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XXXX Farm

XXXXXX

**BUILDING
SURVEY
REPORT**

ON

**XXXXX FARM
THE STREET
XXXXXXX
WILTSHIRE**

FOR

XXXXXX, EsQ

(Ref: XXXXXX)

7th December 2010

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XXXX FARM

This report was prepared following a recent inspection of the above property on the 7th December 2010. At the time of the inspection the weather was fine but cold. The property was unoccupied and predominantly unfurnished, but did have some floor coverings and a few items of furniture and personal effects. In carrying out this building survey we would draw your attention to our Conditions of Engagement.

This report is intended for the purposes of the person to whom it is addressed and no responsibility or liability can be accepted in respect of any other party who may become aware of its contents. This report may not be copied or published in whole or part without prior consent in writing.

For obvious reasons, the survey does not extend to parts of the property which are hidden, inaccessible or otherwise concealed from view and such areas cannot be guaranteed to be free from defect. The land and buildings cannot be guaranteed free from harmful or deleterious materials, as these may be concealed from view or only identifiable by analysis. This report does not extend to minor matters of a trivial or cosmetic nature, nor will discrepancies with present day building regulations or practice be discussed unless particularly relevant; in respect of the latter, with increasingly frequent revisions to the regulations, only very recent construction will comply in all respects. The survey does not cover such matters as fittings, furnishings, carpeting or electrical or other appliances.

This report is on the assumption that the property is for owner occupation: if the property is to be let then one should be aware of the relatively high standards required in respect of health and safety, including obtaining of regular test certificates for gas/heating appliances et cetera. For further information please consult your solicitor and/or letting agent.

As the vendor was not present it was not possible to make any enquiries on site in regard to the history of the building, such as in respect of past repair and alteration work, defect investigation and services maintenance. It will therefore be necessary to rely upon the formal responses to your solicitor's enquiries rather than on any informal information obtained on site.

DESCRIPTION

The property comprises a 2-storey dwelling house, believed to date from the late sixteenth century, but with later additions: the section to the front is oldest, followed by the central section and with what is probably a Victorian addition to the rear.

We understand that the property has a grade 2 listing as being of architectural and/or historic interest; your solicitor should verify this and advise on the implications of such a designation. Such a listing places limitations on what may be done by way of alteration, extension and even maintenance; the listing will usually also cover the erection and demolition of buildings within the curtilage (even those of limited lifespan). Most conservation officers will resist change and follow the minimal repair philosophy propounded by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. An owner of a listed building is liable in respect of any unauthorized alterations that may have taken place at any time after the building was listed.

We understand that the property was listed in April 1987 and the description given on the listing is as follows:

XXXX FARM

“Farmhouse. Late C16. Timber framed with colourwashed brick noggings mostly replacing original wattle and daub. Thatched roof. 'T' plan with narrow central bay containing lobby entry. To right, a parlour, to left a kitchen, and in rear brewhouse or dairy. Lean-tos in re-entrant angles, and outbuilding to rear. Framing 3 panels high with ogee corner braces. Right bay raised later to 2 storeys and gables. Tripartite timber casement windows. Raised flush dormer to left bay. Rear wing has blocked original window now covered by outshut under extension of roof, and another window over boarded front door. Norwich Union firemark. Interior: Stair in lobby with access from original kitchen. Parlour has chamfered chalkstone fireplace with timber lintel, the jamb bearing scratch date of 1593, and the lintel containing cupboard. Kitchen has large square fireplace with curing cupboard, a small ember hearth and access to former bread oven. Chamfered spine beam with double bar stops. Rear bay has axial gable fireplace with a second oven, which would have projected at rear, now removed and blocked.”

The house was originally timber framed on sarsen footings, probably with wattle and daub infill panelling, although much of this material has been replaced with brick, as have parts of the timber frame. The Victorian part is mostly of solid brick and stone construction, but with a timber framed and timber clad wall to the left. The house is under a hipped thatched roof, but with tiled roofing to the Victorian part.

Old maps tend to imply that the house was divided into two dwellings at one time.

LOCATION

The property is in a small but popular village between Pewsey and Devizes, in what is normally regarded as a sought after location; we are not aware of any unusual adverse factors but being close to Salisbury Plain there may be some noise from military activities.

From geological maps we would expect the property to be on a chalk sub-soil, but this cannot be guaranteed. There are several trees close to the building but there is no evidence of these causing any damage to the main structure and damage associated with tree roots is rare on such subsoils (it is much more common on clay). Nevertheless it is not unknown and we would always recommend that proper insurance cover be maintained and that tree growth close to buildings be kept within reasonable bounds.

The property falls within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and within a Conservation Area; your solicitor should advise on the implications of such designations.

This is a low lying location and while we are not aware of any past flooding problems, it is important that your solicitor make the usual enquiries of the Environment Agency in respect of flood risk.

We understand that the barns to the left are to be sold separately and converted to residential use; access is via a driveway which will be shared with this development and your solicitor should advise on rights of way and maintenance liabilities.

ACCOMMODATION

Any references in this report to left or right should be read as regarding the property from the front, which we have taken as facing the main door from the road. Where possible the descriptions given in this report follow those in the estate agents particulars.

Ground floor: Entrance hall
Sitting room (front right)
Family room (front left), leading to
Side lobby, leading to
Dining room (central), leading to
Kitchen (right), leading to
Larder
Scullery (rear left), leading to
Shower-room with WC

First floor: Landing
Bedroom 1 (front left) double
Bedroom 2 (front right) double, leading to
Bedroom 3 (central) double
Rear landing (rear right, with stairs from scullery)
Bathroom with WC and hot water cylinder

Outside: Gardens
Side porch
Attached storeroom to rear
Open shed housing oil tank
Garage with store area and workshop

Services: Mains electricity, water and drainage are believed to be connected but service runs have not been traced and your solicitor should verify connection in the normal way. Central heating is not installed.

Area: We estimate the gross external floor area of the dwelling to be approximately 254m², excluding all outbuildings.

EXTERNAL CONSTRUCTION

Roof & Roof Spaces

The principal roof is demi-hipped and thatched; the Victorian section is pitched and clad in clay tiles.

Typically local thatched roofs, using combed wheat straw, require re-thatching about once every 25-30 years with re-ridging and a certain amount of patching being necessary about half way through this period; where longstraw is employed instead of combed wheat red (as may be insisted upon in this village by the conservation officer) durability is significantly less. Re-thatching involves the removal of the outer layer of the thatch and its replacement with a new weathering coat; thatch should not be removed in its entirety except after serious neglect or a fire. It is important that re-

thatching is undertaken in a manner and using materials acceptable to the local authority conservation officer.

The thatch is showing general evidence of wear but, with some localized attention, we believe that that to the main slopes should remain serviceable for several years yet; there is still a good overhang at eaves. The ridge will require early attention as will some of the more vulnerable locations, such as at the stacks and valley. The valley to the rear left is quite sharply formed and has therefore been lined, rather than finished with swept thatch; the lining is some form of felt and is now in quite poor condition and in need of early renewal.

Thatch is a specialist matter and in view of the condition of the thatch we must recommend that you take further advice and obtain estimates of likely future expenditure; in our experience advice and estimates can vary tremendously from one thatcher to another and we would normally recommend the employment of an established local thatcher of good repute. The best thatchers tend to have long waiting lists, not uncommonly a year or more.

The tiling is deteriorating, particularly to the right slope, with cracking, crumbling, lamination and increased porosity; however at present only a handful of tiles require immediate renewal and we would have considered comprehensive re-tiling (even if permitted by the conservation officer) to be premature as it should be possible to continue on a repair "as and when necessary" basis for the foreseeable future.

The roof is of traditional construction forming an A-frame of rafters, joists, purlins and trusses. The first floor rooms are built within the roofspace and thus much of the structure is hidden from view, particularly to the front section as there is no access to the roofspace above this. A hatch in the ceiling to the rear landing gives access to the tiled part and, via this, to the thatched part over bedroom 3. As is typically found in an older building, the roof is not lined with any form of sarking material: the use of sarking material under thatch is a modern innovation intended to reduce fire risk, but its effectiveness is questionable; under tiling it provides a valuable secondary barrier to rain and snow penetration, but again is not traditional. Part of the tiled section has had polythene sheeting applied under the rafters as an alternative to sarking material, but we recommend that this be removed as it reduces ventilation to the roof timbers and increases the risk of decay setting in.

The roof structure is clearly weak by current standards but, from what could be seen, we do not believe it to be exceptionally weak by the standard of a house of this age. Provided that thatch is retained as a covering, the structure should not pose a serious problem, although it would be unrealistic not to expect some future maintenance to be needed. As with most properties of the type the roof structure has been further weakened by the depredations of wood boring beetle, particularly common furniture beetle (woodworm), but the damage here is no more than is typically found. There has been some upgrading and reinforcement: for example, the purlin to the front of bedroom 2 has apparently been renewed.

At present there is no visible immediate need for repair, although we suspect that removal of distorted plaster to the rear of bedroom 2 may reveal a snapped rafter. There is quite widespread failure of battens we recommend that these be replaced prior to re-thatching: this is a normal maintenance requirement.

A-frame roofs tend to push outwards on the upper parts of the walling, leading to what is known as roofspread: this has occurred here and can most clearly be seen to the right of the front elevation and to the left of the tiled roof. In the former location the combination of stress from the roof and a failed frame joint has led to the wallplate rotating and the upper part of the front wall leaning out: to counter this, metal strapping has been fitted around the corner and the indications are that this work has restored stability.

As with most properties of the type the roof structure has been further weakened by the depredations of wood boring beetle, particularly common furniture beetle (woodworm), but the damage here is no more than is typically found.

This is a listed building and as such it is probable that a conservation officer would resist any large scale reinforcement work, such as might be suggested by a structural engineer. In the circumstances we have taken the view that repairs are only likely to be allowed on an “as and when necessary” basis. It is always difficult to judge when one needs to intervene with the structure of a listed building and the opinion of the conservation officer may well differ from that of an engineer or surveyor: it is important that the roof structure is regularly inspected for signs of deterioration, and that repair work is executed as and when necessary. We would advise against using the roofspace for other than the lightest storage purposes.

We noted some evidence of rodents in the roofspace and elsewhere and birds have clearly been present within the roof. The presence of rodents would hardly be unusual, especially in a rural location, but because of the tendency for rodents (including squirrels) to gnaw electric cabling, it is important that they are properly controlled.

There is smoke/scorch marking to timbers towards the rear of the house, and on some of the plasterwork visible in the roofspace: we suspect that this is fire damage rather than cooking smoke, as the chimneystack is very old, probably original.

To summarize:

- The thatch shows evidence of wear and the need for re-ridging and associated work to the thatch is fast approaching; we recommend that specialist advice be sought.
- The structure is weak but (as far as can be seen) no more so than with very many cottages of this period and we see no reason why one should not continue on a repair “as and when necessary” basis.
- The tiling is also worn and in need of some maintenance, but we would have considered complete re-tiling to be premature.

Chimneystacks

There are two chimneystacks, the front (main) stack brick and chalkstone built, the rear brick built; both have cement fillets to the thatch but the rear stack also has a metal flashing to the tiled roofing. Cement fillets are less durable than metal flashings but are more traditional in a thatched building and the need for renewal of fillets tends to coincide with the need for re-ridging and re-thatching. The fillets are now ineffective (especially to the front stack), being well above the thatch.

There is no serious distortion or fracturing to the stacks, beyond what is normal for a house of this age.

At present (rather surprisingly having regard to the condition of the thatch and fillets) there is only very slight damp penetration down the chimneystacks as far as the habitable areas, usually the "trigger" for repointing and/or re-filleting works to take place. Pointing to the mortar joints is showing some erosion, especially just above the roof surface, but only localized repointing should be necessary on fillet renewal. Dampness within the roofspace is only to be expected and this is one of the reasons why it is desirable to keep roofs well ventilated, in order that moisture may disperse. We would normally advise against rendering stacks within or above the roofspace; a practice all too often recommended by builders and one which can result in dampness being transferred further down the structure.

There is dampness at the feet of the stacks. This is only to be expected and is likely to be the usual combination of rising damp, moisture penetrating down from above and chemical contamination, not helped by the masonry being painted with impermeable paint. We would normally advise that the masonry be left exposed and the property kept well ventilated, in order that any such moisture may disperse; alternatively we would recommend the use of a lime based plaster and lime wash finish (although there may be hidden modern materials which would be incompatible with this). Chalkstone is particularly unsuitable to be painted over and from the description given it was probably unpainted at the time of the listing.

The main stack serves the open fireplaces in the sitting and family rooms: both fireplaces now have concrete soffits at the foot of the flues. A hatch in the family room soffit was screwed into place and one in the sitting room soffit resisted being opened, presumably due to build up of soot or other debris above. This stack also served a blocked in fireplace in bedroom 1: no ventilator has been fitted (which is recommended practice) but there is no evidence that the absence of such is leading to any problem. The rear stack serves a rather old Rayburn Royal oil fired cooker in the dining room.

We presume that the flues are unlined. Unlined flues are normal in a house of this age, but can cause problems when the products of combustion chemically attack the masonry of the stack and sometimes nearby walling. This is seldom a serious matter with the occasional open fire, but staining and structural damage may occur where such a flue serves a slow burning appliance such as a room heater or stove, hence the desirability of lining a flue when such an appliance is installed.

The timber beams above the fireplace openings in the sitting and family rooms have been cut, repaired, and reinforced: we are uncertain as to why this took place. The fireplaces are not in use and we cannot comment on the efficiency of the draw; the Rayburn was also not seen in use and an appraisal of the condition of such a unit would be outside the scope of this report.

Rainwater Goods

Thatched roofs do not normally have rainwater goods. Rainwater from thatched roofs drips onto the surrounding ground, and it is therefore important that there is a good overhang of thatch to take the water as far away from the wall as possible. As thatch wears the overhang diminishes, and the risk of internal dampness increases. It is important that when rainwater hits the ground it is either absorbed by the ground (usually by a flowerbed or lawn) or is directed away from rather than towards the walling: this is normally done by simply having paving sloping away slightly, but

sometimes a gully is provided. The placing of garden ornaments, furniture and plants close to the walling can sometimes cause problems by directing the water back towards the wall, and if in proximity to the wall then restricting the rate of evaporation from this.

In this case there is a gully to the right, a concrete path to the front, the drive to the left and tiled roofing at the rear.

The rainwater goods serving the tiled roof are of cast iron type, as are those to the side porch. These are showing evidence of corrosion and some damage by chipping, but are still basically serviceable and should remain so for some years with proper maintenance. You will appreciate that maintenance of cast iron rainwater goods tends to be more complicated and costly than that of plastic fittings, but we doubt if the conservation officer would allow a change of material.

We would normally recommend that, on taking possession and as an item of annual maintenance, gutters are cleaned out and their levels, joints and mountings are checked. Subterranean surface water disposal systems could not be examined for obvious reasons and a watch should be kept for any evidence of water backing up downpipes/gullies which might indicate obstruction.

Walls

As described before, the main part of the house was originally timber framed with wattle and daub infill panelling, although much of this material has been replaced with brick or block, as have parts of the timber frame. The soleplate of the timber frame bears on sarsen stone footings. The Victorian part is of solid brick construction to the rear, but with some stone to the right and timber framing to the left (the latter being part clad in timber boarding and part in timber shingles).

The walling is thus very variable in construction and thickness: the first floor of the main part is still predominantly only around 125mm thick, as is the timber walling to Victorian part, but much of the ground floor walling has been increased to about double this, either by lining with masonry or (as to the left of the family room) replacing the original walling.

Thin walling (typical of timber frame construction) is inevitably vulnerable to heat loss (and associated condensation), moisture penetration and draughtiness: it is also more vulnerable to damage by neglect than would be modern walling. There is always a risk with timber frame that gaps will occur between the frame and masonry sufficient to admit rain and draughts. While such gaps need to be filled to keep the building weather tight, this should be done in such a way as to allow the timbers to breathe and using materials that are flexible enough to adapt to slight movements in the frame: the use of modern mastics can lead to water entrapment, as can the use of cement mortar; lime mortar is usually suitable but the use of cement mortar is not recommended.

Foundations could not be examined for obvious reasons but in a property of this age these are unlikely to be to the depths required today (if present at all) and some structural movement might be expected as normal, possibly on a seasonal basis. In any house of this age one would expect some distortion and cracking but in this case we saw no evidence of any recent structural movement of a sort associated with problems below ground level, beyond normal tolerances for a house of this age, and we have no reason to suspect that the house is currently affected by subsidence or other progressive foundation failure.

As already mentioned, there has been some work to counter the tendency for the front wall to lean outwards at the right corner, by way of strapping about the corner upright.

There is a problem to the right of the sitting room where the soleplate has decayed, leading to outward movement of the wall at low level and some displacement and loosening of the lower panels. The decay is likely to have been exacerbated by covering the soleplate internally by lining the wall, and externally by a rubble fillet and (in places) by render: even when damp, soleplates can be surprisingly durable if left exposed and able to "breathe". To the front of the wall, where the distortion is worst, it appears that the sarsen footings have been replaced with brick: possibly at one time there was a doorway or drain here. In our opinion the damage is sufficient to warrant reconstruction of the lowest part of the walling here (up to the first horizontal timber), to include renewal of the soleplate and possibly the lowest parts of the uprights: however the conservation officer will have an opinion on the extent of works needed and their nature.

To the front elevation there is also a problem of decay to the soleplate, for similar reasons, although here the decay is less advanced and distortion to the masonry less serious: excessive render and rubble needs to be removed to assess the damage properly, but we suspect that works may be confined to the renewal of all or part of the soleplate.

Elsewhere, as far as can be seen, the framing gives the impression of being in reasonable order: the hidden parts of the framing could not be checked for obvious reasons.

In regard to timber framing, it is now generally accepted that it will survive better if left exposed and not coated with paint, render or waterproofing agents; a permeable stain is preferable to paint and any treatment against beetle attack or rot is likely to be beneficial. Paint applied to the framing is not beneficial and ideally we would advise its removal where still present: much has worn away. Paint removal is subject to the approval of the conservation officer and should only take place if this can be done without damaging the surface: we would strongly advise against using a blow torch for such work, or any variation on sand blasting. Unnecessary filler should also be removed as this can also trap moisture and increase decay. In future repairs should be executed as and when necessary; they should not be allowed to accumulate until serious structural problems develop.

Brick panels in old timber framed walls tend to work loose with time and a watch should always be kept for signs of cracking or insecurity which might indicate the need for localized remedial action: we do not believe any such work to be needed here at present, apart from at low level where the soleplate has failed. A panel under the window to bedroom 1 has been secured with metal clamps: effective, but not very attractive. Wattle and daub (or plastered lath) panels are less likely to work loose, but cracking often occurs between the panel and the frame, requiring some filling to prevent water ingress.

The masonry of the walling is painted with a modern masonry paint, although the actual specification was not determined: more than one type is thought to be present and in places forms quite a thick skin. The paint is blistered by dampness at low level and has blown away from the masonry beneath in places, especially from the stone walling to the right of the kitchen and shower-room. Paint applied to old solid walls tends to trap moisture within the walls, increasing not only the risks of internal dampness but also damage to the masonry and decay to any timbers which may be embedded in it. We would not normally recommend painting old walls, although this is a very common practice and the use of a traditional limewash can help to protect vulnerable, friable old masonry from erosion. We would recommend that on next repainting treatment be restricted to a

micro-porous paint; ideally one would use a limewash on a building of this age, but we suspect that there may have been past use of modern materials with which it would be incompatible.

Brick and stonework to the main part of the house is hidden by the paint, but we did not see any evidence of serious erosion to masonry or mortar. The exposed brickwork to the rear of the Victorian part has some patches of badly eroded mortar and a few quite badly eroded bricks: this wall requires localized repointing and a handful of bricks would warrant re-facing. We would advise using a traditional lime based mortar for any future repointing work to older solid walls, where some flexibility is beneficial and where it is desirable for the walling to "breathe", that is, for moisture within the solid masonry to be able to evaporate. In the past there has been some use of modern cement mortar, not recommended (although very common) practice as this can trap moisture, leading to damp problems and exacerbating the tendency for old soft bricks to erode; it also tends not to be very durable. Where bricks are badly eroded, it is best to cut them out and replace them: re-facing with a soft tinted mortar is, however, usually regarded as an acceptable alternative. Re-facing with cement is unsightly and can be damaging to the adjacent brickwork.

When this property was built the interior would have been kept reasonably dry by the fact that the walling would have been able to "breathe" as it would not have been coated with impermeable materials inside or out, such as modern paints, renders and plasters, and the external ground level would almost certainly have been well below soleplate level, if not internal floor level. The application of modern materials to old walling both inside and out tends to increase the amount of moisture held within the walling, and makes any damp present more apparent. Where possible we recommend leaving masonry and timber exposed.

Ground level about parts of the property is close to or above floor and normal damp proof course level, rather than the 150mm below that is now recommended: too much of the older part rubble and mortar fillets are effectively raising ground level to soleplate level and bridging the relatively moisture resistant sarsen footings. At the rear path level is well above the floor level of the Victorian part of the building. High ground levels increase the risk of internal dampness and it is desirable to keep ground levels low and vegetation under control. While there may be practical difficulties to comprehensive ground level reduction, we would certainly recommend this where possible and would advise the removal of bridging fillets and render.

Where it is unrealistic to reduce ground levels it is sometimes recommended to create a drained, gravel filled trench against the walling: this can be effective, and might be a suitable approach towards the rear of the building, but can be counterproductive if drainage arrangements are inadequate or become clogged.

Taken overall the condition of the walling is considered to be reasonable for a building of this vintage, but there are certain weaknesses, vulnerabilities and inconveniences common to such old walling and some significant repair and maintenance is now recommended, particularly cutting out and renewing the worst decayed parts of the frame; further work will be needed in future, consistent with age and type.

To summarize the main points:

- Early attention is recommended to decayed lower frame timbers (particularly soleplates) to front and right together with some reconstruction of the lowest masonry here.

- Excessive ground levels, rubble fillets and impermeable masonry paints are combining to increase dampness within the walling.
- By their nature, old thin timber framed walls have practical and maintenance disadvantages, and are thermally very inefficient.
- A certain amount of routine maintenance is necessary by way of localized repointing, brick re-facing et cetera.

Joinery

External joinery is of the conventional softwood type as one might expect: windows are predominantly of the side hung timber casement type, but these vary in age and design and there is a metal hopper style window to the larder.

As one might expect, there is a certain amount of decay by wet rot to the external joinery and some repair will be needed prior to next and subsequent redecorations. The worst decay we found was to the windows to the family room, sitting room, scullery and bathroom, and to the pent roof that has been fitted at about first floor level to protect the windows below, but most timbers have decayed to some degree. Repair, rather than renewal, is still a realistic proposition, particularly as, in our experience, older joinery tends to decay more slowly than that employed in more recent times. We suspect that the conservation officer would resist any suggestion that windows be renewed (although windows are not original) and it is likely to be necessary to continue on a repair “as and when necessary” basis for the foreseeable future. If this were not a listed building then one would be considering renewal to reduce future maintenance costs and to improve thermal efficiency.

The windows and doors mostly open and close reasonably well for an old house, although some of the windows are a little stiff; the front door was locked and could not be tested, but we suspect it to be stuck. As with most building of this age, windows and doors are likely to prove somewhat draughty.

Windows do not incorporate trickle ventilators (as used in a new house) and ventilation is largely dependent on the opening of windows, not always convenient. Lack of ventilation is one of the prime causes of condensation in a building and as one might expect there is some evidence of condensation about the building, but less than might have been anticipated. In any property a good balance of heating and ventilation is necessary to keep condensation under reasonable control but we would make the point that condensation is, at least in part, very much a reflection of individual lifestyle.

We would mention that since April 2002 window replacement has required local authority building regulation consent, unless the work is undertaken by a FENSA approved contractor. Simply replacing broken, or otherwise damaged, glazing does not require such consent. Effectively this means that replacement windows usually have to be to the latest specifications, not always consistent with trying to provide windows which are in sympathy with an older building. There are certain exemptions in regard to listed buildings and those in a conservation area, and as the consent of the conservation officer would be needed for any replacements, we recommend that he or she be consulted at an early stage.

External Decorations

External paintwork is in poor condition and we recommend redecoration next summer, after executing repairs as necessary.

INTERNAL CONSTRUCTION

Ceilings

Ceilings are believed to be predominantly of lath and plaster type, but with some plasterboard and fibreboard sheeting, such as the fibreboard that may be seen in the bathroom.

Lath and plaster ceilings have a limited life expectancy, although many remain serviceable for centuries if well made and not unduly stressed. Typically failure may be precipitated by dampness (such as from leakage), excessive dryness (such as may follow the installation of central heating into an older building) or vibration (possibly from traffic, aircraft, or simply heavy use of a floor or loft above compounded by the presence of joists weaker than would be permitted today). In a house of this age weakening is also caused by stresses imposed by distortion in weak roof structures et cetera. Unfortunately it is not unknown for apparently sound ceilings to suddenly fail and poor ceilings to last many years, so that predictions as to durability are necessarily approximate.

The ceilings show evidence of distortion, cracking and hollowness, and there are many areas of plaster that are weak even by the standards of a house of this age: the sloping ceilings are particularly weak (including to the kitchen) and have partially collapsed in the bathroom and on the rear landing; the scullery ceiling has been badly weakened by a leak from above; the ceiling to bedroom 3 has been patched but remains very weak. The ceilings (particularly those mentioned above) are vulnerable and fragile and failure could easily be precipitated by impact or dampening.

Our normal recommendation would be to retain old plaster (which forms an integral part of the character of a building of this age) for as long as possible, repairing as and when necessary; the conservation officer would certainly wish for historic plaster to be retained wherever possible. We are, however, concerned that in this case some of the plaster is sufficiently unstable that it could fail without notice and damage anything delicate that may be below. There is no reason why these ceilings could not be repaired with lath and plaster.

It should be borne in mind that plaster used before about 1908 can contain potentially harmful substances and proper precautions should always be taken when handling it, especially the wearing of a breathing mask. Similar comments apply to old paint, which may still be present under later applications.

In places headroom is limited, such as at the doorway between bedrooms 2 and 3.

Partitions & Plasterwork

Partitions are of mixed type, some being of plastered brick or blockwork, others of timber studwork, and some of painted brick/stone. There is a certain amount of distortion and cracking to partitions, but no more than one would normally expect in a building of this age and type and generally only reflecting distortion in the floor structure.

There are areas of hollowness and much of the lowest plaster has been damaged by dampness: some renewal and filling will be necessary on redecoration. We would normally caution against over enthusiastic renewal, both to walls and ceilings, as even quite hollow plaster can remain serviceable for a great many years if left undisturbed and the conservation officer is likely to encourage the retention of any really old plaster that may remain. In our experience contractors often recommend far more extensive plaster renewal than is really necessary. However, in this case we see little alternative to renewing the worst affected areas.

Random measurements for dampness were made about the lower parts of the walling where this was readily approachable. You will appreciate that significant areas were hidden behind kitchen fittings et cetera. Dampness was measurable and visible in most of the external and internal walling, although the house had been vacant, unheated and unventilated for some time and the problem might not appear as serious in the summer with the property well heated and ventilated. We believe that the dampness has been exacerbated by the application of impermeable modern plaster and paint to large areas of the walling, but the high external ground levels and related matters (as already discussed) are important factors.

Dampness in places is sufficient to place low level timbers at risk: in addition to the "usual" softening by rot to skirtings, we noted some rot to low level joinery (including the door frame to the sitting room) and to partition framing (especially the partition between the family room and the lobby behind). The lowest parts of the wall framing, particularly the soleplates, are obviously at risk, although if exposed and able to "breathe" decay to these can be extremely slow: we are concerned in regard to the hidden sections of such timbers and those where plaster and paint lap over them, such as to the right of the dining room.

In the sitting room a rather unusual low level lining has been introduced, presumably to counter dampness: unfortunately dampness is all too obvious on the sections of walling without this lining (particularly the rear wall) and to the walling above the lining. There is a gap between the lining and the wall: while this provides beneficial ventilation, we do not know whether this was deliberate or whether it reflects the movement that has occurred to the lowest part of the flank wall (we suspect the latter).

As a general comment in regard to dampness in older buildings, until relatively recently the normal approach would have been to replace the damp affected plaster with a water proofed render (thus trapping moisture into the wall) possibly with the use of a chemical injection damp proof course (although it should be noted that such damp proof courses are not effective where ground level is excessive). There is now a move away from such aggressive damp proofing methods towards a more sympathetic approach based on allowing the masonry to "breathe" and then permitting the moisture to disperse by providing a good balance of heating and ventilation. This typically involves either exposing masonry to view (one of the reasons why exposed brick or stone fireplaces are sensible in old cottages) or using relatively permeable wall finishes, such as traditionally made lime plasters and renders: unfortunately modern plasters and many modern wall finishes are very impermeable and tend to trap moisture and become damaged by it. Another alternative is to dry-line the walling, with the incorporation of a vertical damp proofing membrane and (ideally) a means of ventilating the void: this can be successful but more often than not it is not done to an adequate standard.

Some dampness is inevitable in an old building and while it is obviously desirable to minimize this by such steps as reducing external ground levels, applying breathable wall finishes and improving

ventilation, attempts at eradication are rarely fully successful. This is a listed building and as such works to minimize dampness are likely to be limited to non-aggressive methods of a reversible type, compatible with the historic fabric of the building.

Floors

The first floor is of suspended timber board on joist type; the ground floor is thought to be of concrete, although we cannot be certain of this without causing damage. There are modern tiles laid in the kitchen and older quarry stile tiles in the family room and larder. There is a stone flagged floor to the entrance hall. Wood block flooring is present in the sitting and dining rooms, although is hidden beneath a vinyl floor covering in the latter.

Carpeting in the side lobby and vinyl coverings in the dining room, scullery and shower-room restricted our inspection.

The first floor has distorted noticeably and is subject to some deflection, but within normal expectations and tolerances for a house of this age and type. The flooring here is clearly weak by current standards, but from experience of similar houses we would suggest that it is acceptable for normal light domestic use, provided that some caution is taken in the distribution of loadings, avoiding heavy point loads close to the centre of joist and beam spans: baths and tanks require very careful thought.

In any property of this age one would anticipate there being some deterioration to floorboards, both by wood boring beetle and by physical damage where they have been lifted to gain access to services. There is no unusual problem here, but the boards are old and there is some obvious weakening. The boarding to the landing and bedroom 2 is very old, possibly original.

Some of the beams supporting the first floor can be seen from the rooms below: they are over-spanned by current standards and bow slightly, but are reasonable for a house of this age. Plaster applied to beams, as to the beam seen from the sitting room supporting the floor to bedroom 2, hides condition from view and can encourage decay by wood boring beetle: cracking at the end of this particular beam is thought to reflect normal deflection in the timber beam, although movement in the flank wall may also be a contributing factor. The beam above the scullery (which is thought to have been re-used from elsewhere) is noticeably split, but this is a natural shake and not a sign of deterioration. The beam above the family room has interesting labelling at each end and is one of the most obviously early components of the building.

There is some minor irregularity to the ground flooring, but we saw nothing which we would consider beyond normal expectations and tolerances. We were not able to determine whether the flooring incorporates a damp proof membrane, but we doubt it. The woodblock floor in the dining room is concealed by a vinyl covering, but where this was pulled back the timbers were revealed to be damp and rotting; the woodblock floor in the sitting room is also a little damp and has suffered some deterioration, but is in much better condition, reflecting the fact that the timber is exposed and moisture able to evaporate. We would always advise leaving old woodblock and tile floors exposed, as coverings will often trap moisture, leading to rot and other problems.

Joinery

Internal doors mostly open and close reasonably well, having regard to the fact that this is an old building. There is some wear and tear to the doors and some are of considerable age, especially to the first floor.

Skirting boards are mostly of reasonable appearance but reverse sides could not be examined for obvious reasons. Skirting boards are among the most vulnerable timbers in a house of this age, and decay to these is often the first indication that a damp problem is occurring; some of the skirtings measure damp and are softening, but not yet badly rotted. On renewing any skirting boards we would suggest that these are separated from potentially damp masonry/flooring either by a vertical damp proof course or by a small air gap; alternatively, one might employ plaster or tile skirtings (as has been done in some parts of the ground floor), or dispense with skirtings (not an original feature) entirely.

The staircases are free from evidence of any serious weakness or failure, but are below current safety standards, particularly the rear staircase.

Kitchen fittings are still basically serviceable, but are clearly quite old, are rather dated and show evidence of general wear and tear.

Internal Decorations

The property is poorly presented internally and redecoration will be needed after attention to dampness and plasterwork.

SECURITY

You should ensure that window and door locking arrangements meet with the requirements of your household insurers; windows lack locks.

It should be borne in mind that windows locked for security purposes or which are otherwise stuck can seriously impede escape in the event of fire. We would recommend that any property purchaser give some thought to means of escape in such circumstances. The fitting of locks to first floor bedroom windows is no longer recommended, although not actually forbidden under building regulations.

In regard to thatched properties, some insurers now insist on electrical installations being checked on a regular basis, and it is possible that this may be extended to heating appliances. While this may not seem unreasonable, it can result in a need to upgrade electrical installations to a higher standard than might be accepted by the average house owner. In our experience insurers are taking an increasingly active interest in what they are covering but so far we have not come across any instances of insurers insisting upon immediate upgrading to the special fire and rodent resistant cables which would be specified for use in a thatched roof today.

Most thatch fires are either the result of electrical failure (often precipitated by rodent damage to cabling) or are associated with chimneys: it is obviously important to ensure that flues are regularly swept to reduce the risk of fires, and fuels burnt should be of a type unlikely to emit hot embers from the chimney pot. Spark arrestors are recommended for open fires or room heaters.

We would strongly recommend that all residential properties be equipped with an adequate number of smoke alarms and that due thought is given to possible means of escape in the event of fire.

SUMMARY OF DAMP PROBLEMS

The lower part of the walling is quite seriously damp with consequential damage to plaster and decay to timbers: we recommend that action be taken to minimize the dampness, including ground level reduction and improvements to the breathability of the walling, together with better heating and ventilation practice. However total damp eradication in an old and listed building is almost always an unrealistic expectation.

In our experience much internal dampness results from external neglect, including excessive ground levels, excessive vegetation, unsuitable wall finishes and poorly maintained thatch. Proper attention to external factors will do much to reduce the risk of dampness. The importance of good ventilation cannot be overstated in keeping dampness under control, both generally about the house as a whole and in respect of specific components.

Any building of this age will have relatively poor thermal efficiency and will be vulnerable to condensation: again one cannot overstate the importance of maintaining a good balance of heating and ventilation to keep condensation within reasonable bounds.

SUMMARY OF TIMBER DEFECTS

Decay to the older external joinery will necessitate some quite significant repair work prior to redecoration and is likely to prove an increasing maintenance liability; however we consider it to be commensurate with the age and type of building and not an unexpected problem.

In the external walling there is some rot to the wall framing which will require repair, particularly to the soleplate and to feet of uprights to the front and right elevations: we regard this as a matter which should be given some priority.

Internally damp is leading to some decay which will require attention prior to redecoration, although damage here is localized and not regarded as a major problem.

The wood block flooring in the dining room is damp and rotting: we suspect that on close inspection renewal will prove necessary.

Many timbers could not be inspected, including those built into the walling, hidden in the main roof and concealed within the floor structures.

There is evidence of infestation by wood boring beetle particularly in the roof space and in exposed timbers elsewhere, and this is likely also to be present in concealed timbers. The infestation generally appears old with little indication of any recent activity and we suspect that a treatment has already been applied. Your solicitor should determine whether a valid and transferrable guarantee exists: if not, we have no alternative but to recommend that a specialist examination be commissioned, as this is likely to be called for by any mortgage valuer.

The beetle damage has caused some weakening to the roof and other timbers, but where seen these still retain their structural integrity and the damage is no more than one might normally expect in an old cottage. Generally wood boring beetle takes a considerable length of time to cause damage, apart from in damp timbers and the best way to protect against this pest and rot is to ensure that timbers are kept dry and well ventilated.

SERVICES

No specialist tests of the service installations were commissioned and these cannot therefore be guaranteed to be in good working order, in compliance with present-day regulations and recommendations or of a suitable specification for this property.

Plumbing

At the time of inspection water had been drained down and we were therefore unable to see the plumbing or sanitary equipment in operation.

The property is plumbed predominantly in copper tube although much of the pipework is hidden from view; pipework appears quite old. There is a plastic cold water tank in the roofspace over the bathroom and a lagged copper cylinder in the bathroom; hot water is provided by an electric immersion and by the Rayburn in the dining room, although these were not seen in operation.

There is no access to the first floor bathroom from the three main bedrooms; we do not know if the conservation officer would permit an access to be cut through the partition to the rear of bedroom 3, which is thought to be the original wattle and daub external wall. The mass of the chimneystacks does reduce the scope for any re-arrangement of the first floor layout to accommodate extra bathroom facilities.

Central heating is not installed.

Sanitary fittings are of some age, appear a little dated and show some evidence of wear and tear. The shower facility is designed for disabled use.

For obvious reasons we could not check the condition of the subterranean water and oil supply pipes.

Electrical

The electric consumer equipment is in a cupboard on the scullery wall. The property is believed to be wired in PVC sheathed cabling on ring main circuitry, but much of the cabling is hidden from view and it is just possible (but unlikely) that other materials may be present in hidden areas.

We do not know when the house was last re-wired, but we suspect that there may have been some upgrading within the last 25 years, although some of the wiring gives the impression of being significantly older. The installation is clearly of some age and there are likely to be discrepancies with the latest recommendations and specifications, which are frequently revised; it is probable that a specialist would advise upgrading, although we suspect that upgrading rather than total rewiring would be advised. We are, however, somewhat concerned to note

the presence of what appears to be amateur work on the electrical installation, such as the placing of sockets on long spurs from other sockets.

Despite the above comments, the installation is probably as good as a significant proportion of those still in everyday use.

With rural thatched properties there is always a risk of rodent infestation in the roof and it is important to prevent them gnawing at the electrical cabling; one should remain vigilant for any sign of infestation and not delay taking appropriate measures if necessary. Ideally special rodent and fire resistant cables would be used, but these are costly and only a small number of properties have these as yet. When considering such rodent-related risks, squirrels should not be overlooked.

The IEE now recommend that electrical installations be checked at least once every 10 years, when a property changes hands or when any significant alteration or extension work is undertaken. No test certificates or labels were seen.

Taking the age and nature of the installation and the presence of the thatched roof into account, we consider that it would be prudent to seek further specialist advice.

Drainage

At the time of inspection water had been drained down and we were therefore unable to see the drainage installation in operation.

We found two inspection chambers in the paving behind the house; drainage from the second passes towards the left, presumably then passing down the drive towards the road: we located two chambers in the drive, but these had very heavy duty iron and concrete lids which could not be lifted. We note from the agent's particulars that the property is connected to the main sewer, but cannot verify this. There is what appears to be an old (presumably defunct) private drainage installation in the land behind the barn, but the lid to this was stuck and we cannot confirm that this is out of use.

Both the chambers behind the house were partially obstructed with debris and the system will require cleaning out before being brought back into use.

There is a cast iron external soil and vent stack to the rear, adjacent to a cast iron waste stack.

INSULATION & ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The house is thatched, and thatch is a good insulator in its own right; however some additional insulation would be needed to bring thermal efficiency up to the standard now required of a new house. In this case there is only a little insulation over the bathroom. We do not know if there is any insulation in the inaccessible roof spaces, but this is unlikely.

The windows are single glazed and therefore well below current thermal standards.

The thermal efficiency of walls and floors is well below current standards, but typical of an old house of this type: one must therefore expect a certain amount of heatloss and associated

condensation and in order to minimize the latter it is important to achieve a good balance of heating and ventilation about the property as a whole.

The most practical ways of improving thermal efficiency would be to provide modern primary double glazing, if permitted to do so by the conservation officer (which is unlikely), and to install an insulated dry-lining to the thinner sections of walling (although this would take up valuable floor space); both suggestions would be at the cost of some loss of character.

Tanks and pipes in the roofspace are not properly lagged: even in a thatched property some lagging would be a sensible precaution. There is now a move towards insulating all hot water pipes throughout the building (to conserve energy) although one would not normally attempt this in an existing building except where pipes are easily accessible.

OUTBUILDINGS

Discussion of the structure and condition of outbuildings is directed at their suitability for the use for which they were designed or have customarily been put: it should be appreciated that standards of construction and condition are lower than for a dwelling.

Side Porch

This is open and comprises a timber shingled roof supported on brick piers. The shingles give the impression of being quite old, but not yet in need of renewal. A section of flashing has come away and should be re-fixed. The mortar to the brick piers that support the roof is beginning to erode and it will not be all that long before repointing becomes necessary.

Attached Outbuilding

This is a lean-to of predominantly timber construction, but with a stone wall to the right, under a felted roof; the floor is tiled and there was once a doorway to the interior of the house, now bricked in. The building is serviceable as a store but the felt to the roof has a limited future.

Oil Tank Shelter

The oil tank is of traditional painted steel type; it is quite old but corrosion is less than often seen, reflecting its sheltered location, and we do not believe it is leaking at present. We regard this as having a limited future, but suspect that it may give several years service yet.

The oil tank is sited in a timber shelter on brick sub-walls; the building has an earth floor and a timber framed roof clad in corrugated sheeting, probably asbestos cement. The shelter is serving its purpose but the roof timbers are badly rotted and require early repair or renewal.

The roof sheeting is believed to be asbestos cement type, commonly used for this purpose when this roof was built. Asbestos was very commonly employed in the building industry until just over 13 years ago and one cannot positively identify it without laboratory analysis; there are numerous substitutes that closely resemble the original and there are also a very wide and often surprising range of products that may incorporate it in some form. It is therefore possible that other asbestos-based products about the property may not have been identified. You will be aware of the hazards associated with asbestos dust and that asbestos-based products may now only be disposed of

through a licensed contractor. While the asbestos that may be used here is unlikely to be of a type proven particularly hazardous, it should nevertheless be handled with respect. We would make the point that asbestos in some form is found in the majority of properties inspected, and we would normally suggest that it be left well alone except in situations where a component is broken and the risk of dust and fibre entering the atmosphere is increased.

Garage Block

This is the most significant outbuilding and is predominantly of brick construction under a roof clad in interlocking clay tiles: thought to be late Victorian in origin, replacing a building whose front wall was what is now the rear wall of the garden area.

The building is divided into three sections: a twin garage, a storage area open to this, and an attached workshop.

The building is serviceable for its purpose but is old and is likely to require ongoing maintenance consistent with this. We would particularly bring your attention to the following points:

1. Floor cracked and uneven: probably not laid on a proper base.
2. Pointing eroding badly in places, especially to gable walls.
3. Back wall only accessible from neighbouring property: not inspected externally.
4. Evidence of currently active wood boring beetle infestation.
5. Decay to external joinery, especially to storage area window.
6. Structural distortion over workshop door: possible connected with roof stress, but we suspect more likely to result from vibration from the door. Stable but weak.

PATHS, DRIVES & BOUNDARIES

The drive is tarred and is in serviceable order but with some general wear and tear and some old patching. The paving about the property is also mostly serviceable, but is very uneven in the vicinity of the attached outbuilding.

The main garden area is mostly surrounded by walling, stone (with tiled capping) to the rear and brick to the front and right; there is a hedge to the front left. The walling is generally in serviceable order, although the stone wall has suffered some erosion, as have the coping bricks to the brick walling.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a house of considerable age and character in a pleasant village location.

Our inspection of the house did not reveal any matters which we would regard as particularly unusual for house of this vintage, although there are some wants of maintenance and repair, and general upgrading is now needed reflecting the lack of such work for many years. There are also some drawbacks and inconveniences not unusual in such an old building.

In our opinion the property provides a viable renovation project for a purchaser willing to budget for early upgrading and repair and maintenance work, and able to allow for the upkeep of an old, thatched and listed building, which inevitably will be an ongoing and not inexpensive

project. It is impossible at this stage to estimate with any accuracy the likely costs of bringing the property up to a reasonably good standard, as this will depend on many factors, not least the standard of finish required and the attitude taken by the conservation officer, but one can easily envisage expenditure of the order £150,000 to £200,000 proving necessary.

Of the matters raised in this report we would particularly draw the following to your attention:-

- 1) Decay to parts of timber frame (especially soleplate) and associated damage to masonry: localized reconstruction likely to prove necessary.
- 2) Damp to lower walling: recommend reduction in ground level, more breathable wall finishes and improved ventilation and heating practice.
- 3) Need for re-ridging and associated work fast approaching.
- 4) Poor external paintwork and rot to external joinery.
- 5) Extensive areas of seriously weak and/or damaged plaster to ceilings and walls.
- 6) Poor internal decorative order and fittings in need of general upgrading.
- 7) Concerns in regard to electrical installations: further advice recommended.
- 8) Certain localized and/or minor defects, including:
 - a) Rotten wood block flooring in dining room.
 - b) Localized internal rot to joinery and partitioning.
 - c) Several roof tiles in need of early renewal.
 - d) Suspected broken rafter to rear of bedroom 2.
 - e) Localized erosion to brickwork and pointing to rear of Victorian part.
 - f) Poor condition of valley lining to rear left of roof.
 - g) Sticking windows and doors.
 - h) Collapsed ceiling in bathroom and on rear landing.
 - i) Lack of access hatch to front roof spaces.
 - j) Polythene sheeting applied under rafters to tiled section.
 - k) Routine overhaul of rainwater goods recommended.
 - l) Rot to oil tank shelter roof.
 - m) Debris obstructing drainage system.
 - n) Slipped flashing to side porch.
 - o) Inadequate tank lagging in roofspace.
- 9) Certain drawbacks, mostly typical of an old house, including:
 - a) Thermal efficiency below current standards, particularly in respect of windows and walls.
 - b) Provision for ventilation below current standards, with resulting risk of condensation.
 - c) First floor distorted and relatively weak, but reasonable for an old house.
 - d) Roof structure weak and fragile by current standards but typical of an old thatched house.
 - e) Staircases not to current safety standards.
 - f) Flues very probably unlined.
 - g) Possible presence of asbestos based components: only to be expected in an older house.
 - h) Evidence of old wood boring beetle activity.
 - i) Lack of central heating.
 - j) Recurring expense of a thatched roof and deterioration to roofing tiles.

XXXX FARM

10) Miscellaneous defects affecting garage, including active wood boring beetle infestation, eroded pointing to walls and deterioration to floor surface.

The above points should not be read out of context with the report as a whole and should not be regarded as being in order of significance: the above does not comprise a complete or comprehensive list of defects. Where appropriate specialist reports and contractors quotations should be obtained prior to entering into a firm commitment to purchase.

We would recommend that this property is insured against fire, flood, subsidence, heave and all other normal perils for not less than £560,000 (five hundred and sixty thousand pounds) on an index linked policy. Obtaining insurance cover on old, timber framed and thatched properties can sometimes be difficult, especially via internet or telephone based insurers: we recommend consulting a local broker should you have any difficulties.

We trust that the above information is sufficient for your purposes but if we can be of any further assistance or can expand on any of the points raised in any way, please do not hesitate to contact the writer.

Andrew N Carr BA FRICS
(Chartered Surveyor)

7th December 2010

PHOTOGRAPHS



Building from front right



Building from left



Building from rear



Building from rear right



Ceiling in bedroom 3



Chalk block to chimneystack



Damaged battens



Damp to fireplace in family room

XXXX FARM



Damp under and to soleplate in hallway



Displaced walling to right of sitting room



Door between bedrooms 2 and 3



Electric consumer unit



End of beam above sitting room



Floor beam above scullery



Front path



Front stack and wear to ridge

XXXX FARM



Garage



Garage floor



Garage gable wall pointing poor



Garage wood boring beetle activity



Kitchen ceiling



Label to beam end over family room



Lining to right of sitting room



Metal strapping to front right corner

XXXX FARM



Panel retained by metal clamps



Pointing to scullery wall



Polythene sheet under tiled roof rafters



Porch flashing slipped



Rear left roof valley



Rear staircase and damp walling



Roof over bedroom 3 looking rearwards



Rot to partition between dining room and lobby



Rot to soleplate to right of sitting room



Rot to window cill and pent roof



Rot to window timber



Rot to wood block floor in dining room



Rubble fillet to front of sitting room



Scorching to wattle and daub



Soffit to sitting room fireplace



Soleplate to right of dining room

XXXX FARM



Strapping to front right corner



Suspected snapped rafter behind bedroom 2



Tiling deteriorating, especially to right



Very hollow plaster to sloping ceiling



Wall distorted over workshop door



Wallplate displaced to front right of bedroom 2



Water tank in roof



Wear and tear to old doors

FLOOR PLANS



Floor plans extracted from estate agent's particulars: for identification only; not to scale; accuracy neither warranted nor checked.