

**The Granary,
Squirrells Farm,
Great Bricett, Suffolk
BCG011**

Historic Building Record

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The Granary, Squirrells Farm, Offton Road, Great Bricett, Suffolk

(TM 056 508)

Historic Building Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a traditional farm building. It has been prepared to a brief written by Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (Edward Martin, 10th March 2010, ref. SpecHBR(EM)_SquirrellsFm_GBricett_2127_08) and is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for conversion and extension (Mid Suffolk District Council 2127/08, condition 2).

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 56 digital images (Appendix 1), but also includes 12 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 10th March 2010.

Summary

Squirrells Farm was known until *circa* 2006 as Hill Farm or Hillhouse Farm, and lies on high ground at the eastern edge of Great Bricett adjoining the road which marks its boundary with Ringshall. The present farmhouse was built on a new site to the north of the farm yard in the 1980s, and the original farmhouse is a grade II-listed building of the early-17th century or before which is now known as Ringshall House and lies on the opposite side of the road (in Ringshall parish). Its gables preserve fine and unusual Jacobean tie-beams carved with fish. Hill Farm was a substantial tenanted holding in 1838 with 155 acres of land in Great Bricett alone, and was owned by Robert Partridge Esquire and occupied by John Squirrell; it is marked on Bryant's county map of 1825 as Squirrels Farm (hence its recent re-naming).

The timber-framed and weatherboarded granary adjoins the western side of Offton Road, and is the only building on the site to survive from the 19th century. It is not shown on the 1838 tithe map but appears to incorporate part of an early-19th century cart lodge which lay several metres to the south. This building was moved as part of a major mid-19th century refurbishment of the farm complex in *circa* 1860-80 and its walls were raised in height by 1.2 m (4 ft) to accommodate a new grain floor. The lower storey was open at both gables and probably formed an implement or cart shelter, but the roadside elevation was rebuilt in brick and probably provided with an open-sided external cart lodge (rebuilt as a vehicle shelter in the late-20th century). The early-19th century ceiling is supported by bolted knee-braces and an axial row of mid-19th century Sampson posts. The first-floor granary is reached by an external stair adjoining the southern gable in the standard manner (the present stair dating only from the mid-20th century). It preserves a complete series of six mid-19th century boarded grain bins with a central (axial) passage, although the gable entrance is offset to the east. Granaries of this kind were once commonplace, but most have been stripped of their fixtures and fittings and the grain bins at Squirrells Farm are among the best 19th century examples to survive in the region.



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Figure 1

Current Ordnance Survey Site Plan

Enclosing the granary and attached 20th century lean-to sheds in a red square and shading the granary itself in red. The remaining farm buildings to the west date from the 20th century, and the farmhouse to the north (marked ‘Squirrells Farm’) is a brick building of the 1980s. The original grade II-listed farmhouse is now ‘Ringshall House’ in separate occupation to the east of Offton Road, which divides the parishes of Great Bricett to the west from Ringshall to the east.

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

Squirrells Farm lies in open countryside at the eastern edge of Great Bricett parish on the western side of the Offton Road which marks its boundary with Ringshall. The present farmhouse to the north of the site is a modern red-brick structure of the 1980s and the original farmhouse lies in Ringshall on the opposite side of the road. Now in separate occupation and known as Ringshall House it is a grade II-listed timber-framed structure of the early-17th century (or before) with an early-19th century façade of gault (white) brick. Both gables preserve important Jacobean tie-beams finely carved with fish – presumably reflecting the name of their first owner. It may be possible to establish the early history of the site with reference to any extant perambulations of either adjoining parish. The farm is named as Hill Farm on the Great Bricett tithe map of 1838 and as Hillhouse Farm on later Ordnance Surveys (reflecting its high location, commanding fine views to the west and south), but is marked as Squirrells Farm on Bryant’s map of 1825 (figures 2-4). It was recently re-named Squirrells Farm on this basis, but the name may have been short-lived as it refers to the tenant named on the tithe apportionment of 1838: John Squirrell. The farm then contained 155



Figure 2
 Bryant's Suffolk map of 1825, which shows Hill Farm as 'Squirrels F(ar)m', and was used to rename the site in recent years.

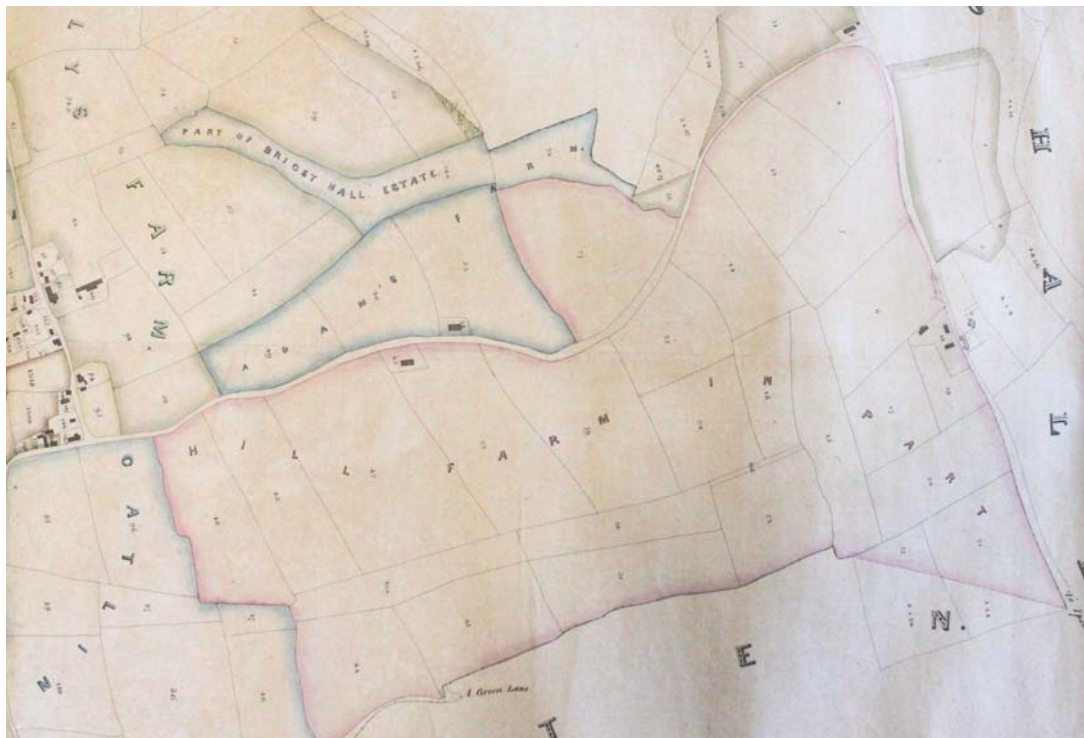


Figure 3
 Great Bricett tithe map of 1838, showing the extent of 'Hill Farm in Part' in red, with the farmhouse to the extreme right (see detail in figure 3a below).

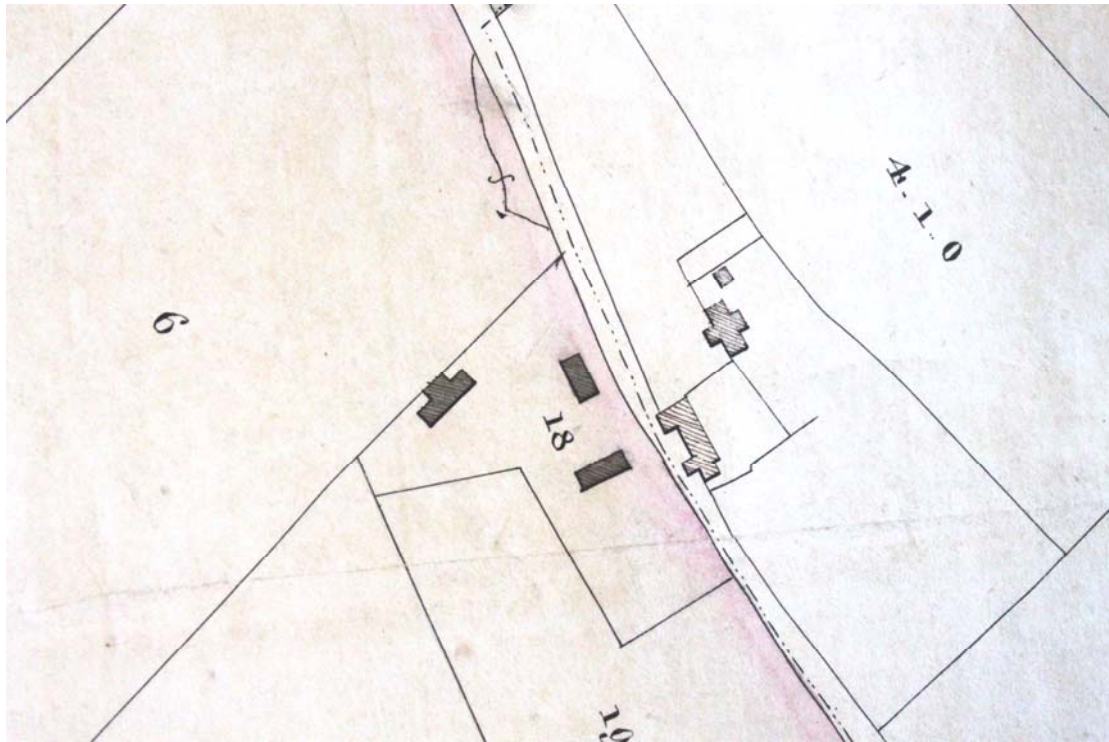


Figure 3a

Detail of the Great Bricett tithe map of 1838, showing the buildings of Hill Farm. The boundary with Ringshall parish is indicated by a broken line in the centre of the road. ‘Ringshall House’ possesses its distinctive cross-shaped outline to the east of the road, but none of the other buildings shown here now survive. The present granary lies to the north of the outbuilding shown immediately opposite the house, but may have been moved and re-used to form the granary’s lower walls. The site (no. 18) is described only as ‘Farm Premises’, while no. 6 was ‘Barn Field’ and no. 19 ‘Stable Meadow’ – suggesting the northern building was a barn with a central porch and the southern building a stable.

acres in Great Bricett (with more in Ringshall and possibly both Offton and Willisham nearby – forming a large holding by the standards of the day) and was owned by Robert Partridge Esquire. White’s Suffolk Directory of 1844 names John and Robert Squirrell as farmers in Ringshall, together with John Hitchcock, but neither Squirrell nor Partridge are recorded in Great Bricett.

The tithe map shows three buildings in the farmyard opposite the farmhouse. The building to the north-west was almost certainly a barn given its distinctive outline (with a central porch) and the name of the adjoining Barn Field. The most southerly structure may have given its name to Stable Meadow to the south of the site, and the most likely purpose of the central building adjoining the road immediately opposite the farmhouse is a cart lodge. The present granary occupies a similar location to this central building, but undoubtedly lies several metres further north and is shown for the first time on the Ordnance Survey of 1886, apparently replacing its predecessor of 1838: it is far closer to the roadside pond shown on both maps, and is no longer immediately opposite the much-extended farmhouse. Many local farmyards were extensively redeveloped in this way during the 1850s and 1860s as the intensive cereal production of the early-19th century gave way to mixed animal husbandry after the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. It is possible, given the structural evidence, that the cartlodge of 1838 was moved as part of this redevelopment to form the lower storey of the new granary.

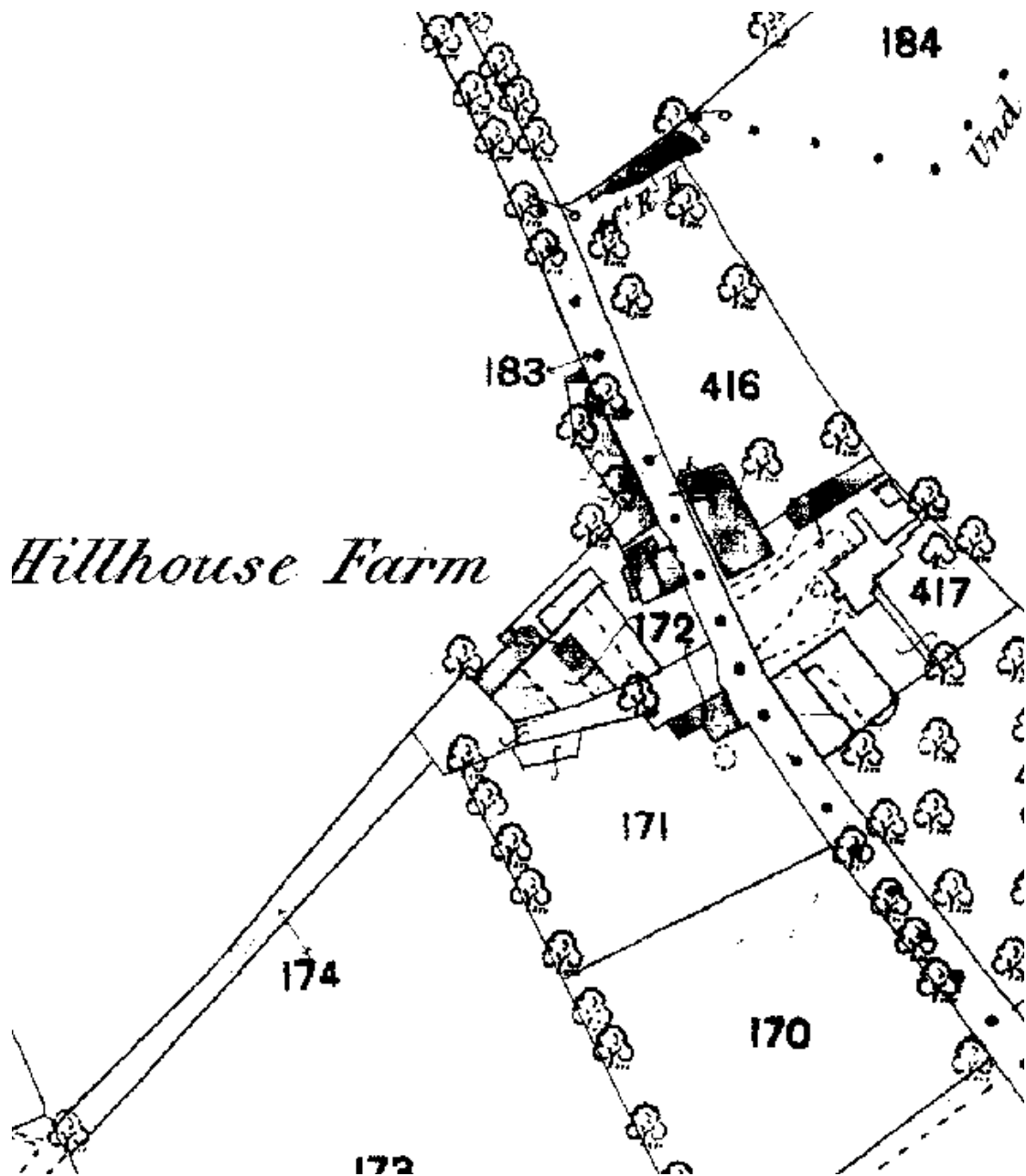


Figure 4

First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1886, showing the farmhouse of 'Hillhouse Farm' (now Ringshall House) much extended to the rear and a new set of agricultural buildings on the western side of the road. The granary is shown with additional sheds to both its eastern elevation and northern gable (both of which were rebuilt in the 20th century) while the small sheds against its western elevation no longer survive. Note that the granary is no longer immediately opposite the farmhouse, as in 1838, and adjoins the linear pond shown in figure 3a.

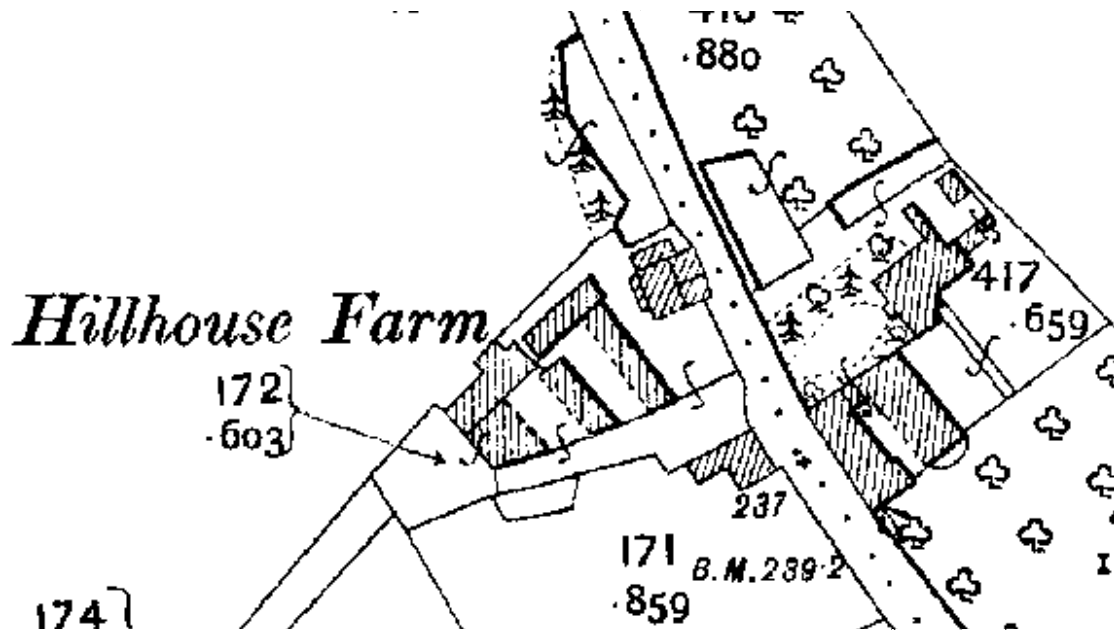


Figure 5

Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904, showing the buildings in more detail. Evidence of the small demolished sheds or enclosures (possibly pig sties) can still be seen on the western storey posts of the granary, but the northern and eastern sheds have been rebuilt. The structures to the west and south were also rebuilt in the 20th century, and the large buildings to the south-west of the farmhouse have been lost. Open-sided buildings such as cart lodges and shelter sheds are indicated by broken lines, and the southern gable of the granary is shown in this manner to suggest the lower storey operated as a vehicle or implement lodge.

Building Analysis

Structure and Date

The granary at Squirrells Farm is a timber-framed and weatherboarded two-storied structure of four bays which extends to 10.1 m in length by 5 m in overall width (33.25 ft by 16.5 ft). It rises to 4 m at its roof-plates with an internal ceiling of 2.3 m (7.5 ft), and is aligned on an approximately north-south axis adjoining Offton Road to the east. The low-pitched roof is now clad in corrugated iron but was probably designed for slate. The eastern roadside elevation is adjoined by a late-20th century lean-to vehicle shed and a single-storied mid-20th century lean-to pig shed abuts the northern gable. These sheds replaced earlier sheds of similar proportions shown on the Ordnance Surveys of 1886 and 1904 but are not of historic significance. A series of dovetail joints in the storey posts of the western elevation secured the tie-beams of an additional narrow range of lean-to sheds shown on the same maps.

The walls contain evidence of two separate phases of construction. The storey posts of both the eastern and western elevations rise to just 2.7 m or 9 ft (35 cm or 14 ins above the ceiling), where they are tenoned to a former roof-plate. Mid-rails are tenoned and pegged to the extant storey posts of the western elevation at a height of 1.95 m (6.5 ft), and the three original binding joists are secured by bolted knee-braces. The walls were subsequently raised by 1.2 m (4 ft) and the present roof was added. The narrow sections of the studs used to form this 'lift', coupled with the machine-sawn softwood of the clasped-purlin roof structure, suggests a date of *circa* 1860-80, but the ceiling and lower walls are more typical of the early-19th century. The ground storey of the eastern elevation was rebuilt in red brick when the

walls were raised, and the western elevation has been much altered and retains few original studs, but its timbers are re-used and of much larger section than those of the upper storey. The pine binding joists are neatly chamfered with curled stops, and the original common joists are fully tenoned in a manner not normally associated with the mid- or late-19th century and in marked contrast to the nailed roof timbers. However, the building does not appear on its present site in the tithe survey of 1838, and it seems likely that the lower storey originally stood several metres further south (immediately opposite Ringshall House) but was moved as part of major redevelopment of the site to form the core of the new granary.

Layout and Function

The ground storey is now entered by 20th century vehicle doors of corrugated iron in the southern gable, and forms a single space interrupted by an axial series of Sampson posts in the centres of the binding joists. The mid-rail of the northern gable is also supported by a central Sampson post, and the southern gable is depicted as an open elevation on the Ordnance Survey of 1904. These posts and both gables relate to the second phase of construction. Given its open and solid side-elevations the building probably served as an implement shelter rather than a cart lodge in the normal sense, but the original early-19th century building may well have been open to the east in the normal manner.

The grain floor is reached by an external stair at the eastern end of the southern gable, but this is a replacement of the mid-20th century. The interior contains an exceptionally complete series of boarded grain bins with an axial passage. Each of the six bins (two abutting the northern gable and two at the same end of each elevation) is 2.1 m wide (7 ft) and the passage is 0.65 m in width (25 ins). The southern end of the grain floor appears not to have contained additional bins but formed an open space – possibly for milling or simply to afford room to manoeuvre grain sacks. A wooden chicken coop rests against the eastern internal elevation of the lower storey but it is not clear whether this is *in situ*.

Alterations

In its present form the granary remains largely complete, although the early-19th century lower walls have been extensively mutilated. Much of the original ceiling survives intact, albeit with additional Sampson posts and several secondary softwood joists supported on nailed clamps (rails). The common joists of the northern bay are the best preserved. The second binding joist from the southern gable rests on the western mid-rail and is also an insertion. Much of the external cladding and the roof covering was renewed in the 20th century, and the corrugated iron vehicle doors of the southern gable are modern. The external granary steps were replaced in the mid-20th century and a narrow aperture has been cut into the boarded front of the north-western bin but the granary floor is otherwise complete.

Historic Significance

The historic interest of the granary at Squirrells Farm lies chiefly in the exceptionally well-preserved boarded grain bins on its upper storey. Apart from a small aperture in the north-western corner these remain completely intact and are among the finest examples of their type in the region. Granaries and bins of this kind were once commonplace but very few now remain in anything resembling their original condition.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from Offton Road to south showing Ringshall House on right and granary to left.
2. General view of site from Offton Road to north showing granary and modern barns to right.
3. Modern farmhouse (Squirrells Farm) to north of granary, seen from Offton Road to south-east. Included for site context.
4. General view of farm complex from south showing hilltop site with granary to right.
5. Ringshall House from south-west showing early-17th gable with original drop finial. Included for site context.
6. Ringshall House from west, showing early 19th century gault brick façade. Included for site context.
7. Detail of Ringshall House showing unusual fish-carved early-17th century tie-beam of northern gable. Included for site context.
8. Entrance to farm yard from Offton Road to south showing granary to right.
9. Exterior of granary from east showing 20th century lean-to shelter in foreground.
10. Exterior of granary from north-east showing 20th century lean-to pig shed to right.
11. Exterior of granary from south showing rebuilt external stair against southern gable.
12. Southern external gable of granary showing roadside lean-to shelter to right.
13. Western external elevation showing rebuilt granary stair to right.
14. Detail of tarred weatherboarding to western external gable.
15. Northern external gable showing 20th century lean-to piggery and Ringshall House to left.
16. External eastern elevation within 20th century roadside shelter, showing stair to left.
17. External eastern elevation within 20th century roadside shelter.
18. Detail of brick lower storey of eastern external elevation.
19. 20th century external granary stair seen from south-east.

20. Interior of lower storey from south-east, showing studwork of western elevation.
21. Interior of lower storey from south showing brick eastern elevation to right.
22. Interior of lower storey from north showing axial Sampson posts to left.
23. 20th century vehicle doors of southern internal gable.
24. Southern end of western interior showing tenoned mid-rail beneath ceiling.
25. Northern end of western interior showing substantial primary wall bracing to right.
26. Detail of bolted knee-brace & pegged mid-rail to western internal elevation.
27. North-western corner seen from 20th century lean-to piggery to north-east.
28. Interior of 20th century lean-to piggery from west showing granary to right.
29. Northern external gable of granary seen from lean-to piggery to north-west.
30. Internal detail of central Sampson post of northern mid-rail.
31. External detail of northern gable showing brick infill above mid-rail.
32. Northern end of brick eastern internal elevation, showing open northern gable to left.
33. Detail of poultry nesting boxes in centre of eastern internal elevation.
34. Southern end of brick eastern internal elevation showing southern entrance to right.
35. Detail of 'His Majesty' domestic mangle stored on ground floor.
36. Detail from north of original tenoned ceiling joists in northern bay.
37. Detail from north-west of original tenoned ceiling joists in northern bay.
38. Detail of curled chamfer stop to pine binding joist of western interior.
39. Detail of ceiling from south showing secondary ceiling joists resting on nailed clamp.
40. Detail of dovetail for missing attached shed in storey post of western interior.
41. First floor grain bins seen from entrance door to south-east.
42. First floor grain bins seen from south-west, showing central axial passage.
43. Detail of softwood clasped-purlin roof structure seen from south.
44. Internal southern gable of grain floor showing external entrance to left.

45. Southern end of western internal elevation on grain floor, showing upper and lower roof-plates.
46. Southern end of eastern internal elevation on grain floor, showing entrance to right.
47. Detail of original roof-plate of western elevation with later studs above.
48. Axial passage between grain bins seen from south.
49. Northern internal gable of grain floor showing rendered brick infill.
50. Grain bins seen from north-western corner of upper storey.
51. Axial passage between grain bins seen from north.
52. Interior of grain bin showing sheet metal lining to exterior.
53. Internal north-western corner of grain floor showing narrow primary bracing.
54. Grain bins viewed from south-west showing original roof-plate to right.
55. Axial passage of grain bins from south showing inserted access to north-western bin.
56. Axial passage of grain bins from south showing southern edge to left.

Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 11-16

Appendix 2 (pp. 11-16): Selected Printed Photographs



Illus. 1. General view of site from Offton Road to south showing Ringshall House on right and roadside granary with 20th century barns to left. The road divides the parishes of Great Bricett to the left and Ringshall to the right.



Illus. 2. Detail of the highly unusual and ostensibly authentic early-17th century northern tie-beam of Ringshall House, carved with fish. A similar tie-beam with drop finial survives to the south. Included for site context.



Illus. 3. Exterior of granary from east showing 20th century lean-to vehicle shelter adjoining road in foreground.



Illus. 4. Exterior of granary from south-west showing rebuilt external stair against southern gable and roadside vehicle shelter to right. Note corrugated iron vehicle doors to ground floor of gable.



Illus. 5. Northern external gable of granary showing the adjoining 20th century lean-to piggy the proximity of Ringshall House on the opposite side of the road.



Illus. 6. Interior of lower storey from south-east, showing the Sampson posts in the centre of each binding joist (and the mid-rail of the northern gable) with the studwork western elevation to the left.



Illus. 7. Interior of lower storey from north showing axial Sampson posts and brick eastern elevation to left. The original ceiling joists of the northern bay shown here are tenoned to the binding joists.



Illus. 8. 29. Northern external gable of granary seen from lean-to piggery to northwest. The gable is entirely open on the lower storey with a central Sampson post.



Illus. 9. Complete boarded grain bins seen from the south-western corner of the first-floor granary, showing the axial passage. The original roof plate and storey post are visible above the floor to the right. The walls were raised to accommodate the bins.



Illus. 10. Detail of softwood clasped-purlin roof structure seen from south-eastern corner of granary



Illus. 11. Southern end of eastern internal elevation on grain floor, showing entrance in southern gable to right and the extent to which the original walls were raised in height (from the original roof-plate immediately above the floor to the present plate).



Illus. 12. The intact grain bins seen from north-western corner of the upper storey (the narrow gap in the foreground is a recent insertion).