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Discovering Old Welsh Houses

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**North West Wales Dendrochronology Project
Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn,
Gwynedd**



**EAS Client Report 2010/07
March 2010**

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

Registered in England N° 286978

North West Wales Dendrochronology Project Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn, Gwynedd

EAS Client Report 2010/07

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

March 2010

**By
I.P. Brooks and K. Laws**

**Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd
Unit 2 Glanypwll Workshops
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North West Wales Dendrochronology Project

Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn, Gwynedd

SH 3992 4405

NPRN (not previously recorded)

Status: Not Listed

Introduction

This report details the recording of the house of Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn, undertaken to compliment both the dendrochronological sampling, undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, and the documentary study undertaken by volunteers for the North West Wales Dendrochronology Project. The fieldwork took place on 16th March 2010.

Methodology

The ground floor plan was 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. Given that the ground floor ceiling and the roof of the main range has been replaced in living memory it was not considered appropriate to plan the first floor or record the roof timbers.

Survey Report

Felin Moelfre is located approximately 1.3 km south east of the village of Llanaelhaearn, Gwynedd (Figure 1) at the foot of the hill known as Moelfre. It is in close association with the farm of Moelfre Mawr (Figure 2) which is assumed to be a replacement for the house now known as Felin Moelfre. The property has a range of buildings including the house itself and a semi-industrial range which held the mill mechanism. The wheel pit (Plate 5) is between these two buildings. The house has not previously been recorded.

Externally the house has clearly been constructed in three major phases. An initial, two storey, house was approximately 11.2 x 8 m in size. This was constructed of roughly coursed stone boulders with large boulder quoins and lintels. It was aligned ENE WSW (Figure 3) at right angles to the lane to the farm buildings of Moelfre Fawr and to Moelfre bach. The door and windows in the front elevation (Plate 1) are offset to the east, allowing for a large fireplace in the western end of the original building. There are two ground floor windows, each of which are wooden, sixteen pane sash windows. The three first floor windows are smaller than those on the ground floor consisting of twelve pane sash windows. The door is clearly a modern fifteen pane glass door. The slate roof has three sky

lights, but is a late replacement roof constructed after a period of collapse. This collapse is clearly seen at the western end of the building where much of the gable end (Plate 2) is constructed of roughly coursed, squared stone blocks. Given the degree of collapse it is likely that the chimney has also been reconstructed. There is also a partially blocked opening in the eastern gable end (Plates 4 and 6) which may have been a doorway.

To this original building a lean to extension was added on the northern side (Plates 2 and 3). This was constructed of rather rough, roughly coursed boulders with two small windows in its northern wall. This extension is clearly associated with the construction of the wheel pit and the building immediately to the north which held the mill mechanism. The quality of the stonework used for the extension is noticeably poorer behind the waterwheel, possibly a reflection of the degree of wear on this part of the building. The water wheel was probably a high breast shot wheel, it has a metal frame with wooden spokes and buckets. The shaft of the waterwheel did not directly drive the mill machinery as there is a gear wheel attached to the waterwheel from which the drive was taken. The two windows are small openings designed to allow the monitoring of the waterwheel and the outlet leat.

A relatively late addition to the building is the porch on the western end of the extension (Plate 2). This has two modern replacement windows, one in the gable end and one in the northern wall and is entered by a door in its south east corner. There is some suggestion that there may have been an earlier structure as the northern wall of the porch partially sits on a thicker section of walling with a similar thickness to that of the extension.

Internally the extension consists of a single room running the length of the building. Three principal rafters are exposed, with linking purlins, but as this is a lean to no further support was required (Plate 7). There are two doorways into the main range of the house, the western of which is partly blocked and now used as a cupboard. There is also a niche cut into the western wall of the extension.

The main range is now a single room, but was presumably sub-divided into at least two rooms with a dividing corridor leading to a staircase in the past. The room is dominated by the large fireplace at the western end with a large wooden bressumer (Plate 8). In the north western corner of the fireplace is an oven (Plate 9). The oven is roughly circular and has a disused mill stone as its base. This stone is a fine grit, top stone with a large eye (Plate 10). It is well worn, now being only 60 mm thick in places (Figure 4.2). It also has two rough holes which appear to have been chiselled into the stone after its use.

Some indication of the nature of the previous division of the house is shown in the lintel above the south western window. This is a section of a tie beam which was chamfered and had broach stops (Plate 11). It also had a series of empty half face housing joints presumably to hold the posts for a post and plank

partition (Plate 12, Figure 4.1). Other features in this part of the house include the blocked doorway in the northern wall, adjacent to the fireplace (Plate 13) the safe in the northern wall and a disused fireplace in the eastern gable wall. The safe is a wall mounted safe made by J.T. Meeds of Bond Street, London and is presumably 19th century in date. The staircase is a modern structure and does not occupy the original position.

Dendrochronology Sampling

Two samples were taken from the bressumer over the main fireplace.

Conclusions

Felin Moelfre has clearly developed over a period of time (Figure 5). The initial house would appear to have been a two storey house with a large fireplace at its western end (Phase 1). It is assumed that this was a domestic building; however the presence of a mill stone in the base of the oven would suggest that there may have been a mill in the immediate area, if not integral with the initial building. Further research on the mill stone may suggest a broad date for this initial phase of construction.

The house was then extended to the north (Phase 2). This phase was contemporary with the water mill immediately to the north and probably suggests it was the accommodation and offices associated with the mill. It is possible that the wall safe may also be part of this phase of development. A porch was then added (Phase 3) to the western end of the extension, possibly incorporating part of an earlier structure.

There was clearly a catastrophic collapse of the western gable wall suggesting a phase of abandonment and then reconstruction (Phase 4) into the current configuration. This period of abandonment also resulted in the original roof structure and first floor being lost (Burns *pers comm.*)

Acknowledgments

The recording of this building was commissioned by Margaret Dunn for the North Wales Dendrochronology Project and she also organised access to the building. The forbearance of the owners during the recording of the house is gratefully acknowledged.



Plate 1: Front elevation



Plate 2: Western gable end



Plate 3: Rear of building, looking SW



Plate 4: Eastern gable end



Plate 5: Wheel pit looking east



Plate 6: Possible blocked doorway in eastern gable end.



Plate 7: Roof structure of the extension, looking NE



Plate 8: Fireplace at western end



Plate 9: Oven, looking NW



Plate 10: Detail of the mill stone in the base of the oven



Plate 11: Broach stop and chamfer on re-used tie beam



Plate 12: Re-used tie beam



Plate 13: Blocked doorway



Plate 14: Wall safe

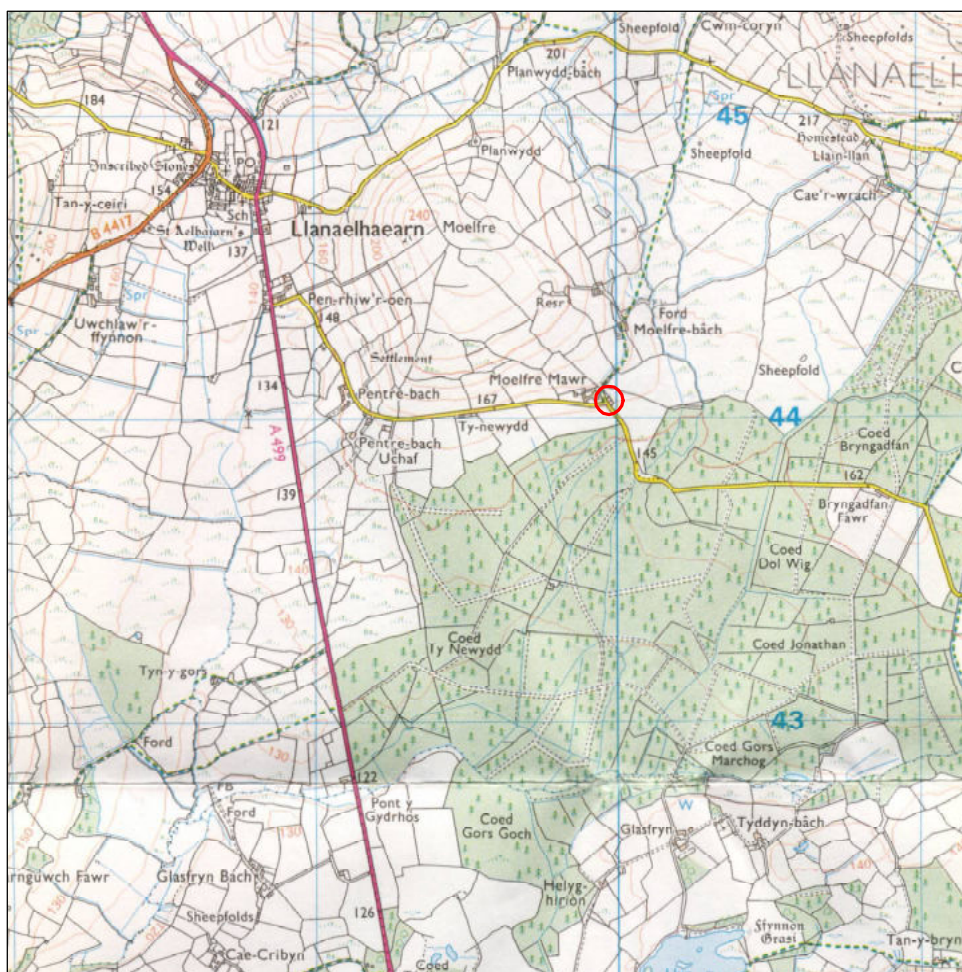


Figure 1: Felin Moelfre, Llangaelhaearn
Location

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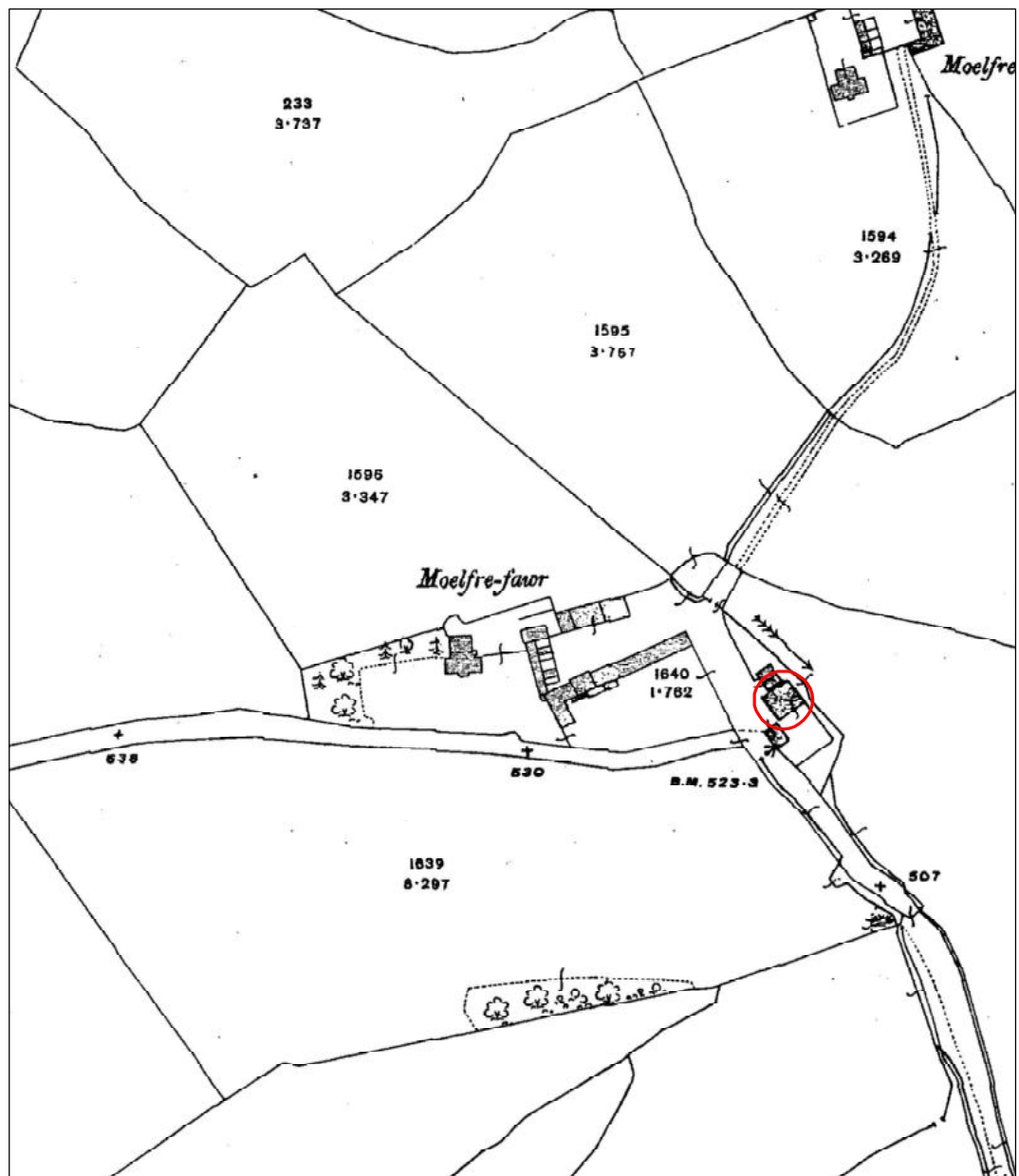


Figure 2: Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn
Extract from the 1917
Caernarvonshire XXXIII.1 1:2500 map

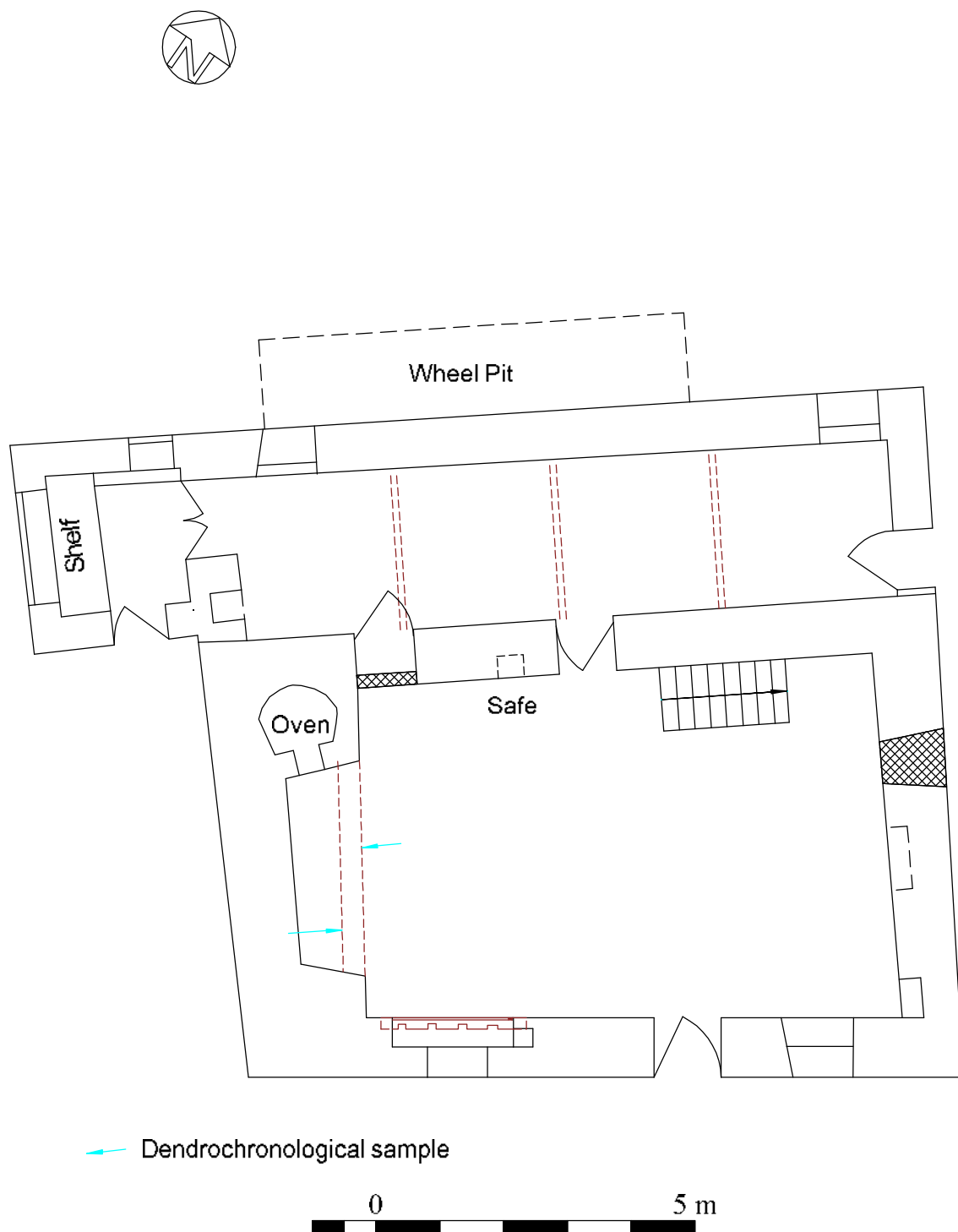


Figure 3: Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn
Ground floor plan
Scale 1:100



Figure 4.1: Detail of Tie beam re-used as a window lintel

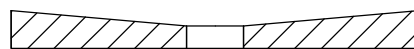


Figure 4.2: Profile through the mill stone in the base of the oven

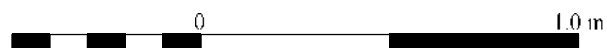


Figure 4: Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn
Details
Scale 1:20



Front elevation



Western gable end





-  Phase 1
-  Phase 2
-  Phase 3
-  Phase 4

Figure 5: Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn
Possible phasing

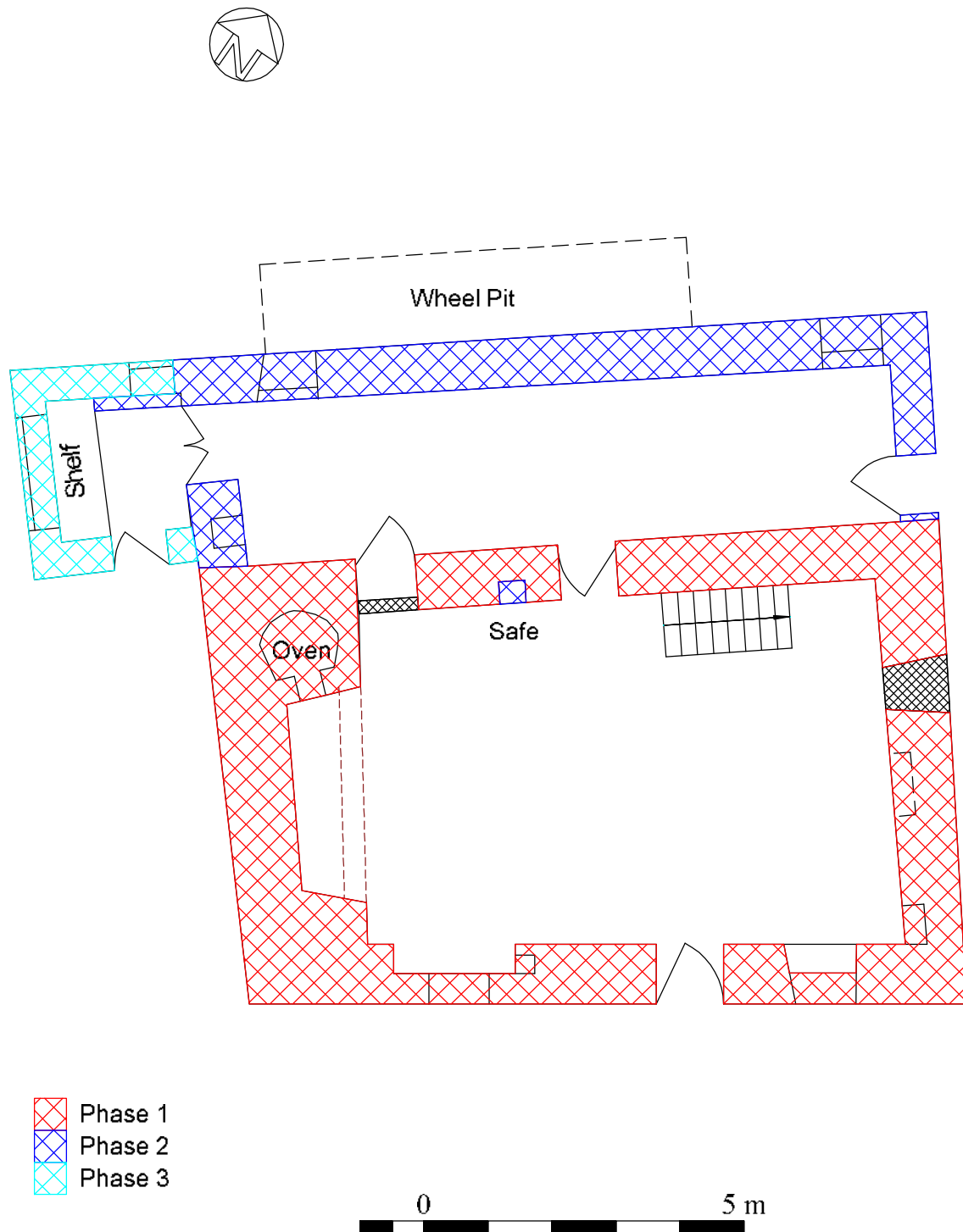


Figure 6: Felin Moelfre, Llanaelhaearn
Possible phasing