

**The development of the timber-framed houses in the Later Medieval period: An evening lecture given to the Worthys Local History Group by Bill Fergie.**

The first meeting of 2017 welcomed Bill Fergie to the WLHG. The lecture focused on timber-framed buildings Hampshire-wide, subsuming some local buildings. The talk was based on the life-long work of Edward Roberts: *Hampshire Houses 1250-1700* (3rd revision 2010). The new edition adds 95 new buildings to the original publication.

Prior to the introduction of dendrochronology, dating timber houses was based on relative chronologies, e.g. structural and architectural features. The methodology of tree-ring dating which correlates the cross-section of wide and narrow growth ring patterns with climatic variables (i.e. good (wide) and poor (narrow) growth years) are compared to date-specific master tree ring chronologies that provide precise dates for timber felling and subsequent construction. This method has been used extensively for the research into the dating and development of Hampshire houses, and has revolutionised the dating precision of timber buildings in the county.

The chronology, materials, and structural techniques of timber buildings, particularly the change from the old-build Anglo-Saxon style of earth-fast construction using slabs of oak sunk into the earth with supporting posts, and wattle and daub inter-laced between the walls, meant pre-conquest houses had a limited life. Timber houses began to survive after *circa* 1200 as the structures began to be built on stone cills, which included chalk and flint in the local area. Houses also became more stable as triangulation bracing and buttressing (which stopped Anglo-Saxon houses shifting) were replaced by the development of the joint junction in the thirteenth century. Interestingly, huge split oak trees were turned upside-down to get the Y-shape from the base of the tree for this new style of joint. However, the interior Saxon hall footprint comprising a north-south through passage with separate rooms at either end of the central hall provides a historical construction link well into the Medieval period.

The Medieval house plan survived well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An example from the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton in West Sussex demonstrated the Anglo-Saxon open hall design with the central and communal space still forming the key layout design for the Medieval house. The strong tradition of maintaining the smokey hall was peculiar to Britain. The hierarchy of the hall footprint also continued with the high end (for high table) with the bedroom to the rear, low end for entry and egress, and a cross passage which also reflected the continuation of the Anglo-Saxon design and living pattern. Service rooms usually comprised a buttery and pantry and were situated at the low end of the hall. There were no above-storey floors, only the ground floor. These features formed the principals of Medieval hall buildings. A series of examples, including: Batchelors at North Waltham (dated to 1499) with herring-bone brickwork, a hall, peg holes indicating there had been an additional bay at the service end, as well as an internal jetty at the high end of the building; and Bayleaf at Singleton (within the open air museum) dated to the mid-1400s, and providing an example of a large window at the high end of the hall, with the fire still positioned centrally within the hall, and two jettied storeys at either end of the house. Aisled Halls and aisle derivative buildings also continued to be built into the Medieval

period, but not in Hampshire after 1400. Although the design remained popular for agricultural buildings. This particular structural category was a cheap, easy, and efficient way of building as oak timber stocks declined, as the build did not require huge trunk timbers. Examples include: Old Berclere Manor dating to 1328/29, with two later wings added onto the central structure; and West Court at Binsted, dated to 1314/15.

Cruck Halls are another type of Medieval building with an ancient construction method that avoids the need for complicated joints. However, it is difficult to add a second storey that is not cramped. There is a standard three-part plan to cruck-framed houses of hall, service area, and parlour. The geographical distribution of crucks in Hampshire provides the most south-easterly and western concentrations with a construction date range of 1250-1500. In Hampshire cruck buildings stopped being built around 1500. The major concentrations of cruck-framed buildings, or “forks”, are found in the Welsh Marches and Peak District. The oldest examples from Hampshire are: Somerset’s Cottages at Bentley (dated to 1311/12) with a service area, hall, and parlour; and Tan-y-bryn at Hannington (1360).

By the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a shift from the communal open hall-type house to what can be identifiable as the “modern” house in terms of layout and functionality. The huge space utilised by a smoke bay over the open hearth in the centre of the communal hall, gave way to the development of the chimney which meant roof space could be converted to living space. Examples include: Tudor Farmhouse at Deane, dated to *circa* 1524, an early example of the demise of the smoke bay; similarly, Corner Cottage at Baughurst (dated to 1581/82). These examples illustrate the transition to confine smoke and condense space. However, brick was expensive. So, initially chimneys were constructed using wood. If a house has soot-stained timbers in what was originally roof-space, then this is an identification marker of a house that once had a smoke bay. Fardels at Micheldever (dated to 1572), and the neighbouring Old Cottage (1571/72), both demonstrate the survival of the old Medieval hall layout surviving well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many houses still retain evidence of former wooden chimney bays and cavities. Some even having short timber chimneys that stop in the roof space with no external ventilation/extraction point, such as the aforementioned Old Cottage and Upper Brook Cottages at Kings Somborne (*circa* 1600). Useful for smoking and so preserving foods, keeping bug numbers and vermin down in thatch, and avoiding the need to punch a hole through the roof. Once brick became affordable, brick chimneys took off and the layout of houses began to change. However, the Medieval footprint persisted, albeit in a more sophisticated format shifting to a hearth-passage (where the Medieval cross-passage hangs on behind the brick chimney thus allowing the hall to be floored design. This was the prototype for the “modern” house format, such as Pamber Priory Farmhouse (1561), Church Cottage at Basingstoke (1527, 1537/38, 1541/42), along with houses on London Road (early 1600s) at Basingstoke, and Poland Farm at Odiham (1607). These houses have an easily identifiable modern layout comprising the two-part plan of parlour and working kitchen. Local examples of such houses include: Pudding Farm, which originally started life as a lobby entranced house; Old Rectory at Headbourne Worthy which also had a Medieval hall layout (pre-1450); Silver Stream at Headbourne Worthy; and Old Farm (*circa* 1610) at Abbots Worthy. The construction of

timber-framed houses stopped *circa* 1700, and was down to the facts that wood stocks were exhausted, and brick had become the cheap replacement material.

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