

Report for
**The Smithy, 70 Birmingham Road, Sutton
Coldfield, West Midlands**

Site Code: SUT-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View from the south-west.

© *N W Alcock and contributors 2012. Copyright in this document is retained under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, with all rights reserved including publication. Copyright in illustrations is reserved to the original copyright holder.*

Oxbow Books

SUT-A: THE SMITHY, 70 BIRMINGHAM ROAD, SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS (FORMERLY WARWICKSHIRE)

Grid reference: SP 1180 9532

Survey Date: 8 March 1990

By: D. Miles

Illustrations:

1. View of the house
2. Ground floor plan
3. Section of truss T2

Page

- 1
- 2
- 3

Reference: N. A. D. Molyneux (1977). 'The Smithy, 70 Birmingham Road, Sutton Coldfield', Report to Birmingham City Museum.

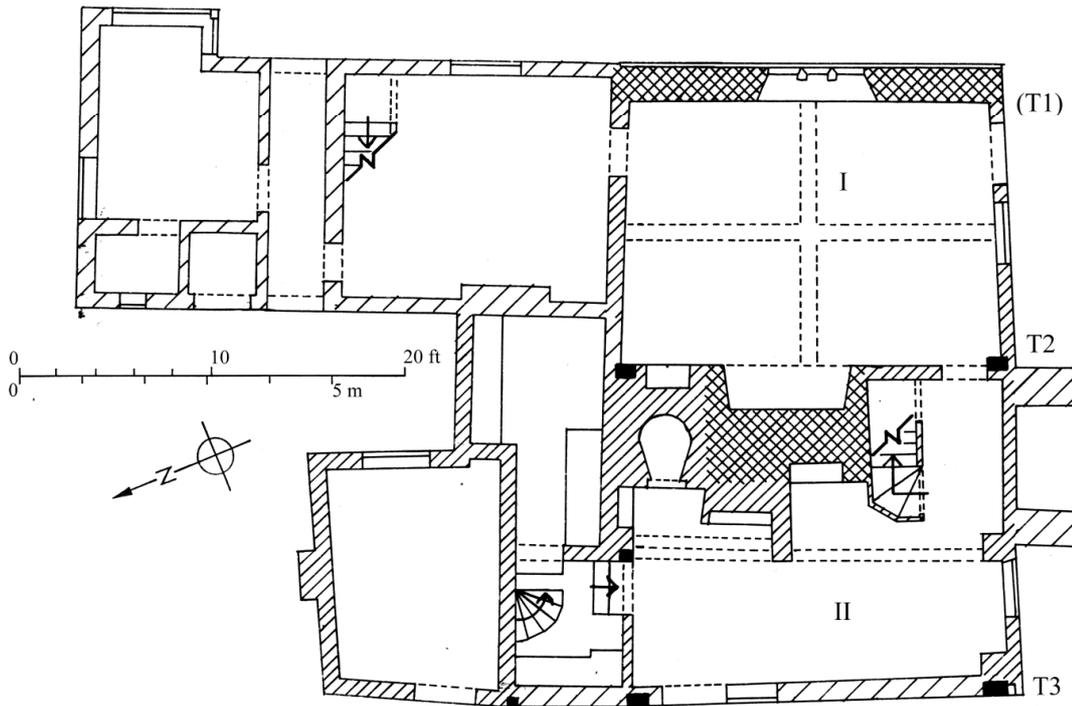


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (after Molyneux (1977)).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The following description is closely based on that given in Molyneux (1977). The name would suggest that the house had once been a smithy, but this is incorrect.

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: The Smithy is a cruck building standing on the west side of Birmingham Road and set at right angles to it. Two bays of the open hall now survive, separated by an open truss with arch-braces and chamfers; there is evidence for a further bay to the west. The longer western bay (II) included a smoke bay with an additional collar. The two surviving crucks have saddle apices (type 'C'); the truss at the eastern end has been replaced in stone. The cruck phase has been tree-ring dated to **1442-4**.

PHASE 2: The stone chimney stack was probably inserted in the early seventeenth century, giving the house a lobby-entry plan. Probably at the same time, the east gable was rebuilt in stone and, then or somewhat later, a single timber-framed bay was added, forming the north-west rear wing.

LATER PHASES: During the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the north-west bay was extended by a further brick section. This has external access only on both floors and must have been for storage. By this period, the third bay of the cruck house had been removed and much of the external walling was replaced in brick. A lean-to extension was built behind the main range which possibly extended along the full length of the range; its possible eastern part was removed when the caretaker's

cottage was added against the north-east side of the rear wall in 1966. Between 1944 and 1966 the house was modernised by Birmingham City Council, who still own it.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The two surviving crucks are of similar form, with saddles. Notably, all the transverse members on both trusses are morticed rather than being halved. The gable cruck (T3) had upper and lower collars (removed) and a tiebeam (probably replaced with an old timber); its cruck spurs survive, as does one cruck stud. The packing pieces contain mortices for windbraces to the west, indicating that the house extended further. Truss T2 had an arch-braced collar (collar and braces removed). The soffit is chamfered. The spurs and one cruck stud survives, with the spur tenoned in to the stud 2in below the underside of the plate. The southern wall plate has an interesting scarf consisting of a steeply splayed scarf with a loose tenon double pegged on each side. Several of the curved windbraces survive.

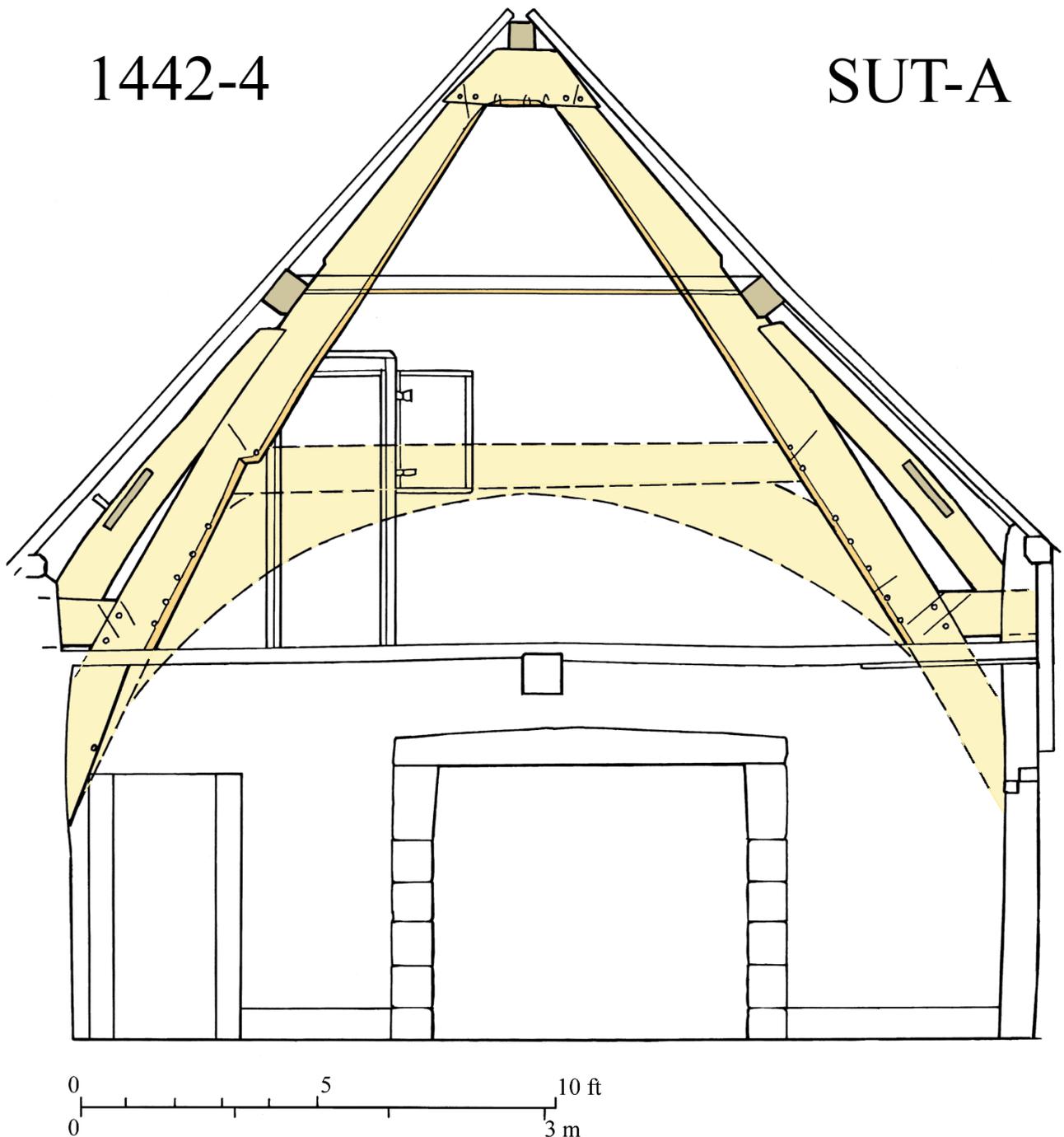


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2.

The rafters are pegged to a square-set ridge with $\frac{3}{4}$ in square pegs in 1in round holes. The rafters measure 5-6in by 3in, and are set at 17 to 19in centres.

Truss T2 carries a series of assembly marks on the western face of the central cruck, including a gouged II, and several hewing marks. The assembly marks are gouged across the joint of the spur and the blade, and across the blade and the missing collar. The hewing marks are scratched and consist of either 'Z' or compressed 'W' shapes. The northern blade has two of these hewing marks within a few feet of each other.

The eastern bay is 14ft long, but the western bay (II) is 17ft long, with the end 7ft forming the smoke bay. An intermediate collar for the smoke-hood is birds-mouthed between the purlins. This carries stave holes on its underside and a stave groove, above with signs of the fixings for the upper ends of the staves on the adjacent rafter couple. The next two common rafters to the east have peg holes 1ft 6in down from the ridge indicating the position of the smoke louvre; the other side of the louvre has been lost through the insertion of the stack which occupies the space to the east up to the open truss. The rafters immediately below this louvre position are weathered. However, the rafters are perfectly clean to the west of the intermediate collar, showing that this partition is original.

LATER PHASES: The roof of the timber-framed north-west extension is of seventeenth-century form with principals, collars and three queen struts. The single purlins are trenched into the principals.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The history of the house has not been investigated. It is known that the house was owned in the late nineteenth century by W Holdnall, a smith, but his smithy was elsewhere in Sutton Coldfield (*Sutton News* 3 Oct 1975). Foundations of a seventeenth-century smithy were apparently found in the front garden, which may possibly have given the house its name (Molyneux, 1977).

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 8 March 1990. Two samples were found to match each other, and were matched against the reference chronologies. A further sample, SUT-A02, was individually compared against the reference chronologies and was found to date more weakly, indicating a felling dated of 1442-4.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
SUT-A01	Packing piece truss 2 S side	49	03	—	—	—	—
SUT-A02	Cruck blade truss 2 S side	67	14c	1375	1427	1441	5
SUT-A03	Packing piece truss 2 N side	37 NM	—	—	—	—	—
SUT-A04	Cruck blade truss 2 N side	77	HS	—	—	—	—
SUT-A05	Packing piece truss 3 S side	56	13	—	—	—	—
SUT-A06	Cruck blade truss 3 S side	59	—	1357	—	1415	3b
SUT-A07	Packing piece truss 3 N side	44	06	—	—	—	—
SUT-A08	Cruck blade truss 3 N side	57	01	1354	1409	1410	3b
Average date of last heartwood ring					1409		

Site sequence (composed of samples 6, 8): 62 rings long dated 1354–1415 with *t*-values of 5.2 (STR-A, site sequence of Ann Hathaways Cottage, Stratford-on-Avon, VA22.91), 4.2 (E.MID); (sample 2): 67 rings long dated 1375 to 1441 with *t*-values of 4.8 (MC10), 4.1 (E.MID). 95% felling date range (samples 6, 8): 1418-1450 (previously 1422–1447)

Felling date for sample 2 (with complete sapwood but one or two rings lost in coring): **1442-4**. This is taken to be the felling date for the structure.