Report and Documentary History for

The Cottage, Aston Street, Aston Tirrold, Oxfordshire

Site Code: AST-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles

Fig. 1. View of the house in 1993, after restoration (Photo: English Heritage)

Oxbow Books

AST-A: THE COTTAGE, ASTON STREET, ASTON TIRROLD, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 5565 8578 *Survey date*: 1990 - 1993 *By*: : D. Miles

Note: Since the house was originally surveyed, it has been re-named Tirrold House.

Illustrations: *Page*

References: Currie, C. R. J. (1992) 'Larger medieval houses in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, **57**, 81-244.

A. D. W. Richmond (1993) *The Cottage, Aston Street, Aston Tirrold, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Investigations 1991-1992*, English Heritage Assessment Report, unpublished.

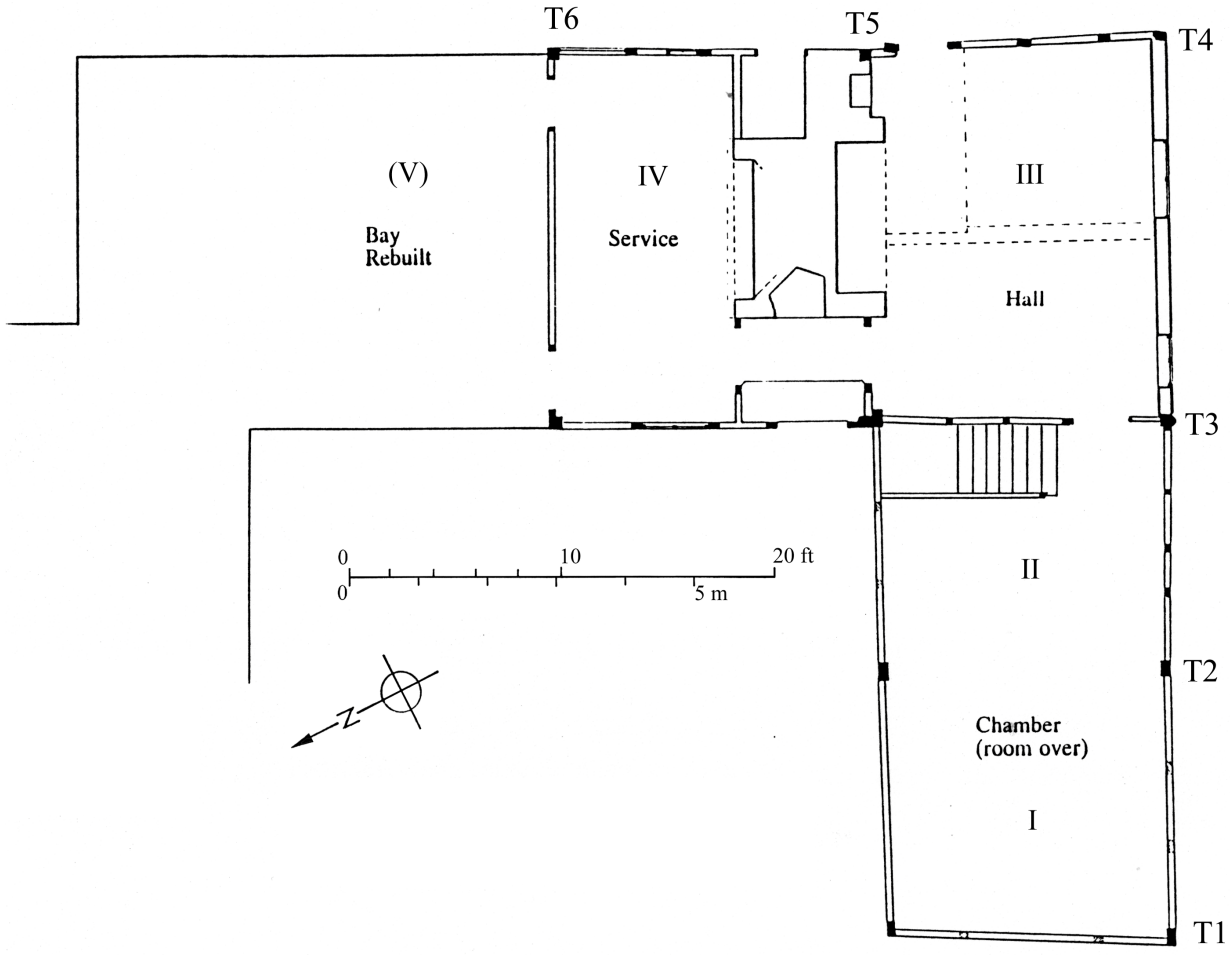

Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Cottage, Aston Tirrold (Fig. 1-2) is a multi-phase building consisting of a chamber block (bays I-II) dated by dendrochronology with felling dates from 1282 to 1286 (indicating construction probably in

1286), an early sixteenth century box-framed hall (bay III), with felling dates from spring 1517 to winter 1518/9, and a seventeenth century wing (bays IV-V) probably of about 1620, the date inscribed on the inserted floor in the hall (Fig. 10).[1]

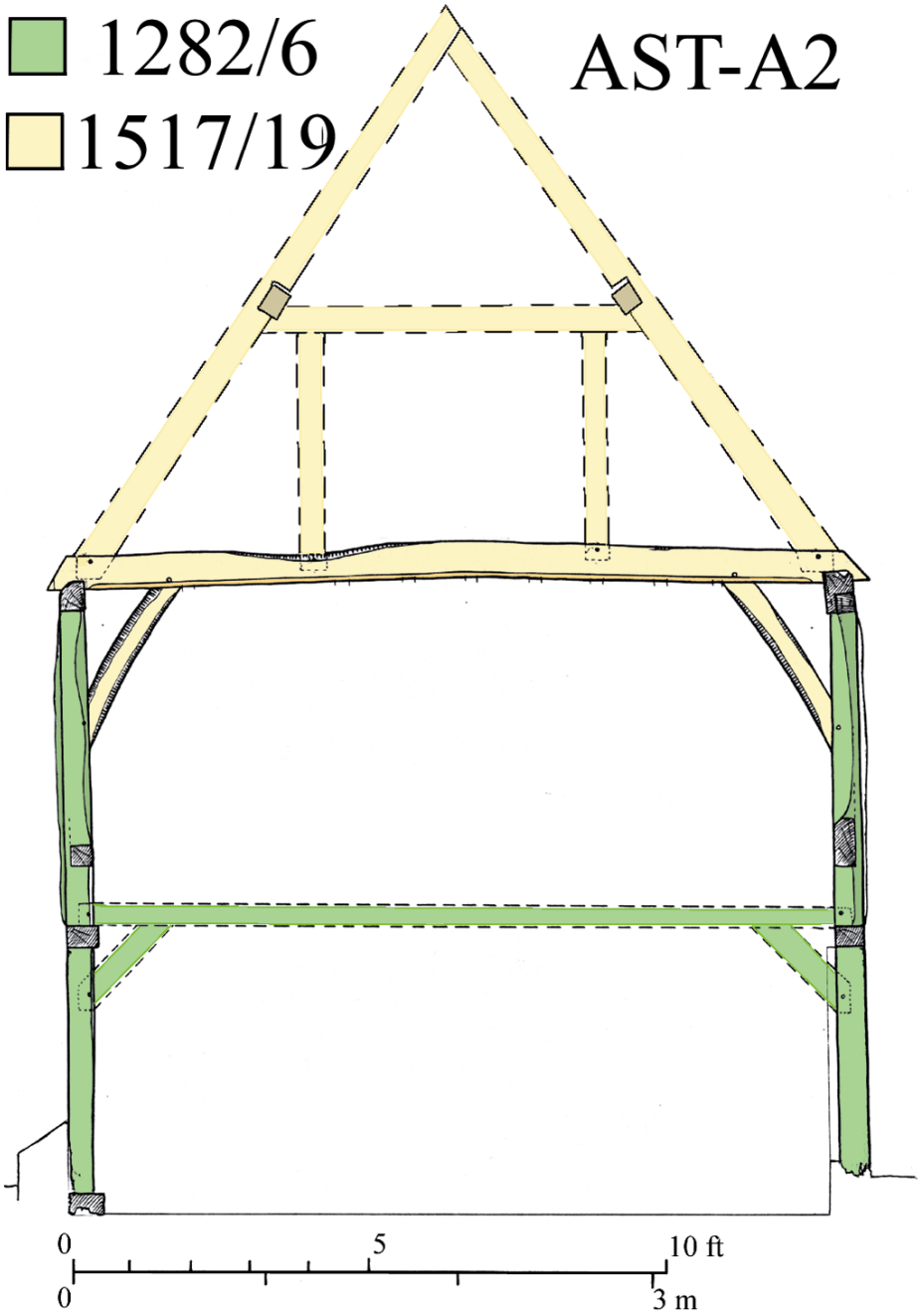

Fig. 3. Section of truss T2. The approximate profile of the destroyed later roof timbers is dashed.

PHASE 1: The two-storied chamber block of 1282/6 is probably the earliest building retaining complete external framing yet identified in England, as well as the earliest timber-framed free-standing chamber block (almost identical in date to the integral chamber wing at York Farm, West Hagbourne, Oxfordshire, X-WHA, 1284/5). It is thought that the block abutted an early hall. Evidence for the precise position of the hall has not been obtained, but the presence of a late twelfth/early thirteenth century hall

[1] The significance of the building was initially recognised by Dr C R J Currie and it is discussed in detail in Currie, 'Larger medieval houses', 103-7.

near the position of the 1517/19 hall has been demonstrated by excavation. The hall was not of earthfast-post construction but had ground sills, with padstones under the truss feet.[2]

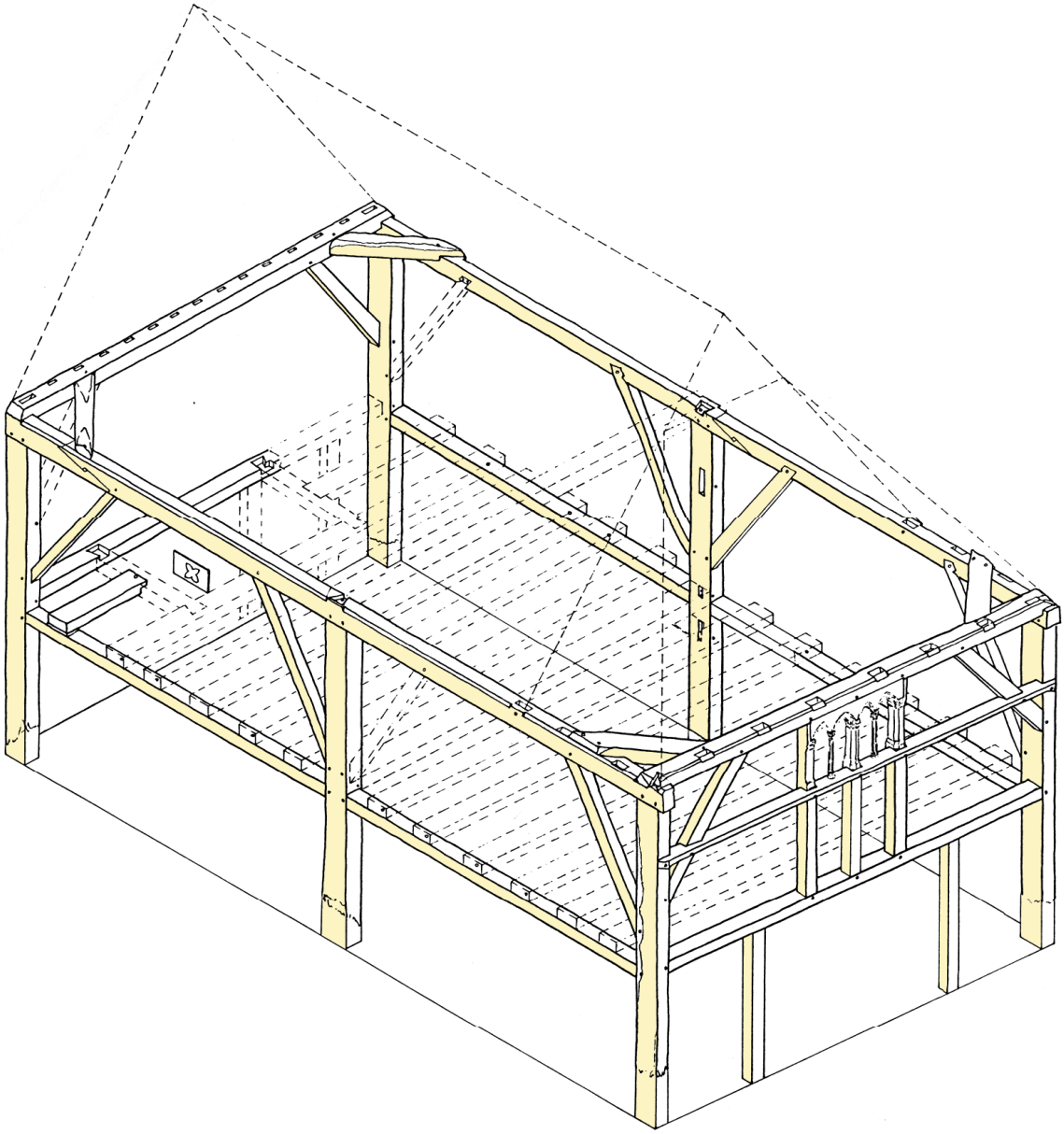

Fig. 4. Isometric view of the chamber block

The chamber block is of two bays with large wall panels (Figs. 3-4). In plan, the west end is at a slight angle to the side walls, with the north side about a foot shorter than the south. It seems likely that the block was built square-on to an existing hall, and extended to the front of the toft, which was not quite perpendicular to the side walls. The block was entered by a door at the east end in the position of the present doorway. Immediately inside, a staircase rose to the north, on the site of the present stair. The ground floor would have been little more than an undercroft, as the floor level (established by excavation) was only five feet below the level of the joists. Upstairs would have served as a chamber or solar and it was lit principally by a four-light window at the west end (Figs. 4-5), with one small 'wind-eye' on the north side just off centre of the panel to the north of the staircase (Fig. 6). There may have been other window openings of this type in the side walls, but the only other surviving original large panels are in the east end.

---

2 Richmond, 1993.

Fig. 5. Gable end framing, viewed upwards under the eaves.

Fig. 6. 'Wind-eye' in the north wall of the chamber block.

The roof was replaced in 1519, at the same time as the hall to the east was built. This later roof appears to have been fully hipped at one end, but this is uncertain since it was largely destroyed in a fire in 1956. The evidence for the form of the thirteenth-century roof is difficult to interpret. The top outer edges of the plates have heavy chamfers without original rafter fixings, but the bird-mouthed rafter seatings in the longitudinal wall plates are clearly secondary.

PHASE 2: In about 1519, a single bay (III) was built in-line with the east end of the chamber block, apparently adjoining a pre-existing structure to its north. It has jowled wall posts, tiebeams and a queen-strut roof. It was single-storeyed, from the evidence of a mullioned window remaining in the east wall, which is bisected by the floor inserted in 1620. Soot encrustation on the northern wall plate indicates that this was either an open hall or a kitchen. The close proximity to the chamber block suggests that a hall is more likely. Otherwise, access between the solar and a hall to its north could only go through the

kitchen.[3] The elaborately moulded mantel beam now reset in bay IV (Fig. 9) may have originally related to a smokehood in this bay.

PHASE 3: In 1620, a floor was inserted into bay III. This contained a smokehood which extended between the inserted transverse beam and the east wall. The upper chamber in bay III was accessed both from the chamber block, through a door cut through the east wall, and from the north range. Probably at the same date, a two-bay range was added, extending northwards at right angles to the hall block (bays IV-V). This was floored over from the start and its chambers evidently superseded those in the phase 1 solar block.

LATER PHASES: Later in the seventeenth century, the central chimney stack was built just to the north of the smoke bay, giving the house a lobby-entry plan. The smokehood was dismantled and infilled, and bay IV (and presumably V) took on the role of a kitchen, with a bread oven and a copper added to the east and west of the chimney. Bay III, once the hall, now became the parlour, with a good fireplace. During the seventeenth century the original floor in bays I-II was partially replaced, with posts supporting an axial beam carrying small joists, and two windows with diagonally-set mullions were inserted upstairs on the south elevation. The staircase may have been reconstructed at this time.

Probably in the nineteenth, century, bay (V) was removed, apart from a small single storey lean-to which may have served as a pantry and scullery for the kitchen. In the 1930s, the first floor was removed in bays I-II and a door and chimney inserted on its south wall. On 5th November 1956, the house was severely damaged by fire; the thatched roofs of all ranges were largely destroyed but most of the walls remained intact. The roofs were all reconstructed in softwood with cedar shingles. In the 1960s, the lean-to north of the kitchen was demolished and a modern single-storey brick extension built. In 1990-91 the roof over the south-west block was reconstructed in oak to the 1519 form; the north wing gable end was similarly restored and the roofs all re-thatched. In 1992 the wall-framing to the south-west block was repaired and the thirteenth century fenestration to the west elevation restored.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: CHAMBER BLOCK: The two storied chamber block was built as a free-standing structure, presumably abutting a hall range to the east, communicating with it through an internal door at ground level. It contains two box-framed bays. Significant features are the very wide panels (approx. 11-12ft wide by 5ft high) on the side elevations, and the slenderness of the storey girts and braces. Nothing remains of the original roof except the uncambered end tiebeams and the dovetail lap joints for the replaced central tiebeam. A pair of mortices in the upper face of the wall plates most probably held the tenoned ends of an intermediate truss set back about five feet from the western hipped end; this would have consisted of a pair of principals rising to a gablet above a hipped end. A piece of unpegged tenon, with the grain slightly oblique to its length, was found in the southern mortice. It is probable that the gablet rafters had curved feet (explaining why the grain ran almost vertically in this tenon). A similar arrangement, but with a tiebeam at this point, exists in the chamber block at nearby York Farm, West Hagbourne (X-WHA, 1284/5). An alternative interpretation is that these mortices held windbraces rising to purlins at the hip end of the roof, as found at Mill Farm Mapledurham (MDM-A, 1335; Chapter 8.6). However, the position of the mortices towards the outer face of the wall plate, where they interrupt the outer chamfers, would cause such windbraces to run into the rafters. The fact that the grain of the tenon in the southern mortice is perpendicular to the wall plate also makes this interpretation less likely.

The top outer edges of the wall plates and of the western tiebeam carry heavy chamfers on both the north and south sides. These are uninterrupted except where the tiebeams are lapped on and at the positions of the mortices for the intermediate truss. These chamfers might be for fixing rafters, but contain no peg or nail holes. A similar chamfer was found at Mill Farm, Mapledurham (MDM-A, 1335). The birdsmouth housings for the rafters along the north and south sides are clearly secondary, since they conflict with the intermediate truss mortices.

---

[3] The opposite view is taken in Currie, ‘Larger medieval houses’.

A much decayed 3 x 5½in timber was reused externally as a cleat at the bottom of the central post on the south side. It had complete sapwood (although the last 20 rings had to be counted rather than measured), and tree-ring dating (sample 13) shows that it is from the primary phase. It was almost certainly a rafter, as no other removed first phase member is likely to have had such dimensions.

Fig. 7. Wall plate scarf in the chamber block.

PHASE I CARPENTRY: A combination of advanced and archaic carpentry features was used in the thirteenth century structure. The wall posts are totally unjowled and without upstands. The wall braces, mostly straight, are joined to the wall plates with notch-laps having 'refined' entry profiles on the inside along the north and south longitudinal walls and externally on the east (Fig. 7). However, the bases of all the braces and the wall-plate ends at the west are tenoned, indicating more care and consideration in the appearance of the structure there. The tiebeams have secret half-dovetails with single pegs. Dragon ties at the corners are tenoned into the tiebeams and jointed with half-dovetails into the wall plates. The only scarf joints in the building are in the wall plates. Adjacent to the centre post, the south wall plate has a tabled scarf with a undersquinted abutment to the top side only, face pegged with a transverse key (Fig. 7). The north wall plate scarf has undersquinted abutments both top and bottom. On the south wall plate, the bottom abutment was omitted, clearly because that wall plate is only 6in high compared to 8in to the north. A delightful subtlety is shown in the positioning of the northern scarf joint; it is placed at the east end of the wall plate just to the east of the last brace, so that the lower undersquinted abutment also forms the notch in the lap joint to the wall brace. The storey girts are 6 by 4in, laid flat, and (apart from the infill panels) are supported only by tenons at each end into the main posts; surprisingly, this optimistic approach has remained reasonably intact.

The original first floor joists ran transversely and were lodged on the storey girts. They were occasionally pegged on, but many simply rested in place. Half-lapped dovetails for two stair trimmers can be seen in the eastern storey girt.[4] The trimmers have been removed but one joist remains *in situ* under the present stair landing and, indeed, the staircase still occupies its original position. This sole remaining joist measures 3 by 8in and was probably thinner than the others, as it only carried the landing; it is raised on a packing block and the whole is surrounded by what appears to be undisturbed thirteenth century daub. The other joists probably measured 4 to 4½in high by 8 to 9in wide, as evidenced by the storey girts at the ends and the mortices for the central beam. This was fixed and braced into the centre posts (Fig. 3).

---

4 Currie ('Larger medieval houses', 105) suggested a stair at the west end from the absence of pegs in this area and by analogy with York Farm, West Hagbourne, where the staircase still rises in the end bay under to the gablet, but this has been superseded by the discovery of the actual stair position at the other end.

No evidence was found for primary samson posts, but archaeological investigation in 1990 found a small padstone under the central truss.[5] This probably related to a replacement floor arrangement using smaller joists; one of these, about 4in square, remains adjacent to the staircase, with the truncated end of an axial beam with a post below it next to the staircase, which aligns with the padstone found beneath the floor. Upstairs, a cleat was found nailed to the lath and daub panel in the east wall directly above the position of the stair trimmer. This probably received a handrail.

The mortice for a door post and a portion of run-out chamfer remain just to the north of the existing doorway, below the east end of the truncated storey girt. These must relate to the original entry position. During the underpinning operation, archaeological excavations found a deep depression running through this door way towards the foot of the stairs. This trench contained pottery dating from the late 12th to early thirteenth century, probably relating to an earlier hall range to the east.[6] It is likely that the entrance to this earlier building was on the site of the present doorway and that, when the chamber block was built in 1286, the same entry position was retained.

Fig. 8. Original stave and daub infill.

Although no original infill panels survive below the storey girt, several of the upper ones remain. The two panels on either side of the west window are primary and intact, as is the large panel at the east end. This panel has only been damaged by the insertion of the doorway (presumably in 1620) leading into the upper part of the chamber block adjacent to the south-east corner post (which had been replaced during the reconstruction of the hall in 1519). The panel in the eastern half of the north elevation also survives intact, including the 'wind-eye' described below. These primary panels comprise riven oak staves with riven oak laths *nailed* onto the outer face of the staves at 3 to 4in centres (Fig. 8). A chalk/lime daub mixed with chopped straw was applied on this framework, finishing flush with the inside face of the staves and with the outer surface of the wall, covering the laths externally by about an inch. Overall, the panels average about 2½ - 3in thick. The only main variation is that the west end panels had the laths nailed on the inside instead of the outside. Externally, the panels may have been finished with a lime-rich lime/hair finish coat, whereas internally the panels had a fine silty/sandy coat over the daub.

During the careful removal of modern hard cement render over the surviving thirteenth-century daub panel on the north side, a small area of infill daub, 12.5in below the underside of the wall plate, was

5 Richmond, 1993.

6 Richmond 1993.

revealed. The removal of this infill revealed a small quatrefoil 'wind-eye' cut out of a solid ½in thick plank of oak (Fig. 6). This measured 9in high by 15in wide, and was nailed to the outside of the vertical staves. Externally, riven oak laths were nailed around the plank, and the lime/chalk daub was applied to a thickness of 4in, forming a slightly bevelled reveal measuring approximately 8½in square. Centred within this was a pointed quatrefoil opening set in a 7¼in diameter circle which, together with the horizontal and vertical setting-out axes, had been scribed into the external face of the plank. The arris of the opening was finished with a fine 5/16in hollow with a quirk similar to the setting out lines, while internally the opening has a plain ¼in flat chamfer. Equally remarkably, the major portion of the original internal harr-hung shutter survives *in situ*, pivoting on wooden ears or pintles let into sockets in the inside of the staves and retained by a small cleat of riven oak lath, the latter with bevelled edges nailed top and bottom to the staves. This flap originally covered the whole of the inside of the opening and when opened would have been hooked or tied to the underside of the wall plate.

In the west end wall, evidence for an elaborate and sophisticated mullioned window was discovered behind the reveals of the nineteenth-century window (Fig. 4). The sill and jambs survived, with remains of moulded capitals on each jamb and a rebate for a face-fixed plank headboard, which was also rebated into the tiebeam. Mortices remained in the tiebeam and sill for a central king mullion as well as intermediate 'colonnettes', all of which presumably were octagonal and decorated to match the jambs. A chamfered window sill runs across the whole end wall, with run-out chamfer stops just before the curved ends. The 7¼in diameter of the small quatrefoil on the north side provides a module which fits the framework of the west window. The headboard is 1 module wide by 5 across, while below the imposts, the window is 2½ modules high by 5 wide. The spacing between each of the four lights is 1 module and the cusping as restored is geometrically derived from this. This window has been reconstructed at the suggestion of the owners to a design by David Brock and Paul Woodfield of English Heritage. Whilst the elements described above had reasonably clear evidence for their restoration, the cusping of the headboard as well as the bases are conjectural, based on the few remaining examples of thirteenth century windows (principally in stone). Thus, the window as reconstructed may not correspond precisely to the original, but is important none-the-less in that it shows that houses, even of such modest size as this, could have sophisticated fenestration. When lime-washed, as it probably would originally have been, the capitals, with the plank headboard and the projecting sill would have echoed stone construction. By contrast, the small quatrefoil 'windeye' has far-reaching implications, in that many smaller houses which were apparently without much fenestration, may have had similar openings incorporated into their daub infill, leaving no evidence if the panels were replaced.

Later wattle and daub panels survive on the western part of the north elevation and the eastern part of the south elevation. These are of a cruder nature and probably date either from the rebuilding of the south-east block (1519) or from the 1620s. One panel in the south-east corner of the south wall, shows the shadow of a shutter rail which would have served the mullioned window inserted centrally in this bay. Another inserted mullioned window (blocked but now re-opened) survives at the west end of the same elevation, tucked in beside the corner brace. The south and north elevations include a number of later studs inserted both above and below the storey girt. The sill beam for the eastern half of the south wall (bay II), was replaced in or immediately after 1508. This beam was morticed to receive the foot of the central post, but its association with the replaced south-east corner post is obscured by the extensive decay at this point.

PHASE 2: The south-east block was rebuilt in 1519, sharing the east wall of the 1286 range rather than having an independent frame. The east tiebeam (T4), the roof above it, and the whole of the south wall frame, were replaced after the 1956 fire. The north wall plate survives and is thickly encrusted with soot along the whole of its length. This member has no mortices or stave holes below which indicates that the range abutted an earlier building to the north.[7] The east wall frame contains two jowled corner posts and a centre stud, adjacent to which is the head of a window about 3ft below the tiebeam, with the mortice for

[7] Currie, 'Larger medieval houses'.

a sill 3ft below this. This window had three diagonally-set mullions and clearly served the south-east block while it still functioned as a open hall. In 1620, the window sill was removed and another rail inserted a foot further up, at the level of the new inserted floor, serving a new ground-floor window. Consequently much of the remaining wattle and daub in this wall probably dates from 1620. A short fragment of the south wall plate remains in the south-east corner but was severed immediately to the west when the wall was rebuilt in brick after 1956. All of the timbers on the east face are very heavily weathered.

The chamber block was re-roofed at the same time as the south-east block was built. All of this later roof was destroyed in 1956 except the lower part of truss T3 which consisted of the original 1286 tiebeam but with later principal rafters, collar and queen struts. The principals had been severed just above the clasped purlins, short sections of which remained after 1956. Mortices in the replaced tiebeam for truss T2 indicated that exactly the same arrangement had existed there. The principal rafters have windbrace mortices. Rafter seatings in the wall plates, to the east of the gablet mortices, presumably relate to the 1519 re-roofing since one conflicts with the north gablet mortice; each has a thin scribed assembly mark (on the top of the wall plate), using Roman numerals (I-XX) running consecutively anti-clockwise from the southern to the northern gablet mortice. They indicate that the 1519 roof contained ten rafter couples with the westernmost carrying a gablet to which the hip rafters were fitted.

In 1990-91 the principal rafters to truss T3 were repaired and extended, and a similar truss was constructed and fitted into the existing mortices of the truss 2 tiebeam. The hip was reconstructed with hip rafters set into existing notches and fixed to a flying collar (as usual with roofs of this period in the locality). Both common and jack rafters were fitted into the existing birds-mouthed seatings on the wall plates. The only conjectural aspects were whether there was a ridge piece and whether the principals were diminished above the collar. It is not known if the roof was originally hipped or gabled at the east end, as the T4 tiebeam was destroyed in the fire.

At some date between 1519 and 1620, the open hearth in this bay was apparently superseded by a smoke hood, and the very decorative mantel beam (Fig. 9) (now reset in bay IV) was probably associated with this hood; its mouldings resemble those on beams dated to the later sixteenth century.[8].

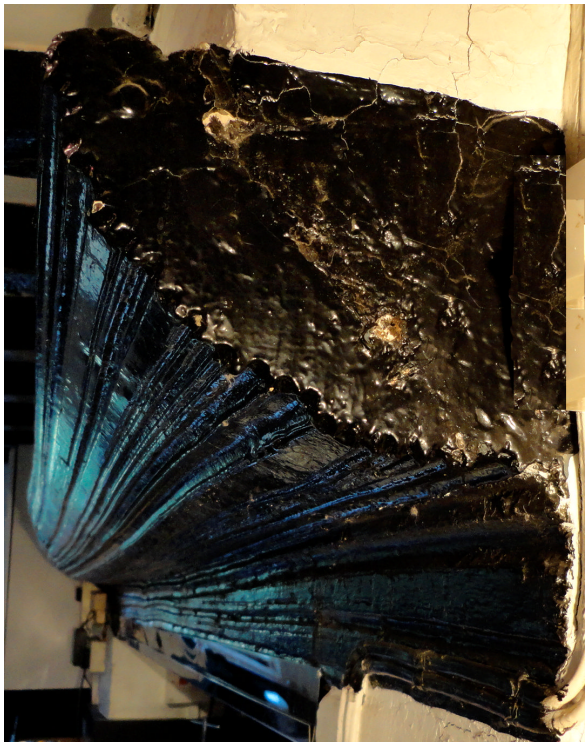

Fig. 9. Mantel beam in bay IV (probably from the 1517/19 range).

[8] Linda Hall (2005) *Period house fixtures & fittings: 1300-1900*, Newbury: Countryside Books, 158f.

PHASE 3: Only one bay survives of the two-storey north wing, which probably dates from close to 1620. The framing members are of small scantling, some of elm. Evidence for two diagonally-set mullioned windows, one above the other, was found on the east side, as well as evidence that it extended further north. It seems to have been truncated prior to 1875.[9]

A floor was inserted in 1620 in bay III. The ceiling beam and applied half-beams are decorated to a very high standard, with ovolo moulding on the transverse beam accompanied by chiselled zigzag patterns and scalloped carvings with ornate floral brackets (Fig. 10). The transverse beam has clear evidence for a smokehood with a corner post and stave holes. The eastern half beam stops at the line of the smokehood, with the incised 1620 date centred in the remaining section. The smokehood was subsequently replaced by the existing brick chimney stack which also serves the north wing, and the mantel beam which is presumed to have been associated with it was reset in bay IV, as the lintel of the new chimney.

Fig. 10. Beam and bracket in the 1620 block.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: In all, 26 samples from 24 timbers were taken over a period of three years. The first ten samples (AST-A01-10) were cores taken on 15th December 1989 by Robert Howard. In an initial study, samples AST-A07-09 produced a felling date range of 1260-1285 (*VA* **23** (1992) 58-9). During repairs e during 1990 and 1991, samples (AST-A11-13) were taken by D Miles for English Heritage Ancient Monuments Laboratory (AML). All three of these had complete sapwood and the first two produced precise felling dates of spring 1282 and spring 1284. The third sample (AST-A13) had such narrow ringed sapwood that the last 20 rings could not be measured or even counted with absolute certainty, therefore a felling date range of 1278-1284 has been given for this sample.

During repairs during 1992, a further thirteen samples (AST-A14-20 and AST-A51-6) were obtained and processed by D Miles for AML. Five of these produced precise felling dates, ranging from late spring 1284 to early spring 1286; AST-16, although it had complete sapwood could only be given a range of 1280-4. These results indicate that the building was under construction during or immediately after 1286. Another sample (AST-A56) from a replacement sill beam produced a felling date of late summer 1508. A further seven samples from the south-east block matched with the tiebeam (truss T2) of the replacement roof over the north-west wing to form the site master ASTON2, although they could not

[9] Not shown on the first large-scale OS map.

initially be dated (and did not match with sample AST-A56, which on archaeological grounds might have been coeval). On re-examination in 2011, these were successfully matched to give felling dates from spring 1517 to winter 1518/19.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
Phase 2: South Block							
AST-A01	Principal rafter truss T3 S side	74	28C	1445	1490	1518	1
AST-A02	Collar truss T3	NM	—	—	—	—	—
AST-A03	Principal rafter truss T3 N side	NM	—	—	—	—	—
AST-A04	Queen strut truss T3 N side	NM	—	—	—	—	—
AST-A05	Queen strut truss T3 S side	NM	—	—	—	—	—
AST-A06a	Tiebeam truss T2	56	28C	1463	1490	1518	1
Primary Phase – Chamber Block: West Wing (A10 of repair phase; A13 reused)							
AST-A07	Tiebeam T3	82	2	1168	1247	1249	1
AST-A08	Principal post T2 N side	55	—	1135	—	1189	1
AST-A09	Principal post T1 N side	58	—	1183	—	1240	1
AST-A10	Principal post T3 S side	74	12	1438	1499	1511	1
AST-A11	Corner post NE, T3	150	54C	1132	1227	1281	1
AST-A12	Wall plate SW, T1-2	110	31C	1174	1252	1283	1
AST-A13	Reused timber (rafter? see text)	94	18-22NMC	1167	1237	1260	1
AST-A14	NW wall plate T3	113	30¼C	1171	1253	1283	
AST-A15	S jamb west window T1	39	13¼C	—	—	—	—
AST-A16	N & S centre posts T2	134	11-15NMC	1136	1258	1269	
AST-A17	N NE girt T2-3	128	31¼C	1156	1252	1283	
AST-A18	NW & SW corner posts T1	113	32¼C	1171	1251	1283	
AST-A19	Joist, NE corner T2-3	142	29¼C	1143	1255	1284	
AST-A20	W girt T1	77	19¼C	1209	1266	1285	
Phase 2: South Block							
AST-A51	N purlin T3	88	15¼C	1429	1501	1516	1
AST-A52	S purlin T3	68	7	1435	1495	1502	1
AST-A53	SE corner post T4	85	34½C	1433	1483	1517	1
AST-A54	NE corner post T4	81	29½C	1436	1487	1516	1
AST-A55	N wall plate T4	89	22C	1430	1496	1518	1
Repair Phase: West Block							
AST-A56	Sill plate T2-3 S side	127	33½C	1382	1474	1508	1

Site sequences: AST-A (samples 7, 9, 11, 12, 13), 152 rings long dated to 1132–1283 with *t*-values of 6.9(E.MID), 6.4(S.ENG). Sample 8 dated with *t*-values of 6.5 (OXFORD), 6.3 (E. MID). ASTON2 (ast01, ast06a, ast10, ast51, ast52, ast53, ast54, and ast55) 90 rings long dated to 1429-1518 with *t*-values of 6.87 (BSNGSTK1); 6.39 (KLBASQ03);.6.37 (WHBASQ01); 6.14 (THEVYNE2).

Felling dates of samples with complete sapwood and identified final rings:

	Phase 1		*Phase 2*
AST-A11	Spring 1282	AST-01	Winter 1518/19
AST-A12	Spring 1284	AST-A51	Spring 1517
AST-A14	Late Spring 1284	AST-A53	Summer 1518
AST-A17	Early Summer 1284	AST-06a	Winter 1518/19
AST-A18	Early Summer 1284	AST-A54	Summer 1517
AST-A19	Early Spring 1285	AST-A55	Winter 1518/19
AST-A20	Early Spring 1286	AST-A56	Late Summer 1508

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The deeds survive from 1753; the first deed recites back to 1666, when William Sadler, Alice his wife, and Jacob Sadler granted the house, then or previously occupied by Richard Tirrold, to Joseph Tirrold on a 2,000-year lease. After that time the property included only the adjoining orchard, with no field-land. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was owned by local labourers and tradesmen, and occupied by labourers. The east part of the curtilage was separated from it in 1745, and the orchard to the south sold off as a separate house, apparently in 1946. Further ownership details are given by Currie.[10]

Presumably the Sadlers must have been entitled to the freehold in order to grant the original lease, but the fact that three of them were vendors may indicate that they had recently enfranchised a copyhold held on three lives (normal in the 17th century in this area), and were selling the house separately while retaining the farmland; it is also possible that it formed part of a marriage settlement. The phrasing of the recital of the lease suggests that the Sadlers owned other houses in the village. The modest size of the curtilage suggests that in the medieval period this was no more than an ordinary peasant copyhold or freehold.

No court rolls appear to survive, but Crown surveys made between 1547 and 1550 cover all but one of the manorial estates in the parish.[11] Six houses and three cottages were freehold, and at least 15 (perhaps as many as 22) houses and four cottages, were held by copy. They were attached, or had been attached, to holdings of which about 12 were yardlands and 15 half-yardlands, besides two larger holdings. At least eight members of the Sadler family were current or recent tenants, ranging from Sir Ralph Sadler, the former owner of one of the manors, to Joan Sadler with a half-yardland, Richard Sadler with two freehold cottages, and Richard Dewe alias Sadler with a copyhold cottage. Thus, the original holding of William, Alice and Joseph Sadler could have been anything between a yardland and a cottage. Examination of seventeenth-century Sadler wills in the Berkshire Record Office has failed to provide any relevant information.

---

10 Deeds in the owners' possession. Currie, 'Larger medieval houses'.

11 The National Archives, LR 2/187, ff. 306-313.