

**Barn at  
Willow House,  
Fressingfield, Suffolk  
FSF 068**

**Heritage Asset Assessment**

OASIS ID: Suffolkc1-109920



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# **Barn at Willow House, Harleston Hill, Fressingfield, Suffolk**

**(TM 261 776)**

## **Heritage Asset Assessment**

*This report provides a written and photographic analysis and record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a timber-framed barn in the curtilage of a grade II-listed house. It has been prepared to a specification written by Edward Martin of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (ref. SpecHAA\_WillowHo\_Fressingfield\_pre\_11, dated 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011), and is intended to inform and accompany a planning application for conversion.*

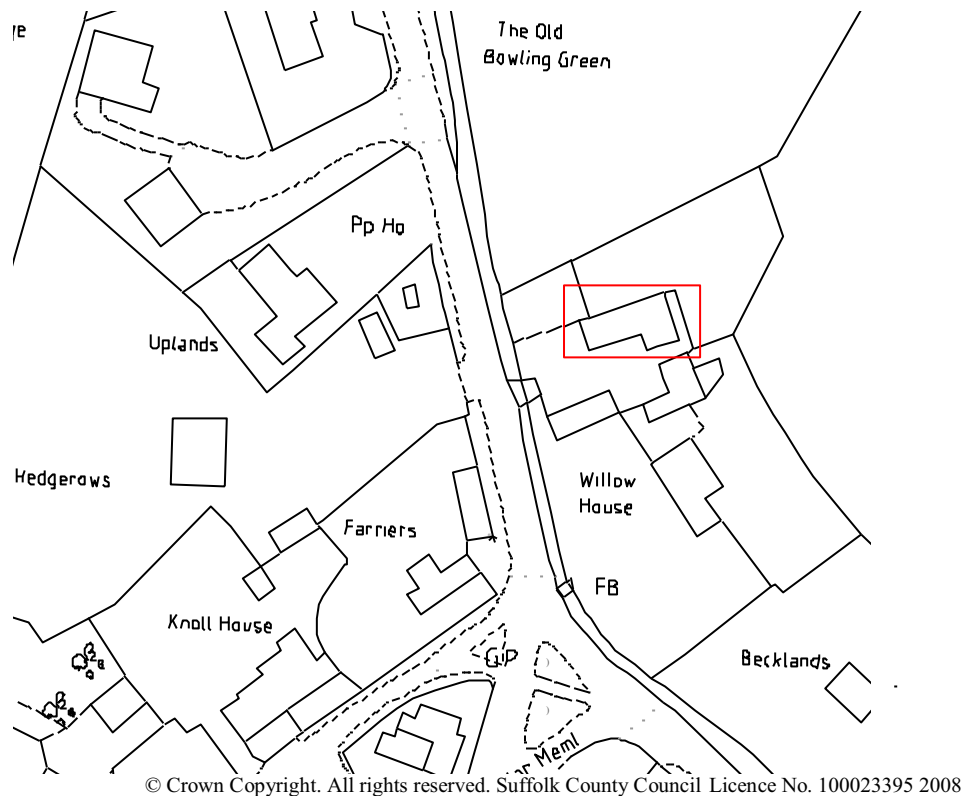
### **Introduction**

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 42 digital images of 21 megapixels (Appendix 1), but also includes 12 printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text (Appendix 2). Each image is described in a separate schedule and the site was inspected on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

### **Summary**

Willow House adjoins open countryside on the north-eastern edge of Fressingfield village, approximately 75 m north of the parish churchyard. The house is a grade II-listed mid-17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed and rendered structure of the quality normally expected in a 'Yeoman' farmhouse with a large acreage, but at the time of the tithe survey in 1838 it was a tenanted smallholding with just 8.75 acres of adjoining pasture land and orchard entirely lacking in arable.

The barn to the north of the house is a substantial timber-framed and weatherboarded example of five bays with an additional bay projecting at right-angles to the south. It appears on the tithe map and dates from the late-18<sup>th</sup> or early-19<sup>th</sup> century with a frame of some quality (despite the presence of some re-used medieval timber), which includes neatly jowled storey posts and primary braces that are fully tenoned and pegged at both ends. The two bays to the west of the central entrance were divided from the rest and provided with a loft, as was the additional southern bay, and the remaining three open bays lacked both arch-braces and knee-braces to their tie-beams in a highly unusual manner. This absence of bracing, coupled with the large scale of the lofted areas, probably reflects the building's use as a hay barn with an integral stable and cow-house rather a standard threshing barn. As such, it is an unusual survival of some historic interest, but unfortunately has been much altered and partly rebuilt. The pantiled roof was originally thatched, as indicated by the steep pitch of its one remaining gable, but the rafters were entirely replaced in softwood during the late-20<sup>th</sup> century and the entire eastern section of the building was re-roofed as a lean-to – creating a sadly truncated appearance (that could be remedied during any future conversion). Large sections of the external walls have also been replaced in modern softwood and cement block-work, ensuring the building no longer meets the strict English Heritage criteria for listing in its own right.

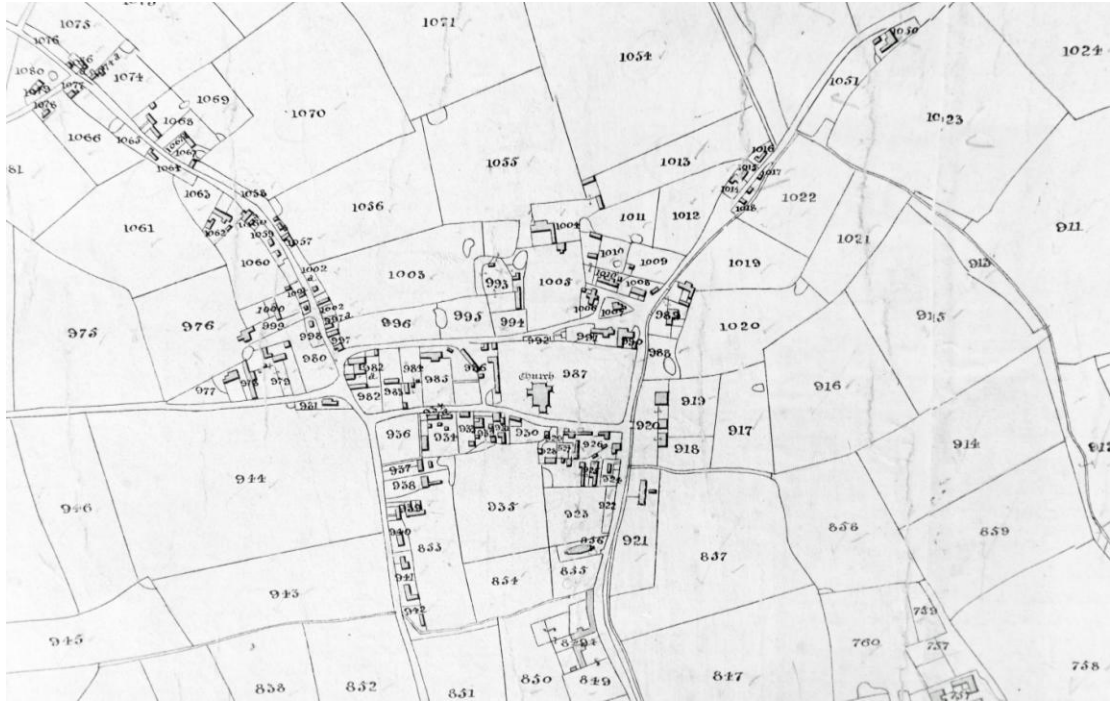


**Figure 1**  
**Modern Ordnance Survey**

**Enclosing the barn in red and showing the grade II-listed 17<sup>th</sup> century house to the south. The building in the south-western corner of the former farm yard is a previously converted mid-19<sup>th</sup> century structure reputed to have been a granary. The neighbouring property known as Becklands occupies the site of the orchard shown on the tithe map of 1838. The rectangular outline of Church Farm Stables (one of the most unusual and impressive mid-14<sup>th</sup> century halls in Britain) is visible in the bottom left-hand corner.**

## **Documentary and Cartographic Evidence**

Willow House adjoins open countryside on the north-eastern edge of Fressingfield village, approximately 75 m north of the parish churchyard and 75 m east of the 14<sup>th</sup> century raised-aisled hall known as Church Farm Stables (ref. ‘English Historic Carpentry’, Cecil Hewett, 1980). The house is a grade II-listed timber-framed and rendered structure of *circa* 1640 with a clasped-purlin roof structure (from which the wind-braces have been removed) and collared lamb’s tongue chamfer stops to the ceilings of its central hall and southern parlour. The hall was originally entered by a cross-passage adjoining the service wing to the north but was later blocked when a lobby entrance was added opposite the high-end chimney (leaving the original door lintel *in situ*). The house is of typical ‘Yeoman’ quality (i.e. of a type that would be appropriate to a substantial holding of 100 acres or more in a normal mid-17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse). The yard to the north of the site contains two timber-framed and weatherboarded buildings that have been converted for domestic purposes in recent years; a reputed granary of two storeys in its south-western corner and a single-storied shed to the south-east. Neither of these converted structures was present at the time of the Fressingfield tithe survey of 1838 (figure 2 below), but the barn in the north-eastern corner of the same yard was shown with much the same outline as it retains today, although a rear porch appears to have projected from the centre of its northern elevation.



**Figure 2.**

**The Fressingfield tithe map of 1838 (showing north towards the top right-hand corner). The small block of land belonging to Willow House lies immediately opposite the north-eastern corner of the churchyard and extends along Harleston Hill.**

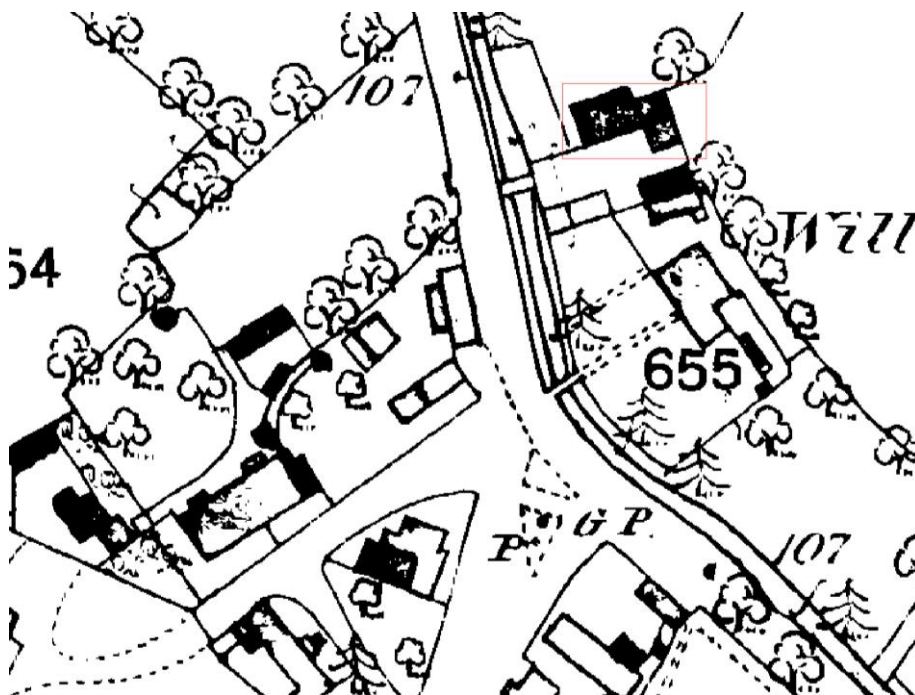


**Figure 2a**

**Detail of the 1838 tithe map, re-oriented to show north in the usual direction. The barn lies to the north of the house (no. 989) adjoining the pastureland known as Barn Meadow (1019) and Home Meadow (1020). Its present L-shaped outline remains unchanged but the projection to the north no longer survives. This projection adjoins the entrance bay (C in figure 5) and probably represents a gabled or lean-to porch.**

The 1838 title apportionment records the property as a tenanted smallholding with just 8.75 acres of surrounding pasture land and no arable. It consisted of the ‘house and premises’ (plot 989 in figure 2) and an orchard immediately to the south (988) with ‘Barn Meadow’ adjoining the barn to the north (1019), ‘Further Meadow’ beyond (1021) and Home Meadow (1020) and ‘Brook Meadow’ (1022) to the east. The owner was named as Harriet Patrick and her tenant as Charles Dye, but unfortunately there is no mention of his name in White’s Suffolk Directory of 1844 and his precise occupation is unclear. He described himself as a ‘farmer’ in the census return of 1841 (information kindly supplied by the present owner), but given the lack of arable he may have been a butcher or livestock dealer rather than a normal cereal farmer. Neither Dye nor Patrick possessed or occupied any other land in the parish, but evidence in the owner’s possession suggests that by the 1880s the residents of Willow House also farmed approximately 50 acres of neighbouring land belonging to Knights Farm to the north. Kelly’s Directory for 1912 names the occupant of Willow House as a carpenter (Lewis Etheridge), although other members of the same family are named as farmers and landowners in the parish. The original nature of the holding must relate to the unusual configuration of the barn, which adjoined the meadow and was probably designed as a hay barn rather than a standard threshing barn.

The title map depicts the barn with its present L-shaped outline but also shows a probable porch projecting into the adjoining meadow. The entrance bays of many early-19<sup>th</sup> century barns possessed lean-to porches against their rear elevations that were designed to extend the length of their respective threshing floors rather than to shelter a principal entrance – but the precise nature of this example is now impossible to determine. By the time of the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1885 (figure 3) this northern projection had been extended to the barn’s western gable – probably by the addition of a lean-to shed – and the recently converted reputed granary had been erected in the corner of the southern yard. The Second Edition of 1904 appears to show a partition to the east of the barn’s entrance bay but internal features were often inaccurate. The northern elevation of the shed in the yard’s south-eastern corner is indicated by a broken line and was probably a shelter-shed.



**Figure 3. The First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1885.**

**The northern projection had been extended to the western gable since 1838 and the recently converted ‘granary’ built to the south, but the layout of the yard had otherwise remained unaltered since 1838.**

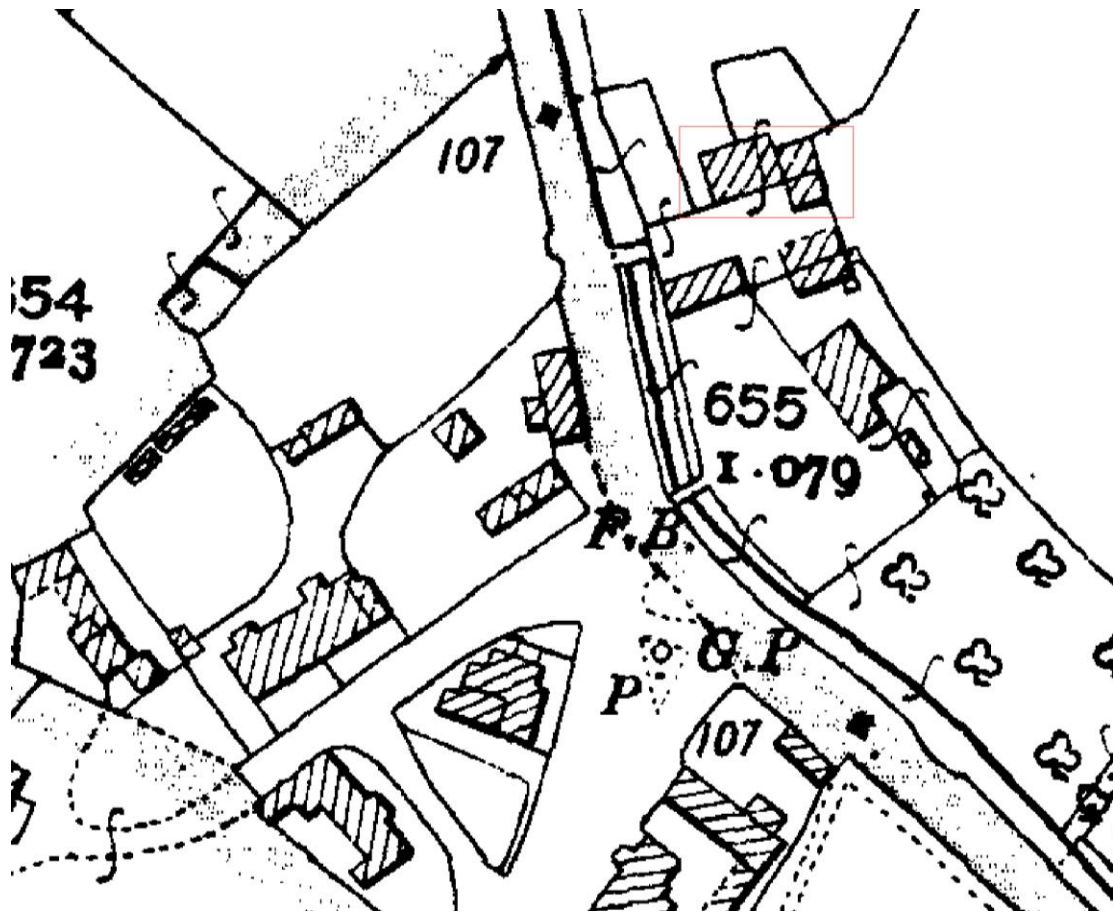


Figure 4  
Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904, showing little change since 1885. The barn's internal partition appears to be on the wrong side of the entrance bay (i.e. to the east rather than west) but internal features were often surveyed inaccurately. The corner of the churchyard is shown here to bottom right.

## Building Analysis

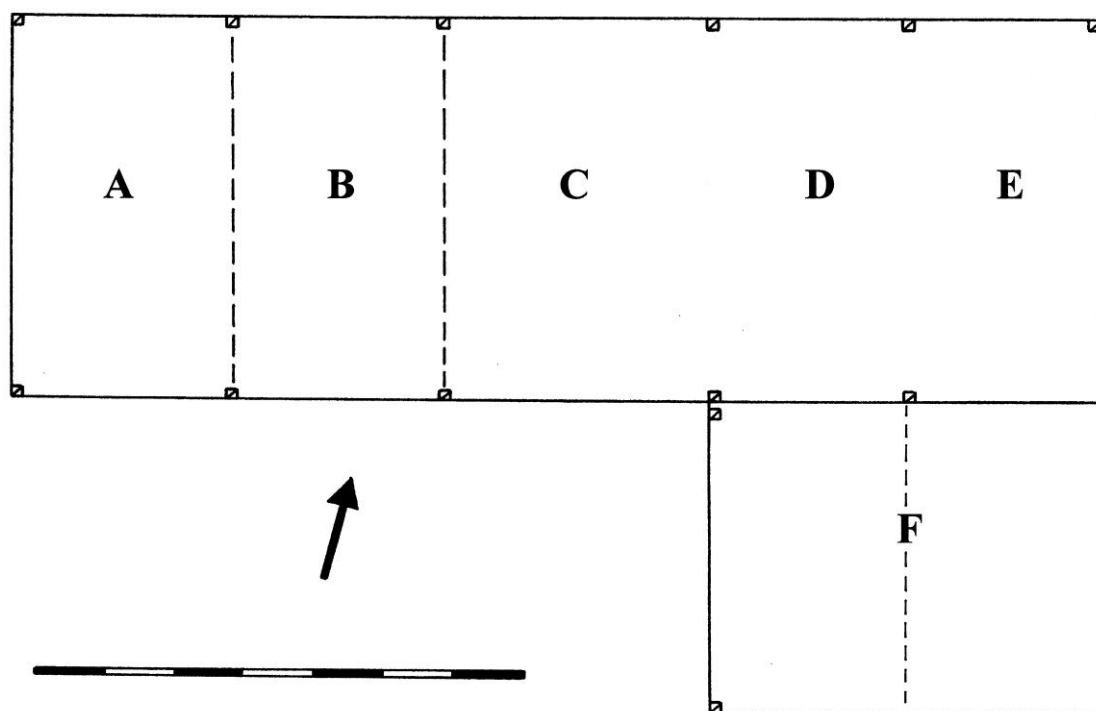


Figure 5

Ground plan of the barn, identifying the bays and principal compartments for ease of reference in the text and photographs. Scale in metres.

### Key:

**A-B.** Possible stable or cow-house with open hay loft above. Divided at ground level from the rest of the interior.

**C.** Entrance bay, formerly with a northern 'porch' or lean-to shed as shown on the historic maps above (of which no trace survives).

**D-E** Open barn, apparently without tie-beam braces of any kind. Roof replaced.

**F.** Possible stable with hay loft. Built as a cross-wing to the contemporary barn but re-roofed as a lean-to along with bays D and E.

The barn at Willow House is a timber-framed and weatherboarded structure in five bays on an approximately east-west axis which extends to 15.5 m in length by 5.5 m in overall width (51 ft by 18 ft). Its walls rise to 3.5 m (11.5 ft) above the internal concrete floor and consist of oak studs of varying scantling interrupted by curved primary braces that are tenoned and pegged to the frame. Many individual timbers contain numerous mortises and other features that do not relate to their present positions and are clearly re-used; the southern roof-plate of bays A and B, for example, contains diamond-shaped mortises for the mullions of a medieval window and retains traces of soot from an open hearth, while the binding joist between the same bays is also sooted and contains dovetail joints in its soffit. The timbers of a southern wing (F) which projects at right-angles from the two eastern bays of the main barn show similar traces of re-use.

The pantiled roof structure of the main barn consists of modern softwood and is understood to have been rebuilt by the previous owner within the last 20 years. Its steep pitch of *circa* 55



degrees reflects the western gable, which survives intact, and suggests the barn was originally thatched. This roof would have continued to the eastern gable and returned at right-angles over the southern wing but has been replaced above bays D and E by a low-pitched lean-to of corrugated asbestos which also extends along the length of the southern shed. The eastern elevation (i.e. the walls of bays E and F) was rebuilt in cement block-work and softwood at the same time, and similar block-work extends along the entire length of the building to a height of approximately 1.5 m between its studs. Most of the weatherboarding was renewed at the same time, including a series of vertical ventilation slats to the north and south of bays A and B, although certain sections of boarding at the upper levels are heavily tarred and appear to survive from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The original layout of the barn was unusual. The two western bays contained a loft supported on binding joists tenoned to the storey posts (1.7 m below the roof-plates) and by clamps (i.e. rails) nailed to the outer walls. The common joists have been recently renewed in softwood but both binding joists survive, along with an axial joist in bay B. The easternmost binding joist (between bays B and C) contains a series of apparently original mortises in its soffit, suggesting the area beneath the loft was divided from the rest of the barn by an internal partition but the loft itself was open to the barn. The loft was also accessible by a loading door in the western gable which remains *in situ*, and possibly lit by a window above (as suggested by a framed opening, now blocked, in the original studwork). It is not uncommon to find floored end-bays which operated as stables and hay lofts in local barns, but the scale of this example seems too large for a smallholding of 8.75 acres and in the absence of any other evidence (since the building has been stripped of relevant fixtures and fittings) it may be interpreted as a neat-house for cattle.

The rest of the barn was open to its roof and appears to have contained a central threshing bay in the usual manner. Unfortunately, with the exception of bays A and B, both the northern and southern roof-plates have been entirely replaced or lost and it is impossible to establish whether the positions of the present full-height entrance doorways to the south and the smaller rear doors to the north are original features; the existing doors and associated studwork date only from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The interior was unusual in that it lacked braces of any kind to its tie-beams, although the storey posts were jowled in the traditional manner. The nature of the wall framing indicates a date of construction no later than the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and possibly as early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, during which period almost all timber frames contained either arch-braces or bolted knee-braces between their posts and tie-beams. The complete absence from the storey posts of any mortises (whether for binding joists or arch-braces) is highly abnormal, but may relate to the presumed use of the interior as a hay barn rather than a standard threshing barn – as suggested by the complete absence of arable land from the property in 1838. The contemporary southern wing (F) was divided internally from the open barn and contained a loft entered by an external loading hatch in its gable. The original roof of this wing would have adjoined that of the northern barn at right-angles, as indicated by the directions of their respective jowled storey posts, although the eastern gable of bay E may have been hipped to reflect the slope of the cross-wing.

### **Historic Significance**

The barn at Willow House is a late-18<sup>th</sup> or early-19<sup>th</sup> century structure which originally possessed an integral loft in two of its five bays and a further lofted bay in a separate cross-wing to the south. It remains of some historic interest despite the loss of much original fabric, including the entire eastern section of its roof, particularly as it appears to have been built (most unusually) without tie-beam braces as a hay barn rather than a standard threshing barn. Given the extent of its alterations it does not, however, meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing in its own right.

## **Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record**

### **Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1**

#### **Photograph no.**

1. General view of site from north-east showing barn in centre with Willow House & church to left and Church Farm Stables to right.
2. General view of site from south-west showing barn in rear to centre & grade II-listed Willow House to right.
3. General view from north-west showing entrance to site from Harleston Hill (B1116) with barn in rear to left.
4. General view from site entrance to west showing converted mid-19th century granary to right and barn to left.
5. General view from concrete yard to south-west showing barn to left and southern shed (F) in centre.
6. Exterior from north showing 20th century weatherboarding with doors to threshing bay right & truncated roof of eastern bays left.
7. Eastern exterior showing 20th century reconstruction incorporating cattle gate & windows to southern shed (F) to left.
8. Exterior of southern shed (F) from south-west showing truncated roof and loading hatch to loft.
9. Exterior from south-west showing loading door of loft in western gable.
10. Southern exterior of barn showing 20th century vertical slats, doors to threshing bay right & doors to floored bays (A & B) left.
11. Detail of junction between barn doors (left) & southern shed (F) showing heavily tarred weatherboarding.
12. Internal western gable (A) on ground floor showing primary bracing and modern loft joists.
13. Interior of western bay A showing original re-used binding joist to bay B with southern entrance to right.
14. Northern interior of bay B showing original axial and binding joists of loft with renewed common joists & cement block-work.
15. Detail of northern interior of bay B showing clamp for original ceiling and pegged junction between primary wall braces.
16. Southern interior of bay B showing clamp of original loft ceiling with entrance doors in bay A to right.

17. Detail from east of sooted medieval binding joist between bays A & B showing evidence of multiple re-use.
18. Interior of barn from east showing threshing bay (C) in foreground with floored bays (A & B) in rear.
19. Detail from east of binding joist between bays C and B showing empty mortises of original partition.
20. Northern interior of bay B from loft showing new softwood roof-plate.
21. Detail of northern storey post between bays B & C showing pegged primary brace with no evidence of brace to tie-beam.
22. Interior of western roof gable (bay A) showing original rafters & loading door with apparent blocked window above tie-beam.
23. Southern interior of bay B on loft showing re-used medieval roof-plate with diamond mullion mortises.
24. Detail of soffit of re-used medieval roof-plate to south of bays A & B showing diamond mullion mortises.
25. Interior of south-western corner of barn on loft showing pegged primary braces and re-used gable tie-beam and roof-plate.
26. Interior of loft from east showing re-used storey posts with arch-brace mortises to left & right with recent softwood tie-beam.
27. Interior of open barn (C-E) from loft to west showing southern entrance doors to former threshing bay C to right.
28. Interior from north showing recently rebuilt softwood roof structure with loft to right & southern entrance doors in bay C left.
29. Detail of southern roof-plate above 20th century entrance doors in bay C showing block for central bar.
30. Detail of southern storey post between bays C (left) and B showing original tenoned binding joist to bottom right.
31. Southern interior of barn showing doors in bay C right & jowled storey post without braces between truncated bays D & E left.
32. Interior of barn from west showing truncated roof structure of two eastern bays D & E.
33. Interior of truncated bays D & E from west showing removed eastern gable.
34. Northern interior of barn showing doors in bay C left & remaining framing with curved primary braces of bays D & E right.
35. Northern interior of bays D & E showing original jowled storey post without either brace or binding joist mortises in centre.

36. Truncated loft of southern shed (F) from north showing original studwork and jowled storey posts to right.
37. Western interior of southern shed (F) from loft to north-east showing re-used storey post adjoining barn post to right.
38. Interior of southern shed (F) from south showing cement-block partition to barn with original curved primary brace.
39. Eastern interior of southern shed (F) showing recent softwood framing with re-used waney ceiling joists.
40. Southern interior of southern shed (F) showing entrance door and plinth with original axial ceiling joist to right.
41. Detail of southern interior of southern shed (F) showing original nailed rail supporting axial joist of loft.
42. Western interior of southern shed (F) showing original framing with primary bracing and storey post to right.

*(Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 11-16)*

## Appendix 2 (pp. 11-16): Selected Printed Photographs



**Illus. 1** General view of the site from the north-east showing the church tower to the left and the gable of Church Farm Stables in the rear to the right. The steeply pitched pantiled roof of the barn was originally thatched and extended further to the left but was truncated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to form the present ‘lean-to’.



**Illus. 2** General view of the site from the south-west showing the high roof of the barn to the left of Willow House (a grade II-listed timber-framed and rendered structure of *circa* 1640 with a central hall flanked by a parlour to the right and a service bay to the left).



**Illus. 3** General view of the site from the concrete yard to the south-west showing the doors to the floored bays (A & B) to the left and the barn doors to the right. The roof of the southern shed (F) in the centre was originally of the same pitch and height as that of the barn but has been truncated.



**Illus. 4** The exterior from the south-west showing the loading door to the loft in the barn's western gable.



**Illus. 5** The eastern exterior which was almost entirely rebuilt in the late-20th century to incorporate what appears to be an entrance gate for cattle with glazed windows to the southern shed (F) to the left.



**Illus. 6** The exterior of southern shed (F) from the south-west showing its truncated roof and the loading hatch to the loft. This gable was originally of identical proportions to the western gable of the barn and the apexes of the two roof structures would have met at right-angles.



**Illus. 7** The northern interior of bay B showing the original axial and binding joists of the loft with recently renewed softwood common joists & cement block-work between the original studs of the external wall.



**Illus. 8** The largely intact interior of the western roof gable (seen from the loft in bay A) showing the original rafters and pegged primary wall braces with copious re-used timber. The horizontal timber above the tie-beam appears to have been the lintel of a blocked window.





**Illus. 9** The interior of the open barn from the north showing the recently rebuilt softwood roof structure with the two-bay loft to the right & the central entrance doors in bay C to the left.



**Illus. 10** The eastern end of the barn's northern interior showing the 20<sup>th</sup> century doors in bay C to the left and the largely original framing of bays D and E to the right beneath the truncated roof. There is no evidence of tie-beam braces or loft joists in the jowled storey posts.



**Illus. 11** The truncated loft of the southern shed (F) seen from the open barn to the north showing the original studwork and jowled storey posts of the intact western elevation to the right.



**Illus. 12** The interior of the southern shed (F) from the south showing the cement-block partition to the main barn with a single original primary brace. The whitewashed axial joist to the right is also original but the common joists of the loft have been renewed in softwood.