

Green's Farm, Newdigate

by R. T. MASON, F.S.A.

This record is in every sense the outcome of collaboration by three people and under the above title should also appear the names of Mr Christopher Dalton who discovered the house and took the photographs and Mr R. H. Wood, who measured it and prepared the drawings, and provided many suggestions as a result of his close observation and knowledge, and also listed and dated the farm buildings.

The farmhouse would seem to occupy a special position in the development of south-eastern framed buildings, and may be regarded as an archetype which, once evolved, persisted for two and a half centuries, from *circa* 1300 to *circa* 1550 and of which many hundreds of examples survive in the Weald. They are readily identified by their smoke-blackened crownpost roofs and numerous other features which imitate so closely the supra-vernacular medieval hall.

Their high quality refutes the late-medieval recession in which economic historians have always placed such confidence. Indeed they argue the exact opposite—expansion and prosperity throughout the fifteenth century.

Early (i.e. thirteenth-century) timber framed buildings are found fairly consistently to embody certain archaic features which may be listed as follows:—

1. A special form of 'scissor bracing' comprising long lacing ties which extend from the wall posts to a high point on the rafters of the opposite side. This feature seems to be normal to aisled buildings.
2. Duplication of triangulation braces especially between tiebeam and post and in the arcades of aisled buildings.
3. The consistent use of square scantlings i.e. breadth and depth roughly equal.
4. The use of straight braces instead of the more familiar curved form.
5. The absence of the collar purlin/crownpost ensemble so common in buildings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; such roofs have no longitudinal ties whatsoever, and, though frequently early, are occasionally found in economically-designed buildings up to *circa* 1400 at least.
6. The use of 'Dragon ties' across the salient angles at eaves level, between tiebeam and wallplate (See Plate V). These are seen to advantage in the thirteenth century roof framing of the Bishop's kitchen at Chichester, and their purpose is to triangulate the upper part of the frame in the horizontal plane.

7. The free use of halvings, often of dovetail form and face-lapped instead of (or in addition to) mortice and tenon joints.

A superficial study, made in the light of modern structural principles of design, shews most of these archaic features to be either redundant or immature and therefore, presumably, the result of 'hit and miss' experimentation, and their progressive abandonment would appear to offer a logical and acceptable chronology of development for south-eastern framed buildings.

The scissor braces become obsolete by about 1260, the duplication of braces by about 1280. Curved braces, no doubt a concession to Gothic principles of design, appear about 1260 and the fully developed crownpost roof by about 1280. Dragon ties, though occasionally found as repairs up to very late times evidently went out of use as an integral component at the end of the thirteenth century. None of the archaic features are found in houses which can be dated fairly securely to the first half of the fourteenth century. It will be realised that adequate bracing of the wall frames would tend to make the dragon ties unnecessary.

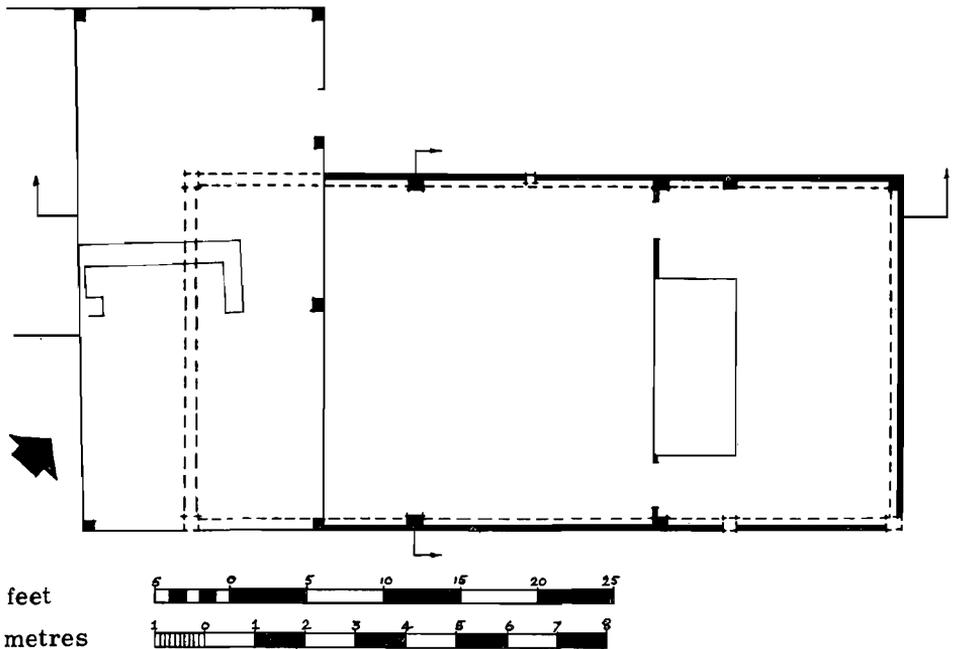


Fig.1. *Green's Farm. Plan.*

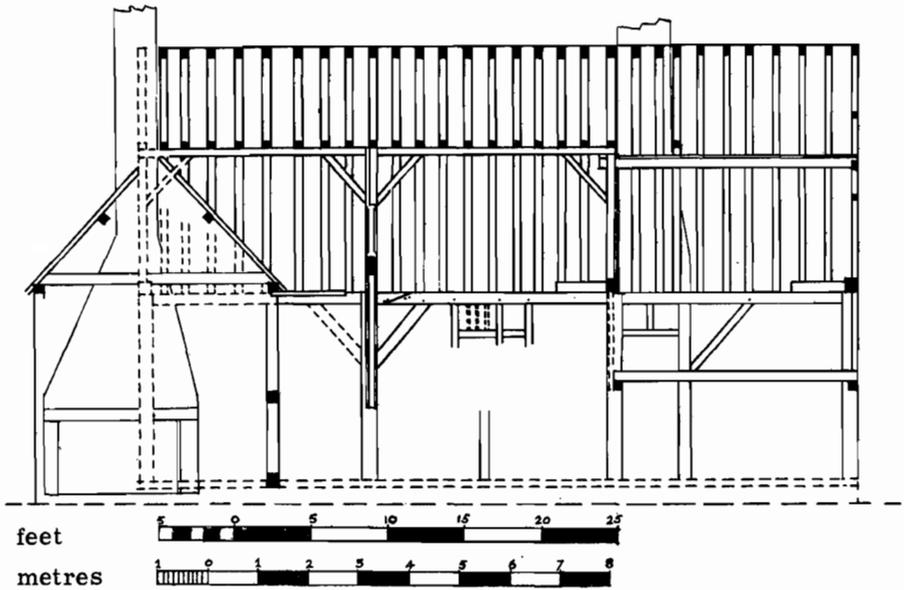


Fig. 2. Green's Farm. Longitudinal section.

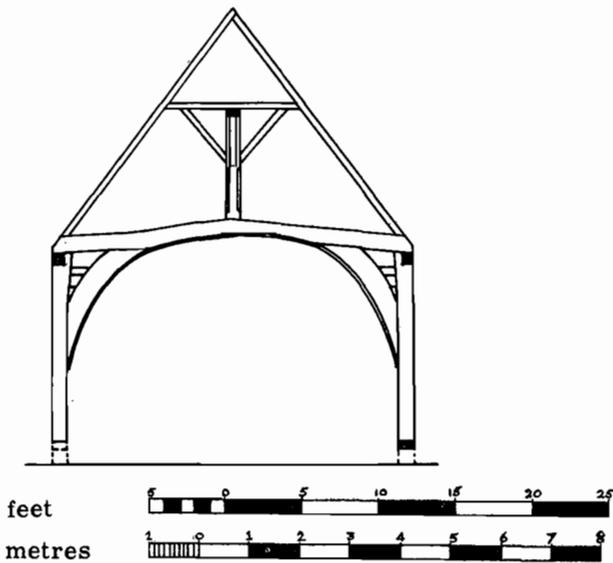


Fig. 3. Green's Farm. Section of hall truss.

The following is a list of houses in support of this thesis, indicating the number of archaic features which each retains. There would undoubtedly have been some distortion due to early innovation or persistence of antiquated methods and it is unlikely that the progression is quite as clear-cut as it seems.

Old Court Cottage, Limpsfield. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.	(c. 1200) ¹
Purton Green Farm, Stansfield, Suffolk. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 7.	(c. 1250) ²
St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester. 2. 3. 4.	(c. 1280) ³
Chennells Brook Farm, Horsham. 2. 5. 6.	(c. 1290) ⁴
Green's Farm, Newdigate. 3. 4. 6.	(c. 1300)

Both Chennells Brook and Greens include massive arched braces with roll mouldings as components of an impressive open truss. A Cambridgeshire example at Manor Farm, Bourn, has the same feature but has also the scissors braces and is dated fairly securely to *circa* 1260.⁵ If the introduction of curved timbers is a concession to Gothic design, then it should have occurred much earlier than *circa* 1260. However, the idea of curvilinear treatment for timber frames as well as for masonry may well have been slow in emerging, notwithstanding the obvious (and probably ancient) precedent afforded by crucks.

It seems clear, however, that Greens lies at the very end of the evolutionary process and can hardly be later than *circa* 1300. Such a date is not unacceptable for a fully-developed crownpost roof like the one at Greens as the classic example of St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester (*circa* 1280) clearly shows.

The house consists of a hall which was originally quite large, even by local standards, and which has a two-storied compartment at the north-east (presumably service) end. To this at the south-west end has been added a two-storied crosswing which is much later and may have replaced an earlier one contemporary with the hall.

The timbers of the earlier work are substantial and the general proportions suggest that the house was originally of some importance. Our timber framed farmhouses often prove to be relegated manor houses, as for



Fig. 4. Green's Farm. Section through arch brace.

instance, Clothalls at West Grinstead, Sussex, and Old Court Cottage at Limpsfield. Greens was a reputed manor in the fifteenth century and probably occupied by a family of that name. Its architectural features are however, mainly related to an earlier period and there are none to indicate exceptional prosperity in the fifteenth century.

The early roof of the hall is virtually intact and heavily sooted, but there has been a late (probably seventeenth century) reconstruction at the north-east end which suggests that the present gable end may have originally been hipped.

At the south-west end the collar purlin continues through the later roof of the crosswing and, though a number of the early rafters have been removed the mortice which received the end crownpost bracket still survives so that the extent of the hall can readily be discerned. From this evidence it seems that the hall was shortened by about 8 feet when the sixteenth century crosswing was built.

The original joists of the north-east two-storied compartment still remain, and these are massive—proportions which are no doubt related to their more than normal distance of span. There are no signs of original fenestration or entries although there are posts forming a sort of 'sub-bay' in the service compartment which, if not later insertions, may indicate a cross passage (see longitudinal section Fig. 2) Much assistance in interpreting this part of the house might be gained from a close examination of the lower part of the hall/service partition but this has been obscured, and perhaps damaged, by the insertion of the large chimney, *circa* 1600.

The amount of original wall-framing which still survives is remarkable for so early a house, and the north-east end (Plate II) shews clearly the use of straight braces upon which the proffered date of *circa* 1300 is partly based. There is however, considerable reconstruction and obscuration along the south-east side by modern materials and cladding. The roof, now tiled, may very probably have been in the first place thatched.

An interesting modification was made to the open truss of the hall probably during the first half of the sixteenth century, when it was plastered over from tiebeam to collar level in hazel-rod wattle and daub. This plaster, blackened on one side only, was evidently intended to confine smoke to the 'lower' bay of the hall, and has been noted in a few other houses locally. The more ancient plastering at the lower end of the hall roof, in a corresponding position, is on oak laths emphasising a feature often observed that 'rattle and dab' is not normally found in the earlier phases of house-building; at any rate, not at this social level.

A refinement is also to be noted in the collar/rafter joints which are morticed and tenoned and not halved as normally. Mortice and tenons in this situation are not, therefore, necessarily a late feature, as they have been sometimes held to be.

The crown post is quite plain, consisting of a square post chamfered to

octagonal section in the shaft and without cap or base other than the rudimentary impression of such which this treatment produces.

The architectural history of the house is therefore roughly as follows:-

- (a) Original hall of two equal bays with two-storied service end and possibly a crosswing built *circa* 1300.
- (b) Hall open truss plastered up to restrict dispersal of smoke, *circa* 1500.
- (c) Crosswing built (or rebuilt), great chimney built in hall, and hall floored over, *circa* 1600.
- (d) Low end of roof reconstructed, hips changed to gable, and staircase either replaced or remodelled, *circa* 1700. The long 'pentice' or shelter along the north-west side may also be of this date but seems later.
- (e) Replacement of many plastered panels by brick nogging and refacing of south-east wall of hall, nineteenth century.

The comparative rarity of buildings like this farmhouse, where high antiquity is coupled to superior construction, argues an initial social status equally superior and one is tempted to think of them as manor houses. This seems to be true of Old Court Cottage, which was almost certainly the courthouse of the Abbot of Battle's manor of Limpsfield and also of Green's which was a reputed manor in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was held by the Green family at least from 1449 to 1497. It had passed into other hands by 1576.⁶

Research might possibly reveal a much earlier association of the Green family with Newdigate. Certainly they appear affluent in 1420,⁷ but did not leave any record of their circumstances by enlargement or modification of the farmhouse. All such work is of earlier or later date.

The overall geography of the farmstead suggests a busy and extensive farm. The ancillary buildings are closely grouped and of greatly varying dates. These buildings include a carhouse of good framed construction with purlin and windbrace roof probably dating from the late sixteenth century, and a granary which is actually two bays of a crosswing of a medieval house of the mid-fifteenth century. It is of two storeys and has an excellent hollow chamfered open truss, and retains its original floor joists. The brick infilling and replacement walling suggest it was brought from some other site and re-erected here during the nineteenth century. Its proportions make it unlikely that it was ever part of the farmhouse.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Mason, R. T. *Surrey A.C.*, LXIII (1966), 130-137.

2. Colman, G. and S. *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Archaeology*, XXX (1965), 149-165.
3. Godfrey, W. H. *Sussex A.C.*, XCVII (1959), 134.
4. Mason, R. T. *Sussex A.C.*, CI (1963), 40.
5. R. C. H. M. *West Cambridgeshire Inventory*, 24.
6. V. C. H. *Surrey*, III, 313.
7. *Surrey A.C.*, VI, 242. 'Inquisition on the death of Thomas Nudigate in 18 Eliz. (1576) shews him seized in his demesne as of fee'
(4) The reversion after the death of Parnell Massey of a messuage, 80 acres of pasture meadow and wood called Semans and Ralford in Capel; held of Thomas Borde and Edward Willet, *as of their manor of Grene's* in free socage; rent 16d; annual value 20s.'

In the same volume of *Surrey A.C.* at page 259 among charters and extracts from charters appears the following, connecting the Nudigate and Grene families with lands in the neighbourhood i.e. in Rusper and Charlwood:

1420 Robert Nudigate of Cressalton [Carshalton] in Surrey grants to John Gilbert and William Grene all those lands &c called Gote-wycke, lying in the parish of Rowsparre in the County of Sussex which he lately had of the feoffment of Amicia late wife of William Nudigate: also those he had of the feoffment of John Brymmes-grove clerk, John Hadresham, John Ashurst and Thomas Hayton in the vill or parish of Charlewode.



Plate I Green's Farm. From north-west.



Plate II Green's Farm. From north-east showing medieval granary building.

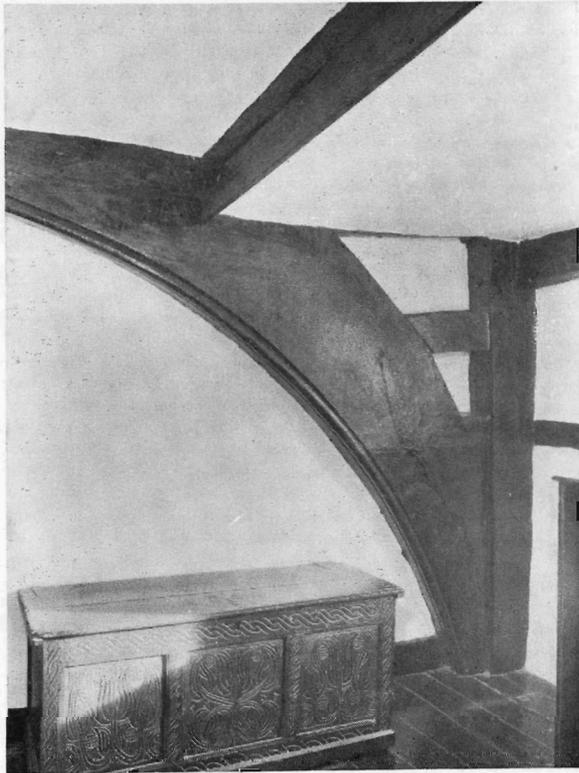


Plate III Green's Farm. Details of arch brace.

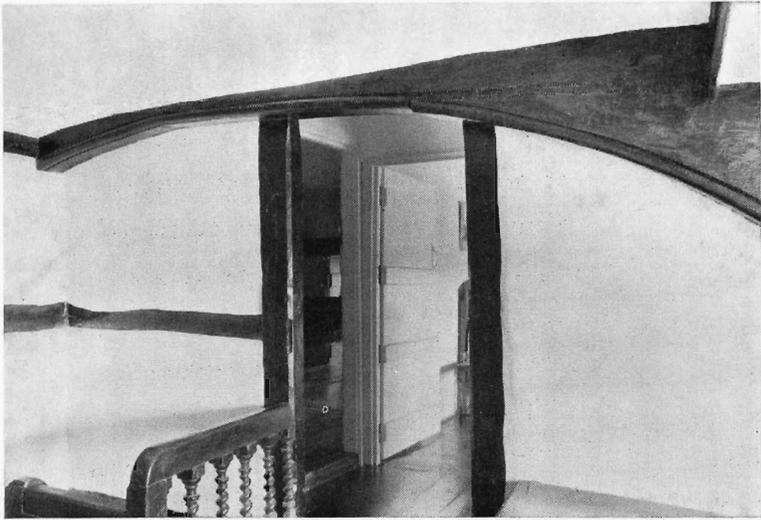


Plate IV Green's Farm. Detail of open hall truss.



Plate V Green's Farm. Dragon tie.