

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In March 2014 Archaeology South-East (a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, University College London) carried out the historic building recording of a timber-framed structure at Woolshots Farm, Ramsden Bellhouse (Fig. 1). The building is curtilage Listed with the Grade II-Listed Woolshots Farmhouse.
- 1.2 The building has been rendered unsafe as a result of storm damage and an application has been made for demolition. Mindful of the potential historic significance of the structure the Conservation Officer at Basildon District Council has recommended that an historic building record of the structure be made to English Heritage level III standard prior to demolition. The recording work has been undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (method statement) prepared by Archaeology South-East (ASE) on behalf of Crawford Surveying Services.

2.0 SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The recording comprised the survey of the building to Level III standard, as defined by English Heritage (2006) and recommended by the Conservation Officer.
- 2.2 A Level-3 survey is intended to provide a detailed descriptive and analytical record of a structure or group of structures. In addition, readily accessible cartographic and documentary resources are drawn upon to provide a broader understanding of the building and its function within the historic development of the site.
- 2.3 A full drawn and photographic record is included as part of a level 3 survey to show the building in its existing form. The drawn record comprises measured plans, elevations and sections, which were drawn as part of the survey, updated digitally off-site and represented as figures in this report. Photographs were taken using digital photography. The photographic survey included general external and internal shots and areas of any surviving architectural detail and historic fixtures, fittings and machinery, where appropriate. A photo location plan is included as Appendix 2.
- 2.4 The more dangerous northern bays had been removed prior to the survey taking place. Therefore no elevation was drawn of this end or of the east side of the building, which was overgrown and obscured by the remains of lean-to sheds. The west and south elevations were safe and easily accessible and were drawn as part of the survey. All internal parts of the existing building were surveyed and photographed and a section drawn of the best-surviving roof truss.
- 2.5 Cartographic and documentary material was studied at the Essex Records Office to understand the origins of the structure and the development of the farm in general. It was found that the building was probably built as a stable block between the middle and the third quarter of the 19th century, and therefore post-dates the farmhouse.

3.0 SITE LOCATION AND SETTING

- 3.1 Woolshots Farm is located on the south side of Ramsden Bellhouse at the T-junction between Church Road and the A129 Wickford to Crays Hill road (TQ 7234 9289; Fig. 1). The stable building stands on the east side of a largely modern farm complex that probably has its origins in the 18th century with the Grade II Listed Georgian red brick

farmhouse, which stands facing the road to the south. The surrounding landscape is largely agrarian.

- 3.2 The structure forms a long linear range dating to a 19th century improvement and rebuilding phase. It is timber-framed and single-storeyed and documentary evidence suggests it was used for stabling working and other horses and other related uses. Its most recent function has been primarily a place to store straw bales, plus a workshop and garage.
- 3.3 Most of the surrounding farm buildings are large modern pre-fabricated structures, but earlier farm elements remain to the south-east and south-west (Fig. 1), which are believed to be contemporary with the stables.

4.0 PLANNING BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The recording works were recommended by the Conservation Officer at Basildon DC and required in view of the historic integrity of the structure. The building is not listed in its own right but is curtilage-listed with the Georgian farmhouse (Grade II List entry number: 112364). The study of historic East Anglian farmsteads is a research objective outlined in the East Anglian Research Framework (Medleycott 2011).

5.0 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The farm was probably established in the 18th century when the farmhouse was built (<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk>). Chapman and Andre's map of 1777 depicts the farm as 'Wool Shot' and comprises perhaps six scattered structures including the farmhouse (Fig. 2).
- 5.2 In 1831 the farm was leased for 14 years by John Greenwood, farmer at Ramsden Bellhouse, and Thomas Greenwood of Springfield, a banker, to William Bulwer of Upminster and his son, Joslin. The tenancy included the *messuage* (farmhouse), 195 acres of land and four cottages at an annual rent of £215 (T/P 588/2).
- 5.3 Mid-19th century mapping (Fig. 3, 1839) shows the 18th century farm replaced by a much larger 'improved' farmstead adopting the common courtyard form of cattle ranges around a south-facing yard. The accompanying tithe award (D/CT 281A) mentions a largely arable farm with a holding of just over 191 acres. The farm is owned by the Greenwoods and now tenanted solely by Joslin Bulwer.
- 5.4 So-called 'cropping books', which detail the types of crops planted in given years, with comments, may be found at the Essex Records Office for the years 1845-53. One of these contains a well-executed sketch elevation of the farmhouse and garden (D/Du 1183). In 1855 the farm was sold at action with 191 acres of land alongside the nearby White Bridge Farm. At the time the farm was occupied by George Jackson who had a tenancy up to Michelmass 1858 (SALE /B3955).
- 5.5 Between 1839 and 1877 the farm was rebuilt again, this time on an E-shaped plan, with a barn to the west, cattle ranges between three east-facing yards and the stable block, which was subject to the survey (Fig. 4, 1877). This period is known as the 'Golden Age of Agriculture' when a boom in agriculture resulted in the remodelling of many older farms. Only the stable block, the southern L-shaped range of the 'E' block

- and a narrow structure on the south side of the paddock survive from this phase (Fig. 1).
- 5.6 The same E-plan layout is shown with greater clarity on late 19th century mapping (Fig. 5, 1896).
- 5.7 By the early 20th century the Woolshots Farm was part of the Ramsden Park estate. Upon the death of the owner, Sir J. H. Johnson in 1910, the farm and the rest of the estate, totalling 853 acres, was sold at auction. At this time the holding had increased from 191 to 259 acres. Amongst the buildings offered in the catalogue were a large timber barn, cattle and cart sheds, a cart horse stable for six, harness room and loft, two loose boxes, chaff house, nag stable, cart shed, coach house and fowl houses (SALE/B3526). The two stables, harness room, chaff house and coach house probably relate to the building in the survey.
- 5.8 Further additions were added after the sale of the farm, mainly in the form of increasingly covered cattle yards (Fig. 6, 1924). The farm was sold again in 1945, the holding having increased to 305 acres. It may be at this time that the farm was bought by the present owner's grandfather (Mr Keeling pers. comm.). The sale catalogue (D10cf B290) describes a 'corrugated iron range' (which this is) comprising 'an enclosed garage for 2 cars, an open garage, 3 loose boxes, a chaff place and stabling for 4 horses'. Other buildings described in the 1910 sale catalogue (barn, cow shed, calf pen and cart sheds) are also described.
- 5.9 In the modern period (post-1960s, map not shown) the barn and 19th century ranges were replaced with larger prefabricated multi-purpose structures, which still dominate the farm today. The only buildings to remain from the earlier farm phase appear to be the stable block, part of the southern cattle shed and a small building on the south side of the paddock (Fig. 1).

6.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

6.1 General description

- 6.1.1 The stable block is built on a roughly north-south alignment on the east side of the farmyard complex. It is a roughly-constructed building built on a primary-braced timber-frame with 6-inch feather-board sides and a modern corrugated iron roof (see cover plate). The surviving interior is divided into five separate areas that all have secondary modern functions such as a garage, workshop and bale stores. Lean-to structures are located on the eastern side, close to the paddock fence-line, and are a mixture of contemporary structures and 20th century additions.
- 6.1.2 The current building has dimensions of 22.20m by 5.7m but originally extended for another 9m, to 31.20m in total, virtually up to the modern prefabricated concrete/brick structure shown on the cover of this report. Storm damage rendered the northern end of the stables unsafe, which led to its removal prior to the survey being carried out. As a result, the surviving north end is in poor condition and the partition wall that now marks the end of the building and the roof above it, are failing (Plate 1).
- 6.1.3 Internally it would appear that much of the original layout survives. Internal areas are divided by timber-framed partitions clad in 7-9 inch horizontal boarding, often found in stable buildings and structures used for animal husbandry. Stable areas retain cast iron tethering rings and indicate where the horses stood. In the following descriptions,

historic function, wherever possible, is given alongside more recent use although inevitably, being utilitarian buildings, function can change over time.

Construction

- 6.1.4 Wall-framing throughout is basic with quite waney studs and braces of varying widths alongside crudely-finished posts and wall plates, some with traces of bark, typical of a late date when good timber was scarce. All are axe-converted, but later additions and changes have been made in machine-sawn timbers that were more common in the latter part of the 19th and throughout the 20th century.
- 6.1.5 Main framing is built from crudely-pegged oak trusses and wall plates. No sill beams remain, presumably having rotted away. Unusually they have not been replaced by brick plinths, but part of the southern end stands on a concrete base. Wall plates are generally quite short, spanning between one and two bays, though they are invariably difficult to see or else replaced by later timbers. In all cases they are joined by crude face-halved and bladed scarf joints, a post-medieval joinery form dating from the early 17th century in Essex (Hewett 1980) and widely used in the 18th- and early 19th centuries. Later joints, in replaced timbers, are lapped over and nailed rather than pegged. Tie beams are of reasonable size at around 170mm² and slightly waney, again suggesting a later date. They are unbraced, which over the span of the building has caused some sagging. Bay posts and wall plates are of similar size and some are reused. All posts have plain heads.
- 6.1.6 Studs vary in width but are commonly around 100 x 50mm or smaller. They adopt a crude later form whereby the studs are connected to the wall plate by small diagonal 'tabs' that are nailed rather than pegged to the frame. The wall bracing is also nailed. Some timbers are reused, probably from the earlier farm structures on the site.

Roof

- 6.1.7 The original roof frame is in standard pegged collar purlin form with additional nailed collars to some of the intermediate bays to prevent the roof from spreading. Additional support on the trusses is provided by nailed queen struts attached to the base of the purlins by birds-mouth joints. At the apex the rafters are nailed to a ridge plate, which is a later form.

6.2 External description (Plates 1-6)

West elevation (Fig. 7)

- 6.2.1 The west elevation faces onto the concrete hardstanding of the modern farmyard (Fig. 7 & Plate 2). Much of it is in a poor state, with missing and damaged doors, areas of missing boarding and a collapsed roof at the north end. The two existing bays at this end are open-sided, though this may not have been originally the case since the wall plate above is a later replacement. The walls of bays 3 and 4, which encompass a former stable area (Room 3), have been rebuilt in machine-sawn primary-braced timbers. The doorway exists for a half-heck stable door, which has been removed, leaving redundant T-hinges in its wake.
- 6.2.2 In the centre of the elevation stands a pair of ledged, braced and battened cart doors, which lead into the current workshop area (Room 4). The doors are held on heavy cast iron strap hinges with spear terminals and are wide enough for bringing in farm vehicles and machinery (Plate 3). Slightly to the left of the doors appears to be a second doorway that has been blocked-in (Figs. 7 & 8) that formed a second entry point into the workshop. The wall to the right of this is clad in feather-board offcuts, perhaps as an economy measure during construction. Any original brick plinth or wall

plate here was removed when the concrete floor was laid inside, which is shown at the bottom of the elevation (Fig. 7).

South elevation (Fig. 8)

- 6.2.3 The south elevation (Plate 3) faces the house and contains the garage mentioned in the 1910 and 1945 sale catalogues. The main feature is the large doorway, separated by a single 15mm² post, upon which iron pintel hinges are fixed. This is an unusual arrangement, since normally the doors would be fitted to the two corner posts. Of the two doors only that on the right remains. It is a ledged and battened form with a small wicket door (Fig. 8) that has been sealed-up from the inside. Around the doorway, original boarding on the sides has been largely replaced with modern plywood but the boarding above is largely intact, though failing in places. The small outshot that stands to the east appears to be contemporary, according to map evidence, and is clad in vertical 6-inch boarding with a single pitch corrugated iron roof (Plate 4). Its last use was to store straw bales but an earlier function was probably as a dog kennel.

East elevation

- 6.2.4 The second long elevation was difficult to record because of collapsed outshot walls and vegetation, made worse by its proximity to the paddock fence. Because of this no elevation was drawn of this side, but a photographic record was made.
- 6.2.5 There are four small outshots on this side. The first, already described at the southern end, is the probable kennel. Following on from this is a later open-sided log store between the kennel and workshop extension, which has virtually collapsed (Fig. 9 & Plate 4). The workshop extension is a later addition and is lit by a nine-pane fixed window. A single door stands on the north side of the workshop outshot whose narrow panels give it a distinct 1930s character. Beside this is a former window aperture the same size as the fixed nine-pane window that lights the stable room slightly further to the north (Plate 5).
- 6.2.6 The wall of the long 19th century outshot at the north end (Fig. 9 & Plate 5) had collapsed outwards and could not be properly recorded. The rest of it was removed with the main building at this end and its full extent is depicted on Figure 1. External boarding has also failed on the main wall behind it.

North elevation

- 6.2.7 The external north wall was removed with the north end of the structure before the survey took place. Instead this is represented by an internal primary-braced stud wall representing one side of room 1 (see section 6.3.2 and Plates 1 & 6).

6.3 Internal description (Fig. 7; Plates 6-18)

- 6.3.1 The interior of the surviving building is divided into five bays, commonly around 4m wide but with some variations, the third bay being 5.7m wide and the fourth bay being only 2.6m (Fig. 9). There are six distinct areas, each area referred to below as a room, for convenience, and numbered accordingly. The greater part of the two end rooms had been removed, but their layout is shown in Figure 1 based on the Ordnance Survey map. The rooms largely retain their original layout and the interiors have been left as they were last used. They therefore tend to contain later fixtures and fittings, reflecting later usage, whilst still retaining some historic character. Currently rooms 1-4 are used to store straw bales and rooms 5 and 6 function as a workshop and garage respectively. As far as possible their original room function has been suggested, based on the 1910 catalogue and any surviving internal historic evidence.

Room 1

- 6.3.2 All that remains of Room 1 is the south-east corner and part of the roof (Plate 6). The floor appears to be laid to concrete and latterly used for bale storage. Corrugated iron sheeting runs around the existing walls which comprise a small length of the east wall and a primary-braced internal stud wall that is boarded on the other side. In their dilapidated state, no longer locked into the frame, the wall timbers provide important information on the construction of the building, which is a fairly crude later form whereby the studs are connected to the wall plate by small diagonal ‘tabs’ that are nailed to the frame (Plate 7). Close inspection was not possible due to the unsafe nature of the collapsing roof above. A small modern hay feeder was observed in the south-east corner, suggesting this may have been used as loose box during the 20th century, which may reflect earlier use.

Room 2: Former small stable or loose box, later cart shed?

- 6.3.3 The presence of an iron tethering ring on the middle post of the east wall suggests that this area was either used as a stable or loose box in the historic period. However, its open frontage to the west suggests it may have become the cart shed mentioned in the early 20th century sale catalogue. Prior to the storm it was used for bale storage.
- 6.3.4 The room is divided from rooms 1 and 3 by timber partitions. Seen from this side, the cladding of the partition wall against room 1 to the north comprises an assortment of 1-inch thick boards of varying widths and lengths nailed to the frame. Above the level of the wall plate the boards are more uniform in width but more irregular in shape and there are gaps in between, enabling good ventilation (Plate 8). The opposing wall has crude vertical boarding in the lower part that is nailed to rails on the other side. The upper part is clad in replaced modern plywood boarding up to the wall plate and is afterwards open along the top. There is evidence to show that the partition originally continued the full width of the room. Above it is a largely intact roof truss that shows the typical pegged collar purlin form and is included as Figure 10 and Plate 9. The west post and one of the queen struts are missing. The east wall retains some boarding around the base but otherwise comprises exposed studwork. The floor is of packed earth.

Room 3: Former loose box

- 6.3.5 From its narrow size and general appearance, it would appear that Room 3 was originally one of the two loose boxes mentioned in the 1910 sale catalogue. Loose boxes were generally used for calving or penning sick animals to keep them away from the main group. One of the main reasons for suggesting this function are the remains of lath and daub-plastering on two of the three existing walls, up to the wall plates (Plate 10), that would provide a degree of insulation warmth and, if lime-wash was applied over the top, a level of hygiene. One of several pegged edge-halved and bladed scarf joints noted in the structure was recorded on the eastern wall plate here (Plate 11).

Room 4: Former stable

- 6.3.6 The boarded interior and tethering rings on the walls indicate that this was one of two stables in this range, as recorded in the 1910 catalogue. The floor is laid to concrete and partially strewn with straw due to its later use for bale storage. A post has been inserted underneath to support the tie beam, which is sagging (Plate 12).
- 6.3.7 The side walls are boarded up to 1.4m except for the north wall, which is fully-boarded up to the wall plate and then feather-boarded up to the apex of the roof. This upper part may be a later addition. Three iron tethering rings are located on the north

wall and the fact that there are no signs of partitions signifies the horses were kept loose rather than in separate stalls. No such signs remain on the south wall, where the boards have been removed, but it is assumed there were once tethering rings on this side too. The door at this end (Fig. 9) is a later insertion; an unusual form of door with two long vertical panels, probably dating to the inter-war period. The nine-pane window on the east wall is probably contemporary with it.

Room 5: Workshop (former stable)

6.3.8 This part of the stable range has been used as a workshop for a long time and contains workbenches, shelving and old tools used to service and repair farm vehicles and machinery (Plate 13). A lean-to roofed extension stands on the east side which was presumably constructed to enlarge the working area.

6.3.9 The north wall is boarded in the same manner as Room 4 but some boards towards the top are feather-boarded rather than flat, again utilising existing resources on the farm. At least one tethering ring survives on this wall, just to the left of the adjoining door to Room 4 (Fig. 9). The west wall is also boarded, apart from around the former yard-side door, which has been blocked with machine-sawn studwork. The door on the east wall is probably contemporary with it and its style of a large top panel, high rail and three long vertical panels beneath is typical of the 1930s. The workshop extension on this side (Plate 14) dates from the first half of the 20th century and has a basic machine-sawn frame and a crude window comprised of small panes of glass inserted into wooden slots on the outside. The south wall is boarded like the north and west walls.

Room 6: Garage (former coach house)

6.3.10 The garage faces the rear of the farmhouse. With reference to the two historic sale catalogues, in 1910 this would have been the coach house and in 1945 the 'enclosed garage for two cars', reflecting the change in modes of transport during this period. It is no longer used for vehicles and is presently used for storage purposes.

6.3.11 The north wall is boarded in the same manner as Room 2, with a fairly random selection of horizontal boards of similar width but varying lengths up to the tie beam (Plate 15), all of which are nailed to the frame. Crude timber-framing occupies the west wall, some of which is missing along with some of the external cladding. The east wall comprises rails with vertical boards nailed to the outside, like the partition wall between rooms 2 and 3. A small wooden harness rack remains in the southern half (Fig. 9 & Plate 16), which is the only historic fitting to remain. The south wall contains one of two garage doors that appear to be a later insertion, since their frame is too large for the aperture (Plate 16). The surviving door on the east side is ledged and battened in form but further ledges have been added to reinforce the door and seal a small wicket door fitted within (Fig. 9). The timber lintel over the doorway is scribed with Baltic timber marks (Plate 17). Imported Baltic timber became increasingly used in utilitarian buildings during the course of the 19th century.

6.3.12 The roof has been rebuilt in machine-sawn timbers, probably when it was clad in corrugated iron. The original roof covering is unknown. By comparison, the contemporary shelter shed to the south-west has a pan-tile roof (Plate 18).

7.0 DISCUSSION

7.1 Historic research and evidence compiled during the building survey supports the already-held notion that the storm-damaged structure on the east side of Woolshots

Farm is a former stable block. Invariably these buildings were used for keeping the horses, tending them and storing their feedstuff. Internal evidence suggests open areas used for stabling horses (without stalls), loose boxes, a cart shed and a coach house. It is likely that both working and domestic horses were kept here, the domestic horses more likely to have been stabled closer to the coach house. Later changes to the interiors due to the degree of damage to the structure, historic change of use and loss of earlier fixtures and fittings, mean there is some ambiguity and the loss of the two end parts means the nature of these cannot be assessed. The most reliable evidence for original function is the 1910 sale catalogue, a fortunate find, which also records a harness room and loft, and a chaff house, neither of which could be identified in the survey.

- 7.2 In its construction, the stable utilised mainly hand-sawn timbers that vary considerably in size and quality. Some are clearly reused from earlier post-medieval buildings and others appear to have been taken from the hedgerows. It is therefore possible they contain structural elements from the original 18th century farm buildings and early 19th century remodelling phase. The use of primary-bracing and nailed studwork are post-medieval forms of building construction, relating to the poor supply of good wood in the 18th and first half of the 19th century. Here the build quality is quite poor, in particular, the un-braced tie beams that have been propped up to prevent them from sagging and the strengthening of the roof frame with intermediate collars. Also worth mentioning is the crude quality of the beams and scarf joints holding them together and the fact that the studwork is nailed by tabs over the faces of the beams rather than tenoned to the frame. This gives the impression that the building was 'knocked together' using the available materials, which is not unusual with smaller farm buildings, but seldom seen in stables or other buildings used to contain large animals. As this building shows, sometimes older vernacular traditions continue on farms and it is interesting to note the quality of this building compared with the surviving 19th century shelter shed to the south-west, which is well-built from machine-sawn timber.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The stable block at Woolshots Farm is one the few buildings to survive from the second phase of farm improvement, during the second half of the 19th century. The intensive layout of shelter sheds and yards depicted on historic maps suggests a concerted focus on cattle rearing for dairy and beef, and it was not unusual for farms to be remodelled or rebuilt at this time, when mixed farming was seen as an ideal, based on the 'crop cycle', a situation that concentrated on the mutually beneficial relationship between crops and livestock. Thanks to good harvests and high prices, improvements in agriculture and expanding markets and transport networks, the period from 1840 to 1870 was a boom time for agriculture, providing wealth and an impetus for many farming estates to be established or improved.
- 8.2 This building is not a significant building in architectural terms. Its interest lies more in its vernacular construction at a time when the layout and form of farm buildings was becoming more standardised, its historic value within the development of the farm over a period of more than 200 years and its group value with the Georgian farmhouse and the two other surviving Victorian farm buildings. Unfortunately its present condition precludes repair to a satisfactory level.

9.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

- 9.1 The site archive will be deposited with Southend Museum and will comprise a hard copy of the full report, a pdf version of the report on CD, the full photographic record with registers, hard copies of the drawn record and field notes.

10.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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