

# AN AISLED HALL AT UPTON, SLOUGH

JOHN CHENEVIX TRENCH

Upton Court (SU 980790) escaped recognition as an aisled hall until 1980. Little was known about the type when the house was investigated by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in 1911, and the ground floor was then more extensively subdivided than now, making recognition difficult. Their suggested date (late fifteenth century) is based on doorway mouldings in a wing which, it will be shown, is later than the hall.

The writer and Mrs Pauline Fenley were invited to inspect the house after Mrs Selina Ballance had recognised its nature, and the Middle Thames Archaeological Society had become concerned about its future. To some rooms we did not gain access: the first floor of the cross wing, the southwest ground floor room, and the southeast first-floor room. The medieval parts of the house are in good condition and substantially intact.

The accompanying drawings illustrate the main features, but some points of interest cannot be shown, and others call for comment. One such point is that there is no evidence for longitudinal braces on the north side of the central truss (Figs 2 and 4), there being no mortices visible in either the posts or the arcade plates. Such mortices are clearly visible on the north side of the bay. The brackets in the angles of the posts and plates may be insertions: those in the central truss are set in mortices which extend below their visible ends. This truss is filled with light studding above first-floor level, no doubt contemporary with the stack (c. 1600). The enormous 'bracket' under the aisle tie on the west side is a re-used spandrel of a wooden arch, turned so that what was originally its

vertical side comes uppermost. It may have come from the missing door at the east end of the screens passage.

The 'step' on the upper surface of the tie-beam of this truss has been boxed in, so no mortice for a crown post could be seen. It seems safe to infer a crown post, however, not only from the presence of the 'step', but from the existence of a collar-purlin, which survives at its southern end, where it too is boxed in.

The position of the surviving length of collar-purlin shows that the part of the building south of the hall (the service end) was always an in-line bay. Evidence for lateral bracing of the spear truss (Fig 5) is lacking, the upper parts of the posts having been altered: that on the west replaced by a lighter timber, that on the east reduced in scantling. On the ground floor the outer faces of these posts show a vertical groove about 40 mm in section, suggesting the former presence of a plank-and-muntin partition. The eastern aisle tie has no mortices in its soffit (underside) for such a partition, but is probably a replacement: its outer end rests on a supernumerary post. The soffit of the western tie is obscured by a modern screen. The position of the sill beam is derived from a surviving fragment south of the present front door.

Only one door from the screens passage into the service bay survives. The former presence of another is attested by pegs on the eastern side of the central post, and could also be inferred from the fact that the surviving door is eccentric, being on the west side of this post. The stair in the western service room may well be in the position of the

# UPTON COURT

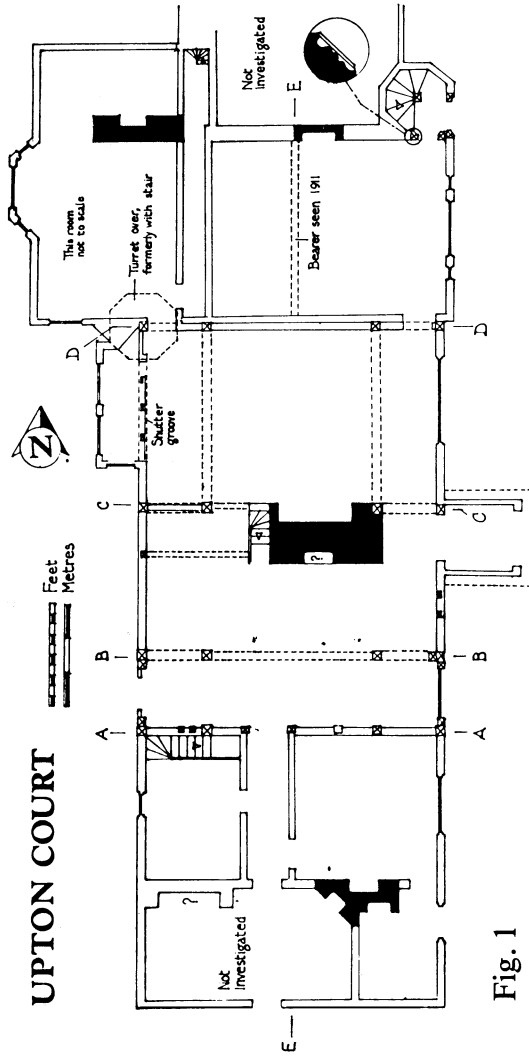


Fig. 1

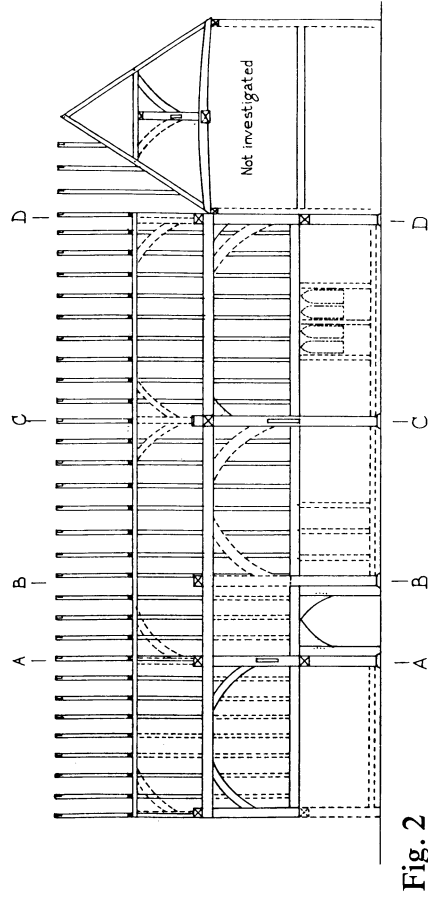


Fig. 2

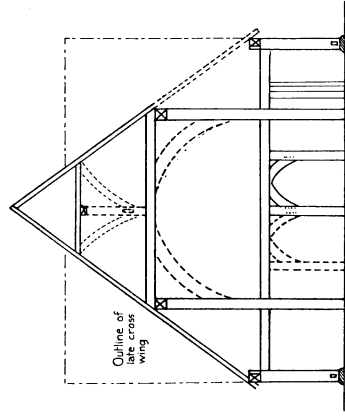


Fig. 3

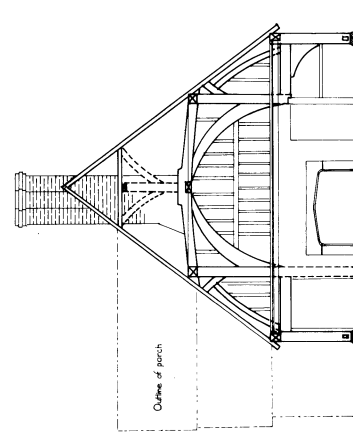
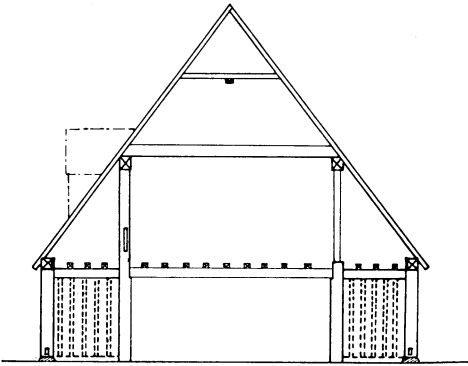


Fig. 4

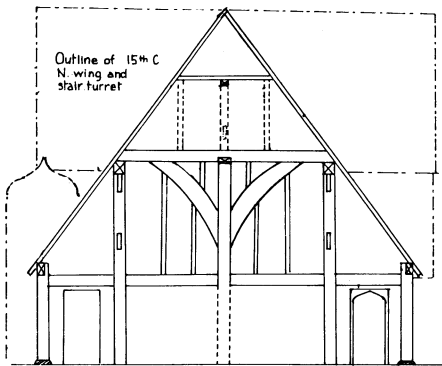
Fig. 1. Ground plan. Fig. 2. Longitudinal section (cut-away view) at E-E, looking west. Fig. 3. Section at A-A, looking south, showing doors into service rooms. Fig. 4. Section at C-C, looking south, showing central truss of hall omitting post-medieval features.



*Fig. 5. Section at B—B (speer truss), looking south*

original stair. In 1911 it apparently opened out of the hall (RCHM), though the investigator's sketch plan cannot be quite accurate. The position of the window (Fig. 2) is attested by mortices and a shutter groove. Its detail is conjectural.

The cross wing at the upper or north end of the hall is framed independently of the hall, and the outer face of the hall gable, where it is visible from the roof space of the wing, shows smooth plaster; it was evidently external when built. The crown-post of the wing is rather crudely chamfered, with equally crude run-out stops. The wing projects 20 ins (0.5 m), suggesting that it was



*Fig. 6. Section at D—D (upper end of hall, and originally an exterior wall), looking north.*

formerly jettied. The stair turret at its north-east corner is modern: its outer doorway has softwood mouldings imitating a late fifteenth century original. The inner doorway has the original mouldings, and gives an acceptable date for the wing, but the door may not be in its original position. The upper part of another turret rises out of the western roof slope, at the junction of the hall and wing. The lower part of this has been removed, and the upper is inaccessible, but this is a likely position for an original stair turret, to which the doorway would have given access before it was re-positioned. The two-storey porch must post-date the insertion of the upper rooms, and may have formed part of the reconstruction at that time, but some of the detail is Victorian.

The brickwork of the southern stack is of about 1600, a date consistent with the diagonal setting of the shafts, and this is no doubt the date of the rooms under the cat-slide roof.

The massive arcade posts, 12 ins square (300 mm), have generous chamfers, but the other timbers, of correspondingly heavy scantling, are plain. The dimensions of the hall, 38 ft (11.4 m) x 27 ft 4 ins (8.2 m), and 14 ft 9 ins between aisle posts, are closely comparable to those of its geographically nearest analogue, The Savoy at Denham (36 ft x 15 ft 6 ins between aisle posts). There too there is a crown-post roof, and there too the wing is later than the hall (RCHM). The Savoy is accepted as of the early fourteenth century, and two lines of evidence converge to suggest that Upton Court is of the same date. The first of these may be called statistical. An inventory of aisled halls was made in 1975 (Sandall, 1975), and — if we exclude the Yorkshire group, to which a different chronology applies) — 28 were known certainly to have, or to have had, crown-post roofs; 25 of these were post 1300, and all three of the earlier houses had passing braces, an early feature, not present at Upton. 19 of the 25 were pre-1400, and 12 (possibly 13) pre-1350. 20

period of its history to shed any light on the later changes to the house.

An 'east wing' apparently existed at one time, and was demolished in the early nineteenth century, if the report of a visit by the Bucks Archaeological Society in 1891 is to be relied on (*Records* VII, 75). Little can be said about this, except that it must have been post-medieval. It was said to have been at the south end of the house, and the large dormer gable at the south end may be a vestige of it; this is much larger than is necessary simply to light the first floor.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am glad to acknowledge first of all my debt to Mr F. R. Groves, the owner of this important house, through whose courtesy and patience we were able to pay two fruitful visits to it. I am also deeply grateful to Mr R. F. Denington to whose good offices we owed our first visit, and to whom I owe all but two of the references to unpublished material here cited. Pauline Fenley was a constructive critic throughout.

Figs 1, 2 and 3 first appeared in *Medieval Archaeology*, together with a very brief report. I am grateful to the Editor for permission to republish them.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fletcher J. M., 'The Bishop of Winchester's Medieval Manor House at Harwell, Berkshire', *Arch. Jnl.*, 136 (1979).  
 Heales, A. C., *The Records of Merton Priory* (Frowde, 1898)  
 Muster Book. *The Certificate of Musters for Buckinghamshire*, Ed. A. C. Chibnall (Bucks. Record Soc. 1973)  
 R.C.H.M. *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England): Buckinghamshire, South* (1912).  
 Records. *Records of Buckinghamshire* (Bucks. Arch. Soc).  
 Sandall, Kathleen, 'Aisled Halls in England and Wales', *Vernacular Architecture*, 6, (1975).  
 V.C.H. *Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire*, III, 315.
- Unpublished sources*  
 C54 Enrolled Deeds, Public Record Office.  
 C66 Patent Rolls, P.R.O.  
 LR 2 Land Revenue Books, Miscellaneous, P.R.O.  
 SC 1, SC 6 Special Collections, P.R.O.

## AN AISLED HALL AT UPTON, SLOUGH

of the recorded houses consisted, like Upton, only of the hall and an in-line service bay at the lower end; of these 15 certainly, and 17 possibly, are of the early fourteenth century or earlier.

The second approach is structural. Features pointing to a date between 1300 and 1350 include the absence of bracing between rafters and collars; the reduction of passing braces to timbers rising from the aisle ties to the arcade posts; and the way in which these braces are tenoned, not into the posts themselves, but into struts joining each post to a rafter.

Upton was a manor of Merton Priory from the early twelfth century until the Dissolution (VCH), and the present building is unlikely to have been the first on the site. The records of the Priory, however, (Meales, 1898) are silent on the subject of its building, and it is impossible to offer a more precise date than the first half of the fourteenth century.

The fact that at this time the only accommodation affording any privacy was a room over the service bay prompts a number of speculations. It was apparently the practice at Merton, from an early date, to send monks to live at Upton (VCH). Possibly the predecessor of this house had better living quarters: an Archbishop of Canterbury did not disdain to visit the place in 1276 (SC 1/18/169). Possibly, as at Lime Tree House, Harwell, (a manor house of the Bishop of Winchester) there was a 'Lord's Chamber' in a separate building (Fletcher, 1979). Possibly the practice of sending members of the community to Upton had lapsed by the fourteenth century.

It had certainly lapsed before the Dissolution, for in 1531 the last Prior leased the house to Roger Erlewyn (C 66/1045), formerly of Iver (Muster Book). At the Dissolution Erlewyn was granted a new lease by the Crown (SC 6 Hen VIII/3463/29). It was apparently for 50 years, and contained the unusual provision that the tenant was to be responsible for repairs up to a height of

eight feet from the ground (which is to say, up to the eaves of the hall, and raises interesting questions about the north wing, whose eaves are much higher: is it conceivable that the wing is later than 1531? or was the lease parroting the terms of an earlier agreement?).

The Manor remained with the Crown for nearly 100 years. In 1568, Roger Erlewyn's lease having been surrendered by his heirs, a 21 year term was granted to Edward Hungerford (C66/1045). In 1589 another 21 year lease was granted to Thomas Duck (C 66/1334) who was to become Valet of the Cellar to James I (LR 2/196/213); and in 1605 Robert Barker was also granted 21 years (C 66/1676), the consequent clash of interests being outside the scope of the present paper.

On the determination of Barker's lease the Manor was sold by the Crown, the purchaser being Charles Harbord (C 66/2542), and Harbord sold it next year to Sir Marmaduke Darrell, of Fulmer (C 54/2869). Neither of these gentlemen would have been interested in living in the house, so will hardly have taken the trouble to improve it. It is among the holders of 21-year leases that we must look for whoever chambered over the hall, inserted the stack, and extended the building one bay southward under the cat-slide.

Erlewyn and Hungerford will hardly do: both are too early. The beginnings of Duck's and Barker's leases both give acceptable dates. The panelling of the ground floor room of the north wing would fit the later date, and seems to have been made for this room, rather than having been brought from elsewhere. The cast iron fireback, which features in the RCHM report, and bears the date 1633, cannot be used for dating any part of the structure; it could have been brought from elsewhere at any time.

In 1711 the house was acquired by Edward Lascelles (C 54/5028), whose great grandson was to become first Earl of Harewood, and in whose family it remained until the present century. But nothing has emerged from this