

Archaeological works at The Wooden Barn, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Midland Automobile Club Ltd

February 2020



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THE WOODEN BARN SHELSLEY WALSH WORCESTERSHIRE

Building recording and watching brief report



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The Butts
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SITE INFORMATION

Site name:	The Wooden Barn, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire
Local planning authority:	Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Council
Planning reference:	18/00397/LB
Central NGR:	SO 72162 63045
Commissioning client:	Firlands Developments Ltd on behalf of Midland Automobile Club Ltd
WA project number:	P5353
WA report number:	2792
HER reference:	WSM70502
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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	02/03/2020	Tim Cornah	Draft for comment	Tom Vaughan

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
REPORT	2
1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Background to the project	2
1.2 Site location, topography and geology.....	2
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	2
3 PROJECT AIMS.....	3
3.1 Watching Brief	3
3.2 Building Recording	3
4 PROJECT METHODOLOGY	3
4.1 Watching brief	3
4.2 Building Recording	3
5 BUILDING RECORDING RESULTS.....	4
6 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS.....	6
6.1 Introduction	6
6.2 Phasing	6
6.2.1 Natural deposits	6
6.2.2 Phase 1: Post-medieval deposits	6
6.2.3 Phase 2: Modern deposits.....	6
6.3 Artefactual evidence	6
6.4 Environmental evidence.....	6
7 DISCUSSION	6
8 PROJECT PERSONNEL	7
9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
10 BIBLIOGRAPHY	7

FIGURES

PLATES

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF PROJECT ARCHIVE (WSM70502)

Archaeological works at The Wooden Barn, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire

By Tim Cornah

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt and Tim Cornah

Summary

A programme of archaeological building recording and watching brief was undertaken at The Wooden Barn, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire (NGR SO 72162 63045). It was commissioned by Firlands Developments Ltd, on behalf of Midland Automobile Club Ltd, in association with the replacement of internal timbers and floor, for which a planning application has been approved, subject to conditions.

The later 17th or early 18th century three bay threshing barn is relatively late in the development of the wider farmstead associated with Court House farm, which is itself considered to have 15th century elements.

The building was of a typical form of threshing barn, with large central doorways which would have opened onto a threshing floor, the boundary walls of which were recorded within the watching brief of the ground reduction works. Evidence for the former presence of these dividing walls was also visible in the standing structure, which had an unusual level of evidence for its order of construction, as well as ritual protection for the stored crop.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

A programme of archaeological building recording and watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) between July 2018 and January 2020 at The Wooden Barn, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire (NGR SO 72162 63045). The project was commissioned by Firlands Developments Ltd on behalf of Midland Automobile Club Ltd, in advance of a proposed replacement of internal timbers and floor. A planning application has been approved by Malvern Hills District Council subject to conditions (planning reference number 18/00397/LB).

The archaeological advisor to the local planning authority considered that the proposed development had the potential to impact upon possible and specific heritage assets.

The barn is curtilage listed, by association with the Grade II listed Court House adjacent. It is recorded as wooden framed, of 17th century date, with many original timbers.

No brief was provided but the project conforms to the generality of briefs. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by WA (2018) and approved by the archaeological advisor. The project also conformed to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures (CIfA 2014a)*, *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief (CIfA 2014b)* and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire (WCC 2010)*

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site lies at a height of approximately 50m AOD sloping down towards the River Teme, 730m to the east. The bedrock geology is recorded as Raglan Mudstone Formation with no superficial geology recorded (BGS 2018).

2 Archaeological and historical background

The following information is derived from the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record which was searched with a 500m radius centred on the building, unless otherwise stated.

Whilst there is a suggested prehistoric enclosure to the south-west of the site (WSM37485), the settlement of Shelsley Walsh is mentioned in Domesday, and certainly existed in the medieval era, located around St Andrews Church (WSM08037) which retains 12th century elements and is located approximately 80m to the south of The Wooden Barn. To the east of the church are the remains of the shrunken medieval settlement (WSM08036).

The Wooden Barn is part of the farmstead of Court House Farm (WSM62209). The earliest elements of Court House itself (WSM09262) date to between 1420 and 1440, it is considered to have had a moat (WSM08035). It is known to have had a watermill in the 14th century which was rebuilt in the 17th century and remains extant within the farmstead (WSM37410). The Wooden Barn itself is a threshing barn considered to date to the 17th century (WSM41255). The farmstead was added to over the following centuries (WSM37418, WSM37417) with the addition of brick structures.

Within the wider search area there are 18 Historic England Listed Historic Buildings as well as 22 other unlisted historic buildings, principally dating to the 17th-19th centuries. These are largely part of a further six farmsteads. The most notable modern feature in the area is the Shelsley Walsh hill climb which is the oldest motorsport venue in the world that is still in use, having been founded in 1905 (WSM37521).

3 Project aims

3.1 Watching Brief

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record, to determine the extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible of:

- archaeological deposits, within the constraints of the Client's groundworks, and
- historic and architectural features, during removal of structural remains of the building

The archaeological advisor indicated that significant deposits and structural remains may be defined as those likely to be of medieval and post-medieval date.

3.2 Building Recording

English Heritage identifies historic buildings as 'a living record of our social, economic and artistic history, as well as being powerful contributors to our sense of place and to feelings of local, regional and national identity' (EH 2006).

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' (CIfA 2014b).

The project will produce a level 3 record of the structure in advance of alteration during the development, as defined in Historic England guidance (HE 2016).

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018). The watching brief was undertaken on 13 July 2018 and the building recording 24 January 2020.

4.1 Watching brief

Excavations within the interior of the building, an area of approximately 13m by 6m, were monitored as the floor level was reduced. The area is indicated in Figure 2 and Plate 16.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Subsequent investigation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature, as appropriate. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited with Museums Worcestershire.

4.2 Building Recording

Building recording consisted of a photographic survey of the interior and exterior of the building, analysis of its 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 Canon EOS 200D 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 Record and Building Phase sheets, complemented the photographic record, along with photogrammetric survey.

The project conformed to the specification for a level 3 survey as defined by Historic England (HE 2016). 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'. 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.

5 Building recording results

5.1 Building description

The building currently comprises a rectangular structure aligned north-west to south-east, with a timber frame clad in wood on a sandstone and brick footing, and with its gabled roof clad in corrugated iron. General views of the buildings can be seen on (Plate 1 to Plate 3)

5.2 Building development

Three phases were identified during the investigation of the building, which are described as follows:

- Phase 1: Later 17th or early 18th century
- Phase 2: 19th century
- Phase 3: 20th to 21st century

5.2.1 Phase 1: Later 17th or early 18th century

As with most such timber frame structures, the methods of timber conversion are clear within this structure. The majority of timbers have been squared on at least one side by hewing, with notching marks visible (Plate 4), along with marks of a wide axe with a shallow curve typical of a side axe (Plate 5). This method is well documented and fairly typical for squaring of the waney side of the timber (Russel 1995). Some surfaces were also finished using an adze (Plate 6). Subsequent conversion both of some waney edges of the trees and quartering and halving the timbers was undertaken by saw, leaving saw marks a little off 90° as is typical of pit sawing (Plate 7).

The barn is a timber framed structure of three bays, with its shortest bay in its centre. The wall framing is of three high square framing (Plate 8, Plate 9 and Plate 10 and Figure 2) with relatively short straight braces running between the sill beam and the posts of the cross frames. Above the tie beams of the gable frames, the multiple studs continue the square framing between two collars. Above the upper of the two collars were raking V struts, typical of a style used from the latter half of the 16th century into the early 18th century.

The intermediary two roof trusses (Plate 9) had only a high collar with raking struts between the principle rafters and the tie beams, in a style typical of later 17th century and 18th century roof trusses. The roof structure consisted of two trenched purlins on each side with common rafters above, all pegged at the apex. A single long straight brace ran between the wall plate and principle rafter of gable end frames, located below the common rafters.

Evidence for partial framing below the tie beams of intermediate frames exists in the form of a central mortice in the base of each tie beam (Plate 9) and two mortices in the posts of the cross frames next

to the doors which would have held bracing (Plate 8). An oddity of carpentry is that at the point where the posts joint to the tie beam, the post runs to the full height of the tie beam at the rear of the frame, whereas it is normal for it to be cut at the base of the tie beam. Some evidence for the reuse of timbers from an earlier structure was also present (Plate 11).

Some indication as to the order of construction is present within the building. One of the rails of the framing on the south-western half of each gable end frame was not morticed in, but simply lapped onto the rear of the central post and then pegged through, despite being morticed into the jowl post at the opposing end (Plate 9 and Plate 10 Figure 2). This indicates that this timber was inserted into the framing after both the north-eastern halves of the gable end frame and the long wall frames were already in place. It is clear that this happened at the point of construction rather than later reworking as there is no indication that the pegs and framing have otherwise been altered. The upper rails at the north-east end of the gable frames have been similarly lapped to the relevant post, although then attached by nail.

These details indicate that the carpenters placed the sill beam onto the plinth wall first, followed by the long wall frames up to wall plate level, and probably also the bracing of the gable end and intermediary frames in order to stabilise the long wall frames which at this point would otherwise be free standing. The north-eastern half of the gable end frames below tie beam level would then have been erected, followed by the previously described lapped and associated timbers. The tie beams and cross framing above could then be placed on, followed by the purlins and rafters.

The evidence for the infilling of the panels in this structure is not clear. At the lowest level of the three high square panels of the wall framing, no holes for lathe staves or grooves were visible, suggesting that the panelling was weather boarded on the exterior. A brick infill could be possible, although for this method a groove was usually cut for a mortar key. For the second and third level of framing, both one and three holes suitable for lathe staves were present in the underside of the timber above each panel at its centre, as well as lapped and nailed joints (Plate 12). A partial groove below these runs out one at end, and a vertical stop at the other (Plate 13). This would have been to allow a vertical timber to be inserted after the frame was erected. It is clear that these vertical timbers were in the centre only, so not part of a wattle panel. This is an unusual method as to how they help create a panel infill. It seems most likely that they added a thin central stud onto which the exterior weather boarding could have been nailed.

As was increasingly the case in such buildings throughout the 18th century, some of the timber framing was not attached through mortice and tenon joints, but by being simply nailed. The small studs below the wall frame bracing were nailed in this way.

Chiselled into the frame which supported the door on the south-west side of the building was the symbol 'IP' (Plate 14). It is unlikely these were initials but actually derived from the Greek symbols chi-ro more commonly used as a Christogram. This derivation is supported by the 'I' symbol being crossed in the centre. The invocation of Christ in this form is well documented and thought to be for the protection of the stored crops. A further indication of crop protection was present on the first floor in the form of a candle burn on the northern end frame (Plate 15). These marks are also well documented and were considered to afford ritual protection from the presence of the devil (Hoggard 2019).

5.2.2 Phase 2: 19th century

A brick pillar with a small area of brick wall was present in the north-west corner (Plate 9) which relates to a possible former shelter shed to the western side of the building (Plate 2; Figure 2).

5.2.3 Phase 3: 20th to 21st century

At some point the infill between the timber framing was removed, the building clad in wood and the roof clad in corrugated iron and new doors onto the threshing floor installed. Within the barn itself, the

plinth wall was rebuilt largely in brick and the sill beam replaced. Further works in the early 21st century saw a small area of external cladding replaced, and new threshing doors added.

6 Watching brief results

6.1 Introduction

The features recorded are shown in Figure 2 and Plate 16.

6.2 Phasing

6.2.1 Natural deposits

The undisturbed natural geology was observed for the full length of the barn's interior and comprised a compact red clay marl (102).

6.2.2 Phase 1: Post-medieval deposits

Directly below one of the cross frame trusses, a partial brick and stone plinth wall was present. Its base course (109) was of limestone and 0.56m wide and probably the original wall dividing the end bay from the threshing floor. This was largely replaced in brick from which the upper courses were constructed (108). This wall was 0.24m wide and constructed of 6 by 4 by 3 inch handmade bricks of probable later 18th century to 19th century date.

6.2.3 Phase 2: Modern deposits

A centrally positioned brick and concrete built post setting was present under the opposing internal cross frame truss (105), of probable 20th century date. Cut [107] was for part of a service, infilled by (106) which contained modern material. An internal cut around the edge of the former threshing floor and south-western part of the barn was cut [104], shuttered and backfilled with concrete in order to support the plinth wall.

6.3 Artefactual evidence

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no artefacts were identified which were considered to be suitable for analysis.

6.4 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

7 Discussion

The later 17th or early 18th century three bay threshing barn recorded here is relatively late in the development of the wider farmstead associated with Court House farm which is considered to have 15th century elements.

The building is of a typical form of threshing barn with large central doorways which would have opened onto a threshing floor, the boundary walls of which were recorded during the watching brief of the ground reduction works. Evidence for the former presence of these dividing walls was visible in the standing structure, which also had an unusual level of evidence for its order of construction, as well as ritual protection for the stored crop.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

8 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Tim Cornah, ACIfA and Graham Arnold, ACIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Vaughan, MCIfA. The report was produced and collated by Tim Cornah. Specialist contributions and individual sections of the report are attributed to the relevant authors throughout the text.

9 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of the project: Simon Fidoe (Firlands Developments), Simon Durling (Midland Automobile Club Ltd), and Aidan Smyth (Archaeology and Planning Advisor, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils).

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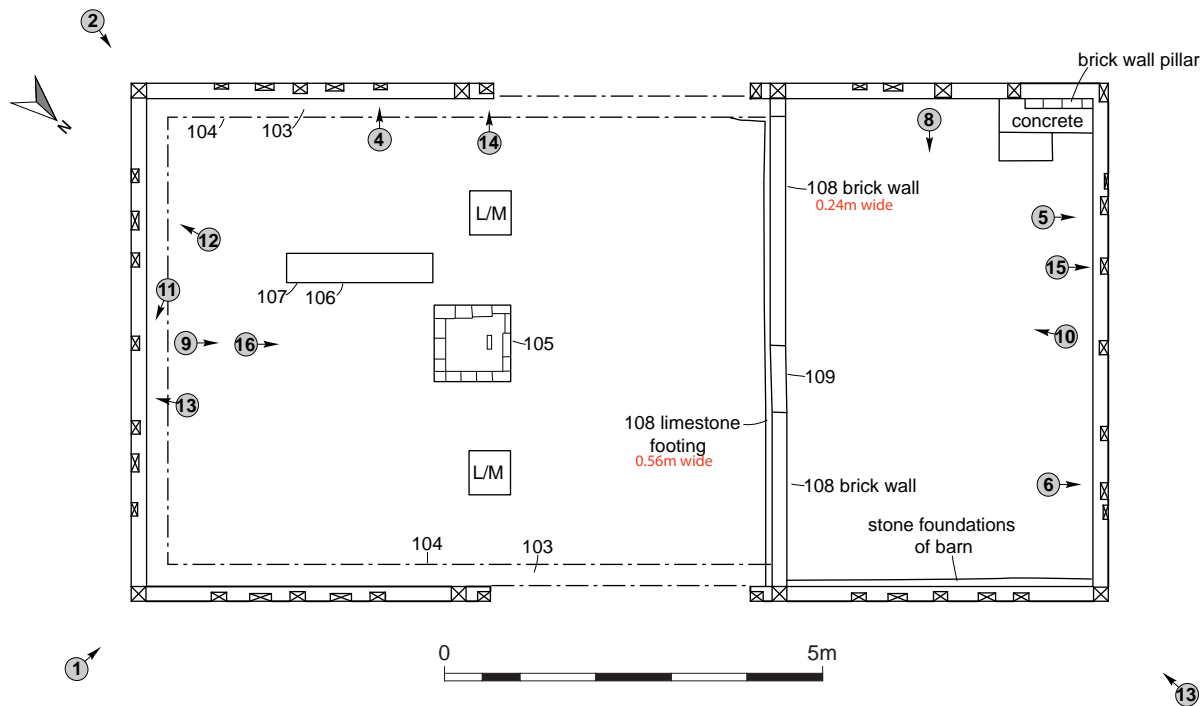
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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



Plan of barn with elevations (based upon Nigel J Teale Drg No3837A-01)

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1 General view of the barn with the farmyard and Court House behind, looking west, 2m scale



Plate 2 General view of the barn from the farmyard, looking north-east, 2m scale



Plate 3 General view of the barn with the farm buildings behind, looking south-west, 2m scale



Plate 4 Timber with a notch mark cut aligned at 90° to the timber with a short bladed axe, most likely a felling axe, no scale



Plate 5 Timber with shallow curved cut marks typical of a side axe, no scale



Plate 6 Timber with shallow scalloped marks, typical of an adze, no scale



Plate 7 Timber with slightly off 90 degree fairly irregular saw marks, typical of pit or double trestle sawing, no scale



Plate 8 Interior side wall frame, looking north-east, 2m scale



Plate 9 Interior end and intermediary cross frames, looking north-west, 2m scale



Plate 10 Interior end and intermediary cross frames, looking south-east, 2m scale



Plate 11 Reused timber next to a redundant pegged mortice joint, with the “III” mark being redundant carpenters marks, looking north-east



Plate 12 Single and double pegholes as well as small lapped joints central to each panel. Note no such corresponding features at the edge of the panels, as would typically be the case, no scale



Plate 13 Groove with vertical stop closest to the 0.20m scale that runs out at opposing end



Plate 14 "IP" mark considered to have been derived from a Christogram, scale showing height from the floor in cm, looking south-west



Plate 15 Candle burn mark, scale showing height from the floor in cm, looking north-east



Plate 16 The interior of the barn during the watching brief, scales 2x 2m and 1 x 0.50m

Appendix 1: Summary of project archive (WSM70502)

TYPE	DETAILS*
Paper	Trench sheet, Correspondence, Diary (Field progress form), Drawing, Photograph, Plan, Report, Section, Survey
Digital	Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text

**OASIS terminology*