

**Brown's Farm,
Holbrook,
Suffolk,
HBK 043**

Historic Building Record

Suffolkc1-72259



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The Barn, Brown's Farm, The Street, Holbrook, Suffolk

(TM 163 369)

Historic Building Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a barn in the curtilage of listed building. It has been prepared to a brief written by Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (Edward Martin, 13th January 2010, ref. SpecHBR_BrownsFm_Holbrook_01292_09) and is intended to inform an application for planning consent (Babergh District Council ref. B/09/01292 & 01293).

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 42 digital images (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 wherever possible includes a scale rod with half-metre divisions in red and white. The site was inspected on 29th January 2010.

Summary

Brown's Farm lies in open countryside at the north-western edge of Holbrook village, approximately 1 km from All Saints church, and is reached by a dedicated track from The Street to the north-east. The site contains a grade II-listed timber-framed and rendered farmhouse of the late-16th or early-17th century with a timber-framed, pantiled and weatherboarded barn in close proximity to the north-west. At the time of the parish tithe survey in 1840 the farm was a medium-scale tenanted holding of 46 acres belonging to the eponymous Joseph Brown and occupied by Edward Brown.

The barn is a relatively late structure that is conspicuous by its absence from the tithe map, which depicts an earlier barn on an entirely different site to the north-east of the farmhouse. The present barn is shown for the first time on the Ordnance Survey of 1882, and dates from *circa* 1880. Its structure consists chiefly of machine-sawn softwood secured by nails, iron straps and bolted knee-braces in the typical manner of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, although a pair of re-used tie-beams and a number of ceiling joists may have been salvaged from its predecessor.

Despite its late origin the barn is of some historic interest as a multi-purpose agricultural building reflecting the larger 'model' barns erected on many gentry farms in the region during the 1850s and 1860s. Its main range of four bays contains a three-bay open barn with an intact threshing floor to the west and a narrow vehicle shed beneath a first-floor granary to the east; an integral lean-to extends along the southern elevation and contains the barn's central porch with cattle sheds on both sides. This lean-to formerly adjoined a pair of enclosed cattle yards containing a shelter shed and loose boxes but these have been demolished, and with the exception of a low cattle trough and the remains of a hay rack all relevant fixtures and fittings have been removed. The building's distinctively compact external profile remains unaltered however, with a traditional (but renewed) external stair to the granary against its eastern gable.

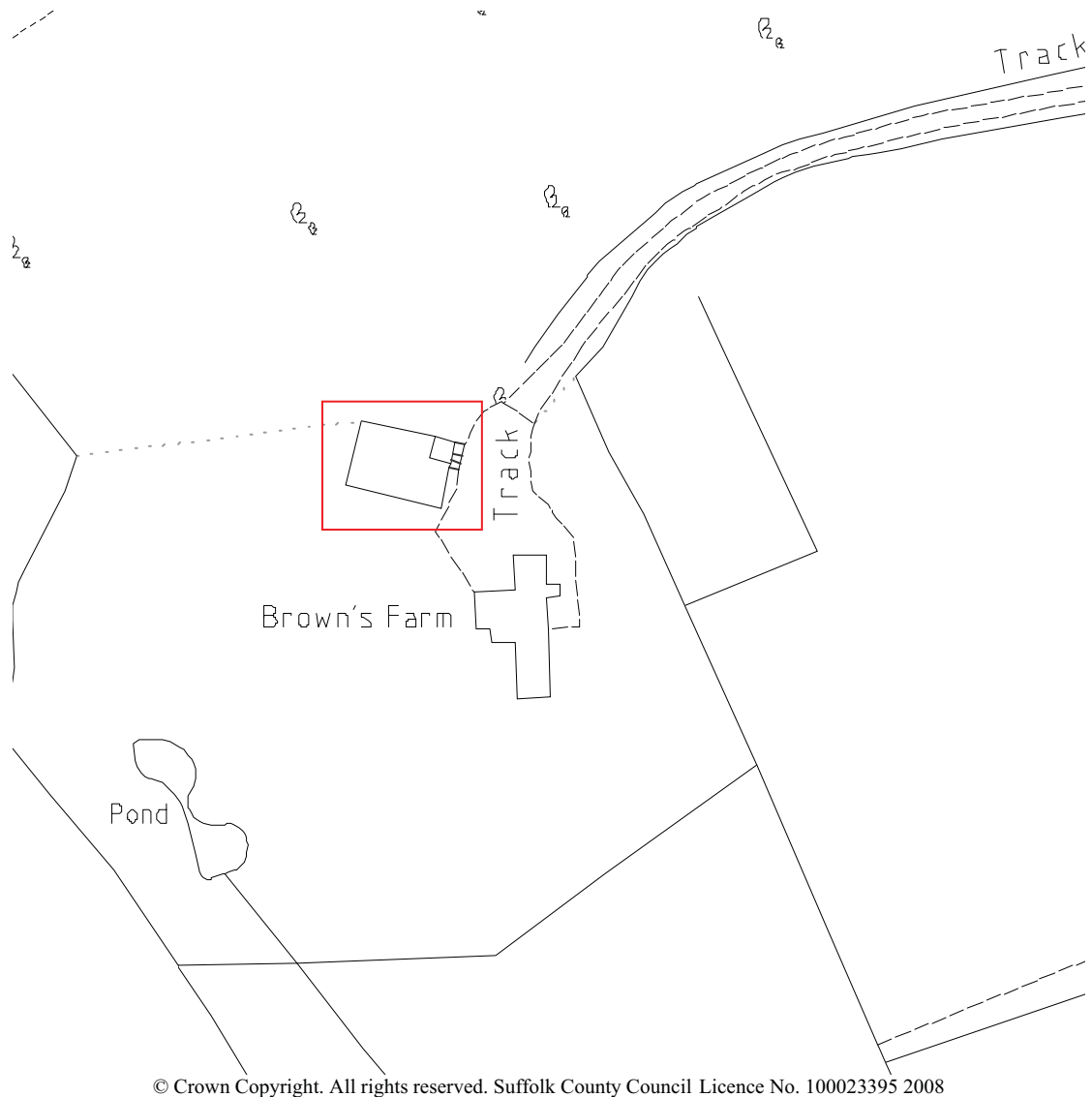


Figure 1
Current Ordnance Survey Site Plan
Outlining the barn in red north-west of the listed farmhouse. The farm track links the site to Holbrook Street to the north-east.

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Brown's Farm lies in open arable countryside at the north-western edge of Holbrook village, approximately 1 km from All Saints church, and is reached by a dedicated track from The Street to the north-east. The site contains two buildings overlooking a sharp declivity to the south-west: a grade II-listed farmhouse and a timber-framed and weatherboarded barn. The house is dated in the Schedule of Listed Buildings to the late-16th century but probably dates from *circa* 1610: it contains face-halved-and-bladed scarf joints and evidence for small 'diamond' window mullions of 2 inches in width (neither feature normally found before 1600). The timber-framed and rendered structure consists of a spacious single-bay parlour (from which alternate ceiling joists have been removed) to the south of an axial chimney containing back-to-back fireplaces and a two bay hall beyond. A gabled extension was built at right-angles to the rear (west) of the hall in the mid-19th century (when the original roof was also renewed), and a linear extension was added to the north of the hall in the 20th century (probably on the site of a previously demolished original service bay).



Figure 2

Brown's Farm on the Holbrook tithe map of 1840 (SRO), showing north at top-right. The farm (no. 80) is reached by a track from a sharp bend in what is now Holbrook Street, but this bend was straightened in the mid-19th century and the track lengthened accordingly.

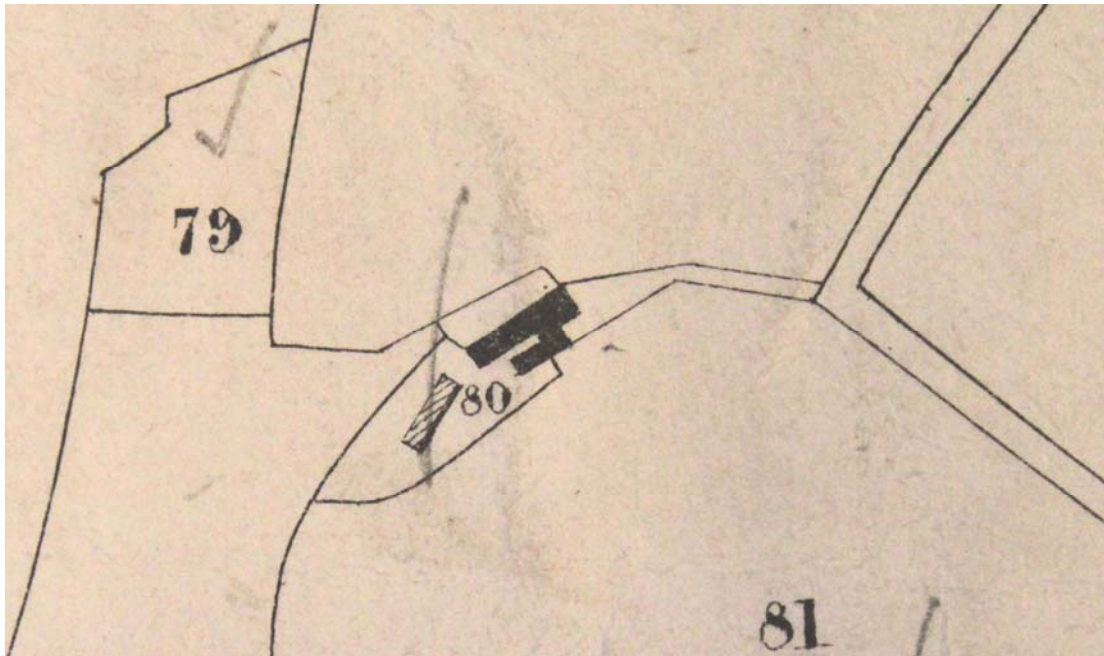


Figure 2a.

Detail of 1840 tithe map above, showing the rectangular farmhouse before its extension (shaded and aligned on a north-south axis). The present barn to the north-west of the house had not yet been built, but an earlier barn with an attached L-shaped structure to the east (in black) lies on the site of the existing drive and lawn immediately north of the house.

At the time of the Holbrook tithe survey in 1840 Brown's Farm was a medium sized arable farm of 46 acres (of which just 6.5 were laid to pasture) owned by the eponymous Joseph Brown and occupied by Edward Brown. The site of the farm (no. 80 on the map) was named in the apportionment as 'yards and buildings', with 'first home field' (81) to the south-east, 'long meadow' (90) to the south-west and 'seven acres' (77) to the north. The farmhouse was depicted as a simple rectangle without its later extensions and the present barn was conspicuous by its absence. An earlier barn occupied an entirely different site immediately north-east of the house, and the farm included a second barn adjoining the western side of Holbrook Street to the south-east.

By 1882 the farmhouse had been extended to the west, a sharp bend in Holbrook Street removed (extending the farm track) and the barn of 1840 entirely demolished. The present barn had been built in a corner of 'seven acres' field to the north-east of the house. It adjoined a pair of enclosed animal yards which are shown more clearly on the later Ordnance Surveys which use broken lines to depict open-sided structures. The shed which projected from the western end of the barn's southern elevation (shed D in figure 6) was open to the east and probably formed a cattle shelter shed; it may well have been undivided from the manger and hay rack which still survive in the modern workshop. A smaller shed in the south-eastern corner of the yard may have formed a pair of loose boxes.

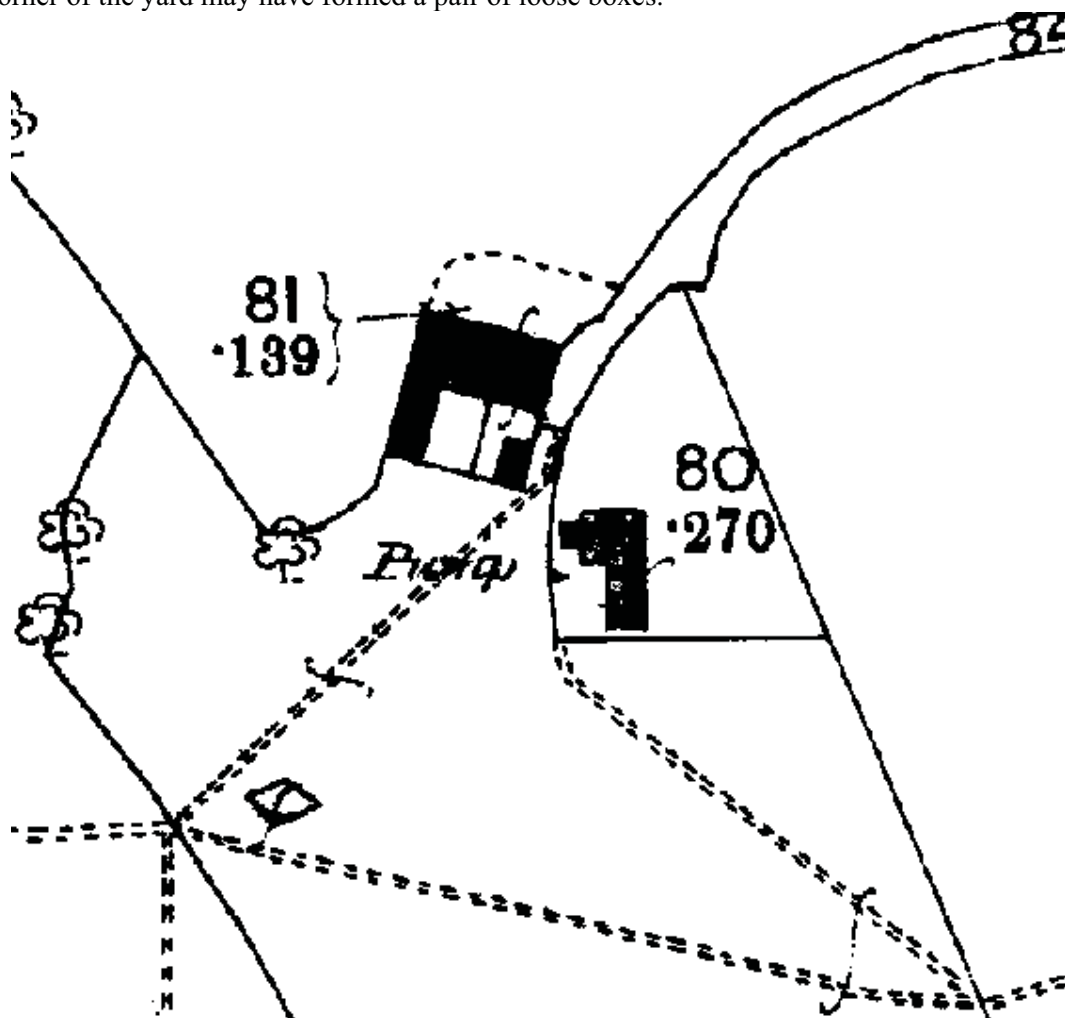


Figure 3

First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1882

The barn shown in 1840 had been demolished and replaced with the present barn, which adjoined a pair of enclosed animal yards with ancillary sheds to the south. The surviving western extension had been added to the farmhouse, but not its 20th century northern end. The pond is shown to the south-west but is far smaller than today.

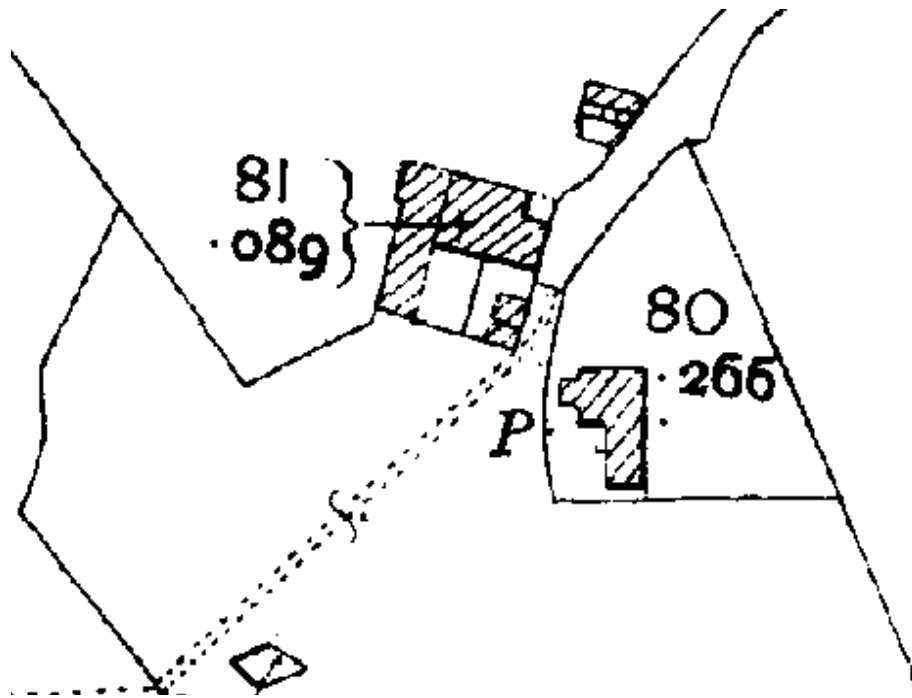


Figure 4

Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904, showing the barn in more detail with the vehicle shed (C in figure 6) in its north-eastern corner and an open-sided yard shelter to the south-west. The western bay of the barn was apparently divided from the rest, but internal partitions are not always shown accurately and it is possible that the western shed was an entirely separate structure adjoining the present barn's western gable (although there is no other evidence of this). A new building with very small yards against its southern elevation had been constructed to the north-east; this no longer survives but may have been a piggery.

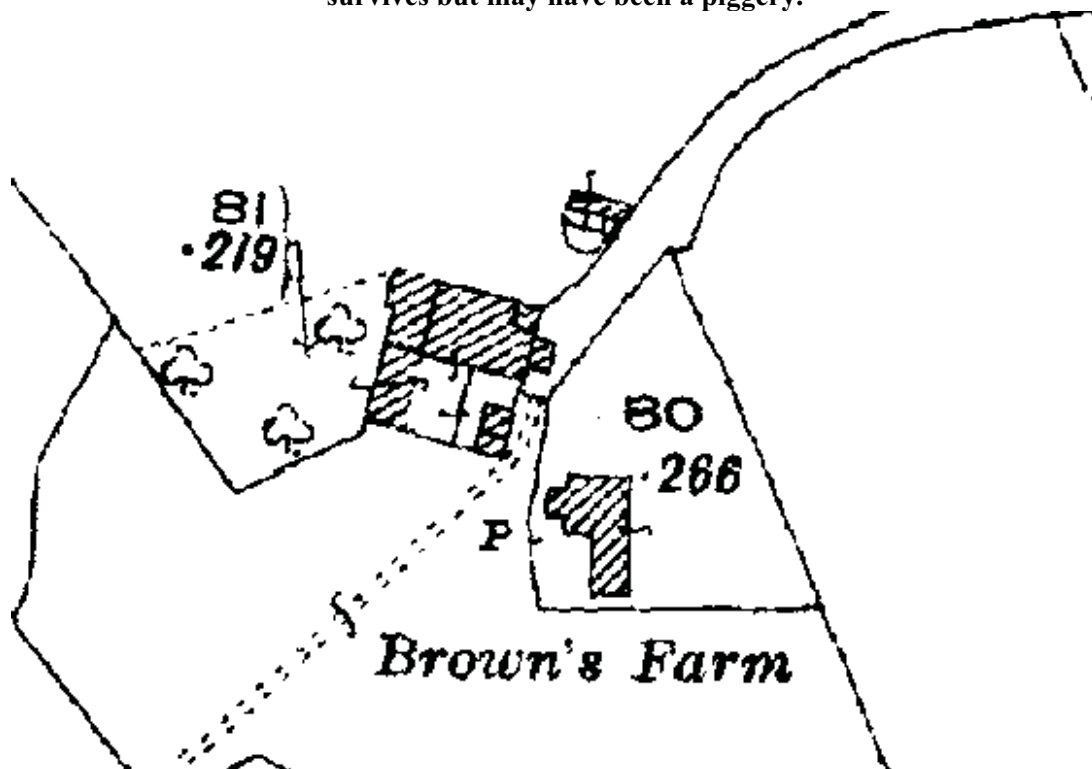


Figure 5

Third Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1926, showing a projection from the eastern gable that may represent a new granary stair

Building Analysis

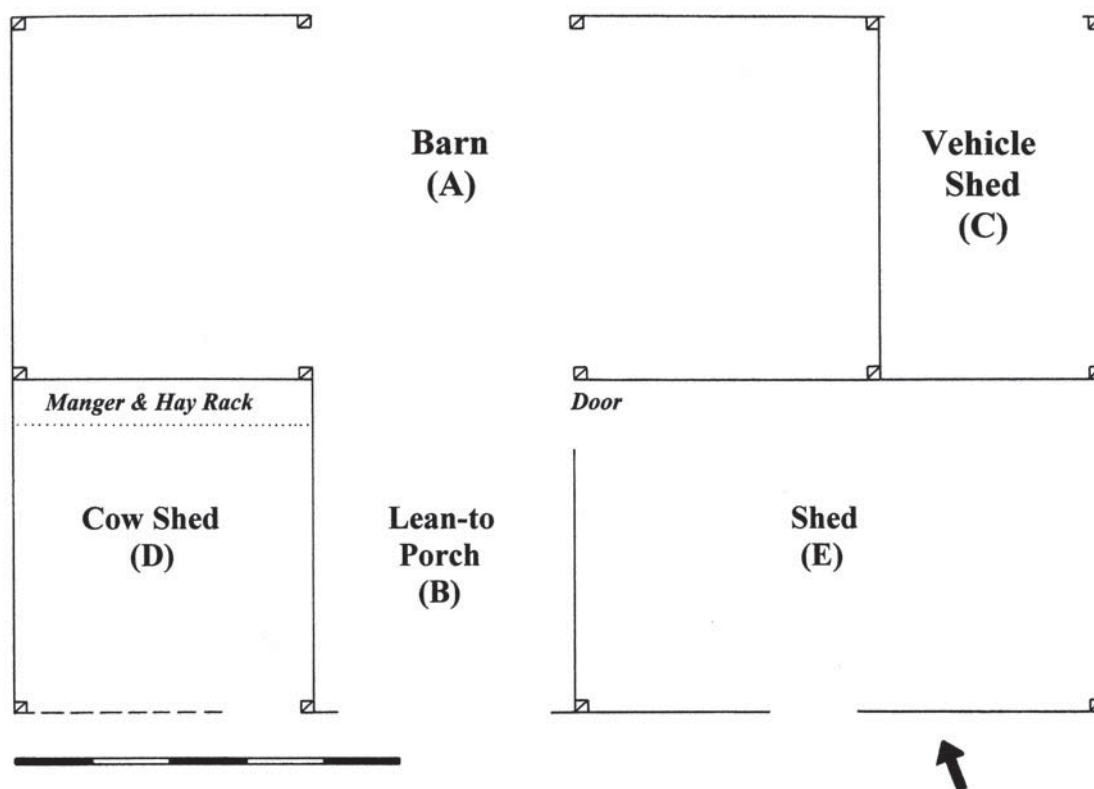


Figure 6

Block plan of barn with scale in metres, identifying each area with a letter for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. The vehicle shed (C) lies beneath a first-floor granary reached by an external stair against the eastern gable. The southern elevation of the cow shed (D) dates only from its late-20th century conversion into a workshop but lacks a brick plinth and either abutted the shelter shed shown on the Ordnance Survey or was open to the yard

Proportions and Date

The barn at Brown's Farm is a timber-framed, weatherboarded and pantiled structure in four bays which extends to 14 m in length by 9 m in overall width on an approximately east-west axis (46 ft by 29.5 ft). The main span is 4.75 wide (15.5 ft) and rises to 3.7 m in height at its roof-plates (12 ft), including a red-brick plinth of 40 cm (18 ins), but an integral lean-to extends along its entire southern elevation.

The framing consists almost entirely of uniform machine-sawn softwood and is characteristic of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, with nailed primary wall-braces and bolted knee-braces to the tie-beams (which are butted and strapped in all closed trusses rather than dovetailed). The storey posts are not jowled, and the original roof structure contains nailed collars with a ridge-board. The barn is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey of 1882 but not the tithe map of 1840, and is unlikely to pre-date the former by more than a year or two. The many local barns of the 1850s and 1860s are stylistically earlier, with hardwood frames, tenoned wall braces and jowled storey posts, and a date of *circa* 1880 is suggested here. The tie-beams of the entrance bay and the ceiling joists of the vehicle shed (C), however, were re-used from one of more buildings of the 17th century or before: the oak tie-beams contain pegged mortises for traditional arch-braces (not reflected in the storey posts)

and the joists exhibit a variety of mortises, dovetails and lath-nails that are not relevant to their present positions. These may have been salvaged from an earlier outbuilding on the site (to the north-east of the farmhouse, as shown in figure 2a) but many softwood structures of the period contain re-used hardwood in these vital positions.

Original Layout and Function

The building was designed as a modest but sophisticated multi-purpose barn which combined several functions under a single roof, as shown in figure 6. It formerly adjoined a pair of enclosed animal yards with a shelter shed and loose boxes to the south, as shown on the Ordnance Surveys, but no obvious trace of these survives.

The main barn (A) occupies three bays at the western end of the main range. It extends to 11.2 m in length by 9 m in overall width (36.75 ft by 15.5 ft) and contained a central entrance bay (midstrey) with full height doors to the north. A threshing floor of white (Gault) brick extends into the lean-to porch (B) to the south which contained low, wide doors to the animal yard shown on the Ordnance Survey. The threshing floor survives largely intact, with secondary floor bricks in the western bay. While the southern doorway has been blocked the northern entrance remains in use, albeit with modern doors of reduced height.

The narrow eastern bay is divided from the barn by an original boarded partition and contains a ceiling of re-used axial joists with double-doors in its northern elevation. Given its orientation towards the site entrance, and the width of its (renewed) doors, this space of 2.75 m (9 ft) in length was probably designed as a vehicle shed for a trap or cart. The upper storey formed a granary reached by a recently renewed external stair. The original door in its eastern gable contains a circular cat hole of standard design at its base – such features were commonly provided in granary doors to permit the farm cats to control vermin. The space is lined with zinc sheeting but contains no evidence of boarded bins.

The western bay of the southern lean-to (D) retains a low boarded manger against its northern wall, as shown in figure 6, flanked by nailed diagonal rails that supported a missing hay rack. The height of these features, with the top of the manger just 73 cm (29 ins) above the ground and the bottom of the rack 1.1 m (45 ins), indicates they were used by cattle rather than horses (a horse rack is normally at least 2 m high). The southern wall of the shed consists of 20th century boarding with large windows and dates only from its late-20th century conversion into a workshop; the absence of any brick plinth from this section of wall demonstrates that it was formerly open and apparently adjoined the open-sided yard shelter shown on the Ordnance Surveys.

The eastern bay of the lean-to (E) forms an enclosed shed of 6.7 m in length (22 ft) entered by double-hung doors from the demolished southern yard and linked to the barn by a door in the corner of its porch. This shed was probably designed as a bullock shed with detached loose boxes in the yard but it has already been converted into a domestic games room and no evidence of mangers or hay racks survives. The space is too large for the pair of working horses a farm of this scale might have required, and its smaller counterpart to the west (D) would have been a more likely candidate as a stable but for the height of its manger and rack. The latter is likely to have accommodated a small number of dairy animals while the larger shed housed fat stock.

Historic Significance

Dating from *circa* 1880 the barn at Brown's Farm is not of particular age or historic importance, and its softwood construction presages the 20th century, but the structure appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey and is of some interest as a multi-purpose agricultural

building. Its combination of barn, vehicle shed, granary, and cattle sheds under a single roof reflects the 'model' barns found on larger farms of the mid-Victorian period, but is a relatively late and inexpensive example of the type built shortly before the agricultural depression of the 1880s and 1890s. It also appears to mark a major alteration in the local landscape which included the straightening of the nearby highway as well as the demolition of an earlier barn which obstructed the farm track. The framing and distinctive external appearance of the building remain largely intact despite the loss of its southern yards, although much of the weatherboarding has been replaced, but with the exception of a single feed trough any historic fixtures and fittings have been lost.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from south-west showing barn to left and farmhouse to right.
2. General view of site from west showing barn to left and farmhouse to right.
3. General view of site from entrance track to north-east showing barn to right and farmhouse to left.
4. General view from south-east showing house to left and site of original barn in centre.
5. Eastern facade of farmhouse showing central hall & parlour to left & modern extension to right.
6. Exterior of barn from south-west showing lean-to cow-shed to left.
7. Southern exterior of cow shed (D) showing absent plinth with blocked barn door to right.
8. Detail of southern exterior showing double-hung door to eastern shed (E).
9. Northern external elevation showing doors to vehicle shed (C) left & barns doors in centre.
10. External detail of red-brick plinth.
11. Exterior from north-east showing renewed external stair to granary above vehicle shed (C).
12. Exterior of eastern gable showing profile of contemporary lean-to sheds to south.
13. Exterior from south-east showing site of demolished cattle yard to left.
14. Interior of barn (A) from east showing central entrance bay in foreground.
15. Interior of barn (A) from west showing central entrance bay in foreground.
16. Interior of northern entrance doors to barn (A), reduced in height but with original knee-braces.
17. Detail of Gault brick threshing floor in central bay seen from south-east.
18. Internal southern elevation of barn showing original lean-to porch (B).
19. South-western internal corner of barn showing lean-to porch (B) to left.
20. South-eastern internal corner of barn showing door to shed (E).
21. Southern interior of porch (B) showing blocked yard door.

22. Detail of softwood roof structure of barn (A) showing nailed collars.
23. Detail of bolted knee-brace and re-used tie-beam in south-western corner of barn midstrey.
24. Detail of re-used tie-beam with arch-brace mortise in north-western corner of barn midstrey.
25. Detail of bolted knee-brace in south-eastern corner of barn midstrey.
26. Detail of bolted knee-braces and re-used tie-beam in north-eastern corner of barn midstrey.
27. Detail of nailed primary wall braces in north-eastern corner of barn.
28. Interior of vehicle shed (C) from north.
29. Interior of vehicle shed (C) from south showing northern entrance doors.
30. Detail from north of re-used ceiling joists in vehicle shed (C).
31. Internal eastern gable of granary showing cat hole at base of door.
32. Southern interior of granary above vehicle shed (C) showing zinc lining.
33. Internal north-eastern corner of granary above vehicle shed (C).
34. Interior of south-eastern lean-to shed (E) from west, showing yard door to right.
35. Interior of south-eastern shed (E) showing door to barn porch to right.
36. Internal southern elevation of south-eastern shed (E) showing yard door.
37. Southern interior of cow shed (D) showing 20th century infill and glazing.
38. Interior of cow shed (D) from south showing low manger against barn.
39. Detail of boarded manger in cow shed (D) seen from south-east.
40. North-eastern internal corner of cow shed showing diagonal rail of hay rack.
41. Detail of diagonal rail of removed hay rack in corner of cow shed (D).
42. Detail of low boarded manger in cow shed (D) viewed from south-west.

Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 12-16

Appendix 2 (pp. 12-16): Selected Printed Photographs



A2.1 General view of site from west showing barn with contemporary lean-to sheds to left and farmhouse to right. The late-16th or early-17th century farmhouse contains a parlour to the right with a central hall and a 20th century extension beyond the small chimney to left. The central wing was added in the mid-19th century.



A2.2 Exterior of barn from south-west showing 20th century glazing of lean-to cow-shed (D) to left, blocked doors to lean-to porch (B) in centre and double-hung doors to eastern shed (E) to right. A shelter shed and cattle yards have been demolished from the foreground.



A2.3 Northern external elevation showing doors to vehicle shed (C) left & barn doors in centre. The latter have been reduced in height.



A2.4 Exterior of eastern gable showing external stair to granary above vehicle shed (C) (the stair renewed in the late-20th century) and the profile of the contemporary southern lean-to sheds to left.



A2.5 Interior of barn (A) from east showing narrow softwood studs with nailed diagonal bracing. The central entrance bay and brick threshing floor lies in the foreground with the lean-to porch (B) to left and northern door to right.



A2.6 Detail of original bolted knee-braces and re-used tie-beam in north-eastern corner of entrance bay. The empty arch-brace mortise in the underside of the tie-beam is shown to right



A2.7 Detail from north of re-used ceiling joists in vehicle shed (C). These substantial hardwood timbers were necessary to support the weight of the granary above.



A2.8 Internal eastern gable of first-floor granary above vehicle shed (C) showing cat hole at base of door and 20th century zinc lining.



A2.9 Interior of south-eastern shed (E) from west showing external southern entrance to left and door to barn porch to right.



A2.10 North-eastern internal corner of cow shed (D) showing low boarded cattle manger beneath modern shelving against barn wall to left and the diagonal rail of a missing hay rack in centre (to left of half-metre scale rod).