

# THE LAST NEEDLE WORKSHOP IN LONG CRENDON

*Archaeological recording work recognised what was originally considered a garden shed to be the 19<sup>th</sup>-century workshop and scouring mill of Matthew Shrimpton that finally ceased to be used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

## INTRODUCTION

Investigations were carried out on an outbuilding at 76a High Street, Long Crendon (NGR SP 69677 08918) as part of a planning application in 2008. The first impressions of the building were that of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century brick-built outbuilding of poor construction and little historic value. On closer investigation this impression proved inaccurate.

## BACKGROUND

Needle making had been an important industry in Long Crendon since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Donald (1971) records that in 1848 Emanuel Shrimpton and his son, Andrew, installed a steam powered scouring mill at 76 High Street, “where it was installed in the brick shed at the back of the house.” The Shrimptons’ had been a needle making family since 1739 and Emanuel is so recorded on the census of 1841. Outbuildings are marked in the area behind 76 and 78 High Street on the 1827 Inclosure map of Long Crendon. The building is also depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1885.

Prior to 1845 all scouring was done at Long Crendon by Richard Shrimpton, with a Horse Mill kept in a barn behind “Dodwell’s Store” (Donald 1971). In 1845 John Harris of Thame set up a steam engine at Harroel. A second was installed by Edward Shrimpton and his son Jonah at their factory at Arnott’s Yard. Although the industry was modernised at this time it was still in overall decline in the area. Matthew Shrimpton was the last manufacturer of needles, specifically darning needles and bodkins, in Long Crendon from his workshop at 76 High Street (Donald 1971). However, the census of 1891 places him living at Backway

not High Street. Donald (1973) contradicts herself, placing Matthew Shrimpton at 78 High Street during this time. This is likely to be a typing error as she mentions his neighbour Mr. Lovell “who made needles in his spare time in the shed at the rear of 78 High Street.”

The 1901 census records Jonah Lovell and his wife Louisa living at 78 High Street. He was aged 55 and an agricultural labourer. The couple had lived here since 1871. At this time Walter B. Crook a farmer and his wife Annie were living at 76 High Street (May 1991).

## SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The property (Fig. 1) is single storey and rectangular in plan. Only the northern, eastern, parts of the western and the internal walls remain of the original structure, although traces of the original footings of the southern wall could be identified. The building was presumably roved in red ceramic roof tiles, due to the numbers located in layers within the building or incorporated into the fabric of later additions.

Originally the building was constructed on stone footings with a single brick course thick wall built upon them. The footings in the northern wall were apparently constructed to a greater height than those of the other walls, the equivalent of six courses of bricks high. This appears to have been a deliberate attempt to create a raised shelf-like structure along this wall, presumably for storage.

The interior was originally divided into two rooms. An internal wall divides the first room from the second and has a small doorway. This is clearly bonded into the fabric of the northern wall and accommodates a fireplace. This fireplace shows a distinct scar of plaster where a covering or structure has been attached to it. Below this scar is considerable discolouration of the wall surface by soot or burning. An opening on the side of the chimneystack at a level just below the top of the scar would indicate that a second flue had been accommodated.

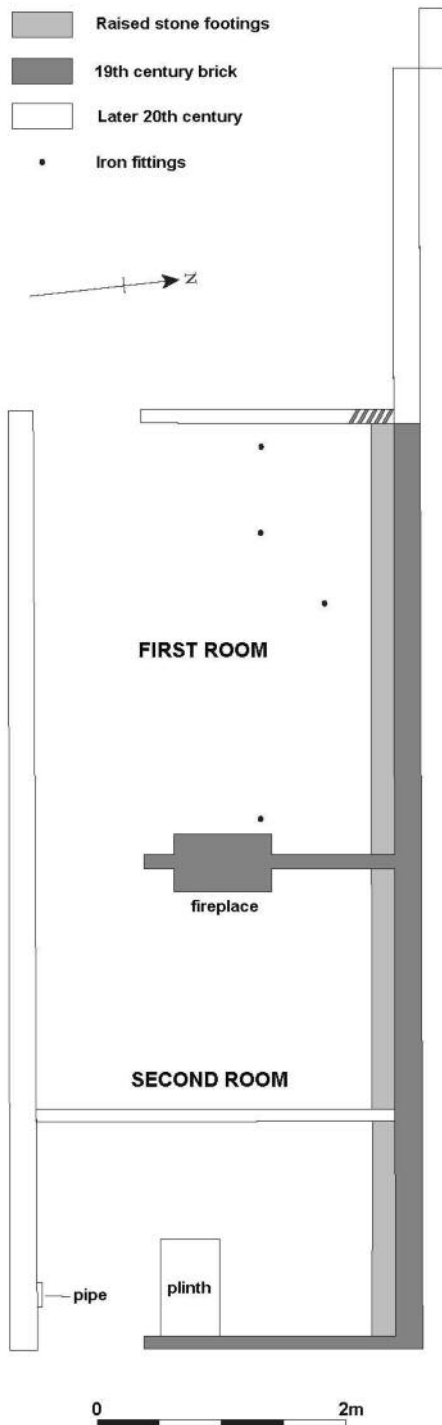


FIGURE 1 Annotated Plan of Building

The original floor was of beaten earth: this had a deposit of coal dust, ash and charcoal over and trampled into it. Set into the floor were four iron fixings, presumably footing for machinery. A brick plinth in the second room also appears to be a setting for further industrial equipment: a pipe in the eastern wall may indicate that it was an overflow for a quenching basin.

### DISCUSSION

The building certainly shows signs of an industrial past: certainly it displays unusual features for a simple garden shed. The fireplace seems out of place in such a structure. It could mark the building as a hovel dwelling, if it were not for the presence of the scorching, the scars of the second flue and the footings in the floor. These are indicative of some form of cottage industry and appear to be associated with either the hardening process of the needles, or to have provided heat for the steam scouring mill. The brick plinth and chimney pipe also appear to be associated with this process.

Contemporary pictures of steam powered scouring engines show that they were not large in size (Shrimpton 1897) and could have easily been accommodated in a building of these dimensions. Considering the presence of the coal dust and fixtures within the first room, it is likely that it housed the steam engine.

The stone footings of the northern wall could represent an earlier building that the standing one was built off. No return for this stone was seen along the eastern wall, but stone footings were seen near the centre of the wall. The wording (Donald 1971) of Emanuel Shrimpton's installation of 1848 would imply that the brick building was already standing, although it may have been built specially to accommodate the new engine.

From the evidence, it appears that the building is in fact the "brick shed" described in 1848 as housing the steam powered scouring engine. This brick shed is also likely to be the same one that Mr. Lovell would use in his spare time to make needles.

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