

HILL FARM, KINGSTON ST MARY

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest identified written evidence referring to this house by name is the land tax register of 1782 which lists 'Hill' as being occupied by Thomas Cogan who paid £3 18s 0d tax (SRO 1). An earlier land tax register of 1767 names his father John Cogan with a tax due of £2 10s 6d, but does not name the property to which this relates. A further document dated 18 March 1797 states that 'Hill' was purchased by Thomas Cogan from John Camplin, a Doctor of Divinity in the city of Bristol, the second son of Thomas Camplin, a coal merchant (SRO 2). Both families had an association with the church at Kingston St Mary. Thomas Cogan was a churchwarden and his name appears on the base of the chandelier which was put up at the expense of the parish in 1773. Richard Camplin was vicar of St Mary from 1662 and in 1669 was succeeded by his son Thomas Camplin who was vicar until 1716. A fine marble monument in the church records his incumbency of 48 years until his death aged 71 years.

The house remained in the Cogan family until it was sold by Frederick Cogan in 1863. Other members of the family occupied nearby properties at Yarford, Tanyard Farm and Westhay Cottage. The property was bought by William Bucknell who may have been responsible for a 'West wing' which has since been demolished. After 1909, the house was occupied by William Cann Evans until 1913. The sale documents from this date refer to recent alterations in the North wing including 'a fitted bathroom and modern sanitary arrangements'. Other rooms are recognisable and as well as the baking oven in the kitchen a chamber for smoking bacon is mentioned.

The farmhouse continued in occupation until 1986, but then lay empty until the recent renovation works. The kind co-operation of the owner, and renovation and repair works being carried out, have provided the opportunity to make a recording of the property.

INTRODUCTION

The farmhouse has as its core a medieval three-room hall-house with cross-passage (Fig. 1). It stands in a prominent position above the village. The walls are of rubble sandstone and cob with brickwork buttresses, the buttresses indicating continuing structural problems. The building was in a very poor condition having been empty for a number of years.

A substantial amount of the original structure remains including ridge purlin and intermediate purlin and three smoke-blackened jointed cruck trusses (JC1, JC2 and JC3), one of which is associated with an internal timber-framed wall with wattle and daub infill. There is evidence of a further missing end truss and of wind bracing. The property has been upgraded and

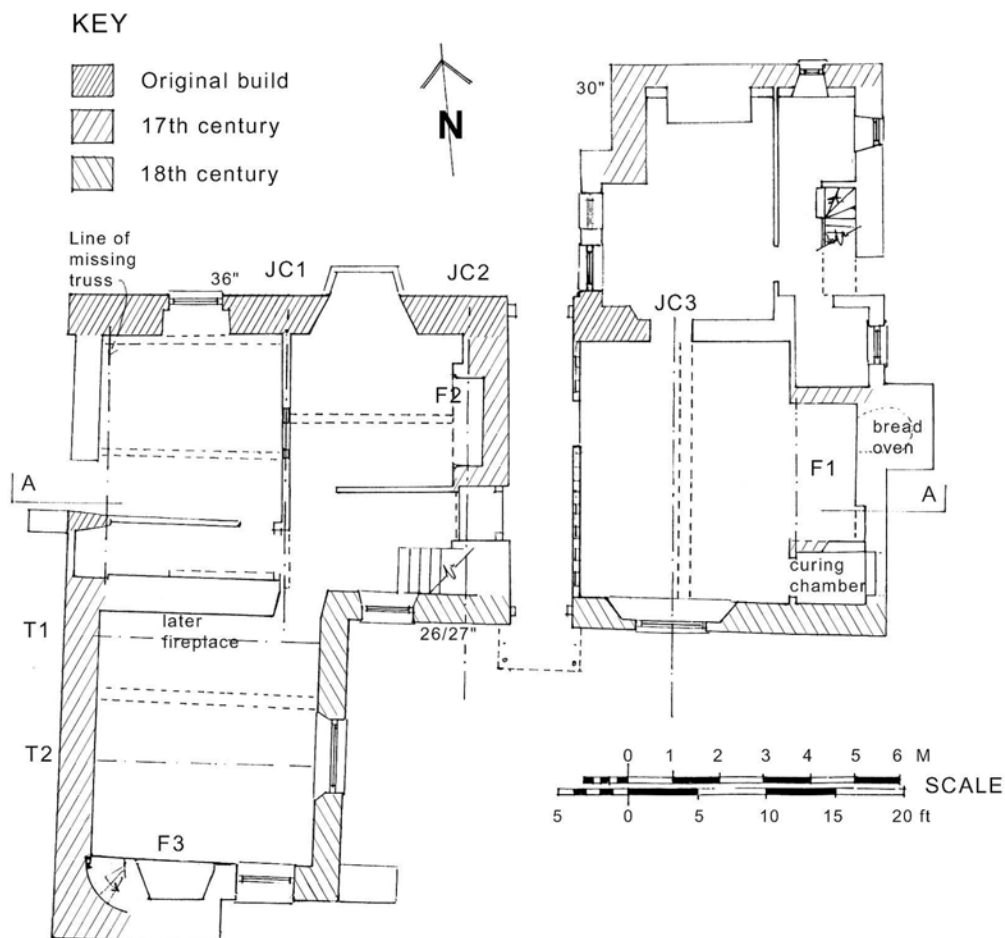


Fig. 1 Ground floor plan

enlarged in different phases and in the early 18th century a shell hood porch was added and walls raised to alter the proportions and the internal height of rooms.

PHASE 1

The main features of the original roof frame were visible during repair works, although it was in poor structural condition. The purlins run from the gable wall at the 'high' (west) end and through to JC3 although they are jointed above JC2 with scarf joints (Fig. 2). There are mortices cut in the purlins, which show that there was another truss originally at the gable wall, but set in from it where it is believed that the wall was rebuilt with stone, replacing earlier cob construction.

Remains of three cruck trusses with evidence of heavy smoke blackening and empty mortices for wind bracing suggest an early date for these frames which continued in use, the later roof being propped from the original ridge. The span of the trusses where most intact at JC1 is 18'0" (5.485m).

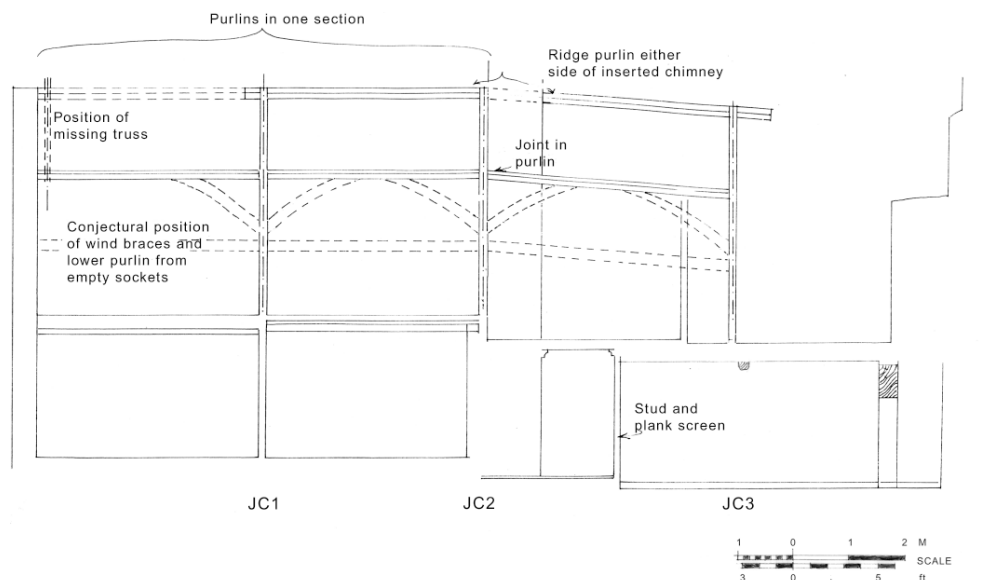


Fig. 2 Longitudinal section A-A showing original structure

The eaves level joint of JC1 shows a side-pegged jointed cruck detail (Fig. 4). JC1 shows smoke blackening on the hall side but not on the inner room side suggesting a smoke free solar. Within this closed truss, the wattle and daub partition is also smoke blackened on the hall side above first floor ceiling level but not below so it may have been decorated or covered on the hall side up to this level. The other face to the inner room was unblackened and there were slight signs of smoke 'leakage' at eaves level. The frame for this partition has been partly exposed to show a heavy upright 12" x 4" (305 x 102mm) which corresponds with a similar upright down to ground floor level. A door opening was inserted at first floor level probably when the hall was ceiled over.

The purlins are trenched and the ridge purlin is diagonally set in a tenoned apex. Second truss JC2 has additional remains of a cusped arch-brace. Most of this truss was cut away for the inserted chimney and there is extensive damage from woodworm attack (Fig. 3). The bays are unusually long and of uneven length, being 13'0" (3.96m) at the high end and 15'0" (4.57m) between JC2 and JC3. JC3 appears to be complete with collar under finishes at the south end but the north end of the cruck has been cut back for later alterations. This frame is smoke blackened on both sides as is the ridge purlin, which stops halfway across the upper room at the service end.

The Somerset Dendochronology Project suggests a phase between 1391–1533 for the use of jointed cruck frames (Penoyre 1999, 311–15). It is assumed that the cob wall at the north of the original roof structure is coeval with the trusses and that all walls were originally of cob with the uprights to the trusses buried in the walls.

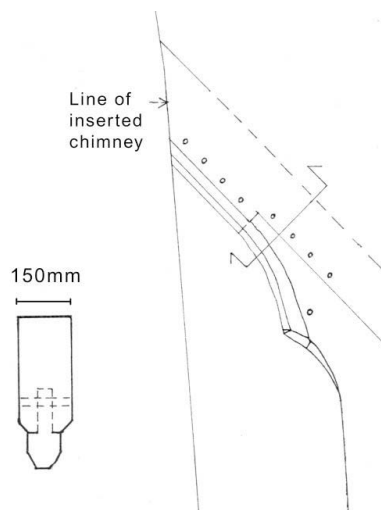


Fig. 3 Detail of JC2

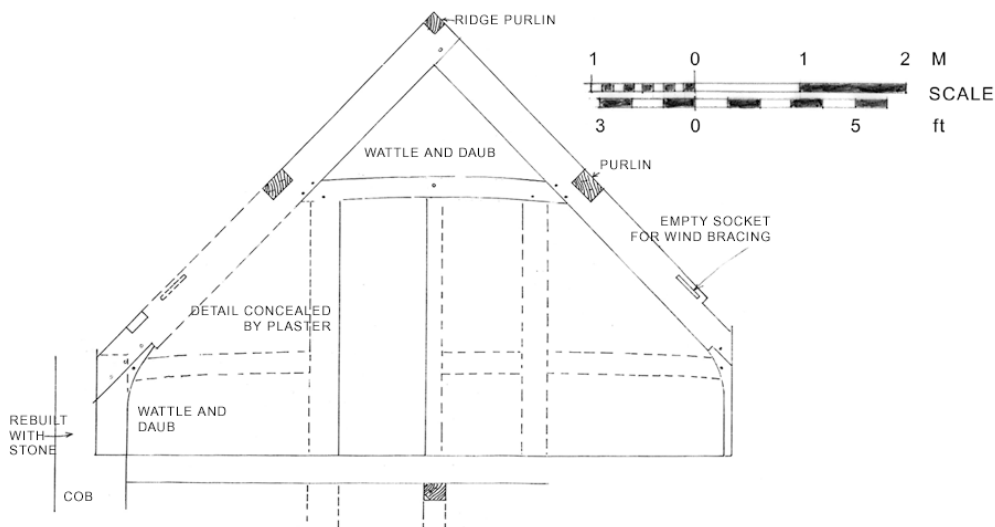


Fig. 4 Detail of JC1 from the west

There are similar jointed cruck roofs with diagonal set ridge nearby at Quantock Cottage, Kingston St Mary, and the Dairy House, Staplegrove (Williams 1987). On the recording of Quantock Cottage, it is noted that 'Unless another jointed cruck ... has been removed, the bay length would be exceptionally long'.

PHASE 2 SIXTEENTH/SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The position of the inserted hall stack backing onto the cross-passage is typical for this district. Under the stairs adjacent is evidence of an earlier winding stair, which would be a common position for a staircase associated with the inserted stack. At the service end of the main range, the earlier line of the original roof is visible in the gable stonework. The beam across the fireplace opening here is very large at 12" wide by 24" deep (305 x 610mm) with a plain chamfer; it appears to have been cut to provide the current access to the curing chamber. Its size may indicate a smoke bay, which would date from around the late 15th to early 16th century. The curing chamber to the right of the stack appears to be associated with an early fireplace opening, which was c. 10' wide and for which the chamfered stone quoins remain. The service room is separated from the cross-passage by a stud and plank screen, which has recently been uncovered.

At the upper end of the house, one beam and a half at the wall support the first floor solar. These have step and run out stops and may be related to a change of use when the cross-wing parlour extension was built. The chamfers stop short of the outside wall which appears to have been originally thicker and probably of cob as is the north wall, in which case the stops would be in the usual position. The solar above has a small stone fireplace set into the wall against the south wing.

The cross-wing parlour to the south has timber beams indicating a former framed ceiling within the floor void. From what could be seen, these are 12" x 12" (305mm) with an 11" deep chamfer. There is a very large chimney stack at the gable with the ground floor stone surround fireplace intact and a plain chamfer to the surround. The details suggest a 17th-century date. Beside it, a spiral staircase was discovered with very little wear, indicating early alterations. Above this staircase is a pigeon loft set in the stonework with a small access from the first

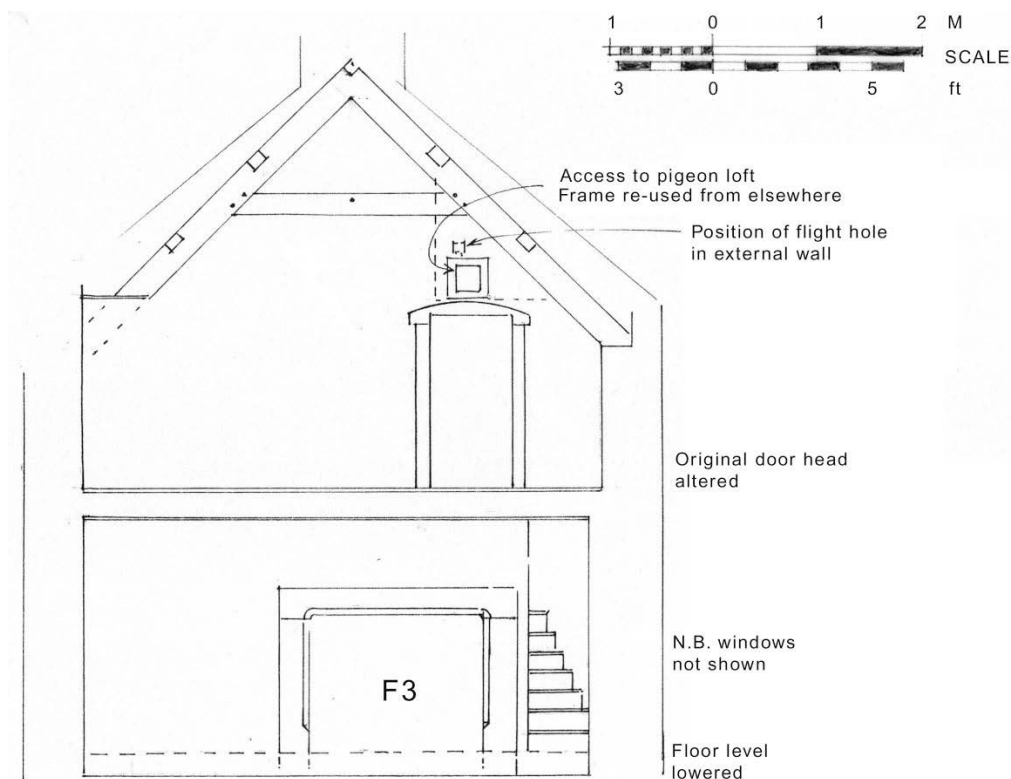


Fig. 5 Gable wall of south wing parlour

floor. No similar feature has, as far as is known, been recorded in this area, although a large columbarium in Compton Martin church is known (McCann *et al.* 2001, 133–9). What sounds to be a similar pigeon loft to this one has been recorded at Knabb's Hall, near Barnsley, Yorkshire (Hansell and Hansell 1988, 163–4).

A small angled opening in the external wall allowed access for the pigeons. Nine nesting boxes are set into the chimney stack in three tiers and other nesting boxes are tucked under openings and to the right-hand side. The internal access to the loft was through a very small opening (apparently a reused window frame) and was covered by a door from a solid piece of timber, which was found intact under the plaster (Fig. 5). The pigeon loft appears to be original to this wing of the house, being shaped out of the gable stonework.

In the ground floor, the floor level was lowered when the room in its current form was set out (early 18th century). The spiral staircase is assumed to have been blocked up at the same time.

In the first floor 'chamber' the roof structure was altered when larger windows were inserted. Two trusses with collars remain of the earlier roof structure with a height which seems to match that of the original cruck frame. The roof had a diagonal set ridge with tenoned apex and trencled purlins similar to the original roof.

PHASE 3 EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The listing mentions the shell porch as being similar to one at the Manor, Kingston St Mary, and this has been confirmed as well as the presence of moulded ceilings at the manor similar

to that in the south parlour of Hill Farm (N. Pearce pers comm). The shell hood at Hill Farm was originally supported on decorated brackets, but when these proved insufficient, turned timber posts were inserted and also twisted metalwork supports. There is another similar shell hood at Taunton Castle, which has apparently been dated to 1680. It seems likely that the eaves height was raised at this time to improve the proportions when the shell hood was added. Floors may have been lowered at the same time.

PHASE 4 NINETEENTH CENTURY

The north wing has a later roof structure and the layout seems to confirm a 19th or early 20th-century date. However, the gable wall appears to have been raised from an earlier level which would again tie in with the cruck-framed roof of the main range. Because of later alterations and lack of detail, it is difficult to draw any conclusions although there is historical evidence that some updating work was carried out in 1913.

OTHER FEATURES

Within the service room there was an area of panelling 11' long against the cross-passage wall. It has a simple scratch-stock moulding and pegged joints. Examples of scratch-stock mouldings on spice cupboards, doors and panelling 'can be found throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries' (Alcock and Hall 1994, 14–17). There is an external ledged and braced door of large sections with planted mouldings. These could have been added later or it might have been an early attempt to give the appearance of a panelled door giving it a probable date of c. 1700.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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