

Report for

**Well Cottage, 40-44 Queen Catherine Road, Steeple
Claydon, Buckinghamshire**

Site Code: STC-C

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View from the south-west

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Oxbow Books

STC-C: WELL COTTAGE, 40-44 QUEEN CATHERINE ROAD, STEEPLE CLAYDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 7013 2692 Survey Date: 1990

By: D. Miles & C. Murray

Illustrations:

- 1. View from the south-west
- 2. View of the east gable
- 3. Ground floor plan
- 3. Section of truss T2

Page

- 1
- 2
- 2
- 3



Fig. 2. View of the east gable.

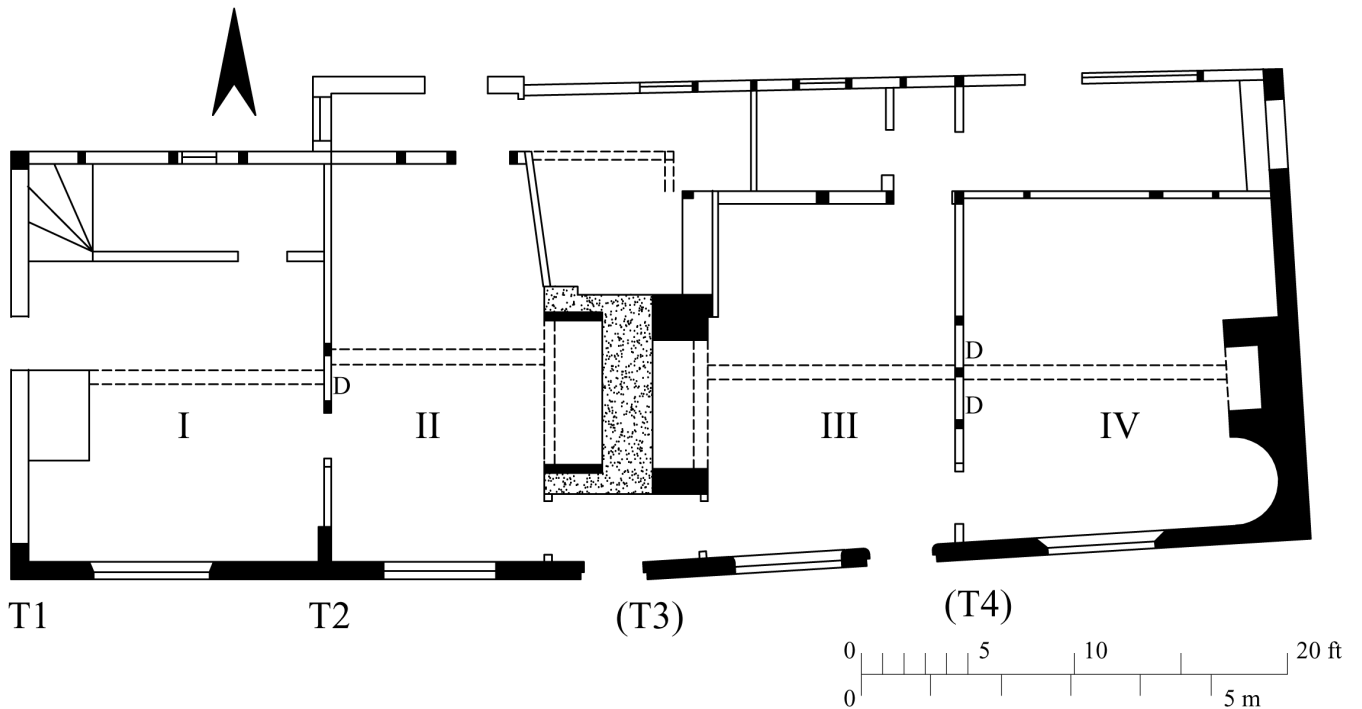


Fig. 3. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering. Note: The angles of the two front walls and the other plan elements have not been precisely surveyed.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Well Cottage house is situated on the north side of Queen Catherine Road, with the front facing south. It is a thatched four-bay building of one storey and an attic, in which bays I-III contain evidence of the cruck structure, although bay III was mostly rebuilt in the seventeenth century. All three bays show evidence of smoke-blackening, but this is most intense in the centre bay. Little evidence of function survives, but it is most likely that bay I was the chamber end, with the hall in bays II-III. The end truss, T1, has a half hip (type 'V' apex), and the next truss, T2, has an 'F2' apex in which the collar carries a pair of short principals. The cruck structure has been dated by dendrochronology to 1444/5.

PHASE 2: During the early to mid seventeenth century bay III was rebuilt, truss T3 removed and replaced by a chimney, and upper floors were inserted in bays I and II. seventeenth century timber-framed walling survives to the rear of bay III and in the former gable end at truss 4, the latter with a weathered face to bay IV. The roof was reconstructed with reused timbers, probably from the cruck house. The upper floor in this bay is probably a later insertion. The arrangement of the chimney with door and lobby in line to the front is typical of seventeenth century house plans in this area.

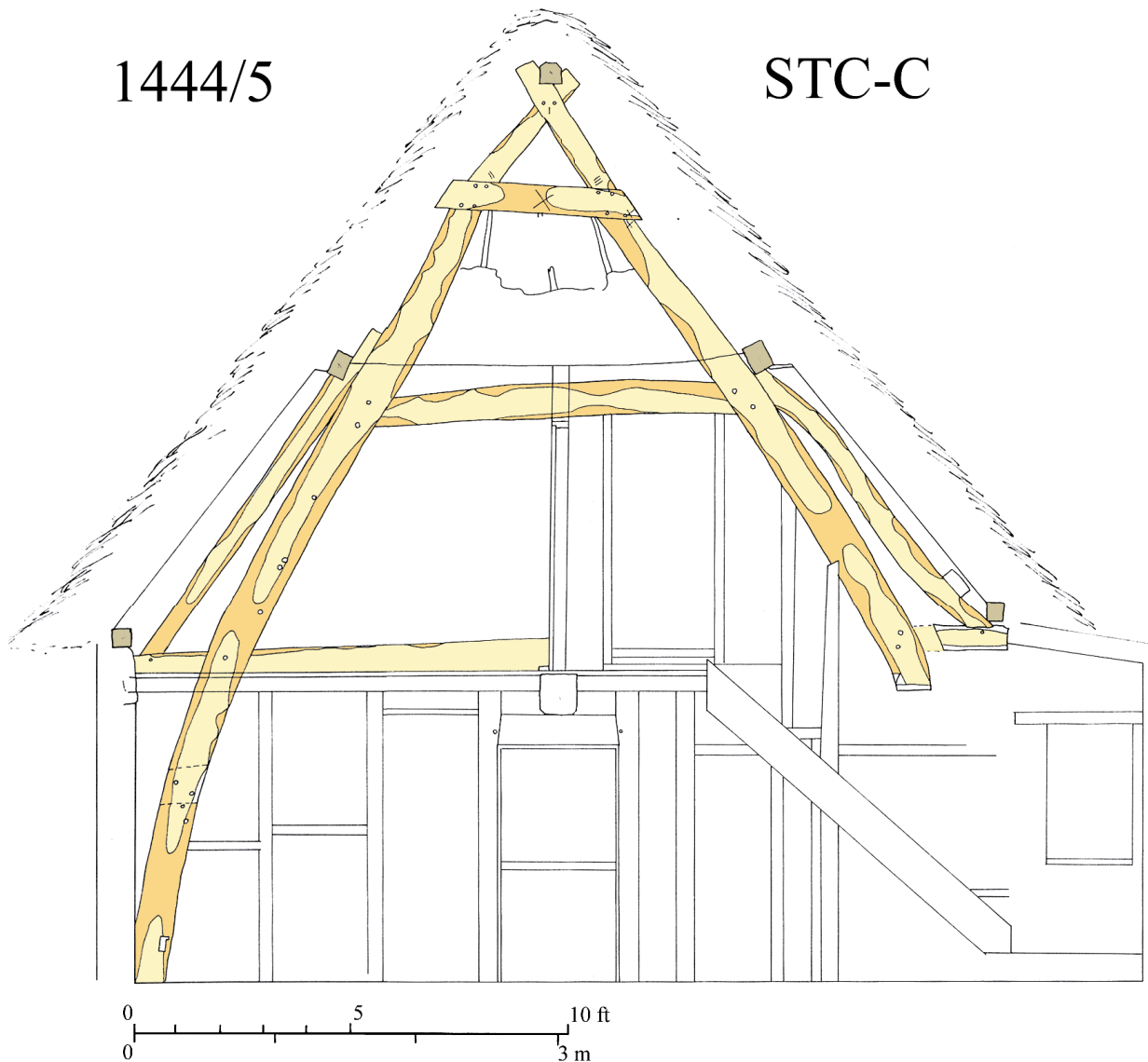


Fig. 3. Section of Truss T2.

LATER PHASES: Later in the seventeenth century, bay IV was added (possibly in 1639, the date inscribed on the sill beam of this bay); the two doors from bay III, presumably led into a pair of service rooms. In the eighteenth century, the front walls of bays III and IV and the east gable wall were replaced in brick (at a slight angle to the earlier work), with a rear outshut that extended behind bay III. This probably took place in 1753, the date picked out in the gable brickwork. Other alterations include the addition of a second fireplace and flue to the back of the existing chimney.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the front wall of bay II was rebuilt in brick in rat-trap bond. The ground-floor windows have segmental heads of alternating red and vitreous header bricks. The presence of three front doors, indicates the former division of the building into at least three cottages. In the twentieth century a single-storey flat-roofed extension has been built onto the gable end of bay I, and a lobby extension onto the rear of bay II. The building is now a single house.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The two blades of truss T1 are complete to the ground and rise to just above the collar for the half-hipped roof. The truss retains its original collar and tiebeam, and has a lower tiebeam at 4-5ft above ground level, which is also halved and pegged onto the blades; it has a packing piece at the front. The ground-floor wall has been rebuilt with coursed rubble stone but the upper storey retains stud and plaster infill. Original stave holes are visible in the soffit of the collar above the window. The fair face of the truss is towards the outside.

Truss T2 also retains both cruck blades, but the rear one is cut off at first-floor level. The upper face of the truss is towards bay I. The blades rise to a saddle carrying short principals crossed at the top to support the ridge in the crossing ('F2' apex); the upper apex corresponds to a type 'D' apex. A strut from the collar to the ridge has been added to the side of the truss facing bay II. The truss has a tiebeam and collar and packing pieces to front and rear. The S cruck blade also carries a halving for a second tiebeam only 4ft above the floor. This lower tiebeam was presumably interrupted by the door studs. Stave holes in the soffit of both saddle and collar show that the truss was closed, but the ground-floor studding and infill have been altered; it now includes a central door of seventeenth-century form with chamfered jambs and lintel (since blocked). The wattle-and-daub infill is sooted on the bay II side but clean on the other, although the timbers in bay I are heavily sooted. Trusses T3 and T4 have been completely removed, probably when the chimney was inserted in the seventeenth century.

Assembly marks were found on the east side of truss T2, with 'I' at the apex, 'II' and 'III' at the base of the north and south upper principals respectively. A large 'X' is marked in the centre of the saddle with smaller 'X's both at the south end of the saddle and at the top of the adjacent cruck blade.

The original purlins survive in bays I and II. At truss T1 they are lodged or trenched onto the backs of the cruck blades just above collar level. At truss 2 they are supported by the packing pieces. Bay I has rough diagonal windbraces (one missing). Bays I and II also retain the original ridge, rafters and some thatch battens. The W end is half-hipped, with the ridge supported on a small yoke on the first set of common rafters; it projects just beyond the yoke and the S rafter here has two stave drillings for the gablet infill. A rafter near the inserted chimney in bay II is also notched for a yoke, suggesting the position of a louvre; the ridge continues until it is lost in the later chimney. This pair of rafters also carry face pegs below the purlins. The ridge, purlins and wall plates are all scarfed on the bay II side of truss T2. All roof timbers in bays I and II are smoke-blackened.

The roof of bay III has smoke-blackening on the ridge, one purlin and most rafters. These timbers have all been reused: the rear purlin has been inverted and now has the windbrace notch in the top half of the inner face; and one rafter has been reset so that a horizontal yoke halving is now vertical. Both purlins are clasped. The ridge is carried on a post rising from the collar at the truss 3 end and on a small yoke with half-hip rafters at the end near truss 4. These timbers cannot have come from elsewhere in the building and therefore suggest that bay III was part of the original structure and has been reconstructed.

Bays I and II retain their original wall plates. The rear corner post at truss T1 is also original as may be some of the other rear wall timbers. The rear wall of bay II has traces of an early window; the top

rail has three mortices and a stave hole, with the position of the sill marked by peg-holes in the flanking studs. There is no evidence for original upper floors.

PHASE 2: Truss T4 was rebuilt with three queen struts between tiebeam and collar. The principal rafters end just above the collar, suggesting the influence of a type 'W' or 'V' apex. A stud or post cut off below first floor ceiling height at the NE corner of truss T3 probably belongs to this phase; the rail to its S has holes for infill staves.

The chimney in bay III is built of coursed rubble limestone; only the bay II fireplace is original. This has a 20th century brick lining, and a cambered wooden lintel with 1in chamfer. The fireplace to bay III may have been added when the front wall was rebuilt. The block of masonry to the rear of the chimney in bay III probably indicates the site of a former oven, now removed.

The upper floor inserted in bay I has a 9in square-cut spine beam with its 3in joists surviving on the N. side. The staircase in the rear corner of bay I is probably nineteenth century. Bay II has a 9½in spine beam with 2½in chamfer and ogee stops. To the front of this are six ¾in joists with ¾in chamfers and ogee stops. At the wall end these rest on an applied half-beam, with similar chamfer and stops, which in turn rests on small brackets. Part of one similar joist survives in the rear half of the bay. The 20th century stairs by the rear cruck blade replace former winders. The upper floor in bay III is carried on a 7½in spine beam with 1¼in chamfer but no stops. The joists are 2½in square.

LATER PHASES: The timber-framed rear wall to bay IV is built with re-used timbers, the sill beam inscribed 1639. The framed partition between bays III and IV contains a pair of doors similar to those in truss 2; these must have led to a pair of service rooms which were later replaced by the present room, and they clearly indicate that bay IV was added before the present brick front wall was built.

The front and gable walls of bays III and IV, including the end wall of the outshut, have been rebuilt in chequered brick with vitreous headers. In the gable end the figures 'T I 1753' are picked out above a row of hollow diamond shapes, all in vitrified headers. The gable wall also incorporates a chimney. This has a ground-floor fireplace of plastered brick with a low segmental plastered arch and timber lintel above. To the right of the fireplace is a floor to ceiling recess with curved sides, its function not obvious. The fireplace lintel supports the spine beam of the upper floor. This is 9½in wide with a 2in run-out chamfer and carpenter's marks. Each side of the beam has a series of Roman numerals, one between every second and third joist. Two joists on each side therefore have the same numeral, marked on the face towards the number on the spine. The joists are 3in wide and square cut. This beam and floor must post-date the addition of bay IV because they do not show traces of a partition corresponding to the paired doors.

The rear outshut is also timber-framed but with studs of very slight scantling. It may precede the brick front and gable walls but is more likely to be contemporary with them, timber being a cheap alternative for unimportant rear walls.

OTHER FEATURES: The windows are mostly leaded casements, much renewed. Of interest at the front are the ground-floor left window, probably mid-nineteenth century, with original wrought iron restrainer, and the small scrolled cock's head hinges of the two windows to ground-floor right. To the rear is an outshut window, opposite the central chimney, of eighteenth/early nineteenth century date. This has two lights with old leaded glazing, wrought iron catch and restrainer. Bay II also has an old two-light leaded casement in the thatch, with moulded eighteenth/early nineteenth century wooden mullion.

The lobby entry to centre front has a nineteenth-century board door with small leaded light and strap hinges. The bathroom has a re-sited eighteenth-century door with two moulded panels, strap hinges and an old catch. This door is weathered and was probably once external.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 14 March 1989. Four of these matched together to form a site master of 80 rings which was dated to 1365-1444. The dendrochronology showed clearly that both trusses are coeval.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
STC-C01	Rear cruck blade truss T2	36 NM	13	—	—	—	—
STC-C02	Saddle truss T2	71	21	1373	—	1443	1
STC-C03	Front cruck blade truss T2	51	17	—	—	—	—
STC-C04	Rear rafter above saddle truss T2	77	21	1367	—	1443	1
STC-C05	Front rafter above saddle truss T2	41	—	1365	—	1405	1
STC-C06	Tiebeam truss T2	66	19	—	—	—	1
STC-C07	Rear cruck blade truss T1	59	17C	1386	—	1444	1
STC-C08	Front cruck blade truss T1	45	—	—	—	—	—

Site sequences: (composed of samples 2, 4, 5, 7), 80 rings long dated 1365–1444 with *t*-values of 6.6(OXFORD), 6.6(E.MID).

Estimated felling date: (sample 7 with last dated ring has complete sapwood), **1444/5** (VA21.90).