

**The Barn,
Ashtree Farm,
Wilby, Suffolk
WBY 026**

Heritage Asset Assessment

OASIS ID: Suffolkc1-121964



Leigh Alston MA (Oxon), Architectural Historian
on behalf of
Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

**The Archaeological Service
(Field Projects Team)
Suffolk County Council, Shire Hall
Bury St Edmunds IP33 2AR
Tel. (01284) 352446**

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Barn at Ashtree Farm, Russel's Green, Wilby, Suffolk

(TM 2477 7288)

Heritage Asset Assessment

This report provides a record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a redundant timber-framed barn. It has been prepared to a specification of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service dated 14th November 2011 (written by Edward Martin, ref. SpecHAA(EM)pre_AshtreeFmBarns_Wilby_2011), and is intended to inform and accompany an application for conversion to Mid Suffolk District Council.

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a full photographic record in the form of 48 digital images of 21 megapixels (Appendix 1), but also includes 12 printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text. Each image is described in a separate schedule and wherever possible includes a scale rod with half-metre divisions in red and white. The site was inspected on 16th March 2012.

Summary

Ashtree Farm lies in open countryside approximately 1 km north-east of St Mary's church in Wilby. The site is reached by a private track from the small hamlet of Russel's Green to the east, and now consists of a single barn with no obvious trace of the farmhouse and other outbuildings which stood here at the time of the Ordnance Survey of 1957 but had been demolished by 1981. Hodskinson's County map of 1783 and the configuration and 19th century names of the nearby fields as shown on the parish tithe survey of 1838 all suggest the farm originally adjoined the western edge of a large medieval common known as Russel's Green, reflecting the characteristic pattern of early settlement in the region. The large pond to the east of the barn was probably associated with this common. The tithe map indicates a number of other small farmsteads in the vicinity which have now disappeared entirely.

The barn is a substantial timber-framed and weatherboarded structure in five bays which dates from the second half of the 18th century and is shown on the 1838 tithe map. It then served a tenanted arable holding of 85.5 acres and originally contained a two-bay stable to the north with a three-bay threshing barn to the south. The combination of stables and barns in this manner is typical of East Anglia but rarely found elsewhere, and the building is accordingly of considerable local historic significance. Although the frame is of some quality, with arch-braced tie-beams, neatly shaped jowls and pegged primary wall braces, there is evidence of major reconstruction in the 19th century and the roof was entirely rebuilt along with much of the rear wall in the 20th century. The hay loft no longer survives and the interior currently forms a single open space. In consequence, despite its historic interest and relatively early origin, the building does not meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing.



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Figure 1
Modern Ordnance Survey

Enclosing in red the barn (i.e. the rectangular building to the west) along with the now-empty concrete yards adjoining its eastern elevation, and showing the private entrance track from the small hamlet known as Russel's Green to the right.

Documentary and Cartographic Evidence

Ashtree Farm lies in open countryside approximately 1 km north-east of St Mary's church in Wilby. The site is reached by a private track some 350 m in length from the small hamlet of Russel's Green to the east, and now consists of a single barn with no obvious trace of the farmhouse which still stood to the east of a large P-shaped pond at the time of the Ordnance Survey of 1957 but had been demolished by that of 1981. Hodskinson's 1783 map of Suffolk County and the configuration and names of the nearby fields as shown on the parish tithe survey of 1838 suggest the farm originally adjoined the western edge of a large medieval common known as Russel's Green, which extended to the east of the present metalled road (figure 2). The settlement pattern of medieval Suffolk was characterised by farmsteads bordering greens in this manner, but most, as in this instance, had been converted into arable land by the second quarter of the 19th century. Many such greens were provided with stock ponds, particularly on their margins, and the unusually large P-shaped pond at Ashtree Farm may have marked the south-western corner of Russel's Green in the Middle Ages. The site is accordingly of some archaeological interest, irrespective of the standing building.



Figure 2.

Hodskinson's Map of Suffolk in 1783 (as published by the Lark's Press, Dereham, 2003), showing Ashtree Farm at the end of a narrow 'arm' projecting north-westwards from the corner of 'Russels Green' (with a long first 's' in the usual style of 18th century typography). A number of similar medieval greens still survived in the region at this period but almost all were enclosed and ploughed in response to the high price of grain during the Napoleonic wars.

In 1838 the property was a tenanted holding of 85.5 acres (17 of pasture and the rest arable) owned by the Reverend William Mack and occupied by Robert Wilson. The tithe map shows the present barn as a detached structure with a simple rectangular outline and a small shed to the south-east (figure 2a). The house and a scattered group of outbuildings lay at an unusual distance on the opposite side of the large pond. By 1886 the layout of the site was more typical of the area, with a substantial complex of new buildings enclosing a yard immediately east of the barn. No trace of these now remains, apart from the scar of a single-storied structure on the weatherboarding of the northern bay (bay E in figure 5), but they probably formed cattle yards and sheds reflecting the new mid-19th century fashion for keeping animals in enclosed yards rather than abroad in the fields (a system of mixed animal husbandry known today as Victorian High Farming). A small projection from the barn's rear (western) elevation is likely to have been a lean-to porch designed to extend the length of the threshing floor in bay B. This mid-19th century layout remained unchanged in 1904 (figure 4) and survived until the demolition of everything but the barn between 1957 and 1981. The present owner acquired the site in recent years and has no knowledge of its earlier history.



Figure 2. The 1838 tithe map of Wilby (SROI), showing north (and the boundary of Stradbroke parish) towards the top right-hand corner.

Ashtree Farm lies in the top left-hand corner (plot 427) and appears to have adjoined the western edge of a large medieval common green which had already been enclosed to form fields by this date. Its former outline is indicated by the names of several fields belonging to a number of different farms in the area: The narrow curved strip to bottom right (395) was named as a 'lane' on the tithe apportionment and opened onto plots 402, 404 and 406, all of which were individually named 'Russels Green'. Its distinctively curved southern outline extended across the modern road towards Ashtree Farm, and was adjoined by another small farmstead (430) that no longer survives. Plot 436 was also named 'Russels Green' and 435 'Common Piece'. The green's northern boundary is less clear and it may have included plots 419 and 421 (named 'Stack Close' and 'High Field' respectively) and at one time possibly continued to the Stradbroke boundary.

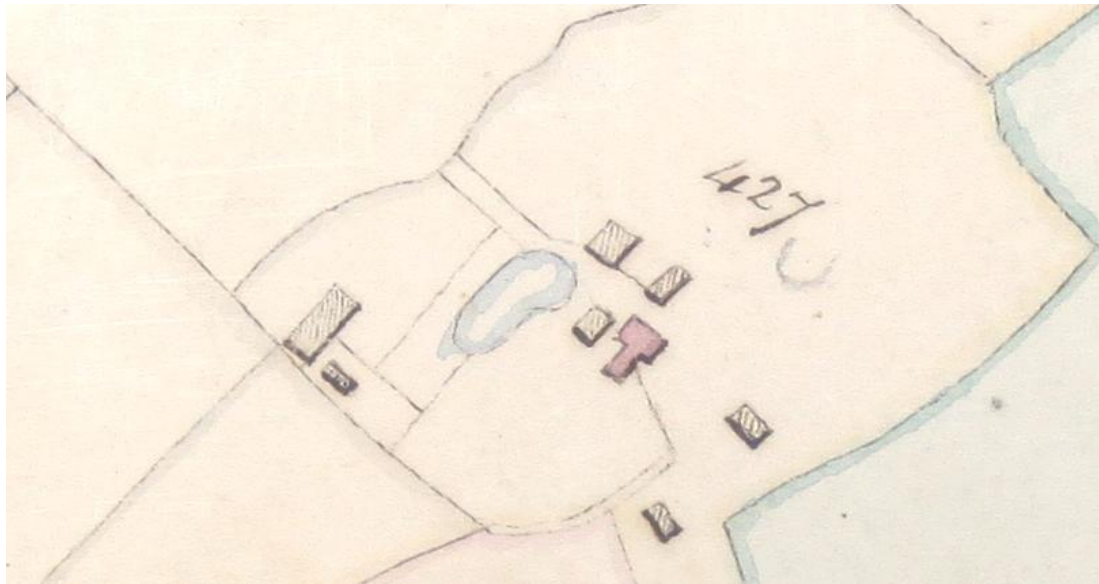


Figure 2a

Detail of Ashtree Farm on the 1838 tithe map. The present barn is depicted with a simple rectangular outline to the left with the T-shaped farmhouse in red on the opposite side of the pond. The site (plot 427) was named only as 'Homestall' on the apportionment with 'Barn Close' to the extreme left.

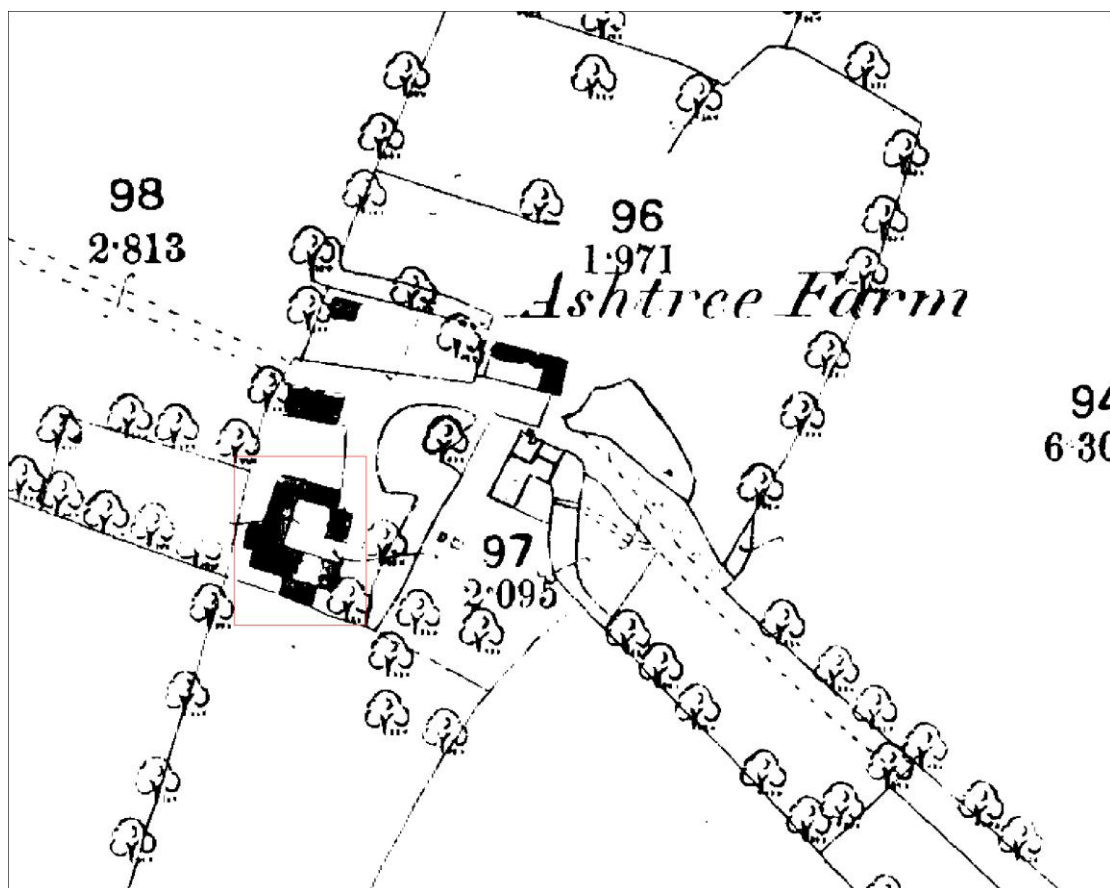


Figure 3. First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1886.

A new complex of yards and sheds had been built to the east of the barn since 1838, along with a probable lean-to shed to the west of the threshing bay (bay B in figure 5).

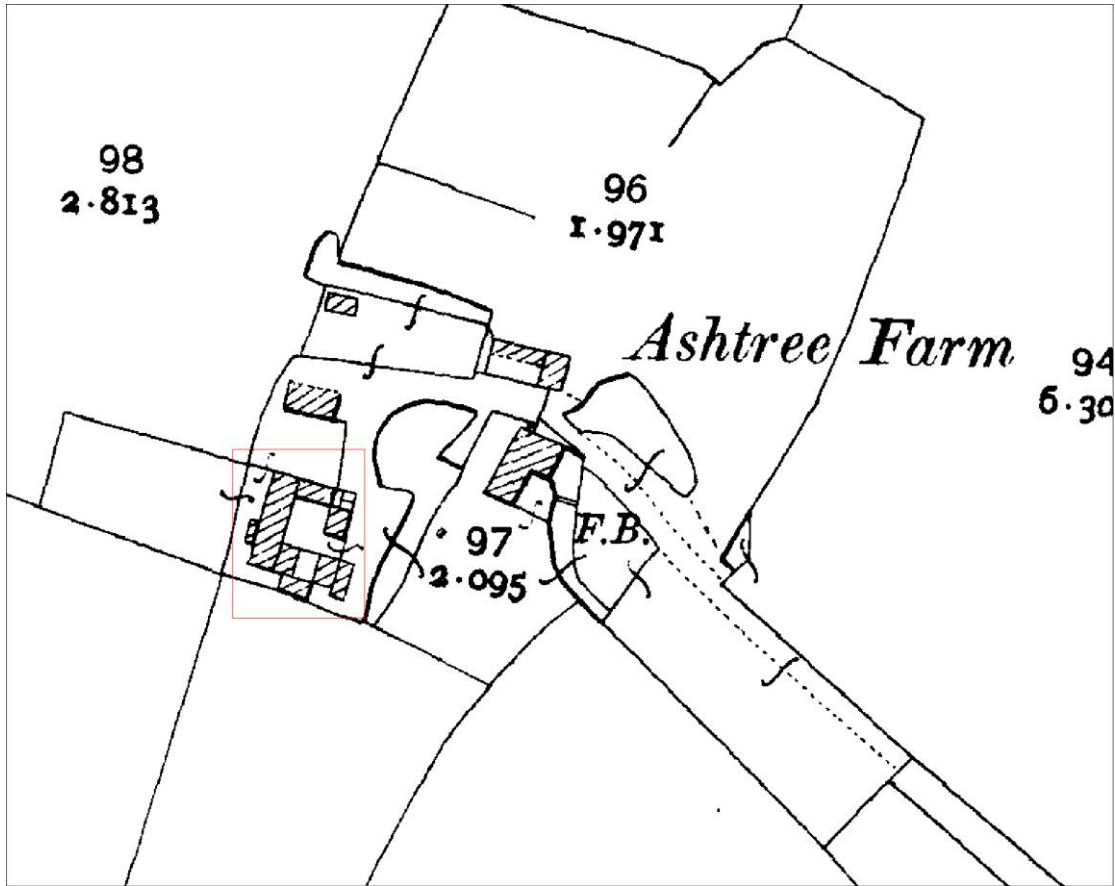


Figure 4. The Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904, showing little change since 1886. The farmhouse to the east of the pond had been demolished by 1981.

Building Analysis

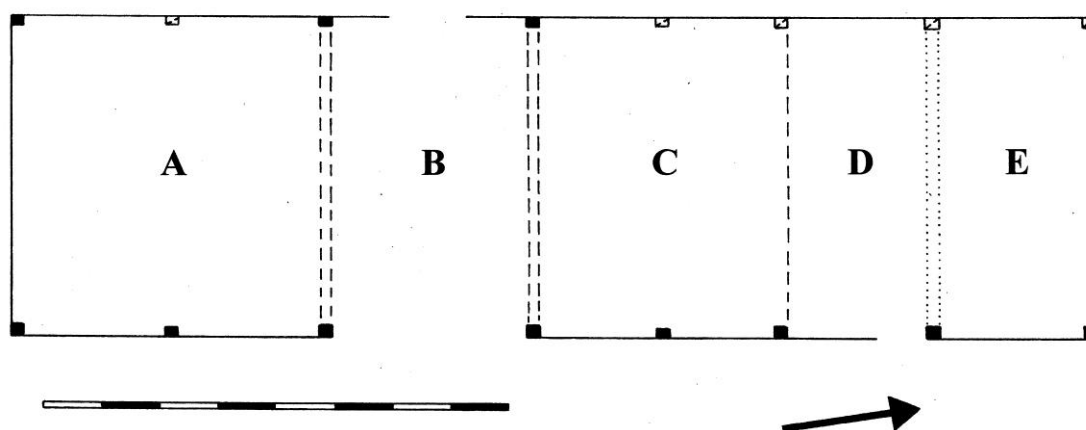


Figure 5

Ground plan of the barn identifying each bay with a letter for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. Scale in metres.

Bays A-C formed a three-bay threshing barn with intermediate posts and a central east-facing entrance while bays D-E were divided by an internal partition and formed a stable with a hay loft above.

Proportions and Structure

The barn at Ashtree Farm is all that remains of a substantial complex of farm buildings that lay on the edge of Russel's Green and was probably of medieval origin. It is a substantial timber-framed and weatherboarded structure of five bays on an approximately north-south axis which extends to 18.6 m in length by 5.5 m in overall width (61 ft by 18 ft). Its walls rise to 3 m (10 ft) at their roof-plates above an internal floor of loose earth and the shallow-pitched roof is covered with corrugated iron.

The interior is now undivided, forming a single open space beneath a replaced, mid-20th century softwood roof structure, but there is evidence of an original partition between bays C and D (the single broken line in figure 5), and the framing alters at this point. The two northern bays contain horizontal mid-rails which interrupt the vertical studs 1.2 m (4 ft) below the roof-plates and are tenoned and pegged to a central storey post which lacks a jowl but contains a deep mortise for the binding joist of a missing ceiling at the same height. Mid-rails were often provided in conjunction with ceilings to secure the outer edges of the floorboards. The binding joist was supported by a shaped corbel-block projecting from the post. The studs are further interrupted by diagonal primary braces which are pegged and tenoned to the storey posts and ground sills with some evidence of re-used timber: the lower braces in the eastern wall of both bays are chamfered late-16th century ceiling joists and the ground sill of the northern bay is a re-used section of roof-plate with rafter housings. The vertical studs are pegged and tenoned to the principals where they are not interrupted by diagonal braces but tenoned elsewhere. The curved, square-sectioned nature of the primary brace above the northern bay's mid-rail (which has not been re-used) is particularly typical of the late-18th century, and the rest of the fabric is consistent with this date. The structure of the two northern bays survives only in the eastern elevation and the entire western elevation and northern gable were rebuilt in a mixture of softwood and reclaimed telegraph poles. A short length of roof-plate to the west of bay E may be original.

The three southern bays lack mid-rails but are otherwise very similar in general fabric to the two northern bays. The jowls of the storey posts are neatly shaped with curved lower edges

and each contains a pegged mortise or mortises for diagonal primary braces which interrupt the tenoned but un-pegged studs. The four posts flanking the central bay also contain mortises for pegged arch-braces to the tie-beams of which those to the west survive intact while those to the east have been replaced with bolted knee-braces. The two outer bays (A and C) contained intermediate (central) posts without jowls or associated tie-beams. Much of the original frame is intact, including all the roof-plates apart from that above the eastern entrance and all but one storey post (between bays C and D to the west), but the partition which divided the northern bays has been entirely removed (leaving only an empty primary-brace mortise in the eastern post) and the tie-beam of the southern gable is badly decayed. The ground sills are either lacking, hidden by shuttered concrete or replaced, and the studwork of the southern bay's western elevation was renewed in the 20th century and has rolled inwards from its low red-brick plinth.

The well-formed nature of the jowled posts and the curved original primary braces suggest a date in the mid- to late-18th century, but only a single brace at the southern end of the eastern elevation occupies its original mortise and appears to be *in situ*. The rest are nailed in place in the 19th century fashion and lie close to empty mortises – some of which contain the stumps of the earlier braces. It would appear that the walls were wholly or substantially rebuilt in the mid-19th century, perhaps when the site underwent the major refurbishment indicated by the historic maps or perhaps even in conjunction with the wholesale movement of an 18th century barn from another site before the tithe survey of 1838 (which shows it in its present position). The junction between the northern and southern bays also presents an anomaly, as the mid-rail and roof-plate of bay D are simply nailed to the storey post and plate of bay C and were clearly not built together. Both original frames are stylistically of the same period, however, and it is unclear which of the two structures may have appeared first. There is no evidence of reconstruction in bays D and E, so these may have adjoined an earlier barn that was later replaced by the present southern bays – or possibly both 18th century structures were re-located from separate sites nearer the farmhouse.

Original Layout and Alterations

The building is typical of East Anglian barns in that it contained an integral stable and hay loft of two bays at its northern end with a three-bay threshing barn to the south. There is no evidence of the stable's original entrance, but a blocked door has been cut into the northern end of bay D with a louver lighting the hay loft immediately above. The original entrance presumably lay in the missing gable or western elevation. The barn was entered from the east, facing the farmhouse, and possessed a small rear door to the west that was sufficient to create a through-draught for threshing and winnowing but not to admit vehicles. The roof-plate of bay C above the present entrance has been raised to increase headroom, and is not original, but its counterpart to the west contains empty stud mortises. These studs lay above a separate lintel which spanned the entire bay of 3.3 m (11 ft), as indicated by mortises in the flanking posts, but all the framing here was removed when a later cart thoroughfare was inserted and there is no evidence of the door's actual width. The present narrow door and framing date only from the 20th century.

Historic Significance

Together with the nearby ponds, which are probably of ancient origin, the barn represents the only remaining evidence of what was almost certainly a medieval farmstead adjoining the corner of a medieval green. In this respect alone the site is of considerable historic interest. The building is also of historic significance as a typical East Anglian barn of the late-18th century, combining a two-bay stable with a three-bay threshing barn in a manner rarely found outside Suffolk and Norfolk. Although the framing has been heavily altered, with evidence of major reconstruction in the 19th century and the rebuilding of the roof along with much of the

rear wall in the 20th, its original layout is still apparent and two of its four arch-braces have escaped the usual replacement with bolted knees. The remaining frame is chiefly of oak and is of some quality, with well-shaped jowls and carpenter's numerals. Despite these points of historic interest however, the building has been too extensively altered in my view to meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of eastern approach to site showing eastern pond to right and site of demolished farmhouse to left with barn in rear.
2. General view of site from the east showing site of demolished farmhouse to left and barn in rear.
3. General view of site from north-east showing P-shaped pond in foreground.
4. General view of site from north showing barn to right and P-shaped pond to left.
5. General view of site from south-west showing field ditch adjoining southern gable of barn.
6. View of barn across P-shaped pond to north-east.
7. View of barn from east showing concrete floors of demolished covered yard and sheds in foreground.
8. Eastern exterior showing corrugated iron roof with blocked stable door and hay loft louver in bay D to right.
9. Eastern exterior showing remains of half-hung barn doors in original entrance (bay B).
10. Blocked stable door & louver to north of eastern exterior showing wide rebated oak planks with roof scar of demolished shed.
11. Northern external gable showing corrugated iron cladding with 20th century double vehicle doors.
12. Western exterior showing mixed cladding or tarred 19th century weatherboarding and corrugated iron with door in bay B.
13. Western exterior of rebuilt southern bays showing 19th century tarred cladding and rolled ground sill.
14. Detail of tarred weatherboarding to western exterior of southern bay (A) with no evidence of earlier pigment.
15. Western exterior from south showing extent to which ground sill has rolled inwardly from brick plinth.
16. Exterior from south-west showing corrugated iron cladding to southern gable.
17. General view of interior from south showing floor of loose earth throughout the barn.

18. General view of interior from north showing 20th century roof softwood structure with nailed collars and some re-used timber.
19. Western interior from north-east showing rebuilt stable bays (D & E) to right.
20. Eastern interior from north-west showing stable bays (D & E) to left with mortise in central post for binding joist of hay loft.
21. Internal northern gable showing 20th century vehicle doors and complete absence of original framing except corner post to right.
22. Eastern interior of stable bays (E-D) showing pegged primary braces and mortise in central post for binding joist of hay loft.
23. Eastern interior of northern bay E with pegged primary braces, the lower a re-used 16th century chamfered ceiling joist.
24. Detail of ostensibly original ground sill of bay E showing rafter housings of re-used roof-plate & re-used chamfered joist of brace.
25. Eastern interior of bay D showing later stable door interrupting primary brace with loft louver above.
26. Detail of mortise for binding joist of missing hay loft in central eastern post between bays E and D.
27. Eastern junction of bay D (left) and corner post of three-bay barn (bay C) showing abuttal joints of roof-plates & mid-rail.
28. Eastern interior of bay C showing pegged primary brace mortise for lateral partition adjoining stable in post to left.
29. Eastern interior of bay C showing pegged primary brace mortise beneath actual nailed brace (evidence of early reconstruction).
30. Eastern interior of original entrance bay B showing raised secondary roof-plate with bolted knees replacing arch-braces.
31. Eastern interior of bay A showing original pegged diagonal brace to right and later nailed brace to left.
32. Southern post of bay A from south showing nailed primary brace beneath pegged mortise of earlier brace and later tie-beam knee-brace.
33. Detail of shaped jowl of south-eastern corner post showing original pegged primary brace.
34. Internal southern gable showing remains of original tie-beam and modern corrugated iron cladding.
35. Detail of original tie-beam of southern gable showing empty stud mortises.
36. Western interior of barn from south-east showing intact arch-braces flanking entrance bay B.

37. Western interior of southern bay A showing original roof-plate and storey posts but replaced studwork.
38. Northern storey post of bay A showing empty pegged mortise of original diagonal primary brace.
39. Original arch-braces to tie-beams flanking western interior of entrance bay B, seen from south-east.
40. Detail from south of 20th century roof structure with original open trusses of entrance bay B (eastern arch-braces removed).
41. Western interior of entrance bay B showing 20th century narrow door with mortises for original lintel in storey posts.
42. Detail of western interior showing empty lintel for low original rear door in southern storey post of entrance bay B.
43. Detail of western interior showing empty lintel for low original rear door in northern storey post of entrance bay B.
44. Detail of western interior showing empty stud mortises in original roof-plate of entrance bay B.
45. Detail of western interior showing carpenter's numeral II and door lintel mortise in northern storey post of entrance bay B.
46. Detail of western interior showing empty original primary brace mortise beneath present nailed brace in southern storey post of bay C.
47. Western interior of bay C showing missing central and northern posts.
48. Western interior of stable bays (D & E) showing short section of original roof-plate to right and 20th century studwork elsewhere.

Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 13-18

Appendix 2 (pp. 13-18): Selected Printed Photographs



Illus. 1. A general view of the site from the entrance track to the east showing the site of the demolished farmhouse in the centre and the remaining barn beyond the P-shaped pond in the rear.



Illus. 2. The barn seen from across the P-shaped pond to the north-east, showing the shallow pitch of its 20th century corrugated-iron roof.



Illus. 3. The eastern exterior showing the concrete floor of a demolished probable 20th century covered cattle yard in the foreground with the half-hung entrance doors in bay B to the left and the blocked stable door and louver in bay D to the right. The scar of a demolished single-storey shed is visible on the weatherboarding of bay E to the extreme left.



Illus. 4. The exterior from the south-west showing the mixed cladding of 19th century tarred weatherboarding and 20th century corrugated iron.



Illus. 5. A general view of the interior from the north showing the late-18th or early-19th century timber frame with substantial areas of 20th reconstruction and a replaced through-purlin roof of softwood with nailed collars and some re-used timber.



Illus. 6. The largely intact framing of the eastern interior of the two stable bays (E and D) showing their pegged primary braces and the mortise in the central storey post which held the binding joist of the missing hay loft. The tie-beam to the right is a replacement, but marks the position of a removed partition between the stable and the three-bay threshing barn. The northern gable to the left was completely rebuilt in the 20th century.



Illus. 7. A detail from the west of the mortise and integral corbel in the central storey post of the two stable bays (E and D) for the binding joist of a missing hay loft. The blocked door in bay D to the right is a secondary insertion and the original stable entrance presumably lay in the rebuilt northern gable or western wall.



Illus. 8. The junction of bay D (left) and the jowled north-eastern corner post of the three-bay barn (bay C). The mid-rail of bay D is nailed rather than tenoned to the post, and the two roof-plates are linked by a crude butt joint – suggesting the two structures were not built in a single phase of construction. The post contains a pegged mortise for the diagonal brace of a missing lateral partition (i.e. the gable of the three-bay barn).



Illus. 9. The eastern interior of the original entrance bay B showing its raised secondary roof-plate and the bolted knee-braces which replaced the original arch-braces to the tie-beams.



Illus. 10. The two original arch-braces to the tie-beams flanking the western interior of the entrance bay B, as seen from the south-east. The matching braces to the right were replaced by bolted knees in the 19th century. Note the 20th century vehicle doors in the northern gable and the loose earth floor throughout the barn.



Illus. 11. The western interior of the entrance bay B showing the 20th century narrow door in the centre. The jowled storey posts on each side contain mortises for the lintel of the original low rear door of the threshing floor as seen in illus. 12 below. The roof-plate contains a series of empty mortises for the missing studwork above this lintel, proving the barn always faced east towards the farmhouse.



Illus. 12. A detail of the western storey post to the north of the entrance bay B showing the neatly chiselled carpenter's numeral II (on both the post and arch-brace) and the pegged mortise for the lintel of the original low rear door to the left.