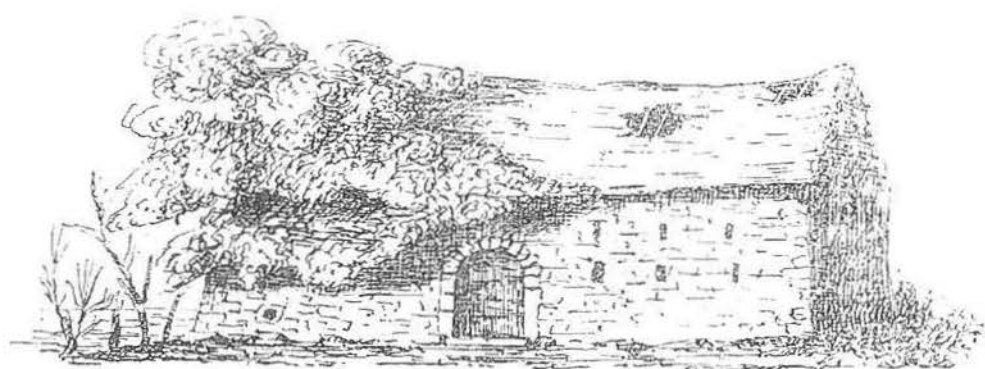


PLAS BERW BARN, PENTRE BERW

NPRN 265407 SH46817187 PGW2*

Survey and Description August 2014

Timothy Morgan MIfA



View of Barn from the South West. (Rev John Williams *The History of Berw* 1861)



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Summary

The barn is located approximately 250 metres to the north east of Plas Berw and at about 40 metres above Ordnance Datum. The writer first visited the site in 2009 when it was a roofless, rectangular stone building partly obscured by trees and aligned north west to south east and set on the lower of two narrow terraces overlooking Cors Ddygai or Malltraeth Marsh.

Opposing doorways in the centre of its long walls and a series of ventilation slits suggest that its primary use was as a threshing barn. The 1841 tithe map indicates that at that time it was one of two buildings, the second of which stood approximately 20 metres to the south of the barn on the upper terrace, although there is now no obvious trace of this building above ground. Beam and joist holes in the south east end of the north east wall of the barn, and at the level of the threshold of a doorway in the south east gable, indicate a first floor across at least part of this end of the building. This floor may have been used for threshing activity but a more likely use would have been for storage of hay, perhaps overlooking ground floor use as a byre.

During the Second World War the barn was adapted by the Home Guard and a flat topped concrete bunker inserted within the north west end facing out over the marsh. Gun ports were cut through the north gable wall and the lower ends of the adjoining, long walls, blocking a number of the original vents. This gable had been partly demolished to a little above eaves level to accommodate the bunker. The corresponding south east gable was more intact, although much of the upper stonework had fallen. The bunker and two 'flechettes' in the field above the barn formed a defensive position overlooking the marsh, the A5 road and the Gaerwen to Amlwch Railway.

It is difficult to securely date the building from documentation or from such details as the plain, dressed sandstone frames of the doorways. Barns of similar design are present on other north Wales estates from the early 17th century, the earliest record of the Plas Berw barn being on an estate map dating to about 1815. Several sources associate the barn with the construction of the second house at Plas Berw in 1615 for Sir Thomas Holland (1577 to c1643) but no evidence has been found to confirm this.

Introduction

In December 2011 planning permission was granted to Andrew Beckmann for conversion of Plas Berw Barn into a dwelling (Ref. 33C290 Sgubor Ddegwm). Planning permission was subject to the condition of a Level 3 Archaeological Assessment prior to commencement of the proposed development. The barn is not included in the statutory register of listed buildings in Anglesey.

Following objections from Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Services to the proposed development a site visit was made by Nick Davies of Cadw and Dave Jump, Conservation



Officer for Anglesey County Council. Neither considered it necessary for the building to be formally listed, but requested amendments to the design which were agreed by the applicant. The park and gardens at Plas Berw, including the barn, were placed on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales by the Beckmann family in 1998. Plas Berw (NPRN 15801) was purchased by them in 1981, but the barn and surrounding fields were in separate ownership until 2008 when they were acquired by Andrew Beckmann.

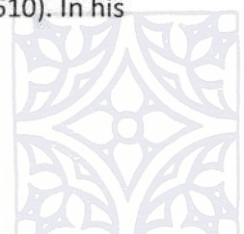
In 2009 I was asked to carry out a measured survey for the Garner Southall Partnership on behalf of Andrew Beckmann as a visual record in advance of repairs to the barn. The owner was concerned that the building was in danger of collapse and posed a potential risk to the public because of its close proximity to the public footpath leading from Plas Berw towards Pentre Berw. In 2011 Andrew Beckmann undertook necessary repairs to consolidate and to protect the structure from further decay. This included removal of a mature ash tree from against the south east gable, which appeared to have caused fracturing of the stonework, and the installation of a roof. In order to satisfy the requirements of a level 3 survey I have incorporated the brief report undertaken in 2009, restructuring and rewriting this after further research and visits to Plas Berw since 2012.

Historical Background

Plas Berw comprises a ruined medieval hall house dated to about 1480 (NPRN 15800) which was built for Ithel ap Howel and a 1615 mansion built for Sir Thomas Holland (NPRN 15801) (RCAHMW 1937). The fragmentary remains of the walls of the medieval deer park and of gardens associated with Plas Berw (NPRN 265407) are recorded in the Register of Parks and Gardens in Wales. This includes the barn and surrounding enclosures which may have formed part of the north end of the park (Fig. 1).

Plas Berw came into the ownership of the Holland family in the late 15th century with the marriage of John Holland to Elinor ap Ithel of Berw (John Williams 1861). Records show that the Hollands of Berw held high office in Anglesey and elsewhere over several generations. Owen Holland was Sheriff of Anglesey in the 16th century, having responsibility and powers over law and order, collection of royal revenues, justice and administration of the courts (Robin Grove-Wight 2012). His great grandson, Sir Thomas Holland (1577-c1643), who built the 1615 mansion at Berw was also sheriff and a member of parliament. His mother descended from another influential Anglesey family, the Bulkeleys of Beaumaris. Records show he had many interests, including coal mining on the marsh below Berw, although John Williams suggests that he was more interested in tilling than mining his estate. Sir Thomas Holland built a warehouse at the water's edge below his property at Tai Cochion (on the Menai Straits) NPRN15827 where all goods and stores for Berw were landed and agricultural produce exported (John Williams 1861).

Plas Berw continued in Holland possession until the death of the Reverend Thomas Holland in c1750, at which point it passed to the Griffiths family of Carreglwyd (NPRN15610). In his



1861 book 'The History of Berw' the Reverend John Williams, agent for the Carreglwyd Estate, described the subsequent decline and dereliction at Berw thus: *Damp are the rooms; and mouldy is the floor. In the best parlour is a heap of grain. The kitchens are empty, the tower contains nothing livelier than the bats and owls which from that stronghold range over weedy moonlight Malltraeth.* This description of dereliction is mirrored in a sketch of the barn from the south west where the roof is holed and most of the north west end is obscured with vegetation.

A RCAHMW air photograph taken by Toby Driver in 2005 (Fig.2) suggests that the earlier approach to Plas Berw was from the south east opposite the Nant-gwag junction on what is now the B4419 Pentre Berw to Newborough road and some distance south of the modern entrance. This feature can be traced on the ground as a widely curving and inturned entrance and hollow way with parallel banks cutting across the upper part of the deer park ('Parc yr Hydd') towards the modern sheds and the present track where it turns sharply to descend the hill to Plas Berw. This feature appears to be shown in the 1840 Ordnance Survey map (Fig.5) but not in the later 1887-88 map when the modern track was already in place and outside of the east wall of the deer park. Its earlier line is close to, but does not coincide exactly with the parish boundary between Llanidan and the detached part of Llanfihangel Ysgeifiog which crossed the field a little to the west. The relocation of the approach to Berw thus appears to have taken place after 1840, perhaps at the same time as the railway bisected the park. The earlier entrance and approach appear to be consistent with the medieval landscaping and building of the deer park, but there is no evidence from the maps or topography that the footpath from Pentre Berw to Plas Berw, which is terraced into the side of the valley and passes close to the barn, ever formed a formal drive.

An early 19th. century estate map (Fig.3) and the Ordnance Survey 6" map 1840 (Fig.4) show the barn and a separate building, aligned parallel to the track on the upper terrace. This second building appears as an elongated structure building and had disappeared by 1887-88 (Fig. 5). Materials from this building may have been utilised in later phases of construction closer to the Plas, such as the coach house NPRN406286 to which the RCAHMW attribute an early 19th. century date.

The Carreglwyd and Berw Estates map of c 1815 (Fig.3) illustrates the field structure prior to the building of the Gaerwen to Amlwch railway in 1860. The enclosures to the west and south west of the barn are listed in the schedule as 'Cae Hen' (Old Field), 'Gwinllan Coed' (Wood Orchard - literally 'Vineyard') and 'Gardd' (Garden). The upper field between the barn and the Pentre Berw road is named 'Gwyn Hingar' (probably a corrupt form of 'Cwningaer' or Rabbit Warren). The fields to the north of the barn are named 'Park Newydd' (New Park) and 'Park yr Efal' (Smithy Park), but these larger fields are geometric in shape and contrast with the more curvilinear forms of Gwinllan Coed, and what was the core of the deer park, 'Park yr Hydd' (Stag Field), focused on Plas Berw. As a place and field name, 'Park' may have one of several meanings: as an area of flat land along a sea-shore, as



a fence enclosing a piece of ground and, by extension, a small enclosure or paddock (Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan 2007).

Long sections of the deer-park wall surrounding 'Park Yr Hydd' remain standing in places up to two metres high (Photograph 1), but they are in need of repair and the original circuit has been cut by the railway line and embankment, the south east length having been demolished for road widening. The railway embankment seems to have erased the curvilinear field pattern to the south west of the barn which probably formed the north 'lobe' of the deer park, but there is no evidence that the park extended beyond 'Park Yr Hydd' into the enclosures to the north and east of the barn. Photograph 2 shows the field boundary to 'Gwyn Hingar' a dry stone wall less than 1 metre high and which seems to be an ineffective height to retain deer. No trace has been noted on the ground of any internal ditch.

Although illustrated in Williams' *'The History of Berw'*, published in 1861 and reprinted in 1915, no description is given of the barn and virtually none of the deer-park. The Reverend Thomas Holland, in possession of the estate from 1708, apparently 'kept up deer in the Park', but the deer park wall 'became ruinous and the fallow deer escaped', the last deer apparently being shot in the 1830s. The RCAHMW opinion was that the barn dated from the early 17th century, although no evidence is given for this and it may reflect a desire to associate it with Thomas Holland (c1577-1643) and the building of the 1615 house of Plas Berw. This is repeated in the NMR PGW database, where it is stated that 'it appears very ancient'.

The Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales refer to reuse of the barn during the Second World War for military purposes, being partly reroofed at that time and altered inside with the addition of much concrete. The writer has been unable to find any other written evidence for the Second World War use of the building, but previously unrecorded features include two Second World War 'flechettes' in the field to the south of the barn (Appendix Photographs 3 and 4).

Aims and Objectives of Survey

The intentions were to provide an independent record of the barn consisting of a set of scale drawings, photographs and a summary description of its then current appearance. This formed the basis for further analysis and research outlined in this report, and constitutes an archaeological and historical assessment independent of the formal planning application (Planning Application 33C290 Sgubor Ddegwm, Pentre Berw). Recognition was made of the guidelines produced by both English Heritage and by the IfA. It was carried out in advance of any clearance of vegetation and trees, subsequent visits being made to check if new features had come to light after this work had taken place.



Methodology

Measured drawings were produced at a scale of 1:50 of both the external and internal elevations together with plans at ground floor and first floor levels (Figs.7-9) in November 2009. Care was taken to ensure that as many details of the building as possible were recorded, a search undertaken of the surrounding area for any other structures and to note any features of the landscape which may be relevant to the barn. Recording was made difficult at that time by both encroaching scrub and mature trees, and the structural fragility of the barn. Access was gained using a tower scaffold and ladder, although some parts of the fabric, most notably the wall-tops and parts of the south east gable, were precarious. These drawings formed the primary visual record of the barn and the basis both for text description and further research leading to the eventual report. Photographs are attached in Appendix I of this report.

Description

The unscheduled barn is located at SH46717187, 250 metres north east of Plas Berw and forms part of NPRN 265407. The long axis of the building is aligned south east to north west and across the full width of the lower of two partly stone revetted terraces overlooking Malltraeth Marsh. A short distance to the north east the boundary wall includes a gateway flanked with roughly formed pillars now infilled with rubble, beyond which there appears to be no trace of any continuation of the terrace. Bedrock is commonly exposed in the area and there are traces of possible quarry scrapes close to the barn which may have provided raw material for the barn and revetment of the terraces. A short, sloping path or ramp connects the south west doorway of the barn to the upper terrace, at the top of which both 19th.century Ordnance Survey maps and the Carreglwyd survey plan show a second building, referred to above, aligned to, and possibly closing off, the track. Nothing remains of this second building above the modern ground surface.

The barn measures 13 metres long by 8 metres wide, the rubble walls being a consistent 0.8 metres thick above a projecting boulder plinth at the base of all the walls except the south east gable and above a second, higher plinth supporting the north west gable. (See Figs. 7-9) The opposing doorways are central to the long walls and have imperfect, semicircular heads formed with rubble voussoirs, the jambs being plainly dressed sandstone blocks varying in colour from grey to red, most of which have fallen. The stumps of iron pintels survive within the core of the north west jambs of both doorways, but the thresholds and almost all the jambs are lost apart from a single block close to the south west doorway. The original disposition of the vents in the south west wall have, like those in the opposing wall, been disrupted by the insertion of rifle slits, but they seem to have comprised two staggered lines of three either side of the doorway. The central of the lower line of vents to the right of the south west doorway is internally splayed to admit more light. Four of the vents have been blocked by the insertion of the rifle slits.



The pattern of the openings in the north east wall is less regular and consists of two lines of three (upper), one of which is a small, rectangular window, to the left of the doorway and two lines of two vents (upper) and three (middle) with the addition of another vent beneath, and close to, the north west jamb of the doorway. Four have been blocked by the rifle slits, which are set at the same level as the single, lower vent and below the level of the middle line so that it is uncertain if they have removed further vents. The north west gable has a line of three upper vents and three within the plinth, the three rifle slits being cut through the wall just above plinth level. The gable had been demolished to eaves level and the reduced wall top given a concrete capping at the same level as the wall-plates on the long walls. The flat stone slabs forming the wall-plates are also missing from the north west end of the building and 1.2 to 1.7 metres of the interior face of the top of the walls has been rebuilt for a flat, concrete roof for a World War II pill-box. This roof was reached by five iron staples set into the face of the longer of the overlapping cross-walls and was reinforced with reused iron railway tracks which had rusted and 'blown' the surrounding concrete. The partial failure of the roof appeared to be exerting pressure on the walls at this end of the barn. In addition, all of the rifle slits were in varying stages of failure, having been created without lintels and sills and weakening the structural integrity of the surrounding stonework by allowing water penetration.

The south east gable is pierced by a central, internally splayed doorway at first floor level with no trace of a timber frame, its head and part of its jambs having fallen. It was probably flanked by a pair of small, rectangular windows, also splayed. Only one of the two windows survives, although it is reasonable to suppose there was a second, and that there were no more than two vents, one either side of the doorway. Below these there are three shallow sockets which may have supported a platform bridging the narrow gap between the barn wall and the higher ground of the track and upper terrace. This would allow access either to stack the topmost sheaves or hay for storage when the ground floor was full or to a timber first floor at this end of the barn. The evidence for a first floor consists of six joist sockets part way along the north east wall, two of which interrupt the vents at this end, suggesting that the first floor may have belonged to a phase intermediate to the original, phase I build and World War II modification and probably before 1860 when Williams' sketch shows the barn in a state of partial dereliction. There is no surviving evidence to show that the doorway is necessarily contemporary with the insertion of the first floor, nor are there any corresponding joist sockets for a floor in the south west wall. This indicates a floor or gallery confined to the south east end supported, perhaps, by vertical posts and with a ladder stair against the internal face of the south west wall. The first floor may, therefore, have extended across little more than a quarter of the area of the barn.

No internal subdivision is evident either in the opposing internal faces of the long walls, apart from a single, ragged hole roughly below the end joist socket of the first floor, or in superficial clearance of the ground floor. Similarly, there is no trace of any surviving roof timbers, of any indication of the form of the roof or of roof material, apart from a few



roughly split slates. Bedrock appears to lie at, or close, to the internal upper part of the barn and externally where it has been cut back, probably for the construction of the south east end. No photographs of any antiquity have yet come to light, and the only illustration is the sketch view from the south west by John Williams, dated to 1861. In most respects this drawing appears to be a reliable image of the barn if one takes into account both the loss of the roof and upper part of the south east gable and the fact that much of the north west end is obscured. The roof is sagging at the ridge and holed, revealing some form of rafters and battens; the roof material is not entirely clear in the sketch but resembles slate. It shows the central doorway with a timber door in situ and its frame complete, as well as the two lines of vents to the south east of the doorway. These six vents, or 'gloywer', are described on the NMR database as 'tiny vents in the stonework rather than windows'.

Major deterioration appears to have largely taken place after the date of this sketch; the 1891 map indicates that it was roofless, although the greatest impact may have been the conversion of its north west end to a World War II pillbox. In 2004 it was described in the NMR as in 'fair condition' although by 2009 stresses from the weight of the wartime concrete pill-box and from the encroachment of ivy and maturing ash trees appears to have hastened decline. Parts of the upper walls were too unsafe to record in detail.

Assessment and Conclusions

'Easily recognisable by its opposed doorways and its massive sides pierced by narrow ventilation slits' (Peter Smith 1975), the primary function of Plas Berw Barn was as a threshing barn. Sheaves of wheat would be unloaded into the barn through the doorway in the south elevation, threshing would take place within the cross passage of the building, using hand-wielded flails. The threshing barn is carefully located and orientated to take advantage of the prevailing south-westerly winds, the wind would blow the chaff out through the passage to the east side of the building. The resulting corn and straw being stored in the northern end of the building. The barn at Berw was only a modest size having only three bays, this would suggest a small enterprise serving only the immediate estate and perhaps reflects the poor quality of the land. What part the now lost building on the upper terrace played in this enterprise is not known. There are a number of ruined windmills in Pentre Berw and Gaerwen and it is possible that the grain would have been ground there.

Barns of a similar design can be found on other north Wales estates, such as at Henblas, Llangristiolus (NPRN31068), where there are the remains of a much larger threshing barn to the south west of the mansion (NPRN15706). Now a roofless ruin, this barn had opposing cart entrances and all walls had two tiers of ventilation slits, above the east doorway is a datestone of 1733 (Haslam, Orbach and Voelcker 2009). Perhaps the finest example is the 17th century threshing barn at Vaynol (Y Faenol) Old Hall (NPRN31461), which shares the same elemental plan as the barns at Henblas and Plas Berw, but at over twice the length as the Plas Berw barn this is self evidently a much grander affair. Another example is Ysgubor Ddegwm, 420 metres north of Llanidan Hall (NPRN15733), a gritstone barn dated to about



1700 and one of the largest on the island. It has opposing doorways with cambered voussoirs, a set of pigeon holes and quarter round eaves moulding.

Threshing barns are often referred to as tithe barns (*ysguborau degwm*), but there is no evidence that Plas Berw Barn was itself associated with the collection of tithes and its title '*ysgubor ddegwm*' is a modern application. Plas Berw, Henblas and Llanidan barns were all built at some distance from the house they served, perhaps reflecting a desire to separate domestic from agricultural activity. Their size may correspond to the quality of available land. Those at Vaynol, Henblas and Llanidan are surrounded by some of the most fertile and productive land in the area. *'The house of Berw is situated in a woody spot which, however, is not healthy, owing to the raw and foul vapours which frequently pollute the air from the neighbouring marsh,'* wrote Henry Rowlands, vicar of Llanidan, in about 1700 (John Williams 1861).

The early nineteenth century brought significant change at Berw with the completion of the Cob at Malltraeth and the canalisation of the Cefni River in 1812. This enabled the reclamation of some 4200 acres of inadequately drained salt marsh into farmland between Llangefni and the sea. This also contributed to the building of Thomas Telford's A5 turnpike road to cross the marsh a mile or so north of Plas Berw in 1826, followed by the branch railway between Gaerwen and Amlwch in 1851. The railway embankment cut through the former deer park and close to the south east end of the late medieval house at Plas Berw. The improvement in Malltraeth Marsh is in contrast to the poor quality of the upper fields, such as 'Gwyn Hingar', which has little depth of soil and an abundance of gorse covered rocky outcrops. There is little farmland at Plas Berw which is suitable for cropping and today much of it is predominantly used for the grazing of livestock.

A line of six joist holes interrupting the original threshing barn vents in the north east wall suggest the insertion of a first floor. This could relate to threshing activity or suggest a later use for hay storage possibly with the ground floor being used as a byre. This intermediate use for the barn as a hay barn and byre may indicate why this building survived when the larger building on the upper terrace did not. By 1861 when the barn was recorded in the Reverend John Williams' History of Berw it was still roofed but the missing slates and overgrowth indicate imminent dereliction.

There is no evidence to indicate what became of the barn until it was made use of by the Home Guard in the Second World War. At that stage, and some eighty years since the Reverend John Williams' sketch, it was probably already roofless. The insertion of a concrete bunker or pill-box would have compensated for the loss of the roof structure at the north west end and acted to stabilise the building. The pill-box was probably part of a 'stop line' intended, with two 'flechettes' in between the barn and the road to Pentre Berw, to cover any enemy advance along the railway below, the A5 road and the B4419 road from Newborough. By 2009 the pill-box had become partly detached from the barn walls, largely through the failure of oxidised railway tracks in its construction.



Apart from the south east end of the barn, where there is evidence for a first floor loft, the interior seems to have been open to the rafters, although one would have anticipated a timber or stone threshing floor capable of admitting a small cart. There may also have been timber side screens to the threshing floor, but there is no evidence for any internal division other than the loft until the intrusion of the World War II pill-box and no sign of floor material, the only roof material noted being cleaved slates. The earlier form of the north west gable overlooking Malltraeth Marsh is not known and it may have been demolished to provide stone for the WWII pill-box.

There are no diagnostic features confirming attribution of the barn by the RCAHMW to the early 17th.century. No explanation is given for this provisional dating and it may simply represent an estimate of age based on the general character of the building, and a desire to place its construction within the same time frame as the early 17th.century unit at Plas Berw. It is first recorded in 1815 and lies outside of, and to the north of, the deer-park focused on the Medieval and later houses. There is no sign of the barn having any attached structures and an elongated building, shown in the Carreglwyd plan, was located c 20m. south of the barn on the upper terrace. The function of this building is not known. The barn may be associated with the field-names, 'Park Newydd' and 'Park yr Efal' to the north, although on the Carreglwyd map these fields have distinctly angular shapes and may be related to undated enclosure of reclaimed land. There is no evidence of a new park being formed in this area and the track following the upper terrace and joining the modern approach to Plas Berw appears to have primarily provided access to the barn.

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Figures

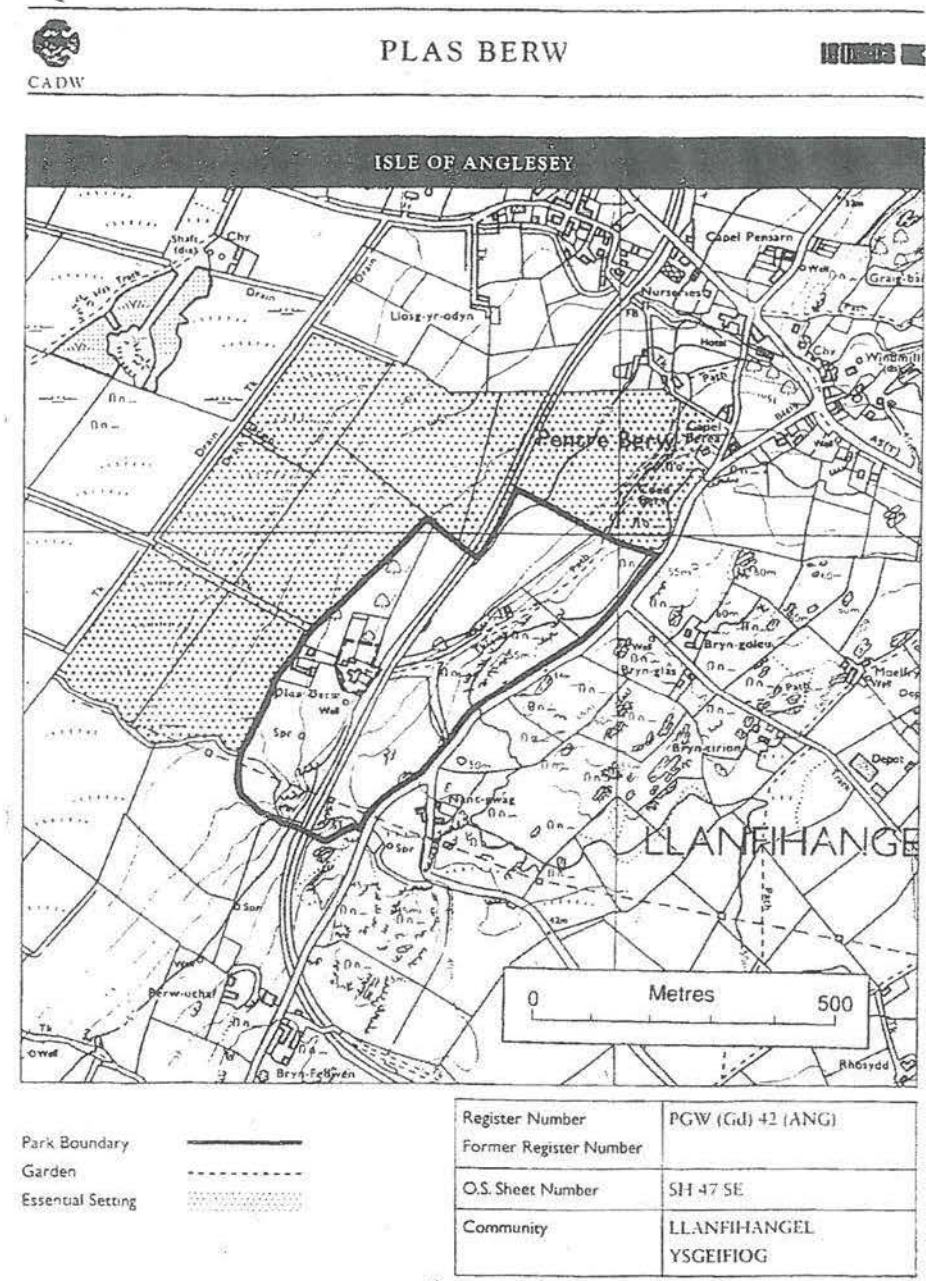


Fig. 1: Register of Parks and Gardens in Wales Plas Berw. Park, garden and essential setting. The deer park was actually focused on the south and west parts of the outlined area.





Fig. 2: Coflein AP 2005 0167 Cat.No. C839856. Plas Berw from the East. Photograph by Toby Driver 2005. Note the inturned curving entrance and hollow way in the centre which crosses Parc yr Hydd and the mid 19th. century railway embankment bisecting the park.

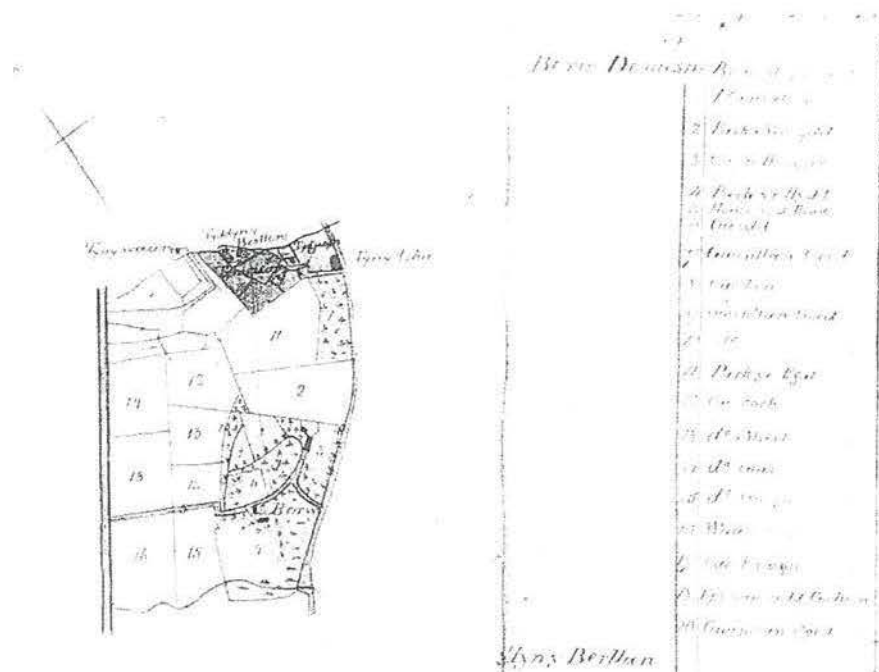


Fig. 3: c 1815 Survey of Carreglwyd and Berw Estates Map and Schedule.



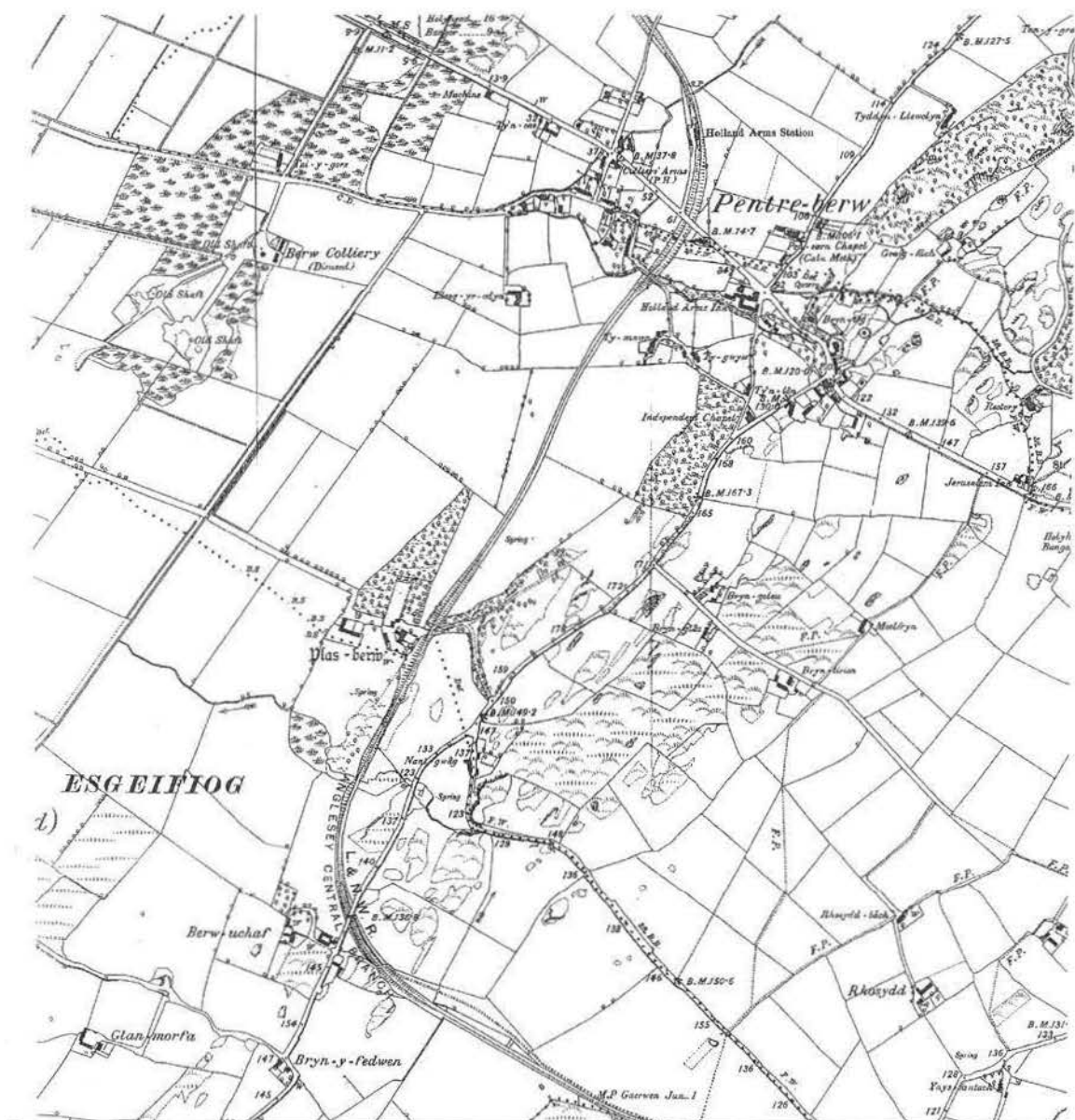


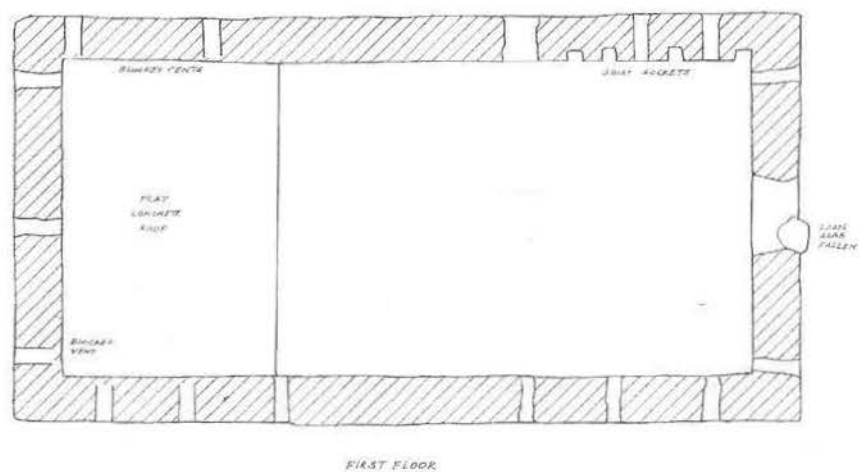
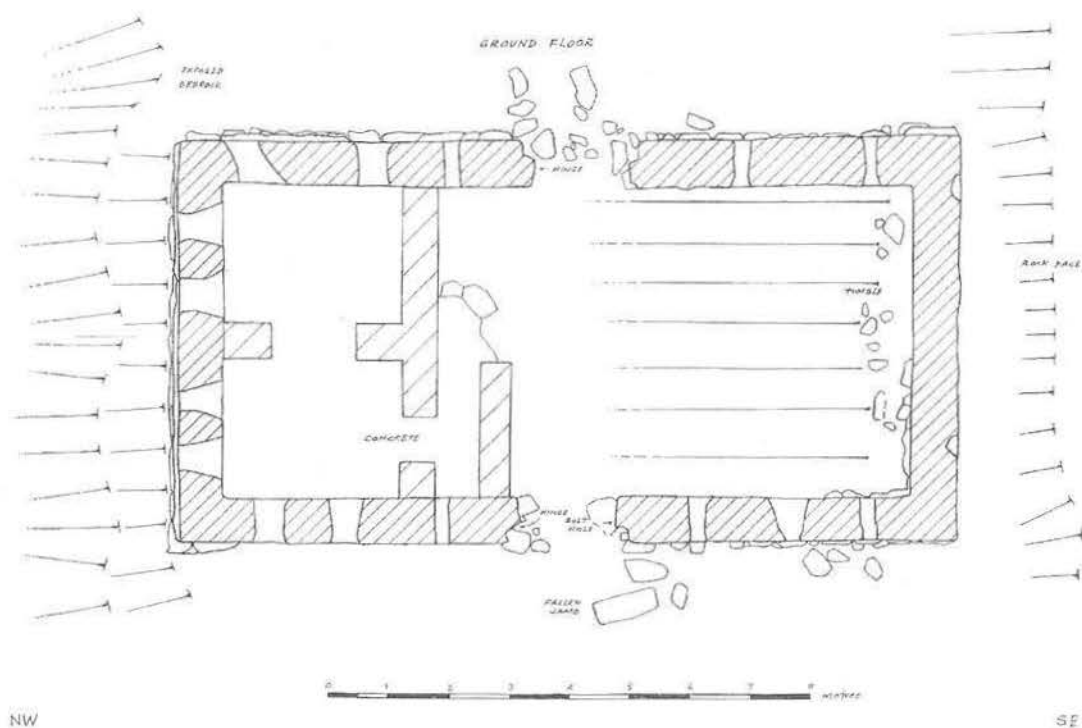
Fig.5: Ordnance Survey 6" 1st. Edition 1887-88.





Fig.6: Location of Barn. Plas Berw centre left and Barn top right. Field names from Careglwyd Map c 1815.





PLAS BERW BARN
PLANS
1:50
SEPT. 2003
TM

Fig.7: Ground Floor and First Floor Plans.



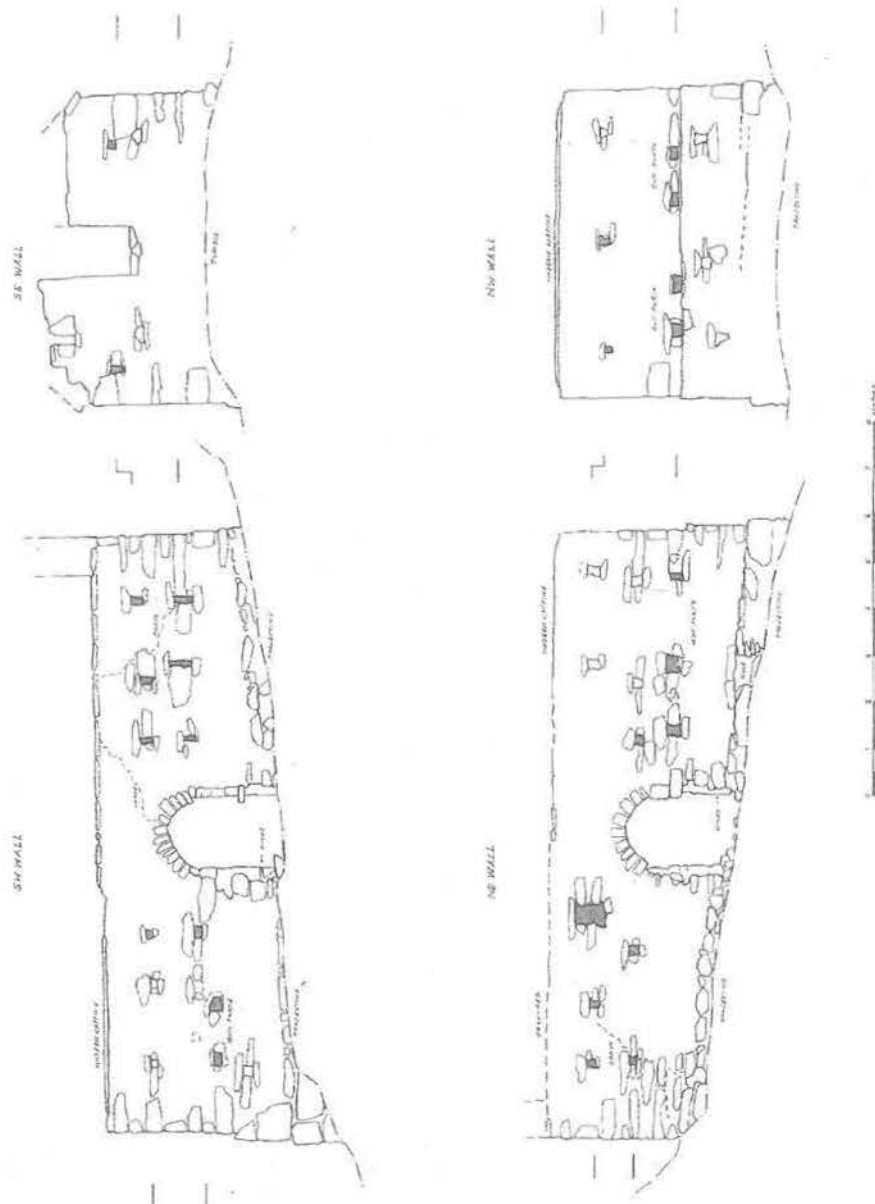


Fig.8: External Elevations.



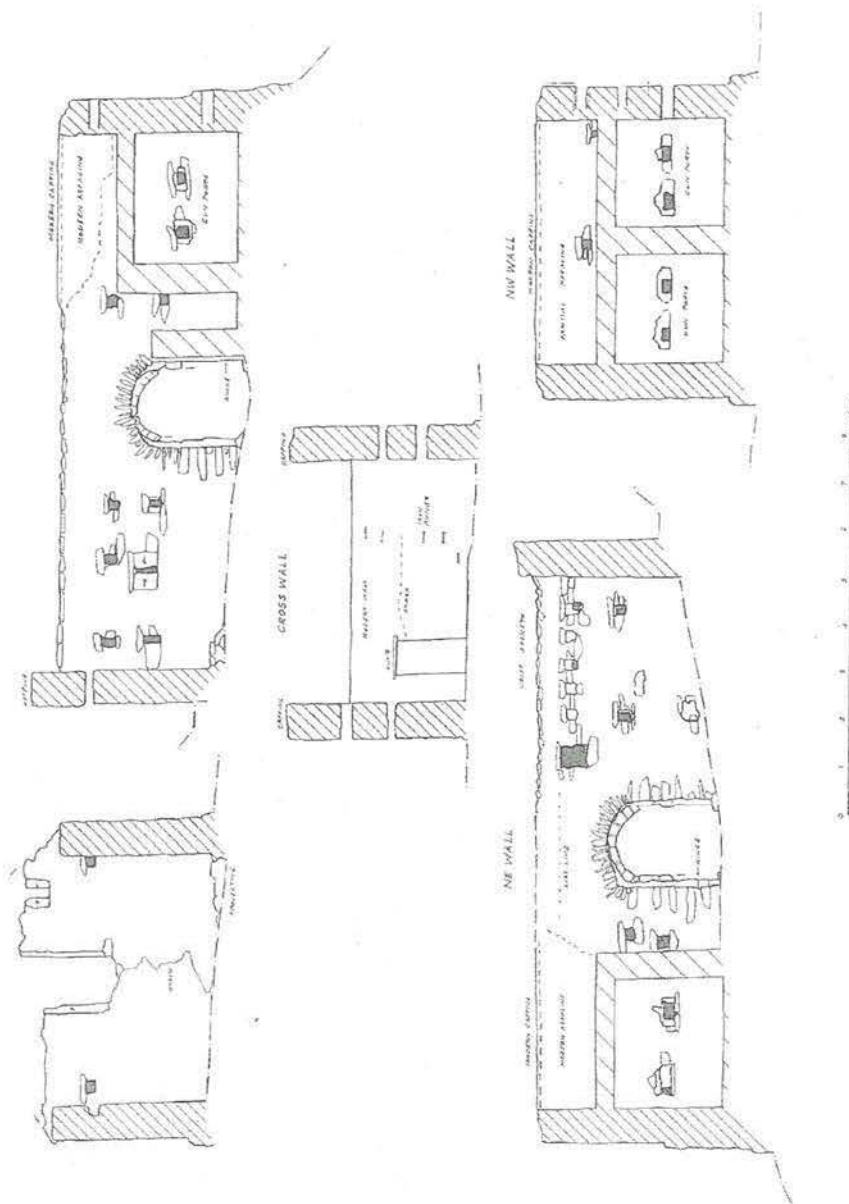
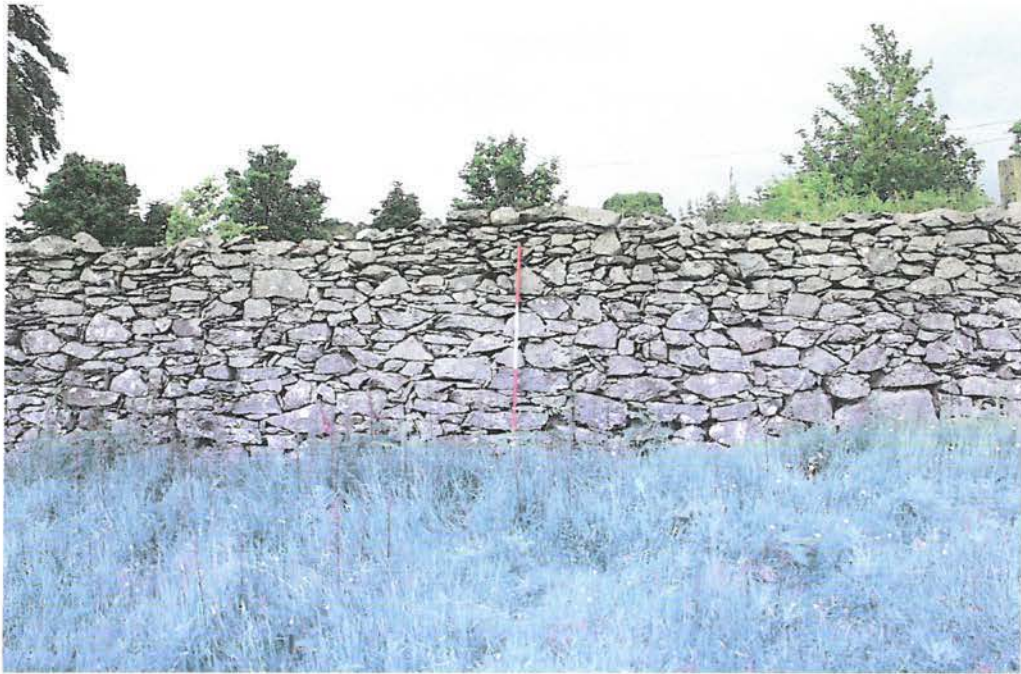
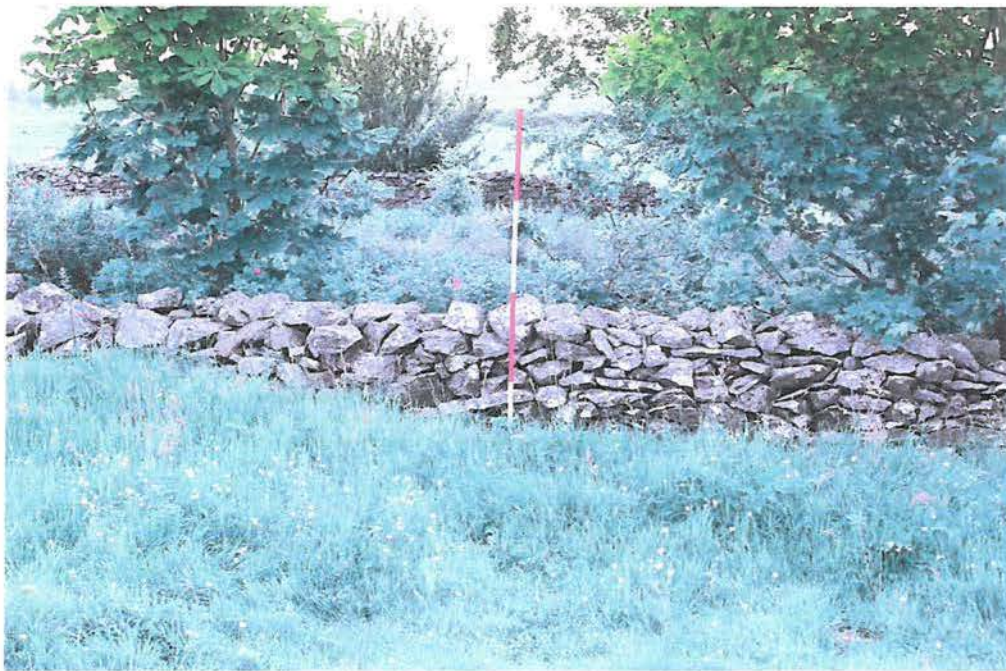


Fig.9: Internal Elevations.



Appendix: Photographs

Photograph 1: SH4666571649 June 2014, deer park wall taken from 'Park Yr Hydd' next to modern drive to Plas Berw.



Photograph 2: SH4670671661 June 2014, field boundary taken from within 'Gwyn Hingar'.





Photograph 3: SH4678171775 June 2014, Flechette to the south of and overlooking the barn.



Photograph 4: SH4681971708 June 2014, Flechette next to the B4419 Pentre Berw to Newborough road.





Photograph 5: September 2009, South West Elevation.



Photograph 6: September 2009, South West Elevation North West end.





Photograph 7: September 2009, South West and North West Elevations.



Photograph 8: September 2009, North East Elevation Centre.





Photograph 9: September 2009, North East Elevation South East of Doorway.



Photograph 10: September 2009, North East Elevation North West of Doorway.





Photograph 11: September 2009, South East Elevation.



Photograph 12: September 2009, Interior South East Elevation.





Photograph 13: September 2009, Interior from South East: Pillbox.



Photograph 14: September 2009: Interior from South: North East Doorway.





Photograph 15: March 2012, South West Elevation.



Photograph 16: March 2012, South East Elevation.





Photograph 17: March 2012, North West Elevation.



Photograph 18: March 2012, North East Elevation.

