

**Dating Old Welsh Houses Group
Gwerclas, Rhug, Denbighshire
SJ 05296 42144**



**EAS Client Report 2015/02
February 2015**

**Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd
Unit 2 Glanypwll Workshops
Ffordd Tanygrisiau
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Gwynedd
LL41 3NW**

Registered in England N° 286978

**A Report Commissioned by the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group in Partnership with The
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales**



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**Commissioned by
Margaret Dunn
For
Dating Old Welsh Houses Group**

February 2015

**By
I.P. Brooks**

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Dating Old Welsh Houses Group

Gwerclas Out Building

Listed Building Reference: Denbighshire 708 (Grade II)

NPRN: 41678

PRN: 11863

SJ 05296 42144

Introduction

This report details the recording of an agricultural building linked to the north eastern corner of the 1767 house of Gwerclas, Rhug, Denbighshire, by a linking corridor, undertaken to compliment both the dendrochronological sampling, undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory (Bridge and Miles 2014), and the documentary study undertaken by volunteers for the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group. The fieldwork took place on 3rd February 2015.

Methodology

The ground floor and first floor plans were made by direct measurement. The drawings of the timberwork were carried out by direct measurement at a scale of 1:20. Photographs were taken with a Nikon D80 digital SLR camera at a resolution of 10.2 mega pixels. Where practical all the photographs included a metric scale.

Survey Report

Gwerclas is located approximately 3.6 Km, NNW of the village of Cynwyd, Denbighshire, on the western banks of the Afon Dyfrdwy (River Dee) (Figure 1). The building recorded forms the eastern side of a small courtyard (Figure 2), approximately 15 x 7 m in size, which is bounded to the west by a stone built range attached to the main house; to the north a barn and to the south by a, stone built, linking corridor (Plate 7).

The recorded building is a storeyed, stone built range constructed of roughly coursed, sub-rounded blocks with slightly larger quoins. The southern gable end (Plate 1) has two centrally placed windows, one for each floor. The ground floor window is a twelve paned sash window with a stone lintel, whilst that on the first floor is four paned casement window also with a stone lintel. The small brick chimney is clearly of a later date than the rest of the gable and it appears to have been constructed with handmade bricks of a size typical in the eighteenth century. The linking corridor to the main house (Plate 7) is a later addition, with its southern facade being finished in squares, coursed blocks. The arched

entrance with its stone voussoirs and triangular pediment gives this structure a classical appearance.

The eastern elevation has two doorways set in its southern half (Plate 2). The northern of these is roughly central to the elevation, whilst the southern doorway is closer to the central doorway than the southern gable. Both of these have modern ledged doors. The windows on the ground floor are of a common form with a four paned casement being set below two panes. The first floor windows now only contain empty frames with a central wooden mullion. All of the openings have stone lintels and the windows also have stone sills. At the northern end of the eastern elevation the boulder footings are exposed (Plate 3) suggesting that this end of the building was originally partly terraced into the natural slope.

The northern gable (Plate 4) has a door-sized pitching hole set at first floor level which is filled with a six-planked ledged door. The opening has a wooden lintel and there is the scar of a canopy above. There is a straight joint between this range and the barn forming the northern end of the courtyard suggesting that the barn is of a later date.

Within the courtyard, the western elevation (Plate 5) has three openings, all at first floor level. The centrally placed doorway is accessed by means of a set of external stone steps (Plate 6). It has a six-planked ledged door below a wooden lintel. There are also a series of square stone quoins on either side of the opening suggesting this doorway may be a later opening. The two windows are filled with modern wooden louvers and have sawn wooden lintels. The northern face of the linking corridor (Plate 8) demonstrates the working nature of this side of the corridor. Unlike the southern elevation it is constructed of poorly coursed, rough, stonework. There is also a partially blocked arched opening in this elevation which unlike the southern elevation does not have stone voussoirs. The blocking is with brick.

On the ground floor (Figure 3) the building is divided into two rooms by a later brick dividing wall. The southern room (Plate 9) has two larger transverse ceiling beams separated by later, smaller, sawn beams. Both of the larger beams are moderately chamfered and the southern beam has straight stops (Plate 10) and a series of mortice holes (Plate 11) suggesting that there has been a partition below this beam. There is also a series of three scratch marks below one of the joists which appears to be a carpenter's mark (Plate 12). The northern beam has run-out stops at its western end (Plate 13) and stepped stops at its eastern end (Plate 14).

The northern room (Plate 15) has two transverse beams and a lateral beam between the northern gable wall and the northern lateral beam. These beams are moderately chamfered and have straight stops (Plate 16). The northern transverse beam also has a series of mortice holes suggesting there was a partition below this beam (Plate 17). Adjacent to the dividing wall is a blocked opening (Plate 18) which appears to have been a doorway. This is directly

opposite the centrally placed doorway in the eastern wall and behind the external stone stairs to the first floor suggesting this door was blocked when the first floor entrance was added. The opening had a large wooden lintel and squared stone quoins. Prior to its current use as a store, this room appears to have been used as a cow house and the remains of the feed rack survives at the northern end of the building (Plate 19).

The first floor is divided into five bays by the four trusses (Figure 4). There is a further division into two rooms with the addition of a plank and muntin screen below Truss 3. The southern room (Plate 20) has a partial attic between Trusses 2 and 3, however, the majority of the building has an open space to the roof structure. There is a blocked opening on the eastern wall which appears to have been a window with a wooden lintel (Plate 21). Truss 1 (Plate 22) has a tie beam and two, slightly curved, raking struts. It also has trenched purlins.

Truss 2 (Figure 5, Plates 23 – 24) is distinctive with a lattice of timbers filling the space above the tie-beam. The spaces between the lattice timbers is filled with hand-made bricks which were between 55 and 70 mm thick. The majority of the panels had their bricks set parallel with east leaning struts, however one panel has the bricks set horizontally. Both sides of this partition had been rendered with lime mortar, however the render on the southern face may also have covered some of the timberwork. Three of the lattice timbers have carpenters marks at their lower ends being marked “III” (Plate 25), “V” and “VI” (Plate 26). The strut marked “VI”, at its base, is also marked “III” at its top end. The tie beam also has matching marks for the beams marked “III” and “VI”. The underside of the tie-beam also has a series of mortice and dowel holes (Plate 27) suggesting that there was a partition below this truss. At least four vertical timbers were separated by a series of dowels suggesting panels of wattle and daub between the timber supports.

Between Truss 2 and 3 is a partial attic which had an access hatch through Truss 3 (Plate 28). Although partly filled by brickwork Truss 3 (Figure 6) essentially has a queen post structure, however there is also a central vertical strut between the tie-beam and the collar. The hatch occupies the space between the eastern queen post and the central strut, whilst the area between the central post and the western queen post is blocked with rough planks. The panels either side of the queen posts and above the collar are filled with hand-made bricks which have been rendered with lime mortar. Below the tie-beam are a series of mortice holes suggesting there was a partition below this truss, probably with a doorway towards its western side. This is not, however, the plank and muntin screen which is occupying the space currently (Plate 29). This partition appears to have been re-used and is effectively leaning against the southern side of the tie-beam for Truss 3 and is being held in place by two short timbers lodged into the mortice holes for the original partition. There are two vertical slots in one of the planks (Plate 30) which presumably held a structure originally attached to the partition in its original position. At the western end of the partition a gap is partly filled with a re-used window shutter (Plate 31) which has “H-hinges” linking the panels.

Truss 4 (Plate 32) is of a similar design to Truss 3, however it contains none of the blocking features, nor evidence of a partition below.

Whilst not directly related to the structure of the building, a wooden plaque was found covering a hole in the floor of the first floor southern room (Plate 33). This depicts a bearded man, the face of which was the only area which has been defined in any detail. The date and original function of the plaque is uncertain, however the face has some similarities to late 17th century carvings.

Conclusions

The building attached to the north eastern corner of Gwerclas has been adapted during its life, probably starting life as a stables, with its main doorway opening onto the small courtyard between this building and the main house. The use of carefully chamfered and stopped beams would suggest a level of refinement, however the lack of a chimney or fireplace would tend to indicate that the building was not a domestic building. The decorative nature of the linking corridor and the size of the arched opening would also suggest the building was a stables. It is not certain whether the opposing doors in the building are contemporary, however, other openings on the eastern elevation would appear to relate to the re-organisation of the building.

It has been argued that the lattice infill within Truss 2 was originally an end truss with the decorative latticework being visible from the main house (Bridge and Miles 2014). The mortice holes and dowel holes below the tie-beam, however, would suggest that there was a timber and wattle and daub partition below the truss of a form not usually associated with an external wall. It is noticeable that this partition contained panels of wattle and daub, rather than the brickwork present within the truss itself.

The plank and muntin screen below Truss 3 is clearly not in its original position and possibly originally came from the house which is known to have occupied at least part of the site of the current house, dated to 1767 by a plaque on its front elevation. Further evidence for re-cycling of architectural features is shown by the use of a window shutter at the western side of the partition. Internal shutters, such as this, became standard feature of the 18th century and continued until 1840's (Hall 2005, 96). The use of plain "H" hinges on the shutter would also tend to suggest an eighteenth century date for this feature. In such it is likely that this shutter was originally in the main house before it was re-used to block a gap in an already re-positioned partition.

The major orientation of the building would appear to have been rotated by 180°, probably in the nineteenth century. The main doorway into the courtyard was blocked by the construction of the stone steps and the upper doorway added. It is likely that at least one of the doors in the eastern elevation was added at this point and one of the first floor windows blocked. This re-orientation is probably related to a change in use of the building from stables to a cow house. Further,

later, changes included the division of the ground floor into two rooms with a brick wall to create a workshop and store.

Acknowledgments

The recording of this building was commissioned by Margaret Dunn for the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group. Thanks are also due to the owners for access to this building and to Paul and Michelle Roberts who facilitated the access.

References

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- Hall, L. 2005. *Period House fixtures and fittings 1300 – 1900*. Countryside Books, Newbury



Plate 1: Southern gable end



Plate 2: Eastern elevation



Plate 3: Exposed footings at the northern end of the eastern elevation



Plate 4: Northern gable end



Plate 5: Western elevation



Plate 6: Stone steps



Plate 7: Linking corridor



Plate 8: The northern side of the linking corridor



Plate 9: The southern, ground floor room



Plate 10: The eastern end of the southern ceiling beam in the southern ground floor room



Plate 11: Mortice



Plate 12: Possible carpenters marks



Plate 13: Northern beam in the southern ground floor room



Plate 14: Northern beam in the southern ground floor room



Plate 15: The northern ground floor room



Plate 16: Beam in the northern ground floor room



Plate 17: Sockets for the partition below the northern ground floor beam



Plate 18: Blocked doorway



Plate 19: Remains of the feed rack



Plate 20: Southern, first floor room, looking north



Plate 21: Block opening on the first floor



Plate 22: Truss 1



Plate 23: Truss 2



Plate 24: Rear face of Truss 2



Plate 25: Carpenter's marks on Truss 2



Plate 26: Carpenter's marks on Truss 2



Plate 27: Mortice holes below Truss 2



Plate 28: Truss 3 and the access to the attic



Plate 29: Truss 3 and the partition below



Plate 30: Sockets with the partition below Truss 3



Plate 31: Re-used window shutter with “H-hinges”



Plate 32: Truss 4, looking north



Plate 33: Carved wooden plaque



Figure 1: Location
Scale 1:25,000

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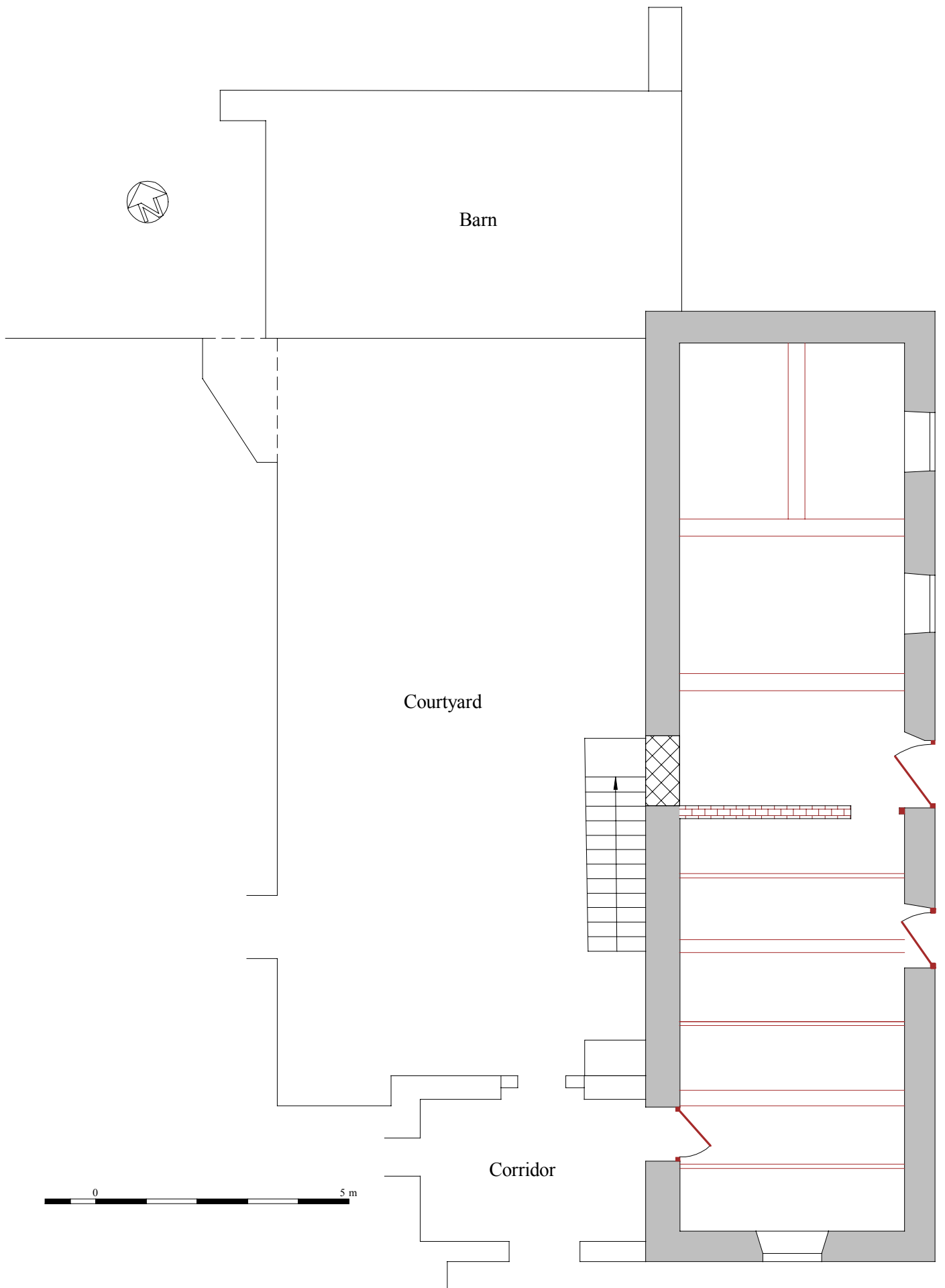


Figure 2: Plan of the recorded building with attached courtyard
Scale 1:100

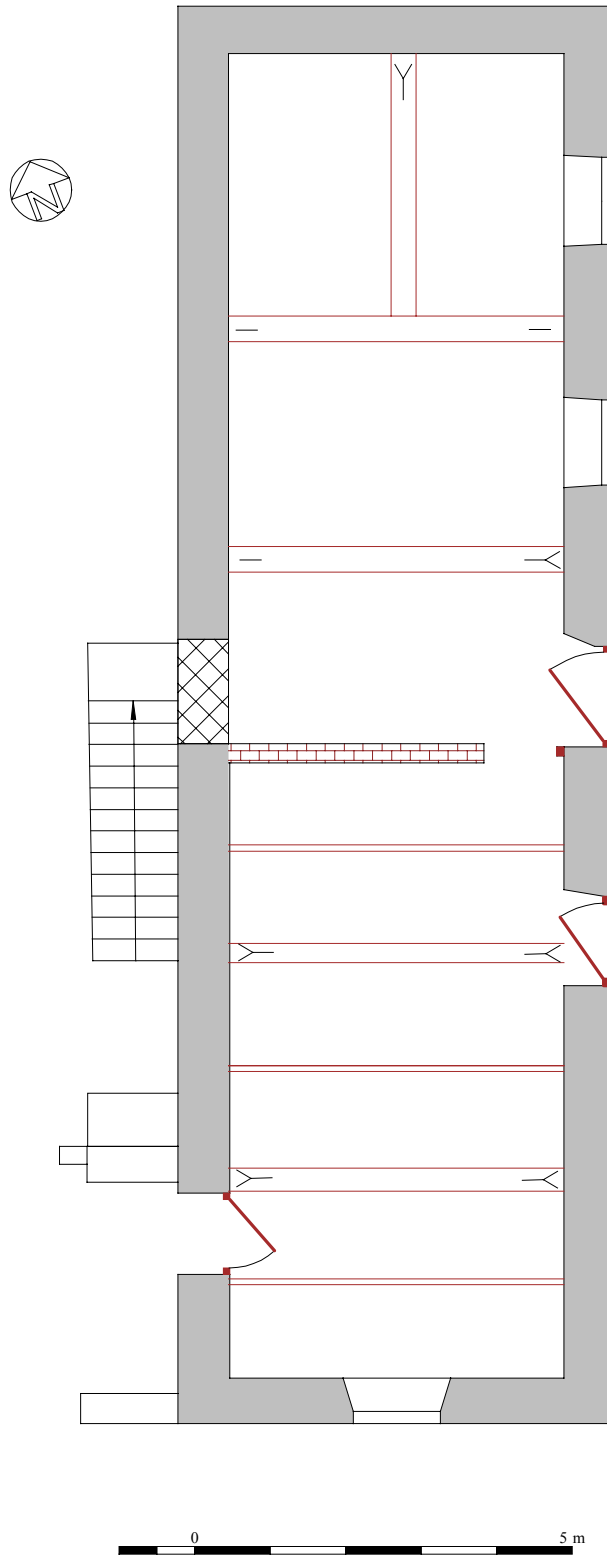


Figure 3: Ground floor plan
Scale 1:100

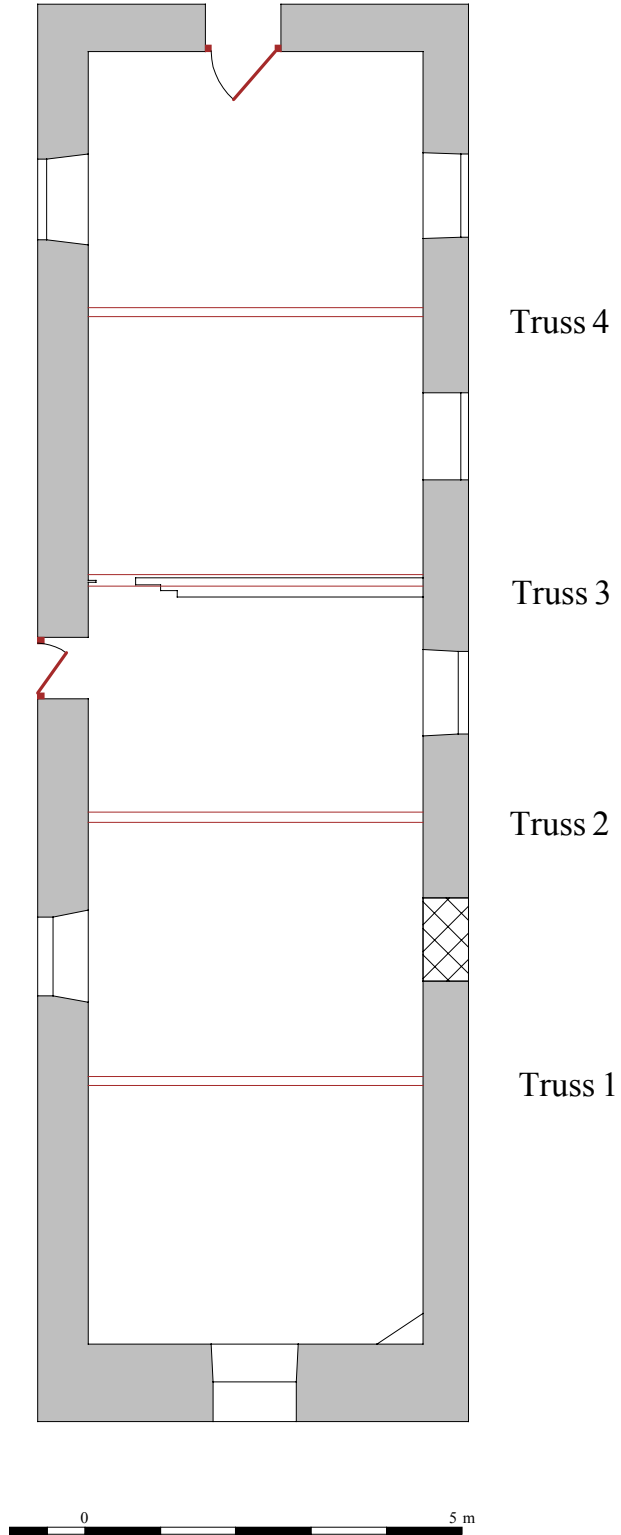


Figure 4: First floor plan
Scale 1:100

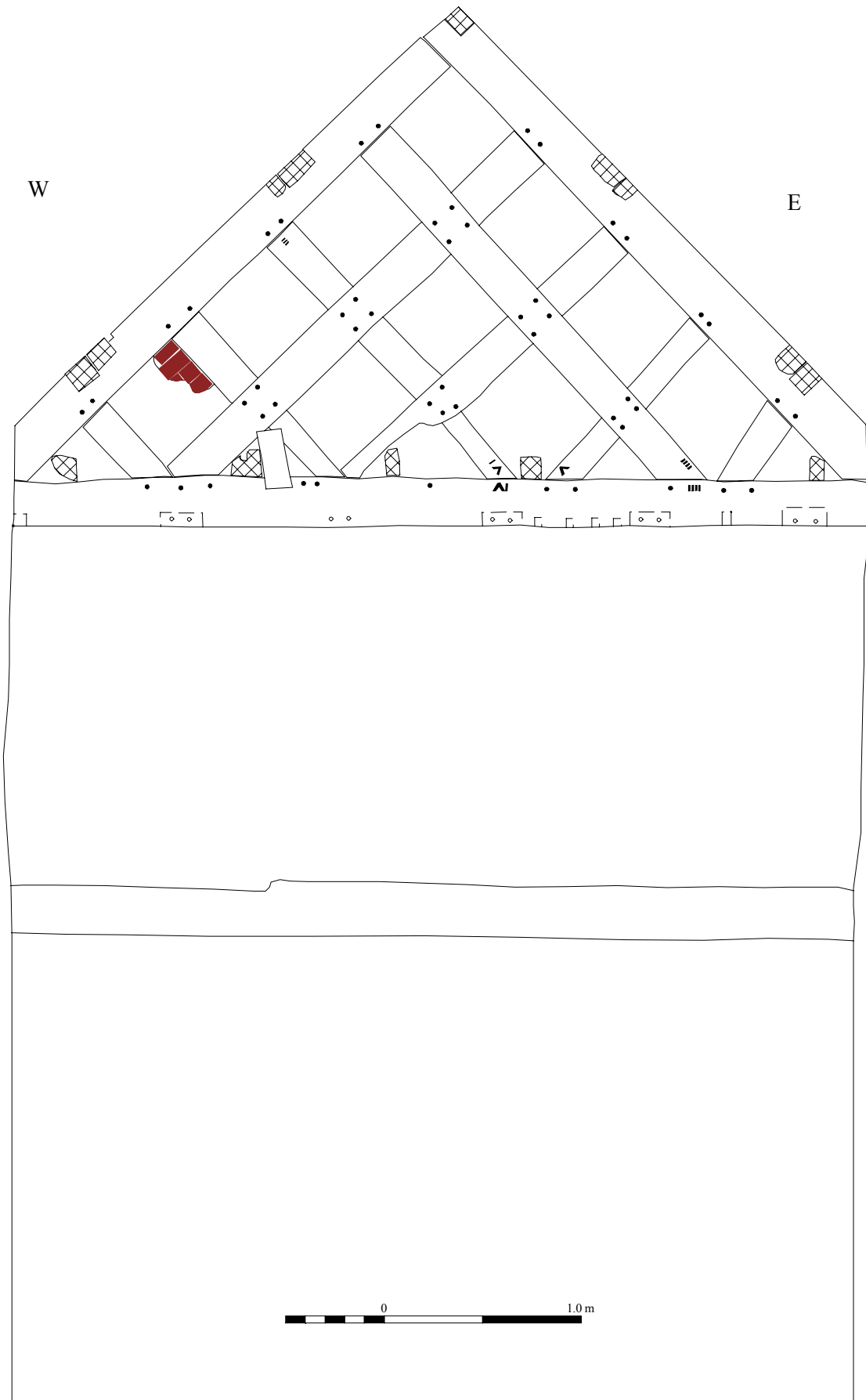


Figure 5: Truss 2
Scale 1:30

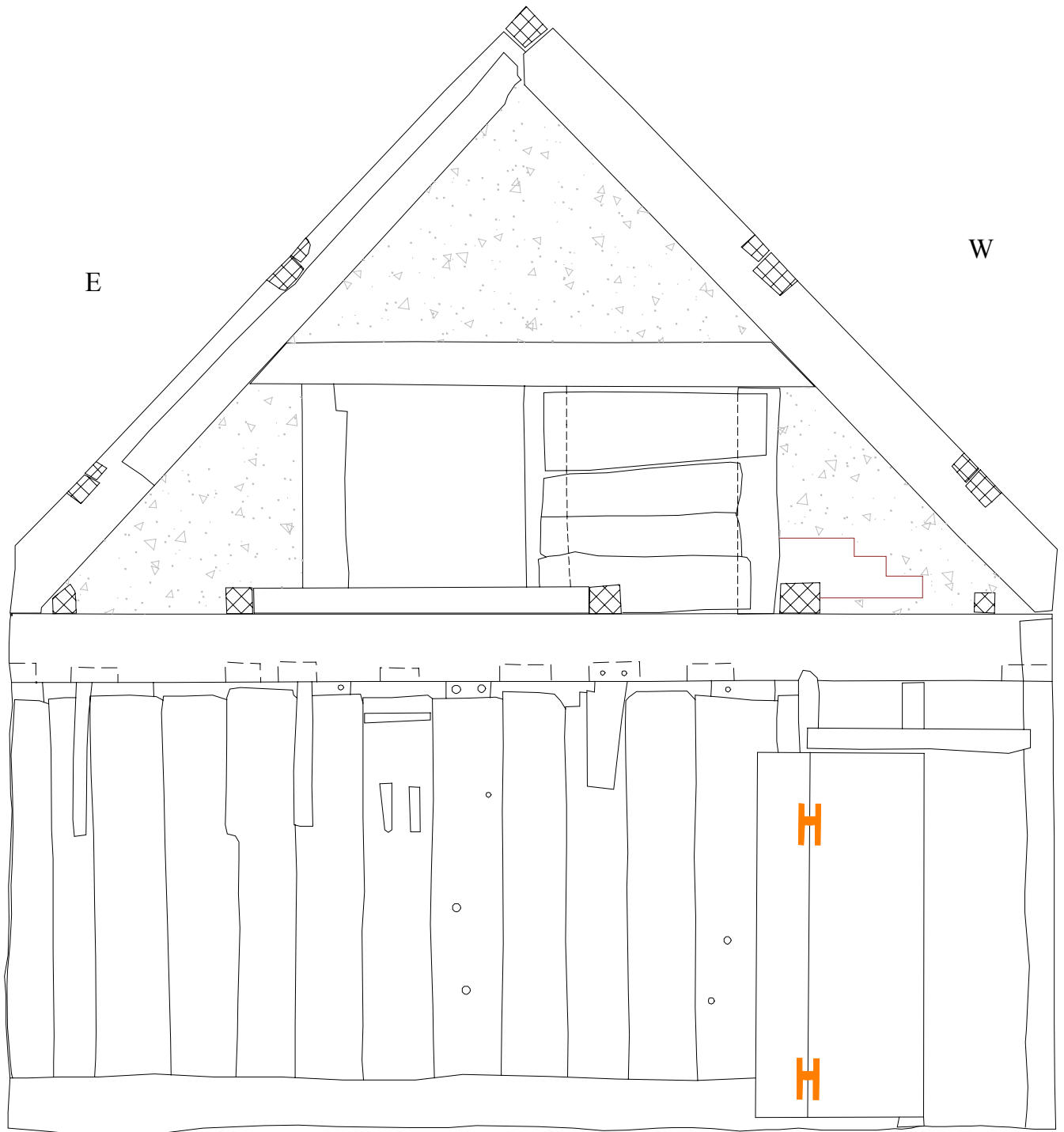


Figure 6: Truss 3
Scale 1:25

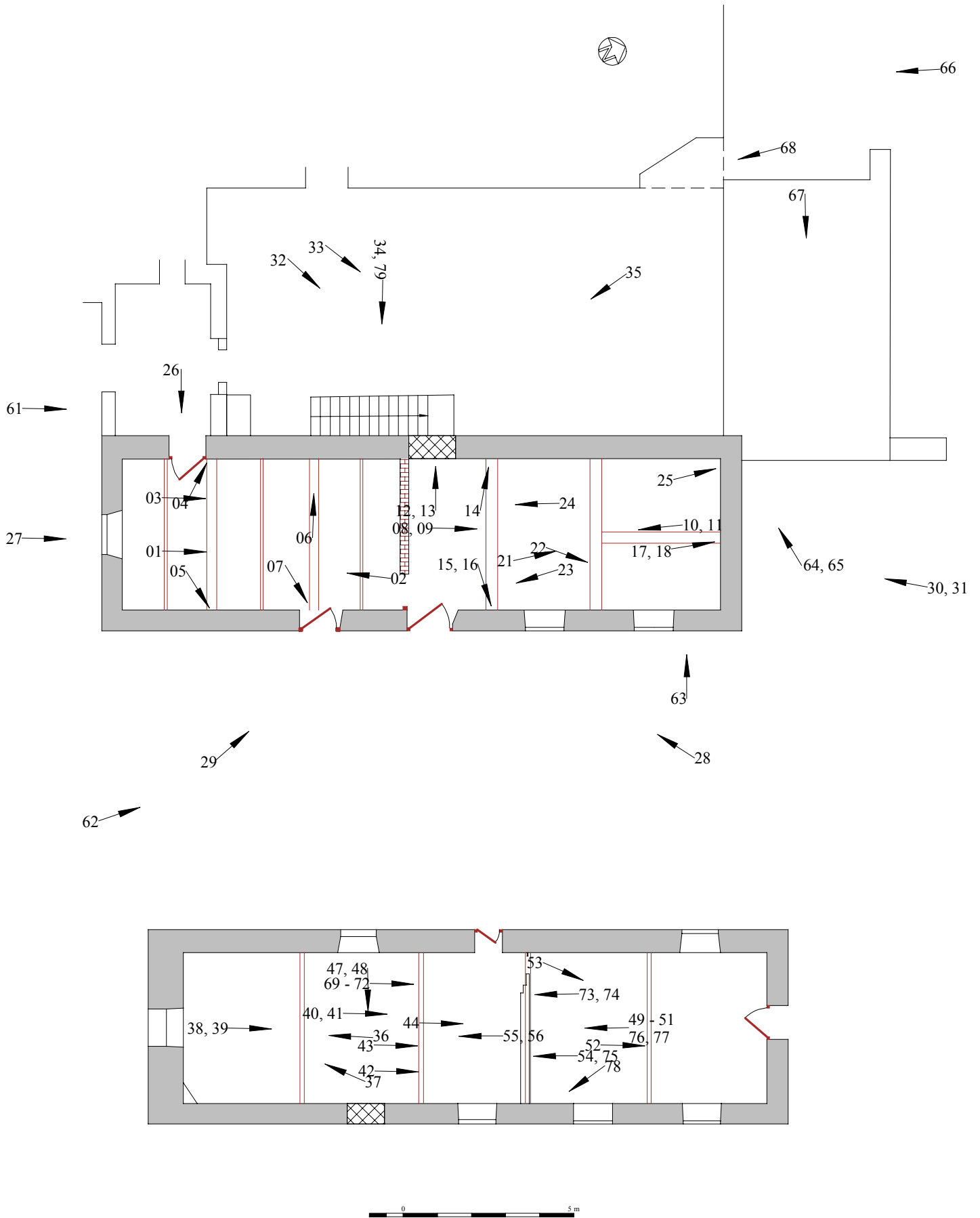


Figure 7: Location of the photographs in the archive
Scale 1:150