

HITCHAM OLD BARN

A POSTHUMOUS STUDY

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HISTORICAL NOTE

FROM the 12th century until 1528 the Manor of Hitcham formed part of the Honour of Wallingford, descending from Miles Neyrnut early in the 13th century through the Beauchamp family to the family of Ramsey in the Second half of the 14th century. Thomas Ramsey occurs in 1488 and left by will 10/- per annum to hold Courts at Hitcham. The Manor remained in the possession of that family until it passed to Sir William Clerke son of Nicholas Clerke of North Weston, Oxon., by his wife Elizabeth daughter of Thomas Ramsey. In 1618 Sir William Clerke obtained from James I a grant of a Court Leet and View of Frankpledge twice yearly and these Courts continued to be held until 1761.

The Manor continued in the possession of the Clerke family until the time of Sir John Clerke, 1st Baronet of Hitcham who sold the property to Charles Doe in 1660. It is interesting to note that until this date, although the Manor had been in the possession of several families it has passed always by inheritance. From 1660 the property was possessed, for short periods only, by various owners, one of whom was Edward Nicholas son of Sir Edward Nicholas Secretary of State to Charles I and Charles II. It was then acquired by Dr. John Freind, Physician in Ordinary to Queen Caroline. Dr. Freind was buried in the Church on 2nd August 1728. The property descended to his cousin John Freind who had assumed the name and arms of Robinson, being a nephew of Richard Robinson, Lord Rokeby, Archbishop of Armagh. John Robinson was created a baronet in 1819. He died in 1832 aged 78. The property was then acquired by Lord Grenville, who at the turn of the century had built Dropmore House and formed the Dropmore Estate.

The property to the south of the Church was acquired by Mr. George Hanbury from Mr. George Matthew Fortescue, nephew of Lady Grenville, in 1866, on which he built the present red brick Mansion. He later acquired the site of the old Manor House and garden and the site of the Barn.

The history of the Manor is difficult to elucidate because of a lack of Manorial documents. Only one Court Roll is recorded by the Manorial Register of the Historical Manuscripts Commission—that of 1676 in the Museum at Aylesbury—from which it appears that Edward Nicholas was Lord of the Manor of

Hitcham cum Dorney and that one of his tenants was Philip Palmer of Dorney. The Palmers have held the Lordship of the Manor of Dorney from the 17th Century to the present day. Colonel P. D. S. Palmer has kindly allowed me to see the Court Rolls of the Manor of Dorney in his possession which present an unbroken series from 1514 to 1782. In every case the Manor is either that of Dorney or of Dorney with Boveney. This led in 1800 to a strong protest from Sir Charles Harcourt Palmer. The Court Roll of 1676 records a View of Frankpledge of the Manor of Hitcham cum Dorney when Edward Nicholas was Lord of the Manor. A memorandum, now in the possession of Lieutenant Colonel P. D. S. Palmer of Dorney Court, drawn up by Sir Charles Palmer and dated 29 Sept. 1800 states that a Court for the Manor of Hitcham cum Dorney had been summoned by Lord Grenville and that he "appeared and protested against any jurisdiction or exercise of Power by or on the part of any Court held in the Parish of Hitcham or in or concerning the Manor of Dorney cum Membris". He then states that the following Rolls were produced:—

1725. Dorney cum Hitcham—in Latin.

1737. Hitcham cum Dorney (thus endeavouring to make Dorney a member of Hitcham instead of Hitcham of Dorney).

Sir Charles then goes on to note that the "Manor of Hitcham is worth little; that there are no copy holders or quit rents of any consequence and the only jurisdiction the Court appears to exercise near Dorney is the Swearing of Petty Constables and Tythingmen and that they summon half the Jury out of Dorney". That the Manor of Hitcham was worth little is no doubt due to the fact the Parish had been enclosed in 1779.

But from the earlier Court Rolls of Dorney it appears that the Ramseys in their turn were tenants of the Manor of Dorney. Although the Manors adjoined and there seems to have been this occasional interchange of the Lord of one Manor being a tenant in the other, the two Manors were clearly quite separate. But it is interesting to note that in Early Taxation Returns for Bucks (pub. Bucks Record Soc. vol. 14 1966) Dorney and Hitcham are assessed together in 1332-6 and again in 1446.

The original Manor House, which stood in the valley east of the church, became a school for a while during the latter part of the 18th century and was pulled down in 1804. A painting in the possession of Colonel Hanbury shows it to have been a typical late 17th or early 18th century building with hipped roof and large white painted window frames. Some of the walls showing traces of earlier brickwork remain in the garden. The modern mansion still stands and is used as a Nurse's Hostel by Cliveden Hospital.

The map attached to the Enclosure Award shows the Barn in plan. From this it is clear that there had been no major alteration or addition to the Barn from that date until the collapse of the western portion in 1966. Incidental to this is mention in the Enclosure Award of some of the new enclosures being bounded by part of the open fields of Taplow and Burnham, which suggests that these adjoining parishes had not yet been enclosed in 1779.

The Great Barn at Hitcham stood just east of the Churchyard of St. Mary and consisted of a timber framed building on a North and South axis with its south gable on the road and a later barn and implement shed abutting on to it at right



PLATE VI. Hitcham Barn from the South West



PLATE VII. Hitcham Barn, Interior.



PLATE VIII (a). Hitcham Barn, The Western Elevation.



PLATE VIII (b). Detail of West Elevation.
Brick filling built after settlement of foundations.

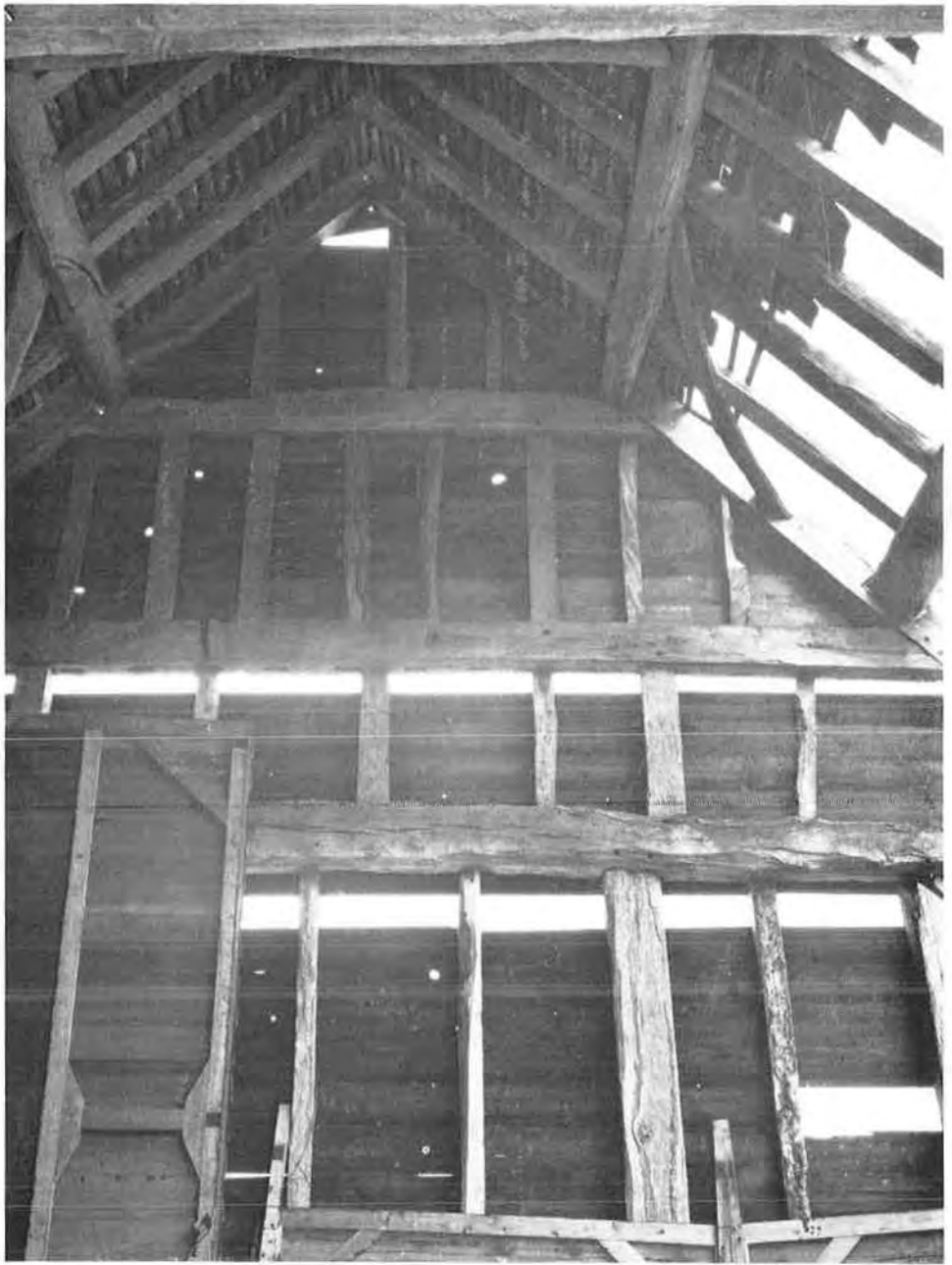


PLATE IX. Hitcham Barn.
North Gable with later framing in lowest panels replacing wattle.

angles and running parallel to the north side of the road leading from Burnham to Hitcham.

The Parish Register, which begins in 1677, contains various notes and memoranda, among them being the following:—

“The Barn on the south-west side of the Parsonage Farm yard together with the stables was built about the year 1671”.

“The Barn on the south-east of the above said farm was built in the year 1679”.

“Look in Ye Old Register and ye first page how ye Parsonage of Hitcham came first to ye Lord of ye Mannour and how it came to be disjoined again”.

At the present time a small house of 16th-17th century date stands a short distance north-east of the church and is substantial enough to have been the Farm house of the Parsonage Farm referred to above. The Barn, in relation to it, is a little West of South, giving, near enough the position recorded in the Parish Register. From the third memorandum, quoted above, the Barn seems to have formed part of the Manor Farm.

The Barn was placed on the Minister's List of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest following the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.

Unfortunately, the adjoining land was no longer farmed from this centre and various proposals for alternative uses were rejected by the Authorities. With no use for the buildings, the owners did not maintain them, and throughout 1966 there were falls of tiling due to rusting through of batten nails. During the morning of Thursday, November 17th, 1966, a heavy slip of tiling on the west slope of the old barn must have struck the main wall plate and overturned the west wall, causing 3 bays of the roof to collapse into the body of the barn. Two bays of the east wall, left unsupported, fell outwards without breaking a single joint and still lay there at the time of writing (January 1967).

With the timber framing heaped in confusion on the ground, it was possible to examine the jointing and determine the order of erection and the probable original form of the Barn.

Fortunately, the Barn had been photographed by the National Monuments Record and these records have been used to illustrate this study. Plate VI (NMR. BB. 66/1638) shows the Old Barn with the later additions lying along the road beyond it. It is taken from a point on the south side of the road, roughly in line with the east boundary wall of the churchyard.

References: V.C.H. Lipscomb; Lt. Col. P. D. S. Palmer (Dorney Court Rolls); County Record Office (Enclosure Award); The Museum, Aylesbury (Court Roll 1676); Hitcham Parish Registers; Bucks Record Society; The Diary of Mary Hanbury (in private possession)

THE ORIGINAL BARN

Figure 1 shows the plan and the west and north elevations of the Old Barn as it was in 1965. The later barn had been built onto the south end of the east wall (as shown on plan), but the basic structure of the Old Barn was complete with various additions which will be described later.

At this time, the lower part of the walls consisted of 4½in brick nogging in an English hardwood frame, the upper half and the gable being tarred softwood

boarding nailed direct to the old framing. The roof was tiled with hand-made clay peg tiles on softwood battens, which suggest from the rusting of the batten nails that it was probably re-roofed at the end of the last century, re-using earlier tiles.

The photographs give adequate record of the Barn as it was at the end, but also give much evidence of changes which must have been made. Broadly speaking, a timber member which is properly tenoned *at both ends* into other timber members must be original, and the order of erection can be deduced from this (see below). Conversely, a timber which is not so fitted is unlikely to be original.

Consider Plate VII (NMR./BB.66/1647): Starting at the top, it will be seen that the lower line of purlins (one of which has snapped) are deeply morticed into the sides of the principal rafter of the truss and held by pins driven in from outside. Although it cannot be seen from the photograph clearly, the common rafters above and below are separate pieces of timber, each morticed into the sides of the purlins.

The knee-brace to the truss tie-beam is solidly morticed to this and the main upright. The wall plate carrying the bottom of the rafters is morticed over the main uprights and from the curious fish-plate joint in the length it can be seen that the right-hand section (north end) was built first and that the bays working southward must have been added in order.

The middle rail of the wall is again properly jointed to the uprights and the rough-hewn uprights are deeply morticed top and bottom. The two modern soft-wood uprights in the foreground are merely "tosh" nailed to the old knee-brace. An examination of the original uprights since the collapse convinces me that they have only been covered with nailed boarding twice or three times, and there is no evidence of other fixings, so that this area must have been open when the barn was originally built.

Coming to the lower (brick) panels, the vertical filling members are properly morticed to the middle rail but not to the wall plate at ground level. The horizontal members are crudely socketed into the main uprights, but a simple experiment convinced me that each square of framing could have been sprung in at a later date.

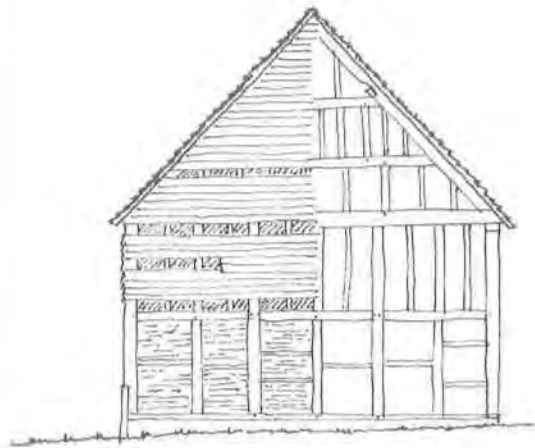
Plate VIII *b* (NM R.BB.66/1642) shows these panels. It will be seen that drastic settlement of the second main column has occurred before the framing was put in, and the filling uprights have been fixed out of plumb to simplify the brickwork. This convinces me that originally the lower parts of the wall were completely open. It is interesting that the modern dutch barn has very much the same layout.

Considering the roof, it was interesting that the area of rafters covered by the later barn at the junction between the two buildings still carried original battens for thatch. This means that, at least until the second barn was added, the roof was thatch and both may actually have been thatched until much later. No search has been made for written evidence on this point, but it seems likely that the change was made when the second barn was built.

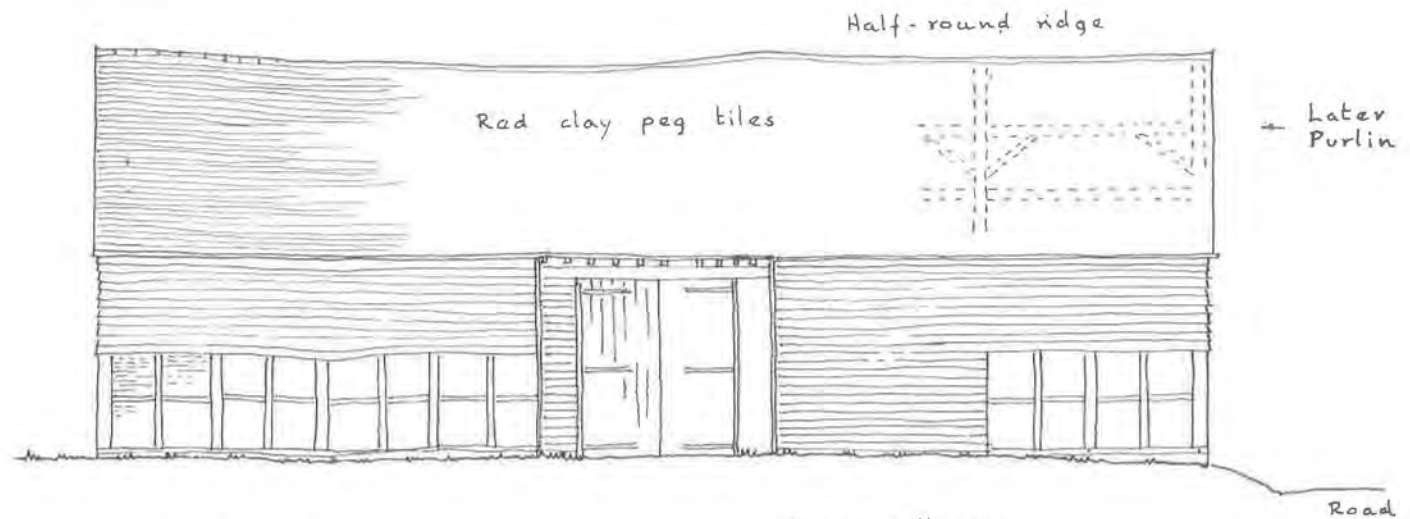
From the farm accounts of Segraves Manor, Penn (Jenkins "History of Penn" p. 40) it was evidently possible for farm buildings to be tiled as early as 1372,

Appearance in 1966

Drwg 1



Exterior & Framing
North Elevation

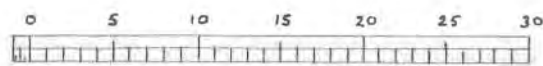


West Elevation

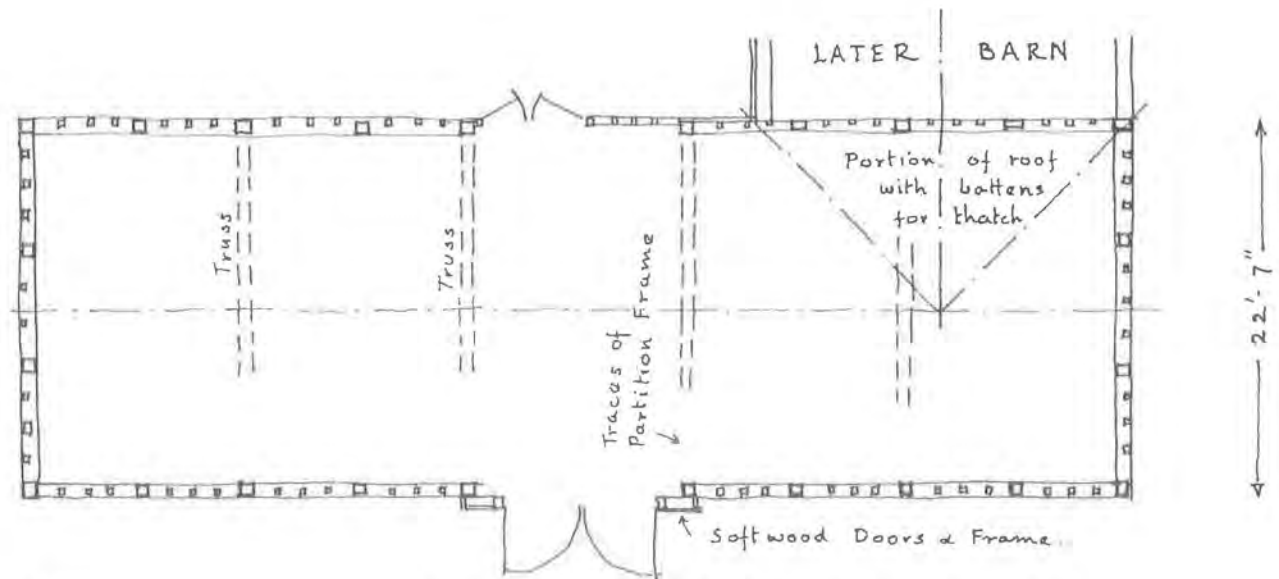
Tarred softwood
featheredge board

HITCHAM OLD BARN

Scale of Feet.



J. D. B. delt. January 1967.



Plan

5 bays av. 13'-1/2" centre to centre.

Fig. 1.

Structure

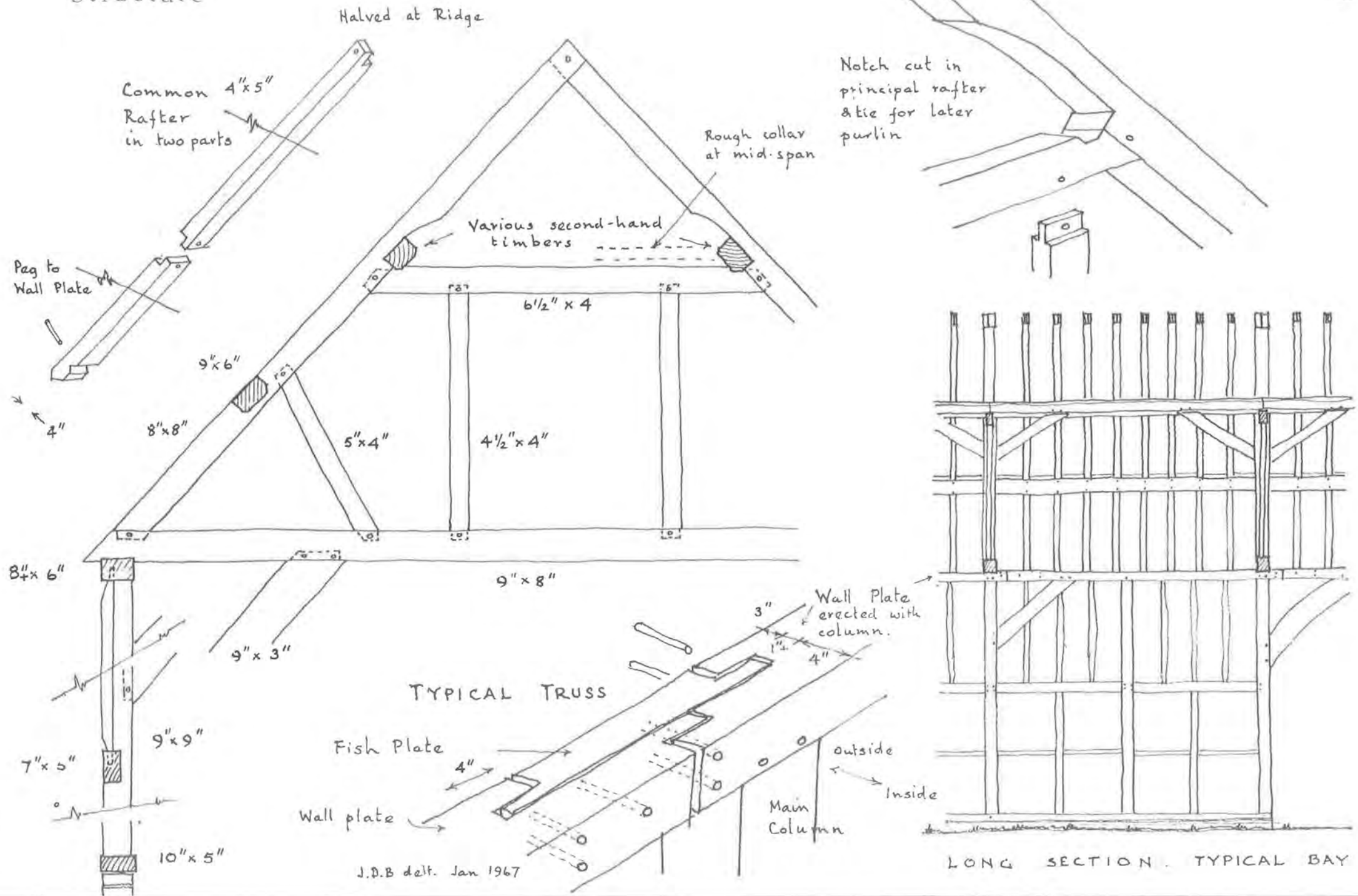


Fig. 2.

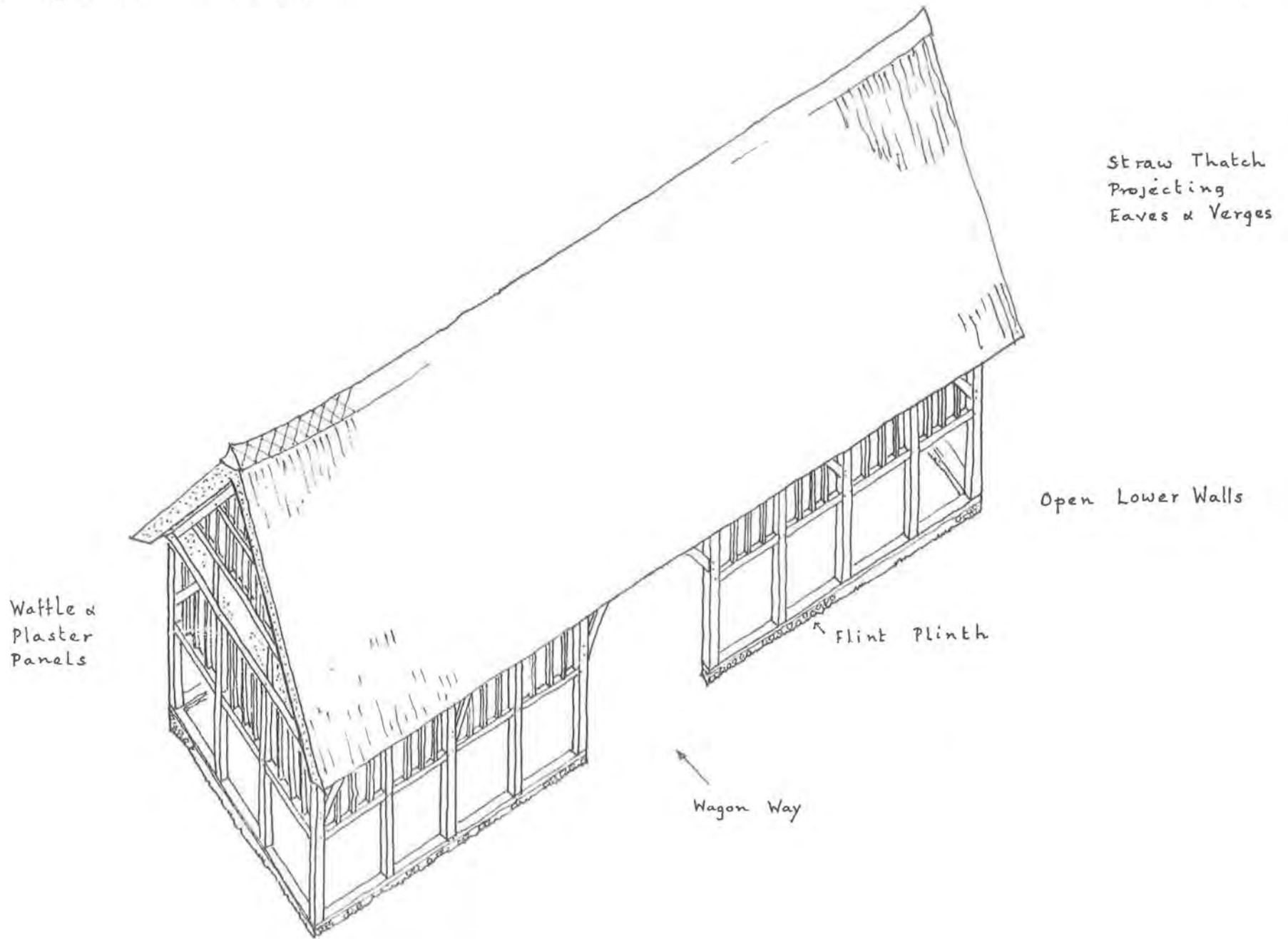
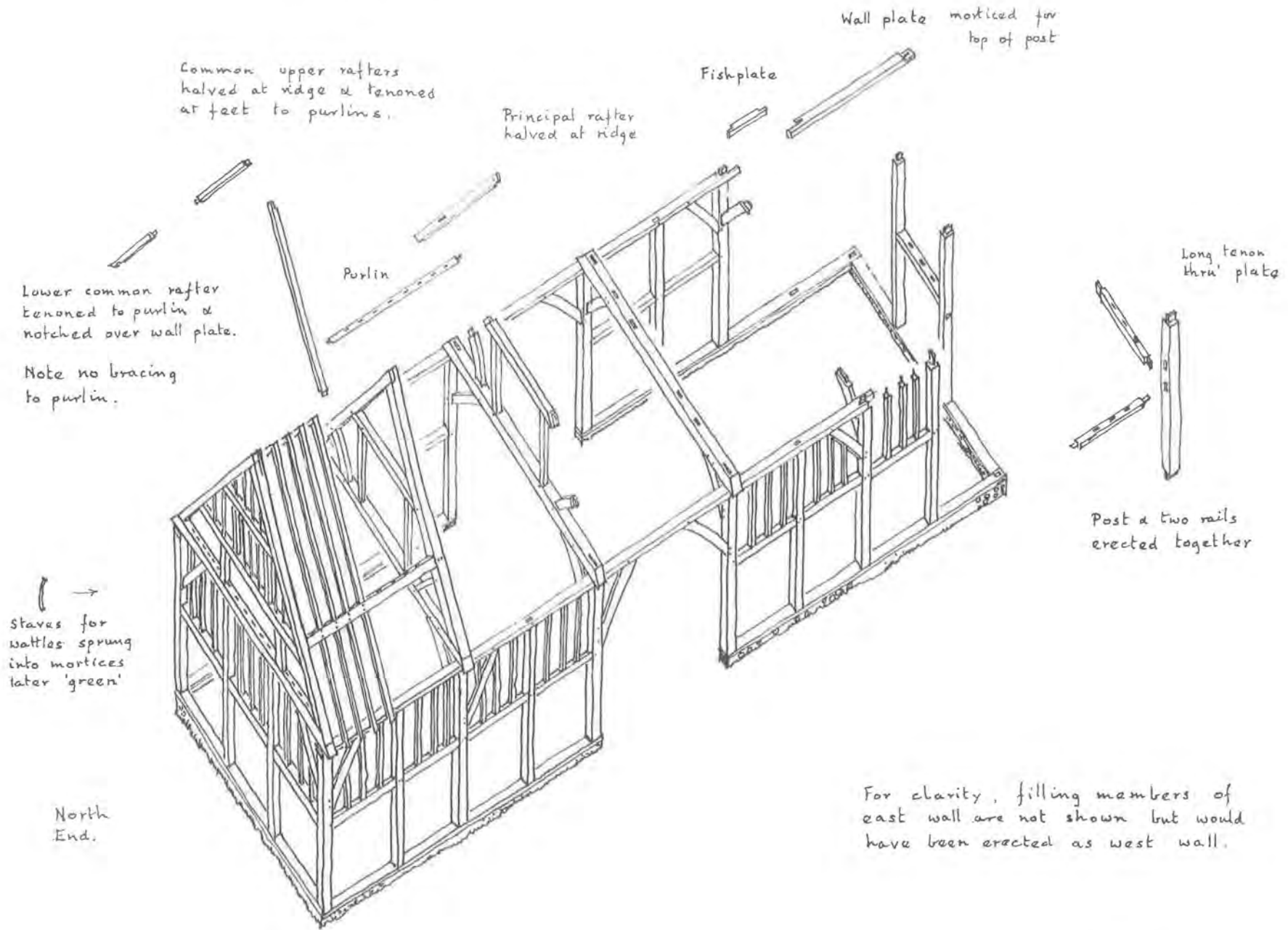


Fig. 3.

Method of Erection



J.P.B. delf. 1.67

Fig. 4.

and it is known that there were kilns burning roofing tiles not far from Hitcham (Burnham) at an early date.

Figure 2 shows the actual roof truss construction. It will be seen from this that originally the upper part of the common rafters stood halved together at the ridge and supported only by the battening. It called for excellent workmanship with relatively crude tools to set such rafters to meet in a straight ridge and yet it was still only faulted by the settlement of the foundation of the main frame.

It will be seen from the drawing that the principal rafters have been drastically cut away to allow the upper line of the purlins to be inserted at a later date, probably to carry the additional weight of roof tiling. These purlins are mainly second hand timber, but the knee braces are properly jointed in and pegged, and they could be contemporary with the second barn. They were mainly held in position by a rough collar birds-beaked between them and driven up tight at the centre span.

Much of this detail can be seen in Plate IX which (NMR/BB66/1651), also shows the north gable wall. In this, the up rights of the upper wall and the two top panels of the gable are almost all original and must have been left open. However, an examination of the narrow strip of gable just above truss tie-beam level reveals, with the exception of the two main framing uprights, the members are all replacements while the main horizontal members are socketed for the staves of wattle, and it seems likely that this was originally plastered ("daub").

From the foregoing, a conjectural view of the original barn has been prepared (Figure 3). Presumably its use was comparable to a modern dutch barn, ventilation being encouraged by the open lower wall and the open gables, and protection being given by the wide eaves and verges of the thatch end and the plastered strip wall where the verges were too high.

It is interesting that in Berkshire, where thatch was more common, it was normally brought round in a half hip from the last truss, thereby avoiding the high verge losing the advantage of gable ventilation.

Conversely, in a barn of comparable age in Beaconsfield (49 London End, formerly part of Bull Farm) which was originally built with a tiled roof, the entire gable end was filled with wattle and daub, part of which still remains.

The foundation plate near ground level is original and has survived remarkably well. Curiously, much of its length is founded on rough brickwork, though there are parts on the traditional flint walling. This suggests that repairs may have been made when the brick panels were inserted, as the two types of brickwork are very similar.

From an examination of the mortices, the method of erection can be deduced and this is shown on the parallel Figure 4. In all these drawings a compromise has had to be found between an attempt to draw the exact timbers with all their irregularities, and the effects of settlement requiring infinite detailed surveying for accuracy, producing a suitable "antique" effect and making a pure "board and tee-square" drawing. Timber sizes given are approximate or averaged from a selection of measurements mainly based on the north end of the barn now collapsed.