

Report and Documentary History for
The Leopard, Bishop's Tachbrook, Warwickshire
Site Code: BIT-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

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Fig. 1. View from the east

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Oxbow Books

BIT-A: THE LEOPARD, BISHOP'S TACHBROOK, WARWICKSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 3148 6150 Survey Date: 12 October 1988 By: D. Miles

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Reference: Steane, John (1981) 'Standlake Rectory', CBA Regional Group 9 Newsletter 11, 81.

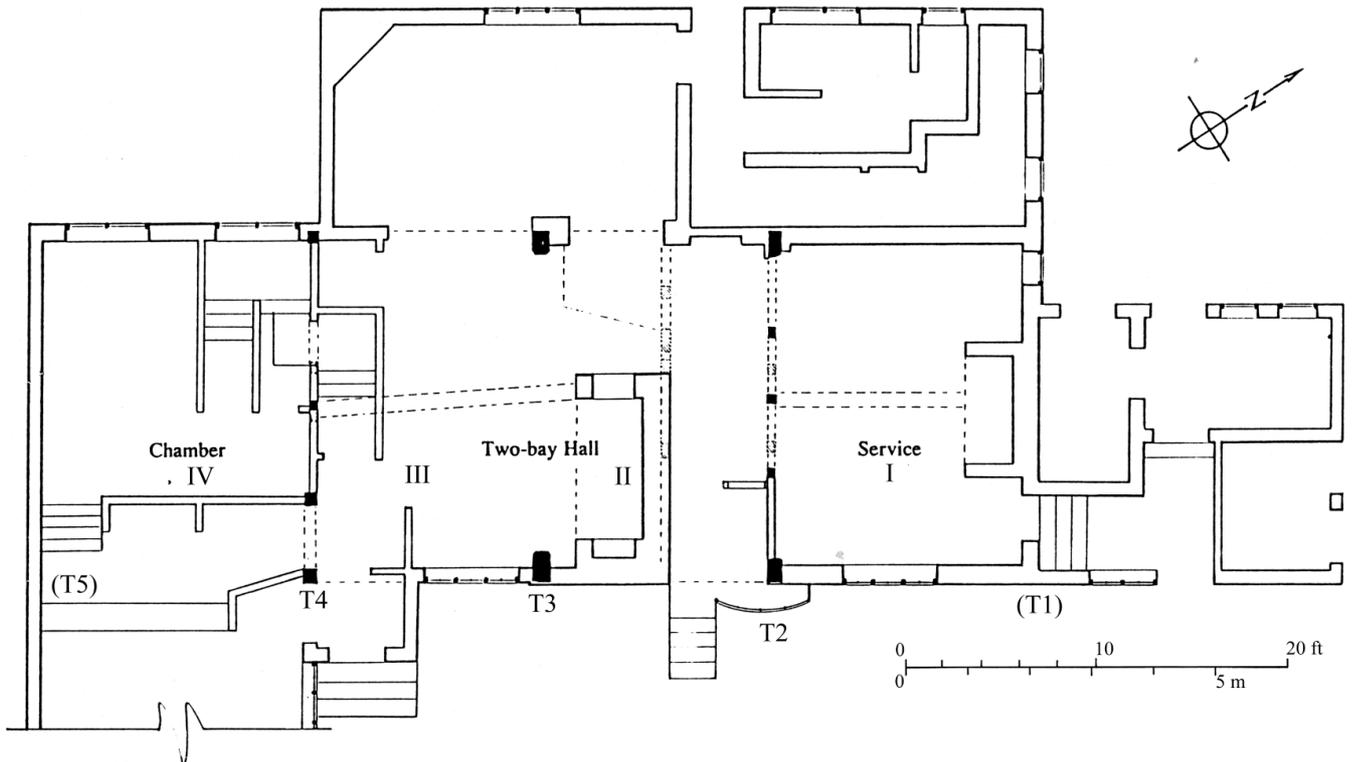


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: The Leopard originated as a four bay hall house of good quality, dated to 1413/14 from a combination of dendrochronological evidence and architectural character. Bay I is thought to have been the lower end as the adjoining bay contains what appears to be the head of a screen partition behind the existing chimney. Bays II and III comprised a two-bay open hall, with two smoke louvre positions, one at the position of the present chimney stack and the other in bay II, just beyond the open truss. The central arch-braced cruck has evidence for a mantel-beam and ogee braces. One of the other trusses (T2) is of jointed form and the other (T4) is an unusual composite construction. All three trusses have type 'C' apexes and are heavily smoke-blackened. Bay IV was presumably the upper end, but has been totally replaced in the seventeenth century reconstruction of this end of the house.

PHASE 2: In the early seventeenth century, the hall appears to have been floored over, with a chimney stack being built between the presumed screen and the open truss, and with a winder staircase behind this stack. Shortly after this, the upper end (bay IV), was replaced with the present two-storey wing which was used for further accommodation. Most of the original fabric from this end has either been removed or covered up in later alterations.

Documentary evidence shows that from the seventeenth century, the building was a small freeholding with 2 acres of land, and that it has been used as a public house since the nineteenth century.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: In bay I, the original north end truss (T1) was replaced sometime in the nineteenth century by a brick wall.

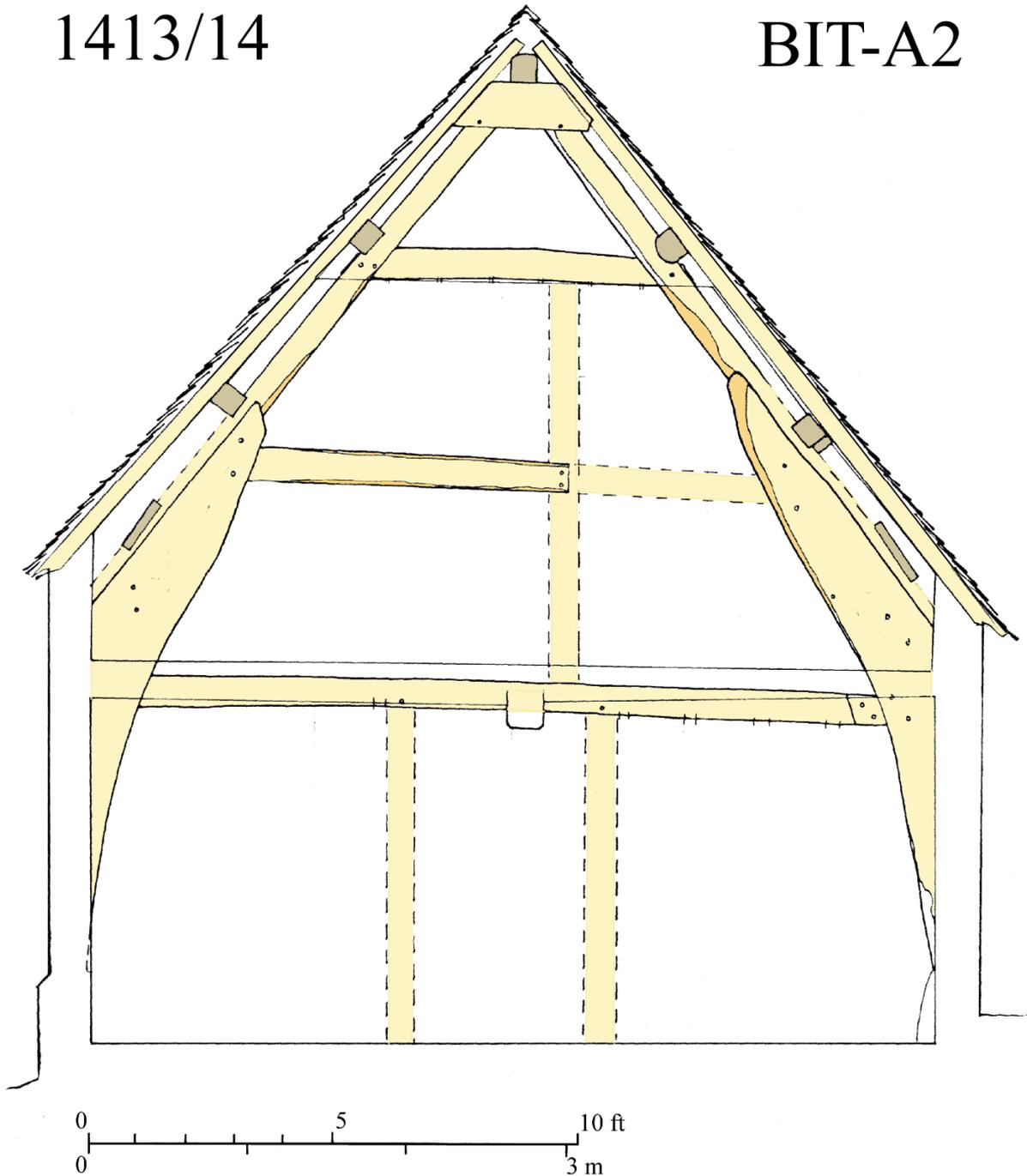


Fig. 3(a). Section of truss T2 from north.

Truss T2 is of crudely jointed form with blades which reach half way up the roof slope, where they are overlaid with squared principal rafters which are joined by a massive saddle (type 'C'). The blades are roughly splayed back to meet the principals. Visually the blades appear to be cut from the same tree. The tiebeam is somewhat below eaves level, and the truss has two collars. All three horizontal members are jointed into the blades and principals with bare-faced half-lapped dovetails with 'refined entries'. The underside of the tiebeam was uncovered during alterations in 1991 and two mortices were found indicating the position of the doorposts of a central doorway. From the roof space it was noted that the

area above and below the upper collar still retains much of its medieval wattle and daub. Scribed assembly marks are present on the south, or upper, face of the saddle and the rear principal.

In bay II, much of the wall frame survives beneath the front rendering; a chamfered inside edge of the wall-plate and a brace from the cruck stud of T3 was noted. Most of the rear wall has been lost through alterations in the nineteenth century and later.

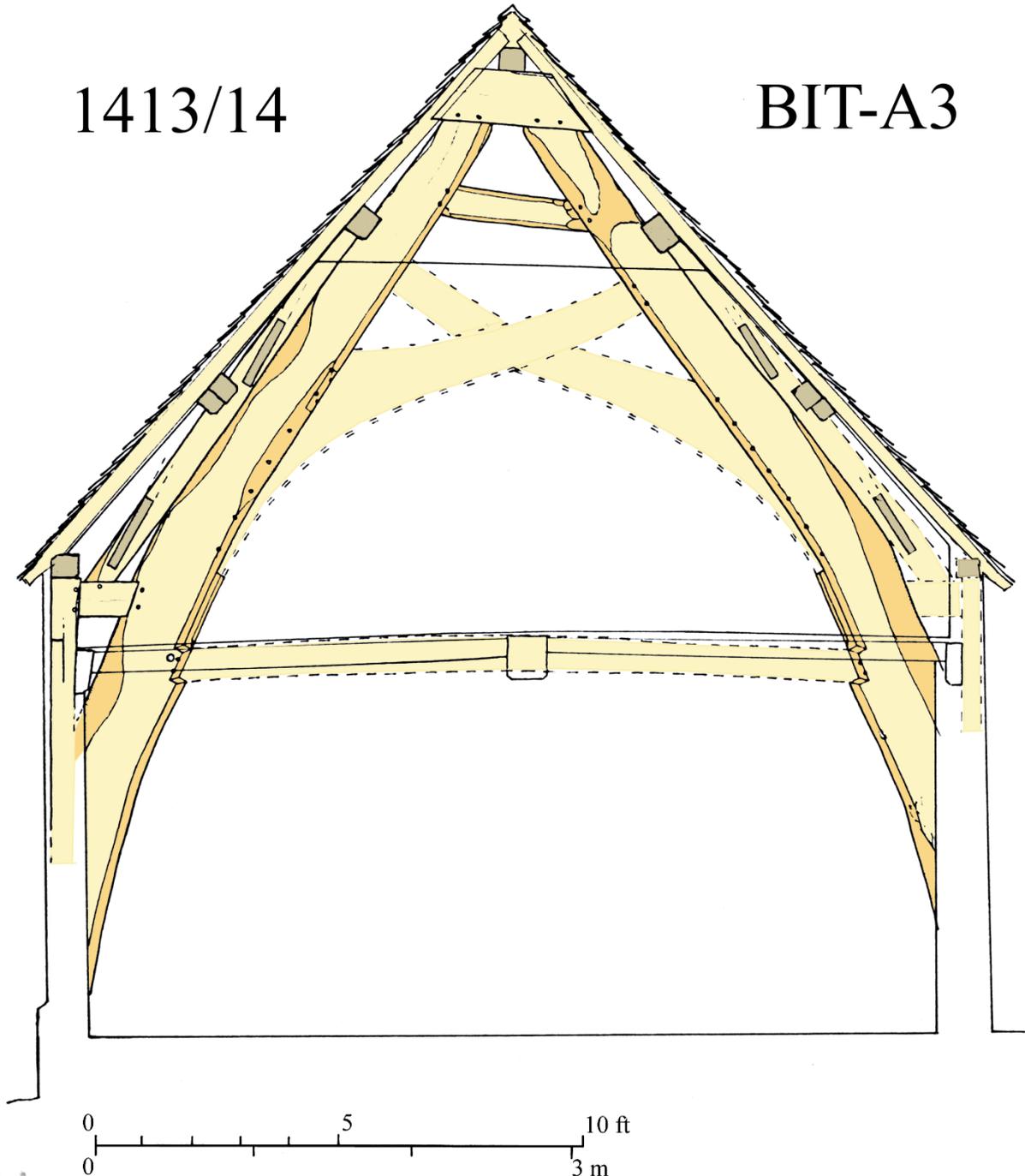


Fig. 3(b). Section of truss T3 from north.

Truss T3 is an excellent example of a high quality open truss despite its having lost its mantel beam and arch braces. The crucks are well shaped and massive, probably cut from the same tree. Each inside edge is decorated with a heavy half-inch chamfer which has a double set-back where the mantel beam was morticed. The existence of the latter is indicated by its mortice and pegholes. The chamfer of the arch braces is continued on the cruck blades, showing them to have been 4½in thick with a ¾in chamfer. The very high mortice visible on the (west) side of T3 (obscured on the east side) seems unlikely to have held

a collar, and the preferred interpretation is for there to have been ogee braces (cf The Old Rectory, Standlake, Oxfordshire (Steane, 1981)). The wall plates sit on top of cruck studs which are tied back into the cruck blades by short spurs tenoned into the studs about an inch below the bottom of the wall plates. Packing pieces have been morticed into these spurs, which carry the lower tier of purlins and both sets of wind braces. These braces average about 2 by 9ins and are slightly curved.

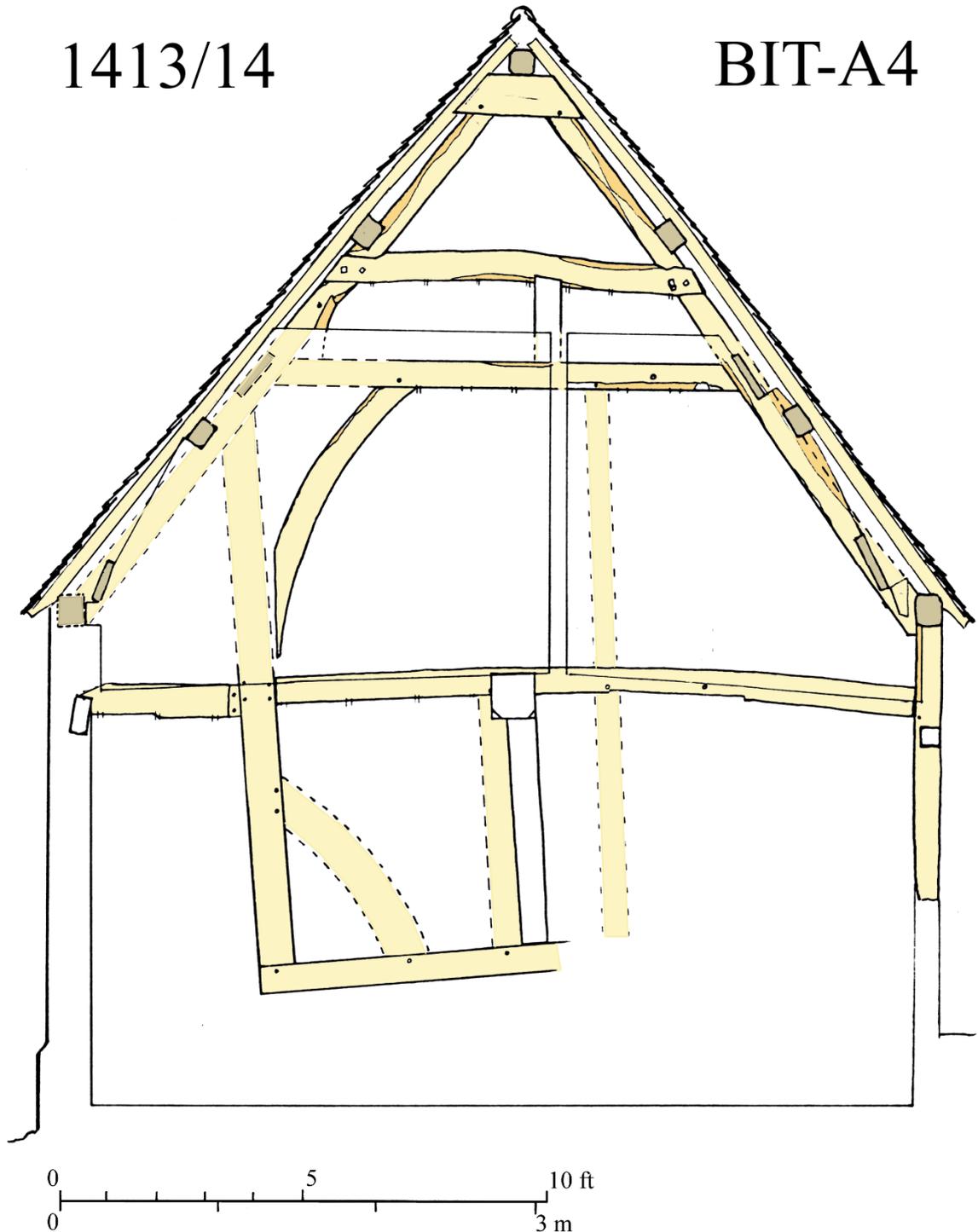


Fig. 3(c). Section of truss T4 from north.

Truss T4 at the southern or upper end of the Hall is enigmatic. Many parts are concealed but enough is visible to deduce that it is of post and principal form, with the principal rafters jointed directly into the wall posts without any sort of kneebrace, horizontal tiebeam or stub-tie. It appears to have had additional support from a pair of interrupted posts and braces. The principal rafters are linked at the top

with a saddle, as on the other trusses. About three feet below this is a collar with a bare-faced lap-jointed dovetail with 'refined entry'. Two feet below this is another collar which is mainly hidden. Above the upper collar most of the medieval wattle and daub still remains, heavily covered with soot. Below this the infill has been removed but stave holes were seen on the soffit of the upper collar. At the front, or eastern end (but not at the rear) a short curved strut rises from the lower collar, notching into the side of the principal immediately below the upper collar; the absence of this collar on the rear may indicate the position of a door into an upper chamber. A post runs from the eastern principal, near the end of the lower collar, down to within three feet of the ground. There the post is supported on a sill beam, about five feet of which survives. This post carries a brace rising to the lower collar, and has what can only be called an aisle tie to the eastern wall post. On the west side there does not appear to be a similar post, but a rail extends from the eastern 'arcade post' all the way to the western wall post. The underside of the lower collar has a mortice, perhaps for a matching brace, but more probably for a stud. Below, the position of one, and possibly two, additional studs were noted, rising from the sill beam to the underside of this rail. Mortices exist for a curved tension brace from the 'arcade post' down to the sill beam. The framing suggests the possibility of two doors between bays III and IV at ground level, one in the 'aisle' and one towards the western side of the truss.

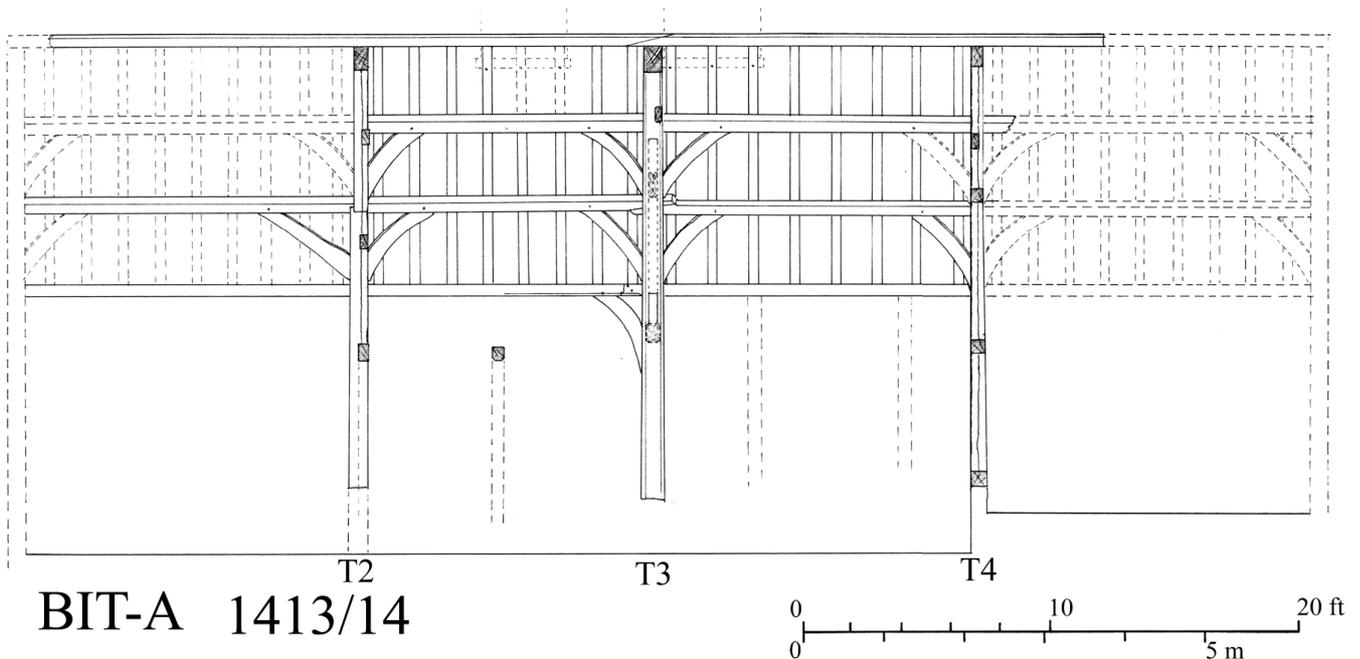


Fig. 4. Long section, from west.

ROOF STRUCTURE (Fig. 4): The roof has double purlins throughout, with two tiers of wind braces. The purlins are jointed with through-splayed scarfs directly over the trusses. In bay I, one of the four purlin lengths has been removed and the ridge piece cut short. Only four common rafters remain (at the rear (west), adjacent to T2). These rafters show little smoke blackening. The roof of Bay II is in an almost perfect state of preservation with all wind braces intact and the only incomplete rafters are two that were shortened to accommodate the chimney stack. The three pairs of rafters at this position show evidence for the smoke louvre. About 18in down from the ridge on the surviving four rafters are peg holes coming down from the top surface, which would have secured a plate to support the smoke louvre. A staple at this position on the underside of the ridge piece probably had a cord threaded through it to control a ventilation flap in the louvre. In bay III, only one rafter and a wind brace are missing. A series of peg holes similar to those previously described indicate the position of a second smoke louvre immediately to the south of the open truss, T3. Little of the roof remains over the demolished bay IV, although the purlins do continue for a foot or two, and the ridge for a full five feet. Wind brace mortices are present on the south side of truss T4, and part of one rafter survives on this side of the truss.

PHASE 2: The bricks of the chimney stack in the hall measure 9 by 4½ by 2-2¼ins. The mantel beam of the present fireplace measures 12 by 15ins. The inserted axial beam is 10 by 12ins and has a 3in chamfer with a trimmed scroll stop. The ceiling joists are 4 by 5ins, laid at 18in centres. They are jointed with

bare-faced soffit tenons with diminished shoulders into the axial beam and into the applied half beams at their outer ends. Over the cross-passage behind the chimney, the joists run transversely, bearing on the original tiebeam to truss T2 and on the screen partition beam. The joists to the rear of the chimney stack are trimmed for a winder staircase (since replaced). In between the joists adjacent to the fireplace breast, a leaded light casement measuring 8in wide and at least 14in long was found during building works in 1991. This had diamond shaped panes of glass, most of which were intact.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The property has been traced back to 1654, when it consisted of a house, probably with 2 acres of land (as later), a freehold in the parish of Bishop's Tachbrook. No deeds, manorial surveys or rentals have been located that might identify it before this. In 1691 it was left as a charity property, and remained as such until sold in 1880 to the predecessors of Flowers' Brewery. It then comprised a close measuring 2ac 29p, with a public house, the Leopard and a carpenter's shop. Details of sources are:

1654	Will of John Wilson, elder, weaver of St Nicholas parish, Warwick. He gives his son John Wilson: 'my house and land in the parish of Tachbrook' [TNA, PROB11/238, f.398v]
1693	Will of John Wilson, of Warwick, stuffweaver. He left to the use of the poor of St Nicholas, Warwick, 'all that messuage or tenement in Tachbrook with the closes, meadows and pastures, barns, stables, orchards, now occupied by Ales Reading, widow' [TNA, PROB11/425, f.161, proved 20 April 1695].
1744ff.	St Nicholas Charity Deeds (including other properties as well as Wilson's Charity). They include re-enfeoffments and leases, allowing an outline list of tenants to be compiled [Warwickshire CRO, DR87/356-82 & /428-437]
1744	Richard Baylis of Bishop's Tachbrook, yeoman
1832	late Samuel Baylis, now William Percox
1861	John Percox
1834(?)	Report of Charity Commissioners (<i>sub</i> Warwick): now occupied William Percox, rent £12 12s, a fair rent: buildings old and timber and thatch to be found.
1880	Sale by charity trustees to Arthur James Lewis & William Wells Ridley for £860, property as noted above (with plan) [Whitbread Flowers, Gloucester, deed bundle O/B220. 27 Sept 1880]

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: 12 samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 12th October 1988. One of the purlins and the front wall plate were found not to be of oak, and two samples had too few rings to be worth measuring. *Note:* The truss and bay numbering has been amended from the original report.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
BIT-A01	Cruck blade truss T3 (open) front (W)	118	26C	1182 1296	1273 1387	1299 1413	5 5
BIT-A02	Saddle, truss T3 (open)	39	—	—	—	—	—
BIT-A03	Saddle, truss T2	28	08	—	—	—	—
BIT-A04	Cruck blade truss T3 (open) rear	79	23C	1221 1335	1276 1390	1299 1413	5 5
BIT-A05	Saddle, truss T4	59	05	—	—	—	—
BIT-A06	Windbrace bay II	129	44C	1171	1255	1299	5

BIT-A07	Cruck stud truss T3 (open) front	70	26	1285	1369	1413	5
				1206	1249	1275	5
				1320	1363	1389	5
BIT-A08	Cruck spur truss T3 (open) front	62	20	—	—	—	—
BIT-A09	Wall plate bay II front	not oak	—	—	—	—	—
BIT-A10	Purlin bay II front	not oak	—	—	—	—	—
BIT-A11	Cruck blade truss T2 rear	NM	—	—	—	—	—
BIT-A12	Cruck blade truss T2 front	NM	—	—	—	—	—

Site sequence (composed of samples 1, 4, 6, 7), 129 rings long matched at 1171–1299 with *t*-values of: 4.0 (OXFORD), 3.8 (E.MID), 3.6 (S.ENG), 6.1 (READING), 3.5 (CUBASQ01).

Or 1285–1413 with *t*-values of: 3.4 (OXFORD), 3.1 (E.MID), 4.0 (S.ENG), 3.8 (ALCASQ01), 4.2 (OXHASQ04), 4.0 (STRASQ03), 5.2 (DROITWITCH).

Felling date: 1299/1300 or **1413/14**. The latter is strongly indicated on architectural grounds, as well as having somewhat higher *t*-values.