

North West Wales Dendrochronology Project Dyffryn Mymbyr, Llandygai, Gwynedd



EAS Client Report 2011/05
April 2011

Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd
Unit 2 Glanypwll Workshops
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LL41 3NW



Registered in England N° 286978

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**Commissioned by
Margaret Dunn
For
North West Wales Dendrochronology Project**

April 2011

**By
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North West Wales Dendrochronology Project

Dyffryn Mymbyr

SH 69503 57263

NPRN 26417

PRN 12118

National Trust Number 475001

Status: Grade II Listed

Introduction

This report details the recording of the house Dyffryn Mymbyr, Llandygai, Gwynedd, undertaken to compliment both the dendrochronological sampling, undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, and the documentary study undertaken by volunteers for the North Wales Dendrochronology Project. The fieldwork took place on 7th April 2011.

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

Dyffryn Mymbyr lies on the northern slopes of the Nant Gwryd valley approximately 3 km west of Capel Curig. It is owned by the National Trust and is currently run as a holiday cottage. The “old” house forms part of a complex with a range of agricultural buildings attached to its eastern gable and the “New” house to the south (Plate 1). The farm is famous for being the subject of Thomas Firbank’s “I bought a Mountain” originally published in 1940. The “old” house is aligned approximately NE – SW on a slight shelf on the hill slope at approximately 240 m OD

The house has been previously recorded by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales in 1951 and 1977 and a note made as part of the Upland Survey carried out by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd in 2005 for the National Trust and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. It was also described in Haslam *et al* 2009 (313). A summary of key descriptions is given in Appendix 1. The building has undergone several phases of restoration. In 1951 it was recorded as being used

as a joinery workshop and in 2005 as accommodation for National Trust Volunteers. A major restoration took place after 2005 when the building was converted into holiday accommodation.

The old house at Dyffryn Mymbyr is a three bay, stone built, stored, house with a later extension to the north west and a range of agricultural buildings attached on the north eastern gable. Both of these are based on buildings which existed before 1889 (Figure 2). The original house was constructed of poorly coursed slabby stonework which tends to be larger towards the base of the walls (Plates 2 – 4). The quoins are emphasised by larger slabs and there is a single chimney on the north eastern gable (Plate 5). The roof has been recovered with small, “moss” slates with tile ridge pieces and rubble stone gable parapets. The south western gable end has been faced in slates hiding any original features.

Whilst the windows are relatively recent replacement the main door in the south eastern wall has a cyclopean stone lintel (Plate 6) with a depressed ogee arch of Tudor type. The door itself is set behind two stub walls.

Internally the ground floor is now essentially a single room with a fireplace at the north eastern end (Plate 7). There is a gap in the original walling in the south eastern wall where the access to the later extension was cut through. The window openings are presumably not original, whilst the two window openings at the northern end of the building have wooden lintels (Plates 8 and 9), the lateral window in the south east corner has a slate lintel (Plate 10). The lintel over the original doorway is a timber (Plate 11). The open staircase is clearly a modern insertion

The fireplace has a large wooden bressumer (Plate 12) which has a slightly curved lower surface and which supports the main longitudinal ceiling beam. This beam stretches for 6.03 m, to just south of the main doorway, where it joins a lateral beam. It is also cross by a lateral beam approximately half way between the bressumer and the other lateral beam (2.88 m from the bressumer) All of the beams are chamfered and have simple run out stops (Figure 6, Plate 13). The underside of the southern lateral beam has evidence of originally having a post and plank partition (Figure 6, Plate 14).

The joists are modern replacements, although they occupy the trenches of the original joists (Plate 15). There is some evidence for an earlier joist pattern in the stairwell where there is an empty mortice adjacent to the stub end of a rafter which sawn off (Plate 16).

On the first floor the house is divided into two bedrooms with intervening bathroom and store room on either side of a short corridor. The bedrooms occupy either end of the house and are partly defined by the two trusses within the building (Figures 4 and 5). Both trusses have a high collar and raking queen struts held together with wooden pegs. There are two pairs of purlins which are through trenched. The southern truss (Truss 1, Figure 4, Plates 17 – 18) is partly

obscured by the modern modification within the building, but is evident in the stairwell and the bathroom. Truss 2 (Figure 5, Plate 19) is between the northern bedroom and the bathroom and corridor. It is clearly exposed in the bedroom and is of the same design as Truss 1. Below and slight in front of Truss 2 is a post and plank partition (Plates 20 – 21) which appears to have been placed somewhat crudely in front of the truss and planks and posts cut to roughly fit the space. It held in place at its base by a rail into which the planks and posts are socketed. This is not in its original position and may be part of the partition originally below the southern lateral beam on the ground floor. The door through the partition has an ogee head (Plate 22) which may also have been part of the original partition.

The common rafters are pegged to the purlins (Plates 23 – 24) and presumably rest on a wall plate. There is also a rail embedded in the east wall which also forms the lintel over the window in the northern bedroom.

Dendrochronology Sampling

A total of ten samples were taken, sampling the principal rafters, purlins and a ground floor ceiling beam.

Conclusions

Despite its somewhat chequered history Dyffryn Mymbyr retains many of its original features. The latest renovation in particular has been rather sympathetic retaining the key elements such as the main trusses, the repositioned partition, the large fireplace with its bressumer and the main doorway on show.

It is likely that the partition on the first floor was originally below the southern of the lateral beam and that it has been heavily truncated to fit into its present location. It is not known when this modification took place. The “ogee” door head was probably also associated with this partition, although once again it is not known where its original position was.

Clearly designed as a storeyed house the position of the original staircase or ladder has been lost in the various modifications.

Acknowledgments

The recording of this building was commissioned by Margaret Dunn for the North Wales Dendrochronology Project. Access arranged by Georgina Ward for The National Trust who own the building.

References

Haslam, R., Orbach, J. and Voelcker, A. 2009 *The Buildings of Wales. Gwynedd. Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth*. Yale University Press. 313



Plate 1: Relationship between the Old and New houses, looking east



Plate 2: Front elevation looking north



Plate 3: Front elevation looking west



Plate 4: Rear elevation of original building



Plate 5: Chimney



Plate 6: Front door



Plate 7: General view of the ground floor, looking north



Plate 8: North eastern window showing wooden lintel



Plate 9: North western window



Plate 10: South eastern window showing slate lintel



Plate 11: Lintel over main doorway



Plate 12: Bressumer and main longitudinal beam



Plate 13: Detail of chamfers and stop at intersection between the longitudinal and lateral beams.



Plate 14: Evidence for the post and plank partition



Plate 15: Ceiling joists



Plate 16: Mortise for an original joist.



Plate 17: Truss 1 over the stairwell



Plate 18: Truss 1 in bathroom



Plate 19: Truss 2



Plate 20: Plank and post partition looking west



Plate 21: Plank and post partition looking south



Plate 22: Doorhead



Plate 23: Common rafters and wall rail looking south east



Plate 24: Detail of relationship between the purlins and common rafters

Appendix 1: Sources

Listing Information

(http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw_eng.php?id=3180)

Street Name and Number:	A 4086,
Listed Building Reference:	3180
Grade:	II
Date Listed:	13/10/1966
Date Amended:	27/11/1996
Co-ordinates:	269508,357272
Locality:	Dyffryn Mymbyr
Community:	Capel Curig
Council:	Conwy
National Park:	Yes

Location

Located on an elevated site on the N side of the Dyffryn Mymbyr, approximately 2km W of Capel Curig; accessed by a long track.

History

Small storeyed gentry house, probably third-quarter C16; apparently originally of end-chimney type (that to the L, Parlour, end has now gone). The house was altered in the C19 and recently (1990s) restored. Originally the centre of a large upland estate, the house is notable for its quality of construction; this suggests a relatively high social context and, given the site's geographical location, it is possible that the builder may have been a junior member of the Wynn family of Gwydir. Incorporated into the Penrhyn estates by the early C19, the house was tenanted until the mid-C19 when a new farmhouse was built opposite it, and it ceased to have a domestic function.

Interior

Very wide fireplace to R (former hall) with massive flat bressummer. Crisp framed ceiling with deeply-chamfered cross-beams and stopped-chamfered joists, a few (to the L) replaced. There is mortising evidence for a former post-and-panel screen to L of entrance; this survives in part, re-located on the first floor. There is

no visible evidence for an opposing entry (forming a cross-passage), though this was probably destroyed when the rear extension was put on. Modern stair to first floor. This has modern partitioning, though the trusses are visible; 3-bay with original pegged collars and queen struts. Post and panel partition to R bay, re-located, apparently from ground floor; ogee-headed doorway to centre.

Exterior

Storeyed house of rubble on a part-boulder plinth, notable for the exceptional length of its quoin-stones; the original render is lost and the masonry is heavily pointed in cement. Renewed small-slate roof with rubble gable parapets and squat C19 end chimney to the R; plain capping and weather-coursing. 2-window front with off-centre (L) entrance. This has an original cyclopean lintel with Tudor-arched opening; 12-pane sliding sashes in later openings to both floors, those to the first smaller and all modern replacements. Later catslide extension to the rear, now modernised; further modern sliding sashes. Three-part sliding sash to ground floor L gable.

Reason for Listing

Included for its special interest as a fine example of a C16 storeyed house.

References

RCAHMW, Caernarvonshire, Vol.1, East, 1956, 106 (334). P. Smith, Houses of the Welsh Countryside, 1988, maps 27, 35, 37 and 39.

Coflein

<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/26417/details/DYFFFRYN+MYMBYR+%28HOUSE%29/>

NPRN	26417
Map Reference	SH65NE
Grid Reference	SH69515727
Unitary (Local)	AuthorityConwy
Old County	Caernarfonshire
Community	Capel Curig
Type of Site	HOUSE
Broad Class	Domestic
Period	16th Century

Site Description

Dyffryn Mymbyr is a small storeyed gentry house built of rubble on a part-boulder plinth and has a renewed small-slate roof with rubble gable parapets and a squat nineteenth-century end chimney to the right. There is a two-window front with off-centre entrance, which has an original cyclopean lintel with a Tudor-arched opening. In the former hall there is a very wide fireplace with a massive flat bressummer and a crisp framed ceiling with deeply-chamfered cross-beams and stopped-chamfered joists, although a few have been replaced. There is mortising evidence for a former post-and-panel screen to left of the entrance and this survives in part, re-located on the first floor. There is no visible evidence for an opposing entry (forming a cross-passage), though this was probably destroyed when the rear extension was put on. There is a modern stair to the first floor. This has modern partitioning, although the trusses are visible. It is 3-bay with original pegged collars and queen struts, with post and panel partition to the right bay, re-located, apparently from the ground floor and an ogee-headed doorway to the centre.

Noted with plan in RCAHMW Caernarvonshire 1: East, monument 334.
Additional note in Caernarvonshire III, page 112a, drawing attention to ogee-doorhead.

Tree-ring dating commissioned by North-West Wales tree-ring dating project in partnership with RCAHMW in 2011.

Two timbers (collar and ceiling beam) retained complete sapwood, and the felling date ranges for these two timbers are therefore given as 1553–55, and the other timbers have likely felling date ranges that would seem to be in agreement with these, making the most likely date of construction of this house 1553–55.

Notes from Llandygai Parish File of Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales 1977

Late 16th or early 17th end chimney house on the northern side of the Mymbyr valley alongside the ancient trackway. The house is constructed from random laid granite blocks and roofed with 'moss' slates. It is of two storeys, the ground floor originally divided by post and panel screen into a hall and two unheated service rooms. The partition has been removed to the first floor but evidence of two openings within it exists.

There is no chimney staircase but access to the attic may have been gained from the hall via a near vertical companionway against the northern wall, the ceiling joists show signs of having carried a trimmer to an opening. All of the floor joists are plain chamfered with simple angled stops. The roof is of through purlin construction carried on two trusses with tapering principals and massive collars.

The doorway has 'Cyclopean' stone head with chamfered two centred arch.

The house has under gone a few alterations apart from replacement of the windows and formation of new openings in the west and north walls.

Notes from Llandygai Parish File of Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales 1951

Early 17th century? Farm now used as joinery shop. It is finely built of large long stone slabs with good quoins and jambs. The roof is carried on two original trusses, purlins and rafters. The roof has been re-slatted; towards the front the original old heavy slates have been reused, towards the back the slates are modern. There is at the first floor a mutilated Post and Panel partition originally from the ground floor which was reset a considerable time ago.

Haslam, R. Orbach, J and Voelcker, A 2009. *The Buildings of Wales*. Gwynedd. Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

313 DYFFRYN MYMBYR, 1½m. W. Small two storey house, with lower, attached barn to the NE. Probably late c.16. Over the S doorway, a cyclopean head with a hint of a Tudor arch. Modern Yorkshire sliding windows

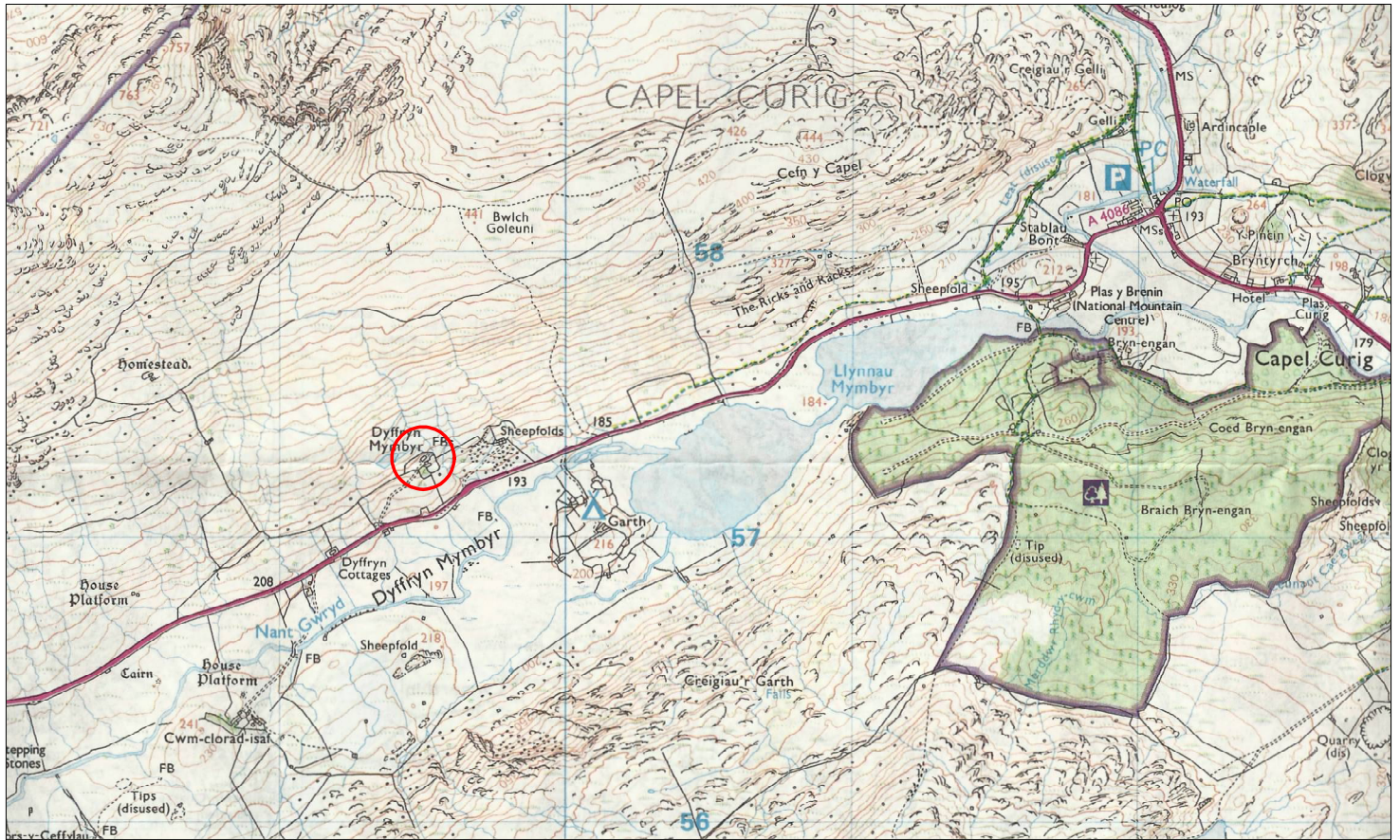


Figure 1: Location
Scale 1:25,000

Reproduced from the Explorer™ OL17, 1:25,000 scale
by permission of the Ordnance Survey ® on behalf of
The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office
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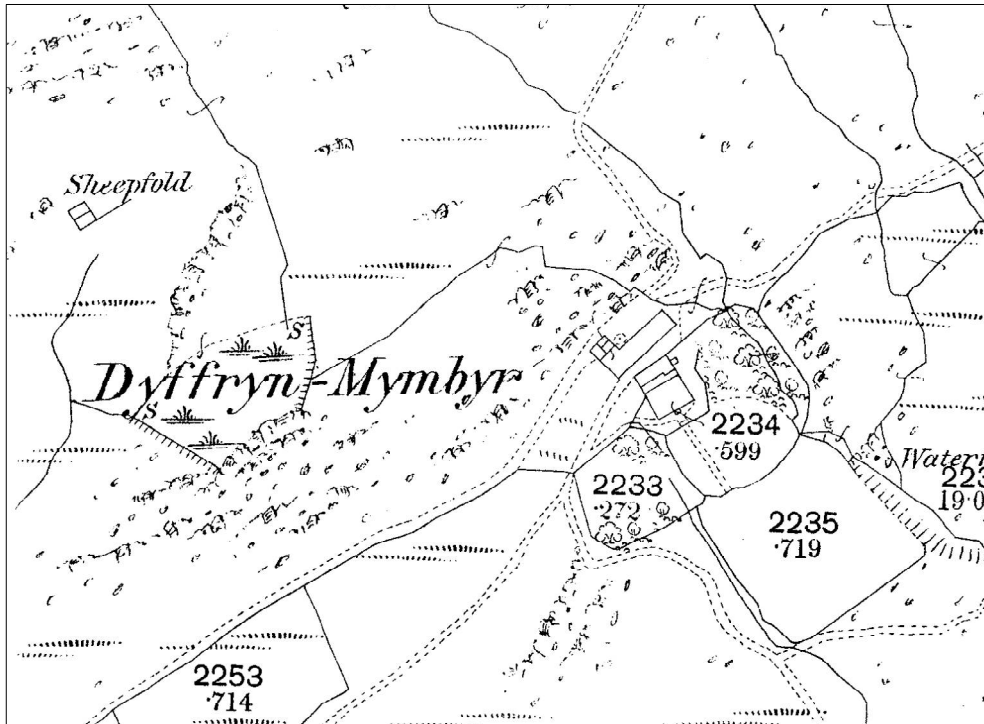


Figure 2: Extract from the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1889
Carnarvonshire VII.7
Scale 1:2500

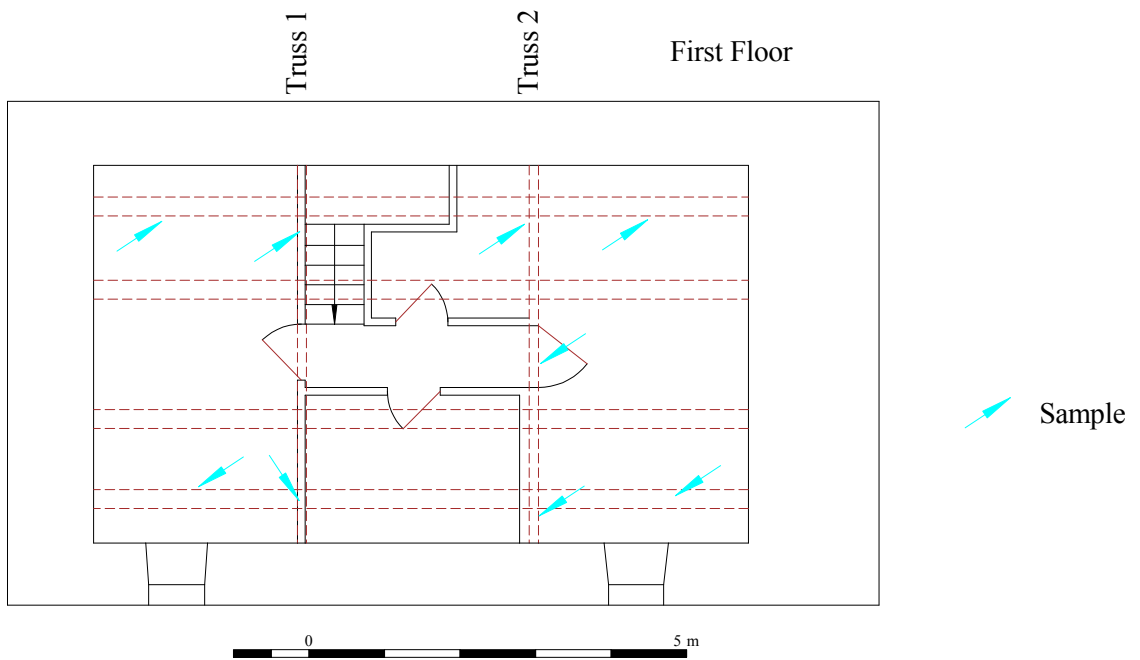
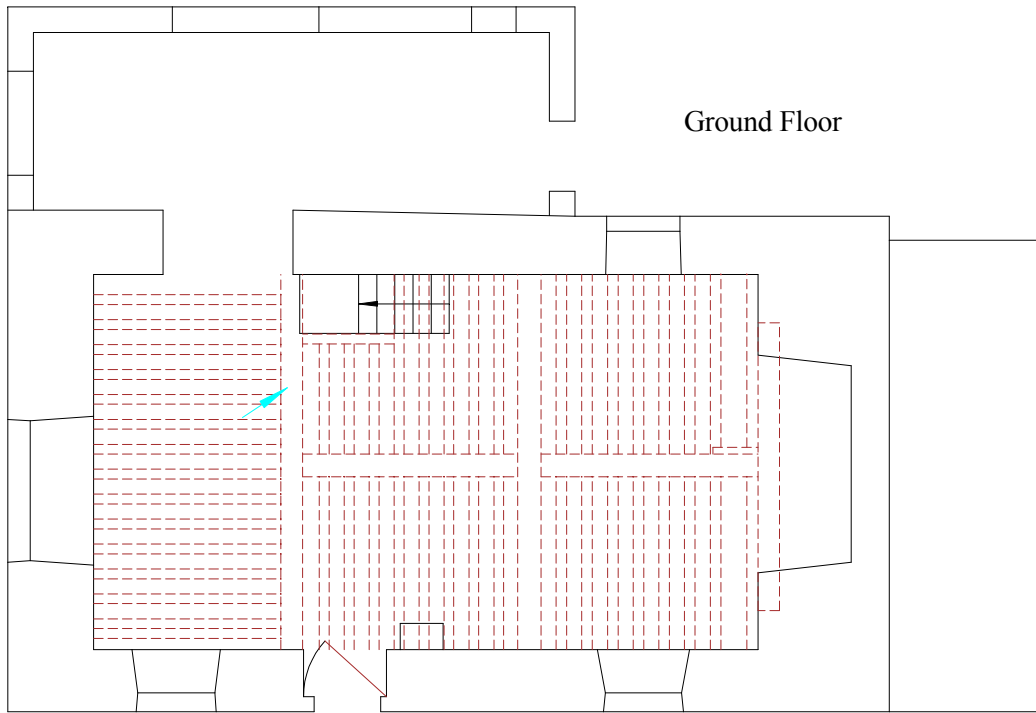
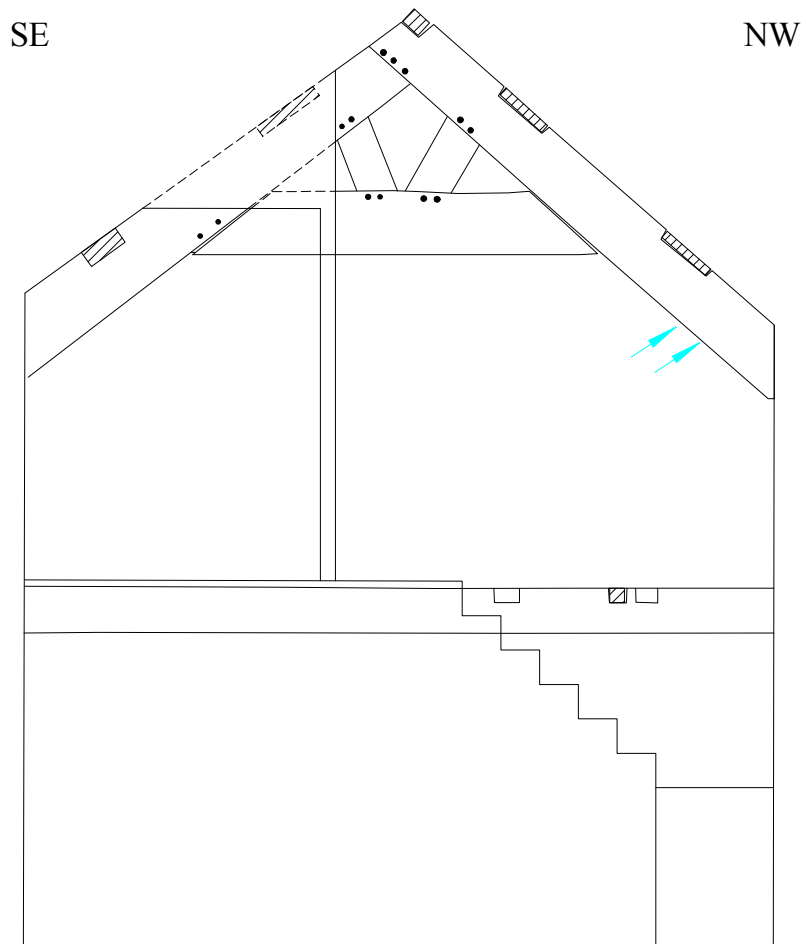


Figure 3: Plan
Scale 1:100




 Position of sample



Figure 4: Truss 1
Scale 1:50

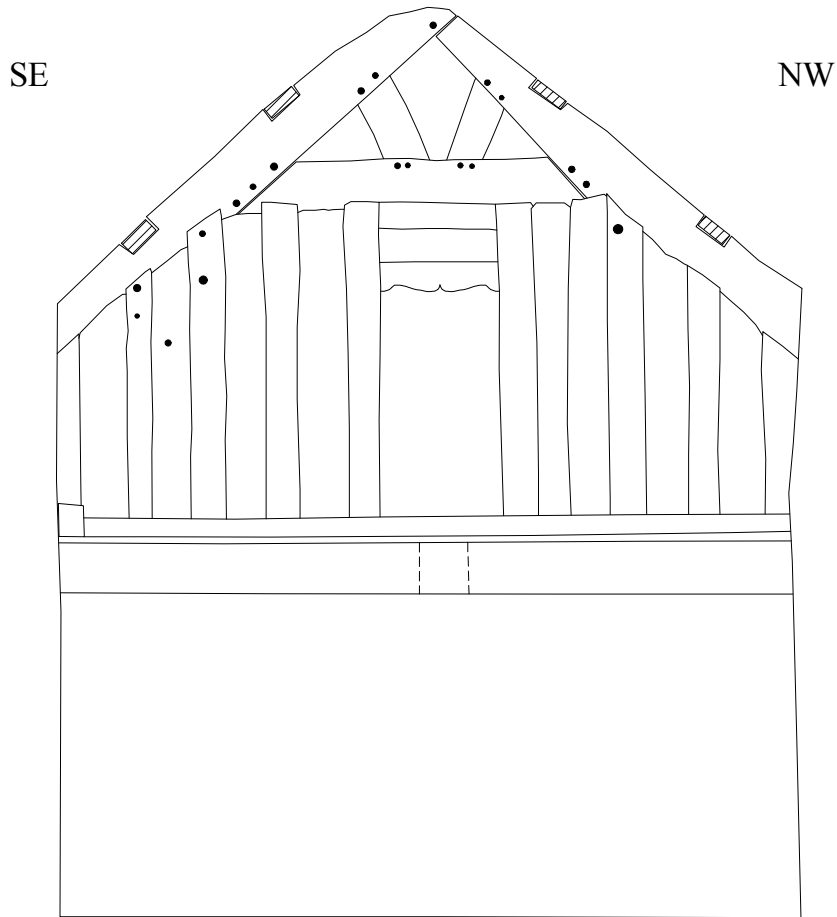


Figure 5: Truss 2
Scale 1:50

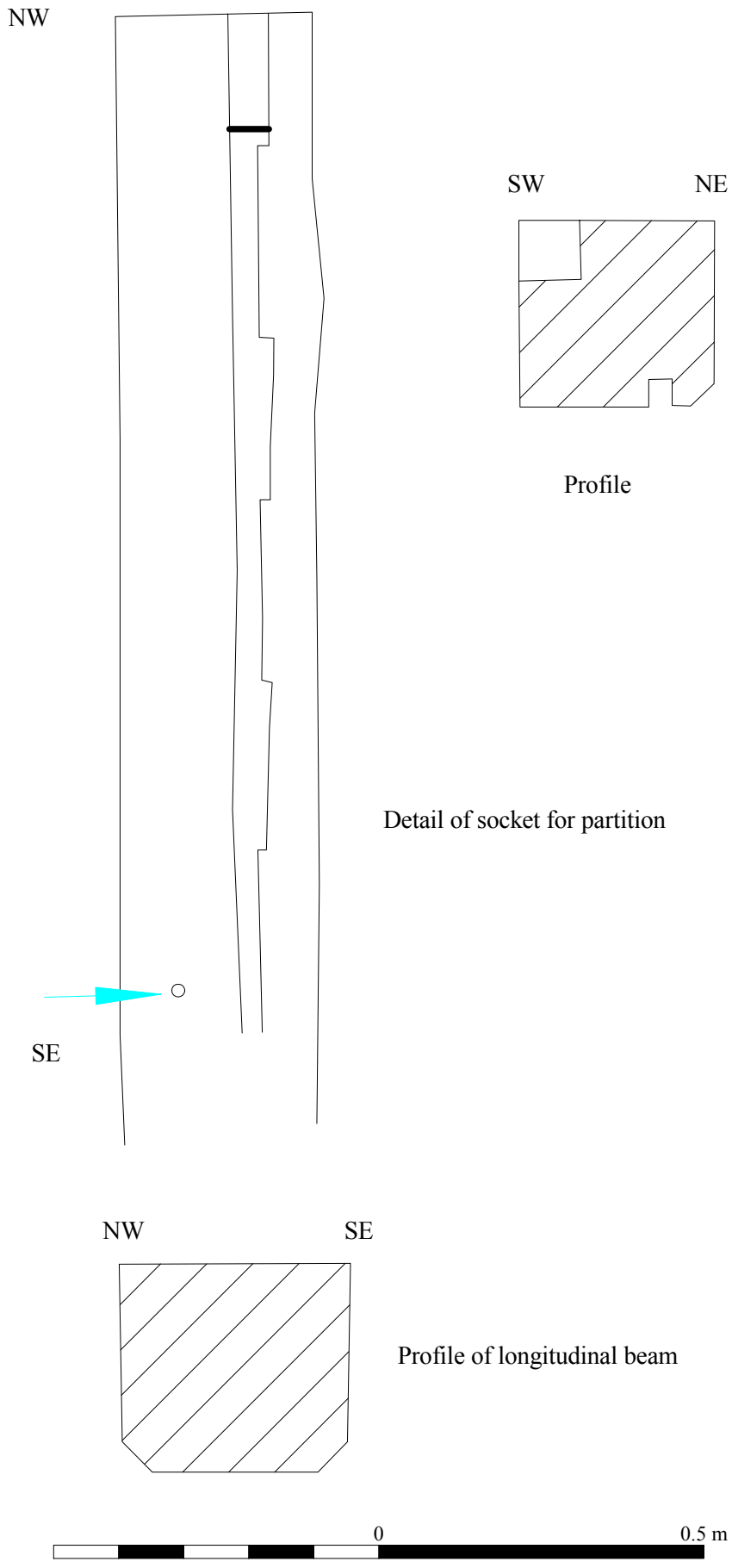


Figure 6: Detail of Beams
Scale 1:10

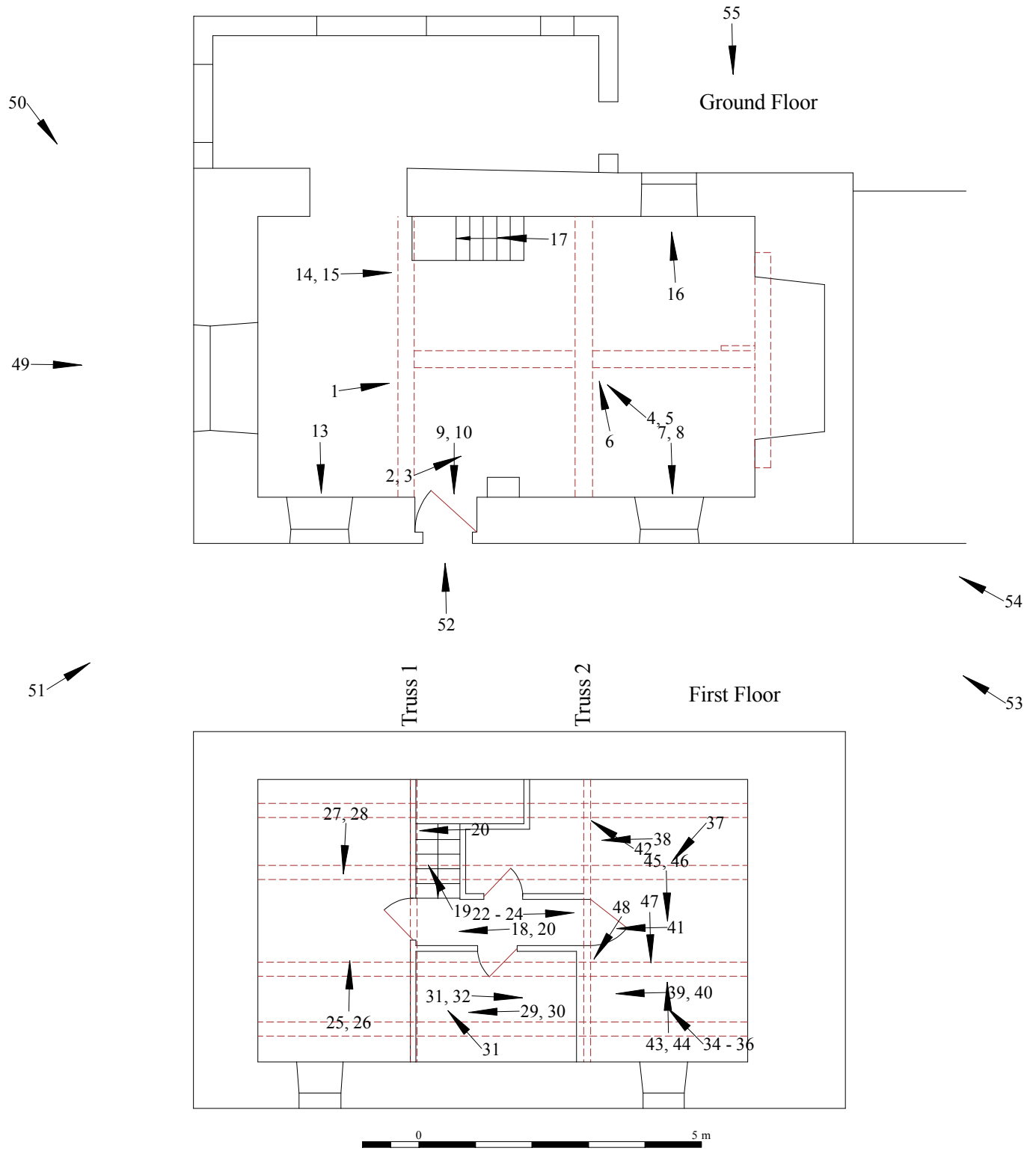


Figure 7: Location of the Photographs in the Archive
Scale 1:100