



# Eavesdropper

The **Newsletter of the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group**  
**No.1 1994**

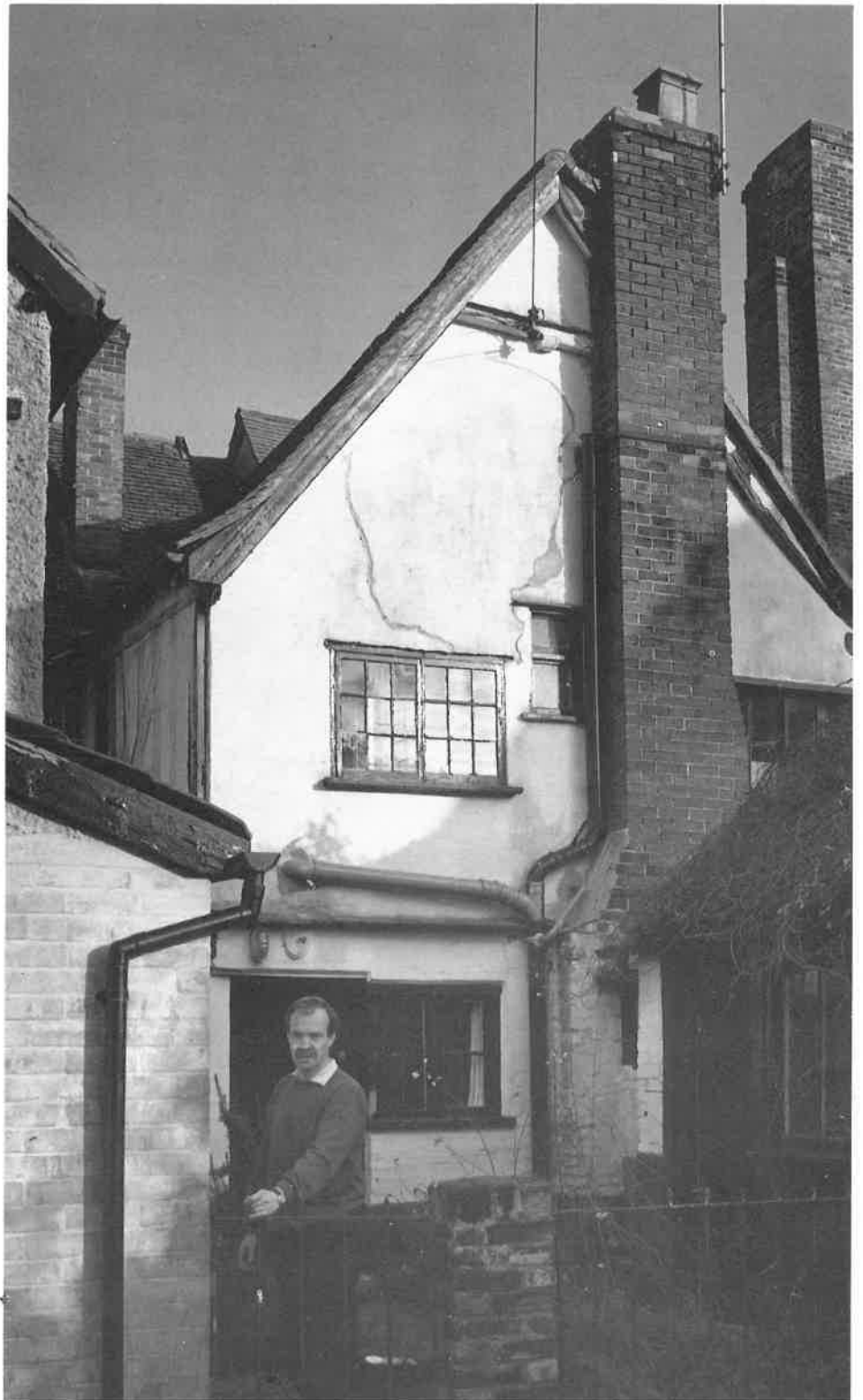
## Building A Group For Suffolk

**W**elcome to the first issue of *Eavesdropper*, the newsletter of the newly created Suffolk Historic Buildings Group. During the three and a half years that I have worked for Suffolk County Council as an Historic Buildings Officer, I have noticed how little information is available in print about the vast wealth of historic buildings in the County. It is significant that Eric Sandon's book *Suffolk Houses* has recently been reprinted, for nothing has tried to replace it since it was first published in 1977.

There are many building enthusiasts around, each following his or her own particular line of enquiry and often quite independent of other researchers. One of the ideas of starting the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group was to draw like-minded people together, to share their knowledge, gain ideas from each other and get some of their findings published. I am also aware that there is an even greater number of people with a more 'gentle' interest in historic buildings in the County and who would like to know more about them. The majority of the current 150-plus membership comes from this band of 'gentle' folk and their needs will have priority.

We are fortunate to live in a particularly beautiful part of England, which has developed a unique building style. We also have a greater number of medieval buildings than most other counties, and thus inherit a legacy and collective responsibility which transcends simple ownership. That is what the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group is all about. It aims to bring 'experts' and 'novices' together in the appreciation and conservation of our historic buildings. We don't aim to go in for jargon. Instead, events and talks

*(continued on back page)*



*The casual planning of vernacular architecture  
– Christopher North at his Needham Market house.*

# A Newly Discovered Medieval Watermill

One of the reasons for founding the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group is to support and encourage the recording and interpretation of the many unknown but potentially important buildings in the County. A large number of Suffolk historic houses and farm buildings remain Unlisted, and those which do appear on the Schedule are often wrongly or inadequately described. Many significant discoveries await the informed enthusiast.

Hold Farm in Bures St Mary provides a classic example. Unlisted until 1988, it is now recognised as one of the finest medieval watermills in the Country. Early mills are extremely rare in

Southern England. Usually built of timber and standing on wet ground, they were unable to withstand the constant vibration of everyday use, and required frequent repair and reconstruction.

Hold Farm owes its survival to its conversion from mill to farmhouse during the early-seventeenth century, and to its ground storey of Tudor brickwork. Built around 1500 to serve the manor farm of Smallbridge Hall, it was designed as a model watermill with ostentation foremost in the mind. Smallbridge was the main seat of the prosperous Waldegrave family, and the mill's appearance from the nearby Nayland road was evidently the primary concern of its original owner.

Brick, like stone, was a relatively expensive building material, rarely used for industrial structures. It is no coincidence that Hold Farm's two extant counterparts were built in stone by wealthy monasteries; one at Reading Abbey, and the other at Abbotsbury in Dorset.

In addition to its ground storey of brick, standing on rubble foundations over a metre deep, Hold Farm boasts a timber superstructure containing no fewer than seven in-line crown-posts, of which six remain today!

The most striking aspects of the building are its twin arches of moulded and chamfered brickwork, through which the waters of the nearby Assington Brook once passed. The stream drove two water-wheels, each one in turn driving a separate pair of stones.

The downstream arch has been protected from the weather by a later extension, and preserves traces of the contemporary red pigment which once disguised its brickwork. Such decoration, typical of the Tudor period, is all too often removed by well-intentioned but ignorant 'restorers'. This sense of external display at Hold Farm, extending even to the moulded window mullions, presents a dramatic contrast to the austere, unchamfered timbers of the industrial interior.

These unique features puzzled all who visited the farm, including watermill enthusiasts, until local fieldwork and documentary research established their meaning. One wonders how many structures of similar importance await recognition elsewhere in the County?

A detailed article on Hold Farm Watermill will appear in the first volume of the Group's Journal. ■

Leigh Alston

## Buildings Forum

The meeting on Thursday 24th November 1993 at Haughley Barn was the first members' meeting to be held by the Group, providing a forum for individuals to introduce particular buildings or themes and discuss them with fellow members:

**Suffolk:  
The Nonconformist  
Heritage**  
by Mark Barnard

Suffolk contains 46 listed Nonconformist Chapels which are still used for worship, and a high proportion of these were illustrated in Mark's slides. The chapel at Walpole, recently acquired by the new Chapels Trust and undergoing a programme of careful repair, provides a fine example. Originating during the sixteenth century as a private residence, it was enlarged and fitted out as a meeting house during the late-seventeenth century. Walpole has a remarkably intact interior, containing a gallery and many box pews. Its survival is largely due to the obstinacy of a local carpenter who, when asked at the turn of the



The interior of Wattisham Baptist Chapel.

century to remove some of the original fittings, refused to do so.

Another Nonconformist Meeting House of national importance lies in Friars Street, Ipswich, and dates from 1700. Daniel Defoe considered this to be 'as large and fine a building of that kind as most on this side of England, and the inside the best finished of any I have seen, London not excepted'. The building is very little altered, with box pews, a finely carved pulpit, and a magnificent chandelier. Framed inside is the original building contract for £257, plus 'four barrels of good beer'.

Eighteenth century chapels are

relatively rare in the County, though good examples survive at Bury St Edmunds, and others at Framlingham, Wickhambrook, Rendham and Wrentham. Most possessed two main entrances, separating the male from the female congregations, with their pulpits lit by a pair of tall windows at the rear of the building.

Most extant Nonconformist Chapels date from the nineteenth century, and are relatively modest in scale and design. An important example of a Baptist chapel survives at Otley, and still retains its school benches and a teacher's desk in the end gallery. At

Woolpit the Primitive Methodist chapel was erected in 1861 and had three classes of seating: 'six pews with doors, ten benches with backs, and good rail seats for free sittings'.

Even the smaller mid to late-nineteenth century chapels can lend a touch of much needed diversity to our increasingly 'residential only' villages. Mark expressed the hope that his talk had given an impression of the diversity of Nonconformist chapels still to be found in the County. ■

## Lodge Farm, Denton, Norfolk by Stephen Heywood

Raised-aisle halls provide Suffolk with some of its most spectacular medieval buildings, though many are now partly concealed within later structures. Additional floor space is created by raising the entire aisled structure above the ground on an enormous tie beam. Such halls typically date from the fourteenth century.

Relatively few Norfolk examples are known, though this may owe more to the failings of the listed buildings schedule than their actual distribution. Lodge Farm was not recognised as a raised-aisle hall until renovation work during 1992/3 uncovered much of its original timber frame. Using a number of informative slides, Stephen told the story of its discovery, and illustrated parallels with other buildings in the area.

The most striking aspect of Lodge Farm is its exceptionally high quality. It originally possessed a pair of oriel windows, together with moulded cornices, decorated spandrels, and ashlar pieces. It also lies within a moat. Curiously however, it has not been possible to identify Lodge Farm with either of the two medieval manor houses of Denton.

Denton is unfortunately poorly provided with extant manorial records, and Lodge Farm cannot be identified prior to 1626. It stands some 300m from the site Denton Old Hall, which no longer survives, and it is possible that Lodge Farm represents a predecessor to this demolished building. Detailed study of the local topography and history may yet reveal an answer.

A tree ring analysis of Lodge Farm was undertaken in early 1993. Seven bores were taken, which gave a felling date of 1355-60 (allowing for lost sapwood) and a complete chronological range of 1215-1335. This in itself suggests an unusually high quality, since more commonplace structures would not have required timbers of such size and antiquity.

This felling date is a little later than that which might have been suggested on purely structural grounds. The lavish decoration and construction of

Lodge Farm is superior to any recorded Suffolk example of a raised-aisle hall, and suggests that the type was still prestigious at this relatively late date - in Norfolk at least. ■

## Toll-Houses: A Last Fling Of Local Distinctiveness by Patrick Taylor

After the first Turnpike Act of 1695 a number of Turnpike Trusts were established in response to the deteriorating condition of Britain's roads. These enabled a board of Trustees to manage the roads in question, levying and collecting the tolls to maintain the fabric.

The name 'turnpike' derives from the turned pole often used as a gate to prevent cattle straying. Toll-bars usually consisted of a large gate to obstruct road traffic, and a small pedestrian gate adjacent to the collecting point. These were placed at strategic positions (often junctions)

along the road, and were manned by the 'pikemen' who collected the tolls. In order to facilitate the permanent presence of pikemen at the gates, many toll-houses were built. These were small domestic buildings of one or two storeys, containing a bay window to permit a view of the road. The need for such windows led to the development of the typical polygonal structure, which Patrick illustrated with a number of slides.

Each toll-house possessed a large central porch to shelter the pikeman, often with a display board of charges in a false window above it. Since the majority of toll-houses pre-date the rise of heavy goods transport by means of the canals and railways of the nineteenth century, they are among the last structures to utilise the traditional building materials of their regions. However their small size, proximity to major roads, and unsuitability for conversion, places the few surviving examples under threat.

Patrick's slides illustrated a wide variety of English toll-houses including those at Sicklesmere, Stratford, Botesdale, Barton and Felixstowe. He asked members to inform him of any other East Anglian examples of this often overlooked building genre. ■



The Toll-house at Sicklesmere, Gt. Whelnetham.

are presented so that members can understand and enjoy the subjects being discussed, although it is hoped that they will, in time, become familiar with the terminology and have the confidence to use it. To satisfy the wide range of interests, the aims of the group will be:

- 1 To collect information about historic buildings across Suffolk.
- 2 To share that information through talks, visits, workshops and publications.

As a member you will receive:

- A free newsletter published three times a year.
- A Journal containing informative articles on a range of subjects connected with historic buildings - sold at cost.
- An opportunity to meet like-minded people and make new friends through regular meetings and talks.
- A chance to visit some interesting buildings - in small groups.
- Advice on the dating and interpretation of historic buildings.
- Guidance on where to get help with repairs and maintenance.

As I have already mentioned, the Group is for the benefit of its membership, the 'enthusiast' as well as the 'generally interested' and this is where members can make it a two-way information flow. If you live in an old house, and have found something of interest, or just puzzling, or you've done some research on a local historic building, the Group would like to hear about it. Perhaps you would like to make a contribution to a members evening or write an article for consideration for inclusion in either



*Doing a repair the traditional way - Christopher North testing a re-daubed opening before applying the first coat of lime render.*

*Eavesdropper or The Journal of the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group?* Other members are always interested and someone could supply an immediate answer to a particular puzzle. As a member you are part of the vitality that will give this Group direction. Where it goes from here is up to you. We have an enormous wealth of interest and experience in the County - lets pull it together for the benefit of our historic buildings. ■

*Tell your friends and anyone who is interested in your Suffolk Historic Buildings Group and get them to join. Membership forms can be obtained from me at 113 High Street, Needham Market, IP6 8DQ. Telephone 0449 721589 or 0473 265162 (office).*

**Christopher North**  
Hon. Secretary

## Wall Painting

On the 3rd of December, 1993, the 50-plus members who attended the Wine and Cheese Party enjoyed a convivial and informative evening as guests of Mr F. Rapsey at Hillcroft Preparatory School, Walnutree Manor, Haughley Green. Christopher North conducted a tour of the ground floor of the seventeenth century building, pointing out a rare example of external plasterwork painted to resemble brickwork. Timothy Easton was our guide to the upper floor, where he highlighted the unusual late 17th century wall-painting above a hearth (*right*). A debased form of cabalistic designs depicting star patterns, it was perhaps intended to be both decorative and apotropaic (evil averting). ■



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