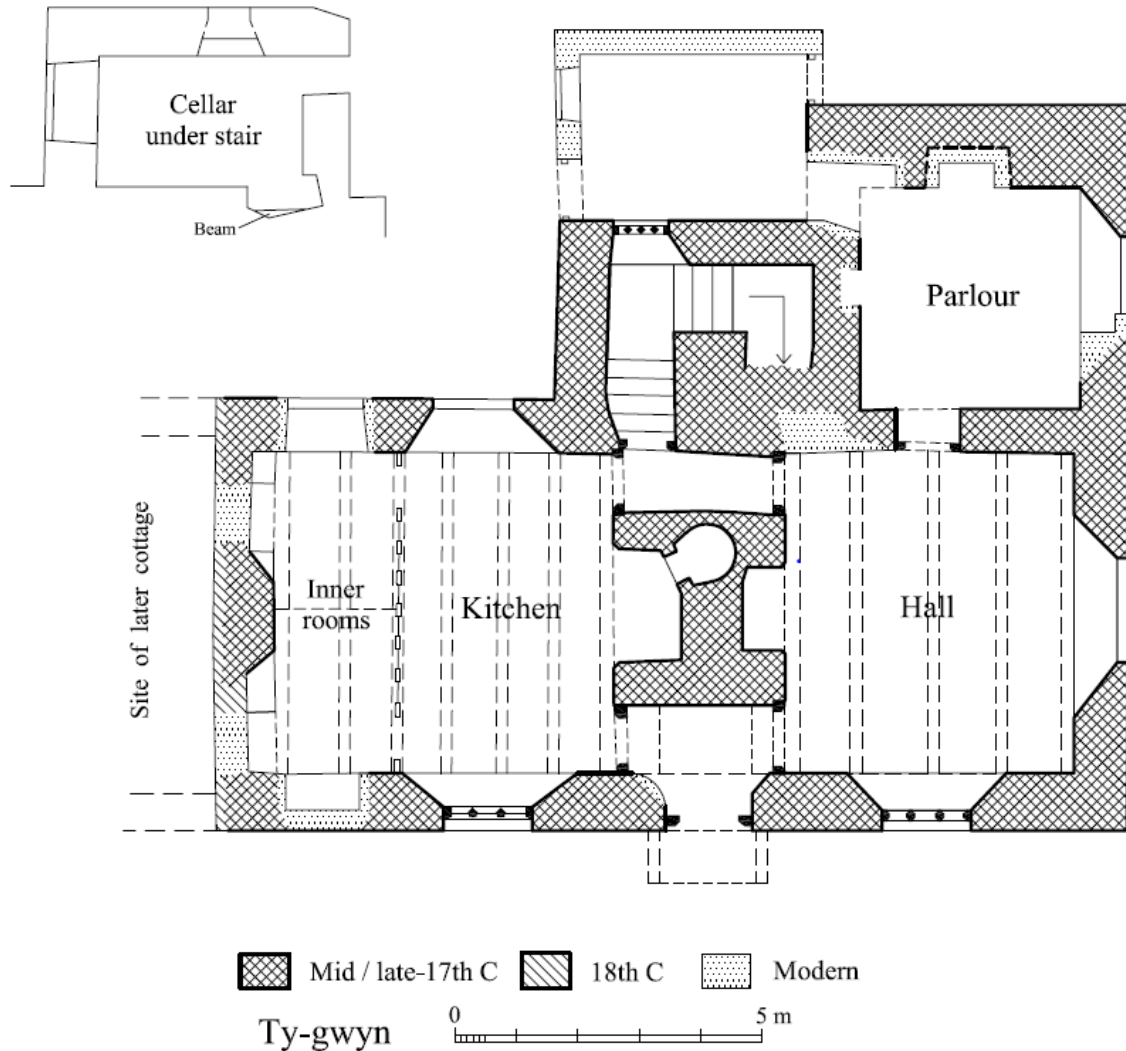


Name: Ty-gwyn

OS grid ref: SO 274 021

Parish / Location: Trevethin / Pontypool

Maps:



Description: A large and imposing Renaissance-style house located just NW of Pontypool town centre. The building is constructed across the sloping hillside, roughly in a NW-SE alignment, and is separated from the farm buildings at a lower level by a modern road. It has an L-shaped plan comprising a lobby-entry house with a rear parlour and stair wing, and formerly had a long range of buildings adjoining the upper (NW) end, including a cottage, removed some years ago. It has rubble stone walls, mostly rendered apart from the NW gable, and a modern tiled roof (apparently replacing earlier thatch). There are two chimneys with ornamental diagonal stacks, one having been rebuilt square and another added to the side to serve an inserted fireplace in the attic. The NW gable of the house was extensively reconstructed when the adjoining cottage was added, and the outline of two blocked windows with rough drip hoods and labels can be seen at first floor level. There would have been two similar windows at ground level. A third window in the attic has a reconstructed three-light diamond mullioned timber frame.

Ty-gwyn is Listed and retains many original features both inside and out. Whoever built the house had gentry aspirations, and this is reflected in the quality of the timber details, the symmetrical arrangement of the original windows, and an unusually complex layout not normally encountered in these upland farms. It has recently been renovated and the surrounding undergrowth cut back so that it now stands in impressive isolation. Within the garden there is a small summerhouse of stone construction with pointed brick arches and

doors, and a slate roof. This contains a cross-corner fireplace and has been built up against the existing boundary wall, though it is now ruinous. It is said to have originally been an earth closet.

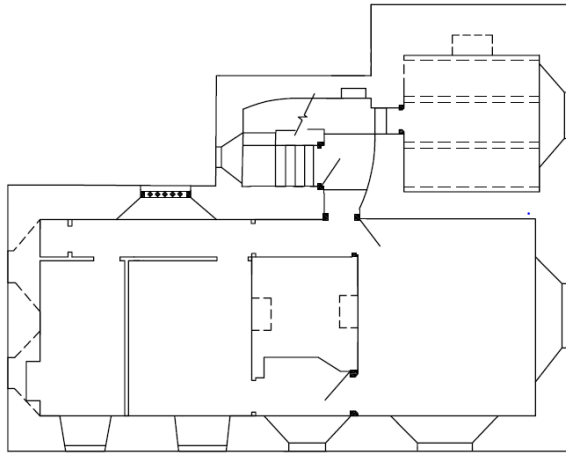
The house is entered through a large Tudor-arch wooden door under a tiled gabled hood supported on chamfered brackets. Inside there is a lobby, leading to rooms on either side of the massive central stack. These rooms are interpreted as a hall and kitchen on the above plan. The **kitchen** has an impressive fireplace with a slightly damaged timber lintel, chamfered and stopped dead against the jambs, with a small triangular-headed salt niche cut into the upper LH side. The dressed stone jambs have narrow chamfers with diagonal stops. There is an original stone-lined bake oven in one side of the fireplace. There are two window openings in the front and rear walls, both wide and low and deeply splayed, with long timber lintels chamfered and stopped dead against the jambs. All the original window openings in the house are of the same type. The front window retains a three-light timber frame, with flat-faced mullions with a raised bead moulding on the exterior, but triangular in section on the inside. This is a curious feature, but as there are signs of alterations on the frame, it could be that this was originally a normal diamond mullioned window that has been trimmed back to receive glass. The kitchen has a ceiling of closely-set joist-beams, having broad chamfers with hollow & fillet stops. One beam has the slots for a dismantled post-&-panel screen that formerly divided two **inner rooms**. The partition separating these rooms has also been removed, but its position is marked by H & F stops on the inner side of the chamfered ceiling beam. There is a small window in the rear lateral wall, and a cupboard in the corresponding position on the front wall (possibly marking the site of another window); however, neither of these openings is original and each inner room was illuminated by a deeply splayed window in the end gable. As mentioned above, this end wall has been reconstructed, and doors have been cut through into the demolished cottage; but the original arrangement of the windows is indicated by the chamfered lintels.

Back in the entrance lobby a RH turn leads into the **hall**, which has a slightly smaller dressed stone fireplace than the kitchen, with H & F stops and a cambered timber lintel stopped dead against the jambs. There are two of the usual splayed window openings, that in the front retaining a timber sunk-chamfered wooden frame intended for glazing. The joist-beams are slightly more widely set than in the kitchen and are distinguished by ornate stops (a keeled stop with torus). All the original doors in the house are the same; fairly massive timber frames with Tudor-arch heads and H & F stops. A damaged door leads from the hall into a small room in the rear wing. This is interpreted as a **parlour**, and it has a single large window opening and a fireplace in the end gable. However, this room has been thoroughly modernised and no early features are visible. A narrow doorway has been cut through the side wall into the small **cellar** under the stairwell, but this seems to be a later alteration, and the original entrance may have been in a corner of the hall, where there is a distinct kink in the wall and a matching recess in the cellar. This recess retains a fairly substantial timber sill beam running underneath the rear wall of the house, which is tempting to interpret as the remains of a timber-framed predecessor of the existing house. The cellar has a large modern window and what is probably a blocked original window.

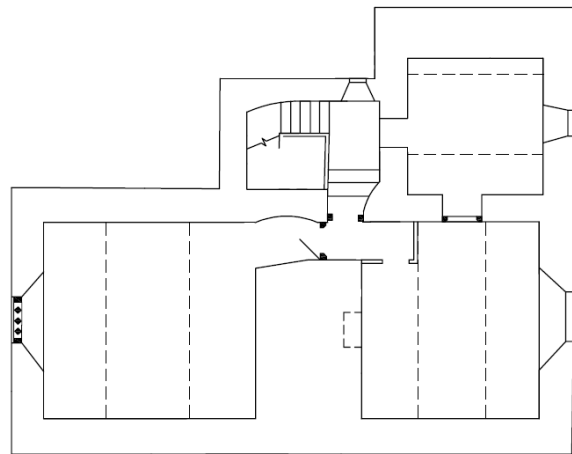
The stair itself is housed in a projecting turret at the back of the house and is reached along a lobby connecting the hall and kitchen. It is entered through a Tudor-arch doorframe and has a right-angled arrangement of heavy wooden treads. At landing level there is an original four-light diamond mullioned window (with added glass) and like all the other window openings, has a chamfered timber lintel stopped dead against the jambs. Another Tudor-arched door leads into the room over the parlour, which has been considerably modernised and transformed into a bathroom but retains a joist-beam ceiling stopped like that in the hall (keeled & torus). The **first-floor** over the main part of the house has been thoroughly modernised and all the ceiling beams are hidden by plastered ceilings. There seems to have been small back-to-back fireplaces in the central stack. A few Tudor-arched doors survive, one leading into what may have been a small closet over the entrance lobby. The two narrow window opening in the frontage appear to be wholly modern. The only other early feature is a very fine 6-light diamond mullioned window in the rear wall. Perhaps it served to illuminate a single large chamber, but the two blocked windows in the NW gable must be accounted for; therefore, it is possible that the first-floor was originally partitioned into three chambers as it was on the ground floor.

The stair continues up to the attic rooms. That over the parlour has a small and low modernised window, and retains two roof trusses with chamfered edges, dovetail-jointed collars and two rows of trenched purlins. There is a blocked Tudor-arch door that led into the attic over the main block, which suggests that the

existing doorway off the landing must be an alteration. Two more Tudor-arched doors survive here, and a pair of identical roof trusses. A brick flue has been built against the central stack, probably to serve an inserted fireplace to warm the smaller room. The four-light diamond mullioned window in the NW gable appears to be a modern copy of the original.



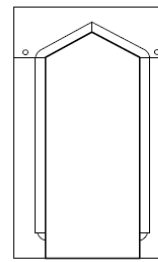
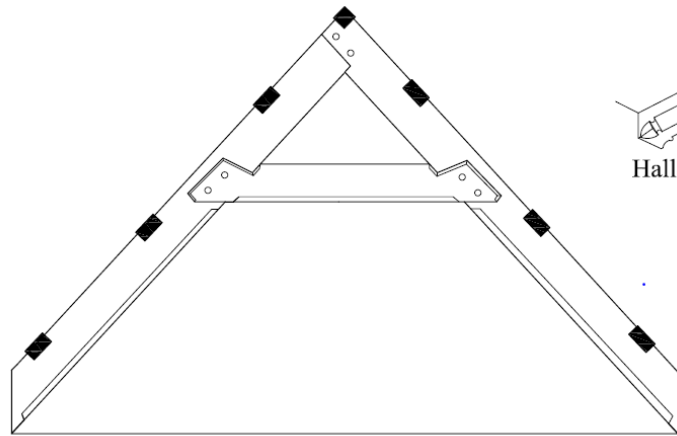
First floor (sketch plan)



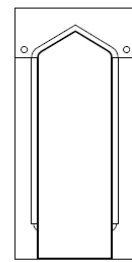
Attic (sketch plan)

Development: all the surviving details suggest the house was built around the middle of the 17th century (any later, and it might be expected that the more fashionable ogee stop would have been used). The question is whether Ty-Gwyn was built in more than one phase, as Fox and Raglan (*Monmouthshire Houses Vol 2 pg.40*) and the Cadw Listing notes suggest. Looking at the plan it does appear that the LH side of the house was a typical upland farmhouse, comprising a hall and two inner rooms, which was later reconstructed when the rest of the house was later added - this would explain the difference in the ceiling beams and window frames in both parts. However, having windows in the gable end is *not* a typical feature of the smaller farmhouses, and these appear to be original, rather than alterations. Furthermore, the Tudor-arched doors are the same throughout the house, from top to bottom, as are the window lintels. The difference in the ceiling beams over the hall and parlour can be explained as a desire to enhance the rooms at that end of the house. The hall has a sunk-chamfered window designed for glass, which Fox and Raglan broadly date to c.1590-1620; the front window in the kitchen is also glazed but, as noted, it seems to have been a modified unglazed frame. There are unglazed mullioned windows on the stair, the first-floor, and the attic. All these timber features strongly suggest the house was built to a unified and contemporary plan, with the finely carved beams and glazed windows reserved for the more important rooms, and the usual unglazed windows elsewhere. The only feature that does not fit into this theory is the kitchen fireplace, which has diagonal stops to the chamfer. This stop is an early feature and is not encountered anywhere else in the house. The fireplace has seemingly been reused, presumably from an older building on site and possibly of half-timbered construction (if the evidence of the sill beam in the stair cellar is taken at face value).

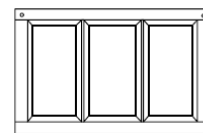
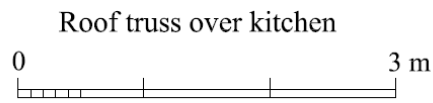
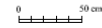
Therefore, it is suggested that Ty-gwyn was built in one go around the middle of the 17th century (apparently incorporating some stonework from a predecessor) to the new Renaissance style with its emphasis on symmetry and improved circulation. Many of these features appear in the upper-class houses of Monmouthshire, so we can assume that the builder was intent on expressing his status and aspirations in wood and stone. Yet the presence of unglazed windows shows that he was not all that removed from his poorer countrymen in the remoter upland farms, where glass was a luxury very few could afford.



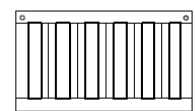
Hall door



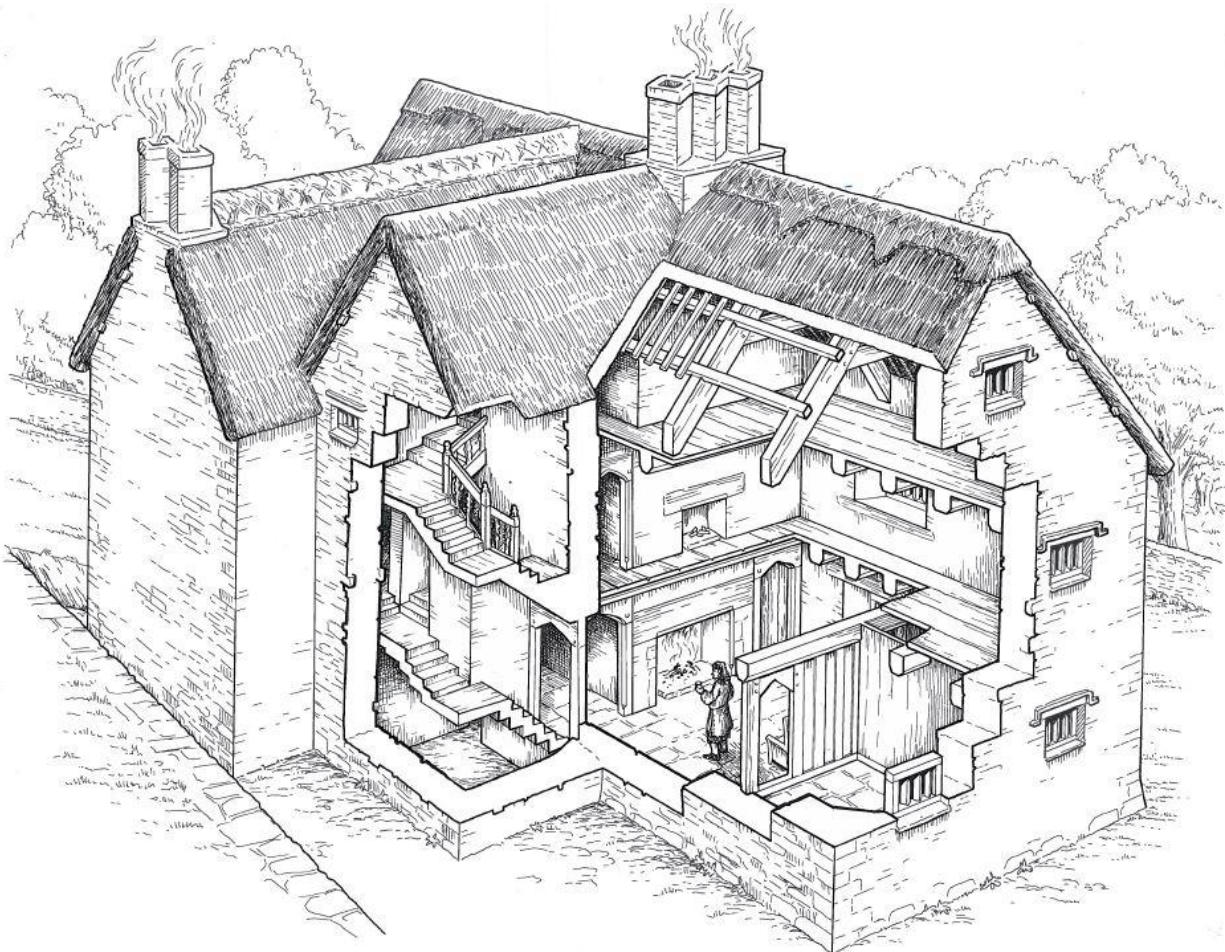
Stair door



Three-light sunk
chamfered window



Six-light diamond
mullioned window



Cutaway view through the rear of the house as it might have looked when first built, showing the large stair and rooms on the NW side of the central stack