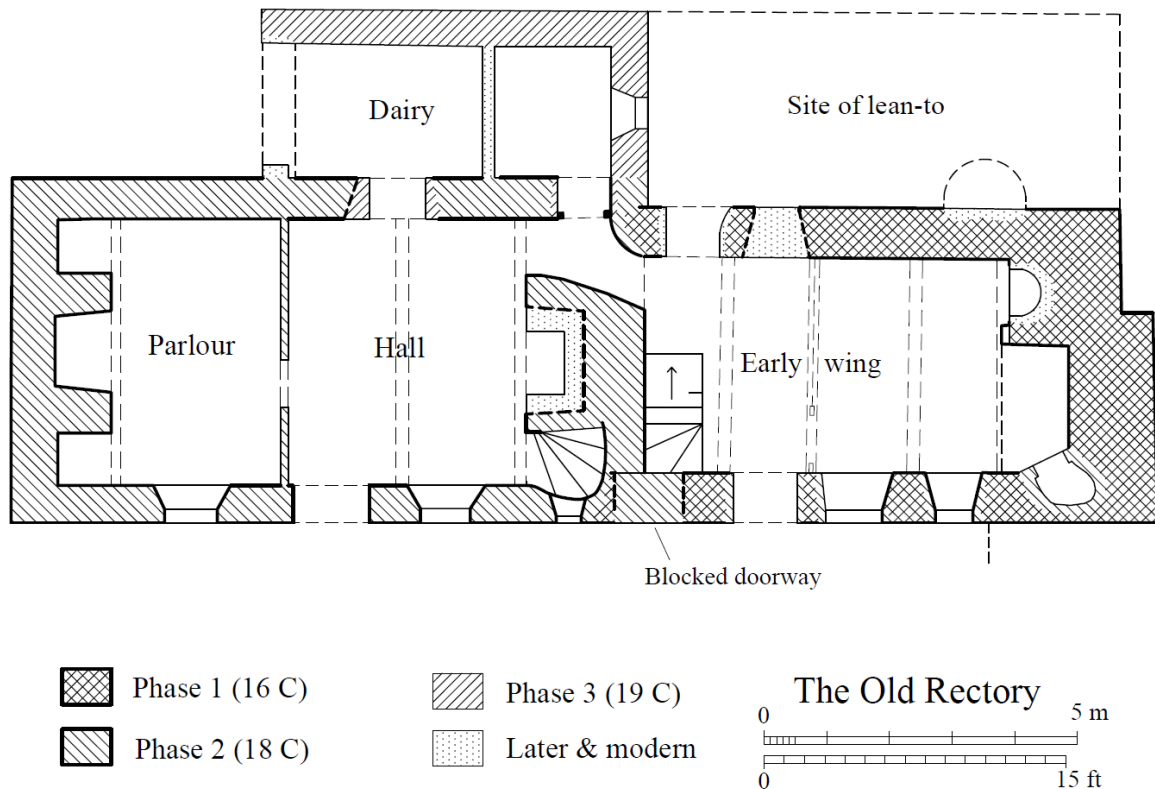


Name: The Old Rectory

OS grid ref: ST 172 893

Parish / Location: Bedwas



Description: Standing on the east side of St Barrwg's church is a visually impressive listed building with rendered and whitewashed walls, gable chimneys and a slate roof. Records date back to the sixteenth century and it is shown and named on the 1841 tithe map (below) as 'Rectory House' before it was supplanted by a more modern building close by. The map also shows additional outbuildings which no longer survive. The Old Rectory consists of a long range built across the slope, aligned roughly east to west, with a number of modern extensions (not shown on the above plan). This is clearly a building of two halves; the LH side is a tall block with a central entrance and symmetrically arranged windows, while the RH side has a lower roof with more irregular fenestration and a large projecting chimney stack. So many alterations have taken place both inside and out, that it is rather difficult to ascertain its development.

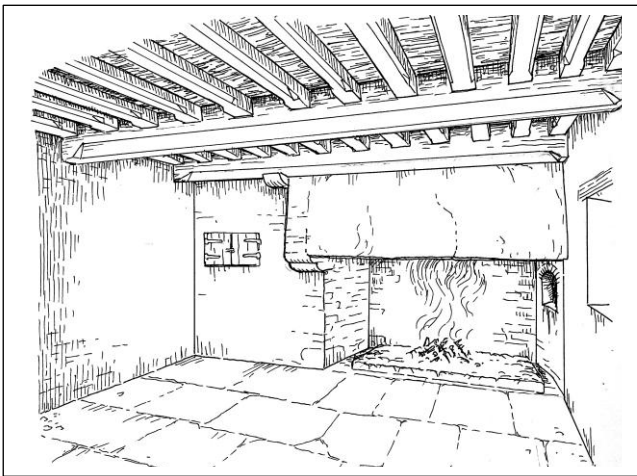


The easiest part to understand is the LH block, which has a typical Georgian appearance and layout. The central doorway leads into the **hall**, which has a stone flagged floor and a fireplace in the RH gable (largely filled in with a modern hearth). There is a ceiling of rather thin beams with narrow chamfers and hollow stops, but the joists are concealed under plaster. One of the beams supports a modern partition wall separating the hall from the **Parlour**. This room has been thoroughly modernised and retains no early features apart from the exposed stone fireplace in the end wall, and the attractive diagonal patterned stone slab floor. A doorway in the back of the hall leads through to a rear lean-to **Dairy**, which might be contemporary with the front block; however, the timber lintel over the opening is unnecessarily long, suggesting that this was originally a window rather than a door. If so, then the lean-to

must be a later addition, and it seems that the doorway into it was from the fireplace passage, where there is an unchamfered square headed wooden doorframe. The dairy too has been modernised, and retains no early features other than a ceiling of rough joists, and a small window in the RH end wall.

At the side of the fireplace is a large and deep winding stair, an early-looking feature for a house of this period. The steps are of stone, covered with timber treads. There is a small window part way up. The first floor is divided by a modern partition into two bedrooms, the larger one heated by a small fireplace inserted into the main stack. The ceiling beams are the same as on the ground floor, the joists similarly plastered over. In the back wall another unchamfered square door leads into the roofspace over the dairy. This was reputedly a servant's room and has a small window in the west gable, but is unheated. Another spacious winding stair leads up into the attic, which has been divided into two rooms by a modern partition. There is a single small window in a recess in the west gable, and there are two roof trusses set into the ceiling beams of the room below. Each truss has thinly chamfered sides, a high set dovetail-jointed collar (removed) and two rows of trenched purlins.

The RH (east) side of the building is clearly the oldest part of the house, and is marked on the plan as an **Early Wing**. It is smaller, narrower and lower than the LH block, and retains much early timberwork; however, it has been considerably altered at different times. It is entered from the hall by a curving passageway at the side of the central stack, and while it is now a single space, at one time there were two rooms of unequal size here, separated by a dismantled lath-&-plaster partition with a single door. The façade has an inserted doorway and two modified windows, while the outlines of a third (blocked) window can be seen from the modern lean-to at the back of the house, where recent renovations have exposed the original masonry. This wall also bears the scars of a ground level feature consisting of a semi-circular structure measuring just over 1.3m across. This could be the remains of a projecting bake-oven, but an intriguing possibility is that it is the site of a circular pigsty. The wall also has beam-holes and a blocked door and window at first-floor level, indicating that there was an lean-to against the back of the house. This lean-to presumably post-dated the addition of the dairy and had disappeared by 1841, for it is not shown on the tithe map.

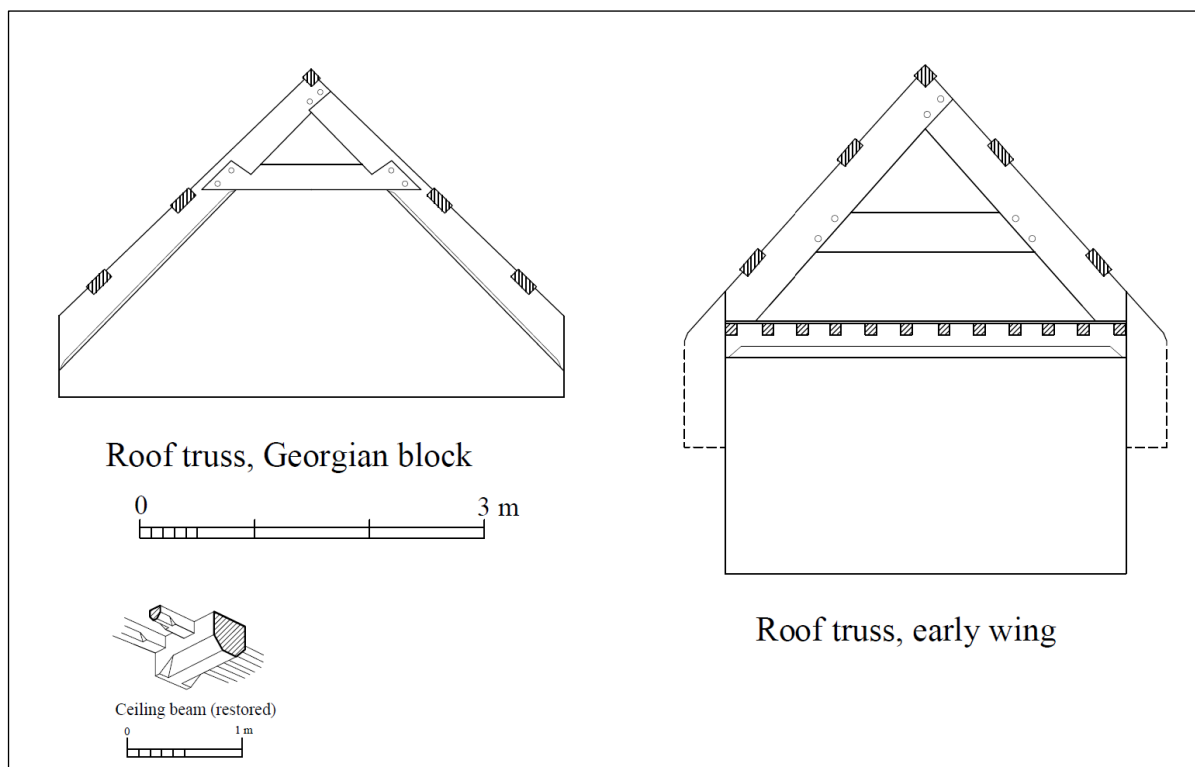


The thick gable end of the Early Wing is dominated by a deep and wide fireplace, which has an enormous unchamfered stone lintel, slightly projecting into the room, and supported at one end by doubled stone brackets (see reconstruction left). This is an uncommon feature - a few similar fireplaces have been recorded in the Vale of Glamorgan, but it is most often associated with medieval houses. The end beam over the fireplace is also supported by a stone corbel. In one side of the fireplace is a small brick oven, but the interior is very rough and irregular and it appears to be an insertion.

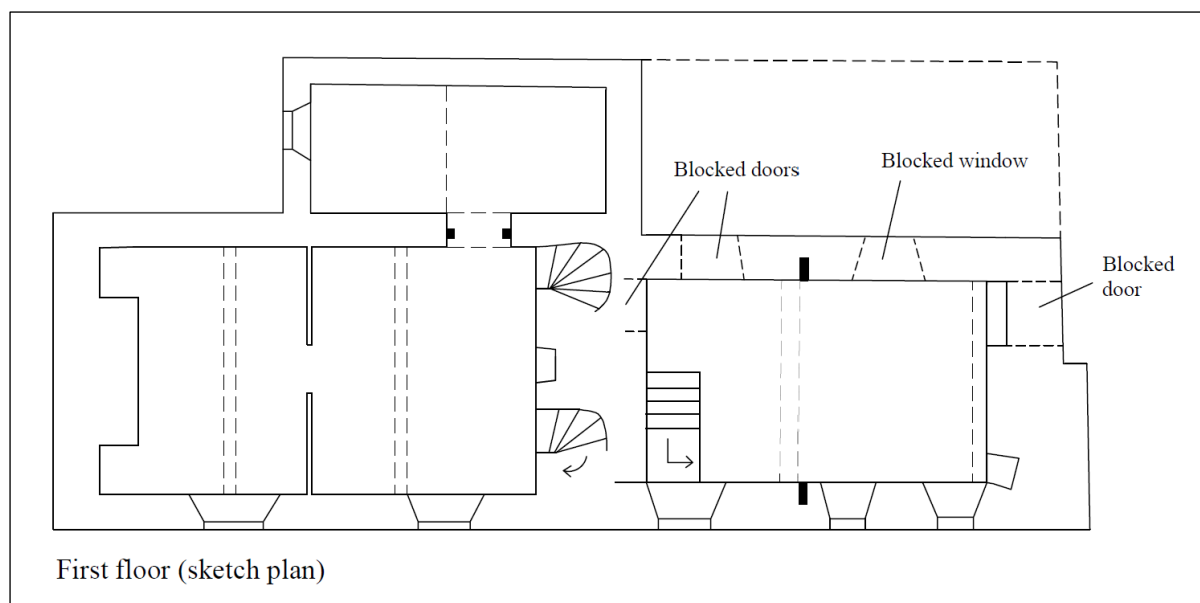
The ceiling is puzzling, and shows clear signs of extensive remodelling. There are now four beams

with broad chamfers and diagonal stops; one is an end beam above the fireplace, one crosses the centre of the room, then there is a thinner beam that carried the aforementioned partition, and finally another central beam which has been reset on its side. There is no end beam against the LH wall. The beams were intended to carry 14 joists, but only half this number now survive (and these are a mix of modern & old unchamfered timbers). Also, the upper sides of some of the beams have been cut away, apparently in an attempt to provide a level floor upstairs (the upper part of one beam has been salvaged and stored in the garage). It seems that the ceiling beams had begun to warp, necessitating this radical rejigging of the timbers.

Rather surprisingly, there is no sign of a winding stair here, and the upper floor is now reached by a small wooden stair in one corner. One final feature to note here is a blocked doorway at the foot of the stair. This has an arched head of rough voussoirs, but half the opening has been blocked by the insertion of the main chimney stack of the Georgian wing. This door is clearly an early feature, and one that is more often found in the uplands of neighbouring Glamorgan rather than Gwent (where doors tend to have flat timber lintels). It also indicates that the Early Wing extended further west at one time, but was subsumed within the Georgian block.



The first floor is a single chamber with three modified windows in the front wall, and a door and window (both blocked) in the rear wall. There is a blocked doorway in the LH gable, which once communicated with the stair in the adjoining wing, and there is yet another blocked door in the opposite RH gable, now marked by a shallow recess. This is said to have been reached by an external staircase from the higher ground outside. However, it is unlikely to have been an original feature because the change in ground level is only due to the construction of the adjacent railway embankment and road bridge. In the same wall, but at the opposite corner, is a ragged opening of obscure purpose. It is too narrow to be the remains of a stair or window, but its position directly above the ground floor fireplace suggests that it might have had some function as a drying chamber for food preparation.



The first floor ceiling is just as confusing as the one on the ground floor. There are only two beams - an end beam against the RH gable, and a central beam crossing the middle of the room, both with broad chamfers and diagonal stops. The LH end beam is missing (as on the ground floor) and the irregular baying of the ceiling again confirms that this part of the house originally extended further west. The north end of the central beam

has been underpinned with a masonry buttress supported by a stone corbel. There are holes for 12 joists, but among the usual mix of replacement timbers there are two original chunky joists. One has been reset upside-down, while the other is chamfered and stopped as the main beams. It therefore seems that, before being remodelled in fairly recent times, the Early Wing had quite elaborate ceilings on both floors. The roof is supported on a single upper cruck with a mortice-jointed collar (now missing) and two rows of trenched purlins.

Development: as previously noted, the Georgian block is fairly easy to understand and is largely of one period, probably early-eighteenth century (with some later fenestration and minor alterations).

The RH wing in contrast, is far more confusing. The blocked ground floor doorway clearly indicates that the early house extended further west. The ceiling beams have obviously been reassembled at some time (probably relatively recently), and the first floor has a sizeable upper cruck that would normally be visible, but has been unnecessarily hidden by the beamed ceiling (suggesting the latter is an insertion). The angled feet of the truss extend well below the line of the ceiling, and coincidentally stop at the height of the aforementioned corbel that now is used to support the central beam. It is tempting to think that this corbel was intended to support the roof truss, which was subsequently moved from its original position. Furthermore, there are straight joints in the exposed masonry of the first floor front wall, which are difficult to explain but seem to point to rebuilding and heightening of the facade.

It is therefore conjectured that the Early Wing is a *fragment* of a much larger structure, perhaps the kitchen of a more substantial house that was lost in the Georgian rebuilding. This would explain its relatively small dimensions and unusual details, such as the enormous fireplace and lack of an original stair. The presence of the blocked arched doorway and stone brackets suggests that this part of the house is old, perhaps early-sixteenth century, and that it was heightened and had ceilings inserted in the early-seventeenth century.