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## YARDE FARMHOUSE, MALBOROUGH, SOUTH HAMS, DEVON TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS

SCIENTIFIC DATING REPORT

Alison Arnold and Robert Howard



ENGLISH HERITAGE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE

## YARDE FARMHOUSE, MALBOROUGH, SOUTH HAMS, DEVON

## TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS

Alison Arnold and Robert Howard

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#### SUMMARY

A number of samples was taken from timbers of various areas at this property, resulting in the construction of five site sequences.

One of these contains 22 samples, taken from the roofs of the North-South and South ranges and from the first- and second-floor joists of the South range, and was found to span the period AD 1432–1603. Interpretation of the sapwood suggests felling of the timbers represented within the range AD 1604–27.

The North-South range was thought to date to the seventeenth century; this has now been supported by the tree-ring results which suggests construction of this part of the building occurred in the first quarter of this century. A quantity of reused timber had been identified within the roof and first-floor joists of the AD 1718 South range. This reused timber has now also been dated to the first quarter of the seventeenth century and is likely to have come from a building contemporary with the North-South range. At least one of the second-floor joists, previously thought to be primary, has been shown to be reused and of the same date as the rest of the timber.

The other four site sequences, comprising a total of nine samples, are undated.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Alison Arnold and Robert Howard

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Laboratory would like to thank the owners of the property for allowing sampling to be undertaken. We would also like to thank John Allan of Exeter Archaeology who kindly arranged access, for his on-site advice and invaluable knowledge of the building, and for providing some of the Figures. Further drawings were produced by Architecton.

#### **ARCHIVE LOCATION**

Devon Historic Environment Record Historic Environment Service Matford Offices County Hall Exeter EX2 4QW

#### DATE OF INVESTIGATION

2008–2010

#### CONTACT DETAILS

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## INTRODUCTION

The former manor house of Yarde Farmhouse is located in Malborough, about 25km south-east of Plymouth (Figs 1–3; SX 7168 4006). The earliest dateable features belong to the late-sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries, although the house may have earlier origins (www.lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk). The original plan of the building is unclear but as seen today, the main part is U-shaped, consisting of a North-South range and two cross-wings that project eastwards: the North range (and eastern extension), and South range (Fig 4). Behind the North-South range is a seventeenth-century two-storey porch, and in the angle between this and the North range is a further, flat-roofed, two-storey porch, thought to date to the twentieth century. To the west of these ranges is a service courtyard, the northern side formed by a western extension to the North range and the western side of the courtyard formed by the kitchen (Fig 4; Thorp 2003).

The present building is mostly the work of the Dyer family, who lived at Yarde Farmhouse between AD 1554 and AD 1765, and illustrates the rising fortunes and social status of the family. No further major building works or refurbishments are thought to have been undertaken after the construction of the South range in the early-eighteenth century (Thorp 2003). Yarde Farmhouse is Grade I listed and a Building at Risk.

#### South range

This four-storey wing was added in AD 1718 by Richard Dyer after he had inherited the estate from his brother, William. It consists of cellar, two ground-floor reception rooms, a central stair hall, two first-floor bedrooms with closets, and an attic for servants' accommodation.

The roof over this range is of six trusses and five bays, and consists of principal and common rafters, collars, three sets of threaded purlins, and a threaded ridge. However, it is apparent that a large number of the timbers utilised within this roof are reused, with the principal rafters having dovetail-shaped halvings for two lap-jointed collars and two pairs of struts (also lap-jointed), the first down to the lower collar, and the second, presumably down to the tiebeam. The spreader plates on which the trusses rest are cut-up sections of principal rafters. The use of dovetail-shaped lap joints was revived by Cornish carpenters in the late-sixteenth century, spreading to Devon in the early and mid-seventeenth century, suggesting these reused timbers date from this period. Documentary evidence suggests that a sixteenth-century parlour and hall were demolished to provide some of the building materials for the construction of this range (Thorp 2007).

#### North-South range

This two-storey range is thought to predate the AD 1718 South range and to have originally been the medieval hall. It has a small room at the higher end with a larger heated room beyond it, at the end of which is a through-passage running from the front to the back of the wing (www.lbonline@english-heritage.org.uk). The roof is constructed of a mixture of modern softwood and historic oak timbers. The majority of the oak trusses contain principal rafters which have empty mortices for two sets of through purlins, and would have had halved lap collars, but these are missing (Fig 5). One of the oak trusses (truss 1) can be seen to retain its cranked collar with notched halving joint (Fig 6).

#### North range

This two-storey range was thought to have been added in the seventeenth century to run parallel to the original parlour range (<u>www.lbonline@english-heritage.org.uk</u>). Although most of the roof is modern, two trusses contain historic timbers. The north principals of these two trusses again have empty mortices, demonstrating they once had through purlins, whilst the southern principals had trenched purlins (Fig 7).

## SAMPLING

Tree-ring dating of the timbers at Yarde Farmhouse was requested by Francis Kelly, Historic Buildings Inspector in English Heritage's South-West Office to inform repairs to this Building at Risk. Timbers deemed suitable for sampling were identified within the floors and roof of the South range (reused and apparently primary timbers) and the roofs of the North and North-South ranges, and of the porch.

It was hoped that by providing a date for those reused timbers used in the construction of the roof and the first-floor joists within the South range it would be possible to establish whether they were sixteenth-century and might have come from the same building as other architectural elements reused within this wing. Dating the cellar and attic joists, which appeared to be primary, would hopefully confirm the AD 1718 construction date for this range. It is unclear as to whether the oak roof timbers within the North-South and North ranges are reused or primary and it was hoped that providing dates for these timbers might clarify the situation. Access to the top of a single truss in the porch gave an opportunity to potentially date this roof. Overall, it was hoped that by dating timbers throughout the building, a greater understanding of the development of the building as a whole and the relationship between the various ranges would be obtained.

Although dendrochronological analysis of other areas of the building complex, including the east and west extensions to the North range and the kitchen range, was requested, unfortunately no suitable timbers were found.

In accordance with the brief provided by English Heritage, a total of 46 timbers were sampled. Each sample was given the code YRD-F (for Yarde Farmhouse) and numbered 01–46. Thirty-two of these were taken from the South range, 12 from the reused timbers of the roof (YRD-F01–12), five from the second-floor joists (YRD-F13–17), ten from the timbers of the first-floor joists (YRD-F18–27), and five from the cellar (YRD-F28–32). Two samples were taken from the single accessible truss of the porch roof (YRD-F33 and YRD-F34). Ten samples were taken from the roof of the North-South range (YRD-F35–44) and finally, two samples were taken from the roof of the North range (YRD-F45 and YRD-F46), with the other timbers from this structure being either modern softwood replacements or unsuitable for analysis.

The location of samples was noted at the time of sampling and has been marked on Figures 8–19. Further details relating to the samples can be found in Table 1. Roof trusses, joists, and other timbers have been numbered from east to west or north to south (as appropriate), or follows the numbering system employed by John Allan (Figs 12 and 13).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

At this stage it was noticed that eight of the samples (six from the South range and two from the North-South range) had too few rings to make secure dating a possibility. These samples were rejected prior to measurement. The remaining 38 samples were prepared by sanding and polishing and their growth-ring widths measured; the data of these measurements are given at the end of the report. These samples were compared with each other by the Litton/Zainodin grouping procedure (see Appendix), resulting in 31 samples forming five groups.

Firstly, 22 samples matched each other and were combined at the relevant offset positions to form YRDFSQ01, a site sequence of 172 rings (Fig 20). This site sequence was compared against the relevant reference chronologies where it was found to match consistently and securely at a first-ring date of AD 1432 and a last-ring date of AD 1603. The evidence for this dating is given in Table 2.

These samples are taken from timbers of the North-South and South range roofs and the first and second-floor joists of the South range. Eighteen of these samples have the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring, which in all cases is broadly contemporary, ranging by only 15 years, and suggestive of a single felling. The average heartwood/sapwood boundary ring date is AD 1587, allowing an estimated felling date range to be calculated for the 18 timbers represented of AD 1604–27. This takes into account sample YRD-F36 having a last measured ring date of AD 1603 with incomplete sapwood. Further support of contemporary felling is given by the good intra-site matching of samples from different areas seen, consistent with a coherent group of timbers being utilised.

The remaining four samples without the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring have lastmeasured ring dates ranging from AD 1540 (YRD-F41) to AD 1571 (YRD-F12) which makes it possible that these are also from timbers felled in AD 1604–27.

Three samples, all taken from timbers of the cellar, matched each other and were combined at the relevant offset positions to form YRDFSQ02, a site sequence of 87 rings (Fig 21). Two further samples from the cellar matched each other and were combined to form YRDFSQ03, a site sequence of 59 rings (Fig 22). Two samples taken from principal rafters of the porch roof matched each other and were combined to form YRDFSQ04, a site sequence of 80 rings (Fig 23) and, finally, two samples from the North range roof were combined to form YRDFSQ05, a site sequence of 130 rings (Fig 24). Attempts to date these four site sequences by comparing them against the relevant reference chronologies were unsuccessful and these remain undated.

The remaining ungrouped samples were then individually compared against the reference chronologies and, although some tentative dating was noted, this was not considered secure, and these also to remain undated.

## DISCUSSION

Prior to tree-ring analysis being undertaken, Yarde Farmhouse was believed to date to the late sixteenth or early-seventeenth century, although there had been suggestions that it may have had earlier origins. The dated timbers are restricted to the North-South range roof and the South range. These were all felled in the first quarter of the seventeenth century and no evidence of any earlier timbers has been found.

The dendrochronological analysis has successfully dated timbers along the whole length of the roof of the North-South range to a felling of AD 1604–27, demonstrating that this part of the building was probably constructed in the seventeenth century, hence predating the AD 1718 South range as previously suggested, and furthermore narrowing construction to the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

Within the AD 1718 South range added by Richard Dyer, timbers of the roof and the first and second-floor joists have also been dated to AD 1604–27. The roof timbers and first-floor joists were believed to be reused and this supposition has now been confirmed by the dendrochronological analysis. However, although the second-floor joists were not thought to be reused, it has now been shown that at least one of these, a main joist, was also reused. Documentary evidence had suggested a sixteenth-century parlour and hall were demolished to make way for this new South range, providing building materials, including timber. However, with the reused roof and joist timbers all dating to the first quarter of the seventeenth century, this is clearly not the case, unless these sixteenth-century structures had been previously extensively remodelled.

The good intra-site cross-matching seen between the timbers of the North-South range and the reused ones in the South range is suggestive of the trees growing in close proximity to each other. This could perhaps support the hypothesis that the South range roof and floor-framing is constructed utilising timbers from a demolished range on site which was contemporary with the North-South range.

It is unfortunate that none of the other site sequences could be matched against the reference material. Dating these primary timbers would have provided evidence as to the construction dates of the North range roof and the porch and cellar stairs in the South range, and hence potentially provided supporting evidence for the AD 1718 construction of the South range.

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## TABLES AND FIGURES

| Sample                | Sample location                    | Total  | Sapwood rings** | First measured ring date | Last heartwood ring | Last measured ring |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| number                |                                    | rings* |                 | (AD)                     | date (AD)           | date (AD)          |
| South Rang            | e roof – reused                    |        |                 | ·                        |                     |                    |
| YRD-F01               | North principal rafter, truss I    | 128    | h/s             | 1454                     | 1581                | 1581               |
| YRD-F02               | Collar, truss I                    | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F03               | South principal rafter, truss 2    | 55     | h/s             | 1533                     | 1587                | 1587               |
| YRD-F04               | Collar, truss 2                    | 50     | h/s             | 1544                     | 1593                | 1593               |
| YRD-F05               | South principal rafter, truss 3    | 66     | h/s             | 1529                     | 1594                | 1594               |
| YRD-F06               | Collar, truss 3                    | 68     | h/s             | 1527                     | 1594                | 1594               |
| YRD-F07               | South principal rafter, truss 4    | 59     | h/s             | 1531                     | 1589                | 1589               |
| YRD-F08               | North principal rafter, truss 6    | 63     | h/s             | 1522                     | 1584                | 1584               |
| YRD-F09               | North principal rafter, truss 2    | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-FI0               | South principal rafter, truss 5    | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-FI I              | North upper purlin, truss 5-6      | 62     | h/s             | 1527                     | 1588                | 1588               |
| YRD-F12               | South upper purlin, truss 5-6      | 69     |                 | 1503                     |                     | 1571               |
| Second-floc           | pr/attic joists – presumed primary |        |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F13               | Main joist                         | 105    | h/s             | 1483                     | 1587                | 1587               |
| YRD-F14               | Joist 2                            | 61     | h/s             |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F15               | Joist 3                            | 55     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F16               | Joist 4                            | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F17               | Joist 7                            | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| <u>First-floor ja</u> | <u> pists – reused</u>             |        |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F18               | Main north joist                   | 68     | h/s             | 1522                     | 1589                | 1589               |
| YRD-F19               | Main south joist                   | 33     | h/s             | 1453                     | 1585                | 1585               |
| YRD-F20               | Joist 2                            | 103    |                 | 1442                     |                     | 1544               |
| YRD-F21               | Joist 3                            | 81     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F22               | Joist 7                            | 103    | h/s             | 1478                     | 1580                | 1580               |
| YRD-F23               | Joist 9                            | NM     |                 |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F24               | Joist I I                          | 66     | h/s             |                          |                     |                    |
| YRD-F25               | Joist 20                           | 66     | h/s             | 1530                     | 1595                | 1595               |

| YRD-F26    | Joist 25                              | 118   | h/s | 1469  | 1586 | 1586 |
|------------|---------------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|------|------|
| YRD-F27    | Joist 27                              | 73    | h/s |       |      |      |
| Cellar     | ·                                     | • • • |     | ·     |      |      |
| YRD-F28    | Base plate                            | 81    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F29    | Understair hanging rail/closing stile | 78    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F30    | Understair mid-rail                   | 59    |     |       |      |      |
| YRD-F31    | Understair rail I                     | 53    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F32    | Understair rail 2                     | 59    | h/s |       |      |      |
| Porch      | •                                     |       |     |       |      |      |
| YRD-F33    | North principal rafter                | 74    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F34    | South principal rafter                | 59    | 01  |       |      |      |
| North-Sout | h Range roof                          | • • • |     | ·     |      |      |
| YRD-F35    | East principal rafter, truss I        | NM    |     |       |      |      |
| YRD-F36    | West principal rafter, truss I        | 83    | 18  | 1521  | 1585 | 1603 |
| YRD-F37    | Collar, truss 1                       | 48    | 14  |       |      |      |
| YRD-F38    | West principal rafter, truss 2        | 54    |     | 1518  |      | 1571 |
| YRD-F39    | East principal rafter, truss 4        | 96    | h/s | 1492  | 1587 | 1587 |
| YRD-F40    | West principal rafter, truss 4        | 78    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F41    | East principal rafter, truss 6        | 109   |     | 1432` |      | 1540 |
| YRD-F42    | West principal rafter, truss 6        | NM    |     |       |      |      |
| YRD-F43    | East principal rafter, truss 8        | 80    | h/s | 1505  | 1584 | 1584 |
| YRD-F44    | West principal rafter, truss 8        | 47    | h/s | 1539  | 1585 | 1585 |
| North Rang | <u>e</u>                              | · ·   |     | •     | •    |      |
| YRD-F45    | North principal rafter, truss 12      | 88    | h/s |       |      |      |
| YRD-F46    | North principal rafter, truss 14      | 98    |     |       |      |      |

\*NM = not measured.

\*\*h/s = the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring is the last measured ring on the sample

# Table 2: Results of the cross-matching of site sequence YRDFSQ01 and relevant reference chronologies when the first-ring date is AD1432 and the last-ring date is AD1603

| Reference chronology                   | <i>t</i> -value | Span of chronology | Reference                  |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 26 Westgate Street, Gloucester, Glos   | 9.0             | AD 1399–1622       | Howard <i>et a</i> / 1998a |
| The Guildhall, Worcester, Worcs        | 8.6             | AD 1361-1609       | Arnold <i>et al</i> 2006   |
| Naas House, Lydney, Glos               | 8.4             | AD 1373–1568       | Howard <i>et al</i> 1998b  |
| Exeter Quay, Devon                     | 8.4             | AD 1407-1606       | Mills 1988                 |
| Wales and West Midlands                | 8.3             | AD 1341–1636       | Siebenlist-Kerner 1978     |
| St Briavel's Castle, Glos              | 7.9             | AD 1362–1636       | Howard <i>et al</i> 1999   |
| Warleigh House, Tamerton Foliot, Devon | 7.7             | AD 1367–1539       | Howard <i>et a</i> /2006   |

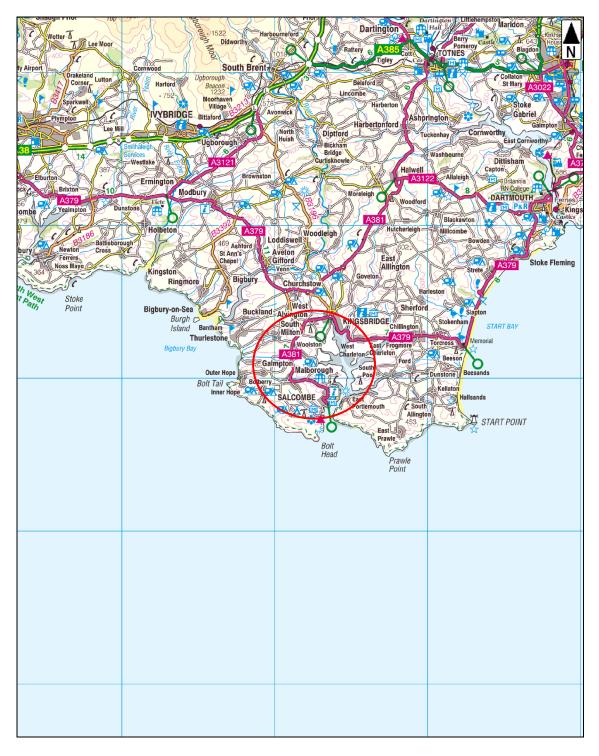


Figure I: Map to show the general location of Malborough

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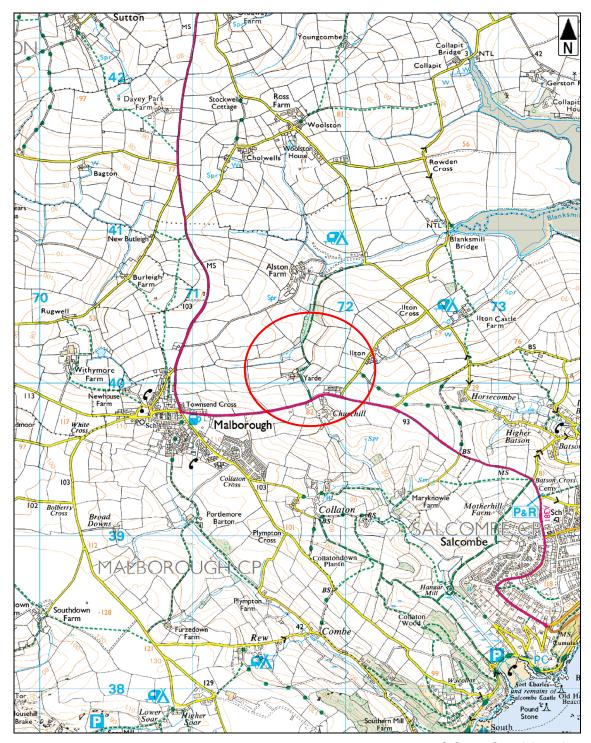


Figure 2: Map to show the location of Yarde Farmhouse

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Figure 3: Map to show the location of Yarde Farmhouse

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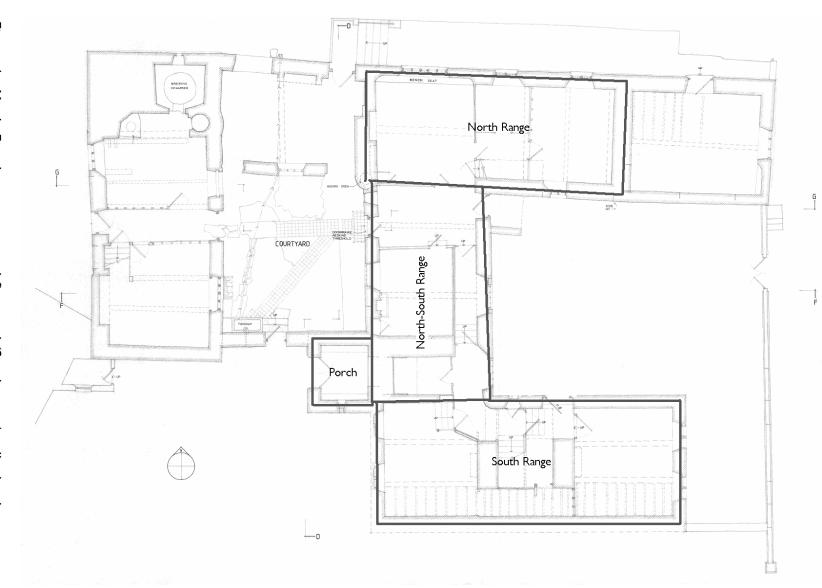


Figure 4: Yarde Farmhouse, at ground-flounder investigation outlined (Architecton) Yarde Farmhouse, at ground-floor and (South range) cellar level, areas

 $\overline{\omega}$ 



Figure 5: North-south range, showing the empty mortices for collars and through purlins in the principal rafters, looking north



Figure 6: North-south range; truss I, taken from the north-east

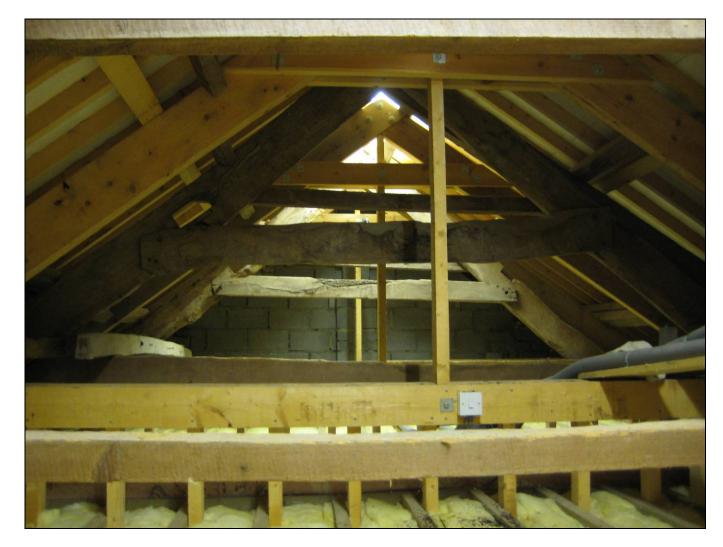


Figure 7: North range; looking east

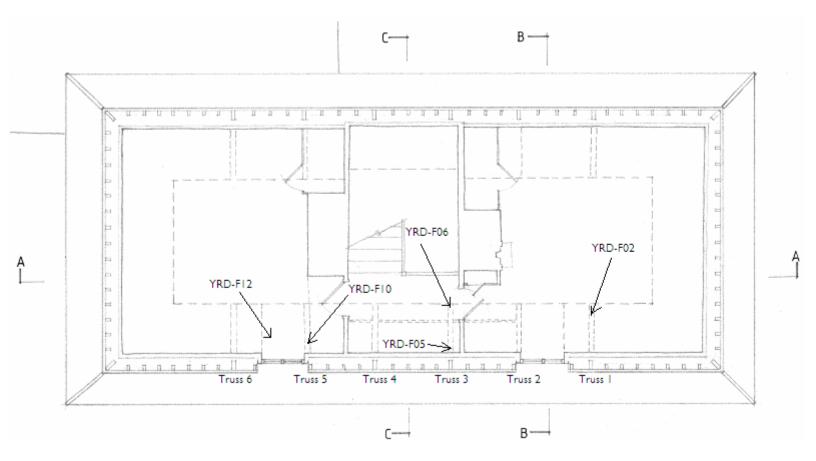


Figure 8: Yarde Farmhouse; South range, second floor plan, showing truss position and the location of samples YRD-F02, YRD-F05–06, YRD-F10, and YRD-F12 (Architecton)

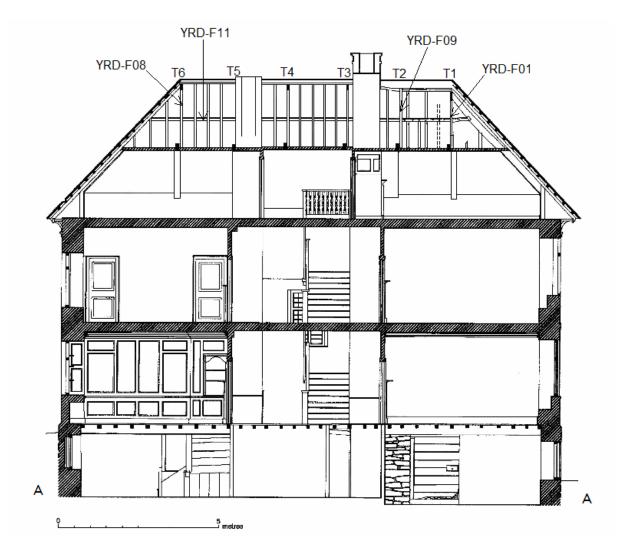


Figure 9: South range; north side A–A, showing the location of samples YRD-F01, YRD-F08–09, and YRD-F11 (John Allan; section position marked on Fig 8)

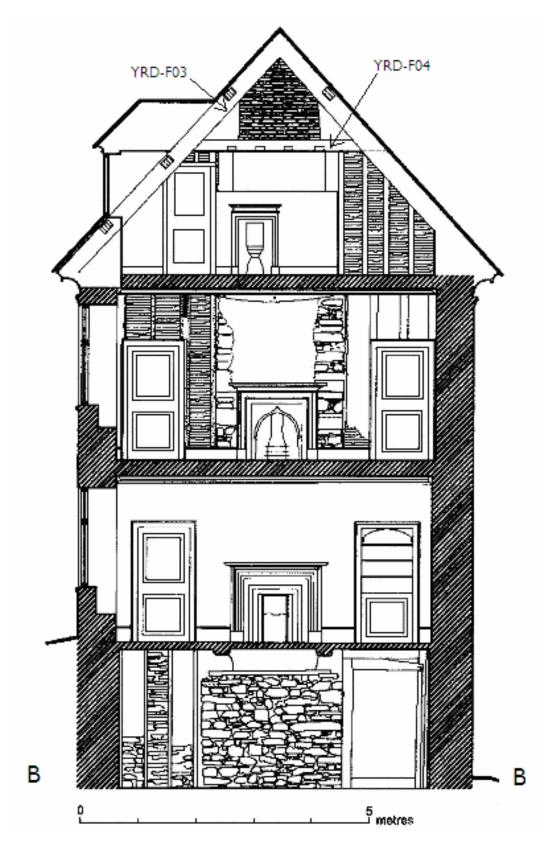


Figure 10: South range; east facing section B–B, showing the location of samples YRD-F03 and YRD-F04 (John Allan, location of section marked on Fig 8)

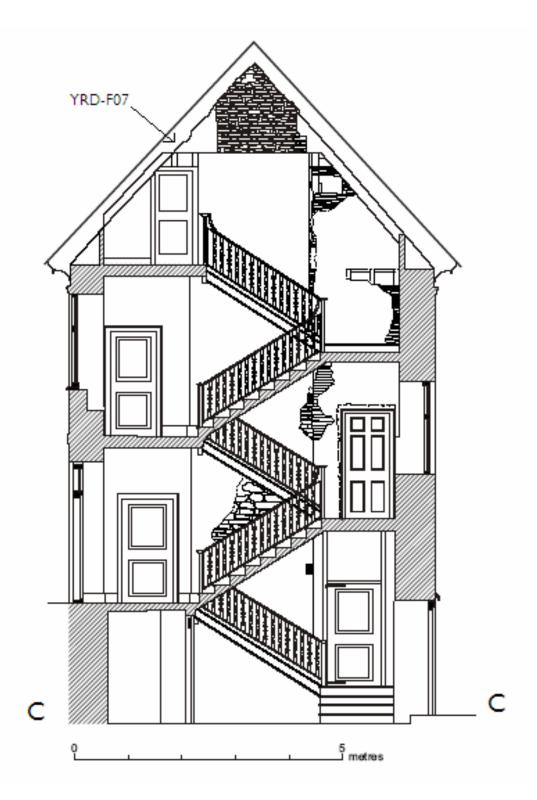


Figure 11: South range; east facing section C–C, showing the location of sample YRD-F07 (John Allan, location of section marked on Fig 8)

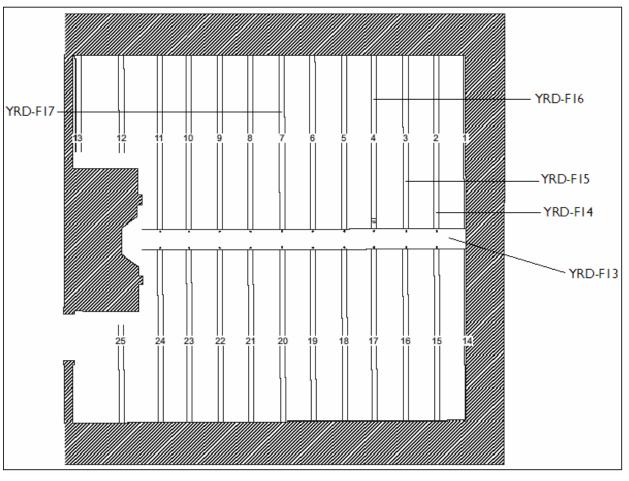
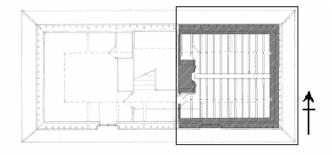
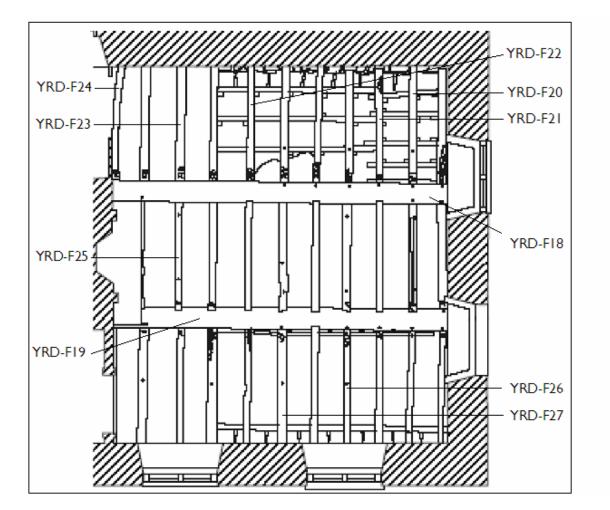


Figure 12: South range; Second floor joists, showing the location of samples YRD-F13–17 (John Allan)



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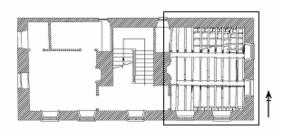


Figure 13: South range: First-floor joists, showing the location of samples YRD-F18–27 (John Allan)

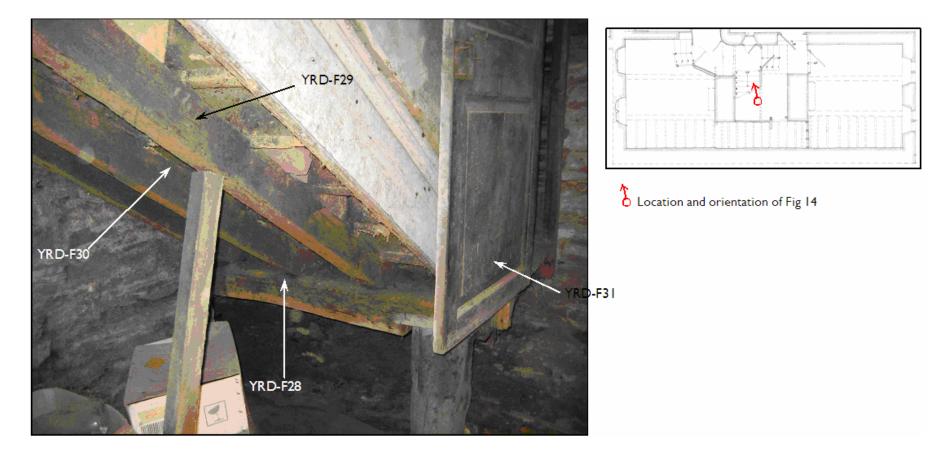


Figure 14: South range: Cellar, showing the location of samples YRD-F28-31



Figure 15: South range: Cellar, showing the location of sample YRD-F32

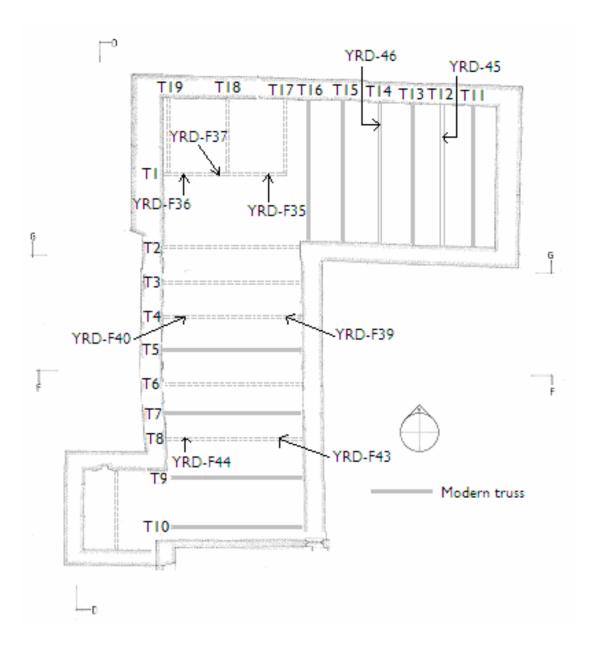


Figure 16: Approximate truss positions in the North-south and North ranges and the Porch, showing the location of samples YRD-F35–37, YRD-F39–40 and YRD-F43–46 (Architecton, amended)

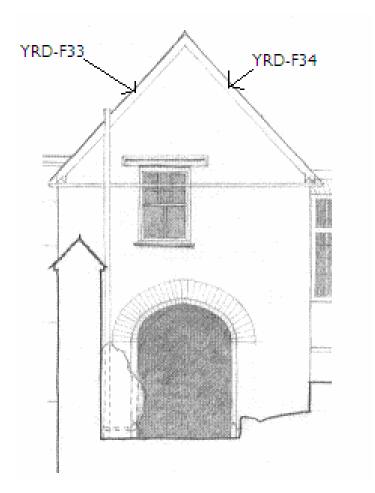


Figure 17: West-facing section D–D through the porch, showing the location of samples YRD-F33 and YRD-F34 (Architecton, position of section shown on Fig 16)

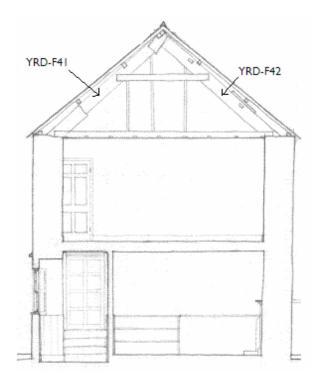


Figure 18: North-facing section through the North-South range, showing truss 6 and the location of samples YRD-F41 and YRD-F42 (Architecton, section position shown on Fig 16)

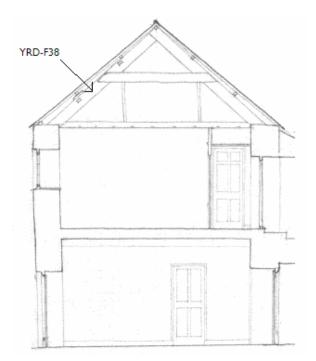


Figure 19: South-facing section through the North-South range, showing truss 2 and the location of sample YRD-F38 (Architecton, section position shown on Fig 16)

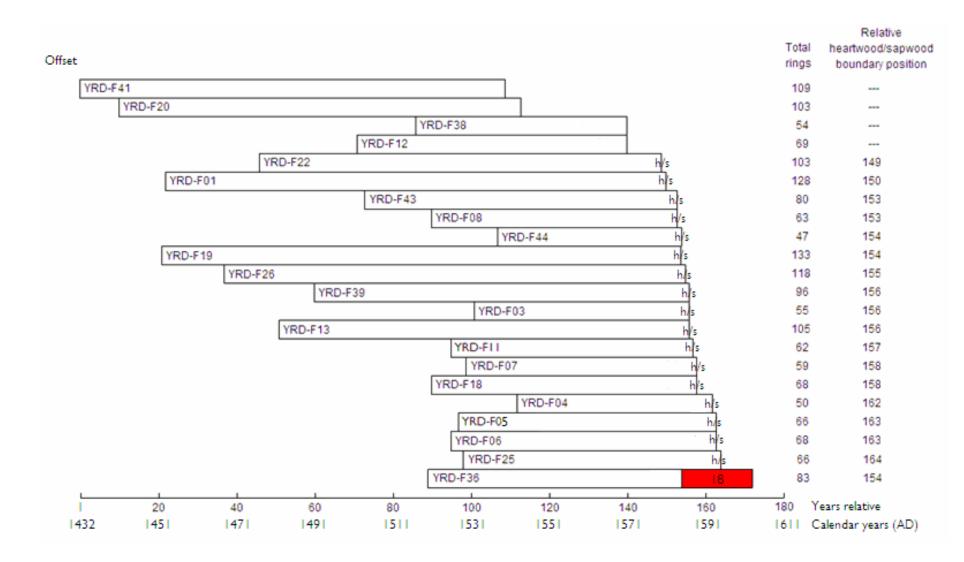


Figure 20: Bar diagram of samples in site sequence YRDFSQ01

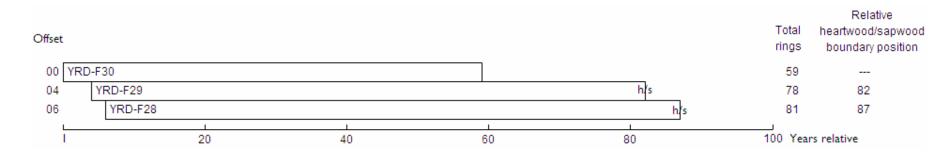


Figure 21: Bar diagram of samples in undated site sequence YRDFSQ02

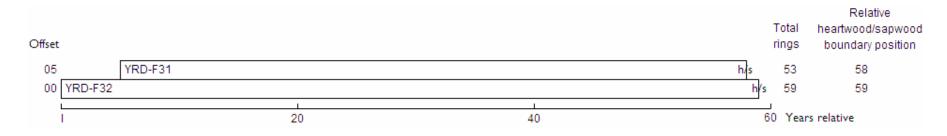


Figure 22: Bar diagram of samples in undated site sequence YRDFSQ03

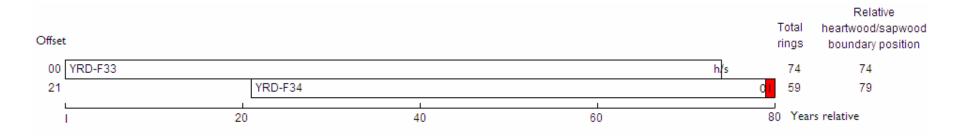


Figure 23: Bar diagram of samples in undated site sequence YRDFSQ04

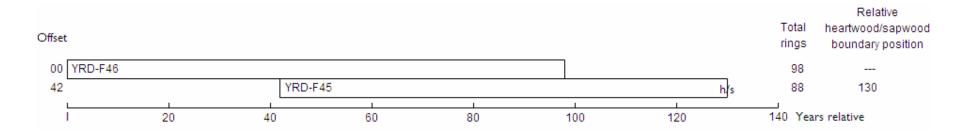


Figure 24: Bar diagram of samples in undated site sequence YRDFSQ05

#### DATA OF MEASURED SAMPLES

#### Measurements in 0.01mm units

## YRD-F41B 109

75 |41 |89 280 232 |93 |40 |08 |33 |39 |02 |17 |3| |29 |42 |78 2|3 |97 |9| |97 |98 236 230 |88 25| 270 293 |52 |59 |49 202 2|8 |77 |97 204 264 239 |54 20| |89 219 |2| |43 233 2|0 |87 |78 22| 269 289 258 253 |44 |66 232 |83 |75 |59 |5| |26 83 |16 |39 |10 |39 64 58 89 |05 |22 |45 |49 |40 |54 |19 |16 |24 |03 |19 |4| |58 |74 |57 68 |04 86 |16 |62 |2| |63 |65 |00 |3| 63 95 |3| |23 9| 89 |9| |13 |44 82 83 |11 |70 |5| |66 |54

## YRD-F43A 80

400 433 466 251 209 194 201 295 257 285 239 180 236 191 220 195 410 312 198 145 126 93 125 148 164 205 280 259 221 240 204 191 248 257 318 325 321 236 268 200 122 125 149 165 205 254 284 292 189 306 271 126 156 181 192 188 177 176 144 157 166 136 114 113 137 162 201 165 177 205 151 146 147 159 165 232 166 134 120 168 YRD-F43B 80

408 452 545 239 209 196 203 279 254 291 236 180 236 196 223 188 406 326 212 134 140 111 113 154 167 213 260 279 221 233 208 199 252 258 316 323 320 229 271 197 124 126 149 167 208 256 282 290 186 310 268 123 156 182 198 182 181 172 142 146 173 136 112 112 141 158 207 180 178 198 141 137 147 159 168 239 165 130 105 167 YRD-F44A 47

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#### YRD-F44B 47

219 261 289 214 220 248 148 143 194 191 226 253 272 308 186 288 300 127 137 178 250 237 188 224 176 177 192 142 103 102 135 145 215 170 188 206 129 97 118 148 162 250 182 145 130 189 152

## YRD-F45A 88

78 | 16 53 70 57 64 61 | 17 103 65 82 40 103 | 21 68 89 | 85 104 104 61 80 | 04 | 55 | 67 | 04 76 59 74 51 | 24 | 57 90 58 | 63 | 54 88 70 239 | 56 204 | 37 | 41 | 64 | 28 83 | 60 | 11 | 46 86 | 02 97 | 20 | 00 | 40 90 59 34 36 24 | 8 46 24 38 20 26 73 | 10 65 42 89 | 76 | 52 86 46 70 98 91 | 25 200 273 | 89 | 46 267 305 | 43 256 | 76 92

### YRD-F45B 88

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## YRD-F46A 98

94 166 567 429 374 371 274 207 234 171 128 154 217 295 351 174 165 125 121 139 129 286 271 130 172 89 98 103 120 123 137 117 103 101 130 68 85 93 93 68 58 64 68 57 37 25 28 14 20 40 62 40 37 32 68 80 40 72 156 86 63 39 38 51 72 63 60 55 48 73 102 208 249 123 131 282 201 97 98 181 126 155 99 121 132 76 69 114 74 114 72 78 87 109 82 116 90 62 YRD-F46B 98

97 174 576 386 378 373 280 215 230 167 122 160 179 320 384 200 163 126 121 142 150 280 268 137 167 87 104 104 109 133 124 121 104 99 123 80 94 99 90 73 61 65 69 61 32 31 29 14 17 45 56 44 42 29 71 89 37 76 135 83 63 36 40 50 72 67 56 52 54 74 100 205 252 143 138 281 198 102 94 181 124 161 99 116 137 73 72 113 73 116 69 81 87 100 86 119 88 60

# APPENDIX: TREE-RING DATING

# The Principles of Tree-Ring Dating

Tree-ring dating, or dendrochronology as it is known, is discussed in some detail in the Laboratory's Monograph, An East Midlands Master Tree-Ring Chronology and its uses for dating Vernacular Building (Laxton and Litton 1988) and Dendrochronology: Guidelines on Producing and Interpreting Dendrochronological Dates (English Heritage 1988). Here we will give the bare outlines. Each year an oak tree grows an extra ring on the outside of its trunk and all its branches just inside its bark. The width of this annual ring depends largely on the weather during the growing season, about April to October, and possibly also on the weather during the previous year. Good growing seasons give rise to relatively wide rings, poor ones to very narrow rings and average ones to relatively average ring widths. Since the climate is so variable from year to year, almost randomlike, the widths of these rings will also appear random-like in sequence, reflecting the seasons. This is illustrated in Figure A1 where, for example, the widest rings appear at irregular intervals. This is the key to dating by tree rings, or rather, by their widths. Records of the average ring widths for oaks, one for each year for the last 1000 years or more, are available for different areas. These are called master chronologies. Because of the random-like nature of these sequences of widths, there is usually only one position at which a sequence of ring widths from a sample of oak timber with at least 70 rings will match a master. This will date the timber and, in particular, the last ring.

If the bark is still on the sample, as in Figure A1, then the date of the last ring will be the date of felling of the oak from which it was cut. There is much evidence that in medieval times oaks cut down for building purposes were used almost immediately, usually within the year or so (Rackham 1976). Hence if bark is present on several main timbers in a building, none of which appear reused or are later insertions, and if they all have the same date for their last ring, then we can be quite confident that this is the date of construction or soon after. If there is no bark on the sample, then we have to make an estimate of the felling date; how this is done is explained below.

# The Practice of Tree-Ring Dating at the Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory

1. Inspecting the Building and Sampling the Timbers. Together with a building historian the timbers in a building are inspected to try to ensure that those sampled are not reused or later insertions. Sampling is almost always done by coring into the timber, which has the great advantage that we can sample *in situ* timbers and those judged best to give the date of construction, or phase of construction if there is more than one in the building. The timbers to be sampled are also inspected to see how many rings they have. We normally look for timbers with at least 70 rings, and preferably more. With fewer rings than this, 50 for example, sequences of widths become difficult to match to a unique

position within a master sequence of ring widths and so are difficult to date (Litton and Zainodin 1991). The cross-section of the rafter shown in Figure A2 has about 120 rings; about 20 of which are sapwood rings – the lighter rings on the outside. Similarly the core has just over 100 rings with a few sapwood rings.

To ensure that we are getting the date of the building as a whole, or the whole of a phase of construction if there is more than one, about 8–10 samples per phase are usually taken. Sometimes we take many more, especially if the construction is complicated. One reason for taking so many samples is that, in general, some will fail to give a date. There may be many reasons why a particular sequence of ring widths from a sample of timber fails to give a date even though others from the same building do. For example, a particular tree may have grown in an odd ecological niche, so odd indeed that the widths of its rings were determined by factors other than the local climate! In such circumstances it will be impossible to date a timber from this tree using the master sequence whose widths, we can assume, were predominantly determined by the local climate at the time.

Sampling is done by coring into the timber with a hollow corer attached to an electric drill and usually from its outer rings inwards towards where the centre of the tree, the pith, is judged to be. An illustration of a core is shown in Figure A2; it is about 150mm long and 10mm diameter. Great care has to be taken to ensure that as few as possible of the outer rings are lost in coring. This can be difficult as these outer rings are often very soft (see below on sapwood). Each sample is given a code which identifies uniquely which timber it comes from, which building it is from and where the building is located. For example, CRO-A06 is the sixth core taken from the first building (A) sampled by the Laboratory in Cropwell Bishop. Where it came from in that building will be shown in the sampling records and drawings. No structural damage is done to any timbers by coring, nor does it weaken them.

During the initial inspection of the building and its timbers the dendrochronologist may come to the conclusion that, as far as can be judged, none of the timbers have sufficient rings in them for dating purposes and may advise against sampling to save further unwarranted expense.

All sampling by the Laboratory is undertaken according to current Health and Safety Standards. The Laboratory's dendrochronologists are insured.



Figure A1: A wedge of oak from a tree felled in 1976. It shows the annual growth rings, one for each year from the innermost ring to the last ring on the outside just inside the bark. The year of each ring can be determined by counting back from the outside ring, which grew in 1976



Figure A2: Cross-section of a rafter, showing sapwood rings in the left-hand corner, the arrow points to the heartwood/sapwood boundary (H/S); and a core with sapwood; again the arrow is pointing to the H/S. The core is about the size of a pencil



Figure A3: Measuring ring widths under a microscope. The microscope is fixed while the sample is on a moving platform. The total sequence of widths is measured twice to ensure that an error has not been made. This type of apparatus is needed to process a large number of samples on a regular basis



Figure A4: Three cores from timbers in a building. They come from trees growing at the same time. Notice that, although the sequences of widths look similar, they are not identical. This is typical

2. Measuring Ring Widths. Each core is sanded down with a belt sander using medium-grit paper and then finished by hand with flourgrade-grit paper. The rings are then clearly visible and differentiated from each other with a result very much like that shown in Figure A2. The core is then mounted on a movable table below a microscope and the ring-widths measured individually from the innermost ring to the outermost. The widths are automatically recorded in a computer file as they are measured (see Fig A3).

3. Cross-Matching and Dating the Samples. Because of the factors besides the local climate which may determine the annual widths of a tree's rings, no two sequences of ring widths from different oaks growing at the same time are exactly alike (Fig A4). Indeed, the sequences may not be exactly alike even when the trees are growing near to each other. Consequently, in the Laboratory we do not attempt to match two sequences of ring widths by eye, or graphically, or by any other subjective method. Instead, it is done objectively (ie statistically) on a computer by a process called cross-matching. The output from the computer tells us the extent of correlation between two sample sequences of widths or, if we are dating, between a sample sequence of widths and the master, at each relative position of one to the other (offsets). The extent of the correlation at an offset is determined by the *t*-value (defined in almost any introductory book on statistics). That offset with the maximum t-value among the t-values at all the offsets will be the best candidate for dating one sequence relative to the other. If one of these is a master chronology, then this will date the other. Experiments carried out in the past with sequences from oaks of known date suggest that a *t*-value of at least 4.5, and preferably at least 5.0, is usually adequate for the dating to be accepted with reasonable confidence (Laxton and Litton 1988; Laxton et al 1988; Howard et al 1984–1995).

This is illustrated in Figure A5 with timbers from one of the roofs of Lincoln Cathedral. Here four sequences of ring widths, LIN-CO4, 05, 08, and 45, have been cross-matched with each other. The ring widths themselves have been omitted in the bar diagram, as is usual, but the offsets at which they best cross-match each other are shown; eg the sequence of ring widths of CO8 matches the sequence of ring widths of C45 best when it is at a position starting 20 rings after the first ring of C45, and similarly for the others. The actual *t*-values between the four at these offsets of best correlations are in the matrix. Thus at the offset of +20 rings, the *t*-value between C45 and C08 is 5.6 and is the maximum found between these two among all the positions of one sequence relative to the other.

It is standard practice in our Laboratory first to cross-match as many as possible of the ring-width sequences of the samples in a building and then to form an average from them. This average is called a site sequence of the building being dated and is illustrated in Figure A5. The fifth bar at the bottom is a site sequence for a roof at Lincoln Cathedral and is constructed from the matching sequences of the four timbers. The site sequence width for each year is the average of the widths in each of the sample sequences which has a width for that year. Thus in Fig A5 if the widths shown are 0.8mm for C45, 0.2mm for C08, 0.7mm for C05, and 0.3mm for C04, then the corresponding width of the site

sequence is the average of these, 0.55mm. The actual sequence of widths of this site sequence is stored on the computer. The reason for creating site sequences is that it is usually easier to date an average sequence of ring widths with a master sequence than it is to date the individual component sample sequences separately.

The straightforward method of cross-matching several sample sequences with each other one at a time is called the 'maximal *t*-value' method. The actual method of cross-matching a group of sequences of ring-widths used in the Laboratory involves grouping and averaging the ring-width sequences and is called the 'Litton-Zainodin Grouping Procedure'. It is a modification of the straightforward method and was successfully developed and tested in the Laboratory and has been published (Litton and Zainodin 1991; Laxton *et al* 1988).

4. Estimating the Felling Date. As mentioned above, if the bark is present on a sample, then the date of its last ring is the date of the felling of its tree (or the last full year before felling, if it was felled in the first three months of the following calendar year, before any new growth had started, but this is not too important a consideration in most cases). The actual bark may not be present on a timber in a building, though the dendrochronologist who is sampling can often see from its surface that only the bark is missing. In these cases the date of the last ring is still the date of felling.

Quite often some, though not all, of the original outer rings are missing on a timber. The outer rings on an oak, called sapwood rings, are usually lighter than the inner rings, the heartwood, and so are relatively easy to identify. For example, sapwood can be seen in the corner of the rafter and at the outer end of the core in Figure A2, both indicated by arrows. More importantly for dendrochronology, the sapwood is relatively soft and so liable to insect attack and wear and tear. The builder, therefore, may remove some of the sapwood for precisely these reasons. Nevertheless, if at least some of the sapwood rings are left on a sample, we will know that not too many rings have been lost since felling so that the date of the last ring on the sample is only a few years before the date of the original last ring on the tree, and so to the date of felling.

Various estimates have been made and used for the average number of sapwood rings in mature oak trees (English Heritage 1998). A fairly conservative range is between 15 and 50 and that this holds for 95% of mature oaks. This means, of course, that in a small number of cases there could be fewer than 15 and more than 50 sapwood rings. For example, the core CRO-A06 has only 9 sapwood rings and some have obviously been lost over time – either they were removed originally by the carpenter and/or they rotted away in the building and/or they were lost in the coring. It is not known exactly how many sapwood rings are missing, but using the above range the Laboratory would estimate between a minimum of 6 (=15-9) and a maximum of 41 (=50-9). If the last ring of CRO-A06 has been dated to 1500, say, then the estimated felling-date range for the tree from which it came originally would be between 1506 and 1541. The Laboratory uses this estimate for sapwood in areas of England where it has no prior information. It

also uses it when dealing with samples with very many rings, about 120 to the last heartwood ring. But in other areas of England where the Laboratory has accumulated a number of samples with complete sapwood, that is, no sapwood lost since felling, other estimates in place of the conservative range of 15 to 50 are used. In the East Midlands (Laxton *et a*/2001) and the east to the south down to Kent (Pearson 1995) where it has sampled extensively in the past, the Laboratory uses the shorter estimate of 15 to 35 sapwood rings in 95% of mature oaks growing in these parts. Since the sample CRO-A06 comes from a house in Cropwell Bishop in the East Midlands, a better estimate of sapwood rings lost since felling is between a minimum of 6 (=15-9) and 26 (=35-9) and the felling would be estimated to have taken place between 1506 and 1526, a shorter period than before. Oak boards quite often come from the Baltic region and in these cases the 95% confidence limits for sapwood are 9 to 36 (Howard *et al* 1992, 56).

Even more precise estimates of the felling date and range can often be obtained using knowledge of a particular case and information gathered at the time of sampling. For example, at the time of sampling the dendrochronologist may have noted that the timber from which the core of Figure A2 was taken still had complete sapwood but that some of the soft sapwood rings were lost in coring. By measuring into the timber the depth of sapwood lost, say 20mm, a reasonable estimate can be made of the number of sapwood rings lost, say 12 to 15 rings in this case. By adding on 12 to 15 years to the date of the last ring on the sample a good tight estimate for the range of the felling date can be obtained, which is often better than the 15 to 35 years later we would have estimated without this observation. In the example, the felling is now estimated to have taken place between AD 1512 and 1515, which is much more precise than without this extra information.

Even if all the sapwood rings are missing on a sample, but none of the heartwood rings are, then an estimate of the felling-date range is possible by adding on the full compliment of, say, 15 to 35 years to the date of the last heartwood ring (called the heartwood/ sapwood boundary or transition ring and denoted H/S). Fortunately it is often easy for a trained dendrochronologist to identify this boundary on a timber. If a timber does not have its heartwood/sapwood boundary, then only a *post quem* date for felling is possible.

**5.** Estimating the Date of Construction. There is a considerable body of evidence collected by dendrochronologists over the years that oak timbers used in buildings were not seasoned in medieval or early modern times (English Heritage 1998; Miles 1997, 50–5). Hence, provided that all the samples in a building have estimated felling-date ranges broadly in agreement with each other, so that they appear to have been felled as a group, then this should give an accurate estimate of the period when the structure was built, or soon after (Laxton *et al* 2001, fig 8; 34–5, where 'associated groups of fellings' are discussed in detail). However, if there is any evidence of storage before use, or if there is evidence the oak came from abroad (eg Baltic boards), then some allowance has to be made for this.

6. Master Chronological Sequences. Ultimately, to date a sequence of ring widths, or a site sequence, we need a master sequence of dated ring widths with which to crossmatch it, a Master Chronology. To construct such a sequence we have to start with a sequence of widths whose dates are known and this means beginning with a sequence from an oak tree whose date of felling is known. In Figure A6 such a sequence is SHE-T, which came from a tree in Sherwood Forest which was blown down in a recent gale. After this other sequences which cross-match with it are added and gradually the sequence is 'pushed back in time' as far as the age of samples will allow. This process is illustrated in Figure A6. We have a master chronological sequence of widths for Nottinghamshire and East Midlands oak for each year from AD 882 to 1981. It is described in great detail in Laxton and Litton (1988), but the components it contains are shown here in the form of a bar diagram. As can be seen, it is well replicated in that for each year in this period there are several sample sequences having widths for that year. The master is the average of these. This master can now be used to date oak from this area and from the surrounding areas where the climate is very similar to that in the East Midlands. The Laboratory has also constructed a master for Kent (Laxton and Litton 1989). The method the Laboratory uses to construct a master sequence, such as the East Midlands and Kent, is completely objective and uses the Litton-Zainodin grouping procedure (Laxton et al 1988). Other laboratories and individuals have constructed masters for other areas and have made them available. As well as these masters, local (dated) site chronologies can be used to date other buildings from nearby. The Laboratory has hundreds of these site sequences from many parts of England and Wales covering many short periods.

Ring-Width Indices. Tree-ring dating can be done by cross-matching the ring 7. widths themselves, as described above. However, it is advantageous to modify the widths first. Because different trees grow at different rates and because a young oak grows in a different way from an older oak, irrespective of the climate, the widths are first standardized before any matching between them is attempted. These standard widths are known as ring-width indices and were first used in dendrochronology by Baillie and Pilcher (1973). The exact form they take is explained in this paper and in the appendix of Laxton and Litton (1988) and is illustrated in the graphs in Figure A7. Here ring-widths are plotted vertically, one for each year of growth. In the upper sequence of (a), the generally large early growth after 1810 is very apparent as is the smaller later growth from about 1900 onwards when the tree is maturing. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the lower sequence of (a) starting in 1835. In both the widths are also changing rapidly from year to year. The peaks are the wide rings and the troughs are the narrow rings corresponding to good and poor growing seasons, respectively. The two corresponding sequence of Baillie-Pilcher indices are plotted in (b) where the differences in the immature and mature growths have been removed and only the rapidly changing peaks and troughs remain, that are associated with the common climatic signal. This makes cross-matching easier.

*t*-value/offset Matrix

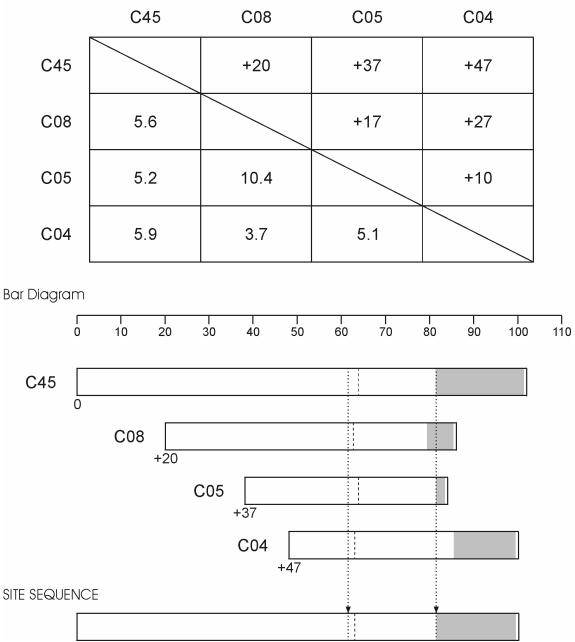


Figure A5: Cross-matching of four sequences from a Lincoln Cathedral roof and the formation of a site sequence from them

The bar diagram represents these sequences without the rings themselves. The length of the bar is proportional to the number of rings in the sequence. Here the four sequences are set at relative positions (offsets) to each other at which they have maximum correlation as measured by the *t*-values. The *t*-value/offset matrix contains the maximum *t*-values below the diagonal and the offsets above it. Thus, the maximum *t*-value between C08 and C45 occurs at the offset of +20 rings and the *t*-value is then 5.6. The site sequence is composed of the average of the corresponding widths, as illustrated with one width

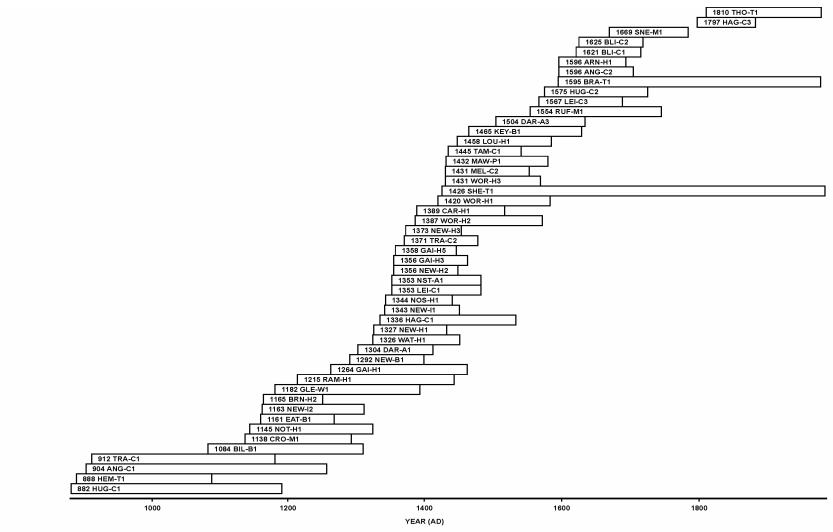


Figure A6: Bar diagram showing the relative positions and dates of the first rings of the component site sequences in the East Midlands Master Dendrochronological Sequence, EM08/87

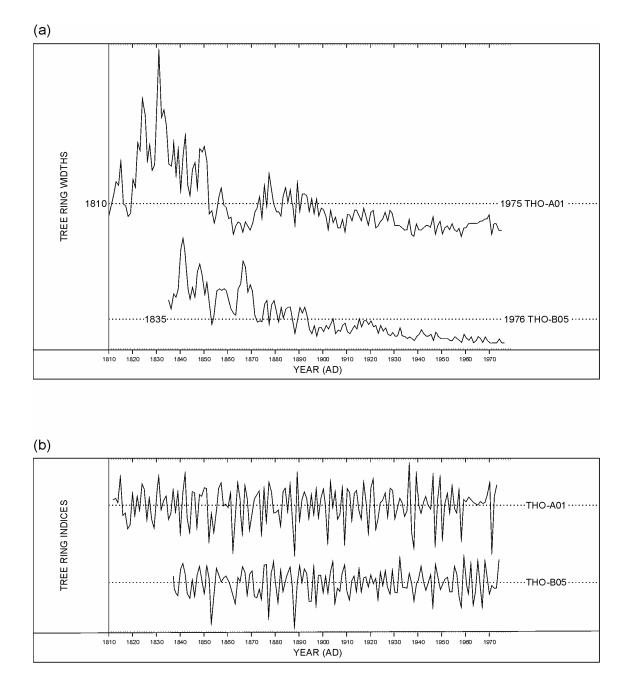


Figure A7 (a): The raw ring-widths of two samples, THO-A01 and THO-B05, whose felling dates are known

Here the ring widths are plotted vertically, one for each year, so that peaks represent wide rings and troughs narrow ones. Notice the growth-trends in each; on average the earlier rings of the young tree are wider than the later ones of the older tree in both sequences

## Figure A7 (b): The Baillie-Pilcher indices of the above widths

The growth trends have been removed completely

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