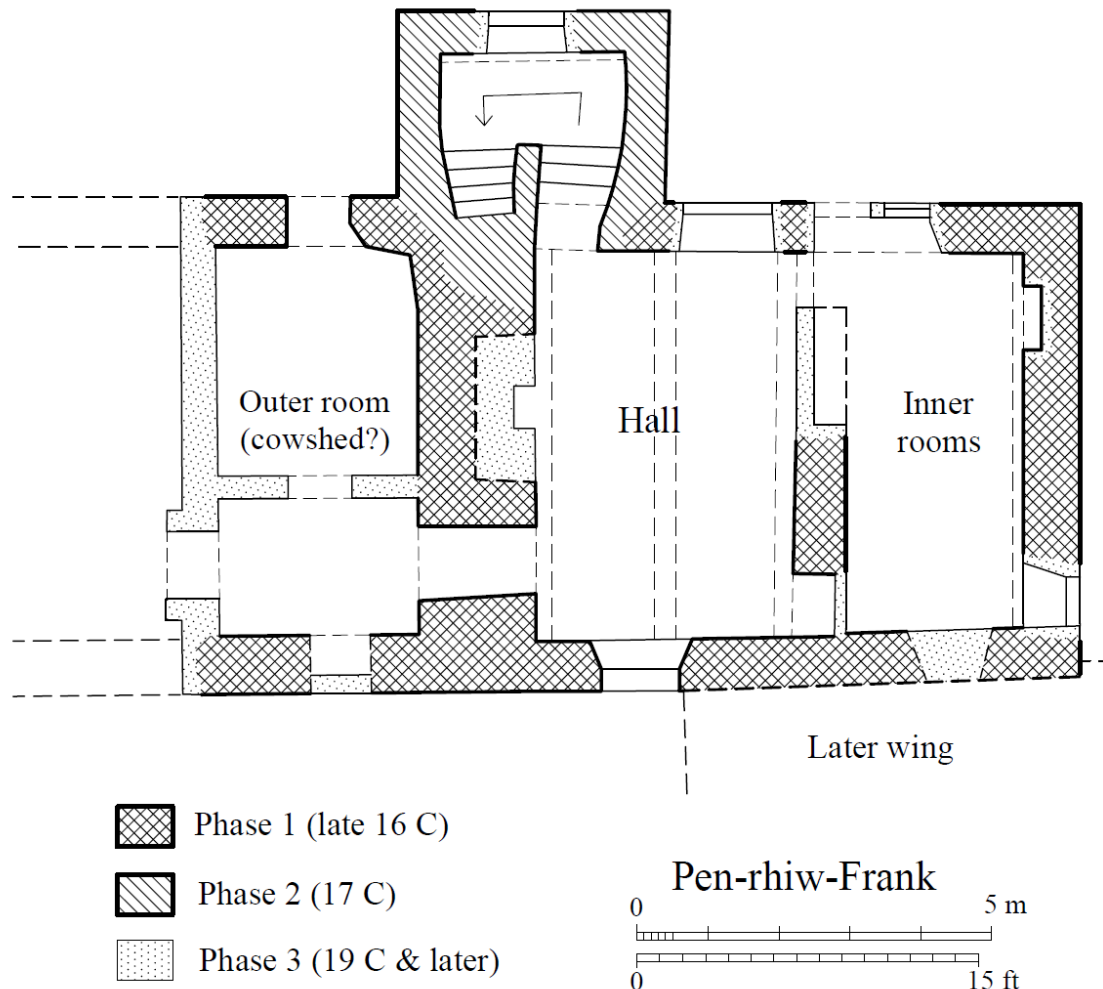


**Name:** Pen-rhiw-Frank (Pen-rhiw-ffranc)

**OS grid ref:** ST 191 952

**Parish / Location:** Mynyddislwyn



**Description:** A large farmstead comprising a much altered and truncated house of hearth-passage plan. The building lies on the north-west slopes of Mynydd Islwyn, and is aligned downhill (roughly east-west). The rubble walls have been thickly rendered and there is a modern tiled roof with brick chimneys. All the existing window and door openings have been modified, and only the deeply splayed walls and a projecting stair wing gives any clue to its great age. A large cross-wing has been built at the rear, but this has been omitted from the above plan. Most of these alterations took place after 1848, as the tithe map (extract left) shows a much longer range extending downhill. A 1966 sketch of the exterior by the Gwent artist Fred Hando, shows that the house had a massive central chimney stack and shouldered drip stones over the stair windows, but these early features have since been lost.



There are now three entrances into the house, but only the one leading into the **outer room** is early. It seems to have formerly opened onto a cross-passage, although the opposing doorway is now blocked. The outer room is used in part as a dairy,

but it was probably a cowshed originally. No early features remain in this part of the house. The **hall** is entered along a narrow passageway through the thick central wall. It has a blocked fireplace, and a heavy beamed ceiling with broad chamfers and diagonal stops (the joists are concealed). There is a timber corbel above the fireplace to support the end beam. Two doors in a thick stone partition lead to the modernised **inner rooms**; that on the north has a small gable fireplace (probably an insertion), while the other room has a little window looking uphill (again, likely to be a substitute inserted when the rear cross-wing was added). In a corner of the hall there is a large dogleg stone stair providing access to the first floor. One of the beams on the landing has a narrow chamfer with hollow-&-fillet stop.

From the landing there is access to the modernised bedrooms above the cross-passage, and a wooden stair continues up to a small attic chamber over the stairwell (which has a plain truss without a collar). Over the main bedrooms there are two papered-over trusses, apparently with dovetail-jointed collars, and three rows of trencled purlins, but now largely hidden by an inserted attic.

**Development.** Although the thickly rendered walls may hide certain features, it is possible to suggest that Pen-rhiw-Frank originated as a longhouse, possibly of sixteenth century date, judging by the carpentry details and the thickness of the walls. Then, in the seventeenth century, the building was heightened and the usual winding stair replaced by a grander stair turret. Such stairs are uncommon in this region, but the proximity of Penllwyn (a minor gentry house with some similar features) across the valley, suggest that the builders of Pen-rhiw-Frank wanted a bit of architectural prestige to boost their local standing.

