

BACON CURING CHAMBERS—SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES

BY COMMANDER E. H. D. WILLIAMS

Since the publication of 'Curing Chambers and Domestic Corn Drying Kilns' in 1976,¹ the existence of the type 1 chambers assumed therein has been confirmed by a discovery at *Manor Farm, Templecombe* (ST 710220). Two other chambers at *Pendyn, Nailbourne, Kingston St. Mary* (ST 215285)² and at *Durrett's Farmhouse, Broomfield* (ST 236338)³ are of a type not previously known, incorporating some features of both types 1 and 2 yet differing from both in other respects. A further most unusual feature at Durrett's Farmhouse is the existence of two chambers in one house, there being one in the hall fireplace as well as the kitchen fireplace. Both fireplaces are insertions in a medieval open-hall house.

MANOR FARM, TEMPLECOMBE. Within an outbuilding, which in other respects is of the 17th century as is the present house, there remains a full-width smoke bay; in the stone front of this, which is supported on a massive timber lintel, is a door at first floor level opening into one side of the smoke bay (Fig. 1). This can have served no other purpose than to give access for hanging bacon in the base of the stack for smoking. The building stands on the site of the Knights Templars' Preceptory.

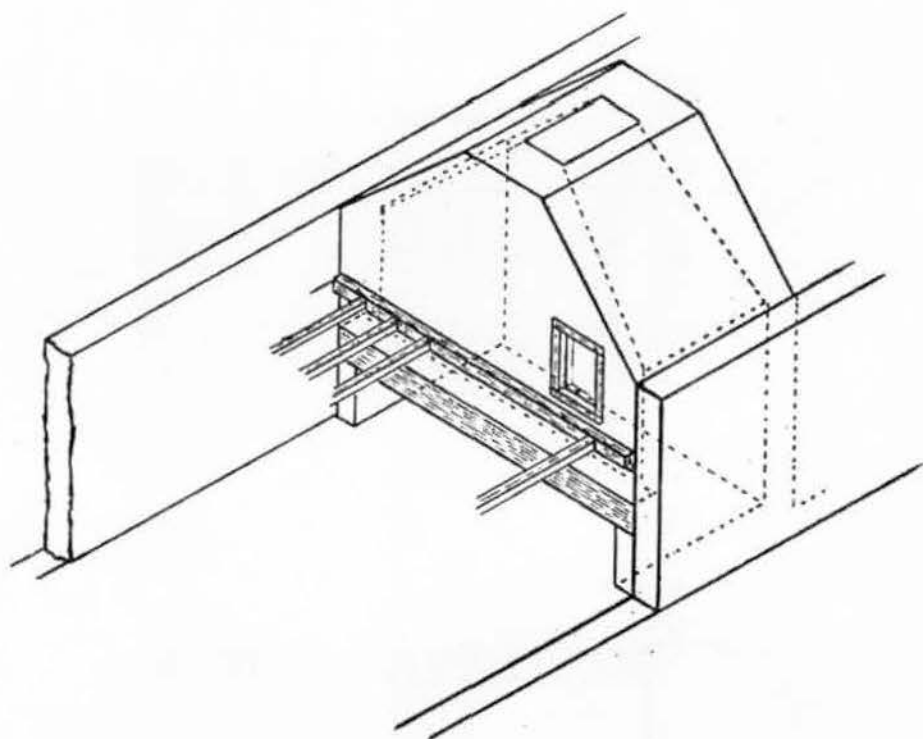


Fig. 1. Manor Farm, Templecombe. Cutaway isometric view of smoke bay with access door at first floor. Type 1 curing chamber.

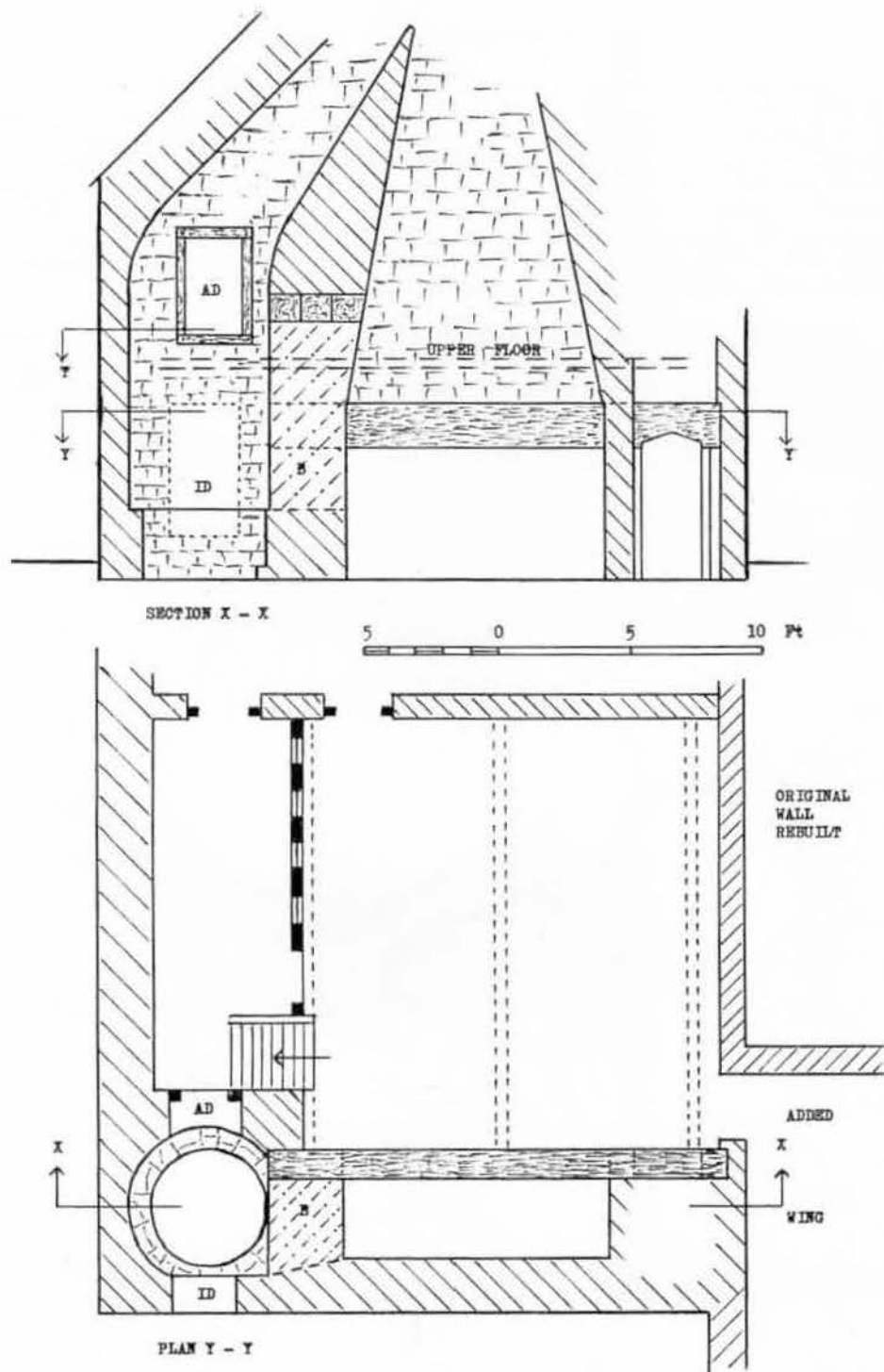


Fig. 2. Pendyn, Nailsbourne, Kingston St. Mary. Plan and elevation of type 2A curing chamber.

PENDYN, NAILSBOURNE, KINGSTON ST. MARY. The house as it now stands consists of the service end and the cross passage, all that survives of a standard three room and cross passage sub-medieval jointed-cruck house, to which a later wing has been added. Beside the kitchen fireplace is a circular chamber enclosed from the room but once open to the hearth. As shown in Fig. 2 there is a door (AD) at first floor level into the chamber; the external door (ID) is a recent insertion subsequent to the abandonment of the chamber for curing when it was shut off from the hearth by the blocking (B) and became a log store. Above the hanging area a separate tapering flue leads up to the top of the main stack.

The service end is unusual in having been divided axially by a stud and panel screen into a large room, the kitchen, and a smaller room, a pantry or dairy(?). A similar division existed at *Godfrey's, Adsborough, Crech St. Michael (ST 276293)*, both rooms having been entered by separate doors from the cross passage, as at Pendyn. At *Godfrey's* there is now a large recess beside the fireplace open to the room and featureless, but by analogy with Pendyn this was probably also a bacon chamber in view of the exact similarity of layout. The structure of the wall between the recess and the fireplace is hidden by plaster and by a later smaller inserted fireplace; on the first floor is a similar plain recess.

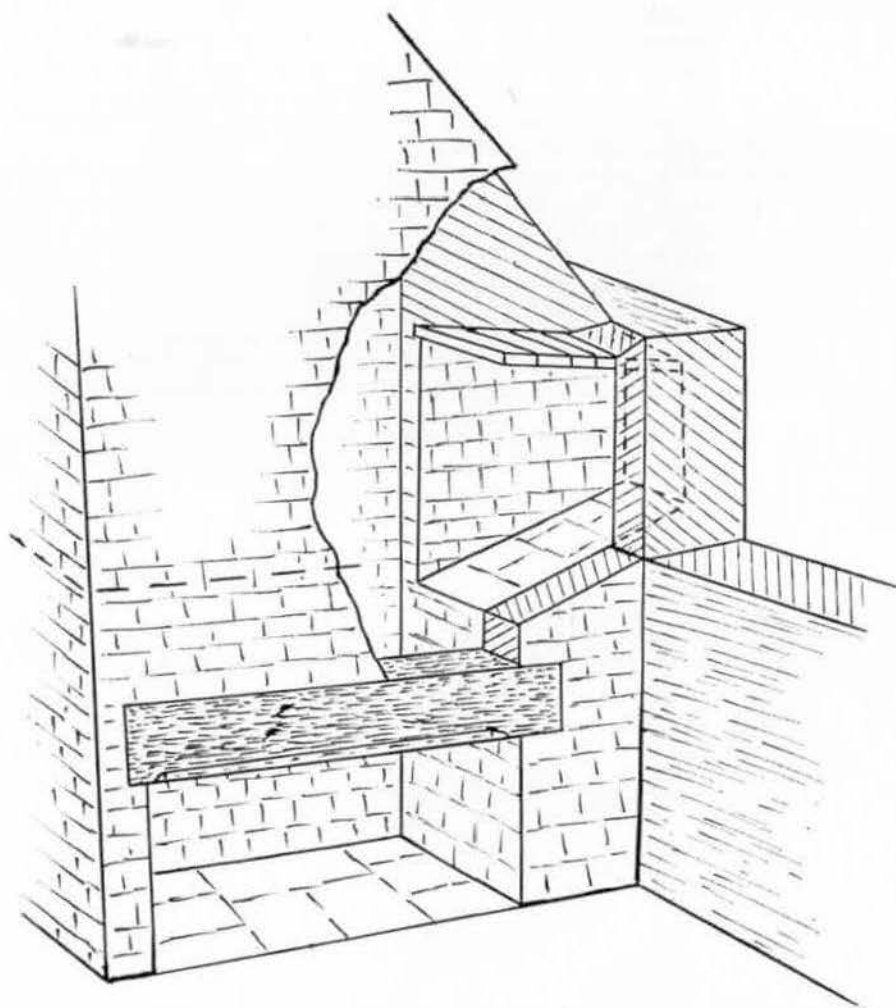


Fig. 3. Cutaway perspective view of the smoking recess in the hall stack at Durrett's Farmhouse, Broomfield.

DURRETT'S FARMHOUSE, BROOMFIELD. Beside the kitchen fireplace is a circular chamber which had a first floor access door (now blocked) and has a separate flue as at Pendyn. In addition to being open to the hearth it is now also open to the room, but the latter is due to alterations when a cupboard (recently removed by the present owner) was built within the chamber.

In the side of the hall fireplace at 5 ft. 2 inches above the hearth is a rectangular recess 4 ft. 9 in. high at the front, with a sloping base and top, and 4 ft. 2 in. deep. The base is of stone and the top consists of wooden baulks in which hooks remain in situ (Fig. 3). Besides being the only known instance of a second chamber in a house the chamber is (so far) unique in its layout and in principle it is similar to the 'lofts' found in Surrey.

At WISTERIA COTTAGE, NORTH STREET, BRADFORD ABBAS (ST 588145) in Dorset, R. Machin has drawn attention to a chamber which although now much altered would seem to have been similar to those at Pendyn and Durrett's Farmhouse. The wooden lintel of the kitchen fireplace (which is an insertion of c.1600 in an open-hall late-medieval house) continues over the front of a 4ft 6 in. diameter recess at the right hand side. The division from the fireplace has recently been rebuilt in stone replacing brick which undoubtedly blocked an original opening to the hearth. The insertion of these bricks had replaced a wooden post below the lintel, evidenced by two pegs of a mortice-and-tenon joint in the latter. The lintel has rounded step and run-out stops to a plain chamfer at the left-hand jamb and where the post has been removed; beyond that to the right the crudely-formed chamfer with plain run-outs has been cut on an originally unchamfered continuation of the lintel, and the recess was thus initially enclosed from the room.

The upper part of the recess above the first floor, in which the owner found hooks in situ, is now divided off by inserted boards to form a cupboard; the door and door-frame to the cupboard were smoke blackened, as was the recess, and were clearly the original access to the chamber. Although not now visible, the owner states there was a wooden baulk above the opening to the hearth and it thus seems probable that the chamber had a flue independent of the main stack.

This third example of such a type of chamber so far removed from the other two in Somerset indicates that it was not just a local variation of the other more frequently found types, and it thus qualifies for separate identification: type 2A is proposed.

Postscript. Yet a fourth example, to which attention was drawn by P. C. Child, has recently been seen at Lugg's Farmhouse, Membury, Devon (ST 258065), thus indicating a yet wider distribution of this unusual type 2A bacon chamber. Dating evidence is scanty but it seems to be of the mid/late 16th century.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 120 (1976), 57.
2. The chamber at Pendyn was first noted by A. J. Anderson and the plan is based on his survey.
3. Durrett's Farmhouse has been fully recorded by R. G. Gilson who kindly drew my attention to this chamber.