Report for

Baker's Close, 104 Lower Radley, Radley, Oxfordshire

Site Code: RAD-B

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles

Fig. 1. View from the east.

Oxbow Books

RAD-B: BAKER'S CLOSE, 104 LOWER RADLEY, RADLEY, OXFORDSHIRE

Grid reference: SU 5328 9874 *Survey date*: 14 Dec. 1989 *By*: D. Miles

Illustrations: *Page*

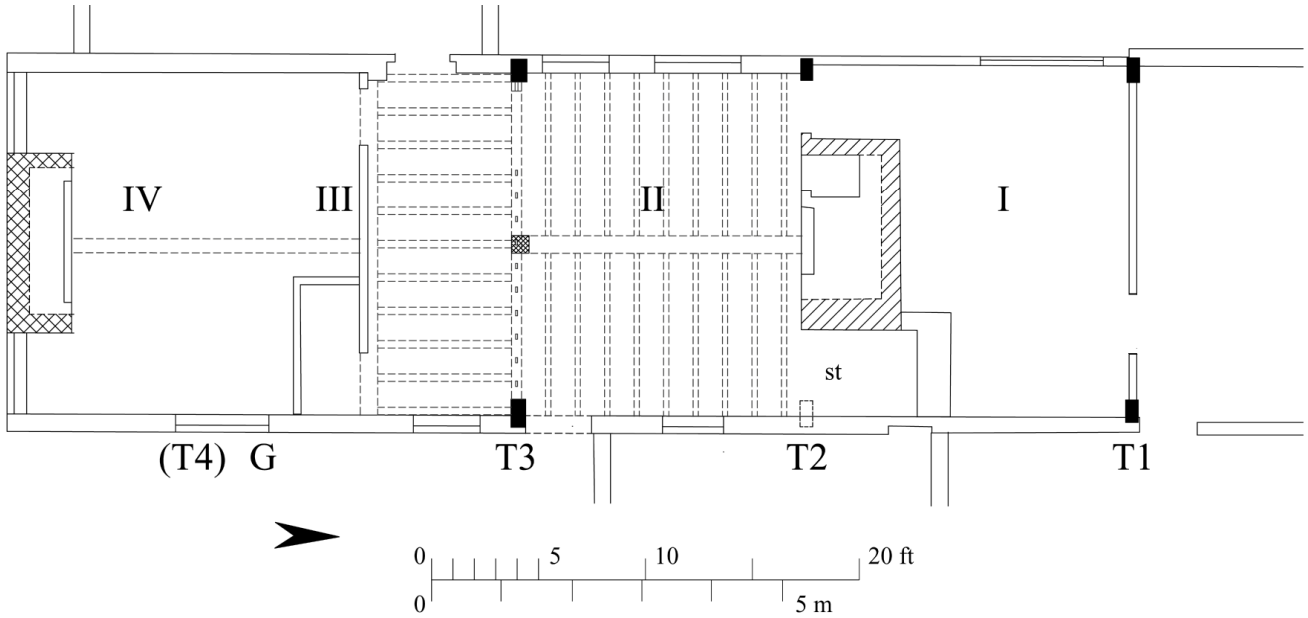

Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering. The position of T4 (removed in Phase 2) is approximate.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 0: The cruck blade from the north truss (T1), which was reused and extended in the existing structure, gave a felling date range of 1256–1288, making it one of the earliest crucks found in the country.

PHASE 1: The existing house at Baker's Close, Lower Radley is a three-bay cruck-framed house orientated north/south with its gable end to the street. The southern bay (III) is the chamber (possibly floored), and the other two bays make up the open hall (Fig. 8.49). Truss T1 is heavily weathered on the north face, indicating that the original structure never continued beyond it. Smoke-blackening is visible on the original roof timbers in all three bays, heaviest in bays I and II. Bay III appears to have been partitioned off originally, athough the roof timbers are somewhat sooted. The three surviving cruck trusses have saddle apexes (type 'C'). A tree-ring date of 1513/14 has been obtained from the tiebeam of T1 (the same truss whose west blade dated to 1256–1288).

PHASE 2: BAY IV: Probably in the late sixteenth century bay III was extensively reconstructed, extending it about 8 feet southwards and partitioning it into two bays, the present bays III and IV. The inserted floor is slightly sooted adjacent to bay II, suggesting that the hall open hearth was still in use at this stage.

LATER PHASES: In the first half of the seventeenth century, judging from the size and style of the joists, bay II was floored over. Probably at this time the chimney stack just north of T2 was inserted. It was not possible to inspect the underside of the inserted floor in bay I but it is likely to have been floored

over at about the same time. In the 1950s, the house was very substantially enlarged with large brick extensions to the north, east, and west. In March 2011, it was seriously damaged by fire.[1]

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

PHASE 1: The crucks are visible on the ground floor apart from the eastern blade of T2 which has been severed at first floor level adjacent to the staircase. Upstairs, most of the cruck frames and purlins have been plastered over, and are only visible in the roof space. All three cruck trusses have the blades joined by saddles which supports the ridge piece (type 'C' apexes). Both T1 (an external truss) and T3 have tenoned collars and tiebeams with skew-pegged bare-faced dovetail joints to the cruck blades. In T1 and possibly T3, the wallplate was supported on the extended ends of the ties.

The western cruck blade in T1 (Fig. 3) differs from the others, being very accurately cut and finished, with a sharp crisp crank rather than the more gentle curved elbow used elsewhere. Dendrochronology has shown that this cruck blade was reused, and that it dates to the later part of the 13th century. The top of this blade was extended, presumably when reused, to reach the roof apex. A spl-

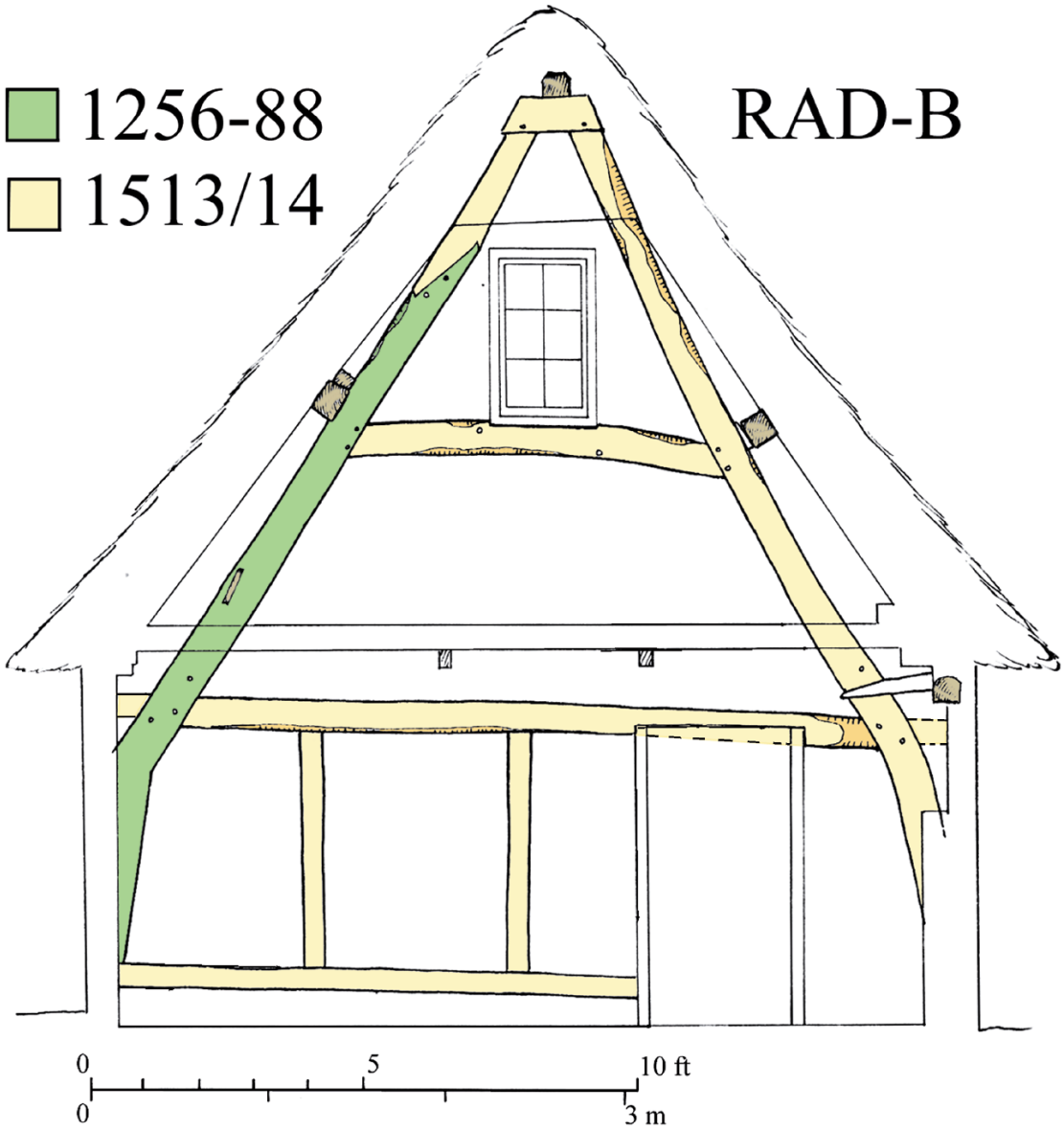

Fig. 3. Section of truss T1, viewed from south (as recorded in 1989).

[1] Oxfordshire Buildings Group, Report 131 was compiled after the 2011 fire, and key information from this has been incorporated here.

ayed scarf with undersquinted abutments was used for the junction and the extension piece has a tongue with two pegs set into the main part of the cruck. The collar to this truss has unused pegholes, so is probably also reused, perhaps from another cruck blade, but in its present position is part of the 1513/14 truss; it was sampled but had too few rings to give a date. The sill beam and the studs below the tiebeam are presumably part of the original infill, although they could be later replacements.

Truss T2 has a collar but the tiebeam is not visible. There were no peg holes for arch braces, but it has a mortice for a cruck spur on the west side of the cruck blade. This truss appears to have been open, as it has thick soot encrustation on the underside of the cruck blades and saddle. However, the infill daub is unsooted as are the nailed-on staves. A notch on the underside of the saddle to receive a central stave is unsooted and therefore secondary. The staves appear to follow the line of the crucks much more closely than in T3, confirming that they are of a different period. Soot deposits of almost ½in thickness were noted on the upper surface of the ridge beam in bay II, about 4 feet to the south of T2.

The T3 tiebeam has a series of stave mortices, 3 by 1in, with rounded ends. These run in an unbroken sequence at 13½in centres, from the east cruck to about four feet from the west cruck where they are interrupted by what appears to be a doorway; a mortice for a door post is visible next to the cruck blade. The tiebeam measures 7 by 5½in, with soot encrustation up to 1/8in thick on the soffit. Some of the wattle and daub infill in T3 is clearly original, as the northern side also has soot encrusted to the same thickness. The positions of two staves either side of the centre of the truss are indicated by two nails, but the next staves have been pegged to the inside face of the crucks, an unusual feature. The pegs are ½in diameter and are clearly primary as both they, the staves, and the underside of the cruck blades are sooted. Such soot deposits (passing through the truss) do not necessarily prove that the infill is later than the truss. Three Chimneys, Mapledurham (MDM-C) showed a similar soot pattern, but the infill stave (which was presumed to be later) proved to be of precisely the same date as the cruck. What has obviously happened in these cases is that the daub panels shrank and smoke leaked through it, thus depositing soot within the gap.

The original roof ends at a pair of gablet rafters (G on Fig. 8..7.2). These are joined at the top with a 3in thick yoke, which supported the ridge piece (terminating at this point). It had a single common rafter pegged in the centre of its south face and, to either side and a few inches below this, are peg holes for hip rafters. The building would therefore originally have extended some feet further south to the removed truss T4; this would most likely have had crucks rising only to collar level (type 'V'). These crucks and the rafters to the south of the gablet were removed during the sixteenth-century rebuilding of bay III. On the east side, the wall plate is scarfed to the southern extension with a splayed scarf finishing about 3ft 6in to the south of T4. This confirms the position of the missing end truss.

Only two assembly marks could be found; the north face of the T3 cruck blade carries a scratch mark /// tag and a similar mark, but with four strokes, was found on the north face of the cruck blade of T2. It seems likely that the assembly marks did not run in sequence, as has been observed elsewhere, even for trusses. The crucks have all been heart-sawn (halved) with the other faces adze-dressed. The collars and purlins are similarly heart-sawn, and the ridge piece appears to be sawn boxed heart. The rafters, with the exception of the large reused members, were riven, either into halves or quarters, with the other faces adzed. The cruck blades, ties, collars and saddles are of oak, but the rafters, ridge, and some of the purlins are of elm.

The purlins measure 5½ by 7½in and are trenched onto the backs of the cruck blades although in at least one place the purlin is held away from the back of the blade by a block.Windbraces were either morticed into the cruck blades or pegged onto the backs of the blades and were trenched into the back of the purlins. These purlins trenches are found on either side of T2 but apparently not beside T3. On the north side of (G), the trenches are inset 1ft on the east and 2ft on the west side; this suggests that the missing hip was very steep. The ridge is 6in square with 2in chamfers on its top edges. It is made up of two pieces, one being over 25 feet long, scarfed just north of T2 with a simple side-halved joint. The purlins have been scarfed to the south of T2 with vertically splayed scarfs with 2in square abutments. On the west side the wall plate is scarfed to the north of T3, with a side-halved joint similar to that in the ridge. The rafters measure 2-3 by 3-5in, although some reused rafters in bay III (and one in bay II)

measure 4 by 6-7in. They are individually pegged to the ridge, alternating in position, and all are soot encrusted. No evidence could be found for a louvre position despite all the rafters being *in situ* in bays II and III. Peg holes further down on the large reused rafters probably relate to an earlier purlin fixing. The most probably position for the louvre is therefore in bay 1 at the present chimney position, where the rafters have been removed for the chimney. apart from the pair nearest to T2. One of these has a peg hole 3-4in below the ridge which might relate to a louvre plate but is more likely to be the fixing for the rafter to the ridge, exposed through the rafter slipping down.

PHASE 2: BAY IV: The reconstruction of bay III was radical, extending the building southwards by about eight feet. A floor was inserted, supported by a transverse beam (9 by 8in) set about 7ft south of T3, the joists tenoned into the north side of the beam (diminished-shoulder tenons) and lodged on top of the T3 tiebeam. The joists measure 4-4½ by 4in and have ½in chamfers with stops formed by saw cuts; finished with a run-out or bevelled stop; the transverse beam has a 1½in chamfer. To the south of this transverse beam, an axial beam 8in wide runs the length of bay IV. The joists either side of it are plastered over. The difference in character between the joists on each side of the transverse beam, and the position of this beam (close to the original end of the house) suggests that the north side joists may be those of the phase I floor, reset when bay IV was extended. In the roof, the purlins have been extended. The ridge has also been extended to the south gable, joined at the yoke at (G). None of the rafters in bay IV show any smoke blackening.

LATER PHASES: The inserted floor to bay II has an axial beam (9in square) lodged over the fireplace lintel, and halved under the T3 tiebeam, where it is supported by a brick pier. This beam has a heavy chamfer with a scroll stop at each end. Joists (3 by 4in) are jointed into the main beam with diminished-haunch tenons. Each joist has a small ¼-½in chamfer with simple scroll stop and the joists are set at 16¾in centres. The floor in bay II is about 5 in lower then in bays III and IV. A staircase stands just inside bay IV on the east side of the axial beam. This has a short run of eighteenth-century turned balusters, of either elm or chestnut.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

For dendrochronology abbreviations see page facing Introduction.

Sampling Comments: Eight samples were obtained through coring by Robert Howard on 14 December 1989. Of these one had only 39 rings and the another had even fewer and was not measured. None of the samples matched each other but two of the samples were dated individually.

TREE-RING SAMPLE RECORD AND SUMMARY OF DATING

Sample Code	Total Sample Location	Sapwood Rings	FMR Rings	LHR Date	LMR Date	Date Date	Cat
RAD-B01	W cruck blade truss T3	39 NM	15	—	—	—	—
RAD-B02	E cruck blade truss T3	62	07	—	—	—	—
RAD-B03	W cruck blade truss T2	92	08	—	—	—	—
RAD-B04	E cruck blade truss T2	58	—	—	—	—	—
RAD-B05	E cruck blade truss T1	53	17	—	—	—	—
RAD-B06	W cruck blade truss T1	77	04	1175	1247	1251	1
RAD-B07	Tie beam truss T1	88	25C	1426	1488	1513	3a
RAD-B08	Collar truss T1	22 NM	08	—	—	—	—

Site sequences: (sample 6 only), dated 1175–1251 with *t*-values of 6.4(OXFORD), 5.9(S.ENG).
(sample 7 only), dated 1426–1513 with *t*-values of 5.6(S.ENG), 4.7(MOU-A, the site sequence of Pye Corner, Moulsford, VA22.45)

95% felling date range: (sample 6), **1256–1288** (revised from 1262–1297, VA22.46, due to new sapwood estimates).

Felling date: Sample 7 with complete sapwood: **1513/14**.