Report for

13 Fowke Street, Rothley, Leicestershire

Site Code: ROT-C

from

The Medieval Peasant Housein Midland England

by

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Fig. 1. View from north

Oxbow Books

ROT-C: 13 FOWKE STREET, ROTHLEY, LEICESTERSHIRE

Grid reference: SK 5851 1274 *Survey Date*: 5 May 1990 *By*: D. Miles

Illustrations:

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

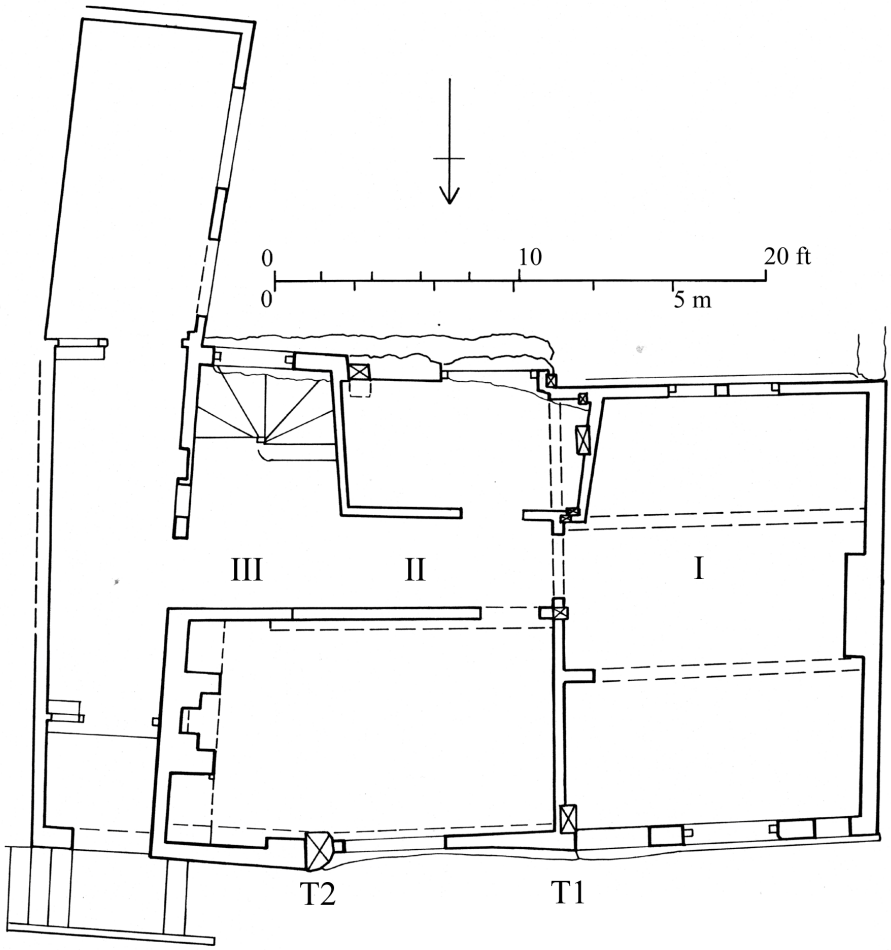

Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: 13 Fowke Street, Rothley is a complex multi-phase building involving alternate rebuilding. The first phase is an early box-frame structure occupying the space of bay I. It originated as a two-bay range running back from the road and was originally floored. It seems likely that this was a cross-wing associated with an open hall, perhaps in the position of bays II and III. Only the eastern side-wall frame survives, with steeply pitched arch-braces and a *trait-de-Jupiter* scarf joint in the wall-plate. It has been tree-ring dated to ***1290-1321***, consistent with the early character of the timber framing in this wall.

PHASE 2: The rebuilding of bay I probably occurred some time in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century and involved the complete demolition of the fourteenth century structure save for the eastern wall-frame. In its place was built a single cruck bay (bay I), parallel to the street rather than end-on. Presumably the phase 1 wall was left in place because it formed a party wall with the adjoining structure to the east. Bay I includes a cruck truss with a type 'C' apex.

PHASE 3: This involved the building of bays II and III, probably replacing an earlier structure; the purlins and ridge rest on those of bay I suggesting that it took place after the reconstruction of bay I. The central cruck frame (between bays II and III) is mostly built of reused timbers, each exhibiting angled halvings which make no sense in their present position. It has a type 'F1' apex. Although all the timbers have the appearance of smoke blackening, this is mainly due to a dark creosote-like preservative which was recently applied to the original timbers. It is likely that this was initially a separate dwelling only relatively recently combined with bay I. Tree-ring dating has given a felling date range of 1576-1601 for a packing piece in this truss.

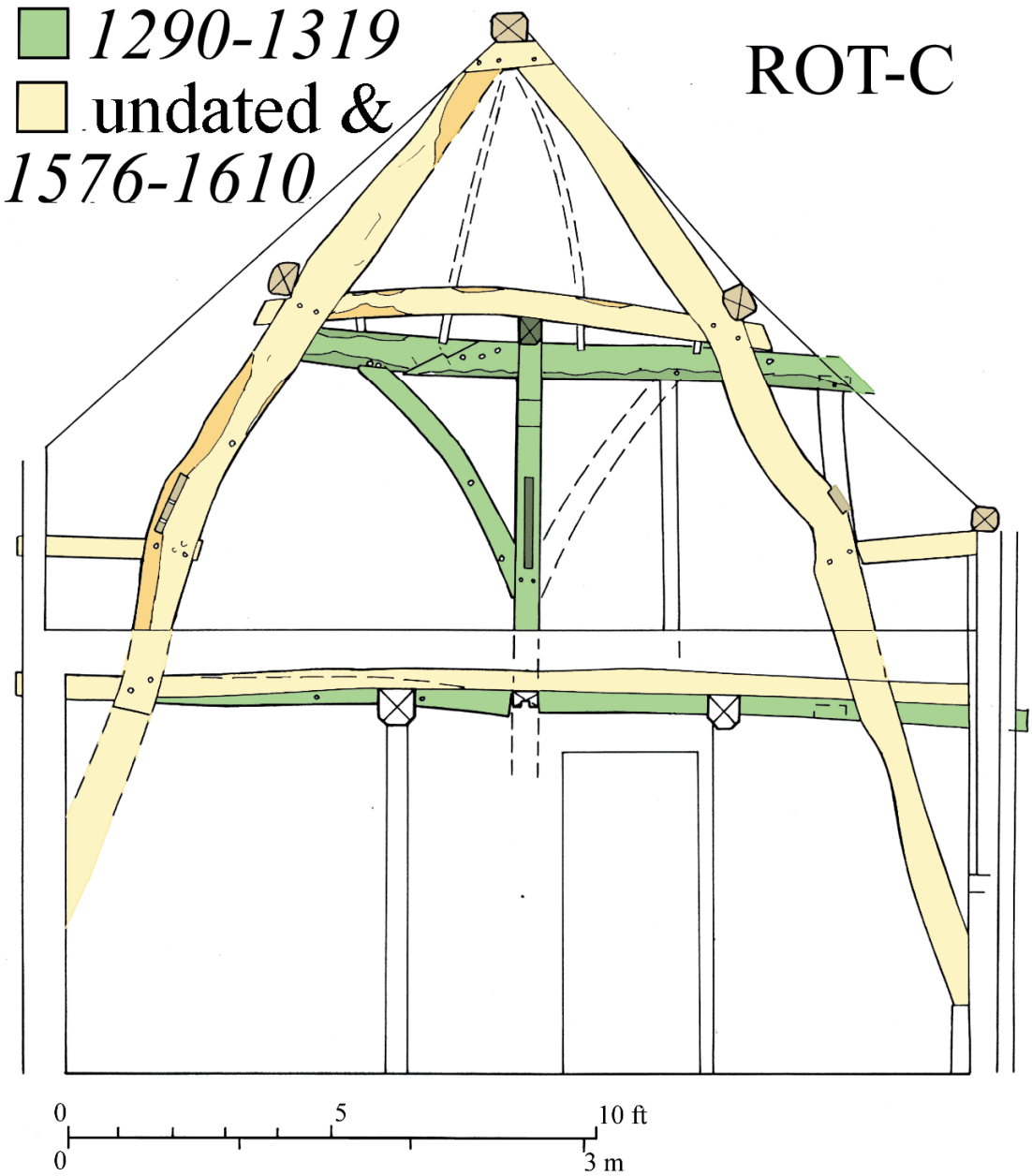

Fig. 3. Section of truss T1 from west.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: All of the half-dozen original timbers of this phase are of small scantling and are well jointed. The wall-plate has a *trait-de-Jupiter* scarf immediately to the north of the severed tiebeam. The tiebeam measures 6½ by 5in and the wall-plate is 7½ by 4in. In the centre, under the tiebeam, a jowled principal post 5in wide has mortices for three braces: one either side to the wall-plates (the northern one still remains), and one on the inside face which rose to connect with the tiebeam. The surviving brace is narrow, about 5in wide, and is steeply pitched with a slight curve. At first floor level, two side girts are

morticed into the post whose base has been cut off at this point. Just visible is the top half of a mortice for a third girt which ran under the tiebeam to the opposite side. The underside of the southern first floor girt contains a mortice possibly for a doorpost; the underside beyond this mortice is chamfered. Neither this, or a similar mortice immediately to the north, were ever pegged. On the northern side of the central principal post, several peg holes probably mark the positions of missing studs.

PHASE 2: The main feature of this phase is the cruck truss which abuts the phase 1 wall-frame. This consists of a matching pair of cruck blades which were halved from the same tree and measure 10½in wide by 4½in thick. The blades are jointed at the top into a saddle on which rests an 8in square ridge piece which is chamfered on all four arrises. The frame also has a 4in thick collar which is halved onto the eastern side of the blades, indicating that the truss was built on the ground and reared up against the existing phase 1 wall-frame. This collar rests on the truncated end of the phase 1 tiebeam. The 6½ by 8in purlins are set onto the back of the cruck blades and are supported by the extended ends of the collar. The rear purlin appears to have been reused. The tiebeam is halved across the blades, as is the collar, and extends beyond them, the northern end projecting outside the wall face. The wall-plates are carried on cruck spurs which again are halved; the plates are further supported at their outer ends on cruck studs. The southern stud is visible and appears to continue down to the back of the blade but it is not clear how it is jointed to the tiebeam. Mortices in the blades are for missing wind-braces, which were halved into the purlins. No rafters are visible. The first floor is supported on two 8in beams running longitudinally, with small (4 by 5in) joists with ½in chamfers. Some of these joists appear to be reused. They carry a plaster floor on rushes which has later been covered with floorboards.

PHASE 3: The cruck truss at T2 is built up of many different bits of wood, most of them reused. The two blades are almost square in section, the front (northern) one being perfectly straight whilst the rear blade has a well shaped elbow just below first floor level. This rear blade has been severed just below the collar, only the packing piece holding up that end of the apex. The cranked collar is curious, with at least six halvings (on both sides). It is most probably to be identified as the elbow of a cruck, with halvings on one side for the spur, the tiebeam and a brace. It carries a king strut supporting the ridge. A lower collar is visible at the top of the stairs, this too has redundant halvings. The roof structure appears to be equally haphazard, with the purlins being very misshapen; a number of the rafters are reused while some are nineteenth century replacements. Internally, many of the ground floor partitions are of plaster on rush. All the floors upstairs are of plaster on rush and the joists are of the same section as in bay I. The axial beam in bay II runs part of the way into bay III; this may have terminated in a smoke hood, since removed. Other features include horizontal sliding sashes in almost all of the windows, stone plinths with brickwork over, and a very high front door reached by steps. Most chimneys appear to date from the nineteenth century.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

Deeds in possession of the owner start in 1930 but include an abstract of title from 13 Nov. 1899, a mortgage by Sarah Sibson, wife of Robert Sibson of Fowke Street, to Arthur Henry Bennett of Leicester, including 'parcel of land with a messuage erected on part of it [No. 13] and 2 houses in course of erection on part of the said land [nos. 15-17]'. In 1910, hereditament 56 shows no. 13 owned by Sarah and occupied by Robert Sibson, with a plot area of 1r 7p; nos. 15 & 17 covered 300 sq. yards each.[1]

[1] TNA. IR58/51138.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facingintroduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 27 April 1989. Of these, samples C01-03 and C06-08 are all from the third phase and mostly appear to be reused (with the exception of the last two). Samples C04 and C05 are from the second phase and are from primary timbers. Only sample C02 dated conclusively.

Seven additional samples were taken by Dan Miles from the reconstructed bay in 1997, three from the primary phase and four from the adjoining cruck truss (second phase). One sample from a cruck blade had too few rings to be worth analysing and was not subjected to further study. None of the samples matched each other, and only one sample from the box-framed phased dated. This was from the severed tiebeam which was cored twice because of its extremely narrow growth rings. The first core extended almost to the centre of the tree, and the second core had a substantial amount of sapwood, together combining to form a 166 year mean sequence.

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-C01	Rear cruck blade, truss T2	48	—	—	—	—	—
ROT-C02	Front packing piece truss T2	54	HS	1511	1564	1564	2
ROT-C03	Front cruck truss T2	40	HS	—	—	—	—
ROT-C04	Rear cruck truss T1	45	20	—	—	—	—
ROT-C05	Yoke truss T1	48	17	—	—	—	—
ROT-C06	Ridge, bay II	25 NM	—	—	—	—	—
ROT-C07	Front purlin, bay II	85	—	—	—	—	—
ROT-C08	Rear purlin, bay II	16 NM	—	—	—	—	—
ROT-C11a	centre tiebeam (box-frame)	130	H/S	1124	1253	1253	
ROT-C11b	same (second core)	130	35	1160	1289	1289	
ROT-C11	mean of ROT-C11a + ROT-C11b	166	35	1124	1254	1289	3a
ROT-C12	wall brace centre post to plate (box-frame)	79		H/S	-		
ROT-C14	collar, truss T1 (cruck phase)	69	15C	-			
ROT-C15	front cruck spur, truss T1 (cruck phase)	41	16C	-			
ROT-C16	centre post, truss T1 (box-frame phase)	69	27	-			
ROT-C17	rear wall plate, bay I (cruck phase)	54	34C	-			

Both samples 2 and 11 have narrow rings, sample 11 exceptionally so (0.94 and 0.44 mm respectively),indicating that longer than usual felling-date ranges must be allowed.

Sample 2 matched at 1511–1564 with t-values: 4.6(E.MID), 5.3(OXFORD), 5.8(KEY-B1), 4.6(DAR-A3), 4.3(GOTMSQ10), 3.7(COSBSQ02), 3.4(CASBSQ03).
Estimated felling date range (sample 2): 1576-1601 (previously 1577-1602). OxCal estimated felling date range ***1576-1610.***

Sample 11 (average of 11a and 11b) matched at 1124-1289 with t-values: 5.7 DLHM2, 5.0 SOUTH, 4.9 EASTMID, 4.7 BIL-B1, 4.6 LCKH1, 4.5 ELYC24, giving a last measured ring date of 1289.
Estimated felling date range (sample 11): 1290-1299 based on a 12-45 ring 95% felling date range. OxCal estimated felling date range ***1290-1321.***