

**Sancroft Barn,
Laxfield, Suffolk
LXD 065**

Heritage Asset Assessment

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Sancroft Barn, Stirrup Street, Laxfield, Suffolk

(TM 273 723)

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(EM)_SancroftBarn_Laxfield_pre_2011, dated 20th July 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 48 digital images of 21 megapixels (Appendix 1), but also includes 10 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 21st September 2011.

Summary

Sancroft Barn adjoins open countryside on the western side of Stirrup Street (the main B1116 between Framingham and Fressingfield), approximately 2 km west of Laxfield village. It belonged in the 19th century to a modest tenanted holding of 45.5 acres based at Sancroft Manor Farm – a grade II-listed late-16th century house on the opposite side of the road – but is slightly closer to a second grade II-listed house of the early-17th century known as Sancroft Cottage. The origin of the name is uncertain as there is no record of a Sancroft Manor in the vicinity, despite its appearance on 19th century maps, but must derive in some way from the Sancroft family of Ufford Hall in Fressingfield 2 km to the north.

At the time of the Laxfield tithe survey in 1838 the timber-framed and weatherboarded barn formed the western range of an enclosed yard but is now isolated in the corner of a field. A 20th century lean-to extends the entire length of the rear elevation, and the whole building lies beneath a shallow-pitched roof of corrugated iron. It represents a four-bay threshing barn with an unusually well preserved threshing floor of gault brick and in its present form dates from the late-18th or the early-19th century. The two northern bays, however, date from the late-16th or early-17th century and were probably designed as a stable with a hay loft. The wall framing is in good condition with internally trenched braces, but its loft and approximately 1 metre of its southern bay were removed when the building was converted into a barn approximately two centuries later. This conversion involved the addition of a new southern bay consisting entirely of re-used timber which preserves a section of its original external wall of whitewashed clay daub. At the time of inspection the barn contained two historic grain sifting machines and the remains of a belt drive, illustrating the introduction of mechanised threshing during the second half of the 19th century. One of the sifters retains its 19th century paintwork and the name of a Framlingham retailer. Despite its considerable historic interest, however, the barn is unlikely to meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing in its own right due to the replacement of its roof and the truncation of its early fabric.

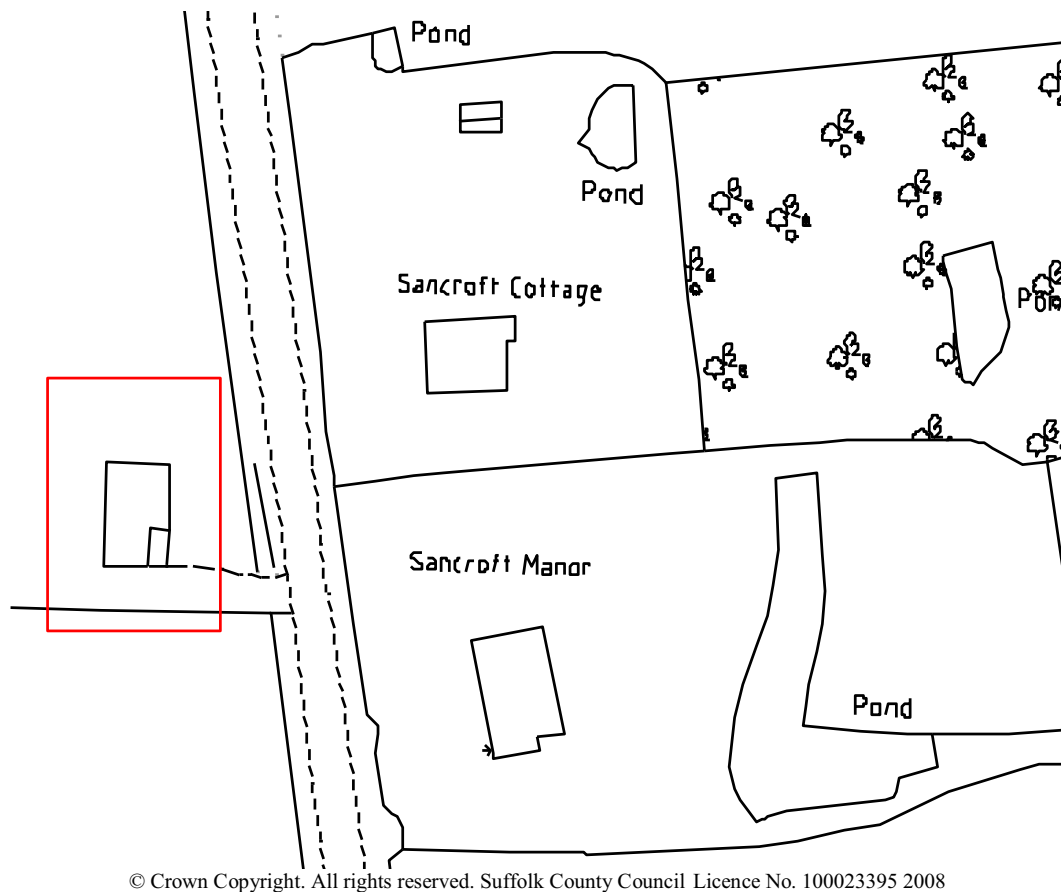


Figure 1
Modern Ordnance Survey

Enclosing the barn in red on the western side of Stirrup Street (B116) and showing the two grade II-listed houses in close proximity on the eastern side: Sancroft Cottage to the north (listed as early-17th century) and Sancroft Manor to the south (late-16th century).

Documentary and Cartographic Evidence

Sancroft Barn adjoins open countryside on the western side of Stirrup Street (the main B1116 between Framingham and Fressingfield), approximately 2 km west of Laxfield village and 500 m east of the boundary of Stradbroke parish. It lies in close proximity to two grade II-listed timber-framed houses on the opposite side of the road: Sancroft Manor 40 m to the south-east and Sancroft Cottage 35 m to the north-east. Sancroft Manor is the older and larger of the two (according to the Schedule of Listed Buildings) dating from the late-16th century and containing three cells parallel to the road while Sancroft Cottage is a two-cell structure of the early-17th century at right-angles to the road. It is unclear from the topography alone to which of these houses the late-16th or early-17th century frame of Sancroft Barn originally might have belonged. At the time of the Laxfield tithe survey in 1838 it formed part of Sancroft Manor Farm, a modest tenanted arable holding of 45.5 acres (including 11 acres of pasture) belonging to Robert Parnter Esquire and occupied by Miss Susan Garrard. It is unusual for an unmarried woman to appear as a farm tenant on the tithe apportionments, but she appears to have been part of a local dynasty of farmers as Jonathan Garrard was the tenant of Boltons Farm in 1844 (White's Directory) and no fewer than three members of the family were named in 1855. Parnter also owned two neighbouring farms amounting to approximately 275 acres in Laxfield parish, together with Sancroft Cottage which was let separately with no land attached.



Figure 2

The Laxfield tithe map of 1840 (showing north towards the top right-hand corner). The barn is shown as part of a U-shaped complex belonging to what is now Sancroft Manor to the south-east

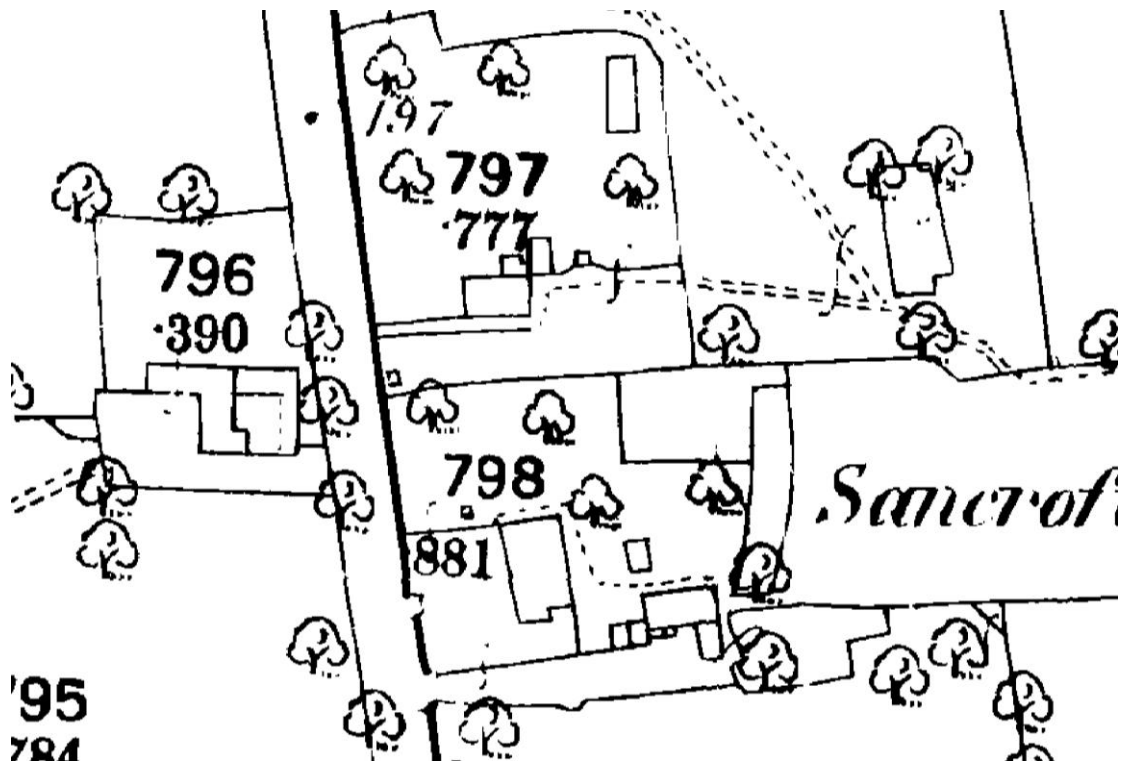


Figure 3

The First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1886.

The buildings are shown more clearly with broken lines indicating the open elevations of a probable cart lodge adjoining the entrance yard to the west of the barn and a small enclosed stable or (more probably) cattle yard with an open shelter-shed to the east. The small engine shed projecting from the southern end of the barn's eastern elevation probably explains the preservation of the original external roughcast render to this section (i.e. to bay D in figure 5).

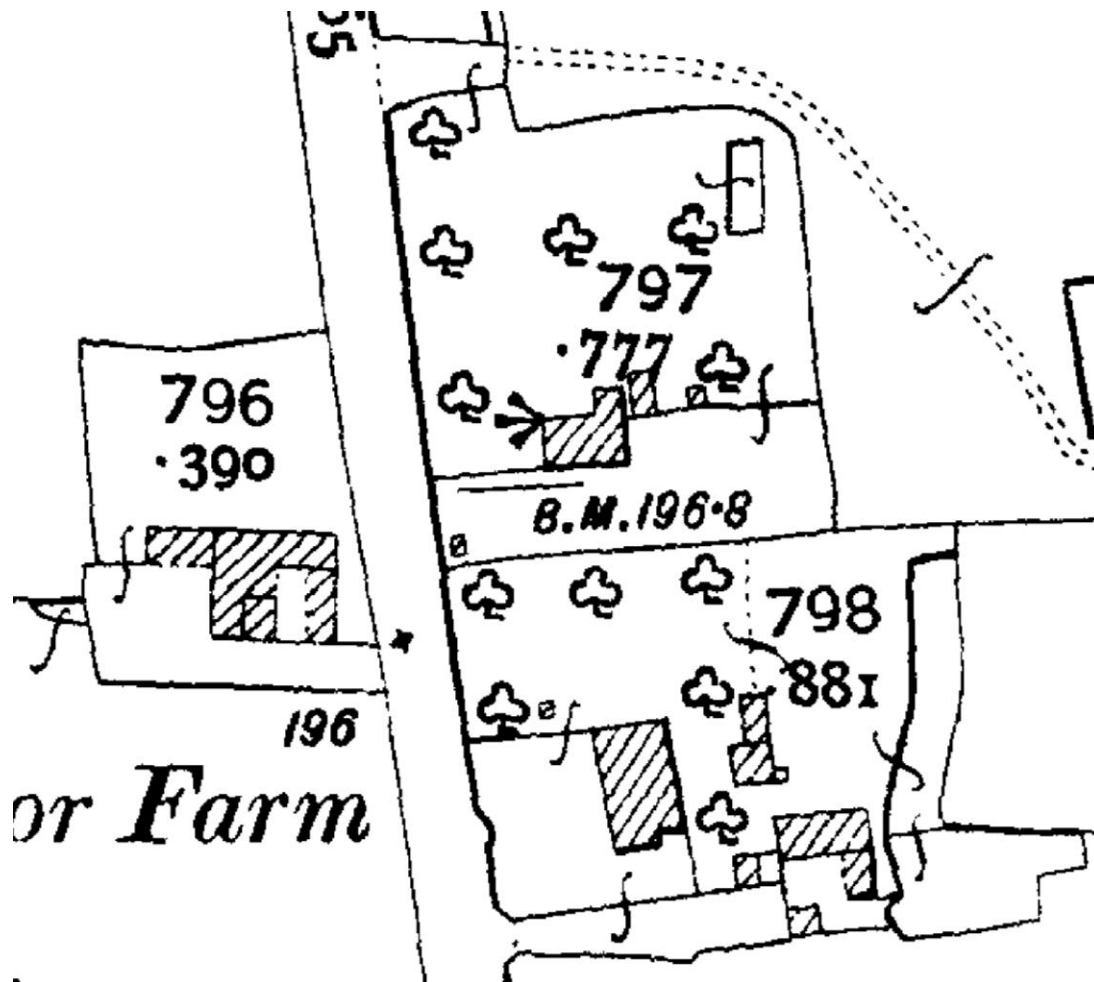


Figure 4
Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904.
Little had changed since 1886. Unfortunately nothing now survives of the adjoining buildings which appear to have been demolished towards the end of the 20th century.

The name of the farm is of uncertain origin. The tithe apportionment does not record farm names, but it appears as Sancroft Manor Farm on the Ordnance Survey of 1886. There was no genuine medieval manor of this name in Laxfield or any nearby parish (although one is recorded by W.A. Copinger (*The Manors of Suffolk*, 1909) in distant South Elmham St Cross), but from the 14th century until 1778 the Sancroft family owned the Manor of Ufford Hall in Fressingfield just 2 km to the north. Ufford Hall's most famous incumbent was Dr William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1677 and 1690, and any link of ownership or geography may have caused his name to become attached to the property.

The tithe map shows the barn as part of a U-shaped complex of farm buildings which had changed very little by 1886 and 1904 (figures 2-4). The site appears to have been entered from the road much as today, with an open-sided cart lodge projecting from the northern end of the barn's western elevation and an enclosed animal yard with an enclosed shed to the north (perhaps a stable or bullock shed) and an open-sided shelter-shed to the east. This complex was still shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1981 (not included here) but was unfortunately demolished in the late-20th century to leave only the barn and its 20th century lean-to on the east. The barn is understood to have been sold away from the adjoining land within the last year. The tithe apportionment names the site (no.21 on the map) as 'barn and yards' with 'Barn Meadow' to the south (20) and 'Barn Field' to the north (22).

Building Analysis

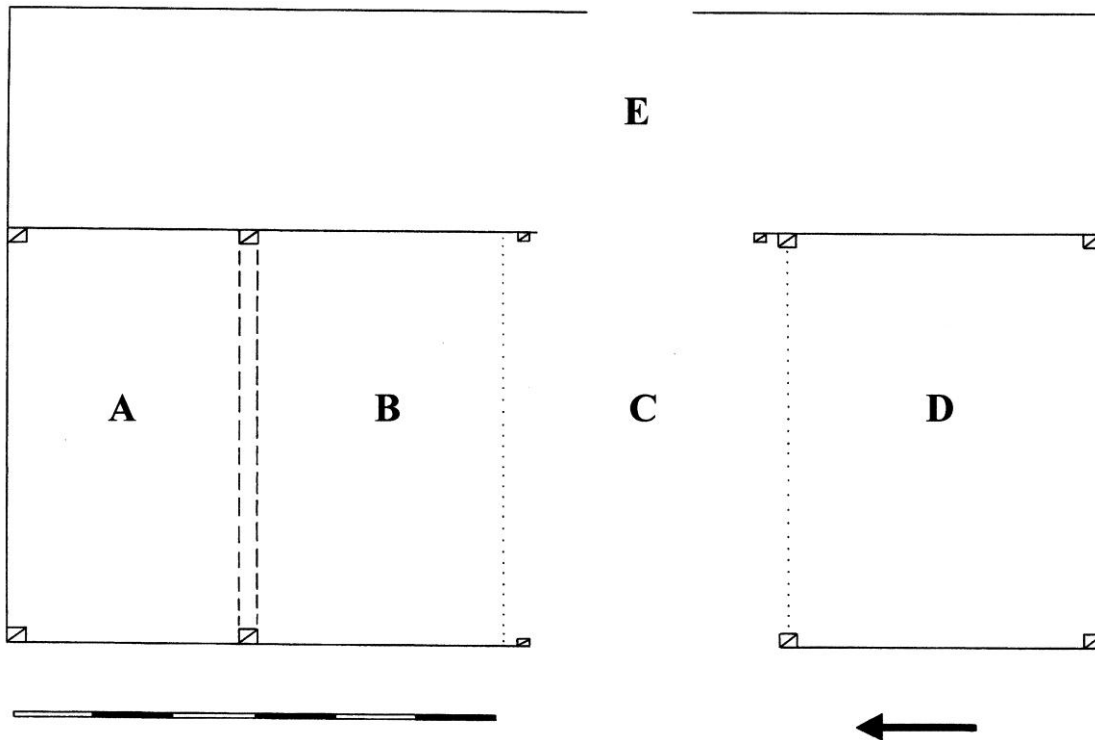


Figure 5

Ground plan of the barn, identifying the bays and principal compartments with letters for ease of reference in the text and photographs. With the exception of bay C the floors are of 20th century concrete throughout. Scale in metres.

Key:

A-B. Two intact bays of a late-16th or early-17th century timber-framed structure that originally possessed a loft and continued further to the south but has been truncated by the entrance bay of the later threshing barn (C). The tie-beams and roof structure are later replacements. The walls with internally trenced reverse-cranked braces but without any evidence of windows or doors. The loft was divided by a partition between the bays.

C. Entrance bay of the threshing barn with double-hung doors to the west and access to the rear lean-to and smaller rear doors to the east. Both roof-plates cut in the 20th century and replaced with softwood to increase headroom. This bay preserves a good 19th century threshing floor of gault brick.

D A single bay of the 18th or early-19th century consisting entirely of re-used timber from a 16th or early-17th century structure that contained a diamond-mullion window beneath its gable tie-beam. Diagonal primary braces interrupting the studs (pegged and tenoned to the storey posts but possibly re-using old mortises). The substantial eastern arch-brace of the open truss adjoining bay C to the north remains *in situ* but its counterpart to the west has been removed.

E. A 20th century lean-to of weatherboarded studwork with a corrugated iron roof and a northern gable of cement block-work. Vehicle doors to the southern gable. The iron pulley wheels of a belt drive are attached to the tie-beam south of the adjoining entrance bay (C). This structure is not of historic significance in itself but preserves an important section of original external roughcast render to bay D of the main barn

(where an earlier lean-to engine once stood, as shown in figures 3 & 4) and the scar of a demolished shed which projected at right-angles from the northern end of the barn.

Proportions

Sancroft Barn is a timber-framed and weatherboard structure in four bays (much patched in corrugated iron) on a north-south axis which extends to 13.7 m in length by 5 m in overall width (45 ft by 16.5 ft). An enclosed 20th century lean-to shed of softwood studs extends along the entire length of the eastern elevation, increasing the total width of the building to 7.9 m (26 ft). The walls of the main barn rise to 3.3 m (11 ft) above the internal concrete floor and the shallow pitched late-19th or early-20th century roof structure consists of re-used oak rafters with softwood through-purlins and nailed collars. The present roof covering of corrugated iron may have replaced slate (although the original roof was probably steeply pitched for thatch).

Layout: Southern Bays C and D

The interior is now an undivided open barn of traditional layout with a good threshing floor of gault brick in its penultimate southern bay (C), entered by half-hung doors to the west, but it contains two distinct phases of construction. The southern bay consists entirely of re-used timber from one or more earlier buildings of the 16th or early-17th centuries, and is therefore difficult to date with any precision. Its open truss to the north retains a single arch-brace to the rear (east) which is pegged and tenoned to the frame, as are the diagonal primary wall braces which interrupt the studs: the presence of arch-braces rather than knee-braces, and the use of traditional joints rather than nails suggests an origin before the middle of the 19th century but unfortunately the joints may relate to the re-use of the individual timbers rather than their present framing. A date in the late-18th or early-19th century is likely, particularly as the external walls were initially rendered rather than weatherboarded. The eastern exterior is intact within the lean-to shed, having been protected by an earlier shed on the same site as shown in figures 3 and 4 above, and consists of whitewashed roughcast clay daub on horizontal split laths nailed to the studwork. Many local barns and houses were treated in this way until colourwash such as red ochre became more common in the second quarter of the 19th century and (in the case of agricultural buildings) cheap tar became available as a by-product of town gas production in the second half of the same century. The section of daub here is a rare survival of considerable historic interest. The lean-to also preserved the outline in tar of the single-storied shed which projected at right-angles from the northern end of the barn's eastern elevation (clad in deal boarding), as shown in figures 3 and 4.

Layout: Northern Bays A and B

The two northern bays (A and B) are considerably earlier and were not designed as a barn at all. Unlike the timbers of the southern bay their wall framing remains *in situ* and has not been re-used, with distinctively reverse-cranked (angled) internally trenched wall braces that are highly characteristic of the late-16th and early-17th centuries. The tie-beams are later replacements but the storey posts between the two bays contain mortises for a binding joist of an original ceiling along with mortises for the down-braces of a partition that sub-divided the upper storey. There is no evidence of loft windows but the centre of the northern tie-beam has rotted away in a manner often associated with the presence of windows or hatches above (the upper part of the gable was lost when the roof was rebuilt, but the pegged mortises in the top of the tie-beam demonstrate that it was vertical rather than hipped). A lofted farm building of this period would normally form a stable, but the layout differed significantly from other examples and while a stable remains the most likely interpretation (particularly given the presence of angled notches below the binding joists of a type normally used to secure the hay racks of stables) it is by no means certain. The hay lofts above stables would not normally be divided by internal partitions, for example, and their bays would be of equal length: the

southern bay in this case (bay B) has been truncated by the later barn entrance and originally continued by an additional metre or more (as shown by the symmetry of the wall braces and the stud mortises at the end of the roof-plate) – giving an internal length of approximately 4 m (13 ft) as opposed to the 2.9 m (9.5 ft) of the northern bay (A). Whatever its original purpose the building was stripped of its loft and converted into a barn when the present southern bay (D) was added approximately two centuries later. Its roof-plates probably survived until the entrance doors were raised and the existing softwood plates introduced in the 20th century.

Historic Machinery

The barn contained two boarded grain sifters (corn cleaning machines) at the time of inspection, together with a cast iron axle and two pulley wheels attached to the tie-beam of the rear aisle south of the threshing bay. An increasing number of machines were introduced into the various processes of threshing, winnowing and cattle feed preparation during the mid-19th century, many of which required external power. The pulley wheels here would have been driven by an engine in the demolished lean-to shed behind the barn's southern bay (D) – or possibly by a horse-engine outside the barn. Part of a belt drive is still attached to the 20th century sifter standing against the back wall of the southern bay, but the second machine in the northern bay is a 19th century antique with its original paintwork simulating wood grain and bearing the painted name 'W. Barker, Agent, Framlingham'. The Barkers appear to have been a major commercial family in the town, with no fewer than nine individuals of that name recorded in White's Trade Directory of 1874 – including Thomas Barker junior, a corn and seed merchant in Woodbridge Road. Curiously, none remained by Kelly's edition of 1912.

Historic Significance

Sancroft Barn has existed in its present form as a four-bay threshing barn since the early-19th century when its southern bay was added, but its two northern bays date from the late-16th or early-17th century and probably represent the truncated remains of a stable. Early agricultural buildings of this type are rare, and the structure is accordingly of considerable historic interest despite its fragmentary condition. The 19th century threshing floor of gault brick is a good example of its kind, and the original whitewashed clay daub of the southern bay illustrates the standard appearance of local farm buildings before the mid-19th century and is also of historic value. Despite these points of interest, however, the barn is unlikely to meet the strict English Heritage conditions for listing due to the replacement of its roof and the truncation of the early wall fabric.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from Stirrup Street to south showing proximity of barn in rear to left to Sancroft Manor Farmhouse to right.
2. Site entrance from Stirrup Street to south-west showing isolated location of barn adjoining open fields.
3. Exterior from south-east showing isolated location of barn with site of demolished 19th century yard to right.
4. Exterior from south-east showing corrugated iron roof and cladding with rear doors in 20th century lean-to (E) to right.
5. Exterior from south-west showing tarred weatherboarding and half-hung doors to threshing bay (C) to left.
6. Exterior from north-east showing location adjoining open field with site of demolished yard to left.
7. External northern gable showing corrugated iron cladding.
8. Exterior from west showing proximity to Sancroft Cottage on eastern side of Stirrup Street in rear to left.
9. Interior of 20th century rear lean-to (E) from north-west showing rear doors to threshing bay and iron pulley wheels.
10. Detail of belt drive pulley wheels in lean-to shed (E) to east (rear) of threshing bay (C) seen from north.
11. Interior of lean-to shed (E) from south showing unpainted boarding to bays A and B of main barn to left.
12. Internal northern cement-block gable of lean-to shed (E) showing roof scar of demolished single-storey shed on boarding to left.
13. Interior of rear lean-to from north showing unpainted boarding to bays A and B of barn to right.
14. Rear (eastern) entrance to threshing bay (C) from lean-to (E) showing pulley wheels and original render of southern bay (D) to left.
15. Original eastern external whitewashed roughcast clay render to southern bay (D) with later boarding to base seen from lean-to (E).
16. Detail of original external clay render to eastern wall of southern bay (D) showing split laths nailed to studs.

17. General view of interior from south showing intact arch-brace to tie-beam between bays C and D to right.
18. 20th century roof structure from west showing replaced tie-beam without mortises between bays A and B in centre.
19. Eastern interior from north-west showing formerly floored 17th century bays (A & B) in foreground with threshing floor (C) in rear.
20. Internal southern gable (bay D) showing re-used timber with pegged and tenoned diagonal primary braces.
21. Soffit of re-used tie-beam in southern gable showing diamond mullion window mortises.
22. Western interior of southern bay (D) showing re-used timber and primary braces interrupting studs with new roof-plate.
23. Detail of south-western corner (bay D) showing pegged tenons of primary braces (possibly re-using old mortises).
24. Eastern interior of southern bay (D) showing re-used timber and primary braces with southern gable to right & grain sifting machine.
25. Detail of re-used eastern roof-plate of southern bay (D) showing empty stud mortises in soffit.
26. Detail of early-20th century grain sifter (seed cleaner) near the pulley wheels in southern bay of barn (C).
27. Detail of belt drive to rear of grain sifter in southern bay of barn (D).
28. Open truss to south of threshing bay (C) showing intact arch-brace with re-used tie-beam and western storey post.
29. Detail of re-used tie-beam of open truss to south of threshing bay (C) seen from south-west and showing empty mortise in soffit.
30. General view of interior from north showing mortises for original loft binding joist in post between bays A & B in foreground.
31. Western interior of threshing bay (C) showing barn doors with renewed roof-plate and re-used storey post to right.
32. Detail of re-used western storey post to south of entrance doors in bay C showing two parallel arch-brace mortises.
33. Detail of western interior of bay B showing re-used tie-beam with roof-plate & brace cut by barn entrance in bay C to left.
34. Eastern interior of bay C showing access to rear lean-to (E) and lack of storey post to in situ truncated frame of bay B to left.
35. Detail of eastern interior of bay B showing re-used tie-beam with truncated roof-plate & brace cut by rear door in bay C to right.

36. The well preserved gault (white) brick threshing floor in bay C viewed from the north-east.
37. Detail from south of the re-used tie-beam between bays C and B showing weathering and empty stud mortises.
38. Open truss of bays A & B from south showing replaced tie-beam and mortises for down-braces of loft partition above binding joist.
39. Western interior of intact 17th century northern bays showing binding joist & wall brace mortises in central post with new tie-beam.
40. Detail of western storey post between bays A & B showing binding joist mortise and angled notch below for hay rack.
41. Northern internal gable of bay A showing intact early-17th century trenched wall braces to corners.
42. Detail of repaired central break in tie-beam of internal northern gable.
43. Eastern interior of intact northern bays (A & B) showing binding joist & wall brace mortises in central post with new tie-beam.
44. Detail of internally trenched reverse-cranked 17th century wall braces in north-eastern corner of barn (bay A).
45. Eastern interior from north-west showing angled notch for hay rack below binding joist of loft in storey post between bays A & B.
46. Painted 19th century grain sifter in north-western corner of barn, seen from east.
47. Painted 19th century grain sifter in north-western corner of barn, seen from south-west.
48. Detail of painted name to 19th century grain sifter in northern western corner of barn. W Barker, Agent, Framlingham.

(Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 11-15)

Appendix 2 (pp. 10-14): Selected Printed Photographs



Illus. 1 A general view of the site from Stirrup Street to the south, showing the proximity of the barn (partly hidden by trees in the rear to the left) to the grade II-listed late-16th century Sancroft Manor Farmhouse to the right.



Illus. 2 The exterior from the south-east showing the shallow-pitched 20th century corrugated iron roof and cladding with the rear doors of the threshing bay (C) in the weatherboarded 20th century lean-to (E) to the right.



Illus. 3 The exterior from the west showing the principal half-hung entrance doors of the threshing bay (C) to the right and the barn's proximity to the grade II-listed early-17th century Sancroft Cottage on the opposite side of Stirrup Street (in the rear to the left).



Illus. 4 The original eastern external whitewashed roughcast clay render to the 18th or early-19th century southern bay (D) with later tarred boarding to its base (seen from the 20th century lean-to (E) and showing the pulley wheel attached to its tie-beam to the right)



Illus. 5 A general view of the interior from the south showing the intact arch-brace to the tie-beam between bays C and D to the right, with the early-20th century grain sifter to the extreme right.



Illus. 6 The open truss to the south of the threshing bay (C) showing the well preserved gault brick threshing floor in the foreground and the 20th century rear lean-to (E) to the right. This truss is integral to the 18th or early-19th century southern bay and consists of re-used timber. The primary diagonal braces of the southern gable, which also consists of re-used timber, are visible in the rear.



Illus. 7 The eastern interior of the threshing bay (C) showing the access to the rear lean-to (E) and the lack of storey post to the truncated late-16th or early-17th century framing of bays A and B to the left.



Illus. 8 The open truss of the early-17th century bays A and B from the south, which originally contained a loft supported by a binding joist spanning the width of the storey posts. The tie-beam is a later replacement but the posts also contain mortises for the down-braces of a partition above the binding joist (presumably with a central door).



Illus. 9 The eastern interior of the intact northern bays (A and B) showing their internally trussed wall braces (truncated by the later entrance to the threshing floor to the right) with mortises for a first-floor partition and binding joist in the central storey post with the apparent notches of a hay rack beneath.



Illus. 10 The painted 19th century grain sifter in the barn's north-western corner, seen from south-west and showing the painted name 'W Barker, Agent, Framlingham'.