

CPAT Report No 1263

Tŷ-uchaf, Cwm Llech, Llangynog, Powys

Survey and excavation



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 BACKGROUND
- 3 TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY
- 4 BUILDING SURVEY
- 5 EXCAVATION
- 6 Tŷ-UCHAF AND ITS SETTING
- 7 CONCLUSIONS
- 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 9 SOURCES

APPENDIX 1: SITE ARCHIVE

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY AND EXCAVATION PLANS

SUMMARY

Tŷ-uchaf lies in the remote valley of Cwm Llech, near Llangynog, in northern Powys, and was built in 1665 by the poet Cadwaladr Roberts. The house has been ruinous for the last century and was recently afforded protection as scheduled ancient monument (SAM Mg 340) on the basis that it is a good example of a post-medieval farmstead with possible earlier origins, the house itself being of some architectural pretension and retaining several distinctive vernacular features in its windows, chimney stacks, nesting holes and platform base.

Proposals to reconstruct the house have provided a rare opportunity to examine in detail the construction and usage of a 17th-century Welsh farmhouse. The programme of survey and excavation has provided a detailed record of the surviving structure which acts not only as an archive but will also assist in developing plans for the reconstruction of the main house.

Prior to the investigations there had been some debate over the origins of Tŷ-uchaf and whether the standing structure had replaced an earlier, possibly late medieval, longhouse. The excavated evidence, however, suggests that the house was built on a previously unoccupied site. A substantial plinth built of local boulders was constructed to revet a platform oriented along the contours of the slope. The house was built from local stone and included two massive chimney stacks, one in the western gable and the other essentially freestanding at the rear, the main walling here being of timber-frame, rather than stone. Original details survive, including a row of nesting holes in the upper part of the south wall and three matching wooden mullioned windows.

Internally, the house was floored with cobbles and stone slabs, being divided into two main rooms by a timber-framed partition. The floor in the western room was constructed of smaller cobbles, including a section where quartz cobbling predominated and this would appear to have been the parlour. The massive fireplace was later reduced by the insertion of a bread oven, built on a stone plinth. The kitchen was also floored with cobbles, but also with an area of large slabs in front of the fireplace. The only entrance to the house was along the eastern side of the kitchen fireplace, via a passage which ran along the rear of the chimney which was used for feeding cattle in the adjacent byre. A small outshut cut into the slope at the rear of the parlour appears to be contemporary with the rest of the house. Its position on the northern side of the house suggest that this is likely to have been used as a pantry and dairy.

The byre, in the rear of wing of the building, saw two main phases of construction. Originally earthen-floored with several stone-filled drains this was later reorganised with the introduction of a partly slabbed floor beneath the stalls and a slab-floored manure passage.

The house was the centre of a small group of farm buildings which included a barn, cartshed and another building, perhaps also a barn or stables, with a fourth building set above the house.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were commissioned by Mr Robert Jones to undertake a programme of survey and excavation in connection with the restoration of a nationally important vernacular house at Tŷ-uchaf, Cwm Llech, near Llangynog in northern Powys (SJ 0283 2500). The house is a scheduled ancient monument (Mg 340) and the restoration and attendant works have required the granting of scheduled monument consent by Cadw, who have also grant-aided the investigations. A brief for the archaeological works required as part of this process was prepared by Cadw (dated 18 June 2013).



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2013

Fig. 1 Location of Tŷ-uchaf, Cwm Llech

- 1.2 Tŷ-uchaf is a ruinous, stone and timber-framed 17th-century farmhouse which retains a number of interesting vernacular architectural and is associated with the remains of a farm complex comprising several other platform-based structures and enclosures. The farmstead occupies a steep slope high on the eastern side of Cwm Llech, 2.7km to the south-west of Llangynog, in the parish of Pennant Melangell.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Tŷ-uchaf was scheduled on the basis that it is a good example of a post-medieval farmstead with possible earlier origins, the house itself being of some architectural pretension and retaining several distinctive vernacular features in its windows, chimney stacks, nesting holes and platform base. The restoration project was seen as providing an opportunity to enhance our knowledge of the development of agriculture, subsistence and rural domestic life in north-east Wales. The lack of later alterations raised the likelihood that well-preserved, buried floor levels and domestic deposits may survive, unlike those in comparable structures that have remained in continuous occupation. The scheduled area comprises the remains of the building itself and the surrounding area, within which associated archaeological deposits may also survive. It is irregular in shape and measures 40m by 40m with an area of 0.14ha (*Cadw Scheduling Description* 2012).
- 2.2 The house is depicted in an undated, but probably 19th-century painting (Fig. 2), the detail of which appears to be particularly accurate. This shows eastern gable of the house with a row of nesting holes above the first-floor window, which are now lost, as is the dormer window just visible on the south side. The roof of the rear wing extends beyond the chimney and follows the same line above what was a byre. Beyond the farmyard scene the outbuildings include a weatherboarded barn and a cartshed, with the shafts of a cart just visible. The Ordnance Survey mapping of 1887 (Fig. 3) shows the farm to comprise an L-shaped house, with two buildings to the south (the barn and cartshed) and a further building to the north, beyond a track.



Fig. 2 An undated, probably 19th-century painting of Tŷ-uchaf
(private collection)

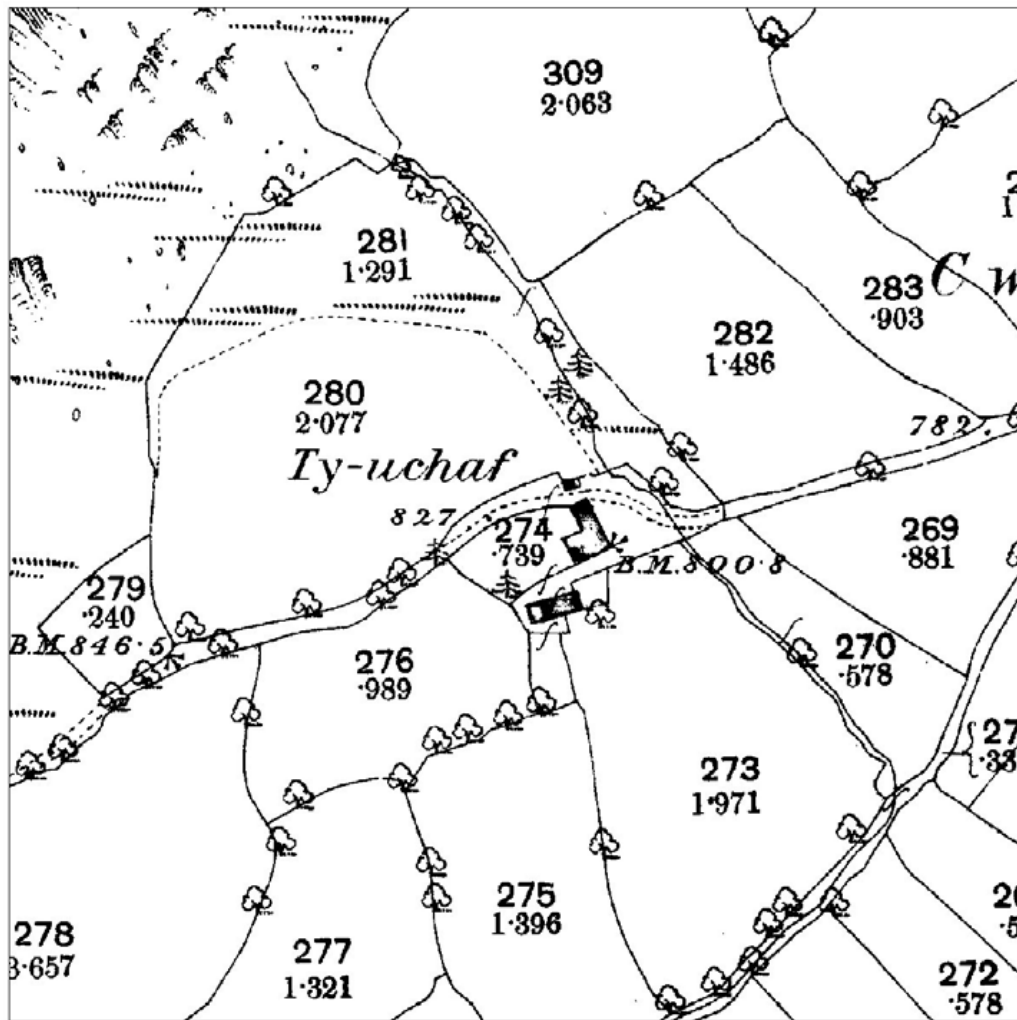


Fig. 3 Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 mapping, published in 1887

- 2.3 The house was visited by the Royal Commission in 1910, though erroneously described as a black and white cottage, and was described then as ruined. Tŷ-uchaf was subsequently recorded by M F H Lloyd of Welshpool while it was still partly roofed; his plans and photographs were published in *Montgomeryshire Collections* (Fig. 4; Lloyd 1934, 96-103), along with a description by Robert Richards MP, then Chairman of the Royal Commission. This record provides a number of important clues regarding the construction of the house which can no longer be determined from the surviving structure. Lloyd describes Tŷ-uchaf as being built of local stone, with a slate roof, cobbled floors and plastered internal walls. The first floor had already collapsed by this time, although a detailed record was made of the surviving timber-framed partition, which divided the main house into two rooms on either floor. He noted that the oak frame was infilled with wattle and there were traces of the stairs alongside the fireplace in the inner room. There is, however, no mention of a second partition which would have separated the room from a rear outshut. An inscription bearing the initials CR and a date of 1665 had been carved into the lintel of the first-floor window frame at the eastern end. Richards notes that this refers to Cadwalladr Roberts, a well known local bard, who was a contemporary and friend of Huw Morys of Pontymeibion, possibly the best known poet in 17th-century Wales. He also records that the last occupant of Tŷ-uchaf was David Morris, who was born around 1850.

- 2.4 Both commentators draw parallels between the ground plan of Tŷ-uchaf and 'the type of house which the pastoralist affected until comparatively recent times – with the cattle and the family all living under the one roof'. This is a reference to the byre which occupied the rear wing; the only access to the house was via the feeding passage, or *bing*. It seems that the upper floor of the byre was a hay store, or *taflod*, which was loaded through a door on a level with the trackway behind, while there was evidently a trapdoor in the passage through which hay was brought down for feeding. This description is particularly noteworthy since it has been seen by some as an indication that Tŷ-uchaf may originally have been constructed as a typical longhouse on a north/south axis, though this would have presented the unusual arrangement of the byre being upslope from the living quarters.

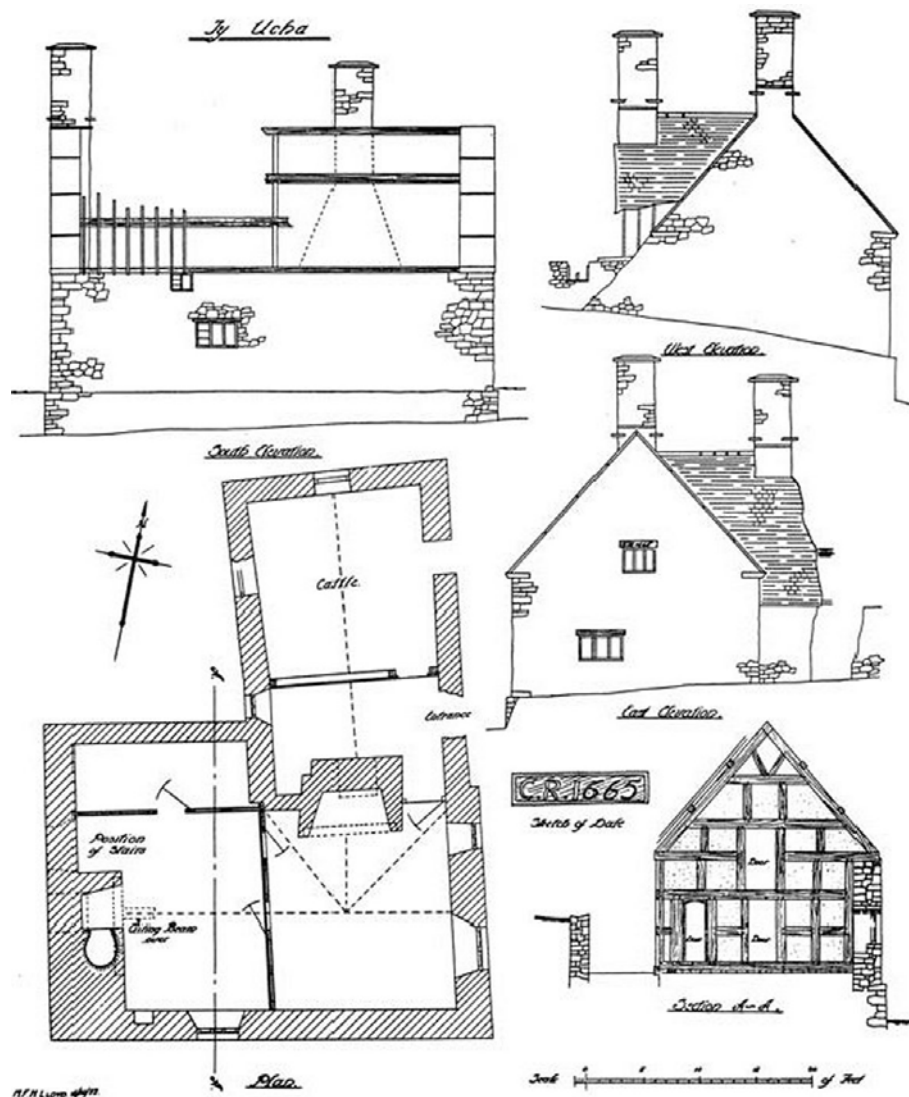


Fig. 4 1934 survey by M F H Lloyd

3 BUILDING SURVEY

- 3.1 The brief provided by Cadw has specified that a Level 4 building survey is required, as set out by English Heritage in '*Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practice*' (2006), which will include the following:
- Detailed stone by stone record and interpretative drawings of all upstanding internal and external elevations and sections of the house, to be produced digitally for reproduction at an appropriate scale.
 - Drawn and photographic records of diagnostic architectural features, such as windows, dressed stone, timbers and structural details such as joints, sockets etc.
 - Detailed ground plan of the house, outbuildings and other archaeological or key topographic features within and adjacent to the scheduled area.
 - Photographic record of upstanding outbuildings not to be developed.
- 3.2 The aim of the building survey was to provide a detailed drawn and photographic record of the plan and upstanding elevations of the remains of the farmhouse and a baseline topographical survey of the rest of the farm complex. This would:
- Provide a comprehensive archive record of the structure as it stands before conservation, partial restoration and incorporation into a sympathetic new structure.
 - Provide plans, elevations and other reference materials on which the scheme for the restoration will be based.
 - Provide reference materials for recording archaeologists and conservation contractors during the implementation of the restoration works.
 - Place the structure into its local, regional and national historical, architectural and archaeological context.
- 3.3 The survey was conducted by Adam Stanford of Aerial-Cam Ltd using the latest photogrammetry software to manipulate a mosaic of high-resolution digital images, taken from ground level and a pole-mounted camera. The software was used to create a point cloud, a solid model and photo-textured 3-dimensional data. The resulting models and auto-rectified images have provided, detailed elevations which have been transcribed as stone-for-stone drawings, available in AutoCAD (.dwg) and PDF formats.
- 3.4 Additional details was added during the excavation phase, particularly in relation to the lower sections of the elevations which were masked by rubble and vegetation at the time the building survey was conducted.



Fig. 5 Tŷ-uchaf viewed from the west. Photo CPAT.



Fig. 6 The collapsed fireplace in the western gable. Photo CPAT 3729-0013

Description

- 3.5 The following description is taken in part from comments by Richard Suggest, RCAHMW. Tŷ-uchaf is set upon a massively revetted earthwork platform, with the housing having been built parallel with the contour of the slope, while the rear, northern wing, incorporating the byre, is cut into the slope behind. The building was of one-and-a-half storeys and appears to be of a single build, dating from 1665, constructed using local stone, with a slate roof. The house was rectangular in plan and divided into two rooms on each floor by a timber-framed partition, now lost, but recorded in the 1930s. This separated the kitchen or hall to the west from a parlour wing to the east. Both rooms contain massive chimney pieces which form the dominant feature of the ruins, incorporating rough limestone quoins and distinctive drip courses at stack level. That in the parlour was freestanding whilst the kitchen fireplace has been modified at a later date by the insertion of a brick-lined bread oven.
- 3.6 The north wall of the house was timber-framed and little trace now survives, save for the sleeper wall on which it stood, a rebate in the western gable wall, and a stub of timber protruding from the free-standing chimney. A small outshut extends to the north of the kitchen, cut into the slope with a continuation of the main roofline. There is no evidence to suggest that this was a later addition and probably formed the dairy and pantry.



Fig. 7 Tŷ-uchaf, viewed from the south-west, showing the main house standing on a stone-revetted platform. Photo CPAT 3789-0058.

- 3.7 The south stands to more or less its full height and several nesting holes are visible below the level of the (missing) wall plate. The western gable is also largely intact and retains several large slab 'kneelers', and a blocked window which presumably lit the stairs. The eastern gable has seen significant collapse with the upper section having been lost, including the first-floor window which formerly included the date inscription, as well as a row of nesting holes depicted in the 19th-century painting.
- 3.8 The surviving walls are pierced by the remains of several wooden-framed windows the openings for which are splayed, with a shaped slate dripmould over the window opening. Each window has plain chamfered jambs, rectangular mullions, diamond-section stanchions, and a glazing rebate. The hall window has four lights; parlour window three lights; the stair and lobby window two lights.



Fig. 8 The partially collapsed eastern gable wall. Photo CPAT 3729-0001

4 TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

- 4.1 The topographical survey, including ground plans of the house and outbuildings, was conducted by CPAT using total station surveying. Levels were related to the Ordnance Survey datum by means of a benchmark on the eastern wall of the house, while the survey has been positioned with respect to the OS national grid as a best fit against published field boundaries.
- 4.2 The survey provided additional detail relating to the house itself, as well as establishing an accurate plan onto which detail from the excavations has been added.
- 4.3 As well as recording the house and byre, the survey included the remains of a range of single-storey agricultural outbuildings set upon a less pronounced east/west terrace. That in the centre was fully walled, and is shown as being weatherboarded in the 19th-century painting, while the western building was an open-fronted cart shed. Little survives of the eastern building which may have been a barn or stables. A tumbled stone field wall defines the paddock in which the complex stands.

5 EXCAVATION

- 5.1 The excavation was conducted over a four-week period between 10 February and 7 March 2014. A full drawn, photographic and written record was maintained throughout and a summary of the site archive is provided in Appendix 1.

The House

- 5.2 The interior of the house was filled to varying degrees by collapsed masonry, particularly where the upper part of the eastern gable had fallen inwards, where the rubble was up to 0.9m thick. The areas around both fireplaces also contained substantial amounts of rubble, all of which was removed carefully by hand. A significant number of artefacts were recovered from the rubble, including pottery, bottle glass, leather footwear and a range of iron objects and nails, all of which dated from the 19th century. It is probable that at least some of this material was derived from the collapse of the first-floor. Roofing slate was also common, in a variety of sizes, together with numerous roofing nails. The slates were mostly found around the inner edge of the walls, suggesting that the collapsing roof timbers had hinged on the wall plates and gables before discharging their load. There was surprisingly little evidence for wall plaster within the rubble and no window glass or structural timber, perhaps indicating that the windows and oak frame had been removed and reused elsewhere.
- 5.3 The house had been built on an artificial platform revetted by a substantial plinth constructed of large boulders likely to have been derived from field clearance. The plinth stood around 1.0m above the adjacent track and projected outwards from the base of the southern wall of the building. A sondage excavated through the kitchen floor demonstrated that the area behind the plinth had been infilled by a layer of fine stone and clay, or scalplings, which is likely to have been quarried from the bedrock at the rear of the building, the byre end having been cut into the slope (see below). No artefacts were found within this deposit and there was no evidence to suggest the existence of an earlier structure.

The Parlour

- 5.4 The floor of the parlour was well-preserved and had been laid carefully, with the cobbles packed tightly. Although there was no patterned design within the floor it did contain several deliberate lines, as well as an area against the partition where quartz cobbles predominated (see Fig. 24). To the right of the fireplace the lack of cobbling may be associated with the position of a winding staircase. A roughly rectangular area in front of the partition lacked any cobbles and marked the position of the original doorway between the two main rooms. The position of a later door in the centre of the partition, recorded in 1934, was not obvious.
- 5.5 The fireplace was floored with large slabs, half of which remained hidden beneath the plinth for an inserted bread oven. This was roughly circular and had a brick floor and the remnants of a brick-lined dome. The rear wall of the fireplace contained a recess, presumably for kindling and tapers.



Fig. 9 The cobbled floor in the parlour. Photo CPAT 3800-0059



Fig. 10 The repaired fireplace in the parlour with the inserted bread oven on the left.
Photo CPAT 3800-0011

The Kitchen

- 5.6 The floor of the kitchen was at a slightly higher level than that in the parlour, there having been a step up along the partition. There was an area of large slabs in front of and within the fireplace and a patch of smaller slabs against the partition, while the remainder of the floor was formed from larger cobbles than those used in the parlour. The floor had been patched against the southern wall, which had evidently moved outwards while the building was still occupied, leaving a gap at its base. The position of the outer door, alongside the chimney, was marked by a threshold slab, the cobbled flooring continuing beyond into the passage within the byre (see below). Some pottery was recovered from between the cobbles and this was generally earlier than that in the rubble, a few sherds dating from the 18th century. An iron band from the base of a wooden bucket was found fused by rust onto the cobbles adjacent to the window.



Fig. 11 The cobbled floor in the kitchen. Photo CPAT 3800-0038

- 5.7 The fireplace had originally had a fire placed directly onto the slabbed floor, which at this point was heavily affected by heat. At a later date a smaller fireplace appears to have been inserted, within a construction of roughly-built stonework which had unfortunately been badly damaged by collapsing masonry. Part of this structure can be seen in one of the photographs taken by M F H Lloyd (1934). As in the parlour, there is a small recess at the rear of the fireplace.



Fig. 12 The original floor in the kitchen fireplace. Photo CPAT 3800-0087

The Outshut

- 5.8 The outshut was divided unequally and the larger, western room had a cobbled floor, although this had later been overlain by a rough slabbed floor. In the angle between the outer wall and the partition were the collapsed remains of a slate-slabbbed bench or low shelf which had been supported on lime-mortared bricks and stone. The slate had evidently broken when the building collapsed and but was clearly associated with a discrete area of ash and cinders which lay both above and beneath the slate, suggesting the position of a coal fire, perhaps for heating a small copper. The smaller room had no flooring but two large slabs at the eastern end had the appearance of steps leading upwards towards the chimney (see Fig. 13). Fragments of window glass were recovered came from a discrete area of the outshut, suggesting that the room, being below ground at the rear of the house, had been lit by a roof light.



Fig. 13 The dairy/pantry outshut showing the later flooring in the larger room. Photo CPAT 3800-0114

The Byre or Cow House

- 5.9 The rear wing of the building was occupied by a byre, which has already been described from the notes of M F H Lloyd. Unlike the house, which appears to be of a single phase, the byre had evidently seen a major reorganisation. In its original form the byre had been constructed on a roughly levelled area cut into the natural slope. The base of the walls was formed by large boulders, a number of which were quartz. The northern, gable wall was constructed directly against the slope, acting as a revetment, as to some extent was the western wall, the external ground level here also being above the level of the floor. The eastern wall may originally have been partly timber-framed, set on a dwarf wall of boulders, this being later replaced by a crudely-built dry-stone wall.
- 5.10 Internally, the byre floor appears to have originally been unsurfaced and sloped towards the house. A number of drains were apparent, filled with edge-set stones, one catching natural runoff towards the area of the byre and others taking animal waste out through the main entrance, adjacent to the house. A number of stakeholes were apparent, presumably for tethering posts. Soil layers which accumulated in this phase contained the earliest pottery found at Tŷ-uchaf, including sherds of 18th-century slipware.



Fig. 14 The later flooring in the byre with the edge-set stones marking the side of the manure passage. Photo CPAT 3800-0009



Fig. 15 The original earthen floor of the byre with drains filled by edge-set stones. Photo CPAT 3800-0108

- 5.11 The byre was later substantially refurbished and reorganised. A rough slabbed floor was laid at the feeding end of the stalls and a slab-floored manure passage was introduced in the rear third of the building. A floor of smaller slabs was laid in the feeding passage along the rear of the kitchen chimney, this clearly acting as a feeding passage. This was evidently the arrangement described by Lloyd and Richards in 1934.

6 Tŷ-UCHAF AND ITS SETTING

By Bob Silvester

- 6.1 Tŷ-uchaf lies in a Cwm Llech, a narrow re-entrant valley that carries the small Afon Goch north-eastwards into Cwm Pennant below the church of Pennant Melangell, the Goch feeding into its parent river, the Tanat. It is a short offshoot, little more than 1.8km long and ends, arguably, in a waterfall known as Pistill cwm llech (1821). The stream itself is in places deeply incised into landscape. The term *llech* can mean either ‘slate’ or a ‘hiding place’ (Evans 1994, 9).
- 6.2 The valley and its encompassing hills constituted a township in their own right in the 18th century, though its boundary cannot be defined. The township was referred to in 1772 and in 1776 and appears too in poor rate assessments around 1840 (Britnell 1994, 3-4). But the Tithe award of approximately the same period grouped Cwmllech with other areas of Pennant into Tre’rllan township.

The Farms

- 6.3 Including the three farms – Tan-y-foel, Maes and Tan-y-coed – that lie at the foot of the valley as it opens out into Cwm Pennant there are eight farms in Cwm Llech, all of which were in existence when the first larger scale maps were produced towards the beginning of the 19th century. Most still exist although Maes has been abandoned and Tŷ-uchaf as we know is a ruin.
- 6.4 The distribution is to some degree expected, but displays too some atypical properties. There are more farms on the east and south-east-facing slopes as might be anticipated, with only two Craig-las (*Tan-y-craiglas* in 1821) and Tan-y-coed (*Ty’n-y-wern* in 1821) on north-facing slopes. The spacing between these two is wide, and the possibility that a farm has been lost between them cannot be ignored. The density on the south-facing slope is not surprising, but the proximity of Tŷ-isaf and Pwll-Iago is unusual, and implies that one (probably Ty-isaf) was a secondary, family creation. It does not need to be stressed that Ty-uchaf as a name will have developed after; probably not significant is the fact that *Tŷ—uchaf* was one of the few farms not to be named on the 1821 map. The abandonment of Maes is also a surprise, given that it had one of the more favourable locations in Cwm Llech. Perhaps the family farming the land died out.
- 6.5 Most of the farms in Cwm Llech adopt a similar topographical position, at a break of slope where the steep, sometimes craggy slopes of the upper valley slopes begin to level out, but well above the valley floor.

The Fields

- 6.6 The earliest accurate depiction of the field systems in Cwm Llech is the Ordnance Survey map of 1887, amplified by the earlier but less precise tithe survey map of 1842. From these the fields present a heterogeneous picture. A small open field lay between Tŷ-uchaf and the stream in the valley, on the evidence available with strips or quilleys; in 1839 some of these strips were still separated only by baulks, but by the end of the century the six strips had been amalgamated into three strip fields.
- 6.7 A second group of strips lay between Tŷ-uchaf and Pwll-Iago, with the solitary occurrence of one *maes* name associated, but defining the original extent of these is not now possible. Enclosed by the 19th century, there are indications from the Ordnance Survey that the lanes west of Pwll-Iago cut through these fields, allowing an inference (cautiously tentative) that these agricultural signifiers pre-dated the establishment of not only the tracks but also Ty-uchaf itself.
- 6.8 Thirdly, there is the lost farm of Maes, adopting a name which would usually indicate a former open field. Unlike the clear signs on the bank of the Tanat opposite Maes, there are, however, no obvious relict traces of an open field on the south side of the river. In itself this might not be evidence enough to question the open-field association, but there are several other factors that might have a bearing: we should notice the extremely straight boundaries to the north-west of Maes farm, an indicator often of late (i.e. 18th or 19th-century) enclosure, and also the fact that several of the fields to the west of Maes had (in the mid-19th-century tithe survey) the field-name *Rhos*, usually indicative of moor or damp, low-lying ground such as a flood plain. These together with the fact that Pwll-Iago held a block of two such fields completely detached from their main landholding in Cwm Llech suggests that this area, damp low-lying ground where the Goch converged on the Tanat, was separated into fields at a late date, previously having been common grazing and meadow. More generally, the prevalence of *rhos* and *wern* names along the valley should be remarked.
- 6.9 The remaining fields along Cwm Llech are irregularly shaped and of variable size. LiDAR and superficial observations in the field indicate that many have lynchet scarps for their boundaries usually reinforced by scrubby tree-based vegetation, hedges or stone walls. The patterning particularly on the Tŷ-uchaf side of the valley (though less so on the south side of the Goch) is reminiscent of what was in place at Tŷ-Draw, Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr (Britnell *et al* 2008) before the landscape organisation of the later 19th century. But on both sides, enclosure of the valley slopes had gone about as high up the side as it realistically could, given the constraints of the natural topography, by the middle of the 19th century.

Tracks

- 6.10 A trackway is visible on each face of the valley, well above the valley floor, but below the more precipitous slopes. The pattern is familiar in many Welsh places with the main communication lines following the most comfortable course. Indeed it is quite feasible that these are virtually the earliest visible features in this and other similar landscapes, tracks that were fashioned before there was permanent settlement when the hills were accessed for seasonal pasturing.
- 6.11 The course of the track that serves both Pwll-Iago and Tŷ-uchaf is interesting for the deviation in its course between the two farms. A contour-hugging track which is what would have been expected beyond Pwll-Iago instead dips down towards a ford across the Goch, before bifurcating, one arm ascending to serve Tŷ-uchaf. There are several scenarios that might be invoked to explain these anomalies, but perhaps the most obvious one is that the early track

was abandoned when a small field system was created to the west of Pwll-Iago and that track to the ford allowed access to the hill pastures via the track on the southern slopes of the valley. Later, a new lane was required to serve Tŷ-uchaf when it was created, and this allowed the contour-following track on the northern side of the valley to be brought back into commission.

Seasonal settlement and summer grazing

- 6.12 No seasonal settlements (*hafodydd*) are known in Cwm Llech, though these would probably only be recognised as earthworks through fieldwork.
- 6.13 Valleys such as this would almost certainly have provided access to the seasonal grazing grounds, even if they were not exploited themselves. However, Britnell (1994, fig. 1.3) was the first to point out that there are two *hafod* field names in Cwm Llech – Hafod You[----] and Cae tan y fotty – both high up the southern flank of the valley on Craig-las land. The significance of field names (as opposed to place-names) containing variants of the element *hafod* is as far as we are aware not a topic that has seen much study, so the meaning of these names is unclear. They could perhaps signify resting grounds for stock being herded to the summer pastures, but their occurrence nevertheless does introduce the subject of transhumance into the Cwm Llech discussion.
- 6.14 Much of Pennant Melangell was open upland in the 19th century, much as it is today. Beyond the enclosed lands of the valley, the hill grazings were extensive, and the importance of sheep is shown by the number of sheepfolds shown on the early Ordnance Survey maps. Three, perhaps four are depicted beyond the head of the valley (Britnell 1994, fig. 1.3)

Tŷ-uchaf and partible inheritance

- 6.15 The pattern of landholding offered by the mid-19th-century Tithe survey (the earliest source available to us) is illuminating. As would be expected, all the farms shown on the Ordnance Survey map, held groups of fields although for Rhyd-y-felin there were two holdings, the house itself and the farm of the same name, while Maes was no more than smallholding of two fields.
- 6.16 The southern slopes of Cwm Llech were dominated by the farm of Craig-las whose fields ran the full length of the valley and had an area of 109 acres. More significant was the patterning on the north side of the valley. Rhyd y Felin comprised two blocks of land linked only along the river, with the farmhouse established in the larger, more northerly one. The house lay beside the Goch, and the more southerly block of land lay on the far side of the watercourse. Rhyd y felin farm also had two discrete blocks which were not contiguous and were not linked, with the added anomaly that the farmhouse was completely surrounded by the land of its neighbour. Together, however, the two formed a cohesive block of about 53 acres, but in the mid-19th century they were farmed by families with different surnames.
- 6.17 The picture higher up the valley is even more remarkable. Pwll-Iago farmed land in six different and discrete blocks, together with two open-field strips. Two of the blocks were at a distance from the farmhouse, one beside Maes and the other north of Tan-y-foel. Tŷ-isaf had land in three blocks together with one open-field strip. Tŷ-uchaf had five blocks and three open-field strips; at least two of these blocks consisting of single fields appear to have been accessible only by crossing a neighbour's ground. Individually these three farms had 33, 13 and 22 acres respectively, With the exception of Pwll-Iago's outlying fields, the three holdings collectively covered a cohesive area on the north bank of the Goch; only a single field, belonging to Pwll-Iago lay on the south side of the river, while Tŷ-uchaf had a valley-floor field that spanned the stream.

- 6.18 This fragmented landholding pattern bears a deep similarity to that of eighteenth-century date around Tŷ-Draw in Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr on the north side of the Tanat some years ago (Silvester in Britnell *et al* 2008). There the fragmented pattern was swept away when the layout of the farming landscape was re-organised in the nineteenth century. In Cwm Llech the pattern survived for longer. The explanation advanced for Mynydd Mawr was based on the concept of partible heritage, the division of assets between all the heirs, in contrast to primogeniture whereby the eldest inherited all. In law primogeniture was imposed on Wales in the mid-sixteenth century after the Act of Union, although in practice it is assumed that the old approach continued for some time after in the more conservative areas of the country. The division of a single landholding into two at Rhyd-y-felin would explain the fragmented picture at the mouth of the valley. Equally it is a picture displayed at the higher end of the valley; it would explain too the over-neighbourly proximity of the farmhouses at Pwll-Iago and Ty-isaf, and also at Rhyd-y-felin (Whether any remnant survives into the twenty-first century has not been established).
- 6.19 We might speculate on the progress of this fragmentation around Pwll-Iago which on the grounds of size and location was surely the earliest farmholding to be established. From the relative size of the three holdings, the relative number of strips in the open field and the location of the three farmhouses and particularly the blocks of ground that each farmed, it could be inferred, though with absolute certainty, that Tŷ-uchaf was hived off from Pwll-Iago with a new dwelling being created at such a distance from its parent that it broadly fitted into the overall spacing of farmhouses on the south- and east-facing slopes of Cwm Llech. At a later date Tŷ-isaf was also created out of Pwll-Iago, leaving Tŷ-isaf untouched.
- 6.20 The date when these divisions were made cannot be deduced from the evidence in the landscape, but it is worth raising the issue of the small open field below Tŷ-uchaf. The occurrence of open-field agriculture in the Welshies and other non-anglicised regions of the Principality have in the past been largely the provenance of historians and historical geographers such as Jones Pierce and Glanville Jones, less concerned with the chronology and time-spans, and their landscape manifestations, than with their place in the societal structuring and agrarian systems of Welsh Wales. So, while it is generally assumed that open fields, regardless of size and place, were a feature of the Middle Ages, it is altogether less evident as to whether they were introduced before the Norman Conquest (regardless of which phase of the Conquest is being discussed) and, more importantly in the context of Cwm Llech, for how long they continued to be introduced into the landscape. In other words, in a remote area of mid-Wales might an open field be created in say the Tudor era. There are of course certain implications deriving from the establishment of an open field. Firstly its presence implies that there was a minimum of two but in reality at least three landholders who required a share of the land. Secondly, it implies that there was some land which because of a combination of soils, slope, altitude, aspect, location and perhaps other environmental factors were coveted by all the farmers and that this type of land was in short supply. And thirdly perhaps these factors continued to be recognised as significant over time, resisting the rationalisation of strips in the open fields and their enclosure.
- 6.21 Can we assume that the small open field in Cwm Llech resulted from the division of the larger landholding of Pwll-Iago, or might it be the sole-surviving remnant of a larger open field – and here we might recall the strip-like elements, apparently cut by the track between Pwll-Iago and Tŷ-uchaf? Against this is the requirement for a group of pre-existing farms of which we have no known trace whose open field strips remained in just one small area. This seems rather unlikely. The most likely chronological context for the expansion of settlement into Cwm

Llech is probably the fifteenth or sixteenth century and would have followed rather than preceded the utilisation of the main valley of the Tanat.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The ruins of Tŷ-uchaf have provided a rare opportunity to examine in detail the construction and usage of a 17th-century Welsh farmhouse. In interpreting the house and its farm buildings we are fortunate to have a 19th-century painting which appears to present an accurate depiction of Tŷ-uchaf, as well as records from the 1930s when, though already ruinous, substantially more of the structure remained standing than is presently the case. The programme of survey and excavation has provided a detailed record of the surviving structure which acts not only as an archive but will also assist in developing plans for the reconstruction of the main house.
- 7.2 Prior to the investigations there had been some debate over the origins of Tŷ-uchaf and whether the standing structure had replaced an earlier, possibly late medieval, longhouse. The excavated evidence, however, suggests that this was not the case and the house was built on a previously unoccupied site. A substantial plinth built of local boulders was constructed torevet a platform oriented along the contours of the slope. This appears to have been levelled using material quarried from the slope behind in the area to be occupied by the rear wing of the building, which incorporated a byre.
- 7.3 The house was well-built from local stone and included two massive chimney stacks, one in the western gable and the other essentially freestanding at the rear, the main walling here being of timber-frame, rather than stone. Original details survive, including a row of nesting holes in the upper part of the south wall and three matching wooden mullioned windows. The roof was of slate in varying sizes, presumably quarried in the Llangynog area. Internally, the house was floored with cobbles and stone slabs, being divided into two main rooms by a timber-framed partition. The floor in the western room was constructed of smaller cobbles, including a section where quartz cobbling predominated and this would appear to have been the parlour. The massive fireplace was later reduced by the insertion of a bread oven, built on a stone plinth. There is no direct evidence for the position of the stairs, although it is believed that they were to the right of the fireplace.
- 7.4 The kitchen was also floored with cobbles, but also with an area of large slabs in front of the fireplace. The level of the floor was slightly higher than that in the parlour. The only entrance to the house was along the eastern side of the kitchen fireplace, via a passage which ran along the rear of the chimney which was used for feeding cattle in the adjacent byre.
- 7.5 A small outshut cut into the slope at the rear of the parlour appears to be contemporary with the rest of the house. Its position on the northern side of the house, and also the fact that it was below ground level at the rear, suggest that this is likely to have been used as a pantry and dairy.
- 7.6 The byre, in the rear of wing of the building, saw two main phases of construction. Originally earthen-floored with several stone-filled drains this was later reorganised with the introduction of a partly slabbed floor beneath the stalls and a slab-floored manure passage.

- 7.7 The house was the centre of a small group of farm buildings which included a barn, cartshed and another building, perhaps also a barn or stables, with a fourth building set above the house. A revetment wall alongside the farm buildings contains a stone-lined recess which may be a goose pen, or possibly a beebole.
- 7.8 On the basis of the initials carved above one of the first-floor windows, Tŷ-uchaf appears to have been built in 1665 by the poet Cadwaladr Roberts, whose grave lies in the nearby churchyard of St Melangell's. He was a contemporary of Huw Morys, and the dialogue poem concerning matrimony, jointly composed by them, shows that they were close acquaintances. He also composed some five nativity carols; one of these was published by David Jones of Trefriw in *Blodeu-Gerdd Cymry* and his satire on smallpox is also included in that volume. His poem begging a harp of Wiliam Llwyd, Llangedwyn, for Siôn Prys is of social interest (Cwrtmawr MS. 128 (122)). 'Llyfr Cadwaladr Roberts, 1676' (Cwrtmawr MS. 227), is his anthology of poetry by some of his contemporaries, including Huw Morys and Edward Morris. The tunes to which he wrote are frequently noted in the manuscripts. He was a very mediocre poet, and his poetry contains a profusion of colloquial forms. His burial on 14 February 1708/9 is recorded in the bishops' transcripts for Pennant Melangell. Some say that he was of the Roberts family of Branas in Edeirnion (Prof. David James Bowen, *Welsh Biography online*).
- 7.9 A further stage of excavation will be required in due course, once the chimneys have been consolidated and the scaffolding removed. In particular, the area surrounding the freestanding chimney stack has the potential to reveal significant information regarding the relationship between the house and byre. The current proposals are for the removal of the byre to allow the construction of a new rear wing. The standing structure in this area is already adequately recorded, although its removal will afford an opportunity to complete the investigations of the byre interior and immediate surrounds. Finally, a watching brief will be required during the building phase in order to record any buried archaeology which may be disturbed by excavations for services and other groundworks.

8 ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

- 8.1 The excavations were supervised by Kate Pack, with the assistance of Sophie Watson, Menna Bell, Richard Hankinson, Viviana Culshaw, Wendy Owen and Ian Grant. Thanks are also due to the following: Bob Silvester, CPAT, for his study of the surrounding landscape; Adam Stanford, AerialCam; Will Davies, Cadw; the owner, Mr Robert Jones; Jamie Richardson, Tŷ Afal; and Rebecca and Andrew Cooke, Boccan Ltd.

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Maps

- 1821 *Ordnance Survey surveyors' drawing* (for Llangynog)
- 1839 *Tithe Survey* Pennant Melangell 1839 (App) and 1842 (map)
- 1887 *Ordnance Survey* 1st edition 1:2500, 04.15

APPENDIX 1

SITE ARCHIVE

Site archive

44 context record forms

20 Drawings:

2 A1 site plans

6 A2 site plans

6 A3 site plans

1 A4 site plans

Digital photographs

Film 3729 1 to 28 – topographical survey

Film 3752 1 to 542 – AerialCam survey

Film 3789 1 to 67 – buildings survey

Film 3800 1 to 137 – excavation

Building survey – elevations and plans in DWG and PDF formats

photographic catalogue

context register

drawings register

finds register

levels record forms

Specification, brief and correspondence

APPENDIX 2 SURVEY AND EXCAVATION PLANS

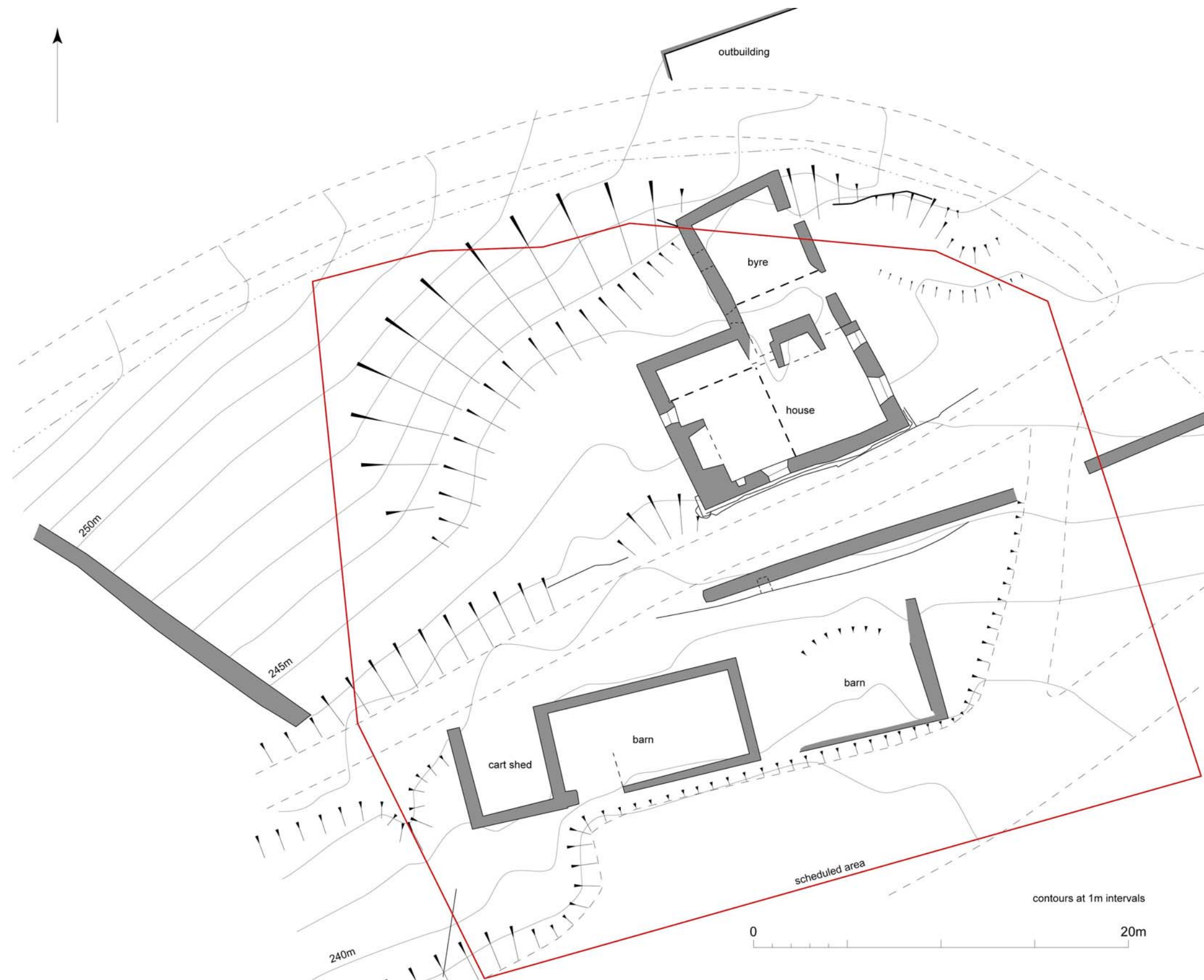


Fig. 16 Topographical survey of Tŷ-uchaf and the farm buildings

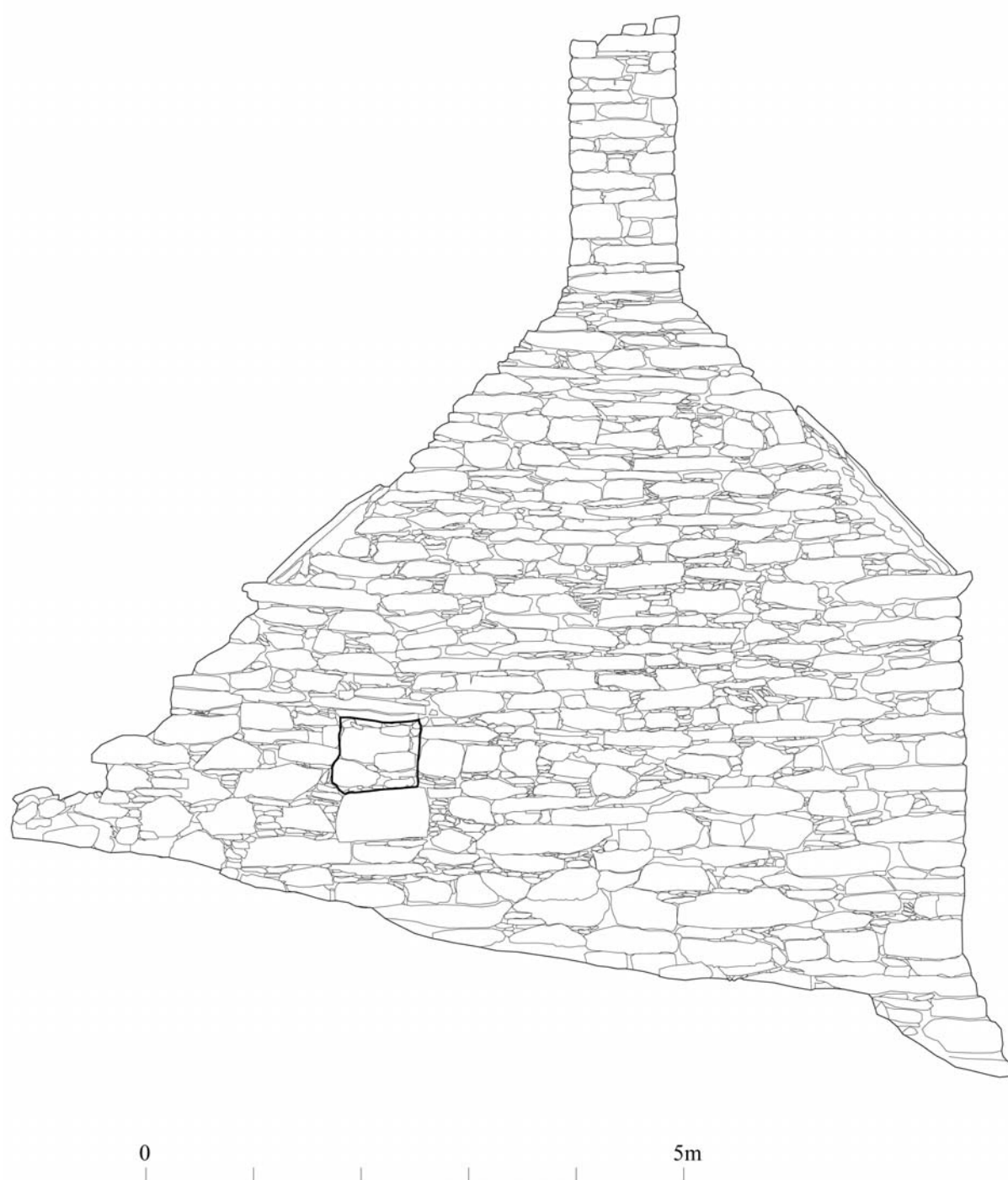


Fig. 17 West exterior elevation of the house

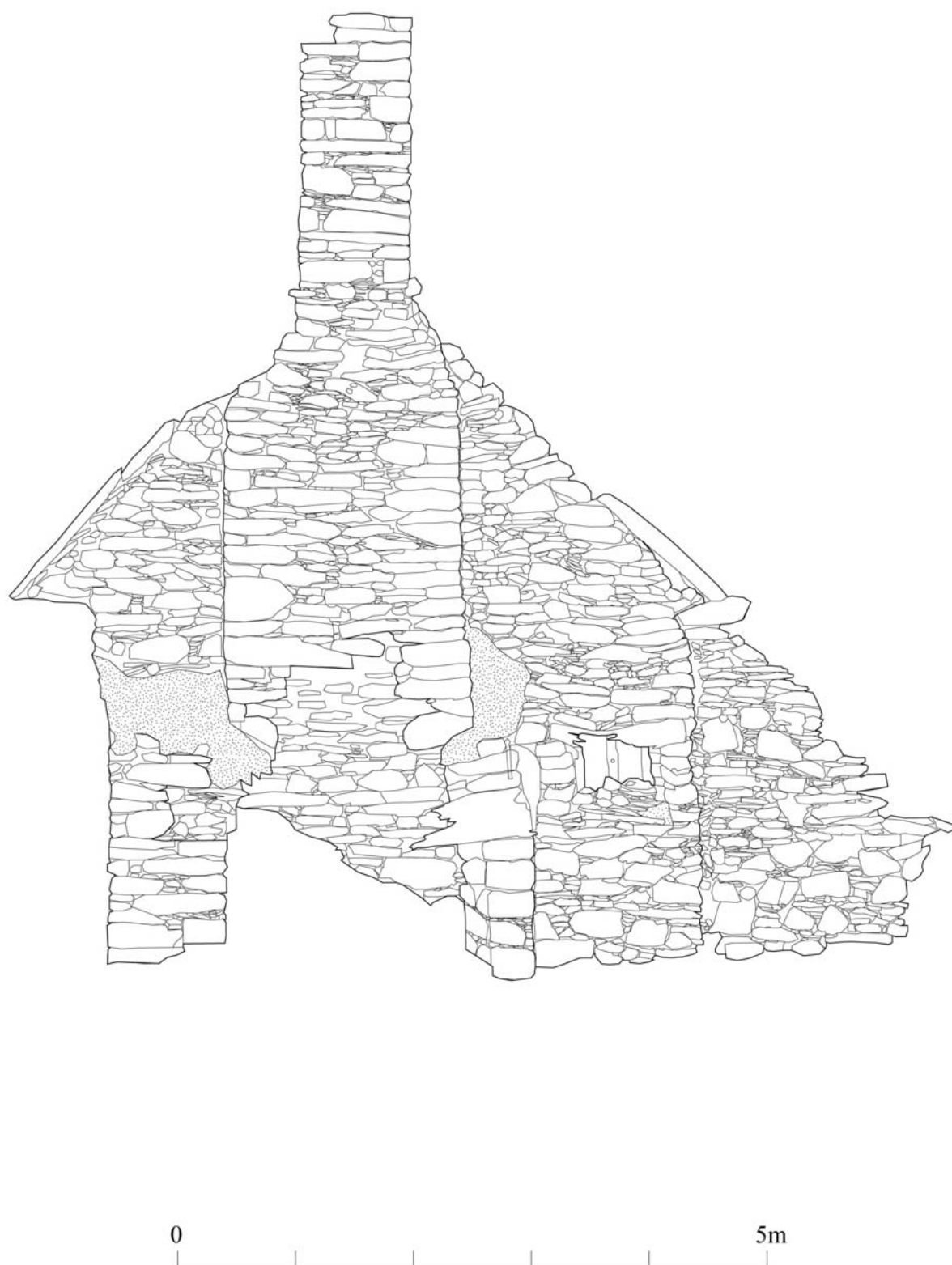


Fig. 18 West internal elevation of the house

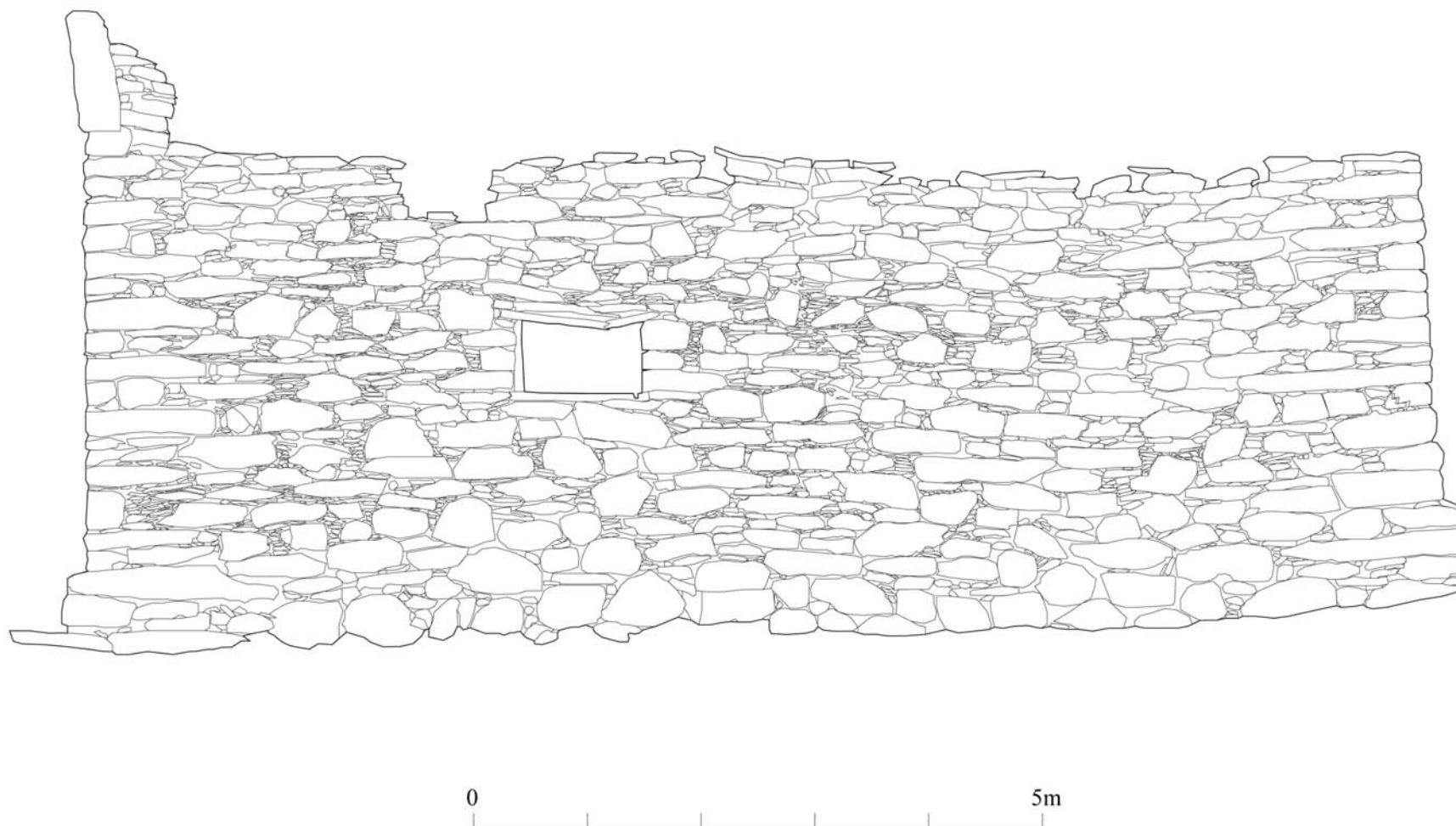


Fig. 19 South external elevation of the house

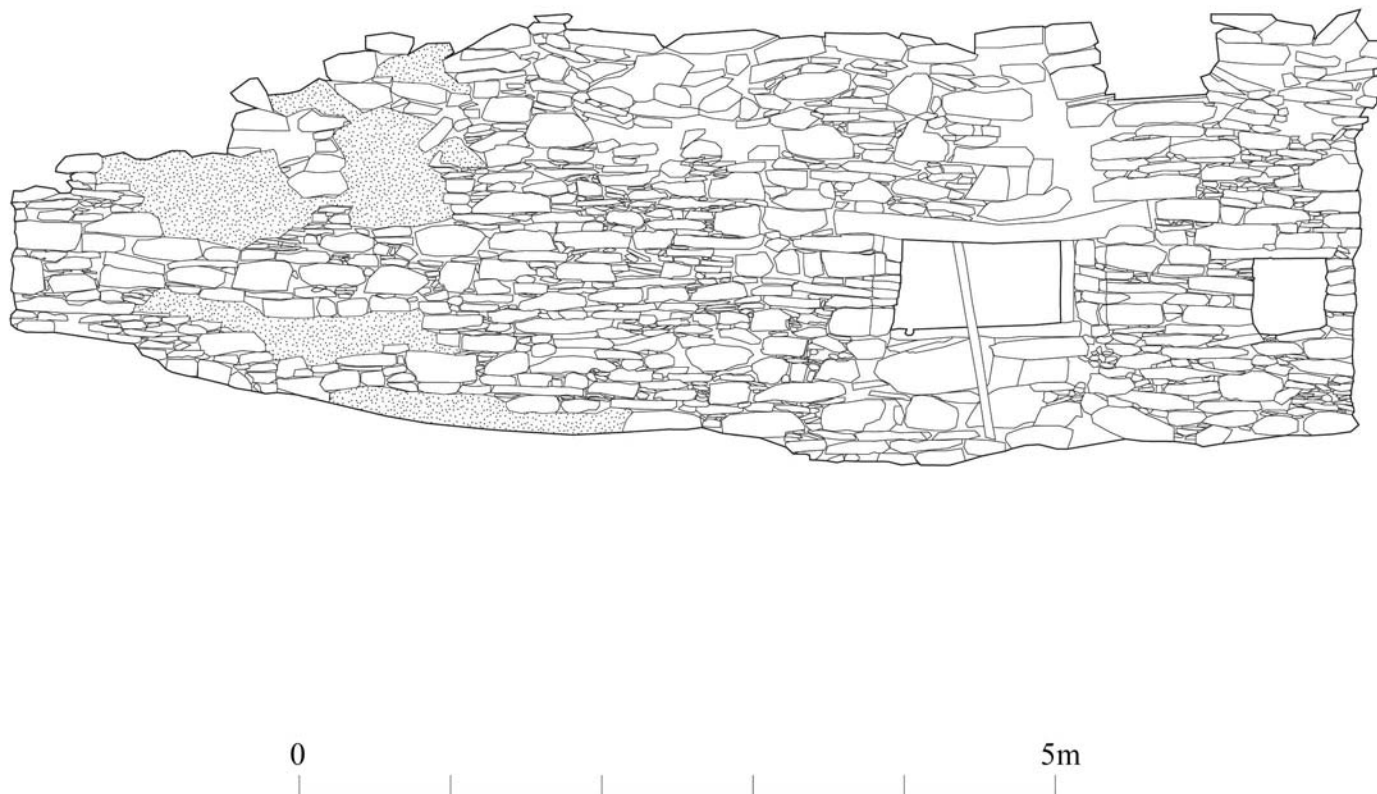


Fig. 20 South internal elevation of the house



Fig. 21 East external elevation of the house

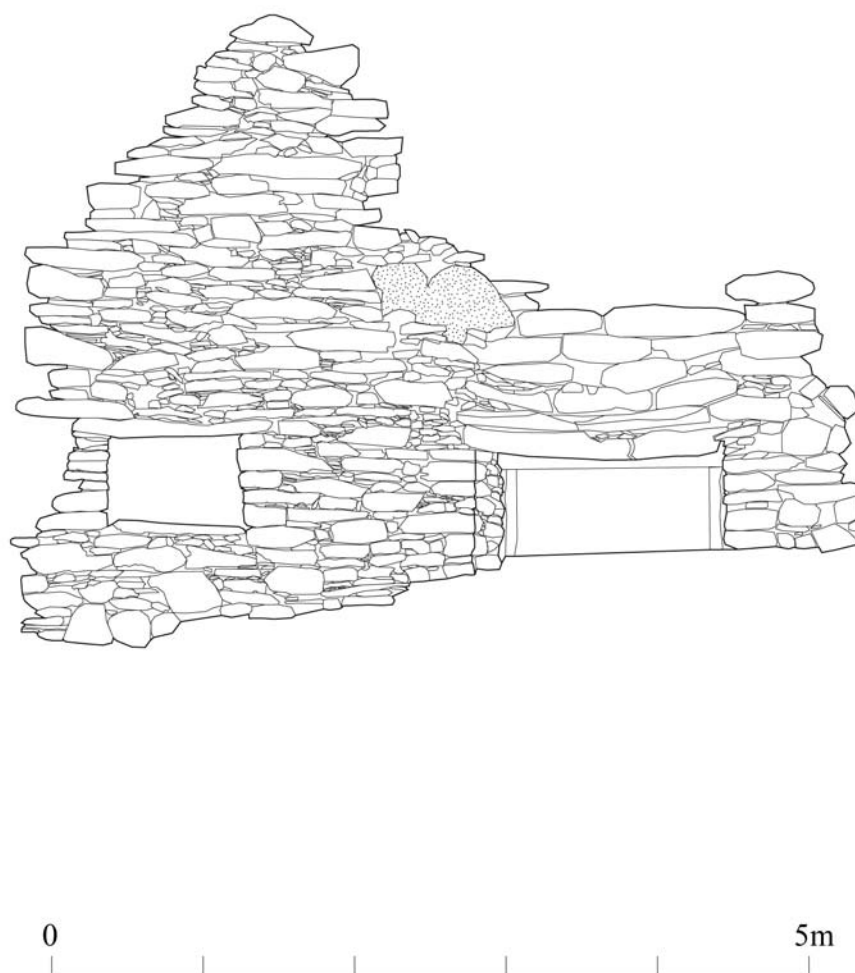


Fig. 22 East internal elevation of the house

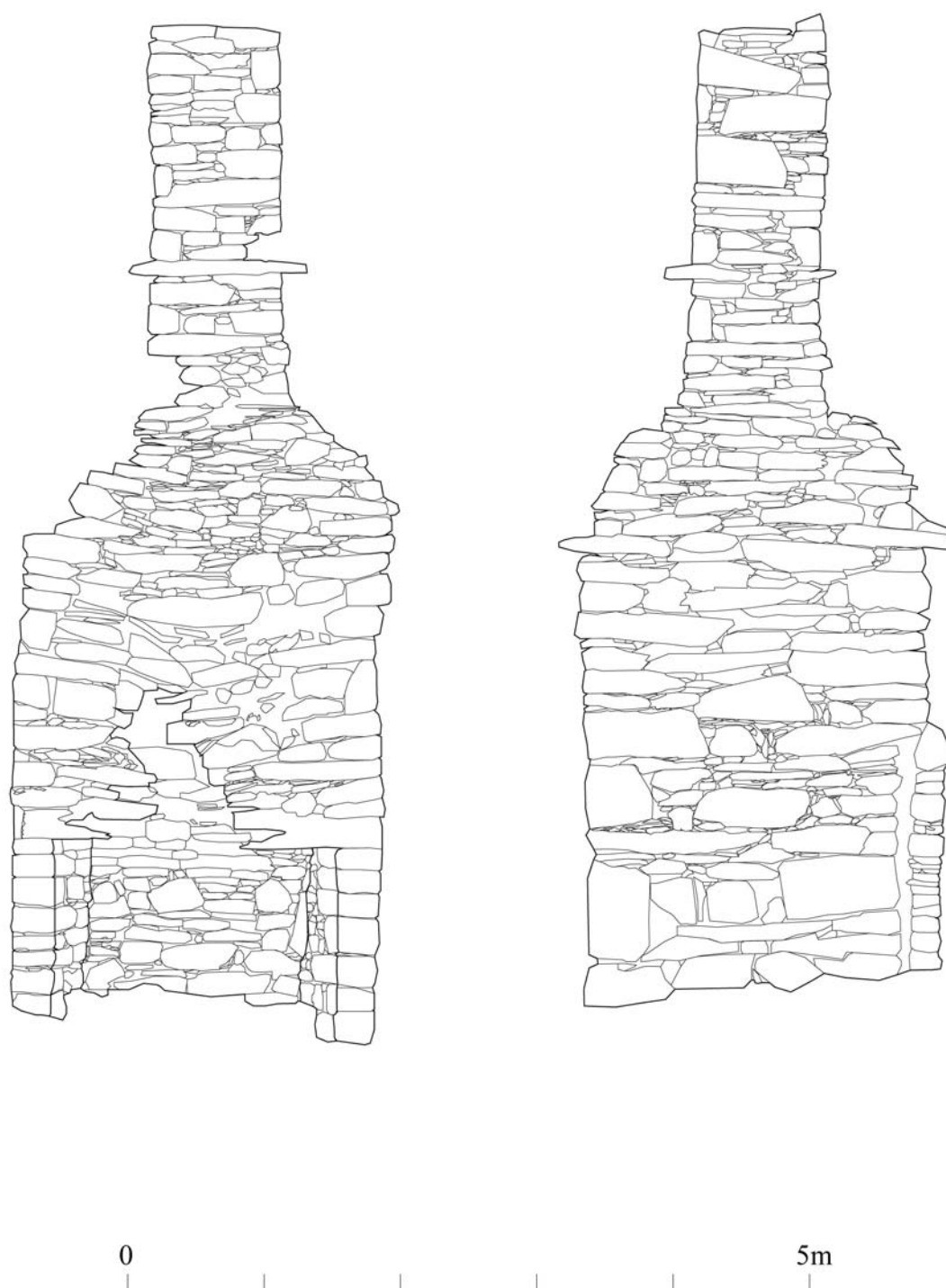


Fig. 23 Internal and external view of the northern chimney

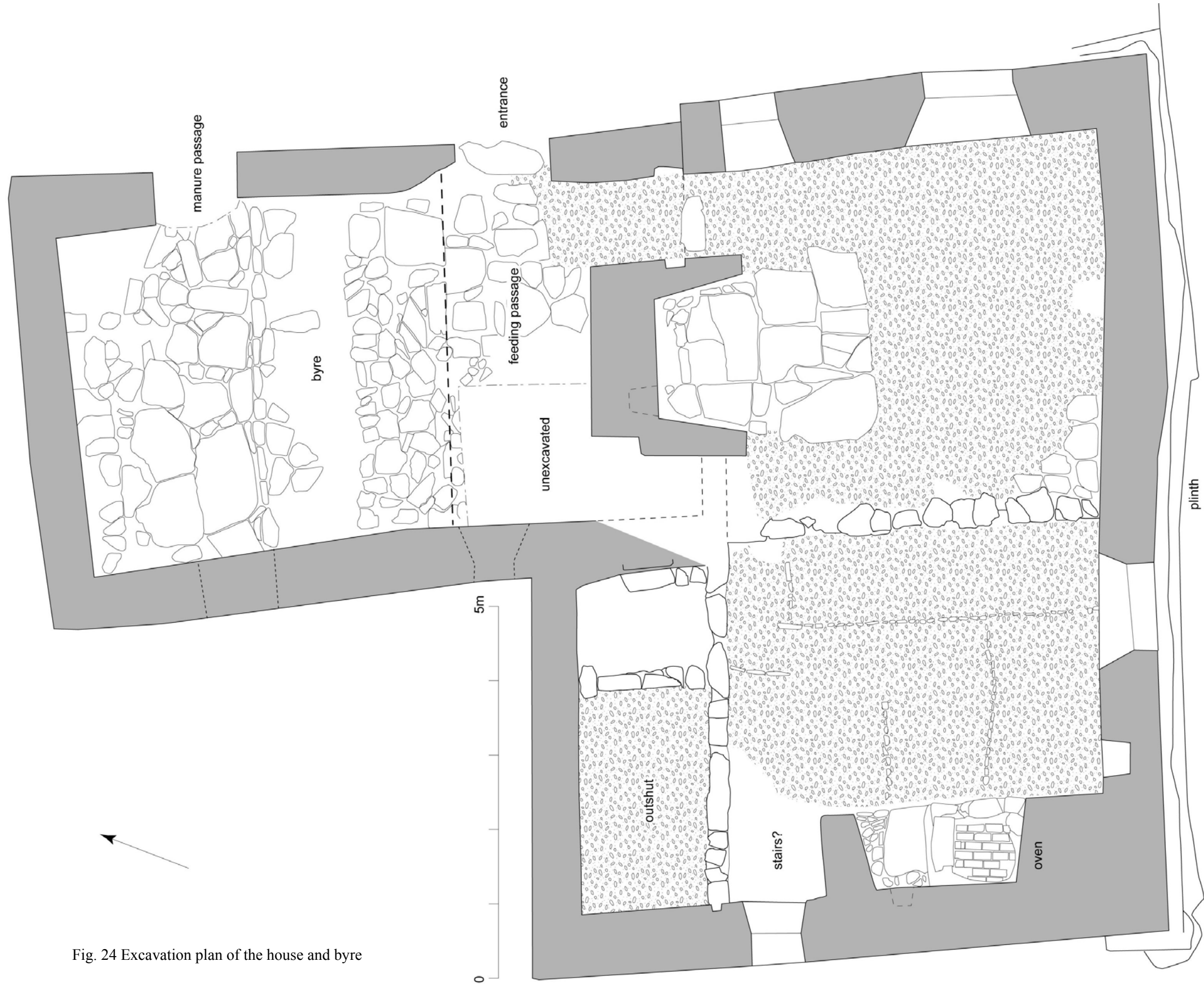


Fig. 24 Excavation plan of the house and byre