

THE MALTHOUSE ATTACHED TO CHURCH FARM, LITTLEDEAN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

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Introduction

I visited this malthouse on 17 August, 1997. Church Farm is a listed building, grade II, but the malthouse is not described in the list description. Bill Cronin, a member of the Gloucestershire Buildings Recording Group, was approached by the owner, and this report is produced as a result of that initial referral. It must be pointed out that the malthouse is on private property.

A copy has been sent to the owner and a copy will be deposited with the National Monuments Record at Swindon.

History

The farm house according to the list description is of an early eighteenth century date. Mr H Boughton, the present owner, advised that a new front was built onto the house in 1725. However, nothing is known about the malthouse and whether it, or rather the part attached to the house was built at the same time as the house or whether it was added at a later date. The only reference in the trades directories is in Kelly's for 1870 when a Joseph Bennet is listed as a maltster at Littledean. There is no indication as to whether he was malting at Church Farm or elsewhere in the village. However, it is perhaps worth noting that in Pigot's *Directory* for 1830, which includes Gloucestershire, listed under Mitcheldean are Thomas Bennet & Co as maltsters, corn dealers and seedsmen. Was this Bennet actually living at Littledean and was he related to the Joseph Bennet mentioned in 1870 or is it just coincidence that the name is the same?

The Site

Church Farm is situated on the eastern side of the village and to the south of the church and just north of the road junction of the A4151 and the minor road to Newnham. Thus to the west of Church Farm is the village and to the east is open farmland. The malthouse is attached to Church Farm house by its northern wing at the western end. The maltings consists of two wings, each running east - west and linked by a short north - south wing. The kiln was converted to a slaughter house at one stage for the farm's use. The other farm buildings, including modern milking parlours are attached to the eastern ends of both wings of the malthouse. These obscure the eastern elevations of both the kiln and the end of the southern wing of the malthouse. To the south there is a detached red brick building with a fairly modern pantile roof. Part of this was a stable and the rest was probably for some sort of storage. There are other modern farm buildings in the vicinity.

The Building

The malthouse is of stone construction with a pantile roof. The building consists of two wings, both running more or less east - west and linked by a short north - south wing. The building as a whole is of two storeys, but the northern arm is of three storeys with the top floor in the roof. Externally, there is no evidence of this third floor. Also, the older, northern wing has the only kiln at its eastern end.

EXTERIOR

The Northern Wing

The western end of the northern wing of the malthouse is attached to the farm house and so there is no external western elevation to this wing. The northern elevation of the northern wing was not inspected but from internal inspection there do not appear to be any windows in it. The southern elevation is rather more complicated. The western most part is more or less of three bays and is almost certainly the original malthouse and is really just a continuation of the house. There is a window to each floor but they are not above each other. Across it are the steps up to the middle floor. They are constructed of brick with stone caps, and the door to which they lead is at the western end. There is then a clear change, with the eastern end presumably constructed when the malthouse was enlarged. This addition is more or less of two bays, plus the kiln. Again there is a window to each floor, but again they are not one above the other and on the ground floor there is now a large opening, to the west of the ground floor window. There are no windows in the loft storey. It cannot be said that this elevation displays any symmetry with regard to the windows and doors.

The Kiln

The kiln has a wooden louvred cowl surviving in the plain gabled roof. The gable is in the east elevation. There is also a window in this east elevation. The elevations facing the court yard to the house are painted white, whereas the kiln elevation facing the fields has not been painted and the irregular nature of the coursed stonework can be seen. It is also worth noting that a scar of a somewhat lower gable which once abutted the kiln, just covering the existing window can still be seen.

The Link Wing

The short wing which links the two east - west wings has an eastern elevation constructed of stone. The western elevation which looks onto the house has recently been neatly weatherboarded onto a timber frame. The roof is of pantiles. There is a window in the centre of both the north and south elevations. At ground floor level there is a walkway through from the new farm yard to the court yard of the house and malthouse. The abutment of the kiln to the link wing is obscured by rendering.

The Southern Wing

The southern wing is like the rest of the malthouse of stone with the elevations facing the house painted white and those to the east, being unpainted. In the east elevation which is largely obscured by recent structures there were a window and a door at both the ground and first floor levels. The north elevation is rather more symmetrical than the others of this malthouse. There are two windows to each of the ground and upper floors and they are above

each other. The west elevation is partially obscured by ivy but has centrally located windows, one above the other at ground and upper floor levels. Also, at the southern end there are stone steps which provide access to the door to the upper floor. The south elevation was not inspected.

All the windows in the malthouse are now glazed. The buildings appear generally in good repair with the possible exception of the east elevation of the south wing where the door frames are missing and the windows are unglazed.

INTERIOR

The Northern Wing

The older northern wing has three storeys.

The bottom floor has a stone flag floor. At the western end of this bottom floor is a kitchen. It is to be presumed that the steeping cistern was on the bottom floor, although there are now no remains of it. Also it should be noted that the structural eastern wall of the original malthouse survives but now as an internal wall. Access was either from the house or from the now large opening in the later part of this wing.

The middle floor is reached by the external steps. It is now divided by light weight partitions. There is a walkway boarded off from the rest of the floor along the southern side. This floor is of lime/cement screed. At the eastern end is the door somewhat above floor level giving onto the kiln drying floor. The bottom part, under the doorway is bricked up, but the walls on either side are plastered and lime washed. Except for the part around the door frame, the walls are slightly recessed. The door to the kiln is of timber, four vertical pieces and three cross pieces. It is side hinged on the southern side. The internal sloping pyramidal roof of the kiln is now visible, although at one time it might have been hidden by the top floor ceiling extension. No shutters survive on the windows.

The top floor is almost completely in the roof space. It has no windows. It is reached by ladder access from the middle floor. The roof structure is of two types, A frame and a simple brace type and rather more substantial in the older part than the newer half. Full access was not possible but the floor like the one below is of lime/cement screed on narrow wooden boards or broad lathes. These run north - south and rest on joist running east - west which in turn are supported by the main timbers running north to south. Some of the joists have numbers on them. This upper floor has sides and therefore the floor does not extend to the roof. This no doubt ensured the grain did not get into the roof space.

The Kiln

The kiln has been completely gutted at the lower levels and in consequence neither the furnace nor the drying floor survive. The ground floor is now flagged but this may be a later replacement. However, it is possible to determine the position of the drying floor and the perforated tiles have been stored elsewhere on site. These are twelve inches square and have five perforations in a cruciform shape per main round hole. The internal pyramidal roof structure survives as does the wooden louvred cowl which was sunk through the centre of the pyramid.

The Link Wing

At ground floor level this primarily provides the walkway between the courtyard of the house and the outer part of the farm. Off it on the northern side is a door into what was the kiln furnace area. On the southern side is door access into the bottom floor of the southern wing. See below for description. The upper floor of this link wing is reached from the southern wing and is really an extension of it. The roof is king post but with a lathe and plaster ceiling under the roof. There are three bays with two main beams running east to west and from each rises the roof structure. The floor is of lime/cement screed on lathe. There would appear to have been access to the kiln drying floor by means of a door, slightly to the west of centre in the northern wall.

The Southern Wing

There are only two floors to this wing.

The bottom floor has a stone flag floor. There is a drain running the length of it, east - west, but towards the northern side as opposed to the centre. The walls are thick and the window cills slope. There are internal wooden shutters. The upper floor is supported on fairly massive beams running north to south. There is wedging under the ends. There are also some additional supports under the beams. There is a hatch in the ceiling, in the south west corner, quite near the door to the upper floor.

The upper floor has a king post roof structure. There are more or less four bays with the main beams running north to south and each supports a roof truss, although the eastern end is rather more complicated. The underside of the roof has a lathe and plaster ceiling. There are two windows on the north side and they have wooden side hinged shutters. The hinges are on the outside. Originally the walls of the whole of this upper floor were probably limewashed. The floor is now of timber boards but originally it was of lime/cement screed.

The Development of the Malthouse and the Malting Process at Littledean

It would seem reasonable to assume that the original or oldest part of the malthouse was the western end of the northern wing which is attached to the farm house. There is no indication of the location of the steep or the kiln. They may have been at opposite ends of this small building but that is by no means certain. The kiln may have been between the malthouse and the domestic residence, more or less where the present kitchen now is. It is possible a domestic bread oven was used to kiln the malt. The eastern wall of this original malthouse survives and is substantial. It could have been the wall separating the malthouse from kiln furnace area. With the later addition or extension of the malthouse eastwards, the kiln was clearly located at the eastern end. Where ever the steep may have been before then, it is most likely to have been at the opposite end of the building to the kiln, and next to the steep would have been any couch frame. It seems likely that the two upper floors were use for growing and probably the bottom floor too, but there is now no indication of how the green malt was moved from the top and bottom floors to the kiln. From the middle floor it would simply be shovelled onto the perforated kiln drying floor. There is no immediate indication of where the kilned malt was stored.

At some later date it seems likely that the southern wing was added, probably to the already existing kiln. Unfortunately the rendering on the abutment of the kiln and the link wing means that it is not possible to determine which was built first, the kiln as an extension of the north wing, or with the addition of the new south wing. The southern wing consists of two parts, the east - west part and a short arm, the link wing, in other words it was L shaped. The link wing provided access to the kiln. It is most likely that the steep and its associated couch frame was on the ground floor at the western end of this southern wing and that again both floors were used for growing. There is a hatch to the upper floor at the western end, but it is likely there was another nearer the kiln so that the green malt from the bottom floor could be easily conveyed to the kiln. However, if this was not the case, then the steep may have been at the eastern end. In that case the malt would have been grown on the bottom floor and then half way through growing it was hoisted to the upper floor by the existing hatch. It would then have been moved, gradually, towards the kiln. Then when fully grown the green malt was simply shovelled onto the kiln. Whether this wing was used for the production of malt at the same time as the northern wing it cannot now be determined. Again there is no obvious place for the storage of the kilned malt.

There are two aspects of the malting process which seem to be missing. Firstly there is the storage of the barley, however on a farm until at least the late nineteenth century and often well into the twentieth century it was usual to store the barley in a rick until just before it was needed. Only then would it be threshed and dressed ready for malting. Usually there was some storage of barley for immediate use near the steeping cistern, but this was not necessarily the case. Such a relatively small storage area would be now less easily determinable. The second problem is the location of the malt storage. When kilning is complete, the malt has to be stored, usually for a month, before it is used for brewing. As the kilning has not only given flavour and colour to the malt, it has also reduced the moisture content to about 3% which is ideal for grinding it to grist in the brewing process. Obviously, low moisture has to be maintained during storage. Therefore malt storage tended to be on upper floors and in wooden bins. There is no obvious location for the latter at the malthouse, although it may be that the middle floor of the northern wing was in fact used for storage and not for growing. This would certainly explain the presence of the partitions, although, the use of a lime screed floor is rather unusual. Furthermore, the whole of the north wing may have been used for storage once the southern wing came into use, especially if both were not in use together. Of course on a farm it would not have been too difficult for the malt to be stored elsewhere, but this would have been rather unusual.

Conclusions

This is an interesting farm malthouse despite the fact that such important features as the kiln furnace and the steeps are missing. There are clearly three phases, the earliest being that attached to the domestic residence which was subsequently extended and finally it would appear that business was sufficiently good to warrant a further extension, the southern wing, or just possibly it was decided that the old malthouse was too small and inconvenient to work and so the southern wing was built. It was designed to take utilise the original kiln. The survival of the lime/cement screed floors is of particular interest, especially those in the northern wing.

The size of the windows is indicative of a malthouse but there is none of the regularity so often found in larger and later malthouses. This one simply grew as the need arose. Thus the main externally distinctive feature is the kiln cowl.

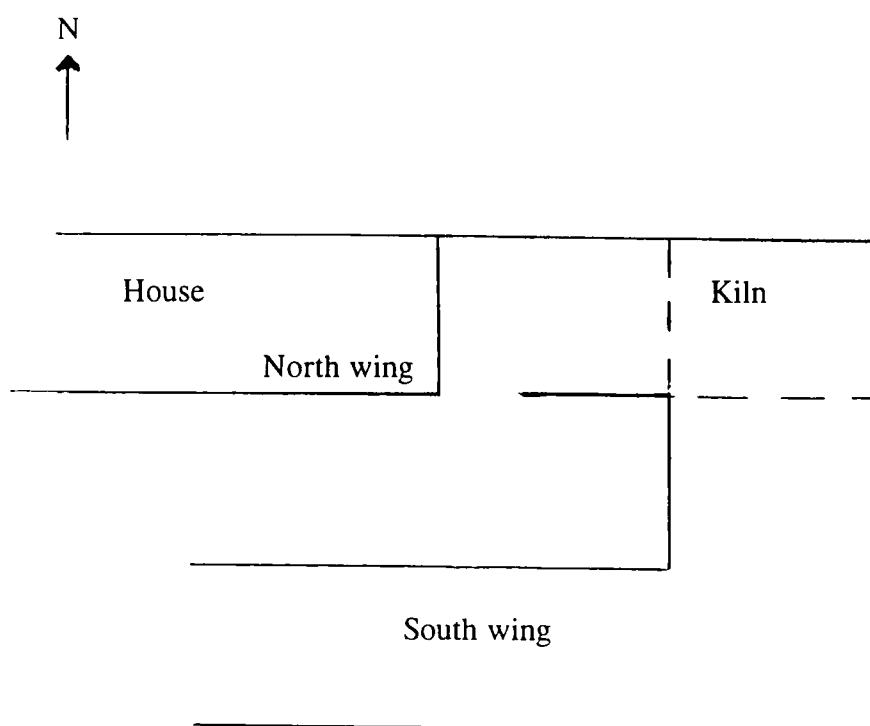
Although perhaps not as externally attractive as some small malthouses, this one is important because of the survival almost unaltered of the early growing floors in the northern wing. Also, it is an important example of a farm malthouse. These were no doubt once far more common than they now appear, but being on a farm, they could easily be re-used for other purposes once it was no longer economic to use them as maltings. In consequence relatively few survive with any recognisable features.

Bibliography

Kelly's *Trade Directory for Gloucestershire* for 1870.

Patrick, A., 1996, Establishing a Typology for the Buildings of the Floor Malting Industry, in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, Volume 18, Number 2, Spring issue, pages 180 to 200.

Pigot's *Commercial Directory for Gloucestershire* 1830.



Diagrammatic layout of the malthouse