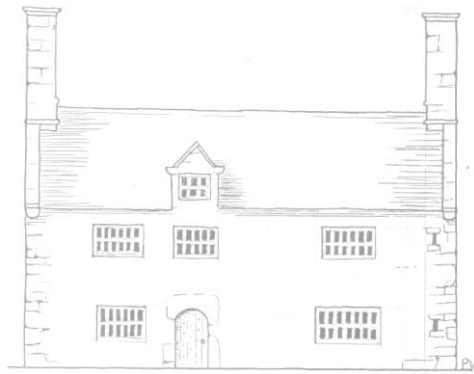


The Landmark Trust

DOLBELYDR

History Album

VOLUME I



Written and researched
by
Caroline Stanford
July 2003

Last updated April 2004

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- and the many private individuals who supported Dolbelydr through The Landmark Appeal.

LEGACIES

A bequest from Dorothy Stroud enabled us to purchase Dolbelydr and funded part of the restoration.

The restoration was also helped by legacies from Diana Wray Bliss, William Williams and Ronald Quinn, and by a gift from Mrs J Harris
in memoriam Mrs E E Ashby

Landmark would like to express its gratitude for these significant and generous contributions.

BOOKS

The books at Dolbelydr have been provided through the generosity of Roger Eaton

DOLBELYDR - Basic Details

Listed: Grade II*

Date: c1580

Acquired by the Landmark Trust: 1999

Opened as a Landmark: Summer 2003

Architect: Andrew Thomas, AA Dipl. RIBA

Main Contractors: Frank Galliers & Sons

Site agent: Eddie Longland

Site carpenters: George Clark & Elwyn Jones

Timber frame reconstruction: Carpenter Oak & Woodland

**CO&W carpenters: Steve Wright, Steve Lawrence, Sam Turley,
Jamie Ward, Mike Newstead, Elliot Baron.**

Building analysis: Peter Welford

Archaeologist: Pat Frost

Plasterers: Neil Day & Julie Haddow

Ironwork: John Hoare-Ward

Window glass: Hinton Glass

Stone tiling: R G Hinds, Shrewsbury

Painting: J S Hall & Company, Telford

Electrical contractor: Deeside Electrical

Mechanical services: JRS Mechanical Services

Bore hole: Powys Drilling Services

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A word on translation and spelling

Dolbelydr

The name Dolbelydr exists in various forms and spellings (Dol Belidr, Dolbelidr, Dolbelydir....) We took advice on how to name the Landmark from modern day authorities on the Welsh language, who advised that 'Dolbelydr' is the correct spelling according to modern conventions.¹

As for its meaning, there again views vary. 'Dol' is meadow in Welsh and translations vary from 'Meadow of the Rays of the Sun' to 'Meadow of Spears' to 'Valley of the Golden Spears' to 'Meadow of Herbs' ('pelidr' being a version of 'pellitory', meaning herbs). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the site was also often confused with Ffynnon Fair or St. Mary's Well, the ruined late mediaeval chapel across the river Elwy, a confusion that has persisted even to recent editions of the Ordnance Survey map.

Henry Salesbury

Just as with the building, so too with the name of its most famous inhabitant we should begin with a word on spelling. The Salusbury family in Denbighshire are extensive and over the centuries, just about every conceivable spelling has been used, often to reflect a network of family loyalties. We have chosen to spell Henry Salesbury 'e' because that was the spelling he chose to use as author of the Grammatica Britannica, which he wrote at Dolbelydr.

¹ Professor Sir Glanmor Williams, Professor Geraint Gryffydd and Dr. Rhisiart Hinckes, *pers. comms.*

Dolbelydr: Summary

Dolbelydr is to be treasured on two main counts. It is a fine example of a 16th century, stone-built manor house, which has survived remarkably unaltered. It was also where Henry Salesbury (1561-c1605), physician and humanist scholar, wrote his *Grammatica Britannica*, published in 1593. The *Grammatica* was one of the first attempts to impose formal grammar on the Welsh language. Little is known of Henry Salesbury's life, although it seems likely that he was related to the Salusbury family, one of the most powerful and wealthy in sixteenth-century Denbighshire.

Dolbelydr, which is in the parish of Cefn Meiriadog, would originally have been a house of considerable status, built of well-dressed limestone and with tall chimneys. Timber analysis dates its construction to c.1578 and for this date its plan is transitional. The end chimneys and primary spiral staircase would initially have been considered innovatory, while the plank and muntin screen, dividing the hall from the entrance passage, may be considered a vestige from earlier times. Dolbelydr gradually declined in status through the years and underwent various alterations. It stood empty from around 1912.

Landmark first visited Dolbelydr in 1982. Its significance as one of Wales' 'lost houses' had long been recognised but the main obstacle to acquiring it was lack of access – during the latter part of its history the house was often approached on stilts from the opposite side of the River Elwy! We were grateful to Mr. Roberts, the farmer on whose land it stands, to agreeing finally to sell us the building and an access track to it in 1999. This acquisition was directly enabled by a generous bequest by Dorothy Stroud. By the time we acquired the house, the roof had fallen in. A later bread oven and external staircase were reduced to rubble and the solar screen on the first floor had been removed to a house in Chester, where it remains today. We installed emergency scaffolding at once, although it was another two years before we had raised the necessary money for its restoration.

Our initial view was that this was a very interesting vernacular building, special because of its largely unaltered features. Local building historian Peter Welford soon convinced us that this had also once been a house of considerable status for the area, with its tall chimneys and well-dressed stone. This led to considerable soul searching about how we should restore it: its later fabric was as if anything more dilapidated than earlier, hard wood remnants. In the end, we decided with our architect Andrew Thomas that as both Dolbelydr's architectural and historic significance stemmed from its late sixteenth-century form, we should present it as closely as possible to its primary appearance.

The house would once have stood in a cluster of walls and farm outbuildings. The forecourt walls have been reconstructed on the footings of the originals and are typical feature of buildings in Denbighshire at this time. As was customary in the 16th century, the walls have again been flush-pointed and then limewashed. Most of the wall at eaves height also had to be rebuilt. Much of the first floor framing remained on the site as well as some of that on the second floor so replacement of the floor joists was not too difficult. The collapsed roof structure was a bigger job, subcontracted to specialists Carpenter Oak and Woodland who took away the roof timbers to their framing yard in Perthshire. Here they painstakingly reassembled the roof frame. Late in the autumn of 2002, a forty foot crane arrived on site to lift the three massive roof trusses back into position. Stone tiles were used for the roof covering, as they would originally have been. There were vestiges of a rear dormer window, which we have recreated and the building now has a full set of correctly sized windows in their original positions, several having twelve or even fourteen mullioned lights, survivals of great rarity. These too are limewashed once more, in imitation of stone.

Inside, Dolbelydr is a fairly typical lateral entry house in plan except for the large lobby area to the left of the front door, which is unusual. A great deal of thought went into how to convert the inside of the building for use as a Landmark, while respecting as much of its primary floor plan and purpose as possible. We became confident that we could accurately reposition the screen to the hall with its Tudor-arched doors, which led

us to seek permission to get rid of later partitions. The original newel post for the spiral staircase was returned by a public-spirited member of the public one open day. In truth, the tightness of these stairs makes them impractical for anything other than the time-traveller in us all and so we have also made a new oak staircase in the latest position for which there was evidence. Apart from this second staircase, the original ground floor floorplan has been largely retrieved. The shower room stands in what was once the service bay and the ground floor bedroom in what would originally have been a parlour.

Although the hall would have become a less communal space by the late sixteenth century, it would still have been used for cooking and we therefore decided to create the freestanding 'island kitchen' in the body of the hall. The slate floor was largely original although many flags had to be replaced. Unobtrusive underfloor heating has been installed. We found the bressumer lying in the middle of the floor – presumably someone had tried to plunder it but then found it simply too heavy to remove. All the bressumers above the hearths would probably have been plastered over originally; to avoid losing the fine moulded stops, we decided instead to limewash them. The cupboard to the left of the hearth was re-made with a fretted ventilation panel, using a photo from the 1970s and fragments found in the room (these probably date from the nineteenth century). The shaft to the right of this hearth was formerly a *garderobe*, accessed from the solar. We found a single diamond-shaped quarry amid the debris of the house, which, like much early glass, was a surprisingly dark green. Today's glass retains a faint greenish tinge and was made in France. The slate floor on the ground floor may be primary, although many of its flags had to be replaced. The sharp-eyed will find two early nineteenth century characters roughly scratched on the hall-side face of the screen by the doorway – one a soldier with a cockade in his hat, the other perhaps his lady.

The internal partitions in the building were all found to be wattle and daub rather than the more usual lime plaster and this is what has been used for the partitions. Patches of the earliest lime plaster coat on the walls survive in various places through the building, which we have tried to replicate. The division of the first and second floors largely follows the line of original partitions, retraced from evidence in the framing, and new oak floors have been laid. The timbers have almost all been limewashed in. Originally, the solar and perhaps the main bedroom would have been brightly decorated with wall paintings in imitation of wall hangings. The timbers would have been crisp and new. By contrast, the surface of most of the timbers we salvaged was today rough and decayed and so it was decided to paint them in.

The first floor solar (today's Landmark sitting room), then and now, is by far the finest room in the house, given extra elegance by being open to the roof with its arch-braced truss. Today's visitors can emerge from the spiral stairs just as Henry Salesbury would have done and gaze like him through green tinged diamond quarry panes down this quiet valley from Dolbelydr, or Meadow of the Rays of the Sun. Just like the house, little has changed here in almost five hundred years.

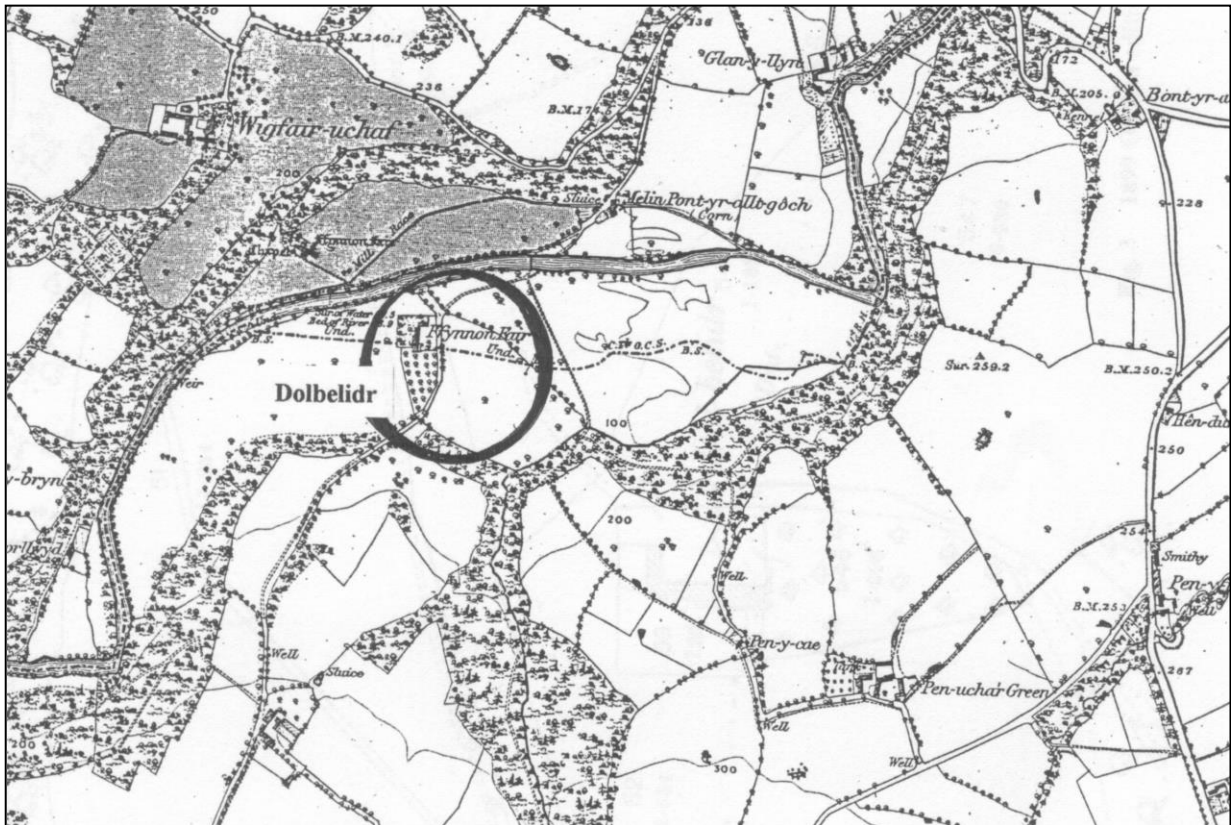


Fig 1: 1877 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" map, showing the Dolbelydr site mis-recorded as Ffynnon Fair (actually the chapel across the river).

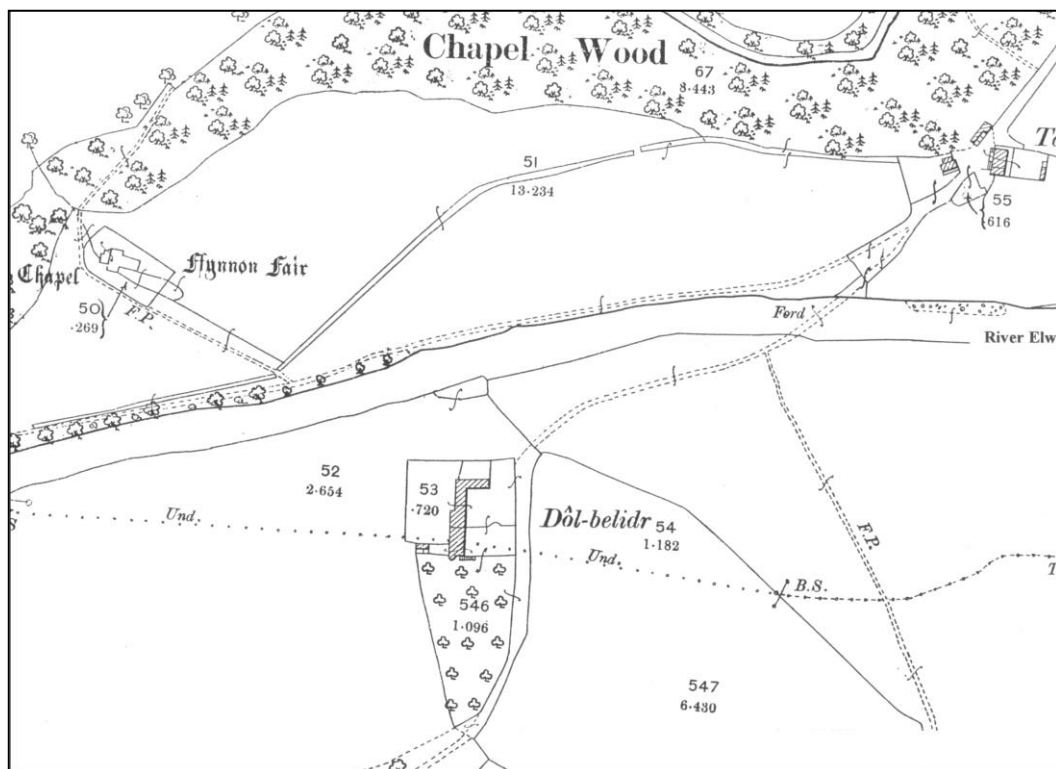


Fig 2: 1899 OS map, 25" (reduced). Both maps show extensive orchards or tree plantations. Note the ford across the River Elwy.

Description & History of the House

The house at Dolbelydr represents an unusual and late variant of an end-chimney, house of the late sixteenth century with an entrance lobby and vestigial cross passage. From dendrochronology on the ground floor screen, a felling date during 1578/9 is suggested, dating the house to c.1580. (Normally we would hope to date from a more integral member than a partition but such was the ruinous state of the building that this was the only bark-edged timber that was accessible at the time. However, the date it provided fitted so well with the documentary and archaeological evidence that it seemed unnecessary to repeat the exercise once access was possible to higher level timber).

Dolbelydr would have been a house of some status, built of well-dressed local stone at a time when timber framing was still the predominant regional vernacular building material. It followed an up-to-date plan and its tall chimneys in particular were indicative of high status. 'Gavelkind' (or partible inheritance) ensured that however impressive a family's genealogy, larger estates were progressively reduced to a collection of smaller ones as inheritance was divided amongst offspring. Dolbelydr is a classic example of this, having been carved out of the Galltfaenan Estate for a younger Salusbury son (see page 4 for a note on the spelling of Sale/i/usbury!). It almost certainly stood as the main house amid a cluster of other farm buildings. A geophysical survey conducted by James Adcock has tantalisingly suggested that the present house may have replaced an earlier one oriented to the south west of the current house, 'presumably a private dwelling of some stature that had associated with it some form of landscaped grounds' (see Fig. 3). Remains of two buildings were tracked, the larger one revealing remains extending some 20m x 20m (and more is hidden by the building site that overlay it at the time of survey). Dolbelydr has always been linked to the Galltfaenan Estate and it is quite plausible that the current site represents the position of the original house on the estate built by 'Alescander de Sausbry – considered younger son of Llew eni and first to settle at Dolbelydr' who is mentioned in a Letter Patent of 1306.

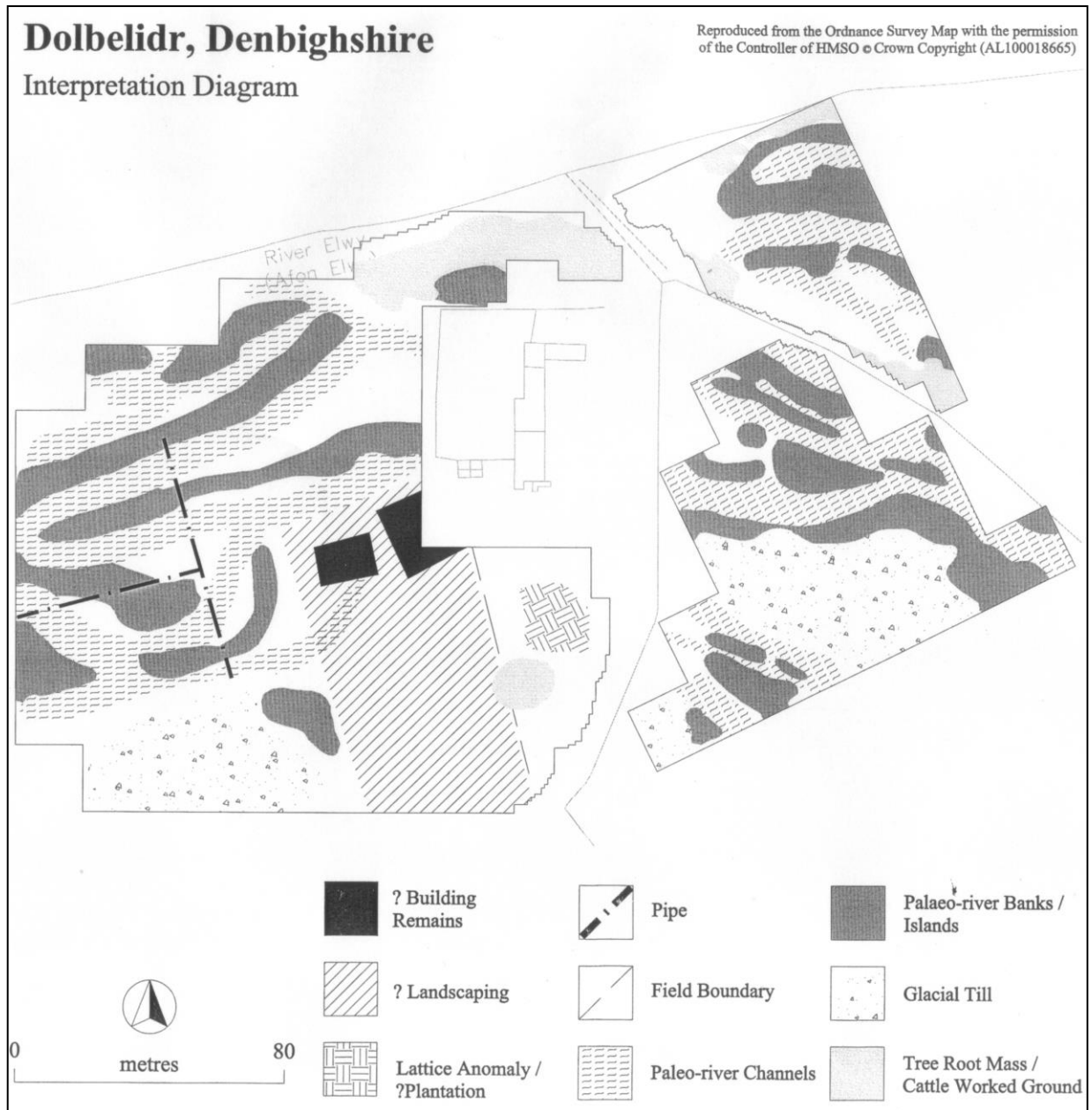


Fig. 3: Summary of geophysical assessment of the area surrounding Dolbelydr, carried out by James Adcock, Bradford University, 2002

This interpretation closely matched the assessment of our building analyst, Peter Welford, who described a typical manor house of this type as being surrounded by barns, byres, dovecot, laundry and so on – almost a little hamlet in its own right. These buildings would almost certainly have been timber-framed and of a more utilitarian standard and therefore more ephemeral in nature. Only the fine stables (dated from the brickwork to c.1700) and the remains of the later outbuildings to the north of the house remain of this complex today, although more complete examples may be found dotted around the area today. The stableblock, originally with a hayloft above, was probably rebuilt on the footings of earlier buildings. In being built of brick and on such a scale, it too speaks of considerable status for its day and indeed various alterations were carried out in the main house around the same time. It seems this branch of the Salesbury family continued to prosper at least for the early part of the eighteenth century.

Today, the main house is presented much as it would have looked in the late sixteenth century, flush-pointed and limewashed on the outside. We found areas of the original flush-pointing on the rear elevation and even traces of residual limewash and it is this finish which we have sought to follow, somewhat unusually for historic buildings in Wales. Much of the original floorplan has been reinstated inside. The site walls are built on the line of the original footings and again enclose a forecourt and orchard, as they probably did when built. Originally they would have stood as high as 8-12 feet (Cadw's Plas Mawr in Conwy offers a nearby example of such high walls). In pastoral settings such walls offered protection against deer as well as the elements and perhaps, in this river valley, against floods. *The Chronicle written by the famous clarke, Peter Roberts*, also known as *Y Cwitta Cyfarwydd* records two such 'inundations' of the Elwy in the early seventeenth century, one in 1612 and another in 1624, when 'a great flood' destroyed part of the bridge at StAsaph, another at Yr Allt Goch and also the 'Chappel Bridge' near Ffynnon Fair on the old road from Wigfair by Dolbelydr and Galltfaenan. In the 1920s, Bezant Lowe could still discern traces of this old road.

The masonry on the east elevation of Doleblydr is more carefully dressed and coursed whereas the other elevations are of coarser rubblestone, suggesting that a more polite front entrance was always intended, facing up the Elwy valley for an approach from St. Asaph. The hard local limestone lends itself well to the clean lines of the chimneys, windows and cyclopean doorway.

The wooden, transmullioned windows at Dolbelydr in imitation of stone are an extremely rare survival, especially in North Wales. The dissemination of architectural features such as these is a fascinating topic in its own right and reflects social and intellectual networks. For example, is it a coincidence that Plas Mawr (1577) at Conwy, one of the earliest references for crow-stepped gables in the region, was built by Robert Wynn, who travelled with courtier Sir Thomas Hoby in Flanders where such gables originated and that the Hobys incorporated the crow step in their modernisation of Bisham Abbey, Berkshire in the 1560s? Perhaps Henry Salesbury's father, the probable builder of Dolbelydr, had links of his own in Monmouthshire where such windows were far more common.

These heavy, diamond mullioned windows were usually replaced by later inhabitants as fashions changed and lighter glazing bars allowed more light to enter. Presumably Dolbelydr's later decline in status protected it from such modernisation, although the mullions also play a structural role, making them difficult to remove.

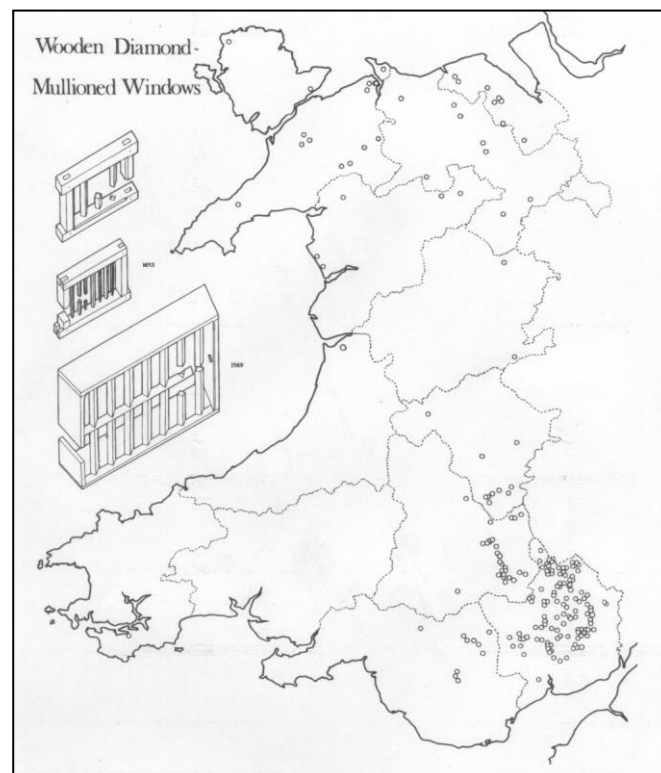


Fig. 4: Distribution of diamond mullioned windows. 'Had the map been based on the number of actual windows rather than the number of buildings possessing one or more of such windows the emphasis on Monmouthshire would have been further reinforced.' (Fig. Xii, Fox & Raglan, *Monmouthshire Houses*, Part 1, 1994 ed.)

As for roof structures, later re-roofing campaigns often led to their simplification, especially with regard to the dormer windows that were so much a part of the polite building vocabulary of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

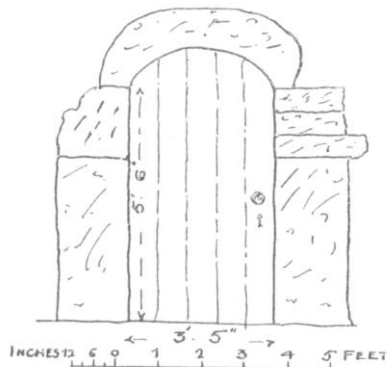


FIG. 199. DOORWAY, DOLBELIDR. Mr. S. S. Platt, del

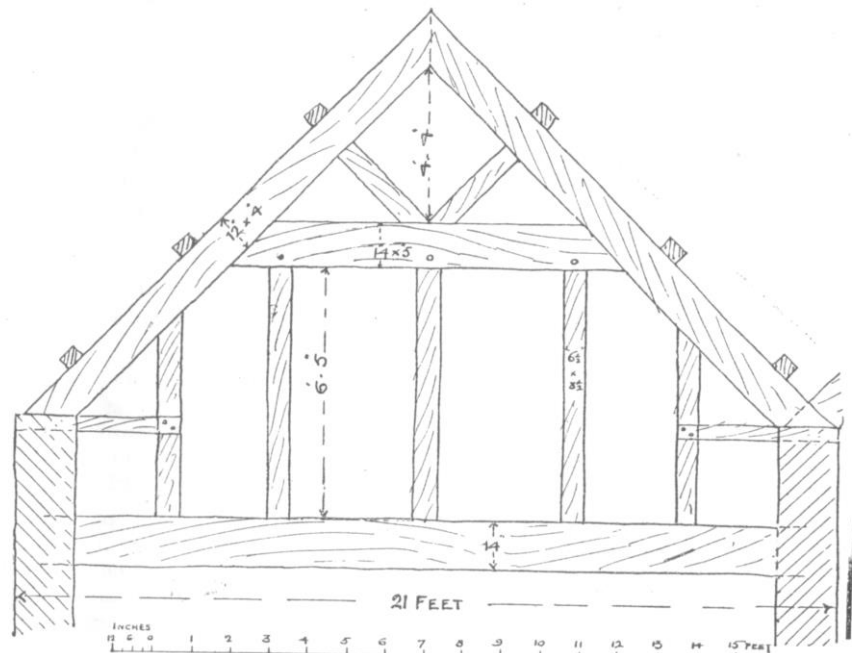


FIG. 200. ROOF TIMBERS, DOLBELIDR. Mr. S. S. Platt, del.

**Fig 5: Measured sketches of features at Dolbelydr from W Bezant
*Lowe's Heart of Northern Wales (1927)***

The attic floor was not necessarily designated for lower grade accommodation at that period and gabled dormer windows were more a rule than an exception. At Dolbelydr we found a squat window to the attic at the rear, squashed in beneath the eaves, which Peter Welford was confident was the remnant of a rear dormer. We felt that it was important that at least the rear elevation should be reinstated, using a salvaged window found in one of the outbuildings. The dormer now lights the upper stairwell, which has been built in a modern form since there was no clear evidence of how it arrived at the upper floor in the past. In 1927, Bezant Lowe recorded the attic floor at Dolbelydr as being partitioned into three rooms, supporting this hypothesis of a front dormer. However, we found no evidence of a front dormer in the framing of the later roof structure and have chosen not, speculatively, to re-introduce one.

End-chimney houses such as Dolbelydr differ noticeably from the various forms of mediaeval and sub-mediaeval houses in having no high end or dias partition in the hall. Dolbelydr follows Fox and Raglan's general observation that Welsh houses with chimneys on the outside walls tend to be found to the west of those with the main fireplace sited internally. The original organisation of Dolbelydr

around the entrance lobby at one end of the vestigial cross passage was also innovatory. Plas Mawr is the first known example of this in the area, but Dolbelydr followed on very soon after.

The retention at Dolbelydr of only a memory of a cross passage makes its particular planform transitional, but the positioning of hearth rather than dias as the focal point of the hall still represents a significant shift in housing culture – it meant people lived in their houses differently. This shift in lifestyle and change in planform became mutually reinforcing. Instead of a household living more or less communally in a multi-purpose hall with hierarchy within the household demarcated by the existence of a high end in the hall, the advent of stairs, end-chimneys and corridors provided more privacy and the beginnings of what we would recognise as modern use of the accommodation. The rooms become more specialised in purpose.

At Dolbelydr we may imagine the hall being used more as farm kitchen, the family withdrawing to the solar on the first floor or parlour (where the ground floor bedroom is today) for privacy. A distinction begins to be made between master and servants in the rooms where they spend most of their time. The spiral staircase to one side of the hearth (the newel for which was returned to us and which we have been able to re-use) is also characteristic of this transitional phase. Such spiral stairs are only one step removed from the internal ladder access they replaced although people soon realised the impracticality of such a tight spiral.

At Dolbelydr, the spiral staircase was later superseded by a dogleg stair rising approximately where the ground floor shower room stands today, a space that was probably originally a service room. What is unusual about this primary arrangement of the ground floor is that a rectangular entrance hall or lobby seems to have been used from the outset instead of the more usual and lateral cross-passage (although opinions have varied about this at Dolbelydr). This lobby was unheated, as was the parlour to the rear. These two rooms had six- and five-mullioned windows respectively, suggesting rooms of some status. The service bay however was lit by a four-light window, confirming its lower status in the hierarchy. The absence of mortices on the hall-side beam of this bay suggests there was at first some kind of opening between the hall and service area – perhaps a serving hatch with a shutter that could be lowered to use as a serving table.

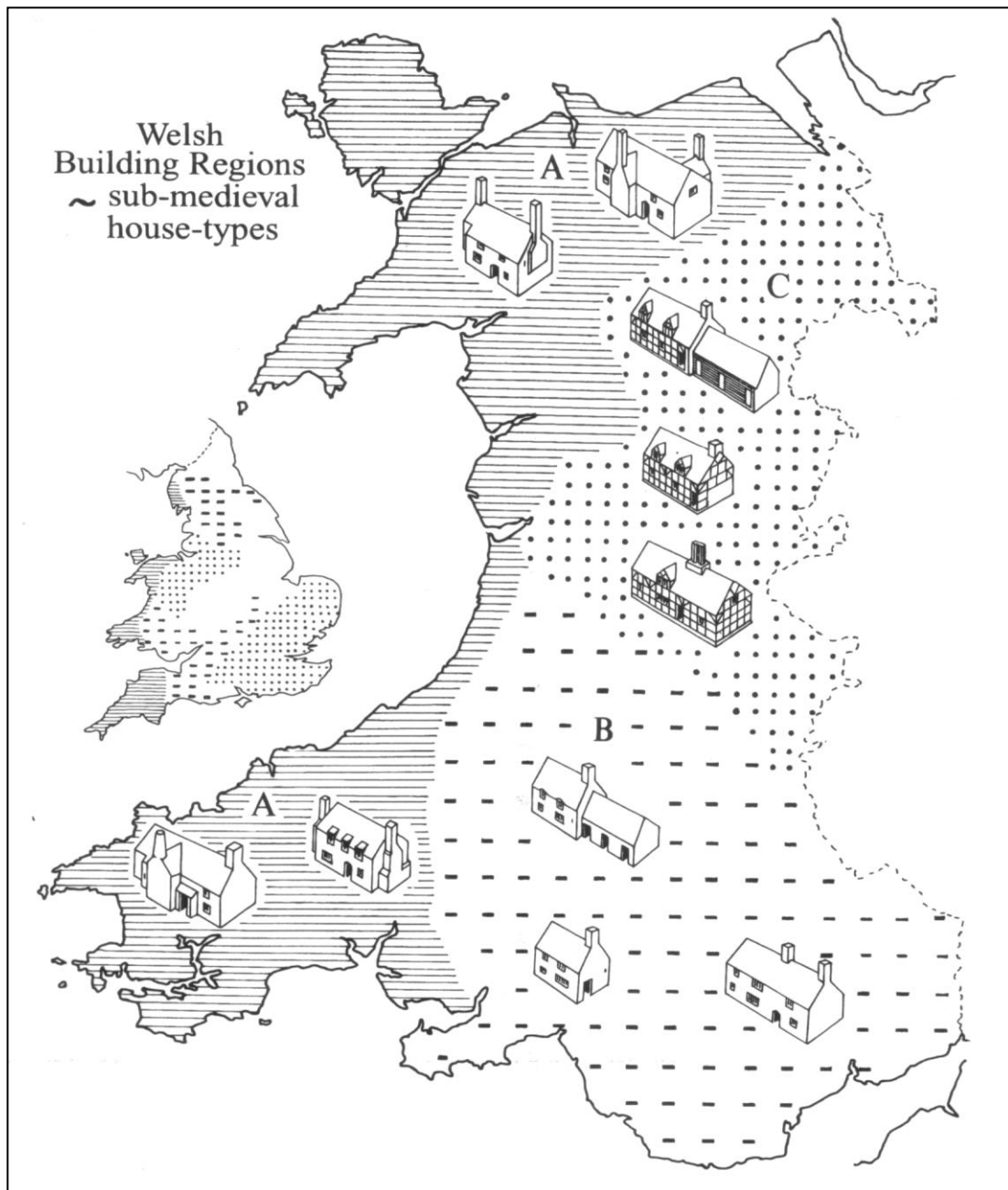


Fig. 6: The geography of sub-mediaeval house types in Wales from *Monmouthshire Houses*. Area A tends to hold houses with chimneys on the outside wall, Area B has chimney-backing-on-the-entry as a predominant type and Area C is more mixed. Fox & Raglan make the point that, while end-chimney houses are usual in Snowdonia, house types in the Vale of Clwyd tend to be more mixed.

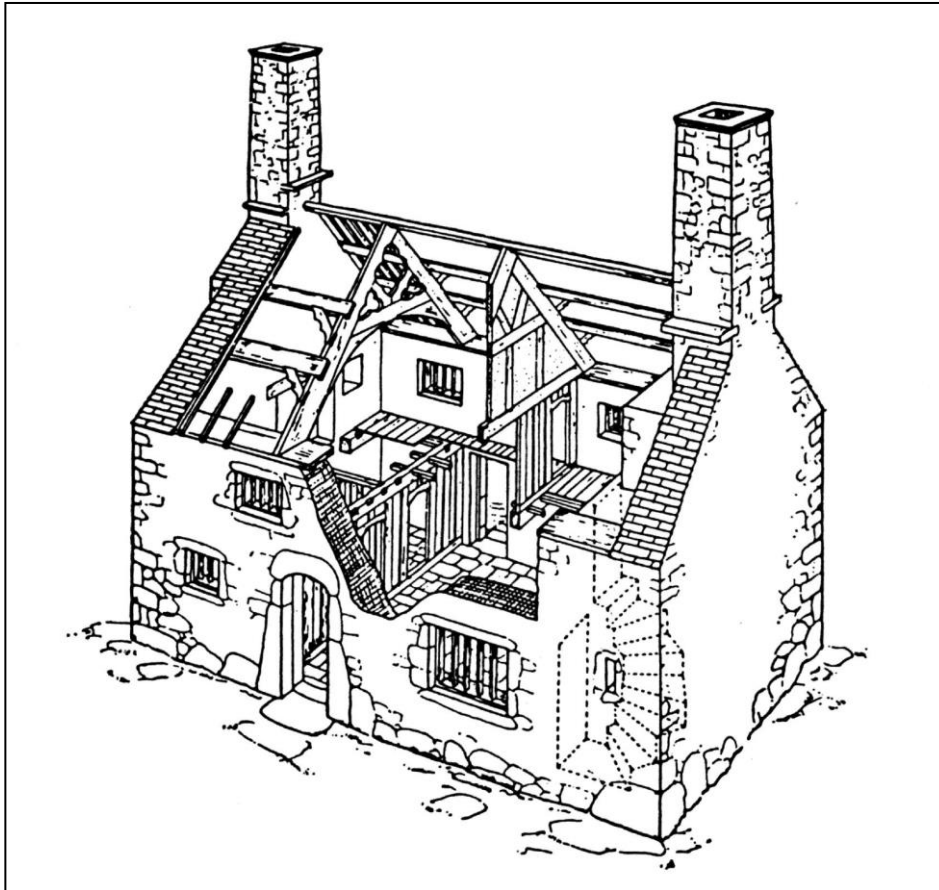


Fig. 7: Axonometric view of a typical end-chimney, cross-passage house – not Dolbelydr although but for the placing of the screen it could almost have been drawn from the building. (adapted from Joan Thirsk, *The Agrarian History of England & Wales*, Fig. 40, p.794).

Around 1700 and again in the late eighteenth century, the arrangement of the ground floor seems to have undergone considerable alteration although the exact sequence of the changes is not clear. (An indenture cited in *Cofio'r Cofyn* – see below - dated 1704 reveals that Dolbelydr was still in the Sale/isbury family at the time and owned by one Edward Salisbury). The plank and muntin partitions that we found, while primary, had all been moved from their original position and rearranged – we found them as a partition to the left of the front door, some reassembled upside down! The partitions included the two Tudor-arched door heads, now reinstated in what we believe are their original positions in the centre of the hall screen. Our architect Andrew Thomas and building analyst Peter Welford spent many hours poring over the *ex situ* members of the partition and many more found scattered across the interior to reconstruct their original form which has, as closely as we are able, been reinstated today.

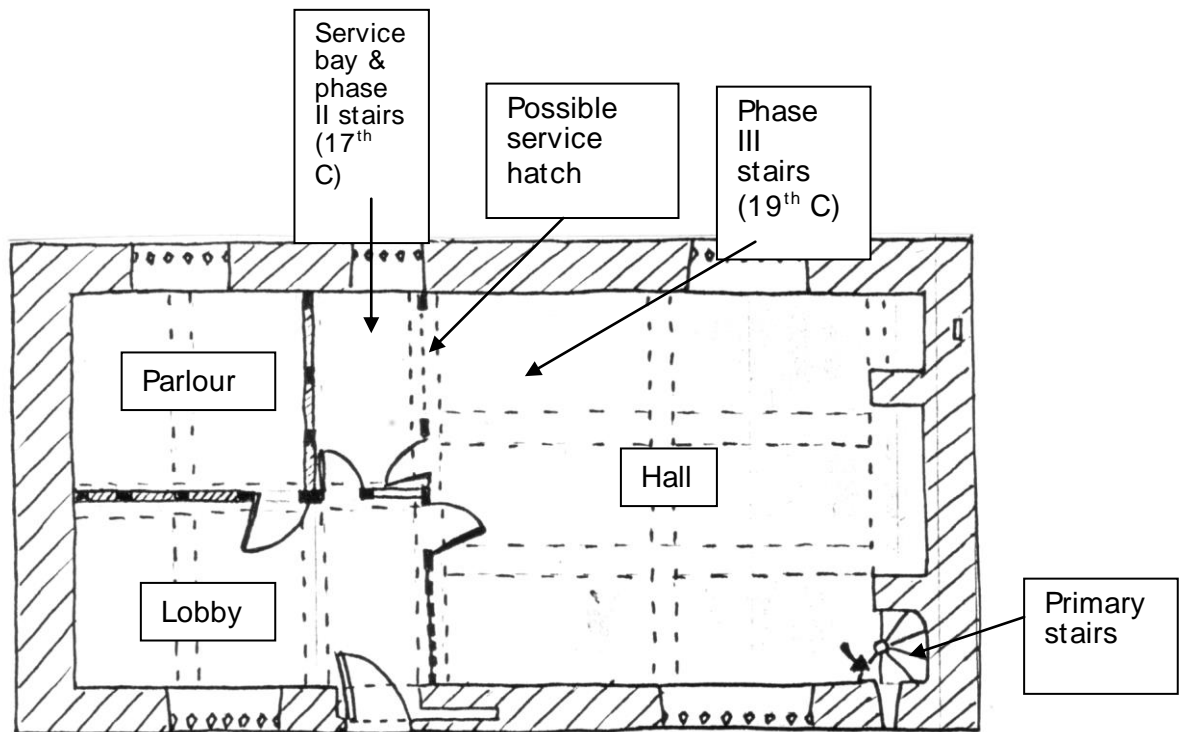


Fig 7: Reconstruction of original ground floor plan at Dolbelydr (P Welford)

Probably also in the eighteenth century, the area in front and to the right of the front door was divided with thick stone partitions to provide a lobby and an extra room and the staircase was moved again to approximately its present position, where it remained within living memory.

Around 1800, the house again was given something of a makeover and refitted as farmhouse with external stairs providing outside access to an attic dormitory, presumably for the farm labourers in order to give the family more privacy. A bread oven was inserted into the south wall of the former parlour. Colonel John Lloyd Salusbury, a career soldier during the Napoleonic Wars, had inherited the Galltfaenan Estate in the 1790s and proceeded to carry out many improvements. The changes at Dolbelydr probably formed part of this process.

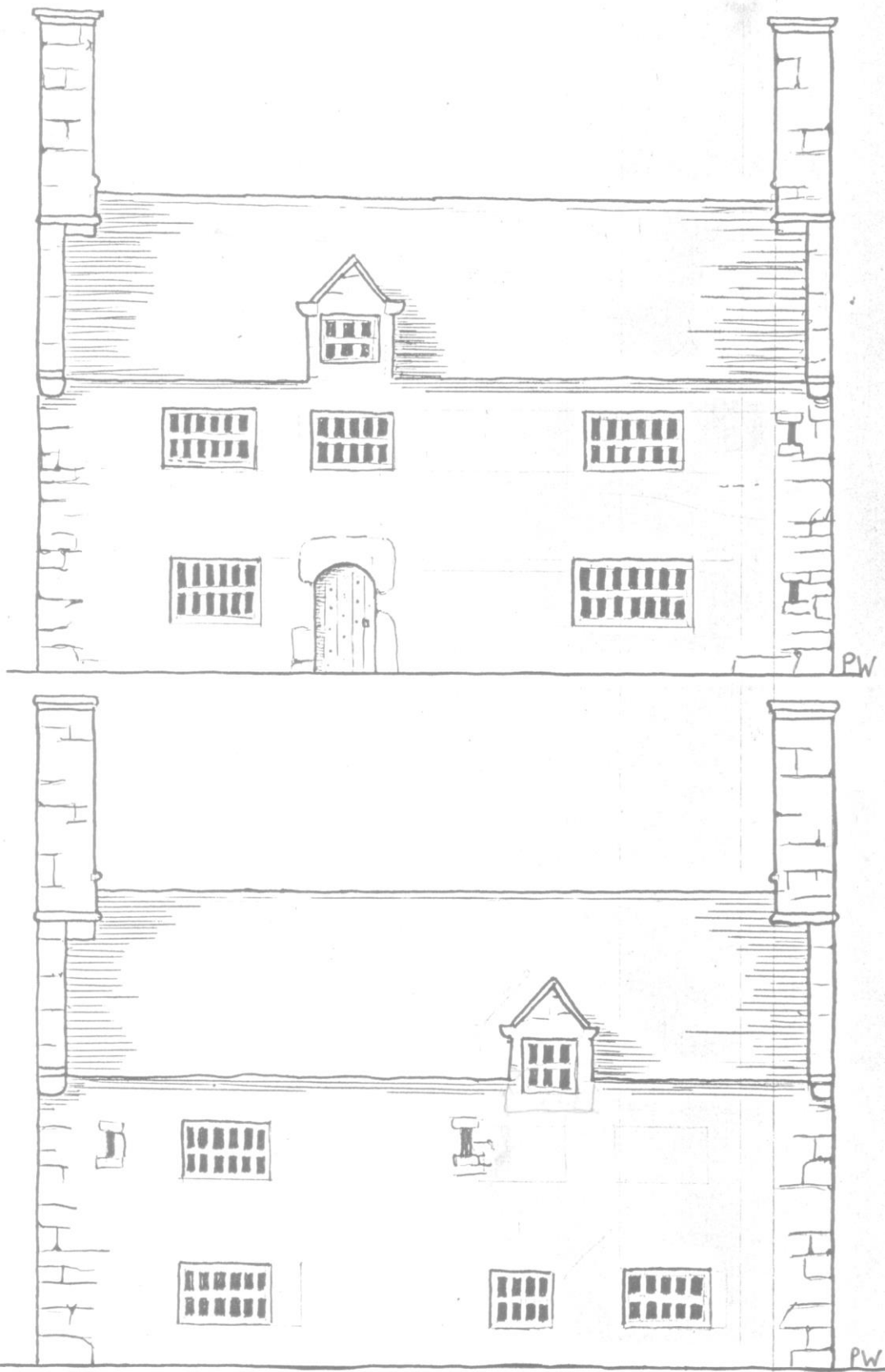


Fig 9: Peter Welford's reconstruction of Dolbelydr's original appearance.

As is so often the case, the house at Dolbelydr began to suffer a gradual decline in status after its proud beginnings. By the mid-nineteenth century, it had become a fairly humble tenant farmhouse. A small hearth was inserted into the room to the left of the front door, feeding into the main flue at this end. At some stage yet another staircase was inserted into the parlour, the house probably becoming a multi-household dwelling.

In 1987, the local history society celebrated its tenth anniversary by collecting various oral histories, including the reminiscences of Margaret Williams, published in *Cofio'r Coyfn*. Margaret's family were the last occupants of Dolbelydr, from 1903 to 1912, when the house was incorrectly known as Ffynnon Fair. Her father Ellis Edwards was gamekeeper for the Galltfaenan Estate to which Dolbelydr still belonged. According to Mrs Williams, tradition has it that the house at Dolbelydr had been relegated from main residence to accommodation for estate employees when the Sali(e?)sburys bought the big house at Galltfaenan from the Ravenscroft family in the distant past. Galltfaenan still belonged to the Mainwaring family - by a happy touch of continuity, Judy Welford, wife of Peter Welford our buildings analyst for the house, is related by marriage to Lloyd Mainwaring, the last of the Salusbury Mainwarings, formerly of Galltfaenan. Lloyd Mainwaring built another house also called Dolbelidr after he sold Gaelltfaenan in 1926, completed in 1930 to designs by Sir Guy Dawber, the well-known Arts & Crafts architect.

Mrs Williams remembered an idyllic childhood at Dolbelydr. With her three brothers, she went to school in Trefnant, sometimes (a circuitous route!) via the track past Galltfaenan Hall and through the woods or, when the river was low, on stilts across the river. Stone steps on the south end still led up to the large room on the second floor which they knew as the Granary and where the children played at schools. There was a long orchard where they kept bees, pigs and pet sheep and there were walnut trees just outside (one remains in the NW corner of the orchard and more have recently been planted).



Fig 10: Dolbelydr c. 1905, at the time Margaret Williams lived there as a child (NMRW).

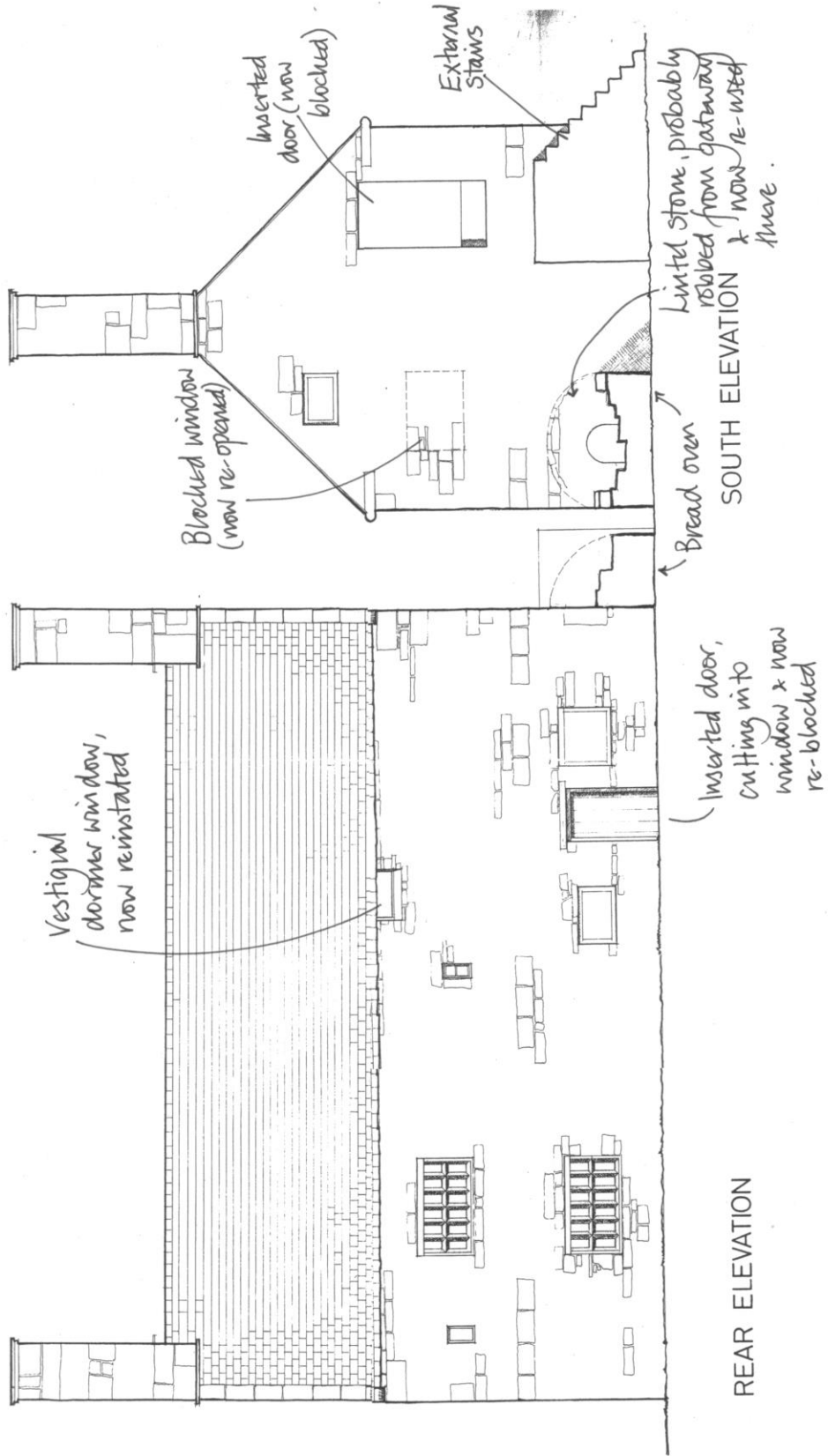
Inside, the hall was a large kitchen/living room with an enormous fireplace, just as today. There were seats either side of the hearth and she remembers the massive bread oven in the former parlour. The house was lit by paraffin lamps and the parlour (the solar?) was kept for visitors only and special birthday teas, with a violin for entertainment. In those days there was more snow in winter, kept at bay by huge log fires and the massive front door, studded with nails and secured by a bar which slid into the sockets still to be seen today. Mrs Williams also remembered the garde robe ('a peculiar little toilet') – not used in her day but which she remembered as leading down a vertical shaft to a stream running nearby. Amateur painters came in summer to paint the river valley and Mrs Williams was bought her first paintbox by a kindly neighbour, Mrs Campbell of nearby Glas Llyn.

In 1926, Lloyd Mainwaring on coming into his inheritance, sold the house and estate at Galltfaenan to the Tates, of sugar refining fame, who added an extension to the main house. By then, it seems, Dolbelydr was already standing empty and neglected. Sir Henry Tate kept an old railway carriage in the orchard as a fishing hut – it was still there when Landmark arrived but too decrepit to save.

In 1964, Cyril Wright, lecturer in architecture at Liverpool University, visited Dolbelydr, took photos and carried out a measured survey. In 1977 four of his architectural students returned and did the set of full survey drawings which follow. These were an invaluable resource to us in showing the building as it was in its early stages of decay. The drawings show the building still roofed even at this relatively recent date and also show the latest alterations. The external staircase and bread oven were still in place and a ceiling had been inserted across the solar to form an extra attic room, consistent with Bezant Lowe's observations fifty years earlier.



Fig 11: Railway carriage, originally used for transporting horses and then by Sir Henry Tate as a fishing hut in the orchard at Dolbelydr.



REAR ELEVATION

DOLBELYDIR



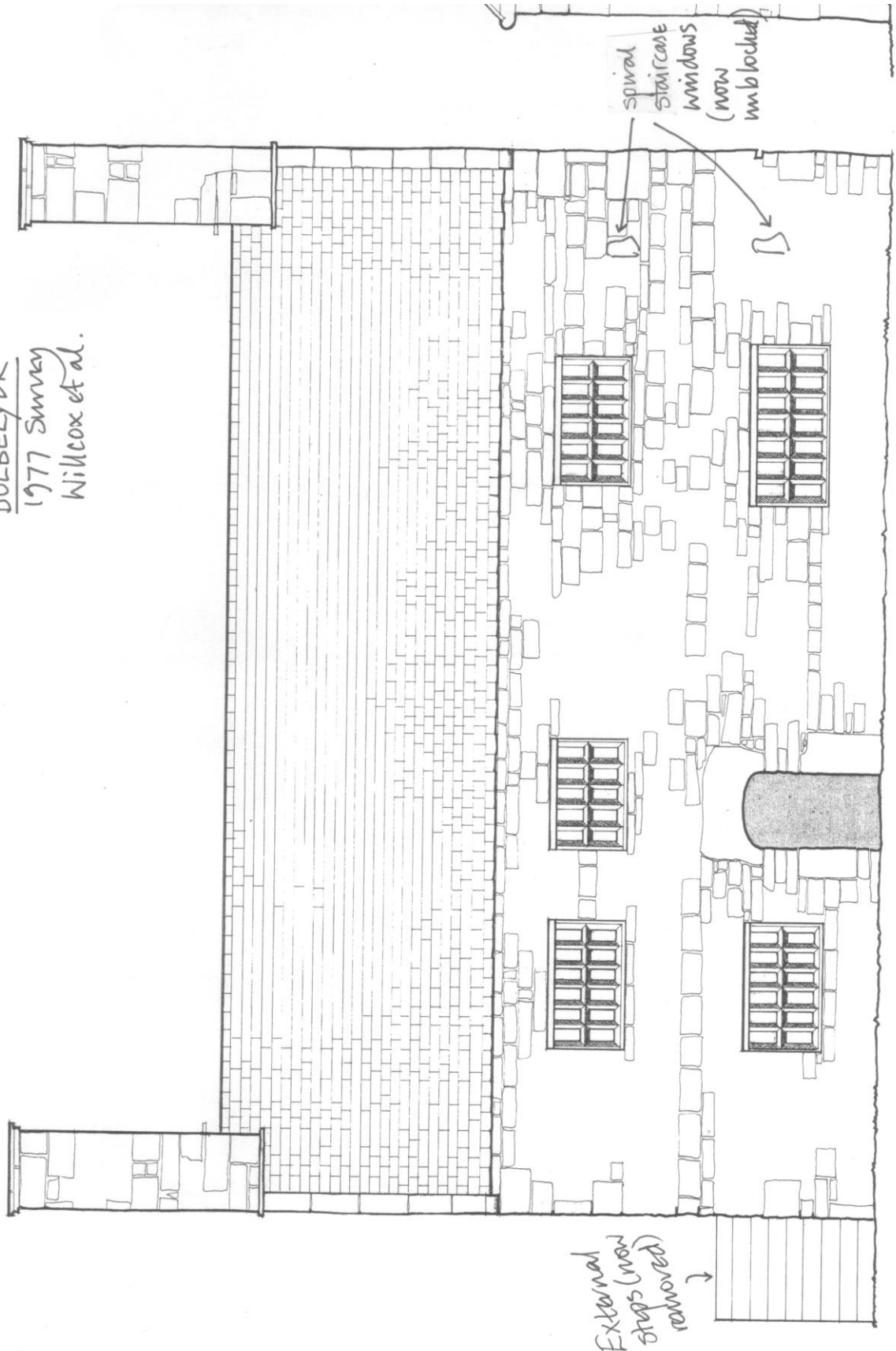
Surveyed by S.E.Willcox
A.Farrar, A.Coombs, R.Fry

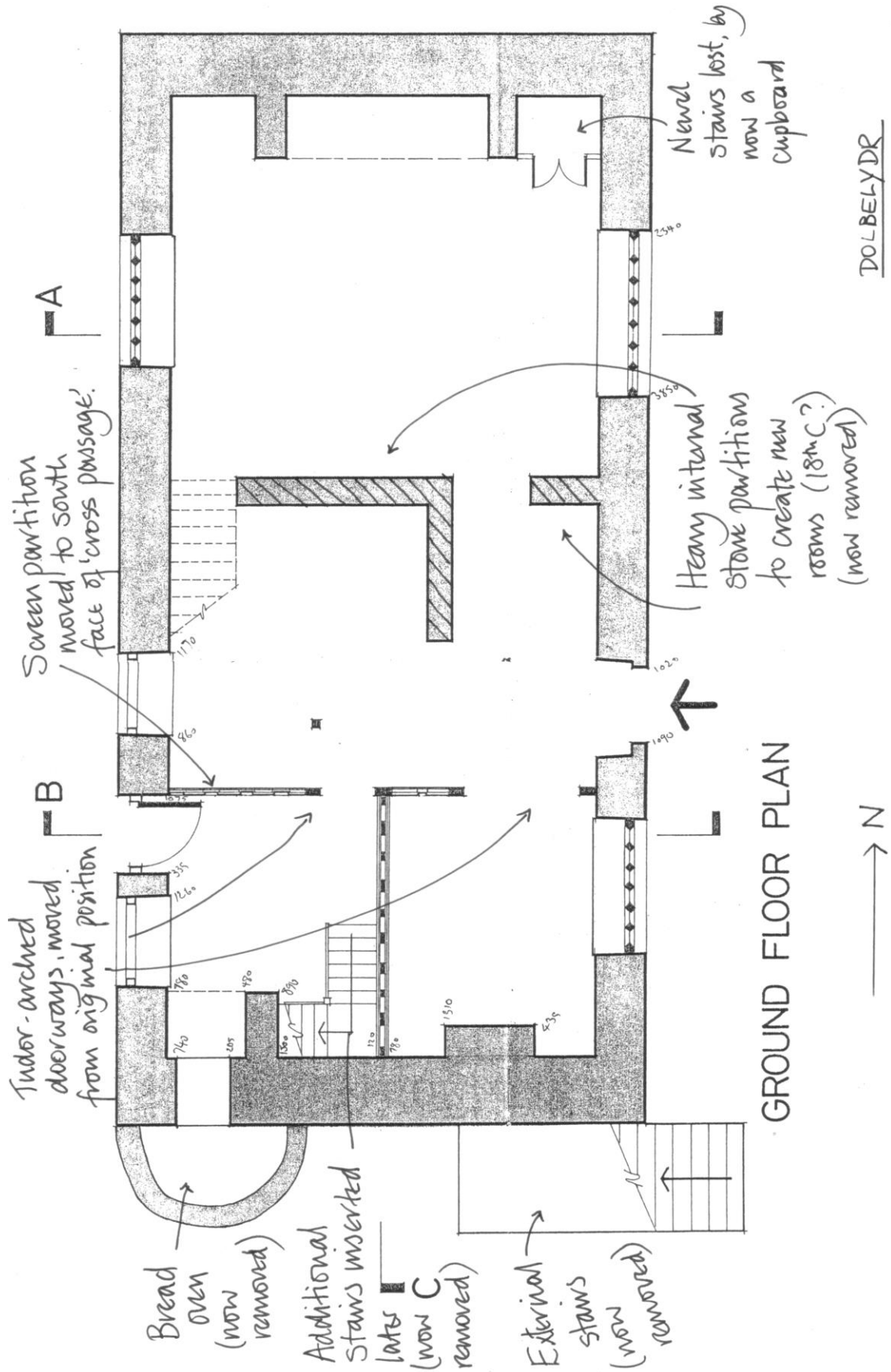
Drawn by S.E.Willcox

Sep. 1977

CLWYD SJ 0309 7095

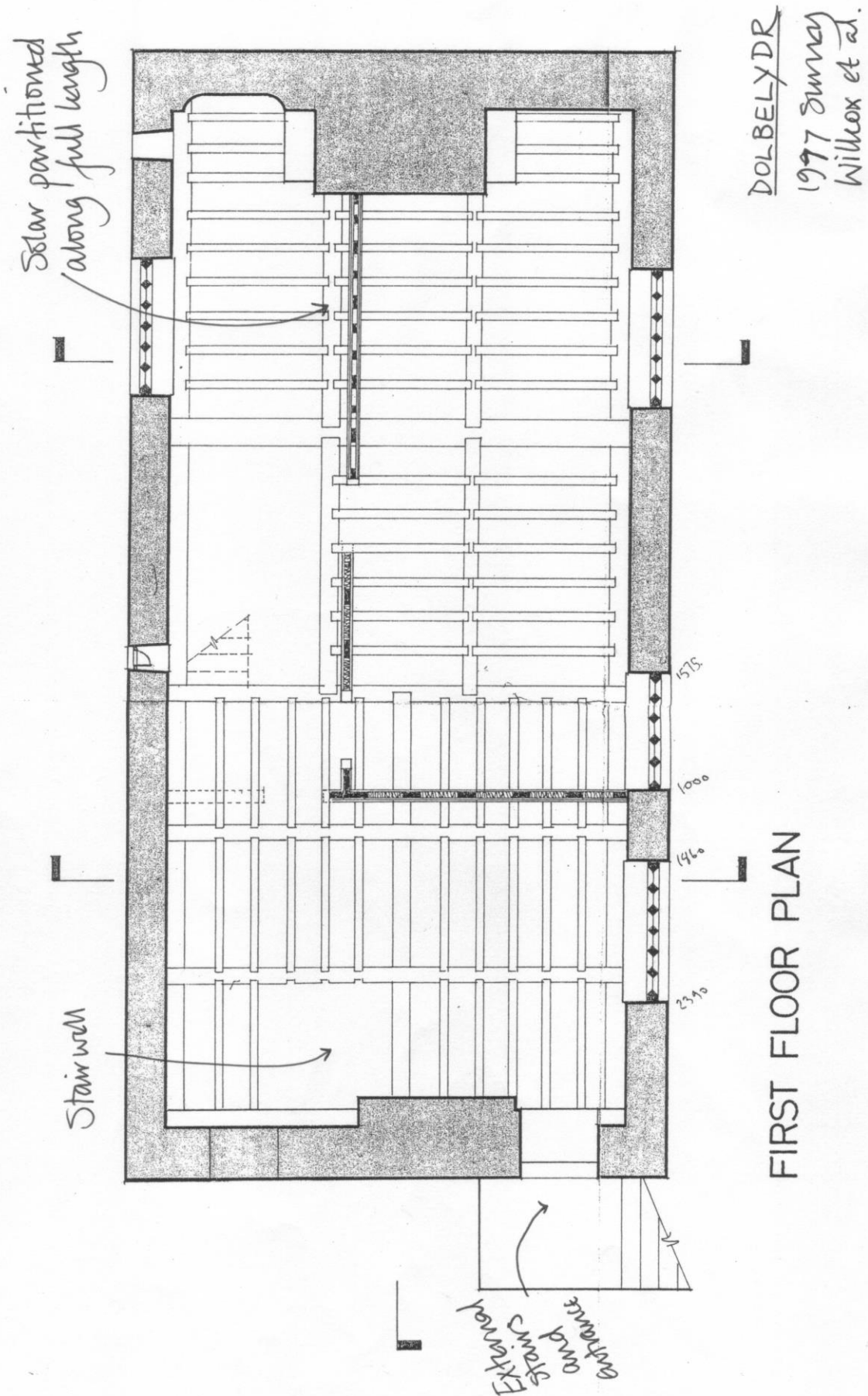
DOLBELYDR
1977 Survey
Willcox et al.



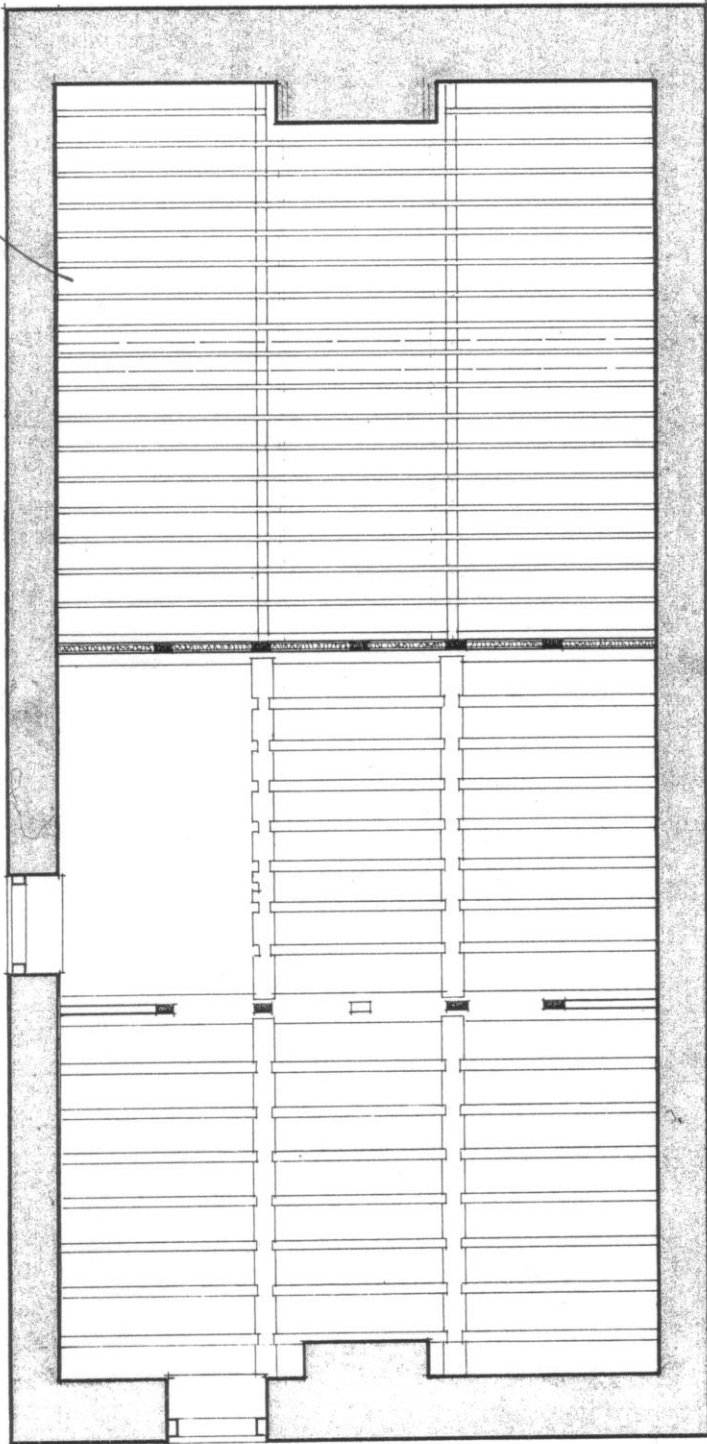


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

DOLBELYDR
1977 SURVEY
Wilcox et. al.

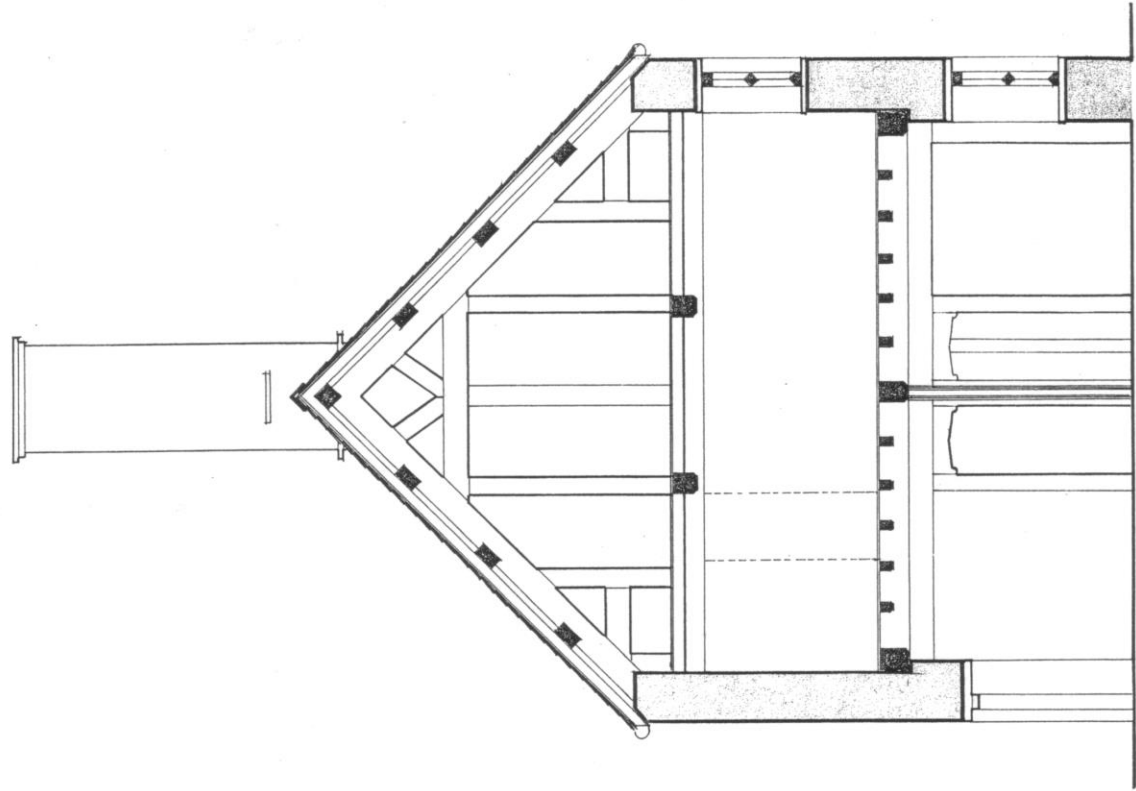


False ceiling had been inserted into the solar

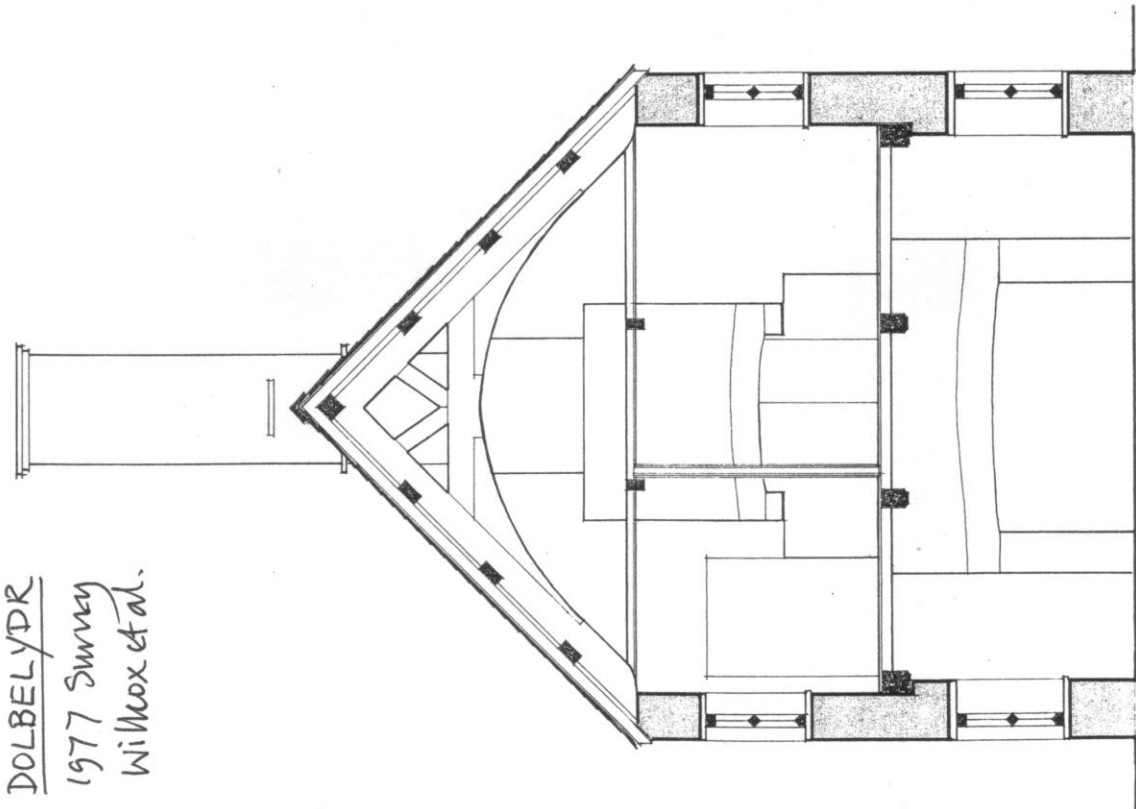


DOLBELYDR
1977 Survey
Wilcox et al.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

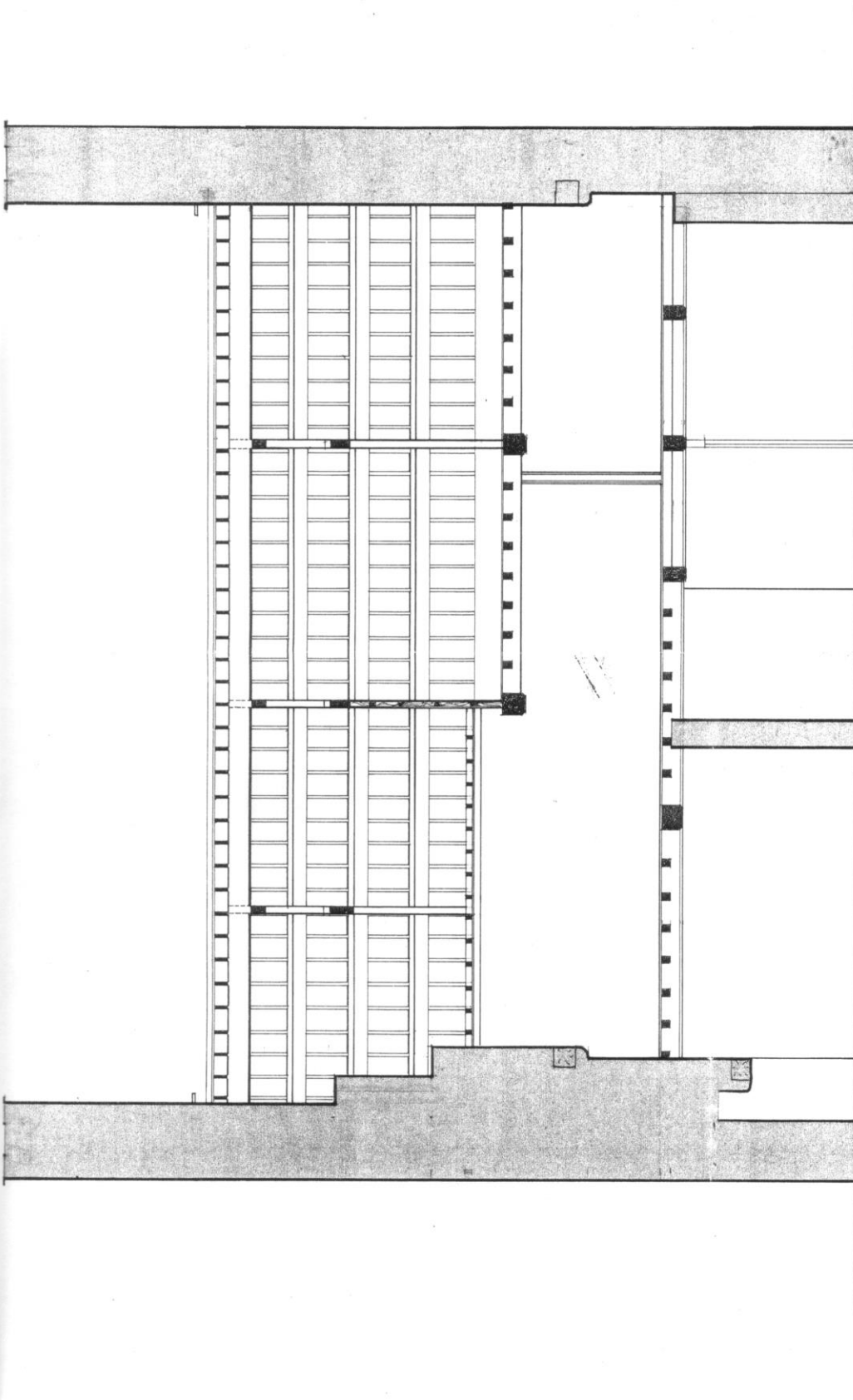


SECTION B



SECTION A

DOLBELYDR
1977 Survey
Wilcox et al.



DOLBELYDR
1977 Summary
Willcox et al.

SECTION C

DOLBELYDR BEFORE RESTORATION.

The following black and white photos were commissioned by Landmark as a record before work began.



East ('front') elevation with sycamores



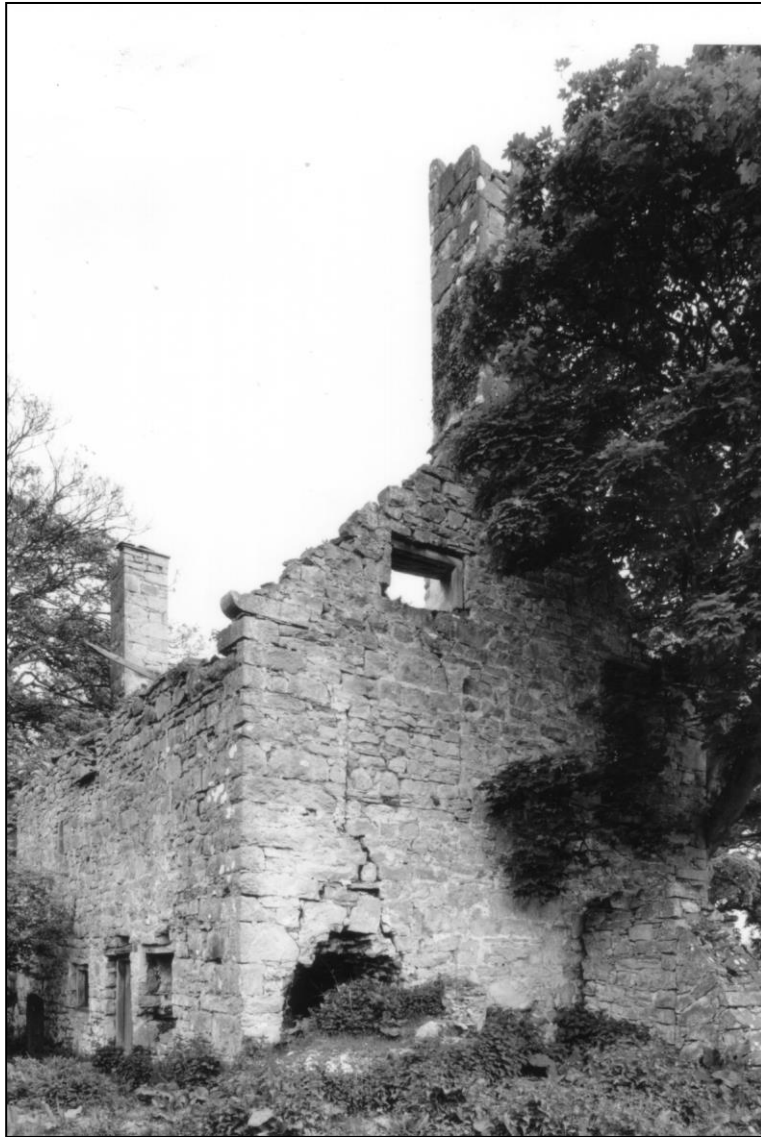
Detail of SE window and 'cyclopean' doorway



West ('rear') elevation with remains of bread oven in the SW corner and of external staircase on the west south wall.

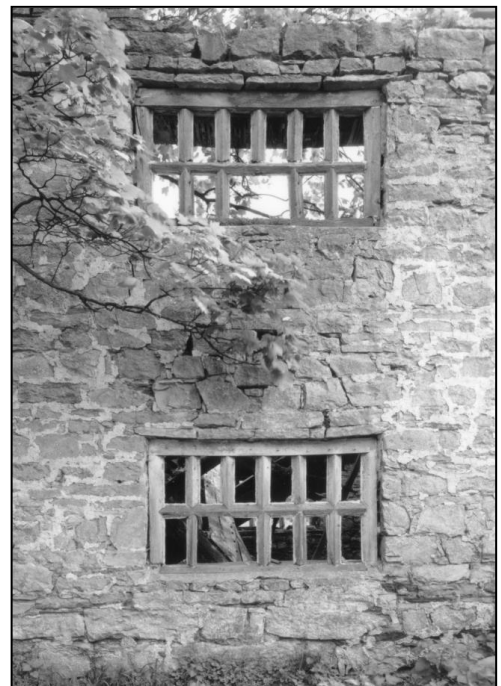
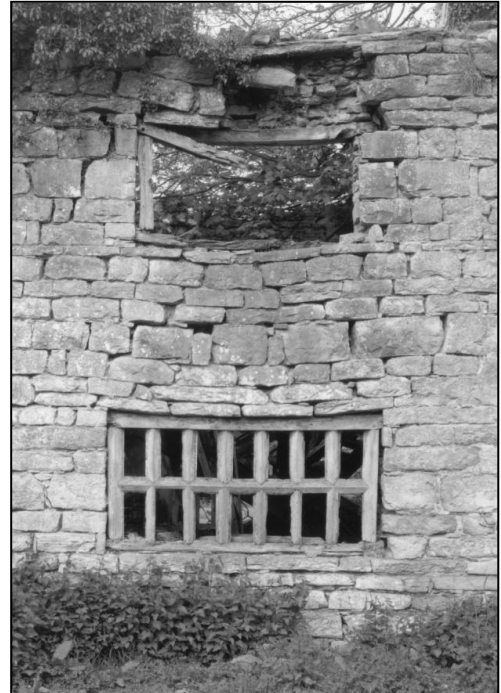


West elevation with inserted door and altered SW window.



West elevation with remains of bread oven and inserted window above.

Windows before restoration: clockwise from top left: east window, hall; windows on east elevation, hall below and solar above; windows on west elevation, hall and solar; view of east window from inside the hall.





Top: North chimney stack(from east elevation). Below: Inside, looking south along along the rear elevation (site of the most recent and now again current staircase).



Hall fireplace – note removed bressumer under pile of rubble!



View north through hall, with collapsed arch brace from solar on floor.



Looking west along the passage way from the front door. The screen and its pair of Tudor arched doorheads have been repositioned along the passage's south wall.

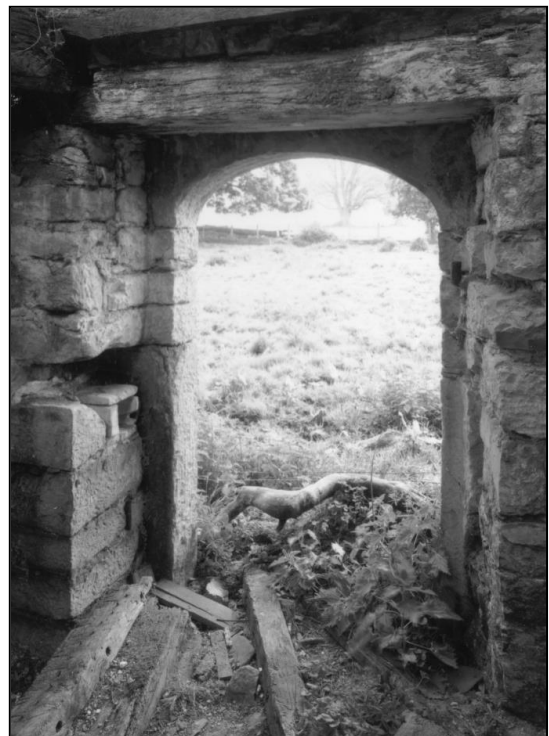


Looking NE from the SW former parlour/service room (now ground floor bedroom).



Top: View SW from passage through service room with remains of bread oven in the far corner. Its massive stone lintel was almost certainly re-used from an entrance gateway, where it now again resides.

Below: The 'cyclopean' doorway, outside and in. Note the socket for a draw bar.





At the very beginning of work on site, autumn 2001.



A canopy of scaffolding wrapped in polythene was erected to protect house and workmen from the elements.

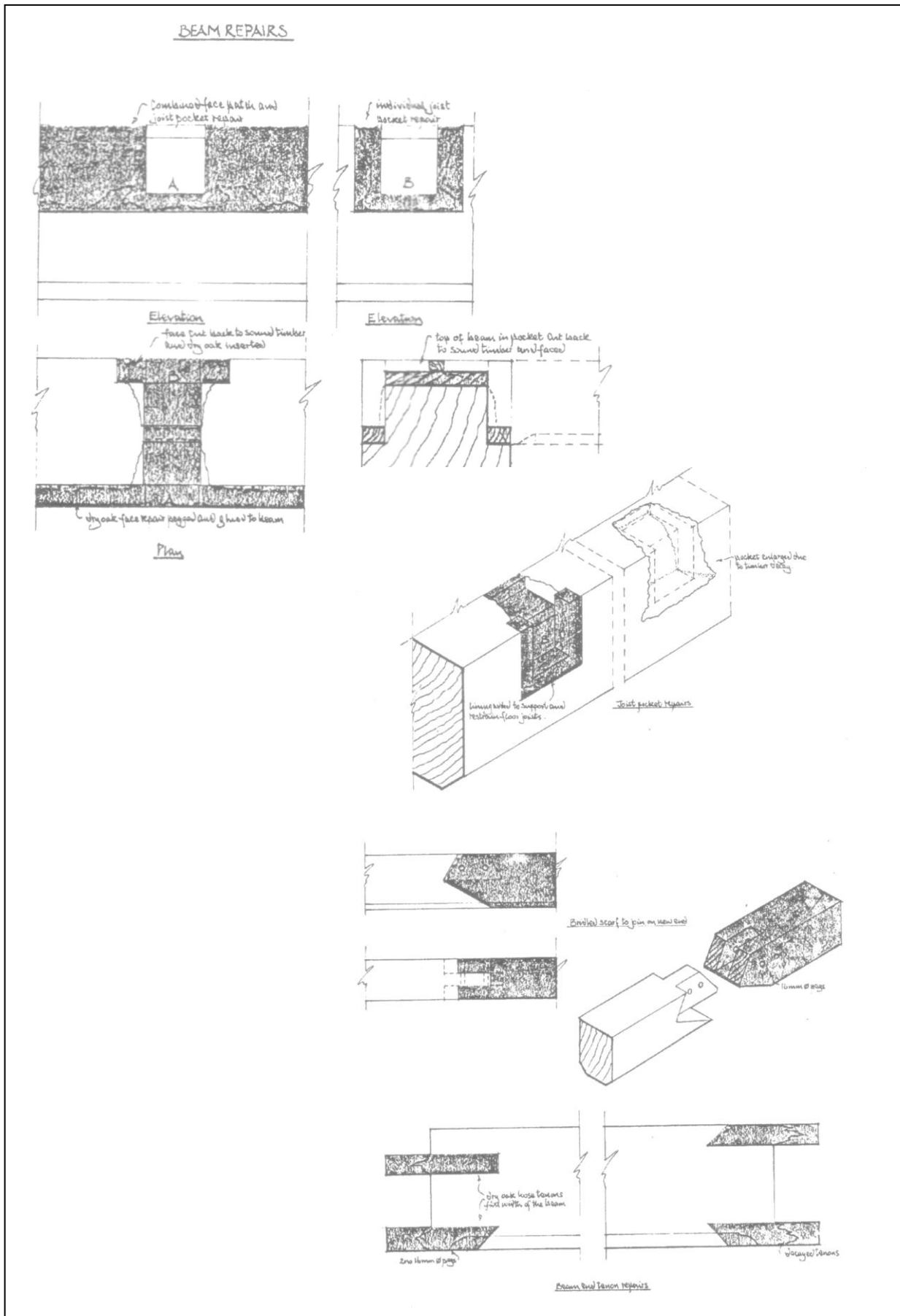
The Restoration of Dolbelydr

Landmark first visited Dolbelydr as long ago as 1982, before the roof had been stripped and then fallen in. The main obstacle to acquiring it was lack of access – during the latter part of its history the house was often approached on stilts from the opposite side of the River Elwy! We were grateful to Mr. Roberts, the present farmer on whose land it stands, to agreeing finally to sell us the building and an access track to it in 1999. This acquisition was directly enabled by a generous bequest by Dorothy Stroud.

By the time we acquired the house, most of the roof had fallen in. The bread oven and external staircase were reduced to rubble, the solar screen had been removed to a house in Chester (where it remains today) and the wall heads were collapsing. Large trees were growing through the masonry. We installed emergency scaffolding at once and removed the trees, although it was another two years before we had raised the necessary money for its restoration. Our initial view was that we had in Dolbelydr a very interesting vernacular building, special because of its largely unaltered features. Local building historian Peter Welford soon convinced us that this was also a house of considerable status for the area, with its tall chimneys and well-dressed stone. This led to considerable soul searching about how we should restore it. Dendrochronology dated the house's construction to the 1578/9 felling season and its later fabric was if anything more dilapidated than earlier, hard wood remnants. In the end, we decided that as both Dolbelydr's architectural and historic significance stemmed from its late sixteenth-century form, we should present it as closely as possible to its primary appearance given its unusually complete survival.

Externally, the large areas of the stonework has been rebuilt, consolidated and repointed with lime mortar and the building's appearance smoothed out with flush-pointing, areas of which remained on the rear elevation. The limewashing too is a traditional finish, now uncommonly used in the area. The masonry had

Examples of joint repair specifications by the architect



been well constructed, with through stones to bind the walls. There had been significant structural movement in the SW corner, where the masonry had been altered to take the flue for the bread oven. Most of the wall at eaves height also had to be rebuilt to some degree.

Much of the first floor framing remained on site if not exactly in situ as well as some from the second floor, so replacement of the floor joists was not too difficult. Only the bridging beam in the hall had to have a steel flitch inserted for strength. The collapsed roof structure was a bigger job. For that specialists Carpenter Oak and Woodland were employed. After careful labelling, they took away the roof timbers to their framing yard in Perthshire where they painstakingly reassembled the roof frame with instructions to keep as much of the original fabric as possible, working to the architect's detailed instructions. The repairs that were necessary are honestly expressed to be read as such. Late in the autumn of 2002, a forty foot crane arrived on site to lift the three massive roof trusses back into position through the scaffold of the temporary roof which had been protecting the building and allowing it to dry out in the meantime.

We had recovered some of the original stone ridge tiles and found a few stone slates on the site, more likely to have been the sixteenth-century covering than the later slate tiles, so stone was chosen for the new roof (which weighs over 30 tons). The roof also provides the evidence of a degree of error in the Tudor craftsmen's original setting out: close inspection of the way the southern gable end meets its chimney stack shows distinct asymmetry! Similarly the stone kneelers at each corner at eaves level are all at markedly different heights. This tested CO & W's ingenuity still further and to compensate for this irregularity, the feet were not added to the roof trusses until they had been returned to the site. The chimneys were each given a new slate capping.

RESTORATION OF THE ROOF



The roofspace beneath the canopy, all timbers removed.



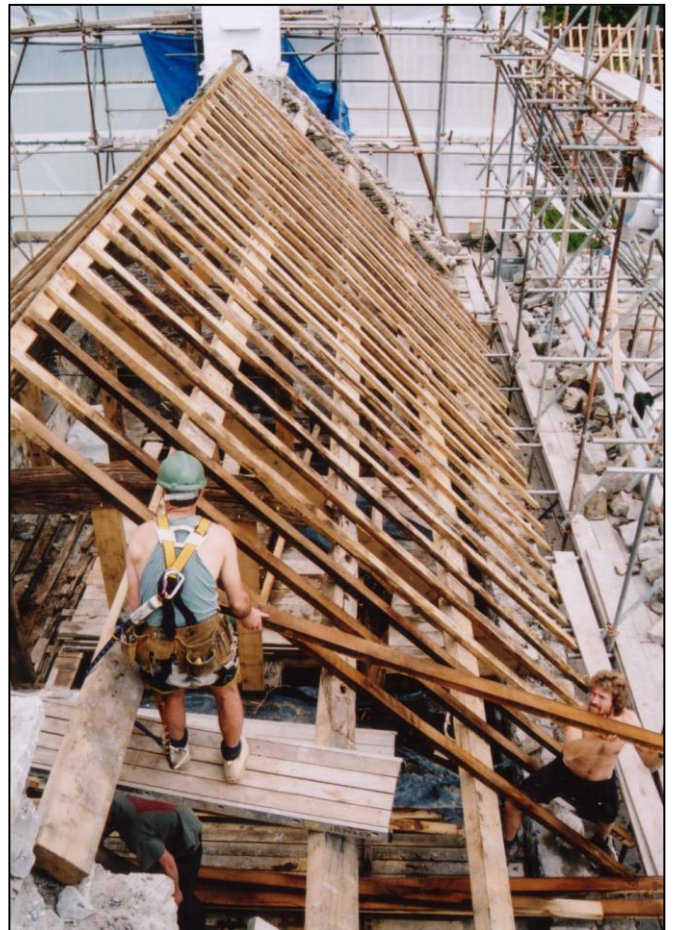
The arch-braced roof truss from the solar under repair at Carpenter Oak & Woodland's workshop in Perthshire.



The truss was then returned to the site for final adjustments....



.... before being lowered back into place using a forty foot crane (July 2002).



The repaired solar partition back in place (looking north) and then fixing the rafters.



With the rafters in place, the fixing of battens could get underway (above, looking south across today's landing and below in the solar roof space).





Fixing the stone rooftiles, huge at eaves level and representing some 35 tons in weight.



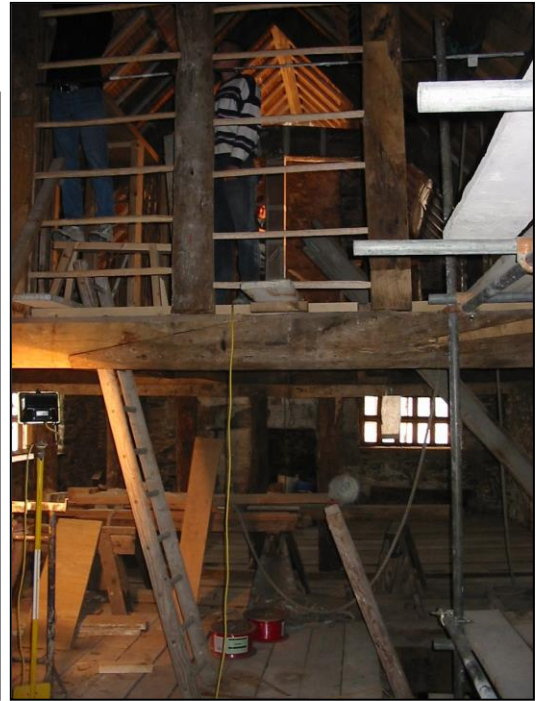
The solar ceiling: soffits torched and limewashed, purlins wrapped to keep them clean, screen partition limewashed, trusses as yet left clean. The roof is insulated with Cumbrian sheep wool (Cumbrian since Welsh sheep apparently have too oily a fleece!)

A great deal of thought went into how we should convert the inside of the building for use as a Landmark, in order to respect as much of its primary floor plan and purpose as possible. This scheme was to evolve as the project progressed and our knowledge increased. We became confident that we could accurately reposition the screen to the hall with its Tudor-arched doors and this led us to seek permission to remove the heavy stone partition walls to the right of the front door, which probably dated from the eighteenth century. Then excitingly, one public open day a member of the public returned to us the original newel post from the primary spiral staircase to the right of the hall hearth, a space which had since become a food cupboard. The evidence of the spiral treads clearly showed in the newel post and so we followed these as closely as possible, re-opening the little windows in the stairwell according to vestigial evidence in the stonework of the originals. This then emboldened us further in our sense that a return to the late sixteenth-century form was the correct way forward – even though the impracticality of such a tight spiral meant we also had to keep the latest staircase, rising out of the hall. The sharp-eyed will find two early nineteenth century characters roughly scratched on the hall-side face of the screen by the doorway – one a soldier with a cockade in his hat, the other perhaps his lady.

Although the hall would have become a less communal space by the late sixteenth century, it would still have been used for cooking, as indeed it was in the early twentieth century. We therefore decided to create the freestanding 'island kitchen' in the body of the hall, a device used successfully in other Landmarks. In the 1970s, there had still been a cast iron range in the hearth although this had disappeared by the late 1990s. We found the bressumer lying in the middle of the floor – presumably someone had tried to plunder it but then found it simply too heavy to remove – which begged the question of how the mass of masonry supported by this beam was staying up! Needless to say, emergency shoring up was one of our first steps. The bressumer above this hearth and the others in the house would probably have been plastered over originally although to avoid losing the fine moulded stops, it was decided to limewash them instead. The cupboard to the left of the hearth was re-made with a fretted ventilation panel, using a photo from the 1970s and fragments found in the room (these probably date from the nineteenth century).



The ground floor cleared and the laying of the underfloor heating in progress



Reinstating the solar partition wall immediately above (both Oct 2002)

As apparent from early photographs, much of the fabric of the many mullioned window frames is, remarkably, primary, except for the little opening casements which were probably added later. Repairs have been carefully patched in where necessary and they have been limewashed inside and out as they would have been originally, in imitation of stone. We found a single diamond-shaped quarry amid the debris of the house, which, like much early glass, was a surprisingly dark green. Careful thought went into the choice of today's lead and glass, which retains a greenish tinge and was made in France. Despite the many-light windows, the heavy beams made lighting an issue in this room and so we have resorted to recessed lights on the ground floor to provide an even spread of light to the inner parts of the room without visually obtrusive lamps or light fittings. The ironwork throughout the building (latches, hinges, bolts, handles...) was all made for us in wrought iron by John Hoare Ward, to architect Andrew Thomas's designs.

The former service bay on the ground floor was a fitting location for a shower room, since it had been altered over the years and the north wall was missing and could be conveniently made into the partition between kitchen and shower room. After careful recording, we were sad to lose the bread oven in this room, but it was a considerably later addition and bedroom use seemed closer to its original polite function as parlour. The stone lintel for the bread oven has been returned to where it probably was in the first place, above the gateway into the forecourt (the stone showed evidence of weathering consistent with having originally been externally placed). The window was returned to its sixteenth century size and the external doorway which had been inserted into this room blocked up. Returning the screen to its original position to the right of the front door also meant that we were able to reinstate the room to its left as an entrance hall, presumed to be its original use.

The slate floor on the ground floor may be primary, although almost all its flags had to be replaced or re-sawn. After careful recording, we lifted the floor in order to install underfloor heating. It was then replaced at the level we found it – it had almost certainly been relaid before at a slightly higher level than at first.

The massive studded front door as remembered by Mrs Williams was just visible in a photo from a 1905 RCHME report; the original was long gone but we have reproduced it as closely as possible. None of the internal doors survived.

The main staircase is all new, following the line of the position of the last phase of staircase development. It is built of oak, as are all the floorboards, which are all new. The linen cupboards on the second floor landing are an insertion, into a partitioned room that would almost certainly once have been lit by a front dormer – but without actual physical evidence, it was decided not to reinstate one. Similarly, we have not installed a squint window into the solar from the second floor although there may well have been one. By contrast, vestiges of the rear dormer window had been retained, no doubt to light the stairwell, and so this we have recreated.

The window in the south bedroom on the first floor had been blocked although its opening was clearly apparent. When we opened it up, the original head and sill were still present. By reinstating it, the full set of windows in their original positions was completed for the building. The internal partitions in the building were all found to be wattle and daub rather than the more usual plastered lathes and this is what has been used for the partitions, which required constant tending to avoid shrinkage. The wattle is formed by weaving horizontal oak laths through vertical staves, again reproducing the earlier form we found; while the key of the daub was not affected, the length of the staves required made this a tricky exercise too.

Patches of the earliest lime plaster coat on the walls survive in various places through the building, most noticeably on the chimney breast and in the window reveal of the second floor bedroom, dated to 1603 by John Parry's graffiti (although it might be 1803!) This early plaster coat had rounded edges at the corners of the chimney breast in this bedroom and was quite smoothly polished. Later plaster had a flatter finish with squarer edges. It was our intention to replicate the early finish if possible and our plasterers Neil Day and Julie Hadow undertook various trials to get the desired finish.



The first floor solar (today's Landmark sitting room), then and now, is by far the finest room in the house, given extra elegance by being open to the roof with its arch-braced truss. We heard a rumour that the solar screen's whereabouts was known and a letter to *Country Life* elicited a response from its current owner. The screen still stands in his house near Chester, despite our efforts to persuade him to part with it in exchange for an alternative. So we had a replica made instead, all moulded by hand just as the original had been. He also showed us a tiny 'chapbook', such as was sold by travelling pedlars and found tucked inside the screen when it was removed – a rare trace of earlier inhabitants (see page 31).

It is one of the joys of this building to be able once again to climb the spiral stairs and emerge into the solar, just as Henry Salesbury would have done. The small closet on the other side of the fireplace also has its tale to tell – it was a *garde robe* or loo although our archaeologist found little evidence of heavy past use at the base of the shaft. Another patch of primary plaster remained in the closet, limewashed a mid-yellow.

Great debate also surrounded the decision to limewash the timbers in the solar. There can be little doubt that this room, the most important in the house, would have been brightly decorated with wall paintings in imitation of wall hangings (or perhaps hung with actual tapestries), with perhaps a coat of arms over the fireplace. Recent research has shown that decorative wall paintings were almost universal in the Welsh Marches in the late sixteenth century. The timbers and panelling would have been crisp and new. Very often wall paintings extended across the surface of the timbers, making no distinction between wall and beam; other times the timbers were polished to reflect the quality of material that they represented.

By contrast, the surface of most of the timbers we salvaged was today rough and decayed. There was no trace of any original colour scheme on the walls; we would not resort to speculation. There was no evidence to suggest the original treatment of rafters and soffits of the roof and so they have been torched (the battens rendered over on the inside) in the style of nineteenth century photos and this also directed us towards the decision to limewash the timbers. The solar today is as the builders would have handed it over to the painters and stainers who followed on from the plasterers – we know it is effectively in its undercoat, but honestly so. The bright curtains, whose screen printed design is based on the

title page of Salesbury's *Grammatica*, and the warmth of the wooden screen evoke some of the richness of colour this room would once have possessed.

Outside, the footings of the forecourt and other walls remained and so we have been able to rebuild them to their original plan. They would have been much higher in the sixteenth century, protection against the elements and the deer (and perhaps even rudimentary flood defences in this river valley). The orchard at the back has been replanted with old varieties of fruit trees and walnuts, in quite a formal arrangement as it might have been at first. Early OS maps show that the orchard extended a lot further south in the late nineteenth century. There are the remains of a pigsty against the south wall of the orchard – the orchard walls too would have been much higher.

Between the house and the stables is a nineteenth-century cartshed, now housing the boiler. Such outbuildings once abutted right up to the house, as seen in the c1905 photo. The fine stable block, memorably described by Peter Welford as 'the late seventeenth-century equivalent of a triple garage,' had no roof when we acquired it. Joist holes were the only evidence of the former hayloft. The size and quality of the bricks are consistent with a construction date c.1700, probably replacing an earlier timber-framed building on the existing stone base. We had planned simple softwood trusses for the stable, but as part of the grant conditions from Cadw were required instead to introduce queen post trusses in oak.

THE STABLE BLOCK



After repair with green oak, queen post roof at Cadw's request, the stables made the perfect setting out shed.



Final landscaping to correct ground levels.



Limewashing a chimneystack



Packing the rubble core of the forecourt walls



Repairs to the walls, using lime mortar.

RESTORING INTERNAL JOINERY



The repaired first floor joists being carefully repositioned above the hall.





The first floor joists patched and reinstalled, looking across the solar floor.



The same floor structure viewed from the hall below.



Piecing the plank and muntin screen back together.



The east hall window repaired and ready for return to the building.



Test fire in the hall hearth – always a relief when it draws! A sample floor slate is laid out and the fretted screen above the cupboard is now installed. The spiral stairs are under construction.



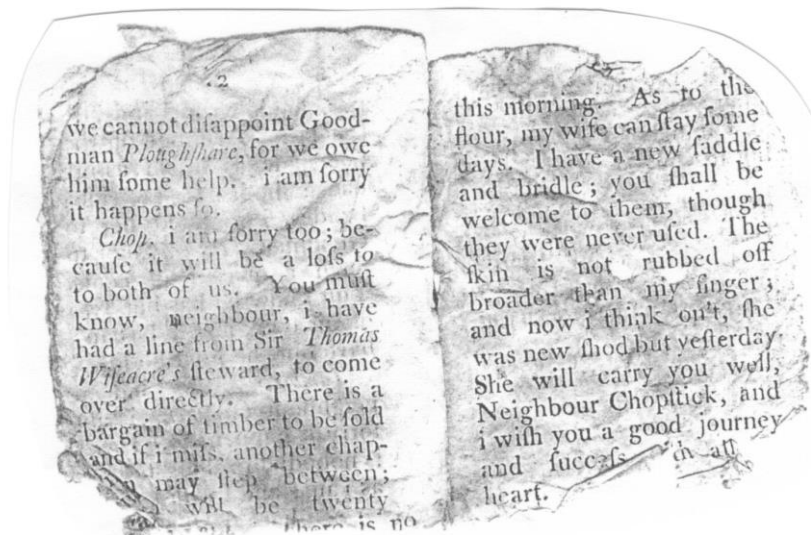
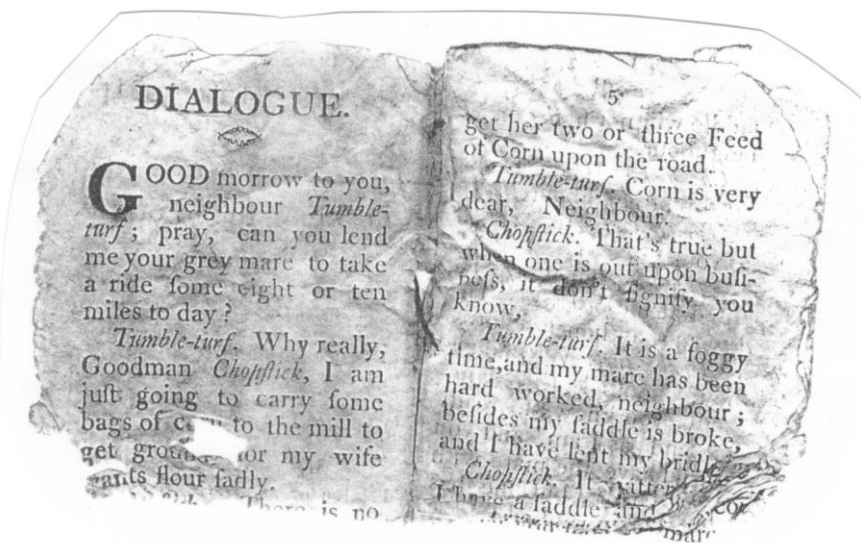
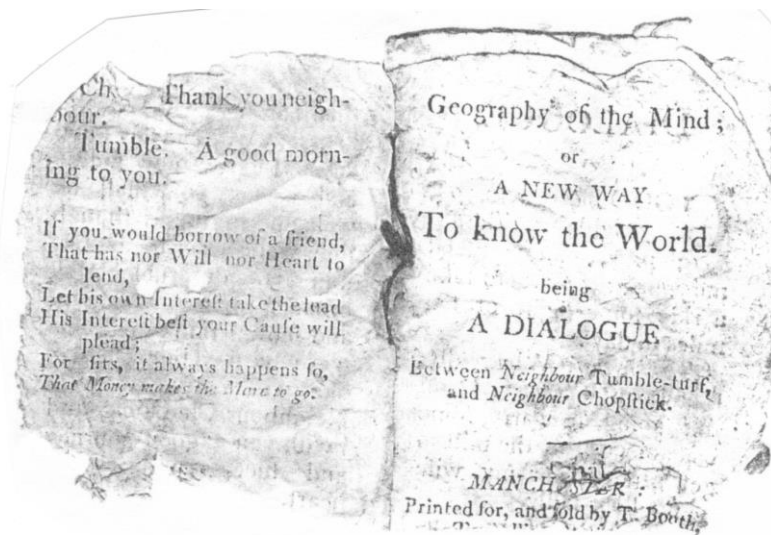
We would dearly love to bury the electricity cables that run down the valley to restore fully Dolbelydr's pastoral setting. Sadly, we do not have the funds to do this at the moment but hope that it may be made possible in the future.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | | Walnut |
| NOTTINGHAM Medlar | SHROPSHIRE PRUNE Damson | MORELLO, LARGE Cherry | LORD HINDLIP Apple | CONFERENCE, BUSH Pear |
| MERRYWEATHER Damson | VICTORIA Plum | MICHAELMAS RED Apple | GLADSTONE Apple | EARLY JULYAN Apple |
| MARJORIES Plum | CLAYGATE Pearmain Apple | RIVAL Apple | ADAMS PEARMAIN Apple | AUTUMN PEARMAIN Apple |
| MORUS NIGRA Black Mulberry | BESS POOL Apple | KING'S ACRE BOUNTIFUL Apple | LORD LAMBOURNE Apple | LUDOVIC QUINCE |

The planting plan for the orchard at Dolbelydr and the orchard in May 2003



The chapbook found behind the solar screen.



6
 saddle will not fit my mare, neighbour.
Chopstick. Then I can borrow of neighbour *Rogers*.
Tumble-turf. His is as bad as yours.
Chopstick. Then I can be fitted at the *Squire's*. The groom is an honest fellow.
Tumble-turf. Why neighbour *Chopstick*, there is nobody, you know, so ready to lend as I am, and you bags could have the mare with get *Squire's* help, but she has wants *Hou* there is no

7
Chopstick. I'll get the groom to stuff the saddle. Nobody ituffs a saddle so well as *Dick Groom*; the poor beast shan't be hurt.
Tumble-turf. Nobody is so willing to lend a neighbour as I am, nobody so willing; but my mare is in rough - order, her mane wants pulling fadly.
Chopstick. That is soon done, neighbour; I can do that myself, and *Dick G* will help me.
Tumble-turf. *mar*

8
 think on't she wants new shoes.
Chop. There is time enough for that; the days are of a good length, the mare trots well, and we have a blacksmith at hand.
Tumble. Aye, as you say, the mare trots well, and the days are of a likely length both for master and man, but our neighbour blacksmith cannot shoe her bag. I always take her to get *Ned Hammer* and get her shoed. *There is no*

9
Chop. My road lies thro' the town; it will be none out of my way.
 [Enter *Tumble-turf's* servant.]



10
 row my mare, *Tom*, prithee step and see if her shoulder is not much wrung. [Exit *Tom*.] There is nobody so willing as I am to oblige a neighbour when I can; but [Re-enter *Tom*.]

11
 ster, she is wrung indeed the skin is rubbed off the poor jade as broad as my back: she is not fit to ride; besides, I promised her to *Goodman Ploughshare* to fetch a quarter of coals. You know he has but two of his own, and if he can't have ours he must be idle.
Tumble. Why indeed neighbour *Chopstick*, I am sorry it happens so. There is nobody so willing to lend as I am; and I will *let you have*

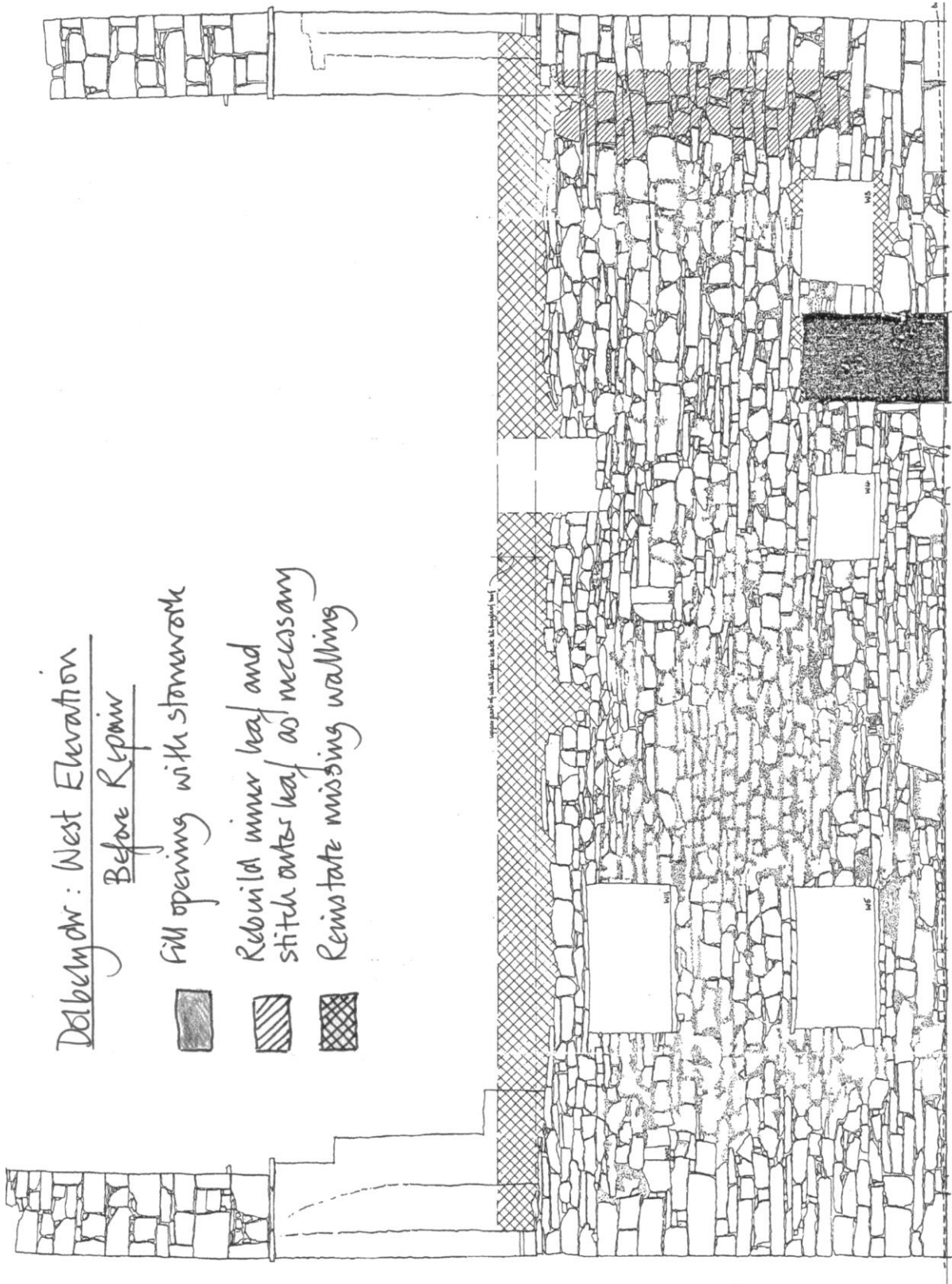


Dolbelydr: West Elevation
Before Repair




Fill opening with stonework

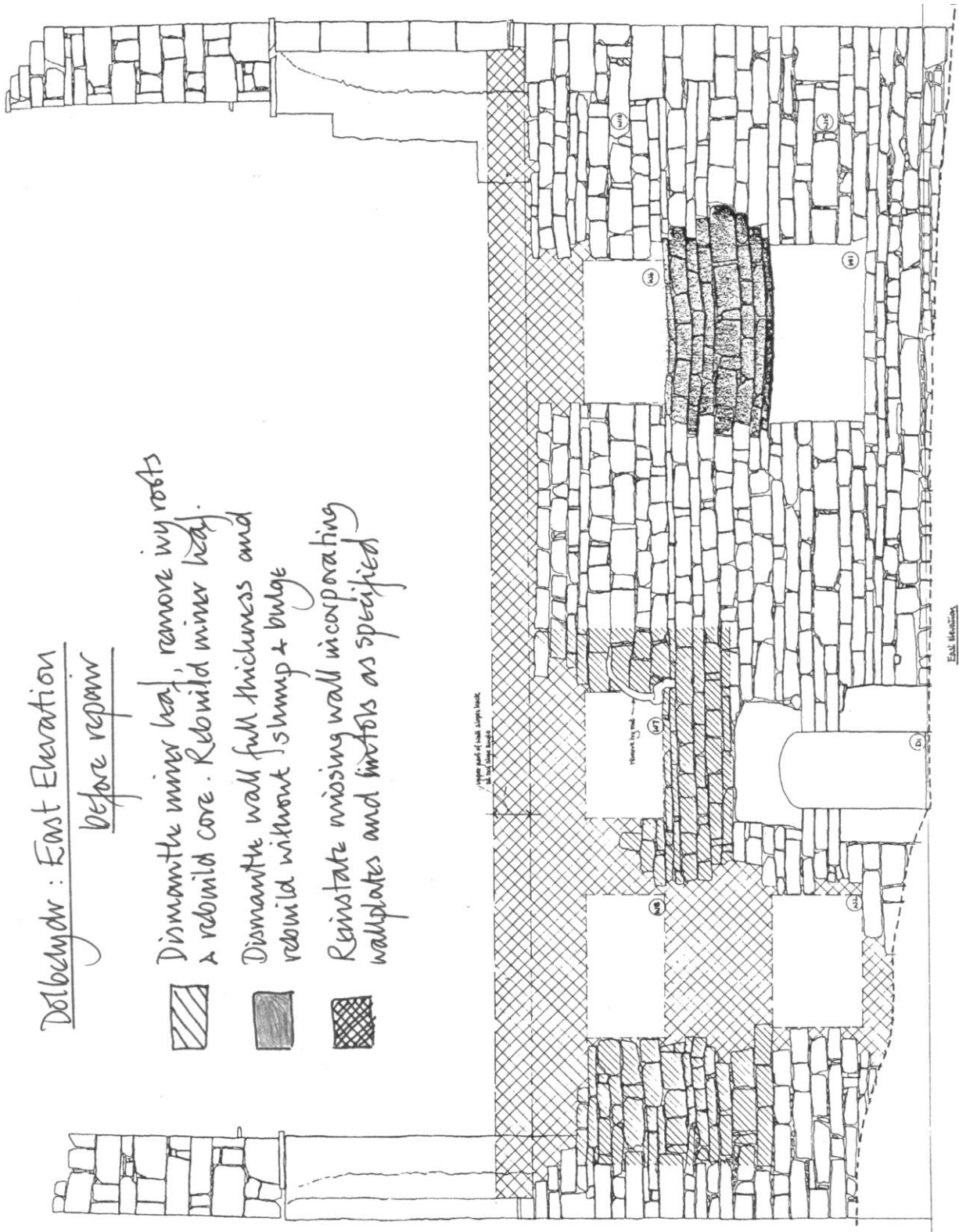
Rebuild inner leaf and
stitch outer leaf as necessary

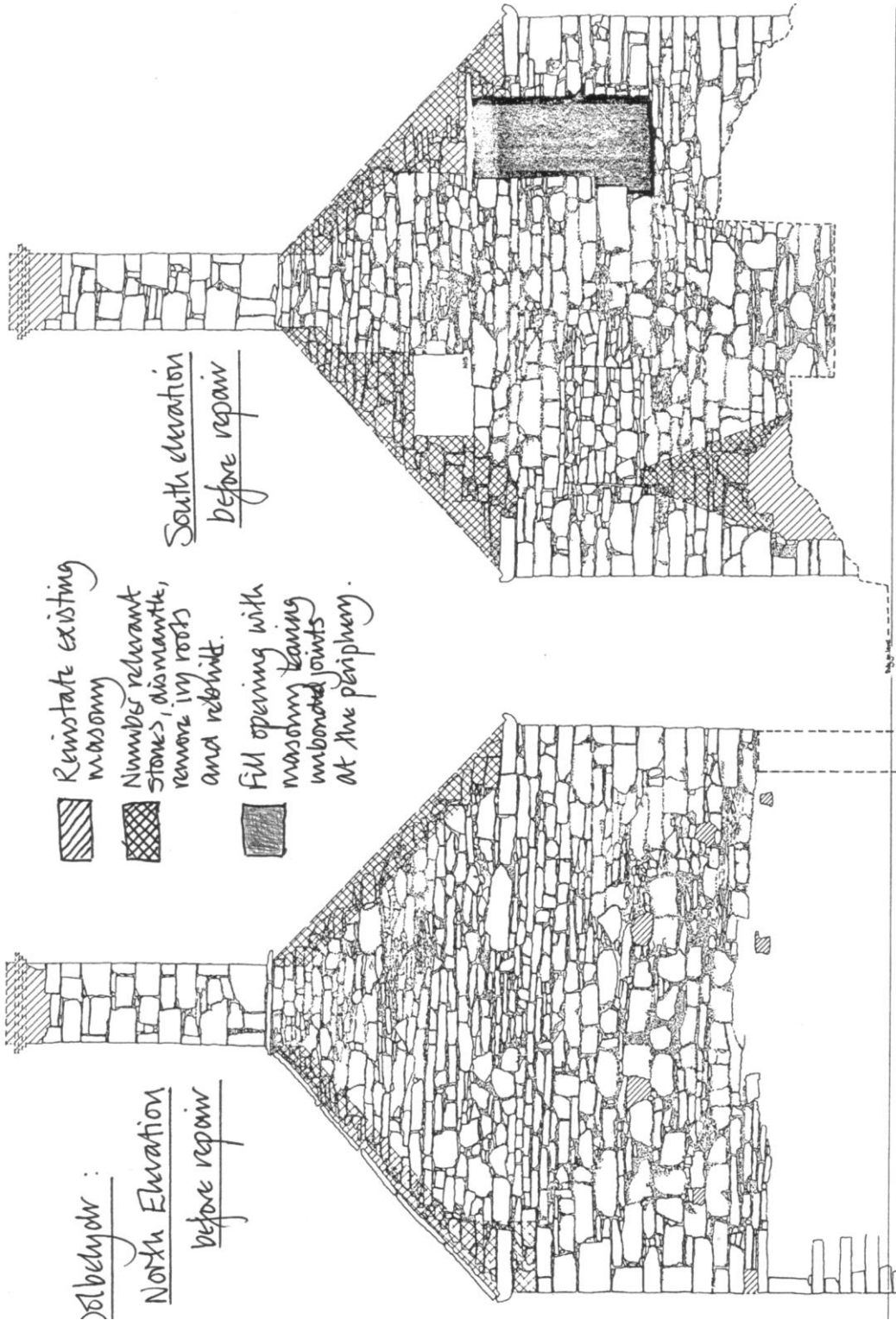
Reinststate missing walling



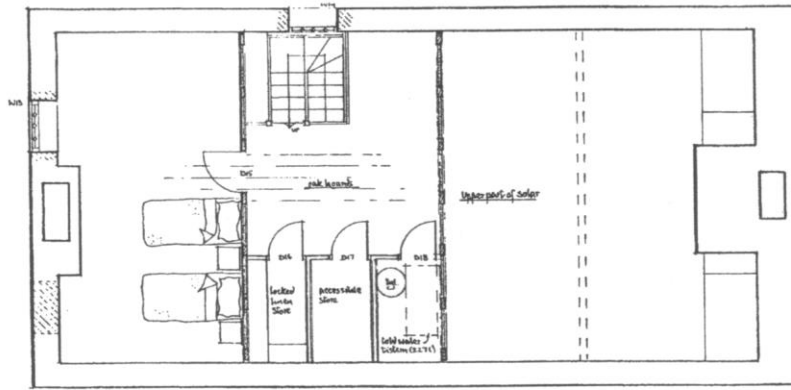
Dolbelydr : East Elevation
before repair

-  Dismantle inner leaf, remove ivy roots & rebuild core. Rebuild inner leaf.
-  Dismantle wall full thickness and rebuild without slump & bulge
-  Reinstatate missing wall incorporating wallplates and lintels as specified



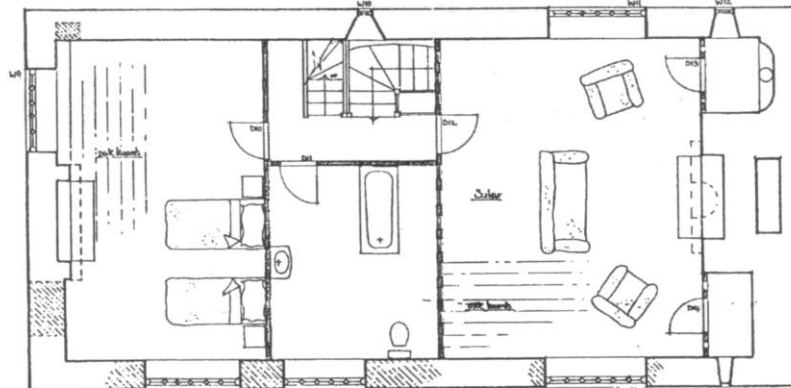


Second floor



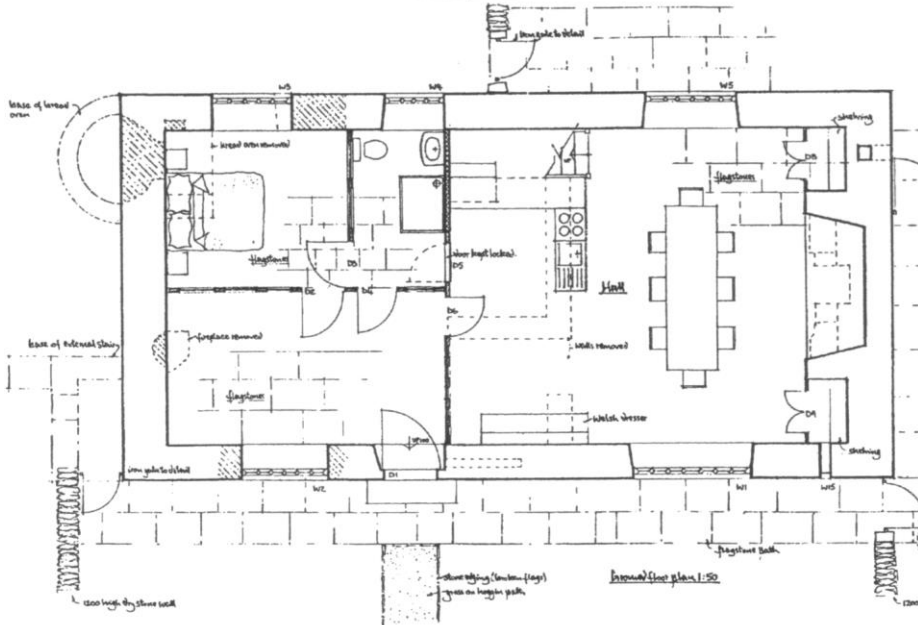
Second floor plan 1:50

First floor



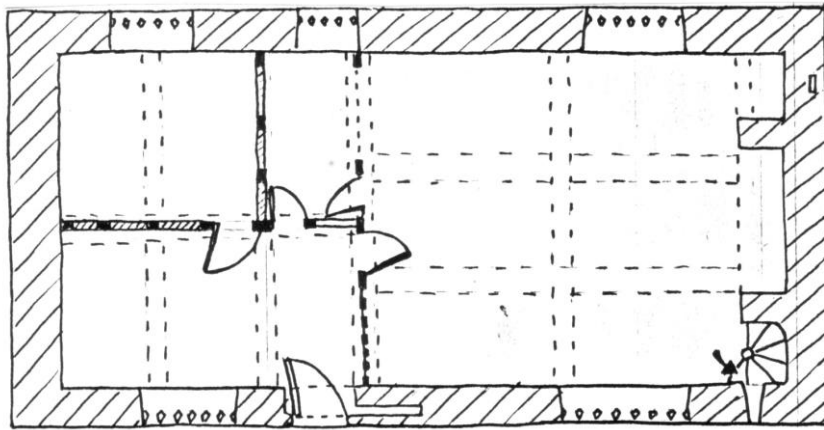
First floor plan 1:50

Ground floor

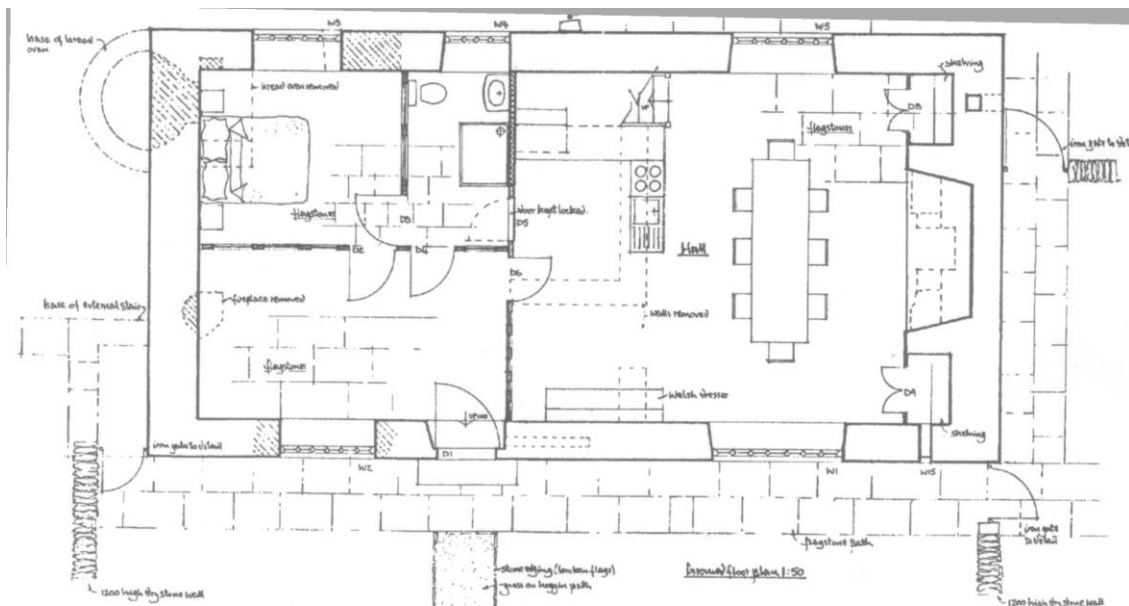
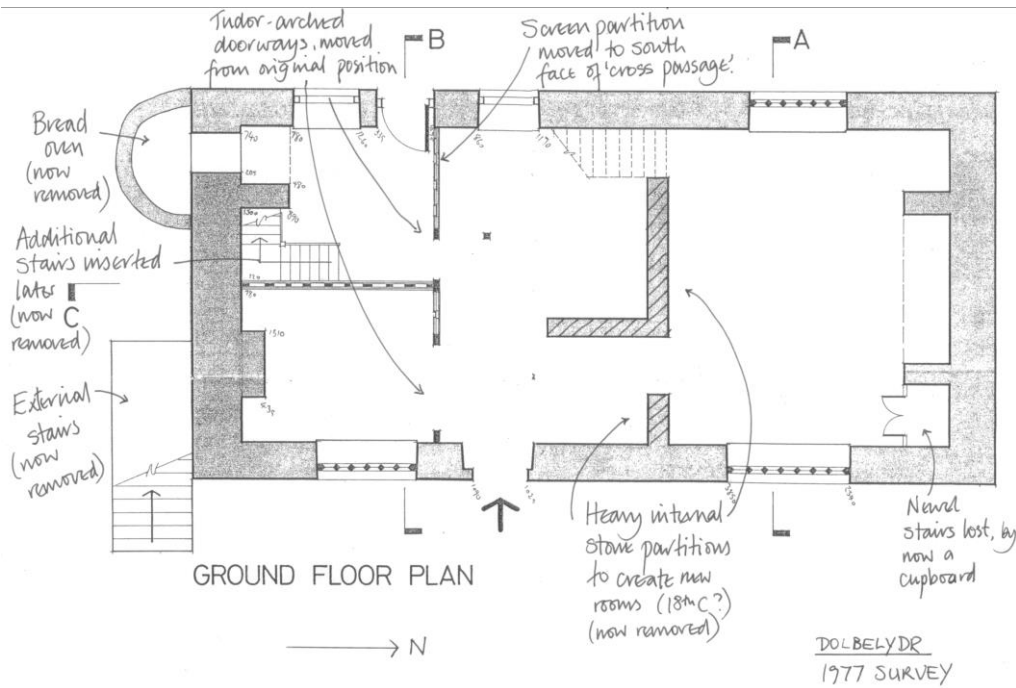


Ground floor plan 1:50

Floor plans for the conversion to Landmark. See pages 23-29 for comparison with the 1977 survey.



P Welford's reconstruction of the original floor plan



Today's arrangement as a Landmark

EVOLUTION OF THE GROUND FLOOR PLAN AT DOLBELYDR (not to scale)