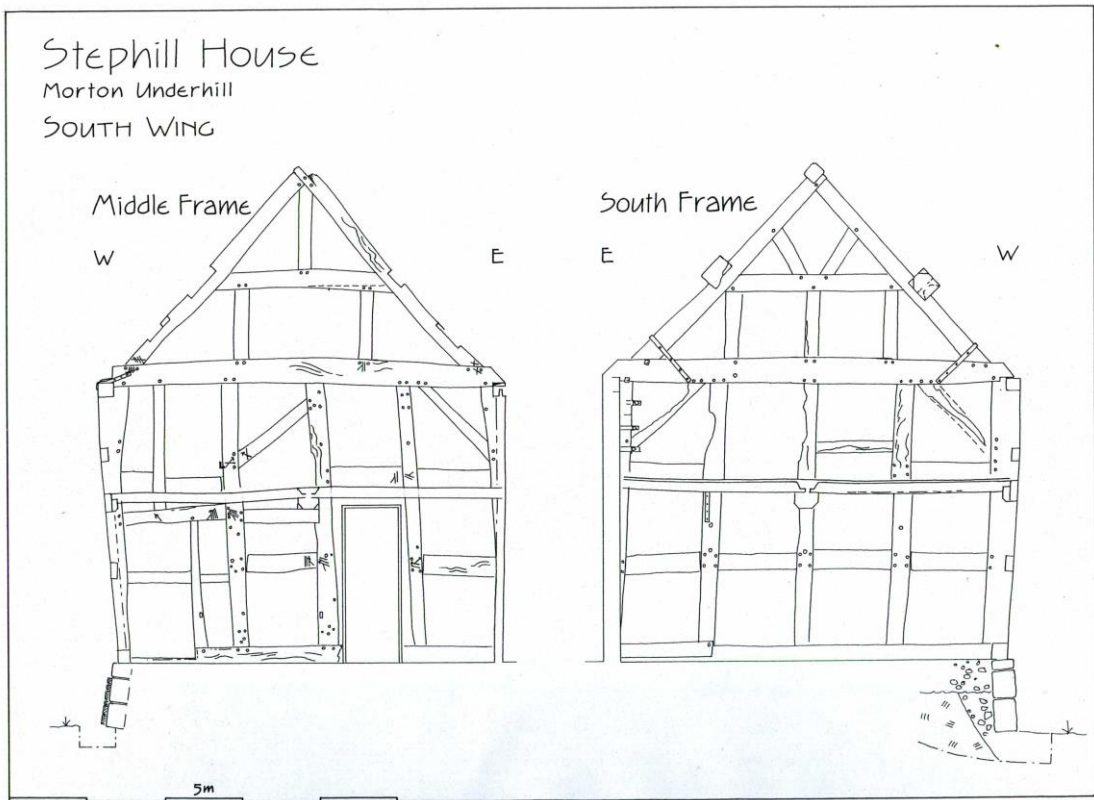


Fig. 9; south-wing sections

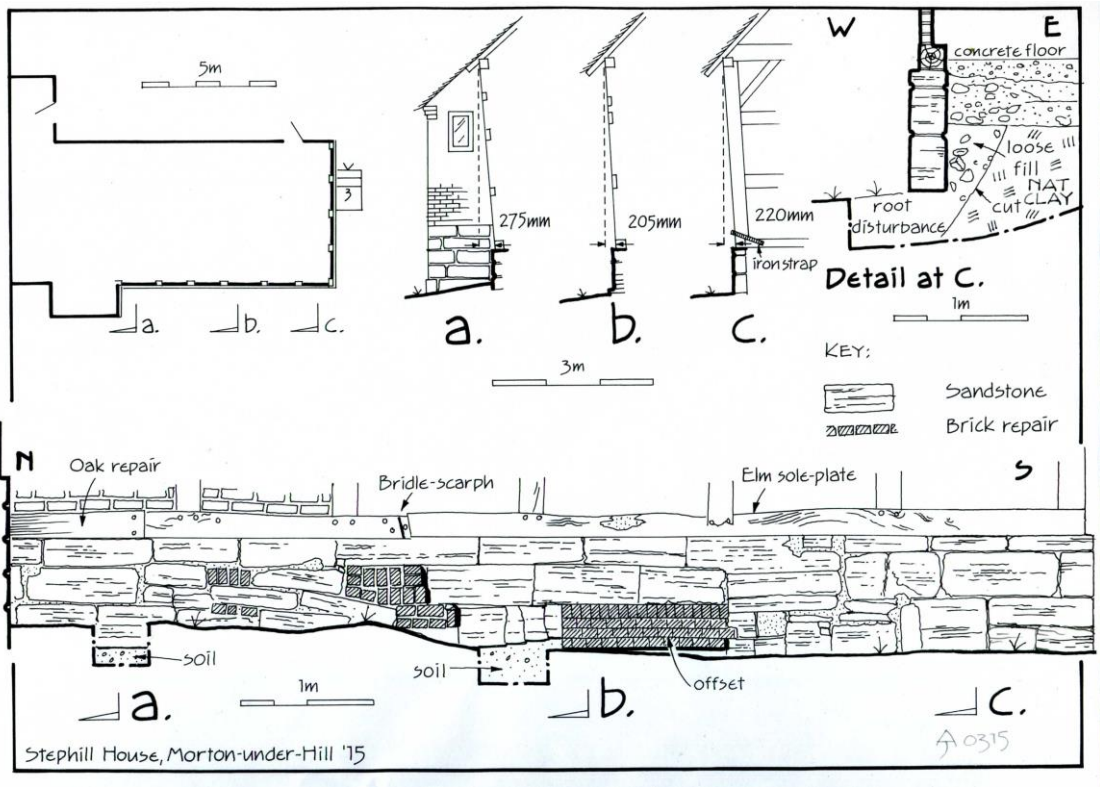


Fig. 10; south-wing masonry wall

DISCUSSION (Figs. 11 & 12)

Inkberrow

Toward the south end of the village on the east side of the High Street is a small one-and-a-half-storey timber-framed house with a rear outshot. The slope of the small plot has required a short masonry wall to retain the terrace, built of large sandstone blocks. The roof is thatched and the upper window is contrived under an eyebrow and the chimneys at each end, are denticulated.

Further north on the opposite side of the road and facing the green are a small pair of brick cottages, with rear wings under a single roof, both cornices and chimneys are denticulated, but interestingly the end walls up to first floor level are of large squared sandstone blocks and this material continues at first-floor level as quoins up to the cornice.

The Old Bull (a 'black and white' public-house of Archers fame) is a late 16th century frame with additions from the following century which adequately illustrates the local character. Here again the slope of the site has required the need for a short (painted) wall, there is a cellar under the cross-wing with external access at the lower ground-level.

Feckenham

In Feckenham, no.1 Droitwich Road appears to be a good model for the 16th century farm-house at Morton Underhill and the jetty at the front of the cross-wing may be a significant feature, not evident from a footprint alone.

Many of the buildings in this village displays denticulated brickwork, either in new-builds, re-facing of ancient frames, or simply in the rebuilt top of a stone chimney. The one building whose elevation is comparable to the main house at Morton Underhill is 16 Alcester Road. This is a four-bay three-storey house with segmental window heads, and denticulated cornice. The irregular bays may indicate an earlier origin for the internal arrangement.

Historic Environment Record (HER)

Although very little archaeological fieldwork has been carried out at Morton Underhill the information held within the HER suggests the potential for deposits of a Roman and medieval nature. Documentary and topographical information has led to the description of Morton Underhill as a shrunken medieval village (WSM07927).

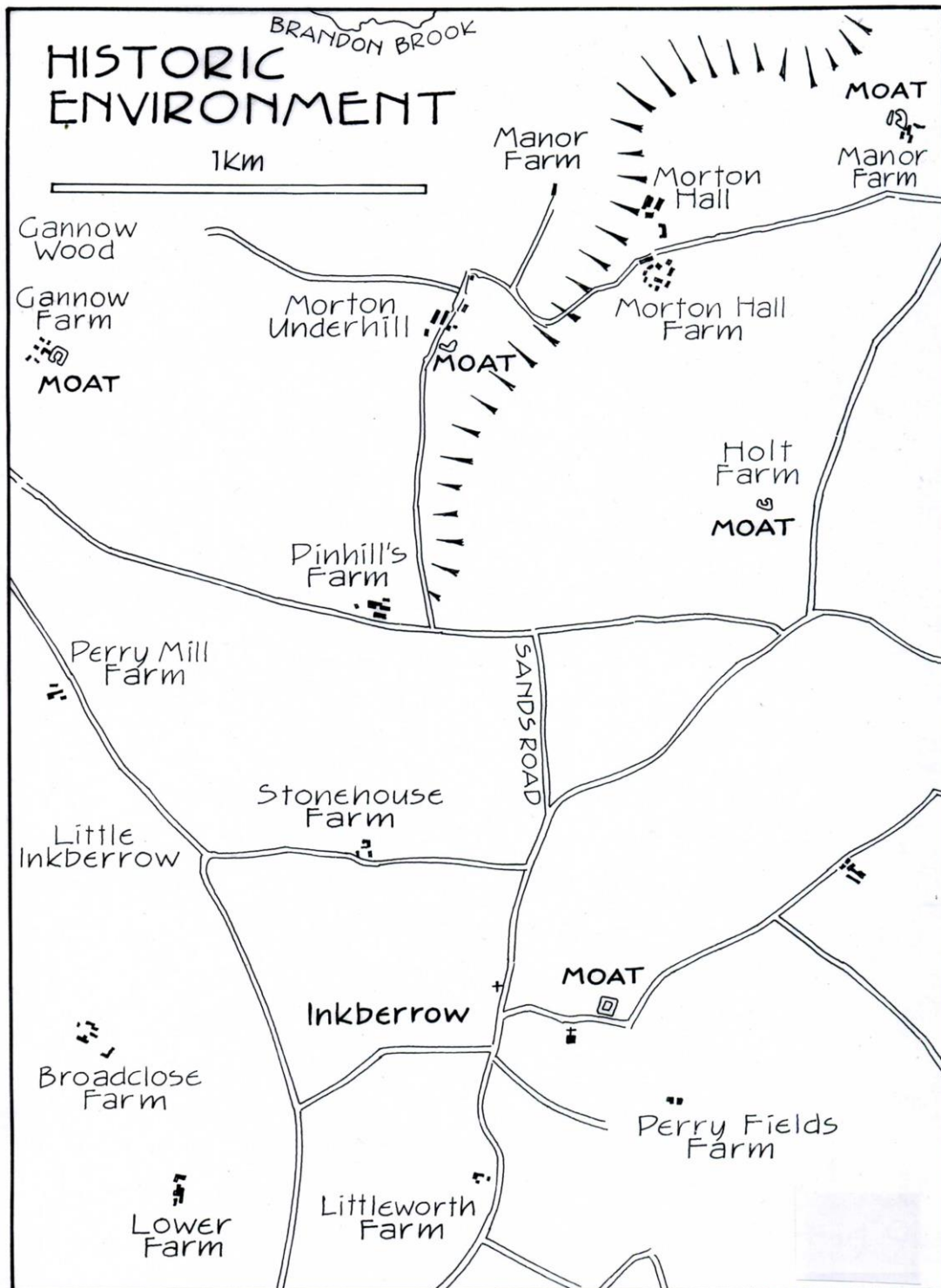


Fig. 11; historic environment, based on OS 1885, showing moated sites

Unstratified Romano-British pottery (WSM10167) has been found from a field north of burnt Lane, a name apparently derived from the medieval period when plague victims were taken along the lane on route to cremation.

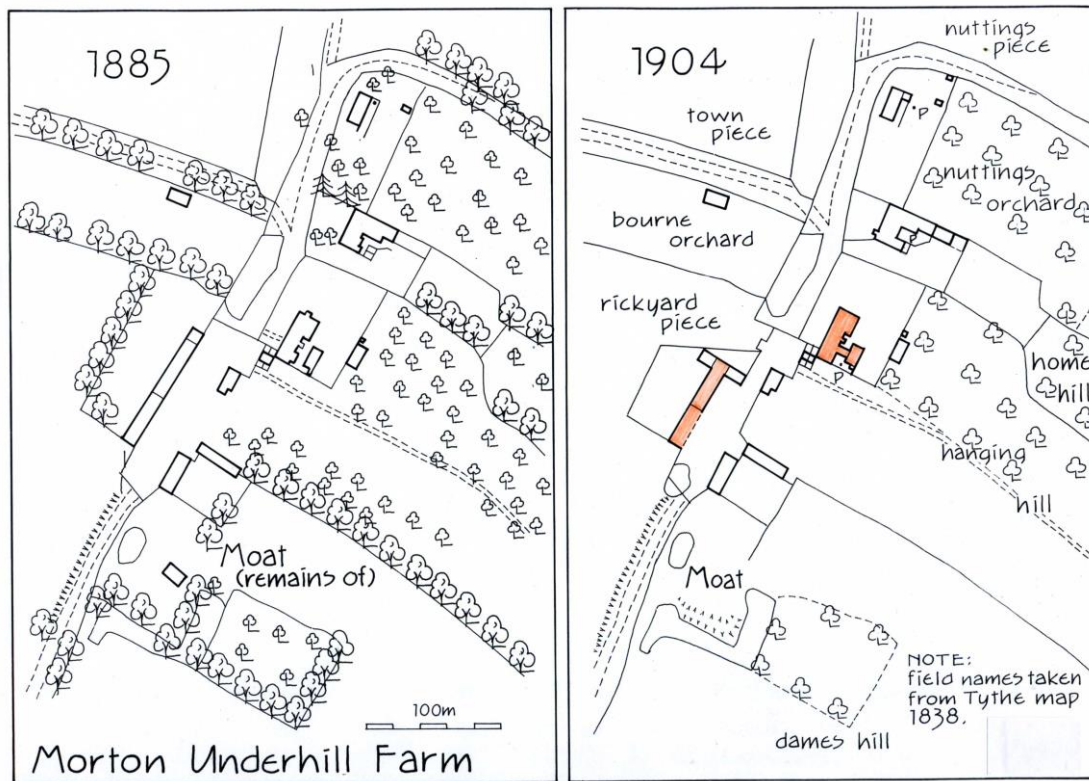


Fig. 12; cartography. Pink, the barn (west) surveyed in 2013 and Stephill House (east) surveyed in 2014.

Previous fieldwork in Morton Underhill consists of a single watching brief (WSM33600) associated with the excavation of a service trench and internal floors during the development in 2004 (conversion) of the former east barn to Morton-Under-Hill Farm and now referred to as Moat Barn (WSM30689). No significant archaeological features were found although an earlier undated metalled surface was observed under the existing lane (Sworn, 2004).

Morton Underhill

At the time of the Domesday Survey (1086) there were two manors at Inkberrow and Morton underhill was held of the manor of Great Inkberrow. The focus of the early settlement at Morton underhill can be identified from the remains of the surviving moat situated to the south of the farm (Fig.10). The position of the later farmhouse (Stephill House) shows that its location had shifted to the north of the farm a pattern reflected within this part of the county where there are the remains of a number of moated sites adjacent to working farms. Examples have been recorded at Manor Farm, Holt Farm, Gannow Farm and to the north of Perry Fields Farm. Further afield, sites are known at Holberrow Green Farm, Dragon Farm, Thorne and a moat in good preservation on the glebe at the foot of the hill, below the vicarage.

Stephill House, formerly the farmhouse for Morton Underhill Farm is an 18th century rebuild, and probably replaces a late medieval structure. This is suggested in the layout of the building as can be seen in the stone basement (characterised by heavily worn steps; see plate 8) and also evidenced by some re-used timbers within the fabric of the later brick building.

The timber-framed south building which adjoins the main house, is a tudor structure, probably erected during a period of prosperity as an extension to the existing medieval building, in-filled with brick during refurbishment when the main house was re-built towards the end of the 18th century. Elements of the dismantled timber-framed house were clearly re-used in the roof of the south-wing, probably the west barn and possibly in the east barn (Moat Barn; WSM30689).

The boarded timber-framed east-barn incorporates numerous re-used timbers including significantly a cruck blade (?pre 1400), observed during the survey of the west-barn in 2013 (Atherton and Cook, 2015a), and may well be associated with the moated site. Re-used timbers are clearly shown in a photograph accompanying the excavation report detailing the results of the watching brief during conversion of the barn (Sworn, 2004).

The details of the outhouse are contemporary with the rebuilding of the house and refurbishment of the south-wing. The former cider press/house was likely to have been built in the same style.



Plate 1; house from north-west.



Plate 2; south-wing from east.



Plate 3; out-house from south-west.



Plate 4; house and cider-press from south-east



Plate 5; house from north.



Fig. 6; main-stair from south



Plate 7; chamfers and stops in cellar



Plate 8; heavily worn steps to cellar.



Plate 9; remains of out-house oven from south.



Plate 10; blocked opening below oven from east.



Plate 11; out-house upper room to north-east.

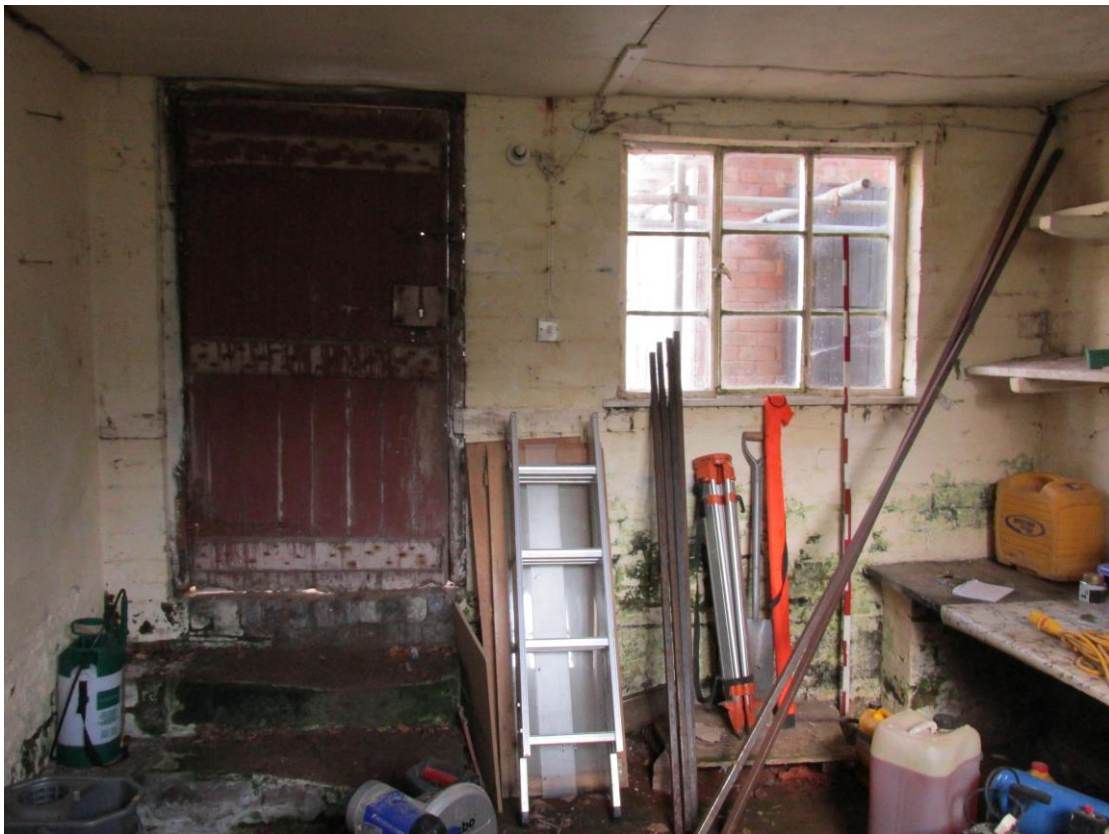


Plate 12; out-house store-room.



Plate 13; out-house fireplace and oven to south-east.



Plate 14; out-house stair to north-east.



Plate 15; out-house window-latch detail.



Plate 16; remains of paved-path to cider-press from the west.



Plate 17; house and south-wing from south-west.



Plate 18; south-wing interior to south-west.



Plate 19; south-wing interior to west.



Plate 20; middle-frame from south



Plate 21; western tie-beam assembly from south-west (see Pl. 21)



Plate 22; western tie-beam assembly, (see Pl.20).



Plate 23; eastern tie-beam assembly from south-east.



Plate 24; middle frame from south.



Plate 25; detail of middle frame and principal from north.



Plate 26; remains of cockscomb hinge (north-bay west-wall).



Plate 27; south-bay showing upper-floor construction to west.



Plate 28; south-bay east-purlin, scarp and wind-brace.



Plate 29; north-bay west-purlin; a re-used principal-joist (see Pl.29).



Plate 30; north-bay west-purlin; re-used principal-joist (see Pl. 28).

METHODOLOGY

Aims and objectives

The objective of the historic building recording was to obtain a detailed analysis and description of the history, character, and date, techniques of construction, phasing and significance of the structures. Primary and secondary sources relating to the buildings were consulted and relevant information included in this report.

Documentary search, fieldwork & recording

The Worcester Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted with a search carried out over a 500m radius centred on the site. Significant aspects of the data within the HER that is relevant to the site, including an analysis of historical mapping was used in this report. The information provided by the HER was complimented by a visit to the Worcester Record Office, to explore the archived documentary evidence.

The site survey comprised systematic external and internal perambulation of the buildings, observing, discussing and noting features including structural, functional and chronological aspects, which was accompanied by the creation of a photographic record. Measured drawings provided by the agent were checked during the survey and annotated accordingly.

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