

Building recording of the Dovecote at 41 Main Street, Bretforton, Worcestershire



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Contents

Summary

1

Report

1 Background.....	3
1.1 Reasons for the project	3
2 Aims.....	3
3 Methods.....	3
3.1 Personnel.....	3
3.2 Documentary research	3
3.3 List of sources consulted	3
3.4 Fieldwork strategy	4
3.5 Building analysis	4
3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results	4
4 Context.....	4
5 The building	5
5.1 Historical information	5
5.2 Building development	6
5.2.1 Phase 1: 17 th century	6
5.2.2 Phase 2: Early to mid-18 th century	7
5.2.3 Phase 3: 18 th to 19 th centuries.....	7
5.2.4 Phase 4: 19 th century	8
5.2.5 Phase 5: Late 19 th early 20 th centuries	8
5.2.6 Phase 6: 20 th century	8
6 Discussion	8
6.1 Research frameworks	9
7 Publication summary	9
8 Acknowledgements	9
9 Bibliography.....	10

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Tim Cornah

Summary

Building recording was required to meet a planning condition relating to the redevelopment of the Dovecote at 41 Main Street, Bretforton, Worcestershire.

The planning condition specified that the building should be recorded to English Heritage specified standards. This required a photographic survey of the exterior and interior of the building and annotation of existing survey drawings. This produced an archive of the building before any changes were made.

An element of historical research and synthesis was also a condition planning approval. Original records relating to the Dovecote were studied at Worcestershire Archives along with historic maps and trade directories. Digitised historic mapping, aerial photographs and other online sources were accessed.

Analysis of the building was based upon the recorded fabric and documentary research. The development of the building was reconstructed and illustrated on phased ground plans and elevations. These have been reproduced at the end of the report along with relevant photographs.

The dovecote is a single bay structure built from stone to front and rear but with a timber framed western gable. It is likely to date to the early 18th century, based on its construction style and inference from the buildings either side.

It is suggested to have originally been a kitchen as suggested by its overall layout and the lack of obvious kitchen and cold storage facilities within the house itself. It had close access from the house and a first floor room in a manner typical of detached kitchens. Within the 19th century, a second floor was added, creating a pigeon loft above from which the original nesting boxes survive.

The ground floor remained in use as a kitchen into at least the early 20th century, with the first floor being a store room.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

Recording of a historic building was undertaken of the Dovecote at 41 Main Street, Bretforton, Worcestershire (NGR SP 090028 44013). It was commissioned by Mr C Davis (the Client), who intends to the conversion of the dovecote into a single dwelling and formation of access and parking area, for which a planning application was submitted to Wychavon District Council (reference numbers W/13/00409/CU and W/13/00410/LBC) and approved subject to conditions including a building record.

The building is a designated heritage asset (Grade II listed building, NHLE 1349994), within the terms used by the *National Planning Policy Framework*. The building is also registered with the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER; WSM23869).

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Worcestershire County Council (WCC 2015) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2016).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (ClfA 2014) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

The event reference for this project, given by the HER is WSM67938.

2 Aims

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines the aims of building recording as 'a programme of work intended to establish the character, history, dating, form and archaeological development of a specified building' (*Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*, ClfA 2014a).

The aims and scope of the project, as detailed in the Brief (Section 3.1) is to:-

- Provide a descriptive and illustrative account and interpretation of the building, including discussion of its local, regional and national significance.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Timothy Cornah (BA (hons.), MSc); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA (hons), MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER).

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- 1885 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500
- 1904 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500
- 1923 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500
- 1938 Ordnance Survey Map 1:2,500

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2016).

Fieldwork was undertaken on 20 April 2016. The site reference number and site code is WSM67938.

Building recording consisted of a photographic survey of the interior and exterior of the buildings, analysis of their development, annotation of existing survey drawings and measured survey. All photographs were taken with photographic scales visible in each shot, where possible. The photographic survey was carried out with a Sony α350 digital SLR camera. All photographs were recorded on a pro-forma Photographic Record Sheet. Annotation of existing ground plans and elevations, and completion of pro-forma Building Phase sheets, complemented the photographic record.

The project conformed to the specification for a level 3 survey as defined in the English Heritage document *Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice* (EH 2006). This level of survey is described as 'an analytical record' comprising of 'an introductory description followed by a systematic account of the buildings origins, development and use' (EH 2006). This required the following elements of survey.

Survey and drawings

- Plans of all main floors and elevations as existing (provided by client).
- Measured drawings showing the form of any architectural or functional detail not more readily captured by photography.

Photography

- Overall appearance of rooms and circulation areas.
- Detailed coverage of the building's external appearance.
- Any detail, structural or decorative, relevant to the building's design, development and use, which does not show on general photographs.

3.5 Building analysis

Analysis of the building was based on the study of the photographic record, building recording forms and annotated drawings. It was also informed by the documentary sources listed above. This allowed plans to be drawn up showing the structural development of the building.

The building as recorded is depicted in Plates 1-25. Ground plans, phase plans and an elevation have been reproduced as Figures 2-4.

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. This was especially the case given the kind permission of the owner of 41 Main Street, to see and consider the interior of the house.

4 Context

The Dovecote at 41 Main Street is located in Bretforton within the Vale of Evesham. The geology of the area is of mudstone with much of the local architecture having being constructed of blue lias stone, similarly to much of the south-east corner of the county.

Bretforton itself is known to have had early medieval origins (WSM29872) and was first mentioned in 709 AD as 'Bretfortona' and further described in the Domesday Survey. A number of its standing

buildings go some way to demonstrate its medieval character. The Church of St Leonards in the centre of the village (WSM02849) contains 12th century elements whilst Grange Farm (WSM02851) and 27-31 Main Street (WSM32816) retain 14th century elements. Further buildings originated in the 15th century such as The Fleece Inn (WSM01000), Grange Farm Barn (WSM02853) and a dovecote (WSM02852), also at Grange Farm.

The current character of the village is predominantly post-medieval with two buildings dating from the 16th century; Upper End Farmhouse (WSM49281) and Houses on Main Street and Drinkwater Lane (WSM46257). The remainder are houses, farms and their associated buildings ranging from the 17th to 19th centuries in date. Bretforton has a large number of listed buildings, within a 500m radius of this building, and a further 26 unlisted building registered on the HER. Further to this, nine separate farmsteads are listed within this area, including Home Farm (WSM60899), the house of which was later to be numbered as 41 Main Street. It had a three sided courtyard, which included the Phase 1 17th century barn as outlined below (WSM32140) and a shelter shed.

It is noticeable that village had five dovecotes listed, dating from the 15th to 17th centuries. That at Grange Farm was stone built and associated with the monastic grange, containing approximately 720-880 nest holes. The Manor House has a further square dovecote (WSM28966) of 17th century date. The Manor House also had an apiary and aviary. A further dovecote of 17th century date existed at 71 Main Street (WSM45003), though later converted into a cottage. The fifth dovecote was at 41 Main Street itself. It is interesting to note that 51 Main Street (WSM30079) has pigeon holes leading into its attic space above the position of its kitchen, though these have been suggested to be decorative only.

5 The building

5.1 Historical information

Dovecotes are known to have been constructed from the medieval era at least and at this stage were the reserve of those with feudal privilege. These usually housed pigeons, which were often named as doves. The right to build these structures was gradually relaxed and they were common within the 17th century and 18th centuries, large numbers of farms had such buildings. They were commonly located close to the house not only because of their ability to provide fresh meat all year round, but also because pigeon dung was considered to be a valuable fertiliser and saved for kitchen gardens. Pigeons were also considered to be a panacea for a number of ailments in the 17th century, many of which involve bizarre treatments using freshly killed pigeons and their blood (Hansell and Hansell 2001).

A further interpretation of this building is that of a kitchen, as outlined below. Whilst the 19th century use of the ground floor as such is obvious due to the inserted fireplace, the same interpretation is also suggested for its original use. Kitchens which did not form a direct part of the house are an increasingly recognised structures (Martin and Martin 1997, Meeson 2000, Alcock and Miles 2013). Whilst some were physically attached such as this example, most were entirely detached. The building recorded here appears to have been detached in terms of access from the house. It has also been recognised these buildings were constructed with a first floor for both cold storage and accommodation of guests. These buildings were usually subsidiary to the house both in size and position, located close to, and easily accessed from, the service elements of the house. It also is increasingly recognised that some lobby entry houses of 16th and 17th century date were built without internal provisions for cold storage and would require buildings such as a detached kitchen to fulfil this critical function (Walker 2000).

The building was described in c 1900 as follows. "Brick and timber one end. Lower part used as back kitchen, the second story used as a storeroom, top part still used for pigeons. Alighting ledges every second row. Date 1630. Bought in 1795 by Mr Ashwin from T Byrd" (Berkeley 1895-1906). Whilst there are a dovecotes listed within the village and not numbered named by individual houses, this description seems certain to relate to this building, given that it is further described as being between a cottage and a barn. Interestingly, the construction date of 1630 is also stated

elsewhere (Cooke 1920). A dovecote in Bretforton described as square built in stone "with one wall rebuilt in brick and timber, bears the date 1630". In 1974, the building was catalogued as a dovecote and suggested to be of 18th century date (Pridham 1974).

The historic mapping shows the building broadly as it survives, though highlights its setting within the context of the farm. One potentially significant variation from the standing building is a small rectangular addition to the front of the building, depicted first on the 1885 OS map. This appears to have been extended by 1923, possibly being retained up to 1938, though this is less clear. It protruded towards the current road and is shown next to the position of the extant fireplace. A small structure such as this protruding from the back of a wide fireplace may have been an oven structure. Successive maps also show a small linking building between the rear door of the house and the rear door of the kitchen.

The building described in the National Heritage List for England (NHLE 1349994) as follows:

Dovecote attached to east side of No 41 (formerly listed as Home Farmhouse 30.7.59 with dovecote and barn adjoining) GV II Dovecote. C17 with some mid-C19 and late C20 alterations. Lias with stone tile roof.

Two storeys, blocked opening to first floor, C20 entrance to right- hand corner. Glover on roof has pyramidal roof. Exposed gable to right of timber--frame with brick infill. Interior: inserted floor, retaining wooden nesting boxes above.

5.2 Building development

5.2.1 Phase 1: 17th century

Whilst this phase does not form part of the recorded building, it is informative in highlighting the dating and use of the structure as a whole. Both the house (Plate 1) to the east and barn (Plate 2) to the west are of a broadly 17th century character, and are described as such within their listing details. The house, 41 Main Street, formerly Home Farmhouse, is described as late 17th century in date.

The house in its original phase was of a lobby entry type with rooms either side of the front door. The space typically occupied by a double backed fireplace in the centre of houses of this date, contained only the staircase. The only ground floor fireplaces were located in the living rooms and were small corner fireplaces of too small a scale to be expected for kitchen use. Corner fireplaces such as this often date from the early 18th century onwards.. There was therefore no clear original provision for fireplaces within the ground floor of the house. When the fireplaces were added, these were too small to be used for a kitchen use and leaving no unheated storage spaces, apart from a small space below the stairs.

There was some suggestion in the western gable of house that there was a chimney breast, though whether it was original is not clear. Indeed, it is unlikely to be original given its lack of symmetry, a central design feature of the house. This was seen by a change in construction, with the dressed ashlar stones being truncated and replaced by less consistently coursed lias stonework (Plate 3 and Plate 4). This was noted on the first and second floors within the dovecote, though not on the ground floor, where the walls were rendered.

5.2.2 Phase 2: Early to mid-18th century

This phase saw the gap between the house and barn filled in by the building recorded here. Its front and rear walls were constructed of roughly coursed lias stone and was accessed on the ground floor through a now blocked door at its rear, close to the back door of the house (Plate 5 and Plate 6). This appears to have had a window next to it, where the current door was cut through in Phase 6. Facing onto the street, the first floor had a window, blocked during Phase 3 (Plate 7, Plate 8 and Plate 9). A further door was added in Phase 6.

The roof structure of this building was supported at its eastern end by the double purlins having been cut into the gable of the house and the purlins being supported at its western end by a timber framed truss (Figure 3, Plate 10). This truss is unusual in terms of its design and construction. The principle rafters sit close to the end of the tie beams, as would be expected within a truss of the 16th century or earlier, 17th century and later trusses were more typically set back a little way from the end of the tie beam, as was the case within the Phase 1 barn (Figure 3). This discrepancy is likely to have been due to the common rafters sitting on the stone walls, but remains an oddity. The purlins in turn supported common rafters, lathes and a stone tiles.

The collar of this truss is also higher than might be expected, with the studs and cross pieces below being an arrangement not commonly seen. Whilst the main members of this truss were pegged together, the studs appear to have been nailed on, though this could not be entirely confirmed by close inspection. This practice is extremely unlikely within a 17th century structure, and likely to date to the 18th century, though probably before much of the timber framing tradition diminished in the second half of the century. The panels between the framing were brick filled, though this may not be original.

A further constructional oddity was that the common rafters on one side of the roof were morticed and pegged into one of the purlins, with separate rafters either side. This can be seen by the peg holes not been aligned on the underside of the purlin with the original rafters above (Plate 11). This technique is very uncommon and was not continued on the other side of the roof, where they were trencled into the purlin, pegged and ran from ridge to wall plate.

The western gable was built butting the earlier barn, the frame of which could be seen from within this building (Figure 3). Some minimal weathering was seen on the Phase 1 barn's gable frame, suggesting that there was a relatively short time between the construction of the buildings. The northern half of the tie beam of Phase 2 building had no mortices at its base, suggesting that there was no framing below. The tie beam did have a mortice at its centre, and although the southern half of its underside was obscured by later additions, it is likely that the southern half had timber framing to cover the gap on the southern side of the barn. Some timber studs are retained in this area, but these are later additions (Plate 13).

On the ground floor, a post was nailed onto the earlier framing, and supported a first floor beam (Plate 14). This central beam had simple run out chamfers at either end (Plate 15). This in turn supported floor joists and boards, though those remaining belonged to Phase 4. How the first floor was originally accessed was unclear, given the later changes. This remained open to the roof. The original features of this ground floor room no longer remained but may be surmised to some extent. As previously suggested, there was potentially a chimney breast on the western gable of the Phase 1 house, leaving the possibility of a fireplace within this room. The front of this building (Plate 7) also shows some small and inconsistent building breaks in stonework. These cannot consistently be shown to relate to a ground floor window, and may relate to a feature such as an oven. This may be supported by a structure shown on the historic mapping protruding from the front of the building, demolished in Phase 6. It is possible that these features relate to Phases 3 to 5.

5.2.3 Phase 3: 18th to 19th centuries

This phase saw the addition of brick fireplace in the north-east corner of the ground floor room, with a chimney breast that ran through the room and roof above (Plate 16). This was constructed

with undiagnostic bricks, possibly of 18th or 19th century date. It was at this time that the western gable of the house was rebuilt, with a chimney breast presumably having been removed. The roughly coursed stone was in one area built onto the brick chimney breast (Plate 17), suggesting their broadly contemporary date. The first floor room was white washed at this time, as it covered the gable end repair and was behind the Phase 4 nest boxes. Within this phase or one of the two proceeding phases, a blue lias flagstone floor was added that ran out of the rear door, and extended as far as the backdoor of the house.

5.2.4 Phase 4: 19th century

Broadly contemporary with, or shortly after Phase 3, a second floor was added and the first floor replaced, excepting the central beam. These respected the position of the Phase 3 fireplace. Some of the floor boards relating to this phase have vertical, even saw marks consistent with a mechanical band saw, suggesting a 19th century date, whilst the rest of the timbers were hand sawn and hewn.

This new loft space the second floor created had a triangular opening added to its southern side (Plate 5 and Plate 18) and nest boxes added against both of its gable walls internally. These remain extant against the eastern gable (Plate 19 and Plate 20). Round wood posts were placed against the former house gable and pegs jointed into these supported split lathe shelves, in turn divided by hand sawn boards. The split lathe shelves were lime plastered within each nest box. The posts were supported by both the new floor and stones built into the Phase 3 repairs to the gable wall of the house. Whilst the nest boxes did not survive on the eastern gable, they clearly had been present, as shown by peg holes running up the Phase 2 stud and along the tie beam. One peg to support the shelves remained extant (Plate 21). This loft space was accessed from the first floor room through an opening in the floor joists (Plate 22) though this in itself a later insertion, as demonstrated by floor joist holes in the walls. How the first floor room was itself accessed was unclear though it is possible that the Phase 6 door in its south-east corner was a replacement from one of this phase (Plate 23).

A Glover was also added to the centre of the roof to aid ventilation (Plate 9) and the ground floor and first floor was rendered throughout, though this only partially remained.

5.2.5 Phase 5: Late 19th early 20th centuries

A skim of bricks was added to the interior of the Phase 3 fireplace, with various fittings suggesting a range to have been added (Plate 22). At this time or the preceding phase a hole was cut through the first floor joist next to the fireplace and new posts and boards added to seal off the first floor room (Plate 25). The function of this change is unclear, given that it gave no access to the pigeon loft above. One of the posts was subsequently removed and the boards cut to create access, possibly in Phase 6.

5.2.6 Phase 6: 20th century

Some of the roof timbers were replaced in softwood at this time, and the chimney stack truncated to below the roof line. A door way was added facing into the road and a further to the rear, with the Phase 2 door being blocked also. A further door was added leading into first floor though without an associated staircase and new timber framing added above this externally. Presumably the suggested Phase 2 timber framing in this area was removed at this time.

6 Discussion

Whilst the building recorded here has previously been described simply as a dovecote, this was clearly not its original use. A brief consideration of the associated house highlights the lack of original fire places and in particular a fireplace the size of which may be associated with a kitchen function. It was also seen to be lacking in cold storage facilities. This has been suggested to be one of the markers of a building where a separate kitchen was once present. Whilst the building recorded here was later than the house, it is likely that it was not significantly later.

Though this building was physically attached to the house, it appears to have been detached in terms of access. This building shares many of the common characteristics of a detached kitchen being subsidiary the house in terms of size, and easily accessed from it. A typical feature of detached kitchens is that they had first floor space for both cold storage and accommodation, as was the case here. Whilst direct evidence for cooking facilities in the early phase of this building was missing, they were suggested to have been once present. As highlighted above, a number of its construction details are odd, but overall early 18th century date is suggested.

This potential kitchen was updated with the addition of a new fireplace, and the removal of the presumed old chimney breast, probably within the 19th century. Soon after this, a second floor was inserted along with nesting boxes, a triangular opening in the wall and a glover added on the roof as part of a pigeon loft. Throughout this time, the ground floor remained in use as a kitchen, with the first floor for storage. It can therefore be suggested that the function of this building was primarily that of a kitchen its use, with the addition of the pigeon loft being secondary.

6.1 Research frameworks

This building is detached in terms of access from the house, so is considered within the broader context of detached kitchens. These buildings have historically been underrepresented, often due to their misinterpretation. Recent work has gone some way to redress this balance (Martin and Martin 1997, Meeson 2000, Alcock and Miles 2013) and Worcestershire has numerous of these buildings dating from the 16th to late 19th centuries (Cornah 2014). However, they remain underrepresented in terms of known examples and overall synthesis.

Worcestershire is well represented in terms of dovecotes, having the highest number of listed buildings of this type in England. Whilst pigeon lofts are not particularly rare, they are usually seen above stables and barns and having one above a working kitchen is unusual. Surviving internal fittings are of great rarity in dovecotes, notably removable wooden nest boxes such as those seen here (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde 2014)

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

A building recording was undertaken on behalf of Mr C Davis at the dovecote, 41 Main Street, Bretforton, Worcestershire (NGR SP 090028 44013; HER ref WSM23869).

The dovecote is a single bay structure built from stone to front and rear but with a timber framed western gable. It is likely to date to the early 18th century, based on its construction style and inference from the buildings either side.

It is suggested to have originally been a kitchen as suggested by its overall layout and the lack of obvious kitchen and cold storage facilities within the house itself. It had close access from the house and a first floor room in a manner typical of detached kitchens. Within the 19th century, a second floor was added, creating a pigeon loft above from which the original nesting boxes survive.

The ground floor remained in use as a kitchen into at least the early 20th century, with the first floor being a store room.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Chris Davis (the client) and Adrian Scruby (the curator).

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Figures

Plates



Plate 1 41 Main Street (formerly Home Farm), looking south-west



Plate 2 Former barn associated with 41 Main Street, looking south-east



Plate 3 Possible former chimney breast on the former gable of 41 Main Street, looking south-east



Plate 4 Possible former chimney breast on the former gable of 41 Main Street, looking south-east



Plate 5 Rear elevation of the Phase 2 kitchen, looking north-east



Plate 6 Rear elevation of the Phase 2 kitchen and back door of the 41 Main Street, looking east



Plate 7 Front elevation of the Phase 2 kitchen, looking south-west



Plate 8 Blocked first floor Phase 2 window, looking north-east



Plate 9 Front elevation of the Phase 2 kitchen and its gable end, looking south



Plate 10 Gable frame of the Phase 2 kitchen, looking north-west



Plate 11 Offset peg holes and rafters in a purlin of the Phase 2 Kitchen, looking north-east



Plate 12 Mortise in the centre of the Phase 2 kitchen gable end frame, looking north-west



Plate 13 Phase 2 kitchen gable end frame, southern end, looking west



Plate 14 Phase 2 inserted post and beam, looking north-west



Plate 15 Phase 2 beam with simple chamfers, looking south-east



Plate 16 Phase 3 inserted fireplace, looking north-east



Plate 17 Phase 3 inserted chimney breast, looking north-east



Plate 18 Phase 4 triangular window for the access of pigeons to the new loft space, looking south-west



Plate 19 Phase 4 nesting boxes, looking south-east



Plate 20 Phase 4 nesting boxes, looking south-east



Plate 21 Evidence of former Phase 4 nesting boxes, looking north



Plate 22 Phase 4 loft access point, looking south



Plate 23 Possible Phase 4 door position, looking south-west



Plate 24 Phase 5 fireplace additions, looking north-east



Plate 25 Phase 5 cut through first floor, looking south-west

Appendix 1 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 67938)

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 3 Photographic records AS3
- 159 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 5 Building Phase Records AS45
- 1 Scale drawings
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Museums Worcestershire
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416