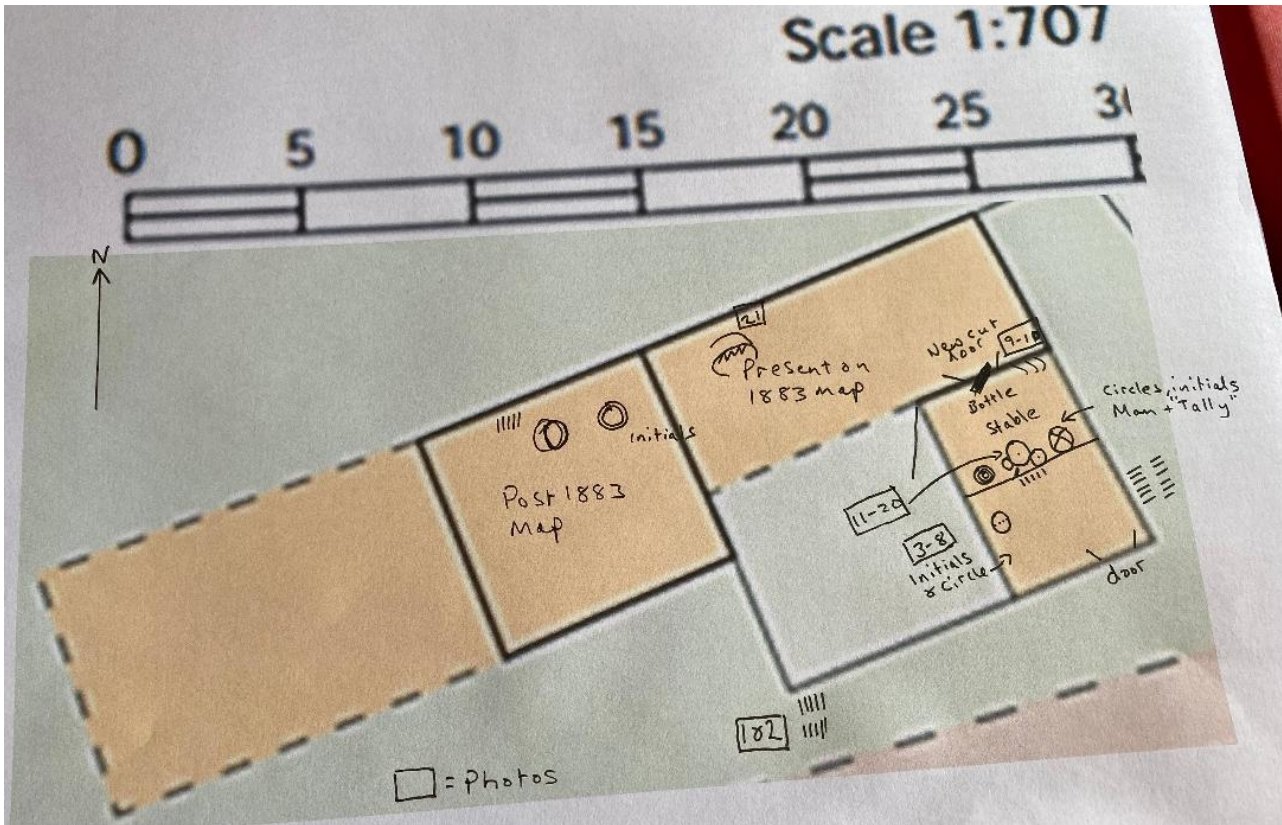


## Farm buildings, Mendham (Bert's Barn) IP20 OPE 20.3.22

The barn and stables are late 19<sup>th</sup> century in design and date. It was present on the 1883 map of the area. The block adjoining it to the South West is later, possibly early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It belonged to your paternal grandfather (Alfred) Bertie Godbold, who was then farming at Highfields further along Foxes Lane towards Metfield. He bought 68 acres from Chestnut Lodge in the mid 1930s. This land included the building you have named Bert's Barn. Bert's only child was your father (Edward) John Godbold, 1926-2018. His initials are seen in photo 4, dated 1945. The other buildings must be late 50s or early 60s. Your father built his house in 1960. The map below records the marks and objects we observed and the location of photos included.



Suffolk Sheet XVII.SW

Surveyed: 1883, Published: 1884

Size: map 31 x 46 cm (ca. 12 x 18 inches), on sheet ca. 43 x 58 cm (ca. 17 x 23 inches)

[Maps home](#) > [Ordnance Survey](#) >



The farm buildings appear to represent a variety of uses – barn for storing produce, a stable with a door (containing most frequent marks and the immured bottle on the NW wall), animal stalls in the NW with a yard in front and the South Easterly part of the complex a room possibly used for storage of equipment and a shelter for the farmers (this is full of their initials and two dates).

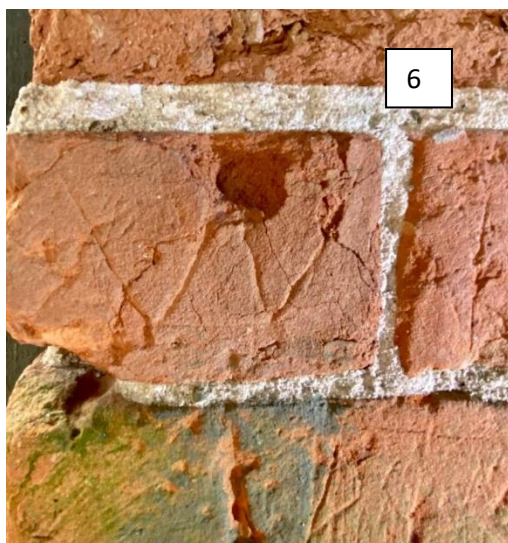
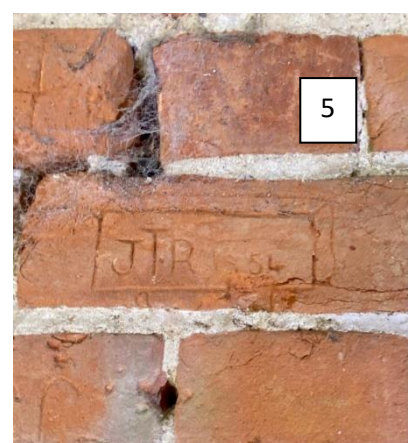
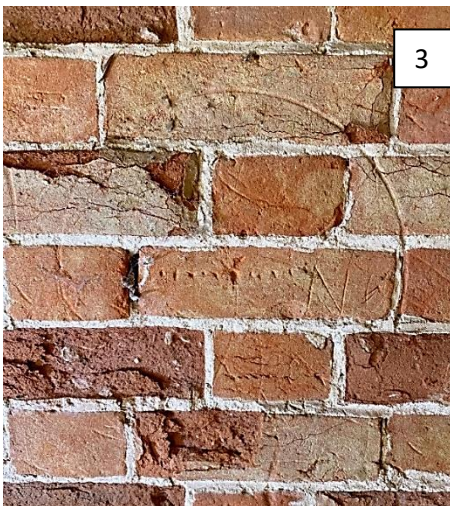
### Marks and bottle

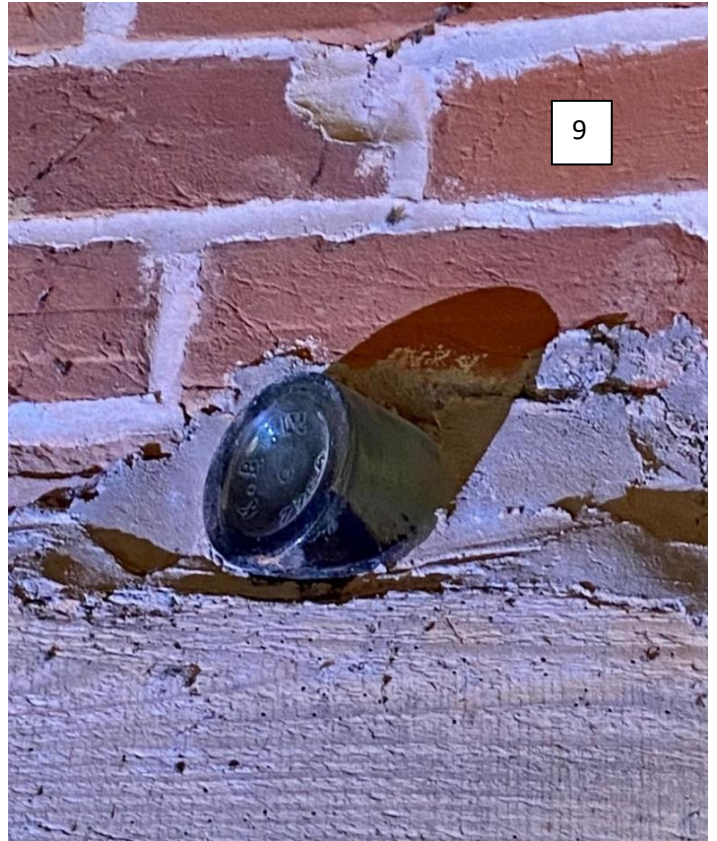
The red brick is soft and easily carved which allows lots of marks to be made.

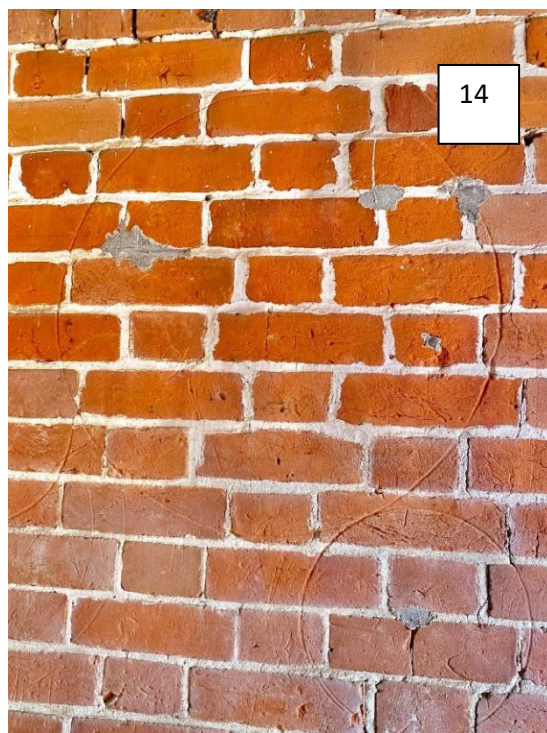
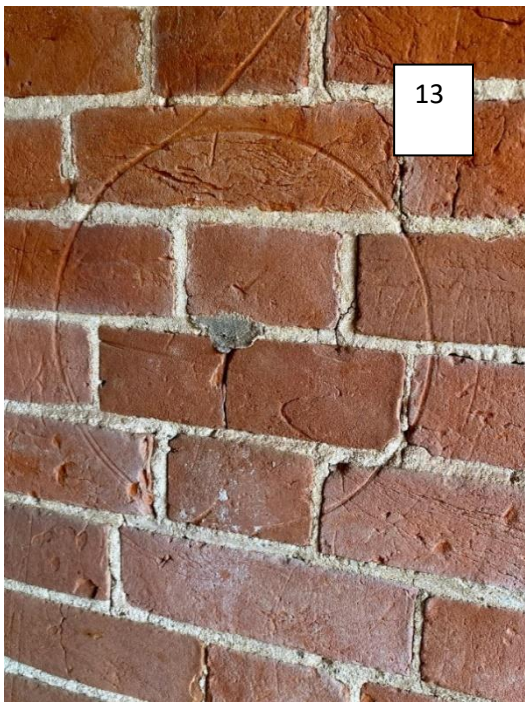
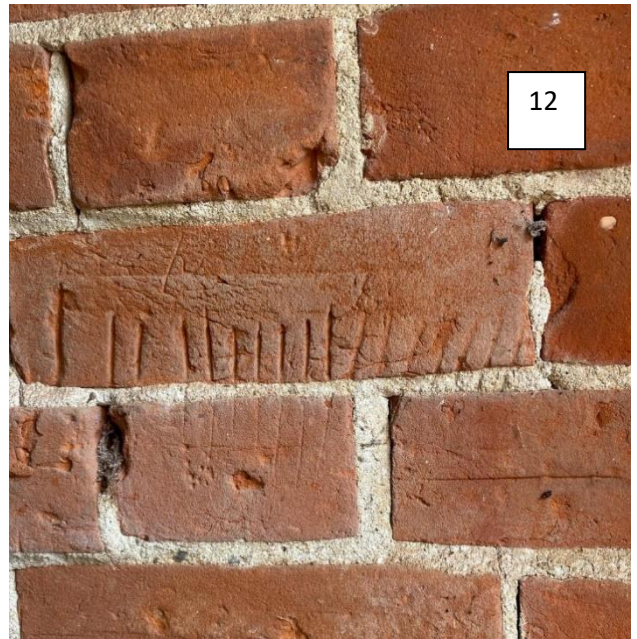
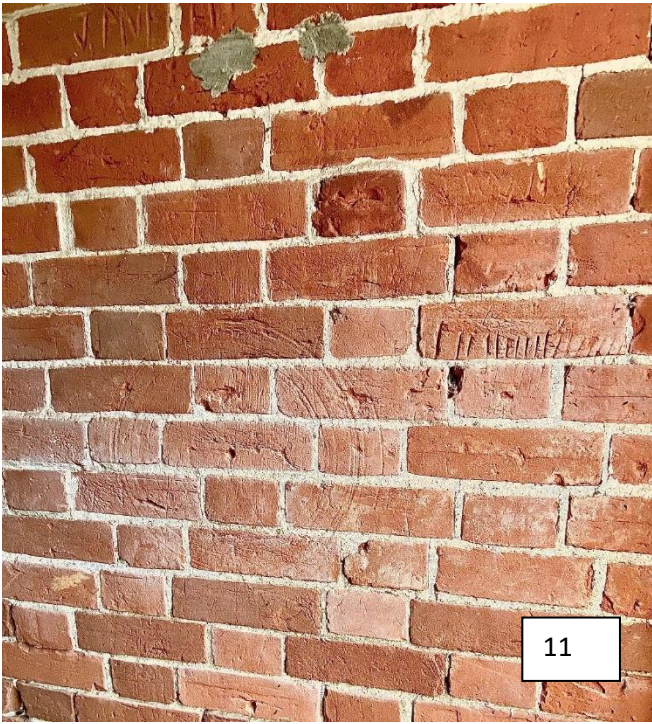
1. On the NW wall (photos 8-10) about 2-2.5m high is a bottle set into and through the wall. It looks like a soft drink bottle/beer with a stopper in it of the style of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is tilted slightly to allow the dark liquid contained in it (photo 8&9) to drain downwards and

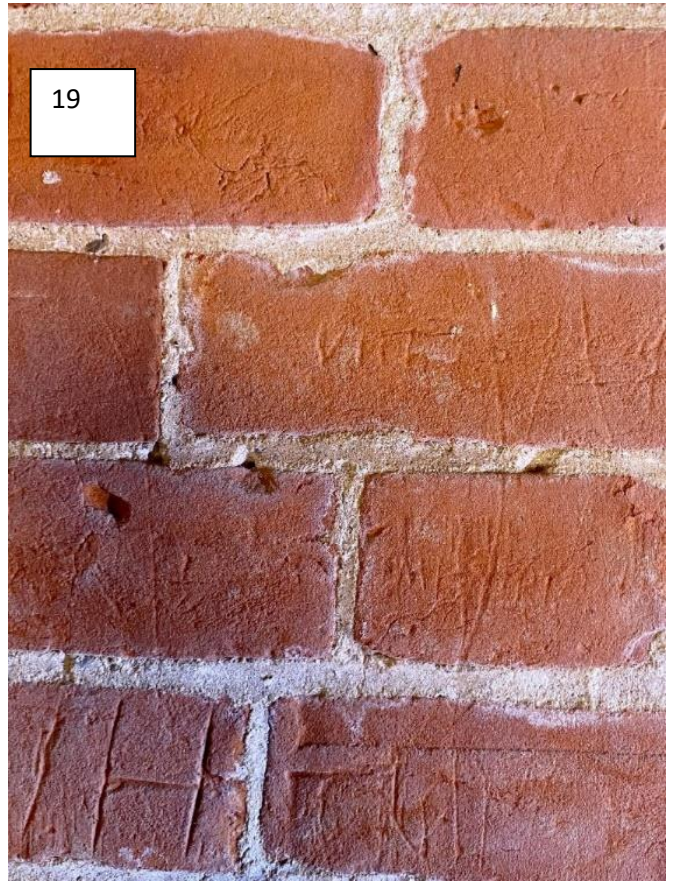
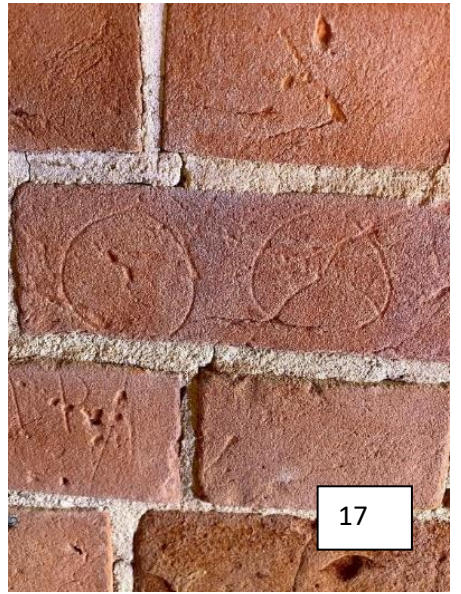
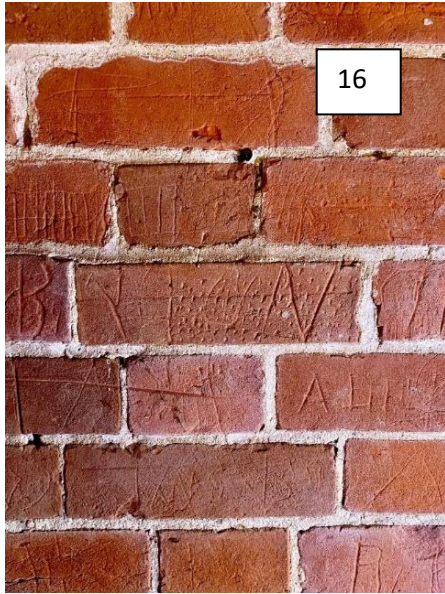
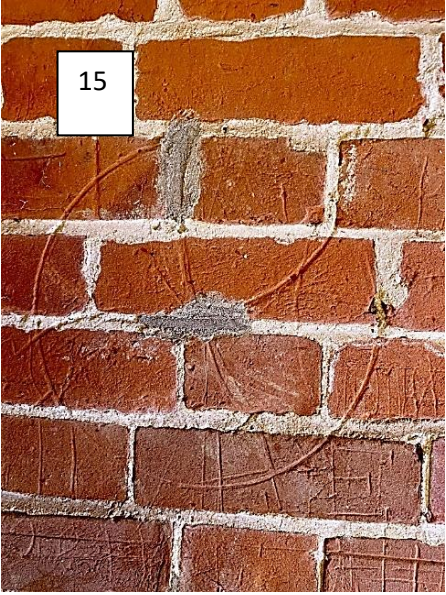
not leak out of the stopper. It has been deliberately placed there to avoid anyone breaking it and has been re-affixed by 20<sup>th</sup> century cement and not lime mortar as it would have originally been.

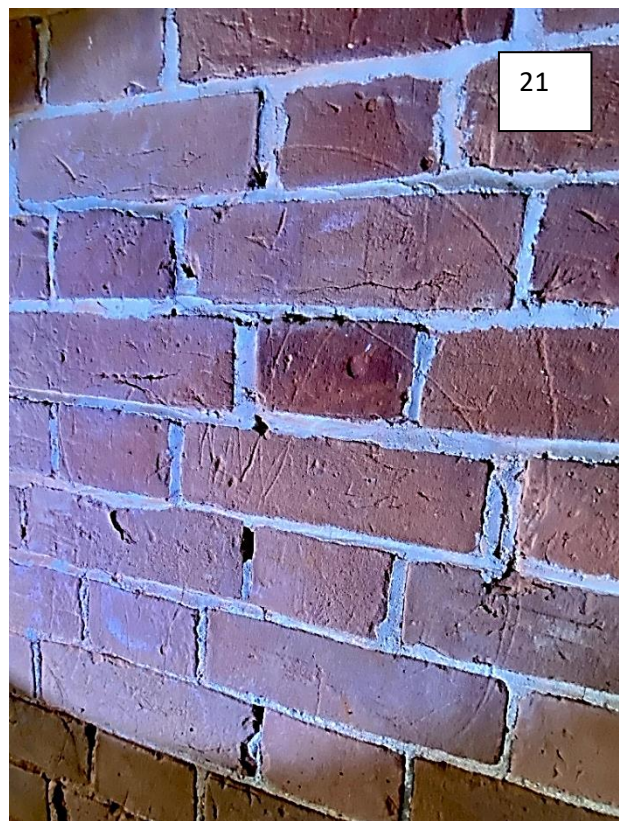
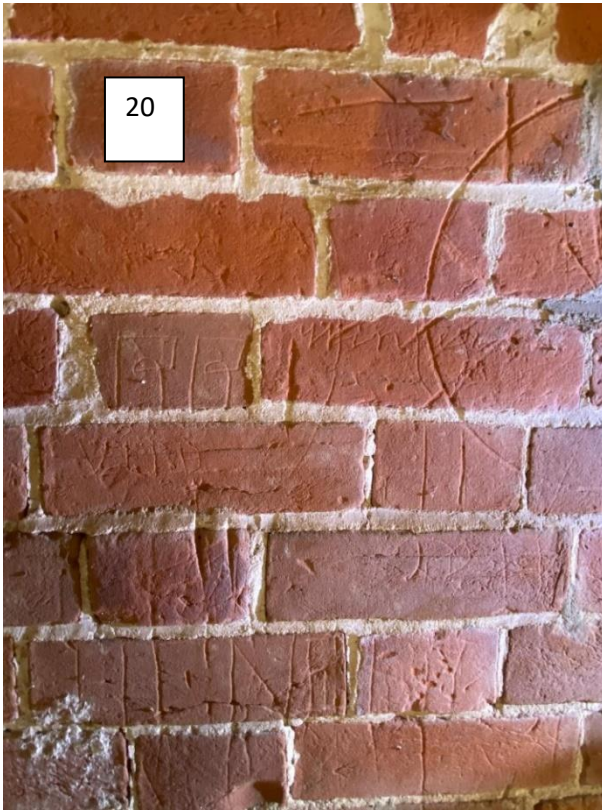
2. Many large circular marks, some within each other, some overlapping (3,11,13,14,15,19-21, 24,25), one making a crude cross (15). Made by farm implements.
3. Lots of marks that look like a tally. They often occur on just one brick and have been carefully made. They occur frequently on the outside of the buildings (at least 4), but also inside (at least 2), some are associated with circles. Photos 1, 2, 7,11,12 & 23.
4. Lots of initials and other marks as well as a delightful drawing of a fat man with a top hat (18) and some kind of a tool (a rake?) which has been struck through.











## Discussion

Clearly, you have a fascinating example of ritual protection symbols (apotropaic or evil-averting symbols) and measures in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. We know that this is not surprising in Suffolk where older ways and folkloric practices, particularly in rural areas, persist much longer. If your father didn't know what the meaning of the marks and bottle meant, your grandparents would have!

Timothy Easton mentions the use of Apotropaic symbols in farm buildings "The circular patterns were applied close to the areas where cattle were housed, against windows and around wagon porches to barns. In stables they can be found above the stalls for the horses. There was a widespread belief that horses suffered from nightmares and were found sweating

in the morning had been hag-ridden during the night" – from *Physical evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain*. A feeling for magic. Likewise, Brian Hoggard has written a chapter in the same book on witch bottles which you have in Bert's Barn. I have passed on this report to him as he is interested in our findings. He has also written a fascinating book called "Magical Hose Protection. The Archaeology of counter-witchcraft" and there is a chapter on witch bottles. Your bottle is found in both the stable and the animal stalls the other side and was there to protect the animals from the onslaught of malign forces.

The "tally marks" could be just that, or sharpening of tools. However, they occur around the buildings and are often found in one brick only. In discussion with others (who know more than I!), they may be a way of keeping track of produce or may be symbolic tally marks made in hope of successful harvests. Whatever they are, they occur with plentiful circular marks which are apotropaic. They occur in other farm buildings elsewhere in the UK.

Your initials and graffiti are a record of your family and workers on the farm. There may be other meanings as you know the walls are full of it!

This brings me on to the last graffiti. The man with the top hat. He is rather plump, face is not smiling and to his right is an implement – a rake or a broom. The line through him says "no entry"! Who is he? A late

19<sup>th</sup> century man, not welcome. Is he the man your grandfather brought the land off? Is he a statement against the gentry of the area? The rake or a broom may just link in with other folklore of an unwelcome man who causes trouble to the farm animals and produce. It could be what your witch bottle is trying also to keep out and also the circular symbols.

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting your property. It is fascinating and thrown up so many questions and insights. If you find anything else concealed around the buildings, please let me know! Likewise, if I can help, please let me know.

Best wishes,

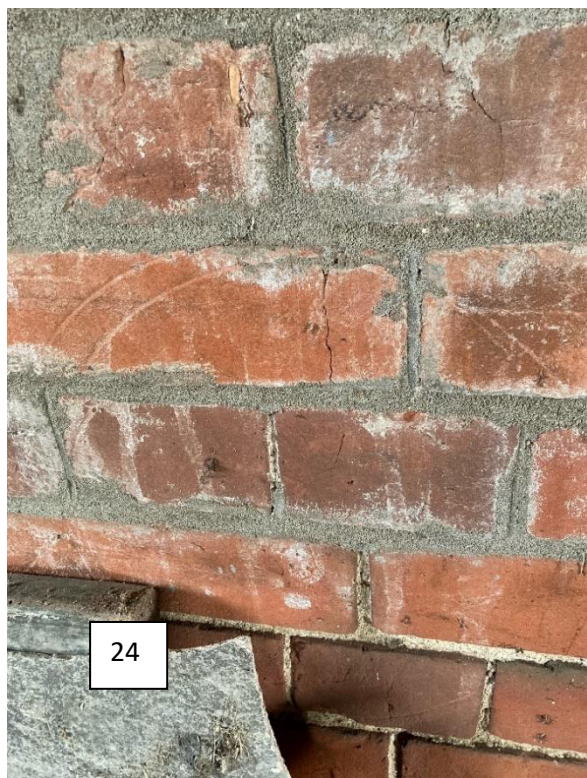
Richard

Second building (SW), absent from 1883 map, presumably early 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
Photos sent by you.

22



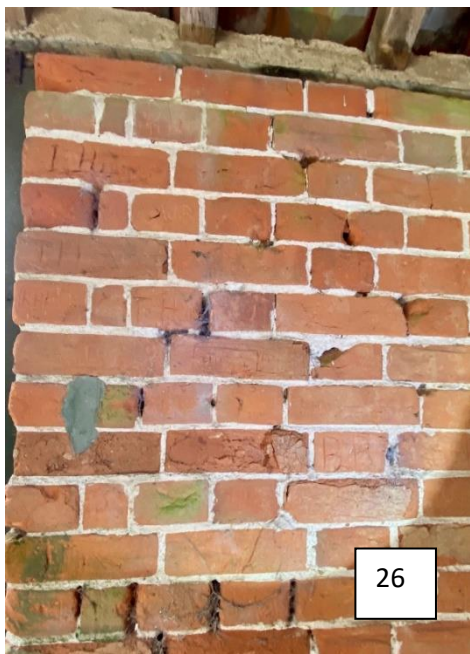
23



24



25



#### Further evidence



Since this report you have been able to look a little more closely at the immured bottle. It appears that the bottle is a horse tonic, the bottle has not been opened but I assume the brown liquid is just that!



