

Summers Hall East Barn, at Summers Hall Farm, Blackmore End, Braintree, Essex.

Introduction.

This survey was requested by the HEM team at Essex County Council following the submission of a Planning Application, 10/00147/FUL, to Braintree District Council for the conversion of the barn to residential. The survey has been prepared to include the previous work carried out to study and analyse the construction of the barn together with the addition of the attached non-listed buildings that mainly form part of the application. The report has been given a site designation by the HEM Team of 'WFSH 10'.

Summers Hall Farm lies in open countryside to the south of the historic hamlet of Blackmore End and at NGR TL 7410 3030. The farmstead includes two C15 listed buildings, the farmhouse and the barn 20m NE of the farmhouse, and a number of later C18 and C19 farm buildings arranged in a typical planned farm layout.

The grade II listed barn 20m NE of the farmhouse (EHER 28256) has already been the subject of a detailed frame survey which identified that it originated in the C15 but was completely rebuilt in the C17, this work is incorporated into this report.

Minimal information has been found in the Essex Record Office on the history of Summers Hall. Morant records it as coming from Somners, or Semenours. The earliest reference that he gives is in 1578 when Thomas Wyseman of Wimbish Esq; conveyed it to John Streyte, whose grandson Nath. Straight passed it, 27th August 1697 to Mr. Dennett. In Reaney's Place Names in Essex the name Henry le Sumenur alias le Somenour is noted from 1264.

Maps & Farming.

Little detail is shown on the Chapman & André map of Essex from 1777 other than the suggestion that there is a barn in existence to the north and east of the house. The Tithe Award for Wethersfield Parish from 1841 has considerable detail in the map of the area around Summers Hall. It suggests that much of the development as seen today had taken place other than the return range of buildings to the west of

the east barn and other buildings now lost. The ownership of Summers at that time was recorded as a J G Sparrow Esq. and the farm was occupied by Joseph Cornell. As with most landowners Sparrow retained the woodland on Summers for himself. The acreage rented by Joseph Cornell was just over 132 acres. Sparrow also owned a farm to the south east of Summers called Shimboro's that was also let to Cornell. This farm totalled just over 110 acres.

Joseph Cornell himself owned five other farms in the parish, one of which, Northeys, was let to a John Hines. Some of his lands spread into other parishes, not checked for this survey, but within Wethersfield Parish Joseph Cornell was farming more than 524 acres. Most of this land was arable with just enough grassland to provide feed for horses. He also farmed a small area of hops. Taking the parish totals from the Tithe Award it is clear that the Parish was mainly arable, the same proportions of arable/pasture as shown by Cornell's holdings as being what must have been very typical of the farms in this area.

No copy of the first edition Ordnance Survey could be accessed but by the second edition in 1898 all of the present development was in place although a considerable amount has been lost through the twentieth century.

Summers Hall itself is a multiphase building with its frontage to the north. Flanking the entrance it has barns to east and west with further eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings that form a small closed farmyard to the west of the east barn. These typically contain open shelter sheds as well as enclosed buildings. During the nineteenth century further buildings and yards were developed to the east of the east barn. The buildings around the later west barn were also further developed in this period. This late development in the nineteenth century possibly points to lean years in the arable market resulting in a change to animal husbandry in the second half of the century.

To the north of the east barn and connected to it is a loose box, possibly from the late eighteenth century, and, of the same period as the brick plinth that was inserted around the barn. To the south of the barn is a nineteenth century brick stable building, built as an extension to the barn. At the same time the south bay of the barn was partitioned off to form part of this stable unit. This last bay was ceiled at tiebeam height, with most of the walls plastered apart from feather edge boarding and vertical side boarding fitted as part of the stable conversion. The east wall had horizontal

boarding against the wall with feed and water troughs mounted to it. Adjacent to this extension and between the barn and the house is a small brick nag stable of typically nineteenth century construction and detail. This was not examined as part of this survey. The other addition to the barn is a lean-to against the south wall of the midstrey that appears to be of twentieth century construction with access gained from the midstrey.

The East Barn.

The barn itself is timber framed in oak with weatherboarded walls and corrugated asbestos roof covering. The five bays of the barn are not consistent in size and the midstrey is offset to the north. The main frame structure appears to be a complete rebuild of an earlier barn possibly dating to the late fifteenth century. It has been rebuilt with a Queen strut roof of possibly the late seventeenth century which is most likely when the barn was re-structured. The rafters appear to mainly reused from the original build of the barn. The present top-plates of the barn are contemporary with the rebuild. It is suggested that the original roof covering was clay tile as no tie stains for thatch are noticeable on the rafters. The original framing had outside bracing some of which has been fully retained where whole wall panels were re-used but in other areas just the remnants of the bracing or trenching of studs exists not always in their original positions.

The midstrey most likely from the late seventeenth century when the top-plate across the opening was cut back to the wall posts and a new top-plate fitted on top of the tiebeams. At the same time the mid rail and braces were also removed. The bracing used in the midstrey construction is primary, a type typical from the early seventeenth century onwards. The door openings still have remnants of slotting in the posts showing that leap boards were fitted. The original high bar slots also survive also survive in the main posts for a drop in cross beam. These were used for two purposes. One was to act as a retention for the double doors, and, when threshing to hang sacking from to adjust the airflow or limit the dust. The main opening to the barn in its original form (C15?) was possibly on the opposite side to the present midstrey. The bay opening has an extra post for an original small doorway with the larger part of the opening, now having late infill at the top. A bracket detail at the top of the posts suggests an opening. The doorway post has a mortise and cut back at the top with an empty mortise in the plate above for a

bracket. The north bay post has a side bracket at the top as well as the jowled face into the barn all cut from the one timber. This north post has a rebate running full height to allow the door to open inwards to balance the smaller section of the south post. A rebate on the storey post adjacent to the smaller door also shows that it opened inwards.

The barn is now set onto a brick plinth that appears to have been built to accommodate failings in the timber frame as it is constructed to varying heights around the building and appears to be from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. It varies in height around the barn and was most likely built in to allow a new sole plate to be fitted into sound ends of studs. This work seems to tie in with the loose box brickwork to the north and also most likely from a similar period. It is possibly at this time that some further changes were made to the wall framing to retain the better lengths of each piece of timber. This is very noticeable in the west wall to the north of the west opening where the original trenching for outside bracing is now at varying heights. From the easily visible carpenters assembly marks it can also be suggested that the main frame posts are not now all in original positions. Not many original tiebeam braces survive and the tiebeams show that the building, even in its original form, never had a crown post roof.

Considering the many changes over time the main timber frame has survived remarkably well. The main change to the roof has been the change to a gable end at the north. This change could have been during the nineteenth century or when other work was carried out in the late eighteenth century as the three extra pairs of rafters inserted are of small section and poorly converted.

Phase I of later build.

The Loose Box/Stable.

This brick building attaches to the north end of the barn using the north wall of the barn as a closing wall to the south. It is the same width as the barn as far as the roadside at the north and then continued to the east, in its original form, along the line of the road. It was most likely built in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries as evidenced by the diagonal pressure marks on the bricks. Diagonal pressure marks are more usual on bricks pre-1800 followed by the change to horizontal pressure marks after-1800. The external brickwork is mainly Flemishbond

except for courses of headers that coincide with the internal lacing pieces. The internal brickwork is of mixed bond.

Although now a loose box it was most likely built as a working horse stable with the return to the road providing access in and out through a wide pair of doors as well as providing a store for feed and equipment. The stable building would have had lined walls with feed racks and troughs. Lacing pieces survive in the brickwork to allow the attachment of these items and one intrudes into the open section parallel to the road showing one build. The vented window is also similar to many found in stables. To the north side of the west entrance doorway the underside of the top-plate suggests that another window was originally in this position shown by mortises and shadows on the timber. Some harness hooks survive on the north wall. The simple roof has a ridge board with deep hand-sawn collars nailed in place and supporting small section purlins that link into the end wall of the barn. Rafters of reused timber and of various section as is nearly all the timber structure other than the top-plates. The roof is covered in slate, which if original, suggests more likely the first half of the nineteenth century for the construction. However the roof material may have been changed in c1860's when much extra building work appears to have taken place on the site with the extension of open shelter sheds to the east of the main barn, returning part way across to the south and then a further range across the site at the far east forming two large yard areas on the eastern side of the barn. These buildings have already been lost with only part of the roadside walling remaining.

The open fronted build on the road frontage to the west shows similar brickwork to the stable and no visible break is shown to the continuous north side wall. In the north wall approximately central to this open fronted build, is a double doorway to the road. This opening has queen closers suggesting that it is original to the build. The roof over this area is formed in the same way as the stable and has similar timber but has been repaired and reset in the twentieth century. The inside gable of this roof where it meets the stable has horizontal wood battens nailed across providing further ventilation through the range.

Beyond the large doorway is a timber-framed division with some wide elm boarding surviving. The original end to this range was lost when the return range of buildings to the south were constructed possibly in the 1860's which may also have been the time of the construction of all the extra brick ranges and yards. The roadside wall to the west of the timber-framed partition is finished with brick on edge below the

wallplate suggesting that it was originally a free-standing wall roofed over at a later date.

Phase II of later build.

Enclosing range.

This narrow long range running north south only extends slightly further west than the earlier range (Phase I). It is constructed as an open fronted shelter for the first three bays from the north and then three further divided bays at the southern end. The narrow extension to the west of Phase I, to enable it to link in, created a small enclosed room to the north-west corner with access apparently from the west but as the south enclosing wall to this small area no longer exists it cannot be shown whether it also had access from the south. Most of the roof timber is again reused material from a variety of buildings and has in many cases been reduced in size from its original cross-section by sawing. The collars unlike the earlier range are machine sawn but fixed with pegs. The roof has been reset and repaired in recent times forming a sound structure. This re-use of timber is typical of secondary buildings of the nineteenth century especially in this case as the lower walls are brick, providing the main strength of the structure.

The west walls are good finished brickwork to the Hall entrance driveway. There are doorways at intervals along the length providing one to the small closed section at the north, two to the northern closed section of the southern bays and one to the open section. The final bay at the south is accessed by a doorway in the gable wall, now with a modern door. The most northerly doorway and door, originally to the small north-west corner enclosed area are of different manufacture suggesting that this doorway may have been moved when changes were made that resulted in the original end gable wall of the earlier section being removed. The door is typical late eighteenth, early nineteenth century with four ledgers and good boarding but no bracing. The southern three doorways are all of similar construction with the doors having ledgers and long braces typical of the second half of the nineteenth century. The most southerly doorway on the west side is wider than the others. A window has been inserted between the southern two doorways in the twentieth century. The southern end gable wall with its doorway has a later high level window. This is possibly early twentieth century work. The division walls at the southern end were simple lightweight stud and plaster partitions suggesting that these were storage

buildings with no windows. Originally the open and closed bays were separated by a brick wall as evidenced by the broken bricks on the internal walls. The inner walling, to the east, of this section had a good brick quined corner at its northern end carefully finished to the open bay but the flint and brick infill to the south was random coursed almost certainly using up broken and badly formed bricks as this wall was not visible to the Hall. The internal face had failed in recent times and had been rebuilt using modern blockwork. The roof covering is slate as on the other brick buildings.

Discussion.

The rebuilding of the barn in the seventeenth century showed the strong influence of arable farming in this area that continued right through to the second half of the nineteenth century. The later buildings show the major change in farm layout that had started in the eighteenth century with the formation of yards and covered areas to conserve manure and increase production. However here it does not appear that this change happened until the second half of the nineteenth century with the decline in arable farming. The buildings, not of great historic merit, have been modified and repaired over the years, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The uses have also changed over this late period and in the last use had changed to the housing of domestic horses with the enclosed buildings becoming garden stores for the hall.

Notes.

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Elphin & Brenda Watkin. January/July 2010.