

NORTHEND FARM HOUSE, LONG CRENDON

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SUMMARY

THE probable sequence of the house, known as Northend Farm, is that it originated as a three bay cruck building, two bays of which formed the hall. It would seem likely that it was built in the early 15th century. Towards the end of the 16th century, the house was reconstructed under the original roof: the hall was divided and chambered over and a fire-place and chimney were built. At the same time, the walls, which were probably built of wattle and daub, were replaced by stone to the height of the first floor and with brick above. In the beginning of the following century, a parlour, with a chamber above, was added to the south of the hall. Finally, early in the 18th century, the cruck bay to the north of the hall was replaced by a kitchen, with a chamber and garret above. The house was demolished in the year 1965.

INTRODUCTION

Northend Farm, Long Crendon in the County of Buckingham, is situate in the close numbered 189 on the 25 in. Ordnance Survey map (Nat. grid SU 687093). Long Crendon lies approximately two miles to the north-west of Thame, nine miles to the west of Aylesbury and twelve miles to the south-west of Bicester. The parish varies in height from rather more than two hundred feet above sea level by the River Thame to about four hundred feet in the north, by the Chilton boundary. The soil is loam, giving way to areas of clay, overlying Kimmeridge Clay, Portland Beds and Gault. The land must always have provided good pasture and its early use for grazing is attested by the numerous references to sheep in the wills of the inhabitants during the 15th and 16th centuries. In the Domesday survey, the parish appears as Credone. The later addition of "Long" is found in the church registers towards the end of the 15th century. William I granted the manor of Long Crendon, with many others, to Walter Gifford,¹ who was created Earl of Buckingham in or about the year 1070. It was his caput and he created a park for beasts of the chase on land adjacent to the Bernwood Forest. There are disturbances in the ground at Cop Hill—a little to the north of the church. G. Lipscomb, writing in 1847,² said that there was a tradition that these indicated the site of Gifford's Castle. The irregularities are still discernible, but only excavation could confirm or refute the tradition.

In the year 1275, the manor was divided into three parts: one part passed into the possession of the Dean and Canons of St. George's, Windsor, in the

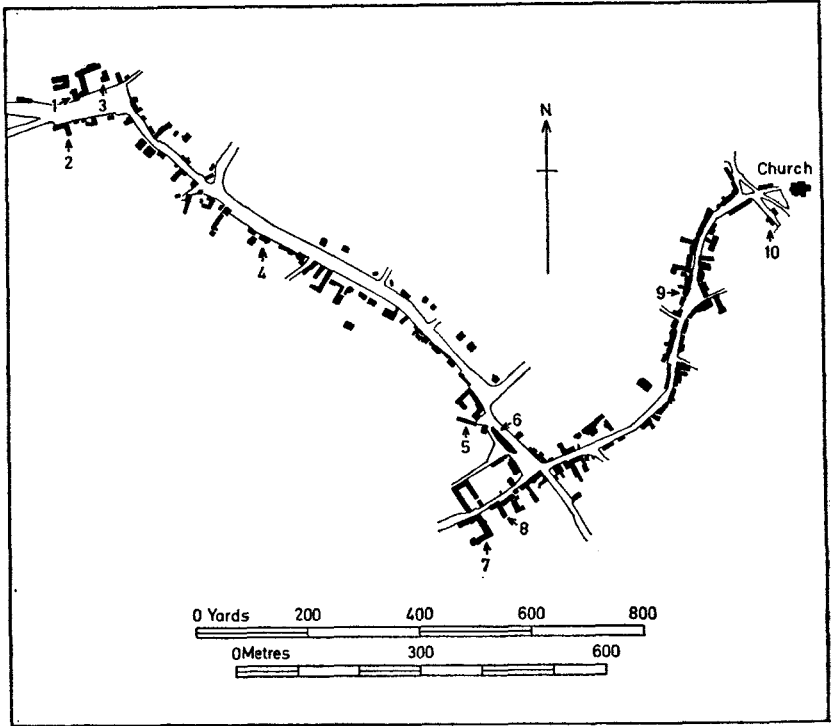


fig. 1. Plan showing the position of the cruck houses of Long Creden.

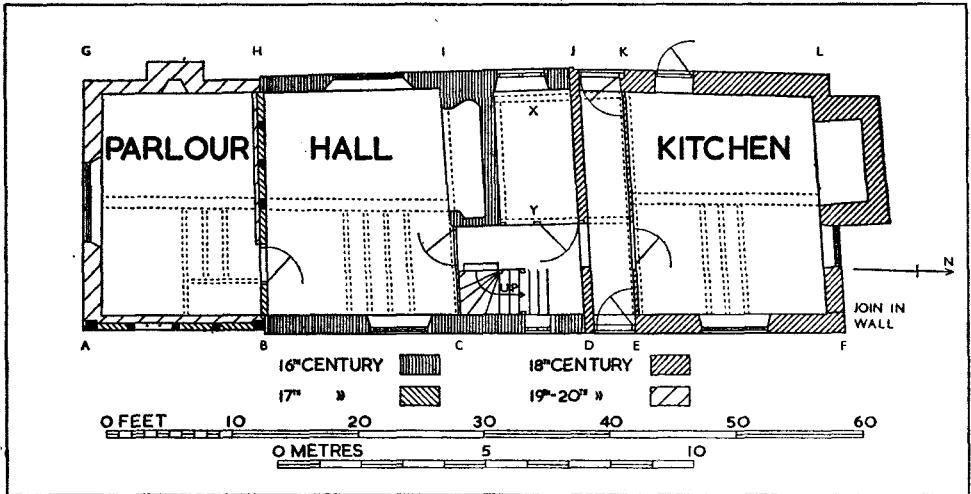


Fig. 2. Ground floor plan.

year 1480; the second into that of All Souls' College, Oxford, in the year 1449 and the third into the Dormer family in the year 1520. Most of the land belonging to the Dormer family was enfranchised in the latter part of the 16th century, but that of the other manors remained copyhold until the provisions of the Law of Property Act, 1922, came into operation.

Northend Farm was one of ten cruck buildings which have been identified in Long Crendon.³ All of these are listed in Table 1 and their positions are shown in Fig. 1. It was not known that Northend Farm was of cruck construction until it was threatened with demolition. During the 19th century, there were many minor alterations and most of the exposed timber was plastered over. When this was removed in 1965, prior to demolition, the medieval origin of the house was apparent. It had not been inhabited for many years and had become derelict. Most of the principal timbers were recovered by the writer and the 16th century window (Plate II) in the east wall has been presented to the County Museum in Aylesbury.

STRUCTURAL DETAILS

The Cruck Unit

The medieval house was undoubtedly of considerable importance. The structure was much more sophisticated than is frequently found in houses of this period. It may be compared with Leadenporch House,⁴ Deddington in the County of Oxford and with Ty Daw⁵ in the County of Denbigh. Only the central cruck of the hall, eight rafters, the ridge-piece, the purlins and the wind-braces over the north end of the hall survived until the date of demolition. In origin, it was an "end-hall" type of house.⁶ It consisted of a two-bay single-storey cruck hall with a two-storey block, containing the solar and the service quarters at the northern end of the hall. The original access to the hall is not certain, but entry was commonly through the side walls at the end by the solar block. It is, therefore, probable that the doors of the 18th century passage were

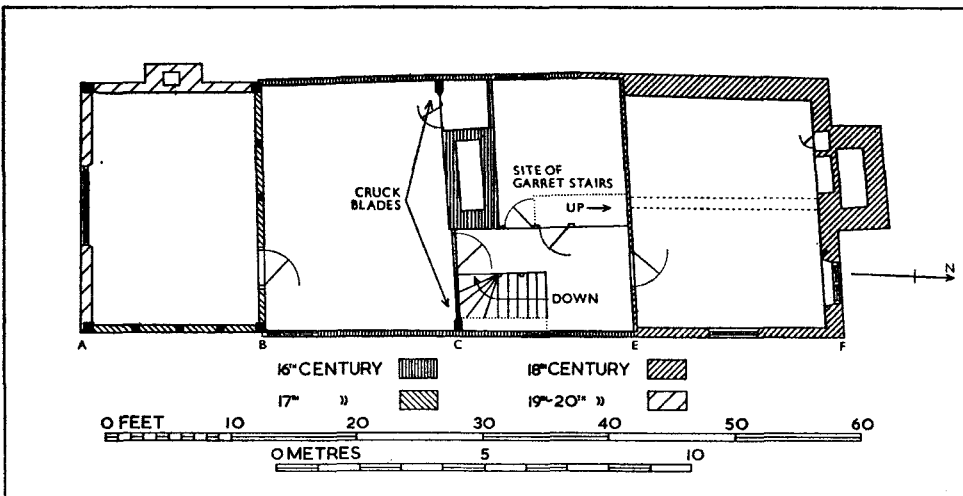


Fig. 3. First floor plan.

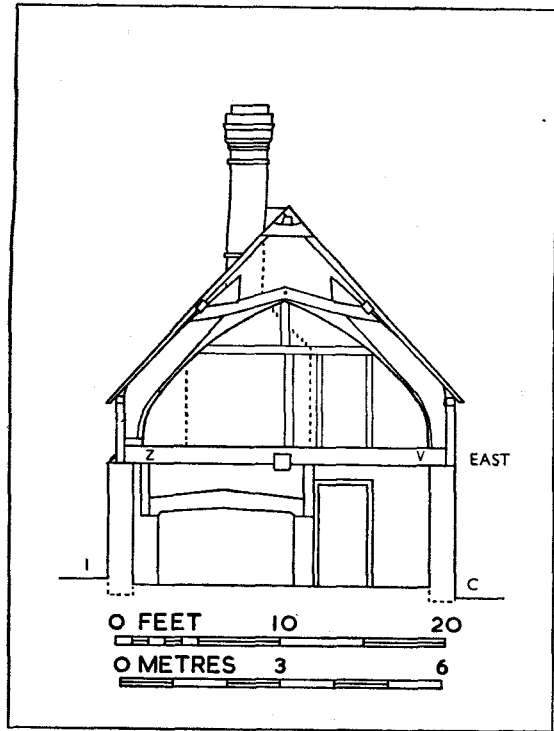


Fig. 4. Section.

placed in the position of their medieval predecessors. The quantity of soot on the cruck truss indicated that the hall was heated by a central hearth, with the smoke escaping through a louvre in the roof. There was no evidence that cooking was done in the hall. Probably, it was done outside.

The carpenters dispensed with a tie-beam and fitted instead an arch-braced collar.⁷ The timbers had been carefully dressed and chamfered (Plate IIIa and Fig. 6). The few examples of these collars which have been recorded are usually found in single-storey halls of somewhat superior construction.⁸

To facilitate the building of the 16th century walls, the lower part of the cruck blades were sawn off, approximately 9 ft. above ground level, and about 4 in. were cut off the outer edge of the blades below the wall-plates. The cruck blades, 9 in. wide and 18 in. deep, terminated vertically 2 ft. above the cambered collar. It was not possible to determine whether or not these originally had continued to the ridge of the roof. The common rafters, placed on the upper edge of the cruck blades, formed the apex of the truss. These rafters were joined at the ridge by a mortise and tenon joint and were strengthened by a yoke halved into them. The large square dowels,⁸ through the halved joints on the collar and the yoke, extended 3 in. beyond the same. It seems likely that the structure was that of a base cruck, but the possibility that the blades did extend to the apex of the roof cannot be ignored, particularly as they do at Lower House (Table 1, No. 3), where the construction of the truss is very

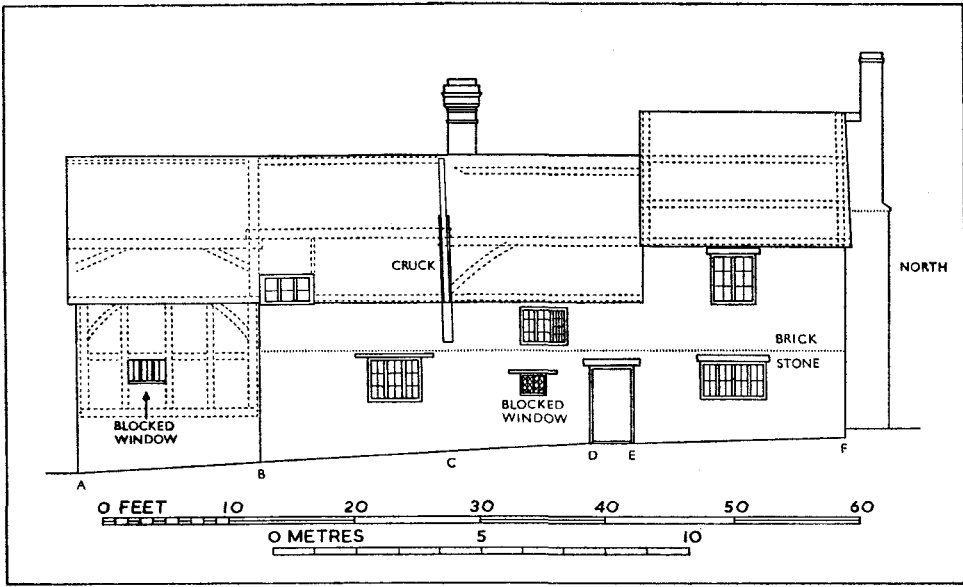


Fig. 5. Elevation.

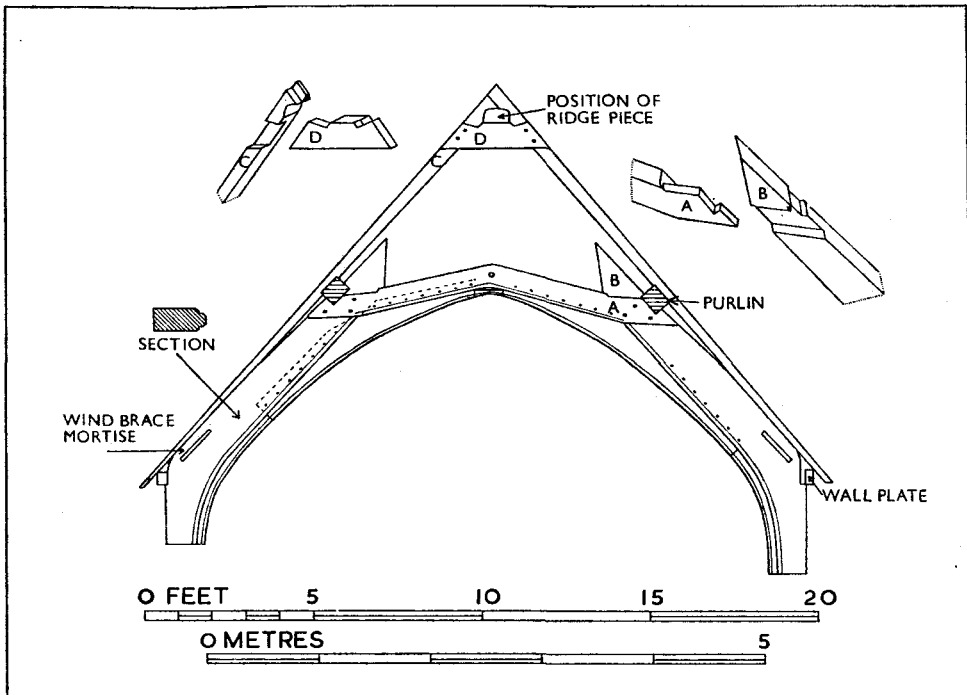


Fig. 6. Cruck truss.

similar. On the other hand, the rafters and yoke were in the position in which they were found prior to the construction of the chimney, as they were heavily encrusted with soot from the central hearth.

The arch-braces were mortised and tenoned into the cruck blades and the collar and each was held in position by fourteen round dowels. These braces and the collar resembled closely those in Montagu's Great Chamber, Bisham Abbey, and Chequer, Abingdon Abbey in Berkshire.⁹ The braces terminated 6 in. from the centre of the collar. A filling piece was dowelled to the under side of this collar, thus forming the centre of the arch. Above this filling there was a hole, 1½ in. in diameter, drilled through the collar. It is difficult to determine its origin^{10,11} but it may have been used during construction.

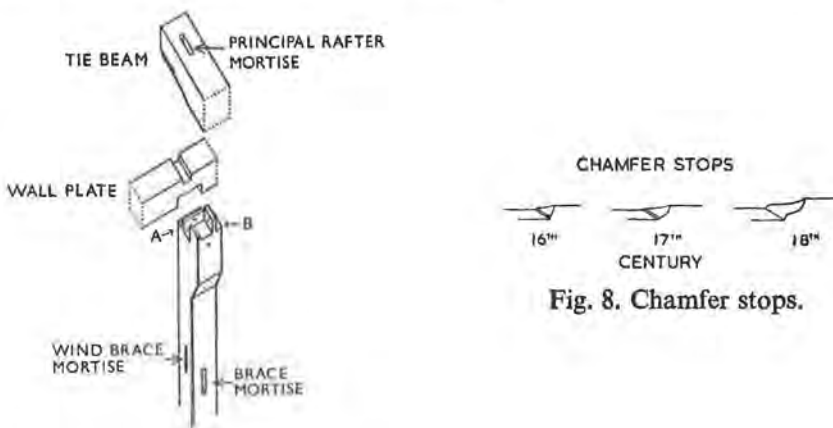


Fig. 7. 17th century angle post.

Fig. 8. Chamfer stops.

The ridge piece, 5 in. wide and 5 in. thick, was supported by the yoke on the common rafters above the cruck. Its northern end must originally have been supported by the timber framing between the hall and the solar. At this point, a mortise was found on the lower side of the ridge piece. From this, it was possible to determine the length of the hall. The purlins, which were turned to correspond with the pitch of the roof, had been sawn to a thickness of 7 in. and a width of 8 in. They were counter-sunk into the cruck blades and the collar at their point of junction. They were strengthened by curved wind braces, 11 in. wide and 2 in. thick, which had been tenoned into the cruck blades and let into the upper sides of the purlins. The northern ends of the purlins were spliced to join those which carried the roof of the third bay. Eight of the original rafters survived. They were 4 in. wide and 4 in. thick tapering to 2½ in. thick at the base. They were housed on the purlins, 12 in. apart, and were secured by square dowels.

16th Century

In the second half of the 16th century, the medieval hall was reconstructed under the original roof. The east and west walls (Fig. 5, Plates Ia and Ib) were replaced with stone to the level of the first floor—which was inserted during these alterations—and brick to the eaves. The walls, 18 in. thick, were built of



PLATE I (a). House photographed from south east.



PLATE I (b). House photographed from south west.



PLATE II. 16th century window,



PLATE III (a). Cruck.



PLATE III (b). Hall fire place.



PLATE IV. 16th century chimney.

Portland stone. They were built in alternate courses of wide and narrow stones. The walls above this level were of brick, each brick measuring 9 in. × 4 in. × 1½ in. Those in the eastern wall were replaced during the following century by bricks measuring 8½ in. × 4 in. × 2 in.

The blocked window (Plate II) in the Eastern wall, situate on the South side of the door, was the only window of this period to survive. The others were replaced during the 18th and 19th centuries.

A main joist, marked "ZV" on Fig. 4 was placed across the hall and the fire-place was built thereunder. Into this joist the joists over the passages and the stair-case were tenoned, with the exception of those situate between the joists X and Y on Fig. 2. The latter were tenoned into a joist running behind the fire-place, which, in turn, were tenoned to the joists X and Y. These were roughly cut and not chamfered. They were 10 in. apart. The axis joist of the South end of the divided hall was supported by the main joist and was joined thereto with a double mortise and tenon joint. The axis joist was 11 in. wide and 12 in. thick. The chamfers were finished with step stops (Fig. 9). The joists were 3½ in. wide and 5 in. deep and were finished in the same manner. They were set 14 in. apart. They had been marked with Roman numerals to facilitate their erection.

The Western jamb of the hall fire-place (Plate IIIb) was built against the outer wall of the house, the chimney lintel being under the main joist mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The fire-place was 4 ft. 9 in. high, 2 ft. 3 in. deep and 8 ft. 2 in. wide. The moulded oak chimney lintel was similar to that in the Abbot's Parlour at Notley Abbey.¹² The moulding resembled closely that of the stone lintel in the central ground floor room at the Priory, Marcham.¹³ Both ends of the lintel were mortised and tenoned into vertical timbers which were joined to the main joist in the same manner. The western fire-place jamb, built of brick, survived until the date of demolition. The moulded chamfer is shown in (Plate IIIb). The stop was 2 ft. above floor level. The top 12 ft. of the chimney were built of brick (Plate IV). The eastern side was 2 ft. to the west of the ridge of the roof, and was joined to it by a gablet.

The oak boards of the first floor were 11 in. wide and 1 in. thick. They had been layed from the west wall and had been halved together. They were apparently held in position by the board placed against the eastern wall, which was secured to the joists by two dowels, 1½ in. in diameter.

It was not possible to determine the date of the oak stair-case. The balusters were probably replaced during the 19th century.

17th century

In the 17th century, a timber-framed building, consisting of a parlour with a chamber above, was added to the south of the hall. There were no mortises on the northern sides of the angle-posts adjacent to the stone walls of the hall, suggesting that the parlour was built after the before mentioned structural sequence and that it was not a part of the medieval house. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the south and west walls were replaced, leaving the angle posts in situ. The north and east walls were lined with brick during this period. The construction of this room apparently necessitated the replacement of the southern wall of the original building into which the hall axis joist had been

inserted in the earlier structural phase. The axis joist in the parlour was erected to protrude into the hall so that both axis joists could be halved together and be carried by one support in the timber-framed wall. The axis and common joists were similar to those of the hall, but differed a little in detail. The common joists were not numbered and the chamfer stops on the axis joists were slightly longer (Fig. 8). The boards of the first floor were elm, the sides not being fitted together. A blocked 17th century window in the east wall of this room was exposed during demolition. It had been constructed by using the timber-framing of the wall for the jambs and the lintel. In the north east corner of the parlour there was an opening in the joists of the ceiling through which, at one time, a stair-case had apparently been built. It is of interest that an independent stair-case was thought to be necessary at so early a date, to avoid the necessity of going through the chamber over the hall to enter that over the parlour.

The joining of the wall plate, the tie beam and a principal rafter to an angle-post is illustrated in Fig. 7. The wall plate was housed above the angle-post and mortised on to the tenon marked "A" on the diagram, so that the top thereof was level with the base of the tenon marked "B". The tie beam was mortised on to the tenon marked "B" and was grooved and tongued into the wall plate. The principal rafter was tenoned into the tie beam.

18th Century

The last structural phase occurred in the beginning of the 18th century. A kitchen, a first floor chamber and a garret were built on the site of the third bay.

Three types of building construction were found in this structural phase: rubble, brick and timber-framing filled with bricks, measuring $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. \times 4 in. \times 2 in. There was no evidence to suggest that the timber-framing of this sequence was, in origin, constructed for wattle and daub. The eastern wall was built in stone rubble to the level of the first floor and thereafter in brick. The western wall, built in stone to the eaves, appeared to have been erected at a later date. It was 2 ft. thick and the masonry was of poor quality. The northern end of the building was built in stone to the height of the tie beam. Above that, the gable end was timber-framed and filled with brick. The south wall, replacing the earlier one marked "KE" in Fig. 2 was timber-framed. A principal joist was built in the wall at the level of the first floor, supporting the 16th century passage joists and the axis joist in the kitchen. A tie beam above supported the camber axis joist and the floor of the garret. The wall marked "JD" was built during this period.

The elm axis joist, 12 in. in width and 12 in. in depth, were chamfered and finished with scroll stops (Fig. 8). The joists were of the same wood. They had been covered with lath and plaster from the time of their erection. The oak boards of the first floor chamber were 11 in. wide and three quarters of an inch thick. They were not halved together.

The kitchen fire-place was destroyed by fire in the beginning of this century. A hob grate, with a pine surround, was fitted in the first floor chamber. The windows were replaced during the 19th century, with the exception of that in the garret, which retained the original casement. The lintel over the northern kitchen window extended $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. to the east of the casement. Under this there

was a joint in the masonry, extending to the ground, suggesting that there had been, at one time, a door at the side of the window. The doors were of panelled pine, but had been painted in recent years to resemble oak. Two of these were hung in the hall.

The chamber on the first floor, immediately to the north of the cruck (Fig. 3), was divided at this time to form a landing, a chamber and a stair-case to the garret. An elm partition was erected for this purpose.

The roof was constructed of oak, with carefully sawn timbers, which had been numbered with Roman figures, but little attention, if any, appeared to have been paid to these during erection. Two purlins, 5 in. wide and 5 in. thick, were placed on both sides of the roof. On to these, the rafters, measuring 3 in. \times 2½ in., had been dowelled, 14 in. apart. The tops of these were mortised and tenoned together. There was no ridge piece.

In the absence of any known documentary evidence, the dating of each structural phase of Northend Farm has had to be assessed in terms of the architectural detail. It is hoped that further research in the district will throw light on the matter. Dating has been based, *inter alia*, on buildings in north Berkshire, approximately fifteen miles from the site in question. As roofs built in the middle of the 15th century differ very little from those constructed a century later, it is not possible to determine the date of the building of the medieval hall more accurately than early 15th century.

In the more sophisticated buildings in Long Crendon, the use of the cruck frame seems to have been discontinued after the end of the 15th century. The Church House, attributed to the end of that century, and Thompsons Farm, re-built in 1562, were not so constructed. Cruck construction may have persisted in smaller houses for a longer period. It is not without interest to observe that nine cruck houses have now been identified in the County of Buckingham, to the east of Long Crendon. Until recent months it was believed that the number of such houses in this area was small.

The second structural phase does not appear to have been effected later than the year 1580. Step stops, like those on the hall beam, are infrequently found in buildings erected after the middle of the 16th century. The fireplace in the Abbot's Parlour at Notley Abbey was built by the last Abbot, shortly before the Reformation. The one at Northend Farm resembled it closely. A later example of this type of lintel is to be found in the central ground floor room at the Priory, Marcham. The date attributed to that fire-place is 1570-90. It is directly under the ridge of the roof. The one at Northend Farm was situate between that point and the outer wall.

The replacement of the fire-place in, and the chimney of, the parlour, at the beginning of this century, has left little on which the date of the 17th century structural phase can be based.

The architectural detail during the last structural sequence persisted over a very long period of time, making it difficult to express with any accuracy the date when such work was executed. The scroll chamfer stops suggest that the work was carried out in the early part of the 18th century.

THE CRUCK HOUSES OF LONG CRENDON

Name	Height	Width	Roof °	Tie beam or collar	Arch Brase	Purlins	Notes
1. Northend Farm	22½ ft.	17½ ft.	55°	Well-cambered collar	Yes	with roof	Demolished May 1965
2. Dragon's Farm	21 ft.	16 ft.	60°	Straight tie beam	No	with roof	
3. Lower House	21 ft.	16 ft.	55°	Well-cambered collar	Yes	Butted and	Similar to Northend Farm
4. The Old Bakehouse	18½ ft.	17½ ft.	50°	—	No	with roof	Possibly a barn in origin
5. Sycamore Farm	19 ft.	17 ft.	55°	Straight tie beam	No	with roof	Demolished December 1966
6. 7 Bicester Road	19½ ft.	13½ ft.	55°	—	No	—	
7. The Manor ¹⁵	25 ft.	23 ft.	60°	Slightly cambered collar	Yes	Sq. set	King Post
8. The Manor Garage	20 ft.	16 ft.	—	—	No	—	
9. 29 High Street	—	15½ ft.	—	Straight tie beam	No	with roof	
10. The Cottages	A 21 ft.	15½ ft.	60°	Straight tie beam	No	with roof	B is a wing to A
Church Green	B 19 ft.	13 ft.	58°	Straight tie beam	No	with roof	

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- ³ I am grateful to Mr. E. C. Hohler for this information.
- ⁴ Wood Jones, Leadenporech House, *Trans. Anc. Mon. Soc.* (1956), N.S., IV, 140-144 pp., and Figs. 5 and 7.
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- ⁸ The dowles of the roof of the County Museum, Aylesbury, which is attributed to the 15th century, are similar.
- ⁹ J. M. Fletcher and P. S. Spokes, "The Origin and Development of the Crown Post Roof", *Med. Archaeol.*, vol. VIII (1964), Plate XIV C and XV C.
- ¹⁰ James Walton, "Cruck Framed Buildings in Yorkshire", *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXXVII, p. 59.
- ¹¹ A similar hole was drilled through the collar on the cruck truss at Lower House (Table I, No. 3). The truss was found to be similar to Northend Farm.
- ¹² W. A. Pantin, "Notley", *Oxonencia*, vol. VI (1941), pp. 22-43.
- ¹³ P. S. Spokes and E. M. Jope, "The Priory Marcham", *Berks. Archaeol. J.*, 57, pp. 86-97.
- ¹⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 6 Fig. 59 b.
- ¹⁵ Considerable restoration was carried out in the mid-16th century and about the year 1920 and it would be now difficult to determine how much of the structure is original.