

THE HALL OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AT TEMPLE BALSALL, W. MIDLANDS (Fig. 5)

The surviving building of the Preceptory of the Knights Templar and Hospitaller at Temple Balsall (SP 207 759) has long been known to contain an aisled hall. Recent restoration has revealed much more of it than has been visible since the 1830s, and has shown it to be a building of major importance.¹ Its principal structural phases (dated by typology) are as follows:

pre- 1250	Original aisled hall.
c. 1325	Reconstruction of aisles.
c. 1500*	Addition of a two-storey parlour and chamber cross-wing at the W. end. This has one clasped-purlin truss, and an intermediate collar-beam truss.
16th century*	Stone chimney added to W. wing, with fireplaces on both floors; that on the ground floor was remodelled with a bolection moulding, c. 1700.
late 17th century	Upper part of roof reconstructed. Possibly at this period, the outer walls were cased in brick.
1864; 1868*	Hall floored and converted into two cottages, with the walls further rebuilt.

*Not further described.

The hall now contains three bays, measuring 14.9 by 9.4 m (48.9 × 30.8 ft.), within the present walls. The NE. end is probably original, as the aisle post (unexamined) is set so far into the wall, that it must be semi-octagonal; the SW. posts have been removed, but the placing of the arcade-brace mortices implies that they were on the line of the outside of the present SW. wall. The position of the arcade-plate scarfs (see below) suggests the likelihood of an original fourth bay here. All the 13th- and 14th-century timberwork is heavily smoke-blackened.

The four central aisle posts are extremely massive, tapering from 0.44 m to 0.35 m across; they are 5.6 m high, standing on stone plinths, and incline slightly inwards. The lower parts are chamfered, with the inner chamfers carrying bar stops.² The rectangular arcade-plates (0.31 × 0.25 m) are set on their inner sides, with pegs through the outer upstands and the plates.³ The original tie-beams and the roof trusses over the posts have been replaced by late 17th-century work in typical Warwickshire style, crudely executed in irregular timber, mostly showing the waney edges. This may date from 1663, the date recorded on a re-used plank discovered during the present restoration. The new roof has two series of through purlins and straight thin windbraces, and includes strainer beams as well as tie-beams proper. Although these strainer beams are not smoke-blackened, and therefore belong to the 17th-century reconstruction, there can be no doubt in the light of the parallels noted below, that they replace original beams.⁴

The aisle posts carry 45° straight square-section (0.22 × 0.22 m) braces to the arcade-plates.⁵ These have curious mortices of vee-form, simply housing the ends of the braces, which are reduced in thickness, but left square-cut. Inward braces to the tie-beams are now missing, but existed in 1830.⁶ Pairs of notched halvings show the former existence of pairs of parallel rafters, which must have crossed the strainer beams and the tie-beams, and been housed in the common rafters.

The tops of the arcade-plates have single-sided dovetail halvings in the centre of each bay, for intermediate tie-beams.⁷ Halvings close to truss C–D and the SW. end may have been for dragon-ties, though their irregular placing is surprising. *Trait-de-Jupiter* scarfs with three vertical pegs each are situated one on each side of truss C–D.

Eight original couples of common rafters survive in the SW. bay (spacing 0.55 m). They have collars with short queen-struts, and use only halved joints, which vary slightly in form to suit the rather irregular timber. Some smoke-blackened aisle rafters also exist, but their

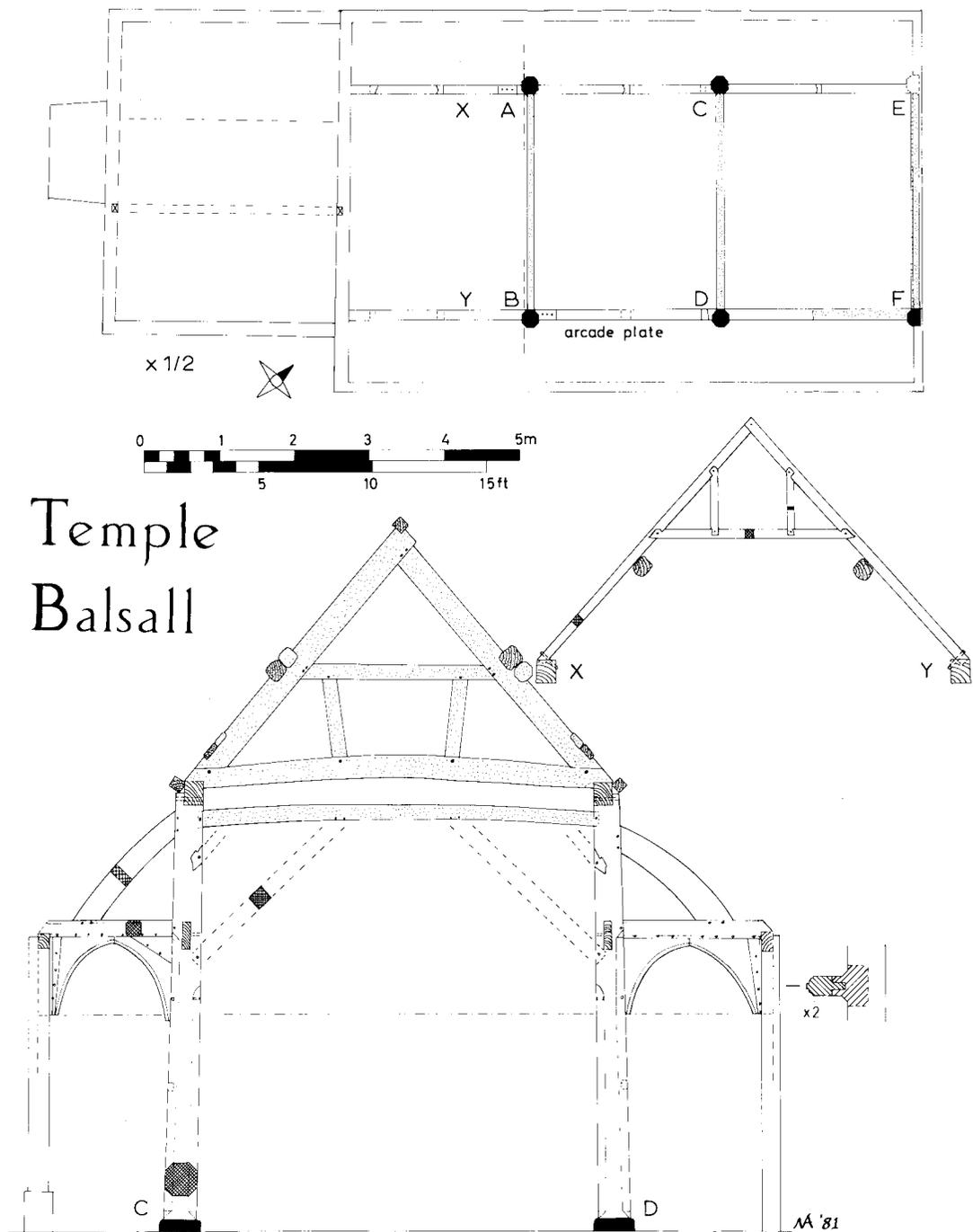


FIG. 5

TEMPLE BALSALL, W. MIDLANDS

- (a) Outline plan of the hall, at half main scale. The arcade-plates, with the details of their halvings, are also shown; (b) Section between aisle post C and D; (c) Section X-Y, showing a common rafter couple, between the arcade-plates. The aisle rafters are inaccessible to observation. Throughout, 17th-century timbers are stippled

joints to the arcade-plates cannot be seen. The SE. side of this part of the roof retains a 'rafter-brace', a straight timber (0.12 × 0.06 m) set diagonally behind the common rafters and running upwards from arcade-plate level at the easternmost surviving rafter to the westernmost one.⁸

The aisle structure contrasts remarkably with the nave. Instead of the straight square-section arcade-braces, the aisle ties have chamfered corners, and the braces down to them are curved and plank-formed (0.35 × 0.15 m). The expanded heads of the wall-posts are cut to a T-section. Below the ties, the arch-braces are also of plank form, though not enough large pieces of wood could be found for all of these, and some are composite. Curiously, the braces on posts B and D have quarter-round mouldings, but those on A and C have only simple chamfers. A further contrast is seen between the numerous small pegs joining these braces to the wall posts and the ties, and the single large pegs between them and the aisle posts (of the same nature as the other pegs on these posts).

The contrasts between the aisle and nave structures is undoubtedly due to the former being a reconstruction of later date. This inference is clinched by the presence on both outer and inner sides of posts A and B of shallow slots. These run out at the tops of the posts, and on the inner sides are tightly capped by the arcade-plates, in such a way that they could only have been cut before the posts were erected. The slots are empty, apart from a short length of the outer one on post B, which contains the edge of a plank. Presumably, truss A-B was originally closed with some form of planked wall. This was later superseded by the present open arch-braced aisle structure; this entirely ignores the plank slot, overlapping it in part, while the empty slot is smoke-blackened inside.

Date and Parallels

Land at Temple Balsall was given to the Knights Templar possibly as early as 1146. By 1185, the manor was fully developed and must have included a manor house.⁹ The Templar estates were sequestered in 1308, and the order was dissolved in 1314; estate accounts for the period 1308-14 record: hall, chamber, chapel, buttery, kitchen, pantry, brewhouse, and bakehouse. A gutter was also constructed between *hall, chamber and chapel*; thus these were contiguous (possibly with the chapel as a wing in front of a linear hall/chamber range). The accounts make it clear that the estate was run down, and the buildings were probably in poor repair.¹⁰ In 1314, the Templar property should have passed to the Knights Hospitaller, but in fact, John Mowbray (heir of the original donor) held Temple Balsall until 1322, and the Hospitallers only obtained it in 1324.

Several features of the hall's original phase mark it as a notably early building. These include the straight square-section braces, the notched-lap halvings, the rafter-braces and the passing-braces. The simple form of the post-head joints and the strainer beams are particularly notable. The latter are found in three early barns: Barley Barn, Cressing Temple, Essex; Sextry Barn, Ely, Cambs., and Grange Farm, Towersey, Bucks., which also share most of the features already noted. Only the Cressing barn has been recorded in sufficient detail to show that it also uses single-sided tie-beam dovetails, and has a few morticed joints as well as notched halvings. The features all indicate a 13th-century date (or earlier), and the probability is for a date before 1250, although our knowledge is not yet sufficient for precision.¹¹ Parallels with the recently described Whiston Hall Barn, S. Yorks.¹² do not add to the dating evidence, but are of particular interest, as this is the only other very early aisled building so far identified outside the confines of south-eastern England. It also has tapering arcade posts, with the arcade-plates (with *trait-de-Jupiter* scarfs) placed on the inner sides of the posts, and with no connection between posts and tie-beams. It combines morticed tie-beam braces with halved passing-braces.

The structure of the aisles must be of the 14th century, with the quarter-round moulding being particularly characteristic. This reconstruction can therefore be attributed to the Knights Hospitallers' need to undo the neglect of the previous owners. The full development in their hands is best shown by the survey taken in 1541, following the dissolution of the

Order.¹³ 'An old hall, at the west end a . . . parlour with chimney . . . with lodgings over [presumably the surviving c. 1500 wing, with its chimney added by this date], and adjoining . . . a buttery with cellar under the same. At the east end of the hall . . . lodgings above, and beneath a low parlour with chimney. . . . On the north side of the hall, the kitchen and other houses of office.' The E. wing probably survived until the 19th-century reconstruction, as it appears on an estate map of 1759.¹⁴

N. W. ALCOCK

NOTES

¹ Mrs Eileen Godder drew the attention of Dr J. M. Fletcher to this striking building, and I am grateful to him for suggesting that we should visit it together. Dr Fletcher is investigating the dendrochronological evidence: the present paper provides an architectural description. Mrs Gooder has kindly provided the documentary references, collected in the course of her extensive study of the Templar estates. The Governors of Lady Katherine Leveson's Hospital are thanked for permission to examine the hall.

² Some of the posts have been cut into for later doors etc., but the only regular features are small outward-facing unpegged mortices 1.7 m over the floor on each post. These were perhaps used in one or other phase of reconstruction.

³ The joints are too tight for the presence or absence of tenons on the tops of the posts to be established.

⁴ The replacement of these strainer beams must have been a remarkable feat. It seems likely that the posts had splayed outwards, probably following decay of the outer walls, and that this was why both strainer beams and tie-beams needed replacement. After the new strainer beams were raised, the posts must have been levered inwards, before the beam ends were pegged.

⁵ These survive on the SW. of post A, and the NE. of posts C and D.

⁶ Drawn in a sketch section by Rev. Thomas Ward (British Lib.Add.MS. 29265, f.126v). In the 17th-century reconstruction, these braces must have been replaced, or picked up on the new strainer beams. An accurate and detailed drawing of the interior made shortly before the conversion to cottages confirms the evidence of Ward's section (Birmingham City Museum, Local History section, F 865 '78; kindly communicated by S. J. Price).

⁷ Only those on the NE. side can be observed, as two of the halvings on the SW. were replaced in 17th-century patching, while the third is concealed. Failure of these feeble and decayed halvings may have been the cause of the 17th-century repairs.

⁸ See J. T. Smith, 'The early development of timber buildings: the passing-brace and reversed assembly', *Archaeol. J.*, 131 (1974), 255. Rafter-braces are very rare in England, and have so far only been found in 13th-century contexts. A similar brace on the N. side of the roof has been removed.

⁹ B. A. Lees, *Records of the Templars in the 12th Century* (British Academy, 1935).

¹⁰ P.R.O. E358/18-20.

¹¹ Smith, op. cit. in note 8, 241-42; C. A. Hewett, *English Historic Carpentry* (Chichester, 1980), esp. 59-63. The Templar association of the Crossing barn is intriguing, but probably coincidental.

¹² S. R. Jones, 'Whiston Hall Barn, Whiston', *Archaeol. J.*, 137 (1980), 431.

¹³ P.R.O. E315/361 f. 15.

¹⁴ Warwick C.R.O. CR621/6.

'WEEPERS': A SMALL LATE MEDIEVAL AISLED HALL IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE (Figs. 6, 7)

Weepers (TL 236 794) is a small medieval timber-framed house with a single aisle and attached byre. A detailed survey revealed a large amount of waney timber and some carpentry details that were used to compensate for this.

The house is situated in the village of Wennington on a plateau above the fens, 4½ miles N. of Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. On an estate map of 1623¹ the house is shown in a close with a small copse of trees. Nearby are two woods, Holland Wood and Wennington Wood, remnants of the Forest of Somersham² which covered an extensive area in the 14th century.

The original plan has an open hall of two bays, 4.06 m. square, a narrow bay for the cross-passage, and a two bay parlour to the W. with a loft above it (Fig. 6). A mortice in the W. post of the cross-passage in the S. wall may indicate the position of a screen that divided, or partly divided, the passage and hall from the parlour. The aisle runs the full length of the main building to the N. and is quite clearly part of the original plan (post 1). It is partitioned from the hall (C-D) to the height of the middle rail, and from the loft above the middle rail,