

A Lost Cistercian Barn at Shilton

By P. L. HEYWORTH

IN their exhaustive monograph on the barns of the abbey of Beaulieu,¹ Horn and Born declare that of the estimated two to three thousand Cistercian barns once existing in England, only two certainly remain—those of Great Coxwell, Berkshire, which is intact, and Beaulieu—St. Leonard's, Hampshire, which is ruinous. Both are former granges of Beaulieu. On the evidence of an ink sketch-plan in a scrap-book in the Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, Horn and Born allow the possibility that a third example of a Cistercian barn may have existed substantially intact at Shilton, Oxon, as late as the middle of the nineteenth century.²

That Horn and Born did not attempt to verify their conjecture is presumably explained by a note at the foot of the sketch, in the hand of Waller whose work it was, declaring 'All now destroyed'.³ In fact the barn existed and was still used as a barn until very recently. It escaped recognition because with the loss at some time of its high gabled pitched roof of stone slate and its timber-framed interior, and their replacement by a corrugated iron roof, it also lost the distinctive character of a medieval aisled barn.⁴ But the evidence for its identity is decisive. Although only the shell of the barn remains⁵ the overall measurements are exactly those recorded in Waller's plan and the siting of the door openings is the same. The existence of an original timber-framed interior subdivided lengthwise into a nave and two aisles is confirmed by the survival of two masonry corbels on the inside of the SW gable wall and their disposition is such⁶ as to leave no doubt that they were designed to carry the terminal truss required by the original framing shown in Waller's sketch plan.

¹ Walter Horn and Ernest Born, *The Barns of the Abbey of Beaulieu at its Granges of Great Coxwell & Beaulieu-St. Leonards* (University of California Press, 1965).

² p. 57. The scrap-book (pressmark: Avery AA 2620 Scr 164) contains a collection of about 340 architectural views, mainly of churches dating from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century. They consist chiefly of lithographs, engravings, etc., but there are a few original sketches of which the plan of the Shilton barn and a drawing of Shilton parish church (dated 1848) are two. The collection was compiled and owned by Frederick Sandham Waller (1823-1905). I am grateful to Mr. Adolf Placzek, Avery Librarian, for this information.

³ See PL. IX.

⁴ It was used as a barn until 1970 when the Manor Farm was closed and the land and farm buildings sold off. The barn and adjacent rickyard were purchased by Mr. T. F. Forde who has since converted part of the barn into a dwelling house for his own occupation. I might add that although living directly opposite the farm for several years and seeing the barn whenever I raised my eyes from my desk, I was not persuaded to examine it closely until Waller's plan reproduced in the Beaulieu monograph came to my attention. See PL. XA.

⁵ Most of the details recorded below are no longer visible or even extant, but in describing them I use the present tense as a matter of convenience.

⁶ Centre to centre 16' 4", centres to walls 8' 4" and 7' 5", topsides to floor 11' 8", area of loading platforms 13" x 13"; see PL. XB. The corbels remain *in situ* since only two thirds of the original building was used in the conversion; the SW end remains unmodified.

Local tradition has it that the barn was destroyed by fire.⁷ At any rate, of the timbers little remains. Two of the principal posts which supported the timber framing and divided the interior into nave and aisles survive as lintels for the main doors. One is 13" × 13", the other 14" × 14", and are respectively 13' 8" and 13' 11" long; they display mortises 10" × 3" (cut at right angles) and 9" × 3" (cut at 45°) on the same face of the timber and 17" apart.⁸ These must represent respectively mortises for (i) the tie beam which on the aisle side connects the principal post with the wall plate and (ii) the short strut which rises diagonally at an angle of 45° from the principal to the heavy raking strut (joining the wall end of the tie beam to the head of the principal post) and which braces the raking strut in the centre where it carries a through purlin.⁹

Two other timbers are set into the inside wall of the NE gable at a height of about ten feet from the ground. Slightly curved and with bevelled ends, one is 9' 6" long, the other 9' 1" (but the outside ends are buried in the adjacent wall); they measure 7" × 7". It seems likely that these are two of the heavy raking struts mentioned in (ii) above, which, running parallel to the roof, rose from the wall end of the tie beam over the aisles and abutted the principal post about a foot from its top. It is difficult otherwise to explain the fact that one of the inset timbers has two dowels inserted 4' 4" and 4' 10" from the bevelled end, and the other a single dowel hole 5' 5" from the bevelled end. These can only represent the point at which the short diagonal strut which extended from the main post outward towards the slope of the roof intercepted (and supported) the heavy raking strut.¹⁰

The argument for this barn belonging to the abbey of Beaulieu depends upon proof that it stood on the land of the manor of Shilton which King John granted to the abbey in the foundation charter of 25 January 1204-5.¹¹ I know of no documentary evidence but there is a presumptive case. The barn stands in the centre of the village next to the brook (the Shill) and ford and is part of the buildings of the former Manor Farm. The present manor house is Victorian and stands on a hill overlooking the farm. But in the middle of the group of farm buildings of which the barn is one stands a two-storey building, probably late medieval in date, known as the Old Manor;¹² to the north-east of the barn is a large circular dovecote which is probably also medieval; to the south of the barn parallel to the north bank of the stream, a few feet from and on the north side of it, is a long lagoon-like stretch of water now used for rearing water fowl but which

⁷ I owe this information and original identification of the barn to Mr. Joe Read of Shilton, formerly the village wheelwright, who owns a commode made from surviving timbers of the destroyed barn. I am grateful to Mr. Jack Read for help in surveying the building and to Mr. F. Cumber for permission to do so.

⁸ See PL. XIA. When the walls of the barn were dismantled as a preliminary to rebuilding these timbers were salvaged. They were later sawn up and used for lintels.

⁹ See PL. IX.

¹⁰ See PL. XIB and for the identical construction of small triangular trusses buttressing the principal posts on the aisle side in the barn at Great Coxwell, see Horn and Born, fig. 5 A (p. 6).

¹¹ See Horn and Born, Appendix I. Shilton is not among the nine granges of Beaulieu listed by R. A. Donkin, 'The Cistercian Grange in England in the xii and xiii centuries', *Studia Monastica*, vi (1964), 124, nor is it listed by D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London 1953).

¹² Also (July 1971) undergoing conversion into a dwelling house.

would serve very well as a fish pond ; on the opposite side of the stream is a steeply sloping field known as the Conyger. Thus the local associations are strongly manorial and the grouping just described contains all the elements of a self-sufficient domestic manorial economy. When taken with the architectural evidence provided by Waller's nineteenth century drawings it is difficult not to accept that we have in Shilton a third example of an aisled Cistercian barn perhaps dating, as do those of Great Coxwell and Beaulieu-St. Leonards, from the thirteenth century.¹³

¹³ Horn and Born make use of a variety of evidence in dating the barns of Great Coxwell and Beaulieu-St. Leonards, some of it valid for the Shilton barn. It may be that the Shilton barn is to be associated with that of Beaulieu-St. Leonards. The extant corbels at Shilton were employed to support the half-posts from which the terminal truss rose : they are identical in design with (although slightly smaller than) the corbels which performed the same function on the eastern gable wall of Beaulieu-St. Leonards (see Horn and Born, plates 35 (p. 41) and 45 A (p. 51)). These are quite unlike any of the corbels found at Great Coxwell.

No importance is to be attached to the fact that at both Great Coxwell and Shilton the longitudinal axes of the barns run approximately north to south (precisely, NNW-SSE at Great Coxwell, NE-SW at Shilton) rather than the more usual east to west orientation. In both cases the eccentric axis can be accounted for by the difficulties of the terrain. At Shilton the ground rises steeply to the north and the construction of the NE gable wall involved cutting back into the hill side with the result that ground level there is at the level of the eaves of the building. The normal east to west orientation would have required excavation of the hill side along the whole ninety-foot length of the barn and would have had the disadvantage of increased exposure to and danger from damp, and the inconvenience of limiting access to the barn by making impossible the normal arrangement of centrally placed doors standing opposite each other on a north-south axis. The alternative of building away from the hill side and closer to the stream would be forbidden by the flooding to which the land on both sides of the brook is subject during wet weather. This has recently (1970) been countered by raising the level of the ground by about three feet.

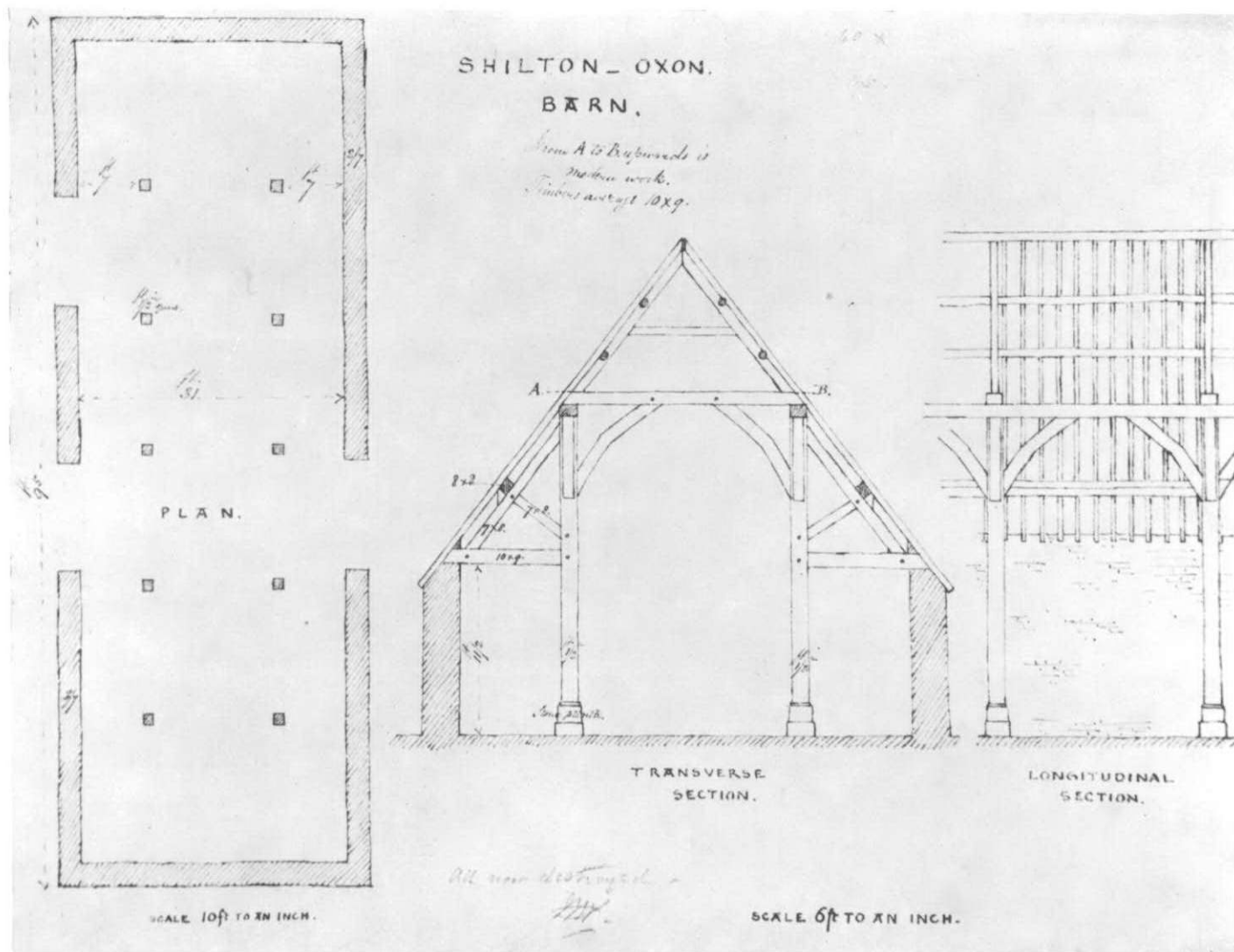


PLATE IX

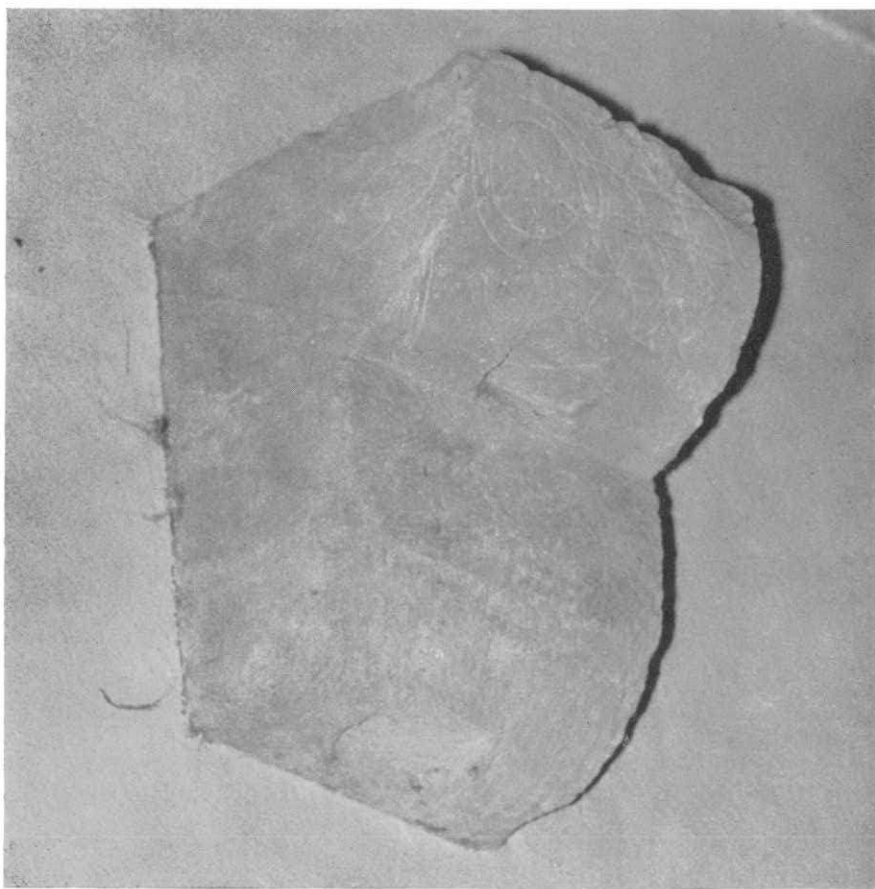
Shilton Barn. From the Scrap Book of F. S. Waller.

Ph. Avery Library, Columbia.

PLATE X



A. Shilton Barn from the Old Manor, looking East. The smaller door and windows are contained in an original door-opening.



B. Corbel in the S.W. Gable Wall.

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PLATE XI



A. Principal post used as lintel at S. door of barn.



B. Heavy raking strut set into N.E. Gable Wall.

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