

# English Peasant Buildings in the Later Middle Ages (1200–1500)

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*FROM A SYNTHESIS OF evidence for late medieval peasant buildings this article argues that their size, quality and complexity have frequently been underestimated. Documentary evidence from the West Midlands is used to define the main features of peasant buildings — agricultural buildings as well as houses — in the period 1350–1500. Similar characteristics are found in the same period in other regions, in the context of their own building traditions. The origins of durable vernacular houses must be sought in the 13th century with the move away from earthfast construction. A series of changes began long before the ‘Great Rebuilding’ of the 16th and 17th centuries, and connected with that process in an evolutionary pattern.*

## INTRODUCTION

Any appreciation of the nature of medieval peasants, their economic activities, their style of life and their standard of living must involve an assessment of the quality of their buildings. Although much research has gone into aspects of this subject, it has resulted in a dispersed literature, and has led to many contradictory judgements.

Historians, or rather the few who have written on the subject, tend to hold very low opinions of peasant housing conditions:- ‘hardly more than crude huts’ is one view; a widely read text-book states that ‘Housing was primitive . . . for the most part (houses) were small, with one or two rooms for people and animals alike’.<sup>1</sup> These impressions are derived from archaeologists, who have in the past tended to emphasize the less sophisticated aspects of the peasant house. One village site has been said to have had buildings that were ‘flimsy’, ‘slight’, and built of ‘poor timber’; the peasants, it is said, lacked both the materials and the incentive to build more solidly.<sup>2</sup> The conventional wisdom among those who study vernacular architecture is also to see ‘impermanent buildings’ being replaced by more durable types towards the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> There is an evident reluctance to date good timber-framed buildings in peasant contexts much earlier than c. 1400.<sup>4</sup> These opinions have been challenged by some archaeologists and architectural historians,<sup>5</sup> and the purpose here is to re-examine the subject, firstly by means of a detailed regional

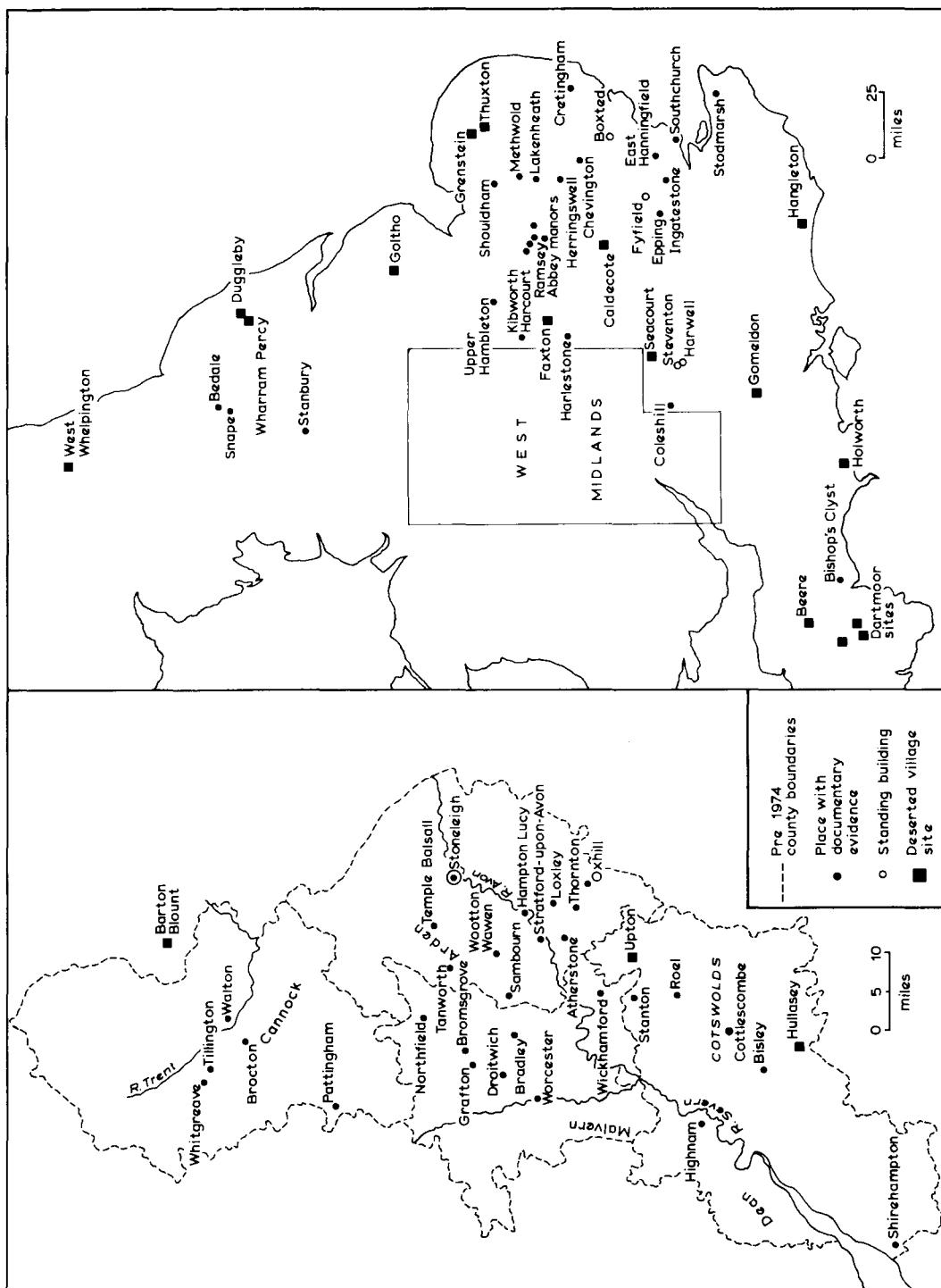


FIG. 1  
Map of buildings, settlements and manors mentioned in text

study of the documentary evidence for the West Midlands in the period 1350–1500, and then through an extension of the investigation to other regions and earlier periods, using a combination of information deriving from documents, architecture, and archaeology.

Before turning to the detailed evidence, some preliminary comments are needed on the term ‘peasant’, which has in the past created some difficulties and misunderstandings. To English-speaking people of the 20th century the word conveys a picture of downtrodden masses, capable only of leading a meagre existence in wretched living conditions, at the mercy both of their physical environment and their social superiors. Given this perception of the peasantry, it is understandable that they should be expected to have lived in houses (or huts) that were rough, temporary and inadequate.

Peasants can be defined simply as small-scale rural cultivators, occupying a relatively subordinate social position, and having relatively low incomes. Their material and legal conditions vary today, and varied in the past, from country to country, and from individual to individual. The differences between peasants depended on the resources available to them, the level of technical development, and the prevailing social system.<sup>6</sup> The peasants of late 13th-century England, to take a much-studied case, are normally thought to have included everyone from small-holders with an acre or two of arable land (plus common rights) who gained much of their living from craft work, wage-earning or small-scale retailing, up to a well-endowed minority (perhaps a twentieth of the land-holding population), who had 40 or 50 acres (16 or 20 ha) of land. Most of the recorded rural population in England held between five and 30 acres (2–12 ha), except in the eastern counties, from Kent to Lincolnshire, where in many villages a clear majority held five acres or less. If peasants are defined in this way, with their families and dependents they formed a majority of the English population, in excess of 80%, so their households according to current estimates numbered about a million.

A half of all peasants in the late 13th century suffered the disadvantage of holding in villeinage, that is, by a customary tenure regulated in the lord’s court. Villeins (serfs), when compared with free tenants, owed heavier obligations to their lords in terms of labour services and rents, and they were also subject to restrictions on migration and marriage. Freemen had their share of deprivation, however, because their holdings were often smaller than those of villeins. In one sample of 22,000 peasants from the East Midlands in 1279, 29% of villein holdings contained less than seven acres, while 47% of free tenants came into this small-holding category.<sup>7</sup> Both villeins and free tenants had some independence, in the sense that they were responsible for the management of their own holdings, and the control exercised by lords, directed mainly to ensuring rent-payments, fell a long way short of complete dictatorship. The sharing of interests by customary and free tenants is shown by co-operation between neighbours within the village community, primarily in the use of common pastures and fields. Late medieval English peasants were much involved in the market, with the upper ranks selling surplus produce and hiring labour, while the less well-off had to earn wages and buy food. The penetration of buying and selling into peasant society is shown by the market for land, already

active in the 13th century,<sup>8</sup> and the development of money rent, which was far advanced in 1250, and had almost entirely replaced labour services by c. 1400.<sup>9</sup> This definition and characterization of the peasantry is reflected in many ways in their material culture. Survey and excavation of village sites show the small defined territory (*toft*) of each household, often closely associated with neighbours in collective groupings. Comparison between the material remains of the village and those of aristocratic residences indicates the extent of social divisions between the peasant majority and the lordly élite. The importance of market contacts is demonstrated by the numerous finds of pottery and metal-work originating from outside the village.<sup>10</sup>

#### WEST MIDLAND PEASANT BUILDINGS, 1350–1500

The documentary evidence for peasant buildings in much of England in the late 14th and 15th centuries is abundant, because of a special combination of circumstances. With the social and economic changes of the 14th century, and particularly after the collapse of population associated with the epidemics of 1348–75, there were important readjustments in the relationship between lords and tenants. Buildings became a point of friction, because tenants were amalgamating holdings and therefore wished to demolish redundant houses; they were also changing methods of farming, which required modification in accommodation for crops and animals. They might even wish to raise cash by selling surplus buildings or their materials. On the other hand the landlords correctly judged that the amalgamation of holdings and the decay of buildings would reduce their rent incomes, which were already declining. They seem to have lived in expectation that in the near future the population would recover, and that the holdings would again be rented out separately. The loss of buildings threatened this hope, as well as wasting what the lords saw as *their* assets, although the erection and maintenance of buildings had been the responsibility of the tenants as far back as our documents go.

Landlords in the late 14th and early 15th centuries were having to adjust to new and adverse circumstances, which involved them in abandoning the direct management of agriculture, and depending more than ever on rents. Thus their minds were concentrated on the problem of conserving tenant holdings. In the West Midlands they took a variety of measures to protect buildings, acting mainly through their chief instruments of discipline over tenants, the manor courts. From the court records of the region we find that, especially from the 1370s, tenants who demolished or stole buildings, or allowed them to decay, were amerced (fined). Tenants were ordered to carry out repairs, sometimes in such precise terms that the building or even the part of a building requiring attention was named. Those failing to comply with the orders were threatened with financial penalties. When a holding was surrendered, the lord could have a survey carried out with an assessment of the cost of repairs, sometimes with the intention of recovering the money from the outgoing tenant. When new tenants took up a holding, an obligation to carry out maintenance would commonly be inserted in the formal record of their tenancy. If decay was already far advanced, the new tenants might be required to put up a new building or

buildings, often of a size fixed in the agreement, and with a time limit (usually a year or two) for the completion of the work. Tenants might be helped to repair or rebuild by remissions of rent, arrears of rent, or entry fines. More rarely they received grants of cash. Gifts of timber or straw were much more common, and these formed part of the building agreements between lords and new tenants. A last resort would be for the lords themselves to carry out rebuilding, paying directly for the materials and the hire of labour.<sup>11</sup>

The lords were fighting a losing battle. The tenants, who sensed their improved bargaining position, were generally becoming more assertive. If a lord pressed them too hard, they could leave the manor, and many did. Lords might demand large amercements for failing to carry out repairs, as high as 3*s.* 4*d.* or 6*s.* 8*d.*, instead of the normal 4*d.* or 6*d.*; they might warn tenants with huge penalties of £2 or £3; they could insist that the tenants be bound by pledges (sureties) to guarantee that they carried out orders or agreements to do building work. If a tenant resolutely refused to comply, he could be evicted, but this would have been an admission of defeat, because the whole idea was to keep as many tenants in well-ordered holdings as possible. Tenants could call their lord's bluff, because they knew that in the circumstances of the generally low demand for land a tenant with a decaying building was usually preferable to no tenant at all. Many buildings fell down, and perhaps a half of all of the occupied messuages of the 1340s had become empty tofts within a hundred years. Everywhere were ruined and abandoned buildings, not only concentrated in the deserted village sites, but also scattered over the many shrunken villages. Gradually the lords accepted the situation. Even at the height of their campaign individual tenants were occasionally given permission to remove a building or were excused compliance with a building agreement; by about 1480 most lords had given up the struggle for repairs, and stopped making building agreements or individual court orders. Instead they issued bland and ineffective general injunctions to tenants to maintain their holdings.<sup>12</sup>

These conflicts involved customary tenants only, as lords had no direct interest in the buildings of free-holdings. Occasional references in deeds and rentals suggest that the housing stock of free tenants declined also, but we cannot tell if the process was on a smaller scale. The selectiveness of the sources does not seriously diminish the value of their evidence, because customary tenants were numerous, and they give us a good sample of different economic strata within the peasantry. The lords, no matter how ineffective their measures, were unconsciously creating as a by-product of their attempts at conservation a mass of information for posterity.

In using this material I am extending the original work of Mr R. K. Field, who published a remarkable collection of building agreements for Worcestershire.<sup>13</sup> He showed that the agreements enable us to analyse the size of buildings because they often specify the number of bays ('spaces', *intersticia*, 'rooms') or the numbers of pairs of crucks ('forks', 'couples') to be built. As the dimensions of the bay, approximately 15 by 15 ft (*c.* 4.6 m × 4.6 m), are known from standing buildings, we can conclude that 84% of the 113 Worcestershire buildings whose sizes are recorded, were either of three bays, 15 by 45 ft (*c.* 4.6 m × 13.8 m), or of two bays, 15 by 30 ft (*c.* 4.6 m × 9.2 m), with three bays in a majority. The remaining sizes were of one bay (2%), four

bays (11%) or five or six bays (4%). Research extending into Worcestershire's neighbouring counties of Gloucestershire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire repeats Field's findings in that 80% of buildings were recorded as of two or three bays.<sup>14</sup> A Worcestershire agreement that has come to light since Field's publication gives contemporary confirmation of the size of the bay; at Grafton in 1435 Thomas Davys was to 'build anew a bay sixteen feet long annexed to his hall'.<sup>15</sup> In the light of the new research into the whole region a slight modification should be made to Field's argument that three-bay houses belonged to the better-off, thriving peasants. Three-bay buildings — being the commonest — are found on holdings as small as a quarter-yardland (*c.* 7 acres or 3 ha) and as large as a full yardland (*c.* 30 acres or 12 ha) or even larger. Similarly the four- or five-bay buildings that were sometimes built by wealthier tenants also occurred on quite modest tenements, so there does not seem to have been an exact correlation between the size of individual buildings and the acreage of their builders' holdings (this apparent anomaly will be explained below). Critics of these sources may object that the sizes of buildings should not be taken too seriously because they generally refer to future constructions, and the agreements were not carried out; so the documents tell us about theory, not practice. It is true that tenants often did not keep their side of the agreement, but the sizes of the buildings were those that contemporaries thought appropriate and reasonable, in the light of their experience of existing buildings. In any case some of the buildings envisaged in agreements are known to have been completed.

In considering the nature of peasant buildings, our attention must be focused on the small piece of land, often as little as a quarter-acre (0.1 ha), that served as the centre of each holding, either arranged next to its neighbours along a village street, or, in an area of dispersed settlement, beside an access road. It was usually of rectilinear shape and bounded by banks, hedges, fences or walls, with an external ditch. Archaeologists customarily call this plot a *toft*, and in some parts of the country this is the word found in the documents. In the West Midlands the contemporary sources use the term '*messuage*', '*toft*' being reserved for an empty plot after the removal or decay of the buildings.

Throughout the West Midland region, as in Worcestershire, there are few references to two-storey buildings. Field's one example came from near Bromsgrove, Worcs., in 1474. A clear reference to a rural building with an upper floor ('a lower and upper chamber in the upper part of the hall') is found in a maintenance agreement from Shirehampton, Glos. (now Avon) in 1483.<sup>16</sup> At Loxley, Warw., in 1488 a house was equipped with a *gryce* (ladder) and trap door, which implies the presence of a loft.<sup>17</sup> There is also architectural evidence for floored end-bays of cruck buildings of *c.* 1500 at Stoneleigh, Warw., and there may have been a movement towards upper floors in rural houses in the region towards the end of the 15th century, as has been noted in Devon.<sup>18</sup>

People and animals were usually accommodated in separate buildings. The long-house, in which dwelling and byre came under the same roof, which is known from excavations in Gloucestershire in a 13th-century context,<sup>19</sup> had evidently become a rarity after 1350. Only two unambiguous references to dwelling houses and byres built in line were discovered by Field, to which another Worcestershire

example can be added, at Northfield in 1440, where a tenant agreed to build 'a hall . . . and a chamber at the front end of the hall with a byre at the rear end'.<sup>20</sup> Normally peasants had a separate dwelling house, called a hall (*aula*), or a hall and chamber (*aula et camera*), or an *insethouse*. The most common arrangement was for a three-bay house to be divided into a hall and one or two chambers, separated by screens or walls which are called *speres* in a court roll from Hampton Lucy, Warw., in 1457.<sup>21</sup> Kitchens are mentioned as free-standing buildings, though they may sometimes have occupied an end-bay of a dwelling house.

One problem that has been considered by both archaeologists and historians is the likelihood of a holding containing more than one dwelling house. Under the pressure of population increase in the 12th and 13th centuries we know that holdings were divided, with yardlands and bovates being split into halves and quarters. Ultimately each fraction became a completely separate entity, but it is possible that at an intermediate stage two households would share the holding, and so two separate dwellings might be found occupying the same messuage. Subletting, a clandestine activity and therefore only partially documented, might also have led to an extra house being built on a holding for a sub-tenant. A very well-documented occasion for the co-existence of two households would arise from retirement arrangements. An elderly couple, or a widow, would surrender land to a new tenant and sometimes a formal agreement for the maintenance of the old tenant would be registered in the court roll. The retiring peasant might be allowed a share — perhaps one bay — of the main dwelling house. More often a separate 'chamber' or 'house' was provided in the messuage, either a converted existing building, or a purpose-built dwelling. Because of the generally low expectation of life these arrangements would have been temporary and occasional.<sup>22</sup>

Peasant holdings were normally provided with agricultural buildings as well as dwelling houses. Even a cottage tenement might have a house, a granary, and a byre, though perhaps only two buildings, a house and barn, would be found on some small-holdings.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the region, when for various reasons manorial juries listed all of the buildings on a holding, in villages such as Cottlescombe, in Elkstone, Glos., and Stoneleigh, Oxhill, and Wootton Wawen (all in Warw.), three or more buildings are mentioned, such as a hall, granary, bakehouse and byre in 1438 at Cottlescombe, and a hall, chamber, kitchen, granary, oxhouse and bakehouse at Stoneleigh in 1481.<sup>24</sup> The basic structures were those to provide living space for people, one building for animals (a byre or shepcote were the most common), and another for crop storage, either a barn (*grangia*) or granary (*horreum*), terms which were apparently interchangeable.<sup>25</sup> Frequently an additional building was a free-standing bakehouse, which may have been also used for brewing. There are occasional references to the presence on peasant holdings of brewhouses, malt-kilns, stables, pigsties, dovecotes, cart-houses, wain-houses, shops and forges. Buildings must often have served more than one function, whether by using the same space for a number of purposes, such as storing a cart in a barn, or by dividing a building into sections, as must have happened in the case of the '*horrium cum shepehouse*' that needed roofing at Thornton, Warw., in 1472.<sup>26</sup>

As peasants, particularly those who were better-off, clearly possessed a number of buildings, we can envisage the messuage as containing a grouping, even a cluster of structures, often around a yard. This layout is familiar from the physical remains, whether revealed by surveys as at Hullasey, Glos., or by aerial photographs (to take an example from outside the West Midlands region) as at Duggleby, Yorks., or from excavations at sites such as Barton Blount, Derbys.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps variations in the wealth and status of peasants were reflected in the number of buildings rather than in their size, or in a combination of number and size that would give a better-off peasant a total of a dozen bays, while a cottager would have only four or so. The quality of construction may also have varied with the social rank of the tenant. Certainly functional differences might lead to differences between buildings, like the timbers called 'forklegs' or 'hovel-forks', found in agricultural buildings, which indicate their relatively insubstantial construction.<sup>28</sup> Our suspicion that some buildings were very slight is aroused by the sale of their materials for sums as small as 1*s.* 6*d.* or 2*s. od.*, unless of course the timber being sold had once been of good quality but had deteriorated badly through neglect. No doubt some of the minor structures, such as pigsties, were both small and flimsy, hence their rare appearances in our documents, because lords were concerned to maintain the more important buildings. One type of agricultural building, the 'helm', was in use at Bisley, Glos., in the late 14th century. The name was applied to poor quality cart-sheds or stack-stands in some regions in later centuries, but at Bisley helms stood on staddle stones, to protect the crops stored in them from damp and vermin. Their timber-framed superstructures, designed to sit on four or twelve stones, would have been quite sophisticated, even if on a small scale.<sup>29</sup>

The bulk of the West Midland evidence relates to dwelling-houses or barns, and there can be little doubt of the substantial nature of these buildings. They normally had stone foundations, usually no more than a low plinth wall, but higher walls, even up to the eaves, are implied by some Cotswold records. The timber superstructures were invariably based on crucks, called 'forks' or 'couples', so peasants were using a building technique that could have been sturdy. Other major timbers, such as ground sills, wall-plates and studs are also mentioned, commonly made of oak, elm, or ash. The walls were infilled with wattle and daub, and can be shown from some sources to have been plastered and lime-washed.<sup>30</sup> Thatched roofs of straw were normal, though reed thatch is recorded in two cases, and a peasant's barn at Sambourn, Warw., mentioned in 1480, is known to have been tiled.<sup>31</sup> This example is by no means unusual in demonstrating a relatively high standard of construction for the more important agricultural buildings. Barns, when their structure is recorded, were invariably built with crucks. The agreements for maintaining retired peasants might provide for the conversion of an agricultural building into a dwelling, like the cart-house on a yardland holding at Stanton, Glos., in 1405, that was to be used to house an elderly couple.<sup>32</sup> This implies that an agricultural building, although in need of alteration to make it habitable, was not markedly inferior to a dwelling in its basic structure. Maintenance agreements have as a common theme the honourable treatment to be accorded to the outgoing tenants, and the comparability of their new style of life

both with their life before retirement and with that of their successors, so they could not be fobbed off with a shed.

The quality of peasant buildings was very much dependent on the availability of suitable timber. In the special circumstances when the lords were encouraging or threatening tenants to do repairs they were given trees from the lords' woods. When timber was not available in the immediate vicinity, more remote sources could be used; so tenants on the bishop of Worcester's manors adjacent to the city of Worcester were supplied from Malvern Wood, nine miles (*c.* 15 km) away.<sup>33</sup> This leaves the problem of the source of timber for peasants who were putting up buildings in normal circumstances, either customary tenants acting on their own initiative (because most building work was *not* carried out under pressure from the lord), or free tenants whose buildings were not subject to control by landlords. Some tenants would have had trees growing on their land: in wooded districts like the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire peasants might have a small acreage of woodland as part of their holding; in champion districts there would have been at least some hedgerow timber around the messuages or in the boundaries between furlongs in the open fields.<sup>34</sup> The use of such trees by customary tenants was subject to seigniorial control, and illicit felling or the sale of timber led to amercement in the manor court. Presumably permission would have been given to customary tenants who wished to use the timber for building on their own holdings, and again free tenants would have encountered no restrictions. However, the amount of such timber, especially in champion areas, must have been quite small; for major timbers, like cruck blades, peasants needed access to the products of mature woods. A tenant's common rights often included 'housbote', entitling him to take some building timber from the lord's wood. On the rare occasions when this custom was given any definition, it was clearly supervised by the lord's officials, and we may doubt if large numbers of trees could have been taken.<sup>35</sup> Peasants also took timber without permission, and were then fined in the lord's court on the report of a woodward in an exercise designed to collect revenue rather than to deter offenders. The quantities recorded were usually small, often single trees, and certainly not enough to build complete new houses.

It therefore seems likely that peasants often obtained their timber on the market. We know that this happened in towns: for example, the Guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-upon-Avon purchased timber together with other building materials for work on its properties in the 15th century. The guild records give information about prices, like the small oak trees which cost 3*d.* each. In a survey of Tanworth-in-Arden, Warw., in *c.* 1500 'great' oaks, suitable for major building timbers, were valued at 8*d.* each.<sup>36</sup> If a three-bay cruck-built peasant house needed perhaps 20 trees of varying sizes the cost of buying timber could have been as much as 10*s. od.*<sup>37</sup> The employment of labour for felling, preparation, and transport added to the expense, but this cost would have been incurred even if the trees were obtained freely. Expenditure could have been kept down by re-using timber from older buildings, and there is much evidence that this was a common practice. Other materials posed fewer problems, as straw, clay and (less certainly) withies or hazel rods for wattles would have been obtained either on the peasant's holding or on the

commons. However, the iron-work of houses — nails, hinges, locks and keys — would all have been purchased.

Observation of the structures of surviving peasant buildings has led to the conclusion that they were put up by specialist carpenters, often using a high degree of skill. The suggestion is sometimes made that this is true only of the very best buildings, those exceptional examples that have stood the test of time. However, the documents show that carpenters were normally employed by peasants on all kinds of buildings. Aggrieved peasant employers in law suits complained of poor service from carpenters, like John Bonde, who contracted to build a house at Temple Balsall, Warw., working by the day, and was impleaded in 1415 by Thomas Bloxwyche, because 'sometimes he came to his work around prime (early morning) and sometimes around sext (midday).'<sup>38</sup> Carpenters were too numerous to have all found employment in upper-class building projects. For example, 32 were listed among the tax-payers of 60 villages and towns in south Staffordshire in 1380–81. They sometimes lived in groups, like the three carpenters who were recorded at Brocton in Baswich, a village of about 23 households.<sup>39</sup> Contemporaries assumed that a professional carpenter would be employed to put up peasant buildings, as is shown by a grant of 9*s.* 10*d.* made to a tenant of Pattingham, Staffs., in 1444 to pay a carpenter.<sup>40</sup> Litigation over contracts, and prosecutions under the Statute of Labourers in the late 14th century, record the employment by peasants of other building specialists, notably masons, thatchers and daubers. We cannot know the size of the contribution that the peasant or his household made to building work, especially in the less skilled jobs, such as preparation of the site, carriage of materials, and daubing, but in view of the evidence for the hiring of specialists, we should not assume that a great deal was done by the peasant. After all, the agricultural activities on the holding needed attention for much of the year, and some of the slack times of the farming calendar, like mid winter, were not suitable for building work. Unskilled labour would certainly have been used in the 'rearing' of the timbers, recorded in seigniorial building projects when ale was supplied to the often large groups of volunteers who came to lend a hand. In this operation at least the idea that house building was a 'communal' activity has some justification.

The argument then is that peasants bought materials and employed labour, leading inevitably to the conclusion that they spent a good deal of money on their buildings. How much did a completed building cost? One indication comes from the accounts of landlords who took on the construction of tenants' houses themselves. The most fully documented example is John Bromefeld's holding at Tillington, Staffs., where the earl of Stafford paid for a three-bay dwelling house and a three-bay barn in 1437–38.<sup>41</sup> He did this economically by dismantling two buildings at Whitgreave, about two miles away, transporting the timbers, and re-erecting them at the new site. This operation cost £2 5*s.* 4*d.*, and together with extra timbers and laths, and the cost of wattling, daubing and thatching with reeds, the whole expenditure came to £3 18*s.* 2*d.*, or about £2 per building. The job was evidently not completed at the end of the accounting year, as there is no mention of doors or fittings, so the £2 figure must be regarded as a minimum. Had the earl also paid the

full cost of cutting and fitting new timbers, rather than recycling old materials, the completed buildings would surely have worked out at a minimum of £3 each. An estimate of this order is supported by the sum of £2 7*s.* 1½*d.* spent on extensive repairs (not a complete rebuild) on a three-bay house at Walton in Heywood, Staffs., in 1461–62, and an abbot of Evesham's claimed expenditure of £13 6*s.* 8*d.* on rebuilding a whole tenement (presumably three or four buildings) at Wickhamford, Worcs., in c. 1400.<sup>42</sup>

Is the cost of a tenant's building to a lord irrelevant in assessing a peasant's own costs? Lords built one in a hundred tenant buildings at most, and this minority could be unrepresentative as well as tiny. In particular it can be alleged that, because of their superior resources, lords built to a higher standard. There is probably some truth in this argument but it seems unlikely that their standards were very much better than those of the peasants. In the case of the Tillington buildings the original timber frames from Whitgreave are likely to have come from a peasant-built house and barn, and if these were acceptable to the earl of Stafford's officials they evidently did not expect that there would be great differences between a tenant house that they built, and one put up by a peasant. Incidentally, the moving of the buildings should not suggest their flimsiness, as is sometimes stated, but rather resulted from the flexibility of good quality timber-framing, which could be dismantled and reassembled, as is recorded on many occasions both for seigniorial and peasant buildings. A further indication of the portability and interchangeability of these structures is provided by the transfer in 1391–92 of two tenant buildings (most likely barns or dwellings) from Bradley, Worcs., to the town of Droitwich, a distance of six miles (9 km), and their re-erection as salt-houses by the estate managers of the bishopric of Worcester at a total cost of £7 12*s.* od.<sup>43</sup> Their timber-work was clearly of a sufficient standard to provide the basis for a seigniorial building, albeit one intended for industrial use.

If landlords had really been aiming to erect tenant buildings very much superior to those of peasant houses in general, they would surely have used techniques and materials familiar from their own manor houses: mortared ashlar foundations, for example, or glazed windows, or roofs of ceramic tiles. We should beware of idealising the motives of landlord builders. All of our knowledge of late medieval estate management suggests that they were reluctantly seeking to preserve wasting assets in a bleak economic climate. Unlike some builders of 'estate' cottages of the 18th and 19th centuries they were not making a far-sighted investment in the long-term future, because they had different concepts of investment, and they were unlikely to have been motivated by a spirit of paternalistic philanthropy.<sup>44</sup> They seem rather to have been providing at reasonable cost the sort of buildings that were appropriate for a peasant holding, so that tenants would be attracted to them. Accordingly we are justified in thinking that the costs of tenant buildings put up by lords provide some guide to the financial commitment of peasants paying for similar buildings. There are too many uncertainties to allow us to say that a peasant's costs would have been either higher or lower than those incurred by a lord. Any participation by a peasant in the work would have helped to reduce the labour bill; on the other hand many lords obtained timber free (or at least they did not pay for it

directly), whereas the peasant who was putting up a building independently often had to buy his timber.

To some extent we do not need to speculate on the cost of building when the peasants themselves were paying, because there is direct evidence in the form of estimates made when a dilapidated tenement was inspected by a jury, and when sums of money were mentioned in building agreements. The bulk of assessments of dilapidation amount to a few shillings only, but they refer to relatively small-scale repairs, such as rethatching a roof. The largest sums, intended to pay for major repairs, are our best guide to the cost of a new building. Some examples are the ‘waste and destruction’ of Henry Chamberlain’s buildings at Roel, Glos., in 1400, said to be worth £4, or the assessment of £2 put on repairs to a cottage holding at Stanton, Glos., in 1442. In 1438 at Stoneleigh, Warw., the lord gave a tenant £2 and ‘sufficient timber’ to repair a three-bay house. At Highnam, Glos., in 1351 a new tenant agreed to carry out building work worth £3 within a year.<sup>45</sup> These and other sums said to be needed to carry out major repairs on peasant buildings confirm the impression gained from the Tillington and Walton examples that a new house or barn of three bays would have cost at least £2, and a more likely sum would have been £3 or £4, especially if the timber had to be purchased. These are no mean sums: £3 approaches the annual earnings of a carpenter in about 1400, or the purchase price of six oxen or 30 sheep. Peasant houses were rather cheaper to build than modest town houses of the 15th century, which cost £10 or so, but these were two-storey buildings with tiled roofs.<sup>46</sup> Seigniorial buildings, superior to these houses in both size and materials, were very much more expensive. Taking into account the general levels of price and wages, these medieval rural houses were rather cheaper than modern houses. But they needed a considerable outlay of cash, and involved much greater expenditure than any ‘crude hut’.

The documents summarized above accord well with the evidence of the surviving late medieval buildings. Dozens of well-carpentered houses, of two, three or four bays, based on cruck principals and erected on low plinth walls of stone, still stand in the West Midlands. The notion that these were superior buildings, exceptional in their ownership or craftsmanship, and were therefore given an unusual capacity for survival, has been countered by Alcock who has pointed to the ‘cruck villages’, like Stoneleigh, where cruck buildings exist in sufficient number to show that these were not just the houses of a small élite.<sup>47</sup> Also Charles’s emphasis on the rôle of the carpenters working in the 15th century at the peak of their accomplishment within a well-established building tradition suggests that the surviving houses are representative of a once numerous type.<sup>48</sup> Many cruck buildings failed to survive, according to Alcock, not because they were flimsy in construction, but because their lack of height made them difficult to convert to two-storey dwellings in the 16th and 17th centuries. The documentary evidence allows us to glimpse hundreds of buildings that have now perished, which would appear to have been very similar in size and construction to those still standing.

To sum up: in the West Midlands in the period 1350–1500 peasant messuages generally contained a number of buildings, consisting frequently of a house and barn, and often one or two other buildings used for food processing and agriculture.

The house and barn were commonly of two or three bays (about 9 to 14 m in length); they were built of large timbers, including crucks, by craftsmen at a cost of about £2 to £4. The other buildings may not have been as substantial as the houses and barns, but their quality should not be underestimated. Buildings were regarded by landlords as such crucial elements of tenant holdings that they made strenuous efforts to keep them in good repair. Providing that they were maintained, buildings of this type were potentially durable: the tiny minority surviving until the present day were selected more by good fortune than by any unusual qualities in their original structure.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR PEASANT BUILDINGS OUTSIDE THE WEST MIDLANDS,  
1350–1500

Until other researchers are able to gather a similar quantity of documentary evidence for other regions, no more can be done here than to make brief excursions into the printed and manuscript sources to provide some comparative material. A starting point is Bishop's Clyst in Devon, where the bishops of Exeter built a number of cottages in the early 15th century, including one with the luxury of a roof of stone slates.<sup>49</sup> Devon, like the West Midland counties, lay within the cruck building area, though walls at Clyst were made of cob rather than the wattle and daub panels found further north. Two-bay thatched cottages built as part of a row (and therefore cheaper than a free-standing building), averaged £3 4*s. od.* each. Further east at Coleshill in Berks. (now Oxon.) in the 1430s the lord was carrying out a major campaign of rebuilding, again including one building (a barn) roofed with slates.<sup>50</sup> A four-bay thatched dwelling house 21½ ft (6.6 m) wide and 51½ ft (15.7 m) long, with stone walls 9 ft (2.7 m) high at the sides and 16 ft (4.9 m) high at the gables, was built for £7 6*s. 4d.* The same yardland holding, known from a previous tenant as 'Feld's', was also provided with a barn (*orreum*) of at least two bays, which cost nearly £4 to repair over a two-year period.

In the East Midlands the building traditions were very different. Crucks were rarely used, and building stone was often scarce. On the Ramsey Abbey estate which was centred on Huntingdonshire, with outlying manors in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, there were many building agreements between the Abbey and its tenants in the first half of the 15th century.<sup>51</sup> The size of the buildings was described in terms of six or eight *byndyngstodis* or 'binding posts', that is of two or three bays; to confirm the expectation that these buildings were similar in size to those of the West Midlands the dimensions were sometimes given in feet, 30 or 40 ft (9.2 or 12.2 m) long and 14, 15 or 16 ft (4.3, 4.6 or 4.9 m) wide. Again each holding was equipped with a group of buildings. For example, a cottage at Wistow, Hunts. (now Cambs.), was described as consisting of an *insethouse*, a chamber and a bakehouse.<sup>52</sup> The first two were perhaps joined together, so the holding was provided with at least two separate buildings. A larger holding, at Little Raveley, Hunts., in 1428 had an *insethouse* of eight binding posts, a barn of eight, and a bakehouse of six, all in need of rebuilding after a disastrous fire.<sup>53</sup> On most Ramsey

holdings buildings for animals are rarely mentioned, apart from the occasional sheepcote or stable. Long-houses were as rare as in the West Midlands, the only possible example being from a maintenance agreement at Chatteris, Cambs., in 1443 which allowed a widow to keep three animals 'at the east end of the *insethouse*'.<sup>54</sup> Animals were perhaps normally sheltered in yards. Most buildings were of one storey, except for a few with solars, notably at Warboys, Hunts.<sup>55</sup> The peasants of the Ramsey estate may have built less substantially and spent somewhat smaller sums on buildings than their contemporaries to the west: they did not build byres; judging from the absence of references to stone foundations they either built directly on the ground or on padstones; and the timbers needed for a structure without crucks could have been relatively slender. On the other hand the differences between the regions should not be over-rated: a tenant still had to maintain two or three buildings, totalling eight or more bays; he (or she) employed specialists for thatching and daubing as well as carpentry, to judge from references to these craftsmen in the building agreements; and because of its relative scarcity, timber cannot have been cheap to buy and transport. When Ramsey Abbey paid for repairs to tenant buildings at Hemingford Abbots, Hunts., in the mid 15th century timber was purchased in parcels at prices varying from 2s. to 20s. A sum of 16s. bought the timber for a barn, and the 'making' of a barn in carpentry and roofing cost 39s. 4d.; £4 6s. 6d. was paid for repairs to a tenement (we are not told for how many buildings).<sup>56</sup> Further north, at Upper Hambleton, Rutland (now Leics.), an area where stone foundations were used, repairs to two tenant buildings in 1453 involved an outlay by the lord of £1 11s. 7d. and £2 2s. 11d.<sup>57</sup> That peasants would also have paid a minimum of £2 for a new building, and probably more, is implied by the reductions of rent and grants of cash made by Ramsey Abbey to its tenants, the sums of £1 or £2 evidently being intended to cover part of the cost only. One Ramsey document gives a clue about regular maintenance of buildings, because in a contract to provide a retired peasant at Hemingford Abbots in 1444 with a 'chamber', the incoming tenant agreed to employ a thatcher for two days *per annum*.<sup>58</sup> If we assume that more time would be needed to look after the larger roofs of the three buildings of a medium-sized holding, then the ideal expenditure each year could have been as much as 2s. od. or 3s. od.

In the counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and in south Lincolnshire the documentary evidence for tenant buildings seems less plentiful. Buildings were certainly said to be falling into disrepair, and landlords enjoined new tenants to maintain them, but whether because the problem was less acute, or because different relationships prevailed between lords and tenants, detailed building agreements and direct subsidies for buildings seem to be recorded less frequently than in other regions. However, there is enough information to suggest that buildings were of the post or stud construction recorded in the East Midlands, without substantial stone foundations. Although some of the numerous cottage holdings may have been furnished with only one building, at Shouldham, Norfolk, in 1434 a cottager had two, and a one-acre tenement recorded at Herringswell, Suffolk, in 1371 was provided with three.<sup>59</sup> There are several statements, from Methwold, Norfolk, Cretingham and Chevington, Suffolk, and Epping, Essex, that the messuages of

larger holdings contained three buildings.<sup>60</sup> Besides the dwelling houses, barns and bakehouses are most frequently mentioned. In Suffolk in the late 14th century bakehouses were sufficiently well-built to make them convertible into living accommodation for retired peasants.<sup>61</sup> Throughout the region, from the middle of the 14th century, two-storey houses (the upper rooms being called solars) are recorded in the context of divisions made on retirement.<sup>62</sup> Dimensions of buildings were evidently similar to those of the East Midlands. Retired people were given small chambers of 15 by 15 ft (4.6 × 4.6 m); the houses of active peasants were larger, like the building measuring 40 × 18 ft (c. 12.2 × 5.5 m), that a tenant of Methwold agreed to erect in 1432.<sup>63</sup> A hint of costs is provided by the grant of 20*s.* together with timber that was given to the same Methwold tenant, and the sum of 31*s.* spent by the lord of Southchurch, Essex, on a tenant's building in 1438.<sup>64</sup> These sums, together with the assessments of damage, amercements, and penalties of £1 or £2 mentioned in connection with decayed or demolished buildings, suggest that the expenses of building may have been a little lower than in the west of the country, but were by no means negligible. The sums quoted above tend not to include the cost of buying timber, and high prices, in an area where demand was such that native timber supplies were supplemented by imports, may have been a factor in East Anglian building costs. The timber collected by a prosperous peasant of East Hanningfield, Essex, for building a house in 1381 was valued (after his execution for joining the revolt of that year) at £5 6*s.* 8*d.*<sup>65</sup>

In Kent, where informative manorial records are lacking, wills of the period 1460–1500 sometimes give an indication of housing arrangements when they specify the division of property between widows and heirs. The wills are useful because they confirm the evidence of standing buildings that the better-off peasants lived in wealden houses with their combination of open halls and two-storeyed end-bays. Robert att Wod of Stodmarsh, for example, in his will of 1497 left his wife access to 'the north chamberre . . . and the chamber underneth'. In the course of describing the rights of widows and heirs references are made in various wills to kitchens, shops, a bakehouse, a barn and a stable, suggesting that in Kent messuages were often provided with subsidiary buildings, like their counterparts elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

The documents of the south-eastern counties can be compared with the more tangible evidence of surviving buildings. In the north this is difficult, because few low-status buildings survive that can be dated before 1600. Does this mean that the medieval peasant houses of the region were of exceptionally poor quality? In their authoritative study of the vernacular architecture of north Yorkshire and Cleveland Mr B. Harrison and Mrs B. Hutton have refuted this suggestion partly through the use of documents. Accounts of Bedale of the second quarter of the 15th century show the lord building houses and barns for tenants with substantial timber frames on stone foundation walls and pad-stones. Because of the expense of providing some roofs with stone slates some of these houses cost more than most of those recorded further south at the same period: the construction of one house came to £11 3*s.* 9*d.*, and another totalled £4 15*s.* 6*d.* Such sturdy and expensive structures were by no means universal in the north, and other documents like accounts for Snape apparently depict (despite difficulties with impenetrable dialect terms) some quite

crude and cheap buildings. Judging from the number of references in north Yorkshire to two-bay buildings, houses could have been rather small but, as in other regions, they were invariably accompanied by barns.<sup>67</sup> At Stanbury in Bradford, W. Yorks., in 1421 it was agreed in a court judgement that three buildings were sufficient for a holding.<sup>68</sup>

This survey of documented buildings, although inevitably incomplete, confirms the wide variety of local constructional traditions already known from the material evidence. There are however some common characteristics:

- 1.** Peasant messuages contained not just a house but a group of buildings. The long-house was a localised type, and over most of the country animals were either housed separately, or kept in yards. Of other buildings, barns were most common, followed by kitchens and bakehouses, and a variety of other structures.
- 2.** Individual houses and barns were mostly of two or three bays, so measured from about 30 to 45 ft (9.2 to 13.7 m) in length.
- 3.** Among the great variety of materials used, some seem to have been of high quality, including stone foundations, and even complete stone walls in the west and north; they used substantial timbers, and (more rarely) slated or tiled roofs. Buildings were not provided with such solid foundations in the east but they were still professionally built using expensive timber. The agricultural buildings included some very well-built barns, and even bakehouses and cart-houses were regarded as suitable for adaptation for use as dwellings. Surviving vernacular buildings seem to be characteristic of once more numerous types, and the absence or rarity of standing buildings in some regions should not necessarily be regarded as evidence of the flimsiness of the local methods of construction.
- 4.** Buildings for peasants were erected by professional craftsmen, certainly in the case of the carpentry, and often for the stone work and thatching also. The wages, together with the costs of materials, meant that houses built by lords cost anything between £2 and £11, and when peasants were paying, may be estimated at between £2 and £4. The involvement of the craftsmen has implications for the quality and durability of the buildings.

#### PEASANT BUILDINGS, 1200–1350

So far the discussion has concentrated almost entirely on the period 1350–1500, because so much of the documentary evidence belongs to that period. The decades after 1350 might be seen as a time of radical innovation in peasant building, and the situation in our documents regarded as the result of recent or current developments. This would accord with the view of the period as the ‘golden age of the peasantry’, when after the plagues, land and corn were relatively plentiful, rents and restrictions were reduced, and standards of living improved.<sup>69</sup> The evidence of standing

buildings fits this theory particularly well, because so many are dated to the decades after 1400, when it is argued that standards of carpentry attained a high level of competence. Still-existing late medieval peasant buildings are numerous in the south-east and especially in Kent, with its impressive wealden houses, and where there is independent evidence of a concentration of peasant prosperity.<sup>70</sup>

However, we should be cautious in accepting this argument too uncritically. Historians always have to be wary of confusing a real change with a mere innovation in documentation. We know more about houses after 1348–49 because of the administrative responses to the fall in population. The changes in peasant society during the 14th century were real and important, but they should not be exaggerated. Peasants with larger holdings could have fared quite well in the 13th century because rising prices and low labour costs gave them the opportunity to profit from the market. Conversely the 15th century, with its low prices and high wages, posed problems for those who had acquired more land. Just as historians can recognize the perpetuation of many aspects of society through the 14th-century crises, the archaeological evidence suggests some continuity also in peasant buildings. The innovations revealed by excavation belong to the 13th century rather than to the period after 1350. The characteristics of late medieval peasant buildings indicated above can also be recognized in the period 1200–1350:

- 1.** The typical lay-out of house, barn, and other buildings is found on many 13th-century sites. Long-houses were more widely distributed than after 1350, and perhaps all of the needs of a peasant holding could be served by a single long-house, though it is difficult to prove archaeologically that long-houses stood in isolation. On the Dartmoor settlements, or at Gomeldon, Wilts., long-houses were associated with other structures, interpreted as barns, byres, out-houses, and ovens.<sup>71</sup> In the areas where long-houses do not occur, in much of the East Midlands and the south-east, houses and barns are found together, and with bakehouses or other structures.<sup>72</sup> In East Anglia we can appreciate the complex of buildings within a messuage from the excavations of Thuxton in Norfolk.<sup>73</sup> Maintenance agreements in East Anglian court rolls assign to old people access to a number of buildings on a holding, often as many as three, and retired peasants might be given the bakehouse for conversion into a dwelling. References to peasant barns are not infrequent in early series of court rolls such as those for Lakenheath, Suffolk.<sup>74</sup>
- 2.** The dimensions of excavated 13th-century buildings are very much in line with those recorded in later documents. The great majority measured from 25 ft (7.6 m) to 50 ft (15.2 m) in length, and from 12 to 16 ft (3.7–4.9 m) in width, similar to the two- or three-bay buildings mentioned in post-1350 court rolls. Often those measuring 60 ft (18.3 m) or more accommodated both animals and people, and could have been long-houses in the true sense.
- 3.** We can define a clear and important innovation in building construction in the 13th century when various forms of foundation were adopted instead of earthfast posts (visible archaeologically as post-holes) which had been a feature of building in

rural settlements since prehistoric times. The new foundations ranged from the well-built and quite high dry-stone walls (surviving up to 4 ft, or 1.2 m), using Dartmoor granite or Cotswold oolite, to the thinner but mortared flint walls at Hangleton in Sussex, or to the relatively rough chalk blocks of Wiltshire and the Yorkshire Wolds.<sup>75</sup> In those areas in which stone was less easily obtained only the gables might have foundations (a phase at Faxton in Northants.), or at Goltho, Lincs., pad-stones allowed the main upright timbers to stand a few inches off the ground surface. Even when no stone was used (for example in Norfolk) walls of 'clay lump' were built.<sup>76</sup>

The significance attached to the new type of foundation depends on the reconstruction proposed for the superstructure. One temptation is to assume that the stone walls on some sites once stood to a sufficient height to carry the rafters, which may be supposed to have been no more than rough branches. Alternatively the stone walls can be seen as bases for walls of cob, or of timber infilled with wattle and daub of the kind known from vernacular buildings. The former theory found favour in the past, but now opinion among architectural historians is moving towards associating the beginning of stone foundations in the west with the development of cruck building. As it is thought that the use of crucks in peasant buildings developed in the 13th century, the simultaneous appearance of stone foundations seems more than a coincidence.<sup>77</sup> The foundations protected the timbers from damp, and provided a level base for a good quality roof. The crucks have left no archaeological trace because they were set into horizontal sill beams. Accordingly the buildings of the 13th century when excavated have a similar appearance to those of the succeeding three or four centuries because they were built on the same principles, in their superstructures as well as their stonework. Documentary references from the West Midlands to the use of crucks in the construction of small peasant houses as early as 1312 and 1325 add some support to this view.<sup>78</sup> Outside the regions where stone foundation walls and crucks were used, 'primitive' framing was evidently introduced in the late 13th and early 14th century, providing a structure with a longer life and more sophisticated carpentry than earlier earthfast construction.<sup>79</sup>

Small finds from excavations of peasant houses throughout the country provide clues to the character of the superstructure. They show that the doors were hung on iron hinges or turned on stone pivots and were provided with iron locks and keys. Sometimes there is evidence also of fittings for wooden shutters. The number of such openings is suggested in an agreement to build a house for a widow at Halesowen, Worcs., in 1281 which specifies the provision of three doors (presumably one was internal) and two windows. Descriptions of crimes in late 13th-century court rolls show that doors could be considerable obstacles.<sup>80</sup> Carpentered doors and shutters with locks and hinges, fitting into frames and strong enough to frustrate robbers, must have been attached to high walls with strong timber uprights in the 13th as well as in the 15th century.

4. If we accept that the adoption of solid foundations was accompanied by the introduction of substantial timber superstructures, we may also suppose that

professional building craftsmen were being employed by peasants in the 13th century. A rare reference to a peasant obligation to carry out building work on village houses appears in a custumal of Sturminster Newton, Dorset, of 1235–52, which states that ‘if any building in the vill decays and ought to be repaired’, a customary yardlander ‘with his neighbours’ ought to carry timber, ‘make the wall’, and make the wattling. This shows that peasants could play a major part in building work, co-operating in common under the lord’s enforcement.<sup>81</sup> The relatively early date of the document, and its nature as a record of established customs, means that it recalls an old self-help system that was probably already giving way to the use of more specialized labour. In the absence of any occupational census an indication of the relative importance of rural crafts can be obtained from surnames. In Essex, for example, ‘Carpenter’ was becoming quite common in 1222, in the early phases of the formation of surnames. A century later contributors to the Lay Subsidy in the county included 35 people called Carpenter or Wright, who presumably practised the trade, or whose recent ancestors had done so. These were the fourth commonest craft surnames, after Smith (129), Tailor (47) and Baker (36). There were many more Carpenters and Wrights than Coopers, Turners or Dyers.<sup>82</sup> A conservative estimate (in view of those exempt from taxes, and those without an occupational name) would be that there were more than a hundred carpenters working in the county, and such a figure is plausible in the light of Edward I’s ability in the late 13th century to recruit for castle building in Wales large numbers of woodworkers, for example 47 carpenters from Oxfordshire on one occasion in 1277.<sup>83</sup> If they were to have all found peace-time employment, these craftsmen must have been employed by peasants as well as aristocrats, clergy and townsmen.

Labour could be hired more cheaply in 1200–1350 than afterwards, and prices of some materials may have been lower also, though there is little direct evidence for the cost of peasant buildings. Fragments of information can be gleaned from occasional court-roll references, usually arising from disputes among tenants. On the Suffolk manor of Lakenheath in 1326 Matthew Outlawe was said to owe half of the cost of trees needed to build a house, 5*s. od.*, so the full price would have been 10*s. od.* When Adam le Grey of the same place was accused in 1331 of destroying parts of a house — doors, locks, a kiln, timber, and a (?)well — damages of 13*s. 4d.* were claimed.<sup>84</sup> If these sums are at all typical, materials and fittings could have cost a pound, and wages would have brought the total to at least double that sum. On the other hand, some cheap structures are known. Two lords of East Midland manors in the first half of the 14th century, Henry de Bray of Harlestone (Northants.) and Merton College at Kibworth Harcourt (Leics.) built cottages, presumably to house full-time estate workers, at relatively low costs of 10*s. od.* to 30*s. od.* each in the first case, and 9*s. 9d.* each in the second.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps such buildings can be regarded as characteristic of those of the lower ranks of rural society? On the other hand cottages intended for living-in servants may well have been specialized structures untypical of the house-holding peasantry.

The main resistance to the idea that many peasant buildings were of substantial and professional construction is based on the study of the surviving architecture. If,

as is now argued, the new stone foundations and pad-stones of the 13th century were designed to support well-carpentered timbers, including crucks in the west and south, why is it that such buildings are not still with us? Their inability to last is surely proof of their technical inadequacy? However, while it is true that the bulk of standing medieval peasant buildings are dated after 1350, there are a few examples from an earlier period, notably cruck houses at Harwell and Steventon in Berks. (now Oxon.) both dated by radiocarbon and dendrochronology to the years around 1300. In explanation of these awkward dates the suggestion is made that the Harwell house belonged not to a peasant but to the tenant of a twentieth of a knight's fee, who, unlike a peasant, would have been capable of constructing a durable building.<sup>86</sup> In fact the status of the tenure may give an impression of grandeur, but the amount of land that these tenants held would not have been much greater than a peasant's yardland. The Steventon house, judging from a near-contemporary survey of the manor, is likely to have belonged to a villein with a yardland or so, who was burdened with substantial rents and services.<sup>87</sup> If Mr C. Hewett is right in his dating of houses at Boxted and Fyfield in Essex, then it is also possible to find in the non-cruck areas relatively humble rural dwellings of the 13th and early 14th century still standing. There are other candidates for early dates in Oxon. and Kent, and the extension of dendrochronological research will no doubt add to the numbers of houses known to survive from the pre-1350 period.<sup>88</sup>

The test of durability until the 20th century is a very stringent requirement. That any peasant building should still be in use after seven centuries should rather be a matter for wonder. A more reliable yardstick of quality might be the observed period of use of excavated buildings. The successive houses at Wharram Percy's House 10 site were originally thought to have each lasted about 30 years, but now that the sequence has been re-interpreted to give each a life of perhaps 70 years, this has ceased to be the classic demonstration of ephemeral housing.<sup>89</sup> At Beere (Devon) and Holworth (Dorset) houses built in the 13th century are thought to have been in use for a century or more.<sup>90</sup> These and other examples from deserted settlements were cut off prematurely by decay or depopulation. Indeed, a great number of 13th-century buildings must have been the subject of tussles between lords and tenants over dilapidations in the late 14th and 15th centuries, and collapsed more often through deliberate neglect or even demolition than because of inherent defects in the original construction. Many other medieval houses fell victim to the successive post-medieval rebuildings, mainly because of changing fashion and a desire for improvement in accommodation. The expensive houses of Bedale, none of which have lasted, provide only one example of the failure of good-quality buildings to survive.

Supposedly temporary buildings have been linked with the peasants' insecurity of tenure and rapid migration, both of which would reduce, it is thought, any incentive to invest in expensive and long-lasting buildings. In fact, although lords had the right to evict customary tenants, they generally respected hereditary rights. Even the heirs of notorious rebels benefited from the assumption that holdings should stay in the family. There was a tendency for customary tenures to be converted into leasehold for a number of years or lives, especially in the 14th century,

but the change did not happen everywhere, and sometimes even reverted back to hereditary tenures. All freeholds were hereditary. It seems unlikely that a peasant's fear that his investment would be taken away by his lord would be a major reason for erecting flimsy buildings. Perhaps peasants who often migrated, or who sold their holdings, lacked the motivation to build durable houses? This is an unconvincing suggestion because tenants would have benefited in the short-term from solid buildings that gave them elementary comfort, dry shelter for animals and crops, and lower maintenance costs. As holdings were often sold for cash (that is, money paid by the new tenant to his predecessor, over and above the dues owed to the landlord), the outgoing tenant would presumably have gained from a price that reflected the good quality of the buildings. Migration became even more rapid after 1350, and as we have seen this led to much decay, but there is no evidence that new buildings became less substantial — rather the contrary is true.

Finally, it has been suggested that peasants would have had difficulties in building to high specifications in areas of timber scarcity. This problem must have been at its most acute in the 13th century because land clearance for agriculture then reached its greatest extent, and pressure on timber resources increased because of the demands of urban and seigniorial building. Although we are ill-informed about the details of common rights to take trees, it seems likely that much timber was purchased. There may be a link between the adoption of better standards for some peasant buildings in the 13th century and the rapid expansion of the market in that century. Peasants who had previously been dependent on sometimes inadequate local supplies, were able to buy timber more easily because of the proliferation of markets, the wider use of cash, and the development of the transport network. The peasant who had laid out money for materials would be anxious to avoid a future recurrence of cost, and would have favoured new building methods like the use of foundations that prolonged the life of the timber. The growth of a labour force of building workers would have been a natural accompaniment of the tendency away from self-sufficiency and towards economic specialization.

Although enough has been said to counter the theory that 13th-century peasant houses were merely impermanent huts, their quality should not be over-estimated. One reservation must arise from regional variations, which make generalizations well-nigh impossible. In particular there are the districts where the post-medieval vernacular tradition, like that of Lincolnshire, includes such features as earthfast foundations and insubstantial mud and stud, pointing to the survival of older building methods through the later Middle Ages.<sup>91</sup> Also excavations of East Midland sites show that the abandonment of earthfast posts was followed by phases of building in which timbers simply rested on the ground surface without any foundation, which represents a very modest step forward in construction technique.<sup>92</sup> And finally there is the problem of reconciling a view that houses went through a significant general improvement with historical perceptions of the period (especially the years c. 1280–c. 1320) as one of growing peasant poverty, in which small-holdings increased in number, and high rents and taxes exacerbated the problems of low agricultural productivity and bad harvests. Perhaps the changes in housing (which have not been closely dated anywhere) belong to periods of relative

prosperity in the years before 1280, or after 1320? Should historians emphasize more strongly the benefits of the expanding market on the middling and upper peasantry? The groups who were especially vulnerable to the economic trends of the 13th century, the small-holders and cottagers, depended for their livelihood on wages of such a low purchasing power that they could not have paid for any but the cheapest building. Even peasant families with large holdings must have been periodically deprived of their savings by the swingeing entry fines and other exactions that some lords were able to impose at the height of their powers in the late 13th century.

#### CONCLUSION

We have tended, under the influence of Hoskins's 'Great Rebuilding' theory, to look for dramatic waves of innovation in rural building in the 13th and the 15th centuries as well as in the period 1570–1640. Now that the 'Great Rebuilding' idea is being revised and refined in terms of a series of regional movements at different times within the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, we should also define the late medieval 'rebuildings' in terms of trends and processes rather than revolutions.<sup>93</sup> In the 13th century in many regions stone foundations developed, and were probably accompanied by new types of timber-work that resulted by 1300 in some well-carpentered and durable structures. Some areas advanced more rapidly than others: while a 13th-century peasant at Upton, Glos., could have a house founded on ten or more courses of excellent dry-stone walling, his equivalent of c. 1400 at Grenstein, Norfolk, managed with walls of clay-lump. The carpenters employed by a peasant of Steventon erected a cruck framework that still stands, while those working at Goltho were developing a technique of 'primitive framing' with an estimated life of 'more than 50 years'. Archaeology has made us most conscious of regional variations, but we should also be aware of social differences. We can rarely link an excavated house with a particular type of tenant, though we can say with some confidence that the superior house at Upton belonged to a customary yardlander, as such people made up the overwhelming majority of the villagers there at the time; it is equally likely that the Grenstein buildings belonged to small-holders with less than ten acres, which may be a factor in explaining the differences between the two settlements. Another approach to this problem might be to discover by excavation different standards of building in the same village at the same time, but no village has been excavated extensively enough to enable such variations to be defined. As has already been indicated, cheap cottages like those built by the lords of Harlestone and Kibworth Harcourt before 1350 may point to a sizeable substratum of housing for poorer people that co-existed with substantial buildings (see p. 37). A similar disparity between the better-off and the poor existed at the time of the 'Great Rebuilding', which began with yeomen's houses in the 16th century, but did not benefit the labourers of eastern England until the late 17th century.<sup>94</sup>

Turning to the lay-out and function of buildings, in the 13th century the regions can be divided between those where the chief building of a messuage was a specialized dwelling-house, in the south and east, and those in which long-houses predominated. The pattern was already changing by the late 13th century on sites in

Gloucestershire and Wiltshire where separate dwellings replaced long-houses. This trend was apparently continuing in the Midlands in the next two centuries, but it was not everywhere a one-way process, as at Wharram Percy at House 6 a long-house succeeded a smaller separate dwelling in c. 1400. Groups of buildings on peasant messuages are recorded throughout the period 1200–1500, and there is some evidence for an increase in the number and size of agricultural buildings in the later part of the period, for example at Faxton.<sup>95</sup> Peasant houses of two storeys were being built in eastern England from the mid 14th century, and had become common by 1500. They were in use in Berkshire before 1400,<sup>96</sup> and developed in Devon and the West Midlands in the 15th century.

In the late 14th and 15th centuries a general improvement in the standards of materials and workmanship increased the durability of buildings. Again this was a case of gradual change, not a sudden transformation, as the techniques of building foundations and the associated carpentry had originated before 1300. Perhaps a feature of the period after 1350 was the wider diffusion of standards of carpentry that had previously been confined to a minority of houses. The main roofing material continued to be thatch, though a few peasant buildings erected by lords were being given complete slate roofs in the 15th century.

Given these changes in the later Middle Ages, the 'Great Rebuilding' may now look like a further stage (or a succession of stages) in a continuing process. When a settlement that was occupied from the Middle Ages until the 18th century is excavated, as at West Whelpington in Northumberland, the 'Great Rebuilding' is revealed not as a revolutionary innovation but as the gradual adaptation of late medieval structures to the needs of a new age.<sup>97</sup> Throughout the country, as we have seen, most of the new features adopted after 1540 can be shown to have at least an ancestry before 1500.

\* \* \*

Many wider implications flow from the study of peasant buildings. The detail of these would extend this discussion beyond the scope of a single article, and they will only be sketched here.

First, the rich variety of housing types and methods of construction across the country give only one indication of the heterogeneous peasant culture of medieval England. We are aware of many geographical variations in settlement forms, field systems, agricultural methods, diet, inheritance customs, and dialect. Unfortunately the distribution of building types coincides exactly with none of the other variables in peasant society, so that for example, regional variety in buildings cannot be explained simply in economic or ethnic terms. Although the availability of materials and the needs of farming systems help to throw light on some of the differences in buildings, they do not provide all of the answers.

Secondly, the agricultural buildings must be seen as the major single investment that a peasant made. Erecting a three-bay barn in the 15th century could have taken a high proportion of a middling tenant's disposable income over many years. The proliferation of agricultural buildings in the 15th century, shown most

dramatically at Caldecote, Herts., where on one holding two great barns dwarfed a dwelling house, point to the increased level of investment by peasants *en route* to becoming capitalist farmers.<sup>98</sup> By giving better protection to crops, animals and equipment the peasants' expenditure on buildings made a contribution to the efficiency of their agriculture.

Thirdly, the dwelling house can be regarded as an important item of peasant consumption. Archaeology has made us aware of the peasants' rôle as buyers of metal goods and pottery, but, leaving aside food-stuffs, they are likely to have spent most on clothing, with housing accounting for a sizeable proportion of their expenditure. Once we accept that peasants lived in houses, not huts, we can make some judgement of the quality of life that the structures provided. They were hardly ideal residences, measured against later standards, because of their lack of built floors; also the small size of their unglazed windows, combined with open hearths, cannot have provided their occupants with a healthy environment. They can still be compared in size with working-class urban houses of the 19th century, which had much the same floor area (450–650 sq. ft., or 42–59 sq. m). They were superior to Indian housing of the 1960s which allowed less than 40 sq. ft. (3.7 sq. m) on average per person, or peasant houses in late medieval Provence (65 sq. ft. or 6 sq. m per person), as the average English peasant family of five had 90 sq. ft. (8.3 sq. m) each in a two-bay house, and more than 100 sq. ft. in a three-bay house.<sup>99</sup>

Fourthly, methods of paying for buildings deserve some consideration, because peasants depended on supplies of credit to raise sums as large as £3, and many of them must have spent years paying off the cost of a dwelling or barn. Pleas of debt in manorial court rolls show that facilities for borrowing cash existed in many peasant communities, and there are occasional references to mortgages. 'Starts' on building perhaps depended on short-term economic fluctuations, above all the variable quality of the harvest; cycles of building, as in more recent times, presumably moved in relation to long-term shifts in incomes, with relatively few 'starts' in, for example, the difficult years 1300–20. Also building activity can be assumed to have taken place at specific stages in the tenant's life-cycle, avoiding the years at the beginning when an entry fine had to be paid to the lord, and often a purchase price to a previous tenant. Perhaps the best time for building was in the peasant's early middle age.

\* \* \*

Modern observers have tended to underestimate the capacities and the achievements of the medieval peasantry. Those who began research on peasant houses had low expectations of their subject, because they were understandably prepared to find the simplicity and extreme poverty usually regarded as the main peasant characteristics. As knowledge has advanced, peasant buildings appear to have been both more complex and in many cases more substantial than was originally supposed. Many questions remain unanswered, and it is hoped that this essay will help to indicate the problems that can only be resolved by further research, especially in the material evidence.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> R. Roehl, 'Patterns and Structure of Demand 1000–1500', 107–42 in C. M. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, I (London, 1972), 118; J. L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy 1150–1500* (London, 1980), 13.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Hurst, 'The Wharram Research Project: Results to 1983', *Medieval Archaeol.*, xxviii (1984), 77–111.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. R. Machin, 'The Great Rebuilding: a Reassessment', *Past and Present*, 77 (1977), 33–56.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. E. Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses* (London, 1975), 3–4.

<sup>5</sup> M. W. Barley, 'Houses and History', *Counc. Brit. Archaeol. Annual Rep.*, 31 (1981), 63–75; S. Wrathmell, 'The Vernacular Threshold of Northern Peasant Houses', *Vernacular Archit.*, 15 (1984), 29–33.

<sup>6</sup> For a definition of peasants, with reference to the sociological and anthropological literature, see R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 3–19.

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1956), 197–229.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. P. D. A. Harvey (ed.), *The Peasant Land Market in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1984), 19–28.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. R. H. Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England* (London, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> J. G. Hurst, 'A Review of Archaeological Research', 76–144 in M. W. Beresford and J. G. Hurst (eds.), *Deserted Medieval Villages* (London, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> B. F. Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1977), 273–74; C. C. Dyer, 'Deserted Medieval Villages in the West Midlands', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Scr., xxxv (1982), 19–34; Hilton, op. cit. in note 6, 192–93.

<sup>12</sup> C. C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society* (Cambridge, 1980), 167, 294–95.

<sup>13</sup> R. K. Field, 'Worcestershire Peasant Buildings, Household Goods and Farming Equipment', *Medieval Archaeol.*, ix (1965), 105–45.

<sup>14</sup> The new figures, deriving from the counties of Glos., Staffs. and Warw., and a few manors in Worcs. not available to Field, are as follows:

one bay	two bays	three bays	four bays	five bays	TOTAL
5	27	39	10	1	82

These figures, and the generalizations that follow on the West Midlands, are based on research into the records of 75 manors in the region, deposited in the nine archive repositories named in subsequent footnotes (15–45).

<sup>15</sup> Hereford and Worcester County Record Office (henceforth H.W.C.R.O.) ref. 705: 100, B.A. 1120/12.

<sup>16</sup> Dyer, op. cit. in note 12, 318.

<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust Record Office, Stratford-upon-Avon (henceforth S.B.T.), DR 18/30/15/8.

<sup>18</sup> N. W. Alcock, J. G. Braithwaite, and M. W. Jeffs, 'Timber-framed Buildings in Warwickshire: Stoneleigh Village', *Trans. Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeol. Soc.*, lxxxv (1971–3), 178–202; N. W. Alcock and M. Laithwaite, 'Medieval Houses in Devon and their Modernization', *Medieval Archaeol.*, xvii (1973), 100–25.

<sup>19</sup> R. H. Hilton and P. A. Rahtz, 'Upton, Gloucestershire, 1559–64', *Trans. Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, lxxxv (1966), 70–146; P. A. Rahtz, 'Upton, Gloucestershire, 1564–8', *ibid.*, lxxxviii (1969), 74–126.

<sup>20</sup> Birmingham Reference Library, 518080. For Field's long-houses see E. Mercer, "Domus Longa" and "Long House", *Vernacular Archit.*, 3 (1972), 9–10.

<sup>21</sup> H.W.C.R.O., ref. oog:1, BA 2636/164 91282.

<sup>22</sup> R. M. Smith, 'Some Reflections on the Evidence for the Origins of the European Marriage Pattern in England', 74–112 in C. Harris (ed.), *The Sociology of the Family* (Sociological Review Monograph, 28, 1979).

<sup>23</sup> Dyer, op. cit. in note 12, 317. This does not rule out the possibility that some cottage holdings supported one building only.

<sup>24</sup> Dorset County Record Office, D10/M227/1–2; S.B.T., DR 18/30/24/17; P.R.O., SC2 207/59–60; SC6 1040/15.

<sup>25</sup> Repairs were ordered after the burning of 'orrii vel grangie' at Atherstone-on-Stour, Warw., in 1450, Bodleian Library, Warwick ch.a.1.

<sup>26</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 1911/13, for the 'granary with sheep-house'.

- <sup>27</sup> P. Ellis, 'The Medieval Settlement at Hullasey, Coates', *Trans. Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, cii (1984), 210–12; M. W. Beresford and J. G. Hurst, 'Wharram Percy: a Case Study in Microtopography', 114–144 in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement* (London, 1976), plate 11.8; G. Beresford, *The Medieval Clay-land Village: Excavations at Goltho and Barton Blount* (Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mono 6, 1975), 12–18.
- <sup>28</sup> N. W. Alcock and R. de Z. Hall, 'Documentary Evidence for Crucks', 28–36 in N. W. Alcock (ed.), *Cruck Construction. An Introduction and Catalogue* (Counc. Brit. Archaeol. Res. Rep. 42, 1981).
- <sup>29</sup> C. Dyer, 'Evidence for Helms in Gloucestershire in the Fourteenth Century', *Vernacular Archit.*, 15 (1984), 42–45.
- <sup>30</sup> Field, op. cit. in note 13, 109–11.
- <sup>31</sup> S.B.T., DR5/2358.
- <sup>32</sup> Gloucestershire County Record Office (henceforth G.R.O.), D678/61.
- <sup>33</sup> H.W.C.R.O., ref. oog: 1, BA 2636/175 92474.
- <sup>34</sup> For peasant groves, C. Dyer, 'A Note on the Economic Environment of Sydenham's Moat, Tanworth-in-Arden', *Trans. Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeol. Soc.*, xc (1980), 63–64; on hedgerow timber in open-fields, P. D. A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village* (Oxford, 1965), 23–25.
- <sup>35</sup> R. H. Hilton (ed.), *The Stoneleigh Leger Book* (Dugdale Soc. xxiv, 1960), 103, gives a restrictive definition of 'housbote heybote and fuyrbote': oaks and other trees could only be taken with the permission of the foresters, if the need was genuine and no waste was caused. Occasionally the right was enjoyed without restriction, as stated in a Little Packington, Warw., charter of the late 12th century: R. R. Darlington (ed.), *The Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory (Register I)* (Pipe Roll Soc., new ser., xxxviii, 1962–63), 167. Specific references to 'housbote' are rare because the right was customary, subsumed in charters and other documents in the phrase 'with appurtenances'.
- <sup>36</sup> T. H. Lloyd, *Some Aspects of the Building Industry in Medieval Stratford-upon-Avon* (Dugdale Soc. Occasional Paper, no. 14, 1961), 16–17; L. D. W. Smith, 'A Survey of Building Timber and Other Trees in the Hedgerows of a Warwickshire Estate, c. 1500', *Trans. Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeol. Soc.*, xc (1980), 65–73. See also O. Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* (London, 1976), 73–84.
- <sup>37</sup> O. Rackham, 'Grundle House: on the Quantities of Timber in certain East Anglian Buildings in Relation to Local Supplies', *Vernacular Archit.*, 3 (1972), 3–8 estimates for a modest East Anglian 3-unit house of c. 1600 the use of 79 trees. A cruck house of similar size needed less timber, as shown by J. Blair, 'Two Early Cruck Houses in South Oxfordshire', *Oxoniana*, xliv (1979), 55–61, but his example was unusually economical in its construction. The figure of 20 arises from a tentative suggestion by the Editor.
- <sup>38</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 112, Ba 519.
- <sup>39</sup> W. Boyd (ed.), 'The Poll Tax of 1379–81', 157–205 in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, xvii (1896).
- <sup>40</sup> Staffordshire County Record Office (hereafter S.R.O.), D1807/72 (I am grateful to Miss J. R. Birrell for this reference, and for the two subsequent Staffordshire examples below).
- <sup>41</sup> P.R.O., SC6 988/12.
- <sup>42</sup> S.R.O., D1734/3/2/2; W. D. Macray (ed.), *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham* (Rolls Ser., London, 1863), 305.
- <sup>43</sup> H.W.C.R.O., ref. 705/7, BA 7335/38.
- <sup>44</sup> Hilton, op. cit. in note 6, 213; Harvey, op. cit. in note 11, 331–33.
- <sup>45</sup> G.R.O., D678/66A (Roel); D678/94 (Stanton); P.R.O., SC2 207/79 (Stoneleigh); G.R.O. D936a/M2 (Highnam).
- <sup>46</sup> R. Machin, 'The Mechanism of the Pre-Industrial Building Cycle', *Vernacular Archit.*, 8 (1977), 15–19; Lloyd, op. cit. in note 36, 23–24; D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Winchester Studies, 2, 1985), I, 172.
- <sup>47</sup> N. W. Alcock, 'The Origin and Spread of Cruck Construction in Britain', 56–60 in Alcock (ed.), op. cit. in note 28.
- <sup>48</sup> F. W. B. Charles, *Cruck Construction and its Derivatives* (Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mono 2, 1967), 8.
- <sup>49</sup> N. W. Alcock, 'The Medieval Cottages of Bishop's Clyst, Devon', *Medieval Archaeol.*, ix (1965), 146–53.
- <sup>50</sup> P.R.O., SC6 744/17, 19, 22.
- <sup>51</sup> E. B. Dewindt (ed.), *The Liber Gersumarum of Ramsey Abbey* (Toronto, 1976).
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 319–20.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 204.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 297.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 101, 339–40.
- <sup>56</sup> P.R.O., SC6 877/4–8.
- <sup>57</sup> H. B. Sharp, 'Some Mid-Fifteenth Century small-scale Building Repairs', *Vernacular Archit.*, 12 (1981), 20–29.
- <sup>58</sup> Dewindt, op. cit. in note 51, 302–03.
- <sup>59</sup> Norfolk County Record Office (henceforth N.R.O.), Hare 2453; British Library, Additional Charter 54072.
- <sup>60</sup> N.R.O., Bantoft, P190 B; Suffolk County Record Office, Ipswich Branch, HA 10: 50/18/5.1 (1); Suffolk County Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch (hereafter S.R.O.B.), E3/15.3/1.15; P.R.O., SC2 171/72.
- <sup>61</sup> E.g. at Walsham-le-Willows in 1378: S.R.O.B., H.A. 504/1/8.
- <sup>62</sup> E.g. at Ingatestone, Essex: Essex County Record Office, D/DP M15; Great Cressingham, Norfolk: N.R.O., R187A; Fornett, Norfolk: F. G. Davenport, *The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor* (Cambridge, 1906), lxxviii–lxix.
- <sup>63</sup> N.R.O., Bantoft, P190 B.
- <sup>64</sup> J. F. Nichols, 'Custodia Essexae' (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1930), 270.
- <sup>65</sup> Essex County Record Office, D/DP M833.
- <sup>66</sup> H. S. Cowper, 'A Note on some Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Wills', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xxx (1914), 127–31; E. Melling (ed.), *Some Kentish Houses* (Kentish Sources, V, Maidstone, 1965), 7–9. The latter publication, and L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540* (2nd edn. Oxford, 1967), 601, contain editions of a building contract

for two buildings at Cranbrook c. 1500. If this was being built for a peasant it would show a complete transition to modernity, because the larger house, 44 feet by 18 feet, was to be entirely of two storeys, with 3 rooms above and below, and a chimney and two fireplaces.

- <sup>67</sup> B. Harrison and B. Hutton, *Vernacular Houses in North Yorkshire and Cleveland* (Edinburgh, 1984), 2–16.
- <sup>68</sup> M. L. Faull and S. A. Moorhouse (eds.), *West Yorkshire: an Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500* (Wakefield, 1981), 815.
- <sup>69</sup> E.g. M. M. Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society* (London, 1972), 139–42.
- <sup>70</sup> Mercer, op. cit. in note 4, 3–4; J. T. Smith, 'The Evolution of the English Peasant House to the late 17th Century: the Evidence of Buildings', *J. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, 3rd ser., XXXIII (1970), 122–47; F. R. H. Du Boulay, *The Lordship of Canterbury* (London, 1966), 191–92.
- <sup>71</sup> G. Beresford, 'Three Desolated Medieval Settlements on Dartmoor: A Report on the late E. Marie Minter's Excavations', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XXII (1979), 98–158; D. Austin, 'Excavations in Okehampton Park, Devon, 1976–78', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.*, XXXVI (1978), 191–239; Hurst, op. cit. in note 10, 111.
- <sup>72</sup> E.g. M. Biddle, 'The Desolated Medieval Village of Seacourt Berkshire', *Oxoniana*, XXVI–XXVII (1961–2), 70–201.
- <sup>73</sup> 'Medieval Britain in 1964', *Medieval Archaeol.*, IX (1965), 214.
- <sup>74</sup> R. M. Smith, 'Rooms, Relations and Residential Arrangements: some evidence in Manor Court Rolls 1250–1500', *Medieval Village Research Group Annual Report*, 30 (1982), 34–35; Cambridge University Library, EDC 7/15/11/1/6–9, transcribed by Miss J. Cripps and deposited in the School of History, University of Birmingham.
- <sup>75</sup> Beresford, op. cit. in note 71, 138; Rahtz, op. cit. in note 19, 94; E. W. Holden, 'Excavations at the Desolated Medieval Village of Hangleton, Part 1', *Sussex Archaeol. Collections*, CI (1963), 54–181; J. G. and D. G. Hurst, 'Excavations at the Desolated Medieval Village of Hangleton, Part 2', ibid., CI (1964), 94–142; J. G. Hurst, *Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds* (Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mono 8, 1979), 37–54, pls. III and IV.
- <sup>76</sup> 'Medieval Britain in 1966', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XI (1967), 307; Beresford, op. cit. in note 27, 41–42; P. Wade-Martins, *Village Sites in Launditch Hundred* (East Anglian Archaeol. no. 10, 1980), 112–26.
- <sup>77</sup> J. T. Smith, 'The Problems of Cruck Construction and the Evidence of Distribution Maps', 5–24 in Alcock (ed.), op. cit. in note 28, believes that while crucks are older than the 13th century, they developed greatly in that century with the abandonment of earthfast foundations.
- <sup>78</sup> Alcock (ed.), op. cit. in note 28, 29–33.
- <sup>79</sup> Beresford, op. cit. in note 27, 40–41.
- <sup>80</sup> Door fittings occur on most sites, e.g. ibid., 43; for shutter hinges see Holden, op. cit. in note 75, 166, 169; J. Amphlett (ed.), *Court Rolls of the Manor of Hales, 1272–1307* (Worcs. Hist. Soc., 1910), I, 165; Faull and Moorhouse, op. cit. in note 68, 809.
- <sup>81</sup> E. Hobhouse (ed.), *Rentalia et Custumaria* (Somerset Rec. Soc. v, 1891), 82.
- <sup>82</sup> W. H. Hale (ed.), *The Domesday of St Paul's* (Camden Soc., 1859); J. C. Ward (ed.), *The Medieval Essex Community. The Lay Subsidy of 1327* (Essex Historical Documents, 1, 1983).
- <sup>83</sup> A. J. Taylor, 'Castle-building in the late Thirteenth Century: the Prelude to Construction', 104–33 in E. M. Jope (ed.), *Studies in Building History* (London, 1961).
- <sup>84</sup> Source, op. cit. in note 74; EDC 7/15/11/1/6, 8.
- <sup>85</sup> D. Willis (ed.), *The Estate Book of Henry de Bray* (Camden Soc., 3rd ser., XXVII, 1916), 49–51; C. Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition. Kibworth Harcourt 1260–1700* (Cambridge, 1983), 56.
- <sup>86</sup> C. R. J. Currie and J. M. Fletcher, 'Two Early Cruck Houses in North Berkshire Identified by Radio-Carbon', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XVI (1972), 136–42; P. A. Legget et al., 'Tree Ring Dates for Buildings with Oak Timber', *Vernacular Archit.*, 13 (1982), 48–49; J. Hillam and J. Fletcher, 'Tree-Ring Dates for Buildings with Oak Timber', *Vernacular Archit.*, 14 (1983), 61–62.
- <sup>87</sup> London, British Library, Add. MS. 6164 fo. 19; Alcock (ed.), op. cit. in note 28, 60.
- <sup>88</sup> C. A. Hewett, 'The Smaller Medieval House in Essex', *Archaeol. J.*, CXXX (1973), 172–82; Blair, op. cit. in note 37; E. W. Parkin, 'A Unique Aisled Cottage at Petham', in A. Detsicas (ed.), *Collectanea Historica. Essays in Memory of Stuart Rigold* (Kent Archaeol. Soc., 1981), 225–30.
- <sup>89</sup> Hurst, op. cit. in note 75, 28–41.
- <sup>90</sup> E. M. Jope and R. I. Threlfall, 'Excavations of a Medieval Settlement at Beere, North Tawton, Devon', *Medieval Archaeol.*, II (1958), 112–40; P. A. Rahtz, 'Holworth, Medieval Village Excavation. 1958', *Proc. Dorset Nat. Hist. and Archaeol. Soc.*, LXXXI (1959), 127–47.
- <sup>91</sup> D. L. Roberts, 'The Vernacular Building of Lincolnshire', *Archaeol. J.*, CXXXI (1974), 298–308. Post-medieval architecture could of course have deteriorated from medieval standards.
- <sup>92</sup> Beresford, op. cit. in note 27, 40.
- <sup>93</sup> Machin, op. cit. in note 3, revising W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570–1640', in id., *Provincial England* (London, 1963), 131–48.
- <sup>94</sup> M. Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England* (London, 1984), 3.
- <sup>95</sup> 'Medieval Britain in 1968', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XIII (1969), 279.
- <sup>96</sup> Biddle, op. cit. in note 72, 111.
- <sup>97</sup> Wrathmell, op. cit. in note 5.
- <sup>98</sup> *Medieval Village Research Group Annual Report*, 22 (1974), 22A; G. G. Astill, 'Economic Change in Later Medieval England: An Archaeological Review', 217–47 in T. H. Aston et al. (eds.), *Social Relations and Ideas. Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton* (Cambridge, 1983).
- <sup>99</sup> L. S. Burns and L. Grebler, *The Housing of Nations* (London, 1977), 11; S. D. Chapman (ed.), *The History of Working-Class Housing* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 107, 232–35; G. Demains d'Archimbaud, *Les Fouilles de Rougiers. Contribution à l'archéologie de l'habitat rural médiéval en pays méditerranéen* (Paris, 1981), 243.