

Report for

**Willow Vale Farmhouse, Steeple Claydon,
Buckinghamshire**

Site Code: STC-A

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View from the north-west

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Oxbow Books

STC-A: WILLOW VALE FARMHOUSE, STEEPLE CLAYDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 6946 2686 Survey Date: Jan. 1989

By: D. Miles

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References: John Chenevix Trench (1989) 'Willow Vale Farm House, Steeple Claydon', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, **31**, 13-26.

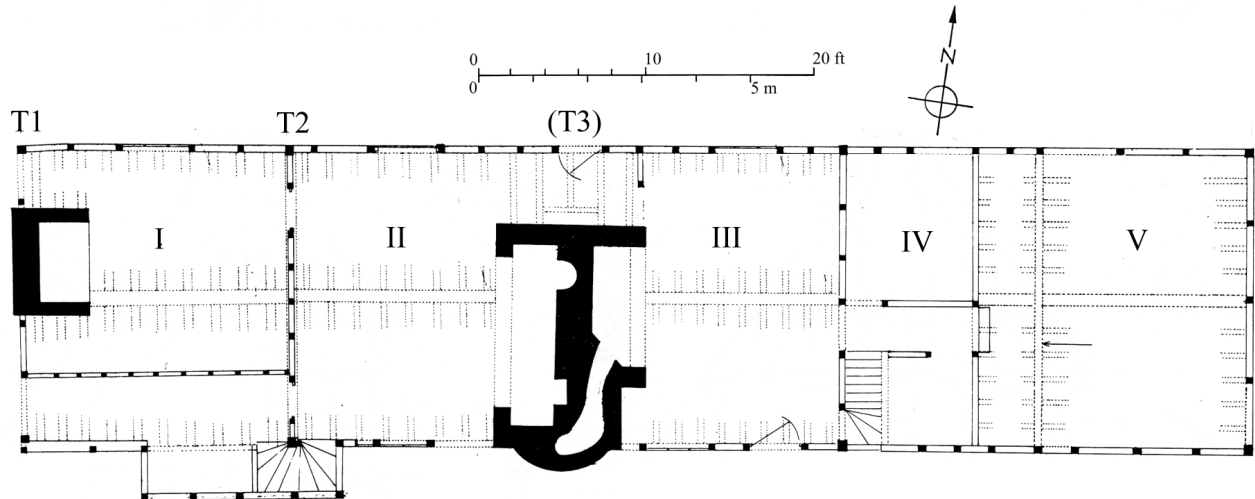


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (based on Chenevix Trench, 1989).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Willow Vale Farm is a five-bayed house under a thatch roof. Two cruck-built bays survive from the first phase. These comprise a chamber (west) with an original floor, and a hall bay; at least one further bay existed, either for a two-bay hall or for a service bay. The western hip cruck has a type 'V' apex and the other a type 'C'. The cruck phase has been tree-ring dated to 1448.

LATER PHASES: Shortly before 1600, a chimney was inserted against T3 and the hall floored over. A wall painting of formal roses in monochrome on the chamber side of T2 is thought to date from this period. In the mid-seventeenth century the lower end (bays III, IV, and V) was rebuilt in box-framing.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The crucks comprise slightly curved blades of boxed-heart section, with tiebeams and collars half-lapped without any significant dovetailed halving. The western truss, T1, has a tiebeam supporting the wallplates, but the rest of the infill framing is later. This truss carries a half-hip (V-apex); the second pair of rafters has a small yoke supporting the end of the ridge. In truss T2, the tiebeam is at a lower level and the wall plates are supported on cruck spurs which were half-lapped dovetailed into the cruck blade. These were in turn supported by cruck studs, which were let into the backs of the blades at varying heights (one since removed). This truss has a square set ridge with a saddle (C-apex). There is no indication of infill below the T2 tiebeam. The roof in Bay II is heavily sooted and smoke-blackened thatch was found during rethatching.

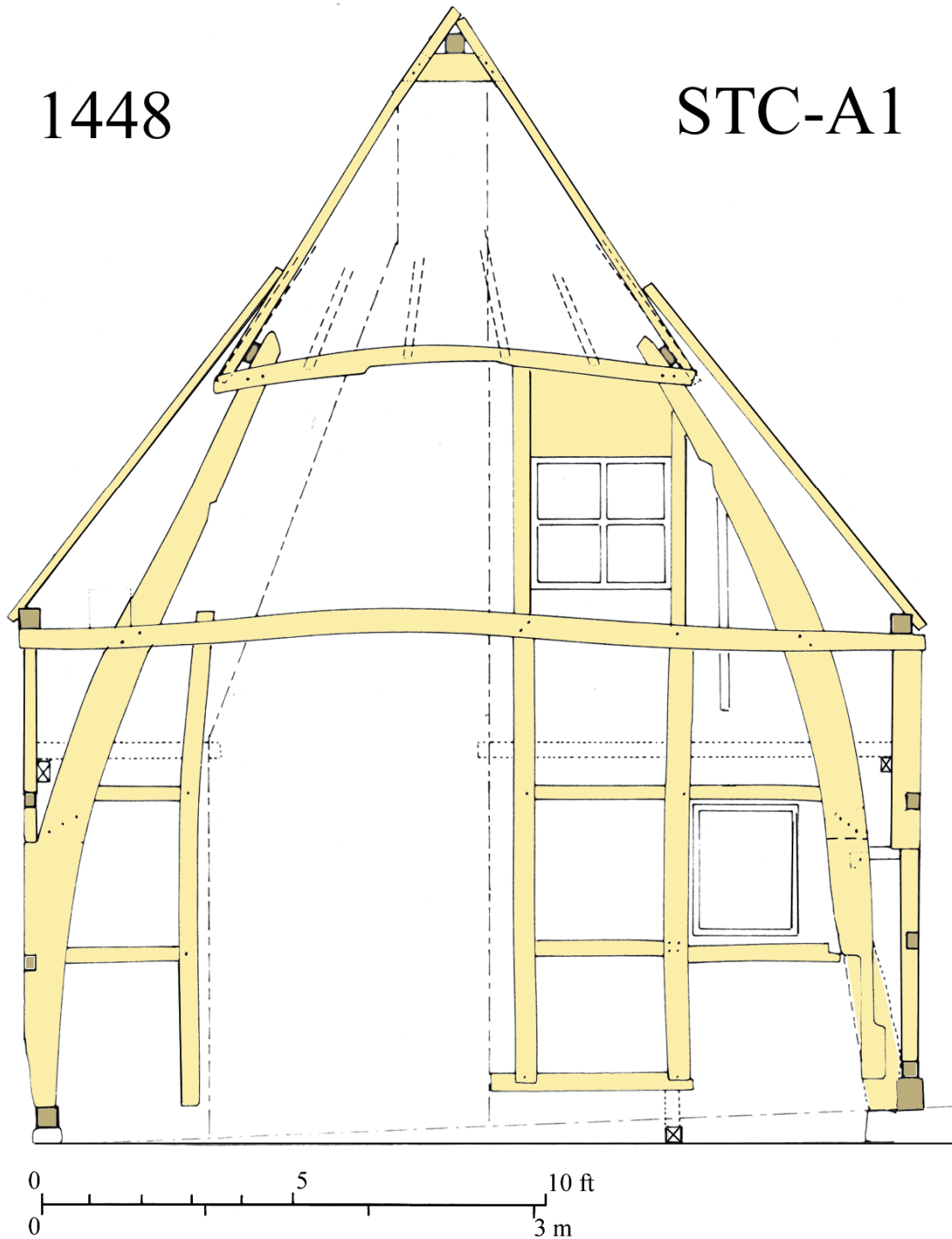


Fig. 3. Section of Truss T1.

An important feature is the floor in bay I which has been shown by the tree-ring dating to be of the first phase. The joists measure between 4-5" high and 6" wide. They are supported by an axial beam with a step-and-ogee mouldings. There is no indication of a stair trimmer and it is suggested that access was by a ladder from the hall.

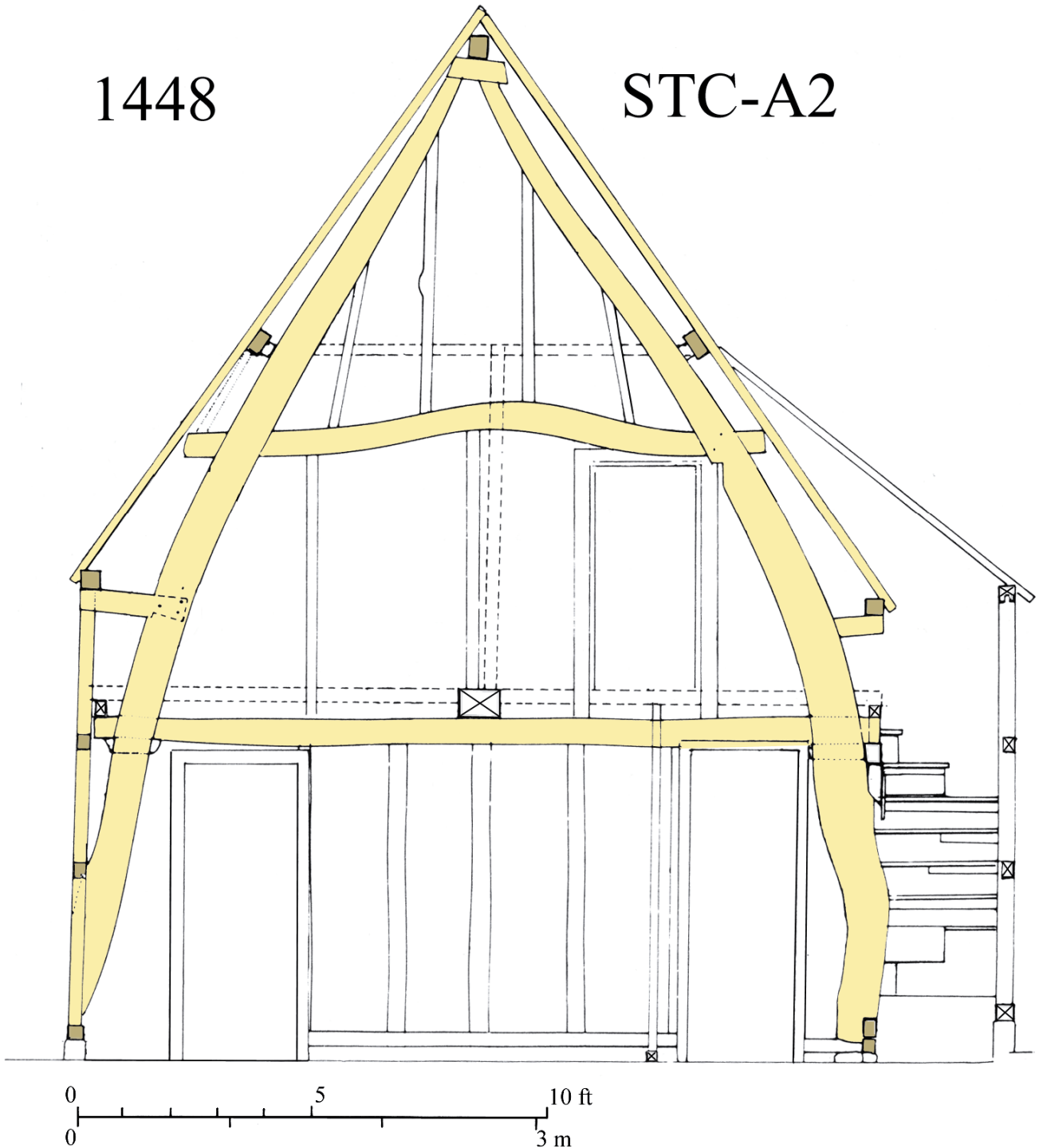


Fig. 4. Section of truss T2.

The purlins have simple splayed scarfs just within bay II. The original position of truss 3 is marked by pegholes in the purlins; these extend a short distance beyond the truss position, terminating in the splays of the next scarf. The earliest part of the inserted stack appears to have abutted T3, which was not removed until the eastern end was rebuilt. Excavation of the floor in bay II during renovation showed no trace of a hearth, suggesting that the original hearth was in the same position as this chimney and implying a two-bay hall originally.

LATER PHASES: A detailed description and drawings are to be found in Chenevix Trench (1989). The house includes a wall painting of a Tudor rose surrounded by foliage, dated to about 1600. Apart from the cruck studs, the external framing appears to be 17th century.

DOCUMENTATION

Willow Vale was the house of an eight-yardland farm (184 acres) at enclosure in 1795; this holding was principally freehold and had been built up by purchase over the previous century. The core of the farm appears to have comprised a three yardland holding. Additional details are given in Chenevix Trench (1989).

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 14 February 1989. Six additional samples from discarded floor joists were analysed independently by D Miles in 1990; the four matching samples are listed below.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Sample Location	Total Rings	Sapwood Rings	FMR Date	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Cat
STC-A01	Rear cruck blade truss T1	59	07	1386	1437	1444	3c
STC-A02	Front cruck blade truss T1	27 NM	—	—	—	—	—
STC-A03	Front cruck blade truss T2	51	13	—	—	—	—
STC-A04	Rear cruck blade truss T2	42	—	1388	—	1429	3c
STC-A05	Saddle truss T2	75	—	1351	—	1425	3c
STC-A06	Yoke hipped end rafter couple	47	14	1399	1431	1445	3c
STC-A07	Front rafter hipped end	50	02	—	—	—	—
STC-A08	Ridge piece bay I	42	16	1406	1429	1447	3c
	Average date of last heartwood ring (A01-A08)					1432	
WVF-01	Joist from bay I	33	3	1400	1429	1432	2
WVF-02	Joist from bay I	52	18C	1397	1430	1448	2
WVF-03	Joist from bay I	61 +1NM	15C	1387	1432	1447	2
WVF-04	Joist from bay I	36	39	1401	1427	1436	2

Analysis of samples A01-A08: site sequence: (composed of samples STC-A01, 3, 4, 5, 7), 97 rings long dated 1351–1447 with *t*-values of 3.7 (OXFORD), 6.5 (STC-C site sequence). Analysis of joist samples WVF-01-4: site sequence: (composed of samples WVF-01,2, 3, 4), 62 rings long dated 1387–1448 with *t*-values of 5.6 (SHERNAVE; M. Bridge), 5.0 (TICKNHM-1, Tickenham Court, Avon), 5.0 (OXON93; Haddon-Reece & Miles).

Samples WVF-02 and 3 have complete sapwood, with felling in **summer 1448** and **spring 1448** respectively. This strongly indicates construction in 1448, and also makes it likely that samples A06 and A08 had virtually complete sapwood.