

**Suffolk County Council
Archaeological Service**

**Barn at Wenham Hill,
Great Wenham,
Suffolk
WMM 008**

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Archaeological Record

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**Barn at Wenham Hill
(Formerly Wenhamhill Farm),
Wenham Lane,
Great Wenham, Suffolk**

(TM 075 370)

An Archaeological Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a timber-framed barn within the curtilage of a listed former farmhouse. The report has been prepared to a brief written by the Archaeological Service of Suffolk County Council (Edward Martin, 26 January 2009, Ref. WenhamHill2009) and is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for conversion (Babergh District Council application B/08/01538).

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a full photographic record in the form of 50 digital images (Appendix 1) but also includes printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text (Appendix 2). Each image is separately described and includes a scale rod with half metre divisions wherever possible. The site was inspected on 13 February 2009.

Summary

Wenham Hill lies on the ridge of a hill in open countryside at the southern edge of Great Wenham parish, and was formerly known as Wenhamhill Farm. The house is a grade II-listed building with impressive early-17th century chimneys dated in the Schedule to the '16th century or earlier'. The timber-framed and weatherboarded barn and a brick shed currently used as garaging to the north of the house are the only survivors of a large complex of farm buildings. The barn is a six-bay structure of considerable historic interest. It was built in the early-17th century as a three-bay barn with a central porch to the east and a fourth bay at its northern end that was partitioned to form a stable. The original barn was extended in the mid- or late-18th century by the remarkable method of inserting two additional bays into its centre and moving one or both ends outwards. The clasped-purlin roof structure was renewed at the same time. Despite extensive restoration in recent years much of the 17th century framing still survives, complete with arch-braced tie-beams and internally trencled wall-braces, and the original porch is intact. The 18th century wall framing and roof structure (formerly thatched) are also largely unaltered. The method of the barn's extension is unique in my experience, and

as a good early 17th century example with 18th century additions the building merits listing at grade II in its own right.



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Figure 1

Existing Ordnance Survey Site Plan

Showing the barn to the north in red (1), with the 19th century brick shed (2) and former farmhouse (3) to the south.

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Wenham Hill occupies a hilltop location in open countryside at the southern edge of Great Wenham parish, approximately 800 metres south-east of St John's church. The grade II-listed farmhouse contains fine brick chimneys with octagonal shafts of early-17th century appearance but is dated in the Schedule of Listed Buildings to the '16th century or earlier' (albeit without the benefit of internal inspection). Of the complex of agricultural buildings shown to the north of the house on early-20th century maps only the barn which forms the subject of this report and a 19th century brick shed (currently used as a garage) now survive.

At the time of the title survey in 1839 the property formed a modest tenanted holding of 53 acres owned (along with several other farms in the parish) by the trustees of Sir Gilbert East and occupied by David and Robert Rist. 70% of the land was arable, and the rest pasture. The title map (figure 2) shows the present barn with an L-shaped profile, suggesting a lean-shed shed adjoined its south-eastern corner. A number of other detached structures are also shown, but none survived a mid-19th century refurbishment which saw the arrival of the present shed (2) and a complex of animal yards before 1882 (figure 3). Many local farmyards were

redeveloped in a similar manner as farmers were forced to diversify into mixed animal husbandry after the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.

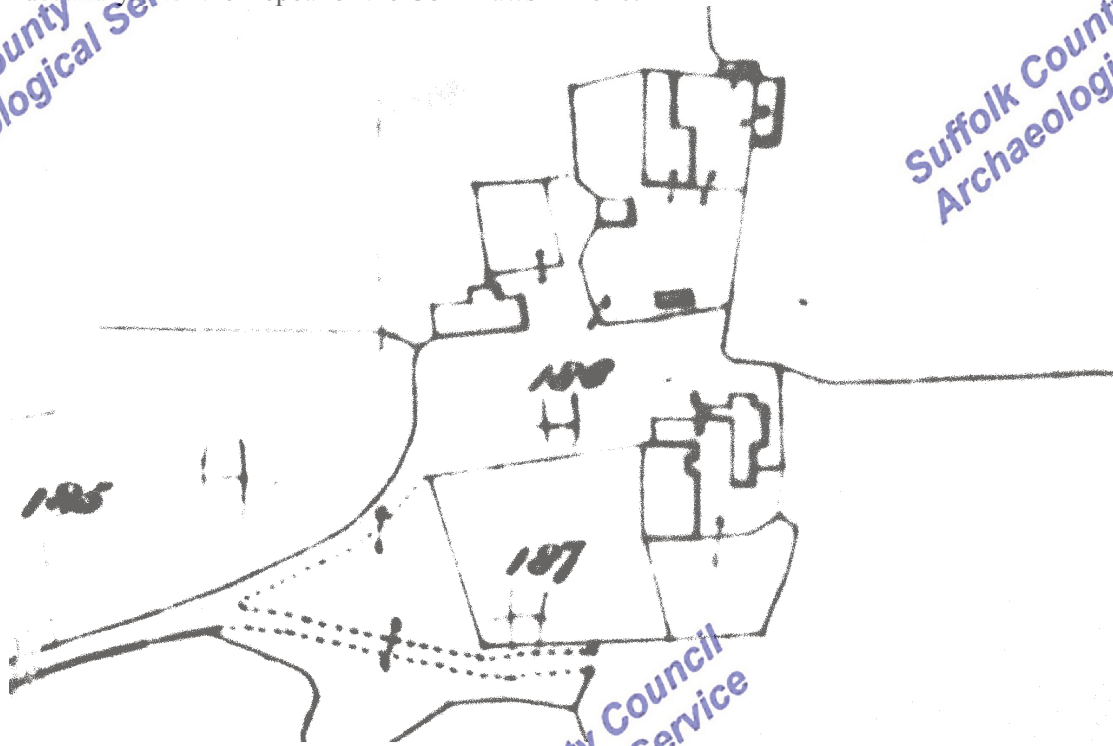


Figure 2
Wenham Hill Farm on the Great Wenham of the map of 1839 (Suffolk Record Office), showing the remaining barn as an L-shaped structure to the north of the site. The farmhouse lies to the south-east, but no other buildings now survive. Area 186 is described as 'barn and yards' in the apportionment, and 186 as 'house and garden'.

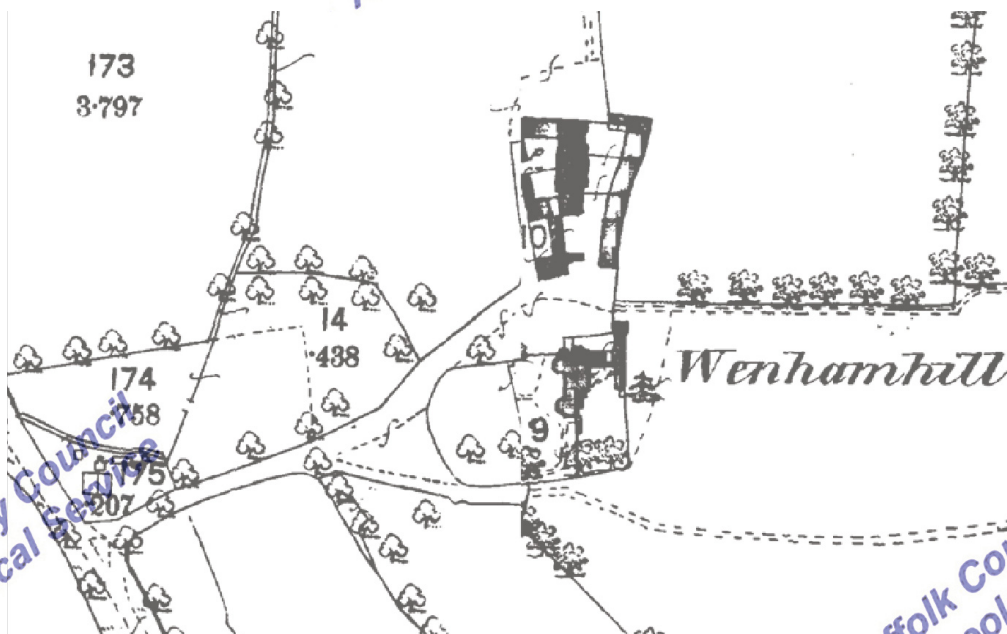


Figure 3
First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1882, showing Church Lane to the south-west. The farm buildings had been transformed since 1839, with a new complex of animal yards and sheds to the east and west of the barn. The present brick shed (2) is shown as part of a longer range which extends to the barn's northern gable.

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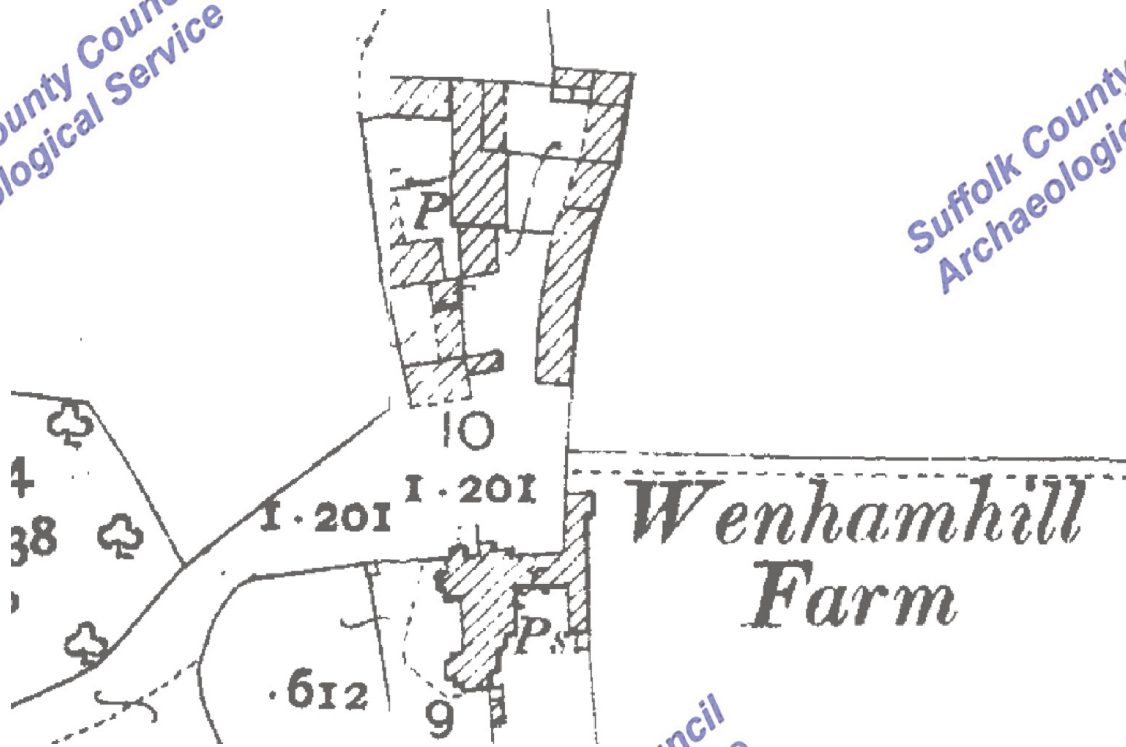


Figure 4

Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904. The new yards of the mid-19th century are shown in more detail, with broken lines indicating the open-sided animal shelters to the east of the barn. The building to the south of the complex was probably a cart lodge.

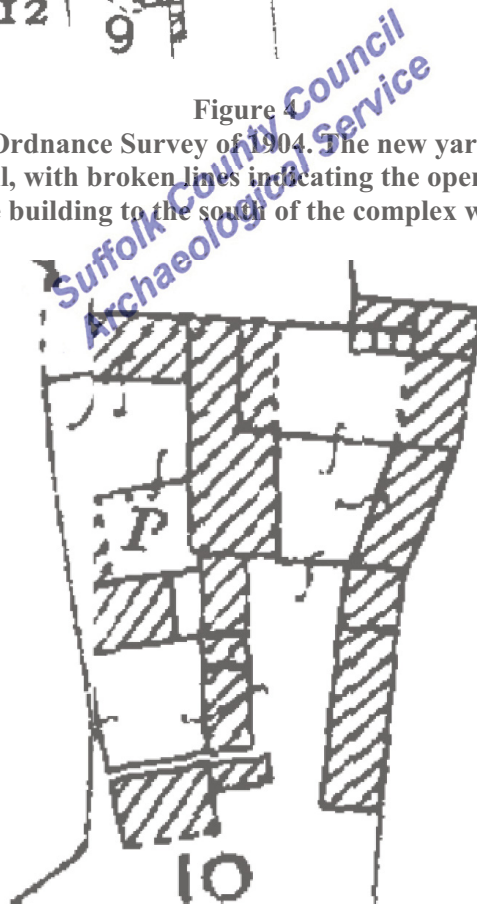


Figure 5

Third Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1926, showing the sophisticated yard complex. The L-shaped profile of the barn had apparently remained unaltered since 1839. With the exception of the barn and the rectangular shed to the south-east (2) the entire complex has been demolished without trace

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Building Analysis

11B. The barn at Wenham Hill underwent extensive renovation during the late-20th or early-21st century when it was, in effect, converted from an agricultural building into a domestic and garden storage area (its purpose at the time of inspection). The external weatherboarding was renewed along with most of its brick plinth and ground sill, and no trace remains of the numerous attached sheds and animal yards shown in figures 2-5.

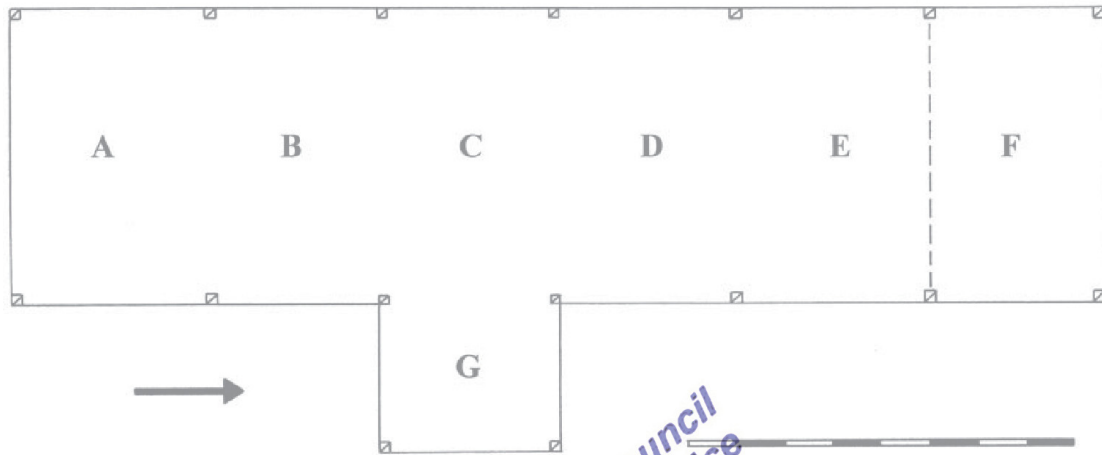


Figure 6

Ground plan of the barn numbering its various bays for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. Scale in metres. The northern bay (F) was originally partitioned from the body of the barn, as indicated by broken lines, and presumably formed a stable, but the position of its entrance is unclear

Proportions and Structure

The barn is a timber-framed structure in six-bays on a north-south alignment which extends to 22.25 m in length by 6.1 m in overall width (73.5 ft by 20 ft). A gabled porch projects to the east by an additional 3 m (10 ft) from the third bay from the south. The walls rise to 3.65 m (12 ft) at the roof-plates, and the roof, now covered in corrugated iron, is pitched at approximately 55 degrees (suggesting it was initially thatched rather than tiled). The ground sills rest on a shallow brick plinth of approximately 60 cm (2 ft) in height. The present external weatherboarding has been entirely renewed in recent years, as has most of the plinth and ground sill, although a short section of mid-19th century brickwork survives in the western elevations of bays A and B (as labelled in figure 6 above). The timbers of the northern gable, excepting only the corner posts, were also renewed.

With the exception of the sills and the northern gable the timber frame escaped the recent restoration, and contains evidence of two phases of construction. The two outer bays to both north and south (i.e. bays A, B, E & F) are typical of the early-17th century, with internally trussed plank-sectioned braces descending from the corner posts to the wall studs. The uninterrupted studs of 13 cm by 9 (5 by 3.5 ins) rise 2.9 m (113 ins) from the present sills and are tenoned and pegged to the roof-plates. The roof-plates contain face-halved and-bladed scarf joints of a type not usually found in the 16th century or earlier. The studs are notched for the horizontal staves of wattle-and-daub, and were probably exposed externally (despite the internal bracing) as their waney surfaces are oriented to the interior. The porch is contemporary with this phase of construction but contains mid-rails. The jowled storey posts are arch-braced to the tie-beams, but the roof was replaced during the second phase; it probably consisted of clasped purlins with wind-braces.

The original framing of the two central bays, C and D, is very different. Its narrow studs are not pegged to the roof-plates and are interrupted by straight, diagonal primary braces in the usual style of the 18th century. The four corresponding storey posts (at the corners of bay C) are significantly narrower, and their tie-beam braces are straighter than those of the earlier phase. Remarkably, the original four-bay building was enlarged in the mid- to late-18th century by inserting these two new bays and physically moving one or both ends of the barn to accommodate them. The double-pegged mortises which held the mid-rail of the porch can still be seen in the eastern external surfaces of the storey posts between bays A & B and D & E. The roof was rebuilt in its present clasped-purlin form at the same time. It is not at all clear why the usual method of extending a barn by adding bays to one or both gables was not employed here.

Original Layout

The original barn of the early-17th century consisted of four bays and contained an open barn of three bays (A, B & E) and a northern bay (F) which was partitioned to form (presumably) a stable. This partition was removed when the barn was enlarged in the 18th century, but its empty stud and brace mortises remain visible in the tie-beam. The stable appears not to have possessed the usual opposing doors in its external elevation, although a secondary doorway with a notched and nailed lintel adjoins its south-eastern corner post, and the space must have been entered either from the barn or the missing northern gable (or both). Notches in the storey posts may have secured the clamps of a hay loft.

The existing porch originally projected from the central bay (B) of the three-bay barn, as indicated by double-pegged empty mortises in the external surfaces of the storey posts which now divide bays A & B and bays D and E. These mortises lie 2 m (80 ins) above the ground, and coincide precisely with the height of the porch mid-rail. Prior to the removal to the north in the 18th century of both the porch and the barn's northern bay (E) – or vice versa – the structure was entered by full-height doors beneath the roof-plate in bay B which lacks pegged stud mortises. The present studs in this bay are insertions of the 18th century. The western elevation of the same bay (B) also contains 18th century studs, but its roof-plate preserves four original stud mortises with a central gap of approximately 1 m (39 ins). This gap indicates the width of the 17th century western doorway, which would have contained a low lintel. Early barns typically possessed small rear doors in this manner, sufficient only to create a through-draught for threshing and winnowing but not to admit vehicles. The tie-beam of the porch gable contains triple-pegged mortises at both ends to secure the original door jambs, and an inserted (nailed) stud at the eastern end of its northern elevation suggests the presence of a side-entrance.

Later Alterations

The new framing of the 18th century, which saw the removal of the partition between bays E & F and the insertion of bays C & D, can be distinguished by its relatively straight tie-beam braces and by the presence of primary bracing. The new storey posts at the corners of bay C are also significantly narrower than their 17th century counterparts. The roof and wall framing of the resulting 6-bay barn remains largely complete despite the recent replacement of the plinths, sills, floor and cladding. The exception is the northern gable, which is a recent replacement in the position of the original. The early-17th century framing survives intact in the eastern half of the southern gable and the eastern elevation of bay A, complete with two externally trenched braces, in all three elevations of the porch (G), and in the eastern and western elevations of bays E & F. There is evidence of a secondary side-door at the western end of the porch's southern elevation (where the mid-rail soffit has been cut to raise head room), but the precise arrangement of the 18th century rear door is unclear as a full-height entrance spanning the width of bay C (identical at 3.35 m or 11 ft to the 17th century entrance

bay B) was inserted in the mid-19th century and recently infilled. Of the four 17th century arch-braces to the tie-beams all but one survive, and of the six 18th century examples five now remain; two were replaced by bolted knee braces in the 19th century (to the western storey posts between bays D & E and bays E & F). Map evidence indicates the former presence of a shed in the southern return of the porch and bays A & B, but no trace of this survived the renewal of the cladding.

Historic Significance

The barn at Wenham Hill is a good early-17th century structure of four bays with an integral stable and a contemporary porch that was enlarged and re-roofed in the mid- to late-18th century. The dramatic method of this enlargement, which involved the insertion of two new bays into the centre of the building, is unique in my experience and of considerable historic interest. Much of the 17th century framing, and almost all the 18th century structure, survives intact, despite heavy 'restoration' in recent years, and the barn undoubtedly merits listing at grade II in its own right.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Description of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from west showing barn (1) to left, brick shed (2) in centre and house (3) to right.
2. General view of site from north showing barn to right, house in centre and brick shed to left.
3. Western external elevation of brick shed showing barn to left (included for site context).
4. Western elevation of brick shed from north-west showing house to right (included for site context).
5. General view from south showing barn to left and brick shed to right.
6. Western external elevation from south-west showing brick shed to right.
7. External western elevation of bay C showing blocked door with 19th century brick plinth to right.
8. Detail of 19th century brick plinth to western external elevations of bays A & B.
9. Southern external gable showing porch to right.
10. Exterior from south-east showing porch to right and southern gable to left.
11. Eastern external elevation.
12. Southern half of eastern external elevation showing porch to right.
13. Northern half of eastern external elevation showing porch to left.
14. General view of interior from north showing intact arch-braces to tie-beams with porch to left.
15. General view of interior from south showing intact arch-braces to tie-beams with porch to right.
16. Interior of southern gable showing original external wall bracing to left.
17. South-eastern internal corner of barn showing original external braces.
18. Internal eastern elevation of southern bay A showing original wall brace.
19. Detail of original arch brace between bays B and A seen from north.
20. Internal eastern elevation of bay B showing original roof-plate without mortises & secondary studs.

21. Internal eastern elevation of bay C showing secondary roof-plate & original porch G.
22. Internal eastern elevation of porch G showing mortises of original door jambs in tie-beam.
23. Internal eastern elevation of porch G showing large jamb mortises in gable tie-beam.
24. Clasped-purlin roof structure of porch G seen from east.
25. Internal southern elevation of porch G showing blocked secondary door to right.
26. Internal northern elevation of porch G showing blocked original side-door to right.
27. Detail of original side-door in northern internal elevation of porch G (nailed stud to right).
28. Eastern internal elevation of bay D showing secondary roof-plate and studwork.
29. Detail of eastern storey post between bays D & E showing pegs of original porch mid-rail.
30. Storey post between bays D & E from south showing original porch mortise above scale.
31. Eastern internal elevation of bay E showing original studwork.
32. Eastern internal elevation of northern bay F showing secondary door to right.
33. Detail of lapped and apparently secondary door lintel in eastern internal elevation of bay F.
34. Tie-beam between bays F & E from north showing secondary arch-brace and original stud mortises.
35. Tie-beam between bays F & E from north showing bolted knee-brace replacing secondary arch brace.
36. Detail of eastern internal elevation of bay F showing trenches of missing external wall brace.
37. Interior of northern gable showing recent reconstruction.
38. Internal western elevation of bay F showing original studs but lacking brace.
39. Interior of north-western corner showing empty mortises of external braces in post.
40. Detail of face-halved scarf joint in original western roof-plate of bay F.
41. Internal western elevation of bay E showing original roof-plate with secondary knee-braces.

42. Internal western elevation of bay D showing secondary roof-plate & studs.
43. Detail of junction between original (right) & secondary roof-plates to west of bay D.
44. Internal western elevation of C showing blocked secondary entrance.
45. Internal western elevation of bay B showing original roof-plate with evidence of narrow rear door.
46. Detail of western roof-plate in bay B showing wide mortises & gap of original narrow door.
47. Internal western elevation of southern bay A showing original roof-plate & secondary studs.
48. Detail of south-western corner post showing empty brace mortises to right & left.
49. Detail of eastern internal elevation showing original wattle-and-daub notches.
50. Secondary clasped-purlin roof-structure seen from northern bay F.

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Appendix 2 (pp. 12-15): Selected Printed Photographs

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A2.1 General view of site from west showing barn (1) to left, brick shed (2) in centre and house (3) to right

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A2.2 Western external elevation from south-west showing blocked entrance in central bay (C) and brick shed to right

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A2.3 Eastern external elevation showing porch in central bay (C)

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A2.4 General view of interior from south showing secondary clapsed-purlin roof with intact arch-braces to tie-beams and porch in bay C to right

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A2.5 South-eastern internal corner showing southern gable to right with original externally tenoned wall braces

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A2.6 Internal eastern elevation of porch (G) showing mid-rails in side elevations and mortises of original door jambs in tie-beam

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A2.7 Eastern internal elevation of northern bay (F) showing apparently secondary door lintel and secondary arch-brace replacing closed partition to right. External bracing removed. Rebuilt northern gable to left

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A2.8 Internal western elevation of northern bay (F) showing original studs (external wall braces removed) and plinth rebuilt

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