

Report on

**Grange Farm, Widmer End, Hughenden,
Buckinghamshire**

Site Code: HUG-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View of Grange Farm during renovation.

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Oxbow Books

HUG-A: GRANGE FARM, WIDMER END, HUGHENDEN, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 8821 9595

Survey Date: 8 Feb 1989

By: D. Miles

Illustrations:

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References: Johnson, Ian and Fenley, Pauline (1974) 'Grange Farm, Widmer End', *Records of Buckinghamshire XIX*, 449-456; E. Mercer and S. Pearson, 1976, 'Grange Farm, Hughenden', unpublished report (National Monuments Record).

Note: The building is described as oriented north-south (bay IV to bay I).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Grange Farm now comprises a tall two-bayed cruck house with later extensions. Originally, it probably had additional structures at both ends, although this has been the subject of differing interpretations. Truss T3 is heavily weathered on the north side, indicating that it was exposed for a considerable period, but much of the south face of T1 is smooth and unweathered, interpreted by Johnson and Fenley (1974) as implying the presence of an additional bay beyond it. However, Mercer and Pearson (1976) demonstrated that the house must have extended northward of T3 from the evidence of mortices for windbraces on the north face of T3, and the presence at the same truss of a short section of purlin relating to the missing bay. This evidence is reinforced by the fact that bay II had the remains of what appeared to be an original floor and so could not have been an open hall. Although bay II had collapsed by the time of the present investigation, the previous recorders noted that substantial sooting seems to be confined to bay III. The smoothness of part of the south face of T1 must result from the protection of a further bay or (more probably) a lean-to beyond it. Indeed, a lean-to still survives in part, and the upper parts of T1 are heavily weathered on the south face above its roof level. The weathered north face of T3 indicates that bay IV was removed relatively early, leaving this truss exposed for a century or more before the present eighteenth-nineteenth century flint and brick extension was built on its site.

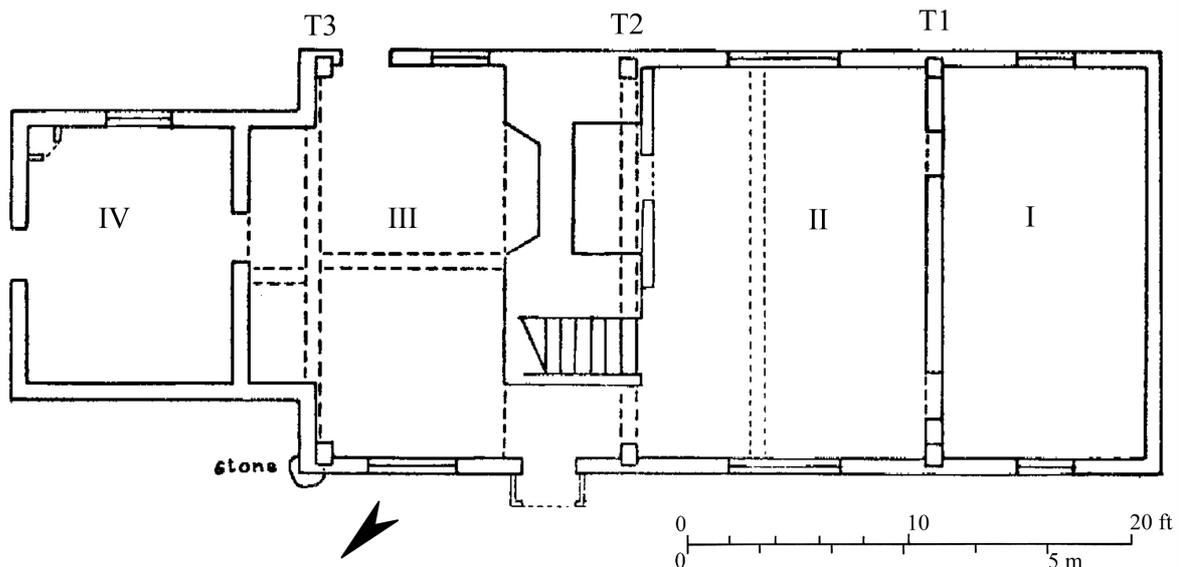


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

The most likely plan is therefore a chamber and solar over in bay II, with a lean-to beyond it, an open hall in bay III and a service room in bay IV. Dendrochronology has failed to date the building. Dates of between 1450 and 1550, and circa 1500 have been proposed for the cruck phase. However, in

comparison to the dates obtained for other tall type 'W' crucks (1551-9 for LON-F; 1549-60 for DID-B), a date well on in the 16th century now seems certain.

LATER PHASES: At some time during the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the northern bay (IV) was demolished. Subsequently, perhaps as late as the early eighteenth century, a chimney stack was inserted just within bay III, and the rest of this bay floored over. Later in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, a two-storied brick and flint extension was built on the site of bay IV, but to a reduced width. Later still, a single story extension was added beyond it.

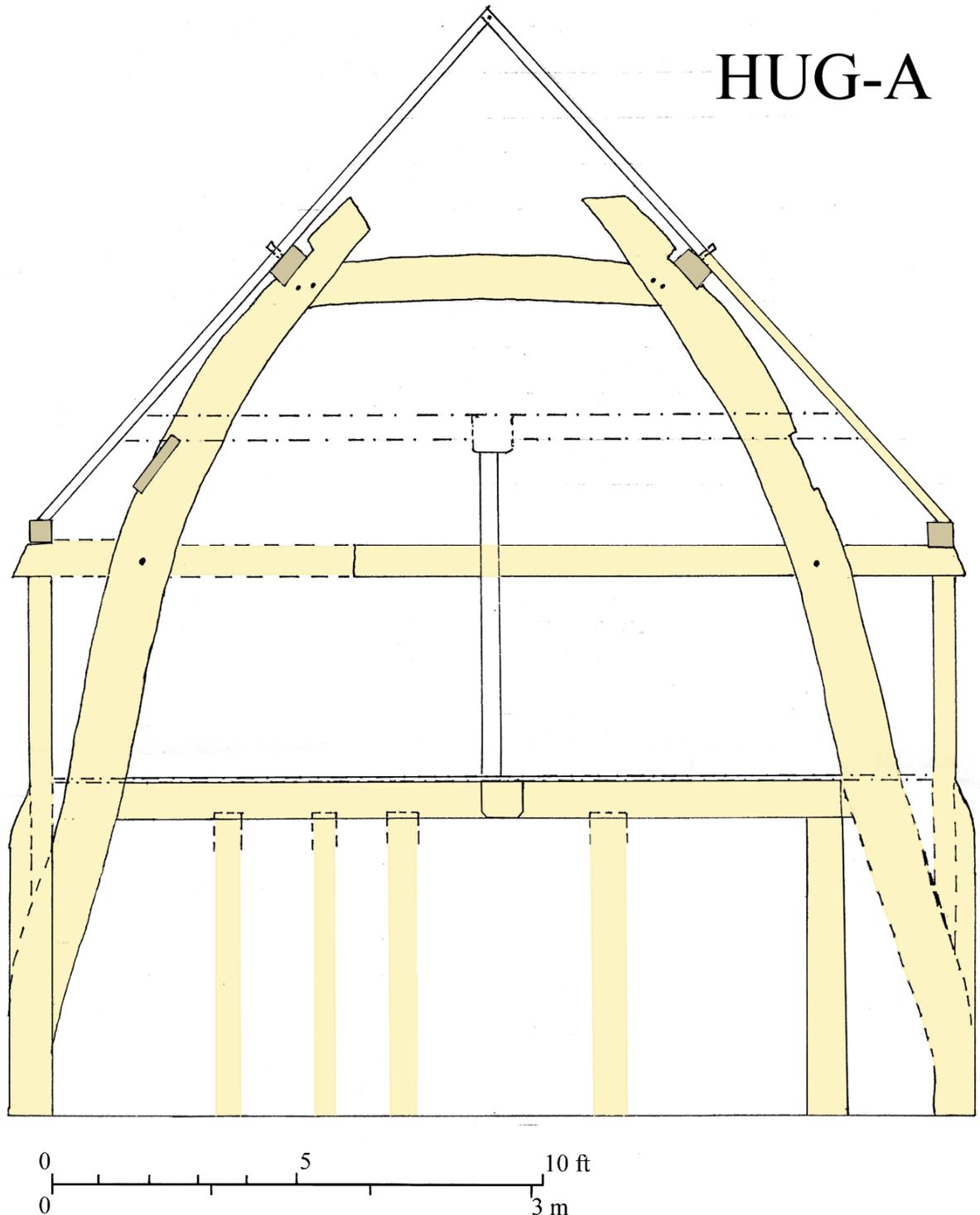


Fig. 3. Section of Truss T3

The house was in a poor structural state when it was acquired by Wycombe District Council and thereafter progressively deteriorated to such an extent that T1, bay II, and the southern lean-to had collapsed by 1987. Two recent attempts at restoration of the property have both been interrupted and the house remained an empty shell when examined.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The most notable feature is the extreme verticality of the cruck frames. Clearly designed to provide at least one upper chamber, the crucks rise eleven feet to the wall-plates, giving spacious upstairs accommodation. The crucks in all three trusses have type ‘W’ apexes, in which the cruck blades terminate immediately above the collars. The cruck blades are about 9in thick, 10in wide in T2, and 12-15in wide in trusses T1 and T3. They rise steeply to the collars, with little curvature. The purlins are carried on the extended ends of the collars, with packing pieces in the middle truss. The tiebeams are about six feet above floor level, with upper tiebeams some five feet further up. The latter extend to the support the wall-plates which are secured with bare-faced tenons. In T2, the upper tiebeam is truncated, and it is not clear if this was the original arrangement.

The rafters are seated on sunk housings in the wall-plates, and originally had projecting sprockets fixed on the upper surfaces of the rafters. Rafter holes were present. No evidence for a ridge was found, and it would appear that the roof consisted simply of rafter-couples fixed to the purlins. The paired windbraces are slightly curved, and measure about 2in thick. They are pegged onto the backs of the cruck blades, or at T2, are morticed into the packing pieces. One set of windbraces are slightly ogee-shaped.

The joists in bay II were 6-8in wide, 6in deep, lodged on the tiebeams of T1 and T2, running axially (N-S). Mercer and Pearson (1976) noted that they were set at 11in centres, spanning from tiebeam to tiebeam.

Some wall framing still survives above first floor girt level. It consists of large panels, with four full-height panels per bay. The timber frame has been replaced by brickwork at ground floor level with the exception of the crucks. The north-west blade of T3 has a substantial stone set underneath it.

LATER PHASES: The inserted floor in bay III has of an axial beam with ogee stop chamfers, and 4in square joists. Bay IV has a similar arrangement except that the joists are only 3in square.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

Johnson and Fenley (1974) identify this house as forming part of the estates of Missenden Abbey, the successor of the capital messuage of their property at Pirenore, but they also suggest that it was a copyholding rather than a demesne leasehold as would be expected if this identification were correct.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Six samples were obtained through coring and three samples from offcuts by Robert Howard on 8th February 1989. Samples 08 and 09 matched together to form a sequence of 67 rings. However, neither this nor the individual samples could be matched with reference chronologies.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

| Sample Code | Sample Location | Total Rings | Sapwood Rings | FMR Date | LHR Date | LMR Date | Date Cat |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| HUG-A01 | Front cruck blade truss T2 | 25 NM | 4 | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A02 | Rear cruck blade truss T2 | 46 NM | 16 | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A03 | Front cruck blade truss T3 | 40 | 11C | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A04 | Tiebeam truss T2 | 11 NM | — | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A05 | Rear cruck blade truss T3 | 75 | 25c | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A06 | Front wall plate | 61 | 14 | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A07 | Purlin bay I | NM | — | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A08 | Floor joist bay I | 56 | 21 | — | — | — | — |
| HUG-A09 | Floor joist bay I | 62 | 07 | — | — | — | — |

Not dated.