Aylsham & District u3a Historical Buildings Group

Report on

Barn to rear of 1 Market Place
(on Bank Street)
facing onto
Norwich Road
Aylsham

East side (facing Norwich Road)
Note colour change where the dark red bricks suddenly change to a more orangey red part way up.

Overview

The building stands on the south-west corner of what was nominally the garden to number 1 Market Place. The building is a prominent feature of the 'garden plot', occupying approximately one quarter of the available space and aligned to present its longest side towards the adjacent Norwich Road. All historic plans of the town that have been located indicate the building has always been open to/accessible from Norwich Road.

The building is a simple rectangle, constructed of brick walls with a steep pitched roof clad with pantiles. The base of the walls project to create a tall plinth. Wide brick pilasters on the two long sides divide them both into 3 equal sections (bays). The tops of the north and south walls have been carried up above the roofline to form simple triangular gables. The sloping sides of the gables are finished with low parapets for the edges of the pantiles to sit against. Moulded brick platt bands on the north and south walls form the base of the gables (the majority of the southern platt band has been crudely hacked off).

On the east side, a large opening occupies the full height of the central bay. The top half of the opening is fitted with a 9 paned window (now covered over internally). The top hinges for a pair of full height doors are present to each side of the glazing – these must have been cart doors as there is no corresponding opening on the opposite side as required for threshing doors. The bottom half of the opening has been filled with painted timber cladding that incorporates a personal door.

A 20th century door and window (both of poor quality) have been inserted on the west side.

External details of the building (July 2024)

Brickwork:

The walls are mostly 1½ bricks in thickness (approximately 13”). Unusually, they sit centrally on a 2 brick thick (approximately 18”) plinth – normally when a thicker plinth is present, the internal face of the plinth and walls above are flush.

Two types of bonding are present to the external brickwork:

English bonded brickwork to plinth – alternating courses of brick sides (stretchers) and brick ends (headers).

Flemish bonded brickwork to walls above plinth – alternating stretchers and headers in every course.

English bonding was typically used for most external brickwork prior to 1700 and produces the strongest possible wall. Flemish bonding was a new innovation that arrived from the Netherlands around 1700 – it is considered more decorative than English bonded brickwork while still retaining sufficient strength for most buildings. The use of Flemish bonding for all external walls above the plinth puts the earliest construction date at around 1700.

Where the original mortar finish has survived, the horizontal joints have been given a ‘ruled’ finish – this is a rounded horizontal indent running along the mortar joint (see picture to the right). The indent is applied with a special tool and was normally reserved for high class work – it subtly altered the visual appearance of the joints. Note how only the horizontal joints have been ‘ruled’, the vertical joints were often also ruled on high class houses. The fact that a ruled mortar finish has been used on an ‘agricultural’ building suggests the more fashionable Flemish bonded brickwork could have been used soon after its introduction around 1700.

To the left is part of the moulded brick platt band at the base of the north gable (unfortunately the top moulding has been covered by an inappropriate lead canopy). The platt band is identical to that on the side of the ‘Black Boys’ in the Market Place (which has been ‘dated’ to 1710), and also those on the north and west sides of the ‘Old Bank House’ on the opposite side of Norwich Road – which has been confusingly assigned several dates in the Norfolk Heritage records.

As can be seen in the main picture at the start of the report, the bricks change colour part way up the walls. This is the case on all four sides but the changeover height differs on each side, suggesting the changeover was not deliberately designed in.

There is a high proportion of ‘blue headers’ in the darker red sections. These are produced when the bricks are ‘over-fired’ so they begin to vitrify – this can be accidental or deliberate. The ‘over-fired’ bricks are much more resistant to weathering than normal bricks and are also stronger. In places the blue headers appear to have been deliberately chosen and laid to create a pattern, this is particularly noticeable on the west side as shown on the right. This type of pattern was fashionable pre-1700 but was rarely used after then until the late 1800s. There are some 18th century houses in Aylsham that possess small areas of blue headers to create a similar pattern, but these patterns appear to be ‘accidental’ – one such house on Hungate Street is dated 1765 but the brickwork appears to be later than the barn.

There is subtle change of brick size between the darker reds and more orangey reds. In both cases the bricks are 2¼” tall but while the darker bricks are 9” x 4⅛”, the orangey bricks are 9⅛” x 4¼” – suggesting they were produced by a different brick-maker.

Ventilation openings:

Just 4 vertical ventilation openings are present – 2 each on the north and east walls. All 4 are bridged by a single brick half-way up as a form of simple reinforcement. A single small additional ventilation slot is present to the north gable and the marks of two previous sets of honeycomb vents, arranged in diamond shaped clusters, are visible on the south gable. Virtually no cross ventilation is provided so the building was not really suitable for arable storage or dusty activities such as threshing. All original ventilation openings have been blocked over a protracted period:

Blocked ventilation opening on north wall – carefully blocked from inside using bricks laid on their sides and bedded in lime mortar, suggesting late 19th century work

Blocked ventilation opening on east wall – crudely blocked from outside by stuffing space with upended bricks secured with minimal lime mortar, suggesting inter-war work

Blocked ventilation opening on north gable – crudely achieved by covering the opening internally with modern building materials, suggesting circa 1970s work

Blocked diamond pattern honeycomb ventilation openings on south gable – closed off by inserting additional bricks into the honeycomb openings using cement mortar, suggesting done circa 2000

Former entrance door:

The current mixture of glazing, timber cladding and personal door, which have together replaced the original cart doors, seems to date from two different periods:

The original door frame for the cart doors (with the top hinges) is still present to the sides of the original opening. A simple timber frame to support the nine glazed sections has been inserted into the original door frame. The glass used appears to be pre-war and the panes are quite large, which together with the lack of mouldings on the timber sections used, suggests an interwar date – the capabilities existed for such work in late Victorian or Edwardian times but they would normally not consider it a finished job without moulding the timbers. The fitting of the personal door below the glazing is extremely crude – the side of the original door post has been cutaway (exposing the underside of the joint with the sill of the glazing) before wedging a new door post into position to hang the new door onto. This workmanship is typical of the 1970s.

Roof:

The original roof has been replaced in modern times with unglazed machine made clay pantiles. The roof pitch and low gable parapets are both designed for pantiles and would not be suitable for thatch, so it is safe to assume the roof was always pantiled.

Internal details of the building (Inspected March 2025)

Internally the building consists of a single rectangular space open right up to the apex of the roof. The horizontal space is visually divided into 3 by a pair of braced tie beams that prevent the roof from pushing the front and back walls over:

North gable wall and northernmost braced tie beam

The scale of the barn interior is apparent in this picture, looking towards the south-west corner with both braced tie beams visible. The long window is set at normal modern window height!

The two braced tie beam assemblies (i.e. each horizontal beam, with their two vertical end posts, two diagonal braces, and short support beams projecting from the walls at the base of the posts) are older than the rest of the building. (It was common practice to reuse parts from older buildings throughout history prior to 1900.) See the pictures below for evidence of: reuse from an earlier barn; chamfered edges with run out 'stops'; and joints all inscribed with a full set of carpenters marks. From this we can infer that they were originally made in the late 17th century.

Foot of a braced tie beam showing that the vertical post was originally part of a different building

Chamfered edge (arrowed) with run out stop (circled) at bottom

Another view of chamfered edge (arrowed) with run out stop (circled) at bottom

Carpenters marks (arrowed) – in this case for joint number 1. The two stopped chamfers can also be clearly seen on both edges of the post below the joint and can also just be seen on the bottom of the brace – although not visible in this photo, a separate pair of stopped chamfers start on the post just above this joint, and the tie beam itself has matching chamfers albeit larger.

The roof structure possesses regularly spaced trusses linked by small section horizontal beams (purlins). The purlins support common rafters and are reinforced with diagonal wind braces. Stylistically, this is a 17th century design but in this instance, the common rafters are simply halved poles of varying diameter along their lengths and their slenderness means they have to be very closely spaced – these halved poles are much too crude for 17th century work but are typical of 18th century carpentry. Wrought iron straps have been used to attach the base of the roof to the tie beams – again an 18th century technique. The roof has been heavily repaired in modern times, particularly towards its northern end.

Evidence of previous alterations/changes of use

At some stage, the roof was ceiled using lime plaster applied to timber laths fixed to the underside of the common rafters. Most of this was subsequently replaced with plasterboard which has since been entirely removed, presumably as part of the re-roofing works. The lack of an internal scaffold meant it was not possible to ascertain the age of the original plastering, but it would be surprising if it pre-dated the second half of the 19th century. The ceiling plaster enabled the building to be used as a warehouse for something that needed to be kept dry and dust free.

In the south-east corner is what appears to be the remains of a flue and fireplace:

The dimensions and design are typical of mid-19th century work and the fireplace would be more suitable for a cast-iron stove than an open fire. The flue itself has been tethered to the two outside walls using a right-angled wrought iron strap (arrowed).

The south gable has 3 anomalies which suggest an additional structure/space could have existed within the roof space next to this gable (see known owners/occupants below for significance of this):

The horizontal timber (black arrow) at the base of the south gable protrudes beyond the wall face. Timbers normally only protrude like this to provide support for an upper floor – the corresponding timber at the base of the north gable is finished flush with the face of the internal brickwork as was standard practice throughout the 18th century.

The upper part of the south gable (within the yellow dashed outline) appears to be lime plastered, with the area below being limewashed down to the protruding beam. The plastered wall area is ½ a brick thinner than the rest of the wall – while this doesn't matter for a barn, if part of a room it would be routinely plastered to prevent draughts blowing through the mortar joints.

What appear to be a pair of windows (red arrows) have been blocked up – interestingly these match the positions of the blocked external diamond honeycomb vents shown on page 4 but are a different shape! This raises the possibility that high level windows pre-dated the honeycomb ventilation openings, with the internal window openings conceivably being bricked up independently of the external bricking up of the honeycomb openings.

Known owners/occupants

- From 1614 to 1668 the house and two barns were owned by Firmin Lawes, then his son Thomas Lawes (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, p. 69) – the precise locations and footprints of the two barns are unknown.
- In 1668 Mary Coney (a widow) inherited the messuage from her grandfather Thomas Lawes (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, p. 59). From 1688 her daughter and son-in-law (Hannah and Henry Rippinghall) lived with her at 1 Market Place.
- In 1714 Henry Rippinghall (a lawyer) inherited the messuage from Mary Coney (although Hannah had died in 1701). On his death in 1715, due to an outstanding mortgage, ownership passed to John Havet but Henry Rippinghall's second wife Elizabeth (who happened to be John Havet's daughter) was able to continue living in the house – the inventory taken at the time records the presence of a barn (used for wood storage) with a bedroom over (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, pp. 64-66).

- From 1715 to 1725 John Havet owned the property. Elizabeth Rippinghall moved out in 1720 and it is not known who the subsequent occupant was (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, p. 67).
- A plaque on the wall of Number 1 Market Place states Christopher Layer lived there until his untimely death in 1723. This is not correct. Christopher Layer was a local lawyer who lived in London from 1715 after selling off the family estate in Booton (in 1713), but he did practice in Aylsham and was well known for spending lavishly. (Betty Gee, *Christopher Layer 1683-1723 A Norfolk Lawyer,* Aylsham Local History Society Journal Vol. 6 Number 1, pp. 16-22). His only connection to 1 Market Place seems to be that he was apprenticed to Henry Rippinghall until they fell out (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, p. 42).
- From 1725 to 1764 ownership is unknown as all the properties previously belonging to John Havet and Henry Rippinghall were divided into numerous shares which were conveyed to numerous individuals (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, pp. 67-68).
- In 1764 John Repton bought numbers 1 & 2 Market Place together with 50 acres for his daughter Dorothy (Roger Polhill, *Repton 200: The Repton Family in Aylsham,* Aylsham Local History Society journal Vol. 11 Number 2, pp. 50-51). She married John Adey in 1768 who then moved in. John Adey was a lawyer and was heavily involved during the 1770s with the Aylsham Navigation that resulted in a canal being dug to bring wherry traffic to the new wherry basin serving the mills at Millgate/Dunkirk.
- In 1822 William Repton (a lawyer) inherited 1 & 2 Market Place from his aunt Dorothy Adey – she had no surviving children and her husband had died in 1809 (Roger Polhill, *Repton 200: The Repton Family in Aylsham,* Aylsham Local History Society journal Vol. 11 Number 2, p. 51).
- The 1839 Wright's map of Aylsham shows the barn as being part of numbers 1 & 2 Market Place (i.e. what we currently think of as 'Barclay's Bank'). This was both owned and occupied by William Repton. Wright describes the messuage as house, buildings, yards and garden. In addition, William Repton owned and occupied the following plots etc. around Aylsham:
    - an orchard running from Budgens car park to Palmers Lane (on which he built the current house called The Orchards in 1847 – now flats),
    - a garden in Burgh Road roughly half-way between Norwich Road and Oakfield Road (Oakfield Road was called Gay's Lane in 1839),
    - a 'garden field' just outside town off the Cawston Road,
    - a 'cart shed pightle' off Palmers Lane,

    and owned but rented out further plots:

    - a house on Hungate Street where the library now stands – subdivided into a house and a stable with house,
    - a 'house, stable, yard and garden' on Market Place (current 'Flour & Bean' bakery and 'Celebrations' card shop),
    - 5 plots of land just outside town down Cawston Road,
    - 3 plots of land plus an access track just outside town off Spa Lane,
    - and 2 plots of land just outside town between Norwich Road and Hungate Street.
- In 1858, following William Repton's death, 1 Market Place was leased for use as a bank by Gurney and Co. before they purchased it a year later. Gurneys Bank became part of Barclays Bank in 1896 who continued to use the premises until 2024 (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, p. 190). The two original houses were entirely reconstructed in 1966 leaving just the Market Place facade intact (albeit altered) and the barn.

Conclusions

From the known ownership/occupants of 1 Market Place and details of the barn's construction, the probable build period for the barn can be deduced as follows:

- the building pre-dates 1764 so it must have already been present when John Repton purchased the site;
- between 1725 and 1764 the site was shared between multiple owners with no overriding interest so it is safe to assume no new barns would have been erected in that period;
- similarly some sort of short term tenancies account for the period 1720 to 1725;
- between 1715 and 1720 number 1 Market Place was occupied by an elderly widow as a private house, so again any new construction work is highly unlikely;
- a barn filled with wood and containing a bedroom over is recorded in 1715 which could well be the barn under consideration;
- 1668 seems too early for the barn so it can't have been present when Mary Coney inherited the site. Although Mary's daughter and son-in-law, the Rippinghalls, moved into 1 Market Place with her in 1688, Henry Rippinghall was at the time renting rooms in London where he was attempting to make a living as a semi-trained Lawyer;
- around 1690 Henry Rippinghall set himself up as a lawyer from his mother-in-law's house. The barn was constructed for some sort of general storage rather than any sort of agricultural activity, so could well date from shortly after 1690 when space would be at a premium within the house – the external brickwork and roof structure of the barn both support a construction date of around 1700-1710;
- Henry Rippinghall doesn't appear to have been a very successful lawyer (William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis, *Aylsham: A nest of Norfolk Lawyers*, pp. 59-67) and was a bit a 'chancer'. If he wasn't diddling clients and getting sued, he was trying to get money out of clients who didn't pay – little wonder he had to live with his mother-in-law for over 20 years. It would also explain the change of bricks while the barn was being built – Henry simply ran out of money part way through (or put simply, stopped paying) and when work resumed, there was a good chance the original builder/supplier wouldn't continue so he had to find alternatives.

Thus it is reasonable to conclude the barn was built by Henry Rippinghall while he was living and working as a lawyer in his mother-in-law's house. Construction commenced around 1700 but due to financial difficulties, proceeded erratically in at least 2, possibly 3 phases, so the building almost certainly took several years to complete.

Following their purchase in 1859, when Gurney & Co undertook any required alterations to make the site suitable as banking premises, the interior of the barn was upgraded. The roof was plastered internally and a stove was installed. The ventilation slots through the outside walls must also have been either glazed or bricked up at the same time otherwise the other works would have been pointless! Depending on what was stored in the barn, the original cart doors must also have been replaced/altered.

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