

# BEAM MARKINGS AT BISHOPSTONE

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THE thatched cottage now known as "Beams" and more prosaically as 55 Main Road, Bishopstone, contains an interesting series of builder's markings on the oak beams forming the ground-floor frame of the house. It was originally an external wall, but owing to the common practice of extending the line of the roof to give extra ground-floor area by means of an "outshot", this wall now forms one side of the inner hall.

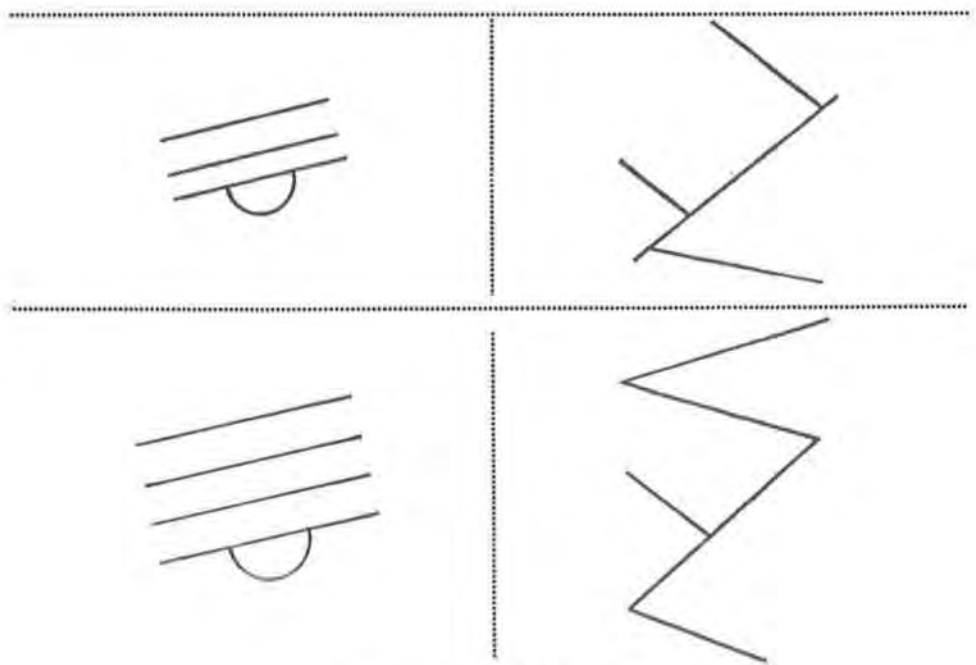
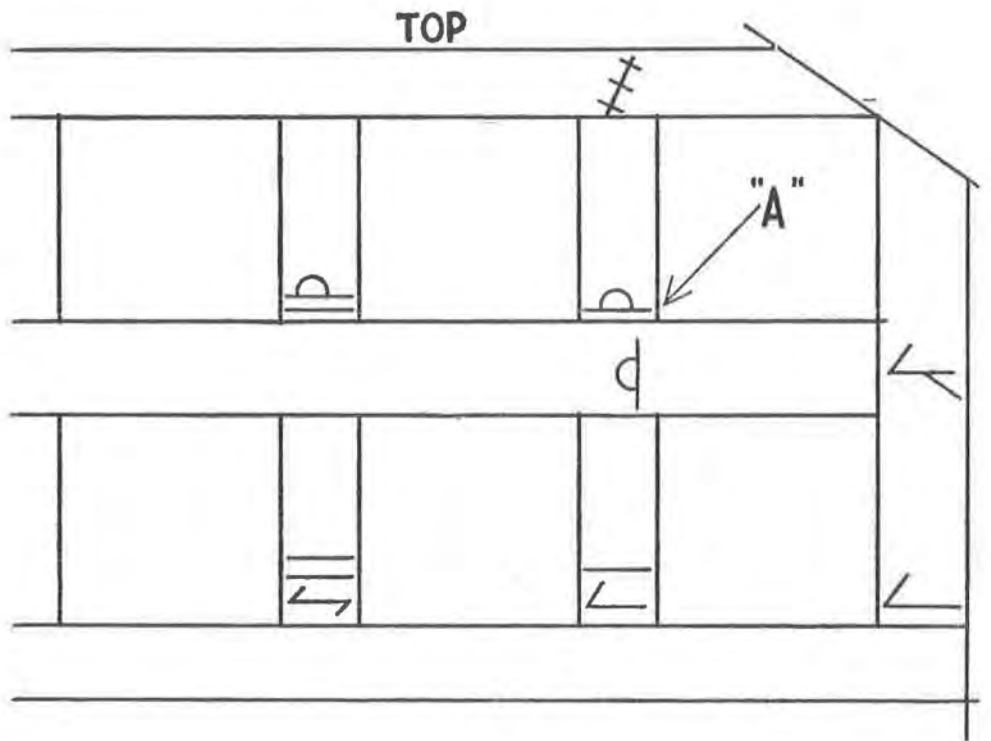
Photographs of the cottage before restoration about twenty-five years ago appear in *The Cottages of England of the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries*, by Basil Oliver, F.R.I.B.A. (published by B. T. Batsford Ltd.), and in *Sketches of the Bucks. Countryside*, by H. Harman (published by Blandford Press). The original building, which was two cottages until restoration, is probably between two and three hundred years old. The frontal aspect is interesting, rising as it does to two upper storeys.

The markings are as shown on the accompanying diagram. Mr. Marshall Sisson, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., throws some light on their purpose in his book *Country Cottages*, No. 4 in Methuen's series of Field Study Books, where he writes:

"It seems likely that the timbers for the frame of a house were cut, fitted together and numbered at the sawpit and were then taken down and re-erected on the selected site. If the timbers of old houses are examined it will be found that all the joints are marked with Roman numerals, incised with a chisel, so that re-assembling would be a simple matter. In this way difficulties of transport could be reduced as the finished timbers would be much lighter to handle than the rough trunks of trees. There are even records of complete timber houses being taken down and transported from one part of the country to another in medieval times."

Markings similar to that shown at "A" on the diagram appear at the juncture of a diagonal brace and a vertical beam in the house at 3 Church Street, Aylesbury. Either these beams derived from the same sawpit or the markings conformed to a common code with which local builders were familiar. As this system appears to have been in general use, one may conclude that many such marks pass unnoticed today.

Editor's Note.—It may be of interest to note that markings of an unusual character, which seem to have something in common with those noted by Mr. Parrott above, are found in the cottage at Piccotts End, near Hemel Hempstead, Heris., in which a series of wall paintings of about 1500 were discovered recently. Other markings on timbers inserted later than the main framework of this house appear to bear groups of circular depressions instead of the usual stroke marking.



SUNDRY MARKINGS