
Wig Bach: Abergwyngregyn, Gwynedd



Level II Archaeological Building Record

GAT Project No. 2190

Report No. 951

May, 2011

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Prepared for
Gwynedd Council

May 2011

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Wig Bach Cottage

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Wig Bach, Abergwyngregyn

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING AT WIG BACH, ABERGWYNGREGYN, GWYNEDD (G2191)

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Council Consultancy has commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government to carry out a building survey at Wig Bach, Abergwyngregyn, Gwynedd (fig. 1) in advance of demolition. The building is located at NGR SH 639721, close to the A55 expressway with the front elevation of the cottage facing the road. The current property is an amalgamation of two small conjoined cottages built in the late 1860's by the Penrhyn Estate, for estate workers. The cottages are considered to be of local importance.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS) requested a detailed photographic record of the existing structure in advance of demolition; this needed to include a written account to provide basic background and historical information; drawings including any existing plans of the site and architect's drawings; and high quality, detailed photographs showing all features, details, room spaces, and elevations to illustrate the setting, appearance, and structure of the building.

A limited desk top study, involving a visit to the University of Bangor archives was required to access previous records of the building.

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The significance, origins and development of the site are discussed with reference to the available historical sources. There were no appropriate architects' plans available, and thus a scaled plan was created, showing the main features and the direction of photographs.

A photographic record was made recording all features, room spaces and elevations. The direction of photographs are shown on figure 2 and figure 3. The report conforms to the requirements for a building record at level 2 as set down in English Heritage's *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practice* (2006).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL RECORD

4.1 Historical Background

During the post-medieval period there appears to have been dispersed settlement along the fertile coastal strip east of Abergwyngregyn. The survival of estate maps and plans for this area is extremely limited (Johnstone 1995, 16). A 1693 survey of the sea coast of England [including Wales] shows roads crossing the Lavan Sands, with no detail of the fields in the coastal strip (Collins 1693). A plan of the *New Road of Penmaenmawr* dated to 1769 (UCNWB Penrhyn 198) showing the proposed new turnpike route between Conwy and Bangor shows a pattern of irregular small fields on the coastal strip, although it does not show any detail or the location of any structures with the exception of the old bridge at Aber. A survey of the glebe land at Aber parish dated to 1776 shows four irregular shaped fields, three of which appear to have been under cultivation and one pasture on the coastal strip immediately north of Aber on the west side of the river (Gwynedd Archives XPE/56/106), and also indicated that the surrounding land was the property of the Baron Hill estate. The

earliest reasonably detailed depiction of the wider area is provided by the John Evans map of 1797, which shows buildings scattered across the coastal strip by Abergwyngregyn. The more accurate 1 inch O. S. depiction, completed by 1823, shows a scatter of buildings on either side of the main road and linked to it by a series of smaller roads or tracks. The fields of Wig (known at that time as Wig Bach) are described on a survey of the Baron Hill Estate of 1830 (UCNWB Baron Hill MSS 4972). In 1839 the Bangor to Conwy road was improved in Abergwyngregyn with a new road and bridge built north of the village itself, effectively bypassing it (UCNWB Baron Hill MSS 6895). The Llanllechid tithe map of 1839 and the Abergwyngregyn tithe map of 1848 (Gwynedd Archives) only shows the boundaries between different land blocks, rather than the individual fields themselves. The Aber tithe map shows Wig Farm associated with field 28, referred to on the apportionment as *Gwig bach (arable)*, although it is clear that this refers to the land associated with what is now known as Wig Farm, and that Wig Bach cottages had not been constructed at this time. A railway plan of c.1840 shows that the area was divided into numerous small fields of irregular size and shape, which could date back to early times.

The principal 19th century landowners in the study area were the Bulkeley and Pennant families, the former having gained control of the manor in 1689, who at some time between 1848 and 1871 reorganised the coastal strip into a landscape of rectilinear fields. This resulted in the loss of many of the small roads and buildings shown on earlier maps, including some associated with Wig Bach. This field pattern has survived with only limited alteration until the present day. The Bulkeley family remained the main proprietors of the manor until 1863 when they sold off their Caernarfonshire lands, including Wig and the Abergwyngregyn holdings to the Penrhyn estate in whose holding it remained until into the 20th century (Evans 2003).

The Wig Bach cottages would appear to have been built shortly after the Penrhyn Estate took over the area between 1868 and 1870, when they first appear as new properties in the Penrhyn estate rentals, in the tenancy of Humphrey Ellis and R. Morris (UCNWB Penrhyn MSS 2877-2878). The cottages are typical of the building style used by Penrhyn Estate for their farms and outbuildings. They are shown as constructed on a Penrhyn Estate map of 1871-2 (UCNWB Penrhyn MSS 2221). Improvements were also carried out Wig Bach cottages in the early years of the 20th century (Penrhyn MSS 14).

4.2 General description

4.2.1 External description

Wig Bach is located at NGR SH 639721 near the village of Abergwyngregyn, close to the A55 expressway with the front elevation of the cottage facing the road. It is a one and a half storied building, with the upstairs rooms in the roof space. The property was originally two cottages (cottage A and cottage B), the eastern one (cottage B) being the larger of the two. Both were amalgamated into a single dwelling around 1920. A green painted, iron gate with vertical rails adorned by two volutes, permits access from a short driveway leading from the A55 carriageway to the rear of the property.

The property is rectangular in shape and orientated east to west. The south, east, and western elevations are constructed from quarried, faced and mortared green granite. A more irregular mortared rubble stone with larger quarried stone at the quoins has been used for the northern elevation. The roof is of slate and appears to have been renewed. It has overhanging eaves with white weatherboarding and the gables are clad in slate.

The property has three very dominant chimneys, probably constructed from brick but covered in render. The eastern chimney-piece has three diagonal stacks all originally serving cottage B

and straddling both the northern and southern roof pitches. The central piece has four diagonal stacks and probably served both cottage A and cottage B, again straddling both roof pitches. The third chimney-piece has two diagonal stacks and would have traditionally served cottage A.

The southern elevation of the property has an original porch on the west side, constructed from the same granite as the property proper and leading into what would have been the traditional entrance into cottage A. The entrance was made into a walk in window when the properties were amalgamated. On the eastern side of the southern elevation a recessed internal porch gives access to cottage B, with a slate plaque alongside bearing the name 'Wig Bach'. There are two horizontal twelve pane fixed windows on the ground storey, a large dormer window in the eaves, and a twelve pane cat-slide dormer window in the south facing gable, all having replaced the original windows probably when the cottages were combined.

The east facing gable has three twelve pane fixed windows, and is very overgrown. The west facing gable has two six pane fixed windows in the roof space, and a twelve pane fixed window in the downstairs lean-to extension. The north facing elevation has two doors, one leading to the kitchen and one to the living room of cottage B, situated on the eastern side of the elevation. Two further doors are situated to the west of the northern elevation and give access to the living room and lean-to kitchen of cottage A, although the latter was blocked presumably during the improvements in 1920. Two small, two-pane fixed windows are located either side of the door to the living room of cottage B. There is a large dormer window in the eaves, and a twelve pane cat-slide dormer window in the north facing gable, all replacements. The ground storey has been rendered and painted white.

4.2.3 Internal description

Cottage A Living Room

Cottage A was originally accessed by the porched entrance (described above) located on the western side of the southern elevation. This external doorway was blocked up with a twelve-pane fixed walk in window during the improvement works *circa* 1920. The entranceway would have originally led into the main living room of cottage A. This room exists today as a rectangular room some 6.10m in length and 4.0m wide living room orientated north to south, with a wooden staircase on the west side leading upstairs. An eight-pane wooden door leads from the northern wall of the living room out into the rear of the property, and a fifteen-pane wooden door leads through the eastern wall into the traditional living room of cottage B. A chamfered ledged tongue and groove door in the west wall leads into the kitchen of cottage A, and may be original. An architect's plan of proposed improvements to the property *circa* 1920, shows that this room was used as a living room but was originally divided in two by an east-west internal wall at its northern end. This extra room was utilised as a downstairs bedroom. The plan depicts a window in the northern wall of this bedroom where the eight-pane door leading to the outside rear is now located.

The living room has an open fire on the eastern wall with modern red-brick surround and slate hearth. The floor is tiled in alternating black and beige tiles, and the walls are plastered and painted white. A blocked up fireplace is located in the north part of the eastern wall and would have originally served the downstairs bedroom.

Cottage A Kitchen

The kitchen of cottage A exists today as a rectangular room measuring 3.70m in length and 3.40m in width orientated north-south and occupying the single-storey lean-to structure on the west of the property. The room has the remains of wooden kitchen units and a plastic sink, ripped from the wall and strewn across the floor. There is a large cupboard in the northwest corner, probably having functioned as a larder, and a doorway leads through the southern wall

into a downstairs bathroom. The floor is entirely tiled in brown-red ceramic tiles, and there survives the traces of at least five different types of wallpaper on the walls. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a kitchen scullery and little change has seemingly occurred to the layout of the room, aside from the room could originally be accessed via an external door in the north end of the east wall. This doorway must have been blocked up during the house improvements, and the part of the entranceway made over to an external storage shed.

Cottage A Bathroom

The bathroom of cottage A exists today as a roughly square room some 2.1m in width occupying the southern part of the single-storey lean-to structure on the west side of the property. The room has a stand alone shower in the northeast corner and a white ceramic toilet on the east side of the south wall. A ceramic basin had been fixed to the western wall but has been smashed and is strewn across the floor. The floor is entirely tiled with the same brown-red ceramic tiles seen in the kitchen, and the walls are plastered and painted white. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a bathroom, however the fittings have changed with a bath originally having stood against the southern wall, and a toilet and basin against the western wall.

Cottage A Bedroom 1

The first and largest bedroom of cottage A is located to the rear (north) of the property and exists as a rectangular room measuring 7.25m in length and 2.60m in width, orientated east-west. The floor is of wooden floor boards and the walls are wallpapered in plain white. A large dormer window is located in the northern wall, with a small two-pane fixed window in the western wall. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a bedroom, however the dormer window was originally much smaller and an open fireplace was located on the western wall, presumably blocked up during the improvement works.

Cottage A Bedroom 2

The second bedroom of cottage A is located to the front (south) of the property, and exists as a rectangular room measuring 3.80m in length and 3.10m in width, orientated east-west. The floor is of wooden floor boards and the walls are wallpapered in plain pattern paper, painted in light blue. A large dormer window is located in the southern wall, and a wooden cupboard on the west wall housed the boiler. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a bedroom; however the dormer window was originally much smaller. No fireplace is depicted on the plan and no evidence of one could be found, meaning that the room may have been unheated.

Cottage B Living Room

Cottage B was originally accessed by the internal recessed porch on the eastern side of the southern elevation. The main entrance leads into a small hallway which gives onto a rectangular living room measuring 6.00m in length and 4.00m in width orientated north-south. An eight-pane wooden door leads through the northern wall into the rear of the property, and a fifteen-pane wooden door leads through the eastern side of the northern wall into the kitchen of cottage B. A chamfered ledged tongue and groove door separates the living room from the hallway/ main entrance to the west, and a fifteen-pane wooden door leads from this living room west into the living room of cottage A. A large twelve-pane fixed window is located in the southern wall, and a modern red-brick fire hearth contains a multi-fuel burner on the western wall. The walls are decorated with a yellow and pink floral paper, and the floor is tiled with alternating black and yellow ceramic tiles. The northern part of the room is tiled with smaller brown-red ceramic tiles and the traces of a demolished internal wall can be seen. The 1920s architect's plan depicts the room as a living room, but also shows that the northern part of the room was sub-divided by an internal partition. This room is unnamed on the plan but appeared to be a walk in larder. The plan also shows that like cottage A, the door leading

from the living room through the northern wall to the rear of the property was originally a window.

Cottage B Kitchen

The kitchen of cottage B is a rectangular room measuring 3.10m in length and 2.10m in width and orientated east-west. The room has a number of white wooden kitchen units which have been pulled away from the north and east walls and lie strewn across the floor. The floor is tiled in brown-red ceramic tiles and walls are wallpapered in plain white paper. A large cupboard with wooden doors is located to the west side of the northern wall and was most likely a larder. A doorway in the northern wall leads into the rear of the property. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a kitchen with a range originally standing on the southern wall. The doorway in the northern wall originally led into a small lean-to outside toilet, however this has since been demolished.

Cottage B Hallway and Staircase

A small passage some 3.70m long and 0.76m wide is orientated east to west and connects the living room with the entranceway and staircase. The floor is tiled with alternating black and beige ceramic tiles and the walls are papered in plain white. The staircase had white painted newel posts with ball finials adorning the head and footer posts of the stair. The staircase leads onto the upstairs landing which has wooden floorboards and plain white papered walls.

Cottage B Bathroom

The bathroom of cottage B is a rectangular room located upstairs at the rear (north) of the property. This room is rectangular and measures 3.15m in length and 2.40m in width, orientated east-west. The room has a green ceramic toilet on the eastern wall, and a green plastic bath against the northern wall. A ceramic green basin had stood against the southern wall, but has been smashed and the remnants are strewn across the floor. A nine-pane window is located in the eastern wall. An iron fire-surround is located on the western wall and has been painted in cream colour. The surround has formalised floral designs and depicts two doves around a centralised arabesque motif. The floor has wooden floorboards and the walls have plain white paper. The door leading to the landing is a chamfered ledged tongue and groove door. The 1920s architect's plan depicts the room as being an upstairs bedroom, and it is clear that once the lean-to outdoor toilet was demolished, this bedroom was converted into an indoor bathroom.

Cottage B Bedroom 1

The first and largest bedroom of cottage B is located upstairs and at the rear (north) of the property. The room is rectangular and measures 4.10m in length and 2.85m in width, orientated east-west. The room has a nine-pane fixed window in the northern wall, and a white painted iron fire-surround is located on the eastern wall. The surround has formalised floral designs and depicts two doves around a centralised arabesque motif. The floor has wooden floorboards and the walls are covered in plain pattern wallpaper painted bright yellow. The door leading to the landing is a chamfered ledged tongue and groove door. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a bedroom.

Cottage B Bedroom 2

The second and slightly smaller bedroom of cottage B is located upstairs and at the front (south) of the property. The room is roughly rectangular and measures 4.05m in length and 2.80m in width, orientated east-west. The room has a nine-pane fixed window in the southern wall, and a white painted iron fire-surround is located on the western wall. The surround has formalised floral designs and depicts two doves around a centralised arabesque motif. The floor has wooden floorboards and the walls are covered in plain pattern wallpaper painted white. The door leading to the landing is a chamfered ledged tongue and groove door. The 1920s architect's plan also depicts the room as a bedroom.

5 CONCLUSION

Wig Bach cottage is a well preserved example of nineteenth century estate workers cottages. The external elevations of the building have changed little since their construction, with the only alterations having probably occurred circa 1920 after the production of the architect's plan prior to alteration. These changes involved the blocking of the original entrances on both the northern and southern elevations into cottage A, and the insertion of multiple paned windows throughout. The internal layout has very few original features and has seen a programme of gradual modernisation over the last century, with central heating being added and the consequent blocking of some fireplaces. The decoration of the rooms has followed the trends but appear to have stopped being changed in the 1970s, with floral wallpaper being dominant throughout. Moreover, the modernised red-brick fireplaces in both living rooms appear to belong to this era. The metal fireplaces in the bathroom and two bedrooms of cottage B appear to be original, as does the chamfered ledged tongue and groove doors found throughout. However, the multiple paned wood and glass windows are testimony to a phase of alteration dating from when the cottages were combined into a single dwelling, although the date of this remains unknown.

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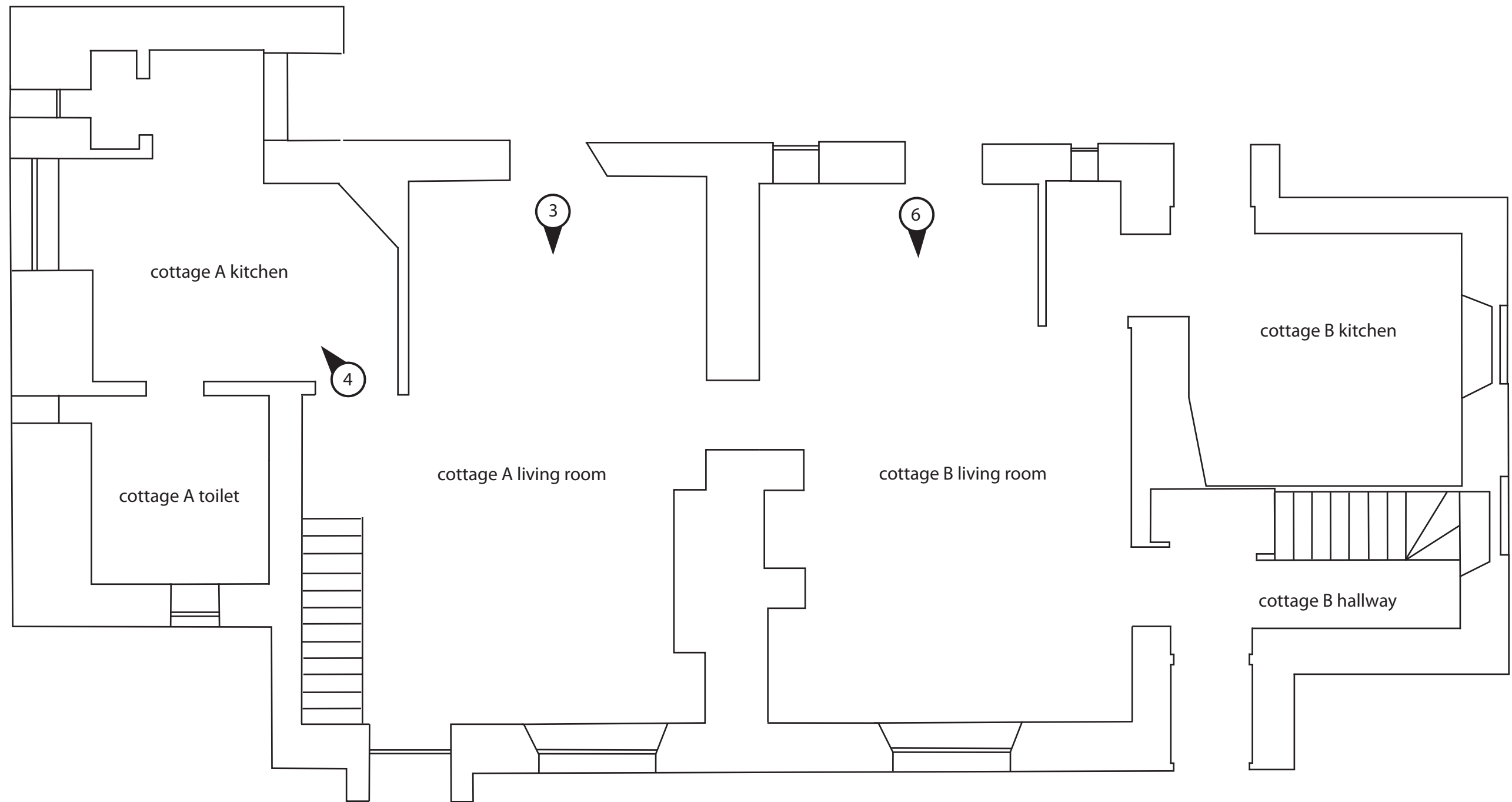


Figure 2: Direction of photographs, ground storey

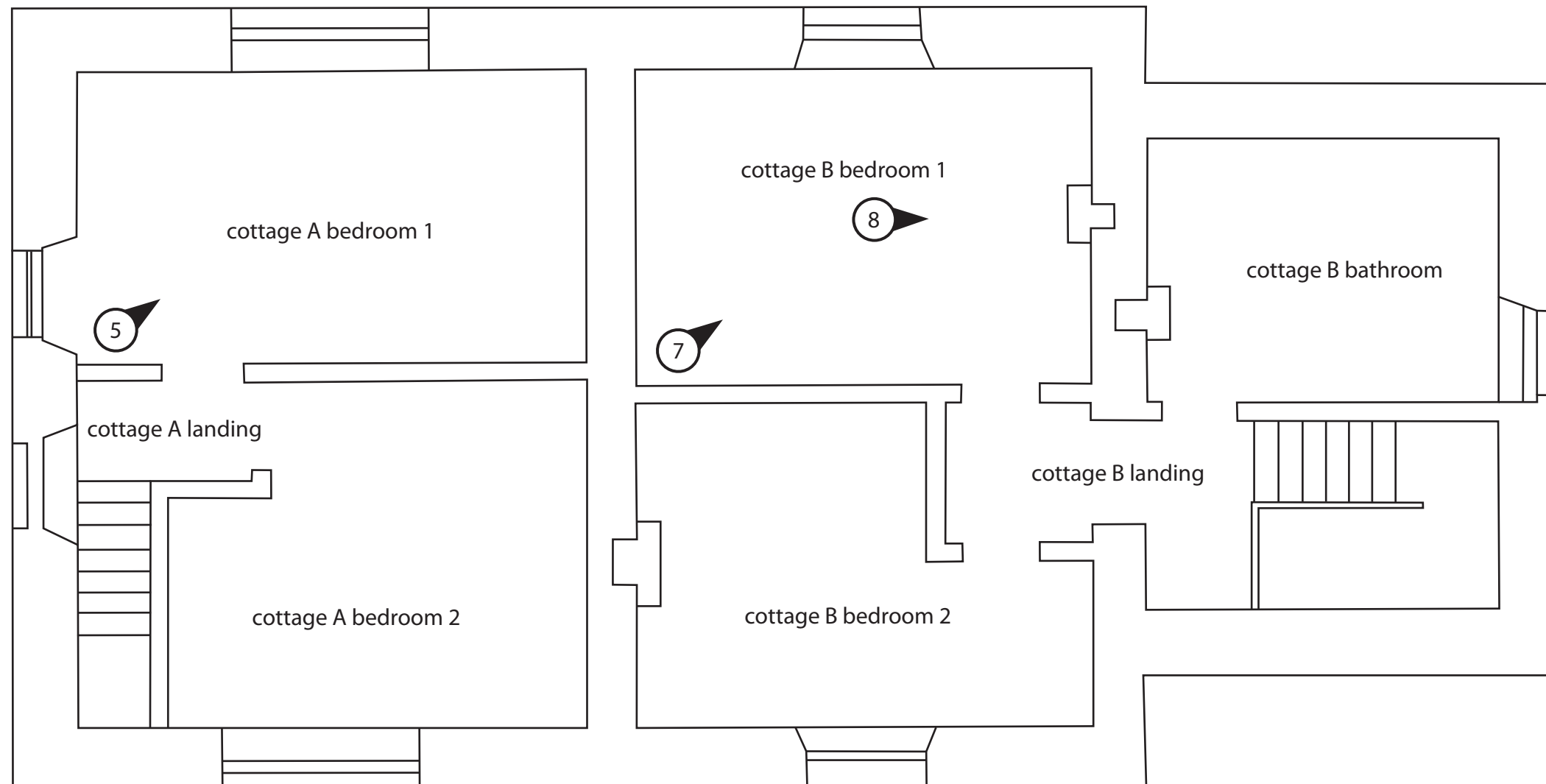


Figure 3: Direction of photographs, first storey



Plate 1: Northern external elevation from the north



Plate 2: Southern external elevation from the south



Plate 3: Cottage A Living Room from the north



Plate 4: Cottage A Kitchen from the southeast



Plate 5: Cottage A Bedroom 1 from the southwest



Plate 6: Cottage B Living Room from the north



Plate 7: Cottage B Bedroom 1 from the southwest



Plate 8: Cottage B Bedroom 1 fireplace from the west



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