

MEDIEVAL
DETACHED KITCHEN
AT LITTLE BRAXTED HALL, LITTLE
BRAXTED, ESSEX

An Historical Assessment

by

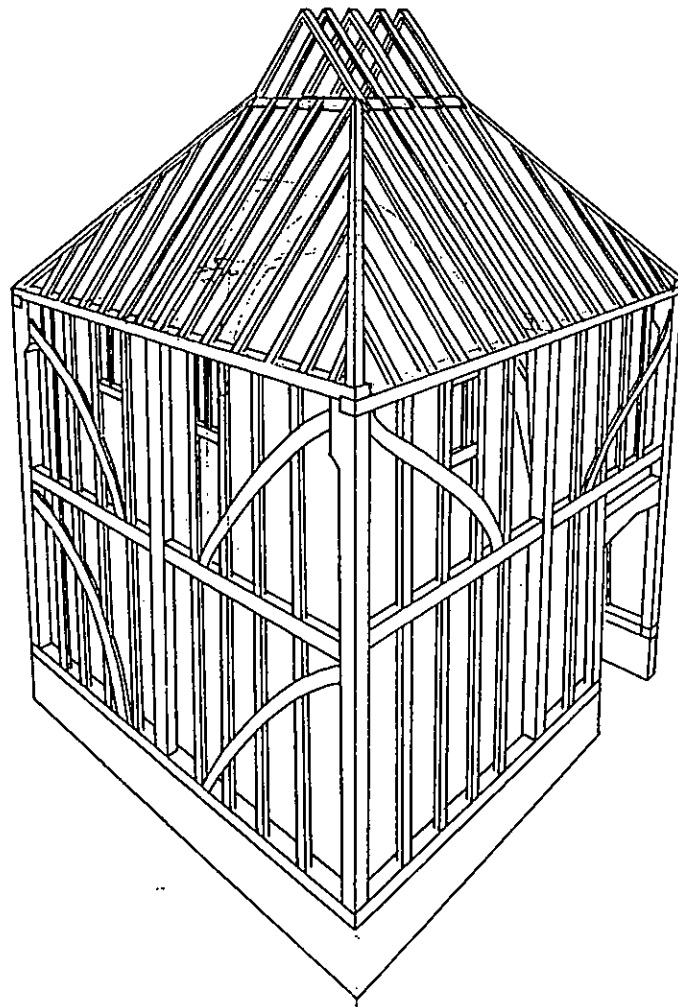
Richard Bond

Historical Analysis & Research Team
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ENGLISH HERITAGE

**MEDIEVAL DETACHED KITCHEN AT LITTLE BRAXTED
HALL, LITTLE BRAXTED, ESSEX: AN HISTORICAL
ASSESSMENT**



**RICHARD BOND
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH TEAM
ENGLISH HERITAGE**

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The kitchen at Little Braxted Hall is a grade II listed timber-framed building dating to between AD 1397 and AD 1419. The building stands on a moated site and formed part of the residence of the medieval manor of Little Braxted. The present Little Braxted Hall stands a short distance to the south-west of the moated site; the house was probably built during the 16th century as part of a major replanning of the site which resulted in the land within the moat being given over predominately to agricultural use. With the removal of the main residence away from the former moated site there would have been no need to maintain the detached kitchen in its former use, and it seems likely that it was around this time that the building was adapted for its later use as a combined stable/dovecote. This study looks at the evidence for the detached kitchen as an historic building type in lowland England, and assesses the significance of the Little Braxted example in the context of current research in Essex and East Sussex.*

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The drawing on the front cover shows the building as it would have appeared as built, during the period AD 1397 - 1419. The drawing is based on a reconstruction drawing of the building by Cecil Hewett.

16 November 1998

MEDIEVAL TIMBER-FRAMED KITCHEN AT LITTLE BRAXTED HALL

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1.0 Introduction and scope of study

- 1.1 This report arises from an assessment of the building carried out in October 1998 by Richard Bond of the Historical Analysis and Research Team of English Heritage. The analysis was supplemented by a tree-ring dating project carried out on behalf of English Heritage by Dr. Martin Bridge of the Institute of Archaeology at University College, London.
- 1.2 The research was requested by Andrew Derrick of Eastern Region of English Heritage following a proposal from the owner of the Little Braxted Hall, Mr and Mrs K Speakman, to convert the now redundant former kitchen (latterly dovecote) building to office use. The main aim of the assessment was to elucidate the age and original function of the building and assess its rarity and historical significance in a regional and national context.
- 1.3 It is emphasised that this report is primarily an advisory document, and does not constitute a full building analysis or fabric record. The site survey comprised a brief visual inspection of the building only, and was far from comprehensive. The potential for further fabric analysis is outlined in section 5 of this report.
- 1.4 The fieldwork for this assessment comprised a one-day site visit to investigate the building and its setting and for the dendrochronologist to assess the timbers and remove a number of core samples, and a further day looking at documentary sources at the County Record Office at Chelmsford. The building was photographed using both slide and print film (*figs 20-24*) and sketches made of various construction details (*figs 11 and 14*). At the time of the site visit the interior faces of the walls up to and above the level of the mid rails were concealed behind boarding and the framing in these areas could not therefore be fully assessed. One section of boarding at the north end of the east wall was removed, however, in order to confirm the evidence for an original door opening in this position (see section 3).
- 1.5 Of those timbers sampled for dendrochronological analysis, a total of six were dated, producing a felling date range of AD 1397 - 1417. The samples were combined to produce a site chronology of 80 years covering the period AD 1314 - 1393, which was dated against several regional master curves and local chronologies. The results of the analysis suggest that the timbers used in the construction of the kitchen were most likely of local origin, the strongest crossmatches being found with relatively local material - the strongest matches of all being with the well-replicated chronology from Cressing Temple, less than 10k. away.¹

¹ I am grateful to Dr Bridge for this information

2.0 Historical development of the site

- 2.1 At the time of the Domesday survey of 1086 the manor of Little Braxted comprised 1 hide of land² held by Hughling (*Hugolinus*) from the Bishop of London. Before the conquest the manor had been held by Alvríc, a free man, with land for two plough teams. There were altogether in the village four villeins, three bordars and four slaves (i.e. together with their families); the villagers between them also held land for two plough teams. Following the conquest the size of the lord's estate remained the same, but the villagers themselves no longer held any lands, there no longer being any villeins in the village, only eight bordars, two slaves and one priest. At the time of the survey the manor contained woodland for 40 pigs, and included one mill. There was one horse, four 'beasts' (*animalia*), 13 pigs and 130 sheep. The rating for the manor in 1086 was 60 shillings, the same as before the Conquest.
- 2.2 In 1694 the Little Braxted estate was mortgaged by its owner, Robert Aylott, to William East. An indenture (deed) describing the buildings and lands which made up the estate makes specific reference to '.....mills....and dovehouses'.³
- 2.3 In 1774 the estate was owned by Jacob Pattison, a major Essex landowner who held a large amount of property in and about Witham. By 1784 the estate had passed to WB Rush, who was in turn leasing the property to F KING.⁴ Two estate maps, dated 1784 and 1792, whilst by no means accurate as measured surveys, do nevertheless give a clear indication of the layout of the fields and buildings which then made up the property (*figs 1 - 3*). The two maps are fairly similar in terms of what they show, although the actual shape of the moat and the size of the buildings relative to one another varies considerably. Both maps depict an L- shape building within the moat which can only have been the former manor house, known to have existed up until the 1960-70's (see description below). A square-plan structure close to the house is likewise clearly the medieval kitchen, or rather combined dovecote and stable, as it would have been used by this time (inexplicably this is not shown on the 1792 map).
- 2.4 In 1841 the owner of the estate was Angelica Clark. She was the principal landowner in the parish of Little Braxted at this time, holding 78 of the 114 plots listed in the Tithe Award land register. The estate was occupied by Ann King. Like the earlier estate maps, the Tithe Award map is a valuable record of how the site appeared at this time (*fig 4*).
- 2.5 The series of 25" O.S. maps charts the later development of the site between 1875

² Then reckoned to be about 120 acres; but this was merely a fiscal, not areal measure.

³ Essex Record Office. Ref.D/DB T648

⁴ Essex Record Office. 'Surveys and plans of estates lying in the county of Essex and belonging to W.B. Rush, Esq.' two handbooks dated 1784 and 1792

completeness, are all rectangular structures, having in common an open hall of one or two bays, generally supplemented by a floored bay at one end. None conform to the square plan type represented by the Little Braxted kitchen, and although not all of Stenning's examples are given dates, none would seem likely to date much before the beginning of the 16th century. The examples cited do show a remarkable variety in the positioning of the kitchen in relation to the parent house. Some are, or were originally, completely detached structures like that at Little Braxted, whilst others were clearly built as extension ranges to the house, often, but not always, attached at right angles to the outer side wall of the service cross wing. However, with so few examples firmly dated, and with many of these surviving in fragmentary form with the parent house either absent or else so altered as to have lost all evidence to show the original relationship between the two, it is unclear whether, as Stenning questions, 'the attached and detached variants represent alternative approaches or stages in an evolutionary process'. Certainly in the context of the Essex examples discussed by Stenning, the kitchen at Little Braxted represents an exceptional, perhaps even unique early survival, not only on account of its being a much earlier structure, but also for the completeness of the original fabric, and the fact that to date it is the only surviving example of a square-plan kitchen positively identified as such in the county.

- 4.2 Further research into detached kitchens has been undertaken by David and Barbara Martin in Eastern Sussex. A recent study has revealed that, after houses and barns, detached kitchens were the most common building type in south-east England.¹⁶ As in Essex, the majority of the surviving examples date from between 1450 and 1550, and are generally large and complex structures ranging in length from two to four bays. The buildings usually had more than one ground floor room, and one or more upper chambers. Only one example of a square-plan detached kitchen has so far been positively identified, at Little Brook, Crowbridge, the building now existing as a shed in front of the house. An apparently quite similar building, at Mount Street, Battle, originally also thought to have been a detached kitchen, has since been shown to have been much later in date, and have an entirely clean roof. This building is now thought more likely to have been a 17th century slaughter house.

5.0 The potential for further research

- 5.1 On the basis of the evidence presented in this report, it would appear that the kitchen at Little Braxted is an extremely rare example of a once common but now all but forgotten building type in medieval England. Whether the kitchen is truly a unique survival is as yet impossible to say with any certainty. Whilst the existence of the building has been known about for some time, it is only relatively recently that its significance has been fully recognised. It is clear that as recently as 1931 the building remained completely misunderstood in terms of its original function (*fig 19*), suggesting the possibility that some of the other larger dovecotes described by

¹⁶ D. & B. Martin. 1997, 85-91

6.0 Bibliography

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8.0 Figures



Figure 1 Detail of Rush Estate map of 1784 (traced from original). North to top.

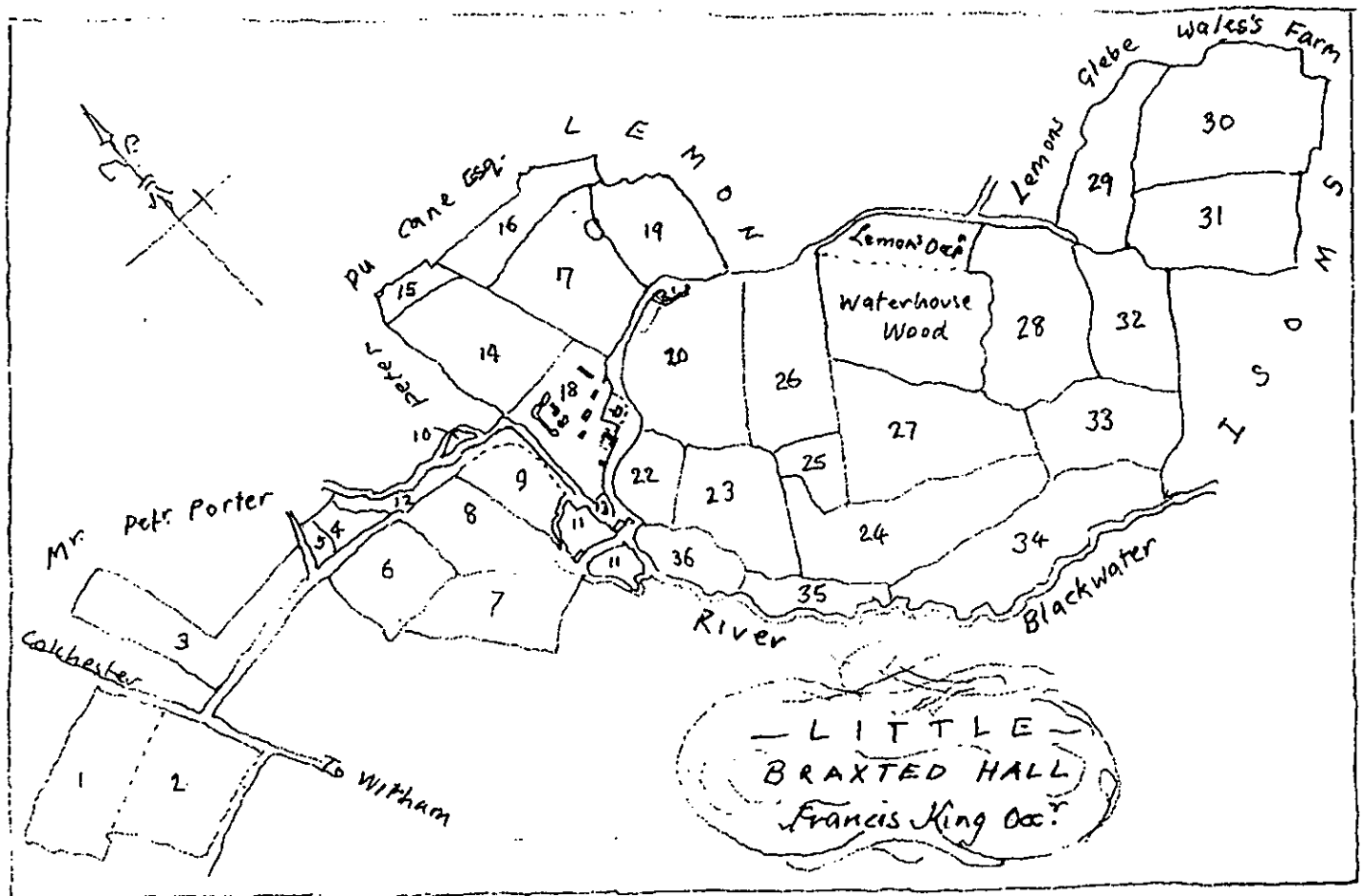


Figure 2 Extract from Rush Estate handbook of 1792 (traced from original). Actual size.

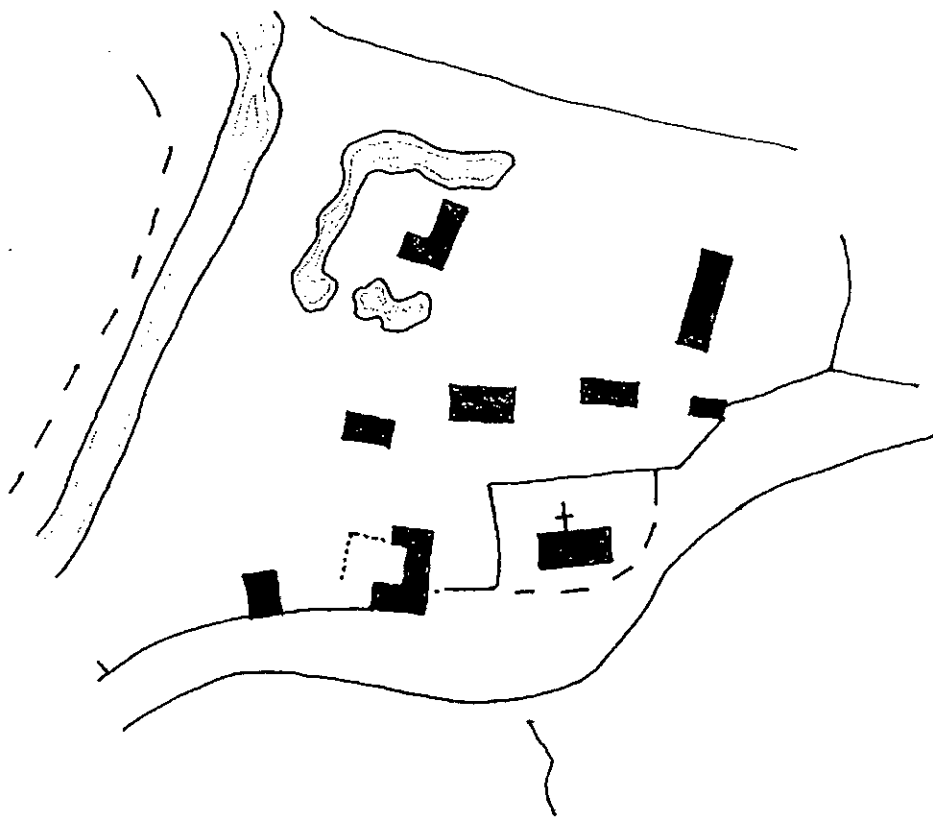


Figure 3 Detail of Rush Estate map of 1792 (traced from original). North to top.

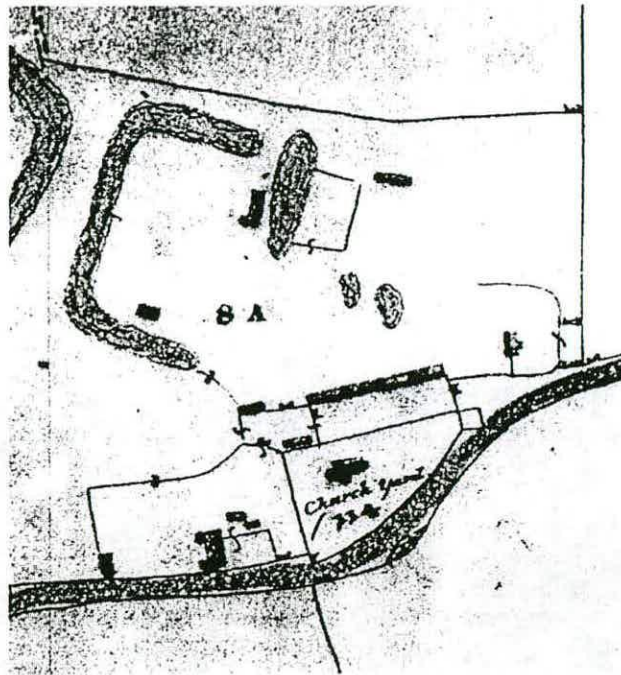


Figure 4 Detail of 1841 Tythe Map (traced from original). North to top.

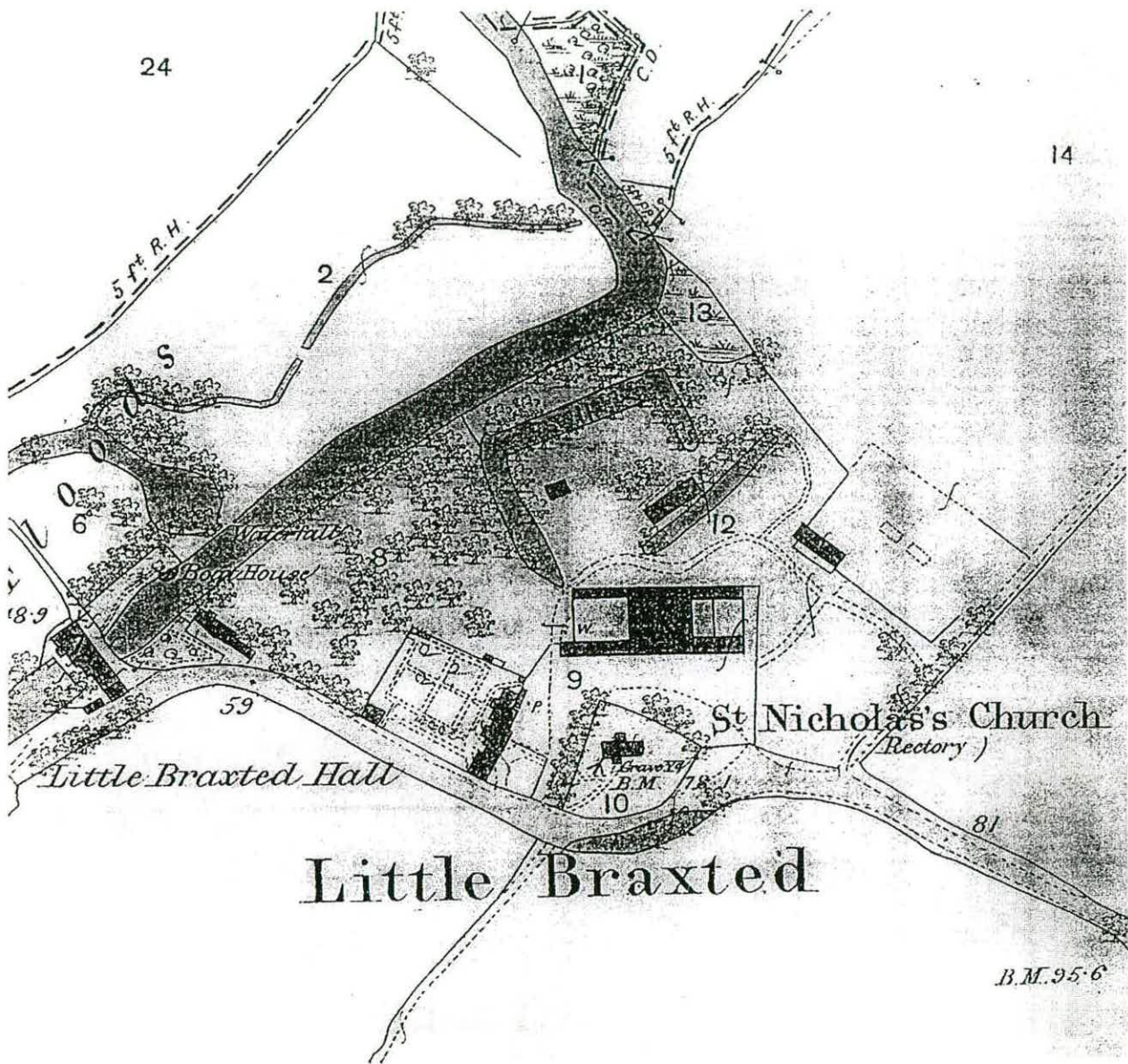


Figure 5 Detail of 1st Edition 25" O.S. map of 1875.

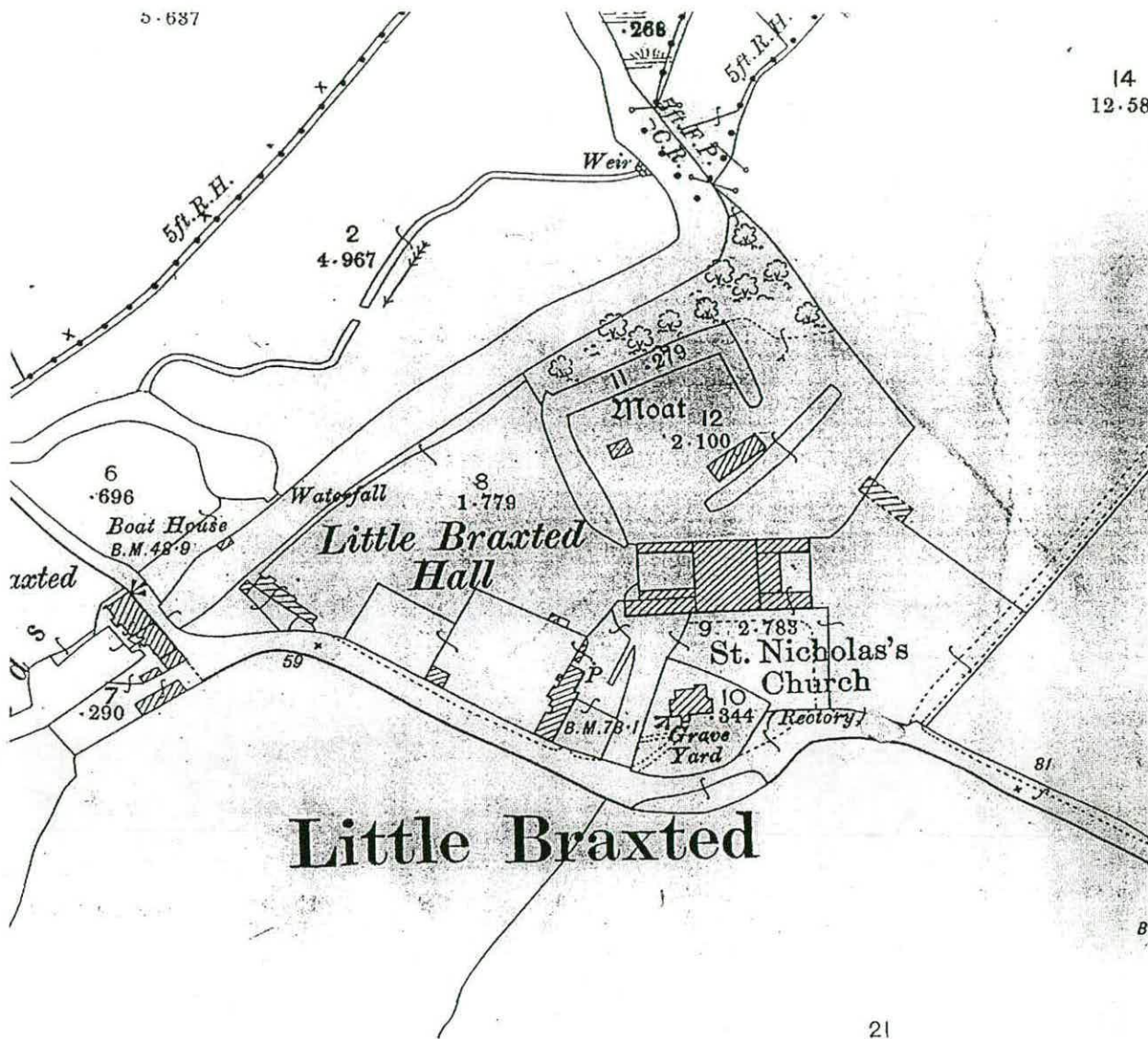
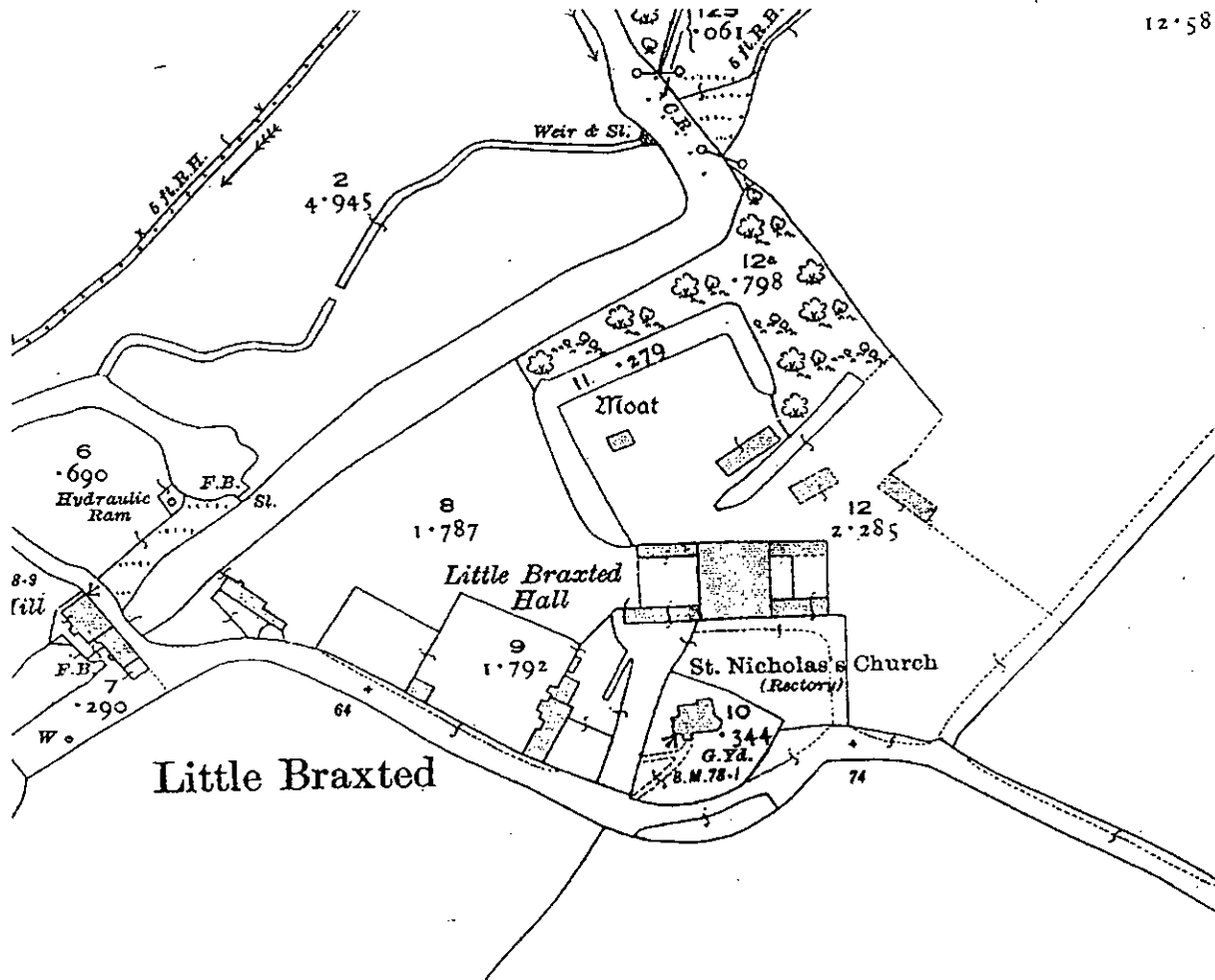


Figure 6 Detail of 2nd Edition 25" O.S. map of 1897.



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Figure 7 Detail of 25" O.S. map of 1922.

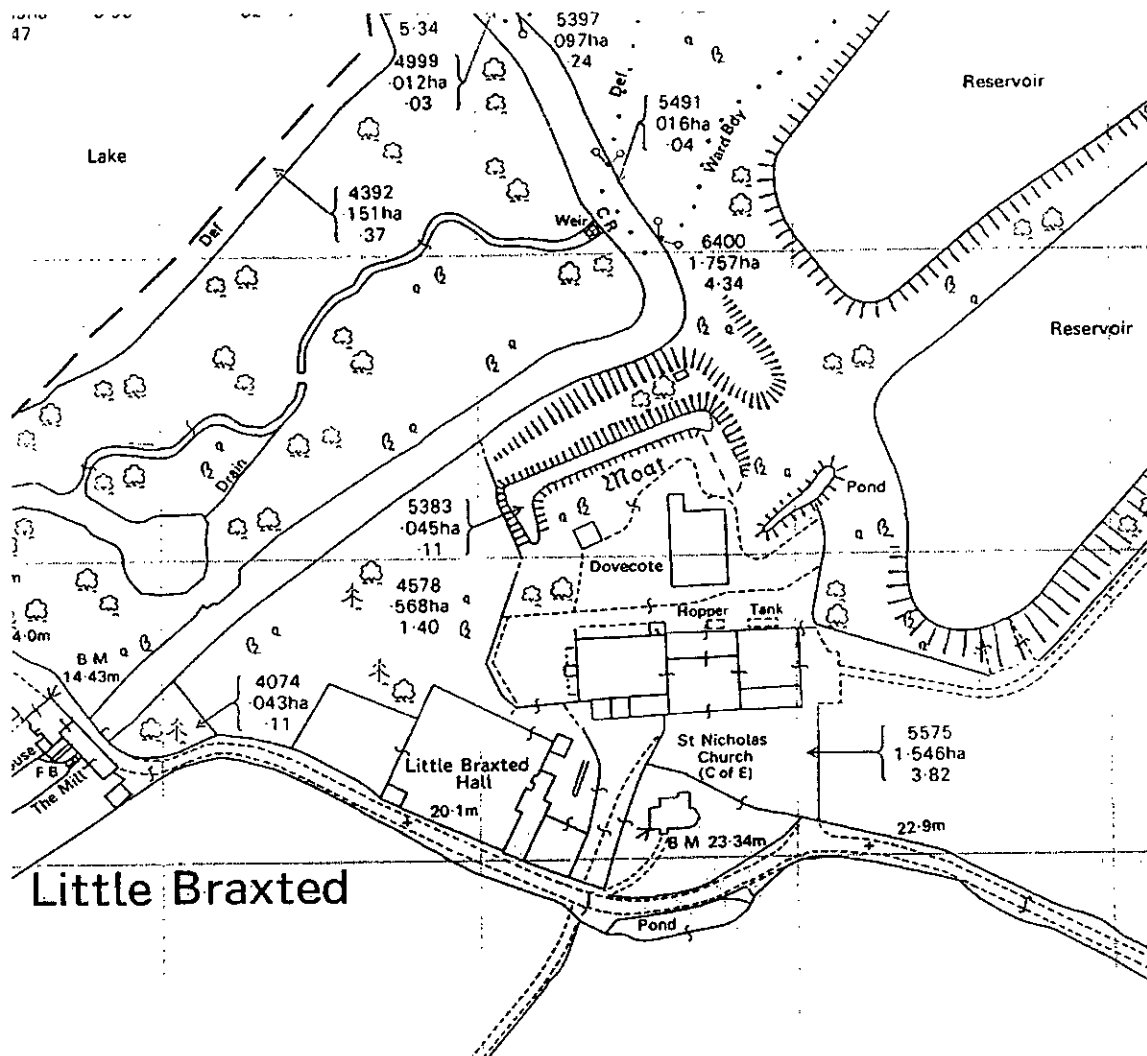


Figure 8 Detail of 1:2500 O.S. map of 1985.

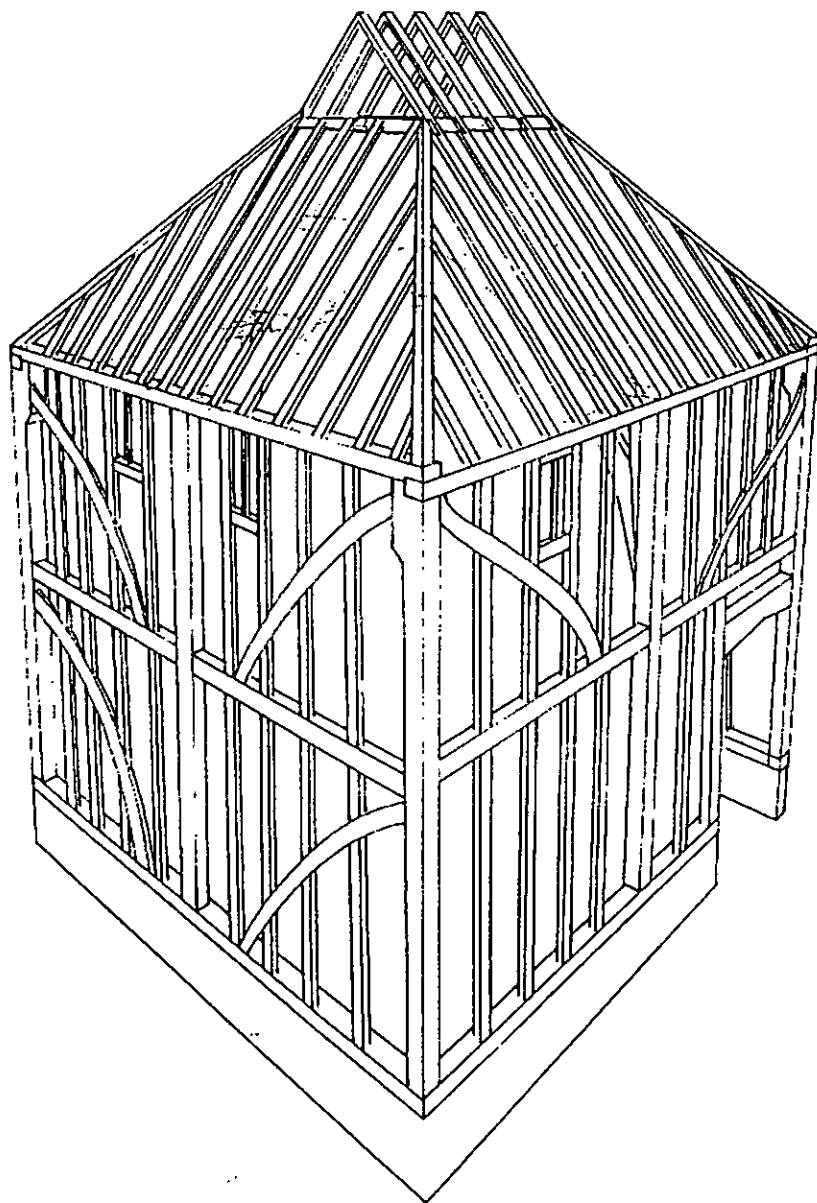


Figure 9 Reconstruction drawing showing kitchen as built, c.AD1400. This drawing based on an earlier reconstruction drawing by Cecil Hewitt (see figure 10).

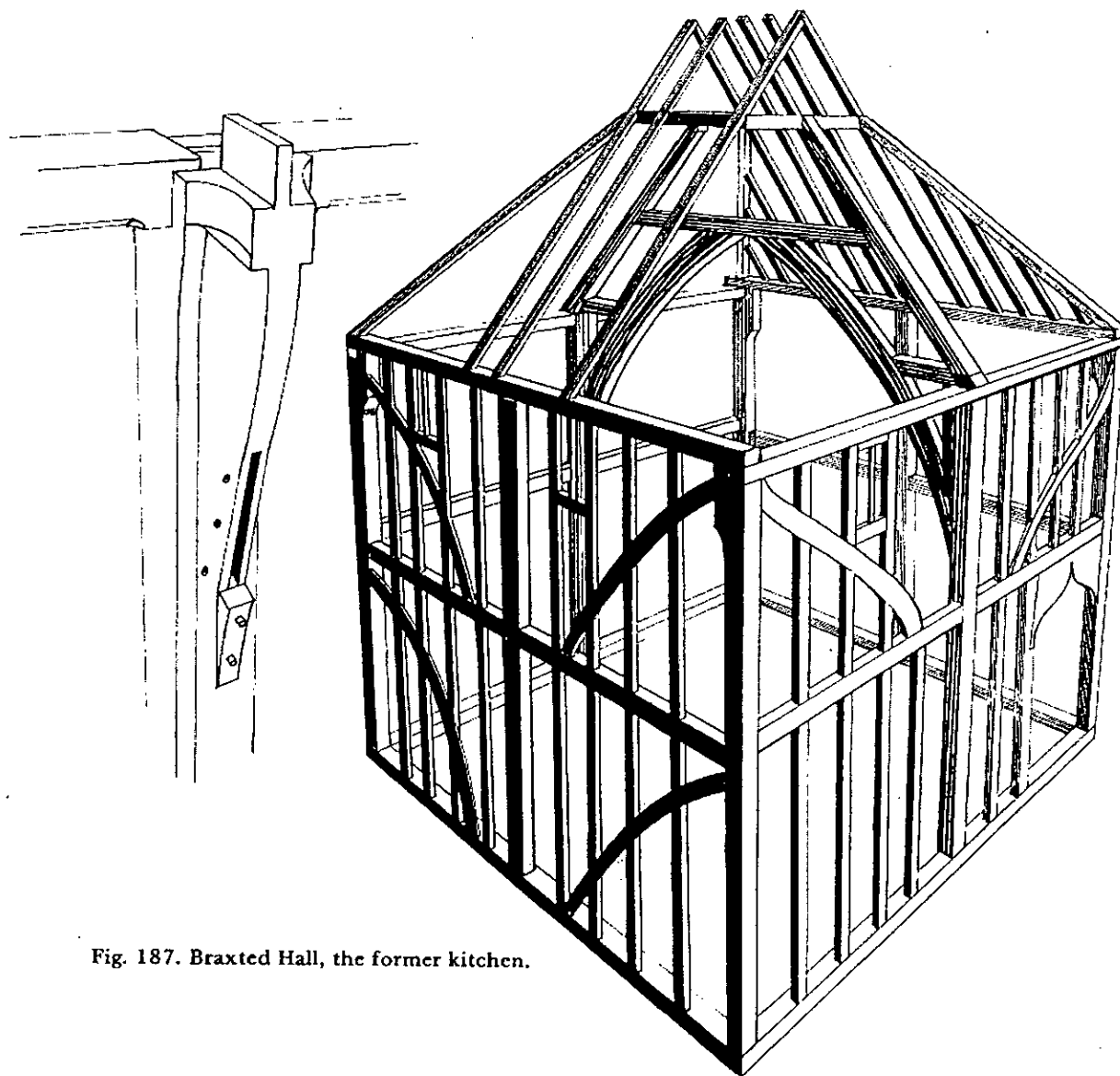


Fig. 187. Braxted Hall, the former kitchen.

Figure 10 Reconstruction drawing by Cecil Hewett showing kitchen as built, c.AD1400. Compare this drawing with figure 9.

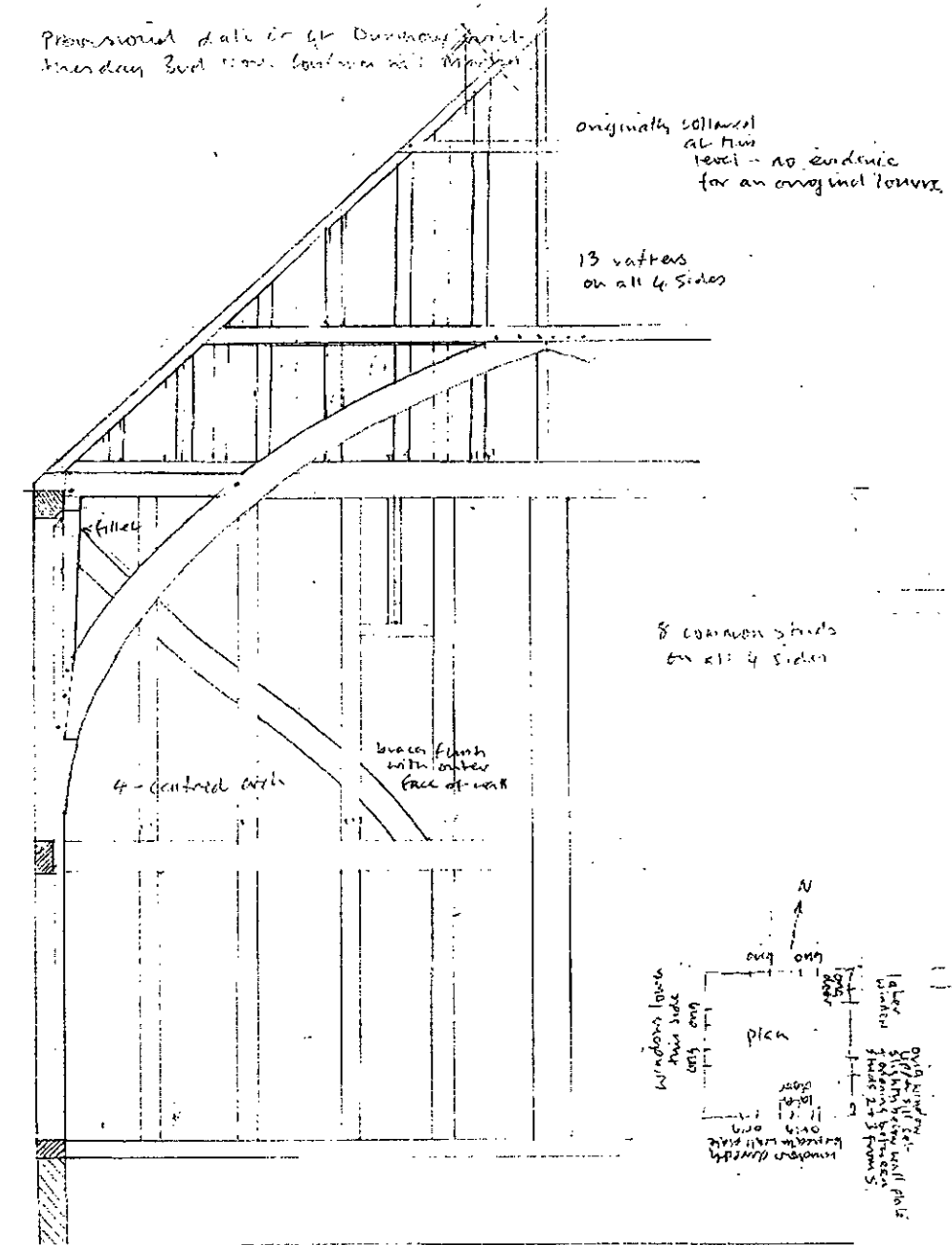


Figure 11 Survey drawing of north wall of building.

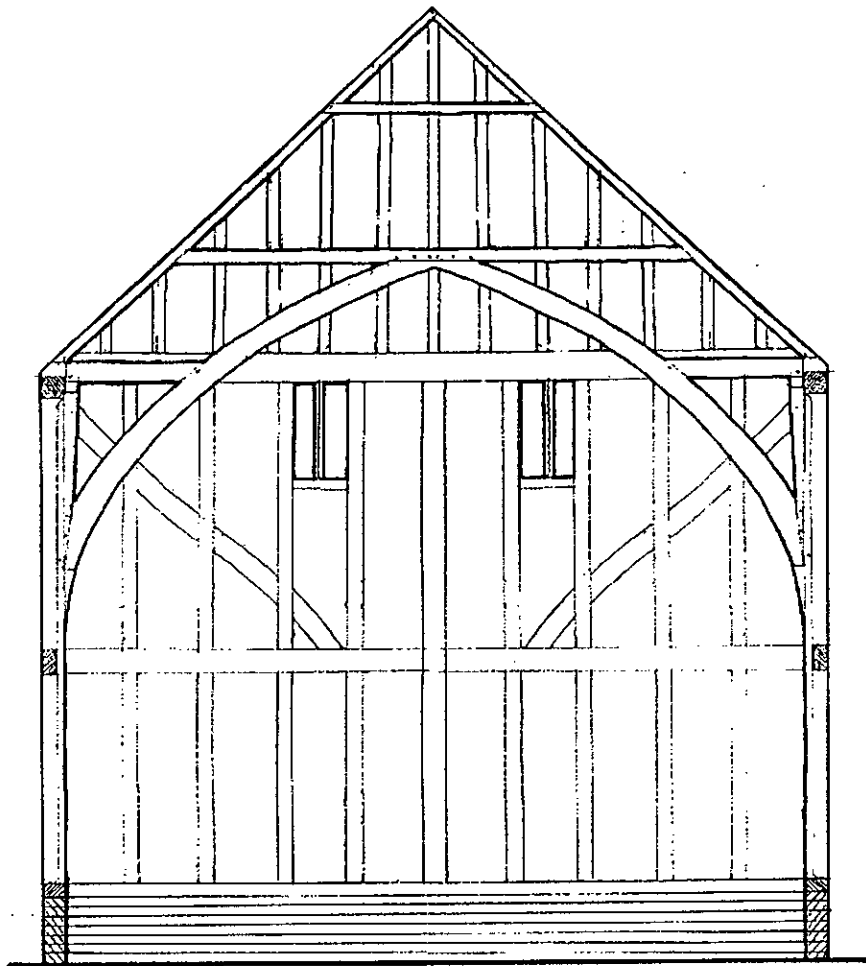


Figure 12 Sketch cross sectional view of building showing form of central cross frame and framing pattern of north wall. Not to scale.

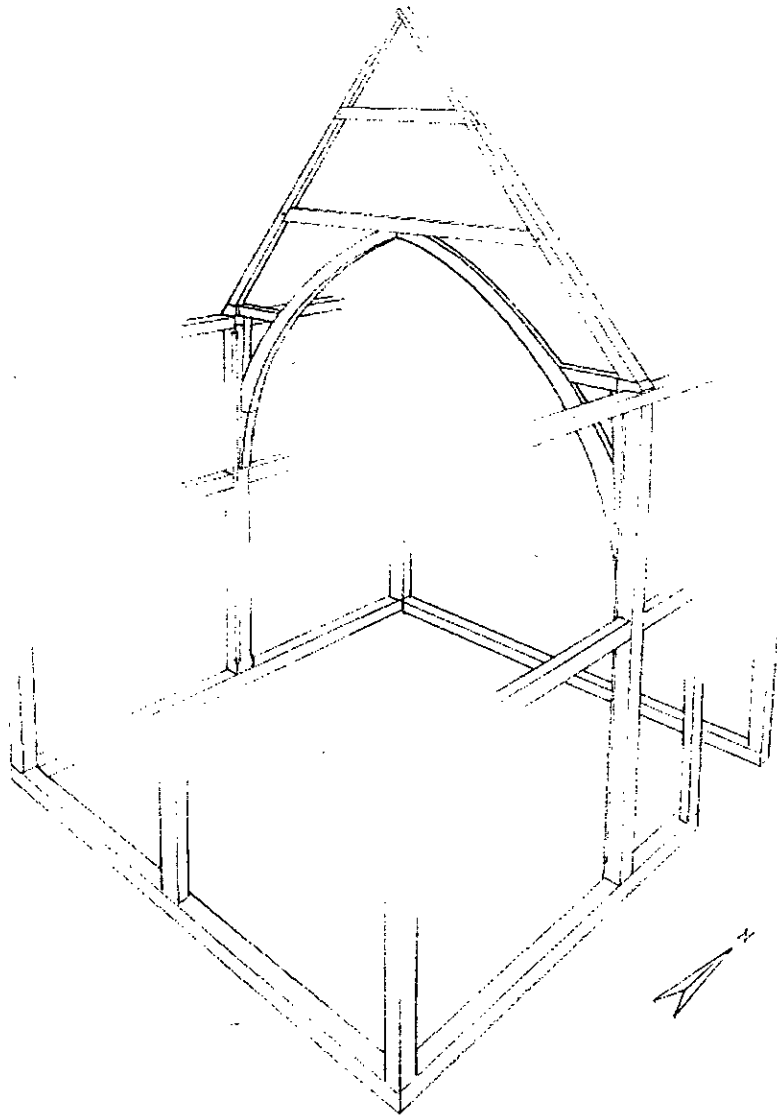
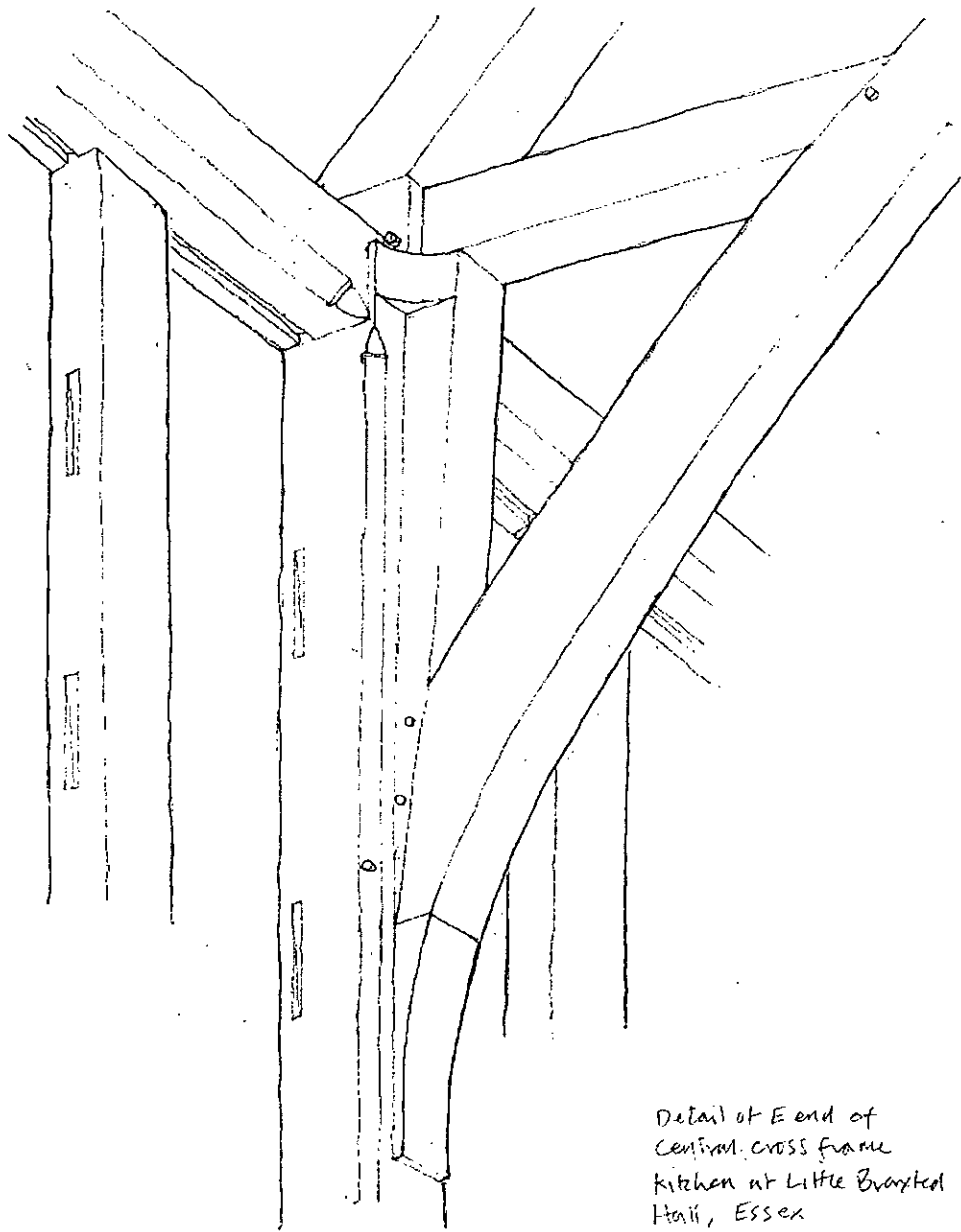
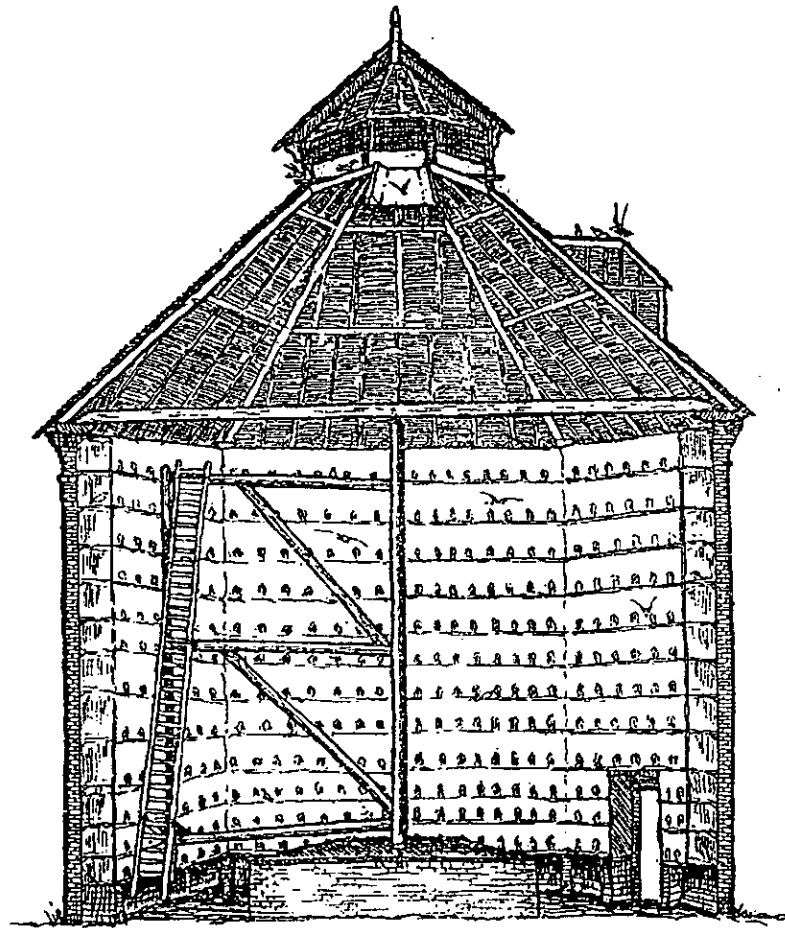


Figure 13 Sketch reconstruction drawing showing form of central cross frame as built.



Detail of E end of
Central cross frame
Kitchen at Little Broughton
Hall, Essex

Figure 14 Sketch showing assembly of timber frame at east end of central cross frame.



SECTION OF TYPICAL COTE.
BASED ON WENDON LOFTS.

B

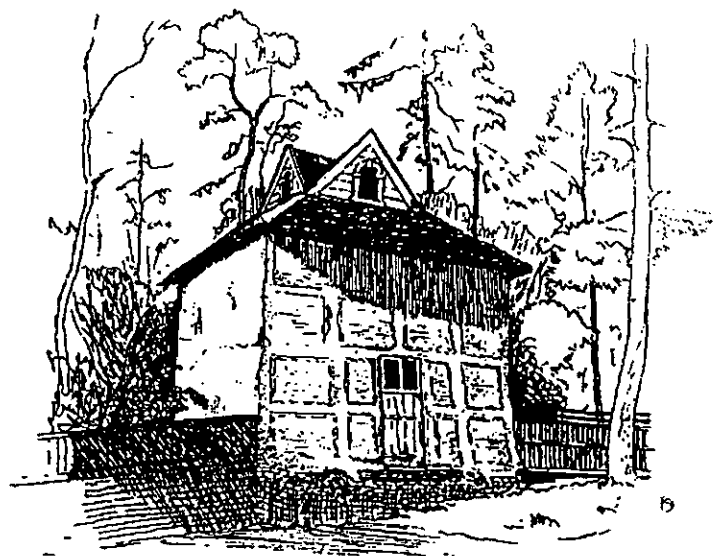
Figure 15 Section of typical dovecote. From 'Pigeon Cotes and Dove Houses of Essex' by Donald Smith, 1931



FINCHINGFIELD—CORNISH HALL.

A large square cote (10 ft. by 19 ft.) standing east of the old farm house, part of the complex of farm buildings. It has a very stout timber framing of old oak, covered with old tarred weather-boarding, the whole standing on dwarf brick piers. It has an old timber board floor. The pyramidal tiled roof continues forming the typical, two gabled lover, with a range of entrances on the west side only (now). Within there is a stout alighting beam. Nests covered all four sides, but are now entirely cleared. A floor has been inserted but the timbers of this are old, so that one may surmise that the cote is at least sixteenth century work. The cote is used as a granary and store, and is in good weather proof repair. The door faces south.

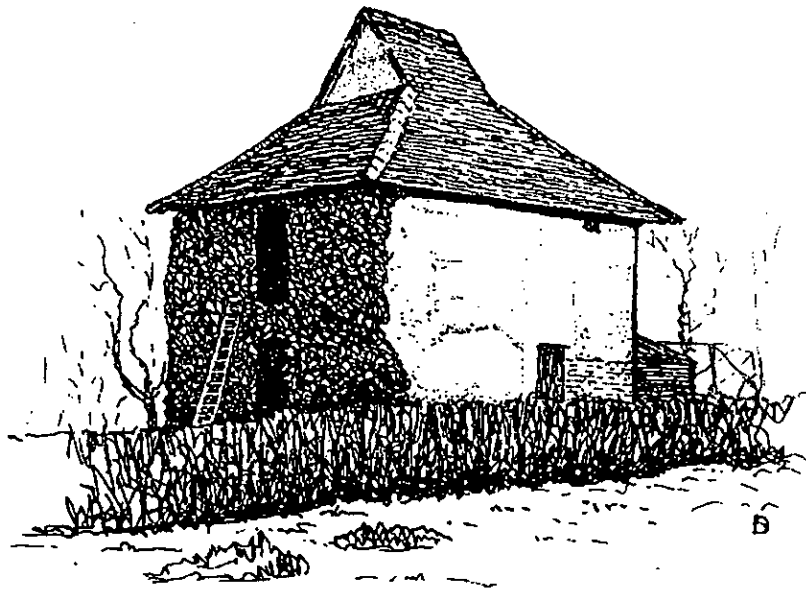
Figure 16 Cornish Hall, Finchingfield, Essex. From 'Pigeon Cotes and Dove Houses in Essex' by Donald Smith, 1931



GREAT MAPLESTEAD—DYNES HALL.

A large cote, formerly standing to the west of the present Hall. One historian writes: "the only building of earlier date than 1575 is the old dove cote," but one doubts very much the veracity of this statement, which, most possibly was based upon evidence of a former cote, very probably on the same site. As the cote is now quite gone there is no possibility of verification by structural evidence. The view—for which I am indebted to the present occupant of the Hall, T. S. Gosling, Esq.—shows a very large square timber framed structure of lath and plaster, with panelled pargeting, surmounted with a four gabled lover of somewhat pretentious appearance.

Figure 17 Dynes Hall, Great Maplestead. From 'Pigeon Cotes and Dove Houses in Essex' by Donald Smith, 1931



LITTLE BRADWELL—PARK FARM.

A rectangular cote standing nearby the house on the south side in the garden. It is of timber framework on a brick foundation and of two storeys, the floor joists of the upper floor being very stout old oak. Date, possibly early seventeenth century. The east and south sides are weather-board, the north is brick filled, and the west plaster. Two small more recent windows, east and west of lower half. Entrance to loft by ladder from without. Both entrances on north side facing house. No vestiges of nests in loft, but alighting beam and framework of lower. Roof tiled, of the pyramidal, common two gabled type. Gables now closed with lath and plaster. Now used as workshop and store. In good condition.



LITTLE BRAXTED—THE HALL.

Here, within a few yards distance are all the essentials of an old self-contained Manor—manor house, homestead moat, church, water-mill, and dove house. The latter is noteworthy, as being the largest solely timber built (with exception of a very low brick base) cote in Essex. It is approximately 22 ft. square, interior measurement. It stands to the north of the present Hall, within the old moated enclosure. It is of very stout timber framing, of two bays supported upon timber sills. The tiled pyramidal roof has been badly completed, covering the loss of the lower. No nests remain but all the timber uprights are bored for nest supports. The structure has been somewhat badly used, but there appear to have been lights in both south and west walls. Entrance is on the south side. The cote is now used for stabling purposes, there being a manger along the length of one side. This cote, quite as large as many a farm cottage, must have housed a very large number of pigeons indeed.

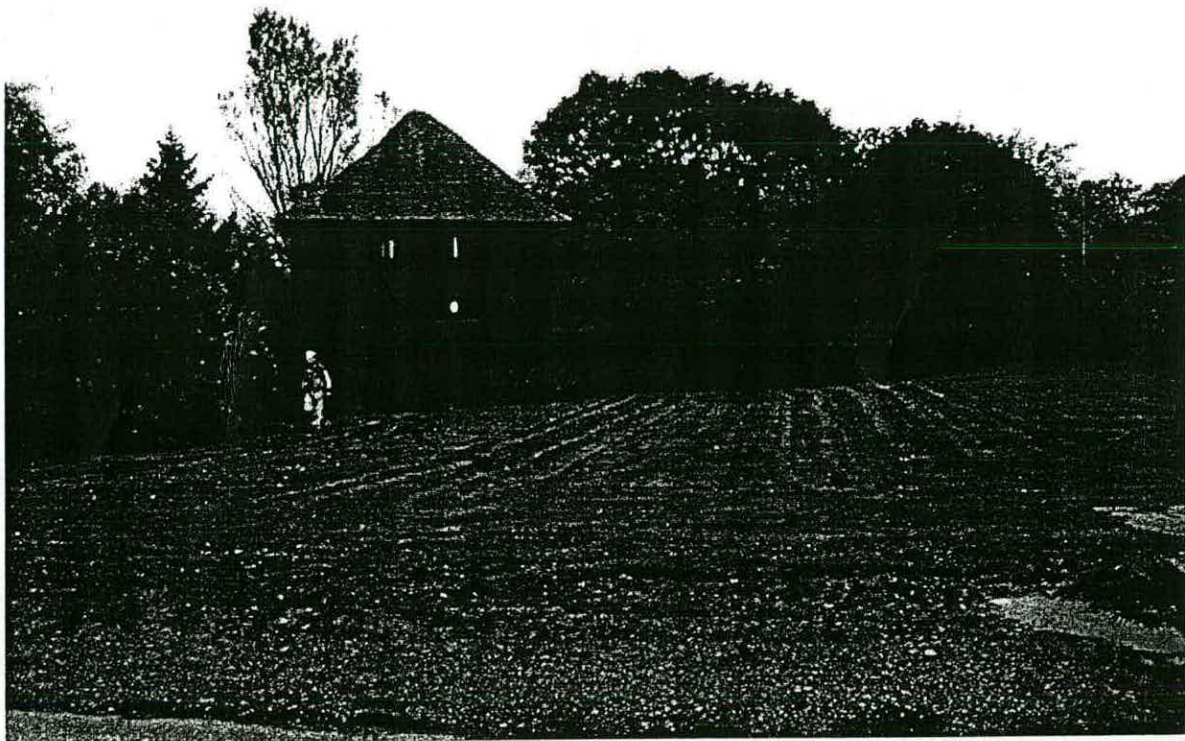


Figure 20 Kitchen at Little Braxted. View from south. Photograph taken October 1998.



Figure 21 Kitchen at Little Braxted. View from north. Photograph taken October 1998.



Figure 22 Interior of building, view to west. Photograph taken October 1998.



Figure 23 Interior of building, view to north-east. Photograph taken October 1998.

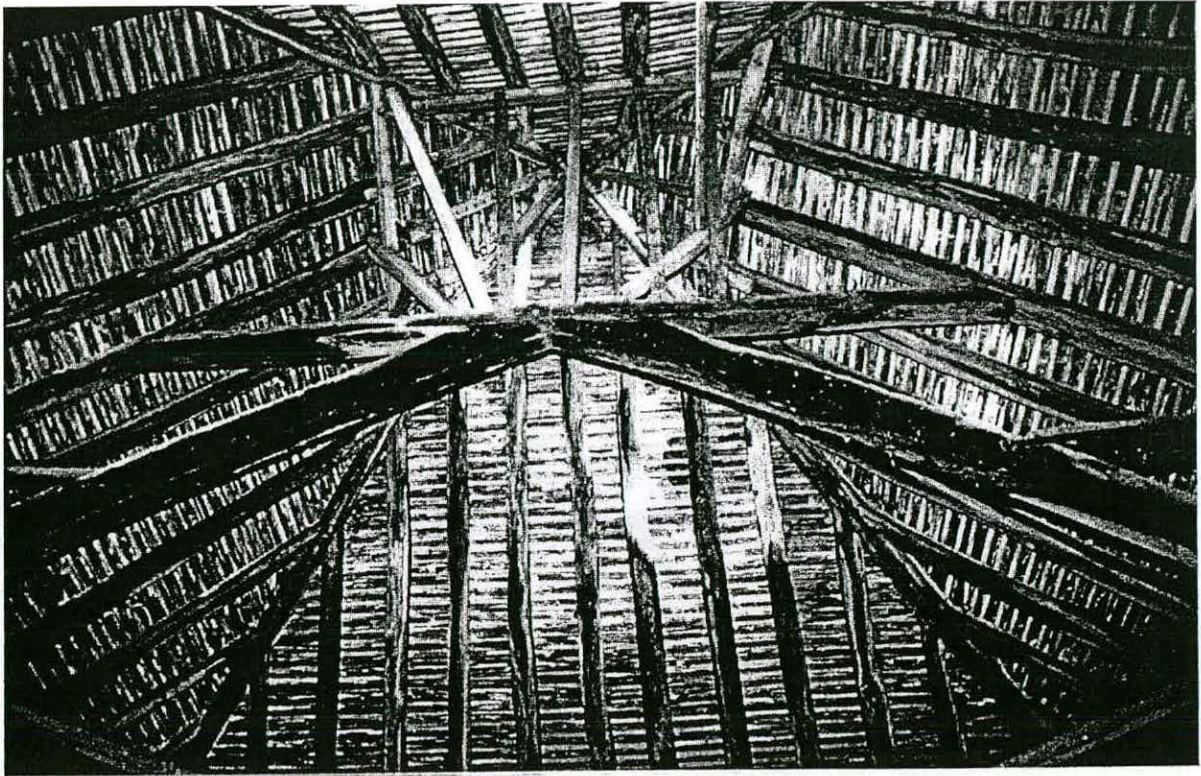


Figure 24 Interior of building, view of roof construction. Photograph taken October 1998.

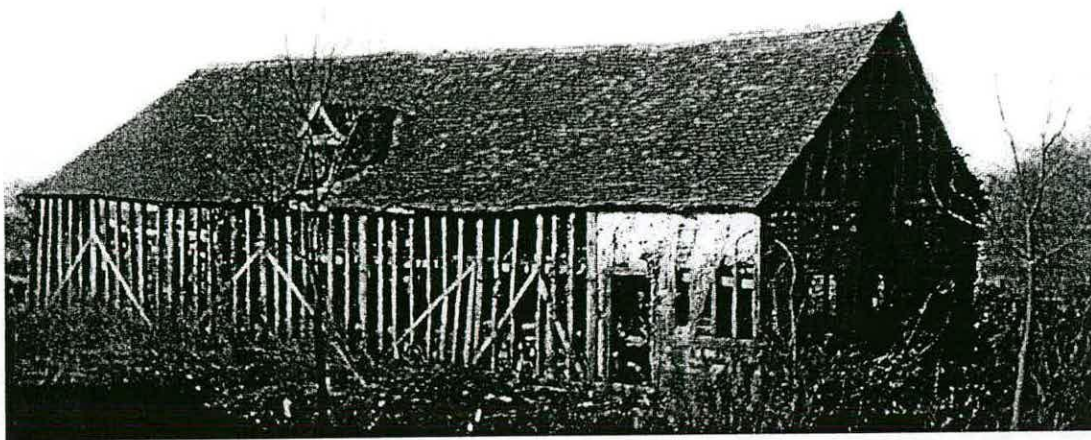


Figure 25 Barn formerly standing in farmyard of Little Braxted Hall, now demolished. Photograph courtesy of Mrs P Church of Little Braxted.

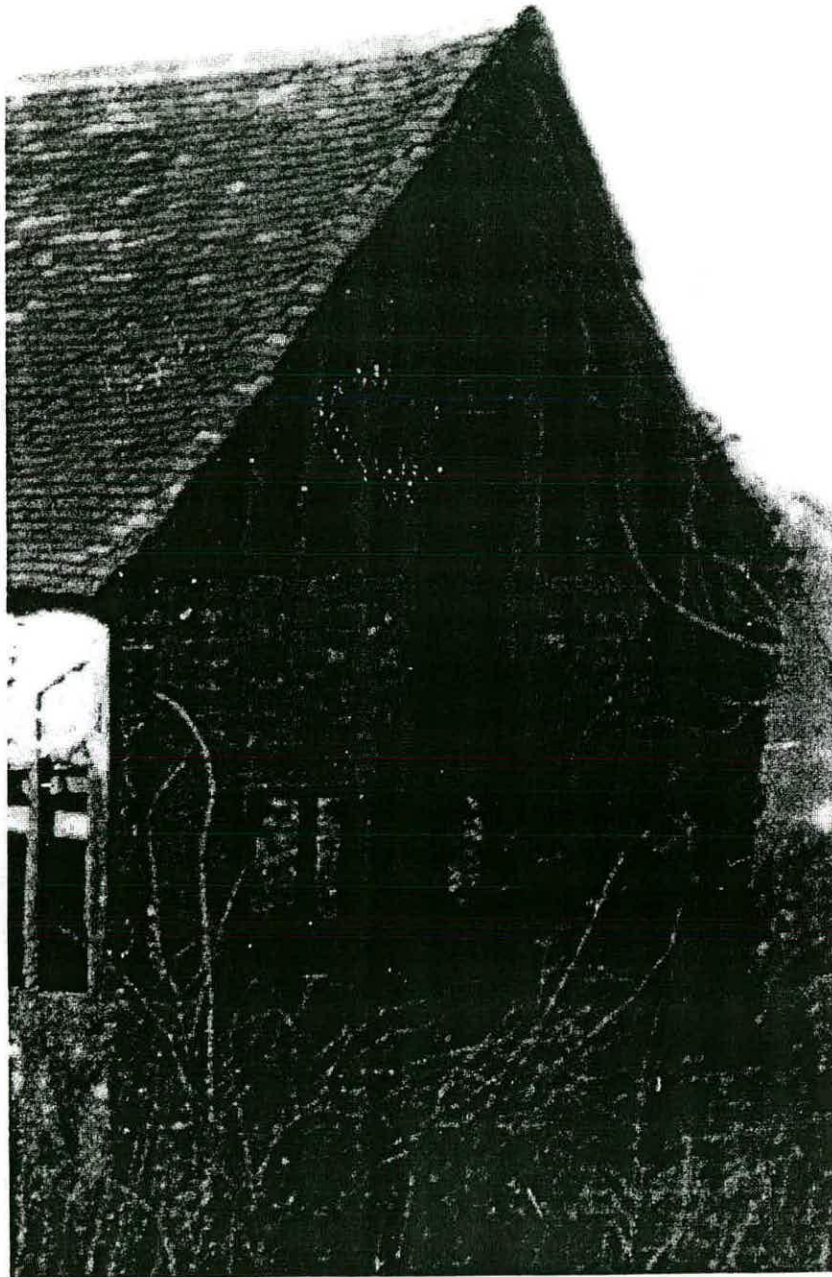


Figure 26 Detail of figure 25, showing exposed timber-framing in gable of former barn.

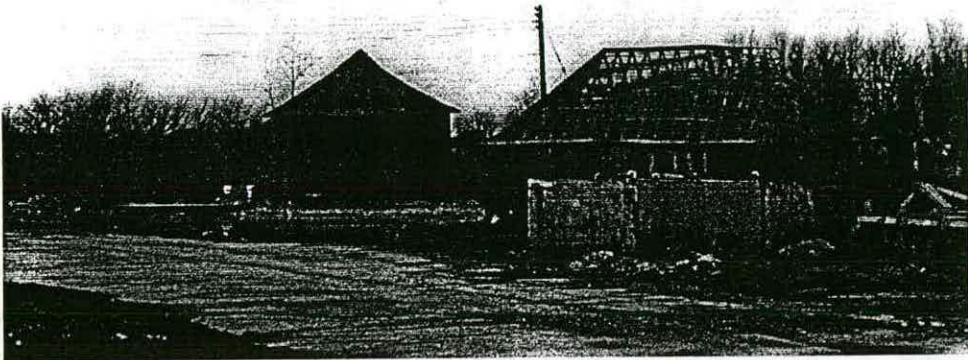


Figure 27 'The Old House' formerly standing in farmyard of Little Braxted Hall. The building was aligned E-W, and stood to the SE of the medieval kitchen (seen in centre of photograph). Photograph courtesy of Mrs P Church of Little Braxted.



Figure 28 Detail of figure 27, showing exposed timber-framed construction of 'The Old House', formerly standing in farmyard of Little Braxted Hall.

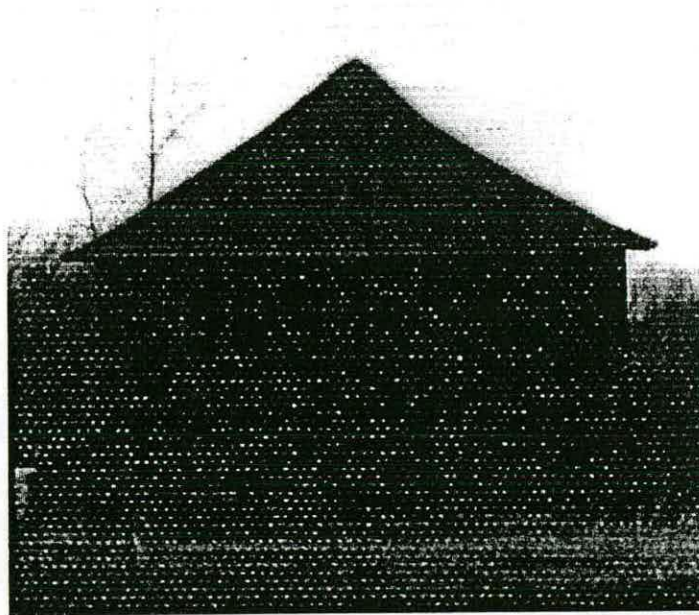


Figure 29 Detail of figure 27, showing appearance of kitchen, c.1975. Note the existence of a door opening at upper floor in south wall at this time.