

Report for
Fringford Mill House, Fringford, Oxfordshire

Site Code: FRI-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View of the house from the south

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Oxbow Books

FRI-A: FRINGFORD MILL HOUSE, FRINGFORD, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 6132 2873

Survey Date: 16 Dec. 1989

By: D. Miles

Illustrations:

- 1. View of the house
- 2. Section of truss T1

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Note: Since the only early feature is the single cruck truss, no plan of the house has been made.

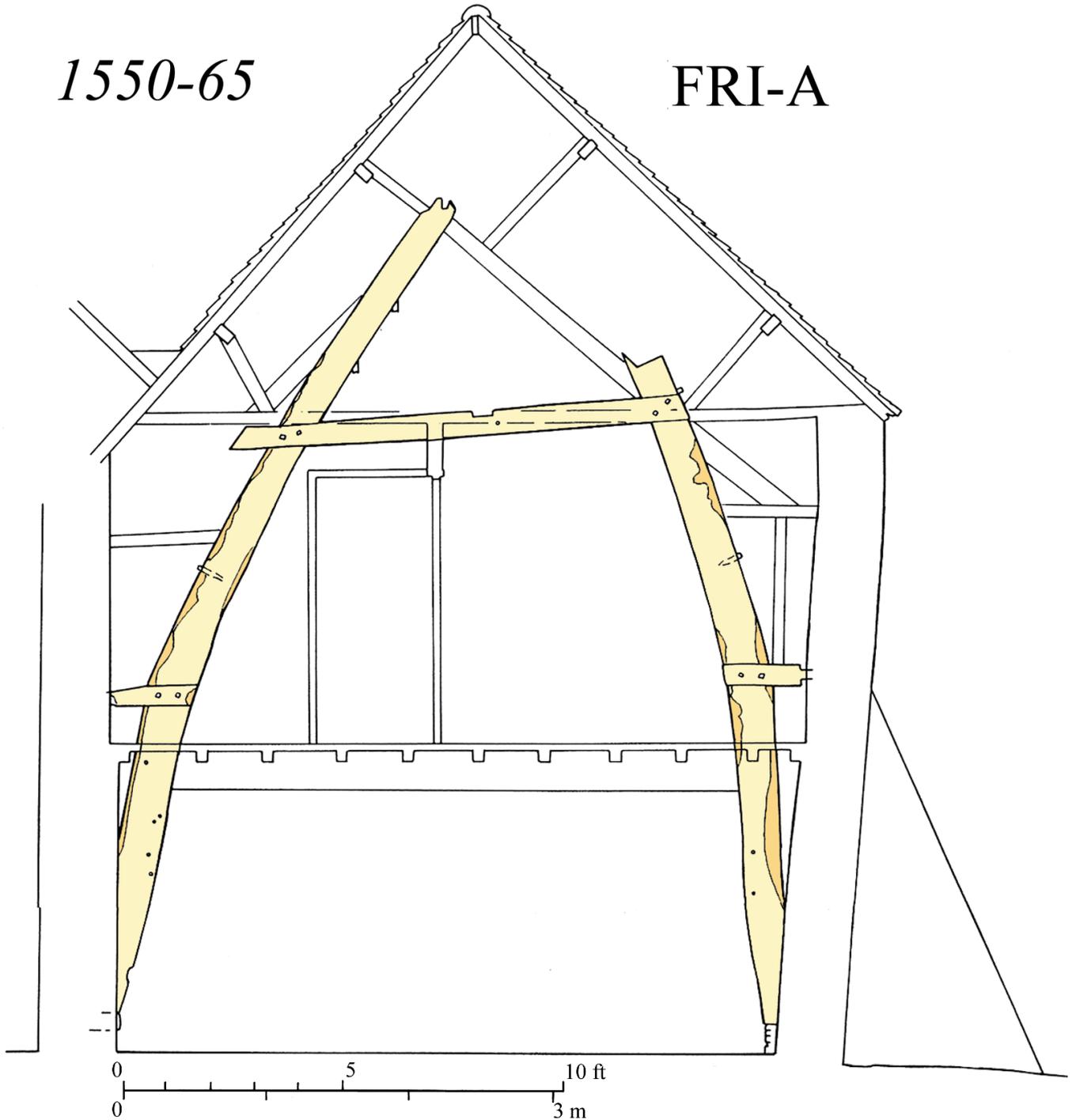


Fig. 2. Section of truss T1.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Fringford Mill House is a two-bayed domestic block adjacent and to the north-east of the mill building. It has stone walls probably replacing a timber frame. One cruck truss remains although with the blades truncated. Nothing is identifiable of the interior arrangement of the primary structure except that the central cruck truss was filled under the collar. Timbers from this truss have given a felling date range of **1544-76**. The watermill is probably of eighteenth-century date but undoubtedly replaced another structure on the same site.

LATER PHASES: Probably in the early eighteenth century, the timber walls were removed and replaced largely in stone, raising the eaves by some three feet. The north-east gable end was rebuilt with an inglenook fireplace incorporated on the ground floor. At this time the crucks were truncated to accommodate the new roof pitch. The front fenestration probably dates from this period with triple casement windows both upstairs and down to the north-east bay, with the front door in its present position at the south-west end of the bay nearest the mill, with a double casement window above it. The windows upstairs had diamond leaded lights. By the end of the eighteenth century, the front wall was leaning outwards to a considerable degree. The area around the front door was rebuilt plumb and a large buttress added adjacent to the central cruck. These details were evident on a photograph dated c.1890. At that time, the roof was about two feet lower than the mill roof, with substantial settlement in the roof slopes between the central cruck truss and the two ends of the block. Shortly after the turn of the century, the front wall was further raised about 18in and two new softwood trusses inserted, raising the level of the roof pitch to match that of the adjoining mill building. The house was quadrupled in size in about 1950, with an addition to the north west and a larger extension forming a cross-wing to the north-east.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: Only the two blades of the central cruck truss remain. The rear blade is truncated just below the original apex, while the front blade has been cut just above the collar to receive a later purlin. It is not known what form the apex was but the notch on the rear blade appears to relate to the later insertion of a ridge board, as in the eighteenth-century truss immediately to the north-east. The blades measure 7 by 11in at the base, tapering to 4½ by 7½in at the top, and are of very waney timber on the face (south-west) side. The collar is 4 by 7½in and is trenched across the face of the crucks with two skew pegs. It has a series of 1¼in diameter stave holes at 13in centres, although the top of the collar has no stave groove. The tiebeam is concealed by plaster and plywood, but it is probably a modern insertion as there are no peg holes for it in the blades and it is fixed to the cruck blades with threaded rods. Also, it is attached to the north-east face whereas all the other horizontal members are trenched on the south-west side. A 3ft length section of sill beam survives in the rear wall to the north of the cruck foot. The cruck spurs are about 7in wide; they are probably not the ends of a severed tiebeam. The remains of staves nailed to the soffit of the rear cruck blade are probably later insertions.

LATER PHASES: The early eighteenth century replacement stone wall is of random coursed rubble construction, approximately 1ft 7in thick. An oak transverse beam (9½in square) divides the N-E bay, with small joists 3-4 by 4in high. The main beam has a small ovolo moulding, of a similar pattern to that on the mantel beam over the fireplace. No original windows remain, although the three main windows in the front elevation are roughly in their original position. The other sides of the building are obscured either by the mill or by modern extensions.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

A brief unpublished history of Fringford Mill was written in 1979 by a former owner of the property, Mark Waghorn. The first record of a mill on this site is in 1046. The history concentrates mainly on the mill itself although it concluded that the house was of base-cruck construction dating from the fourteenth century.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing introduction.

Sampling comments: Five samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 16 December 1989. The two cruck blades matched together and were averaged to form a sequence but it failed to date. The collar, sample FRI-A03, did not match the other four samples but did date individually against the reference chronologies. The two cruck spurs were found to match each other and gave the same date.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
FRI-A01	W cruck blade	94	04	—	—	—	—
FRI-A02	E cruck blade	94	03	—	—	—	—
FRI-A03	Collar	73	HS	1465	1537	1537	3a
FRI-A04	W cruck spur	48	HS	1483	1530	1530	5
FRI-A05	E cruck spur	51	HS	1487	1537	1537	5
Average last heart ring date					1535		

Site sequence: Sample 3 dated 1465–1537 with *t*-values 4.8 (OXFORD), 5.3 (DIDBGP01, VA20.89); site sequence (composed of samples 4, 5), 55 rings long matched at 1483–1537 with *t*-values 5.6 (DIDBGP01), 3.4 (STEAGP01), 3.5 (LONFSQ01) 3.4 (MOUASQ10), 3.0 (E.MID).

95% felling date range: **1544-76** (previously 1550–1575).