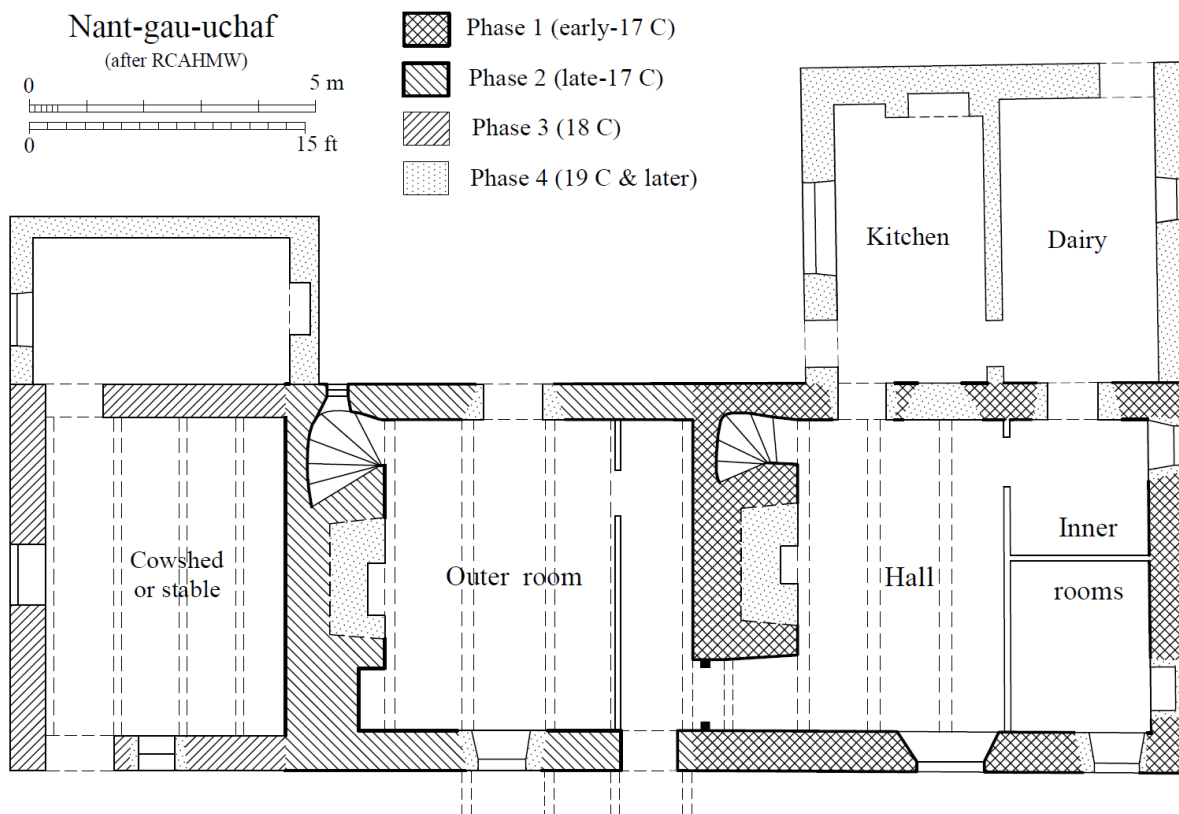


Name: Nant-gau-uchaf

OS grid ref: ST 196 998

Parish: Mynyddislwyn **Location:** Croespenmaen

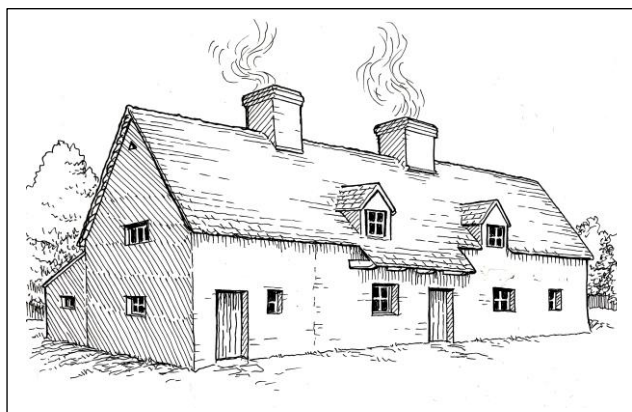
Maps:



Description: This large farmstead on the ridge between the Sirhowy and Ebbw valleys was demolished in 1977 and its site is now occupied by an industrial estate. Fortunately, the RCAHMW carried out a survey at the time, and this account is based on those notes. The above plan is also based on the survey, with hatching representing the likely structural phases.

The house consisted of a long, downhill-sited range, aligned roughly north-south, with two extensions at the rear. It had limewashed rubble walls, stone tiles, brick chimneys and inserted dormers on the first floor. A short section of a pentice survived along part of the east frontage at the time of survey (see drawing below, based on a sketch by Peter Smith). Most of the door and window openings had also been altered over the years.

The oldest part was the uphill end, comprising a typical hearth-passage house entered through a chamfered timber door with cambered head. The **hall** had an infilled inglenook fireplace and a joist-beam ceiling with broad chamfers and the usual hollow-&-fillet stops. Behind a modern partition were two **inner rooms**, that



on the west being a pantry, and the one on the east a small parlour. The latter had an inserted brick fireplace in the gable. The joist-beams here were concealed under a plastered ceiling. From the hall a stone winding stair (with a blocked window) led up to the first floor. This had been completely modernised and the roof trusses had apparently been replaced, although one was noted to have a dovetail-jointed collar so might be early.

On the downhill side of the hall was an **outer room**, which had a modern partition separating the entrance passage from the main

room. This room also had a blocked gable fireplace and winding stair, with a chamfered joist-beam ceiling with ogee stops. The beams of this part of the house projected through the front wall to support the pentice. The stair had a curious little circular window 20cm in diameter, carved out of a single slab of sandstone. Such openings have not been noticed elsewhere in upland Gwent (although something similar survives at Penrhiw-fawyddog not far to the north).

Beyond the outer room was an added cowshed or stable, with thin chamfered joist-beams and, at the back, a small lean-to extension with a fireplace (interpreted as a servant's room). Another larger extension was built off from the rear of the old house, which inevitably caused some rearrangement to the original windows on this side of the building. The extension appeared to be relatively modern, and was divided into two parts - a dairy (containing salting slabs), and a kitchen (with a large fireplace).

There were a number of ancillary buildings, most notably an impressive barn with a full length pentice, and an adjoining cowshed, situated on the east side of the yard. The roofs of both appeared to be late. Other buildings included a cart shed and pigsty.

Development: Nant-gau-uchaf was clearly an interesting building of several phases, the various additions resulting in a very elongated linear plan. Its loss is to be regretted. Judging from changes in the stonework and the varying timber details, it is clear that the upper end was the original house, probably early-seventeenth century in date, and that the outer room was added towards the end of the century. The small cowshed / stable at the lower end may have been added in the eighteenth century, and the two rear wings in the nineteenth.

A possibility voiced by the RCAHMW investigators is that the outer room could have been a separate house, making Nant-gau-uchaf an example of the Unit System. While this is a possibility, it will be noticed that the original hall could only have been reached by passing through the outer room. Therefore the two parts were not independent. The internal layout very closely resembles Twyn-gwyn at Pontypool which, although it also had duplicate stairs and fireplaces, is evidently one house, and not two.

Another puzzle is whether the pentice extended along the entire frontage of the house. The investigators assumed so, but only four beams survived and no other stubs were indicated on an exterior sketch made at the time. Admittedly, pentices are notoriously difficult features to identify when they have been cut away, but at some houses (such as Blaenllwynau, Mill Farm, Pistyll-gwyn and the aforementioned Twyn-gwyn) the pentices appear on the additions, and not on the original buildings. It may therefore be that the pentice at Nant-gau-uchaf only extended along the front of the outer room. Should old photographs of the house come to light, this question may be resolved.