

## 'The Great Barn' Lewknor: The Architectural Evidence

By M. C. J. MORREY and J. T. SMITH

*THE discovery of an important late Medieval hall-house on land at Lewknor acquired by All Souls College in 1440, was reported in the last volume of this journal, with an account of the documentary evidence by Hilary L. Turner. The structure was studied by Mr. J. T. Smith for the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, and measured and drawn by Mr. M. C. J. Morrey. The photographs are by Mr. T. H. E. Buchanan.<sup>1</sup> We are very grateful to the tenant Mr. L. Graham for allowing access to the barn.*

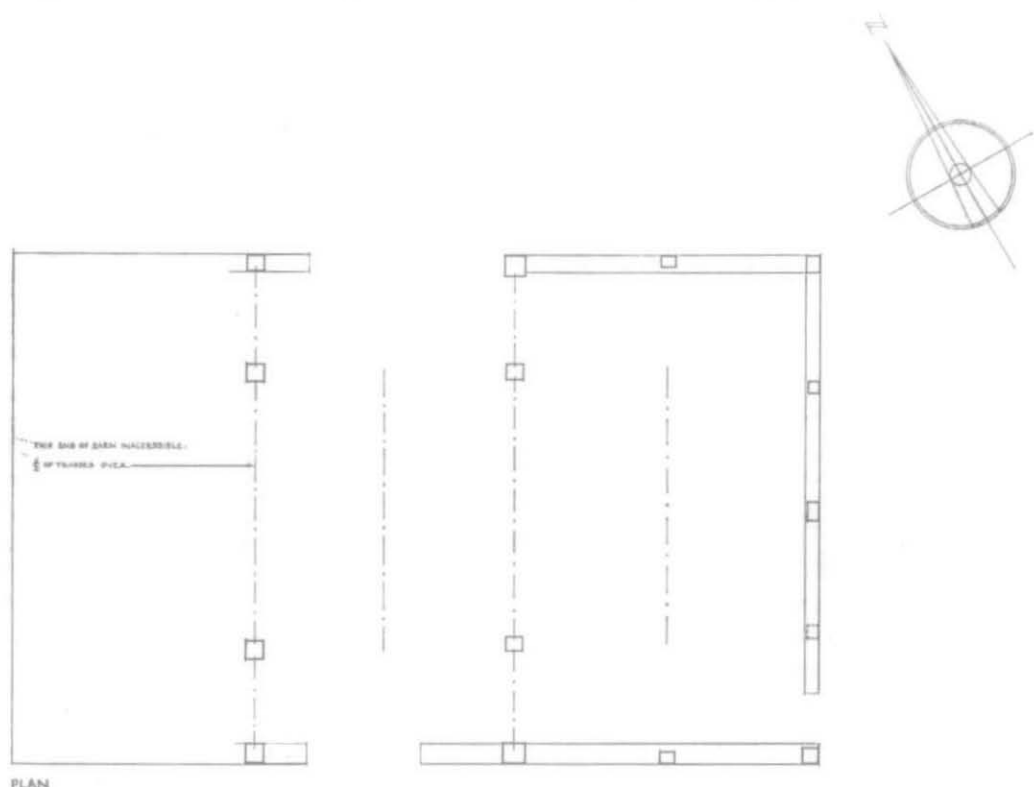
The hall-house—for that is undoubtedly what it was originally—comprises three bays which vary in length between 15 and 18½ ft. Its plan (FIG. 1; PL. XXIII, A) is of the end-hall type, that is to say that such minor or service rooms as there were stood at one end. The hall itself, about 34 ft. long, and open from ground to roof, comprised two bays divided by an open truss with a clear span of about 29 ft. (FIG. 2). A spere-truss (PL. XXIII, B; FIG. 4, left) divided the hall from the cross-passage and whatever rooms lay west of it,<sup>2</sup> but since this part of the building is now occupied by large bins its recording and interpretation are inevitably inadequate.

From a structural standpoint the hall was remarkable principally for the span of the open truss, which is quite unusually wide for a timber-framed building (FIG. 3, right). This truss, like the others, was of tie-beam type, with two very large arch-braces from wall-posts to tie-beam. Although it was reconstructed as an aisled truss when the hall became a barn, its form can be reconstructed thanks to the reuse of the original arch-braces. The braces have two chamfers and their soffits are trenched and mortised to take other timbers which have been removed (PL. XXIV, A). Since such decorative timberwork as survives in the building is extensively cusped it can be presumed that the open truss was treated similarly with a series of cusps, perhaps seven, matching those which survive in the topmost part of the truss (PL. XXIV, B). They were evidently secured in place by the extensive use of buried (or slipped) tenons, i.e. tenons mortised into two timbers and pegged through to hold them together, and probably the peg-holes which now help to secure the braces reset in their present position were originally cut for the tenons at the upper end of the cusped members. Above the tie-beam the roof was of raised-aisled type<sup>3</sup> that is to say, it is in effect

<sup>1</sup> For permission to publish the drawings and photographs we are indebted to Mr. A. R. Dufty, Secretary of the Commission.

<sup>2</sup> For convenience of description the barn, which is aligned north-west and south-east, is described as lying east and west.

<sup>3</sup> For this term see J. T. Smith, 'The Reliability of Typological Dating of Medieval English Roofs', in R. Berger (ed), *Scientific Methods in Medieval Archaeology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1970), 239-269, esp. 251-253.



BARN at CHURCH FARM, LEWKNOR, OXON.

MEASURED & DRAWN BY H.C. MORREY, 1971.  
NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD  
SOUTH LANCASHIRE AND HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

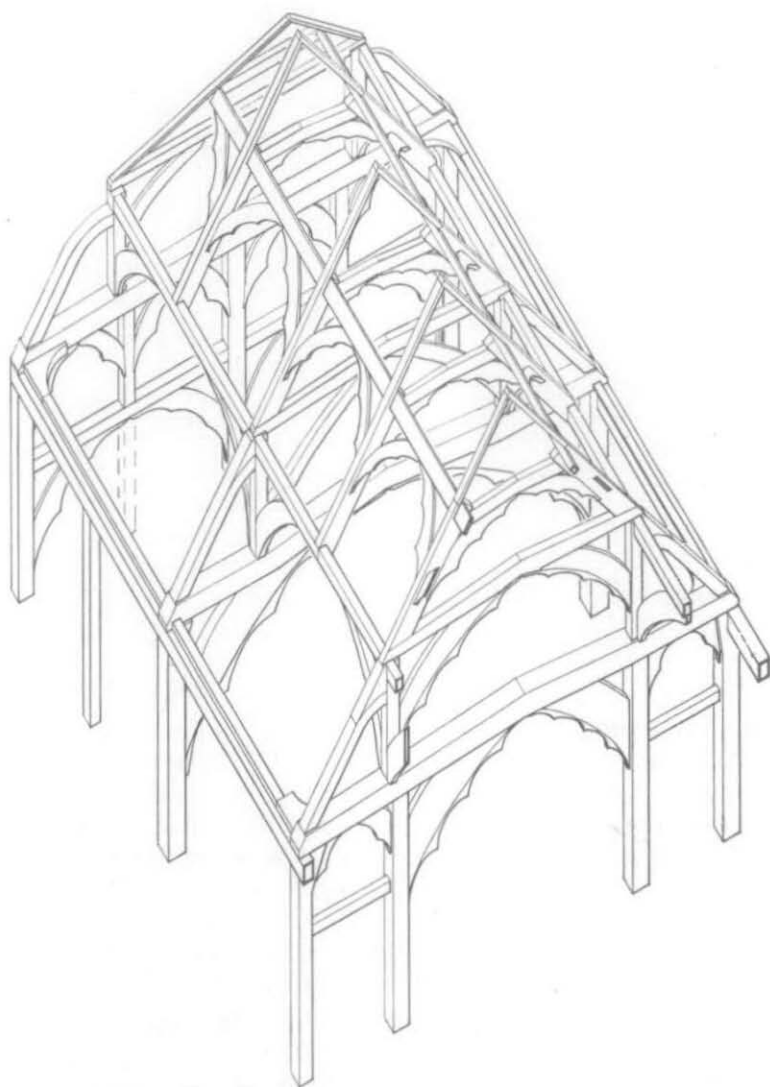


FIG. 1.

an aisled hall raised high above the ground. The aisled frame thus formed has square posts, chamfered on the inner edges, which support plates and a slightly cambered tie-beam and which are themselves propped by braces, tenoned into the ends of the tie-beam below. In the arch-braces which join the raised aisle-posts to the tie-beam are a series of peg-holes and tenons which must have been intended for applied cusping like that below. The topmost part of the truss comprises short principal rafters into the top of which purlins are slotted; the principals are linked by a collar-beam which is supported by cusped arch-braces and there are cusped wind-braces from principals to purlins. The topmost tie thus forms a clasped-purlin roof.<sup>4</sup>

In its original form the open truss must have been an impressive and richly ornamented structure, hardly paralleled for size in English timber-framed buildings. As an indication of its pretensions its clear span of 29 ft. may be

<sup>4</sup> For the best account of this type see F. W. B. Charles, *Medieval Cruck Building and its Derivatives* (1967), 51-53; also J. T. Smith, 'Medieval Roofs . . .', *Archaeol. J.*, cxv (1959), 124-6.



BARN at CHURCH FARM, LEWKNOR, OXON.


ISOMETRIC VIEW FROM NORTH. SCALE:   
MENS & DELT. M.C.J. MORREY 1971. NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD.

FIG. 2.

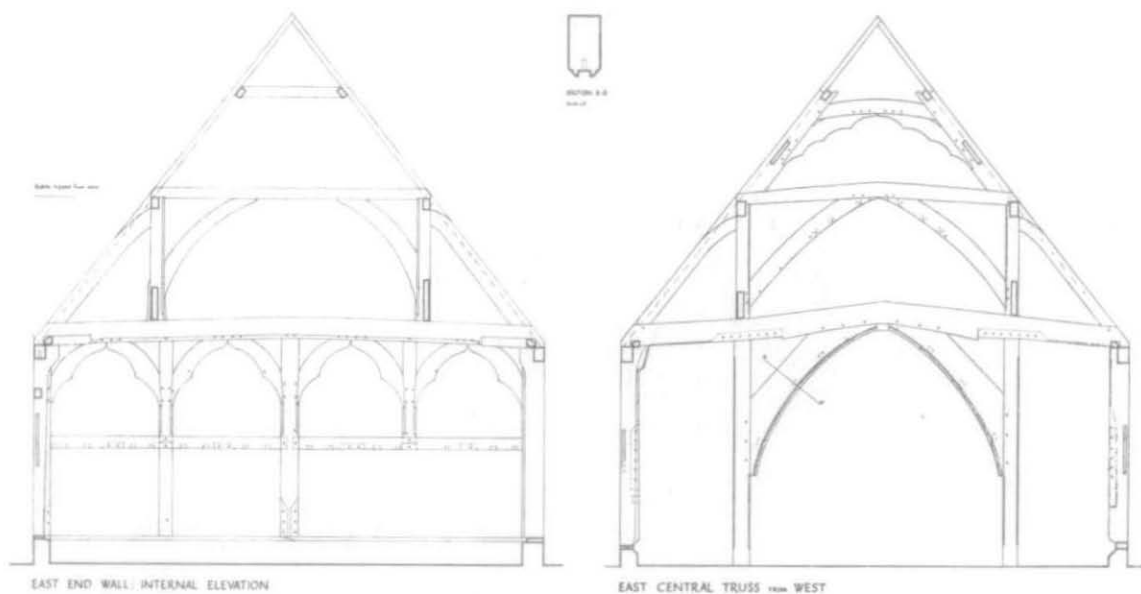


FIG. 3.

compared with that of such stone buildings as Stokesay Castle and the Old Deanery, Salisbury, with spans of  $29\frac{1}{2}$  ft. and 31 ft. respectively.

Presumably the intended aesthetic effect of the three progressively slighter tiers of cusped timberwork was to lessen the feeling of weight and heaviness which tie-beam trusses almost inevitably produced and which is very apparent in the mid-19th century drawing of a hall at Great Malvern Priory.<sup>5</sup> It is rather surprising that the longitudinal members of the roof, the raised arcades, were left completely plain when so much effort was devoted to enriching the truss and even the wind-braces, because these timbers must have been quite conspicuous in the middle plane of any view of the roof (FIG. 4, right). A fuller appreciation of the aesthetic possibilities inherent in a very complicated roof was shown at Fiddleford Manor House in Dorset, where transverse, lateral and longitudinal timbers alike were cusped to produce an extremely rich effect,<sup>6</sup> although the arch-braces were merely chamfered and not cusped, so that all the ornament was concentrated above the purlins.

The spere truss (West central truss, Fig. 4, left) was treated in broadly the same way as the open truss, except that the open panel at the top of each of the flanking 'aisles' had cusped braces forming a small ogee at the apex. A com-

<sup>5</sup> T. H. Turner and J. A. Parker, *Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages*, II (1853), opp. p. 75, reproduced in Margaret Wood, *The English Medieval House* (1965), Pl. 25A.

<sup>6</sup> RCHM, *Dorset*, III, 273-274.

parable treatment is apparent in the East end wall, which is divided by posts and a rail into two registers of four panels (FIG. 3, left; PL. XXV, A). Each panel of the upper register has cusped curved braces terminating at a little ogee at the head, and evidently the lower register was treated similarly. A few structural points deserve comment. The arch-braces of the spere-truss are each formed of two pieces of timber held together by buried tenons, the presence of which is revealed by two adjoining peg-holes, one in each member. This feature, though not common, seems to occur in roofs where large members have to be built up from timbers too small for the purpose, such as one or two of the collar-beams in the roof of Stokesay Castle. No doubt it made for the economical use of timber. At Lewknor a third timber, cusped, was attached to each brace by means of both buried and normal tenons. There was also a form of horizontal bracing at the corners of the hall, using large solid brackets laid flat and butting, on the wall side, against a massive cornice which for part of its width rested on the wall-plate. (PL. XXV, B).

Unfortunately, it is not possible on the evidence at present available to reconstruct the appearance of the long walls. That they incorporated big braces is clear from the mortises in the principal posts of the trusses, and there were probably two large windows, one on each side of the open truss.

The date of the building is difficult to state with any precision. The best evidence is provided by the profuse cusping of the timbers, which is a kind of ornament common in the second half of the 14th century and which persisted for much of the 15th century; closely dated examples, unfortunately, are hardly to be found. A limiting upper date is provided by the acquisition of the glebe land by All Souls in 1440 (see above) since the College is unlikely to have built so large a hall on a farm leased to tenants. It may be one of those large houses built by wealthy members of the clergy in the 14th century, such as the parsonage houses at Coningsby (Lincolnshire) and Marlow (Bucks.),<sup>7</sup> but a lower term for the date bracket is hard to define—it could be as early as the mid 14th century, but is likely to be nearer the turn of the century.

The date cannot be refined by the typology of the roof because raised-aisled construction is found over a long period. It is a not uncommon technique in East Anglia<sup>8</sup> and a different form of this same principle has been recorded in Oxfordshire<sup>9</sup>; whereas the former group is in every way part of the great family of rafter roofs and its derivatives the latter is more distantly allied to it, showing its affinity in such matters as the clasped purlins,<sup>10</sup> and the absence of a ridge-piece. These problems, which require more extended discussion than can be undertaken here, will it is hoped be dealt with elsewhere.

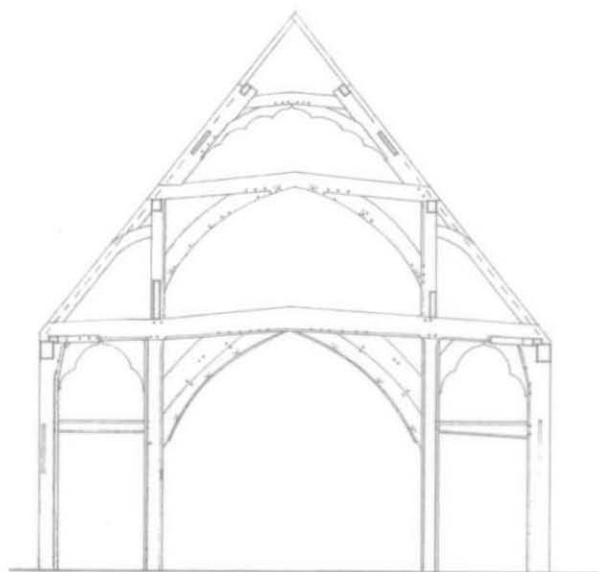
The later history of the building can be dealt with briefly. It became

<sup>7</sup> M. W. Barley, A. Rogers and P. Strange, 'The Medieval Parsonage House, Coningsby, Lincs.' *Antiq. J.*, XLIX (1969), 346–66; M. E. Wood, 'A Fourteenth Century House at Marlow, Bucks', *JBA*, 3rd ser., XII (1949), 53–58.

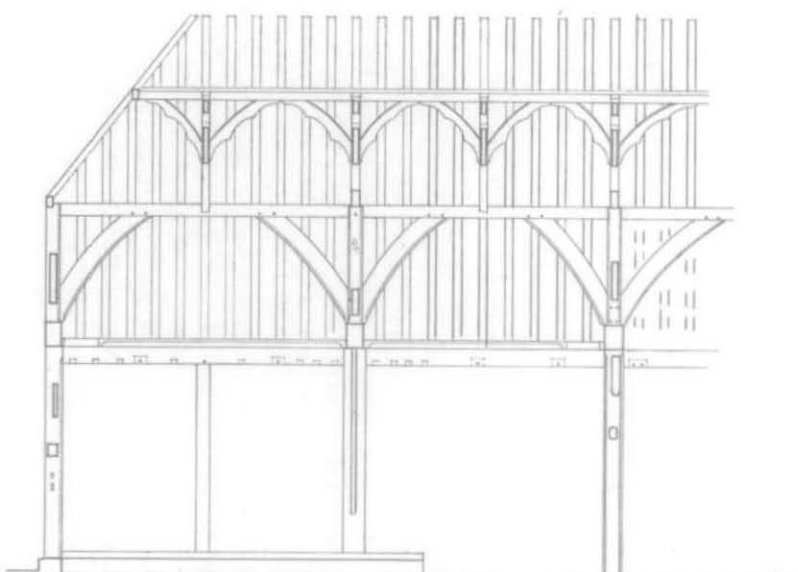
<sup>8</sup> J. T. Smith, as note (3). The number and variety of such roofs has been greatly increased by the researches of Mr. David Penrose in Suffolk.

<sup>9</sup> J. T. Smith, as note (4), Pl. xiv, B, 'Roof of an unspecified building at Oseney Abbey'.

<sup>10</sup> For a different view of the significance of clasped purlins see F. W. B. Charles, as note (4).



WEST CENTRAL TRUSS FROM EAST.



SOUTH WALL.

BARN at CHURCH FARM, LEWKNOR, OXON.

DESIGNED & DRAWN BY T. J. L. GIBSON, 1911.  
HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE, 25, BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.1.  
ENGL. ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY, 1911.



FIG 4.

a barn without ever having been altered by the insertion of a chimney-stack and upper floor—the usual fate of medieval halls—at some uncertain date. Perhaps because the open truss was showing signs of weakness the arch-braces were replaced by posts, so producing the deceptive appearance of a true aisled hall. Equally uncertain is the date when the West end of the roof was cut back to give a hipped end. The cladding of weather-boarding, replacing the original infilling of wattle-and-daub, was put on in the 19th century.

*A generous donation from All Souls College for the publication of this paper is gratefully acknowledged.*



A. Lewknor : The great Barn from the East.



B. Spere-truss, from the South-East.

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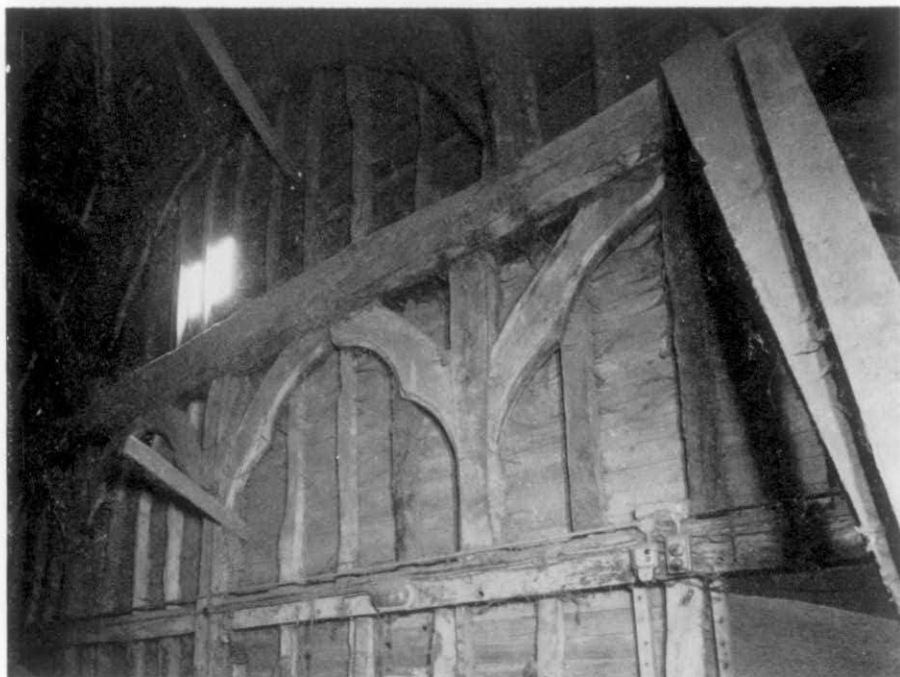


A. Detail of open truss, from the North-West.



B. Upper part of open truss, from the North-West.

*Copyright H.M.S.O.*



A. East end wall.



B. Spere-truss, from the East.

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