

Report for
**Terret Close, High Street, Long Wittenham,
Oxfordshire**

Site Code: LOW-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



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

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Oxbow Books

LOW-A: TERRET CLOSE, HIGH STREET, LONG WITTENHAM, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 5457 9376 Survey Date: 3 August 1988/2003 By: D. Miles

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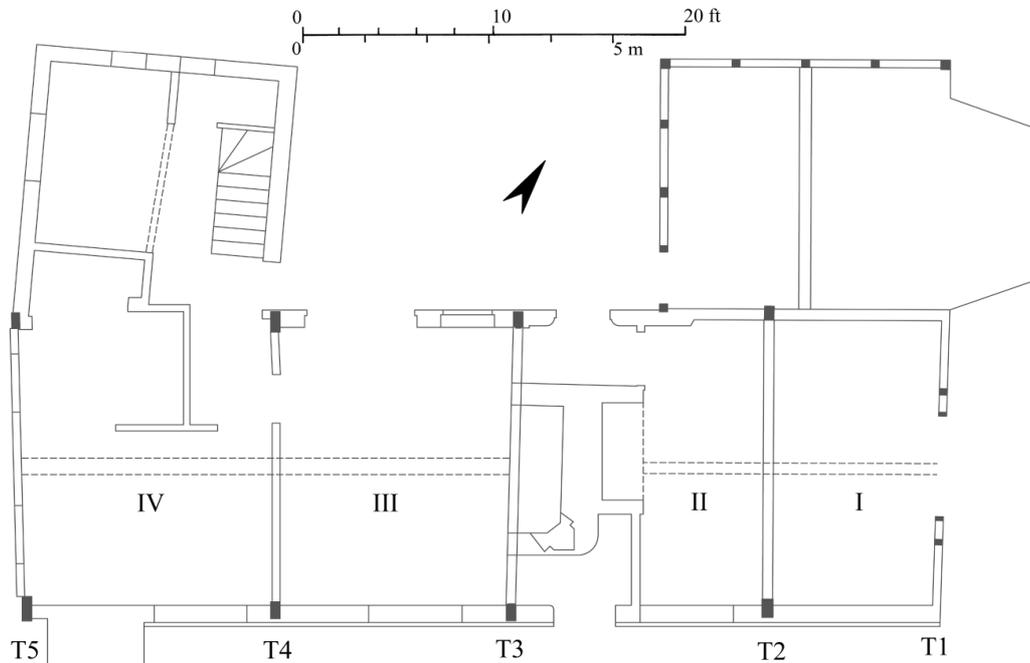


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Terret Close, Long Wittenham, contains a four bay cruck range running north-east to south-west along the north side of High Street. Much of all five cruck trusses remain. Both ends of the house are half-hipped, (type 'V' apexes). The intermediate trusses, T2 and T4, are closed and have type 'C' apexes.

PHASE 1: Truss T3, in the centre of the original two-bay hall, originated as an arch-braced open cruck of high quality, with chamfering running out from the removed braces onto the cruck blades. The blades from this truss gave a felling date range of **1352–1373**, but in the existing building it has been reused or reconstructed, with an added collar and tiebeam, although it remained as an open truss.

PHASE 2: The house was reconstructed with a two-bay central hall with a service bay at one end and a chamber or solar at the other. Soot blackening on the main timbers within bays II and III, shows that this an open hall. If the open hearth was on the site of the existing fireplace north of the open truss T3, then bay I would presumably have been the service end. Neither end bay has evidence for floors. The date of this reconstruction has not been established.

PHASE 3: Probably in the seventeenth century, the hall, chamber and service were floored over although apart from the inserted axial beams, no further indication of date is visible. The three swept dormers probably date from this period although the fenestration has since been renewed.

LATER PHASES: In the eighteenth century, the house was re-fronted with most of the timber wall-framing replaced with brickwork. Probably within the last century, the house was extended behind bays I and IV, leaving an open courtyard between them.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: Truss T3 has substantial 6in thick cruck blades up to collar level; above this level the blades are concealed, but the 5in thick collar appears to be halved across them. The blades are carefully cut, carrying chamfers running out below long mortices (six peg holes) for the tenons of arch-braces. As the collar has no corresponding peg holes, it is clearly a replacement. Originally, this truss may have had a very high collar (perhaps insufficient to prevent spreading), or may have been of base cruck form, with a wider span. On the rear wall, the cruck blade is exposed outside, where it rests on a large padstone (plastered over).

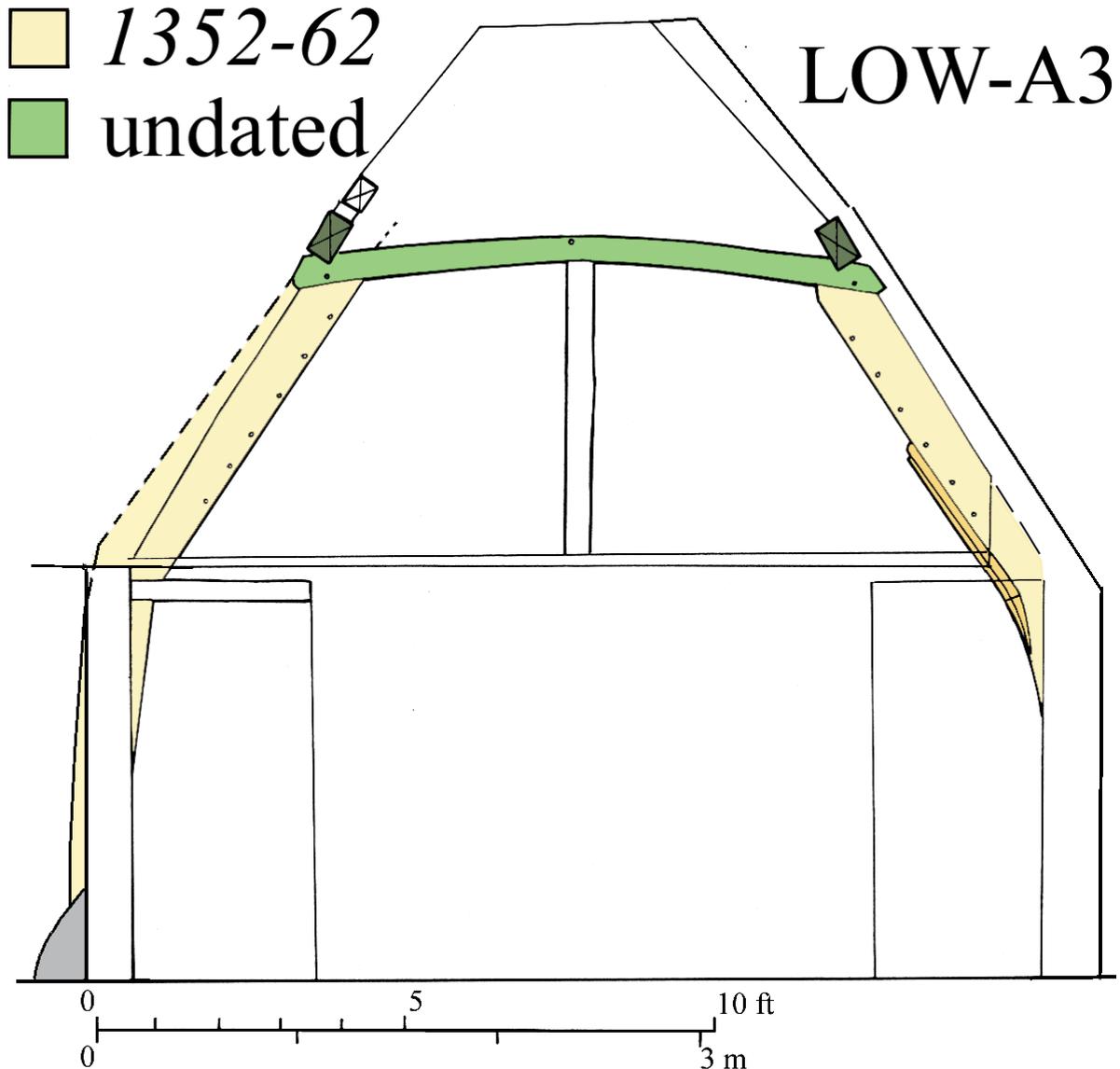


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T3 from the south-west.

PHASE 2: The end trusses T1 and T5 were half-hipped with the crucks terminating at collar level (type 'V' apexes). They are mostly concealed, although they seemed to have the usual arrangement of tiebeam and collar joined to the cruck blades with half-dovetail lap joints. Some intermediate studs remain but these seem mainly to be secondary replacements and alterations.

Trusses T2 and T4 are full crucks, with saddle (type 'C') apexes. In truss T2, the blades are gently curved to almost straight, 7in thick, and have numerous unused peg holes, suggesting that they may have been reused. The 4½in thick collar is joined to the blades with half-dovetail lap joints; it protrudes beyond the blades to support the purlins, one of which is slightly trenched into the back of the blade. The collar has been cut at the face of the cruck blades and raised up about a foot to provide additional headroom; it is simply nailed to the crucks. Packing pieces are pegged to the back of the cruck blades and

give additional support to the purlins. The 5in thick tiebeam is similarly jointed but without the half-dovetail, and appears to be reused. Tiebeam and collar halvings are each secured by two skew pegs. The underside of the tiebeam has stave holes set at regular intervals but with some intermediate ones and with no door jamb mortices evident, although the centre of the tiebeam soffit is covered with a iron strap. Both collars have stave holes below and stave grooves above indicating that these trusses were closed.

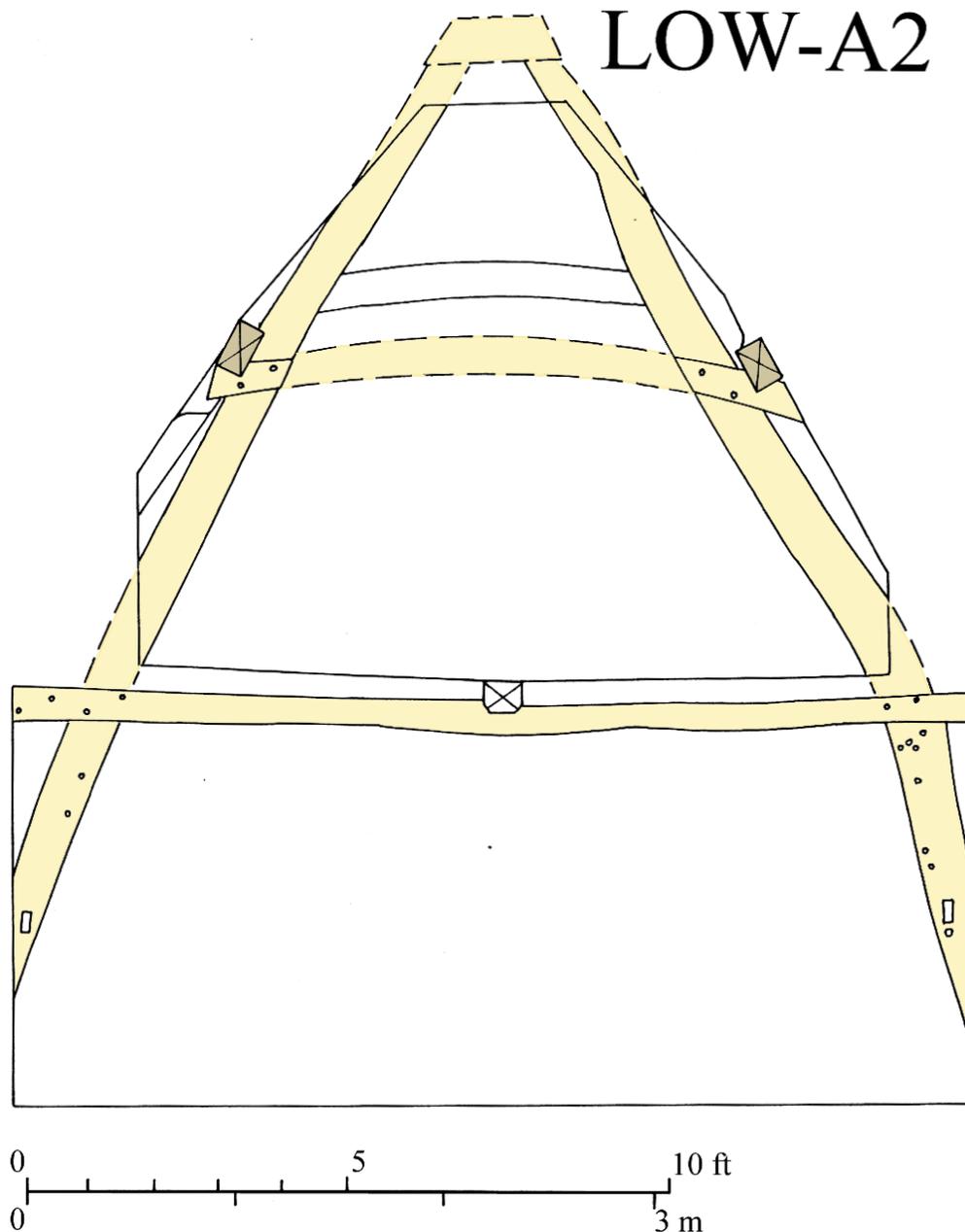


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T2 from west.

On truss T3, the replacement collar is associated with a tiebeam halved onto the southern face of the blades, with a central stud between it and the collar. The purlins are notched into the top of the collar, and appear to be halved into the concealed backs of the blades.

Little of the remaining roof structure is visible, apart from a slightly cranked windbrace rising from T4. All of the soffits have been plastered, and the form of the ceiling plastering suggests that the ridge beams survive for most of the length of the roof with, no doubt, many rafters. Both oak and elm are used in the main structure. All of the cruck blades are oak as are the tiebeams and collars, but the purlins and packing pieces are elm. The cruck blades are all boxed heart, as is the tiebeam to truss T2, but the other ties as well as the collars and purlins are all heart sawn. No assembly marks were noted on any of the cruck frames.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 3 August 1988. Of these, both cruck blades, tie, and collar were sampled from both trusses T2 and T3. Only samples LOW-A05 and LOW-A07 from the cruck blades of truss T3 had sufficient rings for 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
LOW-A01	Cruck blade truss T2 south side	45	—	—	—	—	—
LOW-A02	Cruck blade truss T2 north side	42 NM	11	—	—	—	—
LOW-A03	Collar truss T2	25 NM	—	—	—	—	—
LOW-A04	Collar truss T3	51	15	—	—	—	—
LOW-A05	Cruck blade truss T3 north side	80	22	1272	1329	1351	3d
LOW-A06	Tiebeam truss T3	44	20	—	—	—	—
LOW-A07	Cruck blade truss T3 south side	56	12	1292	1335	1347	3d
LOW-A08	Tiebeam truss T2	46 +2NM	02NM	—	—	—	—

Average last heartwood ring

1332

Site sequences (composed of samples 5, 7), 80 rings long dated 1272–1351 with *t*-values of 6.0(OXFORD), 4.6(S.ENG).

95% felling date range: **1352–1373** (revised from 1352–1383, VA20.89, due to new sapwood estimates).