

Report for

**Rhenold's Close, 28 North End Road, Steeple
Claydon
Buckinghamshire**

Site Code: STC-B

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

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Fig. 1. View of Rhenold's Close from the south-east.

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Oxbow Books

STC-B: RHENOLD'S CLOSE, 28 NORTH END ROAD, STEEPLE CLAYDON BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Grid reference: SP 6992 2738

Survey date: 1990

By: D. Miles and C. Murray

Illustrations:

1. View of Rhenold's Close
2. Ground floor plan
3. Section of truss T2

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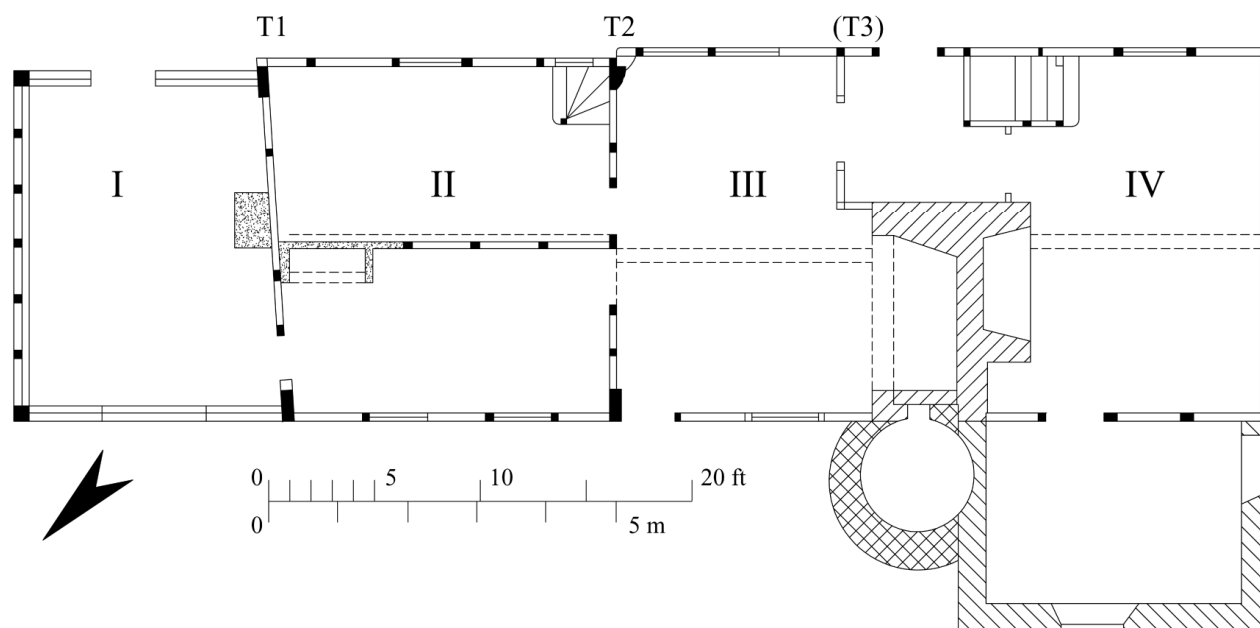


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 1: Rhenold's Close is an unusually small thatched house, originally of only two full bays. It lies parallel to the street, on the south-east side. Bays II and III of the present house formed a two-bayed open hall, probably functionally divided at ground-floor level. It is possible that the south-west end continued as a lean-to half bay, as at Mill Farm Mapledurham (MDM-A), although no structural evidence for this has been found. The central open truss has a saddle apex (type 'C'), and both end trusses were half hipped (type 'V' apexes). Both bays are smoke blackened, indicating that the centre truss (T2) was open at least above the tiebeam, although it has a tiebeam as well as a collar. Most of the original roof structure survives above purlin level. The house has no evidence of any original flooring. The original structure has been dated through dendrochronology to **1431–6**.

PHASE 2: In the seventeenth century, truss T3 was removed and an in-line extension was added to the south-west end, of two-storeys plus attic. A large rubble-stone chimney stack was built in the position of T3 and a lobby entry formed. This bay evidently served as a parlour. At the same date or possibly later in the seventeenth century, the medieval hall was partitioned and floored over. A partition was built within the central cruck truss (T2) with two doorways, and bay II was partitioned along the axial beam. The house contains much original detailing from this period (although some features may be antiquarian restorations).

LATER PHASES: In the eighteenth century, a rubble-stone lean-to extension was built to the NW of bay IV. Later in the same century an oven projection was added to the stack, blocking an opening in the lean-to. During the nineteenth/early twentieth century a chimney stack was inserted in bay II and bay I was added, using much second-hand timber.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: Truss T1 is a cruck truss with collar and tiebeam. Other timbers visible at ground floor level appear to be comparatively modern or reused. The cruck blades terminate just above collar level for the half-hipped roof (type 'V' apex). The north-east face of this truss is heavily weathered, indicating that it was certainly the end of the house. At the apex of truss T2, the blades support a saddle for the ridge (type 'C' apex). The north-west blade is extended, with a joint above the collar. This appears to be an early repair for although it is smoke blackened it is not chamfered, as are the blade below the joint and the saddle which it partly obscures. A raising notch was noted near collar level on the south-west face of the opposite blade. Both cruck trusses have their horizontal timbers halved and pegged onto the north-east face. None of the infill timbers below the tiebeam of T2 appear to be primary. A removed lean-to half-bay at the south-west end is possible, but had this existed, T3 would be expected to have been gabled rather than half-hipped.

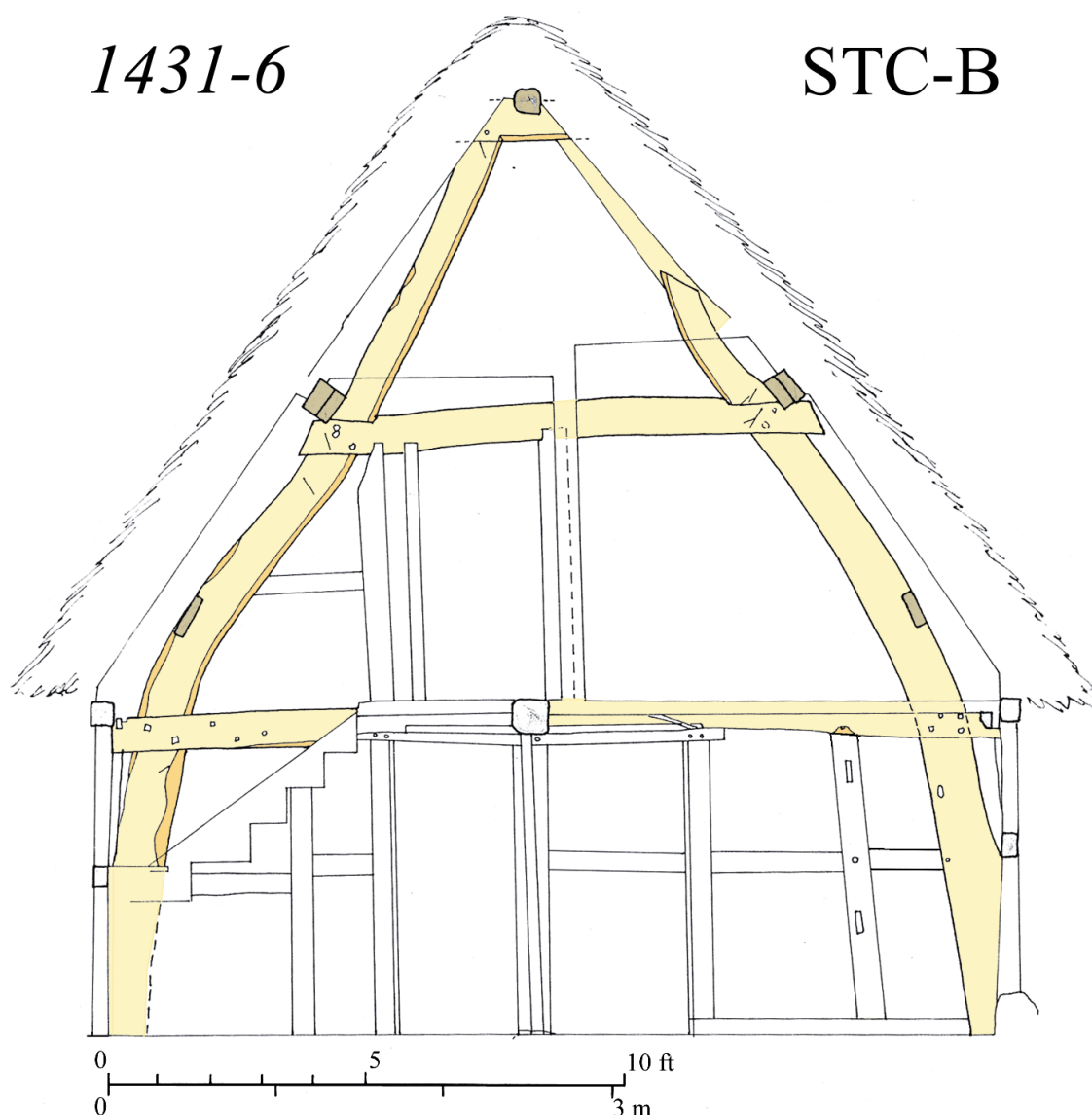


Fig. 3. Section of truss T2, from the south-east.

All the roofs are thatched. The medieval bays retain the original purlins resting on the backs of the cruck blades. The ridge is supported on the saddle of T2 and on yokes at each end; the north-east yoke is set on the second couple in from T1, and the south-west one is similarly placed in relation to the start of bay IV, indicating that the original end truss stood exactly at the junction between bays III and IV. The ridge and the purlins are scarfed on the north-east side of T2. Original rafters survive above purlin level but have been cut off below this (except for two rafters in Bay II). The rafters are substantial in scantling,

with flat soffits and roughly shaped upper surfaces supporting the thatch. Large single wooden pegs attaching the rafters to the purlins can be seen in the dormer window bays. The windbraces are long and curved, and mortices and peg holes in the purlins show the position of the removed windbraces at the south-west end of the building.

PHASE 2: The seventeenth-century roof to bay IV has double trenched purlins with long diagonal windbraces and original rafters. The wall-framing of the medieval bays was reconstructed, independent of the cruck trusses; the garden front (south-east) shows a building break at T2, perhaps the result of a misfit between the irregular original plan and the new frame. Bay IV has rectangular wall panels with long diagonal braces to the tiebeam and wall plates. The wall between bay IV and the north-west lean-to has an exposed rail with stave holes indicating that it had originally had lath and plaster infill. Much infill was replaced in the eighteenth/nineteenth century with brick. One panel above the door on the north-west side has seventeenth century herringbone brick infill.

The seventeenth-century main chimney stack is built of coursed rubble stone with roughly squared, coarsely-tooled blocks, and is capped by a brick chimney retaining some narrow seventeenth-century brick at its base. The ground-floor fireplace in Bay III has a roughly chamfered timber lintel, a salt niche and a later opening to a domed brick oven that projects on the outside of the building. On the floor above, the stack has been altered and has a shallow plastered projection. This contains a length of reused timber, possibly a lintel for a now-blocked fireplace, but it is most unlikely to have been an original seventeenth-century feature. In bay IV, both ground and first floors have fireplaces whose very slightly arched timber lintels have narrow run-out chamfers. The first floor lintel rests on brick jambs that appear to be an addition to the main stack. This suggests that both fireplaces could be late seventeenth/eighteenth century rather than earlier. The brick firebacks have been rebuilt. The side of the stack facing the lobby entry has a long shallow niche with a timber lintel.

Bay IV has an original seventeenth-century ceiling with axial spine beam and joists. These have narrow chamfers with ogee stops. The upper room has a similar spine beam but the joists are concealed. Both this room, the attic, and the upper rooms in bays II and III, have floors of old wide boards. The lobby has plain joists, one chamfered in part. The position of this chamfer and the adjacent trimmer suggests the site of a former staircase in the corner between the chimney and the entrance to the centre bay. Bay III has a narrow spine beam with narrow chamfer and run-out stops on square-cut joists. These could well be of late seventeenth- or even early eighteenth-century date. Bay II has a very irregular ceiling with bent joists and two trimmers exposed in the north half. The ceiling in the south half is concealed. Bay IV has a framed winder staircase from ground floor to attic, with chamfered newel post and many seventeenth/eighteenth century treads. The winder stair in Bay II is probably eighteenth century.

The house contains a number of plank doors with nailed battens and hook-over strap hinges, apparently late seventeenth/eighteenth century in date, but in suspiciously good condition. The doorway to the first floor of bay IV has a chamfered frame with ogee stops. The doorways between bays II and III on the ground floor have run-out chamfers. The windows are generally eighteenth-century or later imitations. All have leaded glazing with either rectangular or diamond type panes, some with old glass. The opening lights have iron frames, some with good eighteenth-century catches and restrainers (e.g. bay II ground and first floor windows on the north-west side). The window mullions are mostly chamfered but Bay IV and the lean-to also have mullions with narrow ovolo mouldings. There are three oriel windows, each of three lights with curved wooden sills and lintels. Although those in bay III and bay II might be eighteenth century, that in the lean-to is certainly modern, and it is likely that all these windows are twentieth-century insertions.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 10 March 1989. Four of these matched together to form a 74 year sequence which dated with a last measured ring of 1430.

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-B01	Rear cruck blade truss T2	50	20	1380	1409	1429	1
STC-B02	Rear purlin bay II	20 NM	—	—	—	—	—
STC-B03	Front purlin bay II	43	08	—	—	—	—
STC-B04	Collar truss T1	74	28	1357	1402	1430	1
STC-B05	Ridge piece bay II	34 NM	—	—	—	—	—
STC-B06	Rear cruck blade truss T2	50	02	1379	1408	1428	1
STC-B07	Rafter 1 from truss T2 front	55 +2NM	23+2NM	1374	1405	1428	1
STC-B08	Rafter 4 from truss T2 rear	12 NM	2	—	—	—	—
Average date of last heartwood ring						1406	

Site sequences: (composed of samples 1, 4, 6, 7), 74 rings long dated 1357–1430 with *t*-values of 5.5(E.MID), 5.6(S.ENG).

95% felling date range: 1431–1447 (revised from 1433–1456, VA21.90, due to new sapwood estimates), probably close to the beginning of the range, in view of the surviving sapwood. OxCal refined felling date range: **1431–6**.