

**OAKHILL FARM, COPPICE ROW
THEYDON BOIS
ESSEX**

LEVEL II HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

December 2010

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**OAKHILL FARM, COPPICE ROW
THEYDON BOIS
ESSEX**

LEVEL II HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Client: Mr Rob Rai

FAU Project No.: 2342

NGR: TL 4396 9929

OASIS No.: 88151

Date of Fieldwork: November 2010

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A programme of low-level historic building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on a group of modern structures at Oakfield Farm prior to demolition and redevelopment of the site. The work was commissioned by Mr Rob Rai and carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the Historic Environment Management team of Essex County Council (ECC HEM), who also monitored the work on behalf of the LPA.

Copies of the report will be supplied to ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be deposited with Epping Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>.

A dairy farm was established in the late 19th century on the site of a 19th-century brick and tile works. The farm closed in the late 20th century and became a breeding centre for exotic pets and 'live foods', known as Peregrine Livefoods Ltd. Several new structures were built for this purpose to augment existing mid-late 20th-century farm buildings into the new enterprise. Apart from the farmhouse, no Victorian farm buildings or buildings associated with the earlier brickworks remain on the site.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description

Oakhill Farm is located on the western side of Theydon Bois on the eastern boundary with Epping Forest at TL 4396 9929 (fig. 1), close to the manorial site of Birch Hall (EHER 4041). Access is by a narrow tarmac track that leads southwards off Coppice Row past the farmhouse and down the slope of the hill to the former farm (plate 1).

The buildings included in the survey comprise the farmhouse and modern (post WW II) brick farm buildings and late 20th-century sheds and concrete block-built structures contemporary with the later business use, which stand around and encroach onto the yard (plates 1-3).

2.2 Planning background

An application to demolish the farmhouse and other buildings and construct a new house on the site was submitted to Epping Forest District Council in July 2010 (EPF/1345/10). In view of the impact of the proposed conversion works upon the existing buildings and their possible association with the 19th-century brickworks and farm, ECC HEM advised Epping Forest District Council that a condition for historic building recording should be made before development takes place, based on Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The requirements of the condition were specified in a brief issued by ECC HEM in October 2010. The subsequent works were carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by ECC HEM.

2.3 Objectives

The purpose of the historic building survey was, as stipulated in the brief (ECC HEM 2010), to produce a low-level RCHME level 2 record of any historic (pre-WW II) farm buildings or brickworkS structures (possibly reused as part of the farm) before demolition takes place. As part of the record, the survey was required to address plan form, materials and method of construction, dating and phasing, room function and internal spatial layout, fixtures and fittings and the context of the farm in the contemporary landscape. In the event only the farmhouse is likely to pre-date WW II.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

At the start of the survey, the holdings of the Essex Records Office, Chelmsford were investigated to understand the origins and development of the farm. Historic maps were used

during the survey to assist the identification of any historic structures, the results of which were added to a block plan of the site (fig. 1). As all but the farmhouse pre-dated WW II, basic external and internal architectural descriptions were made of the structures, which were categorised as follows in order of importance. Building numbers 1-4 are referenced to the block plan (fig. 1)

- The farmhouse (1)
- Post WW II farm buildings (2-4) adapted by Peregrine Livefoods
- Late 20th-century sheds and concrete structures built by Peregrine Livefoods

A series of digital photographs were taken externally and internally of the main buildings and general site shots were taken using 35mm black & white print film. A representative selection of photographs is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-16. The remainder can be found in the archive.

4.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

A brick ground is shown on a Birch Hall estate map from 1799 (Ryan 2010), which by 1870 had become a brick and tile works (fig. 2). According to Trades Directories, David Todd advertised as a brickmaker in Theydon Bois from 1878 to 1886 (Ryan 1999). A map from 1870 shows an L-shaped house, possibly built for the brickmaker, a long drying shed and four other structures occupying the site (fig. 2). The building beside the clay pit south-east of the farmhouse was probably an old kiln and some of the other buildings may represent more recent kilns, plus workshops, mould stores, etc. Part of the house may have survived as the former farmhouse, building 1

Oakhill Farm was established after 1886, an event resulting in the clearance of all the brick works buildings from the site and building afresh using bricks made on the site. The new complex, built as a dairy farm, comprised the farmhouse (possibly retained from the brickworks) and a yard to the south containing cattle ranges (shelter sheds, etc) and outbuildings on two sides, forming an an L-shaped plan form (fig. 3).

Additions were made to the western ranges in the early 20th century and the farmhouse was extended on a rectangular plan form, with another building constructed to the north-west (since demolished) (fig. 4). The same layout continued into the post-war period (fig. 5).

Judging from the map evidence and the materials used in their construction, the existing farm buildings (2-4) were constructed in the second half of the 20th century as part of the later phase of the farm. Buildings 2 and 3 contain reused bricks made at the site and presumably originally used in Victorian farm structures. They comprise a former garage/vehicle shed (2), building 3, whose function is unknown as it has been altered significantly, and dairy 4.

It is unknown when the farm closed, but Peregrine Livefoods was established in the mid 1990s by the two farming brothers and the farm buildings adapted to new use. Breeding sheds, warehousing and other buildings were added around the former farmyard. The business commercially bred exotic reptiles and their food (locusts, fire flies, etc) and relocated to new premises near Ongar in April 2010. Since then the site has been redundant

5.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Farmhouse 1

This appears to be the only historic building (pre-WW II) as defined in the brief (HEM 2010). Only a small element of historic fabric remains, the southern range, which is feasibly 19th century in date. A much larger extension, probably added in the inter-war period adjoins the north wall, more than doubling the size of the structure (fig. 1).

The farmhouse is four bays long and brick-built on two levels in Flemish bond beneath a pitched plain tile roof. The two long elevations are built in yellow stock bricks while the gables are built of red bricks. The south elevation (plate 4) is fenestrated with horned sash windows, indicating a date no earlier than the 1850s (Hall 2005). Much of the north elevation is hidden behind the 20th century extension (plate 5). The chimney stack is attached to the western gable and is now surrounded by a single-storey extension similar in character to the north extension.

The north extension is built of red brick beneath a long half-hipped roof. Its proportions and plain wooden windows (possibly replaced) suggest a modern date, though the tiled roof and dormer windows are typical of the inter-war chalet bungalow (plate 5), which, if it is the same building depicted on the early 20th-century map, suggests it was built in the 1920s (fig. 4)

Internally the house has been modernised, and therefore only a visual survey of the interior was undertaken.

5.2 Garage/vehicle shed 2

This structure stands on the eastern side of the former farmyard (plates 1 & 2) as part of the post-WW II phase of the dairy farm. Most recently it was used, amongst other things, for locust breeding but may have previously functioned as a vehicle shed/workshop during the latter life of the farm. The main structure is four bays long and built of yellow stock bricks, some of which are discoloured, perhaps being reused kiln wasters from the old brickworks. They are coursed in a crude Flemish bond and laid in cement, incorporating concrete blockwork at the bases of the rear (east) wall and some of the partition walls inside.

The front elevation (west) has areas of modern infilling reducing the size of the large garage doorway and smaller one at the southern end (plate 6). The remaining window is modern and likely to be original. The pitched asbestos roof is laid on a modern machine-sawn timber frame. A short red-brick chimney stands at the south gable (plate 6 & 16), though any internal fixtures no longer remain.

On the north side is a contemporary lean-to structure. Its double doors suggest this was used to house farm vehicles but has been modified for single entry in the post-farm period. The roof has been replaced in moulded steel sheeting.

The interiors have no fittings or fixtures of interest (plate 7).

5.3 Building 3

A second, post WW II structure stands on the west side of the farmyard, roughly where the farmyard shelter shed once stood (plate 8). This building was extensively modified when the farm was converted by extending the building to the north and adding a second floor. In addition, the warehouse was built to the west and a shed and canopy to the east (plate 8). The original eastern doorway has been narrowed from 1.2 to 0.9m.

Brickwork similar to building 2 can be seen on the east elevation beside the doorway and within the later shed (plate 9). The walls include a variety of hues and sizes derived from earlier brickworks structures, but are predominantly standard 9 inch yellow stock bricks. These walls are again built with cement but in this case appear to have been built directly onto an earlier lime/concrete floor perhaps contemporary with the farm, rather than with proper foundations. All windows are modern and there is no sign of earlier apertures.

The interior is whitewashed and the modern first floor partly supported on long oak planks and posts that have sockets for railings and are therefore likely to have been reused from the 19th-century shelter shed (plate 10). There are no other significant features.

5.4 Dairy 4

The dairy is situated at the southern end of the yard (plate 11), opposite the modern warehouse (plate 12). Unlike the other post-war structures, it is built from Fletton bricks and its appearance has not changed much in recent years. In fact it is the only building to retain elements of dairy farming, although none of these are of historic value.

Two large cow doors on the north elevation provide access into the dairy. These are flanked by plain windows, one of which has a later fan inserted into it. Some of the side windows have been blocked. The gable has been rebuilt with a modern steel roof (plate 11). Inside (plate 13) the concrete floors slope to a wide gully in the centre. All the stalls have been removed and a ceiling added.

Next door the lean-to roofline has also been altered and the southern corner rebuilt (plate 11). Inside the cattle area is screened by a concrete block wall onto a side passage (plate 14).

5.5 Modern structures

The vast majority of building relate to the establishment of Peregrine Livefoods in the mid 1990s. Typically they comprise large concrete block-built structures with steel roofs and small sheds, used for breeding purposes, packing and warehousing (fig. 1). The interior of the concrete-built warehouse is included as plate 15, while more general plates of the site and plate 16 show the character of the sheds, which are similar in form to the typical garden shed. None have any historic or architectural value.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Information from maps and observations undertaken during the survey show that the standing buildings at Oakhill Farm are mainly modern in date. The farmhouse, which may include part a house associated with the Victorian brick and tile works, is the oldest of the group and dates from the 1850s onwards. Part of it appears to have been replaced in the inter-war period and since then the interiors have been modernised.

The only buildings that remain from the dairy farm all post-date WW II and are therefore modern as defined by the ECC HEM brief. Indeed, it is not certain whether buildings 2 and 3 were built as farm buildings, though they clearly predate the more recent structures on the site. Given the high degree of alterations to these buildings in the 1990s, it is difficult to properly assess their function. It is interesting to note that these two stock brick structures potentially include bricks from the former brickworks, from which the late 19th century farmstead was probably built. After demolition, these bricks were cleaned-up and reused in the modern era. Recycling building materials has been happening on farms for centuries. Indeed, the timbers beneath the first floor in building 3 appear to originate from the late 19th-century farm.

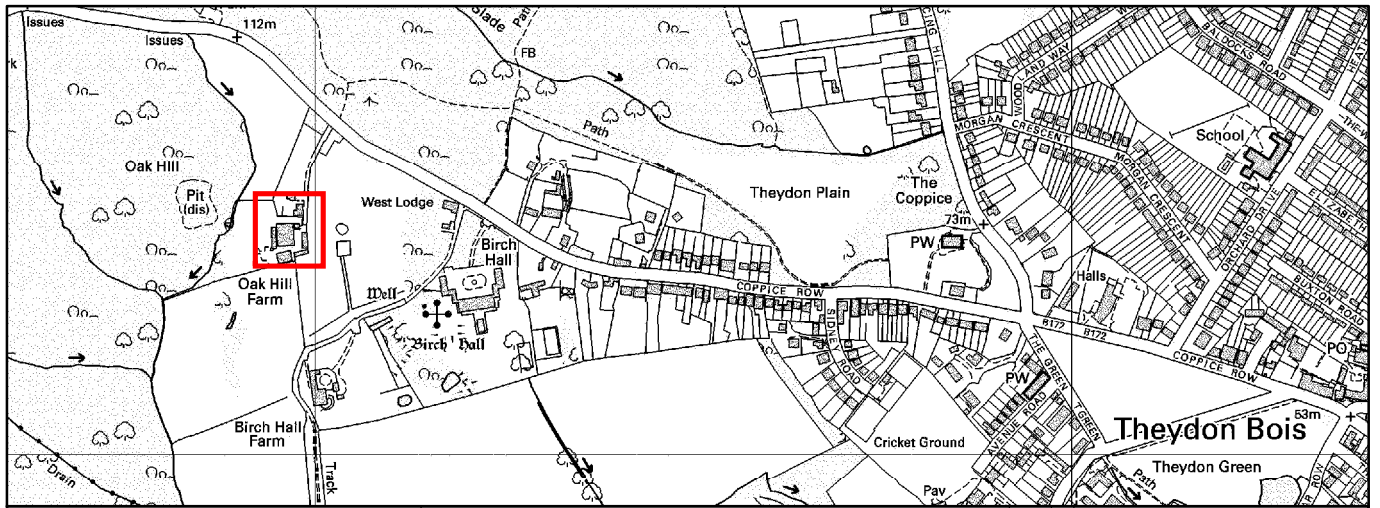
Dairy farms such as Oakhill Farm were established in the late 19th century during a period of agricultural depression following a series of bad harvest and a slump in the price of corn. During the last century the old farm buildings were replaced with new ones using the same materials. Therefore the modern farm structures, and those built for Peregrine Livefoods, have no historical or architectural value. Likewise, the farmhouse which appears partly Victorian in date is typical of its type and has low architectural significance, although historically its possible association with the earlier brickworks is of some interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr Rob Rai for commissioning this survey and to Colin Howson for facilitating the fieldwork. Fieldwork, recording and photography were undertaken by the author. Illustrations were prepared by the author and produced by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Mark Atkinson and monitored by Adam Garwood of ECC HEM, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

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Fig.1. Location and block plan

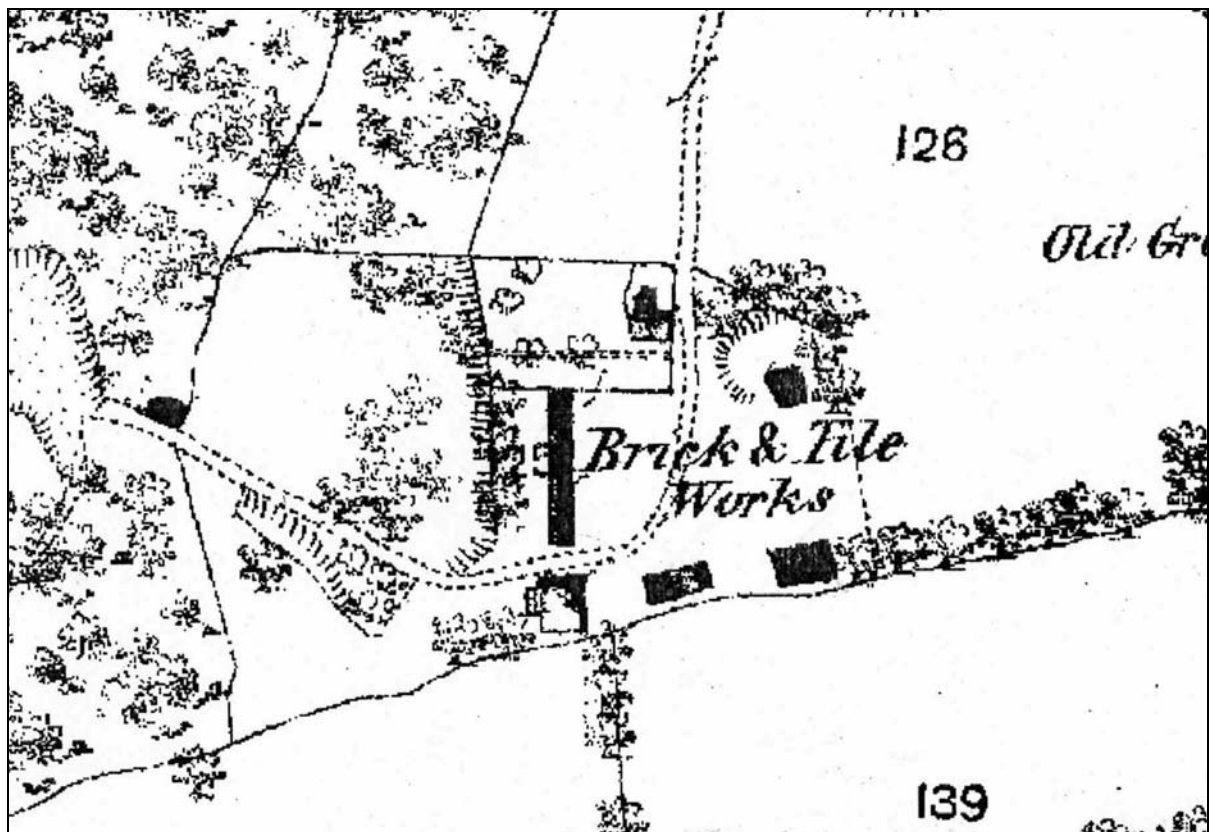


Fig. 2 Brick and tile works (first edition Ordnance Survey map c.1874)

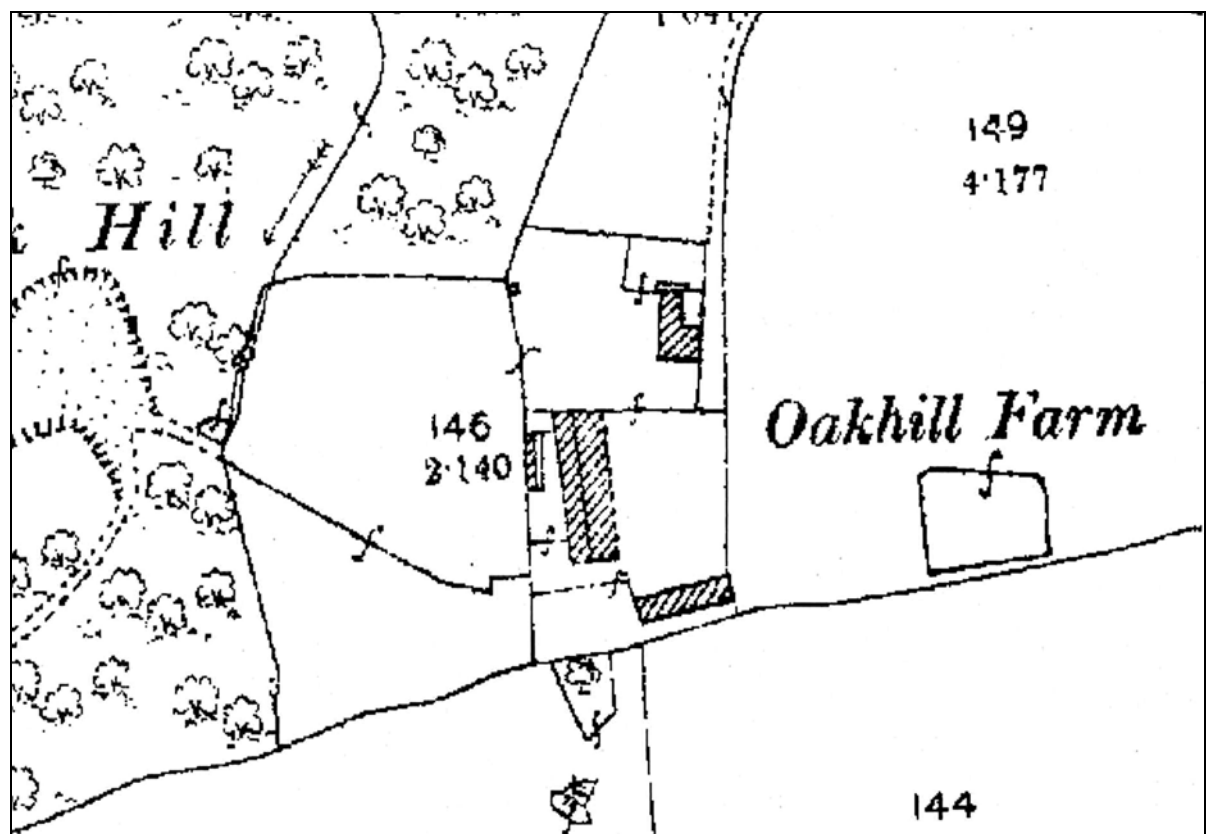


Fig. 3 Early map of Oakhill Farm (second edition Ordnance Survey map c.1896)

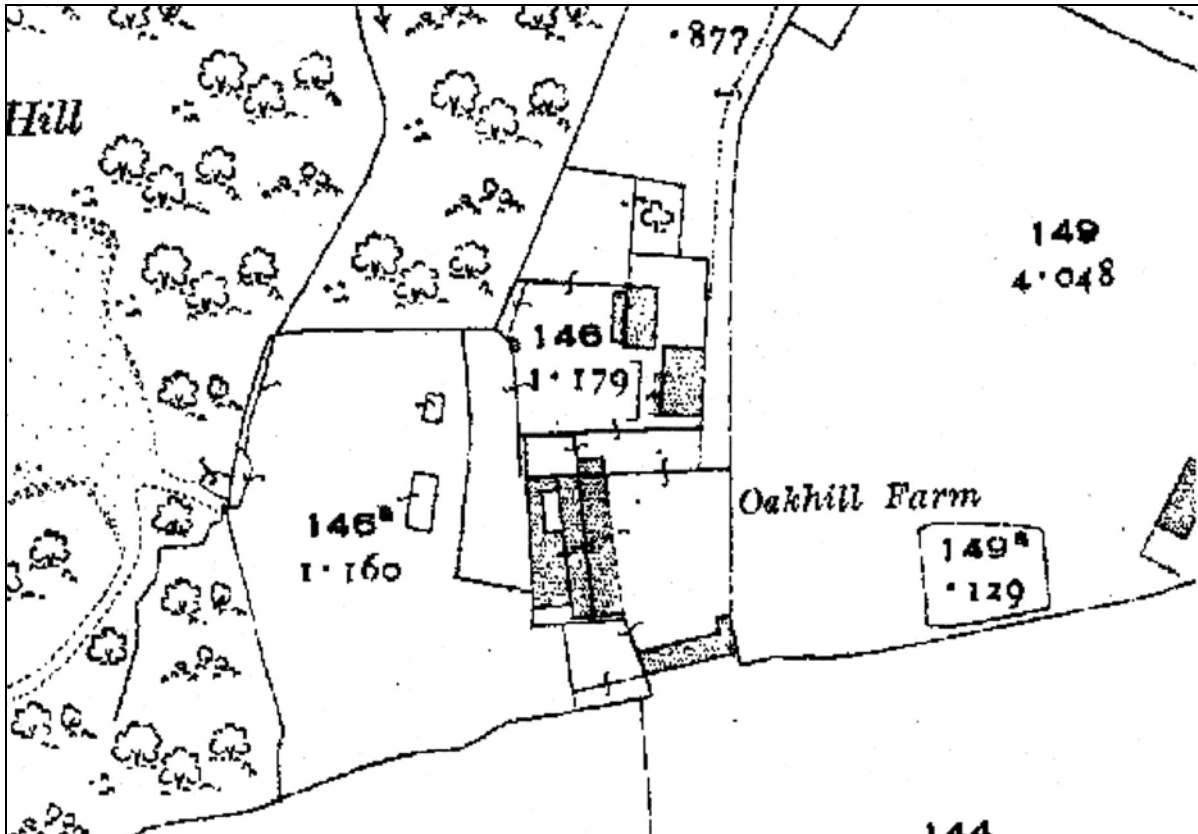


Fig. 4 Oakhill Farm in the early 20th century (New edition OS map, 1914-24)

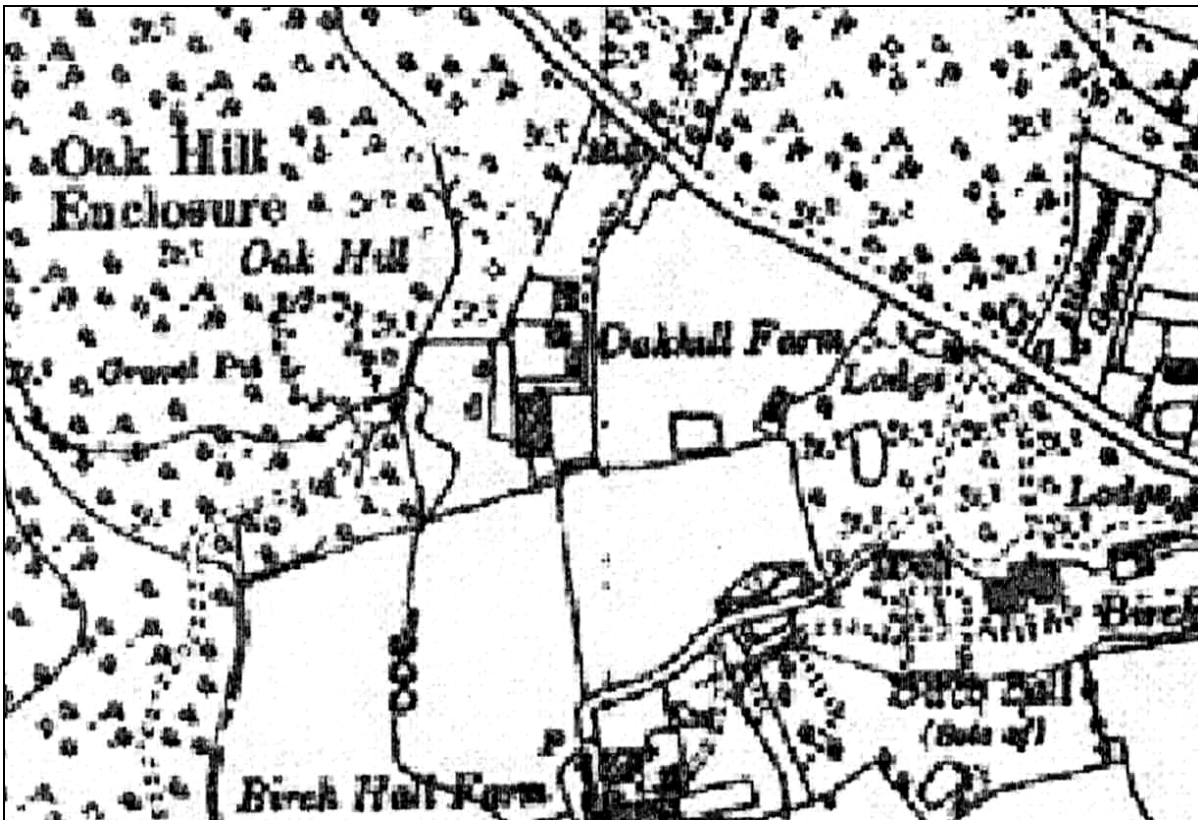


Fig. 5 Post-war map of Oakhill Farm (revised Ordnance Survey map c.1938-53)



Plate 1 Entrance to farmyard viewed to south



Plate 2 Farmyard viewed to south



Plate 3 Farmhouse and farmyard viewed to north



Plate 4 Farmhouse 1 viewed to north



Plate 5 Farmhouse viewed to east



Plate 6 Building 2 viewed to east



Plate 7 Interior of building 2



Plate 8 Building 3 and modern structures viewed to west



Plate 9 Detail of brickwork of building 3



Plate 10 Interior of building 3 viewed to north



Plate 11 Dairy building 4 viewed to east



Plate 12 Dairy and modern structures viewed to east



Plate 13 Interior of dairy viewed to north-east



Plate 14 Interior of dairy lean-to viewed to east



Plate 15 Interior of modern warehouse viewed to north



Plate 16 Typical modern shed, attached to building 2

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

Site name: Oakhill Farm, Coppice Row, Theydon Bois, Essex

Project no.: 22342

Index to the Archive:

Document wallet containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 HEM design brief
- 1.2 FAU written scheme of investigation
- 1.3 Client/archive report
- 1.4 Unbound version of report
- 1.5 CD containing digital photographs & copy of report, pdf-formatted

2. Site Archive

- 2.1 Photographic record (digital prints & monochrome 35mm prints & negatives)
- 2.2 Photographic registers
- 2.3 Survey notes

Appendix 2: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Oakhill Farm, Coppice Row, Theydon Bois, Essex	
Parish: Theydon Bois	District: Epping
NGR: TL 4396 9929	OASIS Record No.: 88151
Type of Work: Building recording	Site Director/Team: Andrew Letch (ECC FAU)
Dates of Fieldwork: November 2010	Size of Area Investigated: N/A
Curating Museum: Epping	Funding Source: Mr Rob Rai
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related HER Nos. None
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: Victorian & late 20th century	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: A programme of level II historic building recording was undertaken at Oakhill Farm prior to demolition and residential development of the site. The site was a brick and tile works in 1870 before becoming a late 19th century dairy farm. In the mid 1990s a business supplying exotic pets and feeds was established on the site. The survey found that most of the existing buildings relate to later business use of the site. Two stock brick-built structures and a Fletton-brick dairy building appear to relate to later use (post WW II) of the farm, the former probably built from bricks made on the site. These buildings were subsequently incorporated and adapted by Peregrine Livefoods. Based on the survey and map research, the farmhouse appears to date from the mid-19th century onwards and may have been built as part of the brickworks. The interior has been modernised and a large extension built on its north side, probably in the 1920s. None of the buildings are historically or architecturally important although it is interesting to note the presence of locally-made stock brick in two of the later structures, which show that these were built from materials salvaged from demolished farm buildings.	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: Andrew Letch	Date of Summary: 1st December 2010