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THE CRUCK-FRAMED BARN AT SEDDONS FOLD, PRESTOLEE

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INTRODUCTION

Seddons Fold is situated on an area of land formed by a sharp bend in the River Irwell at Prestolee, Bolton (SD 756 062). The barn lies to the south of a complex of buildings dating from several periods. The stone farmhouse was built during the 16th and 17th centuries, and has an early Georgian extension to the west. Since the barn is in poor condition and its future remains in doubt, measured drawings and a photographic record

were undertaken by the Unit in January and February 1984.

No documentation for the barn itself has been found, but the Fold was the former home of the Seddon family, who are known to have held land in the area from the late 15th century onwards. The Seddons appear to have had considerable standing in the locality, and the size of the barn and the very fact that it survives today, probably reflects the extent of their status. The family history is particularly well documented by Fletcher (1880).

THE BARN

The barn is a cruck-framed building, in which the weight of the roof is carried by a series of transverse trusses, formed by pairs of massive cruck blades. They are full crucks, with the timbers rising from ground level to the apex of the roof. Each truss is also strengthened by cross-beams connecting the two blades (Ryder 1979, 6). These occur in various positions at Seddons Fold: below the apex of the timbers at roof level (the collar-beam); where the cruck trusses are connected by longitudinal timbers supporting the rafters (the purlin-beam); where a transverse beam meets the wall level (the wall tie-beam); and at ground level as a lower cross-beam. The transverse cross-beams are all set into the cruck blades, and up to four pegs are used to secure the half-lap joints. In almost every case the pegs have been inserted in a different direction, and are located randomly so as not to split the beam (Charles 1981, 25). The trusses divide the area within the barn into four bays of approximately equal length (Fig 1).

The Vernacular Architecture Group has classified cruck trusses according to several features (Alcock 181, 93) and of particular importance is the way in which the blades are joined together at the apex to support the ridge beam. In this case the apex form is of type A: the blades are held together by the collar-beam, rather than being jointed at the apex. This particular type appears to be a common feature of cruck-framed buildings throughout the region.



Plate 1 Seddons Fold : interior

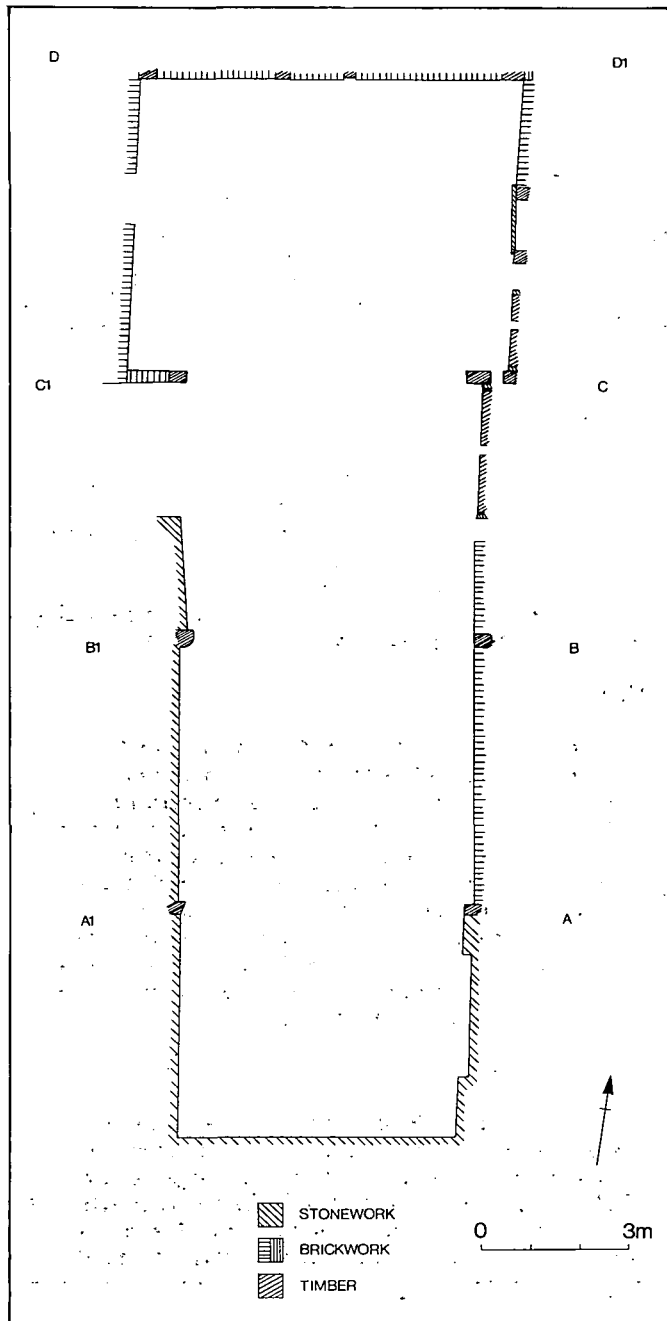


Fig 1 Seddons Fold : ground plan

The trusses are numbered A, B, C and D from the southern end. The wall-plates, which run the length of the structure, are carried on the ends of the wall tie-beams. Outer blades are also present on Trusses A, B and C (see Cordingley 1961 93, type VI j); these are used in cases where the positioning of roof purlins on the cruck blades would have resulted in too steep a roof pitch. The purlins running across the back of these blades are strengthened by single convex windbraces (Fig 2). Truss D and portions of the side walls have been infilled with brickwork, although there is clear evidence, in the form of mortices in the underside of the wall-plate, that this must have replaced earlier wattle-and-daub panelling or timber boarding. Bay A is unusual in that it is constructed entirely of coursed sandstone; it does, however, appear to be contemporary with the rest of the building.

The carpentry is of a particularly high standard, and the oak timbers are secured throughout with oak pegging. The principal methods used in joining the timbers are edge-half scarfing (Brown 1976, 37) and mortice and tenon joints. The base of each cruck blade appears to be supported on a large sandstone block, which must to some extent have protected the timber from damp and decay. Removal of the present ground surface indicated that the original level was approximately 50mm below that of today. A number of sandstone roof-flags on the ground outside the barn are all that remain of the original roof. These are pierced, and would have been secured to the rafters by oak pegs.

Subsequent alterations have obscured the internal arrangement of the timbers, and consequently it is difficult to determine the original function of the building. It may originally have been used for the storage and processing of grain, and later become multi-functional: housing cattle at ground level and grain in lofts above.

Bay A

This bay is constructed almost entirely from sandstone but appears to be integral to the whole structure, since the overlapping scarf-joints on the purlins could only be placed in position if this were the case. The entrance through the eastern wall has been altered on a number of occasions (Fig 3): the lower doorway having been infilled with stonework, possibly at an early date, and the upper entrance blocked by brickwork. It was doubtless this bay which was used for the storage of farm produce, since the upper doorway must have provided access to an upper floor or loft. Several vents in the southern wall of the barn (Fig 4) would have assisted in the circulation of air around the stored grain. Part of the western wall is constructed of brick, in a mixture of English and Flemish bond (Brunskill 1978, 46), and is similar in style to the brick-built Georgian extension to the farmhouse. It is possible that by this period the barn was in need of repair, and the bricks were an obvious substitute for the timber infilling.

Truss A (Fig 5)

The purlin-beam and wall tie-beam both remain in position on this truss, and there is evidence for a

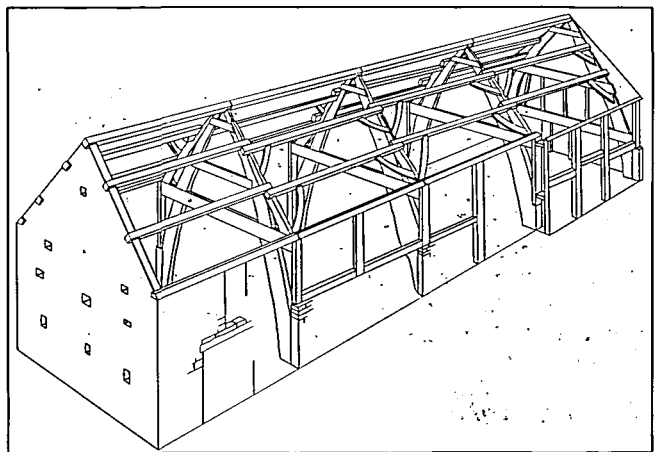


Fig 2 Seddons Fold : isometric view

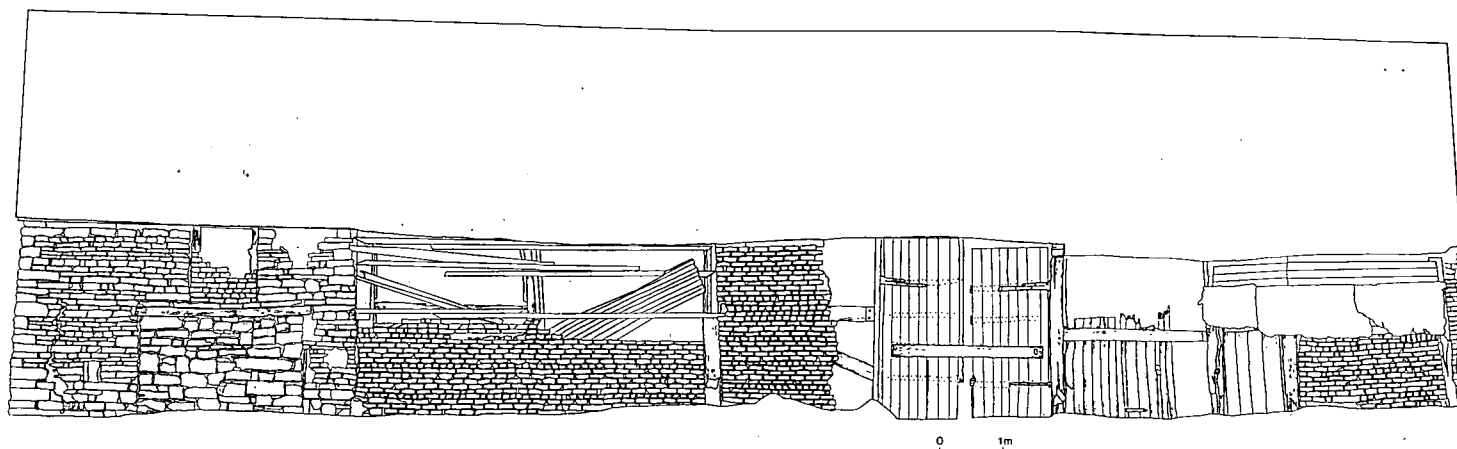


Fig 3 Seddons Fold : east elevation

lower cross-beam and a single vertical beam having been present at one time. In addition, the wall tie-beam, cross-beam and collar-beam all display grooves for wattle panelling and wall-studs. This arrangement of timbers suggests that Bay A was, in some way, independent of the rest of the building. The truss has been carefully repaired with oak pegging where the wood has split, and the wall tie-beam bears the original carpenter's numbering '1 x 1'. A large wedge of wood has been inserted on the west side between the cruck and the outer blade, to support the weight of the latter. A feature common to all the trusses is that the wall-posts are morticed into the wall-plates.

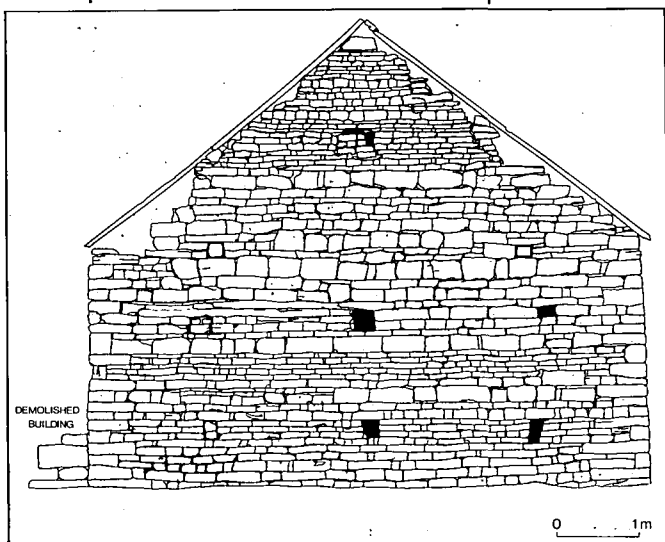


Fig 4 Seddons Fold : south elevation

Bay B

This appears to have been an open bay adjoining Bay C, since there is neither evidence for wattling on the tie-beams nor for the presence of a lower cross-beam. The lower half of the walls are now of brick, but it is clear from notches on the wall-plates that the walls were once wattle-filled. It seems probable from what remains of the original structure that the lower half of the wall was of sandstone. The principal wall-stud, which is morticed to the wall-plate, is still in position on the east wall.

Truss B (Fig 6)

The cruck blade, outer blade and wall tie-beam have all been clearly marked by the carpenter with the

symbol \perp . Where marks have been identified, they all appear on the southern face of the timbers. This would imply that the timbers were marked up and put together with the eastern face downwards, before being brought to the site and erected. The purlin-beam is missing, though the pegging holding the outer blade in position is clearly visible.

Bay C

It was this bay which permitted access to the barn through a double-doored entrance in the eastern wall. Originally the doorway had to be large enough to admit a cart, and if the barn had been used to process grain it would have been necessary to have an entrance too on the opposite side of the building. This would have created a through-draught to assist in the winnowing of grain, as indeed appears to have been the case at Seddons Fold. A portion of the original stonework still survives, as does the wall-plate on the western wall.

Truss C (Fig 7)

There is clear evidence on the cruck blade of a lower cross-beam having once been present, which may have supported an internal arrangement of timbers associated with Bay D. The way in which the wall-post has been set on the back of the cruck blade can clearly be seen on this truss, since the

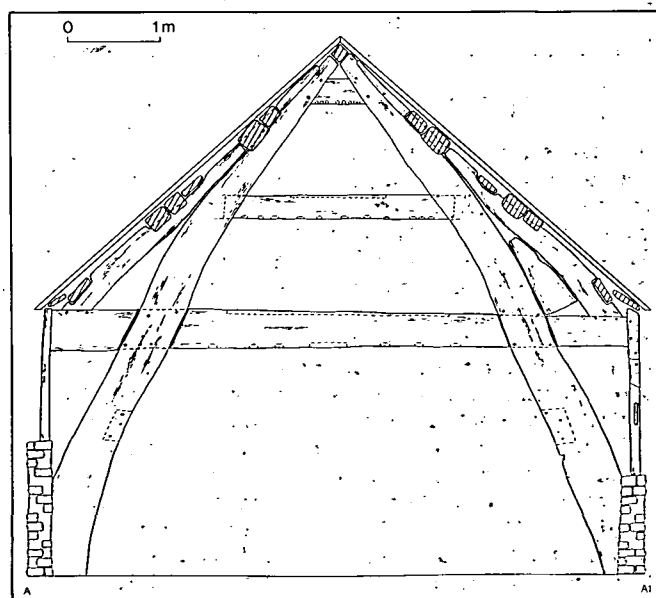


Fig 5 Seddons Fold : section A-A1

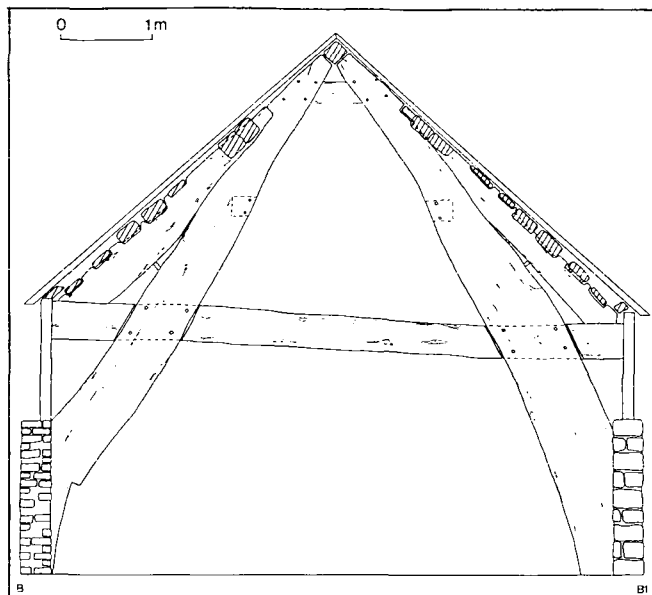


Fig 6 Seddons Fold : section B-B1

lower timbers have not been encased in stone or brickwork.

Bay D

This bay extends outwards to the east and west in order to accommodate the width of Truss D. The exact association of the truss with the rest of the building is difficult to determine, and it is possible that the timbers were re-used from another structure. Slots cut into the beams on the truss indicate that the bay also had an upper floor. A number of wall timbers remain in situ and are notched to hold the wattle panelling. Two doorways through the western wall permitted access to the bay.

Truss D (Fig 8)

The arrangement of the timbers of this truss are completely different to those of A, B and C. It is considerably wider, the blades are far more curved, and the roof is set directly on the cruck blades, in the absence of outer blades. The timbers are entirely infilled with brickwork which must have replaced wattle panelling, since grooves are still visible on the collar-, purlin-, and wall tie-beam.

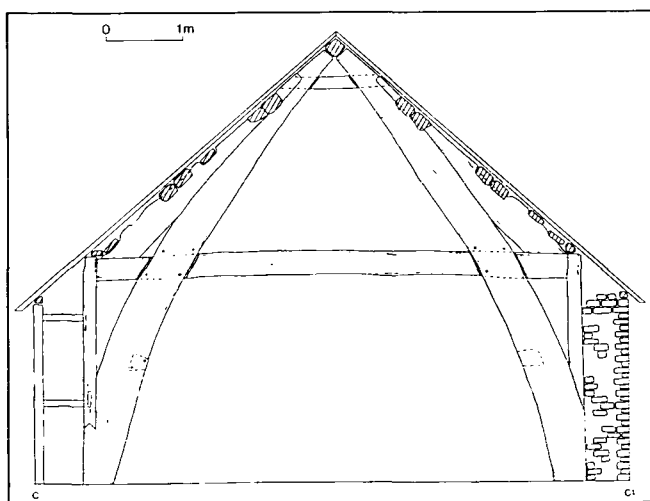


Fig 7 Seddons Fold : section C-C1

The brickwork of the side walls is not bonded to that behind the truss, suggesting construction at different periods.

DATING

The majority of cruck-framed buildings appear to have been constructed between the early 15th and the 17th centuries. However, there are no typological features by which they can be precisely dated. For instance, the use of various carpentry techniques may have persisted longer in some areas than in others, particularly in Northern England. The edge-half scarf joint frequently used on the purlins does, however, appear to be an early technique for joining timbers.

The earliest recorded date for a member of the Seddon family living at Prestolee is 1553, when Cicely Seddon married Peter Seddon (Fletcher 1880). It is known for certain, then, that buildings existed on the site at this period, and it would seem reasonable to assume a tentative date of the late 15th or early 16th century for the construction of the barn. It is possible that the barn was

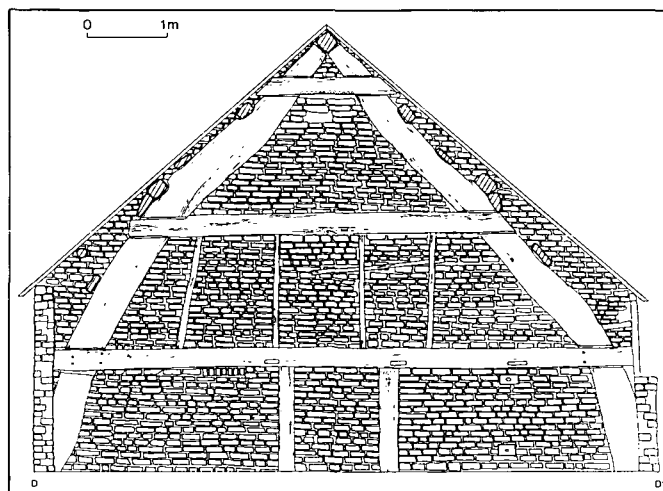


Fig 8 Seddons Fold : elevation D-D1

built at the same time as an earlier timber farmhouse, but survived subsequent alterations and rebuilding in stone. The stone bay seems to be contemporary with the rest of the building, and the brickwork may well be of late 18th or early 19th century date.

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