

WILLOW VALE FARM HOUSE, STEEPLE CLAYDON

JOHN CHENEVIX TRENCH

Two surviving bays of a three-bay cruck house were dated by dendrochronology to c.1450. One bay was chambered over from the start. The house was freehold and associated with large free holdings in the common fields. It is argued that it was built to house a demesne tenant of one of the Steeple Claydon manors. Shortly before 1600 the hall was chambered over, and a stack inserted. At the same time the plaster of the original first-floor chamber was decorated with a monochrome design of large formal roses. Thirty or forty years later the third bay was replaced by one in box-framing, the stack was doubled, and two further box-framed bays were added at the East. These were unusual in having dropped ties.

Description

In 1988 the new owners of Willow Vale Farm House applied for listed building consent for an extensive programme of improvement and renewal. This led to the discovery, by the County Historic Building Officer, of wall paintings in the roof space, and to the writer and Mrs Pauline Fenley being invited to investigate.

The house (Plate I) lies in West Street, Steeple Claydon, on what was formerly the NW fringe of the village, at SP 695268. It consists of 5½ in-line bays running E–W. The two western bays, I and II on the plan (Fig. 1), are cruck-framed. The other three bays, III, IV and V, are box-framed.

The W gable, Fig. 3 (Truss A), displays a cruck with the blades terminating just above the collar. Crucks of this description were originally classified as Type W, but more recently a new classification, Type V, has been proposed for crucks supporting a half hip,¹ as proved to be the case here. The second pair of rafters from the W in Bay I are joined at the apex by a yoke (Fig. 3, inset); the pair between these and the gable are truncated 3 feet (0.9m) below the apex; and the yoke has a row of six peg holes for hip rafters. The ridge piece has had an extension nailed to it, reaching as far as the chimney, and

the truncated rafters have extension pieces fastened to the outside, to carry them up to the new ridge.

The ridge piece rests on this yoke, and on a saddle joining the blades of a Type C cruck frame at B (Fig. 3b). 12 ins (30mm) E of this (Fig. 4) there is a pegged scarf joint in the ridge. At the E end of Bay II the ridge piece rests on another yoke. It will be argued that this is not original.

Peg holes, and the remains of lap dovetail trenches, show that the W cruck couple (Truss A) was formerly joined by a tie, 5 ft 10 ins (1.75m) from the ground (Fig. 3).

The SW and SE cruck blades of Truss A, the yoke, the saddle (Truss B) and the ridge piece between A and B yielded dendrochronological dates that were averaged to give a likely felling date of 1462 (see Appendix).

The rafters of Bay II are heavily sooted; those of Bay I slightly so at the E end, especially on the S side, but hardly at all elsewhere. From the roof over the E end of Bay I, smoke-blackened thatch (more hay than straw) was recovered. Between Bays I and II a wattle and daub partition extended to the apex; it had had a skin of

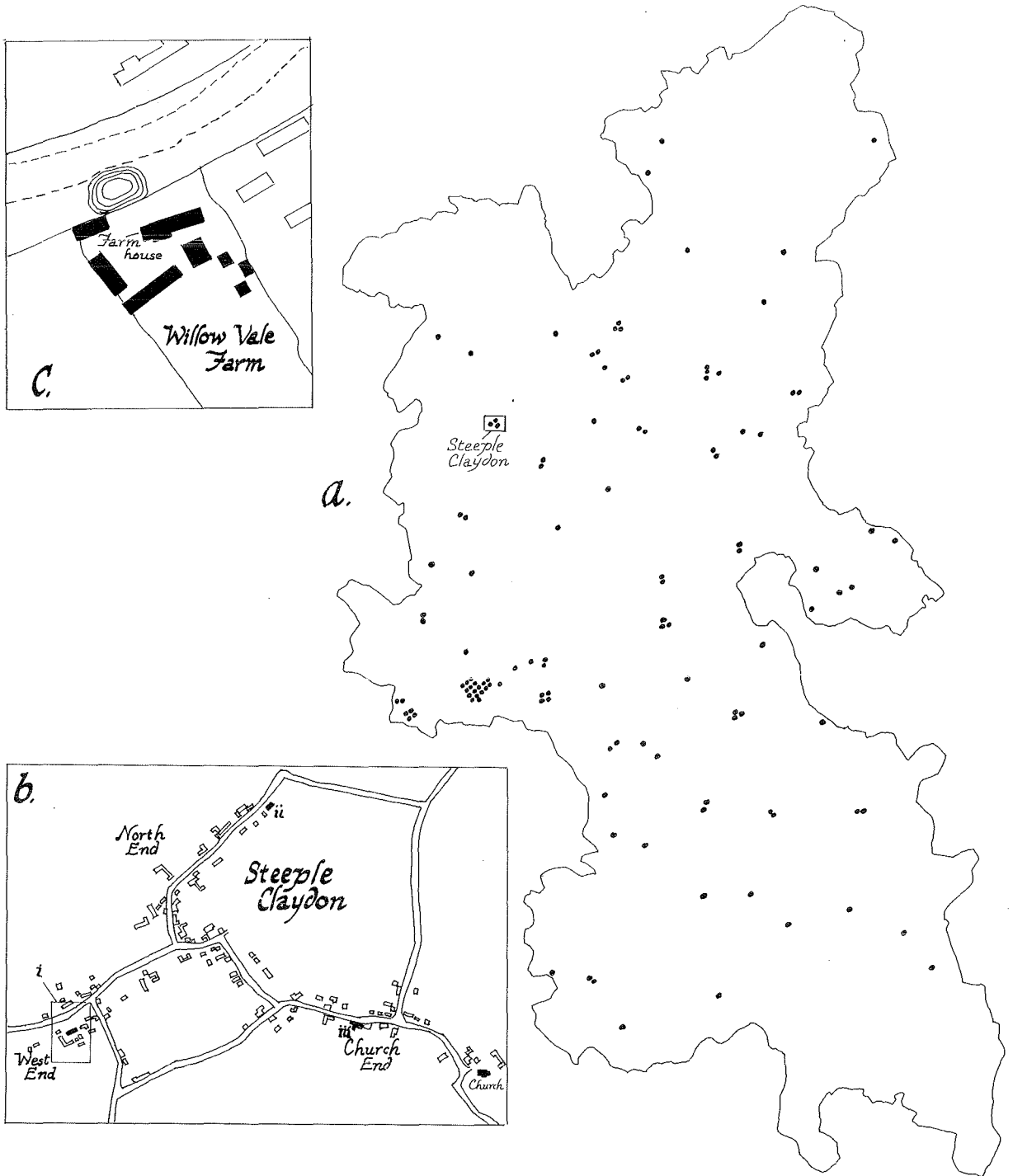


Fig. 1. (a) A distribution map of true crucks in Bucks, showing position of Steeple Claydon. (b) Steeple Claydon village before recent development, showing Willow Vale Farm (i), Rhenold's Close (ii), and Well Cottage (iii), all cruck-framed. (c) Willow Vale Farm in 1795, after the Enclosure map of that year.

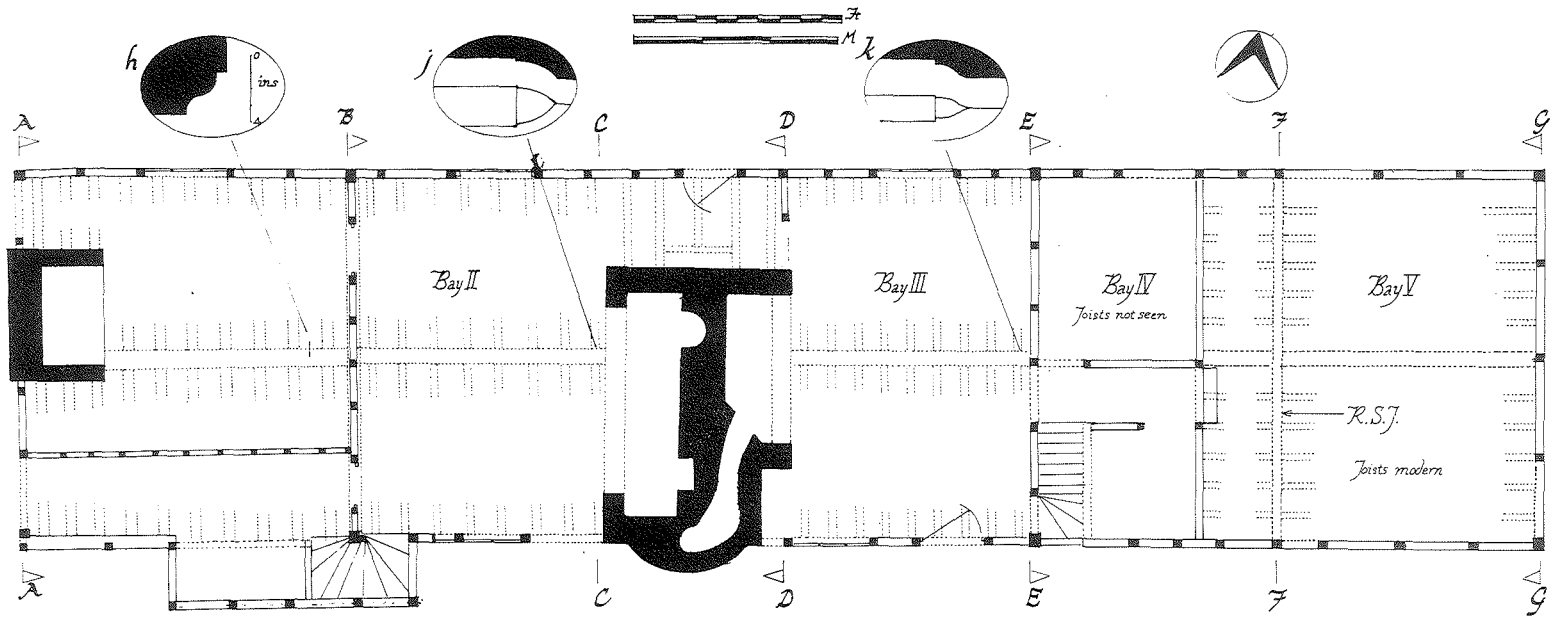


Fig. 2. Willow Vale Farm, Steeple Claydon: ground-floor plan.

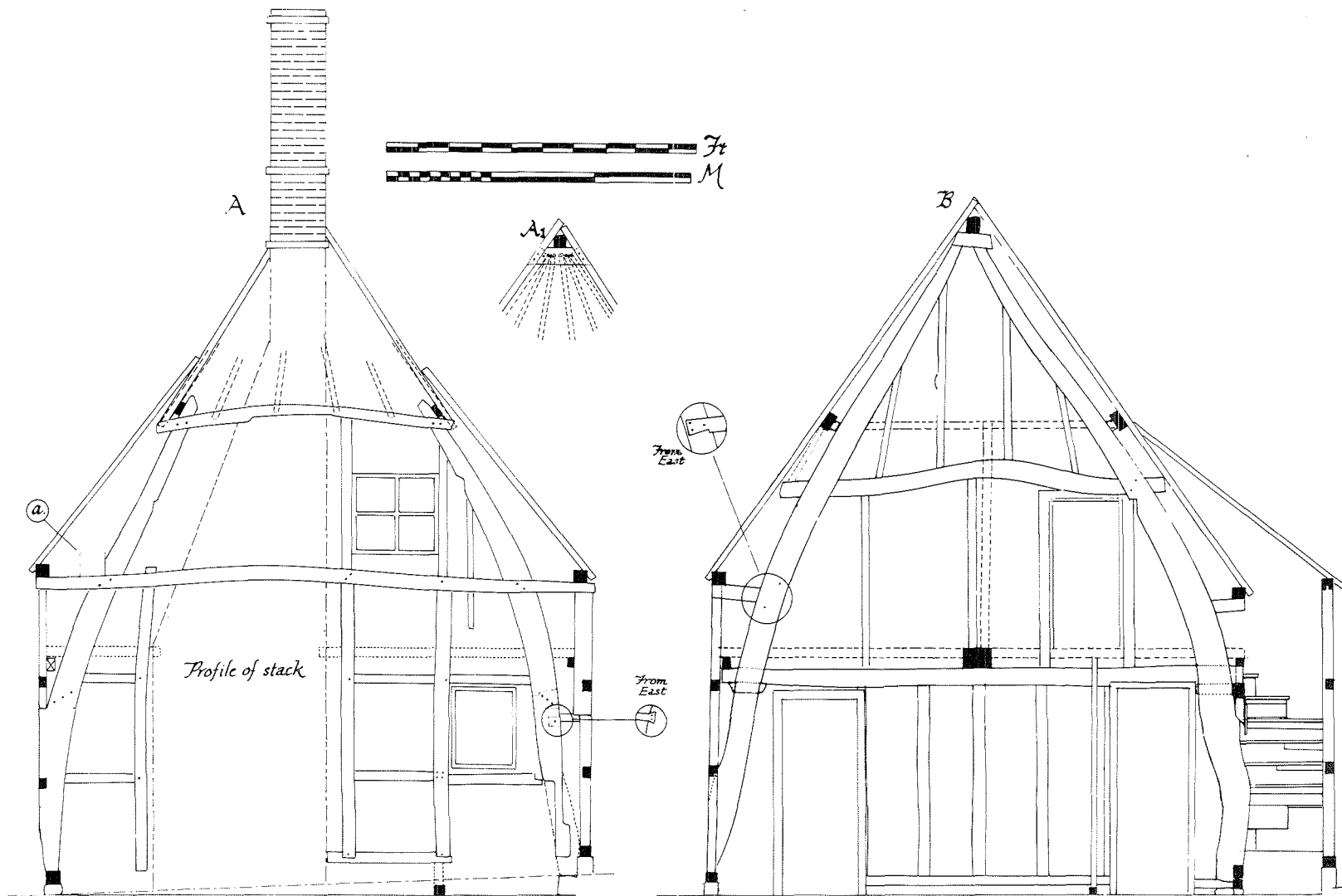


Fig. 3. Left: Elevation of western gable (Truss A). Right: Section at B. Inset: Section at A1, showing hip. All looking E.



Plate I. Willow Vale Farm house from the north. (Photo: Bucks County Council)

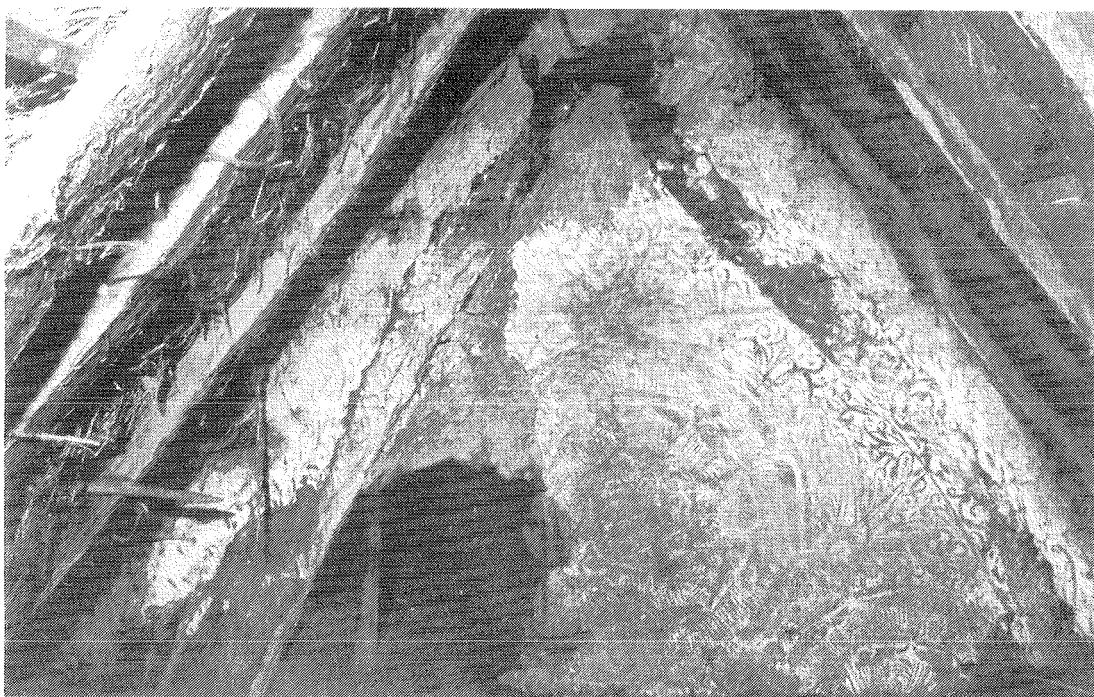


Plate II. The wall painting on the W side of Truss B.

plaster applied to both sides and, where this had flaked away, heavy sooting of the daub was observed on the E side, but none at all on the W. This indication that Bay I was chambered over from the start was later confirmed by dendrochronology (see below). The first floor chamber must have been reached by a ladder from the hall, as there is no opening in the joists. The doorway reached by the ladder was not at the point where the collar allows most head room, since the stave sockets in its soffit are uninterrupted there. It may have been where the present door is (Fig. 3b). Beneath the tie beam the truss was probably open; the studs now seen there are not pegged, and are therefore not an original feature.

The plaster skin on the western side of the partition was painted with a monochrome design of large formalized roses in greenish black (Plate II). Dr Clive Rouse, shown a photograph, has given it as his opinion that it was painted shortly before 1600.

In Bay I the first floor is supported on a spine beam with a carefully formed step-and-ogee moulding (Fig. 2), which could be of any date between 1450 and 1550. The joists, six inches wide, were in very poor condition and have been largely renewed. A dendrochronological determination, conducted separately from that on the other timbers, though by the same laboratory, yielded a felling date of 1448 for these (see Appendix). Reasons are given under 'Discussion and Dating' for thinking that this date is to be preferred to 1462. In any case, the western bay must have been chambered over from the start.

The rails on which the Bay I joists rest are supported on the outer ends of the tie in Truss B, but not in Truss A. There the northern rail is supported at its western extremity by a wedge-shaped piece of timber clasped between the cruck blade and the corner post (Fig. 3). On the S side the rail is only nailed to the corner post, but this is consequent on a major alteration: the addition of an outshut, overlapping Bays I and II, to house a stair (Fig. 2), and the insertion of any E-W timber-framed partition, well able to take the weight of the joists. The construction of

the western stack, and the consequent removal of the hip, may be part of the same alterations; the fireplace has mid eighteenth-century proportions.

The central stack occupies a half bay, framed by box trusses in each of which the function of a tie is performed by the lower of a pair of collars. In the eastern one this collar is jointed to the principal rafters by open lap dovetails (Fig. 4a). (The jointing of the western truss could not be examined.) This form of truss allows headroom for doors giving access between the first-floor rooms on either side of the stack. The purlins of Bays II and III rest on the uppermost of the twin collars of these trusses.

There is clear evidence at this point that there was a third cruck-framed bay to the East. The purlins of Bay II continue E for 6 ft 8 ins (2m), beyond Truss C, and terminate in the lower halves of splayed scarfs, showing that they originally extended further. The peg hole where the N purlin was attached to the cruck blade is visible just short of the scarf ('b' on Fig. 4).

The stack is of two builds, not strikingly different in form or brickwork but indicated by a straight joint in the N side. It served five fireplaces, one on each floor in the bays on either side, and one in the small chamber of the lobby entrance on the N side. The W ground-floor fireplace contains the blocked opening of an oven, which had evidently projected beyond the stack. When the E half of the stack was built, an oven was contrived in its S side, projecting through the side wall of the house (Fig. 2).

The peg-hole for the lost cruck blade (visible in the northern purlin) is exactly in line with the straight joint in the stack. This has implications for the structural sequence.

E of the stack, Bays III to V seem to be all of one build. The spine beam in Bay III (Fig. 2) has a narrower chamfer than that in Bay II (1½ ins as opposed to 2 ins), usually an indication of later date. The stops on the two beams are also different, Bay II having a step and tongue, Bay III a step and ogee; either could be of any date

between the late sixteenth and the mid seventeenth centuries. The fireplace in Bay III is less wide than that in Bay II, often, when found together in one house, another indication of rather later date. The three bays have dropped ties, clasped purlins and queen struts (Fig. 5a). The carpentry is superior, with well-shaped timbers of heavy scantling, and three pegs for each important joint.

The last bay to the East (Bay V) is less carefully built than the others, and its floor is 15 ins (0.375m) below that of the rest of the house (Fig. 4). The slope of the ground means that at the SE corner the floor is about 4½ ft (1.35m) below ground level (Fig. 6); the room was probably a dairy, and the room over it is likely also to have had an agricultural use: an irregularity in the tie of the E gable may be a doorhead for a loft door. When the present occupants moved in there was a pitching hole in the first floor. The gable is hipped, and the truncated principal rafters are triangulated by braces in the plane of the roof, of which the outer ends can be seen externally. The ground-floor ceiling beams had all been renewed when the house was investigated.

The last structural change before the present century seems to have been the insertion of ceilings over the first floor in Bays I and II. This was done by nailing lateral joists to the rafters.

Two non-structural features are worth noting, both in the roof space. One is a series of pulleys evidently designed to lead a cord from the NW corner of the chamber over the hall, up through the ceiling and through the roof space to a point close to the W gable, where a hole in a joist shows that the cord then penetrated the ceiling again. Just beneath this there is a blocked opening in the brickwork of the gable, about a foot square. The most likely explanation for this contrivance is that it worked a bell to summon men from the farmyard, or further afield.

Another roof-space feature at present defies explanation. At the NW corner of the stack is what looks at first like an open-topped box, 8×9 ins in plan and 15 ins high

(200×225×450mm). Although its base is now blocked, it originally framed a hole in the ceiling, and a framed hole of similar dimensions is vertically below it in the floor of the chamber over the entrance lobby, and the ceiling of the lobby ('a' in Fig. 4).

Finally, two dated finds may be noted. When, shortly before our first visit, a ruinous farm building on the property was demolished, three of its bricks were found to bear inscribed initials and a date. The initials were TK (twice) and KT (once); the date, very ill-executed in all cases, seems to have been intended as 1762. And in the course of stripping old wall paper, a scrap of paper was found on which was written 'This house first papered 1880. T. Cross Farmer'.

Discussion and Dating

It has recently been proposed that estimates of the number of sapwood rings to be allowed for in arriving at dates by dendrochronology may hitherto—at least in the south of the country—have been 12 to 15 too high.² If that is correct, the dating of the building of Willow Vale Farm House may be nearer 1450 than 1460 (see Appendix).

Dr Rouse's date for the wall painting of the chamber (shortly before 1600) gives a date also for the identical plastering of the other face of this wall, and consequently for the chambering over of Bay II, which was certainly the hall. When the floor of this bay was dug up in 1988, no trace of a hearth was found, and probably its site lies under the stack.

If the hearth was where the stack is now, it implies a two-bay hall, with both bays open to the roof. This opens up an interesting possibility: that there was a fourth bay, a two-storey structure, to the east, beyond the second bay of the hall, balancing that to the west. If so, Willow Vale Farm House was exceptionally large: only two cruck houses in Bucks are known for certain to have had four bays³ though one other, also in Steeple Claydon, is suspected.⁴ At neither is there any direct evidence, and many of the numerous three-bay cruck houses had two bay halls. In any case, the eastern end here must have been the service end. The chamber at the

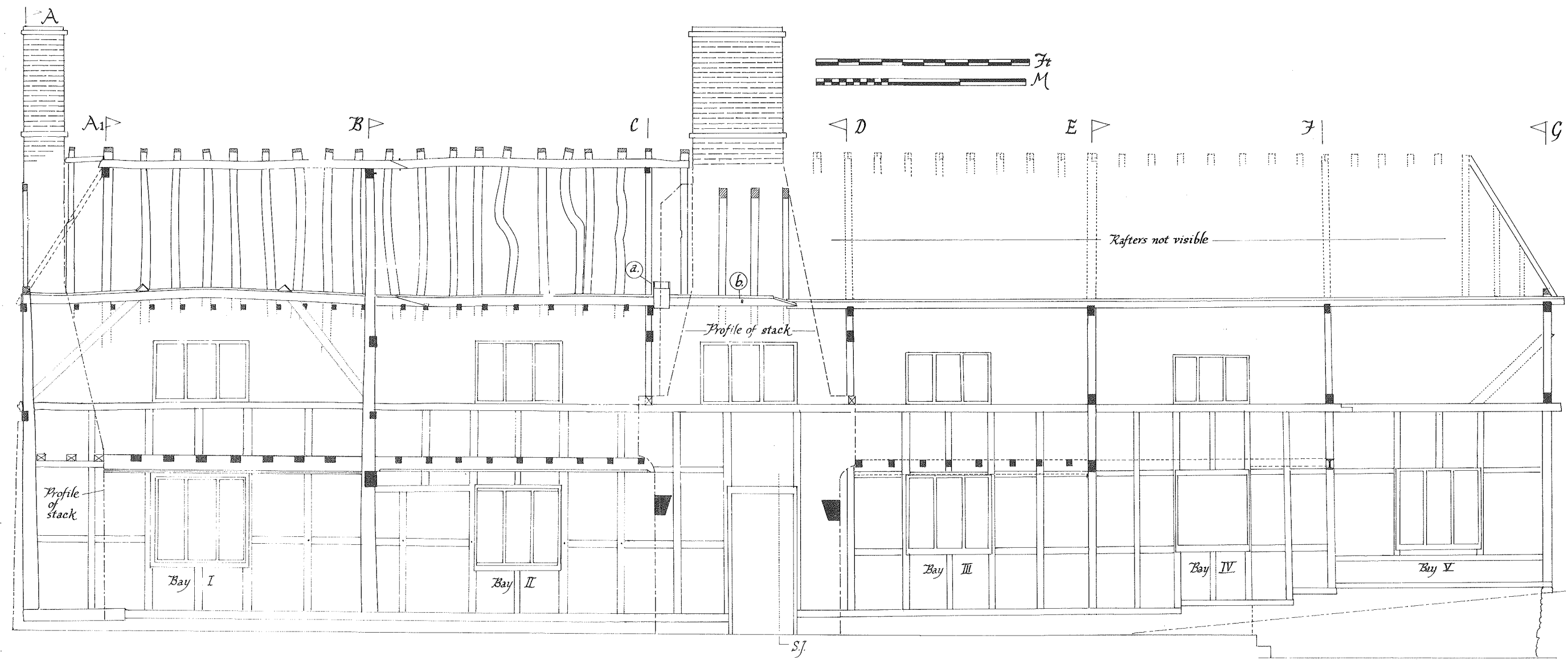


Fig. 4. Long section, looking N. There is no reason to think that Bay II did not have wind-braces like Bay I, but it was not possible to examine the purlins for trenches. (a) is the open 'box' framing a former opening in the ceiling; (b) is the peg-hole for a cruck blade.

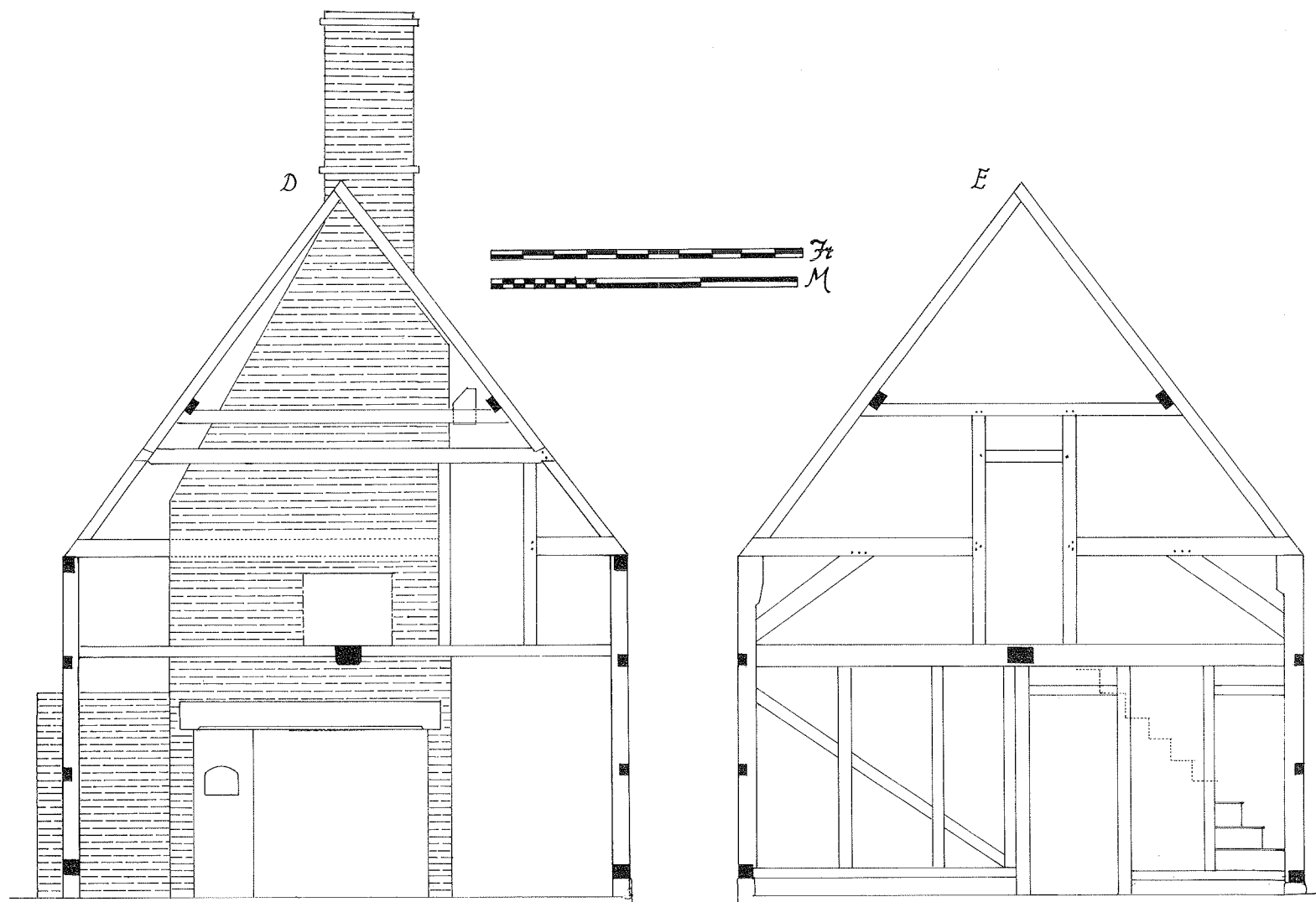


Fig. 5. Left: Section at D, looking W. Right; Section at E, looking E.

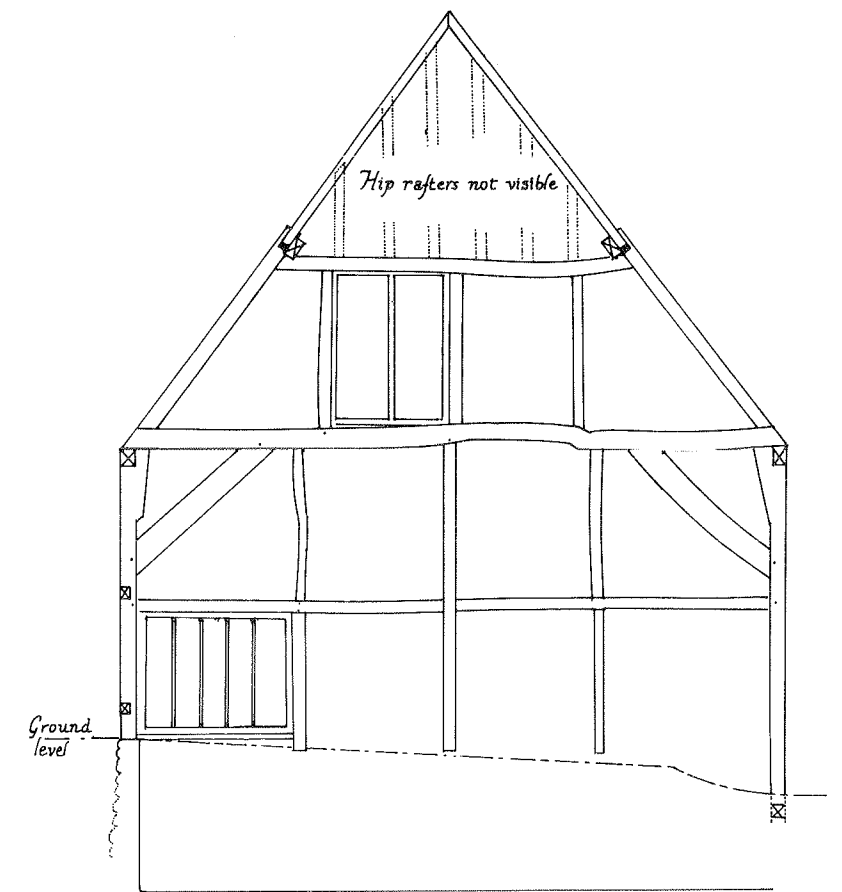


Fig. 6. East Elevation.

other (western) end seems to have been a superior room: although most of the pegs in Truss B were driven from the hall side, they were sawn off flush on the west, and were driven from the W at the apex.

The sequence of events that led to the three eastern bays assuming their present form is obscure, but not beyond conjecture. There seems to be no reason why the cruck couple at D should not have survived the insertion of the W half of the stack in c. 1590. It has been noted that the straight joint in the stack (which presumably marks its original E face) is exactly in line with the peg that secured the purlin to the cruck blade, so if the cruck survived there must have been an offset or batter in the staff. Both are common in axial stacks. If it did survive, the only structural change necessary would have been to provide a new yoke to support the shortened ridge piece. The yoke is there, and it is between two of the old common rafters, not new principals. In fact Truss C is really only a truss by courtesy, having no principal timbers at all, not even, like D, an 'interrupted tie'. The upper collar seems to sit in a very shallow trench; the ends of the lower could not be seen. It is suggested that both collars were inserted only when it became necessary to triangulate the roof there while the cruck couple beyond the chimney was being removed, to be replaced by the truss seen there today. In this truss (D) the function of the tie, as noted above, is performed by the lower of a pair of collars jointed to the principal rafter by open lap dovetails, and C may be similar.

Both the eastern cruck trusses, then, will have been replaced at the same time, when the three new bays were built, these being contemporary with the E half of the stack. The straight braces in the new trusses point to a date towards the middle of the century (cf. Fagnall and Luckings Farms, Coleshill⁵), and dropped ties are thought to belong to the reigns of the first two Stuarts;⁶ they are not common, the carpentry being elaborate and possibly considered risky. Trusses of this construction are often referred to as having 'interrupted ties'; but a timber that is interrupted cannot function as a tie, and 'dropped tie' seems preferable. The

function of the tie is performed by a rail at first-floor level. It was not possible to see how this is jointed to the post; a secret half-dovetail with a blocking piece above it may be conjectured.

No discontinuity is to be observed in the cladding frame, which must therefore all be of the same date as the most recent part of the house: the three eastern bays. Only one scarf was to be seen in the wall plate, and that — a plain halving — was in Bay V. Any others were obscured by thatch.

There is some evidence for the house having been divided at some time. The sill beam on the S side is interrupted as though for an external door immediately W of the stack; and the provision of a second stair may also point in this direction. The documents hint at the circumstances under which this may have happened (see 'History' below).

History

The name Willow Vale Farm does not appear in any record until 1920.⁷ Before that it was no doubt known by the names of its occupiers.

Since the Tithe Apportionment Award for Steeple Claydon, and its all-important accompanying map, have not survived, the starting point for an enquiry into the descent of the property must be the parish Enclosure Act of 1795.⁸ From this it is possible to trace the descent back into the seventeenth century and forward for several generations into the nineteenth. The latter will be left to the last.

In 1795 the farm was in the possession of William Brown the younger. It was much the largest farm in the village: 184 acres (76.6ha) after enclosure, eight yardlands before, plus some old enclosures, including a group known as Bridgemill Closes. A yardland or virgate was notionally thirty acres, but varied from place to place, and the Steeple Claydon yardland was evidently much less—perhaps only 16 acres. It was mainly freehold. William Brown's name heads the Posse Comitatus of 1798,⁹ but he is not shown as owning any horses or carts; this

must be because they were already committed to the militia.

The second stair had already been built; its outshut can be seen in the plan of the house on the Enclosure Map.

William Brown the younger had acquired six of his eight yardlands, and the house, by purchase from his father. The father, also William, had acquired the property as legatee and executor of his uncle William Snow in 1782.¹⁰ That these six yardlands were freehold is shown not only by their being so described in the will but by the fact that the conveyance was by deed of feoffment, not by surrender and admission in the manor court, as with copyhold. The purchase was financed by a mortgage; William junior borrowed the £1,781 purchase price from William senior; in effect he undertook to pay his father 5% a year for life, or £139—a very comfortable income. His father was then 55; he died in 1814 at the age of 88,¹¹ styling himself gentleman.¹² It is a reasonable conjecture that the burden of the mortgage led to the son's disposals of land noted below.

Some of William's other land had also been Snow property at one point. John Snow, a cousin of William Snow, left the reversion of some of his land to another cousin, Mary Statham of Potter Row, Great Missenden, in 1765.¹³ Between 1784 and 1790 the land tax returns show us William Brown acquiring land worth £4 0s 6d from 'Mr Studham', who is not identified, but whose name must be identical with Statham. How the land was acquired is not known.¹⁴

William Snow's family had been in Steeple Claydon since before 1522, when at least two families of the name were present.¹⁵ The immediate source of his yardlands, however, can be discerned only in outline. His cousin John left him all his 'messuages and tenements in the town fields and precincts of Steeple Claydon' in 1765.¹⁶ This John may have been the same man who was left 2½ yardlands by his father in 1705,¹⁷ and was certainly the residuary legatee of a kinsman, Henry Triplett¹⁸ who died in 1755. This Henry was one of three brothers. Their

father, John Triplett, had died in 1709 leaving his four yardlands, and his house, to his wife for life. Three of the four yardlands were 'lately purchased'.¹⁹ Henry was left two closes, one of which, Wooding Close, is probably identical with Woodend Close, adjacent to Willow Vale Farm house.²⁰ Another brother, Richard, was left 'The Great Close' (possibly identical with the 'Brown's Great Close' of the Enclosure Award), and a third, John, perhaps the eldest, was residuary legatee. None of the brothers seems to have married; all their property may have come in the end to Henry; Richard's certainly did.²¹ Henry was described as 'my uncle' in the will of Thomas Snow, 1741,²² who left him a yardland 'late my father's'. One of Henry's yardlands, left to John Snow, bore the name 'Hunt's Yardland'.

William Snow seems not to have lived in the house at Willow Vale: it was let at the time of his death in 1767.²³ Probably the same applies to John Snow: the Snows, as a long established family, must have had their own homestead in the village. And since the house was too big for anyone not farming many acres, it may very well have been let divided. This may be the context for the second doorway and the second stair. But the episode was shortlived: from Henry Triplett's death in 1755 to William Snow's in 1767.

The T.K. whose initials were scratched on a brick in 1762 has not been positively identified. But John Snow, dying in 1765, had as tenants two sisters called Kenning. The evidence does not locate them, but TK may have been the Thomas Kenning who is attested as a young man in 1727, and is thus of the right generation to have been their father.²⁴

The histories of the Triplett, Snow and Brown families are obscure. The Parish Register and the Bishop's Transcript are both defective, and the Snows disappear from both after 1659 (apart from one burial). Their wills attest their continued presence in Steeple Claydon, however; they must have been dis-senters.

There is no doubt, though, that Willow Vale

Farm came to the Snows from the Triplets. Wiliam's will states explicitly that the yard of his house, where some of his bequests were to be found, was 'the estate of Henry Triplett'.²⁵

Earlier than the occupancy of John Triplett, a churchwarden in 1676,²⁶ direct evidence for the descent of the property gives out; John unfortunately omitted to levy a fine when he bought his three yardlands. But a number of legitimate inferences can be drawn from the known facts.

If the house was of no more than three bays, it conformed to what was probably the norm for the standing Buckinghamshire crucks. Although the recently published gazetteer²⁷ lists only six domestic cruck buildings with more than two bays, this counts only surviving bays. D. H. Miles's recent dendrochronological survey, far more detailed than anything possible in a listing exercise, has brought to light a further eleven with evidence of having once had a third bay, 75% of his random sample.

In the few cases where anything of their history is known, these three-bay houses were associated with substantial land holdings. Widmer Grange Farm was the capital messuage of the Missenden Abbey demesne lands in Kingshill.²⁸ North End Farm, Long Crendon, was a 'house of considerable importance'.²⁹ Hill Farm, Chalfont St Peter, was evidently a yeoman house.³⁰ In Hampshire, cruck houses with two-bay halls 'seem to have been prestige buildings'.³¹ By contrast, Forge House, Coleshill, almost certainly a two-bay building, was the home of a tile maker with a very small land holding;³² and it may be conjectured that the two-bay house known as Rhenold's Close at Steeple Claydon³³ was the home of a villein virgater. Such modest houses may formerly have been much more common; that more have not survived can be attributed to the less robust construction to be expected at this social level.

It is especially noteworthy that the Willow Vale holding was freehold, yet consisted mainly of virgated land, which indicates land in the common fields (a virgate is the same as a yardland). Freehold land in the late seventeenth century could have two possible origins: it could

be ancient freehold, or it could be alienated demesne. A named yardland, which implies a compact one, cannot be anything but alienated demesne.

At this point obscurity descends once more, for there were two manors in Steeple Claydon. For two hundred years from 1120 its lords were the d'Oilly family,³⁴ but in the twelfth century they granted 4 hides to Oseney Abbey in Oxfordshire;³⁵ of these 2½ were in villeinage and 1½ in demesne. Early in the following century the Abbey acquired a further hide in demesne from Hugh le Pauper, an undertenant of the d'Oillys,³⁶ and held all 5 hides until its dissolution in 1539. Its land then became known as the Rectory manor, and passed through a number of hands before coming in the mid sixteenth century to the Challoner family.³⁷

The main manor came eventually to the Crown,³⁸ and from the late fifteenth century onwards was devoted to the support of a succession of royal ladies³⁹ (which is why we find 'Regina' at the head of the muster roll of 1522). In 1557 this manor too came into the hands of the Challoners.⁴⁰

In all this time only two rentals survive to show the pattern of landholding, though there is some help from the Muster Roll. One rental is from the reign of Edward III, and lists the holders of 35 virgates.⁴¹ Since no fewer than 20 of them are shown as being 'lately' or 'formerly' someone else's, it is a reasonable inference that the document dates from just after the Black Death, c.1350. There are seven free tenants, apart from the Abbot of Oseney. It is clear that the standard peasant holding was one virgate, though there are a few half-virgates. If the Domesday hides were all virgated (which cannot be taken for granted), the free tenants shared 15 virgates, as below:

Non-demesne hides in DB	15 (=60 virgates)
Non-demesne hides granted to Oseney	2½ (=10 virgates)
Balance	11½ (=50 virgates)
Listed in rental, c.1350	
as in villeinage	35 virgates
Available for free tenants	15 virgates

The free (assized) rents varied widely: four men paid a penny or less, one paid five pence farthing, one seven pence and one twelve pence. Rents were not in proportion to acreage, but we can say that three holdings were much larger than the others.

The Muster Roll⁴² shows eight people (apart from the Queen, the Abbot and the Vicar) who, since they are assessed on land, are certainly free tenants. Six of them are assessed on multiples of a mark or half a mark, two on 5 and 4 marks respectively, the rest on 1 or less; two are assessed on 5 and 10 shillings respectively. Nothing can safely be inferred from this about sizes of holdings, though the formalism would be consistent with there being some relationship between marks and virgates, and perhaps between shillings and acres of unvirgated land (Professor Chibnall suggested 6d per acre for North Bucks⁴³). In combination with the evidence from 1350, this allows us to say that there was enough ancient freehold to sustain Willow Vale Farm, and that there was a tendency for its ownership to be concentrated. But the three considerable landholders of 1350 have now been replaced by two.

However, this scanty record also begins to expose the characteristic of ancient freehold that unfits it for being the origin of the Willow Vale holding: its instability. Free holdings were in a constant state of flux, as owners died without male issue, distributed their property by will, failed financially, or took up profitable leases elsewhere. Willow Vale Farm, never in multiple occupancy for long, never allowed to fall into disrepair, tells of the continuity that comes of being always the capital message of a large tenement; and in the long term that is only possible with leasehold. Its own history, traceable from the generation in which it became freehold, shows the fluctuations in the size of the holding that are characteristic of free tenure. If it had not survived into the Age of Conservation it would surely not have seen in the year 1990. It is to leased, and ultimately alienated, demesne that we must look for its origin.

The other rental, a post-Dissolution docu-

ment of perhaps 1540, unfortunately does not cover the whole township.⁴⁴ Both manors are represented, but the Crown had already alienated much of the land. There is consequently nothing useful to be learned about the freehold land, and the interest of the document is in what it has to say about the demesne. Demesne land let at farm includes two virgates lately 'Hunt's', besides other, unvirgated land. This was demesne of the main manor.

For the Rectory Manor we have to wait until 1627 for more information. Then we have a complete list of the fields in its demesne.⁴⁵ Two of them, Sandfurlong and Clayfurlong, are the names of common-field sub-divisions, and unmistakably indicate compact demesne. Another, Gabriel's Ground, is a medieval name and may also indicate a furlong. Three, Great Rufain or Rifain, Peartree Hill and Bushey Close came into the hands of the Verneys in the next century.⁴⁶ Six entered the market after 1642, including Sandfurlong and Gabriel's Ground.⁴⁷ Another, Bridgemill Close, was bought by William Snow in 1680,⁴⁸ and was part of William Brown's property in 1795.⁴⁹

The evidence, then, does not allow us to say with complete confidence what land was farmed from Willow Vale. But the balance of probability, especially in the light of the recurrence of the name Hunt's, points to the core of the holding, probably including the house, being demesne of the main manor, and to a tenant of the demesne being the first occupier. The rest of the land was no doubt assembled from fragments of the Rectory demesne and ancient freehold.

To revert to 1795 and the subsequent descent of the property, William Brown died in 1831,⁵⁰ having apparently sold off much of the land: only 50 acres of former common-field arable features in his will. His son, William Snow Brown, born in 1791,⁵¹ predeceased his father, possibly dying intestate but leaving a son of his own, William Law Brown.⁵² That this William came into a diminished patrimony is indicated by his styling himself 'farmer'; his father and grandfather had been 'gentleman'. He sold Bridgemill Closes in 1841,⁵³ and died without

issue in 1849.⁵⁴ His real estate was left in trust to be sold for the benefit of four nieces.

The 'T. Cross, farmer' who occupied the house in 1880 was no doubt related to Mrs Rosetta Cross of Steeple Claydon, who died in 1890, leaving bequests to two kinsmen called Thomas Cross.⁵⁵ One of these was 'of Oxford', the other 'of Middle Claydon'. Rosetta Parrott had married John Cross of Middle Claydon in 1841.⁵⁶ There was also a Thomas Cross who was farming in Steeple Claydon in 1841.⁵⁷ The family thus had extensive local connections. It has not been thought that following these up would add anything of value to our understanding of the house.

The property was still a working farm when it was sold in 1966, with 215 acres (89.5ha).⁵⁸ At its next sale, in 1987, there was only one acre

attached to it.⁵⁹ Much of the land is now a housing estate.

Acknowledgments

My thanks are first of all due to Bob and Rosemary Brown, who patiently allowed us to tramp all over their house, and to come back again and again to check points of which the importance was not apparent at first sight. I am most grateful too to Mrs Susan Ranson for searching the Verney papers for the sparse but invaluable material relating to Steeple Claydon, and to Mrs Elizabeth Sandford for facilitating this (the papers are not at present accessible to the public). My thanks also to Pauline Fenley for her ever valuable help in evaluating the evidence, and very special thanks to Dan Miles, who not only arranged the dendro-dating, but checked, corrected and supplemented my own observations.

APPENDIX: DENDROCHRONOLOGY

Eight samples were taken in February 1989 by Robert Howard, and these were submitted to Nottingham University Tree-ring Dating Laboratory. The laboratory work was funded by the Leverhulme

Trust, which made a grant to Warwick and Nottingham Universities jointly for their work on the Dating of the Medieval Peasant House Project (Cruck Project).

Table 1. Cross matching of samples from Willow Vale Farm, Steeple Claydon.

Sample	Offset		Sap rings	Total rings
STC-A05 (Saddle, Truss B)	00	*****	00	75
STC-A04 (S Cruck blade, Truss B)	37	*****	00	42
STC-A01 (S Cruck Blade, Truss A)	35	***** >	07	59
STC-A06 (Yoke, A1)	48	***** >>	14	44
STC-A08 (Ridge beam, A-B)	55	***** >>	16	42

The samples were cross-matched by the Litton-Zainodin procedure, and five of them cross-matched as indicated in the bar diagram in Table 1, when the t value was 5.0.

Because of the acceptable t-value matches and because the heartwood/sapwood boundaries are consistent with the samples having the same felling date, the samples were averaged at these offsets to form a sequence of 97 rings, designated STCASQ01. This

sequence was found to match the Local and Regional Reference Chronologies when the date of the first ring is 1351, and the last is 1447. The average date of the last heartwood ring is 1432, giving a felling date range of 1447 to 1482. The likely felling date was estimated as c.1462.

The t-values of the match of STACSQ01 against the reference chronologies, when the date of the last measured ring is 1447, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. T-values of the match of STCASQ01 against reference chronologies when the date of the last measured ring is 1447.

East Midlands 080887	3.0	MC 10-H	2.7
Northants	4.8	Abington	3.2
Boughton	5.2	Upton	3.5
Oxford	3.7		

Note: For E. Midlands see R. R. Laxton *et al.*, 'Tree-ring dates for some East Midlands Buildings', *Trans. Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire* 40-5. For Oxford see D. Haddon Reece, D. H. Miles *et al.*, 'Tree Ring dates from the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, HBNC', *VA* 20 (1989). For MC10-H see J. M. Fletcher, 'A list of Tree-ring dates for building timber in Southern England', *VA* 11 (1980). Other chronologies mentioned are constituent members of the E. Midlands chronology.

The timbers that yielded these results were the SW cruck blade, the SE cruck blade, the yoke, the saddle and the ridge piece between Trusses A and B. Timbers that did not yield satisfactory matches were the other two cruck blades and the northern rafter of the yoked pair at the W end.

In 1990, sections of the floor joists removed from bay I were recovered by the owner and six samples were obtained from these, two of which had complete sapwood. These were submitted to the Nottingham University Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory for analysis and also to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, HBMC (AML). Of the six samples received by the AML, four were found to match together both visually and statistically. These four samples were averaged together into a site master of 62 rings and run against both local and regional reference chronologies, where the last measured ring dated at 1448 with the t-values as shown in Table 3.

T-values for joists from Willow Vale Farm matched against local reference chronologies.

Mapledurham Hall 1278-1438	t=2.75
MC19 (J. M. Fletcher) 1399-1800	t=3.04
Alton, Hants (J. Hillam) 1348-1504	t=3.21
Oxford, 126 High St (J.M.F.) 1367-1477	t=3.40
MC16 (J. M. Fletcher) 1314-1636	t=3.68
Oxford Mean Curve (D.H-R. & D.H.M., = <i>et al.</i>) 1043-1987	t=3.71
East Midlands (Nottingham) 882-1981	t=4.05

The AML data was subsequently given to the Nottingham University Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory for running against their reference collection and particularly against their site master for Willow Vale

Farm, STCASQ01, but no results have been reported at the time of going to press.

Despite the low t-values of the floor joists, the AML results are very significant in the light of the results previously obtained by Nottingham for the other timbers from the house. The issue here is mainly of felling dates. Of the five samples dated by Nottingham, three had sapwood but none were complete to the underside of the bark. Therefore they have been ascribed a felling date range of 1447-82 with the year 1462 singled out as being the most likely date. The AML samples on the other hand had sapwood on all four samples dated and two of these were complete, with firm felling dates of 1447 and 1448 respectively.

The problem lies in the felling dates for the joists being 14-15 years earlier than the likely felling date for the timbers in the house itself. This can be adequately resolved by closer examination of the sapwood itself and the methods used for estimating it where it is not complete. If we look at the last heartwood ring dates for the samples dated by Nottingham, compared with those from the AML, we can see that the differences between the two sets of samples are less than previously envisaged, as outlined in Table 4.

As Table 4 shows, the average last-heartwood-ring dates vary by only 2 years between each set of samples, and the estimated number of sapwood rings for each proposed felling date varies by no more than 2.5 for each proposed calculation. As the difference in dates seems to come down to the method of sapwood estimation, it is worth noting that the Nottingham laboratory uses a standard method of calculation such that there is a 95% chance that the sapwood variance will be between 15 and 50 with an average number of sapwood rings being about 30. The AML, however, has recently completed an interim study in which the sapwood variation in 68 historical building timbers sampled in Oxfordshire were found to be between 10 and 36 with an average of 18.58 (60). This trend of fewer sapwood rings has been noticed by the AML to be more of the rule than the exception in the south of the county. In view of the fact that Willow Vale Farm is very close geographically to Oxfordshire, and considering that two of the AML samples possessed complete sapwood felled in 1447 and 1448, it is reasonable to choose the earlier of the two proposed felling dates and suggest that Willow Vale Farm was built in 1448 or shortly thereafter.

Table 4. Comparison of results obtained by Nottingham University with those from AML.

Sample No.	No. of rings	Last heartwood ring dates	Last sapwood rings dates	No. of Sapwood Rings	No. of Sapwood Rings for Proposed Felling date of 1448	No. of Sapwood Rings for Proposed Felling date of 1462
Nott. Univ.						
STC-A01	59	1437	1444	7	11	25
STC-A06	44	1428	1442	14	20	34
STC-A08	42	1431	1447	16	17	31
Average:		1432			16	30
AML						
WVF1	33	1429	1432	3	19	33
WVF2	52	1430	1448	18 Comp.	18	32
WVF3	61	1432	1447	15 Comp.	15	29
WVF4	36	1427	1436	9	21	35
Average:		1430			18.25	32.25
Average of both sets:		1431		17.3	31.3	

REFERENCES

- N. Alcock, *Cruck Construction*, CBA Res. Rept. 42 (1981) 97.
- D. Haddon-Reece, D. H. Miles *et al.*, 'Tree Ring Dates from the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, HBMC', *Vernacular Architecture* 20 (1989) 46.
- R. W. Evans, 'A Gazetteer of Cruck Buildings in Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 29 (1987) 205-10.
- R. T. Mason, *Framed Buildings of England* (Horsham, 1974) 50, 55.
- J. Chenevix Trench, 'The Houses of Coleshill', *Recs. Bucks* 25 (1983) 71-4.
- Kelly's Directory, 1920.
- BRO, IR/69 ii.
- I. F. W. Beckett (ed.), *The Buckinghamshire Posse Comitatus* (BRS 22, 1985).
- Claydon Papers, 2/919, 920; BRO D/A/We/195/175. The point is stressed because on the enclosure map only William Brown's 'Old Enclosures' are specifically described as freehold.
- BRO, D/A/T/54, s.a.
- BRO, D/A/We/130/67 (66).
- BRO, D/A/We/93/179.
- BRO, Q/RPL/3/5, 11.
- A. C. Chibnall (ed.), *The Certificate of Musters for Buckinghamshire* (BRS 17, 1973) 54.
- BRO, D/A/We/48/141.
- Ibid.*, 93/179.
- Ibid.*, 85/218.
- Ibid.*, 50/175.
- BRO, IR/69 ii.
- BRO, D/A/We/71/85.
- Ibid.*, 76/113.
- Ibid.*, 105/75.
- Ibid.*, 63/45.
- Ibid.*, 105/75.
- BRO, D/A/T/54, s.a.
- R. W. Evans, *op. cit.*
- D. H. Miles, pers. comm.
- Ian Johnson and Pauline Fenley, 'Grange Farm, Widmer End', *Recs. Bucks* 19/4 (1974) 456.
- G. Beresford, 'North End Farm, Long Crendon', *Recs. Bucks* 18/2 (1967) 125.
- C. F. Stell, 'Hill Farm, Chalfont St Peter', *Recs. Bucks* 18/1 (1966) 73.
- N. W. Alcock, *op. cit.*
- J. Chenevix Trench, *op. cit.*, 84.
- D. H. Miles, pers. comm. The conjecture, however, is my own.
- VCH Bucks* iv, 227.
- H. Salter (ed.), *The Cartulary of Osney Abbey* (Oxford Hist. Soc., 1936) iv, 15, 18, 29; v, 208, 209. *VCH* has not got the whole story.
- Salter, *op. cit.*, iv, 409; v, 210, 211.
- VCH* iv, 228.
- VCH* ii, 321.
- PRO, SC6/Hen 8/1382.
- VCH* iv, 227.
- PRO, SC12/24/10.
- Chibnall, *op. cit.*, 54.
- Ibid.*, 21.
- PRO, SC12/23/38.
- PRO, C 128/375/73.

46. Claydon, 2/559, 2/616.
47. Claydon, 2/560.
48. Claydon, 2/941.
49. Claydon, 2/920.
50. BRO, D/A/We/32/27.
51. BRO, D/A/T/54 s.a.
52. BRO, Catalogue of Banns, ed. Plaisted, No. 1383.
53. Claydon papers, *ex. inf.* Mrs E. Sandford.
54. BRO, D/A/We/146/37.
55. BRO, D/Wig/2/1/22, f 77.
56. BRO, PR/53/1.
57. BRO, HO/107/44.
58. Sale Catalogue in possession of the owners.
59. *Ibid.*