SHORTER PAPERS

10 LOAD LANE, WESTONZOYLAND
NGR ST 34870 34665 HER NO. 13885

CHERYL GREEN
with contributions by Dave Taylor, and illustrations by Tara Fairclough

Context One Heritage and Archaeology carried out a programme of historic building recording prior to and during demolition of a Grade II Listed farmhouse (Historic England Listed Building reference 1060100). The controlled dismantling provided the opportunity to record extensive details of the historic fabric that had previously been concealed within an early 19th-century shell. The recording confirmed that the 'earlier core' described in the listed building entry was early post medieval, enabling key questions to be addressed relating to form, construction and joinery techniques (Fig. 1)

The farmhouse frame was a jointed cruck of three trusses, the end of the purlins embedded in the cob of the gable ends (Fig. 2). Side-pegged long-tenons (Fig. 3) joined the collared principal rafters and main post, the tenoned apex with ridge-piece held in a V-notch (Fig. 4). According to roof apex-type classification, this equates to type E (Alcock 1981; McDermott 2005, 95), the most common apex type for jointed crucks, and also recorded for the Sedgemoor Inn (Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) Report, February 1973). The thatched roof (which was partially *in situ* beneath the modern roof) was supported on three rows of trenched purlins, the lengths joined by splayed scarfs and some more crudely executed dovetails, below pegged common rafters (Fig. 4). The frame was infilled with cob above a wooden sill resting on a blue lias plinth, the thick south-western cob gable wall incorporating a chimney and re-faced during the Victorian period in brick. The north-east gable was rebuilt in 2006 following the partial collapse of the cob.

The ground floor plan typifies post-medieval

Fig. 1 Rear elevation showing original frame and cob gable (2 x 1m scales; looking SE)

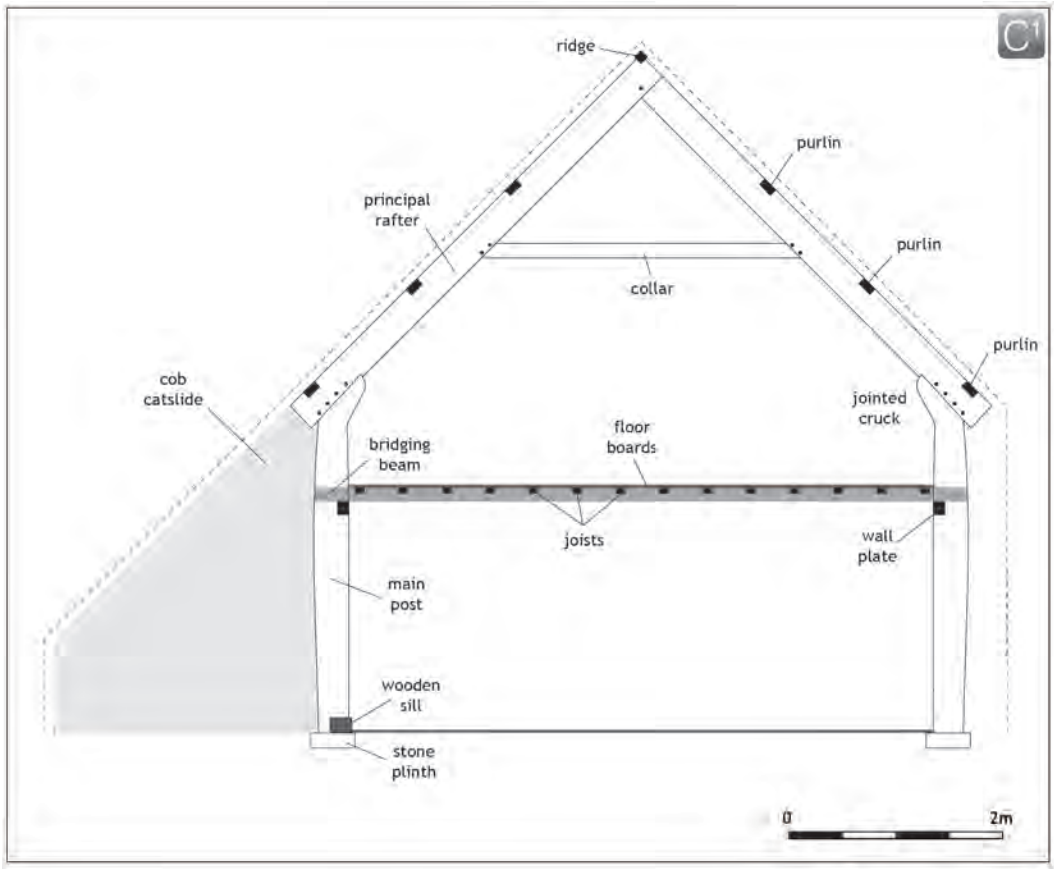

Fig. 2 Schematic reconstruction - cross-section

Fig. 3 Side-pegged long-tenon joint of Truss 2 following removal

Fig. 4 Truss 1 and 2 with collars, and purlin with splayed scarf joint and dovetail joint (looking SE)

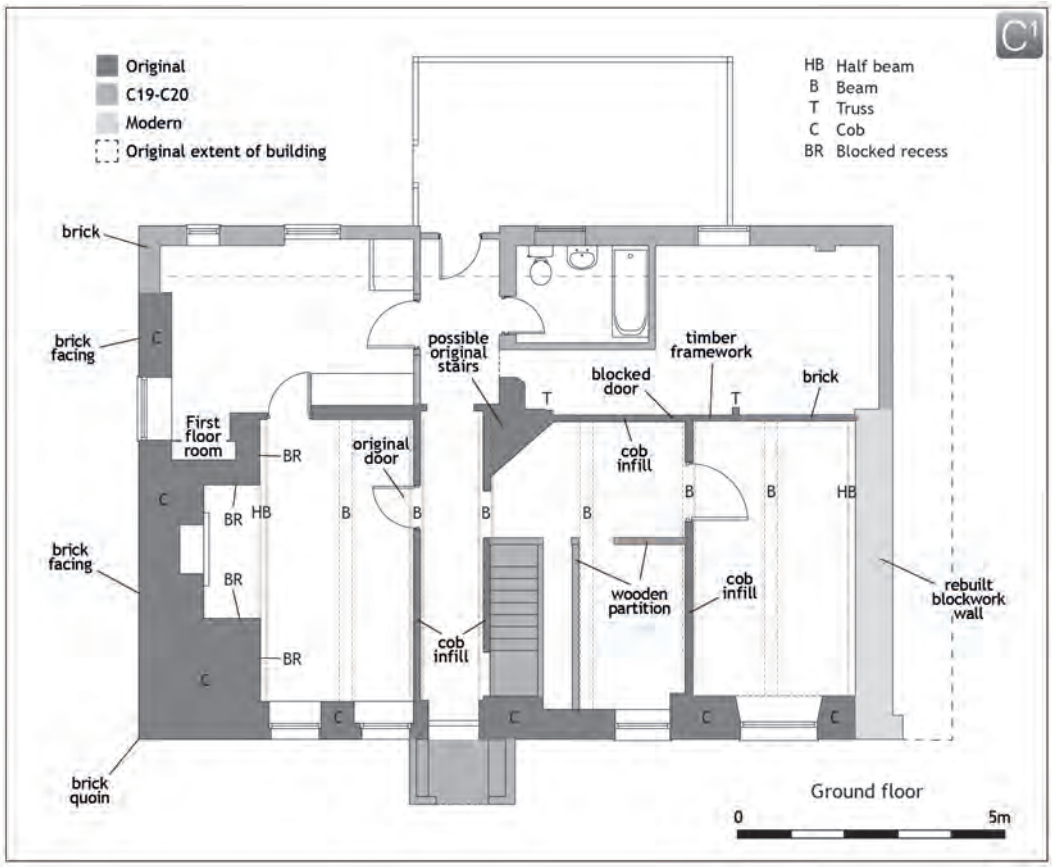

Fig. 5 Schematic reconstruction – phased ground floor plan

farmhouses, the cross-passage arrangement pre-dating the 18th century, when symmetrical, double-pile plans became the norm. It consists of three in-line rooms of kitchen with fireplace (south-western end), cross-passage, hall and inner room, and three chambers above used for sleeping and farm storage (Fig. 5). The first floor was supported on bridging beams with steep chamfers and square stops (not run outs) (Fig. 6), including half-beams at either end, the latter being closely dateable to the late 16th to early 17th century (*pers. comm.* Dave Taylor). The presence of these beams through the full length of the farmhouse suggests a single construction date. The kitchen fireplace bressumer also had steep chamfers and square stops identical to the bridging beams. On either side of the fireplace, facing into the room, were a pair of blocked recesses with another two bricked-up recesses on the side walls of the fireplace. These relate to the multi-purpose function of the fireplace, with chest-height ovens for baking and other culinary activities.

Fig. 6 Bridging beam showing steep chamfers and square stop

The rear elevation was encased in an early 19th-century extension beneath a catslide roof, further extended by a 20th-century conservatory. However, the gable walls possibly delineate an original catslide

roof suggesting an outshot, a blocked doorway with dovetail joints providing access from the central hall. The outshot may have accommodated stairs to a small first-floor room at the south-western end alongside the chimney, providing access through a small wooden door (concealed behind later reed and plaster walling) to the first-floor chambers (Fig. 7). Alternatively, the presence of some light sooting within this small room and what appears to be a draught-tunnel may perhaps indicate a drying room for hanging meat, a practice identified in the West Country in the early 17th century (Brears 2015, 103). The presence of this small room on one side of the chimney is reminiscent of a smoke-hood arrangement, in which case the ground-floor fireplace would have been a later reconstruction. In this scenario, the stairs would have been located elsewhere, perhaps within the hall adjacent to the cross-passage.

Later alterations included additional upright supports to the lower purlins, and the insertion of a first-floor wall lining and ceiling comprising reed and plaster constructed against wooden studs fixed to the common rafters. This reduced the width of the rooms, creating a void in the eaves between the studwork and the outer wall. The insertion of the ceiling closed off the roof, which originally would have been open to the timber frame. There were no redundant mortices on the underside of the purlins to indicate wind bracing, however the massive chimney would have provided sufficient stiffening for the building (*pers comm.* Dave Taylor). Two plaster partitions in the roof space correspond with the room partitions below and might be original, employing the same dovetail joints for the timber framework as used for some of the other joints; the plaster abutted the inside of the common rafters, but encased the purlins. Carpenter's marks and setting out lines were observed on some of the timbers, the reference faces positioned away from the chimney and the first truss marked with a 'I' (*pers comm.* Dave Taylor).

The jointed cruck construction with original first floor and chimney, together with other closely dateable features, indicate a late 16th- to early 17th-century build for 10 Load Lane, with possible 17th-century adaptions. This pushes the use of jointed crucks towards the end of their known employment in Somerset, with the Somerset dendrochronology project placing most jointed cruck structures within the 15th century (McDermott 2005, 92). Replacing the open halls of the previous centuries, it exemplifies the transition towards greater comfort and privacy, something that began to be seen from the mid 16th century. Alternatively, the building was erected in the 17th century, explaining some crudely executed later carpentry techniques, but re-using a jointed cruck frame from an earlier building. Nevertheless, the absence of smoke-blackening on the roof timbers reinforces the likelihood that the

Fig. 7 Rear showing small room with door alongside cob chimney, cob gable wall, additional supports to lower purlin, and later first floor internal stud wall of reed and plaster (looking E)

building always had an integral fireplace as opposed to originating as an open hall or single-storey open-roof house, thus reinforcing a post- mid-16th-century date (Penoyre 2005, 31). The former manor house at Weston Court Farmhouse, Westonzoyland, was also a jointed cruck construction but with no evidence of smoke-blackening, and with ceiling beams and a large fireplace in one gable (VAG Report, September 1976). Perhaps this was built in a similar local tradition, although the carpentry does differ slightly. The long tenon cruck joints of Load Lane are reminiscent of truss 3 at the Mount, Dowlish Wake, dated by dendrochronology to 1591 (*pers. comm.* Dave Taylor). Most of the records held by the Vernacular Architecture Group show dovetail joints occurring in the 17th century (*pers. comm.* Dave Taylor), although they are also recorded for the jointed cruck roof of the Sedgemoor Inn which originally was open to the roof and earlier in date (VAG Report, February 1973). The dovetails might suggest a 17th-century date for the building, although the elements utilizing this technique could represent early modifications; if so, this would encompass the door to the outshot, the internal partitions within the roof, and two purlins. Alternatively, the timber frame may have been re-used or modified in the 17th century, which might also explain the difference in the quality of workmanship between the splayed scarfs and the dovetails, along with some inconsistencies in the presence of carpenters' marks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Dave Taylor of the Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group for his invaluable observations and comments on the assessment report. We would also like to thank the following for their contribution to the successful completion of this project: Ian Tyers (Dendrochronological Consultant), Chris Webster (Somerset Historic Environment Record, South West Heritage Trust), Charlotte Westwood (Conservation Officer, Sedgemoor District Council), and members of the Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group (Tony Beresford, John Rickard and Denny Robbins).

REFERENCES

Alcock, N. W., 1981. *Cruck Catalogue*, London: CBA Research Report 42.

Brears, P., 2015. 'Boiling Furnaces, Smoking Chambers and Malt Kilns in West Country Households', in J. Allan, N. W. Alcock and D. Dawson (eds), *West Country Households, 1500-1700*, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 99-114.

McDermott, M., 2005. 'The Somerset Dendrochronology Project: Phases 5 and 6', *SANH* 148, 89-96.

Penoyre, J., 2005. *Traditional Houses of Somerset*. Taunton: Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group (reprinted 2014).

VAG February 1973. *Sedgemoor Inn*. VAG Report.

VAG February/September 1976. *Report by E.H.D. Williams – An Outbuilding at Court Farm*. VAG Report.