

Report for  
**The Thatched Cottage, Hill Wootton, Leek  
Wootton, Warwickshire**

*Site Code: HIW-A*

**from**

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

**by**

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Fig. 1. View of the house from the west.

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***Oxbow Books***

HIW-A: THE THATCHED COTTAGE, HILL WOOTTON, LEEK WOOTTON, WARWICKSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 3027 6885 Survey Date: 10 October 1988 By: D. Miles

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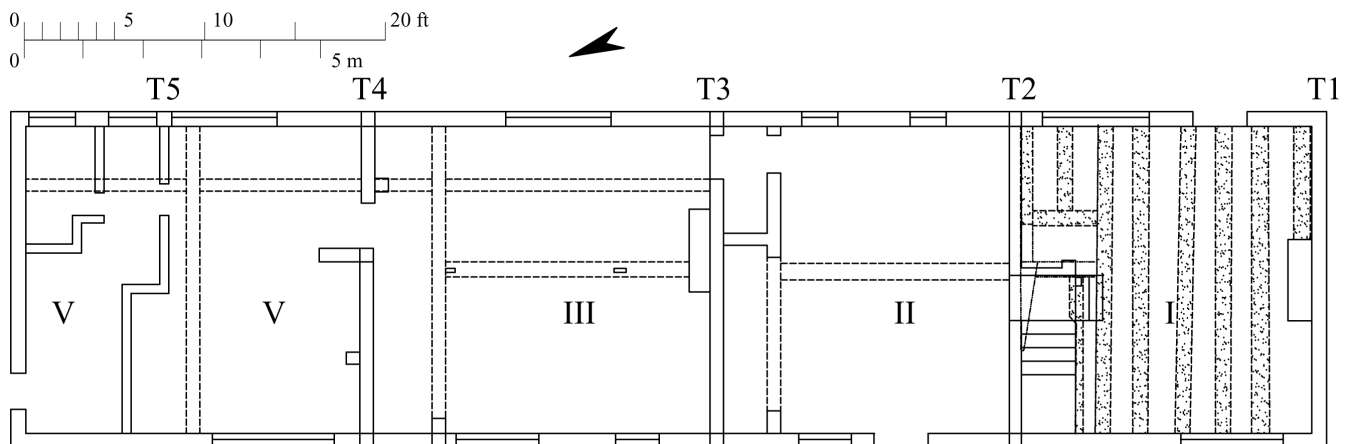


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

**SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

PHASE 1: The Thatched Cottage, Hill Wootton, is a linear building of five bays, the south-western three bays being the original cruck house. Bay I was the upper end, with a chamber and solar over, and bay II the open hall; the third bay was probably for service, but may have been part of the hall. The chamber still retains its original floor joists and trimmed ladder stair opening and has been shown to be contemporary with the rest of the cruck structure. Truss T1 was removed (c. 1960) and T3 is mostly concealed but truss T2 still remains intact, albeit charred in the roof space from a recent fire. This had been a closed truss separating the chamber from the hall, and some wattle and daub staves remain above the collar. The roof is of thatch which had been burnt over the first three bays. The house has been dated through dendrochronology with a felling date range of 1470–8.

PHASES 2 and 3: The flooring over of the hall and the insertion of the chimney probably occurred sometime in the later sixteenth century. The fourth and fifth bays appear to have been constructed in the later seventeenth to eighteenth century, employing much reused material, and at this stage the original end cruck (T4) must have been removed. It seems possible that bays III-V together provided some sort of workshop at this stage, but probably by the nineteenth century, the house was divided into cottages.

**STRUCTURAL FEATURES**

PHASE 1: Of the two remaining cruck trusses, truss T2 is the most complete. This is a full cruck truss with the blades joined by a saddle carrying a ridge (removed) (type ‘C’ apex). The tiebeam has bare-faced dovetail joints to the cruck blades. The cruck spurs are similarly jointed; they extend to be supported by the cruck studs. Wall plates sit on the spurs (mostly renewed). Packing pieces rise from the cruck spurs and are housed into the backs of the cruck blades about three feet below the apex (with a birdsmouth joint on the west side). The packing pieces are also half-lapped to the ends of the collar. The purlins, since removed, were trenched into the backs of the packing pieces. No other original framing exists in this truss, but some later (perhaps sixteenth or seventeenth century) studs and rails provide infilling below the collar. One cruck blade stands on a sandstone block, but it was not possible to inspect the bottom of the crucks to determine how the sill beam is jointed to the cruck. The cruck stud is set in a V-groove in the back of the cruck blade (as at Phoenix Cottage, Stoneleigh, STO-F). Pegs for a mid-rail in the cruck stud of T3 confirm that the house originally had a third bay, but T4 has been removed.

The trusses have racked towards bay I, leaning by over two feet at eaves level; we were informed that truss T1 fell out and the end wall was rebuilt c. 1960. Little is left of the original external walling, although the cruck studs of T2 and T3 and a mid-rail for bay I are still *in situ*. Most other members have been removed at some stage, and the walls infilled with brickwork and later timber framing, probably in the seventeenth to eighteenth century. The small window to the south of T3 was possibly the location of a doorway, but whether this was original is uncertain.

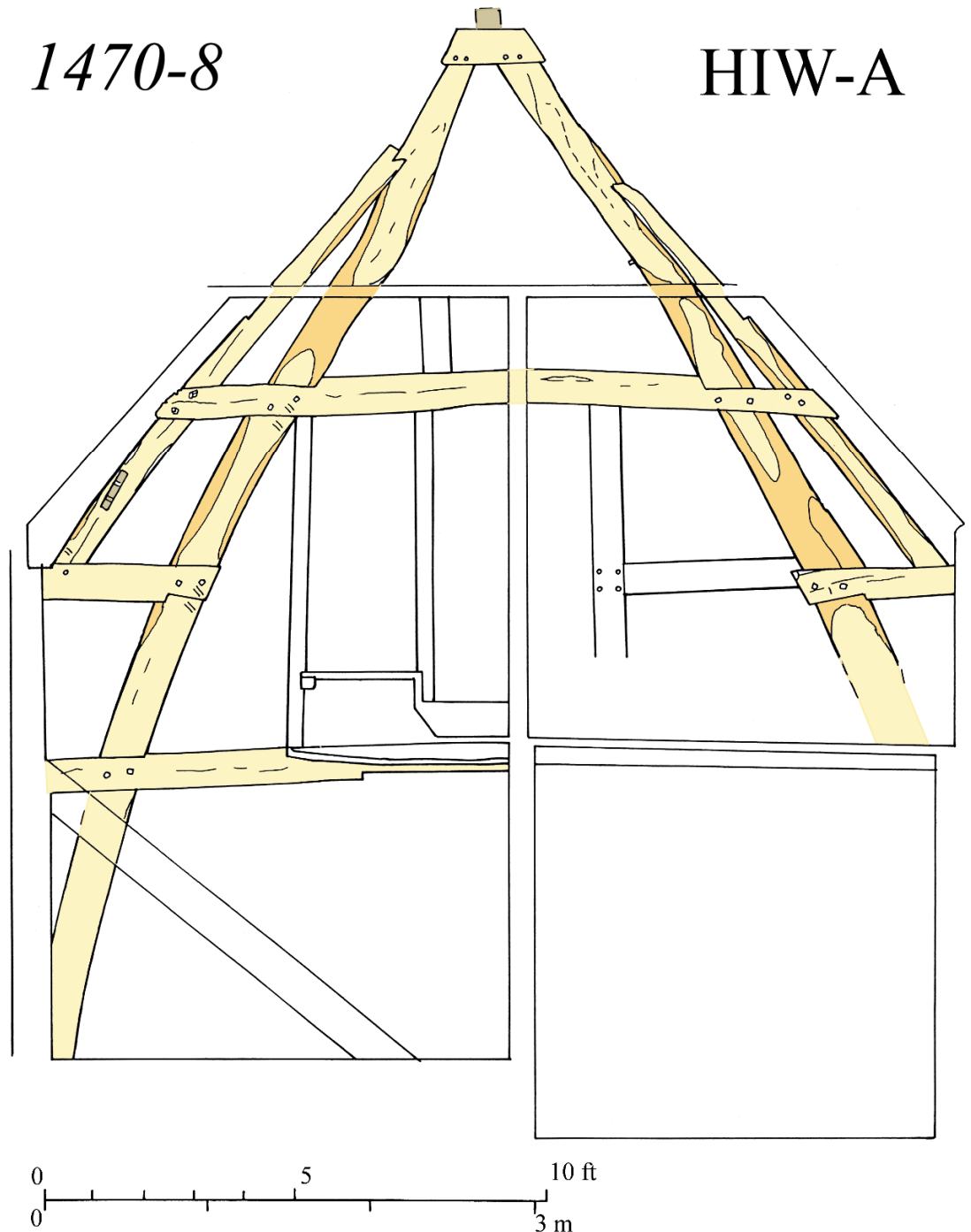


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2.

The first floor joists of bay I are of considerable interest, since the tree-ring dating shows that they are primary, proving that this bay had always had a first-floor chamber. The joists measure 5in deep by 9-12in wide, and run transversely from front to back at 12-18in centres. A cased axial beam (omitted from plan) is probably a later support (possibly of the 1960s). An original trimmed opening survives in the centre of the ceiling adjacent to truss T2; this seems to have been comparatively small and was presumably for a ladder stair. It was later filled in and the stair moved to the front of the bay. The first

surviving joist north of T2 in the front half of the ceiling seems to be primary, but has been trimmed back for the later stair. It has a mortice on the soffit probably for a post at the corner of the ladder stair.

PHASE 2: In bay II, the hall was floored over and a fireplace built, probably in the sixteenth century, judging from the depth of the chamfer on the axial beam and the snubbed pyramidal stops. The inglenook fireplace has a substantial though apparently un-chambered lintel (although perhaps the soffit has been trimmed back). This is supported on what appear to be brick piers, so it possibly originated as a smokehood on timber posts (cf. LOX-A). There is also a good late seventeenth century salt cupboard.

PHASE 3: The brick-walled bays IV and V were added, probably in the eighteenth century, and the end cruck (T4) was removed. The roof here is supported by the brick walls between bays III and IV and at the end of the house and by truss T5. The latter comprises a set of principal rafters which meet on a king-post rising from a collar. The king-post supports a diagonally set ridge (4in square). Although the principal rafters appear to be clean and primary, the collar, king-post and ridge appear to be reused, and the latter are slightly smoke blackened. The common rafters are certainly reused for they are much older and are visibly smoke blackened.

It appears that the ground floor may have originally been unpartitioned between T3 and the north end wall. These bays show a complicated pattern of ceiling beams. In bay III, a well-finished transverse beam near the position of T4 supports a central axial beam and a second axial beam set some 3ft within the west side wall; the transverse beam has slight chamfers, which are stopped on each side of this second beam. A further beam apparently continues this to the end of bay V (though it is cased beyond the wall between bays III and IV). The central axial beam contains two mortices for posts, one in its centre and the other beside the transverse beam; it also carries slight chamfers, stopped on each side of the medial post position.

Bays IV-V were probably originally undivided, as the present partitioning appears to be modern. The transverse beam here is much more irregular than that in bay III, with larger chamfers, also stopped at the axial side beam; it is hidden beyond this, but presumably continues to the outside wall to carry two portions of the axial beam. Just what was the function of this end of the house after the addition of bays IV-V is unclear. The posts supporting the ceiling beam would suggest that the upper floor was intended to be heavily loaded, so perhaps the ground floor formed some sort of workshop, whose output was stored upstairs. The only logical purpose for the axial beam beside the east wall would be for an opening in the gap between the beam and the wall, which could perhaps fit with the suggested workshop use.

## DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

*Sampling Comments:* Ten samples were taken through coring by Robert Howard on 10 October 1988. Of these, three samples from the cruck structure and one from a floor joist in bay I matched together.

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

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
HIW-A01	Cruck blade truss 1 front	72	21	—	—	—	—
HIW-A02	Packing piece truss 1 front	65	17	1404	1451	1468	1
HIW-A03	Collar truss 1	40	09	1419	1449	1458	1
HIW-A04	Cruck spur truss 1 front	55	04	—	—	—	—
HIW-A05	Cruck blade truss 1 rear	70	18	1400	1451	1469	1
HIW-A06	Packing piece truss 1 rear	44	10	—	—	—	—
HIW-A07	Cruck blade truss 2 rear	50	HS	—	—	—	—
HIW-A08	Cruck blade truss 2 front	65	12	—	—	—	—
HIW-A09	Floor joist bay I	40	10	—	—	—	—
HIW-A10	Floor joist bay I	43	—	1392	—	1434	1
	Average date of last heartwood ring				1450		

Site sequence: (composed of samples 2, 3, 5, 10), 78 rings long dated 1392–1469 with *t*-values of 9.3(E.MID), 7.0(MCI0).

95% felling date range: 1470–1491 (revised from 1474–1500, VA20.89, because of new sapwood estimates); central felling date 1470 (revised from 1480, VA20.89). OxCal refined felling date range: **1470-8.**