



The History of Ewyas Lacy: Michaelchurch Estate

Document Record

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Title: Digital Images Collection: Photographs of a letter concerning a Structural Survey of Firs Cottage

Place name: Michaelchurch Escley

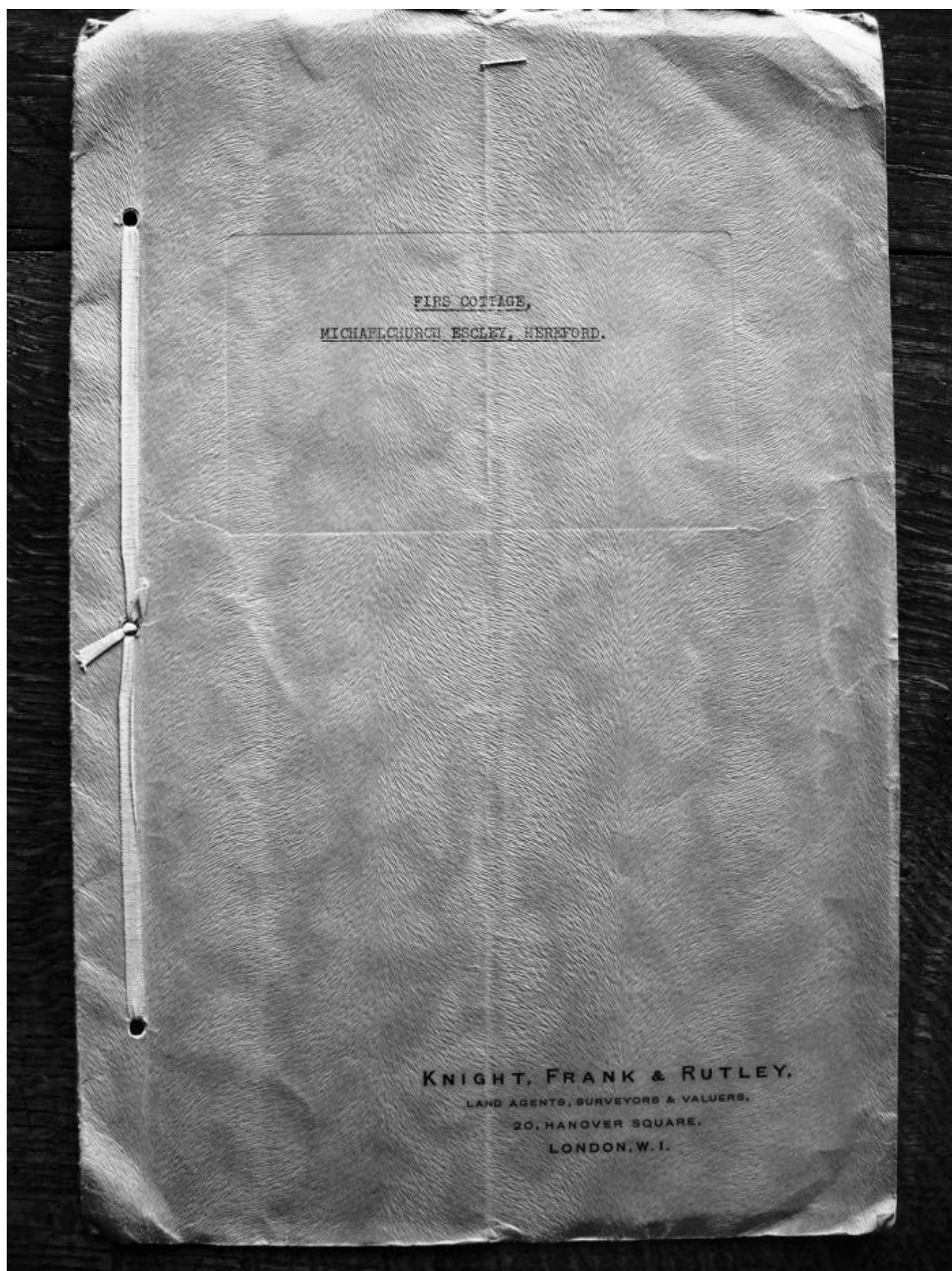
Date: 1962

Description:

Photographs of a letter from Knight Frank & Rutley dated 26th July 1962 reporting on a Structural Survey of Firs Cottage for MH Hunter.

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KNIGHT, FRANK & RUTLEY, LONDON & HEREFORD

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20, HANOVER SQUARE,
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26th July, 1962.

Dear Sir,

Firs Cottage, Michaelchurch Escley,
Hereford.

In accordance with your instructions, we have surveyed the above property for the purpose of advising you on the condition of the structure and services and we report as follows:-

The property stands in its own grounds and comprises a House with a large detached garage nearby, a small outbuilding and a gardener's Cottage and School House, the latter has a separate entrance from the road.

STRUCTURE

The house is built mainly of stone with part stone tiled roof and has been added to at the west end and a further section on the north side more recently built in 11" cavity brickwork with a concrete tiled roof. In this later section, a bitumen felt damp proof course has been provided but, as would be expected, no damp proof course could be found in the original structure which is probably 300 to 400 years old. Air bricks have been inserted in the bay to the sitting room on the south-east corner to provide some sub-floor ventilation but generally the ventilation of the cavity timber floors is inadequate and, as there is rising dampness, the conditions are conducive to dry rot. Although there are no obvious outward signs of dry rot, we would advise that these timber floors be opened up for further inspection and, if necessary, replaced by solid floors with a waterproof membrane.

CONDITION

The roof slopes on the south and east sides are covered with stone tiles of varying sizes and many of these are broken or laminating badly and a number have slipped, particularly on the inner slope to the pitched roof on the east side where several tiles are missing allowing storm water to penetrate. These tiles are laid on the original cleft battens and secured by wood pegs and from time to time a number have been replaced and fixed with galvanized nails. In our opinion, the whole of these two roofs should be completely stripped, re-battened, felted and replaced with concrete tiles similar to the rear section.

Apart from defects in the tiling, the ridge requires re-bedding and the verges to the gable ends pointed up. The small roofs over the two dormer windows should similarly be stripped and re-tiled.

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Internally

Access is provided to the interior of the roof space by means of trap doors in the ceiling of three of the rooms on the first floor and an inspection showed that the roof over the rear part of the house has been framed with fir carcassing timbers with 4" x 2" rafters and 7" x 3" purlins in long sections spiked together and supported on breeze blocks. The roof has also been covered with a bitumen impregnated hessian. The roof over the old part of the house is framed with the original cleft rafters and supporting timbers of varying sizes all of which are affected by worm which is active. Some of the roof timbers, in particular a purlin, are badly affected by worm and, in our opinion, it will be necessary when roof repairs are carried out to replace some of the more badly affected timber and in any case all the main structural timbers and woodwork generally throughout the house should be treated with a proprietary insecticide.

Internal partition walls are built partly in timber studding covered with laths and plastered and partly with brick or breeze blocks in the later section of the house, and in many rooms the plaster to the ceilings and walls is cracked and in some cases off-key. It is also, as previously mentioned, considerably perished in places by dampness and these areas will require hacking off and re-plastering before being decorated.

Apart from quarry and flag-stoned floors on the ground floor, there are some floors of timber joist and boarded construction and in most rooms these are affected by worm, but appears to be an old infestation. Carpets and furnishings precluded a detailed examination of the floors and, although there is no undue springiness, it may well be found that the joists also are affected by worm. In one of the bathrooms the floor boards around the W.C. have sunk and this fitting should be removed and the boards taken up for further investigation.

Carpentry and joinery work generally is only of fair standard. In one or two rooms the original ledged and boarded doors exist. The staircase has been constructed in softwood and the treads and risers have been painted. In the staircase and passage some of the timbers have been replaced to give additional support both to the staircase and the structural framing where some of the old affected timbers have been replaced.

In the kitchen there is a matchboarded dado fixed to the stone external walls but we are unable to comment on the fixing battens behind.

Windows are of wood and metal casement type, the latter showing some signs of rust, particularly in the bathroom where the window has probably been affected by considerable condensation. All windows require easing and adjusting and in the first floor bedroom on the south-east corner there is only one wood opening casement with two small opening transome lights, additional openings should be made.

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OUT-BUILDING

This is constructed in stone and brick and has a stone tiled roof. It is divided into two, one part being used as a potting shed and the other, which has been plastered internally and provided with a boarded floor and light is, we understand, used as a spare bedroom.

CONDITION

There are a number of stone tiles which are broken and others which have slipped and all the ridge tiles require re-bedding. The walls which are approximately 18" thick require pointing up and grouting in with cement mortar and also the single flue chimney stack.

General repairs are necessary to this out-building including renewal of defective guttering.

In the potting shed section, the roof has been framed with old cleft rafters and purlins and a timber truss and many of the timbers are affected by worm which is active.

GARDENER'S COTTAGE AND SCHOOL-HOUSE

This is constructed with timber and stone walls and has a stone tiled roof.

CONDITION

The roof slopes covering both the gardener's cottage and school-house have stone tiles many of which are broken and slipped and laminating, and are generally in similar condition to the roof slopes over the front part of the house. There is no access to the roof space in the gardener's cottage to examine the state of the roof timbers or tile battens and, in view of the general condition of the cottage and the school-house, it may be considered sufficient to effect a repair to these roofs using some of the good salvaged stone tiles from the house. The ridge tiles require re-bedding and also pointing up of the verges to the gables on the south and east side, and on the south slope the valley gutter is particularly bad, the valley being formed by swept tiling. The stone chimney stacks require pointing and making good of cement flaunching around the pots.

The main external walls which are of adequate thickness require pointing up and grouting in with cement mortar particularly at ground level on the east elevation.

Windows are mainly of the wood casement type and these require repair particularly to the school room where oak window frames have been fitted, and the mullions and oak cills are considerably weathered and rotted. A wood cill to the gardener's cottage is also badly rotted and should be replaced. The barge boards to the gable are decayed and affected by worm and should be replaced.

The corrugated asbestos lean-to shed is in fair condition.

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Internally

Internal partition walls to the gardener's cottage are constructed in timber studding with laths and plastered but all the rooms are in poor decorative condition with much of the plaster being affected by dampness, particularly in the bedroom at the south end. There is also evidence of dry rot in the skirting and this should be removed and the floor boards in this particular area opened up to ascertain the extent of the outbreak. Work has also affected much of the woodwork including the ledged and boarded doors, floor boards and the roof timbers in the end bedroom on the north side, but this appears to be an old infestation.

In the living room and kitchen, the floors are of flag-stone, worn and uneven and in the front sitting room the boarded floor, although apparently sound, should be opened up for inspection.

In the school room section, the roof timbers are sound but affected by worm and the general condition internally is poor. Much of the plaster is coming away from the walls owing to dampness and the wood floors in several parts of the school room and small adjoining rooms are badly rotted and can only satisfactorily be dealt with by replacing with a concrete floor.

OUT-BUILDING

This is a stone and stone tiled structure which requires similar general repairs to the roof where a number of tiles have slipped, particularly around the chimney stack and the stone walls require pointing and grouting in.

The roof timbers are all affected by worm including the wall plate. There is a small timber and boarded lean-to shed covered with asbestos slating and some of the timbers are affected by worm. The slating, although covered with vegetation, is satisfactory.

LARGE GARAGE ADJACENT TO FIRS COTTAGE

This is a timber framed garage covered with corrugated steel sheeting and has a floor which is part concrete and part flag-stoned. Worm has affected some of the timber framing and this appears to be active and should receive treatment. The sheeting has been painted externally and is well covered.

GARDENS AND GROUNDS

There is a small tarmac drive to the garage which requires re-surfacing but otherwise there is no formal carriage sweep or drive to the house. Generally the gardens and grounds have been well kept and well stocked, but considerable repairs are necessary to the concrete paving particularly around the house on the south side where this is badly cracked and sunk and the steps require taking up and re-laying.

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SERVICES

DRAINAGE SYSTEM

A water test was applied to the underground drainage system by Messrs. Cliff Watson and Company, Limited and we enclose their report. As you will see, the test was satisfactory with the exception of the section of drain at the rear of the house. Repairs are required to the rainwater pipes and the inspection chambers. The soil waste is taken from the interceptor to discharge into a cess-pool which appears to be acting as a septic tank but there is no separate liquefaction tank and no filter bed and it would appear that the water is allowed to penetrate the open jointed stonework in the side of the cesspool.

COTTAGE

The report states that the drainage is connected to a septic tank in the field but, here again, there is no evidence of a filter bed.

ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION

An examination and test of the electrical installation was carried out by Messrs. Cliff Watson and Company, Limited and we enclose their report. Numerous items of repair are necessary to the installation and, although the test reading was below the minimum standard required by the Electricity Board, this was apparently due to general dampness and no major re-wiring of the house is necessary, but there is insufficient number of switch socket outlets in most rooms and the wiring and fittings need general attention.

Similar remarks apply to the cottage and the lighting point to the garden shed requires re-wiring.

We note that the service cables to the cottage are fed from the mains supply in the house and these sub-main cables are not considered large enough for the load required and they have suggested that a new service is put into the cottage and the existing sub-main cables be used to supply the garden room and the old schoolroom section only.

DOMESTIC HOT WATER SYSTEM

This is obtained from a Beeston domestic boiler which was not fired at the time of our inspection but from a superficial examination by Messrs. Cliff Watson and Company, Limited, it appears to be in fair condition but requires repair to the smoke damper slide and a new fire bar door is necessary. A 50 gallon galvanized hot water cylinder is fitted with a 3 kilo watt immersion heater but the cylinder has not been lagged or covered with an insulating jacket. In the cottage, hot water is supplied from a combination grate with a back boiler which feeds a copper hot water cylinder in the bathroom and this was in operation at the time of our inspection and appears to be in serviceable condition.

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COLD WATER SUPPLY

Cold water is obtained from a private supply and feeds two 100 gallon galvanized iron storage cisterns with a further 60 gallon cistern in another part of the roof space. The tanks are not protected against frost, but appear to be in satisfactory condition. In the cottage, there is a galvanized iron storage cistern in the bathroom in satisfactory condition. We understand the water supply is gravity fed from a reservoir on the Michaelchurch Estate but the exact run of the pipes is not known; these should be traced and tested and the legal position clarified.

GENERALLY

As you will gather from the above report, the structure has been neglected and considerable repairs are outstanding particularly in regard to the roofs, the worm infested timbers and defective cement rendering, and we consider that the timber floors must be opened up for inspection.

We have not inspected woodwork or other parts of the structure which are covered, unexposed or inaccessible and we are, therefore, unable to report that such parts of the property are free of rot, beetle or other defects. Furthermore, it must be remembered that, owing to the age, type of construction and the siting, there will always be trouble with rising dampness.

It may be found that, when the roofs are stripped, as suggested, the structural timbers then exposed should be treated by a specialist; on the other hand, it may be that the Contractor on the job could carry out this work which, of course, would be less expensive.

Yours faithfully,

Knight Frank Rutley

M. H. Hunter, Esq.,
Bridge Farm,
Michaelchurch Escley,
Nr. HEREFORD.



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Observations:

None