

Report for

**The Old Crown House, *and* Isabel Cottage,  
Skirmett, Hambledon, Buckinghamshire**

*Site Code: SKI-A*

*from*

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

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Fig. 1. View of the house from the east.

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***Oxbow Books***

**SKI-A: THE OLD CROWN HOUSE, AND ISABEL COTTAGE, SKIRMETT, HAMBLEDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

Grid reference: SU 7754 9020 Survey Date: 20 April 1989, 1998 By: D. Miles; Catherine Murray

*Illustrations:*

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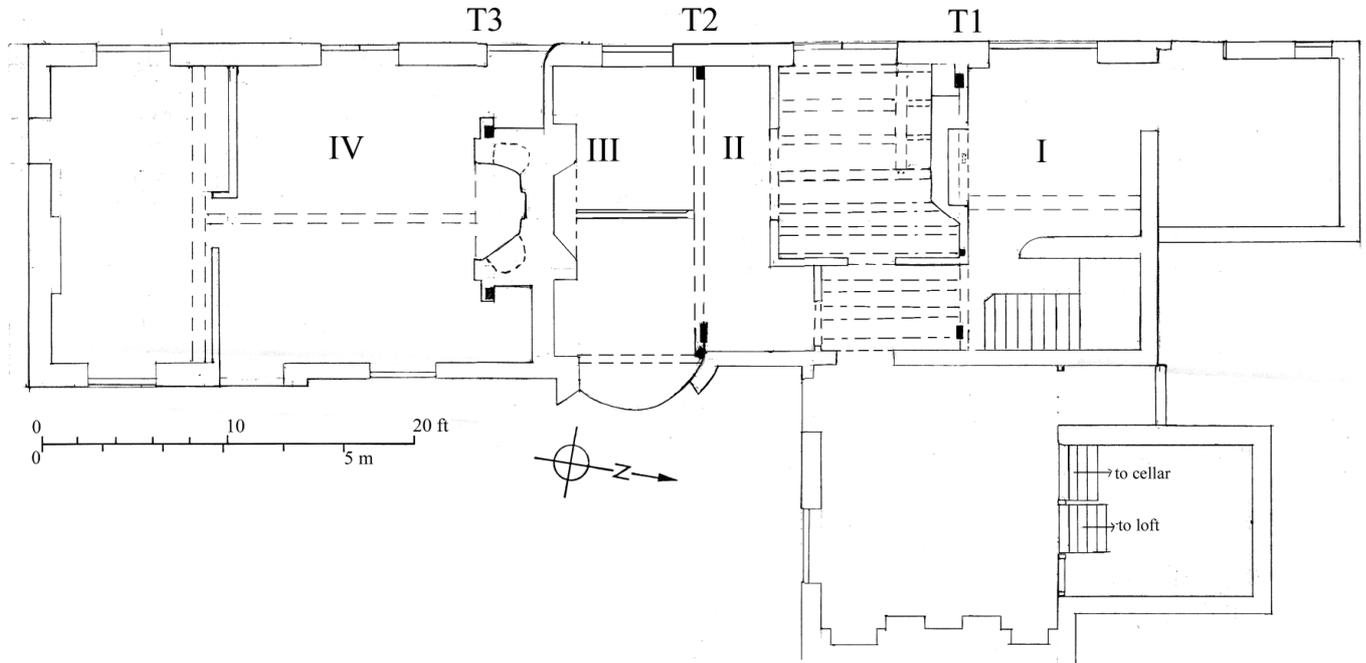


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (from a 1998 drawing by Catherine Murray). Bays I, II and III (most) comprise The Old Crown House, bays III(rest), IV and V Isabel Cottage.

**ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY**

**SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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PHASE 1: The Old Crown House and Isabel Cottage together comprise a four bay cruck-built house, running north-south, parallel to the road. It includes two type 'W' cruck trusses (with truncated blades) and one unusual aisled truss. Although virtually the entire roof structure survives intact, only a tentative interpretation of the plan is possible. The first two bays to the south, bays III and IV, can be identified as the open hall, from to the soot encrustation on the roof timbers. Bay IV was fully hipped from T3 southwards. The truss in the middle of the hall (T3) is very unusual in that it is an aisled structure with arcade posts rising to a collar supporting the purlins, and aisle ties connecting with the wallplates. As this truss has the appearance of a spere truss, it probably marked the division of living and service functions in the hall. This contrasts with the normal use of crucks in the centre of an open hall, creating a large open space. Only one similar truss has been recognised elsewhere, at Cruck House, Wilmcote, Aston Cantlow, Warwickshire (not a project house).

Truss T2 is a closed cruck truss, and bay II to the north retains what are likely to be the original joists running longitudinally and bearing on the cruck tiebeams. Bay I, the last bay to the north, is clearly the north end of the house; again it was fully hipped from T1 northwards. Although bay I seems not to have been floored, the absence of smoke blackening suggests that it was a second chamber. A tree-ring felling date range of 1442-1474 has been obtained for the building.

LATER PHASES: To the east of bays I and II a large post-medieval timber-framed wing was built. Possibly in 1618 (inscribed date on mantel beam) a fireplace was constructed to the north of T3 in the

former open hall. Probably in the 19th century, another fireplace was inserted to the north of T1. Later still an in-line extension was constructed to the south of bay IV, and the roof line extended.

### STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The cruck trusses truss T1 and T2 are similar in design and section. The crucks terminate just above the collars, forming type 'W' apexes. In both trusses the crucks have been truncated below the first floor tiebeams, but above this they measure approximately 11 by 7in. The tiebeams measure 5-6in wide by about 8½in and the collars are 7½ by 5in. Both are joined to the crucks with bare faced lap dovetails with twin skew pegs.

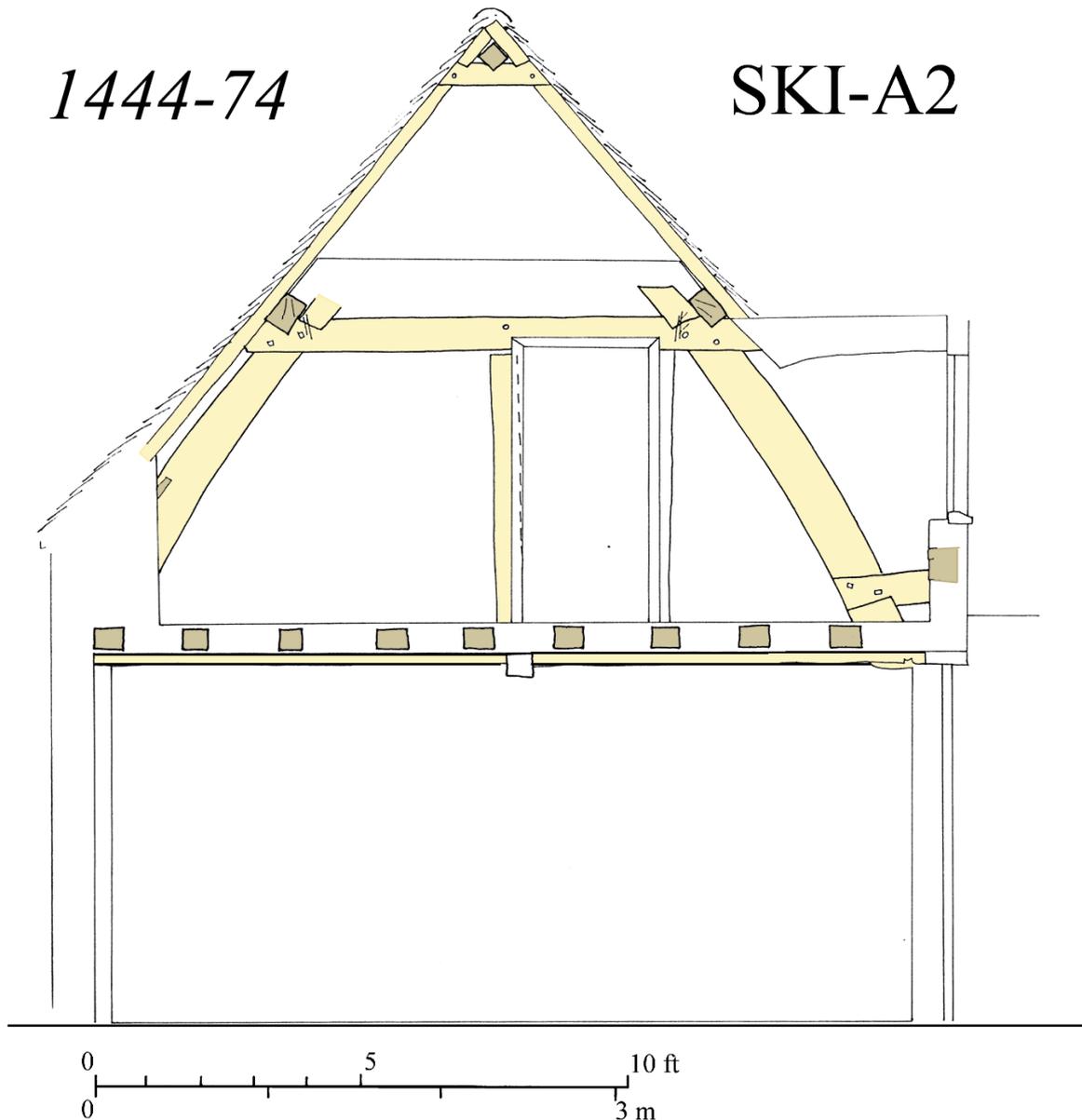


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2.

The purlins measure 8 by 6in and have double-splayed scarfs. They were braced by windbraces, some of which were morticed into the side of the crucks, while others were pegged onto the backs of the blades. The purlins sat in notches on the extended ends of the collars. The rafters measure 2-2½ by 4-5in; in bay II they are mainly of oak and are placed at 14 to 15in centres, while in bay III they are predominantly beech and are set at 15 to 17in centres. The tops of the rafters are slightly offset; adjoining corners are mitred to allow an offset of approximately 2in. No evidence for a smoke louvre was found, but the rafters in bays III and IV are very heavily soot-encrusted. At T1 and T3, the common rafters which form part of the trusses measure 3 by 6in and each has a yoke 5½ by 4in, which is single pegged to the principals in T1 and double pegged in T3. The yokes clasp a diagonally set ridge which tapers from

5in square in bay II, to 4½in square in bay III; it is a single piece of timber spanning both bays. At both ends of the roof, at T1 and T3, the hip rafters are pegged to the yoke with three jack rafters fanning out between them, probably with others fixed to the hip rafters themselves.

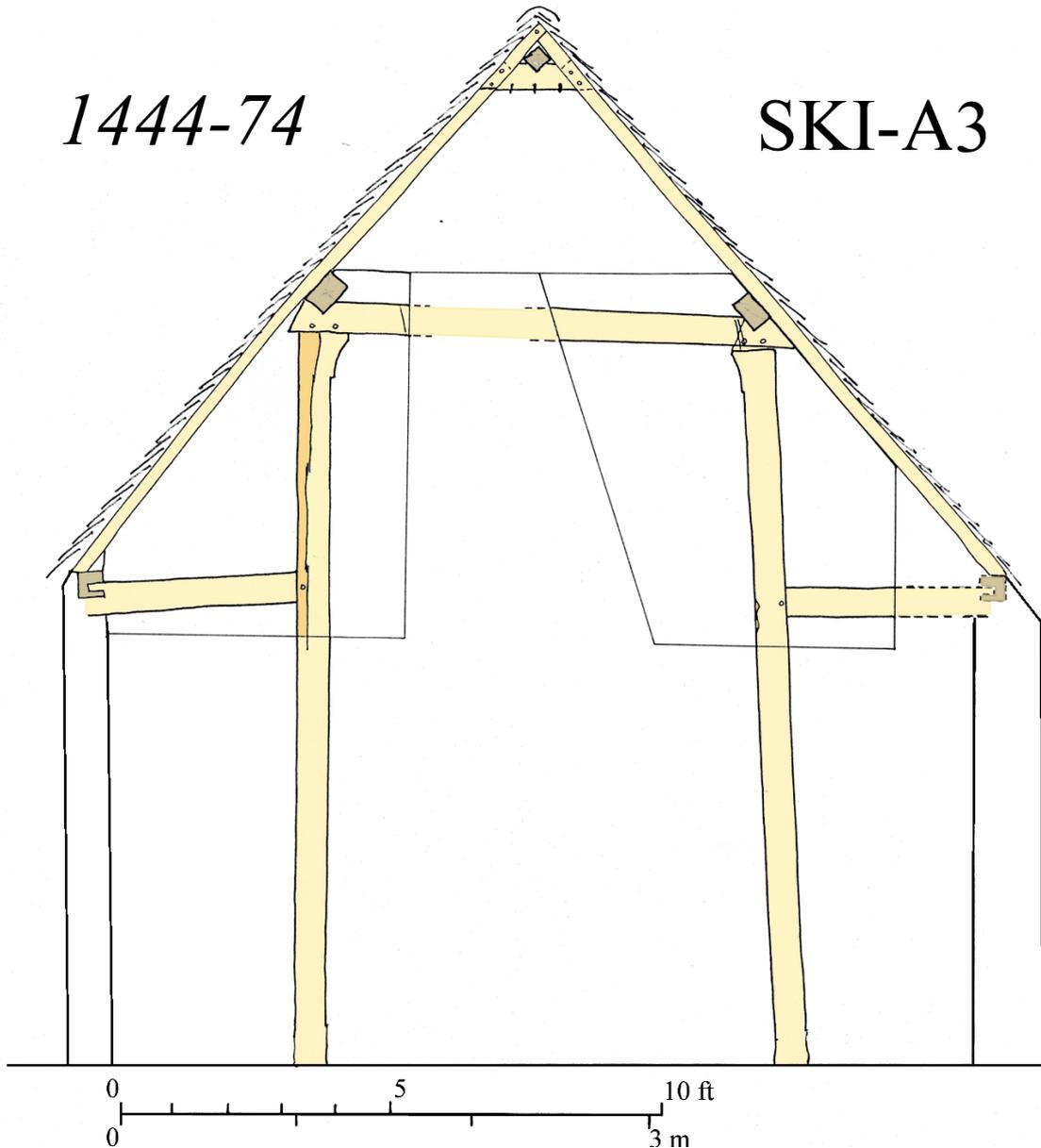


Fig. 4. Section of truss T3.

Truss T3 comprises a pair of arcade posts with jowled heads which support a collar. Above the posts the collar is notched to receive the diagonally set purlins. There is no evidence for any bracing from the arcade posts to the collar. Five feet lower down are two aisle ties which are morticed to the arcade posts and are supported by studs in the external wall frame. The upper parts of the aisle ties have bare-faced tenons which restrain the wallplates in a sort of reversed assembly. The arcade posts measure 6 by 7in, widening to 10-11in at the jowls. Both the collar and the aisle ties are 6½-7in high.

Some thin scribed assembly marks were noted. The south side of T2 has a // and a // with double tag at the junction of the collar and the crucks, and T3 has a ///-tag on the north side of the collar. The upper faces of T2 and T3 face each other in bay III, and the upper face of T1 faces north to bay I.

In bay II, the floor seems to be original, with a trimmed stair opening to the south of T1. The joists measure about 5½in high and between 5½ and 7in wide, with the westernmost two being of beech. The joists are tenoned into the tiebeams, the pegs for them being visible in the tiebeam soffit of T2.

## DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

*Sampling Comments:* Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 20 April 1989. Two samples matched together, one from the rear purlin of bay II, and the other from the arcade post of T3, strongly suggesting that the two elements are contemporary. The 83 ring sequence formed was successfully dated against the 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
SKI-A01	Front (east) cruck blade truss T1	45	00	—	—	—	—
SKI-A02	Front purlin truss bay II	71	00	—	—	—	—
SKI-A03	Rear purlin truss bay II	60	00	1365	—	1424	3d
SKI-A04	Rear cruck blade truss T2	38	17	—	—	—	—
SKI-A05	Tiebeam truss T2	19 NM	09	—	—	—	—
SKI-A06	Front cruck blade truss T2	11 NM	00	—	—	—	—
SKI-A07	Front post (spere truss T3)	83	10	1361	1433	1443	3d
SKI-A08	Tiebeam (spere truss T3)	64	00	—	—	—	—
Average date of last heartwood ring					1433		

Site sequence: (composed of samples 3, 7), 83 rings long dated 1361-1443 with t-values, 4.7(E.MID), 6.4(KENT 88), 4.0(MAPLEOMH).

95% felling date range: 1444-1474 (previously 1446-1471). OxCal estimated felling date range: **1444-74**.