

PLAS ABERMEURIG, ABERMEURIG, CEREDIGION

PHOTOGRAPHIC BUILDING RECORD AND WATCHING BRIEF



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Graham Bailey



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CEREDIGION
PHOTOGRAPHIC BUILDING RECORD
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Gan / By

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PLAS ABERMEURIG, ABERMEURIG, CEREDIGION: PHOTOGRAPHIC BUILDING RECORD

SUMMARY

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services was commissioned by Graham and Sally Bailey Conservation (Historic Environment Consultants), on behalf of Dr and Mrs Clarke of Plas Abermeurig, to undertake an archaeological scheme of works at Plas Abermeurig (at NGR SN 56366 56511) to fulfil a condition placed on planning permission.

A photographic record of the site was made during renovation of the property, and a watching brief was undertaken on associated groundworks.

Plas Abermeurig has undergone a considerable amount of alteration and development over time. In some cases, later changes have destroyed evidence of the original form and function of the building. During the renovation, however, a number of features have been revealed that offer clues as to how the building has developed.

This report presents a selection of photographs that illustrate key features of the building that were revealed during the renovation, and which suggest how the building has been altered and developed.

Plas Abermeurig has undergone a range of alterations during its history. As a result, evidence of the earliest origins of the building are at least partly obscured, if not destroyed by later changes. However, enough has been revealed during the renovation work to suggest that the building originally had similarities to the house at nearby Gwastadgwrda. The original house may have had a lobby-entry plan (with a centrally placed doorway placed opposite a back-to back chimney stack, with access to the rooms on either side) house with hall parlour, hatch and service rooms in an equally divided range.

Later changes have destroyed any evidence to indicate whether the building ever had full cruck trusses. The scarfed crucks in the roof of the northern annexe may be in situ, but it is also possible that the walls in this part of the building were raised when the east wall was rebuilt.

The blocked openings revealed in the dining room walls suggest that there was a second storey in the southern end of the building. The surviving evidence appears to suggest either that this was the form of the original building, or that it entirely replaced an earlier building. The only possible evidence to suggest there was an earlier building on the site is that the cobbled floor surface appears not to run up to the base of the walls (suggesting they were originally associated with different walls to those existing now).

INTRODUCTION

Project Commission

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services (DAT-FS) was commissioned by Graham Bailey (Historic Environment Consultant) to undertake an archaeological scheme of works at Plas Abermeurig (at NGR SN 56366 56511) on behalf of Dr and Mrs Clarke of Plas Abermeurig, to fulfil a condition placed on planning permission (A080592LB).

The condition was placed on consent for the development because the building is Grade 2 Listed and because the renovation had the potential to reveal, damage or destroy archaeological evidence of the origins and development of the building.

The condition stated that:

'No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the planning authority'.

A written scheme for investigation (WSI) for the work, proposing a basic photographic record of the building prior to the commencement of works, and a watching brief on any associated ground-works was produced by DAT-FS and approved by Ceredigion County Council prior to the commencement of works.

Scope of the Project

Photographic survey of the building prior and during renovations. Archaeological attendance and recording during groundworks associated with renovations that had the potential to expose, damage or destroy any underlying archaeological remains, if present. The project also included preparation of this report and an archive of the results.

Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results.

Abbreviations

Regional Historic Environment Record – HER; Primary Record Number – PRN; National Grid Reference – NGR; Scheduled Ancient Monument – SAM.

Illustrations

Record photographs are included at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale.

THE SITE

Location and Topography

Plas Abermeurig is located around 6m to the north of Lampeter in Ceredigion (SN 56366 56511) within Nantcwnlle ward. It lies on the northwestern side of the unclassified road between Abermeurig to the south and Llundain-fach to the northwest (through which the B4342 passes).

The grounds are relatively level lying within the Aeron valley.

Archaeological Background

The following information is included to provide a context for the building described in this report. It is not intended to be an exhaustive history of the building. Further research would undoubtedly identify more sources and more detailed information.

Listed Building Description

History

Late C18 to early C19 country house. Owned by the Edwards family in early C18. Probably rebuilt in later C18 by John Edwardes 1723-96, who inherited in 1780. The house is said to have been burnt and rebuilt about 1800, and about that time passed by marriage to the Rogers family of Hafod, Nantcwnlle. Dr John Rogers (1786-1846) was owner in early C19.

Interior

Early 19th century interior detail. Stick-baluster stair with ramped rail and thin paired column newels. Elliptical arch to hallway, panelled. 6-panel doors. C20 fireplaces in main front rooms, SE room has attractive plaster cornice of urns and grapes and plaster floral ceiling border.

Exterior

Roughcast with slate deep-eaved roof with timber mutule cornice, and stone end stacks, the N stack very large and with external chimneybreast. Three-storey, three-window range of broad sashes. 12-pane with additional narrower outer panes to main floors, six-pane with similar outer panes to upper floor. Louvred wooden shutters. Centre 6-panel door with rectangular overlight and traceried fan. Timber columned porch, two columns, two reeded half-columns, triglyph frieze and cornice. Plain S end wall with C20 conservatory, door to ground floor left. Three-window, two-storey outshut rear and centre stair gable with attic lunette and mid-height 12-pane window. To each side is ground floor 12-pane and first floor 6-pane sash. Single storey annexe to north unusually apse-ended, said to have been a dairy. Tall centre south front cambered-headed 24-pane window with stone voussoirs under small gable. Casement window to left.

Building history

The Listed Building description suggests there may be evidence for three phases of building on the site: an early 18th century building; a later 18th century rebuild, and a rebuild in around 1800. It is, however difficult to ascertain which of the modifications discernable during the building renovations, were made in which phase. The following summary is based on observations made during the archaeological recording works and are discussed in more detail later in the text.

Some of the evidence revealed during the renovation works suggests that the earlier 18th century building may have had earlier, possibly sub-medieval (early post-medieval) origins. This possibility depends partly on exactly what the form of the earlier building was, but due to the extensive later rebuilds, this is uncertain. The interpretation presented here attempts to explain all the available evidence, but may prove to be incorrect.

In its earliest form the building may have been a single storey building. It appears not, however, to have been a traditional long house (domestic occupation to one end of the building with animal byre at the other end). Alternatively, the southern end may have had two storeys, or a second storey may have been added as a later modification.

At some point, the southern end of the original building appears to have been partially demolished and extended to the south. The original end to the building and its cobbled floor were revealed beneath the drawing room floor. A third storey may even have been added at this time.

In the early 19th century the dwelling end of the building was again substantially rebuilt. A second range of buildings was added to the back of the earlier house and the interior was remodelled to give a double pile floor plan with a central hall running from front to back with the staircase in the centre of the rear pile. Two rooms, front and back are arranged on either side of the hallway. The floor levels also appear to have been changed at this time. The exterior was also remodelled giving the house its present appearance and character.

Despite the gentrification of the main dwelling, the northern part of the earlier building was retained, presumably for a specific reason. It was also modified by the addition of an apsidal end and a large decorative arched window.

The apsidal end to the north annexe is not represented on the 1st or 2nd edition Ordnance Survey mapping, suggesting it post-dates 1905.

METHODOLOGY

The archaeological recording methodology was detailed in the WSI prepared by DAT-FS prior to the commencement of the project. The main aim of the works was described in the WSI as archaeological attendance and recording during groundworks and 'level 2' building recording as defined in *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to best recording practice* (English Heritage, 2006).

The aim of the renovation was to retain the majority of evidence and features relating to earlier phases of the building and to return the layout and character of the building to its 19th century form by removing most 20th century alterations.

At the time of the visit to undertake a basic record of the building, the exterior of the building and the majority of the ground floor interior walls were free of plaster, allowing repairs, rebuilds and blocked openings to be seen. Some re-pointing had occurred. Only a basic photographic record was made, concentrating on features that illustrated evidence of how the building has been altered, and evidence of original fabric and features.

Project Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological recording as laid out in the WSI were as follows:

- *Provision of a WSI to outline the methodology by which Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services will undertake the watching brief.*
- *To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits, and to appropriately investigate and record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the works.*
- *To identify and record any architectural features and details revealed during the works, relating them to the history and development of the building.*
- *To produce an archive and report of any results.*

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

North annexe exterior

The north annexe, the single storey part of the house (Photos 3-6), is set back slightly from the main house and appears to be of earlier origin. A narrow window where the two building phases meet (Photo 8) appears to be part of what was originally a larger window in the earlier building, the south part of which has been truncated by the façade of the 19th century house. The base of this window is at a higher level than the window to the north (Photo 4). Originally, this wall would have continued northwards forming the northern part of a possible long-house style building, however, an irregular joint visible in the stonework to the north of this window (Photo 4) suggest that the east face of the north annexe has been substantially or even entirely rebuilt, flush with the earlier wall. On the interior, the wall of the rebuilt section is thicker than the section of wall containing the narrow window (Photo 11). A series of steps in the interior face of the rebuilt wall where it joins the earlier wall (Photo 12) are a curious detail which may have been intended to strengthen the join between the two phases of walling. Within the rebuilt section are a window opening with a wooden lintel and two straight joints indicating the former presence of a doorway (Photo 4). There is no evidence for a window ever having been present to the right (north) of the doorway.

In a later phase of alteration (modern), this doorway was blocked and a tall arched window was inserted (Photo 4). The arched window is wider than the original door opening, and the exterior stonework of the northern door-jamb has been removed to accommodate the window frame. Internally, however, the original width of the doorway and the pad for the door lintel (indicating its height) appears to have been retained (Photos 10 and 18) (the sawn off stub of which is still present on the south side of the doorway). To the north of this window, a straight joint indicates the end of the building (Photo 7). The thickness of the walls at this point (and on the west side of the building) suggest they are contemporary with the window and former doorway. There is no surviving evidence to indicate whether the rebuilt walls of the northern annexe, correspond with the footprint of the earlier phase or not (although it is considered likely). In a later phase of alteration, the north wall of the annexe was demolished and replaced by a curved wall forming an apsidal end to the building, and including a window opening on the east face (Photo 3) and a doorway on the west face. This seems to be an early 20th century addition and may be associated with its purported use as a chapel for a short time.

Due to the extent of later alterations, the small portion of wall linking the main house with the rebuilt northern annexe is the only surviving bit of exterior masonry relating to the early phase of the building. It is difficult from this one bit of evidence to be certain what the form and layout of the early building was, however, inside the building, other features survive that may also originate in the early phase.

Northern annexe interior

The Interior face of the east wall of the northern annexe retains several interesting features, some of which have been mentioned above. On the north side of the arched window opening are several small niches or recesses. Although at least two of these small vertical slots (see photo 18) appear to have been intentionally constructed, others may have been formed by the removal of stones. There are also one or two stones that look as if they may have been used to block up small recesses. Although the function of these features is

uncertain, it seems likely that they held timbers for fittings relating to a former use of the building, possibly a staircase or timber framed dividing wall.

Wooden pegged scarfed (jointed) cruck roof trusses survive, apparently original and in-situ (Photos 13-16). Examples of this cruck style are often dated to between the 17th to early 19th centuries. It is possible that the crucks were originally part of the building that was demolished before the present walls were constructed. Although well constructed, the timbers used, and the absence of any decoration or finishing on the truss, suggest that the trusses were not intended to be a visible feature in the domestic part of a dwelling.

A large chimneystack forms the north wall of the present dining room of the main house (Photo 22), and the south wall of the northern annexe (Photo 17). The hearth in the annexe includes a bread oven which may be a later insertion. The large bressumer beam may also be a modification to an earlier form of hearth, although this is not certain.

On the dining room side of the chimneystack, the removal of wall plaster revealed the presence of another early hearth with a large, chamfered bressumer beam (Photos 22 and 24). This hearth was blocked up and replaced by a smaller fireplace (which cut through the bressumer beam) during the later rebuilds of the house.

The lower part of a blocked opening visible to the upper left of the dining room fireplace (see Photo 24) may have provided access (via a ladder or stair) to a loft space above the northern part of the house.

During the renovations, the 19th century floor levels in the dining room were reduced to reveal a fine, decoratively lain cobbled floor surface (Photo 28). This lower surface was associated with a hearthstone at the base of the fireplace (Photo 29), and was at a slightly higher level than the floor in the northern annexe (which was not cobbled).

More cobbled floor surface was also revealed below the floor of the 19th century drawing room, where it abutted wall footings (neither the cobbled surfaces or the wall footings were visible at the time the building record was undertaken, so it is not possible to ascertain the exact location or character of the footings). Based on this evidence, the south end wall footings, cobbled floor, two-hearth chimneystack and the earliest wall fragment of the northern annexe, are all considered to be part of the original house. A photograph of the cobbled floor taken during the renovation works (Photo 28) indicates that the cobbled surface did not run up to the east and west walls of the dining room. This suggests that neither of these extant walls are associated with the earliest phase of the building.

On the west side exterior of the northern extension (following demolition of the galley kitchen extension), two straight joints were visible, one where the annexe wall abbutts the chimneystack, and one where the main house walls appear to abutt the chimneystack. It is uncertain, but is perhaps unlikely, that such abuttings would have been a feature of the original building.

Main House

The main three-storey exterior of the house (Photo 1) appears to have been built in a single phase, with no visible evidence of alterations to door and window openings. The two storey western range of rooms may be a later addition, possibly when the house was re-modelled in the 19th century. Internally, however, there is some evidence, and some unexplainable features to suggest that there may have been an intermediate phase of building between the 19th

century and the original building. From what is known of the history of the house, this phase of building may have occurred in the late 18th century.

In the upper southwest corner of the west wall of the dining room, the lower part of a former opening blocked with stone packing and a timber frame, was revealed beneath the 19th century plaster (see Photo 23). The height and location of this feature suggest it must relate to an upper floor that would have been lower than the existing ceiling level. It must also relate to a different doorway than the existing doorway between the dining room and the former kitchen. Interestingly, this doorway appears to have been altered at least once. It appears to have three lintels, each at different heights. The lowest lintel, on the kitchen side of the doorway (photo 21), is most likely to have been of the same phase as the blocked first floor opening in the dining room.

The nature of the blocked opening could not be ascertained during the building recording work, whether a window or doorway, it suggests that the pre-19th century phase of the building had at least two storeys. If a doorway it suggests that there may have been an additional suite of rooms built on the western side of the building, as is the case now, but with original floor levels similar to the cobbled floor surfaces.

A part of the renovation works, the floor levels in the former kitchen in the western annexe were reduced. The material removed had all been redeposited, and although a lower horizon indicated by a layer of lime mortar was revealed, no more substantial floor deposit was revealed within the depth of material removed (Photos 19 and 20).

In the under-stair area, floor levels were also reduced. Straight joins visible in the stonework of the west wall suggest a former door opening. Other stonework hints at an earlier building plan, the details of which remain unclear. Being constructed from re-used timber, the 19th century stairwell panels appear to be a later modification (Photos 25-27).

WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was undertaken on groundworks on the southwest side of the northern annexe following demolition of the galley kitchen extension. This included ground reduction to formation level and the excavation of footings for the curving wall of the new extension.

A small portion of wall footings on an almost northwest to southeast alignment were identified within the area of the demolished kitchen extension (Photo 30). This wall appears not to be associated with any of the standing remains, although it is aligned similarly to the northern annexe, but in the absence of further evidence, it is difficult to interpret its significance. It is possible that the wall represents a small extension or lean structure attached to the annexe. The wall measured at least 3m in length and between 0.55m and 0.4m in width, continuing beyond the edge of the excavated foundation trench. It had been truncated in the area of the footing trench prior to this phase of works, possibly when the previous galley kitchen extension was built. The wall was possibly clay bonded, but no clear evidence was present.

An area of large paving slabs was also identified at the northern end of the new extension footing trench (Photo 31). These appeared to continue beyond the area of the excavation and were neatly laid heading in roughly westerly direction. It is possible they are part of a former footpath leading from the building. They post-dated the wall footings as they were laid on top of the continuation of the wall beyond the edge of the excavated area.

Areas of disturbed ground were noted within the footing trench, presumably associated with more recent construction works associated with the galley kitchen extension and other alterations to the building (Photo 32). Numerous fragments of pottery dating from the 18th century onwards were recovered (most of which has been retained by the house owners).

CONCLUSIONS

Plas Abermeurig has undergone a range of alterations during its history. As a result, evidence of the earliest origins of the building are at least partly obscured, if not destroyed by later changes. However, enough has been revealed during the renovation work to suggest that the building originally had similarities to the house at nearby Gwastadgwrda (SN56575695). This house is Grade II* listed and has been dated to the mid- or later 16th century and was the subject of a full structural survey by the RCAHMW.

Gwastadgwrda is neither a longhouse nor an early storeyed house. The back-to-back fireplace stack appears to have been placed centrally, with both sides serving domestic rooms. There are full-length cruck trusses on the south side, while on the north side it is unclear if the cruck trusses are full length or are raised.

The cruck trusses suggest the building was originally a single long range. However, one end of the building was raised to two storeys. The whole range represents a lobby-entry plan (a centrally placed doorway placed opposite the chimney stack, with access to the rooms on either side) house with hall parlour, hatch and service rooms in an equally divided range.

At Plas Abermeurig, there is also a back-to-back fireplace stack with each side appearing to serve domestic rooms. The truncated narrow window occupies the expected location of a doorway in a lobby-entry plan building. The existing stonework, however, does not suggest there was ever a doorway (unless this section of wall was entirely rebuilt at some point).

In what survives of the earliest building, later changes have destroyed any evidence to indicate whether the building ever had full cruck trusses. The scarfed crucks in the roof of the northern annexe may be *in situ*, but it is also possible that the walls in this part of the building were raised when the east wall was rebuilt.

The blocked openings revealed in the dining room walls suggest that there was a second storey in the southern end of the building. The surviving evidence appears to suggest either that this was the form of the original building, or that it entirely replaced an earlier building. The only possible evidence to suggest there was an earlier building on the site is that the cobbled floor surface appears not to run up to the base of the walls (suggesting they were originally associated with different walls to those existing now).

SOURCES

The Regional Historic Environment Record, housed with Dyfed Archaeological Trust in Llandeilo.

Carmarthenshire County Council Planning Services web site.

Llanfihangel-Abercywyn parish tithe map and apportionment 1841.

Ordnance Survey 1st edition map 1888. 1:25,000

Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map 1905. 1:25,000

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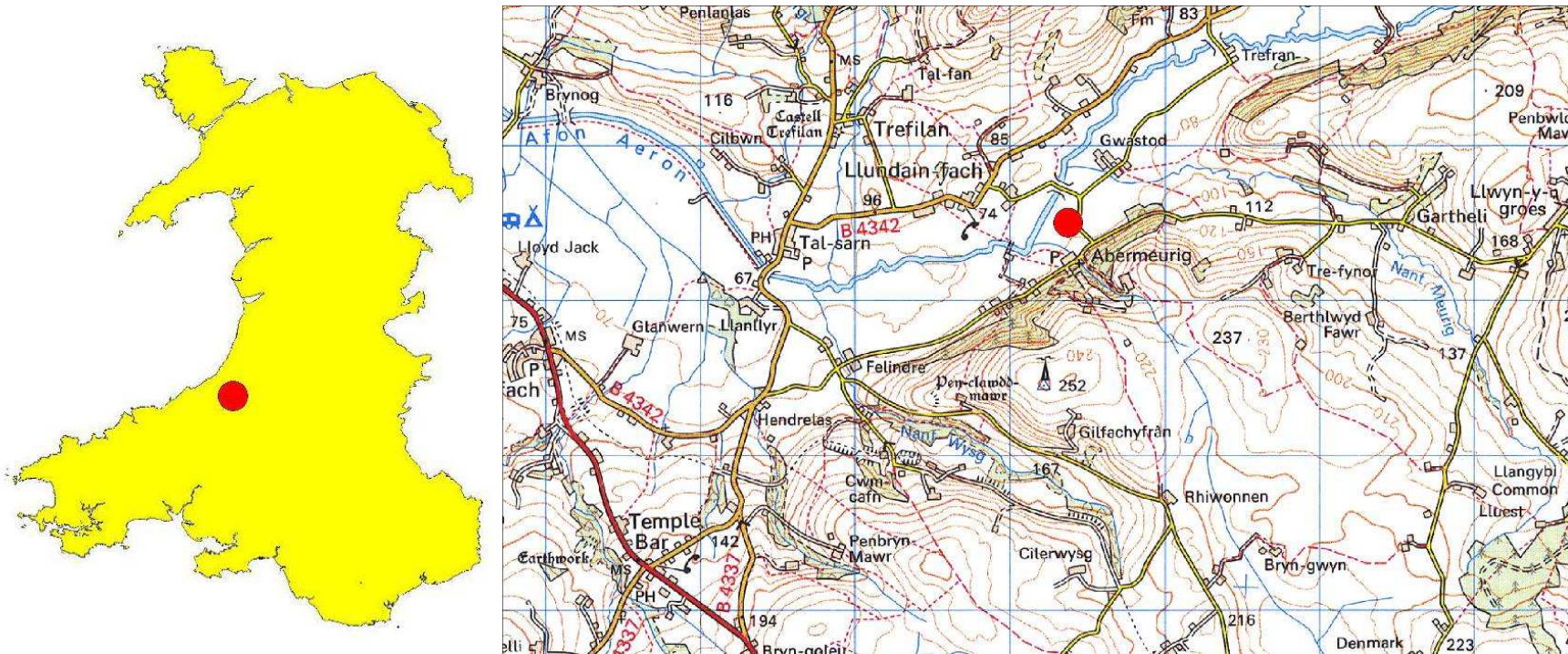


Figure 1: Site location

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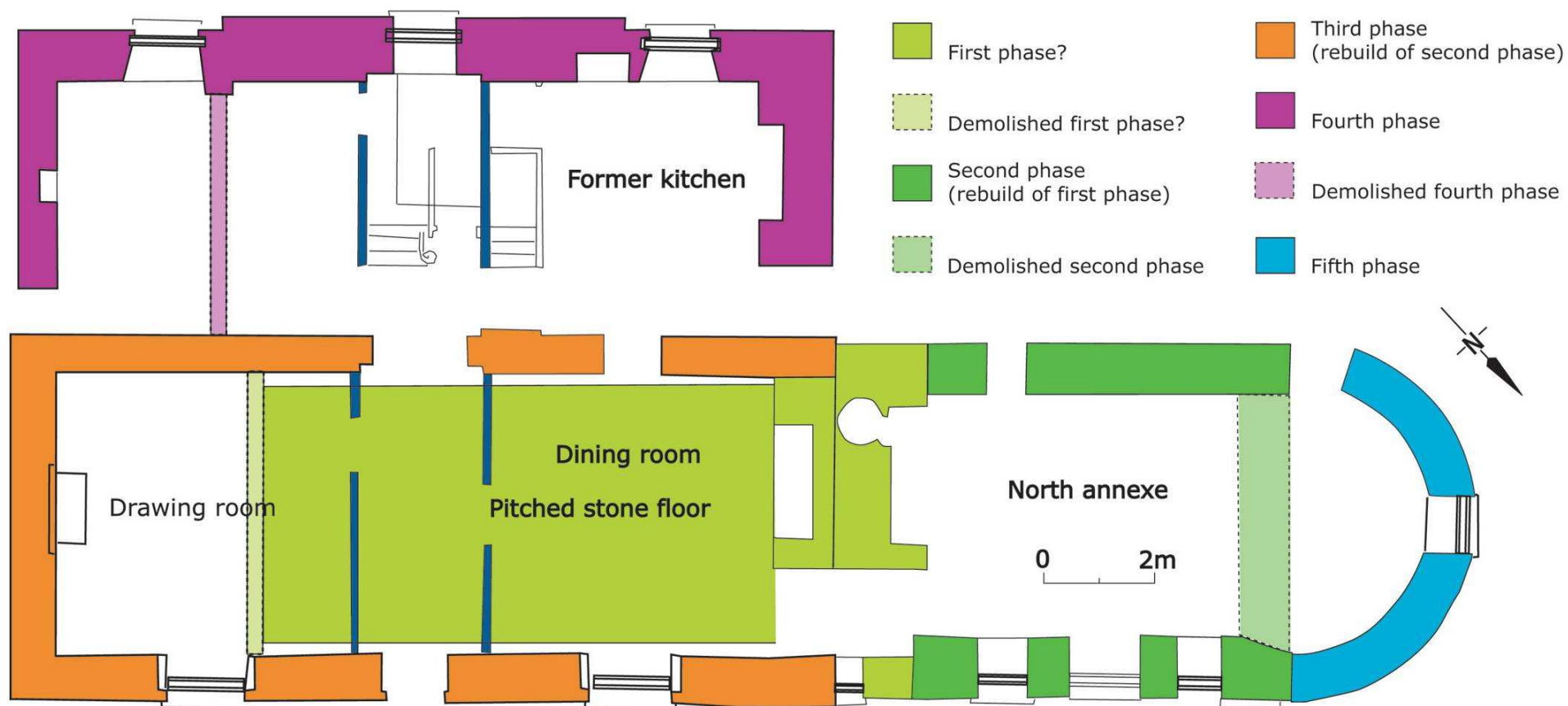


Figure 2: Ground floor phase plan



Photo 1: The East facing facade of Plas Abermeurig



Photo 2: The south facing elevation



Photo 3: The east facing north end of the house



Photo 4: The north end east facing elevation (note differences in stonework and window heights)



Photo 5: The west facing elevation



Photo 6: The north end west facing elevation



Photo 7: Straight joint between northern annexe and the apsidal end



Photo 8: Possible truncated window (in location of former doorway?)



Photo 9: Doorway in west wall of northern annexe (note straight joint with chimneystack)



Photo 10: Interior view of arched window opening with 50cm scale resting on location of earlier doorway lintel.



Photo 11: Interior view of interface between early and later walls of east face of northern annexe showing irregular joint in stonework.



Photo 12: Interior view of interface between early and later walls of east face of northern annexe showing stepped later wall.



Photo 13: Roof timbers and back-to-back chimney stack. Facing south.



Photo 14: Roof timbers facing north towards apsidal end of northern annexe.



Photo 15: Detail of roof timbers at apsidal end (partially repaired)



Photo 16: Detail of pegged scarfed cruck



Photo 17: North side of back-to-back chimneystack



Photo 18: Interior east wall of northern annexe showing recesses in wall and joint to apsidal end



Photo 19: Fireplace on former kitchen (floor levels reduced)



Photo 20: Sub-floor deposits in former kitchen



Photo 21: Three door lintels in doorway between dining room and former kitchen (equating to three phases of building?)



Photo 22: South side of back-to-back fireplace showing truncated bressumer beam and later inserted hearth.



Photo 23: Blocked opening in west wall of dining room
(note height in relation to door lintels).



Photo 24: Blocked opening in north wall of dining room above fireplace.



Photo 25: Lath and plaster stairwell division utilising re-used timber (note straight joint to left). Looking north.



Photo 26: Stairwell looking south (note straight joint to right)



Photo 27: Wall stub below stairs (part of earlier building?)



Photo 28: Cobbled floor in dining room
(note hearth stone and base of original fireplace)



Photo 29: Cobbles in dining room (note hearth stone, blocked fireplace, straight joint to left and missing cobbles against wall)



Photo 30: Wall revealed to west of northern annexe during watching brief



Photo 31: Large slate slabs at northern end of new extension area



Photo 32: Overall view of new extension area to west of northern annexe

PLAS ABERMEURIG, ABERMEURIG CEREDIGION

PHOTOGRAPHIC BUILDING RECORD AND WATCHING BRIEF

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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by
Duncan Schlee

Swydd / Position: Field Services Project Manager

Llofnod / Signature



Dyddiad / Date 15/12/2011

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

James Meek

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature



Dyddiad / Date 15/12/2011

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn*

*As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report*

