

The Farm Buildings At Moorden



The Estate map of Moorden Farm (left), produced for the owner, George Children in 1804 shows the farmstead to consist of six main agricultural buildings in addition to the house. Adjacent to the farmstead is a small cottage and garden (1).

The buildings are contained by hedged field boundaries & a bisecting fence encloses one of the buildings to create a probable livestock enclosure (2). This also includes one side of the main farm pond, from which the animals would obtain their drinking water. The main building within the yard is large and most probably a multipurpose mediaeval barn (3). The granary can be seen enclosed within the orchard in close proximity to the house (4), which was often the case due to the value of their contents.



By 1841 the farmstead had drastically changed as shown by the Tithe map for the parish of Leigh (left).

Although the livestock buildings to the south of the farmstead (2) still remained, the cottage, & large mediaeval barn had disappeared leaving a small stand alone building in its place (5). Several of the outhouses associated with the farmhouse are also no longer in existence. A barn to the north had been built, later becoming the oasthouse (6). A stable with hayloft & cartshed were erected near the farm pond (7) adjacent to a formal stable & coach house (8). This backed onto a dairy (9), which adjoined a large threshing barn (10).

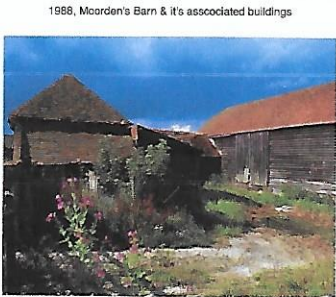


The largest of the buildings within the modernised farmstead was this barn. It consisted of nine bays, of which two had threshing floors & double doors. The barn is recognised as a grade 2 listed building & is described in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, as being:

'Weatherboarded with a half hipped tiled roof and foundation of coursed freestone with some brick courses over...inside there are fairly close set uprights with half rail, diagonal braces above, tie and collar beams with sloped queen posts and through purlins.'

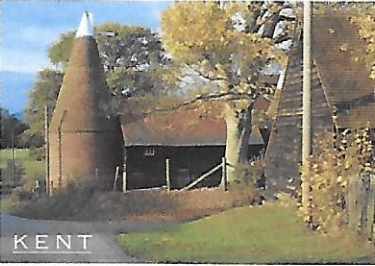
One of the end bays of the barn was used as a milling room & supported a hayloft above it. From this loft hay was cut into chaff using a chaff cutter & then dropped through a shoot to the milling room below where, along with the milled grain, it was sorted out for food for the livestock on the farm. The centre of the barn was used to store sheaves of corn before it was threshed, using flails, on the two threshing floors. The two double doors were then opened for the wind to blow out the straw into the yard for the cattle & at the same time separating it from the grain. Some of this grain & other feed was stored in the other end bay of the barn. The introduction of mechanical threshing machines from 1786 meant the old process of threshing died out & the horse powered machines were permanently installed in barns. Farm employees feared their jobs would be lost as the machines meant harvesting grain became a lot more efficient. Over the course of the nineteenth century labour requirements did drop by 30 percent on corn growing farms. However the Census records show that at Moorden there were no drastic changes in work force numbers.

The barn provides an excellent idea of the wealth & size of a farm at the time it was built since the more bays it had the larger amount of corn it was designed to hold. This barn is particularly big, compared to others in Leigh, which only had on average three bays. Any extension to the barn also suggests an increase in wealth. The cattle hovel & pig sties added to Moorden barn by 1896 is a good indication of a rise in stocking rates.



The new farmstead built at Moorden after 1804 coincides with the new ownership of the farm. William Wells I bought Moorden between 1813 & 1815 & it is most likely the changes in the buildings were as a result of this. Like many other farms in Leigh bought by William Wells, there were obvious improvements to Moorden Farm to bring it up to date & make it more economical. Wells was a businessman and would have seen his farms as business investments, by putting money into them they were more likely to make higher profits.

The way the farmstead was being constructed was that of a carefully planned and thought-out process, to get the most out of the farm, economically. The buildings were each designed for a specific purpose & built in the best circumstances. Yards would be built facing the south to catch the sun, and cartsheds, for example, faced the north to protect them from the rain and sun. Farmyard manure was used to its full extent on the land & easy access to the livestock areas made this possible. Tools & equipment were being developed to a much higher standard & received adequate housing as a result. Agriculture was being viewed with a more revolutionary & sophisticated eye. The new design of farmyard played an important role in the cycles that went on in an agricultural system, but some buildings were slightly more independent of the others, the oasthouse is an example of one. This particular building was solely designed & built to be used on a hop growing farm, like Moorden.



1970s, Moorden oast & cartshed on right



c.1925, Entrance to Moorden Farmhouse & cartshed on right



1975-1980 Entrance to Moorden Farmhouse & cartshed on right



1970s Moorden farmstead from the B2076

Apart from the addition of two modern barns erected at Moorden in the 1960s, the nineteenth and early twentieth century farm buildings at Moorden remained the same until the late 1980's. They had become redundant & impractical for use with larger modern agricultural machinery, farming methods & enterprises. Many had also fallen into disrepair as a result of the slumps in the agricultural economy at this time. It was at this stage the majority were converted into houses & a new farmyard to the North of the original site with contemporary farm buildings evolved.

Farm Worker's Cottages

From the Ordnance Survey maps it is evident that between 1884 & 1896 three cottages were built at Moorden to the South of the main farm compound to house farm workers. They do not feature in the 1891 Census so it is most likely the erection of these cottages was in fact between 1891 & 1896 & coincided with changes made to the Redleaf estate, after it was inherited by Frank Hill's sons on their father's death. The ornate nature of their design is of significant interest as it is in the style of prominent architect George Devey who had carried out a lot of commissions in Penshurst where he worked on the estate's lodges, cottages and farms. He often tried to create an artificial image of a building's age by combining styles & materials from different eras, as seen by the cottages at Moorden, which have overhanging gable ends, porches, bay windows & beam work all replicating much earlier styles.

According to the 1901 Census records we can see that living in cottages No.1-3 were the Brooker family from whom the adjacent orchard gets its name, most probably they lived in cottage No.1 as that is nearest to the orchard, Head of the household was Gideon Brooker, age 46 who was married to Naomi (42) & they had two children, Harry (16) & Naomi Lucy (7). Gideon's occupation is listed as farm carter & Harry's as carter's mate. Harry is also still listed as a Farm Labourer on the 1911 Census, he has married Amy Parker who's father James is a cowman on the farm.

The other two families living in the cottages at the time of the 1901 Census were the Humphrey family & the Smith family, both families were involved in the running of the farm. Walter Humphrey (42) a farm worker at Moorden originated from Chelsea & his wife Eliza (37) from Cowden. They had four children Minnie (15), Florence (10), William (6) & George (2).

Alfred Smith (44) from Burwash in Sussex was listed as a garden labourer, so could have worked in the gardens at Redleaf house. His wife Ann (51) was from Penshurst. They had two children Adelaide (11) & Arthur (6).

By 1911 the Burren family had replaced the Humphrey family in the cottages.



(L-R) No. 3-1 Moorden Cottages



(L-R) No. 3-1 Moorden Cottages



By 1937, Moorden Cottages (left) & new council houses (right)



This layout of buildings did not substantially change in the future, however the 1884 Ordnance survey map (left) shows extensions to building (5) & the addition of a new building next to it.



By 1896 the Ordnance survey map (below) shows the early livestock buildings (2) to the South of the farmstead have been removed & replaced with modernised bullock hovels adjacent to where the original buildings stood.



c.1988, Farmbuildings at Moorden just before conversion into houses

The livestock buildings present on the farm signify that beef cattle were the main livestock kept on the farm as well as some pigs.

The extensive stabling suggests horse power was an important part of farm practice & the existence of a coach house and stable implies the status of the farmer was of importance.

By 1937 the Ordnance survey map (right) shows a further stable (11), known as the Lower Stable had been built, perhaps due to the need for extra work horses on the farm to aid the Second World War effort.



Late 1970s/early 1980s, The Lower Stable (Far left) & bullock hovel & yard



c.1988, The Top Stable & stable pond



c.1910, Cart pony outside Riders Stable at Moorden Farm (L-R) Eric, Ethel & Don Day



c.1988, The Riders Stable