

## GARNIVAL'S WEEK: A LATE 13TH-CENTURY BASE-CRUCK HOUSE IN THE PARISH OF MILVERTON

BY MARK McDERMOTT

Garnival's Week (from Old English 'Wic', a farm, or dairy farm) is an isolated farmhouse to the east of the village of Milverton which contains the fragmentary remains of a base-cruck roof which has been dendrodated to 1287. This is an addition to the list of Somerset base-cruck roofs published by E.H.D. Williams and R. Gilson.<sup>1</sup>

### *Exterior*

The building consists of a long range, facing W, with an outshut extending partway along the back. The rendered walls are presumably built of the red sandstone which is exposed at the N gable-end. Most of the front wall seems to have been rebuilt: it is relatively thin and a half-beam in a room at the N end of the house is detached from the inner face of the wall. There are no early window-frames or doorways and the roof is 'Roman' tiled.

### *Plan*

The plan (Fig. 1) is unusual in that there are three, rather than the more usual two, rooms on the 'upper' (N) side of the former cross-passage (the rear door of which has been blocked and a partition on the N side removed). Also unusual (for Somerset) is the fact that the room immediately to the N of the former cross-passage has an upper-end fireplace. This has plain sandstone jambs and a modern lintel. The curving wall at the SE corner of the fireplace is a recent feature. This room may have served as a post-medieval kitchen.

The ceiling beam on the N side of the former cross-passage has deep chamfers, but any stops are hidden by inserted pillars at each end. A modern blockwork wall has recently been removed from beneath this beam (which is now supported by a wooden prop) but there is no morticing in the soffit of the beam for an earlier partition. Against the partition wall between the stairway and the unheated room at the lower end of the house is a fragment of a half-beam with a deep chamfer and a step stop.

The only detectable early feature in the room beyond the main stack (which should be regarded as the post-medieval hall) is an axial beam which is hidden by a modern ceiling but accessible through the floor above: this has deep chamfers, straight-cut stops and wide mortices for former tenoned joists (the present joists rest in narrow slots).

Beyond the hall are two parallel inner rooms. The E room formerly contained a dog-leg stairway. The only early features are three ceiling beams in the W room with deep chamfers and prominent step stops. Only the sawn-off butts of the original joists (which are cogged instead of tenoned) survive. The beam at the E side of this room has jointing for a former wattle-and-daub partition, indicating that the separation of these rooms was an early feature.

The outshut has undergone extensive recent alterations and no early features are visible.

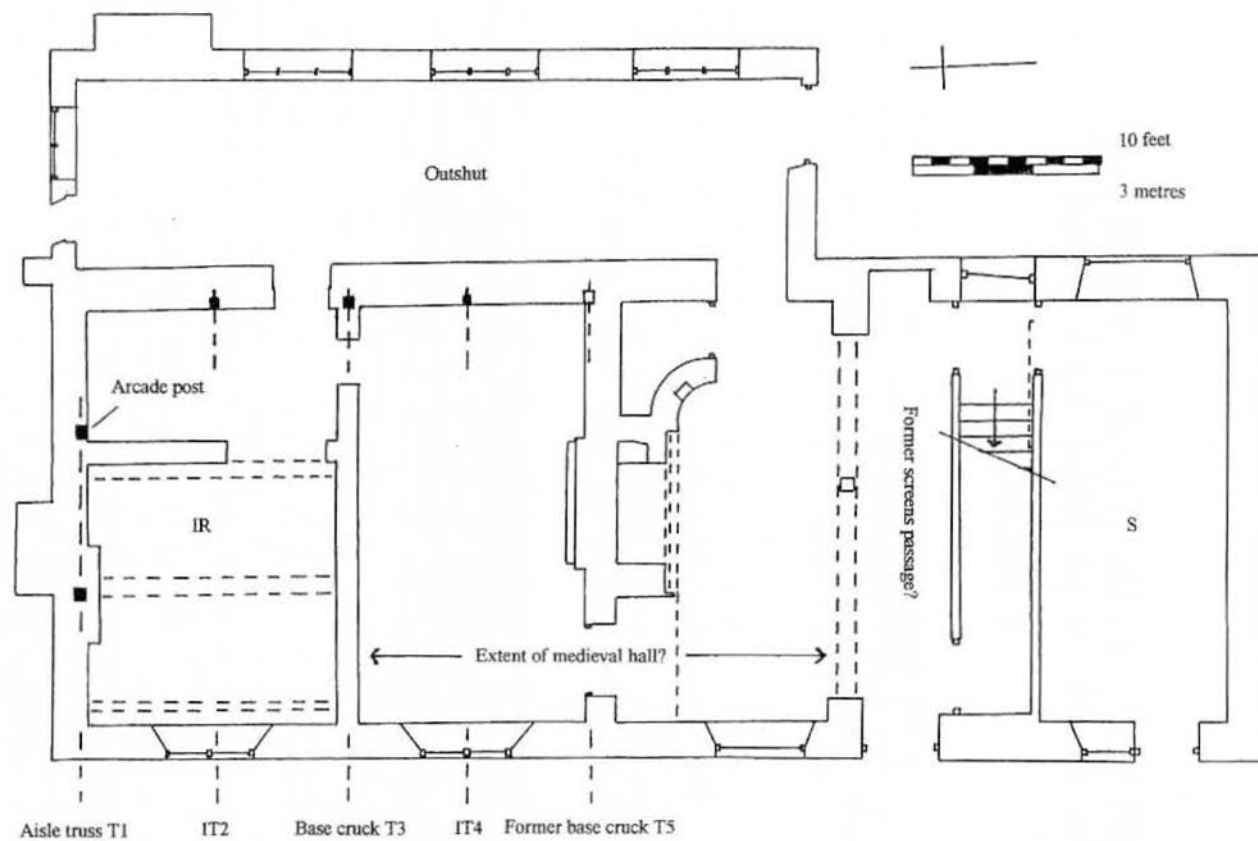


Fig. 3. Ground plan of Garnival's Week farmhouse, showing the positions of medieval roof trusses visible on the first floor and/or in the roof space.

### Roof

This has been raised slightly (the rebuilt front wall is higher than that at the back and the ridge has been lifted) and is now supported by modern A-frame trusses which have, above the collar, raking struts on either side of a vertical metal rod. Several earlier trusses are, however, visible at first-floor level and/or within the roof-space.

### Jointed crucks

In the S half of the building are two trusses which have jointed-cruck principals with redundant side-pegged joints. There are three tiers of trenced purlins (now incomplete), and each truss has a tenoned apex with a V-notch for a former ridge-piece and, unusually in the case of jointed crucks, joints for a former collar with curving halved dovetails. The principals are unblackened and lack mouldings or bracing, and the collar joints confirm an early post-medieval date. The cruck posts are missing and the principals have probably been reused, although they may have originated within the building.

### Base-cruck truss (T3)

In the N half of the building a thick curving principal emerges from the E wall at first-floor level (Fig. 2). The principal is archbraced and has heavy windbraces (Fig. 3) which have narrow chamfers with bar stops. A butt purlin is tenoned into the concave side of each windbrace (*cf.* Long Sutton Court House and Doulling Abbey Farm barn) and there is a short length of butt purlin between each windbrace and the principal (*cf.* the Tudor Tavern, Taunton). On either side of this truss is an intermediate truss (IT2 & IT4), the principal also slightly curved but of thinner scantling, which clasps the purlin between the underside of the principal and the upperside of an archbrace. In the face of the base cruck below the level of the windbraces there are pegs on either side of an off-centre mortice which has a peg-hole in the back but not through the sides: the purpose of these features is unclear.

The windbraces and intermediate trusses have been cut away within the roof-space, as have the remaining *in situ* common rafters (of square section), and on the W side of the roof the stumps of the rafters have evidently been reused to support the ceiling rising at an angle from the top of the heightened front wall. The main principal and its archbrace, however, rise to the underside of a tie (Plate 1), below the W end of which are a matching principal and archbrace which appear to have been cut away below ceiling level (perhaps when the front wall was rebuilt). There is smoke-blackening on the S side of this truss; and carpenter's marks indicate that this was truss 2. Nothing remains of the matching principals of the intermediate trusses, but the surviving archbracing of these trusses implies that they included collars.

The superstructure above the tie of the base-cruck truss has been removed at some time, exposing a complex sequence of joints on the top of the tie (Fig. 4 which, like Fig. 2, shows the eastern end of the tie). From each end of the tie the sequence consists of a mortice, a raised dovetail within a trench, a smaller mortice and a pair of parallel notched-lap joints with refined angle of entry; and there is also a groove along the top of the tie, presumably for wattle-and-daub infill. Two of the mortices must have held upper crucks or straight principals (probably the latter, since the slightly larger outer mortices are more likely to have been used for this purpose); the dovetails almost certainly held a pair of arcade plates; and angle or 'dragon' ties (*cf.* the corner braces in Doulling Abbey Farm barn) would have extended from the notched-lap joints to the arcade plates (see the reconstruction in Fig. 4). The remaining pair of mortices may have held either a vertical strut next to the inner face of each roof plate (*cf.* Cargoll barn, Cornwall<sup>2</sup>) or an outer locking piece (*cf.* the Priory of St. John, Wells): the former hypothesis is reconstructed in Fig. 2.

The upper ends of the windbraces were presumably jointed into the arcade plates, and the latter would have supported the common rafters. A reused blackened timber which now

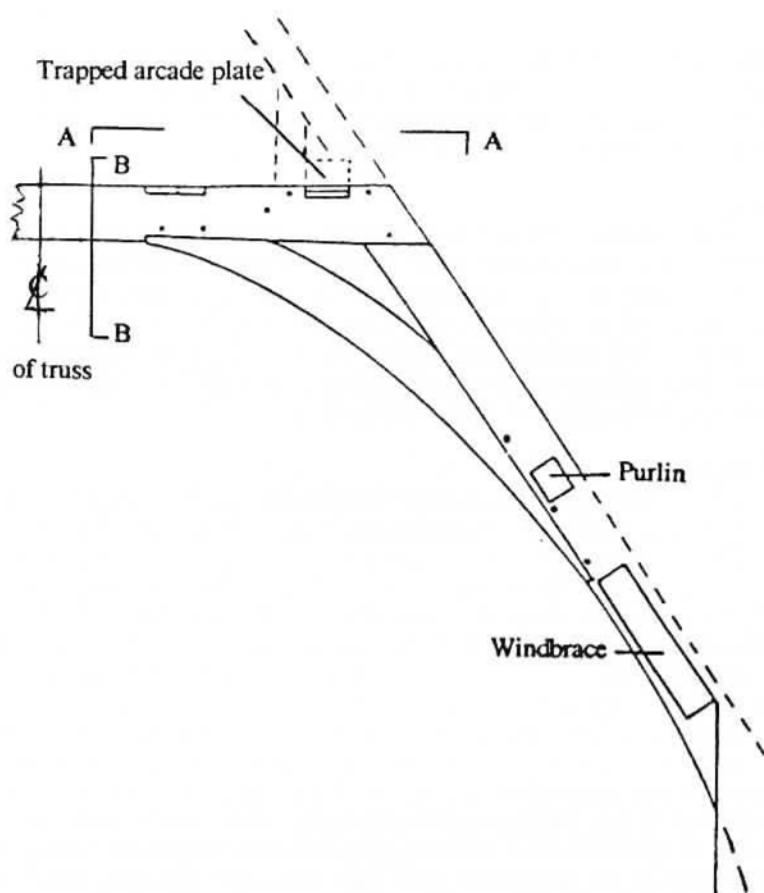


Fig. 2. Base-cruick truss T3.

forms part of the inserted loft floor has a distinctive notched joint and has been interpreted as a former common rafter which would have been hooked onto a bird-mouth joint in one of the arcade plates (Fig. 5).

#### *Aisle truss (T1)*

Embedded in the N gable within the roof-space are the remains of an aisle truss (Fig. 6) which has heavy scantling similar to that of the base-cruick truss. Both posts survive at this level, as does an archbrace rising from the W side of the E post (Plate 2). The W post is tenoned into the underside of a remnant of a tie, but immediately to the E of this post the (presumed) former archbrace and the tie have been replaced by the inserted gable-end stack. The remainder of the tie is also missing, but a tenon at the top of the surviving archbrace, and another (of which only a trace remains) on the top of the E post, would have been jointed into it. Carpenter's marks indicate that this was truss 1, and horizontal scribed lines on the posts have been interpreted as levelling lines.

At the lower corner of the surviving end of the tie is a mortice for a former aisle rafter whose position is also indicated by a rebate in the masonry at the edge of the earlier (and

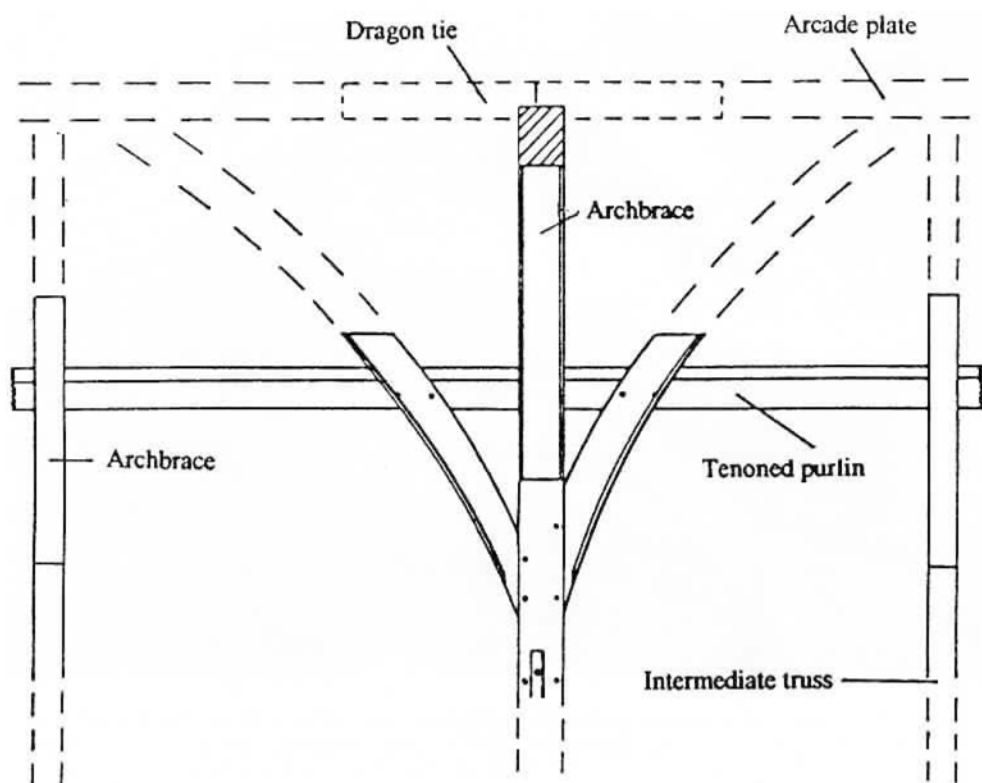


Fig. 3. Section at BB.

lower) N gable. The end of the tie is itself angled in line with this feature. From the E side of the E post a horizontal rail (only the top edge of which is visible) extends to meet the face of a purlin which presumably is/was supported from below by another member.

Disregarding the stonework of the inserted stack, the masonry in which the aisle truss is embedded is plastered, but the surface of the plaster is clean, in contrast to the timbers which are blackened. The backs of the archbrace and the E post, which are partly visible at the top, have a clean finish which suggests that the timbers were at least built against a stone wall, if not originally embedded in it. Decay has largely destroyed any evidence of jointing on the top of the remnant of the tie, and the stonework behind the line of the tie also has a rough and disturbed finish. It is thus uncertain whether there was originally a full gable or a half hip. The truss as a whole has become distorted and misaligned as a result of damage and disturbance: the missing elements and the original alignment are reconstructed in Fig. 6.

In addition to supporting either a pair of upper principals or a half hip, the tie would also have supported the ends of the arcade plates. There is no evidence of former windbracing at this end of the roof: there are no principal rafters and the early purlin on the E side of the roof extends right up to the truss instead of being interrupted by a windbrace. Instead there were probably arcade braces rising from the faces of the posts (below the present ceiling-level) to meet the undersides of the arcade plates. There may also have been dragon ties between the arcade plates and the tie.

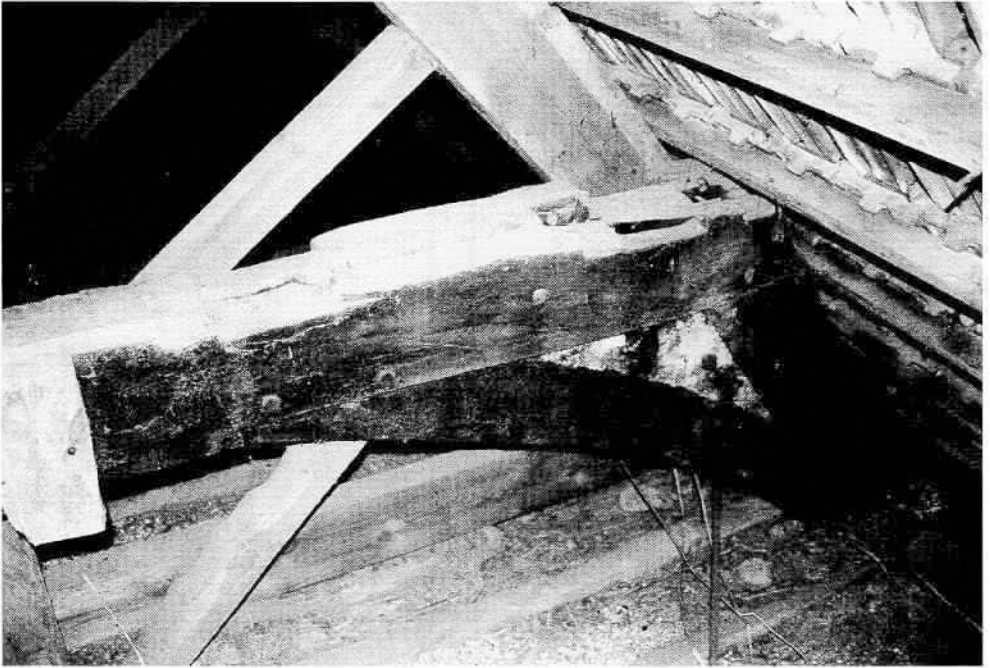


Plate 1. The eastern end of the base-cruck truss, showing a principal and an archbrace emerging above the inserted ceiling, redundant joints in the upper surface of the tie, an infilled spandrel and, near lower right corner of plate, the sawn butt of a heavy windbrace. Part of the aisle truss may be seen near the upper left corner. All other timbers are modern.

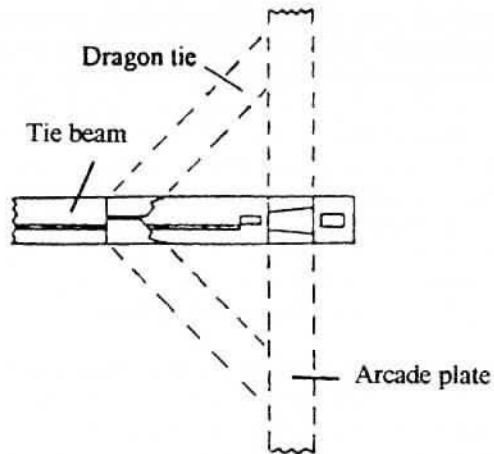


Fig. 4. Plan at AA.

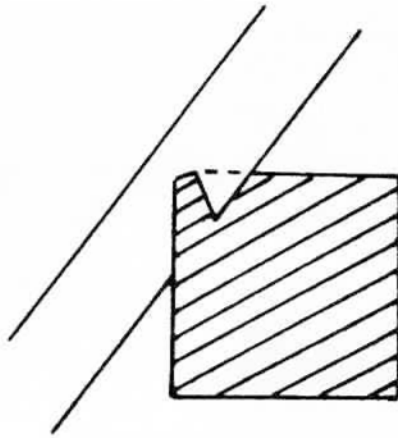


Fig. 5. Rafter and arcade plate (based on drawing by Dan Miles).

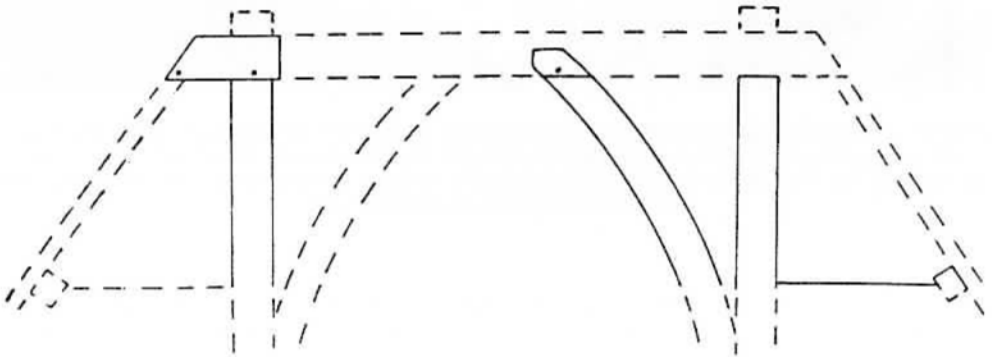


Fig. 6. Aisle truss T1.

#### *Missing trusses*

The purlin which extends southwards from the windbrace on the S side of the base-cruck truss (T3) terminates in a curving butt with a remnant of a tenon. It was therefore formerly jointed into another windbrace, which implies the existence of a second base-cruck truss (T5). Nothing of this truss seems to survive, and a thin straight principal, which emerges from the E wall slightly to the S of the position which the truss would have occupied, is a later feature. The upper end of this principal rests against the E side of the inserted central stack and is nailed to a blackened post which is presumably a reused element from the medieval roof (but not an arcade post, for it is of thinner scantling than the posts at the N end of the roof).

#### *Variable smoke-blackening*

The blackening on the remains of the medieval roof does not occur on the N side of the base-cruck truss (T3). In addition to the groove on top of the tie, this truss also has infilling within the spandrels above the archbraces, a row of holes beneath the centre of the tie, and

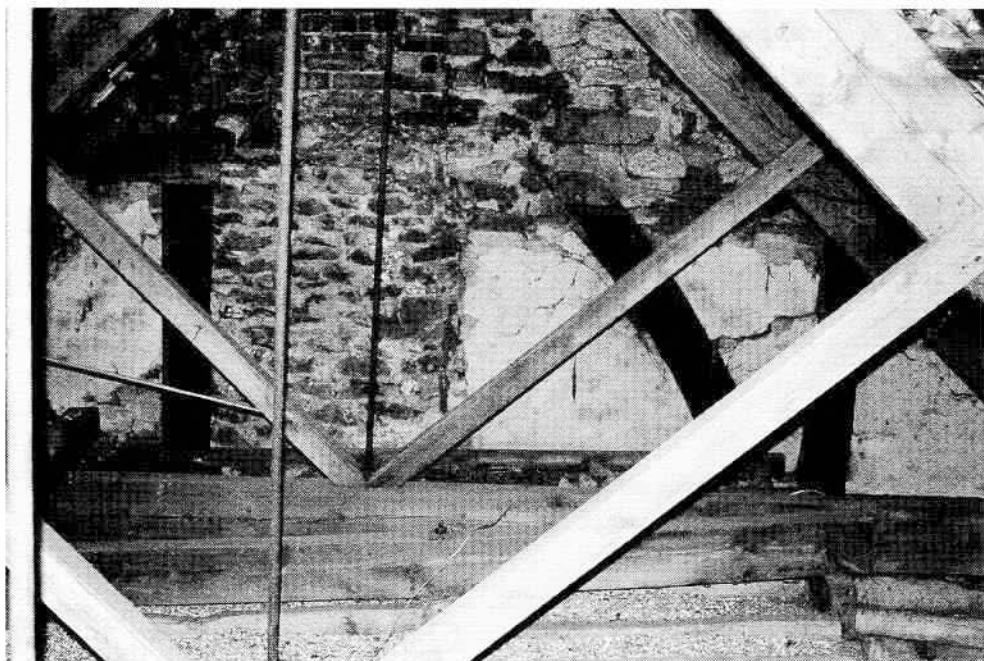


Plate 2. Aisle truss remnants embedded in N gable-end wall. On the left is an arcade post beneath a fragment of the tie. On the right is a second arcade post and, to its left, an archbrace with a tenon (formerly jointed into the tie) at the top. The rubble stonework of the inserted gable-end stack has replaced the left-hand archbrace and the plastered stonework on either side of it.

several surviving nails associated with small patches of undarkened wood on the underside of the archbraces (which are unchamfered). The truss was thus closed with wattle-and-daub, and the presence of smoke-blackening on the S side, but not on the N, implies that it marked the N end of the medieval hall from the beginning, which is confirmed by the uneven alignment of the windbraces and the unequal bay-lengths on either side of this truss. (The Tudor Tavern in Taunton also has a closed base-cruck truss at the end of the hall *and* an aisled gable truss.)

#### *Overall plan of the medieval house*

The fragmentary nature of the remains of the medieval roof makes it difficult to deduce the original plan of the house, but it is likely that there was originally at least one more bay (including another intermediate truss) to the S of the second base-cruck truss (T5), and the medieval hall may have included the space between the present hall and the entry. The entry may therefore occupy the position of a former screens passage.

If it is assumed that base-cruck truss T3 has always been closed and that there was a solar between that truss and the aisle truss T1, the blackening which occurs on the aisle truss remains problematical. If truss T3 was originally open (allowing smoke from the hearth to reach T1) but closed soon thereafter, some blackening would be expected on the N side of the truss. Moreover, the unequal bay-lengths and windbrace alignments on either side of the truss (mentioned above) indicate a functional distinction between the bays *ab initio*: the bay to the N of the truss seems never to have been part of the open hall. It is possible that the house was open to the roof throughout its length when first built (as a number of



medieval farmhouses in Somerset are known to have been<sup>3</sup>), in which case there would merely have been an inner room beyond a low partition at the N end of the hall, rather than a first-floor solar. Truss T3 would then have been infilled when a solar was subsequently inserted.

The 'service' would presumably have been at the opposite end of the house, on the S side of the entry, although there are no medieval features, either surviving or deducible, in this part of the building. The lower end of the house remains unheated, and it may be surmised that there was originally a detached kitchen and that the room immediately to the N of the entry became the kitchen in the post-medieval period.

#### *Post-medieval development*

The medieval hall was eventually ceiled in, but the fact that there is a difference in first-floor level on either side (N & S) of the inserted central stack, suggests that the insertion of the upper floor occurred in stages. The contrasting chamfer stops and joints in the beams over the ground-floor hall and the larger of the two inner rooms suggest, unexpectedly, that the beams over the inner room are later in date than the one accessible beam over the ground-floor hall. The beams over the inner room may represent a late-16th or 17th century replacement of the timbers supporting the presumed medieval first-floor solar, by which time the ceiling-over of the ground-floor hall had already taken place.

The jointed-cruck principals may have been associated with the replacement of the original roof in the S half of the building in the immediate post-medieval period, but their posts are missing and they may not occupy their original positions.

It has been suggested above that the room immediately to the N of the entry may have formed the post-medieval kitchen, and the fact that the lower end of the house remains unheated suggests post-medieval use as a dairy or for some other ancillary purpose. There is no visible evidence to indicate that Garnival's Week was at any stage in its history a 'long house' in which the lower end would have been a cattle byre.

Outshuts were frequently added to Somerset farmhouses in the 17th century, but the outshut at Garnival's Week has undergone extensive recent alterations and there are no visible features which might confirm such a date.

#### CONCLUSION

Garnival's Week is clearly a medieval hall-house in origin, although its precise overall plan is uncertain. Its outstanding features are the base-cruck and aisle trusses in the N half of the building, although both are incomplete and their exact original form is uncertain. Base-cruck roofs occur infrequently in Somerset and those which have been recorded are associated with buildings of some status.<sup>4</sup> The overall appearance of Garnival's Week today is that of a vernacular farmhouse (albeit much altered) but there is historical evidence that its status was once higher.

#### HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Although the Department of the Environment description of this listed building (which makes no mention of a base-cruck roof) states that 'the estate' is mentioned in Domesday Book, there appears to be no basis for this claim. In 1235–6, however, a Gilbert de *Germunvill* held a messuage, 4 ferlings of land and an acre of meadow in Milverton,<sup>5</sup> and in 1305–6 William de Pleynefeld acknowledged the right of John, son of Henry and Joan de *Gernevil*, to a messuage, a carucate of land, ten acres of meadow, five acres of moor and 50

shillings rent in Wyke (N.B.) and Milverton.<sup>6</sup> The 'moor' may be a reference to Weekmoor.

Subsequent references to John suggest that a long-standing dispute developed between him and a Roger atte Wodelond (assuming that the same individuals are involved in each case). In 1327 John de Gerneville alleged that several individuals, including Roger atte Wodelond, had carried away his goods at Milverton;<sup>7</sup> and in 1331–2, when William atte Rigge acknowledged the right of Roger de Wodlonde to 22 acres in Milverton in return for a payment of 30 marks of silver, the record is endorsed 'John de Gernvile put in his claim'.<sup>8</sup> In 1336 John Gerneville, together with Walter and Henry Gerneville and others, allegedly assaulted Roger de Wodelond in Milverton and attacked his house in Langford Budville, driving away 100 of his sheep and carrying away his goods;<sup>9</sup> and a Roger de la Wodelonde was described in 1337 as one of the county escheators and stated to have been *killed* in Milverton.<sup>10</sup>

Roger de la Wodelonde's death did not end John de Gerneville's problems (assuming once again that the same person is referred to), for in 1347 John Gerneville complained that several individuals, including Robert the vicar of Milverton, Valentine Gerneville and others whose surnames included de Hundesmore (Houndsmoor in Milverton parish), Chippele (Chiple in Nynhead parish) and Torel (*cf.* Torrel's Preston in Milverton parish), 'broke his close and houses at Milverton, assaulted him so that his life was despaired of, drove away a horse, 2 mares, 40 oxen and 29 swine, worth £40, and carried away his goods'.<sup>11</sup> The claimed value of Gerneville's livestock, together with the reference to houses, indicates that he was a man of some substance.

The name Gerneville has become permanently attached to the property at Wyke or Week, albeit with modified spelling, but the family had ceased to hold the property by the mid 15th century, when the Warres of Hestercombe held it. According to a paper on the Warre family,<sup>12</sup> Robert Warre (d.1465) and Richard Warre (d.1485) married, respectively, Christine Soror and Joanna Sturton who brought to the Warres various properties which included 'Greywilliswyke'. Christine or Christian was in fact the sister ('soror') of Richard Hangford or Hankford, and her husband died in possession of Gernevyleswike (otherwise Greynvyleswike or Grenvyleswike).<sup>13</sup> It was not Christian, however, who brought the property to the Warres, for the manor of Gerneviliswike had been held by John Warre, Robert's father, to whom the property had been transferred by a group of men, including Sir John Stourton.<sup>14</sup> The group may have exercised some form of trusteeship, however, for another property transferred by them to John Warre was the manor of Hestercombe,<sup>15</sup> which the Warres had held since the 14th century.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore uncertain exactly when and how the Warres first acquired Gerneviliswike.

Joanna or Joan Warre outlived her husband Richard (who evidently died in 1482–3, when his property included Greynvyleswike or Grenvilleswike, held from Cecily, Duchess of York<sup>17</sup>) and at the time of her death in July 1499 she held the manor of Gerneviliswike, worth £3 in income, from Elizabeth, Henry VII's queen.<sup>18</sup> Richard had died without issue, and after Joanna had held the property during her widowhood it reverted to the Warre male line in the person of her husband's cousin, another Richard, whose property included Garnevyleswyke at the time of his death in 1542.<sup>19</sup> Manor court records for Garnivelswyke survive from 1508–41,<sup>20</sup> confirming that the property had achieved manorial status, and there are further references to the property as a manor during the 16th century.<sup>21</sup>

The felling date of the early spring of 1287 provided by dendrochronology<sup>22</sup> for some of the timber of the base cruck roof of Garnival's Week suggests that a member of the Gernevil family may well have been responsible for its construction; and the documentary evidence suggests that the house may have been a small manor house or at least the capital message of a small estate which eventually achieved manorial status. The felling date also means that the roof is an early example of its kind, since base cruck roofs appear to range in date from the late 13th century to the 15th century.<sup>23</sup>

The social status of base-cruck halls seems to have varied in different areas of the country,<sup>24</sup> but if they are generally regarded as prestigious features (as in the case of those recorded by Williams and Gilson), this particular example seems to fit the pattern. The Gernevils were evidently either members of the lower fringes of the gentry or aspiring to enter that class (whilst the surname itself suggests that the family did not come from Anglo-Saxon peasant stock) and the property which bore their name had become a manor by the mid-15th century if not before. This is consistent with the views of Alcock and Barley<sup>25</sup> that base-cruck houses were mainly associated with the gentry, but that some with narrower halls (the c.21 ft [6.4 m] span at Garnival's Week seems to be relatively narrow for a base-cruck building) were probably built for aspiring members of the peasantry.

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- 14 S.R.O., DD/SAS FA 73.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 S.R.O., DD/SAS FA 130.
- 17 S.R.O., DD/SAS FA 134. 'Grenvilleswike' occurs in Collinson, *op. cit.*, **III**, 261.
- 18 S.R.O., DD/SAS FA 73. This 17th-century transcription of the full IPM indicates that the year of the inquisition was 1499, whereas the printed summary of the IPM gives the year as 1500.
- 19 S.R.O., DD/SAS FA 134. Collinson's version of the place-name on this occasion is Grenevyleswick (*op. cit.*, **III**, 261).
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- 25 As note 2.  
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