

**Yew Tree Farm,
Laxfield,
Suffolk
LXD 058**

Historic Building Record

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The Historic Farm Buildings, Yew Tree Farm, Station Road, Earl Soham, Suffolk

(TM 286 727)

Historic Building Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a complex of redundant farm buildings in the curtilage of a grade II-listed building. It has been prepared to a brief written by Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (Edward Martin, dated 18 March 2009, Ref. SpecHBR&MonYewTreeFmLaxfield09) and is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for conversion (Mid Suffolk District Council applications 1698/06/LBC, 1699/06, 1700/06/LBC).

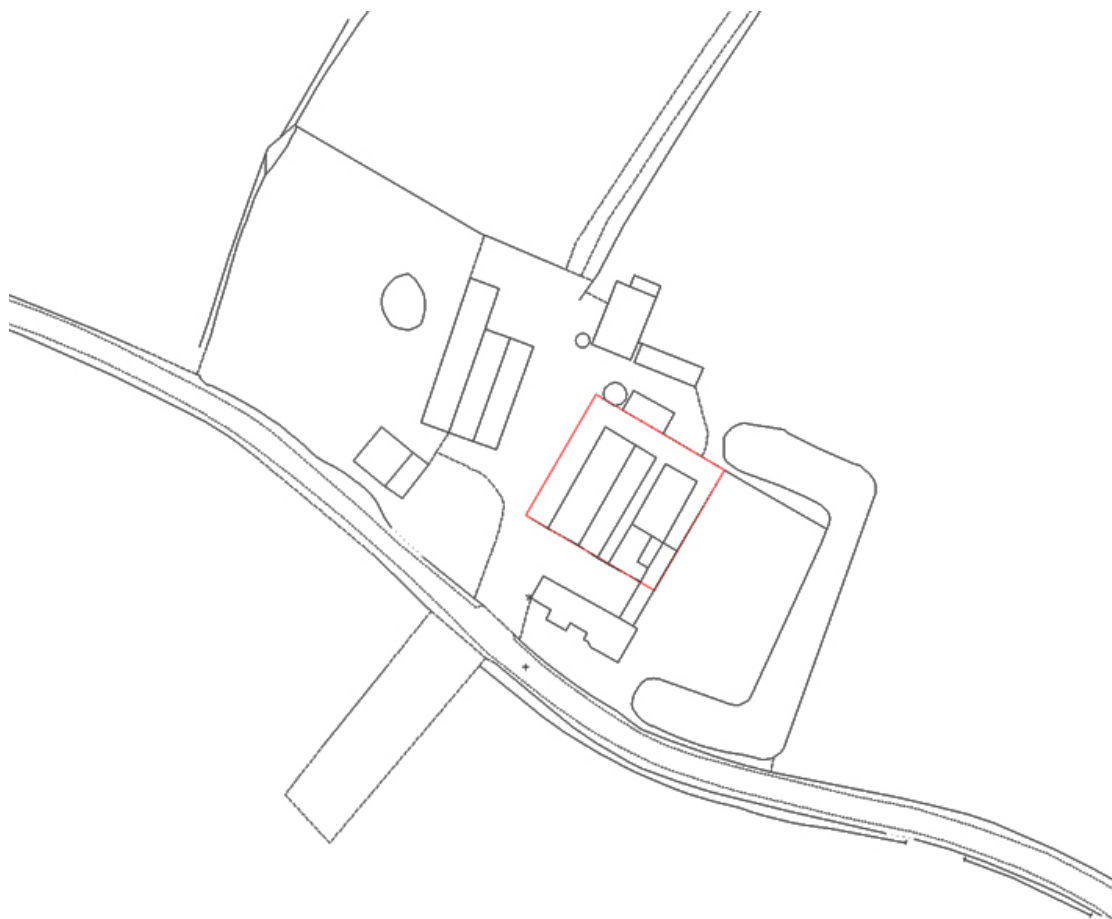
Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 74 digital images (Appendix 1) but also includes printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text (Appendix 2). 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 29th March 2009.

Summary

Yew Tree Farm occupies a moated site in open countryside approximately 1 km west of Laxfield village centre, adjoining the road to Stradbroke on the south-west. The grade II-listed farmhouse is a high-status timber-framed structure of the 16th century with moulded ceilings and twin cross-wings, now clad in 19th century red brick. The moat appears to have been truncated, and probably extended onto the site of the house and farm buildings, but is shown in its present form on the tithe map of 1840. At this date the farm was a relatively substantial tenanted holding of 169 acres, of which 77% was arable.

The tithe map shows a number of detached farm buildings on both sides of the road but these were demolished in the 1850s or 1860s and replaced by the present brick complex immediately behind the farmhouse. This consists of four ranges of red-brick and pantiled single-storied sheds which form a complete E-shaped 'model farm' of unusually modest proportions. The complex included at least 12 separate units, including feed stores and shelter sheds in addition to a stable, cow-house and yards for both horses and cattle. The only detached building was a cartlodge with an integral shed immediately to the west. The majority of sophisticated model farms of this kind survive on gentry estates and are typically larger and more extensive, but this example provides rare evidence of their nature further down the agricultural scale. While the external appearance and proportions of the complex remain broadly intact, it has been considerably altered internally and stripped of almost all original fixtures and fittings. Given the extent of these changes the buildings do not meet the strict criteria for listing in their own right despite their undoubted historic interest.



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Figure 1

Current Ordnance Survey Site Plan

Outlining the complex of 19th century agricultural buildings in red, and showing the moat to the east and the listed farmhouse adjoining Station Road to the south. With the exception of a 19th century former cartlodge immediately west of the complex the remaining agricultural buildings to the north and west date from the 20th century.

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Yew Tree Farm lies in open arable countryside on the north-eastern side of the road between Laxfield and Stradbroke, 1 km west of Laxfield parish church. The farmhouse is a grade II-listed timber-framed structure described in the Schedule of Listed Buildings as a high-status 16th century cross-wing house with moulded ceilings but now clad in 19th century brick (not inspected). A section of ostensibly truncated moat adjoins the site to the east, and this probably once continued further west to encompass all or part of the present house and farm buildings.

At the time of the Laxfield tithe survey in 1840 the farm was a substantial tenanted holding of 169 acres owned by Robert Butcher and occupied by Robert Huson. All but approximately 40 acres of the land was arable (77%), and the rest pasture. The existing outline of the house is shown on the tithe map (figure 2 below), as is that of the moat, but the remaining farm buildings had not yet been built. The map shows instead a single large building behind the farmhouse (presumably a barn) with a smaller structure adjoining the road and a group of buildings alongside a pond on the opposite side of the road (their site now occupied by an area of concrete hard-standing).



Figure 2

Laxfield Tithe Map of 1840, showing north to top-right (SRO Ipswich branch). The farmhouse is shown in red with the moat in much the same form as today. Two outbuildings lie to the north-west of the house, one of which occupies the approximate site of the existing western yard (A in figure 5), and another group lies on the opposite side of the road. The existing farm buildings had not yet been built.

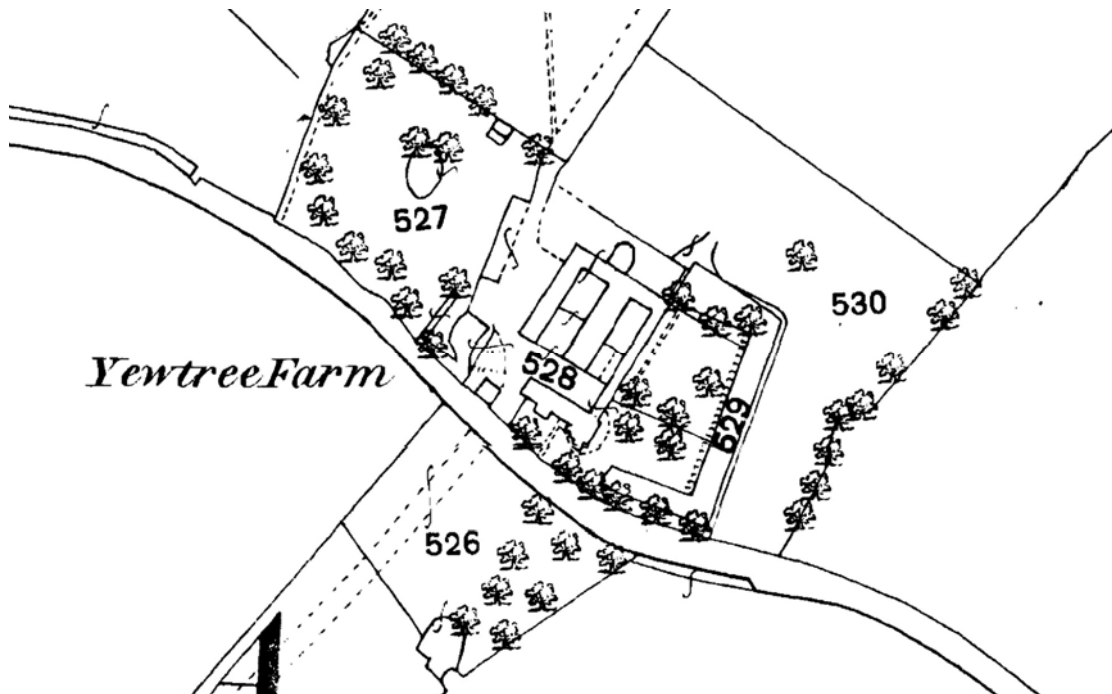


Figure 3

First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1884, showing the present complex of agricultural buildings behind the farmhouse, along with the cartlodge to the west. The buildings shown on the opposite side of the road in 1840 had been demolished. Note the oval projection from the rear elevation of shed 4 (as numbered in figure 5).

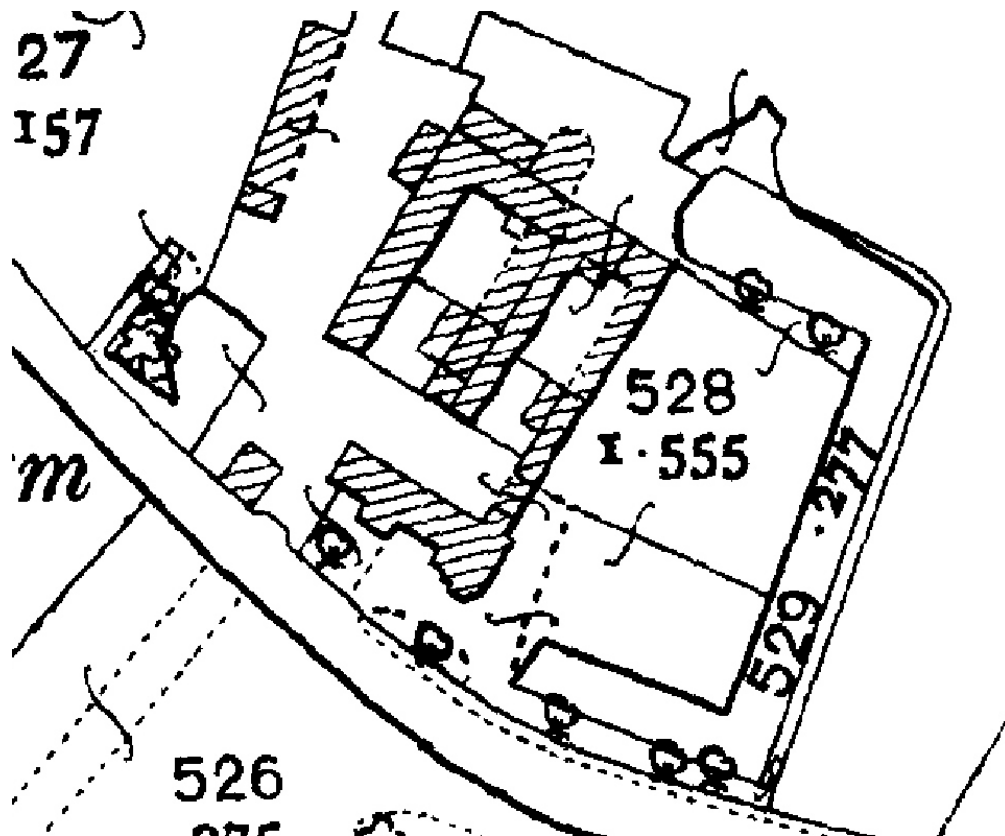


Figure 4

Second edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1902, showing the farm buildings in more detail. Open sided structures such as cartlodges and shelter sheds are indicated by broken lines. The oval projection behind shed 4 no longer survives but was probably an open shelter for a horse mill. Small additional sheds had been inserted into the corners of the yards, and added to the north-western external corner (all since removed or rebuilt) but the present layout remains much the same as shown here.

The site of the house is named only as 'house and yards' on the 1840 tithe apportionment (no. 789 on the map), with 'Backhouse Meadow' (788) adjoining the moat to the rear and laid to pasture. The purpose of the farm buildings on the opposite side of the road (117), which are named as 'yards', is indicated by 'Neathouse Piece' (116) to the north-west and 'Great Neathouse Piece' (115) to the west (i.e. they probably included a cow-house, known locally as a neat-house).

The site had been transformed by the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey in 1884 (figure 3), which shows the present complex of brick buildings immediately behind the house. No farm buildings had survived from 1840. Many local farms were redeveloped in this way during the mid-19th century as intensive cereal production gave way during the 1850s and 1860s to mixed animal husbandry: the high price of grain had been stimulated by the restriction of imports during the Napoleonic wars and artificially maintained by the Corn Laws until their repeal in 1846, and the arrival of the railways opened up new urban markets for beef and dairy produce thereafter. The Ordnance Survey of 1902 shows additional sheds both in and outside the new yards, which were divided into four sections, but these were either removed or rebuilt during the 20th century. An oval-shaped open-sided shed which projected from the northern elevation was probably designed to shelter a horse mill.

Building Analysis

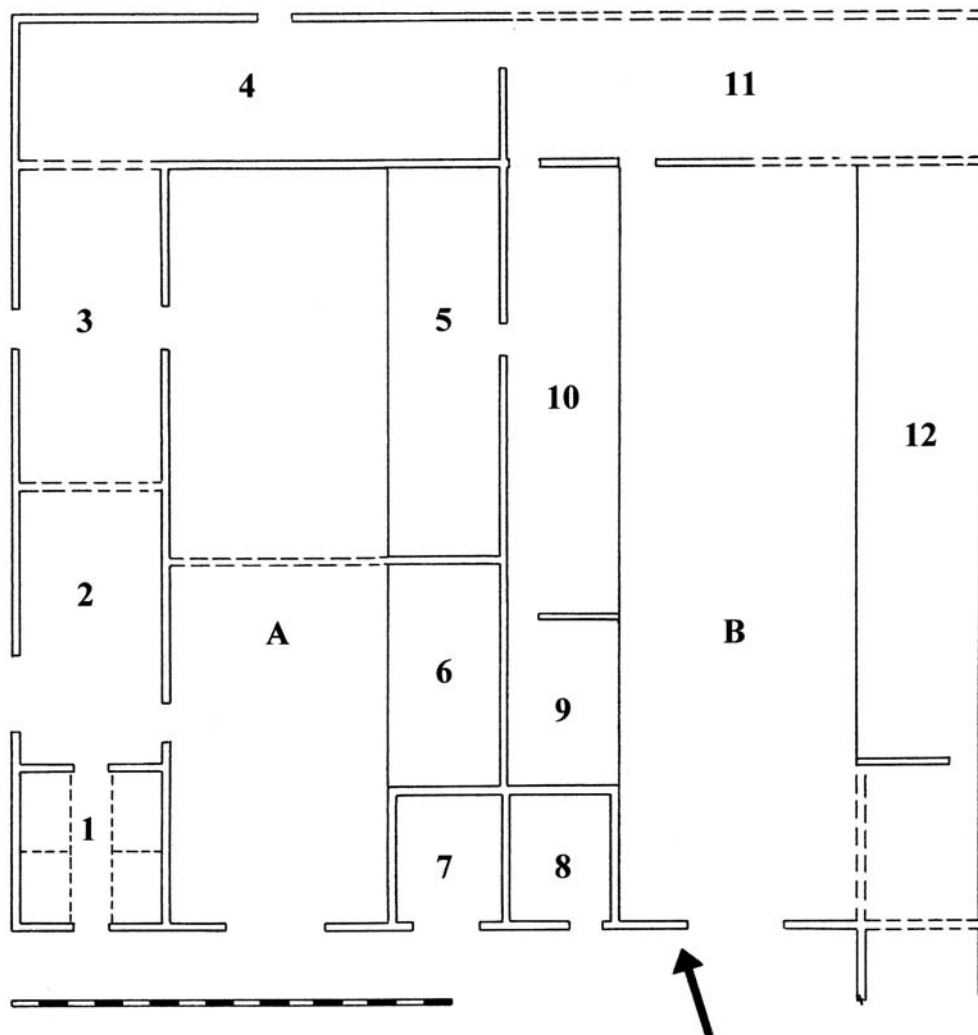


Figure 5

Schematic block plan of the single-phase, single-storied mid-19th century brick & pantiled model farm complex, numbering each unit for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. Scale in metres.

Showing the original layout (as far as this can be determined) but indicating missing or uncertain partitions with broken lines. Areas A and B are open yards, but the northern end of the eastern yard (B) now lies beneath a 20th century covered shed. The analysis of each unit offered below is partly speculative as the complex has been almost entirely stripped of historic fixtures and fittings, and numerous internal partition walls have been removed. At 2.75 m (9 ft) in height the eaves of the western shelter sheds are higher than those of the east (at 2.1 m or 7 ft) suggesting yard A was a horse yard and yard B a cattle yard. Both yards were initially sub-divided, but only the partition of yard A is shown here.

Key

1. Enclosed shed containing grain or root bins consisting of vertical boards held by grooved posts in the usual manner (largely removed and indicated by broken lines).
2. Enclosed shed with double doors to the west. Possibly used as a vehicle shed.

3. **Enclosed shed with opposing entrance doors opening onto the western yard and probably used as a stable. No other candidates for the necessary stable are shown on the Ordnance Surveys.**
4. **Enclosed shed lacking direct communication with a yard and adjoining a probable horse mill on the north (indicated by 19th century Ordnance Surveys). Probably a feed milling and storage area (i.e. a feed barn). No other candidates for the necessary barn are shown on the Ordnance Surveys. The western end contains evidence of removed partitions and may have formed a tack room adjoining shed 3.**
5. **Open shelter-shed with eaves of 2.75 m. The connecting door with shed 10 is secondary.**
6. **Open shelter shed with eaves of 2.75 m.**
7. **Enclosed shed with double doors to south. Probably a vehicle shed.**
8. **Enclosed shed with single door to south. Probably a second feed store but stripped of internal evidence.**
9. **Open shelter-shed, now with inserted late-20th century glazed shed.**
10. **Open shelter-shed with eaves of 2.1 m (7 ft).**
11. **Enclosed shed with original access door to corner of shed 10 and secondary door to yard B. Now subdivided by a 20th century blockwork partition. Probably a cow-shed.**
12. **Open shelter-shed with eaves of 2.1 m (7 ft). Remains of late-19th century boarded feed troughs.**

Proportions and Structure

The farm complex at Yew Tree Farm consists of an E-shaped range of single-storied red-brick sheds with pantiled roofs forming a pair of parallel yards as shown in figure 5. It lies 10.5 m (35 ft) behind the farmhouse and extends to 33.4 m in length (north-south) by 35.5 m in width (109.5 ft by 117 ft), and was built in a single phase as a ‘model’ farm. The eaves rise to 2.1 m (8 ft) externally, and the axial wall of the central range to 4.4 m (14.5 ft) – as does the outer wall of the eastern shed which adjoins a moated garden. The King-post and Queen strut prefabricated deal roof-trusses and materials are typical of the mid-19th century, and the complex must date from the 1850s or 1860s; it is shown in its present form on the Ordnance Survey of 1884 but is absent from the tithe map of 1840.

Layout and Function

The ranges contained at least 12 separate sheds, of which five were open shelters. At 2.75 m (9 ft) as opposed to 2.1 m (7 ft) the eaves of the western shelters (5 & 6) are significantly high than those of the eastern yard, suggesting yard A was designed for horses and yard B for cattle. There was no separate stable on the site, and the only other structure shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1884 (figure 3) was a detached cartlodge and integral vehicle shed to the west (a contemporary building, uniform with the yard ranges, extending to 26.4 m in length by 5.8 m in width and rising to 2 m at its eaves (86.5 ft by 19 ft by 80 ins). The only original fixtures and fittings to survive consist of grooved bins posts in shed 1, indicating that it operated as a feed store, and possibly a number of boarded cattle mangers in shed 12 - but these may be secondary. The functions of the various units outlined in figure 5 are therefore based largely on comparisons with similar complexes elsewhere, but can be suggested with some confidence. The need for traditional threshing barns disappeared with the advent of mechanical threshing during the mid-19th century, and many were converted into animal feed mills and stores. The absence of any detached barns from the Ordnance Surveys and the proximity of the apparent horse mill confirm the identification of shed 4, which extends to a respectable 15.5 m by 5 m internally (50 ft by 16.5 ft), as the model farm’s ‘barn’, despite the presence of only a small door and hatch to the exterior.

Condition

The complex remains largely intact despite the loss of its fixtures and fittings. Several internal partitions have been removed, as indicated by scars in the brickwork (such as those between sheds 2, 3 and 4, which now form a single space) and others inserted (sub-dividing shed 11), while the northern elevation of shed 11 was rebuilt in the late-20th century to incorporate glazed doors and a workshop façade. The arcade posts of the shelter sheds have also been replaced, and mid-20th century shed covers the northern end of yard B which contains a contemporary axial hay rack for cattle. A number of original doors and louvered windows survive, however, along with evidence of red-ochre pigment, but most have been replaced.

Historic Significance

The farm complex at Yew Tree Farm is of considerable historic interest as a mid-19th century model farm. Complexes of this kind were intended to meet the new requirements of Victorian High Farming, and were often built to published designs in order to maximise efficiency and combine the purposes of several older buildings under a 'single' roof. Most survive on larger estates and smaller examples such as this, which illustrate conditions on middle class farms, are relatively rare survivals in anything resembling their original form. The general external appearance and proportions of the complex remain broadly intact, and now represent its chief historic merit, but unfortunately the interior has been extensively altered and stripped of historic fixtures and fittings. Given the extent of these alterations the complex does not meet the strict criteria for listing 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 south-west, showing farmhouse to right.
2. South-eastern facade of farmhouse from west (included for site context).
3. High wall dividing farm buildings from moat, seen from south. This wall forms the rear elevation of the eastern yard shelter (12).
4. Moat from north-east showing house in rear and dividing wall (12) to right.
5. Moat from east showing high wall of lean-to shed (12) to left.
6. General view of site from field to north-east showing modern sheds and silo in foreground.
7. Southern gables of yard sheds from west, showing proximity of farmhouse to right.
8. General view from south-west showing western yard shed to right & detached cartlodge to left.
9. Detached cartlodge to west of site from south showing modern enclosure wall.
10. Detached cartlodge to west of site from north-east.
11. General view of yard complex from north showing 20th century silo to left.
12. General view of yard complex from south-west.
13. Southern gables of yard ranges from south-east, showing entrance to yard A.
14. Southern entrance to yard A from south-west, showing gable of feed store (1) to left.
15. Southern external gable of feed store (1) showing original layout.
16. Southern external gable of central yard range showing doors to sheds (7 & 8).
17. External elevation of western yard range from south, showing doors to sheds (2 & 3).
18. Western external elevation of central yard range showing shelter sheds (5 & 6) to left.
19. Southern entrance to eastern yard (B) showing inserted 20th century covered shed.

20. Southern end of central yard range from south-east showing modern wall of shelter shed (9) right.
21. Detail of reddled door linking sheds 9 and 10 in central range, seen from south.
22. Interior of feed store (1) from south showing posts with grooves for bin boards & door to shed 2.
23. Interior of granary (1) from west showing bin boards in situ.
24. Interior of feed store (1) from north showing external entrance.
25. Interior of feed store (1) from south-east showing pig feed sacks.
26. Exterior of western range from east showing doors to sheds 2 and 3.
27. North-west corner of yard A showing original door and window to shed 3.
28. Original external window to shed 3 from yard to east showing glazing above louver.
29. External detail of original window to shed 3 from yard to east.
30. Interior of shelter shed (5) from north showing secondary door to shed 10 left.
31. Interior of shelter shed (5) from south showing modern arcade posts to left.
32. Detail of secondary sliding door between shelter sheds (5 & 10) from west.
33. Interior of shed 3 from north looking to shed 2 (internal partition removed).
34. Detail of king post truss roof structure of shed 3 from north.
35. Interior of shed 3 from south showing opposing doors to yard (right) and exterior.
36. Interior of shed 3 from south showing queen strut roof trusses at northern end.
37. Interior of shed 4 from east showing external door to right.
38. Interior of shed 4 from east showing junction with shed 3 to left (partition removed).
39. Interior of shed 4 from west showing enlarged door to shed 11 to left.
40. Northern external elevation of shed 11 (rebuilt in 20th century).
41. Detail of 20th century shop facade in northern external elevation of shed 11.
42. Modern lean-to against northern external elevation of shed 4.
43. Northern external elevation of shed 4 from east showing hatch and door.
44. Door in external elevation of shed 4 showing hatch to left.
45. Reddled hatch in external northern elevation of shed 4.

46. Detail of reddled hatch in external northern elevation of shed 4.
47. 20th century farm buildings to north of yard complex seen from east.
48. External north-western corner of complex from west showing 20th century silo.
49. Northern end of external elevation of western yard range, showing windows to shed 4.
50. Door to shed 3 in western external elevation.
51. Western external elevation of western yard range, showing window to shed 2 to right.
52. Detail of original window in western external elevation of shed 2.
53. Southern end of western range showing renewed double doors to shed 2.
54. Interior of shed 11 from east showing original door to shed 10 left & enlarged door to shed 4.
55. Interior of shed 11 from west showing 20th century block-work partition in rear.
56. Detail of door to shed 10 from shed 11 to north-east.
57. Detail of hag-stone on nail to east of original door from shed 11 to shed 10 (seen from north).
58. Interior of shed 11 from east showing modern blockwork partition with shop front to right.
59. Internal eastern gable of shed 11.
60. Interior of shed 11 from north showing removed partition against yard B.
61. Interior of yard B from south beneath 20th century roof.
62. Shelter shed (12) to east of yard B from south-west showing renewed posts.
63. Shelter shed (10) to west of yard B from north-east.
64. Interior of shelter shed 12 from south showing high wall against moated garden to right.
65. Northern end of shelter shed 12 showing boarded feed troughs.
66. Detail of boarded feed troughs in shelter shed 12 from west.
67. Northern end of yard B showing 20th century axial hay racks.
68. Yard B from north showing southern gable of 20th century cover.
69. Southern end of shelter shed 12 showing door to domestic utility shed to left.

70. Southern end of shelter shed 10 showing door to shed 9 to right.
71. Northern end of shelter shed 10 showing door to shed 11.
72. Northern end of yard B from south showing secondary door to shed 11 with shelter shed 10 to left.
73. Sliding secondary door to shed 5 from shelter shed 10 to east.
74. Detail of original shaped arcade post lintel of shelter shed 10 (post replaced).

Appendix 2 (pp. 13-17): Selected Printed Photographs



A2.1 General view from concrete hard-standing on site of demolished early-19th century farm buildings to south-west, showing listed farmhouse to right with yard complex in rear and detached former cartlodge to left



A2.2 General view from north-east across moat showing proximity of farmhouse in rear to left and high wall of eastern shelter shed (12) in rear to right



A2.3 General view of site from field to north-east showing modern sheds and silo in centre foreground with yard complex and farmhouse to left and detached cartlodge to right



A2.4 Southern gables of yard sheds from west, showing proximity of farmhouse to right



A2.5 Southern gables of yard ranges from south-east, with feed store (1) to left, central range to right and entrance to yard A in centre.



A2.6 North-western corner of yard A (right) showing the original doorway and window to shed 3



A2.7 External detail of original window to shed 3 from yard to east, showing glazed upper lights with vertical louver beneath



A2.8 Interior of shed 3 from north looking to shed 2 (the internal partition removed) and showing the central door to the feed store in rear



A2.9 Detail of reddled hatch in external northern elevation of shed 4 (within area of apparent horse mill shown on Ordnance Surveys).



A2.10 Northern end of yard B beneath 20th century roof showing shelter shed 10 to left and shelter shed 12 to right (all posts renewed) with 20th century cattle hay rack in centre