

BOURBLES FARM BARN, PREESALL

Lancashire



Archaeological Building Investigation



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SUMMARY

An archaeological building investigation was undertaken in July 2003 of Bourbles Farm Barn, Preesall, Lancashire (SD 37852 47723) by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) following a request by Mr O'Connor who had proposed the redevelopment of the building for domestic use. Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS) had requested that the investigation be carried out prior to any development taking place due to the historic significance of the barn.

The barn, a substantial red brick building, was constructed in the 1880s and was first recorded on an Ordnance Survey map of 1895. This map showed that the barn was originally part of an enclosed farmstead, with three buildings arranged around a farmyard, and the farmhouse on the fourth side.

This late date for the construction of the barn is associated with the reclamation of mossland, which opened up a new area of fertile land. The large barn was part of a new farmstead built to exploit this area, which was suited to arable farming, and the barn would have been principally devoted to the storing and processing of crops. It is likely that horses were kept on the farm for labour, and a few cattle for manure to fertilise the pasture. These would have been kept either in the eastern area of the barn, under the hay loft, or in one of the narrower buildings located either side of the barn.

The two auxiliary buildings attached to the barn were demolished, probably as the need for storage decreased. The only apparent substantial modifications made to the barn itself appear to be the replacement of the original roof with corrugated asbestos and the blocking up of several pedestrian doorways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North would like to express its thanks to Mr O'Connor who commissioned the work.

The building investigation was carried out by Anthony Lee, who also wrote the report. Emma Carter produced the drawings. The project was managed by Alison Plummer. The report was edited by Emily Mercer and Alison Plummer.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Following planning proposals put forward by Mr O'Connor to convert the barn at Bourbles Farm Barn, Preesall, Lancashire (SD 37852 47723), Lancashire County Archaeological Service (LCAS) recommended that a programme of archaeological investigation be carried out prior to development. The barn is thought to date to at least the late nineteenth century and was considered by LCAS to be of some historical significance.
- 1.1.2 The project was to consist of a building investigation to Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England Level II-type standards (RCHME 1996). This is largely descriptive, providing only an outline level of analysis and interpretation, and consists of measured survey, hand annotation of existing drawings, photographs, and written records.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Bourbles farm is located on the west Lancashire plain, 1.3km east of Preesall, and 15km south-west of Lancaster, lying at approximately 5m OD. The plain's lush green pasture and rich arable land have been created over the last two centuries. Prior to this the area was predominantly marshland formed by rising sea levels after the last glaciation. As the ice-sheet retreated there remained a blanket of glacial till which now forms the coastal cliffs north of Blackpool. It also created many poorly drained hollows which infilled with post-glacial peat, giving rise to the mosses and meres that dominated the area until only recently. Although Permo-Triassic red mudstones, siltstones and sandstones ('New Red Sandstone') constitute much of the floor of the Lancashire lowlands, the solid rock geology rarely emerges from beneath its thick covering of glacial till (Countryside Commission, 1998).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1.1 A verbal brief was provided by LCAS, in response to which OA North produced a project design (*Appendix 1*). Following the acceptance of these proposals by the client and LCAS the work commenced in July 2003.

2.2 BUILDING INVESTIGATION

2.1.2 *Descriptive record*: written records were made of all principal elevations, both internal and external, as well as any features of historical or architectural significance. These records are purely descriptive and compiled using OA North pro-forma sheets.

2.1.3 *Site drawings*: drawings produced by architects on behalf of Mr O'Connor were annotated to produce a floor plan, and a cross-section was drawn to show the form and location of structural features or features of historic interest. Where necessary these were manually enhanced using hand survey techniques. The resulting drawings were digitised using an industry standard CAD package to produce the final drawings (Figs 1-3)

2.1.4 *Photographic archive*: photographs were taken using a digital camera. The archive comprises both general shots of the whole building and principal elevations, and individual architectural details.

2.2 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full archive of the building investigation has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive will be deposited with the Lancashire Record Office.

3. BUILDING SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 THE BARN

- 3.1.1 The barn consists of a single building orientated roughly east/west and situated approximately twenty metres to the north of the farmhouse. The 'front' of the building faces south.
- 3.1.2 The building is constructed of red brick in an English garden wall bond, although with five courses of stretchers to one course of headers rather than the typical three course of stretchers (Lynch 1994). The bricks have typical dimensions of 230mm x 112mm x 70mm. The original mortar bonding is a light grey, chalky cement mix. Parts of the external and internal elevations appear to have been recently repointed. The roof is constructed of corrugated asbestos, supported by a seven bay arrangement of trusses. The building is currently used as stabling for horses.
- 3.1.3 An additional open ended storage building is butted on to the north side of the barn. It is constructed of iron 'RSJ' lintels and corrugated iron. The roof is composed of corrugated asbestos.

3.2 EXTERNAL DETAIL

- 3.2.1 **South elevation:** the barn had had two further buildings attached at either end of the south elevation and were observed as the outline left by the pitched roofs of the structures. This was discernible at the east end as a line of unweathered cleaner bricks. At the western end of the building the evidence was clearer as cuts had been made into the elevation along the roof line of the demolished outshut (Plates 1 and 2). The two windows looking out from the hay loft have neat stone sills.
- 3.2.2 **East elevation:** ventilation holes have been inserted above the southernmost window on the ground floor. These appear to consist of lengths of ceramic land pipe and are almost certainly a later addition (Plate 3). A bolted plate of unknown function was observed to the south of the window in the hay loft, approximately 0.25m x 0.25m. A modern light fitting has been fixed to the south side, positioned near to the roof.
- 3.2.3 **North elevation:** two ventilation holes are evident, equidistant between the east corner and the wagon doorway. The dimensions are the same as a brick laid on end.
- 3.2.4 **West elevation:** no windows are located in the west gable, and the elevation is plain and unremarkable. A modern skim of rendering is visible across the top. A disused iron fixing of unknown function is located high up near the apex. Modern steel strips are fixed to the roof and wall, and offer additional support.

3.3 INTERNAL DETAIL

- 3.3.1 **Introduction:** there are three internal walls (Fig 2). Two run north-south across the barn, sub-dividing it into three large functional bays. A cross-wall separates the eastern bay and hay loft from the rest of the barn. An east-west internal wall connects this and the east gable, and further sub-divides the eastern bay and hay loft. The western wall creates a western and central bay, and has a large opening at the north end. The floor of the interior is plain concrete throughout. The floor is some 0.25m higher within the eastern room.
- 3.3.2 **The roof:** four trusses support the roof, each made up of a tie beam, jointed to a king post, principal rafters, and wall plates. Two struts, one either side of the king beam, offer additional support (Fig 3). There are two purlins in each pitch, plus a ridge purlin. The roof is corrugated asbestos and fixed to the purlins. All timber appear to be original and machine cut. The tie beams within the hay loft are marked with carved graffiti of tall ships with a date of 1950 carved alongside (Plate 5).
- 3.3.3 **Western bay:** there is a pedestrian doorway within the south elevation, with a large stone lintel above. A ventilation hole is situated in the centre of the first roof bay. It has been crudely fashioned by the removal of several bricks, and is certainly a later modification. It is situated 2.50m from the ground. The east end is dominated by a large wagon doorway to the full height of the barn. A machine cut timber lintel runs across the top of the opening. Above the lintel is an arched window with a timber surround, with two struts joining the lintel with the top of the arch. The archway is composed of bricks laid on end, with a dressed sandstone keystone. The archway is sprung from a quoin at either side. The modern doors are bolted on to the outside of the building.
- 3.3.4 The northern elevation has a hatch/window, which was originally a pedestrian door. The doorway is partially blocked and the bricks used to block the lower half are of a paler colour than the original bricks, and a darker cement mortar has been used. A modern timber lintel is situated above the window, and two cement blocks above this are evidence of repair work having been carried out most likely when converting the doorway to a window.
- 3.3.5 The west elevation is the interior of the west gable and is without doorways or windows, and is plain and unremarkable.
- 3.3.6 **Central bay:** the southern elevation contains a small window with machine cut timber lintel, situated at the west side. To the east of this lies a pedestrian doorway and wagon doorway, with a further wagon doorway directly opposite. The pedestrian doorway incorporates a modern timber surround, which accommodates the similarly modern door. The wagon doorways are of the same dimensions and design as the one situated in the west bay (Plate 6).
- 3.3.7 The western elevation contains some evidence of rebuild immediately to the east of the window in the adjoining room, although the exact nature of this is unclear. It is possible that the doorway was originally wider, or that two pedestrian doorways were situated close together, and the westernmost

internal wall extended across to the point between them. A large wagon doorway is situated opposite an identical doorway in the south elevation. The doorway is now blocked with timber planks, within which is a pedestrian doorway.

- 3.3.8 **Eastern bay:** the ceiling consists of low beams orientated north/south inserted into the walls, which support the joists and floorboards. The floor is made up of a thick concrete skim, some 0.25m higher than the rest of the barn. A small storage room is situated to the west of the wide doorway. It is windowless and accessed by pedestrian doorways at the north and south sides.
- 3.3.9 The west elevation has a wide arched doorway in the west side. The archway consists of alternate bricks laid on bed and on edge. The keystone is of dressed sandstone. To the east of the doorway the elevation has been covered with a cement render.
- 3.3.10 The east elevation is divided by an internal wall, and there is a window on either side. The southern window has a timber lintel and sill. The lintel above the north window is 2.39m long with the window being only 1.01m wide. This indicated that the window once extended further north. A stone lintel, which extends down to the floor forming the north side of the existing opening appears to have been inserted during the narrowing of the window. There is further evidence of the blocking visible through cracks in the rendering covering the elevation.
- 3.3.11 The north elevation contains an apparently blocked up pedestrian doorway situated at the west side, the aperture having been blocked with concrete blocks. Further west the elevation has been rendered and painted, and is unremarkable except for two 0.08m deep x 0.08m wide vertical cuts running from floor to ceiling. These are modern and were made to hold steel animal stall rails, one of which remains.
- 3.3.12 **Hay loft:** this is open to the roof and includes two of the four roof trusses. The east elevation is the upper part of the gable and contains a boarded up square window with a rectangular ventilation hole above. There are two further windows within the south elevation, with bricks laid on end above them creating a shallow arch. The loft is divided by the east west internal wall. This contains a single, apparently original, doorway constructed of timber planks with iron hinges and a timber surround.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 THE BARN

- 4.1.1 The site of Bourbles Barn appears as open fields on the first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1847. It was first recorded on the OS map of 1895 placing the inception of the barn somewhere between these two dates. It is likely to have been constructed during the later nineteenth century when many 'new' farms were built to utilise fertile areas created by the draining of mossland (Lake 1989).
- 4.1.2 As the 1895 map shows, the barn originally formed the northern side of an enclosed courtyard farmstead. The two buildings connecting the barn to the farmhouse have since been demolished; the westernmost construction apparently very recently. This would have created a new and large area of fertile land ideally suited to arable farming. Such courtyard farms were common from the late eighteenth century on large lowland arable farms (over 200 acre), which had been improved or enclosed (Lake 1989, 13).
- 4.1.3 It is likely that the function of the barn was the processing and storage of crops, with the possibility that the eastern room, under the hay loft, was used for stabling horses. The threshing floor would have been in the centre of the barn, between the two opposing wagon doorways that would have helped to create the essential draught required in the winnowing process. The western room was most likely to have been used for storing crops ready for threshing. The raised floor in the eastern room is typical within combination barns as the threshing floor was lower to help prevent the corn being easily blown into other parts of the barn. The small windowless room located in the south side of the building, between the eastern and central room, was probably a corn-hole where sacks of grain were stored before leaving the barn.
- 4.1.4 On an arable farm, with only a few cattle kept for manuring purposes, there would be little in the way of buildings for cattle, but one or more barns, stables and shelter for carts (Peters 1981, 7). It may be assumed that the few cattle which were kept were housed in one of the narrower buildings located on the east and west side of the courtyard.
- 4.1.5 Despite the demolition of some of the farm buildings surrounding the courtyard, it appears that the fabric of the barn itself has changed little. The blocking of several pedestrian doorways appears to have been undertaken quite recently, due to the presence of modern concrete blocks. It probably relates to the change in use from one of primarily crop processing, to one of housing animals. Therefore draughts would have been prevented by blocking up disused doorways.
- 4.1.6 This changing role of the barn reflects the changing agricultural practises of the twentieth century, with crops often being processed in the field and stored in silos or large centralised storage depots. There has also been an increase in dairy farming in the area. The modern animal pens erected within the barn,

complete with straw bedding and horse riding equipment, are evidence of the building's current use as stabling for horses.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

Figure 1: Location map

Figure 2: Ground floor plan

Figure 3: Cross section through east end of the barn

Figure 4: OS First Edition 25'' map (1895) showing original layout of the barn and associated buildings

PLATES

Plate 1: South external elevation, east end, looking north

Plate 2: South external elevation, west end, looking north

Plate 3: East external elevation, looking west

Plate 4: Central bay, looking west

Plate 5: Truss in hay loft, looking east

Plate 6: Front external elevation of barn, looking north-west



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