

Report for
28 High Street North, Stewkley, Buckinghamshire

Site Code: STW-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View from the south-east.

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Oxbow Books

STW-A: 28 HIGH STREET NORTH, STEWKLEY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 852 262

Survey Date: 19 May 1990

By: D. Miles

Illustrations:

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

Page

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

References: Alcock, N. W. and Moran, M. (1984), 'Low open-truss beams (mantle-beams): Problems of function and distribution', *Vernacular Architecture*, **15**, 47-55.

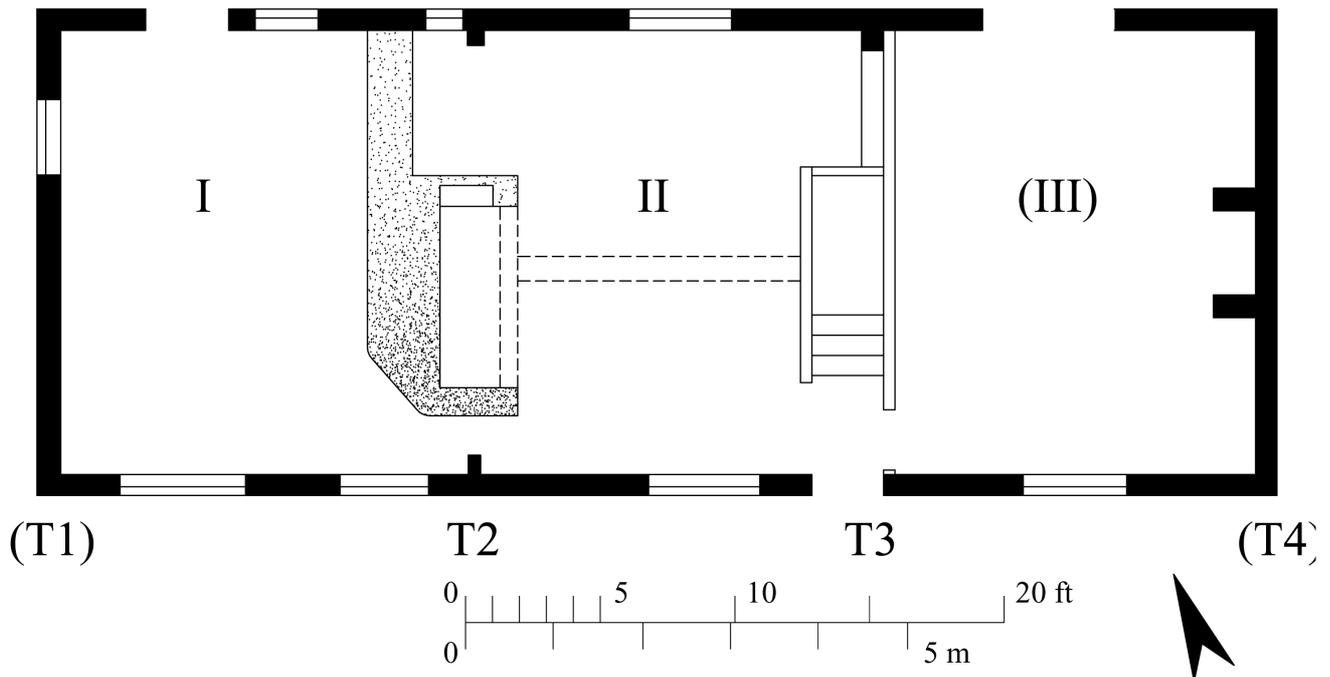


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: 28 High Street North, Stewkley, is a three-bay cruck house standing on the north-east of the main street. A two-bay hall survives at the west end, and the presence of a one bay chamber at the eastern end is inferred. Only the two internal cruck trusses survive. The central open truss (T2) is arch-braced and has a low beam and a chamfered king strut; this beam probably functioned to divide the service area from the main part of the hall. The apex is a type 'D' variety which supported a square set ridge beam. The truss between the hall and chamber has been truncated. Although an attempt was made to date the structure through dendrochronology, all the wood was found to be of elm and no match was possible. Some buildings with low open-truss beams have been tree-ring dated, including 38-9 Woolstaston, Shropshire (1399/1400) (VA 26.70); Pithouse, Mapledurham, Oxon (1455) (MDM-B); Three Chimneys, Maple-durham (1457/8) (MDM-C); and Catherton Cottage, Hopwas Wafers, Shropshire (1486) (VA 27.103). This type of truss is further discussed in Alcock & Moran (1984), where a fifteenth century date range is proposed for this type of structure. The open truss most closely resembles that at Woolstaston, suggesting an early 15th century date for STW-A.

LATER PHASES: Probably during the seventeenth century, the hall was floored over and a large stone fireplace and stack inserted adjacent to the open truss, presumably near the position of the open hearth. In the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries the external walls of the house were reconstructed in brick, removing or encasing the end cruck trusses. The eastern two bays also had the eaves raised substantially,

although the roof line of bay I, may be at the original level. The central section of the rear wall uses glazed headers up to the former roof line, but in the front wall the headers are of yellow brick in a style seen elsewhere in the village.

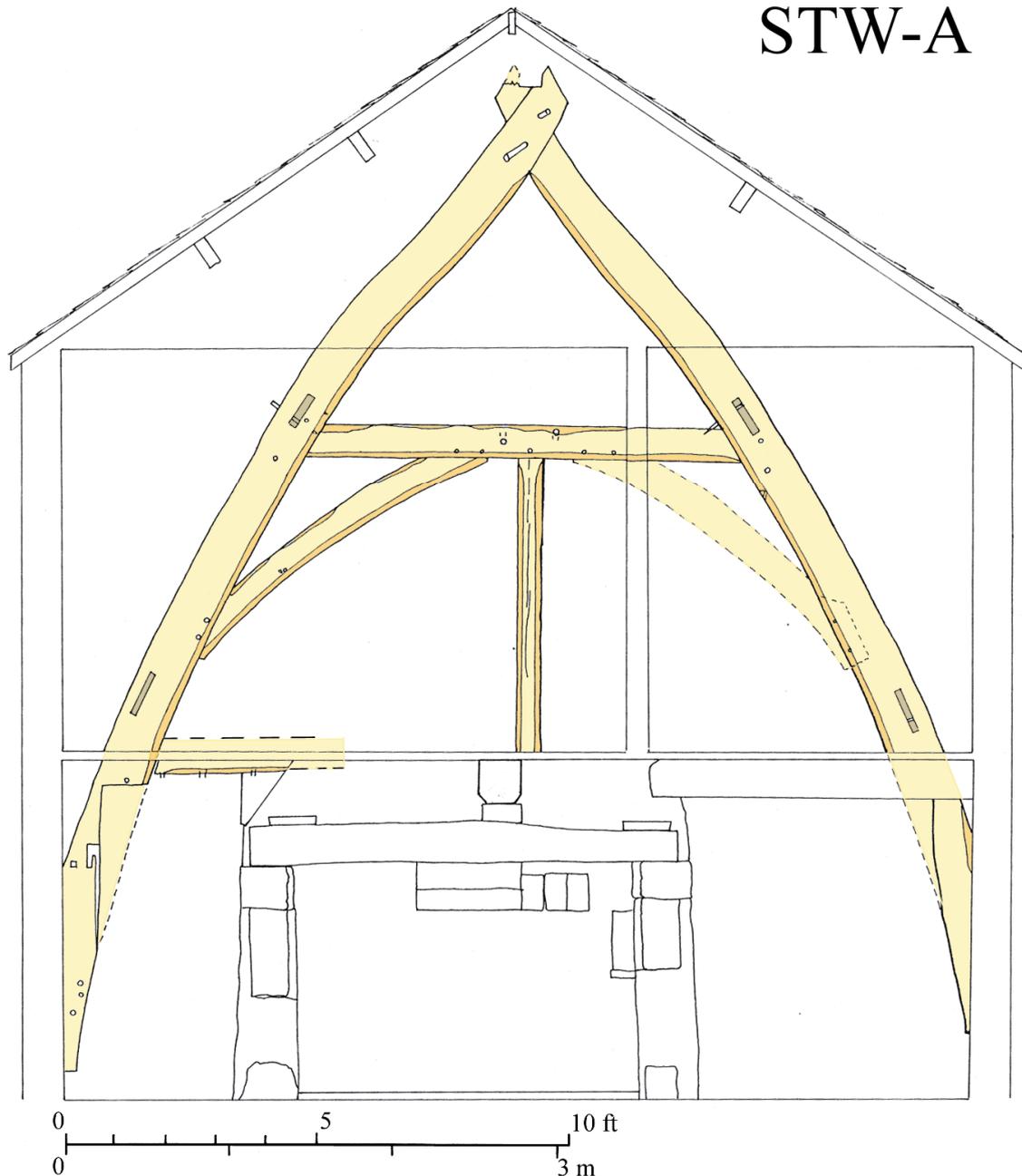


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: Nothing of the original structure can be seen except the inner cruck trusses, T2 and T3. Truss T2 (Fig. 3) is the open truss and consists of two blades which curve in an ogee-shape above the collar. They cross at the apex, the extended ends being cut out to give a seating for a square set ridge (missing) which would have measured 5½in wide; the halved joint uses notably oblique skew pegging (Fig. 4). The collar is trenched on the western or lower face of the truss, and carries a pair of arch-braces. About six feet below the collar, the low open-truss beam or mantel beam is similarly trenched, and between them in the centre is a king-strut. All the timbers in the truss are chamfered right up to the apex with 1-1½in chamfers with run-out stops. All timbers are of elm. The crucks measure 13 x 6½in at the base, reducing slightly at the top, and are cut from a single tree. The collar is 7½in deep by 6in wide, as are arch-braces.



Fig. 4. Apex of truss T2, showing the skew pegging.

It was not possible to determine the dimensions of the tiebeam as only about three feet of it survives, adjacent to the southern cruck; where it is only about 6in high. The soffit has three stave holes in it for a partition, showing that this truss was partially partitioned at ground floor level. Unusually, the purlins were butted, the mortices showing that the purlins were between 8 and 9½in wide. Windbrace mortices are also evident. The collar contains a pair of large peg holes, 6½in to each side of the centre, the hole on one side having been driven in downwards from the west, with the other being driven downwards from the east. These presumably provided a support for hanging something.

Truss T3 is only visible at ground floor level. Only the rear blade now survives (although the front blade was previously recorded). The tiebeam is again trenched across the western face of the crucks. In the inserted bay II floor, the joists measure 4 x 5in with ½in chamfers, and in bay I the joists have been renewed. Bay III appears to have been completely rebuilt and shows no early features.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Seven samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 19 May 1990. All timbers sampled were of elm and most had less than 30 rings. They could not therefore be dated.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

| Sample Code | Sample Location | Total Rings | Sapwood Rings | FMR Date | LHR Date | LMR Date | Date Cat |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| STW-A01 | Rear cruck blade truss T2 | 55 | Not oak 20 | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A02 | Front cruck blade truss T2 | 20 | Not oak 6 | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A03 | Arch brace truss T2 | 30 | Not oak | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A04 | Collar open truss | 28 | Not oak 2 | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A05 | Rear cruck blade truss T3 | 42 | Not oak 20 | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A06 | Tiebeam truss T3 | 12 | Not oak 5 | — | — | — | — |
| STW-A07 | Tiebeam truss T2 1 | 24 | Not oak — | — | — | — | — |

Not dated.