

**Barn at  
Mollett's Farm,  
Farnham, Suffolk  
FNM 019**

**Heritage Asset Assessment**

OASIS ID: Suffolkc1-99415



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**April 2011**



**Barn at  
Mollett's Farm,  
Main Road,  
Farnham,  
Suffolk  
(TM 366 602)**

**Heritage Asset Assessment**

*This report provides a written and photographic analysis and record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a redundant barn and attached sheds. It has been prepared to a specification written by Edward Martin of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (ref. SpecHAA(EM)\_MollettsFm\_Farnham\_3276\_10, dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 2011) and is intended to inform and accompany a planning application for conversion (Mid Suffolk District Council ref. C/10/3276).*

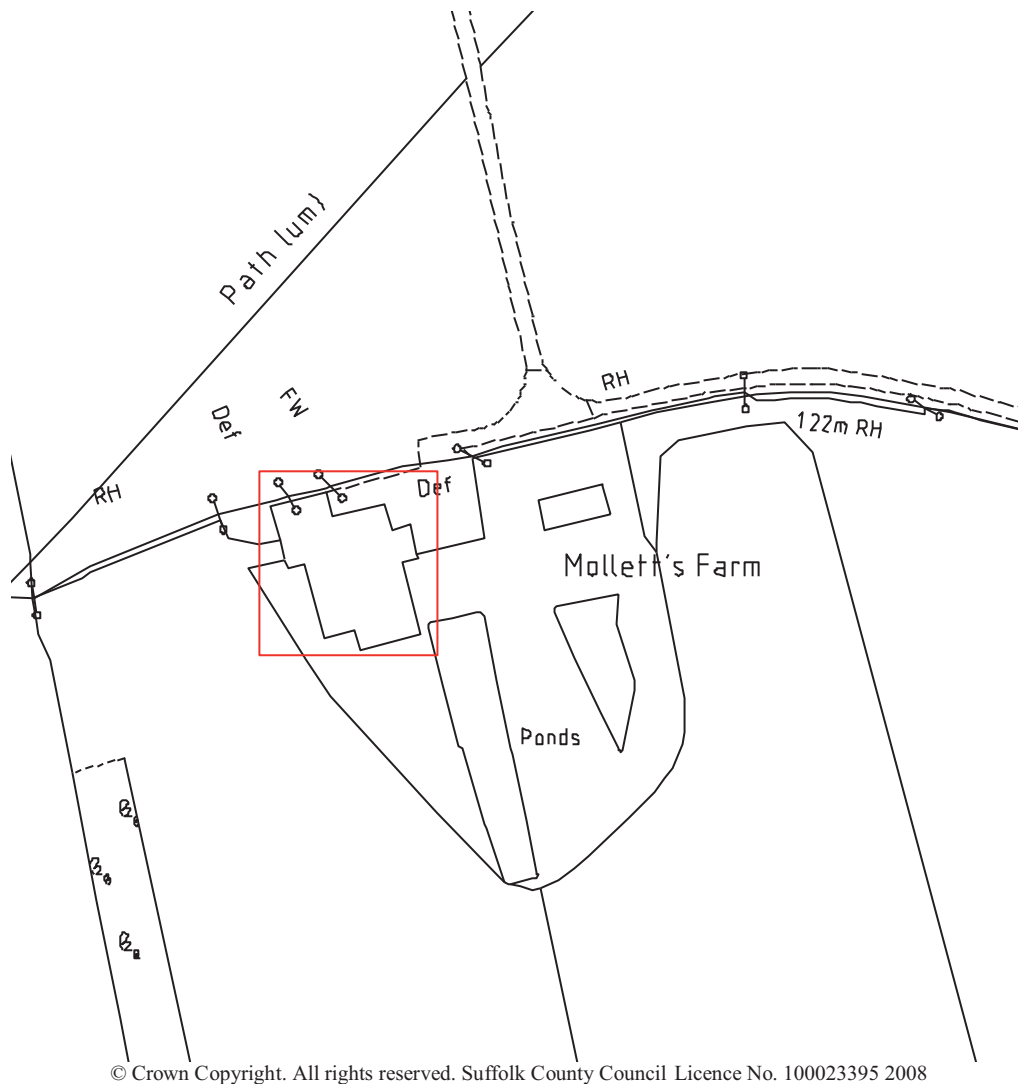
## **Introduction**

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 38 digital images of 21 megapixels (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 the site was inspected on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

## **Summary**

Mollett's Farm lies in open countryside approximately 500 m north-east of St Mary's church and 250 m south of the A12 from which it is reached by a concrete track. The farmhouse is not listed but preserves an early-17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed parlour bay with chamfered ceiling joists and a clasped-purlin roof structure to the east of its contemporary axial chimney. The rest of the original house is reputed to have been destroyed by fire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The site was formerly accessible only by a track from Friday Street to the east, which formed the boundary between Farnham parish to the south and Benhall to the north. At the time of the tithe survey in 1841 the farm was a modest tenanted holding of approximately 20 acres on the estate of Benhall Lodge.

The barn to the west of the farmhouse is shown on the tithe map and retains at least one bay of early-17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framing to the north, but has otherwise been extensively rebuilt and largely converted for semi-domestic purposes in recent years. Its thatched roof structure was entirely replaced with softwood and corrugated sheeting after reputedly suffering damage in the 'hurricane' of 1987. Much of the building's historic character has accordingly been lost, and any precise analysis of its fabric and development is hampered by the concealment of its fabric by modern boarding. The single-storied shed adjoining its southern gable is a relatively late addition of *circa* 1879 and had also been largely dismantled by the time of inspection. The chief interest of the site lies in the relationship of the early-17<sup>th</sup> century barn to the surviving parlour bay of the contemporary farmhouse, which indicates the latter faced a southern courtyard flanked by the barn on the west in the typical manner of the period. The barn is also of interest as its northern gable adjoins the Benhall parish boundary and may preserve archaeological evidence of the banks and ditches often associated with features that in many instances can be shown to pre-date the Norman conquest.



**Figure 1**  
**Modern Ordnance Survey**  
**Enclosing the farm buildings in red and showing the former farmhouse and original entrance track from Friday Street to the east. The simple rectangular outline of the house shown here pre-dates the addition of the modern cross-wing to the west.**

## **Documentary and Cartographic Evidence**

Mollett's Farm lies in open countryside approximately 500 m north-east of St Mary's church and is reached by a concrete track from the A12 some 250 m to the north. The track is shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1973 but not that of 1957 and the farm was formerly reached by a lane from Friday Street to the west. The site lies on the boundary with Benhall parish, which follows the same lane and abuts the northern gable of the barn. Most parish boundaries are ancient features with origins in the pre-conquest landscape, and the ground beneath the gable may preserve archaeological evidence of an early medieval bank and ditch. The farmhouse is not listed but preserves an early-17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed parlour bay with chamfered ceiling joists and a clasped-purlin roof structure to the east of its contemporary axial chimney. There is evidence of a lobby entrance to the south of the chimney, suggesting the house faced the church and a front yard flanked by the contemporary barn to the west, but the adjoining hall appears to have been rebuilt in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century and the cross-wing against its western gable is a recent addition. The original hall is reputed to have been destroyed by fire.

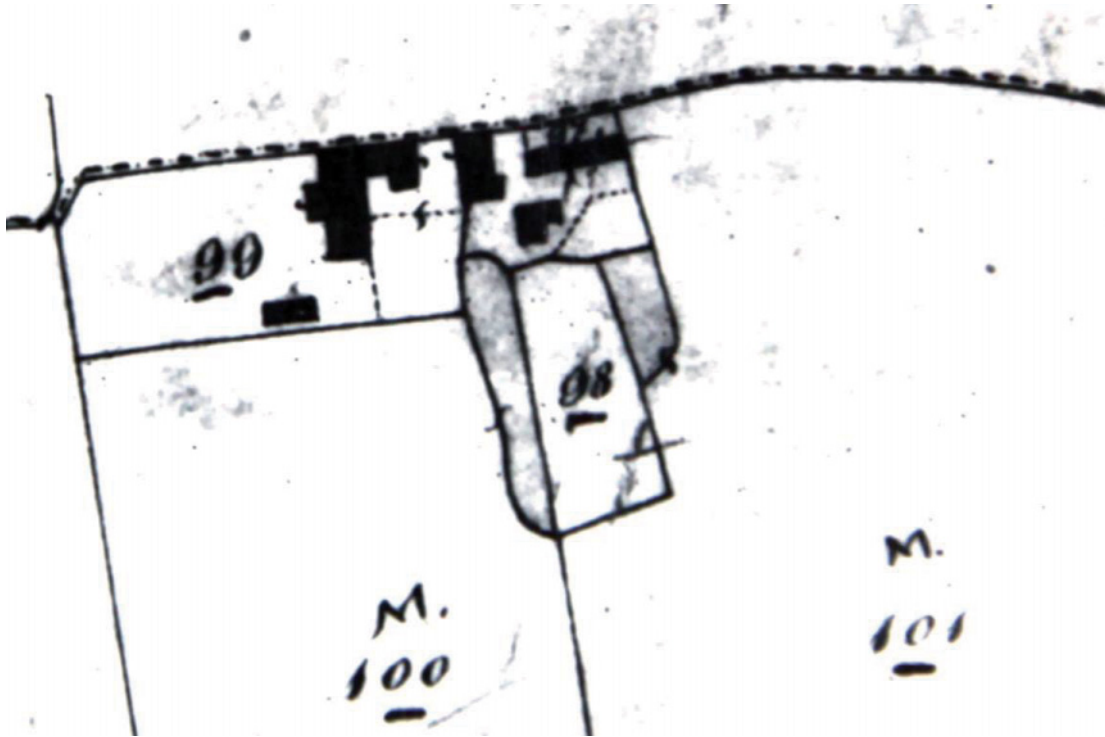


Figure 2

The 1841 tithe map of Farnham parish showing Mollett's Farm adjoining the dotted boundary with Benhall to the north. The barn to the left is shown with a central porch, with the elongated rectangular farmhouse at right-angles to the right

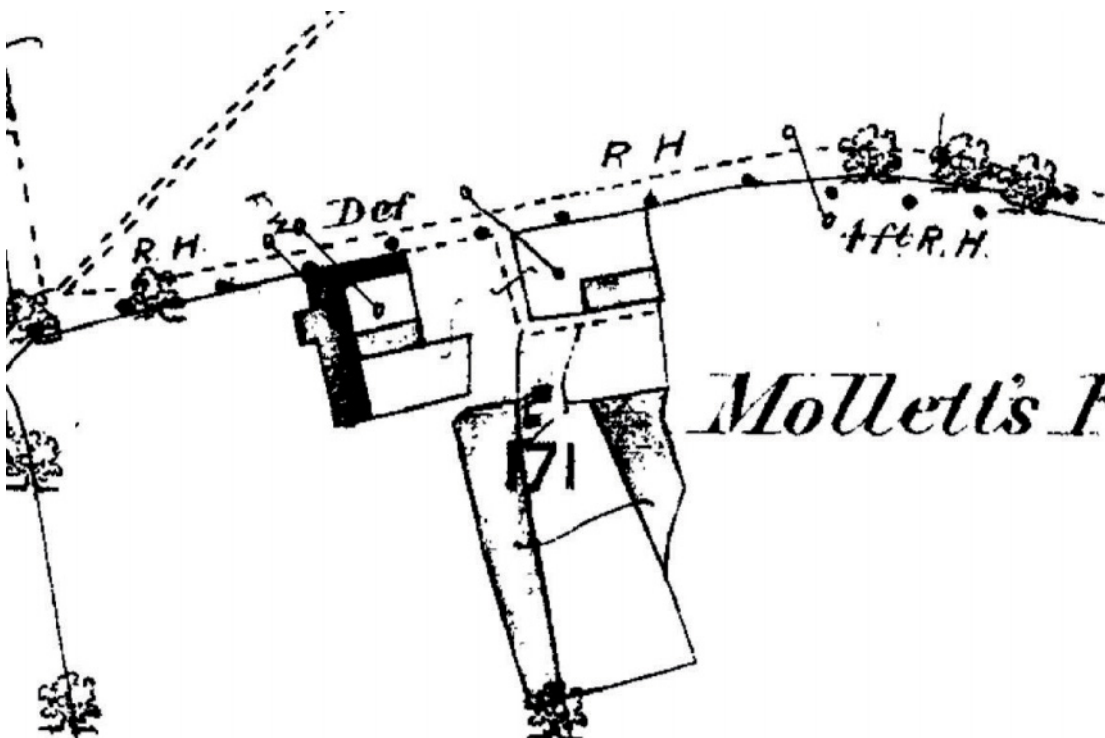


Figure 3

The First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1883. The porch of the barn is no longer central as the southern shed had been added to the southern gable since 1841 and the additional building between the shortened house and barn had been demolished.

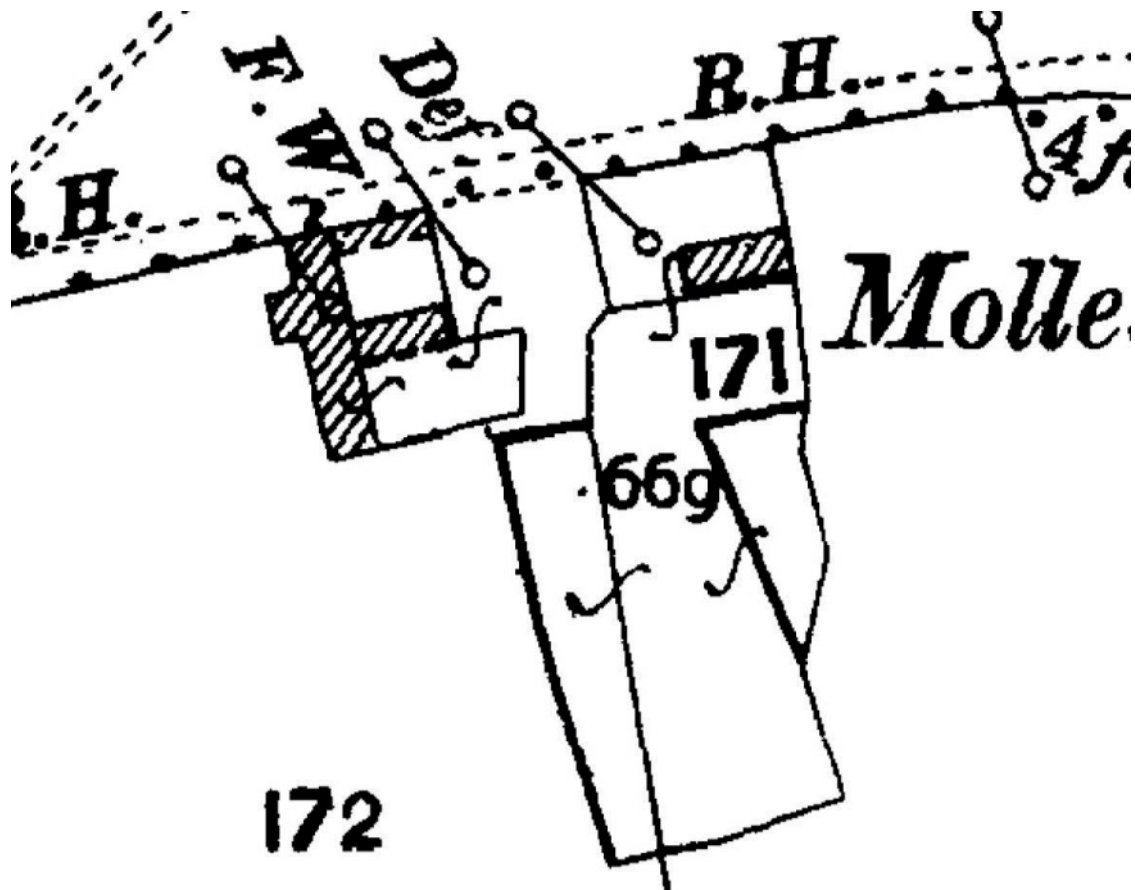


Figure 4

The Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904. The northern entrance track had not yet been built, and the site was reached by a lane from the east and west which marked the parish boundary (the latter indicated by the dotted line). The two buildings projecting from the barn's eastern elevation are shelter-sheds with open-sided southern elevations serving the two adjoining animal yards.

At the time of the Farnham tithe survey in 1841 the farm was a tenanted holding on the estate of Edward Holland Esquire of Benhall Lodge (1km to the north-east) and occupied by James Toller (figure 2). It contained 20.75 arable acres in Farnham parish and may have extended over the boundary as Toller was named as a farmer in Benhall rather than Farnham by White's Suffolk Directory of 1844. The census return of 1851 (kindly provided by the owner) names the occupant of 'Mollett Farm' as Edward Gibbs, a 'farm labourer on a farm of 22 acres employing 1 man and 2 boys', suggesting the farm was no larger than indicated by the tithe return but that its principal leaseholder (perhaps still Toller) lived elsewhere. The house (plot 97 on the 1841 map) was described in the accompanying apportionment as a 'cottage and garden' with a 'barn, yard etc' to the west (plot 99) and a further 'garden' between two linear ponds to the rear (98). The fields to the south were named as 'paddock with pond' to the west (100) and 'parlour field' to the east (101) – the latter confirming the structural evidence that the surviving 17<sup>th</sup> century eastern bay of the house was designed as a parlour. The length of the house suggests it still retained its 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier hall and service bays, but it had been sharply truncated by 1883 (figure 3). The barn was shown with its present outline but, in contrast to the house, had been extended by 1883 with the addition of the surviving single-storied shed to the south. A second shed was also added at right-angles to its eastern elevation and both this and its neighbour to the north were depicted with broken lines on the 1904 Ordnance Survey, suggested they formed open-sided shelter-sheds for the adjoining animal yards. These sheds were wholly or largely rebuilt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the outline of the barn with its central porch and southern shed remains unaltered today.

## Building Analysis

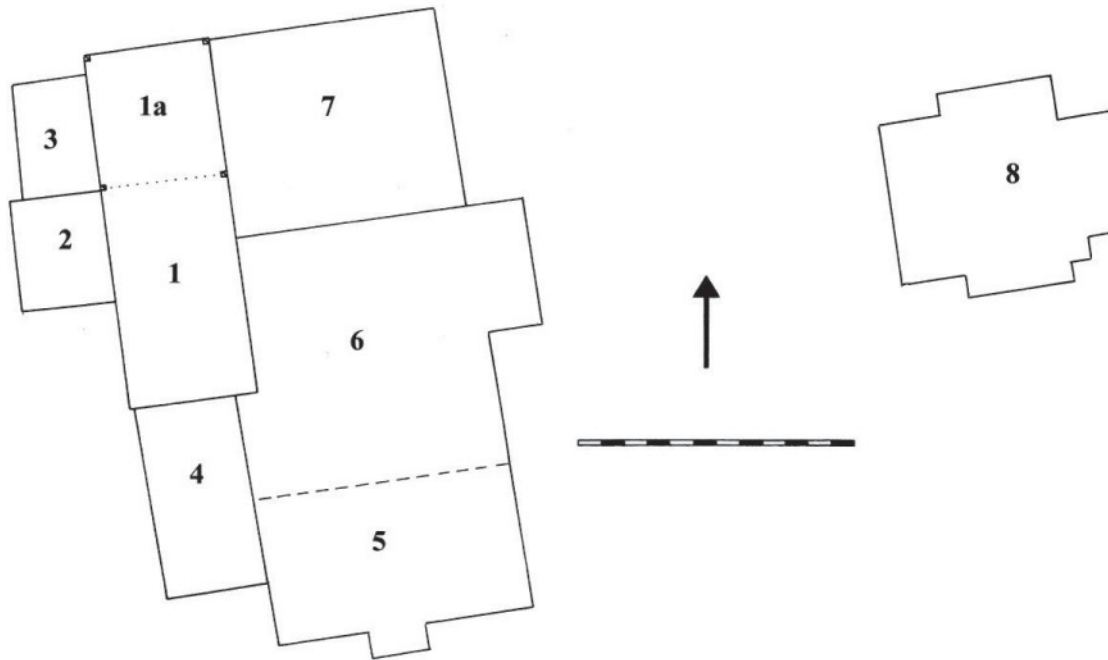


Figure 6

Schematic block plan of the farm buildings, numbering the key elements for ease of reference in the text and photographs. Scale in metres.

### Key

1. A timber-framed and weatherboarded threshing barn of four bays with a corrugated sheeting roof. The northern bay (1a) with exposed wall fabric of the early-17<sup>th</sup> century incorporating reverse-cranked internal braces. The fabric of the remaining three bays hidden by recent boarding, but photographs taken by the present owner indicate much of the frame has been replaced in modern softwood. The roof was formerly a steeply pitched clasped-purlin structure covered with straw thatch but was entirely rebuilt after reputedly suffering damage in the 'hurricane' of 1987. A threshing floor or hard-standing of stone flags in the penultimate northern bay is now hidden beneath boarding.
2. A timber-framed and weatherboarded rear porch with the remains of a threshing floor or hard-standing of stone flags and exposed studwork of the late-18<sup>th</sup> or early-19<sup>th</sup> century.
3. A late-20<sup>th</sup> century lean-to wood-shed built after 1987.
4. A mid-19<sup>th</sup> century single-storied shed of post-and-rail construction clad in vertical boarding and with a pantiled roof sealed with plaster. The date '1879' incised into a panel of roof plaster which is no longer *in situ*. An original gault-brick floor with an axial drain suggests this building was either a stable or a cow-shed but no relevant fixtures and fittings survive and much of the roof and wall fabric had been dismantled prior to inspection.
- 5-7. A series of three much-altered and partly rebuilt mid-20<sup>th</sup> century sheds originally forming covered cattle yards and possibly retaining parts of the southern shelter-shed shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1883 (figure 3 above). Of no historic significance and not discussed further below.

**8. The western end of the former farmhouse which retains a timber-framed parlour bay and chimney of the early-17<sup>th</sup> century to the east and probably faced south towards a yard flanked by the contemporary barn in the typical fashion of the period. Not discussed further below**

### **1-3. The Timber-Framed Barn**

The barn at Mollett's Farm is a timber-framed and weatherboarded structure of four bays on an approximately north-south axis at right-angles to the nearby farmhouse. Its northern gable abuts the ancient boundary between the parishes of Benhall and Farnham and may preserve below-ground evidence of the ditches and banks normally associated with such features.

The building extends to 15.25 m in length by 5.8 m in width overall (50 ft by 19 ft), and its walls rise to 3.2 m (10.5 ft) at their roof-plates on low brick plinths above an internal floor of 20<sup>th</sup> century boarding. The roof is a shallow-pitched softwood structure of the 1990s covered in corrugated sheeting which replaced a steeply pitched thatched predecessor with clasped-purlins that was reputedly damaged in the 'hurricane' of 1987 (as shown in illustrations 1 and 2 of Appendix 2 below).

The new roof was hidden above a new boarded ceiling at the time of inspection, and most of the wall fabric was concealed behind wall-boarding inserted as part of a recent conversion. It was therefore impossible to determine the age and layout of the original barn, but photographs supplied by the owner suggest the three southern bays had been largely rebuilt in modern softwood, re-using old roof-plates and tie-beams with 19<sup>th</sup> century bolted knee-braces. A threshing floor or hard-standing of stone flags is understood to lie beneath the boarded floor of the penultimate northern bay, which evidently contained the barn's principal entrance. Parts of this floor are still preserved in the rear porch (which was designed to extend the length of the threshing floor rather than an entrance) and the original full-height doors appear to have faced east towards a farmyard adjoining the house. Flag stones of this kind were often salvaged from the pavements of Ipswich and other local towns in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to serve as hard-standing for vehicles and may not have been used for threshing.

The northern gable also consists only of modern softwood (now hidden but visible in illustration 2) but the side walls of the northern bay (1a) remain intact and are exposed internally. The oak frame is typical of the early-17<sup>th</sup> century, with oak studs of heavy scantling and mortises for internally trenched reverse-cranked corner braces rising to the (missing) gable tie-beam and the roof-plates. A single brace remains *in situ* (to the east) but empty mortises and trenches reveal the positions of the others. A number of additional studs have been nailed between the original timbers (which are tenoned and pegged to the frame), and the southern end of the western elevation has been rebuilt with a diagonal primary brace (interrupting the studs) in the manner of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The fabric of the porch is identical to this reconstruction, suggesting a major refurbishment at this period. The unusual length of the northern bay, at 5.3 m (17.5 ft), suggests it may have been designed to accommodate the stables and hay lofts often found at the ends of 17<sup>th</sup> century barns in Suffolk, but this is not certain.

### **4. Southern Animal Shed**

The single-storied shed attached to the barn's southern gable extends to 8 m in length by 4.25 m in width overall and is an addition of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It had been stripped of its original pantiles and largely dismantled at the time of inspection, reputedly after sustaining storm damage in 1987, but retained a gault-brick floor with an axial drain to the west of its centre which suggests it was designed either as a cow-shed or stable. Given its large scale on



a small farm and the absence of any hay loft the former is more probable, but no other evidence survived. The walls were of post-and-rail construction with vertical boarding and the rafters were sealed with lime plaster on a bed of reed. An incised date of 1879 on a fragment of this plaster (no longer *in situ* but preserved elsewhere by the owner) is highly likely to date the building, which is shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1883 but not the tithe map of 1841. A number of boards bearing dates and initials in the 1880s were also salvaged from the walls.

## **Historic Significance**

The barn at Mollett's Farm retains at least one bay of early-17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framing to the north but has otherwise been extensively rebuilt and largely converted for semi-domestic purposes in recent years. Much of its historic character has accordingly been lost, and any precise analysis of its fabric and development is hampered by the concealment of its fabric by modern boarding. The single-storied shed adjoining its southern gable is a relatively late addition of *circa* 1879 and had also been largely demolished. The chief interest of the site lies in the relationship of the early-17<sup>th</sup> century barn to the surviving parlour bay of the contemporary farmhouse, which indicates the latter faced a southern courtyard flanked by the barn on the west in the typical manner of the period. Despite their early origins both the barn and farmhouse have probably been too heavily altered to meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing. The barn is also of interest as its northern gable adjoins the parish boundary between Farnham and Benhall and may preserve archaeological evidence of the banks and ditches often associated with features that in many instances can be shown to pre-date the Norman conquest.

## Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

### Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

#### Photograph no.

1. *Circa* 1974. Farm buildings from east from an old photograph in possession of current owner. Showing the original thatch of the barn (1) in rear to right and the pantiles of the southern shed (4) in rear to left.
2. *Circa* 1990s old photo. Barn (1) from north-west during repairs after 1987 storm damage showing remains of thatched clasped-purlin roof.
3. 2006 old photo. Interior of barn (1) from north showing softwood studwork of walls.
4. 2005 old photo. Interior of porch (2) from barn (1) to east showing softwood studs of barn to left.
5. 2006 old photo. Interior of barn (1) from north showing remains of stone-flag floor in threshing bay.
6. 2006 old photo. Interior of barn showing modern roof structure of northern bay (1a).
7. 2008 old photo. Detail of 1881 dated graffiti on board of southern shed (4).
8. General view of site from 20th century entrance track to north showing early-17th century parlour at left end of house & barn right.
9. Exterior of barn from north-east showing modern storage shed (7) to left and early-17th century bay (1a) to right.
10. Exterior from north-west showing modern lean-to shed (3) to left & porch (2) to right.
11. Exterior from west showing barn (1) to left and remains of southern shed (4) to right.
12. Exterior of partly dismantled southern shed (4) from south-west showing post-and-rail wall fabric.
13. Exterior of southern shed (4) from west showing fragmentary condition with gable of barn (1) to left.
14. Internal eastern elevation of southern shed (4) showing post-and-rail construction.
15. Interior of southern shed (4) from south showing axial drain in original gault brick floor.
16. Internal eastern elevation of southern shed (4) showing original render on reeds between rafters.
17. Detail of 1879 dated daub removed from roof of southern shed (4).

18. Detail of plank with incised date 1889 removed from southern shed (4).
19. Exterior from south showing barn (1) to left and 20th century yard sheds (5-7) to right.
20. Exterior from east showing 20th century yard sheds 5 to left and 6 to right.
21. Eastern exterior of central covered yard (6) showing southern yard shed (5) left and northern shed (7) to right.
22. Interior of central covered yard (6) from west showing open elevation of southern shed (5) to right.
23. Interior of southern yard shed (5) from central covered yard (6) to north.
24. Interior of central covered yard (6) from north-west showing junction with southern shed (5).
25. Interior of central covered yard (6) from east showing south-eastern corner of barn (1) to right & southern shed (4) to left.
26. Southern interior of porch (2) showing modern weatherboarding of barn (1) to left.
27. Interior of porch (2) from west showing modern softwood roof structure with door and weatherboarding to barn (1).
28. Northern interior of porch (2) showing original 19th century frame with primary bracing and re-used timber.
29. Interior of barn (1) from north showing recent wallboard and ceiling board concealing the timber frame.
30. Interior of barn (1) from south showing the recent boarding which conceals the fabric of all but the northern bay (1a).
31. The modern softwood roof structure of the barn (1) seen from the north above the recently inserted ceiling.
32. Western interior of the barn (1) showing the southern gable to the left and the door to the porch (2) right.
33. Eastern interior of the barn (1) showing the southern gable to the right and the entrance to the yard shed (7) left.
34. Eastern interior of the barn (1) showing the exposed early-17th century framing of the northern bay (1a) to the left.
35. Internal north-western corner of the barn (1a) showing mortises and trenches for two internal corner braces.
36. Eastern interior of the barn's northern bay (1a) showing intact early-17th century frame with trenched brace to left.

37. Internal north-eastern corner of the barn (1a) showing intact trenched brace with mortise for gable brace and inserted stud to left.
38. Western interior of the barn's northern bay (1a) showing later studs inserted into early-17th century frame with brace trench right

*(Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp.11-15)*

**Appendix 2 (pp. 11-15): Selected Printed Photographs**



**Illus. 1** *Circa 1974.* The farm buildings from the east showing the original thatched roof of the barn (1) in the rear to the right and the pantiled roof of the southern shed (4) to the left. From an old photograph in the possession of the current owner.



**Illus. 2** *Circa 1990s* old photograph. The exterior of the barn (1) from the north-west during storm repairs showing the remains of its original thatched clasped-purlin roof.



**Illus. 3 2006 old photograph. The interior of the barn (1) from the north showing the largely 20<sup>th</sup> century softwood timber of its walls and roof (all hidden by boarding at the time of inspection)**



**Illus. 4 General view of the site from 20th century entrance leading from the main A12 to the north showing the unlisted farmhouse with an early-17th century parlour to the left and a late-20<sup>th</sup> century cross-wing to the right. The barn is shown to the far right. The track which passes from left to right in front of the house marks the boundary between Farnham and Benhall parishes (the photograph taken from Benhall).**



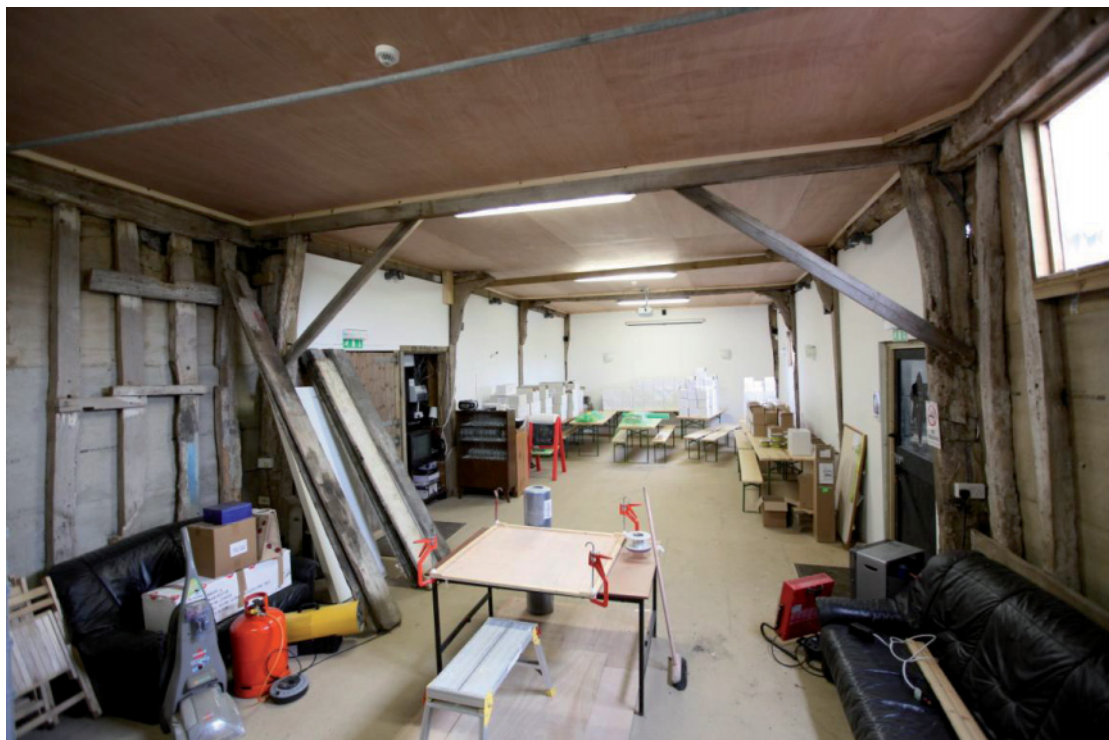
**Illus. 5** Exterior of the barn (1) from the north-west showing the modern lean-to woodshed (3) to the left & the 19<sup>th</sup> century porch (2) to the right.



**Illus. 6** The exterior of the partly dismantled southern shed (4) from the south-west showing its post-and-rail wall fabric with the barn (1) to the left and the corrugated iron southern yard shed (5) to the right.



**Illus. 7** The interior of the southern shed (4) from the south showing the axial drain in its original gault-brick floor.



**Illus. 8** The interior of the barn (1) from the north showing the recent wallboard and ceiling board which conceals most of the timber structure.





**Illus. 9** The eastern interior of the barn's northern bay (1a) showing the intact early-17th century frame with original reverse-cranked trenched brace to left. A number of additional studs have been inserted between the original timbers.



**Illus. 10** The western interior of the barn's northern bay (1a) showing empty trenches for a missing wall brace to the right and later framing with a diagonal primary brace in the style of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the left.