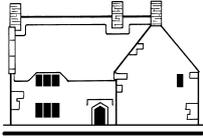


Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group
Affiliated to the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society
and to The Vernacular Architecture Group



HOUSES Nos. 14 TO 17
High Street, Milborne Port

May 2018

LOCATION.

N.G.Ref. ST 6761 1862
Post Code: DT9 5AG
Milborne Port C.P.
South Somerset D.C.

Access is directly from road.

LISTING.

The property is not listed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as being of architectural or historic interest.



FIG.1. THE HOUSES VIEWED FROM THE NE.

EXTERIOR.

The house is two-storey under a pitched roof and comprises four dwellings. It is built of local rubble stone and the north east corner of the building has been rounded. Windows and doors are all modern upvc replacements. The north (front) of the building has concrete lintels over the ground floor windows of Nos. 14 (at the east end), 16 and 17. Number 15 has segmental heads over the door and window. The upper floor windows are under timber lintels, though there is a segmental headed window in the west gable. Number 17 has a lean-to extension on the north side. At the rear Numbers 15 and 16 have two-storey extensions; No.16 is all brick whilst No.15 has ground floor walls of stone. Number 14 has single storey glazed conservatory. The roof is mainly of plain clay tiles but there are eaves courses of stone tiles, two on the front and four at the rear. The west gable is raised and has stepped copings. There is a brick chimney stack at each gable and two further brick stacks set along the ridge.

PLAN. The ground floor (Fig. 2) in the main building is divided into four dwellings, the middle two of which have extensions added on the south side. Inserted chimney stacks with supplementary sections of wall separate the middle pair from each other, a thinner wall separates the western unit.

HOUSE DETAILS.

Walls The exterior walls of the main building are uniformly around 76cm thick measured at waist height; the wall is internally battered. The extensions date from separate periods in the 20th century, that for No.16 being the earlier. Although not specifically measured, they have walls of about 30cm thick.

Fireplaces The fireplaces, with the exception of F4 are blocked. Fireplace F1 is in an inserted stack, the joint being visible in the roof space. There is no witness of fireplace F2 although it almost certainly served No.15. Another large stack contains fireplace F3 which is now not visible; on the first floor there is a small cast iron hooded grate. Fireplace F4 set in the corner of the main room is still in use, its flue rising to the first floor where there is a blocked fireplace and then is channeled into the wall to emerge at the roof apex.

All the (inserted) fire-stacks have been positioned to avoid interfering with the roof trusses and later firewalls have followed the same practice.

Stairs The middle pair of dwellings have straight flights. Numbers 14 and 17 have winder stairs coupled with short straight flights.

Doors and windows Doors and windows in the dwellings are of modern design and materials fitted into former or more recently created openings, identifiable by whether they have timber or concrete lintels. The exception is a brick-faced opening with a brick segmental head in the west gable wall at first floor level (Fig. 15). Timber lintels in the walls indicate earlier openings.

Above the current south door of No.17 are the jamb stones of a blocked first-floor doorway, (Fig. 13), at the foot of which is a roughly dressed large stone that was probably the doorstep. Just to the west of the stone is a timber lintel of an earlier door or window. A bricked-up door, just to the east, is evidence of a doorway that led into the building; a stone step remains in the cupboard beneath the stair of No.16.

In the lean-to of No.17 there is visible in the main wall an original wooden window frame (Fig.14) situated just below eaves level and blocked with lath and plaster and masonry. The window opening is 90cm wide and the uprights of the oak frame are chamfered and have diagonal stops.

Beams The most notable feature is the six panel framed ceiling in No.17, the axial beam of which extends (with a cut-away soffit to give head room over the stair of No.16) to a half beam now incorporated in the below-stairs cupboard wall. The ceiling beams (typically B4) have a 17cm plain chamfer (Fig. 5). A similarly chamfered beam (B3) is in No.16. In No.14 the spanning beam (B1) is rough but set into it is a well-dressed beam (B2) with 10cm chamfers and a step and runout stop (Fig. 6). Matching half beams are set against the walls. On the upper floor there are a pair of slightly smaller beams with similar chamfers and stops lying parallel to B2.

The ceiling beams on the upper floor are generally similar in finish to B1 and appear to be set, and possibly fixed to, the side of the roof truss timbers.

Roof Structure The roof is constructed of oak arch-braced collar trusses and has undergone several phases of repair (Figs. 4 & 8). The 290x120mm principals meet with a plain tenon joint at the apex which was pierced to accept a threaded 100x100mm ridge piece. A roof pitch of 50.3° was measured. The collars, 190x90mm, are slightly cambered and are supported by moulded, open arch braces that meet at the centre of the span; the collars were trestle sawn. Truss numbers are marked on the east faces of the collars and braces (Fig. 11). There are two tiers of moulded purlins, the upper tier being slightly smaller (180mm) in width than the lower tier (210x120mm). The purlins are aligned and the sockets in the principals are cut to accept the purlin profile (Fig. 7). The original common rafters were pegged into the purlins but almost all have been replaced. Between the purlins are two tiers of windbracing. These braces on truss I through to truss III have plain curves that rise towards the centre of the purlin span (Fig. 9). Beyond truss III the braces have a decorative cusped form although most appear to be of a natural form taken, in pairs, from a crooked branch and still retaining a wany edge (Fig. 10). The illustration (Fig.3) shows wind brace positions and styles as they might have appeared. Further cusped windbraces probably continued eastward along the roof.

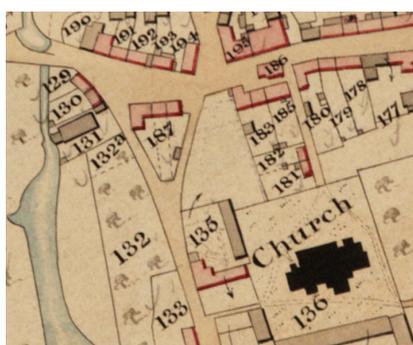
The roof over No.15 (trusses 6, 7 and 8) has been largely replaced and incorporates steel work.

Over No.14 the roof is supported by a single elm truss with a plain tenoned apex. The principals are 280x100mm and are joined by a straight 250x60mm collar, pegged and forelock-bolted to the face (Fig. 12). Two pairs of long crossing struts resting on the two axial ceiling beams support the purlins close to the truss and midway between the truss and the party wall with No.15.

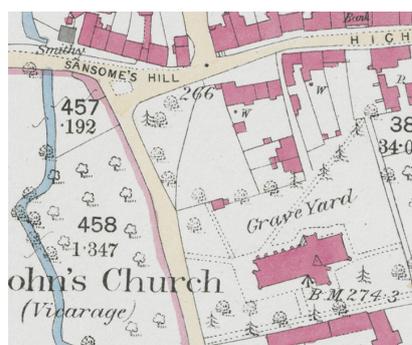
The trusses from I to 8 are regularly spaced and there was no evidence of any smoke blackening on any of the timbers.

There have been significant repairs to the roof as can be seen by the number of replacement plain purlin lengths, also the use of a sill beam from a post and panel partition as a principal in truss 5 which has a replacement straight collar forelock-bolted to the principals.

HISTORICAL NOTES.



Maps: Tithe Map of 1840



Ordnance Survey map of 1886

The 1840 Tithe map shows a row of three houses on plots 183 and 185, apparently divided as 17, 16, and 14&15 combined. Plot 184 is missing. By 1886 the row is shown with 14 and 15 separately and 16&17 combined. The Tithe apportionment also reveals that although the row of dwellings belonged to the Milborne Port Commonalty, it was leased by the Commonalty Stewards to Sir William Coles Medlycott, Bart.. His father, also Sir William, had purchased the lands and tithes from the Marquis of Anglesea in 1834, and also the Marquis' covenant to rent Commonalty property and to repair or rebuild the houses; the Tithe apportionment shows that he leased forty plots from the Commonalty.

The Commonalty has its origins in the Craft Guilds of the town and continues as a charitable trust providing affordable housing to the community. The practice of building and then leasing property seems to have been their established means of gaining income enabling it to give assistance to the 'second' poor of the Borough, ie those not claiming relief from the Parish.

In 1840 the plots 183 and 185 were each described as 'house and garden' of 15 rods and 12 rods respectively and were occupied by John Hilliar and Richard Hallett. The census of the following year (1841) records that (John?) Hilliar was a slater aged about 50 and lived there with his daughters Elizabeth and Mary aged between 15 and 20 years. Richard Hallett, an agricultural labourer and his wife Ann were both about 80 years. The next census in 1851 records John Hilliar, now a thatcher, as a widower of 65 and sharing the house with Susannah Anstey, 29, a glover. The old Halletts have been superseded by Martha Hallett, perhaps a daughter, of 48 years working as a glover. Also at the house were John Moore? a glove cutter and Josiah Ricketts, 18, a lodger.

Church Houses became established in English parishes as places where brewing could take place and the parishioners could hold fund-raising events to enable them to maintain the nave of the church, as required by an order of the Synod of Exeter in 1287. The form of church houses is usually of a large first floor hall with an external access; if the hall were heated it might be by one or perhaps two fireplaces set on the long walls of the building. The ground floor would be used for brewing, storage and often had a private room for meetings. They tended to be located close to the churchyard and were built by the parishioners, often with the assistance of the lord of the manor, and were administered by the Churchwardens. The money raised from the parish gatherings was also used to help the needy members of the parish, principally the 'first poor'. In the 17th century the combination of Puritan strictures and established parish rates meant that funds for the nave and the poor were not dependent on the often

disorderly gatherings; 'church ales' declined and the buildings became converted to schools, alms houses or poor houses.

The Victoria County History notes that by 1569 the Churchwardens of Milborne Port probably rented a building in Church Lane for use as a church house.

The Churchwardens accounts of 1748 through to 1760 make no reference of expenditure on such a building which suggests that the building they formerly rented was no longer used as a church house and therefore was no longer their responsibility.

OBSERVATIONS AND INTERPRETATION.

There can be little doubt that the building now seen as a terrace of four dwellings fronting the High Street and abutting Church Lane was once the late medieval church house of Milborne Port. On the basis of the 16th century Accounts of the Commonalty Stewards, held in the County Record Office and referred to in the VCH, it is at least possible that the Commonalty commissioned the construction of the building and subsequently rented it, in line with their fund-raising practice, to the churchwardens.

The uniformity of the walls and the replication of roof trusses at regular intervals point to a purpose-built first-floor hall. The quality of the oak roof structure and the framed ceiling of the western ground floor room shows it was a building of status in the town; the size and layout of the building are characteristic of church houses generally.

The first phase of building is considered to have occurred in the late 15th or early 16th century, based on the style and construction of the roof; the stops on the oak window frame on the north wall are typical of the period. The wide plain chamfers of the framed ceiling and the wall thickness indicates a similar date range. It was built as a first floor hall and was possibly unheated as there is no evidence remaining of former large fireplaces, and there is no sign of soot deposits on the roof timbers.

Later phases of building relate to the division of the building into smaller units and roof repairs.

In No.14 the framed ceiling on both floors with step and runout stops suggests perhaps a mid 17th century alteration. The bulky fireplace and stack at F1 were inserted possibly in the early 18th century but unlike at No.16, there is no hearth on the upper floor. The roof truss has been constructed with re-used timber and the method of fixing the collar suggests late 18th century work.

Number 15 has been much altered and it is suggested that the fireplace at F2 and stack were inserted in the mid-late 19th century. It is a slim structure and would match the division shown in the 1886 OS map. Part of truss 6, a purlin and a remnant wind brace survive in the roof.

Number 16 has a substantial fire-stack against No.15 and a small hearth on the upper floor. It is possible this was inserted about the same time as that in No.14, representing a time when, perhaps, the building was divided into just two units. In the roof, truss 5 marks a change of wind bracing as the lower tier between trusses 5 and 6 takes a cusped form. The more irregular versions of this form using crooked branches may simply be economic repairs. As truss III coincides with the end of the framed ceiling (mainly in No.17) there is a possibility that there was a timber partition through the building at that position. A partition sill beam replaces an original principal at truss 5.

Number 17 has the best surviving part of the original roof, and the framed ceiling. The corner fireplace F4 is probably late 19th century and by using the corner of the room has allowed a first-floor window of that period to be inserted in the gable wall.

Survey team: John Rickard, Alan Cort, Angie Roberton, James Roberts, Mike Shadwell, Dave Taylor, Tony White.

Figures 4, 7, 8, 9, and 14 supplied by D Taylor

INFORMATION SOURCES.

Tithe Map and Apportionment SRO Ref: D/D/Rt/M/205 and D/D/Rt/A/205

Ordnance Survey of England & Wales, 25 inch:1 mile, Sheet LXXXIV.10 Surveyed 1886

Census of England and Wales, 1841 and 1851

Victoria County History of Somerset, Vol VII, p.153

The History and Antiquities of Somerset, Rev. W. Phelps 1836

Milborne Port Commonalty, Milborne Port History & Heritage Group, Essay No 1, Dr L. Wray. 2018

Churchwardens Accounts 1745-1845. SRO Ref: DVP/mil.p/4/1/1

The Traditional Houses of Somerset, J. Penoyre, 2005

Church Houses in Somerset, EHD Williams. Vernacular Architecture, Vol 23 1992

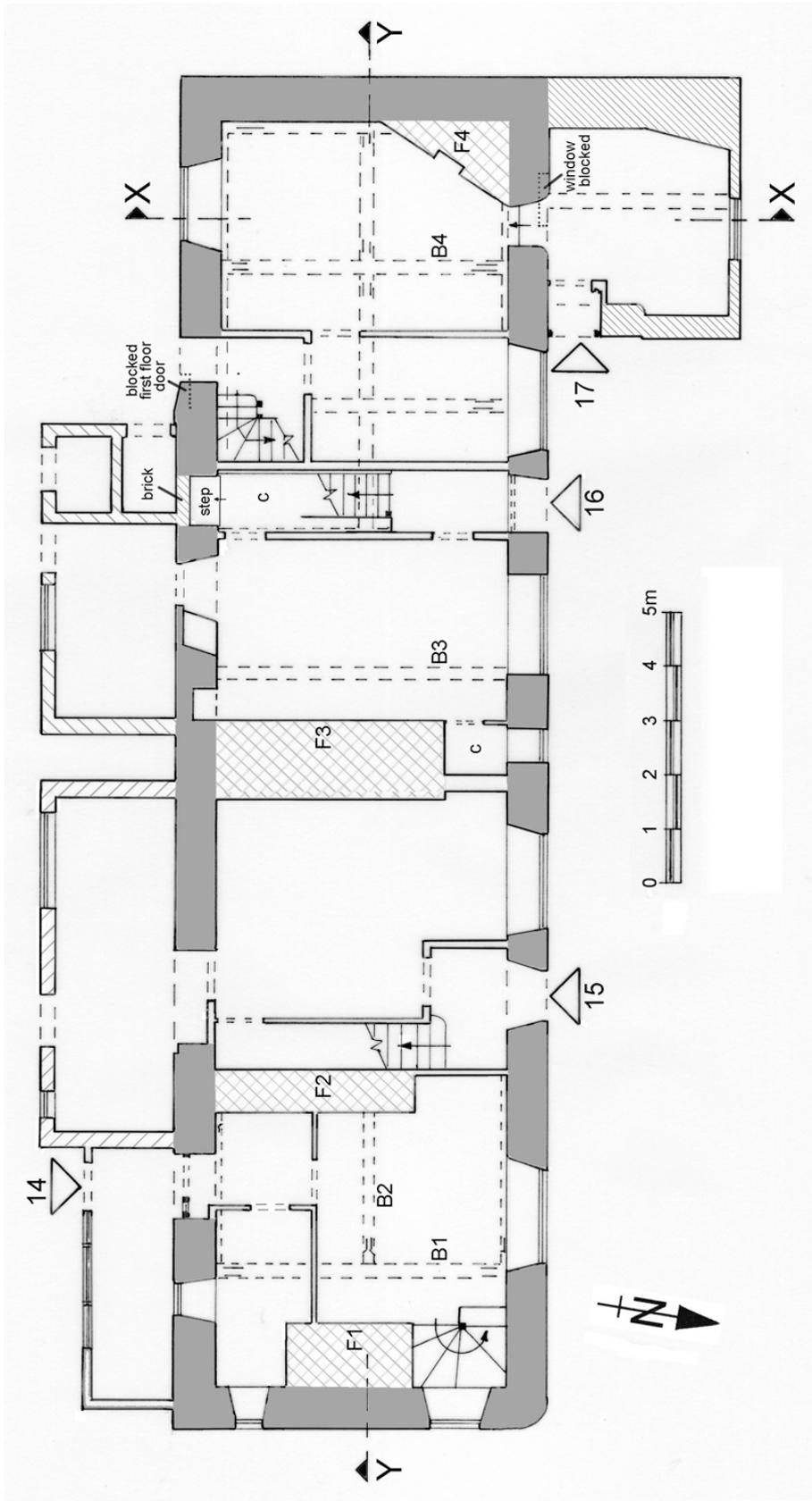


FIG. 2. GROUND FLOOR PLAN

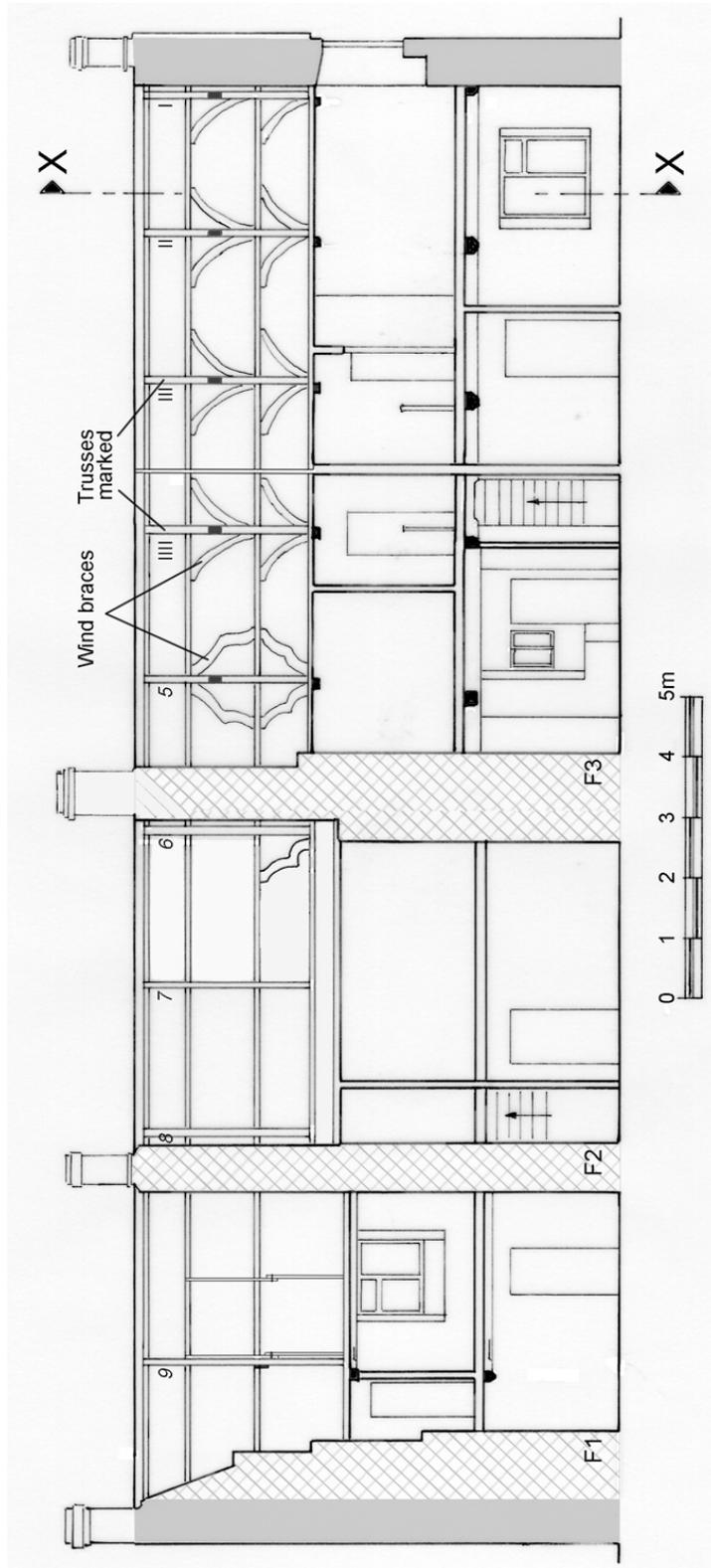


FIG.3. LONG SECTION Y-Y

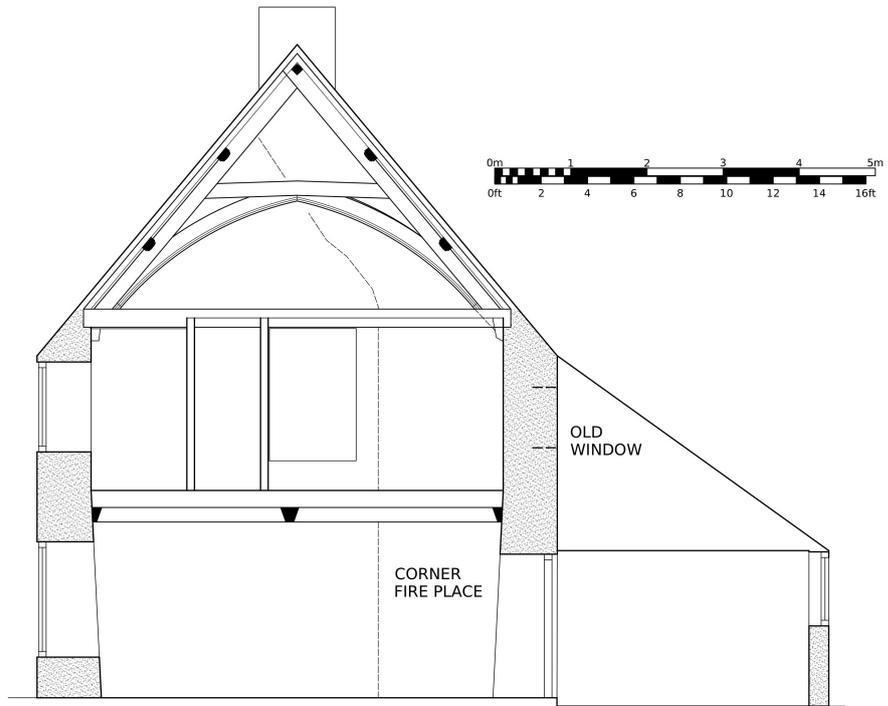


FIG. 4. CROSS SECTION X-X

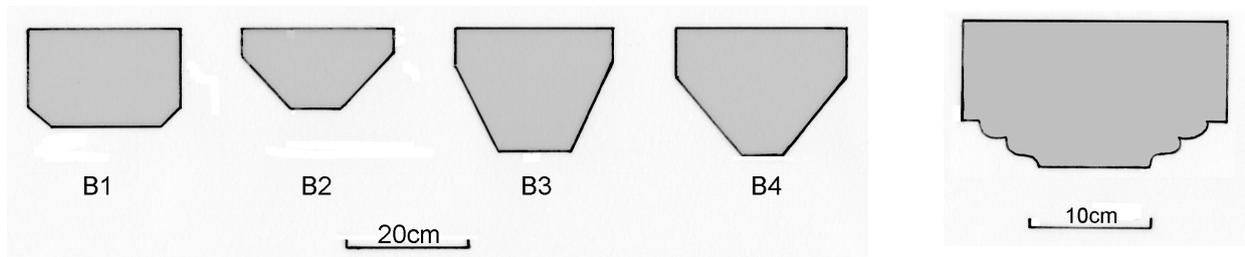


FIG. 5. BEAM AND PURLIN PROFILES



FIG. 6. CHAMFER AND STOP ON BEAM B2



FIG. 7. MOULDED PURLIN



FIG. 8. GENERAL VIEW WEST OF THE ROOF STRUCTURE, TRUSS II IN FOREGROUND



FIG. 9. TRUSS III SOUTH, CURVED WINDBRACES



FIG. 10. CUSPED BRACES AT TRUSS 5 NORTH



FIG. 11. ASSEMBLY MARKS, TRUSS III



FIG. 12. COLLAR PEGGED AND BOLTED AT TRUSS 9



FIG. 13. BLOCKED FIRST FLOOR ENTRANCE
AND SILL STONE



FIG. 14. BLOCKED TIMBER-FRAMED WINDOW AND DETAIL OF DIAGONAL CHAMFER STOP



FIG. 15. WINDOW IN WEST GABLE