

16 FORE STREET, TAUNTON

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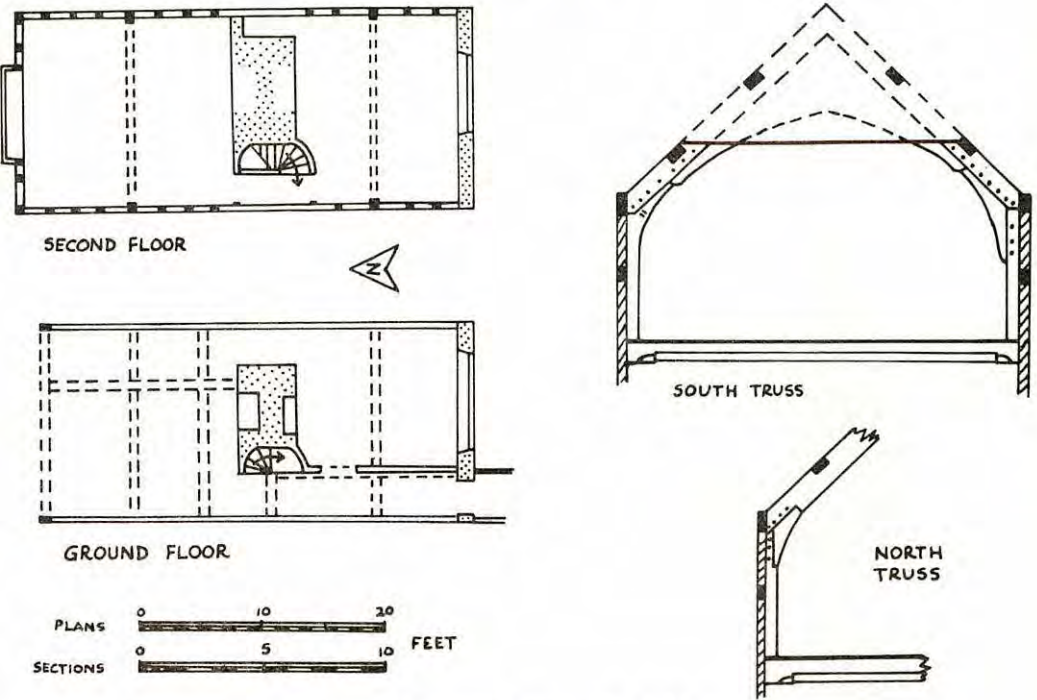
On the southern side of the former market place in Taunton is a small group of timber-framed buildings, of which 16 Fore Street is one of the latest, dating from the middle or the second half of the seventeenth century. Set at right-angles to the road, the building is 16 feet wide and 35 feet long, and three storeys tall, the upper floors being jettied out over the pavement. There are two rooms on each floor, separated by a central brick stack with a staircase to one side of it. On the ground floor there was a passage 4 feet wide which probably ran from front to back of the buildings, giving access to the two ground floor rooms and the staircase. This passage is only preserved in the southern half of the building, and its existence in the northern room can only be assumed; for the present ceiling beams have been re-used and make interpretation difficult. This through passage, which is a common feature of town houses of this date,¹ is continued across the yard at the back by recent passages on both ground and first floors which connect the house to a nineteenth century two-storey kitchen block 17 feet away. This kitchen retains portions of early masonry at the base of its brick walls, and almost certainly represents the original kitchen with galleries connecting it to the house. The south wall has been rebuilt in recent years.

On the first floor each room is spanned by a single ceiling beam, above which rise the roof-trusses of a derived upper-cruck type. The timber framework of the house can be seen on the second floor, where the walls are 6 ft. high. Studs (6 in. \times 4½ in.) rise from bressumer to wall-plate, at 27 in. centres, and a series of short rails of the same scantling, mortised into the sides of the studs, divide the wall into two rows of panels each 30 ins. by 22 ins. The daub filling is laid on horizontal laths sprung in auger holes in the sides of the studs.

Of the two trusses, the northern one is the simpler. Two 10 by 5 in. posts are incorporated in the framework of the wall as if they were studs, but they are set at right-angles to the wall and so project 5 ins. into the room. Their lower ends appear to be mortised into the beam below, while their upper ends are mortised into the lower ends of the 12 by 5 in. principal rafters. A triangular block of wood is mortised into the angle, the posts and rafters being rebated to a depth of 1 in. and 4 ins. respectively to take this brace, and each of the 20 in. long tenons is secured by three pegs.

The southern truss, though clearly contemporary and embodying the same structural concepts, presents a curious contrast. Its two halves are quite dissimilar, only the eastern half resembling the northern truss. The post is set in the wall as in the north truss, but instead of being cut at an angle the top is cut square, while the brace

¹ *Med. Arch.*, 6-7 (1962-3), 202-239. In Taunton this passage can be seen at several houses, including 12, 15, 17 and 18 Fore Street.



16 FORE STREET, TAUNTON: Plans and Roof Diagrams

is not rebated into either post or rafter, and has a sinuous profile. The western post, on the other hand, is the lower member of a conventional jointed cruck, but again is not rebated into the principal rafter as is usual in such structures. Abutting against the upper ends of both brace and cruck-post are the lower cut-back ends of a pair of arch-braces, the rest of the truss being concealed above the modern ceiling. The principal rafters must belong to the same arch-braced collar-beam truss, which accounts for the fact that there are no rebated joints on this truss, and for the different treatment of the top of the posts and the bases of the principal rafters. The cruck-post is a re-used timber, bearing a carpenter's setting-out mark (II), the only one in the whole building, and the remains of the fifteenth or sixteenth century arch-braced collar truss must also be second-hand building material either from the previous building on this site or from a demolished building elsewhere with the same or similar span. As it now stands, the truss is typologically a form of upper cruck, for the whole structure rests on the floor-beam, which therefore acts as a tie-beam as well.

In this context of second-hand timber and rough carpentry, the device of the solid bracket in the angle between post and principal rafter could easily be dismissed as an improvisation by an inventive carpenter. The north truss, however, which appears to have been made from scratch, shows that this device is no accident arising out of circumstances and the material available. This truss is clearly related to, and probably derived from, the jointed cruck of Somerset, Dorset and Devon,² and as a type can be expected to have a similar distribution in those areas, and even beyond in those parts of Wales where the same cruck-derivative is found. At present such bracketed jointed crucks have only been identified in Taunton, Exeter, and near Conway,³ so that generalizations are not possible, but their distribution in space and time suggests that a definite structural tradition is involved. It is possible that a lack of suitable timber can account in part for the development of the jointed cruck from the true cruck, and consequently of the bracketed jointed cruck as well, but the limited distributions of these two types of scarfed cruck suggest that cultural factors such as carpentry traditions must also be taken into account.

² For English false, scarfed or jointed crucks, see for example, the distribution map in *Arch. J.*, **115** (1958), 139; *Proc. Som. A. S.*, **95** (1950), 58-59, and **97** (1952), 79-89; *Tr. Devon Ass.*, **94** (1962), 198 and 222-223; *Antiquity*, **31** (1957), 161; Barley, *English Farmhouse and Cottage*, 166; M. Wood, *English Mediaeval House*, Fig. 70; D. Portman, *Exeter Houses*, Fig. XI., plate 9.

³ 1 and 2 Catherine Street, Exeter: Portman, *Exeter Houses*, 11 and 64, Fig. VII. Upper crucks, though the posts are not thicker than the timber frame wall. The brackets are curved and their upper ends elongated; a mid-fifteenth century date is suggested.

Cymryd, near Conway: Hughes and North, *Old Cottages of Snowdonia*, illustration reproduced in Innocent, *Development of English Building Construction*, 163. Also an open truss, in the form of a raised cruck, the posts being largely concealed in the stone wall. Above the collar are two raking cusped struts, suggesting a date not later than about 1500.