

Report and Documentary History for  
**83-85 The Causeway, Steventon, Oxfordshire**

*Site Code: STE-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*

## STE-C: 83-85 THE CAUSEWAY, STEVENTON, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 4669 9167

Survey Date: 17 Nov 1989

By: D. Miles

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Documentary history by Nat Alcock and Chris Currie with the assistance of Heather Horner and Catherine Lorigan

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. (1976) 'Smaller domestic architecture in North Berkshire, c 1300 - c 1650', Oxford, D. Phil thesis; Currie, C. R. J. (1992) 'Larger medieval houses in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, **57**, 81-244.

For documentary source references, see the bibliography of primary sources.

## Abbreviations:

BRO Berkshire Record Office, Reading

TNA The National Archives

WAM Westminster Abbey Muniments

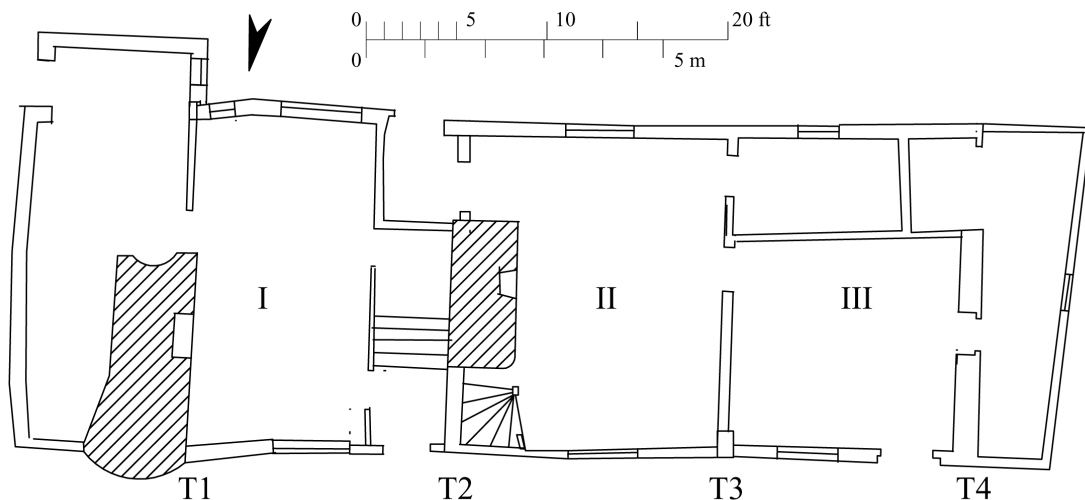


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (after a plan by W. E. Godfrey).

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASES 1-3: Nos. 83-85 The Causeway is a three-bay cruck house without a crosswing, in which all four pairs of crucks remain. Dendrochronology has shown that the northernmost truss (T1) has a felling date range of **1317-46**, while the other three trusses date to **1365/6**. Unused mortices and halvings, variations in the smoke blackening, and different sets of assembly marks point to reuse or reconstruction of all the trusses. The dating suggests that T1 may have originated from a different building to the other trusses. However, since it spans the same width as the other trusses, a simpler explanation is that it used stockpiled or dead timber and also dates from 1365/6.

Trusses T1 and T2 are similar, although the former is partly concealed. Both have their blades terminating above the collars (apex types 'V' (end truss) and 'W'). Although truss T2 is now internal, it is possible that it originated as an end truss, since it is one of only two fourteenth-century examples of a 'W' apex and the other example (MDM-A) forms part of a lean-to end (see Chapters 5 and 8.6); however, T1 seems most likely to have been internal. Truss T3 has a saddle carrying a short king post (type 'F1'), and truss 4 has a saddle carrying a miniature half-hip (essentially a type 'C' apex).

The house was probably reconstructed in the fifteenth century using these earlier crucks. In its fifteenth-century form, the house had a two-bay open hall in bays I and II, with bay III as a floored chamber at the upper end. This bay has an early floor with lodged joists.

LATER PHASES: An axial stack was been inserted in bay II and an end chimney in bay I, which presumably became the kitchen. The extension at the east end and the lean-to at the west end both appear to be later, perhaps added at some time when the house was in divided occupancy. That at the east end is built in square-panel timber framing.

### STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASES 1-2: TRUSSES T2, T3 & T4: In truss T2, the blades are elbowed and terminate above the collar which is slightly cranked. The blades are between 5¼in and 6in thick, and appear to have been truncated after their original use. Tenoned spurs extend out at each side, below which on the north side is an empty lapped half-dovetail housing which also suggest that the truss has been reconstructed. Below this again are mortices for a removed tiebeam.

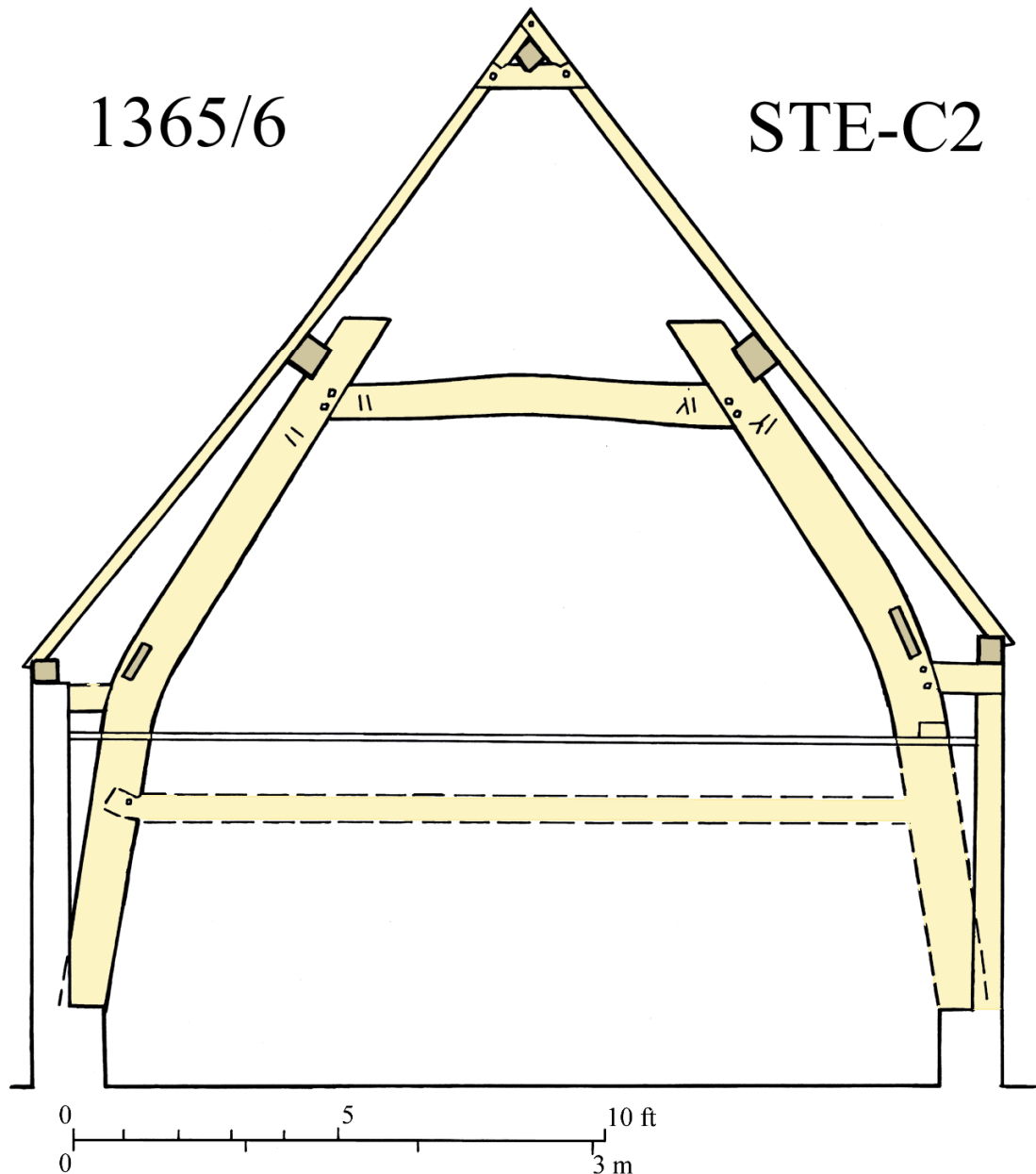


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T2 from the east.

Re-use is further supported by the two sets of assembly marks on the east face of the southern blade. This carries a scribed three or four stroke mark which is not repeated on the adjacent collar. However, a gouged | is superimposed over the earlier mark. This is present on the collar and again lower down the blade, at the position of the missing tiebeam. A final piece of evidence confirming re-use is the presence of three peg holes at the collar/cruck joint. The top hole is ¾in diameter and has been used, the 1in middle hole was also used, but the ¾in bottom hole was unused, with the tenon not being bored

through. On the north blade, a | with a tag was noted at the junction of the collar and the blade. Here the collar and cruck spur have been pegged with 1in pegs.

Truss T3 has 6in thick slightly curved blades which rise to a 7in square saddle supporting a short king post (3in thick). This carries a diagonally set ridge piece. The collar is tenoned into the blades, and was arch-braced. The blades have half-inch chamfers on both sides above the collar. As the crucks are less elbowed than in T2, packing pieces were laid over the backs of the crucks; these rise almost to the saddle and are slightly trenched to carry the purlins. The truss has only one type of assembly mark, four gouged strokes with tag, on the west side, and there is a scratched 'square' mark lower down on the north blade. The truss is marked on the east face, as T1 and T2, but the pegs are driven in from the other side, like T2. This indicates that the building was reared from west to east. An unused peg hole a few inches below the collar may relate to a former collar; however, Currie and Fletcher (1972) suggest that it might have been for a spandrel strut to the missing arch-braces.

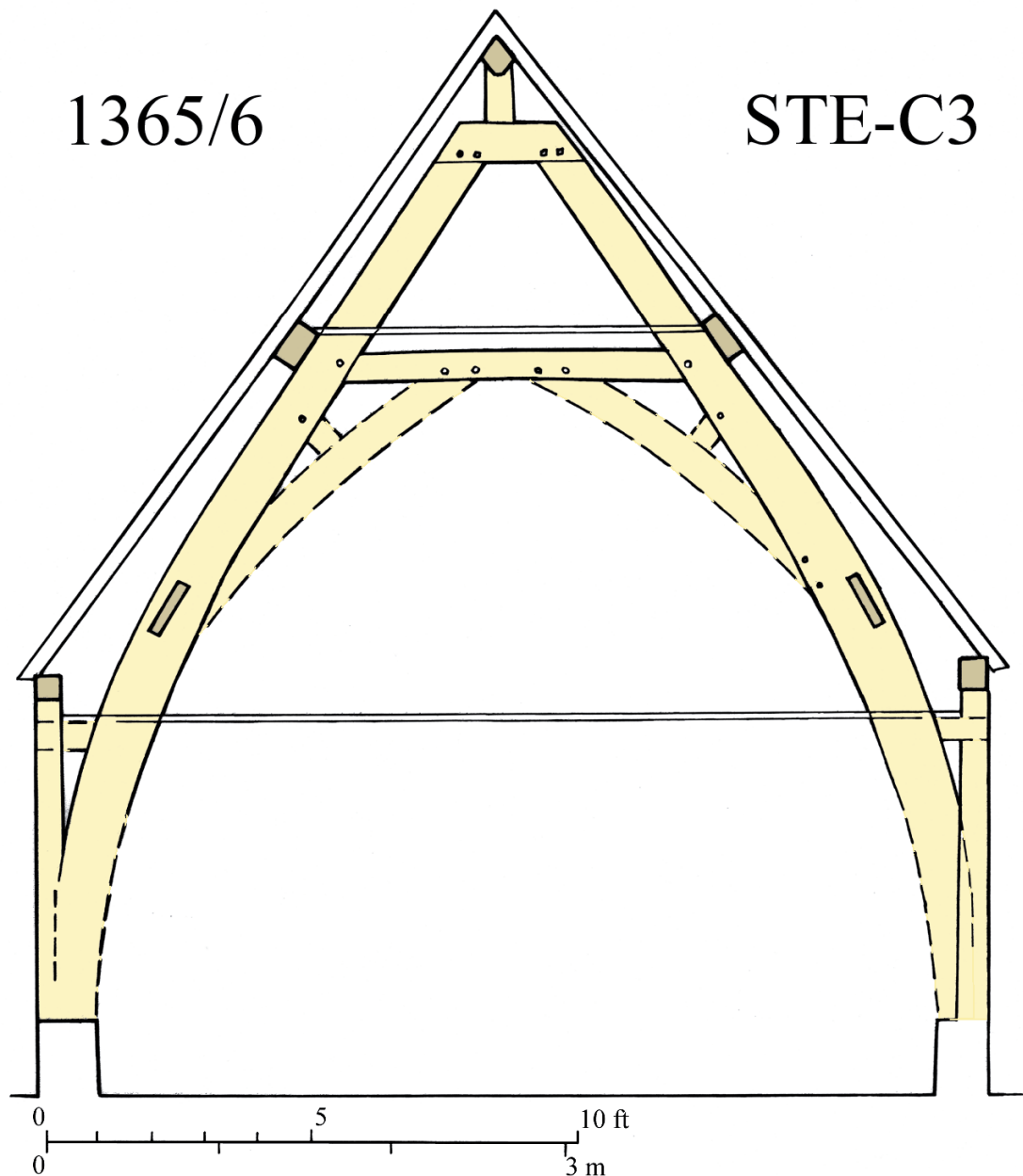


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T3 from the east. The packing pieces are not shown.

From what is visible of truss T4, it appears to be identical to T3 at the top, except that it has no king post above the saddle. While the side of the saddle has two peg holes as though for a king-post mortice, inspection of the top surface shows that no mortice was cut; however, the back side of the saddle is housed for rafters, forming a miniature half-hip.

TRUSS T1: Although the tree-ring date indicates that the blades of truss T1 were felled earlier than those of trusses T2-4, it is suggested above that they were constructed at the same time. This truss is very similar in form to T2. Only the two cruck blades and the upper collar remain. The blades terminate above the morticed collar (type 'W' apex). There are no peg holes in the collar that might indicate that the truss was a half-hipped end truss, and the form of the curved collar might be expected for a full-height truss. A large 1 1/8in peg-hole in the centre of the collar is a feature found in a number of other structures.<sup>1</sup> Each blade contains a mortice for a secondary, lower collar below the existing one. The upper collar is pegged at each end with two 3/4in pegs, whereas the missing collar only used one 7/8in peg. Lower down, a trench for a tiebeam appears to have been unused, as it contains no pegholes. The purlins are trenched onto the backs of the blades at the level of the upper collar.

Two types of assembly marks are used. The first is a gouged | across the east face of the south blade and onto the collar. The line is no longer straight, because the cruck blade has pulled away from the collar at the bottom of the joint by 1in. A similar mark is present adjacent to the unused trench for the tiebeam. Between the collar and the position of the lower collar, four strokes are scribed into the east face of each blade. The east side of the crucks and collar is heavily soot encrusted, but there is only slight smoke blackening on the north purlin.

PHASE 3: RECONSTRUCTION OF BAYS I, II & III: In the present building, the three bays range from 13 to 15ft in length, and are 17ft in breadth. A common feature in all three bays is the use of gouged assembly marks; T1 = I, T2 = II, T3 = III, (no marks visible on T4). The purlins and ridge also probably belong to this phase. The purlins are generally 8 by 5 1/2in and are of elm. They run through all three bays and are scarfed immediately east of T2, and midway between T3 and T4. The joint used is a double-pegged through-splayed scarf with diminished soffit, the splay positioned so that it cannot be seen from below. The purlins are trenched into the backs of the cruck blades, generally in original seatings. The ridge is 4 1/2in square and is diagonally set. It contains two scissor scarf joints, in the middle of bay I, and to the north of T3. Windbraces survive in bay II, with evidence for them in bay I. It was not possible to confirm whether they were used in bay I.

The rafters average 2 1/2-3 by 4 1/2-5in and are of elm, set at about 18in centres. At T2, a pair of larger rafters (3 by 5 1/4in) carry a yoke which clasps the ridge to the rafters. Bay II has very substantial soot deposits, as much as 1/2in thick adjacent to T3. Currie and Fletcher (1972) noted an absence of soot on the south side of T3, suggesting that despite its open-truss form, it was probably closed above a concealed tiebeam.<sup>2</sup> The rafters have been reset, but one original rafter remains on the south side of bay III, seven on the south side of bay II and all nine on the north side. Bay I has one on the south side and five on the north. A window head and sill have been reused in this bay as short rafters. The head is that of a six-light window with mortices for mullions and diagonally-set strengthening rods in between. The sill is for a four light window with diagonally-set mullions and a seventeenth century scribed moulding; it is very weathered.

The floor in bay III is apparently original to this phase. It has 4 1/2 by 5 1/2-6in joists running axially, set at 19-20 1/2in centres and includes a later trimmed opening.

LATER PHASES: The inserted floor in bay II has 5 by 3-3 1/2in wide joists at 17in centres set into a 11 by 9in deep-chamfered axial beam with stepped plaque stops. Both the main chimneys are of clunch, with chamfered wooden fireplace lintels.

<sup>1</sup> The truss is described in Currie and Fletcher (1972) as having had a central king-post using this peg-hole, but in reality the collar does not contain a mortice for such a timber.

<sup>2</sup> A similar arrangement was found at Three Chimneys, Mapledurham (MDM-C, 1458).

## DENDROCHRONOLOGY AND RADIOCARBON DATING

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

*Sampling Comments:* Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 17 November 1989. Samples 1 and 2 from the cruck blades of T1 matched together and formed a sequence which dated with a last measured ring date of 1311. Four other samples from trusses T2, T3 and T4 dated, with consistent heartwood/sapwood transition dates. One sample had complete sapwood. Two other samples failed to date. The dendrochronology shows that truss 1 was from timbers felled a generation before those used for trusses T2, T3 and T4.

Radiocarbon analysis was carried out for John Fletcher. Two samples, presumably from the truncated tops of the cruck blades of T2, were used, although the number of rings from the centre of the sample areas to the heartwood/sapwood boundary is not known. An original report in 1968 was revised in Currie & Fletcher (1972) to 1275/1280±40, with estimates of 55 and 75 years for the numbers of missing rings respectively. A tree-ring date by Fletcher for a blade of the same truss gave a felling date of 1305, but is superseded by the present work (*Vernacular Architecture* **12** (1981), 38-9 and **13** (1982), 49).

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

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
STE-C01	Rear (south) cruck blade truss T1	105	05	1207	1306	1311	2
STE-C02	Front cruck blade truss T1	88	—	1178	—	1265	2
STE-C03	Front cruck blade truss T2	56	HS	1281	1336	1336	1
STE-C04	Rear cruck blade truss T3	98	23	1257	1331	1354	3a
STE-C05	Front cruck blade truss T3	80	03	—	—	—	—
STE-C06	Front cruck blade truss T4	47	03	1301	1344	1347	1
STE-C07	Yoke truss T4	43	16	—	—	—	—
STE-C08	Rear cruck blade truss T2	66	18C	1300	1347	1365	1

Site sequences: (composed of samples 1, 2), 134 rings long dated 1178–1311 with *t*-values of 5.4(S.ENG), 7.4(READING); (composed of samples 3, 6, 8), 85 rings long dated 1281–1365 with *t*-values of 5.4(OXFORD), 5.1(S.ENG); (sample 4), 98 rings long dated 1257–1354 with *t*-values of 5.6(OXFORD), 4.9(READING)

95% felling dates and ranges: (samples 1, 2 of truss 1), 1315-1347 (previously 1319–1344); Ox-Cal refined felling date range **1317-46**; (samples 3, 4, 6, 8 of trusses 2, 3, 4), sample 8 with the latest dated ring has complete sapwood: **1365/6**.

## DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The house appears to have been a small freeholder's cottage. In 1721, the property consisted only of the house and an orchard. It can be traced from 1664 with certainty and is plausibly identified with a freeholding held with 1½ acres in 1548.

### Location

The house stands on plot 15 on the Tithe Map (Fig. 4), when Charles Bedwell owned both it and plot 15a; he occupied the front house himself, with tenants in the back cottages. At one time it was known as Bee Cottage and has also been called Godfreys, after a former owner.

### History after 1664

This holding is identified as a freeholding in 1721, when Arnold Evetts of Oxford sold a messuage and orchard owing a 3d quitrent to the manor, to Nicholas Smith of Steventon.<sup>3</sup> In 1765, the latter left his freehold property in Steventon to his wife Margaret, with a copyhold close in the south field of Steventon called Midlinch croft (surrendered to him in 1739 by Richard and Martha Bristow).

<sup>3</sup> Information from deeds in the owner's possession in 1986.

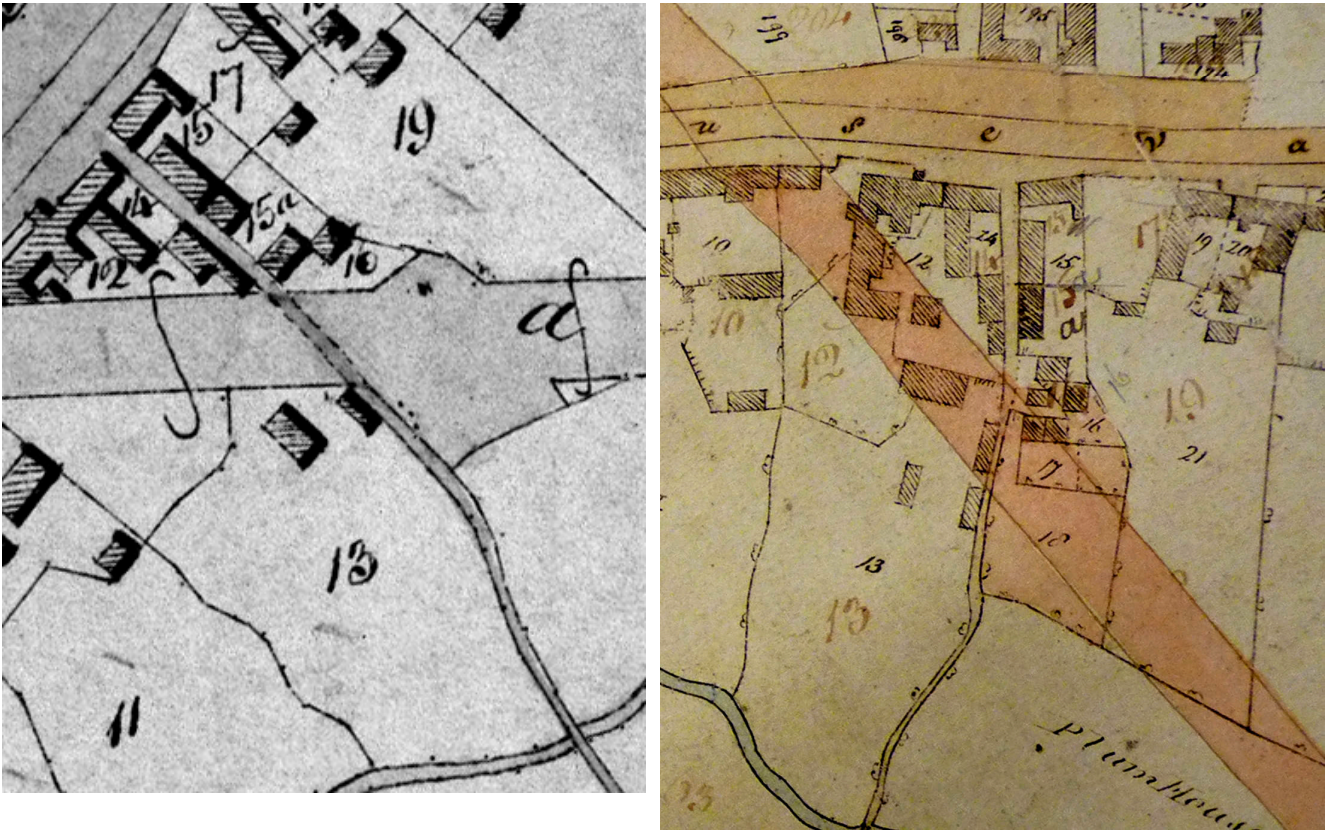


Fig. 4. Excerpts from the 1842 and 1839 maps of Steventon: (a, left) the 1842 Tithe Map;  
(b, right) the 1839 map

83-5 The Causeway is plot 15 (1839 map reproduced courtesy of Steventon Parish Council).

Margaret in turn devised the messuage in Steventon to her elder son, Thomas, in 1782, with a shop, barn and stable. He left this house and his copyhold cottage (holding 86 in the index, lying north of the green)<sup>4</sup> in his will dated 23 Dec 1808 to trustees for Elizabeth, his sister-in-law, for life, then to be sold, with the profits going to her seven children (named) (with his brother Richard).<sup>5</sup> The children sold the cottage to Charles Bedwell of Steventon, tailor, in 1834. He had built two new cottages on the plot by 1839 (TM 15a) and in 1842, was the owner and occupier of the main house (TM 15), with tenants living in the cottages. He died in 1846 and the property passed to his wife, Mary Ann Bedwell.<sup>6</sup> In 1849, she sold it to Richard Greenway, who died in 1866 leaving it to Sarah Lloyd (the owner in 1884) (died 1889) and then to his nephew Albert Edward Bosley of Washington, USA. The latter sold it in 1890 to Richard Hopkins Betteridge (the owner in 1910); in 1890, no. 83-5 was divided into four cottages paying rents of £5 to £6 per annum and was described as 'very old and dilapidated'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This had been acquired by Nicholas Smith in 1755; it was not mentioned in the latter's will and so would have been inherited directly by Thomas in 1765.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas was buried in Steventon in 1812 (*Reg*). The will is recited in the 1815 admission of his trustees to the copyhold (4/132), but appears not to have been proved. Although the burial of Elizabeth Smith, widow, in 1800 seems plausibly to relate to this Elizabeth, the wording of the will indicates that she was still alive in 1808. Register entries: Baptisms of Thomas (1737) and Richard (1743), sons of Nicholas and Margaret Smith. Marriage of Richard Smith and Elizabeth Lyford (1775); nine children baptised, from Elizabeth (1776) and Richard (II) (1777) to Sarah (1793) (with two dying young); death of Richard Smith (1793).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Bedwell married Mary Ann Smith in 1826; she was one of the eight children of Richard (II) (baptised 1809).

<sup>7</sup> Owner's deeds: 27 March 1721. Will of Nicholas Smith, dated 30 September 1743, proved 25 July 1765 (*also BRO*). Will of Margaret Smith, 17 June 1782, also leaving freehold lands in the

The deed of 1721 describes the former ownership of the house. It had descended from William Arnold and his wife Helen to their daughter Elizabeth who married – Evetts, and their son was Arnold Evetts of Oxford, the seller in that year. A William Arnold can be identified as the owner in the 1686 rental, partly from the name and partly from the sequence in the mainly topographically-arranged rental. He was paying 2s 3d and is succeeded by ‘Widow Arnold’ in the 1696 rental, paying the same amount. The additional 2s in addition to the 3d quit rent relates to four acres of arable land, which he acquired in two parcels, in 1666 and 1682.<sup>8</sup> This William (a grocer according to his 1688 will) had a wife, Jane, and the heir to this copyhold land was their son, another William.<sup>9</sup> The latter was only two years old (baptised 6 Jan 1686/7) and his mother Jane was appointed as his guardian.<sup>10</sup>

From the ownership sequence, Helen must have been William’s first wife, the property being settled on their marriage to descend after William and Helen’s deaths to the (only) child of this marriage. A daughter, Elizabeth, left 1s in William’s 1688 will, was presumably Elizabeth Evetts.<sup>11</sup> William’s immediate predecessor is unknown and the rental of 1646/7 includes no obvious entry for the property.<sup>12</sup> A court roll entry in 1661 relating to 81 The Causeway (see STE-I) gives an abuttal as the house of William Arnold to the south, indicating that he already owned it then.

This house can plausibly be identified with the freehold owned by Richard Baker in 1548, held with 1½ acres (rent 9d), since it is the only freehold house included in the 1548 survey that is not otherwise accounted for.<sup>13</sup> However, the history of the house between then and 1661 has not been established. A number of references to freehold messuages are found in the court rolls before 1548, but none can be linked to Richard Baker’s freehold.

### Probate records

As well as the various wills mentioned above, that of William Arnold (1688) is believed to refer to the house. His inventory lists six rooms, including the Shop, which must have been part of the house. It contained mercery goods worth £20, an oatmeal mill, a mortar and a salting trough.

**William Arnold** of Steventon, grocer. 31 Jan, 1687[/8], proved 30 May, 1689.<sup>14</sup> To daughter Elizabeth, 1s; to son, William 1s; rest of goods and chattels to Jane my loving wife, executrix. Witnesses: John Fountaine, James Corderoy, Richard Corderoy.

Inventory: taken 10 May 1689. Rooms:

Shop, Hall, Kitchen, Buttry, Barne, 4 stocks bees, Best Chamber, Chamber over Hall [in that order].

common fields of Steventon and the copyhold close to her younger son, Richard. Will of Thomas Smith. Sales to Charles Boswell, to Richard Greenway and to R H Betteridge (17 June 1890).

<sup>8</sup> Admissions 1/37 and 1/156. The rent for the second admission is given as 2s, apparently in error, since in 1689 on the admission of William’s son after his death, the total rent is given as 2s, the standard rate for four acres; Eventually, in 1713, the younger William surrendered this property to John Greenaway.

<sup>9</sup> Will, TNA, PROB 11/395

<sup>10</sup> Jane Arnold, widow, is recorded in 1698 as the occupier of a near-by house (on Little Lane, TM 16, partly destroyed by the railway in 1840).

<sup>11</sup> Other possibilities are inconsistent with the ages of the parties involved. The William Arnold born in 1686 could not have had a grandson able to sell property, and thus be of full age, in 1721.

<sup>12</sup> A John Middleton paying 2s 3d is listed at about the right point in the sequence, but William Arnold’s rent only reached this total after he bought his field land, so the identity of the values does not in itself support the identification.

<sup>13</sup> Survey, WAM 7358. Apart from ‘Botleys’, identifiable as 99 Causeway, the only other freeholding in 1548 had one yardland and is believed to have been combined with STE-A (q.v.).

<sup>14</sup> Will: TNA, PROB 11/395; inventory: PROB 4/4513.