

Report for

# April Cottage, 12 Church Street, Rothley, Leicestershire

*Site Code:* ROT-B

*from*

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

**by**

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



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

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***Oxbow Books***

## ROT-B: APRIL COTTAGE, 12 CHURCH STREET, ROTHLEY, LEICESTERSHIRE

Grid reference: SK 5856 1265

Survey Date: 17 June 1989

By: D. Miles

### Illustrations:

	Page
1. View	1
2. Ground floor plan	2
3. Section of truss T2	3
Fig. 4. Stone slab infill to truss T3	4
Fig. 5. Graffiti on plaster panel	4
Fig. 6. View from rear	5

The Listed Building description refers to this house as no. 10 Church Street.

Reference: Webster, V. R. (1954), 'Crick-framed buildings of Leicestershire', *Leicestershire Archaeol Hist Soc Trans*, 30, 26-58.

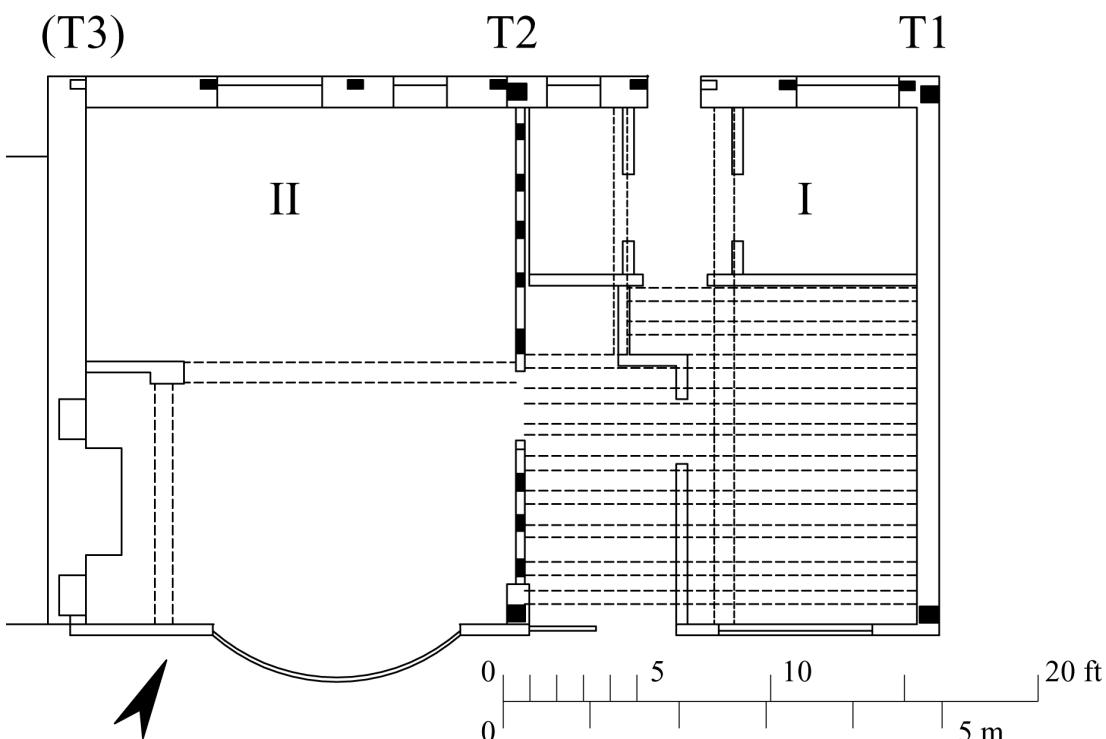


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

**PHASE 1:** April Cottage is a cruck house of two surviving bays which originally extended further westwards into the adjoining house. The end bay (I) was a chamber, with an original floor with framed stair-opening, and bay II was the open hall. These were divided by a studded partition with an off-centre doorway. The two surviving cruck trusses both have saddle apices (type 'C'). The first truss, T1, has crucks described by Webster (1954) as 'of the roughest form imaginable', whereas truss T2 is quite the opposite with well-cut and shaped crucks and with a high quality close-studded partition between the hall and the chamber. The eastern face of truss T2 in the upper room has no smoke blackening; however, the western face of the truss has some light deposits, as would be expected with an open hall whose hearth was at the other end of the bay. Tree-ring dating has shown both trusses to be contemporary, with a felling date range of 1444-8.

**PHASE 2:** Probably in the late sixteenth or seventeenth century the hall was floored over and a chimney stack inserted against its western end. A doorway may have been cut through the first floor partition of truss T2 at the same time. It is difficult suggest a more precise date for this floor, as the joists are of many different sizes, some perhaps being reused.

## STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: Two cruck trusses survive, truss T1 at the eastern gable end, and truss T2 the (nearly) close studded partition in the centre of the house. There may be the fragments of a third truss within the party wall with the house to the west. It appears that the house was initially three bays long, since the assembly marks on the top of truss T2 comprise a III and III-tag, clearly visible on the face (east) side. Therefore, truss T1 is presumed to have been numbered IV, with the truss numbered I in the adjoining house and II in the party wall. However no assembly marks could be seen on truss T1. ‘Square’ marks were also noted on the face sides of the crucks of truss T2 below the collar.

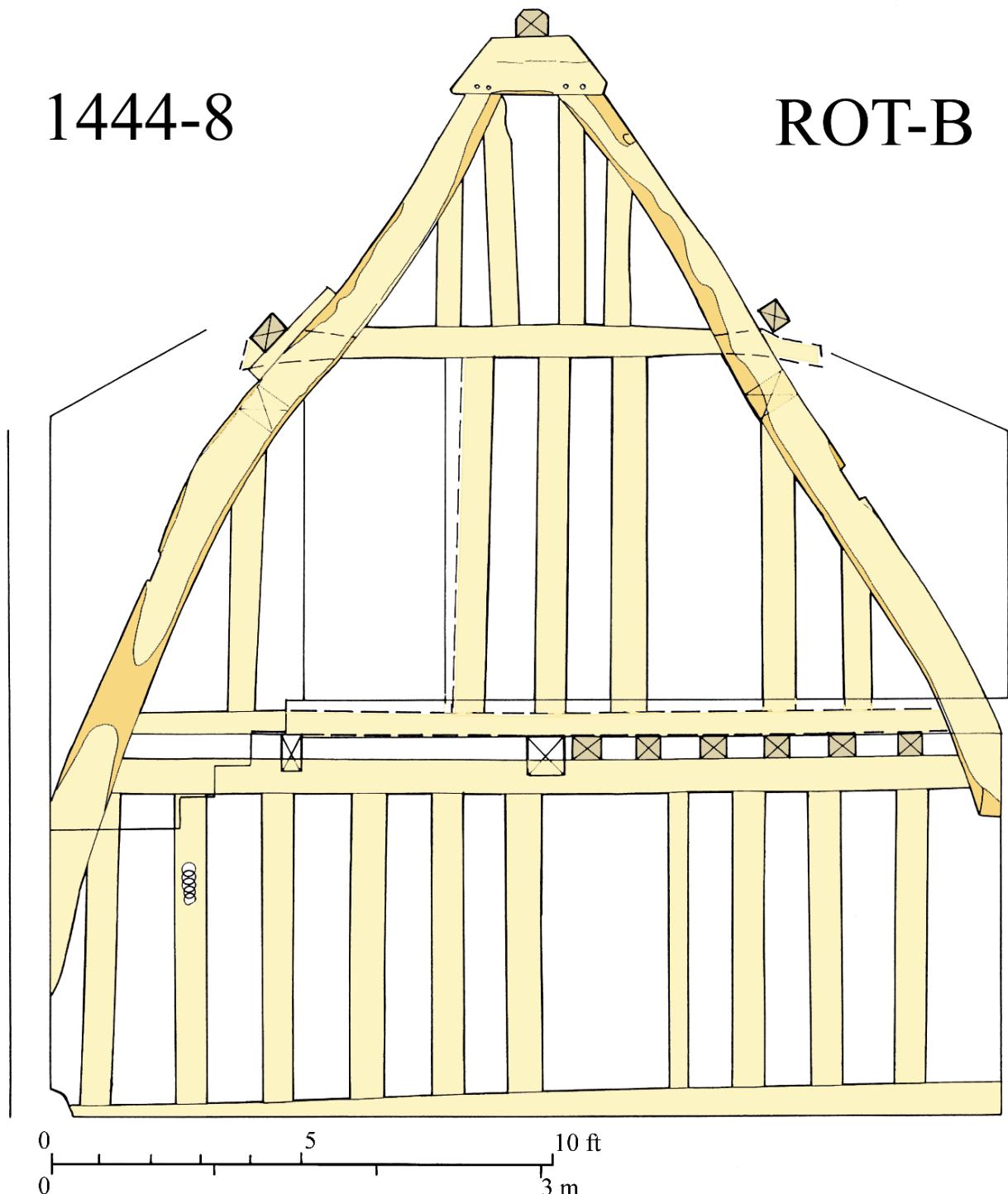


Fig. 3. Section of Truss T2 from the west.

Truss T1 has boxed-heart oak blades of uneven section. Although the general shape of the crucks is relatively regular, the junction at the top is very distorted, as though the whole frame has racked over to

the rear. This is probably due to the removal of the tiebeam, halvings for which are visible. No other features can be seen, as the truss is wholly encased on the inside but for the apex, and on the outside the gable end has been rebuilt in brick leaving exposed only the crucks and what may be an original cruck spur at the rear. This spur is either tenoned into the back of the blade or jointed with a bare-faced dovetail onto its inside (west) face; the outer end is halved over the top of the rear wall-plate. The rear cruck blade measures about 12 by 9in. The foot is obscured by stones mortared around it.

Truss T2 is much better carpentered although again the crucks are boxed heart with waney edges. They measure 13 by 10in and are joined at the top by a 14 by 7½in saddle which supports an 8 by 7in ridge piece. Both a collar and tiebeam are visible but there is no sign of any cruck spur. The 7 by 6½in collar appears to be either elm or chestnut; the tiebeam is 8 by 7½in.

The whole of the truss is partitioned with studs 6-8½in wide by 2½-3in thick, spaced between 5in and 12in apart. The studs are tenoned into position but not pegged. The sill-beam remains under the studs and a padstone is still visible under the rear cruck. Above the tiebeam, the bottoms of the upper studs are tenoned into a beam which sits on top of the joists of bay I, clamping them to the tiebeam. The edges of the studs are grooved to allow thin stones to be inserted between the studs which were then plastered on both sides (Fig. 4). The original ground floor door opening is slightly off the centre line. The purlins (5 by 8in) are fixed to the backs of what are probably packing pieces, only the upper parts of which remain. Wind-braces were cross-lapped and trenched into the back of the blades. Other interesting features on the west face of the truss include a series of overlapping 3in diameter circles on the second stud from the left, and some seventeenth century graffiti inscribed in the plasterwork on a panel to the right of the doorway.



Fig. 4. Stone slab infill to truss T3.



Fig. 5. Graffiti on plaster panel

Little remains of the roof structure, as the front and rear roof slopes were raised in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Some original rafters are reused in the front slope from the wall-plate to the new purlin; these measure about 5½ by 2in. The original ridge survives only over bay I.

Bay I still retains the original floor frame, with only the joists over the rear passage and store room missing. The joists measure 6-6½in wide by 5in deep and are laid at 15in centres, bearing on the tiebeam of truss T2 at their western end. A trimmer at the rear next to truss T2 was for the stair. A transverse beam supporting the joists in mid span has recently been removed; peg holes in the joist soffits show its position.

The rear wall frame (Fig. 6) comprises full height studs measuring 6-9 by 4½in arranged to divide each bay into three sections; these are subdivided vertically into three panels by two intermediate rails. Up to the first intermediate rail, most of the studs have been replaced by a stone plinth. The studs do not

connect with the crucks, but form an independent frame, the only visible point of connection being the cruck spur at truss T1.



Fig. 6. View from rear

## DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

*Sampling Comments:* Eight samples were taken through coring by Robert Howard on 26 April 1989. All the crucks were sampled in both trusses, as were the saddles and the ridge. The last stud to the east of the rear wall was also sampled, but this plus the front cruck of truss T1 did not have enough rings to be worth measuring. Of the samples that did date, the heartwood/sapwood boundary was relatively consistent, indicating that both trusses are likely to be contemporary.

### TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
ROT-B01	Rear cruck truss T2	77	17	1366	1425	1442	1
ROT-B02	Front cruck truss T2	93	13	1351	1430	1443	1
ROT-B03	Saddle truss T2	67	—	1343	—	1409	1
ROT-B04	Ridge piece bay I	92	29c	1351	1413	1442	1
ROT-B05	Front cruck truss T1	24 NM	—	—	—	—	—
ROT-B06	Saddle truss T1	46	03	1373	1415	1418	1
ROT-B07	Rear cruck truss T1	82	03	1347	1425	1428	1
ROT-B08	Stud post truss T1	19	—	—	—	—	—
Average date of last heartwood ring							1424

Site sequences: (composed of samples 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7), 101 rings long dated 1343–1443 with *t*-values of 9.4(E.MID), 6.2(OXFORD). A few rings were lost from the complete sapwood on sample 4, indicating a felling date in the range 1444–8.

Estimated felling date range **1444–8** (revised from 1444–1474, VA21.90).