

Report for
Church Farm, Church Lane, Harwell, Oxfordshire

Site Code: HAR-B

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

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Fig. 1. View of the house from the south-east (Photo: D. Clark)

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Oxbow Books

HAR-B: CHURCH FARM, CHURCH LANE, HARWELL, OXFORDSHIRE

This house was formerly called Le Carillon.

Grid reference: SU 4921 8907

Survey Date: 7 June 1988

By: D. Miles

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References: Currie, 1987 and 1992; Currie & Fletcher

References: Currie, C. R. J. and Fletcher, J. M. (1972) 'Two early cruck houses in north Berkshire identified by radiocarbon', *Medieval Archaeol* **16**, 136-42; Currie, C. R. J. 1987. 'Harwell houses to 1700: an interim gazetteer', in John Ashdown and Julian Munby (eds) (1987) *Vernacular Architecture Group Spring Conference 1987*; Currie, C. R. J. (1992) 'Larger medieval houses in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, **57**, 81-244.

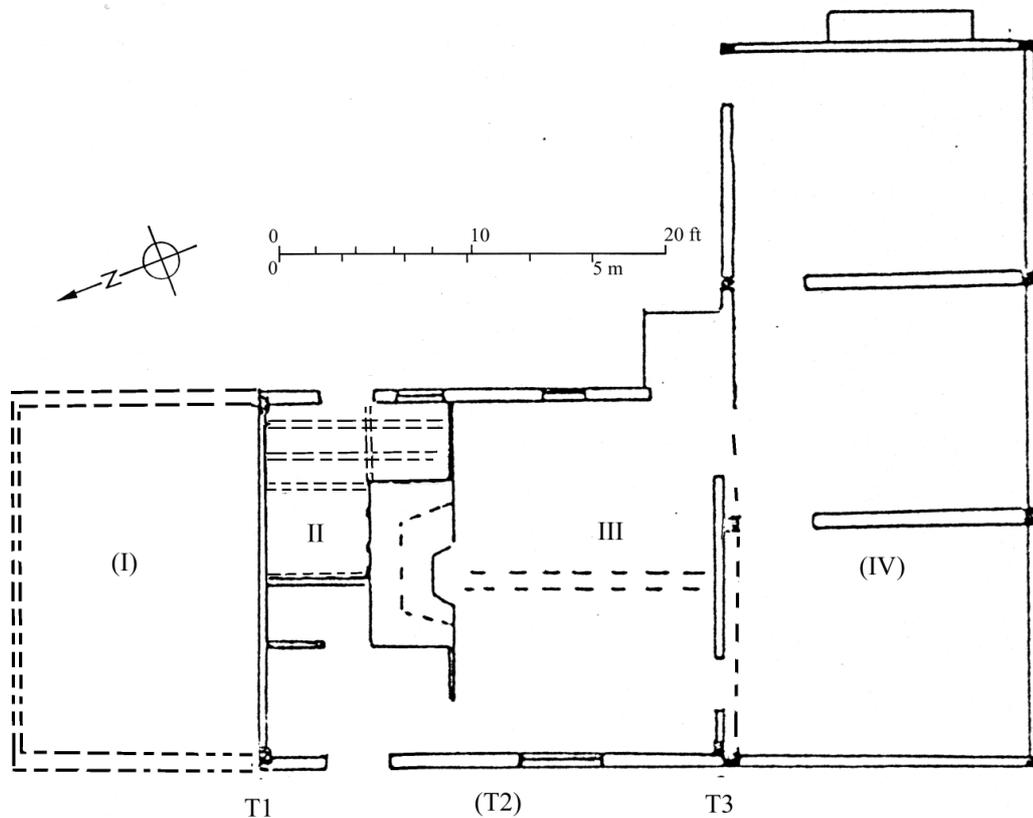


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (based on Currie (1987)).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The house is described in Currie (1987) and the interpretation is revised in Currie (1992).

PHASE 1: Church Farm originated as a four-bay cruck hall house, but only the middle two bays forming the hall now survive (with evidence for the smoke louvre position). The two remaining cruck trusses both have 'F1' apexes. The removed central open truss terminated at the collar, not providing support for the ridge. The upper end (bay IV) was originally floored; it was replaced by the present cross-wing. The service end (bay I) has been demolished. The existing plan suggests the presence of a cross-passage at the end of the hall adjacent to the service end. Smoke blackening is evident on all the original timbers in bays II and III, apart from a noticeable gap on the purlin where the missing open truss was situated.

The cruck structure has been dated by dendrochronology to 1420/1; a radiocarbon date of 1430 ± 60 has also been obtained, consistent with the tree-ring date (Currie and Fletcher (1972)). One sample taken from the cross-wing could not be dated. A separate match for a single sample from the west blade of T3 indicated a felling date range of 1513-1540; it is possible that this dating match is spurious, but it must otherwise indicate that this blade was replaced during repairs.

PHASE 2: Probably in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the chamber end was replaced by the present cross-wing. This extended to three bays and appeared to have had a kitchen in its eastern bay. The two western bays had a low first floor with two rooms above. Smoke blackening is visible in the wing roof space, more so at the eastern end, where is also visible below the tiebeam. The roof of the wing includes common rafters reused from a considerably earlier building.

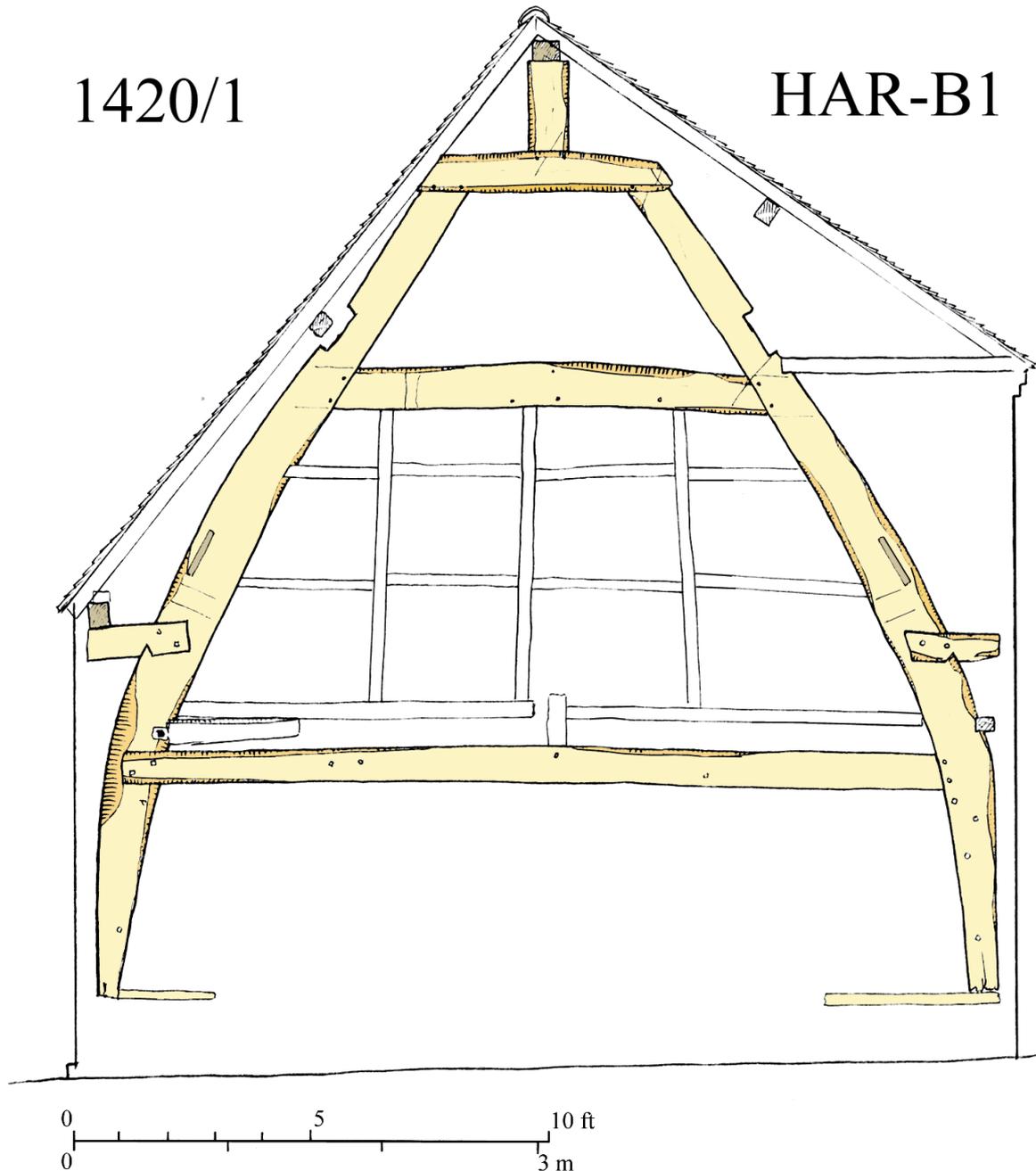


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T1.

LATER PHASES: The hall was floored and the central truss (T2) was replaced by the present chimney, perhaps in about 1600. The infill brickwork of truss T1 is of seventeenth-century character, suggesting the date for the removal of bay I. The outside face of the truss is moderately weathered, despite its north-facing situation, confirming that it must have been exposed from some considerable time. However, the

bay was probably removed after the flooring over of the hall and the insertion of the present chimney stack. This is deduced from the position of the stack, only five feet from T1, leaving space for a cross-passage which would not have been needed if bay I had already been demolished. In the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the cruck range was brick cased front and back. The front wall was also raised to provide two full storeys, leading to the loss of the original western rafters.

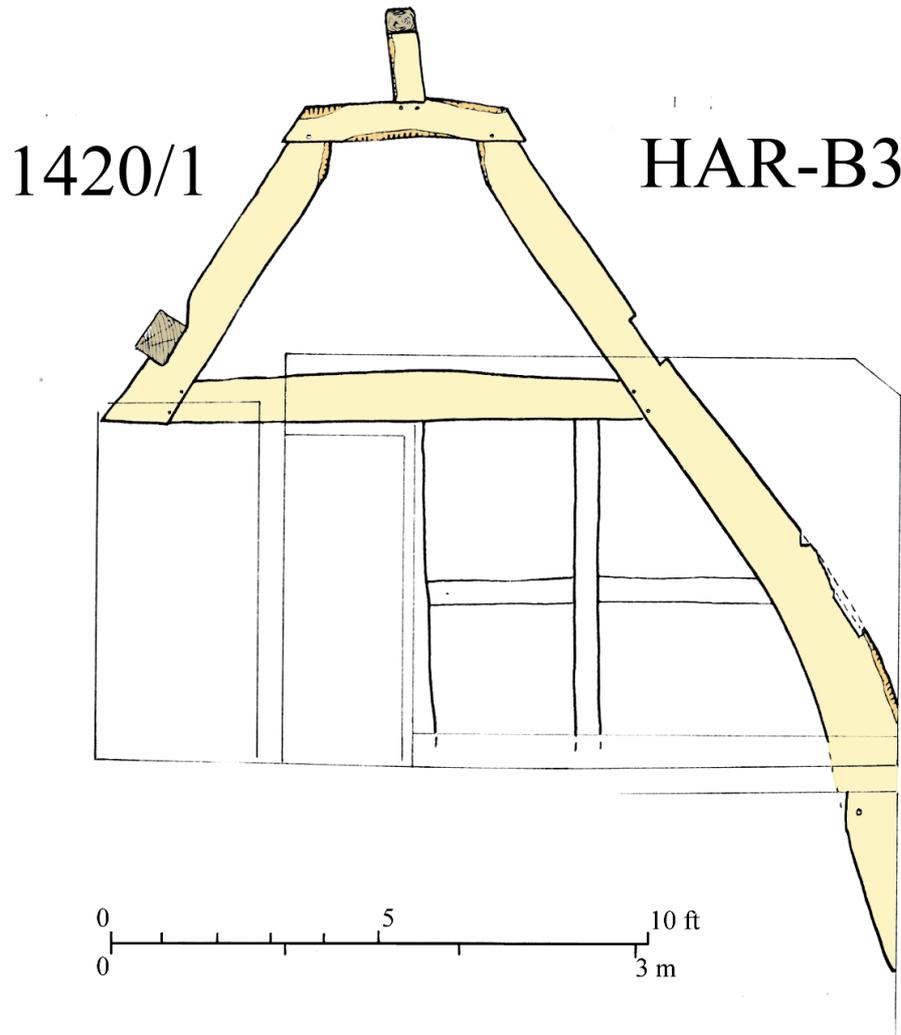


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T3.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: HALL RANGE: The house now ends at truss T1. That this was once an internal truss is indicated by the windbrace mortices on both sides of the blades. Also, the framing members are flush on the inner side, whereas they would have been flush on the outside, had it been built as an end truss. The crucks are well-shaped and appear to have come from the same tree. They terminate in a saddle carrying a king post to support the ridge piece. Below this is a tenoned collar and a tiebeam which is tenoned at the front but crudely lapped and face pegged at the rear; this is therefore probably a later replacement. Although the collar contains various peg holes, they give no clear indications of the original stud positions. The present infilling, probably dates from the demolition of the northern bay perhaps in the seventeenth century. The wall-plates are supported on cruck spurs with notch-lap joints; the cruck studs that presumably existed have been removed without visible trace.

Various assembly marks were noted on the northern face (rather than as normally on the flush 'upper' face). These comprise long scribe marks scored diagonally across the saddle and king post, saddle and western cruck blade, and the collar and blade. There are also scribe marks immediately below the two northern wind-brace mortices, that to the western cruck blade having one stroke, and that to the eastern one having two. The numbering of this truss as (I) suggests that the original northern end may have been box-framed and hipped, rather than having a cruck truss with wind-braces. No other assembly

marks were noted elsewhere in the structure. Truss T3 is similar to T1, although only the front blade, collar and the top half of the rear blade survive along with the saddle and king post. Most of this truss is hidden, but a wind-brace mortice is visible, broken out along the back of the west blade.

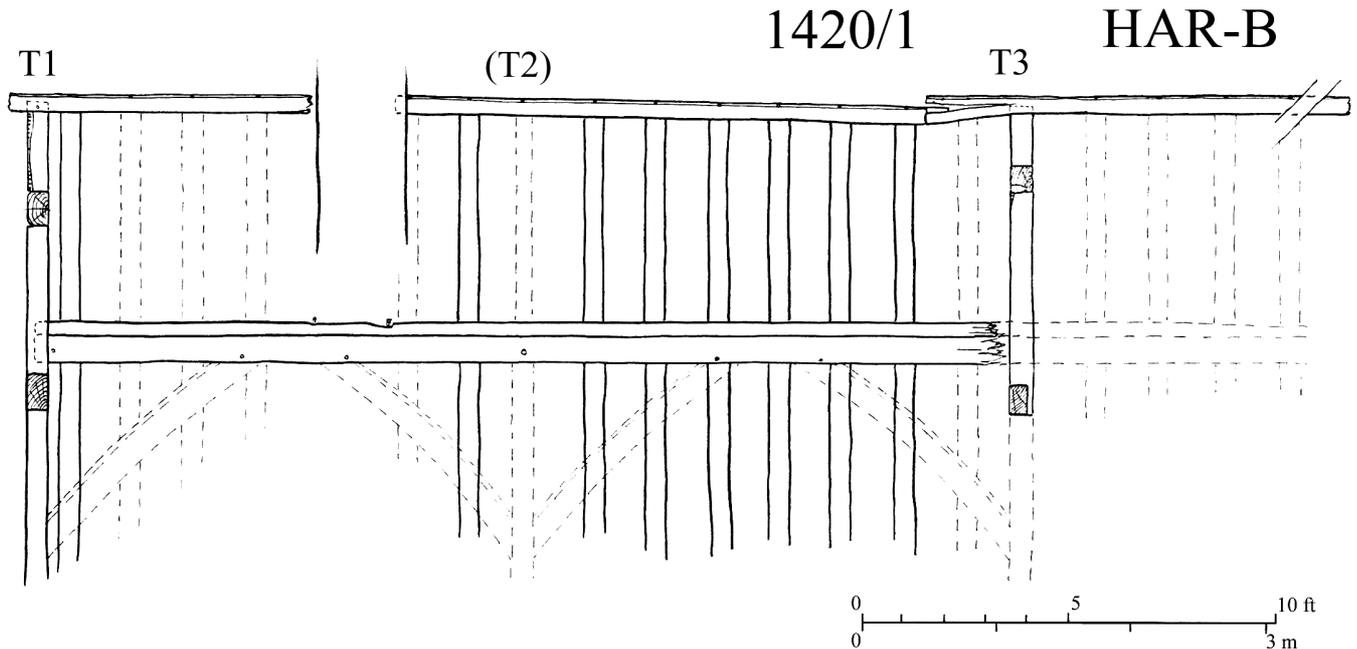


Fig. 4. Long section of cruck range.

Evidence for the removed middle truss (T2) comes from a noticeable gap in the smoke blackening on the eastern purlin, with a central peg hole which must have secured it to the back of a cruck blade (Fig. 4). Furthermore, the same purlin has two sets of peg holes and halvings for wind-braces running down to this missing truss. It is likely that T2 would have been an arch-braced truss which terminated above its collar and purlin; it did not connect with the ridge piece for there is no indication of the latter having been attached to either a king post or saddle.

Most of the roof structure survives along the rear of the hall (Fig. 4). The elm purlin with its halvings for the four wind-braces (all removed) has become detached from truss T1, for its peg hole is now a couple of inches from the cruck blade. At the position of the chimney, it carries two housings in the upper edge of the purlin 21in apart, with the remains of protruding pegs. These are likely to have carried the base of a smoke louvre. The ridge measures about 5½ by 6½in and is of elm over the hall, and oak over the former bay IV. It is scarfed just to the north of T3 with a 12 in bridled scarf which has failed; the extension of the ridge is propped by piece of reused rafter. This second piece of ridge piece continues into the roof space formed by the cross-wing. It is smoke-blackened and carries rafter peg holes *inside* the plane of the wing roof. This, coupled with the fact that the valley rafters are of reused primary timbers, demonstrate that the cruck range originally continued into bay IV (as discussed in Currie (1992)).

PHASE 2: CROSS-WING: The roof trusses are of collar and tiebeam construction with queen struts and a yoke to clasp the diagonally-set ridge. The principals are not diminished, although they clasp the purlins. The latter carry steeply-pitched windbraces. A number of the rafters in the middle bay are reused from a much earlier building; these rafters had double collars, one morticed and the other with notch-lap joints. Several of these rafters have been sawn in half longitudinally to make pairs for reuse.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The house was a freeholding in 1804 (Currie, 1987).

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Ten samples were taken through coring by Robert Howard on 7 June 1988. Two, HAR-B04 and B05, appeared visually to have been cut from the same tree. Sample HAR-B09 is part of the later box-frame phase.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
HAR-B01	Tiebeam truss T1	62	02	1359	—	1410	3a
HAR-B02	Saddle, truss T1	44	07	—	—	—	—
HAR-B03	Collar truss T1	37 NM	1	—	—	—	—
HAR-B04	Cruck blade, truss T1 (NW corner)	107	19C	1314	—	1420	3a
HAR-B05	Cruck blade, truss T1 (NE corner)	107	29	1309	—	1415	3a
HAR-B06	Saddle, truss T3	34 NM	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-B07	Cruck blade, truss T3 (W side)	85	13	1428	1499	1512	3d
HAR-B08	Cruck blade, truss T3 (E side)	110	33	—	—	—	—
HAR-B09	Corner-post	27 NM	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-B10	East purlin, bay II	Not oak	—	—	—	—	—

Site sequences: (composed of sample 1, 4 and 5 from truss T1), 112 rings long dated 1309–1420 with *t*-values of 4.8 (OXFORD), 5.1(MOU-A, Site sequence of Pye Corner, Moulsoford, VA22.91).

Estimated felling dates: (sample 4 with the last dated ring is complete to bark) **1420/1** (revised from c1424, VA20.89). Sample 7 dated with *t*-values 5.2 (OXFORD), 4.2 (MC10), 4.5 (DHR-UHW). Estimated 95% felling date range: **1513-1540** (previously 1513–1537).