



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD**

**ON**

**MANOR FARM BARNS,**

**STEEPLE ASTON**

**NGR SP 4731 2578**

**NOVEMBER 2002**

## **Summary**

Historic building recording was carried out on a series of farm buildings at Manor Farm Barns, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire. The work was carried out in advance of plans to convert the buildings involving changes to and limited demolition of the original building fabric.

The survey results provide a picture of mixed farming activity within the development area in association with a 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse. Activity on the site appears to have been continuous and the modifications and reorganisation of the buildings reflect agricultural development over time in response to changes in productivity and advances in farming technology.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Planning permission has been granted by Cherwell District Council to convert the current stable and barn and to demolish the workshop at Manor Farm Barns, Steeple Aston (NGR SP 4731 2578). A condition was attached to the permission requiring that a photographic record be made of the building prior to the commencement of development work.

### **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 2.1 To make a record of the structure of the buildings that will be affected by the alterations/rebuilding prior to start of on-site works.
- 2.2 To make public the results of the investigations.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The building recording was undertaken at Level II as defined by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (Recording Historic Buildings: a Descriptive Specification). It consisted of three main elements: a drawn survey, a photographic survey and a written, descriptive record. The drawn record was based on an existing survey of the buildings and consisted of archaeological annotations added to explain the construction, phasing and history of the building. The photographic record was undertaken using 35 mm black and white prints and colour slide film. It consisted of general internal and external views together with specific details of features of interest. The written record was a descriptive, analytical survey to complement the other elements of the recording.
- 3.2 The project archive, which will include photographs, photographic negatives, slides, plans, elevations and site notes, will be deposited with the County Museums Service or other agreed body. Copies of this report will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record and with English Heritage's National Monuments Record in Swindon.

## 4. RESULTS

The buildings at Manor Farm are shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map sheet SP 0016SW but are not named as such until the 1923 Revised Edition. Prior to this the site was known as Southfield Farm. The maps portray the farmhouse and its associated outbuildings in much the same configuration as they are in today. The site is situated just off South Side (Shown as South Street on the early editions Ordnance Survey maps) and is bounded on the eastern side by a footpath. The farmhouse itself is thought to be c. 17<sup>th</sup> century in origin (Pevsner).

Before the start of the recent works there were a number of other buildings of modern construction but these were demolished (as part of the development) prior to the current building recording. These buildings were included in the initial survey drawings of the site on which the current building recording drawings are based. The names used for the buildings in the text are taken from these survey plans.

## 5 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 THE OLD STABLES— EXTERIOR

The North facing elevation of the Old Stables shows a three bay structure formed of oolitic limestone rubble construction with a pale, creamy coloured softish mortar. The stonework is braced with three square tie-bar plates, which span the width of the building.

There are two windows; one occupies the central bay to the west of the doorway. This western window has a timber lintel. The eastern window has a wooden lintel on the interior face, but is stone on the exterior, and is situated much lower down the wall face (0.97 m above current ground level). In addition to this it has been blocked (using breeze-blocks) and is almost completely obscured by the stone steps leading up to the loft.

The doorway is 1.80 m wide and has a timber lintel and doorjamb. There is a boarded-up pitching eye situated in the north-eastern corner, which may have been added at a later date, contributing to the unstable nature of the building fabric at this end of the building. This pitching eye was accessed by a stone staircase. The steps are a later addition as they abut the main building and, as mentioned above, block an earlier opening or window. There is a space under this staircase that could have functioned as a storage facility, although any associated doorway has been removed. One further feature exists on this elevation in the form of a lean-to or extension. This extension is also a later addition to the earlier building and was inaccessible during the building survey.

The East facing elevation is of the same fabric as the north elevation. There is a single pitching eye situated centrally on this gable end. The eye has been reduced in size by partially blocking the lower portion above the original wooden sill. Above the pitching eye, just below the apex of the roof can be seen an intact and un-blocked slit ventilator. The perimeter wall adjacent to

the Old Stables, to which this elevation is keyed, bears evidence of a blocked opening. This opening is 1.10 m wide and c. 0.91 m in height. The top of the opening bears a course of brick (0.21 x 0.08 m), and the opening itself has been blocked.

The South facing elevation fronts South Side and is keyed into the perimeter wall at the eastern end. The central bay of this elevation contains a neatly blocked doorway (2.17 m in height by 1.08 m width). The western corner of this elevation is rounded and ends in a chamfer stop just under the eaves. A further portion of perimeter wall abuts the building at this end.

The West facing elevation was almost totally obscured by climbing ivy. No external features could clearly be viewed or photographed. However, the internal elevation detail provides information concerning the building's development.

## 5.2 THE OLD STABLES – INTERIOR

The Stables is a single storey, three bay building with remnants of a hayloft above. The loft floor has been removed leaving the recesses that would have supported it. The walls of the stable have been whitewashed to loft level and a coat of black damp-proof paint has been applied half way up this. No wall treatments have been applied in the loft space itself. The west end wall contains a large opening with timber lintel. This opening has been partially blocked to allow for a much smaller window. This opening may have been a further pitching hole and is situated above the main room in the loft space. Two further openings are evident on this wall. A central window immediately below the one in the loft, of a similar size (0.78 m in height by 1.22 m width), and also containing a timber lintel, has been completely blocked as has the other opening situated to the north of this, almost abutting the south-facing interior wall. This opening appears to have been a doorway (1.98 m in height by 1.28 width) with a timber lintel, providing access to the front garden of the farmhouse. All blocking has been carried out using the traditional oolitic limestone in keeping with the original building. The outshut/lean-to abutting the exterior north facing elevation at the western corner of the building is a later addition and the cat-slide roof is covered with the same materials as the main building. There was no access to the interior of this outshut and as a result structural details could not be ascertained.

## 5.3 THE OLD STABLES - ROOF

The current roofing material is corrugated iron; none of the original external materials have survived. The interior roof construction is that of a common rafter roof. The principal rafters are supported on makeshift pads at the wall head. The tie beams have iron re-inforcement where they meet the principals. Although there is no evidence of alterations in the roof height over time, the trusses do not appear to be original

#### 5.4 THE OLD BARN– EXTERIOR

The Old Barn is formed of the same building materials as the Old Stable. The barn at present consists of three bays with opposite entrances in the central bay. The entrance in the north facing elevation has been blocked to half the barn's height using modern breezeblocks; the upper half is covered over with weatherboards. There are two slit ventilators to the west of the entrance, both blocked or partially blocked. A later blockwork lean-to containing stalls abuts this elevation and obscures the architectural detail.

A further notable feature of this elevation is the two remnant walls projecting northwards at both the east and west ends of the current barn. These features suggest that the original width of the barn has also been altered.

The East elevation appears to be an inserted partition wall, reducing the original length of the barn (from nine bays to three). There are traces of a blocked ventilation slot in the south corner.

The South facing elevation contains the gabled porch. This feature utilises the same traditional building materials with one exception: this is the only farm building with dressed quoins. The porch is probably a later addition to the barn. There are two blocked slit ventilators on the elevation to the west of the porch and a further blocked slot to the east of the porch. In addition to this there are a number of additional lean to buildings abutting this elevation.

#### 5.5 THE OLD BARN – INTERIOR

The interior of the main Old Barn as currently stands consists of four bays. The third bay from the west end containing the porch, has a flagged stone floor extending across the width of the porch and through the building to the blocked opposing doorway in the north wall. There are traces in the floor to the east of the flagged passage, of semi-circular tracks. These tracks are set into the floor. Further traces are evident of a possible base or pad for supporting an upright of some sort. The barn walls are untreated limestone and the roof timbers, supporting a corrugated roof, are not original. The west wall houses an owl hole just under the apex of the roof. The owl hole is of a trefoil design.

#### 5.6 THE OLD BARN - ROOF

The current roofing material is corrugated iron over the main barn building, the porch bears a corrugated asbestos roof, none of the original external or internal roofing materials have survived.

#### 5.7 THE OLD BARN LEAN-TOS

The western lean-to has been constructed using modern brick as the principal building material. The front of the construction was then faced using the limestone in keeping with the character of the rest of the farm buildings. There

are two windows in this elevation, one to either side of the central door. All roofing materials and timbers are modern in origin.

The first lean-to to the east of the porch is constructed using breezeblocks. The roof is corrugated and of modern origin, however, the roof timbers consist of re-used tie-beams of a much earlier date. The rear wall of this lean-to is a continuation of the original south elevation of the old barn. Two slit ventilators are visible within this elevation, both blocked. The eastern wall is formed from a further porch wall, made from traditional materials consistent with the rest of the main barn building. The other side of the porch forms the west wall of a further lean to that extends eastwards for 4.30m. The last lean-to was unroofed and the eastern end wall had been demolished by the time of the site survey, however, traces of the wall remaining suggests that this final wall abutted the original south-eastern extent of the old barn.

#### 5.8 THE CART SHED - EXTERIOR

The cart shed consists of two gable ends roofed over with modern corrugated materials and covered on its south facing elevation with a further sheet of metal panelling. The exterior west facing gable contains a possible pitching eye currently in-filled with weatherboards, there is evidence of re-building and re-pointing in this elevation.

#### 5.9 THE CART SHED - INTERIOR

Both gable ends of the cart shed have been subject to much patching and repairs over time. Materials used have included brick, ironstone and breezeblock. The building has not been floored.

#### 5.10 THE OLD WORKSHOP - EXTERIOR

The West facing elevation of the Old Workshop contains two windows, one to either side of the central doorway. The windows are of modern origin and are situated directly under the eaves and have been reduced in size as evidenced by the single column of bricks inserted into either side of the window embrasures. The doorway extends from floor to wall head. The only other notable detail in this elevation is the decorative corner moulding at the north end also directly under the eaves.

The North facing elevation contained two small recesses with timber lintels and sills

The East facing elevation has two openings, both boarded over. These openings have timber lintels and sills.

The South facing elevation bears evidence of a blocked arched doorway at the west side. The doorway had been blocked using traditional materials and is whitewashed over in keeping with the rest of the interior.

### 5.11 “THE OLD WORKSHOP” - INTERIOR

The interior of this building had concrete flooring with a drainage channel let into the floor parallel to the west wall of the building. The interior was whitewashed and had been painted in the same manner as the Old Stables with black damp-proof paint to half the buildings height. The walls bore traces of stall partitions that had been removed. The stalls ran perpendicular to the east wall, but faint traces on the north and south walls could suggest the presence of further partitions.

### 5.12 “THE OLD WORKSHOP” - ROOF

The current roofing material is modern slate. The roof trusses are that of a common rafter roof, and the materials utilised are not original.

### 5.13 THE SHELTER SHED - Exterior

The rear (southern) and eastern limits of this building are formed by the current perimeter/ boundary wall of the property. The northern extent of the building consists of three round stone pier and a later wooden post supports the northwest corner. The east facing elevation has a recess with a timber lintel in the upper southern corner.

There are no significant architectural details within the shelter shed

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OLD STABLE.

This building may have been the original farm barn with a granary above. Evidence for this includes the situation of the pitching eyes in the gables, the slit ventilator clearly visible in the east gable and the opposite doorways across what would have been the threshing floor. The neat blocking of the south central doorway, utilising the same traditional building materials and methods as the original building fabric must have taken place prior to 1884 (First ed. OS) as the larger barn is already clearly marked on this map and would have called for a change in function of this smaller building.

This early barn was then converted to a stable and hayloft. Access to the loft was eventually relocated to the north wall of the building, accessed by a set of stone steps. The original pitching eyes let into the gable ends were reduced to some extent, particularly the western gable, where the eye has been blocked to the size of a small window

The interior decoration of the stables points to a continuous loft over the full extent of the room. This is due to the fact that the whitewash does not extend above the recesses intended for the floor joists.

At the time of the building survey, the building was still set up as a stable: there are modern cement and iron railing stalls in the interior, which divide the room into three parts. The joist for the loft above had been removed and the pitching hole in the north wall boarded over. The floor is cement and there is provision for drainage.

## 6.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OLD BARN.

This building is shown as a much longer and wider structure on the early edition Ordnance Survey maps. The fact that the current building is much reduced in size from the original can be attested to by the greater length of the south wall (28 m as opposed to the 14.2 m of the current barn). This southern wall provides the rear wall of the later lean-to. A second porch can also be seen at the east end of the south facing elevation. These porches would have served as an extension to the threshing floors, of which this building had two. The width of the building has also been altered, but very little remains to give clues as to the original design and function. The internal features in the floor of the easternmost bay of the current barn point to a degree of mechanisation being introduced to the farm, probably a move away from the traditional hand threshing to a more productive means as the farm developed.

The lean-to situated to the east of the current porch contains early roof timbers from another building. These timbers form two trusses and include arched tie-beams. The timbers appear to have come from a building of a similar width to that of the current lean-to, but their origin is unknown.

## 6.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OLD WORKSHOP AND SHELTER SHED.

These buildings appear on the early edition Ordnance Survey Map as an L-shaped structure. There is a blocked doorway in the south side of the workshop and the blocking utilises traditional materials. The interior of the building is decorated in a similar manner to the stables and the floor drain together with traces of stalls point to this as a cowshed of some sort, possibly to house young or sick animals. There is no evidence of this building being utilised as a workshop.

The shelter shed is supported on three rounded stone piers, but the support at the west side is a timber post. This factor together with the fact that these buildings are shown as L-shaped on the early maps and the blocked doorway in the south wall point to a change in function and access to these buildings.

## 6.4 THE CART SHED

This building, open on the north side and only covered over on the south side in recent years, is not shown on the First edition OS. It does however appear by the 1900 edition. The original fabric of the building has been patched in several places, but a small opening – possibly a pitching eye – can be seen in the west wall. It is not unusual for cart sheds to have granaries housed in the loft space and this may have been the case here.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This farmstead houses a number of traditional and modern farm buildings. Developments in farming practice and changes in size and productivity can clearly be seen in the modifications to, and changing functions of, the buildings investigated for this survey. The earliest building in the study is the Old Stables. This building was the farm barn and granary prior to expansion and the creation of what is known here as the Old Barn. This much larger barn has been subject to a high degree of modification over the years, moving from a nine bay building with two threshing floors, extended by the addition of porches, to a barn roughly half the original size incorporating some form of mechanisation. These advancements have in turn been removed and the barn has reverted to a more basic pattern. The workshop appears to have functioned as a cowshed attached to a shelter shed before modifications.

In addition to the buildings surveyed, the farmstead also housed a dovecote attached to the north of the 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse and a number of further out-buildings constructed from the traditional limestone. A number of these buildings are ruinous, and all lay outside the area of investigation.

The results of the survey provide a picture of a mixed farm associated with the 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse in constant use and subject to re-organisation and development over time in response to changes in land use and farming practices.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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