



***Historic Building Appraisal of
The Old Coach House, Pleasant
Harbour, Wribbenhall,
Worcestershire***

A report for Mrs A.E.Hunt

November 2008

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Project: PJ 228

WSM 40528



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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Wribbenhall is located on the eastern bank of the River Severn, with the town of Bewdley located adjacent on the opposite western bank. The village sits around 3 kilometres to the west of Kidderminster, just off the B4190 Bewdley to Wolverley road. The Old Coach House is located in Pleasant Harbour and is reached via Pewterers Alley, which runs to the north-west off the B4190 (NGR SO 7883 7553; Figure 1).

1.2. Development Details

The Old Coach House is Grade II Listed by the Department of the Environment and also contained on the local list of buildings of historic interest (WSM 29204). It was therefore suggested that any development of the building might affect its historic integrity and result in historic fabric being destroyed or altered without adequate record. As a result, it was decided that further information was required regarding the construction and fabric of the building. It was recommended that the building should be subject to a basic historic building appraisal, so that it could be better understood and that any planning decision made would be better informed. This is in line with Planning Policy Guidance 15 (PPG 15; Planning and the Historic Environment 1990).

A brief of work was written for the scope of the historic building appraisal (WHEAS 2008) and a written scheme of investigation (Mercian Archaeology 2008) for the work was subsequently approved.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The project conforms to the Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures (IFA 2001).
- ❑ The building was recorded to Level 1 as defined by English Heritage (English Heritage 2006).
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council (WHEAS 2008) and for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology 2008).
- ❑ The project conforms to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the Mercian Archaeology Service Manual (Williams 2003)

2.2. Project Content

The aim of the project was to undertake a basic field survey and make a photographic record of the structure, the information from which would be used to comment on the archaeological and architectural value of the upstanding fabric. The project focused on a single strand of evidence (field-survey), with no requirement under the brief for background documentary and cartographic research.

3. Brief Overview

The Old Coach House is Grade II Listed, with the Images of England entry as follows: -

Images of England Reference Number: 156717

Location: GARAGE ABOUT 25 METRES NORTH OF THE MALT HOUSE,
KIDDERMINSTER ROAD (north side), BEWDLEY, WYRE FOREST,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Date listed: 27 May 1986

Grade II

BEWDLEY CP KIDDERMINSTER ROAD (north side) Wribbenhall 10/75 Garage about 25 metres north of The Malt House GV II Probably a barn, now garages. C17 with mid-C19 and some late C20 alterations. Timber-frame with painted brick infill, brick additions and tile roof. Three framed bays aligned north/south, with brick bay added to north. West front: blind, apart from right-hand bay of brick which is of one storey with two windows: 2-light C20 casement to left, a C20 top-hung casement to right, entrance between, entrance to garage in rear (east) front. Framing: three rectangular panels high with straight angle braces.

The building also appears in a list of buildings of Worcestershire, which contain at least one upper cruck (Alcock 1990 p 125). This volume lists The Old Coach House as retaining an upper cruck, along with The Malthouse, which stands on the opposite side of Pleasant Harbour; the cruck at The Malthouse can clearly be seen in Plate 1.



Plate 1: The Malthouse, with the upper cruck clearly visible

4. The Fieldwork

4.1. Comment on the Surviving Building Fabric

NB. This is not a full analytical historic building recording.

Refer to Figure 2 for plan of the building and truss and bay location / identification.

The subject building is located on the northern side of Pleasant Harbour and is oriented north-west to south-east, with access to the building only from the north-eastern side. Only around one third of the south-western elevation is visible, as the remainder is within the private gardens of the adjacent property and is obscured by foliage; the north-western gable end is also within the bounds of the adjacent property and so could not be seen externally.

The original construction is of timber-frame, which has been replaced on the north-eastern and south-eastern elevations by solid 9” brick walls constructed in 3”x 9” brick in a Flemish raking stretcher bond, with a Flemish row (alternate headers and stretchers) between each three rows of raking stretchers. There is a blocked window opening to the north-east elevation, below a rough segmental brick arched head, with a similar head above a former doorway, which has been narrowed and a modern door fitted and a further double doorway below a similar arched head, again modified to accept a modern smaller double door arrangement (Plate 2).



Plate 2: North-eastern elevation (scale 2-metres)

The brick south-eastern gable is curious as it also contains a segmental arched head, below which, presumably there was a doorway, though the brickwork below shows no evidence of straight butt joints that would be indicative of a blocked aperture. To either side of this, there is a pair of oval recesses, within brick header surrounds. The purpose of these is unclear and it is possible that they were simply for decoration, though this does not sit comfortably with the lack of elaboration elsewhere on the building. The corner brickwork of the gable steps out slightly as if to buttress the wall and this suggests that there may have been some rebuilding at this end. There is a modern window at the upper level, set below a brick segmental arch; this may be a direct replacement for a pitching eye door (Plate 3).



Plate 3: South-eastern gable end (scale 2-metres)

The remaining timber frame to the south-western elevation indicates that the frame was originally of three tiers of square panels between the sole plate, which can just be seen at the south-eastern end, and the wall plate (Plate 4). There is a single (visible) remaining angle brace from the post of T2 to the wall plate.



Plate 4: Timber-framing to the south-western elevation (scale 2-metres)

A rebate in the wall plate indicates the possible position of a further truss, which has been removed (Plate 5).



Plate 5: Rebate in wall plate for lap joint to a truss, which has now gone

The present roof cover is of handmade clay tile, which may have been the material used for the original cover, or possibly oak shingles, as the roof has too shallow a pitch for thatch.

Internally, there are two floors, both extensively modernised, with little visible of the original build. Fortunately, one bay of the upper floor remained without modern cladding and one truss (T2), part of another truss (T1) and remaining roof purlins were visible. Truss T1 could just be seen at the apex of the north-western gable, the remainder is hidden behind an internal brick skin; it is not known if this gable end timber-frame can be seen externally as it faces onto the garden of the adjacent property. Truss T2 comprises a pair of principal rafters single pegged at the apex, with one notched to take a ridge plate (missing); the ends of the principals and tiebeam are hidden within the brick skins of the side walls of the building; a pair of queen-struts rise from the tiebeam to a collar above. The tiebeam has been cut through for the incorporation of a modern doorway (Plate 6).



Plate 6: Truss T2 looking north-west. The doorframe cuts through the tiebeam

The purlins are trenched into the principals close to the collar and a pair of straight wind braces rise from principal to purlin at each side. There are two original studs pegged below the tiebeam and further inserted timbers, which would have been added when the tiebeam was cut. The upper face of the girding beam can just be seen at floor level; this has been notched to give the inserted doorway extra height. The upper face of the tiebeam has a groove cut in it to take the feet of staves, which would be inserted into rebated notches cut into the underside of the collar above, with woven horizontal slivers of cleft oak then interlaced between, which may then have been daubed; the holes for the heads of the staves were only apparent to either side of the inserted modern doorway, which suggests that prior to infilling with brick either side of the doorway, the panels were wattled, and possibly daubed; this also indicates that this was done *after* the doorway was cut through.

The purlins to bay 1 are supported by an inserted frame resting on a bridging beam that was inserted through the south-western elevation wall (Plate 7). The purlins to the remainder of the building are boxed in and could not be seen.



Plate 7: Inserted frame to bay 1 to support purlins. Also note the apex of truss T1 in the gable end

5. Appraisal of the Fabric Evidence

From the fabric evidence we can ascertain that the original structure of the subject building was of timber-frame construction, with three tiers of square panels and straight angle braces from the posts to the wall plates, which would suggest a likely mid-17th century date. The form of truss T2 indicates that bay 2 was originally single storied and that a doorway was cut through when the upper floor was added, probably in the 19th century when the building was overhauled and brick used to replace most of the original frame. The positions of trusses T1 and T2 is clear, as they remain in situ, however, the position of further trusses is unclear as the original roof-structure at the south-eastern end has been replaced and the south-eastern gable end wall is 19th century brick. The best indicator for the former position of a truss is an empty lap-joint rebate to the upper face of the remaining south-western wall plate and an adjacent empty peg-hole, though this could only be seen externally as access to the roof-space at the south-eastern end was not possible. If this is correct, it suggests that the structure originally had a bay at the north-western end (bay 1), with an adjacent half-bay; if the present south-eastern gable wall represents the line of the original end of the timber frame, then the original structure would have had a full bay at either end, with a half-bay in between. However, it may also be that the building was once longer and extended further to the south-east, though there was no visible fabric evidence for this.

The structure has lately been used as storage space, but the 19th century use was probably, as the name suggests, a coach house. The north-eastern brick elevation suggests that bay 1 was open to the rafters and used for cart storage, evidenced by the tall double door aperture below a brick arch. The remainder of the space would then have been turned over to stabling, evidenced by the former position of a large single doorway and window, with a pitching eye to the south-eastern gable, suggesting that there was a hayloft over the stable. This however, does not explain the bricked-up

opening and oval brick features in the south-eastern gable end. The earlier use of the space is unknown; it is suggested in the statutory listing that the building was probably a barn, though there is no clear evidence for this and if the half-bay hypothesis is correct, the use may just of likely been domestic, as the half-bay would rule out a central cart bay as would be expected. Unfortunately, much of the frame could not be inspected, as it is located within private gardens to the adjacent property. This means that any evidence for windows / doors/ significant features to the south-western side remains unclear.

As outlined above, the building is referred to in the CBA research report as having a surviving upper cruck (Alcock 1990). However, this seems to be an error and there is no visible evidence for the frame having retained a cruck.

Overall, the historic building retains nothing of architectural merit; with little potential that further study of the fabric could enhance our knowledge regarding the construction, development, function and decline of the building. It maybe that historic documents could shed further light, but this cannot be guaranteed and would be time consuming.

6. The Historic, Architectural and Archaeological Importance of the Structure and the Possible Impact of the proposed development

Unfortunately, the architectural integrity of the structure has been removed along with the majority of its timber-frame and the building is of little historic importance considering our current knowledge of its background, development and usage. It is therefore important that if possible, the remainder of the framing should be retained. There is limited potential for expanding our knowledge of the building by further investigation of the timbers that make up the frame; it is possible, however, that non-original brick panel infills and the modern roof structure may hide minor clues that would assist in indicating its history, though unnecessary dismantling of the fabric to resolve such questions should not be considered.

6. Conclusion

The timber-frame of the Old Coach House was most likely constructed at some time during the middle decades of the 17th century; it is suggested in the statutory listing for the building that it was most likely originally a barn, but the fabric evidence suggests an original a half-bay to the central section of the building, which does not sit comfortably with the accepted plan-forms of barns and may point to a domestic use. Sometime, probably during the 19th century, most of the timber-frame was replaced with brick and the building appears to have been converted to a coach house, with a cart bay at the north-western end and stabling at the other end, below a hayloft. The function of an opening and a pair of oval recesses in the south-eastern gable cannot be determined and it maybe that there was a further intermediate use for the structure.

As it stands today, the building has little historic or architectural merit, though retention of the frame is advised as it may contain clues that may add to our knowledge of the structure in the future.

7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mrs Hunt for commissioning the appraisal and Grace Plant of Grace N. Plant & Associates for her assistance and supply of the drawings, which were used for the basis of Figure 2. Thanks are also extended to Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council.

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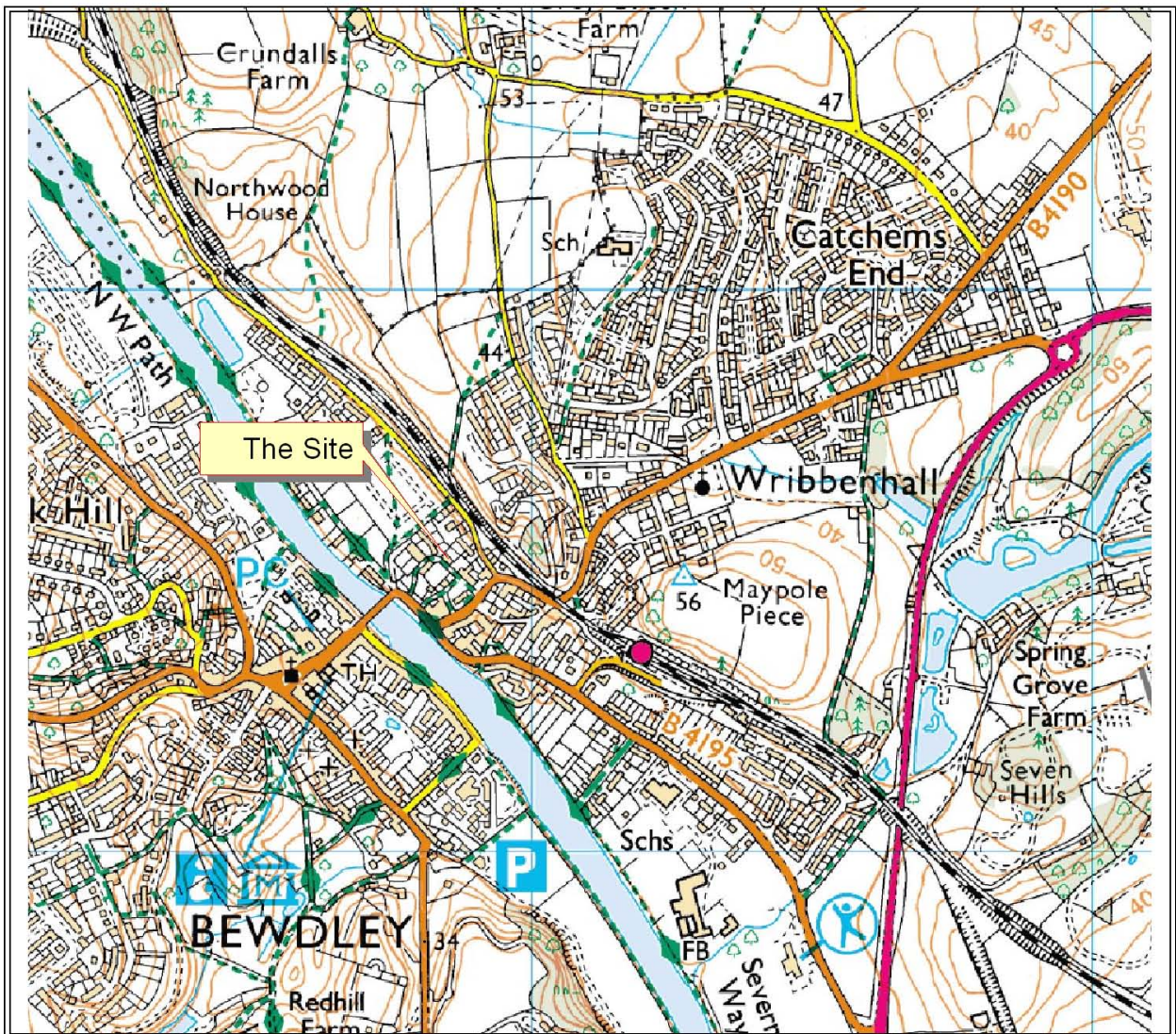
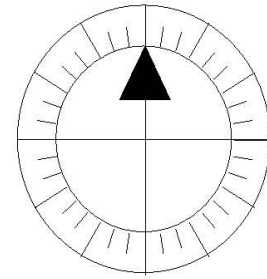
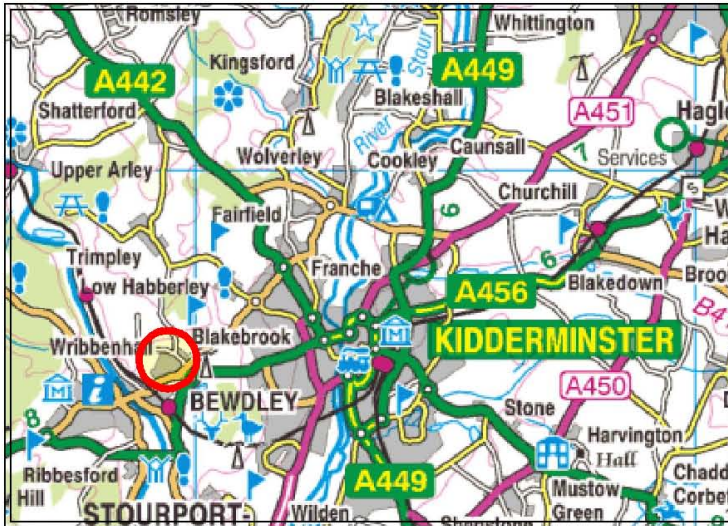
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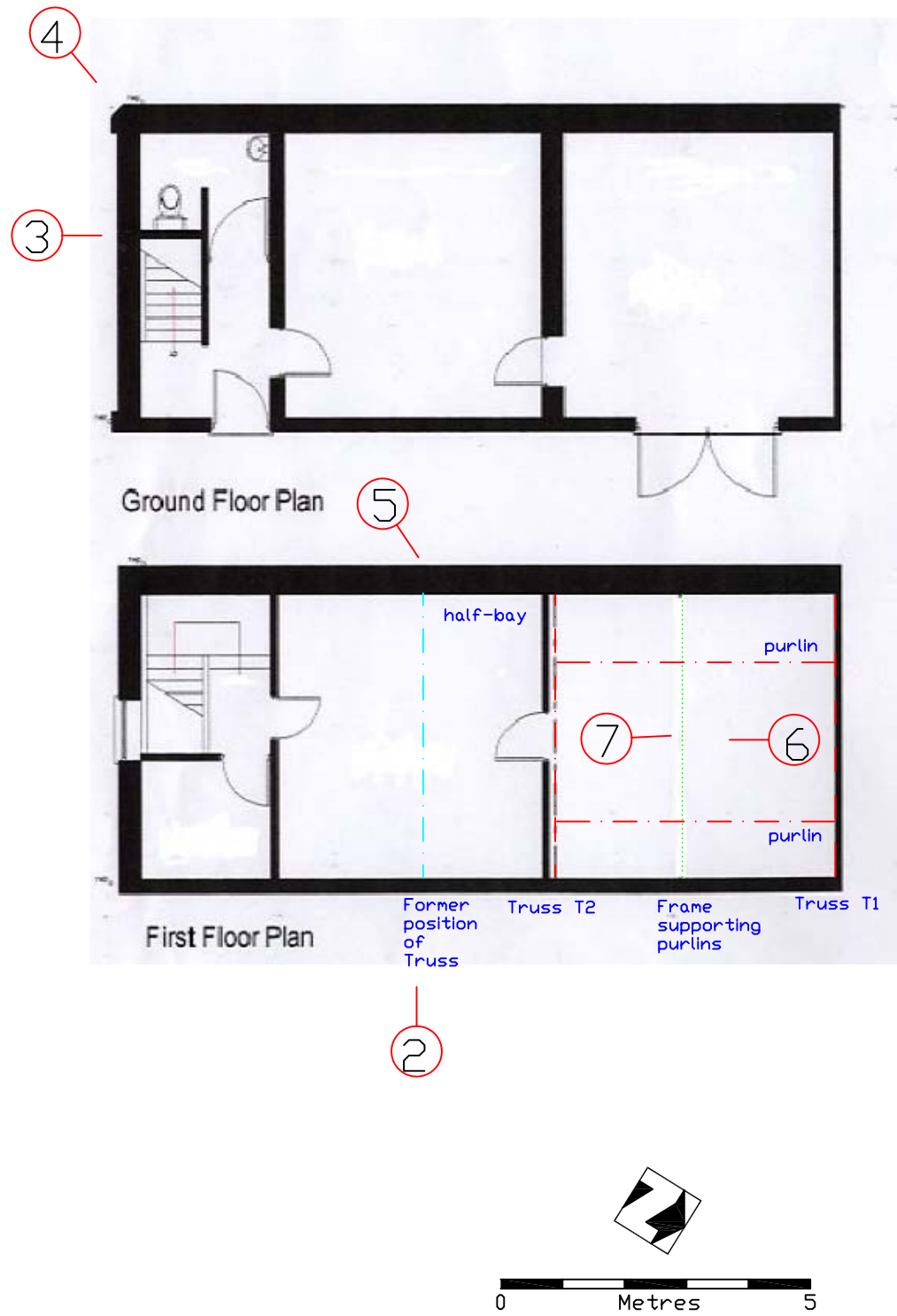
Figure 1: Location of the Site



Location of proposed development site

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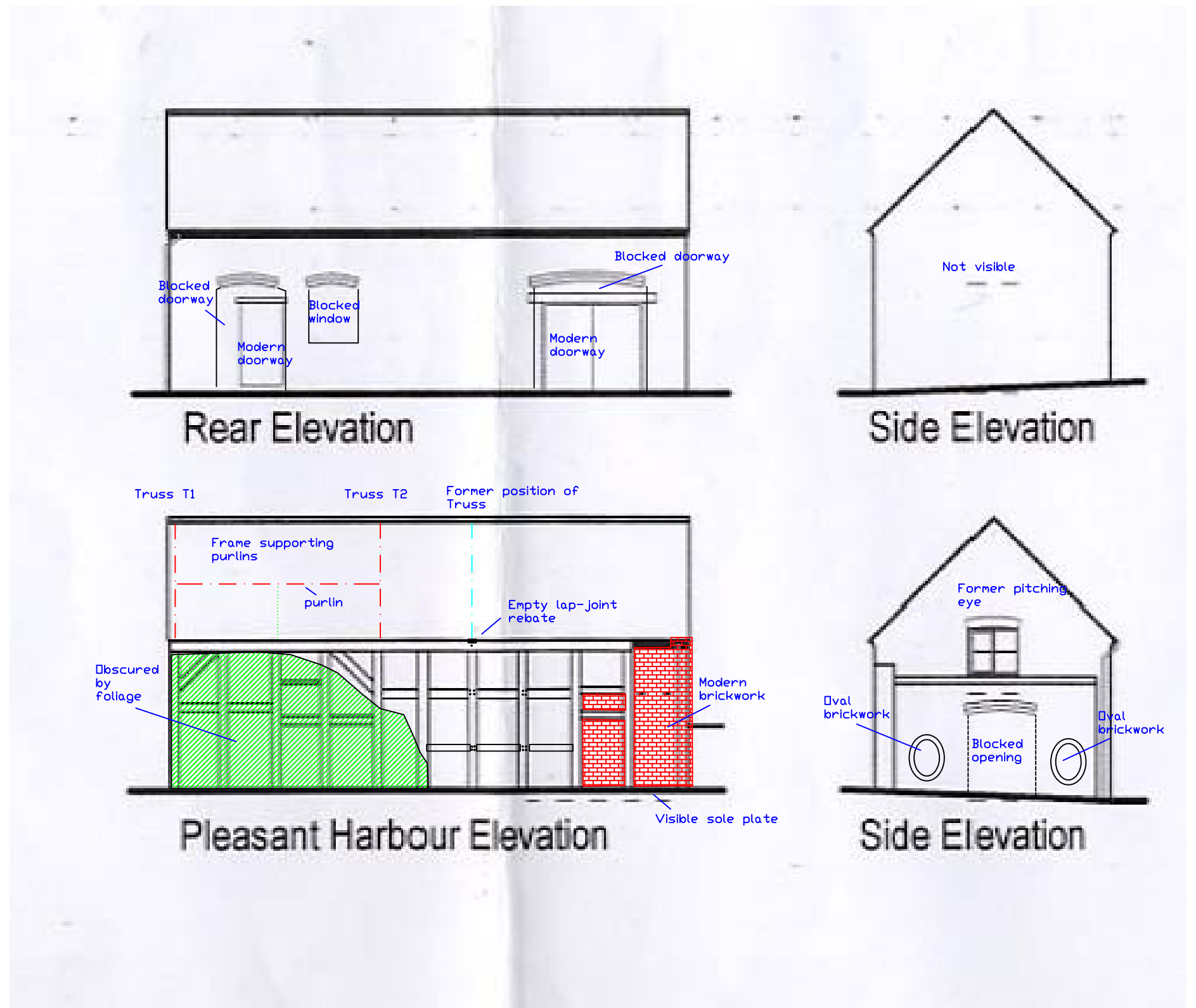


Figure 2: Plan and Elevations (based on survey drawings by Grace N. Plant & Associates)