

BUILDING RECORDING AT ALLT DDU, PONT LLANIO, TREGARON

JULY 2005



Paratowyd gan Archaeoleg Cambria
Ar gyfer Mr K Price, Pentre Farm, Llanfair
Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Mr K Price, Pentre Farm, Llanfair



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**BUILDING RECORDING AT ALLT DDU,
PONT LLANIO, TREGARON**

Gan / By

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SUMMARY

A planning condition required a programme of building recording on a house known as Allt Ddu, near Tregaron, Ceredigion. The house's owner, Mr K Price, commissioned Cambria Archaeology to undertake the recording. It was carried out over one day in July 2005.

Allt Ddu is an abandoned, derelict house containing many features characteristic of the longhouse tradition in southwest Wales. Its date is unknown, but cartographic evidence indicates it was in existence by 1845. Essentially it consists of an upslope dwelling under a tin roof, but formerly thatched, with a downhouse attached on the down-slope side. The downhouse is secondary to the dwelling and in its last period of use contained a threshing barn and cow house.

INTRODUCTION

A planning condition required a programme of building recording on an abandoned, derelict house known as Allt Ddu, near Tregaron, Ceredigion in advance of repairs for a return to use as a dwelling. The house's owner, Mr K Price, commissioned Cambria Archaeology to undertake the recording. It was carried out on 5th July 2005.

Allt Ddu (PRN6846 in the Historic Environment Record for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire) has long since been abandoned as a dwelling house but is practically untouched and retains many of its original features. It is in many ways characteristic of the longhouse tradition of southwest Wales. It is a building of considerable length (c.30m), classically sited into the slope with a step up from the downhouse (usually a byre) to the dwelling and a further rise in elevation between the living room-kitchen and parlour-bedroom beyond. The entrance to the house is in the east wall at the point where the dwelling end and downhouse join, past the fireplace in a manner typical of a central chimney plan (as described in Peate 1940, William 1992). The downhouse, so called as is not a true byre, includes a threshing floor as well as cattle stalls. As it stands it is an addition to the dwelling: there is a straight joint and its rear (west) wall is set inwards from the house. Attached at right angles to the dwelling end is a later outbuilding.

Little about the early history of Allt Ddu is known but surviving farmhouses of this type within the region are generally thought to date from the 17th through to the 19th century.

METHODOLOGY

The stated level of recording corresponds to Level 2 as defined by the RCAHM which comprises photographs of all external and internal elevations and details where appropriate, sketch drawings of plans and elevations and a short written description.

A copy of the report, photographs and drawings will be lodged with the Regional Historic Environment Record held at Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo., SA19 6NE.

DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

Allt Ddu (NGR SN65255706) is situated at 170m above sea level on a south-facing valley slope above the river Teifi, some three kilometres south of Tregaron. The tithe map (c.1845) shows a long building consistent with the dwelling and downhouse. By the time the 1st edition 25" OS map was published in 1889 it had been enlarged to an L-plan. At the same time two detached small outbuildings were added to complete a roughly rectangular arrangement. Just one of these later buildings, a lofted cow shed and lean-to pigsty is still in existence today.

Allt Ddu was last occupied in the early or mid 19th century. The farmhouse is now in poor repair with the downhouse roofless and part of the west wall collapsed. There are three discernible phases of construction present:

The Dwelling End

The dwelling end represents the earliest phase. It is of local rubble construction, clay mortar bonded with walls some 0.6m thick. The east (front) wall had been coloured yellow but the entire building was later whitewashed. The roof (now under corrugated tin) was formerly thatched. There are two fireplaces, the main one being situated in the transverse wall in the centre of the range. They are both constructed of stone with large stacks. The flue of the main fireplace was latterly replaced with brick.

The doorway, which also serves to separate the upper end from the downhouse, is in the transverse wall on the east side of the fireplace in a manner typical of a central chimney plan.

The first room from the entrance with its large fireplace was the main living room. The fireplace is paved with stone flags at floor level but does not otherwise retain any original features: it is presently infilled with a built in range and dry cupboard of the early 20th century and the lintel has been removed. This room is lit by two small windows in the east wall. A straight joint in the semi-collapsed west wall may have been another small window.

Four stone steps lead up from the living room to the bedroom. It is lit by a window in the west wall and has a fireplace with early 20th century tile surround in the end wall. The two rooms were originally separated by a wooden partition few traces of which survive.

Windows are small, unequally sized and of the small casement type. They are not designed to open except the one in the west wall. The internal walls are limewashed with the fire surround coloured red. Early layers show red colouring the living room and lobby. Yellow had in the past been used in the passage. A coarse gravel mix of rammed lime mortar is the main flooring material.

A loft is approached by a ladder stair from the living room through a small opening in the floorboards. It is entirely within the roof space, the floor being on a level with the wall plate, and the ceiling restricted by the slanting sides of the roof. A plank partition serves to divide two rooms. Tongue and groove ceiling and partitioning relate to late 19th or early 20th century refurbishment.

The present roof consists of insubstantial A-frame trusses and corrugated tin. No slots for cruck trusses were identified and it may be that the original roof used collar beam trusses. Remnant thatch consisting of rough branches laid close together and wooden spars pushed into turf clods and straw, was found beneath the eaves at the north gable end.

The Downhouse

The now roofless downhouse (probably slated originally) would have included a threshing barn and cattle stalls. As it stands it is an addition to the house: there is a straight joint and its rear wall is set inwards from the house. Walls are some 0.6m thick, of local rubble with a clay bond. The east (front) elevation is whitewashed.

Between the dwelling end and downhouse are the brick wall bases of two small rooms; a small store and a lobby between the outside entrance and the living room doorway. Whether this respects an original arrangement or not cannot be stated with certainty. The store room has several successive layers of whitewash and the lobby is coloured red. Sawn off joists in profile in the wall above identify a former loft.

The downhouse floor is now covered in building debris but some clues as to the original layout are provided. The top end seems to have been divided for use as a threshing floor: a large and a small doorway face each other across a stone flagged floor in the typical manner. Some 15m to the west is a minor watercourse with the remains of a wheel pit which could have been used to drive barn machinery.

The cattle were housed below. Here the floor surface is cobbled, the arrangement showing that animals were stalled facing down the building towards a feed walk entered in the east wall. A deep building debris obscures the lower end beyond this point and the layout is uncertain.

Another doorway is situated downslope in the east wall. There is a small casement window in the west wall.

The roof was latterly of corrugated tin, the remains lying on the ground nearby at the time of survey. The profile showing in the transverse wall shows that the ridge was staggered at a lower level to the ridge of the house. Slate was probably the roofing material as there are scattered slates with holes for wooden pegs about.

The Outbuilding

This later 19th century stone built and clay bonded outbuilding lies against the north half of the east wall of the house and is cut into the bedrock. It consists of two separate units of roughly equal size, each with a substantial opening in the south wall.

The room nearest to the house has a difficult, uneven floor of underlying bedrock. There are no internal fittings surviving and there is a single loft joist present. That the doorway was widened is indicated by brick dressings on one side.

Against the transverse wall in the neighbouring room is a feed rack. Wall sockets represent a former hayloft above and there is blocked loading door in the east pine end.

The function of this building is uncertain, but the lofted east unit was most recently used as an animal shelter. Some material other than stone eg. weatherboard cladding or corrugated tin may have been used to cover and divide the large openings.

The present roof is of corrugated tin over roughly cut poles. Straw thatch is visible at the end (west) gable wall at the point where the outbuilding joins the dwelling.

Additional Observations

To the southeast of the longhouse is a small outbuilding consisting of a lofted cow house and lean-to pigsty. No record of this building was specified as part of the brief but because of its derelict condition a photographic record of the exterior was made and is included in this report.

CONCLUSIONS

Allt Ddu has many characteristics usually found in the long house tradition in southwest Wales. It is not entirely typical however and differs in some important details.

In this type of dwelling the downhouse is usually a byre and the house and byre are linked in such a way that the feeding walk to the byre is also the entrance to the house. At Allt Ddu the downhouse is secondary and includes a threshing barn as well as cattle stalls. The feedwalk is absent where it might be expected the space instead being occupied by a lobby and store room. The question posed is to what extent this layout reflects an original arrangement or how much it is a product of later development.

Allt Ddu is nevertheless a reasonably intact and rare surviving example of a vernacular building type that was once common within the region.

REFERENCES

Peate, I 1949 *The Welsh House: A Study in Folk Culture*. Reprinted by Llanerch Press, Lampeter

William, E 1992 *Welsh Long-houses: Four centuries of farming at Cilewent* University of Wales Press National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The archive, indexed according to the National Monuments Record (NMR) material categories will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, curated by Cambria Archaeology, Shire Hall, 8 Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire. It contains the following:

A.1 Final report

B.4 Field notes

C.3 Survey drawings

D.1 Photo Catalogue

D.2 Digital photographs

L.1 Project specification

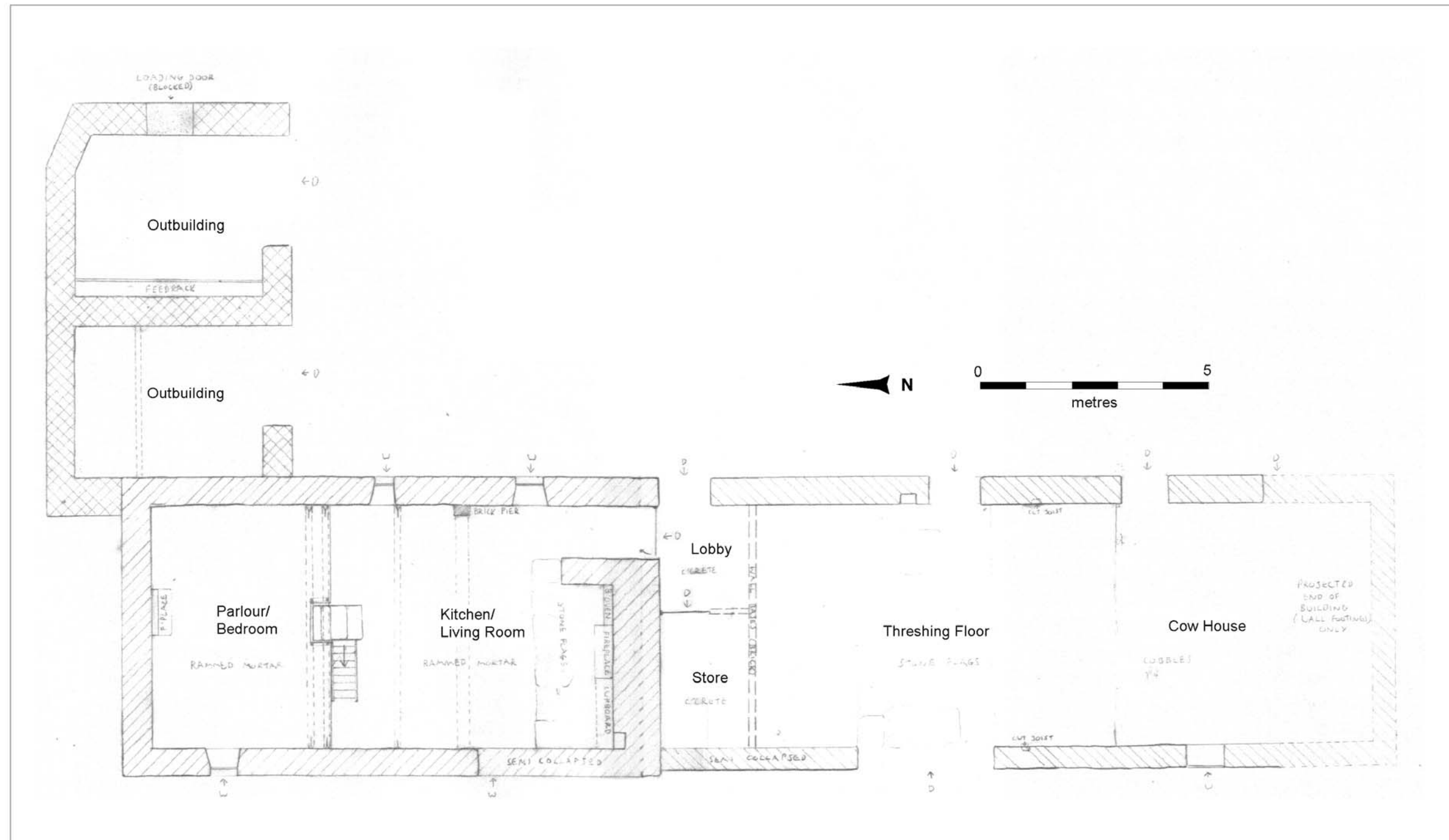


Figure 1: Ground Floor Plan

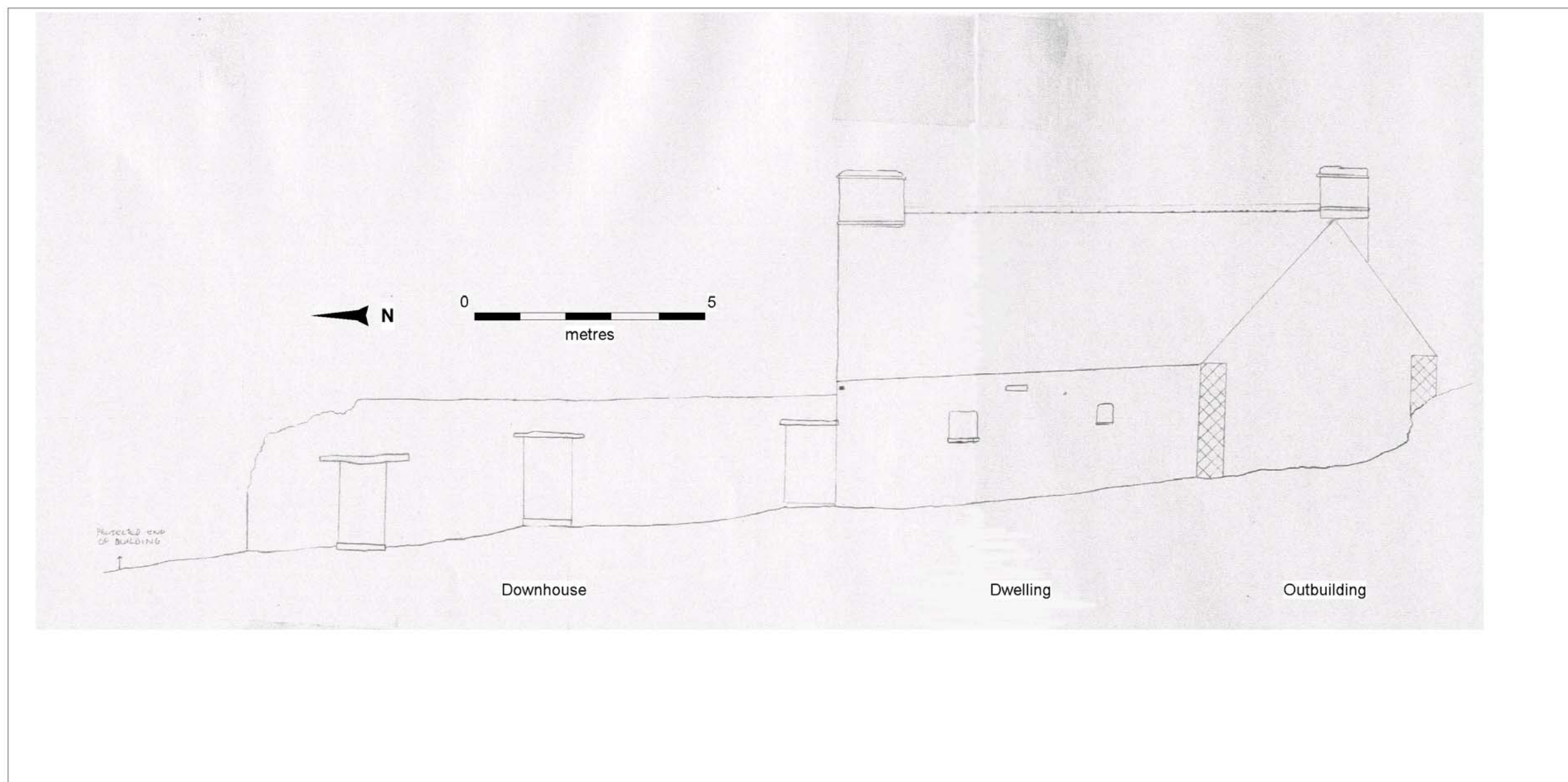


Figure 2: East facing (front) elevation



Photo 1: The upper (north facing) end of the dwelling.



Photo 2: The rear (west facing) elevation of the dwelling.



Photo 3: The rear (west facing) elevation of the downhouse.



Photo 4: The lower (south facing) elevation of the downhouse.



Photo 5: The front (east facing) elevation of the downhouse.



Photo 6: The front (east facing) elevation of the dwelling.



Photo 7: The front (south facing) elevation of the outbuilding.



Photo 8: The east facing elevation of the outbuilding. Note the blocked in loading door.



Photo 9: The dwelling interior looking south towards the main fireplace.



Photo 10: The dwelling interior looking north.



Photo 11: Loft interior looking north to flue of secondary fireplace.



Photo 12: Loft interior looking south to replacement flue of main fireplace.



Photo 13: The downhouse interior – the store room and lobby.



Photo 14: General view of downhouse interior looking south-east.



Photo 15: The downhouse interior looking north.



Photo 16: Rough branches and thatch beneath the eaves at the north gable end.



Photo 17: The north facing elevation of the ruinous cow house.



Photo 18: Cow house interior detail.