

---

# Egryn: Llanaber

---



## Archaeological Building Survey

GAT Project No. 1879

Report No. 865

May, 2010



---

Egryn:  
**Llanaber**

---

Report No. 865

National Trust

May 2010

By  
Andrew Davidson

Illustrations by Tanya Berks



## EGRYN, LLANABER

### A SURVEY OF THE HOUSE

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) for the National Trust. A survey was undertaken over a period of 5 months in 2006 from June to November during the renovation of the house. A reflectorless total station was used to record base information, to which were added detailed hand measurements. Digital photographs were taken throughout the survey. This survey relates only to the present house at Egryn, and does not include the second house of c. 1618 or the farm buildings.

The report contains summary information in parts 2 and 3 on location, architecture and history. Part 4 provides a description of the exterior and interior of the house, whilst a discussion of some of the issues raised by the description is contained in Part 5. A list of secondary sources used during the compilation of the report is provided in Part 6.

The authors are very grateful to several people for all their kindness and help during the survey. In particular Elizabeth Green, who commissioned the survey for the National Trust and helped throughout; Emyr Hall, Building Surveyor for the National Trust;

Margaret Dunn, who has undertaken considerable research on the history of Egryn, and made her researches available to accompany the survey; and all the builders and contractors who put up with us working around them.

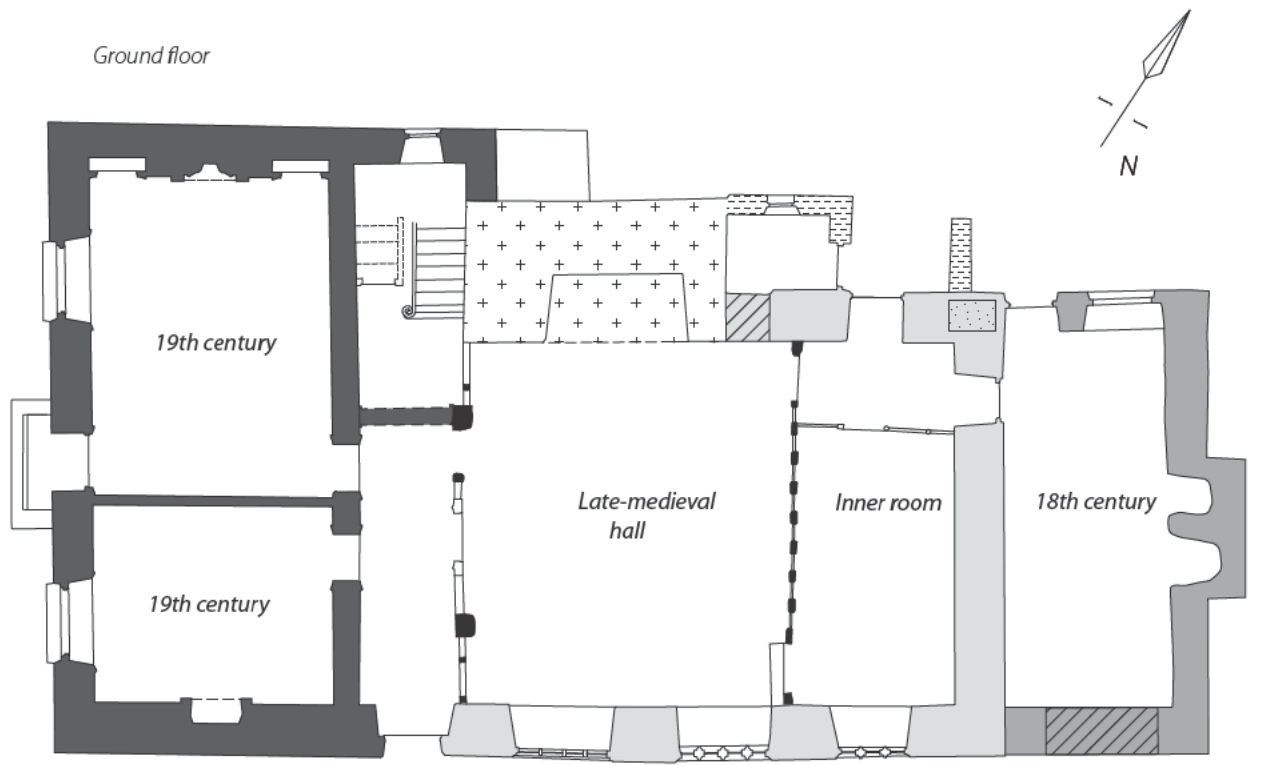
#### 2. LOCATION

Egryn is located on the west coast of Wales, a short distance north of the Mawddach estuary (NGR SH592203), on the west edge of the Harlech Dome. The geology is largely of the lower Cambrian period, and consists of Rhinog grits on the higher ground, and Llanbedr slates protruding below on the western slopes. Hafotty shales and Barmouth grits lie higher up the succession, and form the highest ground. The rocks have proved of economic benefit, and have produced Egryn freestone from the Rhinog grits, quarried from medieval to relatively recent times, slate from the Llanbedr slate and manganese from the Hafotty shales, both mined in the 19th century.

The house of Egryn lies on the north edge of the ecclesiastical parish of Llanaber, which lies at the south end of the medieval commote of Arudwy. Llanaber is a large, nearly square, parish, with its west side facing the Irish Sea, and its south side the estuary of the Afon Mawddach. The narrow west margins of the parish, adjacent to the sea, though now partly improved, were largely salt marsh and peat depos-



*Plate 1: The house at Egryn lies on the fertile coastal strip*



- |  |                        |  |                 |
|--|------------------------|--|-----------------|
|  | Late-medieval hall     |  | 18th century    |
|  | Inserted fireplace     |  | Later extension |
|  | Inserted gable windows |  | Later lean-to   |
|  | Later gable window     |  | 19th century    |
|  | Blocked window         |  | Blocked chimney |

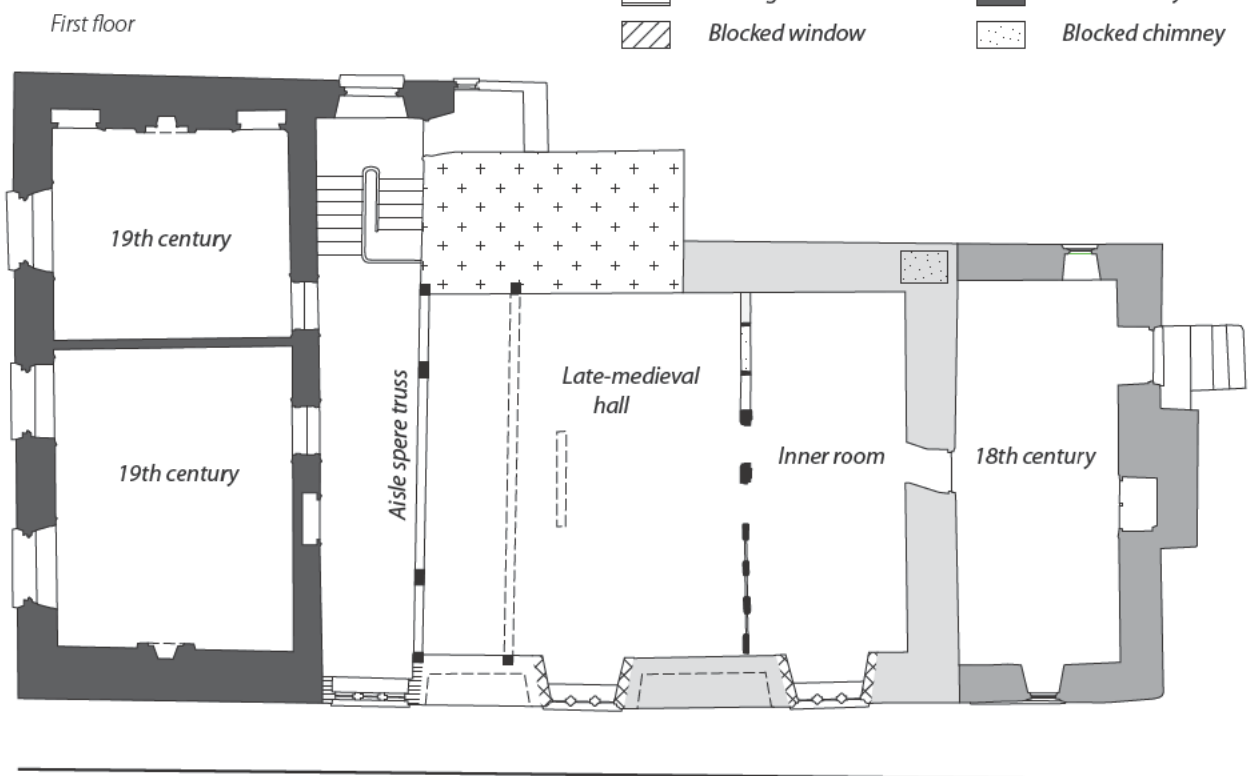


Figure 2: Historic phased plan of Egryn house

its, the latter in particular a useful resource. From the sea the ground rises to a north-south ridge lying at over 500m high. The parish drains westward from this ridge to the sea. Once east of the ridge, however, the drainage pattern shifts and a succession of valleys drain south into the Mawddach estuary. The ground between the west coast and the high ridge does not rise steadily, but rather in steep bursts, with flatter terraces between. The house at Egryn is located at 30m OD, on the better agricultural lands of the coastal lowlands, and on the lower terrace which is some 800m wide, and rises to c. 80m. A steep slope then rises to over 150m OD before another sloping terrace, over 1500m wide and reaching a height of 350m marks an area of upland grazing. The land then climbs steeply to the top of the 500m ridge. Small rivers or streams running down to the sea have cut steep narrow valleys into the hillside. Egryn lies on the north side of one of the larger of these streams, called Ceunant Egryn.

### 3. HISTORICAL OUTLINE

#### 3.1 Architectural development

Egryn is an example of a stone-built late-medieval three unit hall house, with a central two-bay hall flanked by inner rooms at the dais end, and a cross-passage at the lower end. An outer bay once lay below the cross passage. The hall bays are divided

by a cusped collar-beam truss, which lies closer to the passage end. A small louvre truss on the dais side of the collar-beam truss indicates the original use of an open fire. An aisle truss separates the hall from the cross-passage, and a post and panel partition separates the dais end of the hall from the inner room. A floor may have been inserted into the hall to create two storeys c. 1620, when a lateral fireplace, new ground floor windows and new first floor dormer windows were added. An extension was built on to the east end in the 18th century. In the 19th century the west outer rooms of the hall house were demolished and a parlour wing built in their place. A new floor and ceiling were put in the hall at this time.

Parallel and adjacent to the house is a second house of c. 1618, used as a farm building from the early 20th century onwards.

Dendrochronological dating of the principal timbers has recorded felling dates of Summer 1507 to Winter 1509-10 (Vernacular Architecture 2004, 111), indicating construction of the original hall house in or shortly after 1510. This confirms the stylistic dating which had been interpreted as approximately 1500. A beam inserted across the centre of the aisle truss, perhaps to carry a first floor in the hall, was dated to 1592-1622, which again confirms the date of c. 1600 usually given for the second phase of construction.



*Plate 2: Relict medieval settlements above Egryn*

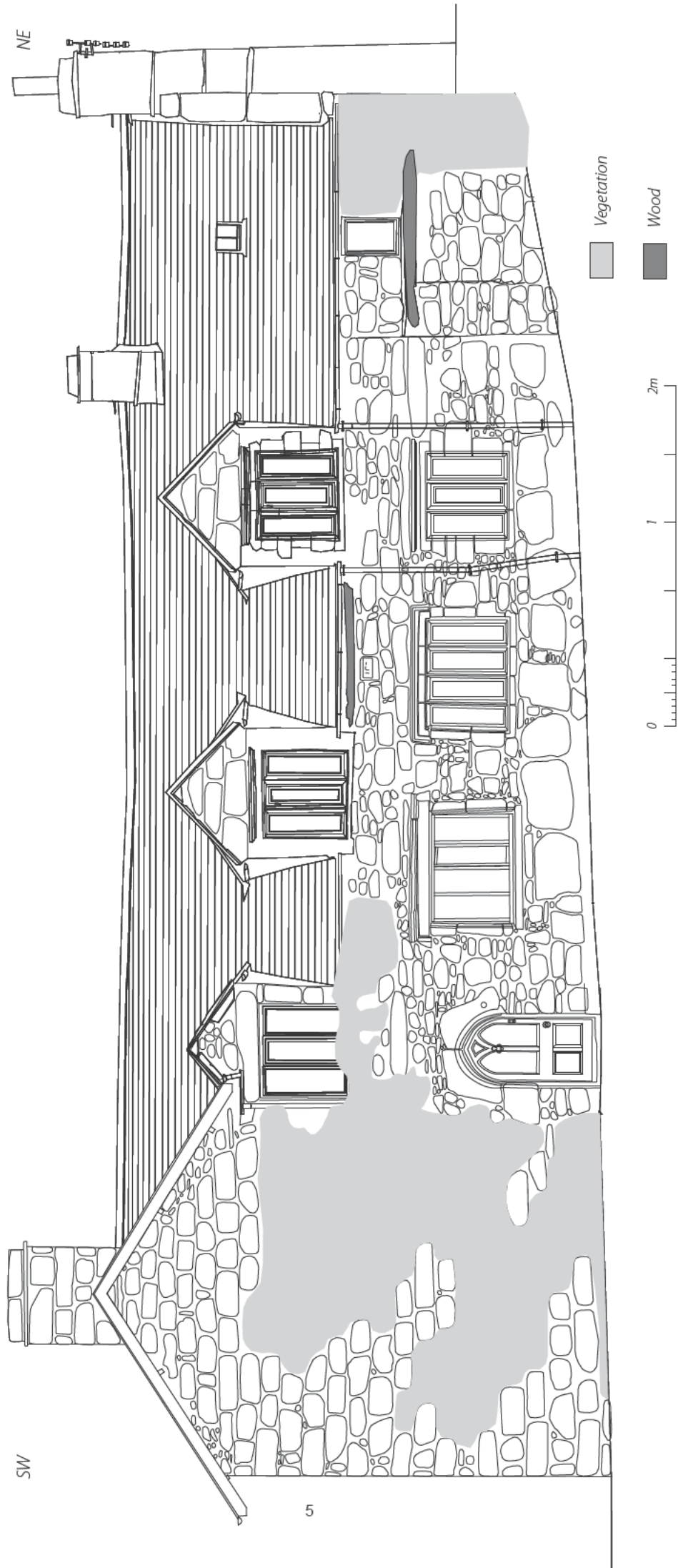


Figure 3: Southern elevation of Egryn house



### 3.2 Historical summary (from information provided by Margaret Dunn)

There is archaeological evidence on the land around Egryn to suggest continuous occupation from prehistoric times. The farm and surrounding area contains a remarkable series of relict earthworks dating from the Neolithic to the present. These include two Neolithic burial chambers and a number of Bronze Age cairns. Occupation during the later prehistoric period is evidenced by defended and open settlements of round houses and associated terraced fields. The remains of a group of rectangular buildings and paddocks indicate medieval occupation. The latter might be associated with the exploitation of the Egryn freestone in the Middle Ages, a stone which was used at Harlech castle and at numerous medieval churches, as well as at Egryn house.

Egryn is clearly listed in the 1419-20 Extent of Merioneth as a free gafael. Its subsequent history is relatively vague until the early 16th century when the estate was owned by the Tudur family. The family appear to have moved to Ardudwy in the 13th century from the area around Abergele in north-east Wales. Urien ap Tegwared is the earliest member of the family to be clearly documented as living in Ardudwy, though references to a 'Tegwared Hen' might refer to his father. Urien is the highest tax payer listed in the 1292-3 Lay Subsidy Roll for Llanddwywe, where his home may have been at Hendre Eirian (earlier known as Hendre Urien). The Tudur family were descendants of Urien ap Tegwared, taking their name from Tudur ap Gruffydd ap Ednyfed, who married, c. 1530, Elizabeth, daughter of William ap Jenkin ap Iorwerth of Ynysmaengwyn, one of the largest and most important estates in Meirionnydd. Tudur was an adult in 1531 when he was a witness to a document signed at Llanfair (UWB Mostyn 3796). His father, Gruffydd ap Ednyfed, was witness to a deed of property in Llanaber in 1509. We do not know if Gruffydd or Tudur lived at Egryn, however Tudur's son, William ap Tudur is known to have owned the property. William married Elisabeth, a member of the Nannau family, another significant estate within the area, in 1558, when he is described as William ap Tudur of Egryn (UWB Nannau 79). Though firm evidence is lacking, the family was certainly of an appropriate rank to build an aisled hall house at Egryn.

William ap Tudur was a patron of the poets, and several eulogies remain to him. William's son Hugh ap William Tudur inherited. Hugh's wife Gwen (of Corsygedol) died c. 1606, when elegies were composed in her honour. Hugh's heir was William (II), whose dates partly overlap with Hugh. It is about this time that the second house at Egryn was built (dated c. 1620 by dendrochronology), and that the lateral fireplace and dormer windows were inserted into the older house (1592 – 1622). William's heir was Hugh (II) d. 1644, followed by William (III), who

died c. 1670. The estate then passed to his daughter Jane (d. c. 1702), who married Hugh Owen of Caerberllan c. 1670.

Her heir was Hugh Owen (II) d. 1754 and his heir Lewis Owen d. 1779. The combined estate remained in the Owen family until c. 1850. The house was rarely lived in by the owners, who lived instead at Caerberllan or in property on Anglesey. The tenants were often other members of the family, and these included John Owen, tenant in the second part of the 18th century, whose son William Owen Pughe (1759 – 1835) was the lexicographer, whose best known work is the Welsh dictionary published in 1803.

Edward Pugh Owen owned Caerberllan and Egryn in the mid-19th century, and is recorded as the owner on the tithe schedule of c. 1840. By the census of 1851 the land had been sold to John Carsons, whose family lived in it until 1886, though the second house and farm appear to have been owned separately. There is no direct evidence, but the 19th century cross-wing is perhaps best associated with the purchase by John Carsons, described in the 1861 census as a landed proprietor, born in Ireland. The house remained in the Carson family ownership until 1955, though the family had moved to nearby Hengwm, and the house and farm was let to tenants. It was sold to H P and E M Roberts, the sitting tenants, who had to re-roof the house. They sold it to Mrs R Bryne 1965, whose son Mr R Bryne died in 2000. The National Trust acquired the property in 2000.

## 4. THE STANDING BUILDING

### 4.1 Description and analysis of the exterior

#### *South elevation*

The south elevation exhibits all the major phases of construction. The centre part consists of the medieval hall, with its cross-passage and later mullioned windows. The hall is flanked by the gable end of the 19th century parlour wing to the west and the 18th



Plate 3: South elevation

NW

SE

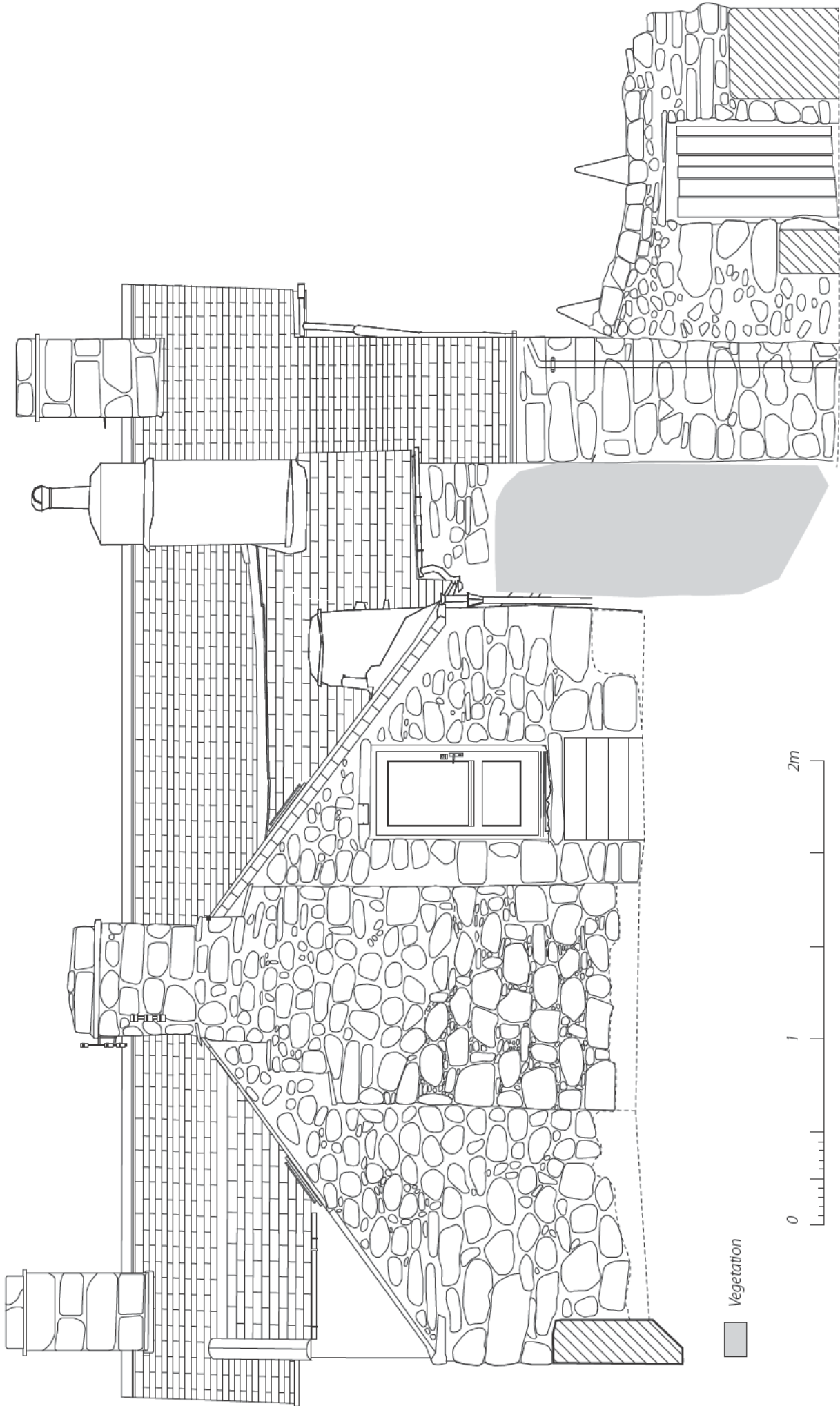


Figure 4: Eastern elevation of Egryn house



*Plate 4: The south door*

century dairy extension to the east.

The lowest course of masonry of the hall consists of very large roughly square blocks which reach up to sill level. Above this course the wall is of much smaller random rubble walling, roughly coursed. A timber wall plate is visible at eaves height between the dormers. A straight joint in the masonry to the east marks the end of the hall and the start of the 18th century dairy block. The masonry of the latter is of local uncoursed rubble. The medieval door, opening on to the former cross-passage, is at the west end of the medieval hall, west of which is the 19th century parlour wing, where the masonry changes to regularly coursed blocks of dark-grey quarried stone.



*Plate 5: Ovolo moulded windows on the south side of the hall*

The doorway to the cross-passage has a pointed gothic arch, the arch being formed from two large chamfered slabs. The arch springs from jambs of the same stone on the west side, though not on the east, where the chamfer is continued down in a rougher form, and is presumably a replacement of the original. There are two rectangular hall windows; the western one retains only its original jambs and a rectangular moulded label with squared returns but no stops. The sill and lintel are concrete, and the window is of four wooden lights. The second window is a four light mullioned window with ovolo mouldings and a rectangular label, again with no stops. The next window, which lit the inner room behind the dais, is the same, but of three lights only. One mullion has been replaced, and the label is a simple horizontal string with no returns. A small square stone with an illegible inscription lies above the east hall window.

Three gabled dormer windows light the first floor. The two eastern windows are of three lights with ovolo moulded jambs and mullions and a moulded label, again with no returns. A third dormer sited above the door is of similar size, but with no mouldings or stone mullions, and a large stone lintel. This window may be of later date, or the window has been completely rebuilt at a later date, perhaps when the 19th century wing was built.



*Plate 6: The eastern extension*

The east end of the medieval house is marked by a vertical straight joint in the masonry, where the later building starts. A long horizontal timber lintel runs over a former large blocked opening, almost of cart shed size. This was subsequently part blocked to create a smaller door, and later fully blocked. A small single-light rectangular window lights the first floor, and there is a small iron rooflight.

#### *East gable*

This is the gable of the 18th century extension. The masonry is of roughly coursed local stone – the rounded nature of the stones suggests most are field stone, not quarried. The ground surface is higher

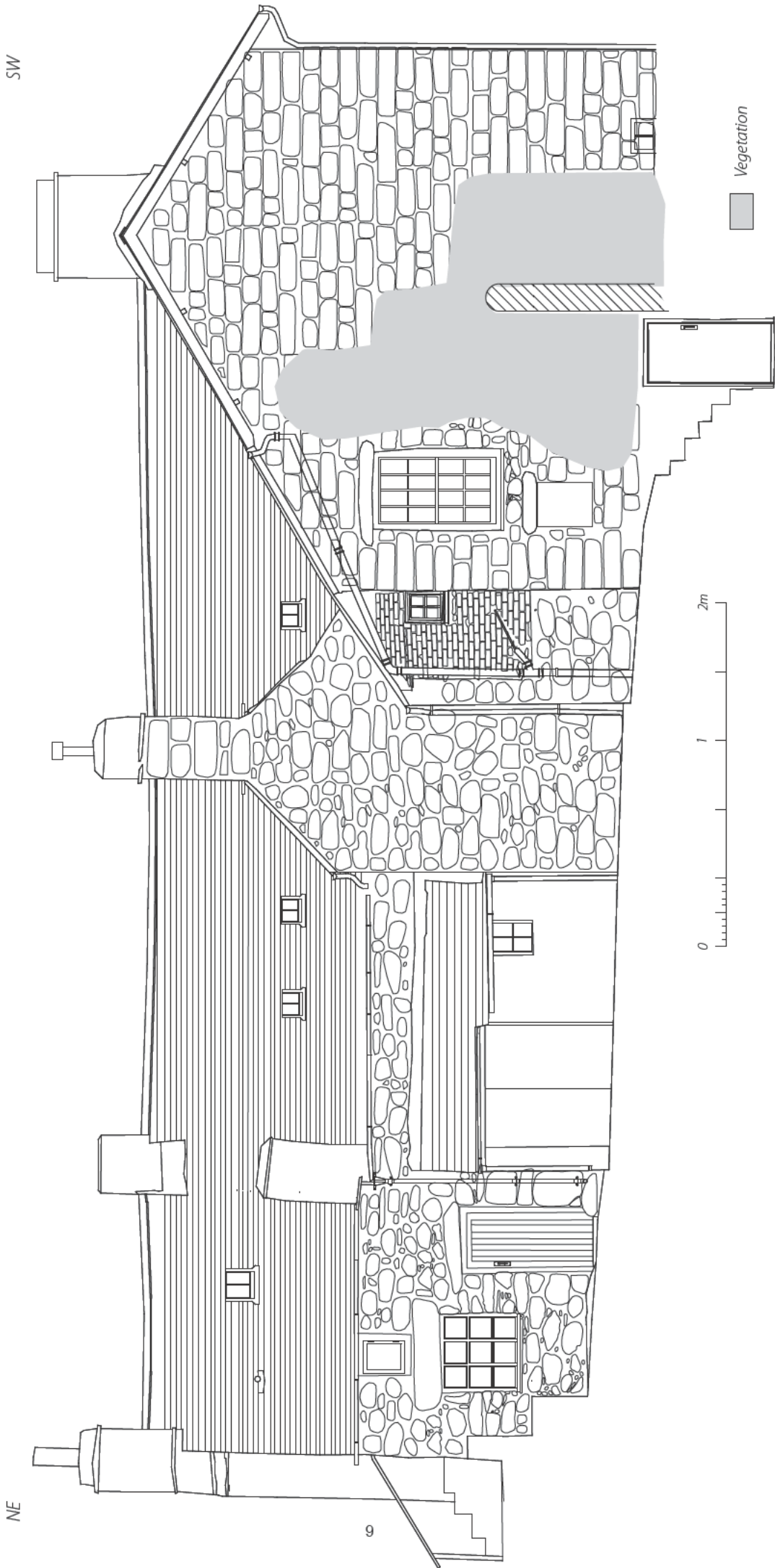


Figure 5. Northern elevation of Egryn house



*Plate 7: The east gable*

here, where the east end of the house is built into the slope, and entry is into the first floor. A large chimney, projecting some 0.5m east of the wall line, occupies the centre part of the gable. It narrows in steps towards the top, and finishes above a horizontal string course. Right of the chimney is a door with five steps up which leads into the first floor room.

*North elevation*

The north elevation, though not necessarily originally, certainly became the back of the house. Examining this side from east to west, at the east end is the 18th century extension, with a large 9-pane fixed window on the ground floor, and a door to the right, both with single slab lintels. A small single light window lights the first floor. There is a straight joint in the masonry above and in line with the right door jamb, indicating the end of the medieval house, though it carries up to form the left side of a small square chimney stack. This may be a later insertion, as the other side of the chimney is also visible as a straight joint in the upper part of the wall. The lower part of the wall is obscured by a later lean-to extension. This small extension with mono-pitch roof continues to, and is on the same alignment as, the projecting lateral hall



*Plate 8: The north elevation*

chimney. The wide stack of this chimney is angled in at eaves height, then continues up as a narrower square stack, with a horizontal string course just below the chimney head. Right of the chimney stack, and extending south beyond it, is the 19th century stair wing and gable end of the parlour wing. A further extension was added on to the east side of this, partially encasing the lateral chimney stack, with a return in the approximate centre of the stack. The upper part of this extension is in brick. A large 16 pane sash window lights the landing on the stairs, and a small window lights the stairs below. External steps lead down to a door into a small basement which lies under the north room. The gable end of the 19th century cross-wing contains a chimney, the stack built with a horizontal string course below the head to resemble the earlier examples. The roof of the later wing overhangs beyond the walls.



*Plate 9: Steps down to basement*

*West elevation*

Built in the first part of the 19th century, the cross-wing was built to resemble the late Georgian/early Victorian houses of the area. The walls are of dark-grey quarried stone, regularly coursed. The roof is



*Plate 10: The west elevation*

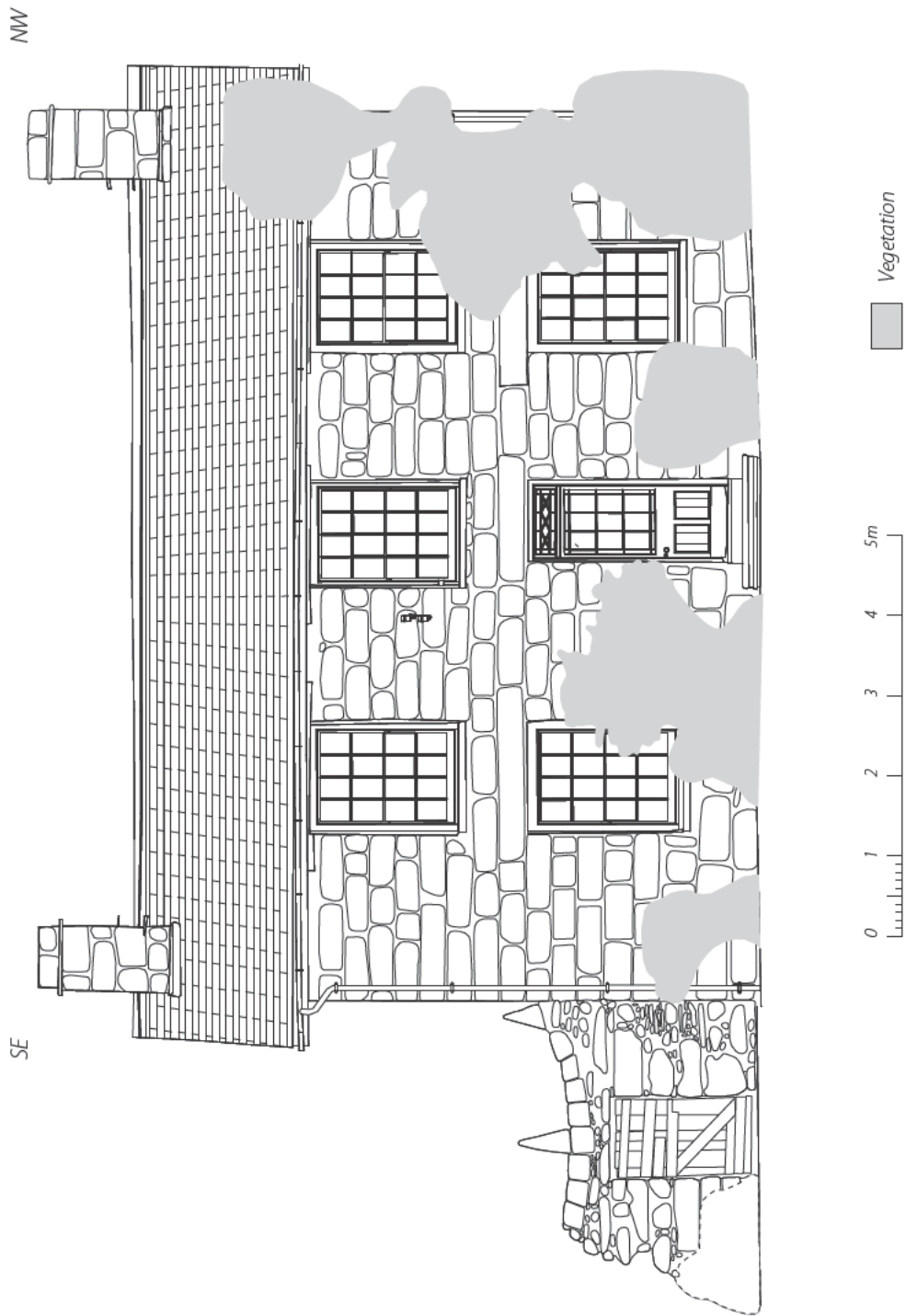


Figure 6: Western elevation of Egryn house



*Plate 11: Re-used timbers used as ceiling joists in the cross-passage*

of slate with wide overhanging eaves, and there are short stone chimneys on both gables. There is a door located just south of centre, of which the upper part is glazed. Either side the door are 16-pane sash windows. Symmetrically above the ground floor door and windows are three first floor 16 pane sash windows, all with slate sills and stone lintels. The door and windows are sited off-centre to the right, to allow for a slightly larger room on the north. The door opens straight into this larger room, and not into a



*Plate 13: The cross-passage after renovation*

hall.

#### 4.2 Description and analysis of the interior

##### *The cross-passage*

The south door enters into the late medieval cross-passage, which was converted into an entrance hall in the 19th century, with a new stair at the north end, access to the new rooms on the left, and the medieval hall through the aisled partition on the right. The insertion of the stairs removed the north wall and door of the medieval cross-passage. There are mortises in the horizontal beams attached to the aisle truss at ceiling height. Reused timbers with grooves for panelling have been used as rafters, presumably from the former partition between the cross-passage and outer bay. Panelled doors open either side into the two 19th century rooms, and through the aisle truss. A moulded dado rail and narrow skirting form part of the 19th century work. The dog-leg stairs at the north end have a simple moulded rail, and slender square balusters with no newel posts. A 16-pane sash window lights the first landing.

##### *The parlour wing*

The 19th century parlour wing lies on the site of the medieval outer rooms. The smaller southern room on the left has wooden planked floors, plaster ceil-



*Plate 12: The cross-passage during renovation*

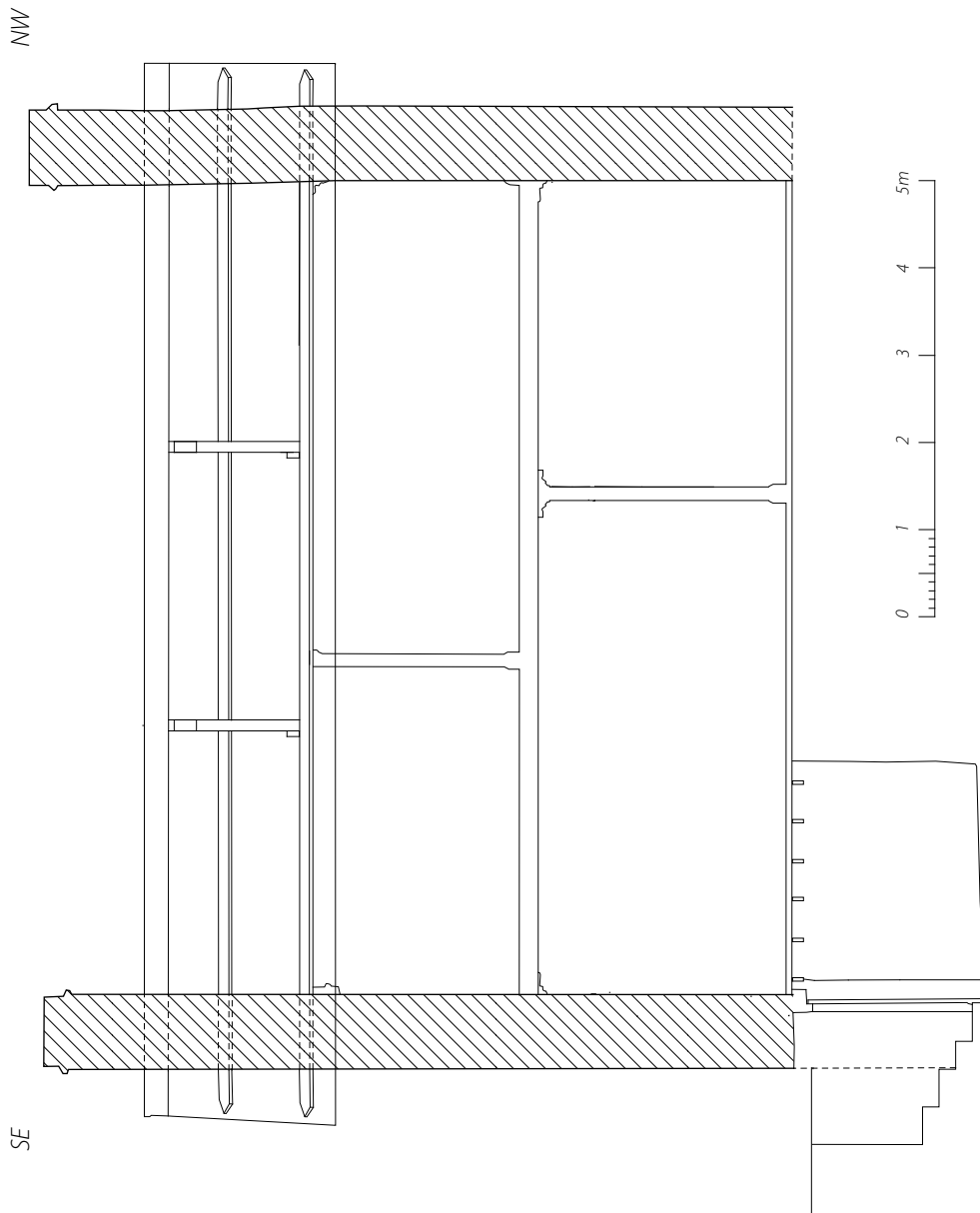


Figure 7: Western cross section through elevation of Egryn house 19th century parlour wing





*Plate 14: The stairs at the north end of the cross-assage*



*Plate 16: Slate fireplace in the parlour wing*

ings with simple moulded coving, picture rail and skirting boards. The window casements have panelled shutters, and the walled is panelled below the sill. The 16-pane sash windows have lambs-tongue mouldings. There is a simple fireplace, with slate surround decorated with quatrefoils in the top corners and grooved linear patterns running vertically down the sides and horizontally across the top. The larger northern room has a stone floor of tiles laid diagonally, a door and window in the west wall of similar style to the south room, and a fireplace in the north wall with flanking open cupboards built into the walls. The fireplace is typical of its time, with a mantle supported on reverse ogee corbels, brown patterned tiles and cast iron surround. An external door opens on to the garden through the west wall. It is panelled below and 9 pane glass above, with



*Plate 17: Door in the west front of the parlour wing*



*Plate 15: Sash windows and panelled shutters in the parlour wing*



*Plate 18: Fireplace with flanking cupboards in the north room of the parlour wing*

marginal coloured lights, and a coloured rectangular fanlight.

#### *The late-medieval hall*

The hall has been considerably modified over the years, but the essential elements of the building constructed c. 1510 and modified 100 years later are

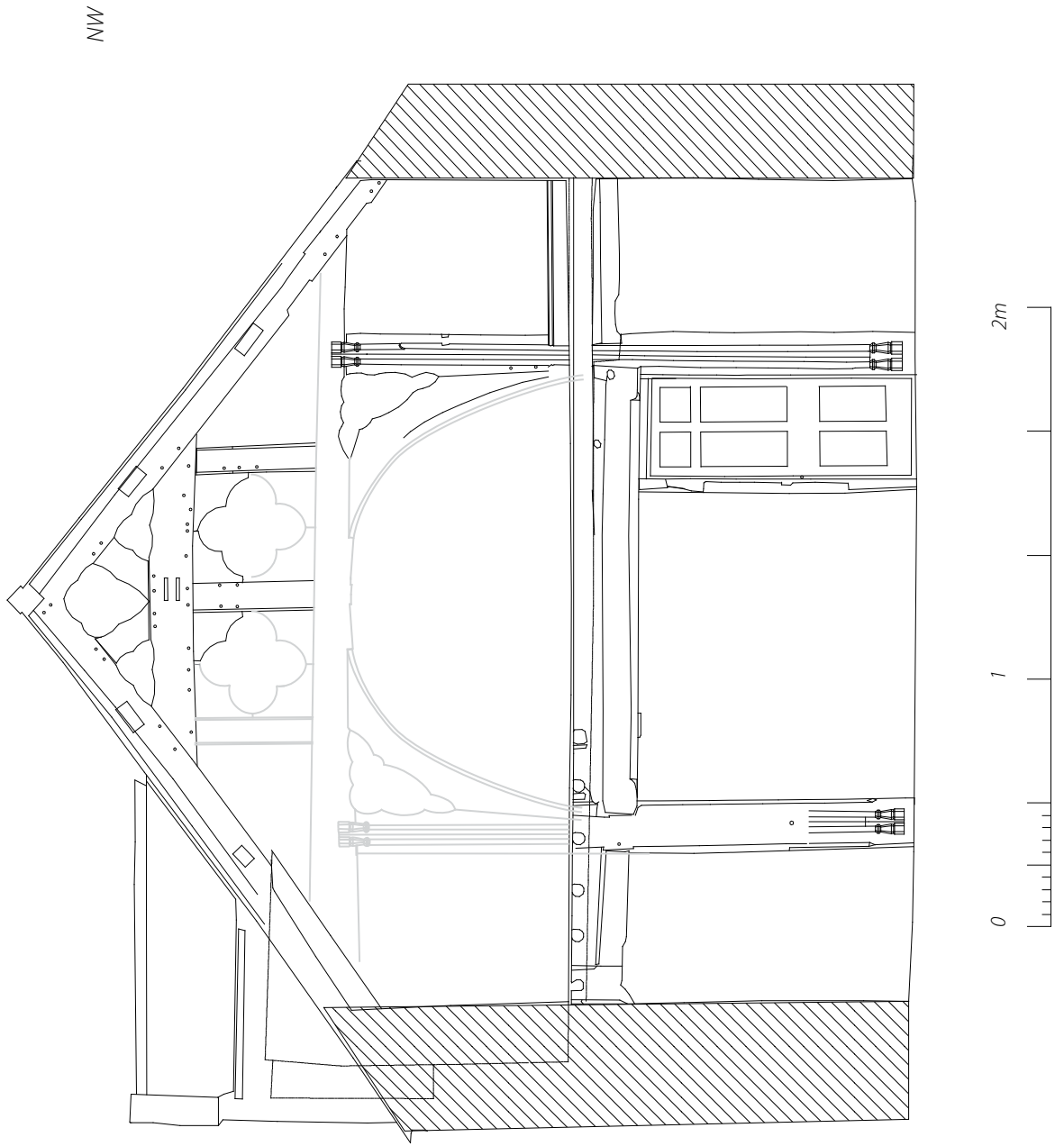


Figure 8: Cross section through elevation showing aisle truss



*Plate 19: The fireplace in the medieval hall*

still present. An aisle spere truss divides the cross-passage from the hall, and a post and panel partition divides the upper end of the hall from the rooms beyond. Two horizontal rectangular windows with deep bayed seats are in the south wall. Both were formerly mullioned, though only the eastern retains stone mullions. A vertical blocked opening east of the fireplace must be a later window of uncertain date. The floor is of slate slabs. The ceiling is 19th century, of rafters running east-west from the aisle truss to a central beam, and from the beam to the post and panel partition beyond. This may have replaced an earlier ceiling (but see discussion in 5.2 below). In the north wall of the hall is a lateral fireplace, built during the



*Plate 20: Blocked window in the north wall of the hall*



*Plate 21: The aisle truss ground floor looking west. The two aisle posts are linked by a later horizontal timber at ceiling height*

second phase c. 1620. An inserted long horizontal timber beam lies somewhat uncomfortably above the fireplace. The present ceiling cross-beam rests on it. The west end of the beam rests on a rounded corbel, and a second smaller one lies east of the fireplace. This timber crosses the blocked opening east of the fireplace, so must be later than it. A vertical timber which runs from the ceiling down the west side of the fireplace, crossing the horizontal beam, marks the position of a former internal partition, when the west end of the hall was divided into two small store rooms. The lateral fireplace has a segmental arch of large stone voussoirs with a quarter round moulding



*Plate 22: The moulding on the hall side of the south aisle post*

above. The jambs either side are chamfered. There are traces of red paint on the arch and jambs. At the rear of the fireplace to left is a later brick lined bread oven, and to the right is a shallow stone alcove, perhaps also inserted, and possibly for a salt cupboard.

#### *The aisle truss*

The aisle truss was originally designed to be seen as a single element, not divided by the later ceiling, and so will be described as such. It divides the hall from the cross-passage, and originally consisted of aisle posts in a lighter box frame with cusped arched brac-

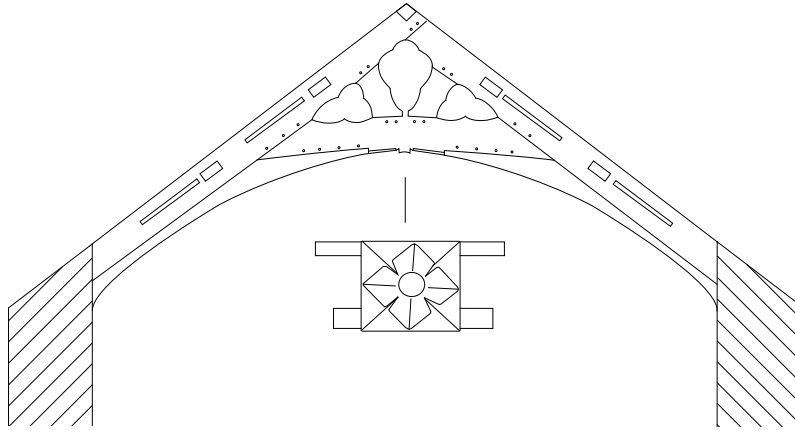


Figure 9a: Collar beam truss

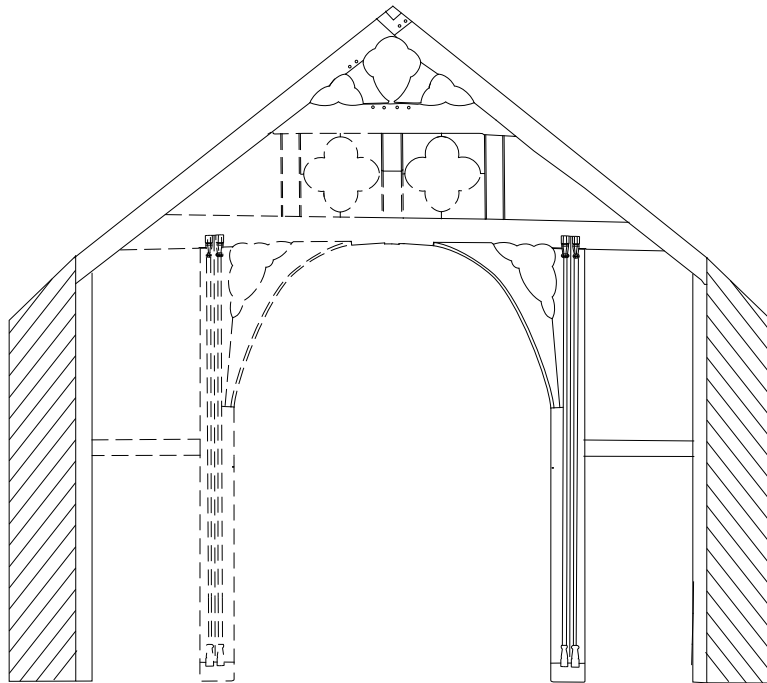


Figure 9b: Reconstruction drawing of aisle truss



*Plate 23: The aisle truss before renovation can be seen behind the collar-beam truss. The south aisle post is missing*

ing to the tie beam, three vertical posts to the collar, and raking struts from the collar to the principals, all with cusped decoration. The purlins and cross-beam are tenoned into the principals. There are cusped windbraces between the principals and the purlins. The aisle posts are decorated with twin bolection moulding, and moulded caps at the base and to finish at the top. Horizontal members link the box frame to the aisle posts at first-floor height. The south one is original, and simply mortised into the aisle post, but the north one is a later replacement, perhaps from the c. 1620 reworking and the aisle post has been cut back. A third horizontal beam with chamfers on the hall and passage side was inserted linking the two aisle posts at this level. A line of mortise holes face the cross passage, and remains of notches for joists are visible along the top edge above.



*Plate 24: The aisle truss after renovation*

#### *Post and panel dais partition*

The upper end of the hall is separated from the inner rooms by a post and panel partition. A transverse beam crosses at lintel height, separating two rows of panelling, which continue up to the tie beam on the first floor. The posts and horizontal rails are chamfered on the hall side, providing a panelled ef-



*Plate 25: The dais partition on the ground floor facing the hall*

fect, though they are not chamfered on the reverse side. Above the tie beam the panels are infilled with wattle and daub. A secondary transverse beam lies between the collar beam and tie beam crossing at the height of the door lintel. Three vertical posts link the collar beam to the intermediate beam, whilst the vertical posts joining the intermediate beam to the tie beam are partly missing. The purlins are tenoned into the principal rafters. There is no evidence for



*Plate 26: The dais partition ground floor inner room.*



*Plate 27: The dais partition first floor hall side*

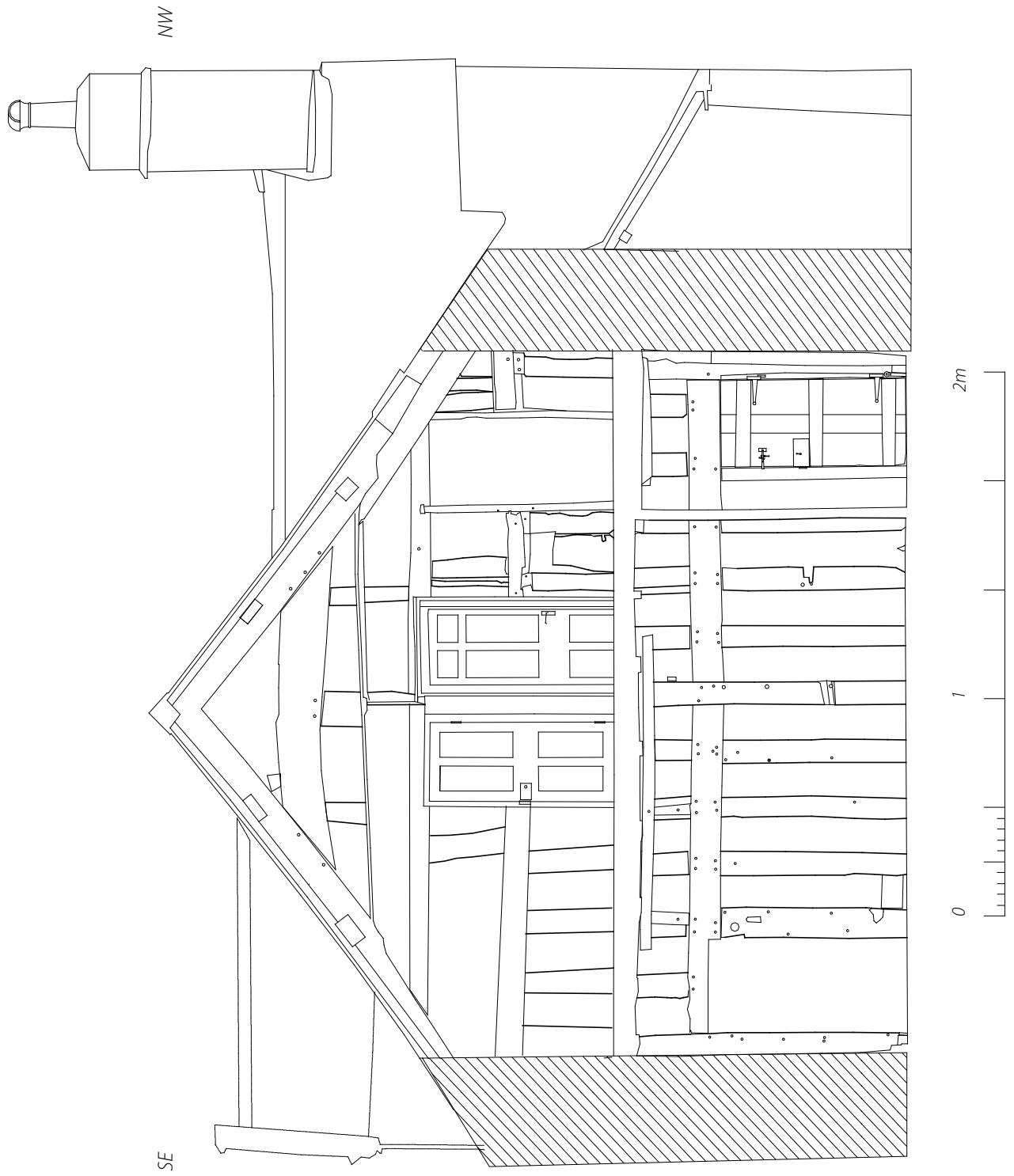


Figure 10: Cross section through elevation showing dais partition



*Plate 28: The dais partition first floor inner room south side*

through the panelling. The lintel of the right door is now cut into the lower transverse beam, though the mortise joints are visible for the original lintel, which might have formed a Tudor or segmental arch. The left door is less elaborate, though the lack of a chamfer on the rail above would indicate it is in its original location. It has been widened and now occupies just over two panel widths, which makes the panel alongside slightly smaller, and with a narrower post. The mortise for the full-width post is still visible. The door is a simple ledged door of 18th or early 19th century date made up of two broad boards and a central narrow one, with contemporary hinges and latch.

*The inner rooms*

Reached through the post and panel partition, the right door leads into the former medieval inner room. This is now a long narrow room which runs nearly the full width of the house, but with a partition across the north end, separating it from a passage entered through the left door from the hall. The passage leads to the 18th century extension beyond. The floor is of slate slabs. The posts and rails of the partition are not chamfered on this side, as on the side facing into the hall. The original wide chamfered ceiling joists rest on a timber wall plate in the end wall of the house, and on a horizontal rail on the partition, the rail being further supported by a vertical post, which may mark the location of a partition. A three-light stone mulioned window lights the room through the south wall.



*Plate 29: The dais partition ground floor north door*



*Plate 31: The dais partition ground floor inner room. The vertical upright supports the plate for the joists*



*Plate 30: The dais partition ground floor south door*

cupping above the collar beam. Part of the upper rail, one post and a number of panels are missing on the north side, perhaps to create a door (see 5.2 below).

On the ground floor there are doorways at either end

The passage which crosses the north side of the inner unit is separated from the room to the south by a light wooden screen of possible 18th century date. Doorways lead from this passage both through the north external wall and through the east gable wall into the 18th century extension. Both appear to be later insertions – the north doorway has a re-used timber with mortises as part of the lintel. The arrangement of ceiling joists above the passage suggests a stair may once have been located alongside the north wall of the house.

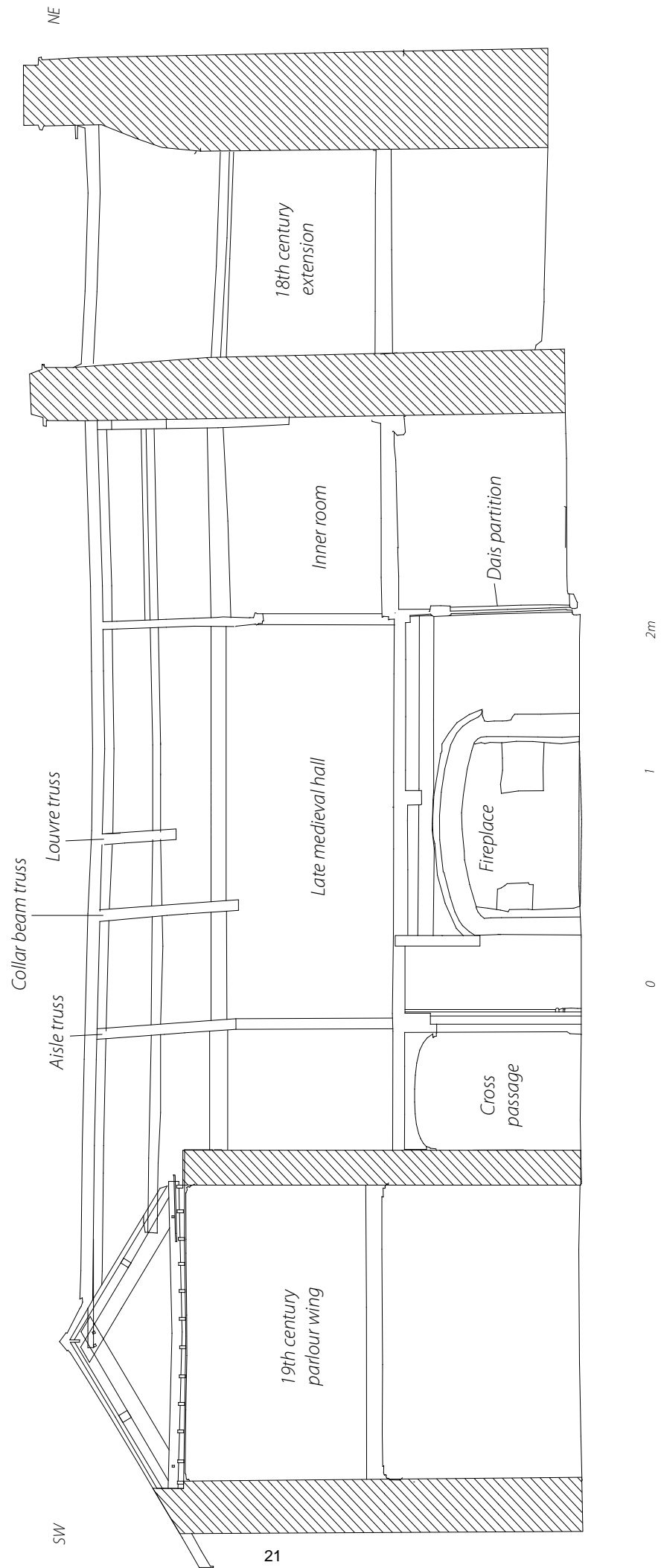


Figure 11: Longitudinal cross section looking north



### *The eastern extension*

A two-storey extension was built on to the east end of the medieval hall house. Though no direct dating is available, the style of the masonry and an external chimney suggest an 18th century date. On the ground floor it may have formed two rooms. The floor is of part cobbles and part large stone slabs. There is a wide blocked door in the south wall, and a door also in the north wall with a window alongside. A large fireplace lay against the east wall, subsequently partly blocked and an oven inserted. A chimney is built into the north side of the east gable wall of the hall house. No fireplace is visible from either side the wall at ground level, and its original purpose is unknown, though a flue is likely to run through the wall from the ground and first floors.

### *Northern additions*

The door on the north side from the former inner room leads into a small lean-to extension of 18th or 19th century date.

### *The first floor*

The current stair rises from the north end of the medieval cross-passage, and was inserted during the early 19th century rebuilding. A landing part way up is lit by a large 16 pane sash window. Off the landing is a door leading to a small extension, presumably built as a lavatory and wash room. This is partly brick-built, and post-dates the early 19th century cross-wing. The stairs continue off the landing to emerge above the medieval cross-passage, on the west side of the aisle truss. The first floor had been converted in the 18th/19th centuries into a series of small rooms which largely hid the medieval roof. These have been subsequently removed, and the room above the hall is now a large single chamber incorporating the space above the cross-passage and the two-bay hall. West of the cross-passage are



*Plate 32: Fireplace with flanking cupboards first floor parlour wing*

the two bedrooms of the 19th century cross-wing. The dais post and panel partition forms the east wall, beyond which is the upper inner room and the 18th century extension.

### *19th century cross-wing*

The wing is divided into two rooms, the larger to the south and smaller to the north, an arrangement which is the opposite of that on the ground floor. The rooms are typical of their date, with boarded floor, simple moulded skirting board and moulded cornice. Sixteen pane sash windows with panelled reveals light the rooms through the west front. A tiled fireplace in the north room is a 20th century replacement. This is flanked by two wall cupboards entered through panelled doors. The small cast-iron fireplace in the south room is original.

### *Main chamber and inner bay*

Two panelled doors lead west from the first floor cross-passage into the 19th century cross-wing. The aisle truss is described above. A rebuilt dormer window lies at the south end of the cross-passage, and in the same wall a mullioned dormer window lights the west bay of the chamber. There are no windows in the north wall, though the gabled roof for the lateral chimney lies on the north side. The outline of an earlier, smaller chimney were visible before plaster



*Plate 33: The discolouration co-incides with straight joints in the masonry which could indicate blocking or an earlier structure*

ing on the upright stone gable which rose level with the interior face of the house wall. The present lateral chimney lies behind this wall.

### *Roof*

The roof is supported on purlins tenoned into the principal rafters with cusped windbraces to each of the trusses and a narrow ridge beam. An arch-braced collar-beam truss with central boss, raking struts and elaborate cusping in the apex divides the hall into two uneven bays. East of the arch-braced truss is a small louvre truss of two cusped principals rising from the upper purlins. Three gabled dormers lie on



*Plate 34: The louvre truss and arch-braced collar beam truss with decorative cusping*



*Plate 35: Decorative cusped windbraces*



*Plate 36: Simple collar beam truss at the east end of the inner room*



*Plate 37: Dormer window in first floor inner room*

the south side, with ceilings at the height of the lower purlin. The gabled extension for the lateral chimney lies on the north side. Wall plates (also visible on the outside of the walls) could be seen prior to plastering some 20cm below the top of the wall.

The inner bay is reached through a door in the dais partition. A simple plain collar beam truss lies against the east wall, into which the purlins and ridge beam are tenoned. A secondary axial beam lies between the south corner of the apex of the dais partition and the east collar beam truss, parallel to the upper purlin. It presumably helped support an internal division, as it has no structural function. The room is lit through the south wall by a mullioned dormer window. A single narrow door with wooden lintel leads through the centre of the east wall into the 18th century extension.

#### *Eastern extension*

The first floor of the eastern extension is a single room with a door in the east wall leading to the outside. Because the ground rises to the east this door is reached from the outside by a small flight of stone steps. The roof is supported on squared purlins which are supported in the two gable walls. Small square windows light the room through the north and south walls.

## 5. INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 The medieval hall house

The origin of the house at Egryn is a well preserved late medieval hall house, built, according to dendro-chronological dating of the rafters and principal rafters, c. 1510. The principal features are the cross passage with spere truss, open hall with heavily cusped decorated roof trusses and wind braces, louvre truss for the open fire, post and panel partition, and inner bay.

The inner bay, central hall and cross-passage survive, whilst the outer bay was demolished in the 19th century to be replaced by a new cross-wing. Excavations undertaken under the wooden floor of the southern room did not locate evidence of foundations for the course of the west wall. The stratigraphy was very disturbed, and construction could have removed all trace of the wall if, as is likely, no deep foundation trench was dug. If the outer bay was the same width as the inner bay, the wall would have passed through the room, though in comparable examples elsewhere the outer bay is often longer than the inner. The masonry of the present west and south walls appeared entirely 19th century in character, however, and it seems likely the medieval masonry was completely removed to make way for the new parlour wing.

The purpose of the aisle truss at the passage end was to act as a screen, or spere truss. The support of the aisle posts was not structurally necessary, but they allowed a convenient method of accessing and screening the cross-passage and outer bay, whilst simultaneously providing an impressive vertical emphasis which encouraged appreciation of the finely worked timbers of the roof. Whilst the majority of spere truss houses lie to the east, with perhaps a stylistic source from Lancashire and Cheshire (Smith 1988, 95) a comparable example is Pennarth Fawr close to Criccieth, whilst another could be found at Cwrt-plas-yn-dre in Dolgellau. The aisle posts on the example at Egryn support the tie beam, but go no further, and this removes the problem of creating a difficult joint either with the purlin or principal rafter.

The arch-braced collar-beam truss divides the hall into two very uneven bays. However, it does lie much closer to the centre between the outer cross-passage wall and the dais partition, and this must have been the original intention, with perhaps the louvre truss pushing it very slightly off-centre. The presence of the louvre truss indicates an open fire in the hall prior to the construction of the lateral fireplace.

The dais partition is of post-and-panel construction, a relatively common form of partition within the area (Smith 1988, 490-1). The posts and rails are cham-

fered on the hall side, but not on the side facing the inner bay. This difference continues up through the first floor. Two doors lead through the ground floor of the partition, one at either end. The mortises remain for a decorative head over the south door, though this has subsequently been removed and the height of the door raised by cutting into the horizontal rail above. The north door had no decorative head nor chamfered lintel. It has been widened by removing part of the adjoining post. Both these factors, namely the lack of chamfered posts and rails on the inner room side and the differential treatment of the doors, must have a direct bearing on the functions of the inner room. It is assumed that the inner room was both divided into two in plan and also of two storeys from the beginning. However the rafters, which are medieval in character, are supported on the east wall on a wall plate fastened to the wall, and on the partition they rest on a horizontal rail fastened to the partition, and supported by a vertical post in the centre. The latter neatly cuts through the principal horizontal of the partition, but all this could be secondary, and it is difficult to be certain that the ceiling dates from the original construction of the hall. The lack of decorative chamfer implies a lower status than the hall, whilst the different treatment to the doorways implies the south inner room was of higher status than the north one. This has led to the suggestion of a cold parlour on the south and a store on the north, (Smith 1984, 127), though the north door may also have led to a stairway. The simple end collar-beam truss on the first floor east wall, devoid of any decoration, would also imply a lower status of the inner bay. The north and east ground floor doorways of the inner room appear to be later insertions from the relatively rough nature of the jambs.

In the south wall two windows light the hall and one window lights the inner room. These are large horizontal windows with ovolo moulded mullions and jambs. This decorative style only reached Wales later in the 16th century, so in their present form they belong to the second phase of the house. The ex-



Plate 38: Blocked window in north wall of hall

ternal masonry shows no sign of a later insertion, so either the south wall was largely rebuilt or the windows were extensively remodelled.

The blocked north window in the hall is more problematic. It is crossed by the horizontal beam above the fireplace, and the corbel supporting the beam lies within the blocking, so the timber and corbel certainly post-date the opening. On the outside face of the wall the window appears to have simple chamfered jambs and a central chamfered mullion. The west jamb is tight in the corner between the wall and lateral chimney, and could possibly pre-date the chimney. In which case the horizontal beam could form part of the second (c. 1620) work, put in partly to help support the wall whilst the fireplace was inserted, and partly to help support the first floor. However its lack of decoration (the horizontal beam between the aisle posts is chamfered with decorative stops) would argue for a later insertion – essentially it looks too clumsy given the care with which the fireplace and windows were built.

## 5.2 The Renaissance house

Several changes were made to the medieval hall house either in a single phase of rebuilding c. 1620, or as separate improvements during the later 16th century and early 17th century. These are thought to include the construction of the lateral fireplace, the insertion of the first floor dormer windows and either insertion or remodelling of the ground floor windows. It is also usually thought the hall was converted at this time from single storey to two storey. These are all changes typical of this time, though lateral fireplaces first made their appearance in the later 15th century, and this might help explain the slight evidence for an earlier lateral fireplace. This is contained within a stone gable which rises from the house wall and carries the gabled roof of the present chimney. Within the masonry of this gable is preserved the outline of an earlier chimney. This mirrors the small chimney which lies at the north-east corner of the house, which looks inserted because of the straight mason-



Plate 39: Straight joint in masonry of inner gable of lateral chimney



Plate 40: Ground floor aisle truss in hall. The upper central horizontal beam dated c. 1620



Plate 41: Dais partition first floor inner room. The upper rail and one post has been removed



Plate 42: The hall fireplace with horizontal timber in the wall above

ry joint on either side, but is otherwise undated. It also appears to have no present function. If these two chimneys are contemporary, then the north side of the house looked quite different prior to the construction of the present lateral stack. The  $\frac{1}{4}$  round moulding on the arch of the present fireplace would suggest a late 16th century date at earliest, but it is not known if this fireplace also served the earlier

chimney.

The present hall ceiling dates from the 19th century, and there is little evidence remaining for an earlier ceiling. The date of 1620 is derived from a horizontal beam across the aisle posts which is assumed to have been inserted to support the new ceiling joists. A central transverse beam would have crossed in the approximate location of the present 19th century beam. This is a perfectly reasonable supposition, however there is a 19th century description recalling the building in the 18th century before the new ceiling and cross-wing were built. The description is by the lexicographer William Owen Pughe (1759 – 1835) who wrote the account in 1830 (Pughe 1830, 10). In his 70's he was describing the house as he remembered it in his childhood. He says 'The inside is curious; the roof is supported by pointed arches, of fine Irish oak, springing from the basement, and dividing the building into three compartments. Over half of the middle one, which is the largest, there was till lately a gallery of communication between the apartments in each end, and protected by a balustrade, as if intended for an audience to hear and see what occurs below'. This would certainly imply that a first floor was never inserted in the hall, but that the two storeyed inner and outer bays were linked across the hall by a passage way at first floor level. The principal argument against this is the presence of the dormer window over the hall. It is difficult to see why this should be inserted if not to light an upper chamber. There are, however, two other factors to take into account. The first is the unusual horizontal timber above the fireplace. The purpose of this is unknown, but it may have helped support such a passageway. The second factor is a break in the post and panel partition at first floor level on the north side where one post and the upper rail of the panelling have been removed. This effectively creates a door through the partition. The presence of this door need not, of course, argue for the exist-

ence of a passageway as opposed to a continuous floor, but if the account by Pughe is correct, then it would argue for the passage running along the north side of the hall rather than the south. It is possible, therefore, that though it would be more usual for a first floor to be inserted into the hall in 1620, it never actually occurred, and that only a passageway linking the two storeyed end bays was constructed. The mortise holes in the beams on the east side of the cross-passage suggest the cross passage was of two storeys at this time.

### 5.3 The 18th century house

The large fireplace on the east gable of the 18th century extension would suggest construction of a kitchen. It is difficult to account for the large doorway in the south wall. The floor adjacent to this doorway is cobbled, whereas the remainder is of stone slabs, suggesting different functions, but the cobbled space is very small. The small chimney on the north-east corner of the inner bay does not, at present, have any function. There is little room for a hearth here, unless the outside door is secondary, and a small hearth and perhaps copper lay in the corner. If the chimney is not medieval, as discussed above, it is most likely to have been built at this date, when the extension was added.

### 5.4 The 19th century house

As we have seen, the insertion of a cross-wing in the early 19th century effectively removed the outer bay and any partition between the through passage and the outer bay. The staircase was inserted, and the end of the cross-passage removed. A basement was dug under the north room. This created a west-facing front of typical Victorian style, though the central door led not into a hallway but instead into the larger north room. Two bedrooms were created above, with a floor two steps higher than the adjoining hall floor. The latter was also inserted at this time, either replacing an earlier floor of c. 1620, or creating a two storeyed hall for the first time.



*Plate 43: Mortise in aisle truss and notches for joists on the cross-passage side*

## 6. REFERENCES AND SOURCES CONSULTED

- Bowen, E. G., and Gresham, C. A. 1967 History of Merioneth Vol I, From the earliest times to the age of the Native Princes.
- Lewis, S., 1833 Topographical Dictionary of Wales; London.
- Pugh, W. O., (Idrison), 1830 'Ardudwy' Cambrian Quarterly, Vol. II, 10.
- Smith, J. B., and Smith, L. B., 2001 History of Merioneth, Vol II The Middle Ages; Cardiff.
- Smith, P., 1984 'Hall, Tower and Church: Some themes and sites reconsidered', in Welsh Society and Nationhood, ed. R. R. Davies, R. A. Griffiths, I. G. Jones, K. O. Morgan, 122-160.
- Smith, P., 1988 Houses of the Welsh Countryside.
- Smith, P., 2001 'Houses c. 1415 to 1642', in Smith and Smith 2001, 422-506.

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH  
ARCHAEOLEGOL  
GWYNEDD



GWYNEDD  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd. LL57 2RT  
Ffon: 01248 352535. Ffacs: 01248 370925. email: [gat@heneb.co.uk](mailto:gat@heneb.co.uk)