

Report for
Pomander House, Townsend, Harwell, Oxfordshire

Site Code: HAR-D

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

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

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Oxbow Books

HAR-D: POMANDER HOUSE, TOWNSEND, HARWELL, OXFORDSHIRE

The house has also been known as Pomander Cottage.

Grid reference: SU 4938 8957 Survey Date: 29 July 1988 By: D. Miles

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The radiocarbon dating was supported by a grant from the Vernacular Architecture Group.

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. (1988b) 'Open plank end trusses in the Oxford Region', *Vernacular Architecture*, **19**, 32-33; Currie, C. R. J. (1992) 'Larger medieval houses in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, **57**, 81-244; Letts, J. B. (2000), *Smoke Blackened Thatch* (University of Reading)

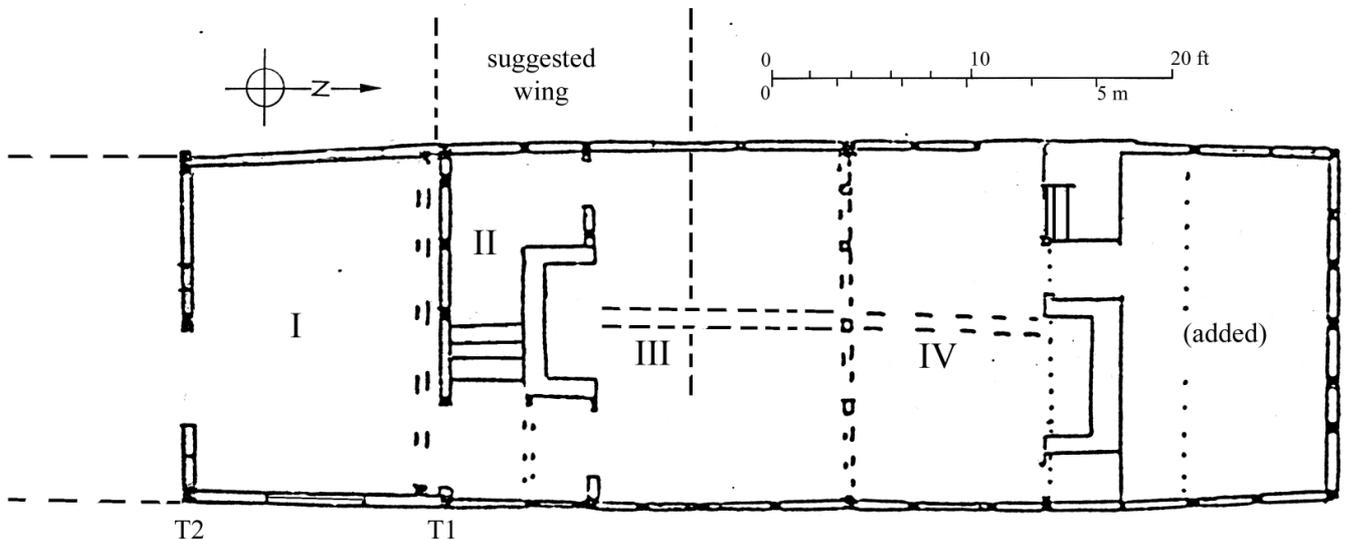


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (after Currie (1987)).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Additional survey information has been taken from Currie 1987 and 1992.

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Pomander House, is a long linear house of several periods. The south end bay is the oldest part, comprising one bay of a cruck open hall (bay I). Two cruck trusses remain, the southern one being the central hall truss, a full cruck with a saddle apex (type 'C') and with evidence of a low tiebeam. The cruck at the northern end of the bay is an open plank end-truss whose blades terminate at the collar which carries a king post (type 'W1' apex). Although an open truss, this design indicates that it must have abutted a contemporary or earlier cross-wing. The small amount of smoke-blackening on the existing timbers within bay I suggests that the southern truss was closed above the collar, separating the roof of the surviving bay from the open hearth in the demolished southern bay.

The style of the plank truss suggests an early or mid 14th century date. Dendrochronology has been unsuccessful, but radiocarbon dating has given a felling date range of *Cal AD 1305-57*. The dating and significance of open plank end trusses are discussed in Currie (1988b).

PHASE 2: In about 1600 a two-and-a-half bay in-line range replaced the previous cross-wing. This included a smoke bay (bay II), a hall (bay III), and a chamber (Bay IV). Bay I was probably converted to service use at this time.

LATER PHASES: In the later eighteenth century a single-storey in-line extension was built to the north. At the same time, or shortly afterwards, the house was divided into two cottages, both with hearth-

passage plan. In the nineteenth century, the property was divided into three cottages and remained like this until about 1925 when R G Bosley converted all three units back into one house. At this time the wattle-and-daub panels were replaced by decorative brickwork.

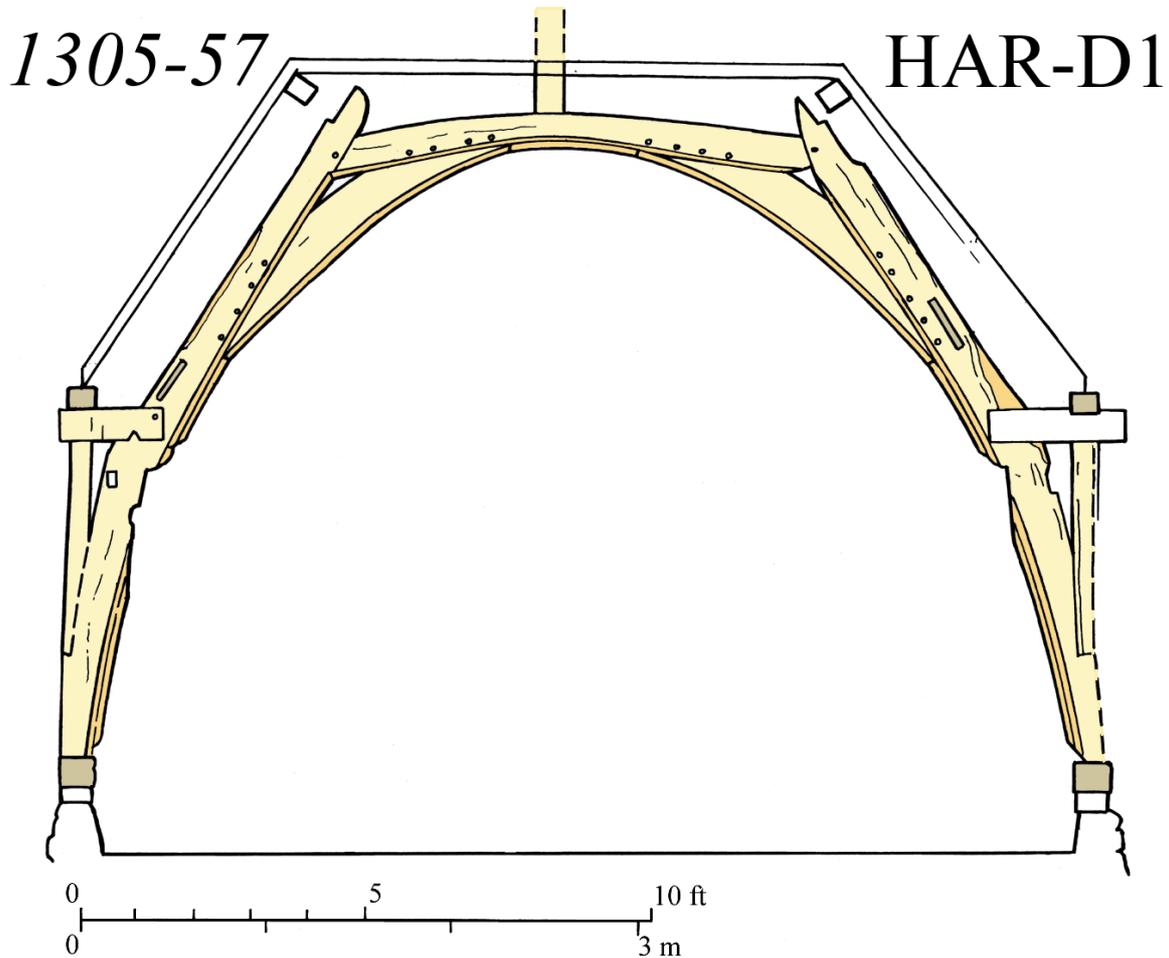


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T1 from south.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: CRUCK HALL (BAY I): The northern half of the original cruck range still remains as bay I. It is about twelve feet long, with the cruck trusses varying from 18ft 6in wide for the plank truss, (T1) to 17ft 6in wide (T2). Truss T1 is an open plank end truss. It has both a hollow moulding and a chamfer on the inside edge of the crucks. It carries a collar and arch braces, both chamfered. The king post supporting the ridge, although apparently original, is not pegged to the collar. The cruck blades terminate above the collar where seatings for purlins are visible. The blades measure 4½in thick and have mortices for wind-braces on the hall side only. Cruck studs rise from the backs of the blades two-thirds of the way down from the cruck spurs. The western spur appears to be original; it has a notch lap joint with the blade. The wall plates are seated in trenches cut into the cruck spurs and the cruck studs are carried in V-notches on the blades.

Truss 2 is an arch-braced truss with the blades terminating in a saddle. The collar and arch braces are also clearly primary. The cruck blades are six inches thick, and have plain flat chamfers on the north side only, but the arch-braces are unchamfered. The tiebeam is very weathered but it may be secondary, perhaps inserted when the southern half of the bay had been demolished. No peg holes are visible on the exterior for it, but inside, on the eastern cruck, the chamfer stops at the position of the tiebeam, suggesting that this truss had a tiebeam originally. The western cruck blade carries a short cruck stud pegged to the back of the elbow, supporting the wall plate. However, the eastern cruck was apparently not wide enough for the same treatment. At eaves level it has an unusual elm packing piece fixed onto the elbow to provide a seating for the wall-plate as well as to take the wind brace mortices. The king post

appears to be a re-used timber and is not pegged into either the collar or the saddle. The wall-plates and purlins have been renewed and reset, as have the rafters, but the original slightly curved wind braces have been retained.

When surveyed, the roof had been completely reconstructed and the roof space was not accessible. Currie (1992) states that the ridge still remains above the ceiling but is not smoke blackened, so is presumably a replacement. He noted some smoke blackening on the north side of the eastern blade of T2.

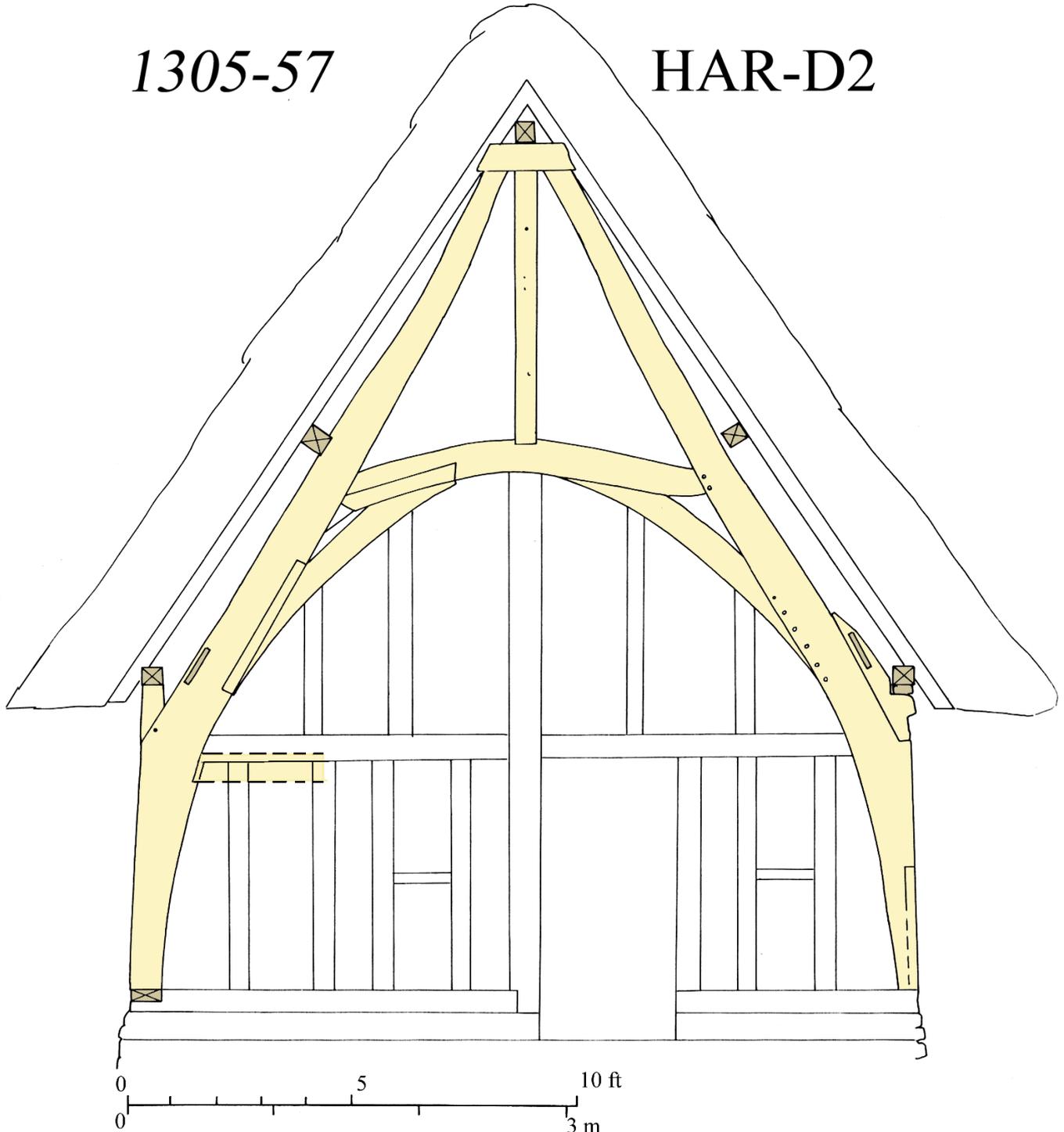


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T2 from south.

PHASE 2: BAY II: Currie (1987, p.38-9) states that the smoke bay (bay II) retained much smoke blackened thatch, along with some of the original louvre support framing. Samples of the thatch were taken for analysis by James Moir and John Letts as part of the historic thatch survey project funded by English Heritage (Letts (2000)).

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The property was copyhold in 1804 (Currie, 1987)

DENDROCHRONOLOGY AND RADIOCARBON DATING

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 29 July 1988. However, none of them could be dated. Sample HAR-D07 was used for radiocarbon dating.

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-D01	Cruck blade truss 1 east side	42	03	—	—	—	—
HAR-D02	Archbrace truss 1 east side	NM	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-D03	Collar truss 1	48	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-D04	Cruck blade truss 1 west side	50	01	—	—	—	—
HAR-D05	Cruck spur truss 1 west side	56	03	—	—	—	—
HAR-D06	Cruck blade truss 2 west side	60	—	—	—	—	—
HAR-D07	Cruck blade truss 2 east side	80	HS	—	—	—	—
HAR-D08	Collar truss 2	49	—	—	—	—	—

Not dated

Radiocarbon dating

Two radiocarbon samples comprising the first and final five rings from core HAR-D07 (80 rings) were submitted to RLAHA, Oxford for radiocarbon dating by accelerator mass spectrometry. These gave the calibrated dates listed below.

Sample	Ref	Cal 95% range	Sapwood info
HAR-D1A	23076	1162-1256	First 5 rings of 80 to h/s boundary
HAR-D1B	23610	1284-1329 (39%) 1341-1396 (56%)	Final 5 rings of 80 to h/s boundary

When combined with the sapwood estimate of 12-43 rings (calculated using OxCal from the measured ring widths), the felling date range of **cal AD 1305-57** was obtained, confirming the early or mid-fourteenth century date suggested typologically.

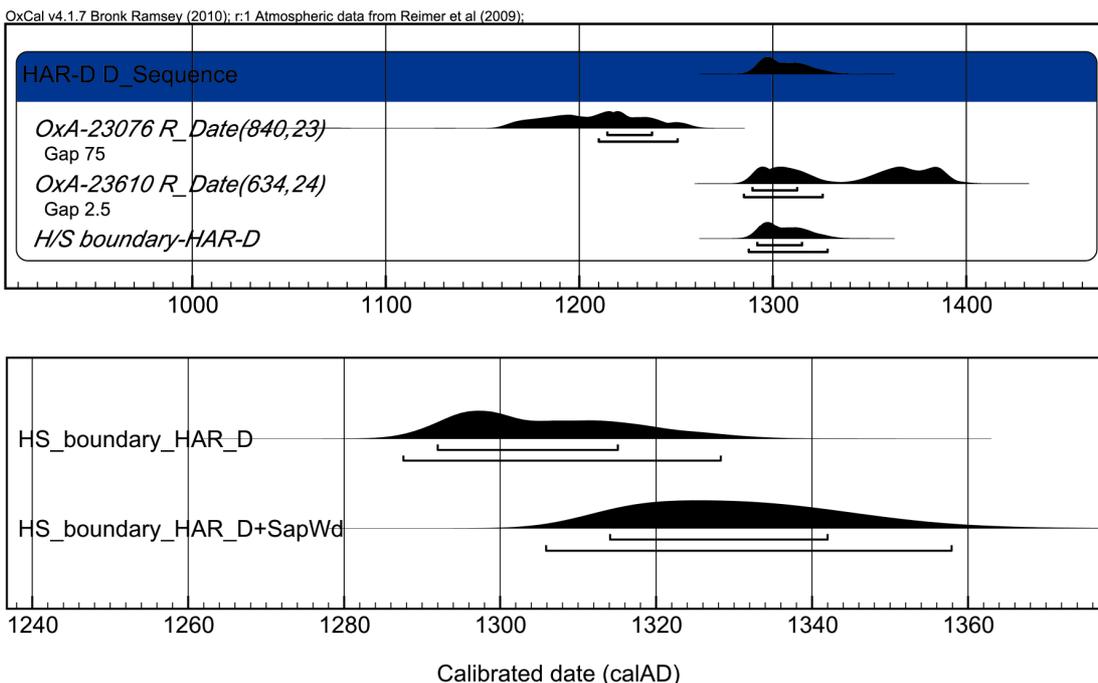


Fig. 4. Combined radiocarbon results for HAR-D. Above: Combination of sample dates. Below: Combination with sapwood estimate.