Model of a roof - Hammerbeam roof

Object: Model of a roof

Place of origin: England (probably, made)

Date: 1800-1900 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Oak, carved and joined

Museum number: W.3-2003

Gallery location: Architecture, Room 128, case 24, shelf EXP

Public access description

The double hammerbeam roof was the high point of timber open-roof design in medieval England. It was developed by Suffolk carpenters in the 15th century for spanning large buildings such as churches. This scale model of a section of such a roof was probably made in the 19th century. Its precise origins are not known, but it might have been made for the Royal Architectural Museum, the collections of which were transferred to the V&A in 1916-20. It is not a copy of any of the surviving double hammerbeam roofs, but appears to combine features of several different ones.

Hammerbeam roofs have arches supported on horizontal beams, or hammers, projecting from the walls. Double hammerbeam roofs, which have two tiers of arches, are rare; only thirty-two survive, all in East Anglia.

Descriptive line

Model of a section of a double hammerbeam roof

Physical description

Scale model of a section of a double hammerbeam roof, comprising one arch with a short section of roof. In oak, carved and joined. The spandrels filled with openwork tracery; blank tracery on other parts, with a winged angel at the base of each side of the arch.

Museum number

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Object history note

The model was found in a museum store in 2003 and accessioned at that time because it was required for the 'Architecture for All' gallery, then at the planning stages. Dr Julian Litten, former member of staff, remembers seeing it in the 'Art Museum Store' for many years, with a plinth with gold lettering on. The plinth has not been found. Dr Litten suggests that it might have come from the Royal Architectural Museum at Westminster, which gave much of its collection to the V&A between 1916 and 1921. Many woodworking items came to Furniture collection (W.1 to 23-1916 and others), but this object was not accessioned. Possibly this was because it was a 19th century model rather than medieval craftsmanship. Dr Litten suggested that the model might have been made by the firm of Rattee & Kett, of Cherry Hinton, Cambridgeshire, to display the construction of the double-hammerbeam roof.

Historical significance: The significance of the model itself is not known, but it was evidently intended to demonstrate the construction details of the double-hammerbeam roof, a form developed by Suffolk carpenters in the fifteenth century. This was a type of openwork timber roof in which two tiers of arches are supported by horizontal beams, or hammers, projecting from the wall. Only about 32 double-hammerbeam roofs survive, 21 in Suffolk, and the rest in Norfolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. The more common single hammerbeam roofs consisted of one tier. This model roof does not appear to copy any existing roof but is an amalgam of features taken from several buildings.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88264/hammerbeam-roof-model-of-a-unknown/