

The Malthouse, Wightfield Manor Farm, Deerhurst, near Apperley, Gloucestershire

By Amber Patrick

Introduction

Early in 1985 it came to the writer's attention that the above malthouse was under threat in that there was a planning application for its conversion to a residence. As a result the site was visited, by kind permission of the owner, Mrs Le Fleming, on a number of occasions in 1985 and in 1986 and finally in February 1992 when the building was undergoing conversion. Measured surveys were made of the three external elevations, the three floors plans, and the kiln furnace. Sections were drawn where appropriate, and other details were noted. Also, black and white photographs and colour slides were taken. Unfortunately little historical information appears to have survived. The report below is based on the field work and other available information.

The Site

Wightfield Manor is located on the very edge of Deerhurst parish, with the parish of Apperley being to the immediate south and west. The manor is located just to the north of the junction of the B4213 and the minor road to Apperley village, at Grid Reference SO869286. The malthouse is one of several farm buildings adjacent to Wightfield Manor House, which is a moated manor of sixteenth century date. The farm buildings are of a later date and were probably all built around the same time as the malthouse. It is perhaps worth noting that the manor house also had a cider mill, but no obvious brew house has survived.

History

The history of the manor house is rather better documented than the malthouse. Fortunately the malthouse has a date stone on it which has the following inscription: W. Barnard, 1816. By the time of Kelly's Trade Directory for Gloucestershire of 1870 there is no record of a maltster at Wightfield Manor, however there is a reference to the seat of Joseph Barnard being at Notcliffe [House]. A George Chandler, farmer was at Wightfield Court. By 1894 the farmer at Wightfield Court was a William Clutterbuck and by 1902 a W. Harris. It is to be presumed that the Joseph Barnard mentioned in the 1870 directory was a descendant of the W. Barnard of the 1816 date stone. Unfortunately nothing else is known about the history of the malthouse, although a pre 1940 photograph has survived.

Description of the Building

Exterior

The malthouse is a rectangular red brick building with a plain tile roof. It is aligned approximately east - west. The eastern end has a single plain gable with the date stone in it. Attached to the eastern elevation is a single storey lean-to structure. No access was obtained

Conclusion

This malting is of particular interest because it is a farm malting and because its kiln furnace has survived intact. It seems likely that later alteration have obscured the original layout and in consequence it is no longer possible with any degree of certainly to determine how malt was made in this building. At the time of the survey it has to be admitted that it was no longer a very attractive building, however, the early twentieth century photograph indicates that it was built with some consideration for symmetry. Each aperture, whether window or door was in alternate bays, thus from the east there was a door at ground floor level, and above that a blank bay and above that in the top floor a window. The next bay had no aperture at ground or top floor but a door at middle floor level. The third bay had windows at top and ground floor levels, and nothing in the middle. The fourth bay had a window at middle floor level only. The fifth bay had windows at top and ground floor levels only. The sixth bay had the above mentioned large doorway at ground floor level and a window above, and thus the symmetry is lost.

The conversion of the building to one residence has at least meant that the malthouse has survived. Some features have been retained in situ, such as the kiln furnace, but some interesting changes were proposed, such as the location of the perforated kiln tiles round the furnace shaft, but at ground floor. What will future industrial archaeologists make of this?

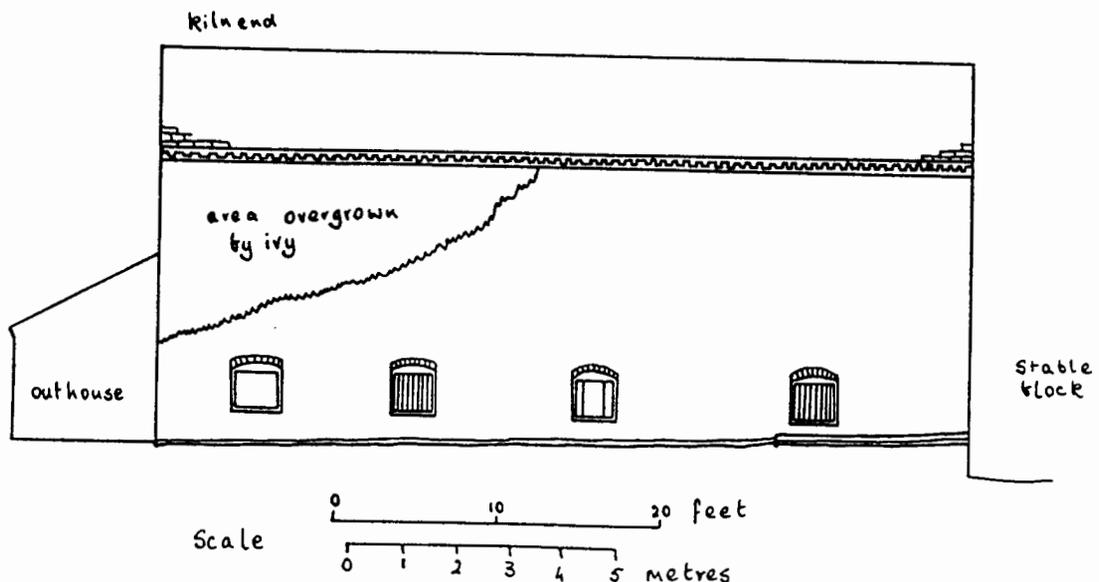
References

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Malthouse, Wightfield Manor Farm, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire.
The north elevation - a typical malthouse elevation.



to the lean-to. Just above the line of the tiled roof are two tie bar bosses. The western end is attached to another farm building (stables).

The northern elevation fronts onto the moat of the manor house. There is a minimal amount of decoration on this elevation, in the form of a dentilated brick course under the eaves. The main fenestration of this elevation is to be found at bottom floor level. It consists of four windows with curved tops constructed of a single row of header bricks. The windows had internal wooden shutters and external wooden bars set on the diagonal. Originally there were seven bars set in each frame. At the eastern end of this elevation the upper floor levels were much over grown with ivy and this obscures the now blocked window to the middle floor elevation.

The southern elevation gives onto the farmyard and a duck pond. The western end of the south elevation, where it adjoins the other farm buildings is completely demolished from bottom to top floor level, although top floor itself survives. As on the north elevation there is a decorative dentilated brick course under the eaves. The original fenestration of the southern elevation would be difficult to determine but for the survival of the early photograph. There was bottom floor door access to the kiln area at the eastern end. The doorway had a rounded top constructed of stretcher bricks. There is external door access to the middle floor by a set of steps which are of concrete and it must be presumed that they replaced an original set, probably of brick or stone. The door they lead up to is of wood and has a cat hole in it. The steps cut across the only, now blocked, surviving ground floor window in this elevation. An original window survives at middle floor level in this elevation, to the west of the steps. At upper floor level there were originally four windows, one of which was in the kiln. However, the windows have been much altered, so that their original form is now difficult to determine. The early photograph of the building, indicates that besides the window at second floor level to the west of the steps there was also another window to the west of that one and confirms the four windows in the top floor. Interestingly it indicates that there was another doorway at the western end in the now demolished part of the elevation. This doorway had a distinctive rounded arch and when the photograph was taken had either no door, or it was open. It was somewhat broader than the door at the eastern end. Did it give directly onto the malting floor?

Finally it should be noted that there is now no cowl over the kiln, nor is the roof constructed in a typical pyramidal or conical shape. This may be the result of re-roofing at some stage, however, it is worth noting that there is no evidence of a cowl in the turn of the century photograph.

Interior

This is a three floor malthouse with the cistern and the kiln furnace located on the bottom floor. The kiln furnace shaft rises up through the middle floor and finally the kiln drying floor is to be found at the eastern end of the top floor, separated from it by a wall.

The original access to the ground floor was by the door opposite the kiln furnace, although it would appear that there was also access at the western end. The steeping cistern was located in the north east corner of this floor, immediately to the north of the kiln furnace. It was constructed of stone. Its east west length was 7 feet (2 m 14 cms) and its width north to south 4 feet 1 inch (1 m 25 cms). The total height was 34 inches (86 cms) and it should be noted that the west side of the steep was constructed of two pieces of stone of not quite equal depths.

The kiln furnace is brick built and the shaft rises to form graceful arches over this part of the bottom floor. It is a compact and well built furnace and it is evident that considerable care was taken over its construction. Besides being functional it was also intended that it should look good. The brick shaft is square in shape with what may be described as broadly chamfered corners. The sides rise up vertically until they reach a decorative band of brick work which consists of a thin string course and above that a dentil brick course and a further string course of bricks. Above this the shaft, initially gradually, and then more rapidly flares out to form the arches. The furnace shaft has been painted white to a height of about nine brick courses with a vertical height of 2 feet 2 inches (66 cms) above the decorative brick work. Above this there is what appears to be brickwork on the diagonal, however, a closer examination reveals that the bricks and the mortar joints are in fact painted onto the existing horizontal brickwork. It should be noted that the arches of the furnace were only one brick (approximately four inches (10 cms) thick.

The furnace aperture is to be found in the south face. Originally there were upper and lower doors set in an iron frame. The lower door was missing and had been replaced by wooden boarding, however the upper door survives. It has a two hinges on the eastern side and an iron latch for securely fastening the door on the west side. The door is in fact a set of double doors kept together by a tie. The fire bars survived but were covered in the fuel of the last kilning! There was also a ventilation aperture above the furnace door in the arched part of the furnace shaft. It would appear that this aperture once had a door to close it, but that no longer survived at the time of the survey.

The surface of the floor around the steeping cistern and the furnace shaft was a mixture of red bricks and stone. To the west of the steep and kiln furnace was the bottom growing floor. This part of the ground floor was paved with red pavois or quarry tiles which measured 11 inches (28 cms) by 6½ inches (15 cms). There were no cast iron columns to support the upper floor, although it had been found necessary to insert two timber verticals as supports. These appeared to be of a relatively recent insertion, perhaps when the western end of the southern elevation collapsed. It should be noted that there were two modern raised rectangular plinths. Their purpose is unknown but was certainly not related to the building's use as a maltings, but may have been associated with a line shafting bracket which was found attached to the third beam from the eastern end of the malthouses. It is unlikely that the malthouse was ever considered large enough to need mechanical power.

The middle floor is now reached only by the outside concrete steps. There may have been additional access by steps or ladder in the now demolished western end. (However, it is worth noting that another Gloucestershire malthouse at Chipping Campden only had external access to the upper floors.) The floor was of ordinary wooden boards but with a surface of lime ashlar/cement screed in places. The litter covering it made it impossible to determine whether the whole floor had this surface. There was also evidence of a metal skirting board round the base of the plastered wall. The eastern wall of this floor was formed by the top part of the kiln furnace shaft. Two tie bar bosses could be seen and formed the other end of those to be seen in the external eastern elevation. The wooden stair of eight steps give access to the next floor was to be found in the north eastern corner. They ran up across the blocked window in the north elevation and then a right angle turn to the south took them to the level of the top floor.

The top floor is open to the roof. The roof structure is one of small props on the diagonal from the main beams to the underside of the roof timbers.

This top floor now has two partitions. One separates off the kiln drying floor at the eastern end and then to the west of that dividing wall is a timber partition. Beyond the partition is the rest of the top floor which appears to have a surface of cement screed on wooden boards but again the debris on the floor prevented a complete inspection.

The kiln drying floor is separated from the main part of the floor by a wall with a width of 6 inches (15 cms). This wall is of an interesting construction. The bottom consists of a row of header bricks. On top of this is a timber beam, like a wall plate. On top of this is a brick wall which reaches to the height of the door. Above and reaching to the roof is a timber planked partition. There is no indication as to why this dividing wall should be constructed in this way. The door which is of wood is centrally located in the middle of the wall. There is a raised threshold which would have prevented the grain on the kiln drying floor flowing out onto the main floor. The door opens outwards from the kiln drying floor. There is a now rather enlarged window in the south elevation but it was originally the same size as the windows in the north elevation. There is no vent for a cowl and it has to be assumed that the building has been re-roofed since it was last used as a malting. The floor of the kiln is of perforated ceramic tiles. There is no makers name on them, so they may have been made relatively locally. They measure 12 inches (30.5 cms) by 12 inches (30.5 cms) and have four small holes to each cluster. The tiles are supported by iron bars (angle iron?). There is no evidence that there was a spark or heat diffusing plate between the fire and the kiln floor.

The Malting Process in the Building

There is some difficulty in determining how the malting process operated in this building. One would have expected there to be some minimal barley storage on the floor over the steep but no chutes survive and as this was a farm malting it is equally possible the barley was stored in the rick until required, then threshed and immediately put into the steeping cistern where the germination process began. It would remain there two to three days. It would then have been thrown out. It would probably have been couched and during this time its volume measured by the excisemen so that the malt tax due could be calculated. (It is possible that this malting was of a sufficiently small capacity that no tax was due.) After couching, the resting of the grain for twenty four hours or so, it would have been spread out to grow. Growing probably took place on the bottom and top floors, although the surface of the middle floor indicates that growing could have taken place there too. The lack of the middle floor at the western end meant that there was no evidence surviving for a hatch, nor indeed was there any evidence for one giving access to the top floor. Therefore it is not possible to determine with any certainty how the green malt was transported to the kiln when it was ready for kilning but it was probably hoisted up from the bottom floors in a basket. The only evident access to the upper floor now is by the stairs against the north eastern corner. Equally it is not easy to determine what happened to the malt after it had been kilned. Normally it would have been cleaned and stored on site, usually on the middle floor, but it could have been cleaned and stored elsewhere on the farm until it was used. It must also be borne in mind that subsequent alterations to the building may well have obliterated the features which would have enabled one to determine how the malting process worked in this building. Another possibility is that it is more or less as built and that it was not an easy building to work and that in consequence it ceased to operate as a maltings relatively early.