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The Elms: West Range of Farm Buildings, Historic Building Report



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1. Executive Summary

David Hickie Associates has been commissioned by Paul and Gabrielle Riley to investigate the historic significance of the connecting section between the large barn/stable and cow shed in the west range of Grade II listed farm buildings at 'The Elms', Main Street, Nailstone.

The investigation has revealed evidence of at least three stages in the development of this range of buildings. The short section of building with pitched roof and circular open window now sandwiched between the barn and the cowshed was erected some years after the main barn/stable. The Barn/Stable was originally the only building in the west range of farm buildings and had an external open stairway to the hay loft on the northern end of this building. This barn/stable is contemporaneous with the large Barn and the main Georgian house, and is likely to have been built in the late eighteen century - see 'The Elms, Nailstone: Historic Building Report' - dated 20th January 2010. At some time after the Barn/Stable was erected it was decided to provide a cover for the stairway. This took the form of a pitched roof with brick sides to the stairway to roof level and open stairway access to the farm courtyard below. As the roof appears to have been built with a rear pitch as well as the front pitch over the stairway, it is concluded that this covered a new storeroom at the rear. The circular opening provided light to the hay loft when the top stairway door to the hay loft was in use.

The cowshed was then erected at a slightly later date and the open stairway was bricked in. A through-passage was created from the barn to the new cow shed. Access to the store behind the stairway was then opened up by removal of the brickwall at ground floor level. The upper floor stairway brickwall was retained and supported on new timber beams. Access to the hay loft from this time is likely to have been by ladder, as there is no evidence of a new relocated stairway in the building.
A building is shown in the location of the 'new' cowshed on the tithe map dated 1841 included in the 'Historic Building Report: The Elms, Nailstone'.

All three stages of development described would have been undertaken in the period circa 1790 (original farm buildings erected) to 1841 (the tithe map shows a full west range of buildings on the plan). Since that final phase of development, a number of minor alterations, new, replacement or blocking of windows, and blocking of stable openings have taken place. However, it appears that the major layout of these buildings has remained relatively unchanged since the early nineteenth century.

Figure 1: External View of West Range of Farm Buildings

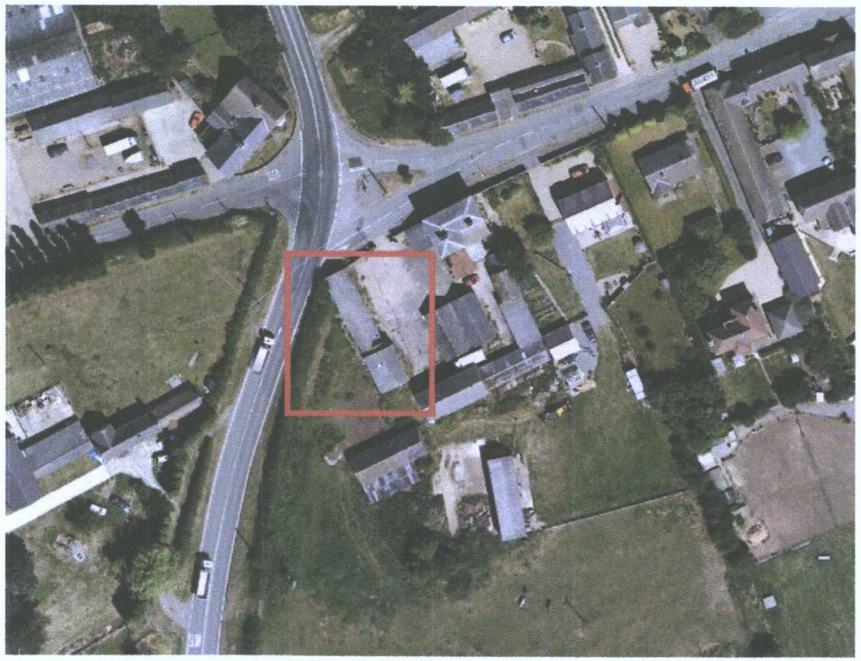


2. Introduction

This survey and report has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines for an English Heritage Level 2 report - 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice' (English Heritage, 2006) - providing a descriptive summary of the building and plans of the layout and specific elements of historic significance. A site inspection was undertaken on Thursday 25th February 2010.

2.1 Location of the 'The Elms' Farmhouse

Figure 2: Google Map satelite photograph shows the current context of farmhouse and the surrounding farm buildings. The west range is located within the red box.



3. Farm Buildings – West Range

The complex of farm buildings is fine example the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth new farmstead layouts designed in a courtyard U-plan with a separate farmhouse. Figure 3 shows the layout and the numbered buildings shown in the photographs of this section. The west range comprises of buildings numbered 6 and 7.

Figure 3: Plan of Farm Buildings

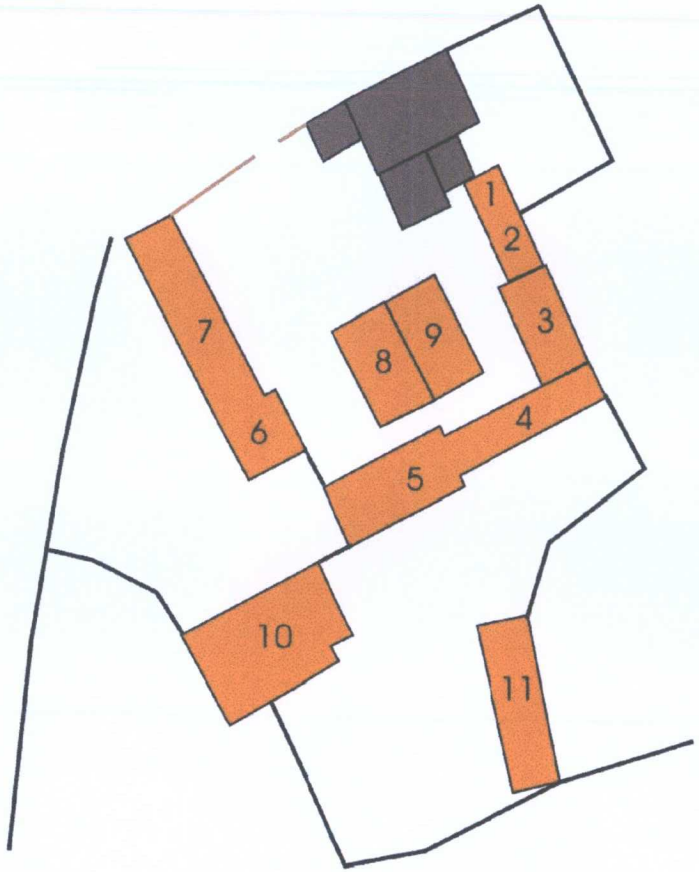
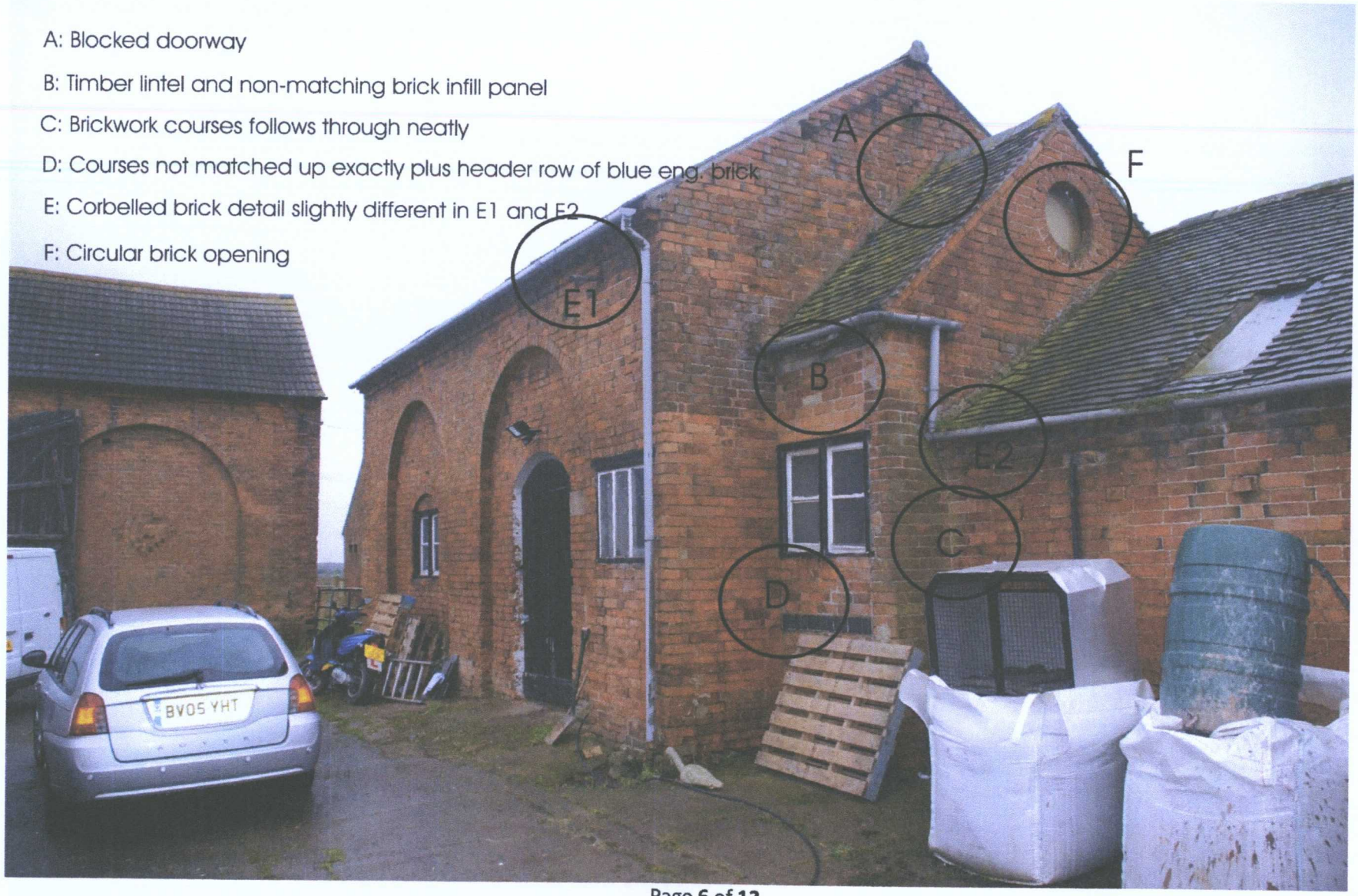


Figure 4: External Evidence of Development Stages



3.1 External Evidence of the Development Stages

A number of details are highlighted in Figure 4:

A: A blocked opening shows that the pitched roof between the Barn/Stable and the Cowshed was added to the Barn at a later date. The Barn/Stable is similar in design to the main Barn on the south side of the group of farmstead buildings. From the inside this blocked opening can be seen to have been the original doorway entrance to the hay loft. This would have had a stairway from this doorway to ground level.

B: The timber lintel at the top of the bricked in panel indicates that this was originally constructed as an open stairway with pitched roof and brick wall side. This opening is in exactly the location required to provided a stairway access from the courtyard to the hay loft.

C: The brick courses in the covered stairway and Cowshed do not match. This indicates that the Cowshed was built after the covered way.

D: The bricked in covered stairway courses do not match the Barn/Stable or the external wall of the covered stairway. This suggests that it was bricked in and windows provided at a later date.

E: The corbelled brick detail on the Barn/Shed and the Cowshed is similar but not exactly the same – confirming different building periods.

F: The circular opening in the end section of the covered stairway provides natural light and ventilation to the top of the stairway and hay loft. Without this opening these areas would have no natural light.

3.2 Internal Evidence of Development Stages

The entrance to the hay loft in the Barn/Stable (farm building 6) shows no evidence of a current stairway. The doorway has been lowered to fit in under the apex of the pitched roof above the old stairway. This also necessitated lowering the stairway upper landing and creating a step up to the floor level of the hay loft. This timber step can be clearly seen in the hay loft doorway.

Internally, the remaining first floor section of the brick wall surrounding the old covered stairway can be seen in Figure 5. When the new cowshed was added and access required through from the barn to the cowshed and out to the back via a new back door, the lower part of the stairway wall was removed and held up by new timber beams. Remaining earlier external brickwork can also be seen supported by the newer Cowshed timber roof construction. From the period of the construction of the Cowshed onwards, the access to the hayloft was likely to have been via ladder, which did not block the new through passage from barn to cowshed.

The former open stairway to the farmstead courtyard was bricked in and a window provided in this panel. The brickwork to about 1m high is double brick with two courses of header, the top one in blue engineering brick. This may have been the sill level for a former window which has been removed in the intervening years and replaced with the existing window or possibly part of the old stairway support detail.

The circular opening in the mid section building is a neat and simple solution to provide natural light into the top of the stairway and the hay loft.

Figure 5: Internal View of Remnants of Hay Loft Stairway



Figure 6: Bricked in stairway and Window



Figure 7: Roof truss structure in hayloft.



Figure 6 shows the inside of where the covered stairway would have been, and shows the remains of a sill which may have had a different window at an earlier period or may have been part of the step support construction detail.

Figure 7 shows the Barn/Stable hay loft roof construction which is different from the roof truss construction style in the newer Cowshed in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Roof Truss in newer Cowshed



Figure 9: End view of Outbuilding 6 Barn/Stable



Figure 10: Inside view of Barn/Stable showing former stable doors now partly blocked and new external wall in blockwork and brick

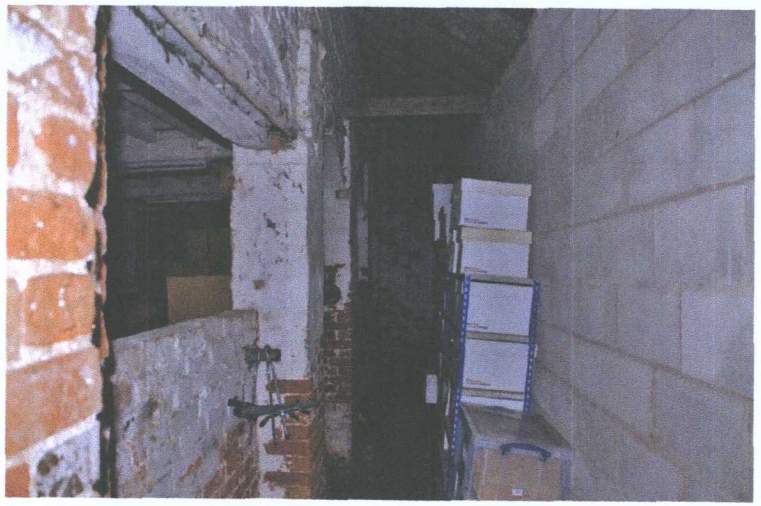


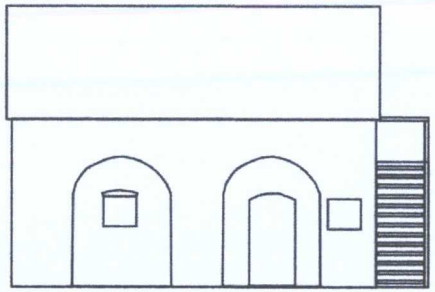
Figure 11: External view of rear of Barn/Stable and Cowshed

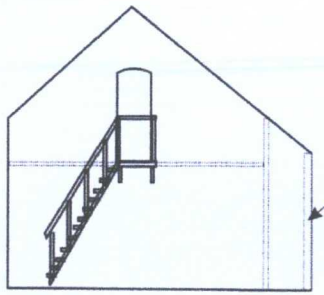


4. Stages of Development of West Range

Figure 12: Sketch diagrams showing likely development stages

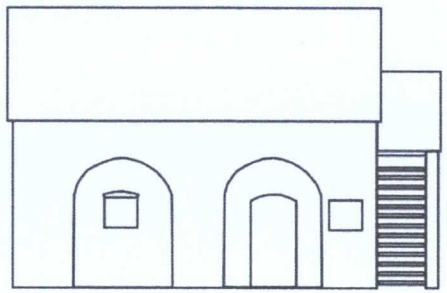
Stage 1: c.1790
Single Barn/Stable
with external stairway

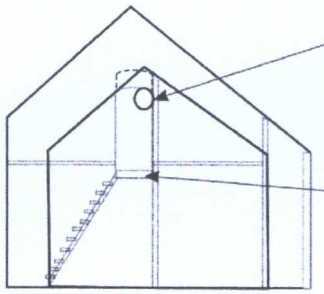




Field side of stables open as per typical stable detail. Likely to have had brick pillars to support roof along frontage.

Stage 2: c.1800-1830
Single Barn/Stable
with covered stairway
and rear store

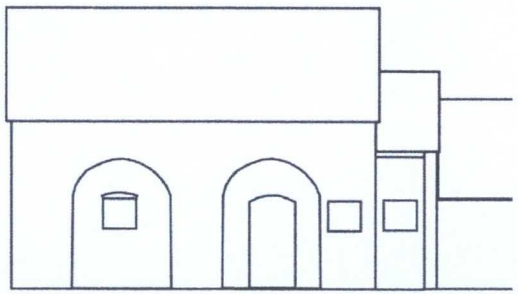


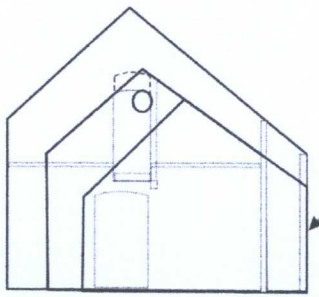


Circular opening created to provide natural light to top of stairway and hay loft.

Hay loft doorway had to be dropped under new pitched roof. New step created to hay loft floor level.

Stage 3: c.1810-1840
Barn/Stable with bricked in
stairway and new Cowshed





Field side of barn bricked in recent past possibly due to structural failure of pillars and roof.

5. Conclusions

All three stages of development described would have been undertaken in the period circa 1790 (original farm buildings erected) to 1841 (the tithe map shows a full west range of buildings on the plan). Since that final phase of development, a number of minor alterations, new, replacement or blocking of windows, and blocking of stable openings have taken place. However, it appears that the major layout of these buildings has remained relatively unchanged since the early nineteenth century.

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