

Report

**Abbey Timbers, Broadway Hill, Harwell,  
Oxfordshire**

*Site Code: HAR-C*

*from*

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

**by**

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View of the house from the north (Photo: D. Clark)

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***Oxbow Books***

HAR-C: ABBEY TIMBERS, BROADWAY HILL, HARWELL, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 4907 8877

Survey Date: 4 July 1988

By: D. Miles

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References: 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.

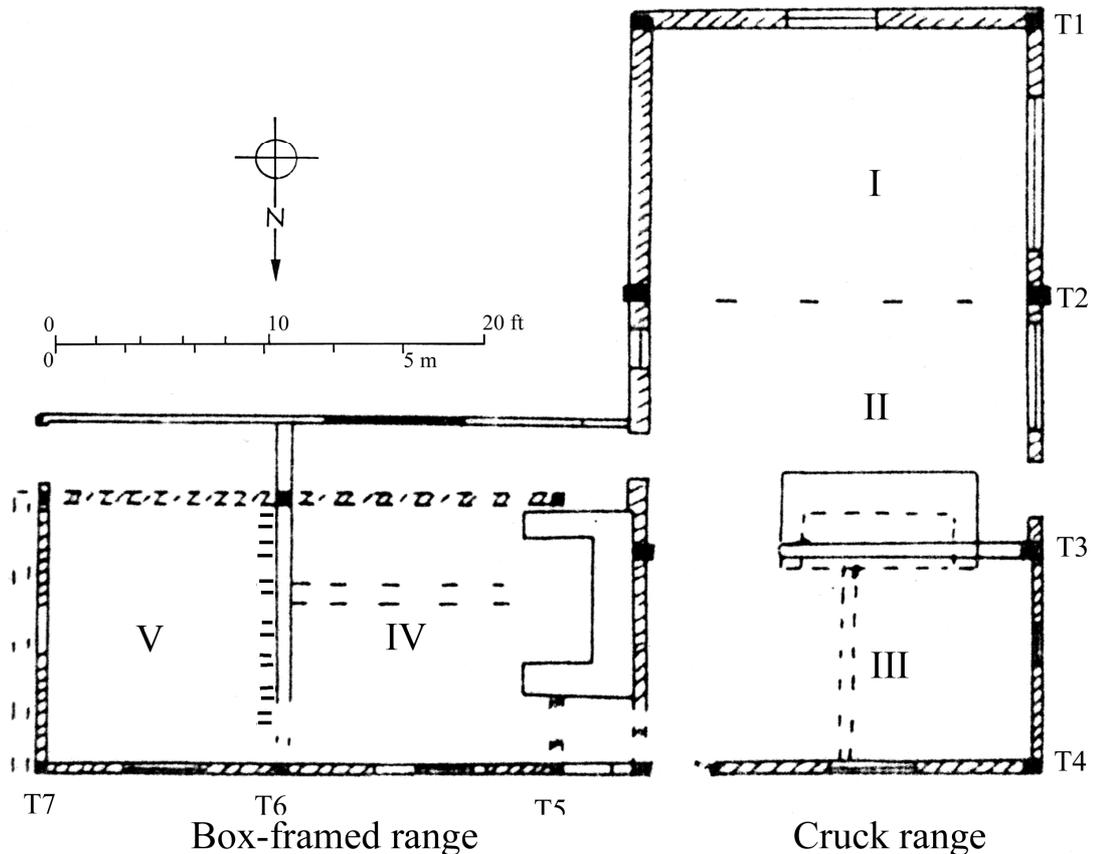


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (based on Currie (1992)).

## ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

### SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The historical development and structural details of both ranges are well described in Currie (1987) and (1992). This account is therefore relatively brief.

PHASE 1: Abbey Timbers is a three-bayed cruck range associated with a two-bayed box-framed range with a crown-post roof, set at right angles to the hall range but separated from it by a 4ft gap. Four cruck trusses remain in the main range, with both type 'C' and 'F3' apices. It contains a two-bay hall at the south end (bays I and II), probably with a kitchen in bay III, the arrangement being indicated by the relative amounts of smoke blackening in the three bays. The box-framed range has a two-bay chamber upstairs, but the original arrangement on the ground floor is uncertain. The cruck range has been dated by dendrochronology to 1399/1400; the box-framed block was also sampled but failed to date. It is considered to be contemporary with the cruck range.

PHASE 2: In the seventeenth century a chimney stack was inserted into the gap between the chamber and the cruck range. Part of the floor to the parlour was replaced at that time, and an outshut was added to the south of the chamber block.

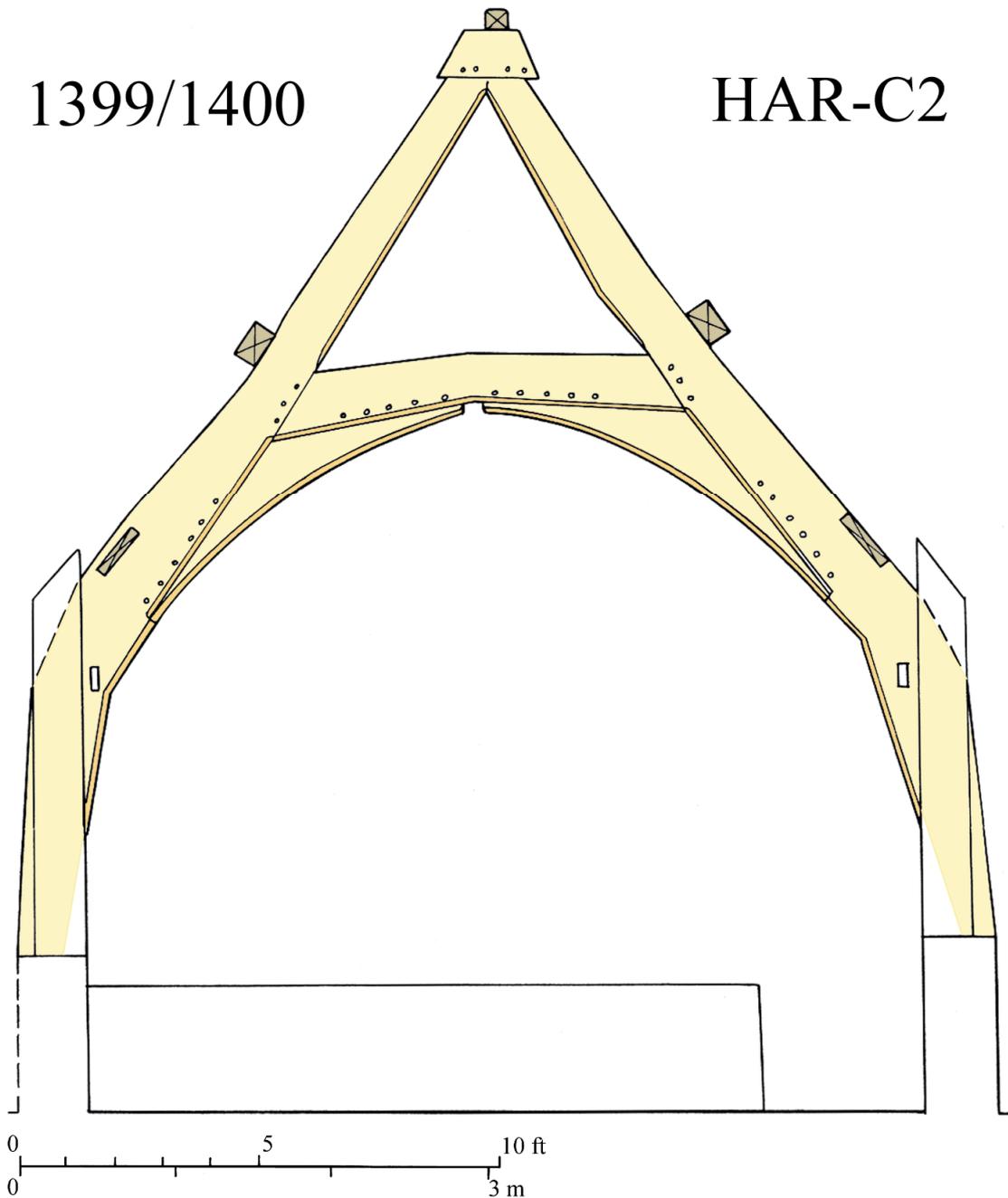


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T2 from the south.

### STRUCTURAL FEATURES

**CRUCK RANGE:** Truss T1 is an arch-braced dais truss with a saddle apex carried on separate upper principals (apex type 'F2'). It appears that the upper part of the cruck truss has been replaced, since it is a different timber (elm) to the rest of the building and, although the ridge and purlins are smoke-blackened, the upper parts of the cruck blades and the saddle are clean. It is also notable that the collar and the tenons at the top of the cruck blades contain unused peg holes.

Truss T2 has well-elbowed crucks with solid arch-braces to a cranked collar and a type 'C' (saddle) apex. Above the collar, the truss appears to have been filled with wattle and daub. The blades are chamfered on both sides right up to the apex, as are the collar and arch braces. In truss T3, the blades terminate at a saddle with a king post and two braces rising above it (apex 'F3'). This truss was closed

both above and below the collar. An elm tiebeam projects beyond the crucks to support the wall plates. Truss T4 is half-hipped, although it may originally have been a full truss.

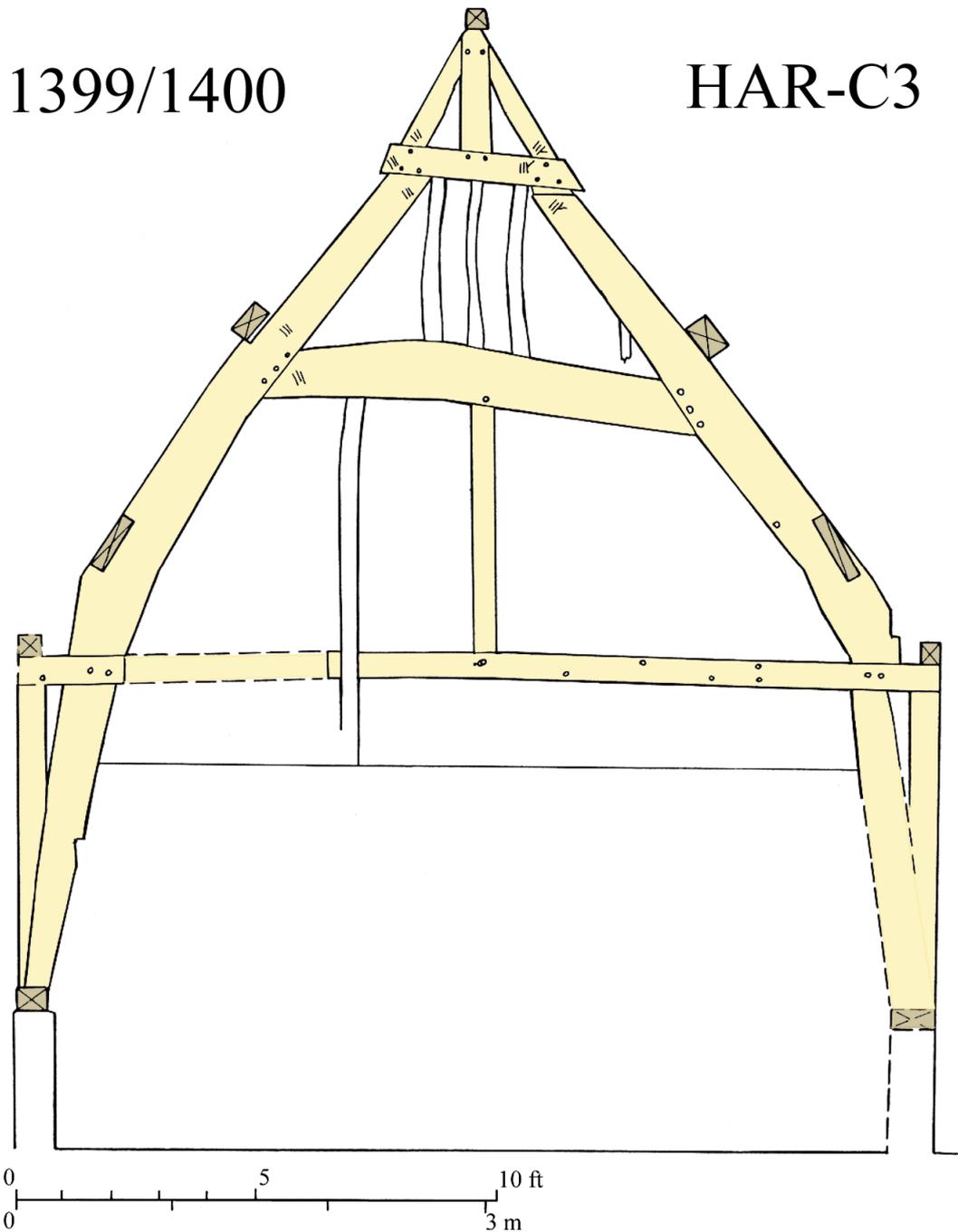


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T3 from the north.

The purlins measure 8½ by 6in and are very slightly trenched into the back of the blades. They are joined with a through-splay scarf with face pegs. The ridge is 6in square in section and is joined in bay II with an edge-halved and double bridled scarf, an exceptionally early use of this scarf. Almost all the wind braces survive. They are straight and are half-dovetail lapped onto the purlins without diminishing. No original rafters remain. Assembly marks were noted on T2 and T3. They are uniform gouged marks with a // for T2, and a /// for T3. A tag is used differentiate the west side of each truss. A pair of parallel lines was noted on the north face of the east blade of T2. This is scribed rather than gouged, and covers the full width of the blade. Smoke distribution seems to be evenly distributed on both sides of ruses T2

and T3 despite each of these being closed above the collars; the surviving purlins and ridge are also smoke-blackened.



Fig. 4. View of the crosswing from the north (Photo D. Clark).

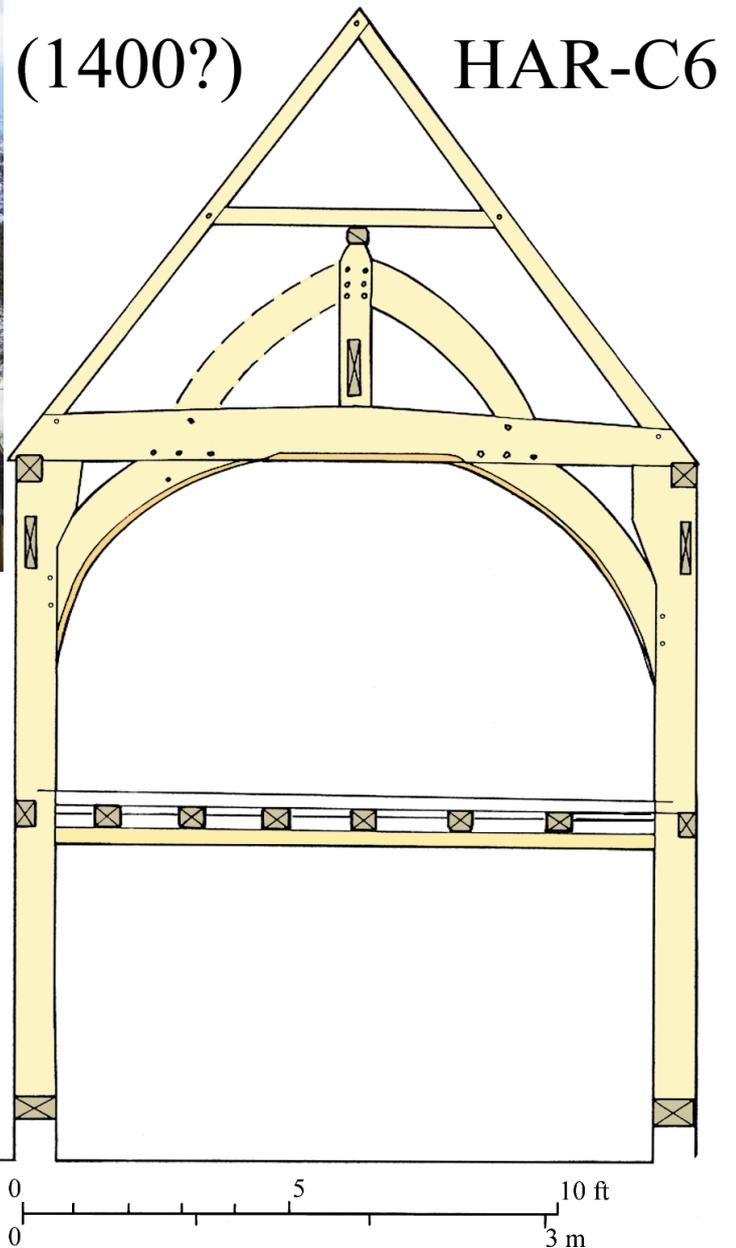


Fig. 5. Section of truss T6 from the west.

**CHAMBER BLOCK:** This is of two bays, with three crown-post trusses. All the trusses have plank-like braces to the cambered tiebeams and square-section down braces to the crown-posts. Both the central crown-post and the king-post of cruck truss T2 have bevelled tops, a distinctive feature suggesting that they are contemporary. The street gable is jettied, and original joists survive in bay V, though they were replaced in bay IV, presumably when the chimney was inserted. The same scarf joints as in the hall ridge are used in the wing wall plates, providing strong evidence that it is contemporary with the hall. The original wall-framing in the chamber block uses tension bracing, similar to that in truss T4 of the cruck range (the only surviving section of wall-framing in that range).

**LATER PHASES:** Seventeenth century work included the addition of an outshut to the wing, probably associated with the linking of the two ranges and the addition of the chimney in the gap between them. A kitchen fireplace and a ceiling were also inserted in the cruck range.

**DOCUMENTARY HISTORY**

Abbey Timbers was freehold in 1804, but its earlier ownership is unknown (Currie (1992)).

## DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

*Sampling Comments:* Sixteen samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 4th July 1988. HAR-C01 to C08 were from the cruck range and HAR-C09 to C16 were from the box-framed chamber block, possibly of a different date. Six of the samples had less than 50 rings (including all but one of those from the wing) and therefore could not be matched.

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

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
<i>Hall</i>							
HAR-C01	Cruck blade truss T2 east side	78	22	—	—	—	—
HAR-C02	Cruck blade truss T3 east side	47	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-C03	Cruck blade truss T3 west side	68	16	—	—	—	—
HAR-C04	Collar truss T4	79	22	—	—	—	—
HAR-C05	Cruck blade truss T4 east side	86	24C	1314	1375	1399	5
HAR-C06	Cruck blade truss T4 west side	65	03	1320	1381	1384	5
HAR-C07	Tiebeam truss T3	Not oak	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-C08	Cruck blade truss T2 west side	71	05	—	—	—	—
<i>Wing</i>							
HAR-C09	Brace post to tiebeam, truss T6 (south)	50	06	—	—	—	—
HAR-C10	Tiebeam truss T6	43	HS	—	—	—	—
HAR-C11	Crown post truss T6	37 +10NM	Ca 10NM	—	—	—	—
HAR-C12	Brace of crown post truss T6 (north)	28 NM	5	—	—	—	—
HAR-C13	Brace post to tiebeam truss T6 (north)	44	HS	—	—	—	—
HAR-C14	Principal post truss T6 north side	48	HS	—	—	—	—
HAR-C15	Principal post truss T5 north side	35 NM	9	—	—	—	—
HAR-C16	Principal post truss T7 south side	38	01	—	—	—	—

Site sequence (composed of samples 5 and 6) 86 rings long matched at 1314-1399 with *t*-values 4.7 (DROITWICH), 4.3 (WICK), 4.2 (MGB-E01), 3.5 (S.ENG).

Felling date: **1399/1400** (sample 5 has complete sapwood).