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WESTACOTT BARTON, NORTH TAWTON, DEVON
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF A DEVON HALL HOUSE

Olivia Horsfall Turner and Barry V Jones

ARCHITECTURAL INVESTIGATION

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SUMMARY

Westacott Barton is a 15th- or early 16th-century cob-built former open hall house with jointed-cruck trusses, which retains its smoke-blackened roof timbers and smoke-blackened thatch. It was recorded by RCHME in 1956 and again in 1996, but in 2010 repair works revealed supplementary evidence regarding the construction of the roof, prompting a request for further investigation in order to inform proposed repairs. This permitted a reconsideration of the original plan form and the development of the house through subsequent phases. The original plan appears to have been a two-bay open hall with a service bay at each end. In the mid- to late 16th century the hall was ceiled-in, as was the western service bay, which was also provided with a chimney stack. In the late 16th or early 17th century a high-status north parlour wing was added, which was subsequently decorated with high-quality plasterwork dating to the same period. In the mid- to late 17th century a two-storey service bay was added to the west end of the main range. Further expansion took place in the mid-18th to early 19th century, when a linhay was added to the south elevation. Probably at the same time, a brick chimney stack was inserted into the western service bay, opening onto the hall. In the later 19th century, ancillary spaces were added, such as a replacement staircase between the main range and the north wing. The development of Westacott Barton from an open hall to a ceiled-in hall with separate kitchen is typical, but the addition of the exceedingly highly finished north wing is unusual for a farmhouse of this status. The high and low ends of the original hall have been respected during the accretive development of additional spaces around the main range.

CONTRIBUTORS

Olivia Horsfall Turner and Barry V Jones

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey and investigation of 1996 was carried out by Barry V Jones and Mike Williams of the RCHME. Photographic recording was undertaken in 1996 by Mike Hesketh-Roberts and Peter Williams. The investigation of 2010 was undertaken by Olivia Horsfall Turner, Barry V Jones and Rebecca Lane of Architectural Investigation, with support from Nigel Fradgley of Imaging, Graphics and Survey. Further photographic recording was undertaken by Peter Williams. Maureen Thompson kindly provided access and hospitality, and Francis Kelly commented on a draft of the report.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

The survey archive is lodged at the National Monuments Record Centre at The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EH.

DATE OF SURVEY AND INVESTIGATION

June 1996 and May 2010

CONTACT DETAILS

English Heritage, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EH
Olivia Horsfall Turner Tel: 01793 414629 Email: olivia.horsfallturner@english-heritage.org.uk
Barry V Jones Tel: 01793 414777 Email: barry.jones@english-heritage.org.uk

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INTRODUCTION

Westacott Barton, North Tawton, Devon is a cob-built former open hall house, with jointed-cruck trusses, retaining smoke-blackened timber and thatch, and is listed Grade II* (LB UID 92968). It is situated in an elevated position on a south-facing hillside with views towards Dartmoor. The main house is the focus of a farm complex of buildings enclosing a yard to its east, including substantial cob-walled and thatched barns, one of which is listed Grade II (LB UID 92969). Westacott Barton was visited by the RCHME in 1956, when it was recorded by R W McDowell, and again in 1996, when it was investigated and surveyed by Barry V. Jones and Mike Williams. In addition, it was photographically recorded in May 1996 by Mike Hesketh-Roberts, and in June 1996 by Peter Williams. Repair works initiated in the early part of 2010 revealed further evidence relating to the construction of the roof, occasioning a request from Francis Kelly, Planning and Development Department (SW), English Heritage, for a further investigatory visit in order to inform the proposed repairs. This was carried out in May 2010 by Olivia Horsfall Turner, Barry V Jones, and Rebecca Lane, Architectural Investigation (West), Research Department, English Heritage, and Nigel Fradgley, Imaging, Graphics and Survey, English Heritage. Further photographic recording was carried out by Peter Williams. The findings presented here incorporate the 1996 report by Barry V Jones with observations and interpretation from the 2010 investigation.

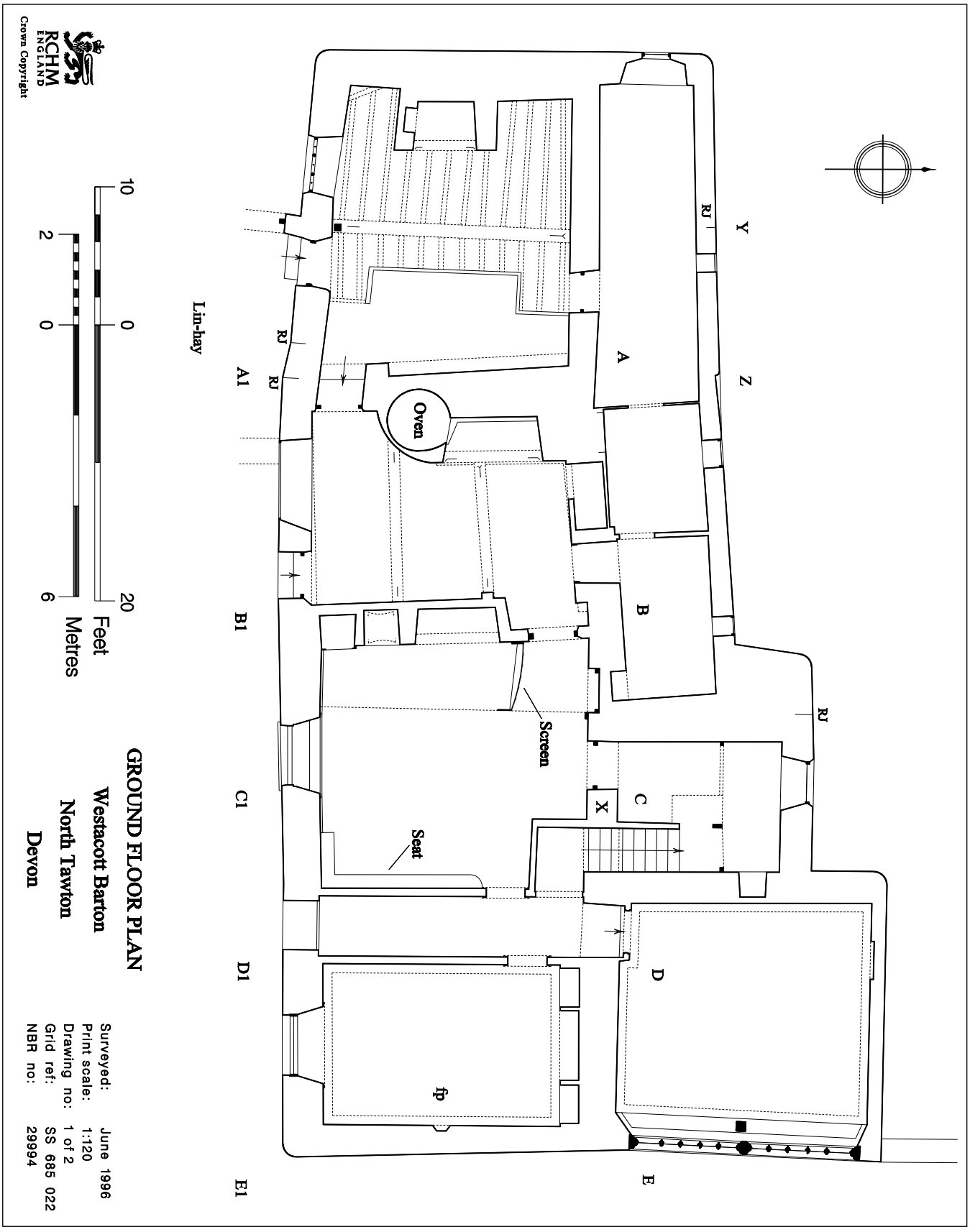

Figure 1. Westacott Barton, ground-floor plan, from the 1996 RCHME report (NBR BF 29994).

PHASE 1: 15TH OR EARLY 16TH CENTURY

The earliest surviving phase of the main house probably dates from the 15th or early 16th century and is a hall-house built of cob, now rendered, on a stone rubble plinth with a thatched roof. The roof is constructed of jointed-cruck trusses, and features smoke-blackened timbers and thatch. The date of the house is suggested by the raised arched jointed crucks of the hall's surviving open truss (see below). Most of the cob walls survive, albeit behind later render.

The plan of the house was probably a two-bay open hall with a service bay at either end. Based on this typology, the cross passage was probably located towards the west end of the central hall, with the principal services positioned at the westernmost end of the building. The eastern bay probably contained the best chamber at a first-floor level, over an additional service room. The roofs of the service bays are both smoke blackened, either by being open at an upper level to the main hall, or by independent heating sources. This plan form is a refinement of the interpretation in the 1996 report which proposed a three-bay open hall, with an unheated bay at its east end. Evidence leading to the revised interpretation is discussed below.

Figure 2. Roof space looking east towards cruck D-D1 showing smoke-blackened timbers and thatch (DP113795).

The roof of Westacott Barton is of key significance in understanding the nature and development of the house, the interior walls having plaster, panelling and lining-out, while the door surrounds and most of the windows date from secondary phases. The bay divisions used here follow those given on the 1996 RCHME plan (Fig 1). The original roof consists of four bays, three of which (bays A-B, C-D, and D-E) retain smoke-blackened timber and thatch, which survives under layers of later thatch (Fig 2). Smoke blackening on the west face of cruck truss C-C1 indicates that bay B-C was also once smoke

blackened, but the rest of the timbers and thatch in this bay have been replaced (Fig 3). All four bays of the main range were therefore open to a heat source, or sources, at some point.

Figure 3. West face of cruck truss C-C1, also showing replaced timbers in Bay B-C (DP113794).

At each end of the roof there are cob walls (A-A1 and E-E1) which indicate the probable extent of the original house. In spite of the extensive survival of this original fabric, however, there is also evidence of considerable alterations to the roof, connected with the addition of a wing to the north of bay D-E (probably in the latter half of the 16th or the very early 17th century) and the insertion of a chimney stack approximately on the line of truss B-B1 (probably in the mid-18th or early 19th century) (Fig 4). There are two surviving trusses, at C-C1 and D-D1, although only the upper portion of these and the two feet of cruck truss C were exposed at the time of recording in 2010. It is reasonable to assume that a third, original truss at B-B1 has been removed, lost, or destroyed.

The heavy ridge piece is diamond-set and runs from the east end of the roof, across truss D-D1, to truss C-C1. At truss D-D1 and truss C-C1 the cruck blades simply abut the ridge purlin and are joined by a yoke which supports the ridge piece and is single-pegged into each cruck blade (Fig 5). This is a notably minimal arrangement in a roof of this scale. To the west of truss C-C1, the apex of the roof space is located further to the south side of the building. The ridge piece is truncated at C-C1 and is missing in bay B-C. It then reappears again in bay A-B, where it has collapsed. This disturbance to the original roof structure is probably a consequence of the insertion of a chimney stack along the line of

truss B-B1. The original roof pitch is shallow, giving a wide span, and with the exception of the collar of truss C-C1, which is chamfered and run-out stopped, all the timbers are squared. The roof structure is discussed in detail below, starting at the east end.

Figure 4. Roof space looking west to former position of cruck truss B-B1, showing inserted chimney stack (DP113792).

The east end of the roof (E-E1) is now hipped. The timber comprising the hip is not original, indicated by the absence of blackening on the end timbers, in contrast to the rest of the bay (D-E), in which the timbers and thatch are both smoke blackened. The last common rafter pair, however, is cut off, which might indicate the location and existence of a former, original hip. On the north side of bay D-E, the original smoke-blackened timbers of the main roof remain, but sections of the thatch have been removed to allow for the insertion of the wing roof which was probably added in the latter part of the 16th century or the early years of the 17th century.

Truss D-D1 is collared with a single-pegged cranked collar, and has a single-pegged yoke with tenons fitting into mortices in the cruck blades (see Fig 2). Rectangular stave holes on the upper side of the collar and circular stave holes on the soffit of the collar indicate that truss D-D1 was once closed. In addition, staves, which are probably part of the original closure, were noted resting on the collar at the time of the 2010 inspection.

The closure of truss D-D1 is confirmed by the difference in the degree of smoke-blackening from one side of the cruck blade to the other: the west side is darker than the east side. There is also heavier blackening at the top of the truss and the underside

of the yoke, suggesting some smoke seepage from bay C-D to bay D-E. The 1996 report recorded that the east face of cruck blade D-D1 was 'virtually clean' with only 'slight smoke-blackening' in bay D-E, and therefore concluded that the east bay was originally unheated. During the investigation of 2010, however, it was noted that, although not heavily encrusted with soot, the degree of blackening to the timbers in bay D-E is greater than would be commensurate with smoke seepage alone, and that the timbers are, in fact, smoke blackened. This suggests that there was at some point some form of heating in bay D-E, albeit of a smaller size and/or for a shorter duration than the open fire in the hall (bays B-C-D).

Figure 5. Diamond-set ridge piece, showing cruck blades abutting ridge purlin and joined by yoke (DP113783).

Bay C-D remains in its entirety, featuring smoke-encrusted common rafters, laths, thatch, and thatch ties, indicating that this bay formed part of the original open hall (Fig 6). The encrustation is heavy throughout, but most densely deposited around cruck blade C-C1, suggesting that the open fire was located in that area of the hall. Truss C-C1 is an open truss with a double-pegged, cranked collar that is chamfered on its soffit and stopped, and has a single-pegged yoke (Figs 7 and 8). A mortice and tenon construction for the yoke is not visible, as it is on truss D-D1. The even distribution of smoke blackening on both faces of truss C-C1 as well as the chamfering and stops of the collar indicate that the truss has always been open.

Figure 6. Detail of bay C-D, showing smoke-encrusted common rafters, laths, thatch and thatch ties (DP113782).

Figure 7. Detail of collar truss C-C1, showing chamfer, pegging and smoke encrustation (DP113796).

Figure 8. Detail of cruck C-C1, showing smoke encrustation and run-out stop on soffit of collar (DP113781).

The hall roof has a single set of purlins which are squared and originally had wind-braces (now removed). On the first floor, in bay C-D, the soffit of the purlin running along the south side of the room features mortices which still contain the truncated tenons of the wind-braces that joined to truss C-C1 and truss D-D1. The mortices on the purlin are closely spaced indicating that the wind-braces were substantial and either met at, or close to, the centre of the bay. The absence of mortices for the wind-braces in cruck C-C1 (exposed by maintenance works at the time of the 2010 investigation) suggests that the wind-braces were attached to the top face of the truss.

The southern foot of cruck C-C1 was exposed in early 2010, on account of concern that the cruck might be failing (Fig 9). Indeed, apparent inconsistencies in the construction of cruck C-C1 in part prompted the Research Department's visit of 2010. The southern end of cruck C-C1 no longer has the lower vertical timber of the jointed cruck construction, though what appears to be an empty mortice on the soffit of the principal rafter suggests its original existence. The missing lower vertical timber was presumably removed in connection with later alterations to the south wall, in particular the insertion of the dormer window located immediately to the west of the cruck.

Figure 9. Southern foot of cruck C-C1, exposed at time of 2010 investigation (DP113791).

Another peculiarity of truss C-C1's construction is that there is no visible pegging for the lower timber into the cruck blade. Comparison of the two ends of the truss sheds light on this. The northern foot of cruck C-C1 is exposed within the wall space, and in 1996 could only be viewed from inside the wall. Now, where a cupboard has recently been inserted into the corridor, a piece of plasterboard has been cut out to allow sight of the cruck joint. At the northern foot of cruck C-C1, the main part of the blade (forming the roof pitch) is straight and extends down to the top of the cob wall, but its foot is of jointed-cruck construction, a curved timber being jointed to the soffit of the main blade (Figs 10 and 11). The curved timber forms an elbow extending down through the cob wall and projecting slightly from the wall's inner face. The joint between the two parts of the blade has a massive single peg driven through from the soffit of the curved timber, that is, face-pegged (see Fig 11). It is reasonable to infer, therefore, that this was also the method employed on the south end of the cruck, explaining the absence of pegging on the sides of the cruck. This method of pegging is found at other sites in Devon and forms part of the local carpentry tradition.

The fact that the west face of truss C is smoke blackened confirms the implication of the chamfered collar that the hall originally also included bay B-C (see Fig 3). The medieval thatch and lathes have, however, been removed, and a later roof structure has been formed at a slightly higher level. On the west face of the southern end of truss C-C1 an

empty mortice indicates the position of a former purlin which has been removed. At the corresponding location at the northern end of truss C-C1 there is a purlin that extends westwards, but it is not smoke blackened and there are no peg marks for rafters on its outer face, suggesting that it is a replacement timber. It is not possible to determine whether it occupies the original mortice or whether that is now empty, as the purlin itself obstructs the view. The adjustments to the roof in bay B-C are probably related to the insertion of a brick chimney stack at the bay's west end, which presumably also occasioned the removal of a third truss at B-B1. To the west of truss C-C1, the ridge purlin is located further to the south side of the building, whereas the central ridge alignment and roof angles of bay D-E and bay C-D are consistent. This shift was also probably prompted by the insertion of the chimney stack along the line of truss B-B1.

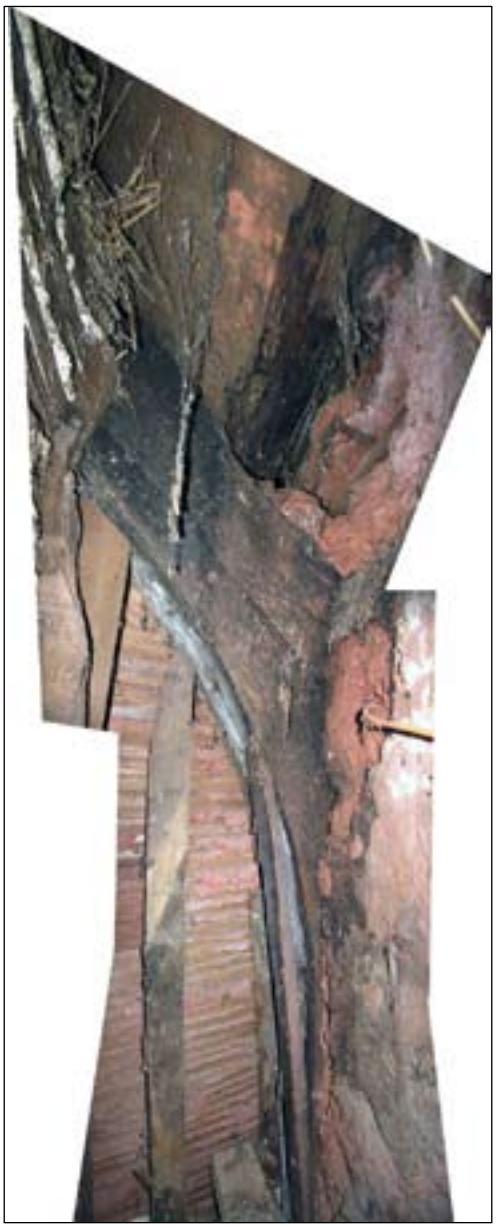

Figure 10. Northern foot of cruck C-C1, showing jointed-cruck construction (composite photograph) (DP113802).

Figure 11. Detail of northern foot of cruck C-C1 showing jointed-cruck construction and face-pegging (DP113780).

To the north-west of the chimney stack at B-B1, an adumbrated common rafter which is smoke blackened is visible at eaves level. Beyond it to the west, in bay A-B, another smoke-blackened common rafter and a layer of smoke-blackened thatch is visible. This confirms the continuation of the original roof structure after its interruption around the area of the former truss B-B1. The smoke-encrusted timbers and thatch in bay A-B, which bear a heavy deposit of soot, also indicate that at some point bay A-B was heated, either by its own heat source or by being open, at least at an upper level, to the hall. The west end of this bay is formed by a thick cob wall which probably formed the original west end of the house. At A-A1 the ridge is carried on an end cruck blade which has its base set into the east cob wall. This blade may be original, or could date from the late 16th or 17th century when an adjacent chimney stack was inserted at this end of the range.

The location of the hall is in part suggested by the direction of pegging on the crucks. The pegging direction at truss D-D1 is from west to east, while the pegging direction at truss C-C1 is from east to west. The best faces therefore suggest bay C-D as an area of aesthetic finish and high status, corroborated by the chamfered collar of truss C-C1 and the probable location of the open hearth indicated by the density of smoke-blackening at truss C-C1.

Figure 12. Two-light window in eastern wall of bay D-E, with chamfered mullions and jambs, probably dating to the late 16th or early 17th century (DP113788).

Further information about the original internal arrangement of Westacott Barton is offered by the wooden-framed windows that are located in what was originally the western elevation. These are now filled in, owing to the later addition of another range to the west (see Phase IV). The window towards the south is a single light, cut from a solid piece of wood, with chamfered edges on all four sides, and may well be original. If it is, its location high up on the wall suggests that bay A-B originally had a loft, prior to being ceiled-in. This appears to confirm the plan arrangement as posited in this report, in which the west bay originally housed a ground-floor service room, with a loft above that was open to the hall.

Typologically, the eastern bay D-E probably contained the best chamber, with a service bay below. There is a window in the eastern wall of bay D-E (a two-light window with chamfered mullion and jambs) which probably dates to the late 16th or early 17th century but which may well have replaced an earlier window in the same position that gave light to the upper chamber (Fig 12).

The house now has two entrances on the south elevation. The one to the east corresponds to the eastern bay of the open hall (bay C-D) and leads into a passage which crosses the width of the main range, leading to a wing of the late 16th or early 17th century. In the 1996 report, it was posited that this entrance passage respected the position of the medieval cross-passage. Observations made during the 2010 investigation indicate that this is unlikely, and that is it more probable that the position of the medieval screens passage was actually towards the west end of the open hall. This is suggested by the presence of a former screen bressumer re-used in the roof at B-B1, and by the continuity of high and low ends in the house through subsequent periods, which shows the high end to have been the east end of the house.

Part of a medieval screen bressumer survives in the roof of the main range, located just to the south of the inserted brick chimney, where it has been re-employed as a rafter (Fig 13 and Fig 14).

Figure 13. Section of medieval screen bressumer re-used as a rafter (DP113793).

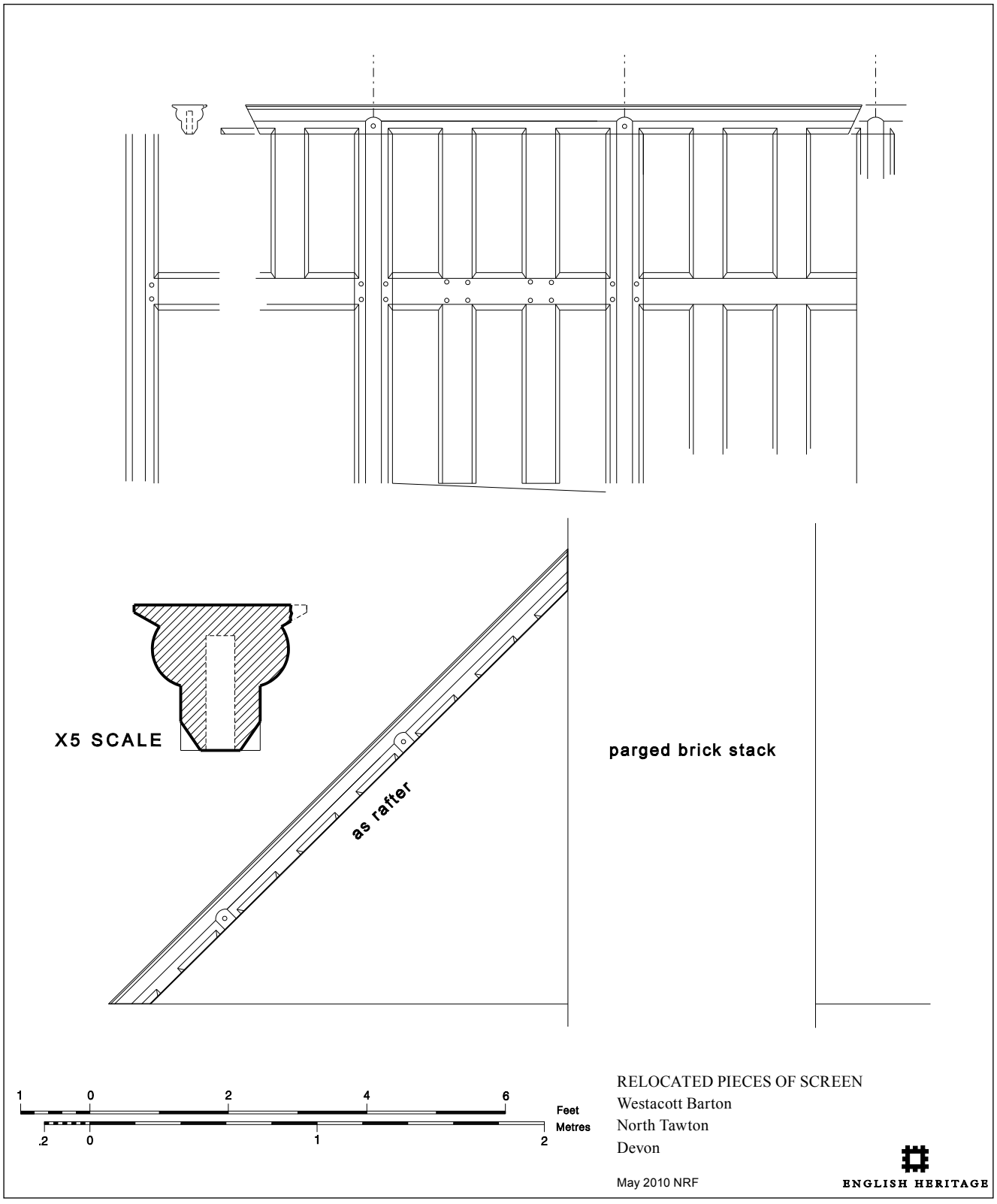

Figure 14. Pieces of screen relocated in linhay and screen bressumer re-used as a rafter (NBR BF 29994).

Figure 15. Panelled screen, probably part of the former screens passage, re-used in the linhay (DP113800).

As noted in the 1996 report, the likelihood that this screen bressumer came from Westacott Barton itself rather than having been imported from elsewhere is strengthened by the presence of a corresponding length of panelled screen re-used in the linhay adjoining the south elevation (Fig 15 and see Fig 14). The bressumer is chamfered and has carpenter's mitres for the screen studs and panel heads, which are also marked by a series of mortices and grooves in the soffit. The upper part of the

bressumer has a quarter-round moulding extending along its length which is returned at regular intervals towards the bottom of the bressumer to form the beginning of what would have been vertical moulded bands. The timber has been painted at a later date but where it has no painted surfaces the timber is smoke blackened. Both faces of the bressumer are of matching quality and the top face has no mortices, indicating that the beam was positioned at the top of a screen which was open above.

In 1996 it was possible to examine both sides of the remaining part of the panelled screen that has been re-used in the linhay (see Fig 15). This showed them to be of matching quality, therefore proving that it is not a section of reused wall panelling. The screen has a quarter-round moulding, 6 centimetres wide, which matches that on the bressumer (see Fig 14). The surviving upper and lower panels are 61 and 81 centimetres tall respectively, and there are pegs in one of the rails for a third level of panels which have not survived. The rails and styles are chamfered.

The position of the screen bressumer in the roof therefore corresponds to the probable zone of the hall from which it was removed. This would be consistent with the screens passage having survived in situ until the time when the chimney stack was inserted into the east side of bay A-B, at which point the screen would have been removed in order to facilitate use of the new fireplace. This would also explain the availability of the screen bressumer for re-use in that particular location within the roof in the context of creating a new roof structure around the inserted stack.

The plan form of Westacott Barton posited in the 1996 RCHME report was that of a three-bay hall with a service bay at the east end. The opportunity in 2010 to re-examine the building has led to a re-assessment of this hypothesis, and it now seems likely that the house comprised a central two-bay hall with one service bay at each end. It appears that the high end was the east end, and that there was a cross passage at B-B1, at the low end of the open hall. The western service bay was open, at least at an upper level, to the hall. The eastern service bay, which probably contained a chamber at first-floor level, was probably originally closed off from the hall, but either the partition degraded, or was removed, or the bay later received its own heating source, resulting in the smoke-blackening now visible.

The sequence of four areas of smoke-blackened thatch poses the question as to whether or not Westcott Barton evolved from a longhouse. The house is positioned on ground that slopes slightly from a higher level at the east end to a lower level at the west end, another feature often associated with longhouses. There is, however, no indication of where a large shared entry for humans and animals might have been located. In addition, although a byre end would have been located to the west, in bay A-B, this bay is not particularly elongated in comparison to the other bays. Therefore, while a longhouse origin cannot be ruled out completely as a possibility, it is not a compelling one.

PHASE II: MID- TO LATE 16TH CENTURY

The second phase of Westacott Barton comprised the flooring-in of the main range, the flooring-in of the service bay A-B (probably replacing an earlier loft or platform) and the provision of a chimney stack at the west end of the service bay A-B.

As discussed above, what appears to be an original window in the former west elevation of the main range suggests that service bay A-B had a loft even prior to being ceiled-in. The ceiling-in of this bay, and the provision of a fireplace and chimney stack against the western wall, appear to have taken place in the mid- to late 16th century. The date for this is suggested by two beams positioned longitudinally in the bay, both of which have hollow chamfers indicative of a mid- to late-16th-century date. The inserted floor beams are stopped differentially in order to respect the chimney stack, indicating that the two are contemporary. The chimney breast located along A-A1 is constructed with a curved timber bressumer, chamfered and decorated with broach stops; both features consistent with a date in the mid- to late 1500s (Fig 16 and Fig 17). The fireplace back is of neatly coursed dressed rubble stone, and has a plinth with a chamfered plinth-top. The fireback features an inset inverse triangle to improve draft. In the roof space, the chimney breast is built of cob, while externally the chimney upper is constructed of thin 17th-century bricks with ornate engaged shafts and bands. The chimney provided heating to the ground floor only, and at a later date a cob flue was added on its north side to provide for a first-floor fireplace.

Figure 16. Chimney breast along A-A1, showing timber bressumer with chamfer and broach stops (DP113785).

Figure 17. Detail of broach stop on bressumer of chimney breast at A-A1 (DP113784).

The beam running to the middle of the chimney breast ends in a carved stop with a step and a run-out (see Fig 16). The beam positioned to the south front runs into the wall without a carved stop, suggesting that, in fact, it continues behind the wall, and that the curved area now built out to accommodate the bread oven was a later addition to the fireplace area. The bread oven, which is built of brick, appears to date to the 18th or early 19th century and has a cast-iron door.

Running along the north side of bay A-B is a half beam with a straight chamfer and a carved stop, inserted in order to hold the joists at their junction with the wall, and indicative of an inserted ceiling. One would expect to find a corresponding half beam on the southern side of bay A-B. Although one is not visible, it may well exist behind what appears to be encasing along the southern side wall. The half beam running along the north side of the kitchen terminates before the eastern end of bay A-B. It probably terminated at the line of truss B-B1 and therefore now appears to stop short.

On the first floor, to the south of the inserted chimney stack, there is a timber door frame and pegged wood partition which forms an ante-chamber off the main room. This could be contemporary with this phase or may date from the 17th century. This chamber has a small window in the west wall, now blocked by the addition of the west range. There is no longer any evidence of a contemporary closure between bay A-B and the hall, probably as a result of the insertion of the brick chimney stack in that position during the 18th or early 19th century. There was, however, probably some sort of division at an upper level between bay A-B and the chambers created above the hall in bays B-C and C-D.

As discussed above, it is also likely that service bay D-E was originally floored-in, in order to create a chamber above. It is therefore possible that the medieval ceiling (perhaps little more than a loft or platform) may be contained in the floor of bay D-E, though no evidence of this is visible, and it is equally possible that it might have been replaced at a later date.

The ceiling-in of the open hall may well have taken place at the same time as the flooring-in of bay A-B, though it is not possible to establish this precisely because the ceiling is plastered, and there is only one corner of a single beam exposed in the hall ceiling. This is only visible on its west face where it appears to have two roll mouldings of contrasting sizes, a smaller moulding near the soffit. It is possible that the soffit has been cut back resulting in the loss of part of the beam moulding. The insertion of a floor would have prevented the use of the hall's original open fire, and therefore, at the same time as the ceiling-in, a chimney stack or smoke-hood may have been provided to serve the hall fireplace. The present hall chimney stack, which may have replaced such an earlier stack or smoke-hood, is built of brick and dates from the 18th or early 19th century.

Westacott Barton's main range has several wooden-framed windows at first-floor level located as follows: two in what was the original western elevation, one in the eastern elevation, and two windows along the north elevation. Those in what was originally the western elevation may well be original, while that in the eastern elevation may have replaced an original one (both discussed above). In the north elevation, there is one tall four-light window which corresponds to bay B-C, and one low three-light window which corresponds to bay A-B. Both are of a similar construction, with plain chamfered mullions and jambs. The generous width of the mullions and the relative narrowness of the lights suggest that these date to the 16th century at the latest. Their insertion probably dates to the second phase of the house, when it is likely that higher-level windows were inserted at the time of flooring-in, in order to provide light for the newly created first-floor chambers. There would also have been windows inserted into the south elevation, but these have all been replaced during later phases of re-fenestration.

The development of Westacott Barton in the mid- to late 16th century is therefore a typical example of domestic improvement through the creation of what was probably a designated kitchen space with chimney stack, and through the ceiling-in of the open hall, thereby affording more accommodation at first-floor level, and resulting in the provision of a chimney stack or smoke-hood for the hall's open fire.

PHASE III: LATE 16TH CENTURY – EARLY 17TH CENTURY

The next phase in the development of Westcott Barton was the addition of a high-status north wing. On the basis of stylistic analysis of the plasterwork and mouldings, this probably took place in the late 16th or even early 17th century.

The north wing is a single-bay, two-storey parlour wing adjoining the north wall of the main range's easternmost bay, thereby forming an L-plan in conjunction with the original range. The addition probably included a staircase block located in the angle of the two ranges, though its original form has been subjected to later alterations. Both the north wing and the staircase block have cob walls and thatched roofs. That this was originally a parlour wing is indicated by the scale and quality of the windows on the east elevation (Fig 18). Both floors have large mullioned windows with moulded oak frames (Fig 19). The window on the ground floor has ten lights with a massive king mullion supporting most of the first-floor east wall (Fig 20). The window on the first floor has five lights. The frames feature ovolo mouldings (Fig 21) which, in association with a long-mullioned window form suggest a date of the late 16th or early 17th century. A modern timber post has been inserted in front of the ground-floor window to give additional support to the lintel, and a plan of the house in 1956 shows that this arrangement was preceded by a pillar which blocked the window's two central lights.[1] On the exterior, the windows are surmounted by a small timber-framed gable which was reconstructed in the 1980s (after having been removed for many years) on the basis of evidence exposed at the eaves (see Fig 18).[2]

Figure 18. Exterior view from north-east showing small timber-framed gable (reconstructed in 1980s) above mullioned timber windows of north wing (DP113772).

Figure 19. Detail of window-frame moulding of king mullion in window of north wing, ground floor (AA97/01518).

On the ground floor the north wing is now reached through the main range via a doorway situated at the north end of a passageway which runs across the width of the main range at the end of bay C-D. This passageway, however, probably dates to a later phase (early 19th century). At the time the wing was constructed, its ground-floor room was probably reached directly through the doorway at the north end of the ceiled-in hall. This doorway retains a wooden frame which has a straight lintel and is ovolo moulded, dating from the late 16th or early 17th century. The ovolo terminates in a chamfer and an elaborate vase-shaped broach stop.[3] The north wing's ground-floor room, lit by the ten-light mullioned window, would probably have contained the parlour (see Fig 19). Above the ceiling there are apparently chamfered beams, suggesting that they were originally exposed and that the plaster ceiling was a later insertion.[4] This is confirmed by the awkward junction between the cornice and the window moulding in the north-east corner of the room, though it may have been that only a short interval of time elapsed between the completion of the wing and the execution of the plasterwork . There is no longer any evidence of a fireplace on either floor for heating but the wing's north wall was almost completely rebuilt following a collapse and it is probable that there was formerly a chimney stack in that position.

Figure 20. Ground-floor room of north wing showing ten-light mullioned window and plasterwork ceiling (BB96/03907).

The south wall of the wing was formed by adding a new raise of cob on top of the north wall of the original range. The wing's roof has a truss, carried on this wall, which has a tie-beam in the form of a plate resting on the wall, and principal rafters which are tenoned and pegged into the tie beam and at their apex. The truss (running east-west at E) has an original closure to the roof of the main range formed of pegged studs interwoven with birch sticks to form a wattle screen which is plastered on its north face. The fact that this closure extends to the apex of the roof suggests that the first-floor chamber over the parlour was originally open to the roof before later being ceiled-in with decorative plasterwork. The roof over the remainder of the north wing (to the north of the truss) is two bays long with a central truss between the bays. The truss is plastered over from within the wing and the roof apex is not accessible. The feet of the principal rafters and the soffit of a high-level tie-beam or low collar, however, are visible in their plastered form within the room.

The fine plaster ceilings are dated to the late 16th century, being identified as typical of the 'period one' of Devon plasterwork, that is, 1550-1600, though it does not preclude the possibility that they were introduced in the early 17th century.[5] On the ground floor the ceiling is patterned using a combination of geometric and curved forms defined by fine low-relief moulded ribs (Fig 22). The ribs are contrasted with naturalistic forms, including Tudor-style roses and leaves (Fig 23), arranged to form scrolls and bosses. The first-floor ceiling is formed at collar height, and probably represents the ceiling-in of what

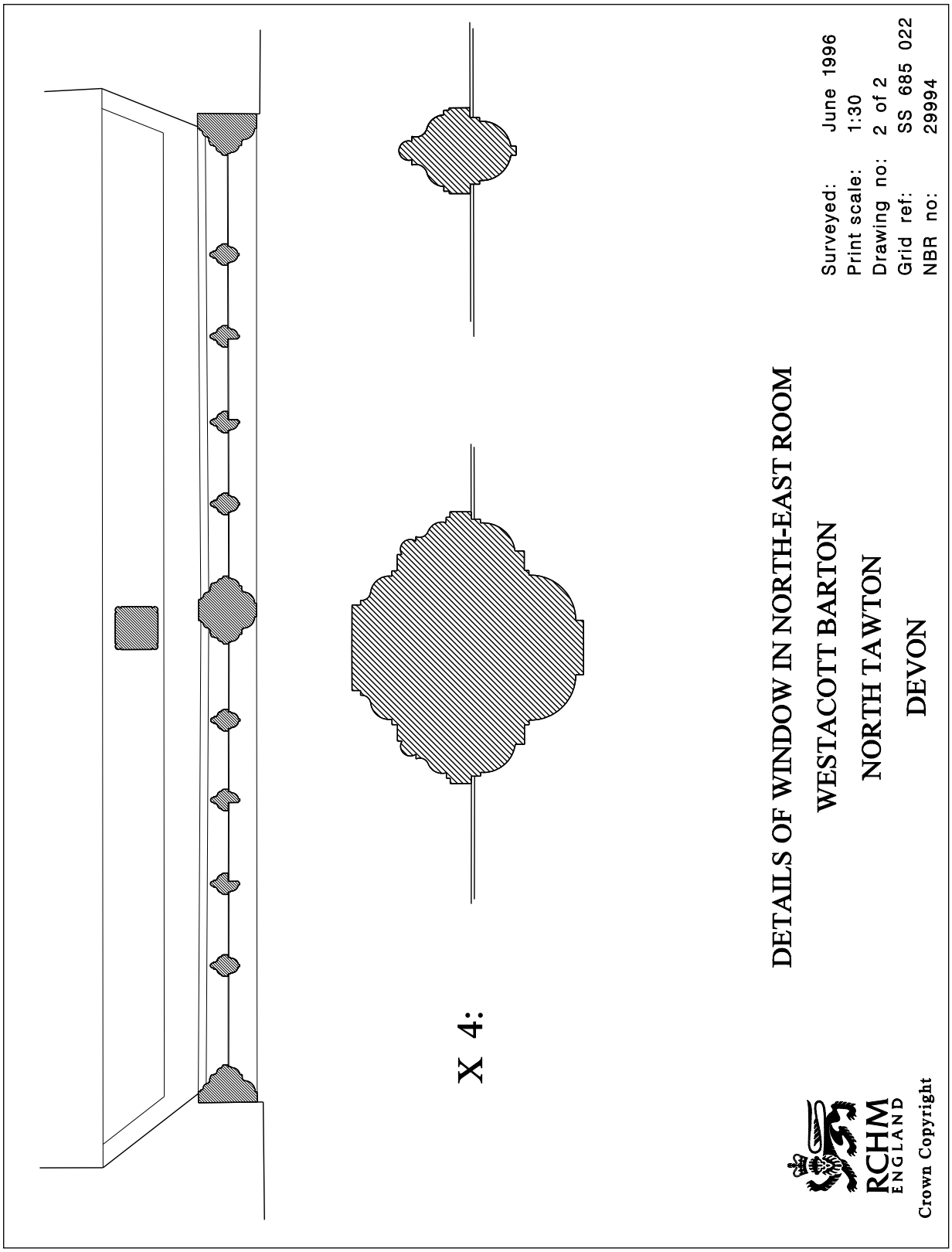

Figure 21. Details of window mouldings of oak-framed, ten-light window in ground-floor room of the north wing, from the 1996 RCHME report (NBR BF 29994).

previously had been a chamber open to the roof (as described above). This ceiling is centred on a pendant suspended from the roof's central truss, and comprises a largely geometric pattern, again using finely moulded low-relief ribs arranged in diamond motifs (Fig 24). The design also includes plant and flower forms which are used on the plastered soffit of the principal rafters. The plasterwork continues on the end walls of the room, above eaves height, where there is a frieze of intertwined flowers surmounted by a moulded cornice (Fig 25). The first-floor ceiling, with its intersecting kite-shaped panels and central pendant, bears particular comparison with the ceiling at Cottles Barton, also in North Tawton, dated in the plasterwork itself to 1599.[6] Both ceilings at Westacott Barton were conserved and partially restored in the 1980s. Documentary research might shed light on the context for their original installation.

Figure 22. Plasterwork ceiling in ground-floor room of north wing (BB96/03908).

A terminus ante quem for the construction of the north wing is provided by the dating of the plasterwork to the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century. As noted above, the closure between the main range and the north wing suggests that the first-floor chamber was originally open to the roof and only subsequently ceiled-in. Likewise, as noted above, the chamfered beams in the ground-floor room, and the junction between the plasterwork and the window moulding suggest that the plasterwork was an addition there as well. The fact that the installation of plasterwork post-dates the construction of the wing, however, does not necessarily imply a substantial intervening period between the two phases. This evidence places the construction of the north wing at some point in the latter decades of the 16th century, or potentially even the early years of the 17th century.

Figure 23. Detail of plasterwork ceiling in ground-floor room of north wing (BB96/03909).

Figure 24. Plasterwork ceiling in first-floor room of north wing (BB96/03913).

Figure 25. Detail of plasterwork on north wall of first-floor room of north wing (BB96/3912).

That the block in the angle formed between the main range and wing was originally a stair block is suggested by its modest size and by its position permitting access to both the original range and the parlour wing. The present stair in this block dates from the 19th century. It is likely that the present ground-floor doorway between the original block and stair block (at X in Fig 1) formed the doorway from the hall to the stair. If this was the case then the block's original staircase would have risen northwards from this doorway, then returned to the east, before turning southwards to reach the first floor with a landing in the south-east corner of the block. This would have corresponded with the original doorway from the stair block into the chamber over the parlour, which was in the south-west corner of the chamber, where there is now a cupboard with an eight-panel 17th-century door. This has slender moulded panels and elaborate 'vase'-shaped iron hinges. The present doorway, which cuts the foot of a principal rafter, respects the current landing position (against the north wall) and was probably inserted when the present stair was built.

The position of the stair block suggests that it may have been intended to give access to a first floor within the main range, probably through the present doorway between the two blocks. This confirms the stylistic indicators that the hall was already ceiled-in prior to the phase comprising the addition of the north wing.

There is also a small two-storeyed block projecting from the west wall of the stair block. The ground floor of this is inaccessible, and the first floor now forms a toilet. There are no features which might otherwise suggest a date of construction. A straight joint, however, in the north wall probably indicates that it was added after the construction of the stair block. Its position in an angle formed between the stair block and an outshot to its south may indicate that the block was added after, or at the same time as, the addition of the outshot. This block originally may have been a chimney stack, possibly serving the outshot.

PHASE IV: MID- TO LATE 17TH CENTURY

In the mid- to late 17th century a two-storey partially heated service bay was added to the west end of the main range. This bay is built of cob and has a half-hipped thatched roof. That it is an addition is indicated by a change in angle in the side walls and by the existence of the thick cob wall to its east, as well by the blocked windows in the west wall of bay A-B. The addition has a single room on each floor, only the ground floor being heated with an internal chimney stack against the west wall. The fireplace has granite jambs, a sandstone rubble back and a cambered wooden lintel which has a chamfer (7 centimetres deep) with broach stops. The ground floor has a transverse beam with chamfers and stepped scroll stops, and squared wooden joists.

It is likely that there was a stair rising into the first floor of the addition from the ground-floor west bay of the original range. This is indicated by an opening at mid-floor height in the wall between the two bays, which has an angled head that rises towards the west. Also, the ground-floor ceiling of the added bay has a trimmer in the south-east corner of the room, which corresponds with the opening through the wall. It is possible that the first floor of the addition was used to accommodate the farm labourers, and that this stair provided access from the kitchen up into the labourers' sleeping loft on the first floor. This room remains open to the roof.

The ground- and first-floor rooms are both lit by a window in the south wall, each window having a three-light wooden frame with diamond-set iron bars and a rebate for glazing. The first-floor window has its leaded glass intact. There is a similar window on the first floor, at the east end of the main range, which may also date from this period. It has a two-light wooden frame which is squared, and has leaded panes. This window is blocked internally by a lath and plaster partition.

Following the addition of the west bay, or possibly at the time it was built, an outshot was built adjoining the west bay's north wall. The outshot matches the form and construction of the earlier outshot adjoining the north wall of the main range.

PHASE V: MID-18TH CENTURY TO EARLY 19TH CENTURY

In this period a projecting linhay was added to the front (south) elevation (Fig 26). The linhay is built of cob on a sandstone rubble base and has a thatch roof. It has three cart bays on the east elevation which have wooden posts and lintels. The cart bays were originally open but have been blocked with brick at a later date. Each of the posts supports a transverse waney-edged beam. Internally, on the ground floor a passage was provided through the linhay across the front of the main range. The first floor is now reached by an inserted wooden stair in the north-east corner of the range, adjoining the passage, and adjacent to the section of medieval screen (as described above).

Figure 26. View of south elevation, with linhay projecting to south, and north wing visible projecting to rear (DP113768).

In the same period, and possibly introduced as part of the same phase, a new brick chimney stack was inserted into the east end of the kitchen (bay A-B), opening onto the hall (at B-B1 on plan). This replaced the cross-passage and the putative 16th fireplace or smoke-hood (discussed above). The chimney stack is built of brick (brick size: 23cms x 11cms x 7cms) and provides a fireplace on the ground floor in the east part of the original hall. There is a change in the ceiling height between the end of bay B-C and the end of the window embrasure: this is probably on account of cutting away the medieval floor joists in order to clear the space to drop in the stack. The moulding that runs north-south across bay B-C probably dates from this phase. It does not appear to be medieval, and was probably attached in order to provide some sort of finish after the works on the chimney stack area. The new fireplace has brick jambs, a squared wooden lintel and what is possibly a contemporary wooden settle against its north-east jamb (Fig 27).

Figure 27. Interior of ground floor showing inserted brick chimney stack opening onto hall along B-B1, and settle (AA97/01519).

On the front of the chimney breast, above the lintel, there is a weight-operated mechanism for turning a spit (Fig 28). This may be of an earlier date than the fireplace and therefore re-set when the chimney stack was inserted. In the kitchen bay A-B, grooves in the bressumer above the fireplace suggest that it may have been the original location for the spit mechanism and imply that it may have been used there for a considerable number of years (see Fig 16).

The house plan at this time was probably as follows: the east end of the house, including the end bay of the main range and the north-east wing, remained the parlour end of the house, and the east end of the hall with the newly inserted stack probably functioned as the hall, or principal room, while the west end of the original range and the additional bay to its west probably functioned as the kitchen and services.

Figure 28. Turn-spit mechanism re-set above inserted fireplace at B-B1 (DP113776).

The construction of the brick stack involved cutting through the central bay (bay B-C) of the original hall roof, where a new thatched common rafter roof structure was built at a slightly higher level. This roof also extends over the earlier smoke-blackened roof to its east. The new roof incorporates part of the medieval screen bressumer (as described above) which is used as a rafter against the south side of the inserted chimney. It is likely, therefore, (as discussed above) that this phase also involved removing the original screen from the cross-passage. The reuse of part of the screen panelling as a stair partition in the linhay indicates that these alterations within the house may also have been contemporary with the construction of the linhay.

It was probably during this period that larger windows were introduced into the southern elevation at first-floor level. This involved the removal of sections of wall plate, as was visible at cruck C at the time of the 2010 inspection, to allow for the insertion of larger casements. As part of this re-fenestration, the front pitch of the roof was also altered and the height of the wall-head raised. This was probably to increase the ceiling height in the principal bedrooms, and to avoid the construction of dormers thereby creating a more polite façade.

LATER PHASES

In the second quarter of the 19th century the present stair was constructed within the earlier stair block. The stair has plain squared balusters, circular-section newels and a slender moulded handrail. In conjunction with this alteration a small lobby was formed to the south of the stair block, providing a direct means of access between the stair and the entrance passage.

At the top of the flight of stairs is the landing, on the right-hand side of which a small additional set of steps leads to the first-floor room of the northern wing. This is not the original entrance to the room: it was located further to the south, though still on the western wall. The original panelled door remains in situ in front of what is a now a shallow cupboard (once the threshold to the stairway). The 19th-century staircase was probably intended to create a more spacious and impressive access route to the north wing's upper room. It necessitated the repositioning of the original door, which in its new location produced what was probably considered to be a more satisfying symmetrical entrance into that room; rather than arriving in the south west corner of the room as was the case when the room was originally created, guests would arrive in the centre of the room, directly opposite the impressive five-light window.

Figure 29. Regency-style doorcase inserted into facade at east end of main range (DP113775).

It was probably also at this time that a passageway at the east end of the house was created in bay C-D, and an entrance with a Regency-style doorcase inserted in the façade at the east end of the main range. The doorcase has a fluted wooden surround with a flat head, a rectangular fanlight, six-panel door and panelled reveals (Fig 29). The passageway is positioned on axis with the doorway to the ground-floor room of the northern wing, suggesting a formal entrance which was presumably added in order to afford access directly into the north wing.

CONCLUSION

Westacott Barton is a substantial former open hall house which is significant for the preservation of its smoke-blackened roof timbers and smoke-blackened thatch, and for its high-quality north wing of the late 16th to early 17th century.

A notable feature of the house's development is the apparent continuity of the lower and upper ends of the building. In the medieval phase, the upper end of the hall appears to have been located at the east end. This was reinforced by the development of the formerly unheated service bay into what appears to have been a separately heated bay, perhaps used as a private chamber. Meanwhile, the lower end of the house developed from the main service bay into a ceiled kitchen with substantial fireplace. Further confirmation of the elevated status of the east end of the house was given by the addition of the northern wing (featuring exceptionally large, high-status windows) probably in the mid- to late 16th century, and the subsequent embellishment of that wing with lavish, high-status plasterwork at the end of the 16th century or beginning of the 17th century.

It is worth noting with regard to the development of Westacott Barton during the 16th century, that the works undertaken to construct the north wing in the late 16th or early 17th century are of a different order to those carried out in the mid- to late 16th century, namely the creation of a chimney stack and the flooring-in of bay A-B and the main hall. The provision of a dedicated kitchen space and additional rooms on a first-floor level is a standard feature of many houses in the mid- to late 16th century, and represents a relatively modest scale of improvement at Westacott Barton in that period, whereas the high-status north wing with its impressive fenestration and decorative plasterwork scheme expresses considerable social aspiration. It is possible that documentary research might reveal a particular context, such as a socially significant marriage, or a bid for elevated status, for the decision to erect the northern wing and create such a finely finished, prestigious space.

ENDNOTES

1 RCHME Historic Building Report on Westacott Barton, September 1956. NMR BF 29994

2 English Heritage, pers. comm.

3 At the time of recording by RCHME in 1996, a stone with a similar moulding and stop was uncovered in the garden. It is possible that this stone formed part of a door surround of the same period, possibly removed from the house during a later phase.

4 List entry description for Westacott Barton (LB UID 92968).

5 French, K and C 1957 'Devonshire Plasterwork'. *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art* **89**, 124–144, (126–127).

6 Cherry, B and Pevsner, N 1989 *The Buildings of England: Devon*, 2 edn of rev edn, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 605.






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