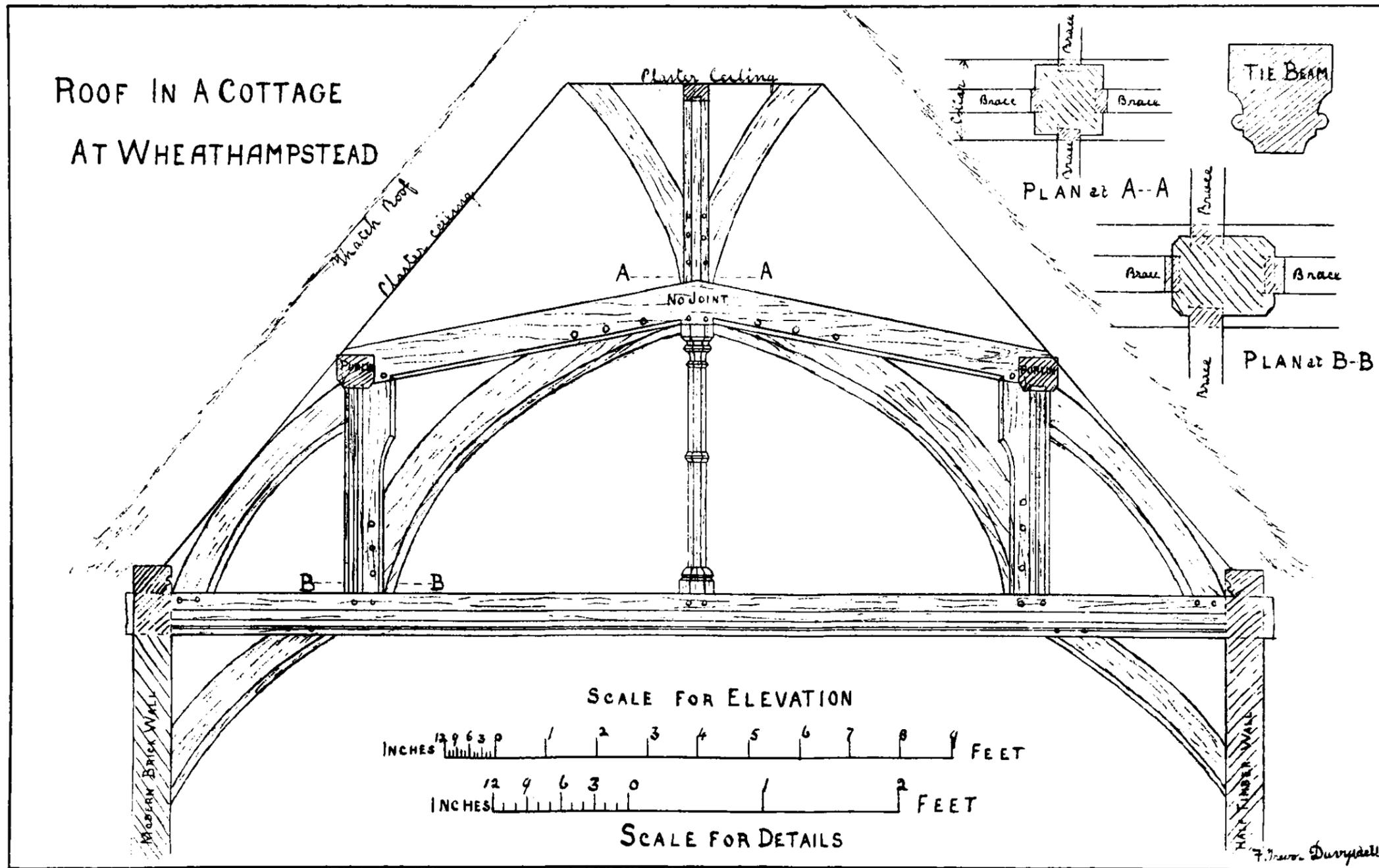


ROOF IN A COTTAGE
AT WHEATHAMPSTEAD



Wayside Chapel.

Notes on an Ancient Cottage at Gustard Wood Common, in the Parish of Wheathampstead, believed to have formed a Mediæval Wayside Chapel.

BY THE REV. CANON DAVYS, M.A.

Externally there is little to distinguish this from any other of the old thatched cottages of the district; but when some years ago I was visiting a sick person in one of the upper chambers, I noticed that the roof overhead was mediæval, probably constructed between A.D. 1400, and A.D. 1420, and of very singular beauty. It has seemed well worth while to have that roof carefully recovered, and illustrated, with some completion of its lost parts, where necessary.* The octagonal "king-post," in rich black oak, with its capital and base, will be seen to be as perfect as when it left the carver's hands; while the beam it supports, cut out of one solid oak tree, shows the wealth of material at the disposal of the constructors. The whole is far too rich in character for simple domestic purposes. The lower "tie-beam," on which the "king-post" rests, is richly moulded, and

* See Illustration.

from the point at which it crosses the building, it would seem to have divided the *Sacrarium* of a chapel from the *Ante-chapel*, to which the way-faring worshippers were admitted. Below this there would doubtless be some kind of screen, and from fragments dispersed about the building this would appear to have been, as we should naturally suppose, of carved oak. The walls of the chapel were of half-timber work; and on its north and south sides may still be traced doorways, one facing towards Wheathampstead, the other towards Kimpton, by which travellers might enter. The *Sacrarium* would contain an altar, raised against the east wall, for the chapel stands correctly for orientation, with its candles, figures, and usual ornaments, with a *reredos* rising to the roof, and so making a window there impossible, while light was obtained from the sides, as traces of windows there indicate. We have thus a chapel answering in its arrangement to many still to be seen on the Continent, though their remains are, as far as I know, exceedingly rare in England.

The total length of the building is 35ft.; the total breadth is 22ft. 3in.; and the beam and roof section illustrated cross at 13ft. from the east wall; while from the under side of the tie-beam to the present floor is 7ft.

It has seemed to me very unlikely that an ancient hamlet like Gustard Wood, of which some of the cottages must have been always about two miles from the parish church of Wheathampstead, should, in the mediæval days, have been left without any "House of Prayer," while the road by which it stands must have been frequently traversed. It is remarkable too that this cottage stands on a part of the manor of the Rectory of Wheathampstead, being thus connected with the church of the parish, while it would be known to the authorities of the Abbeys of S. Albans and Westminster, whose property at Ayot S. Lawrence, and Abbot's (now S. Paul's) Walden, and at Wheathampstead, lay in its neighbourhood. Just, therefore, where we should expect a Wayside Chapel, one seems to have been discovered. The building appears to have been turned into cottages after the Reformation, and a curious mixture of ecclesiastical and domestic work is found in it. It is now disused as a residence, and is in a very dilapidated condition.