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# **Coed-y-Foel, Derwen, Corwen Denbighshire**



**EAS Client Report 2016/02  
April 2016**

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

**Registered in England N° 286978**

# **Coed-y-Foel, Derwen, Corwen Denbighshire**

**EAS Client Report 2016/03**

**Commissioned by**

**Sandra Hankin**

**April 2016**

**By**

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## **Coed-y-Foel, Derwen, Corwen**

**Grid Reference**            **SJ 07537 50489**

**NPRN Number**            **27038**

**Status**                    **Grade II**

**List Building Reference**   **24342**

### ***Introduction***

This report details the recording of the Coed-y-Foel, Derwen, Corwen, Denbighshire, undertaken to compliment both the dendrochronological sampling, undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, and the documentary study undertaken by Sandra Hankin. The fieldwork took place on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

The building is featured as a plate in the 1914 Royal Commission Inventory for Denbighshire (Figure 1, Monument 138A) where two doors in the front elevation suggests the building was divided into two properties at one stage in its life. The house is also recorded in Smith (1988, Maps 10, 12, 19, 29 and 29) which suggest it is a half timbered, cruck framed building with windbraces forming a “Regional type B” (chimney-backing-on-the-entry) plan. It also records the presence of post and panel partitions and a date-inscription of 1633. This description is also used as the basis for the description in Hubbard (2003, 156).

### ***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***

Coed-y-Foel is located approximately 550 m south east of the village of Derwen and 420 m north of Bryn Saith Marchog, both in Denbighshire (Figure 1). It is aligned approximately north west – south east (Figure 2) in a single range which is roughly at right angles to the local hillslope. The house is listed at Grade II (Listed building reference 24342) because it is “a minor hall house retaining much of its early carpentry including an unusually well preserved set of cruck trusses” ([www.historicwales.gov.uk](http://www.historicwales.gov.uk)).

The cottage consist of a single range under a thatched roof, forming a storey and a half cottage. The front elevation (Plates 1 - 5) has single door placed slightly off centre with four ground floor and one first floor windows. All of these have modern wooden frames and fittings, however, they occupy a series of openings

of different sizes which possibly suggests a range of dates for the openings (Plates 2 – 4). There is one very small opening to the south east of the door which is assumed to be from an early phase in the development of the house. The two slightly larger opening and the single opening with three panes are assumed to be later insertions, possibly from several different phases. The stonework is covered by a layer of lime putty and whitewash, slightly obscuring the details of the stone walls, however the coverage allows some features to be determined. The middle of the windows, to the south east of the door, would appear to occupy a partly blocked opening (Plate 5) which corresponds with a door featured on the photograph in the regional inventory (RCAHMCWM 1914, Figure 1). There is also a marked break in the stonework (Plate 5) which aligns with the back of the ground floor chimney (Figure 3), possibly suggesting that the south eastern end of the building may be an extension or that major works have taken place in this area of the house. The north eastern gable (Plate 6) has an offset window on the first floor, however there is also a first floor blocked opening on the eastern side of the gable which presumably marks the position of an earlier window.

The rear elevation (Plates 7 – 10) is more highly disturbed with the insertion of patio doors and large dormer windows. The elevation is also covered by a thicker, better finished, layer of render which obscures the stonework. The south eastern gable is largely obscured by a modern conservatory.

The house is entered through a lobby which now contains the staircase to the first floor and is open. Just inside the door the foot of the northern blade of Truss 3 (Plate 11, Figure 6) is exposed. A peg hole at a height of 2.3 m above the current floor suggest there may have been a tie beam which has now been lost, probably on the insertion of the central fireplace into an earlier structure.

To the south of the entrance lobby is a room currently occupied by the kitchen. The entrance to this room is marked by a post (Plate 12) which supports the eastern end of a beam which is crudely attached to the bressumer over the fireplace (Plate 13). At its western end, the beam rests on a large wooden support which is attached to the end of the bressumer over the kitchen fireplace (Plate 14). This support appears to be the cut off end of a major beam which was presumably a tie beam for an earlier cruck frame, now lost. The post has a mortice at a height of approximately 1.0 m above the floor in the lobby and the top of the post is recessed to take the end of the beam. This would tend to suggest a the house was originally a wooden framed structure, however, the post and beam do not sit comfortably in the structure and may be later insertions, possibly when the house was re-united as a single structure.

There is a single transverse ceiling beam which is moderately chamfered and has run our stops at its western end (Plate 15) and stepped stops at the eastern end (Plate 16) it supports a series of wide, flat joists which rest on top of the beam without any recesses. The window in the western wall (Plate 17) has a

crude wooden inner frame, although the current window is a modern replacement.

To the north of the lobby, the Hall is dominated by the fireplace, to the south, (Plate 18) and a post and panel partition, to the north (Plate 19). The fireplace has a large wooden bressumer with a slight downward bow in the middle of its length. The partition at the other end of the room, (Plate 19, Figure 7) consists of a series of vertical planks (approximately 0.25 m wide) set in two, staggered, offset rows. They are held in place by a head rail with every other plank held in place by two pegs. The planks which face the hall have quarter round mouldings along both edges (Plate 20) and it is these planks which are held in place by two pegs in the head rail. The moulding only appears on this side of the partition. There is also an iron plate centrally placed on the head rail. This is the retaining plate for a fitting (Plate 21) securing another partition running at right angles to the north west. There is currently one doorway through the partition at its north eastern end, however, an inserted block in the headrail at the south western end may mark the position of a second doorway. This would correspond with the layout on the north western side of the main partition which was divided into two spaces by the partition secured by the iron fitting.

The hall also contains lower section of Truss 3 in the western wall of the house (Plate 22, Figure 6). This has a mortice 1.59 m above the current floor level (Plate 23) which corresponds with a marked kink in the profile of the eastern blade of the truss. These mark the position of a tie beam, now lost. The relatively low position of this tie beam would suggest that the current floor level may be above that of the original floor as it would have crossed the centre of the hall.

The north western side of the main partition is now divided into three rooms, although the toilet in the northern corner of the ground floor is a modern creation. The earlier division into two rooms was by means of a post and panel partition of similar basic design to that dividing the hall from these chambers. It has both head and foot rails holding vertical planking forming two, slightly off set rows (Plate 24, Figure 8) with every other plank being held in place by two wooden pegs in both the head and foot rails. Unlike the main partition, however, the planks have simple slightly bevelled edges with no mouldings. Three of the planks, and part of the foot rail have been removed to allow access between the two chambers.

The joists in the chambers are trenched into the headrail of the lateral partition and have moderate chamfering and runout stops (Plate 25), however their appearance would suggest that they are later replacements.

On the first floor, Truss 1 (Plate 26, Figure 5) is exposed in the south eastern gable end of the house. It is clearly the upper section of cruck frame, although the number of modifications to its upper surfaces would suggest the roof level has been modified several times. The truss is also missing its collar, which was presumably removed to accommodate the window in the gable wall. Its position

is marked by a mortice (Plate 27) in each of the blades. Above this the underside of the blades are shaped and there is the remains of blocked mortices near to the current ceiling level, possibly suggesting decorative cusping once occupied the peak of the truss. The upper purlins are late in the development of the roof and relate to a change in the profile of the roof. The one surviving lower purlin (Plate 28), however, is a plank lying parallel with the line of the roof whose line can be traced through to Truss 3. This sits on top of the truss and there are a series of trenches in the top surfaces of both of the blades which suggests that there have been multiple phases of purlins and roof modifications.

Truss 2 is only exposed on the landing (Plate 29, with only one, straight principal rafter and a diagonal brace exposed (the diagonal brace is hidden behind the display cabinet). Clearly not an original truss this feature is directly over the break between the lobby and the kitchen and is probably related to either the division of the property into two cottages, or the reversion of the cottages to a single property. The lower purlin, however, would appear to be an original feature which has the mortice for a windbrace in its upper surface.

Truss 3, is exposed at the other end of the landing and in the bathroom (Plates 30 and 31, Figure 6) as well as on the ground floor (see above). The truss is a cruck frame which originally had a cranked collar, although this has been truncated by the insertion of the door to Bedroom 2. There are, however, peg holes in the north eastern principal rafter which marks its position. The cut end of the collar is supported by a post which appears to run between the tie beam and the peak of the truss. The north eastern principal rafter has two, trenched, purlins, the upper of which is set at right angles to the line of the roof and is probably a late insertion modifying the line of the roof. The south eastern blade of the cruck has two, empty, trenches for purlins together with the surviving upper purlin which is also trenched.

Truss 4 (Plates 32 and 33, Figure 7) incorporates the main, lateral, partition at the north western end of the hall (see above) and marks the separation between Bedrooms 2 and 3. Once again it is a cruck frame with a cranked collar and a tie beam. There is also a short stud between the collar and the tie beam which is centrally placed. The insertion of a plaster ceiling in the hall has hidden the relationship between the tie beam and the head rail of the partition, however a single stud, exposed in the stairwell to Bedroom 3 (Plate 34) suggests there are a series of short studs linking these two elements. The south western principal rafter has one, empty trench which presumably originally held an upper purlin. The north eastern principal rafter, however, has one trenched purlin which overlaps with another purlin which sits on top of the principle rafter. The lower purlin on this side of the house is set well away from the principle rafter and represents a change in the slope of the roof.

### ***Dendrochronology Sampling***

Five samples were taken from two of the trusses and three of the purlins, however only two of these proved to be dateable with samples from the tie beam to the northern truss (Truss 4) and the eastern purlin in the second bay from the south suggesting a likely construction date for the initial phase of the house in 1512 (Bridge 2016)

### ***Conclusions***

Coed-y Foel would appear to have had a complex history of development, whilst retaining the basic form of the original house. Not all the phases are clear, however it would appear that the house started life as a cruck framed hall house with a two bay hall with inner chambers and a service range. It is also likely that this phase was a timber framed building dating from around 1512 (Bridge 2016). Within the Hall, the floor levels for this phase are probable below that of the current house because of the lack of height below the, now missing, tie beam for Truss 3. The differences between the height of the tie beams in Trusses 3 and 4 also possibly suggests that the floor levels were stepped with each element of the house having a different floor level. This would also allow for the alignment of the house at right angles to the local hill slope.

The major modification to this basic layout included the insertion of the central chimney, probably backing on to the cross passage, and the construction of the ceiling to produce two floors. This produced a regional lobby-entry type house with inserted back-to-back fireplace (Smith type B, 1988, 159-161). It is likely that the post and panel partitions at the north western end of the house are also of this phase. The dating of the phase of construction is not entirely clear, however, the lost date inscription, reported in Smith (1988, map 49) and Hibbard (2003, 156), of 1633 may relate to this phase of construction. It would seem likely that the smaller dormers on the front elevation may have originated in this phase, however the larger dormers on the rear elevation are probably a relatively modern addition.

The later phases of the building include its division into two cottages as is shown by the photograph in the regional inventory (RCAHMCWM 1914) before the re-incorporation into a single building. There is a clear break in the stonework of the front elevation at this point, together with the replacement of Truss 2 and the cut off beam attached to the bressumer in the kitchen all of which suggesting major works were undertaken to either divide or re-combine the two cottages. It is also clear that there are multiple phase of modification to the room including changes to the pitch and the probable construction of the dormers, the sequence of which is unclear.

### ***Acknowledgments***

The recording of this building was commissioned by the owners, who's support during the survey is gratefully acknowledged.

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The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions in Wales and Monmouthshire 1914. *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire. VI. County of Denbigh*. HMSO

Smith, P. 1988. *Houses of the Welsh Countryside. A study in Historical Geography. (Second Edition)*. HMSO, London

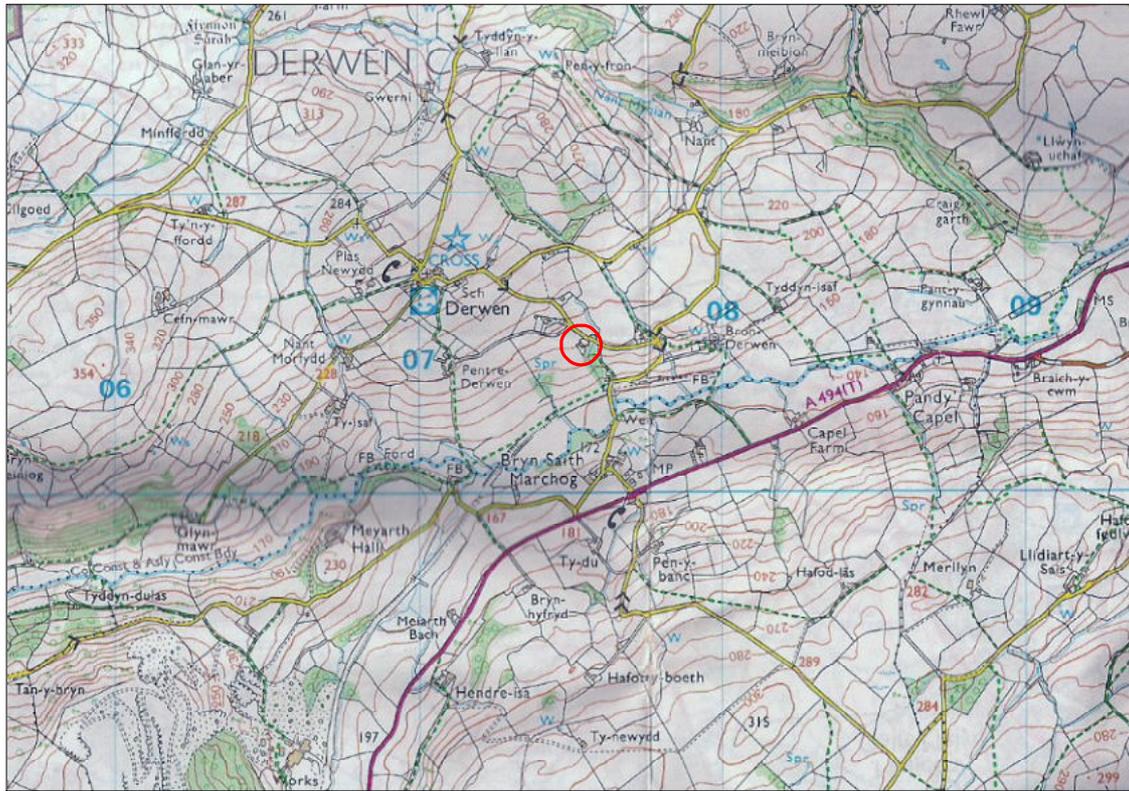


Figure 1: Location  
Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 2: Extract from the Ordnance Survey, 1880 Denbighshire XXVI map  
Not to scale

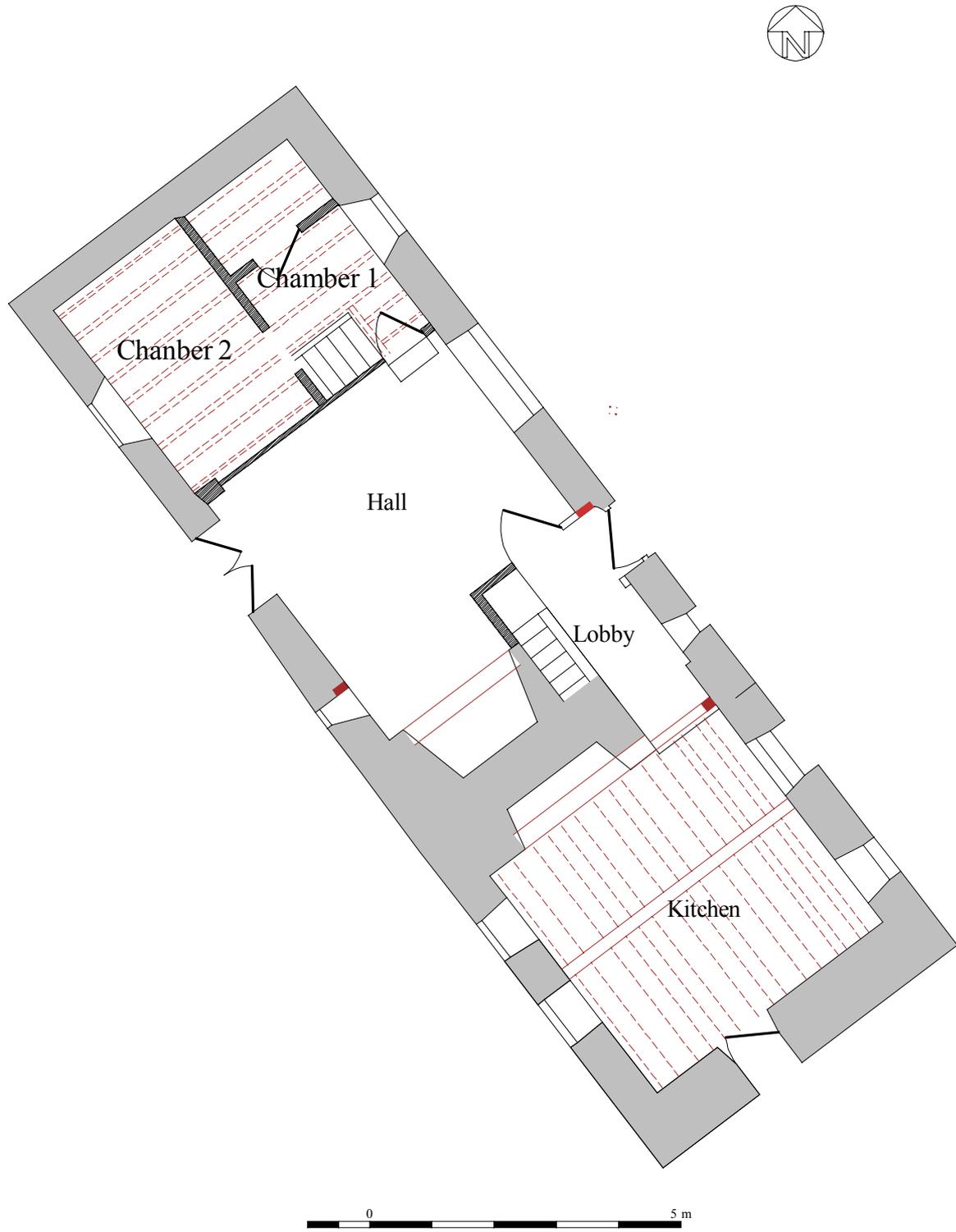


Figure 3: Ground Floor Plan  
Scale 1:100

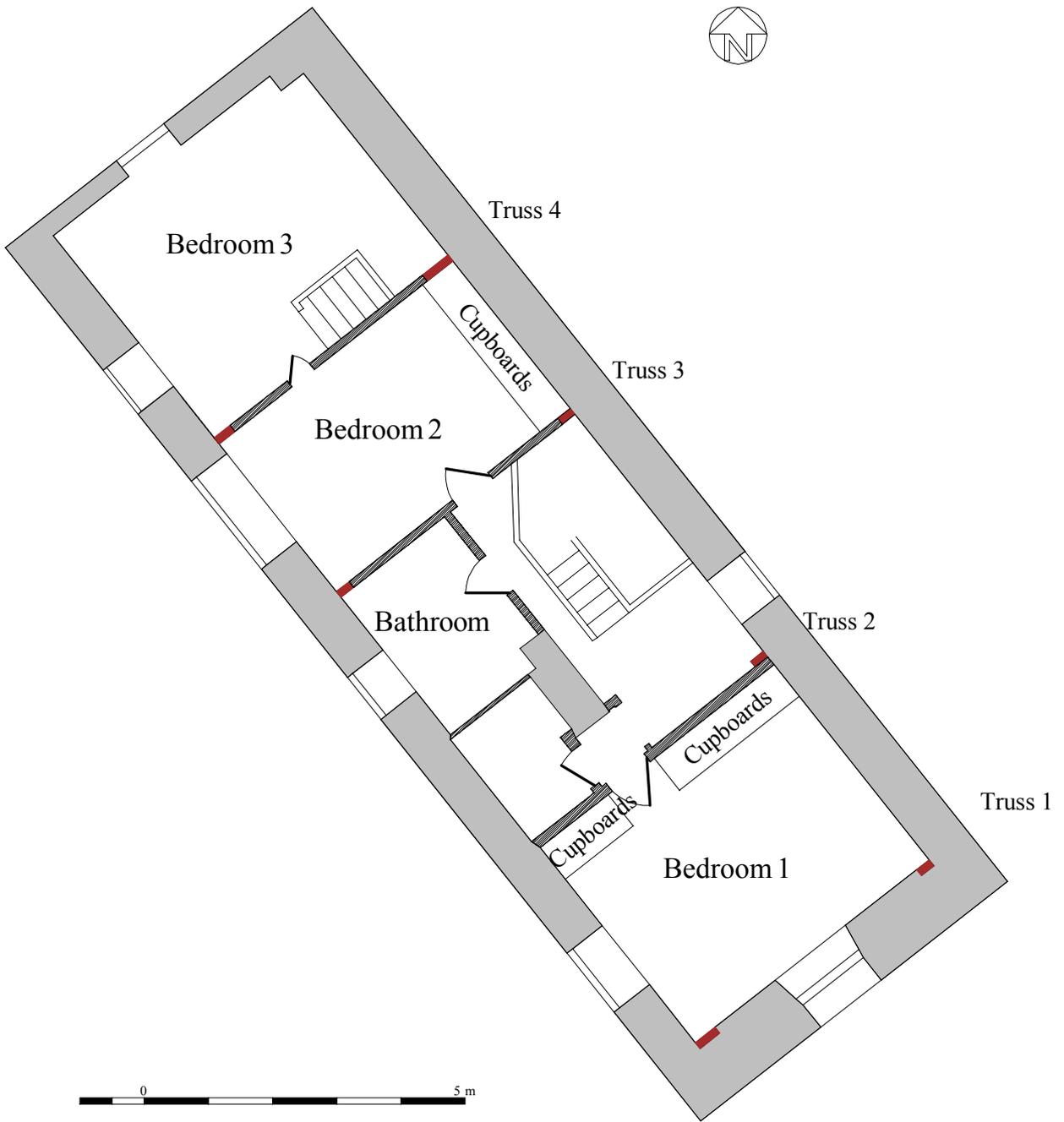


Figure 4: First Floor Plan  
Scale 1:100

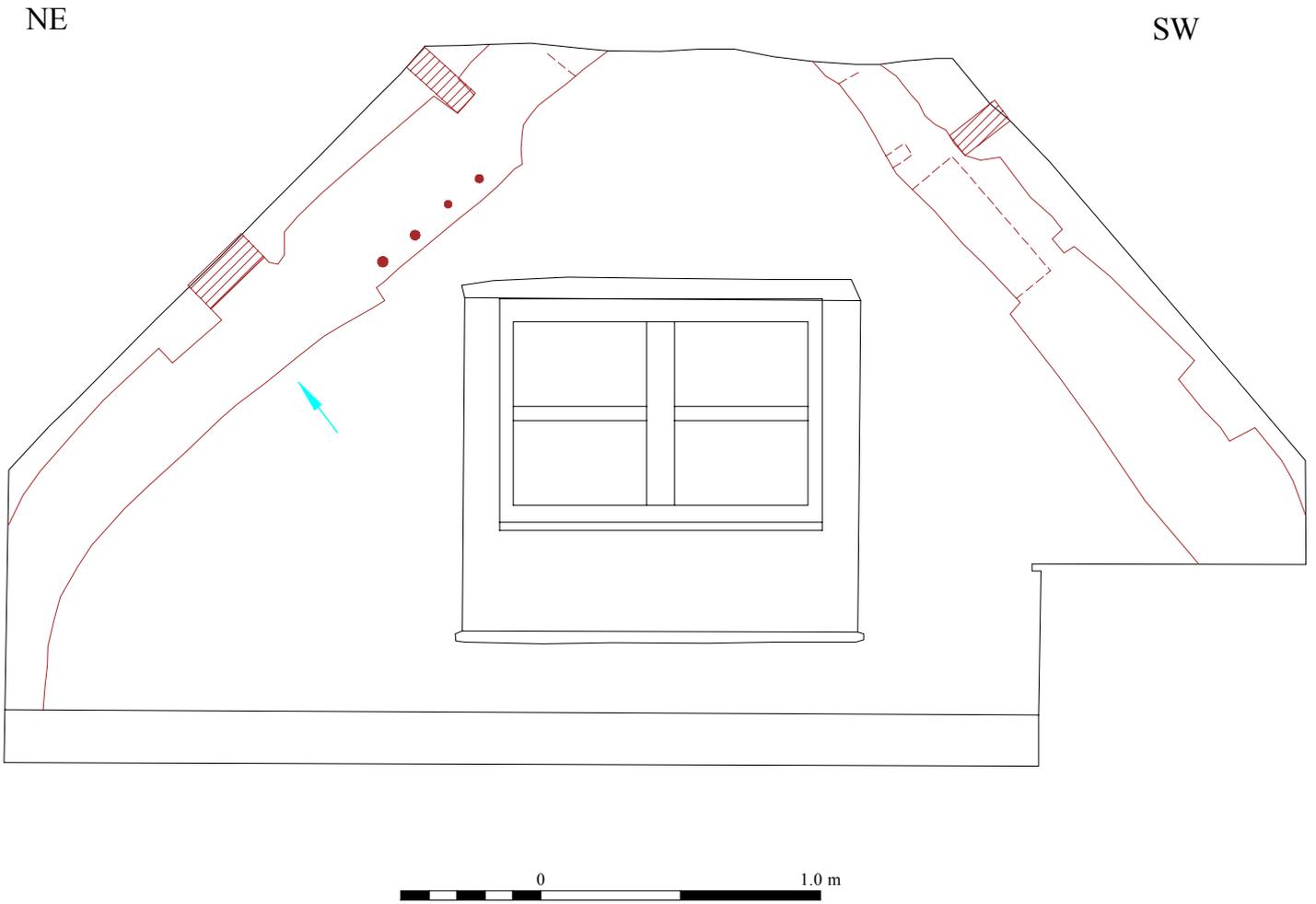


Figure 5: Truss 1  
Scale 1:25

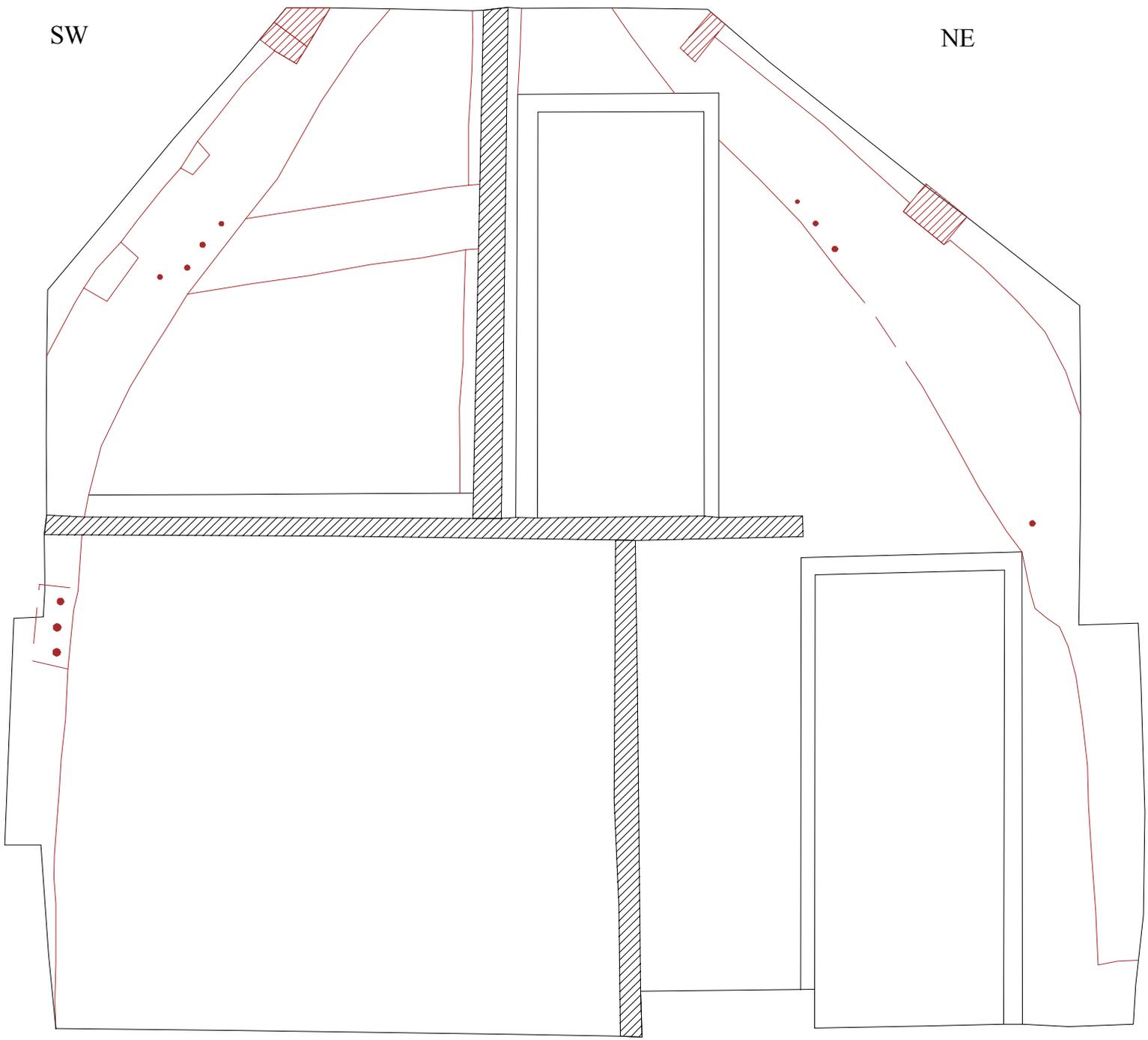


Figure 6: Truss 3  
Scale 1:25

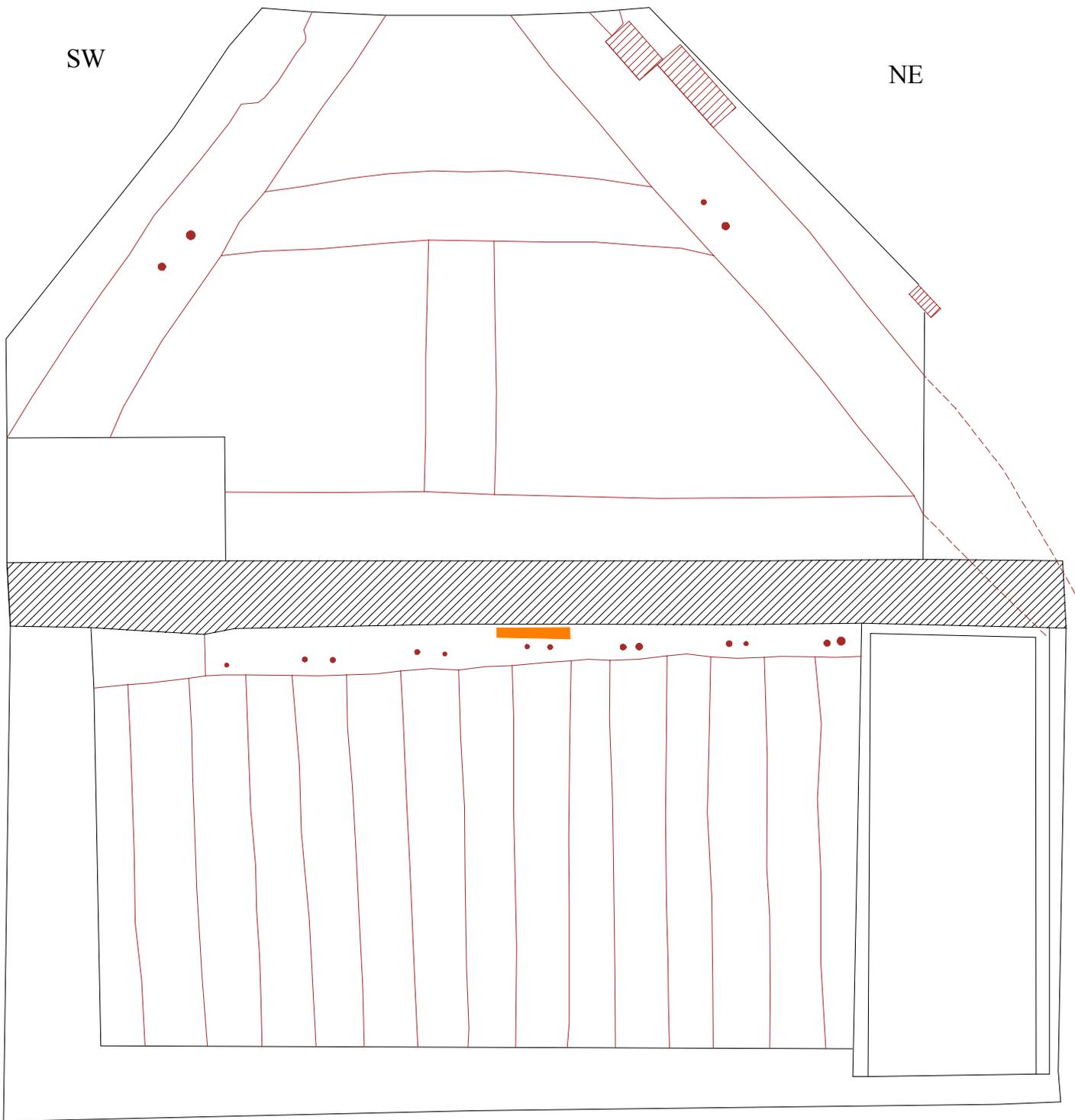


Figure 7: Truss 4  
Scale 1:25

NW

SE

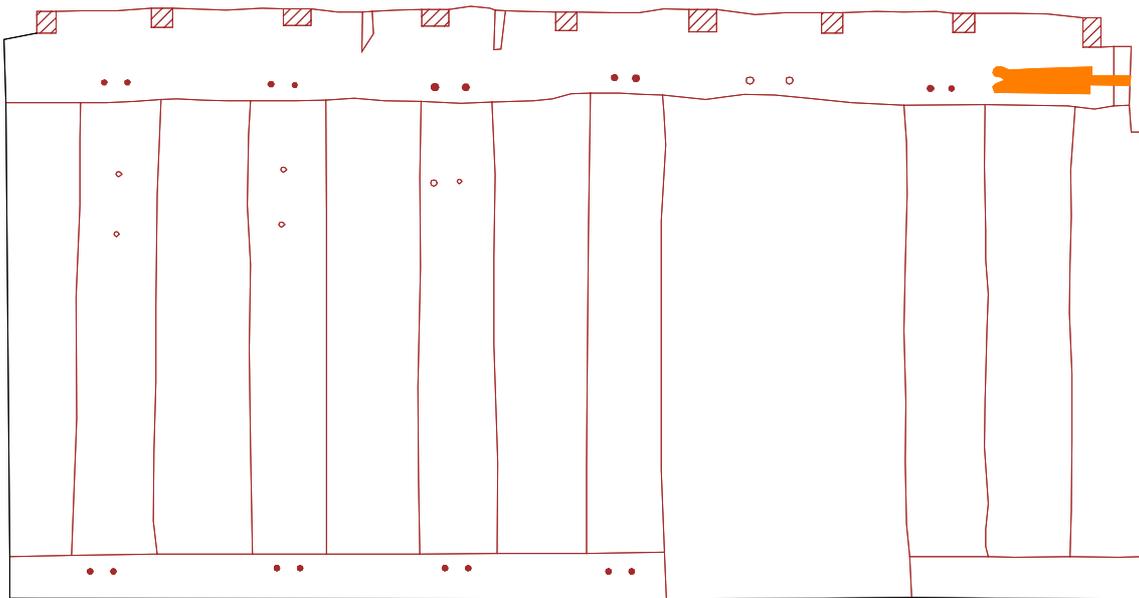


Figure 8: Lonitudinal Partition  
Scale 1:25

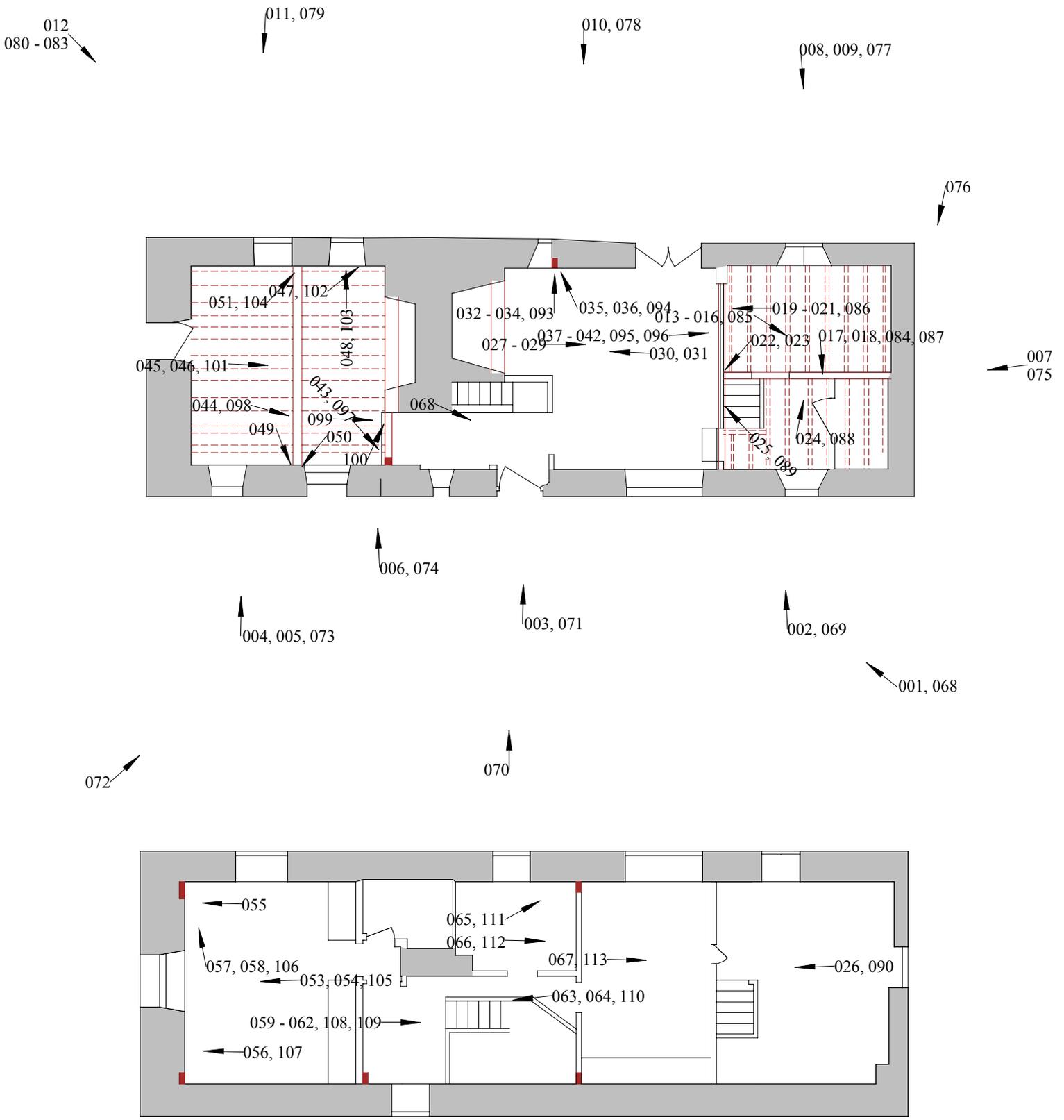


Figure 9: Location of the Photographs in the Archive  
Scale 1:120



Plate 1: Front elevation



Plate 2: North western end of the front elevation



Plate 3: Middle section of the front elevation



Plate 4: South eastern end of the front elevation



Plate 5: Detail of the break in the masonry on the front elevation



Plate 6: North eastern gable.



Plate 7: Rear elevation looking north



Plate 8: Northern end of the rear elevation



Plate 9: Middle section of the rear elevation



Plate 10: Southern section of the rear elevation



Plate 11: Lower section of the northern blade of Truss 3



Plate 12: Post between the lobby and the kitchen



Plate 13: Joint between the kitchen bressumer and the beam separating the lobby from the kitchen



Plate 14: Kitchen fireplace.



Plate 15: Western end of the kitchen ceiling beam



Plate 16: Eastern end of the kitchen ceiling beam



Plate 17: The western window in the kitchen



Plate 18: The fireplace in the Hall



Plate 19: Post and panel partition in the Hall



Plate 20: Detail of the moulded edge of the planks of the partition in the hall



Plate 21: Iron fitting securing the two partitions



Plate 22: Lower section of Truss 3 on the western side of the hall



Plate 23: Detail of the mortice on the lower, western blade of Truss 3



Plate 24: The partition dividing the ground floor chambers



Plate 25: Joists in the chambers



Plate 26: Truss 1



Plate 27: Mortise for the collar to Truss 1



Plate 28: The north eastern blade of Truss 1



Plate 29: Truss 2

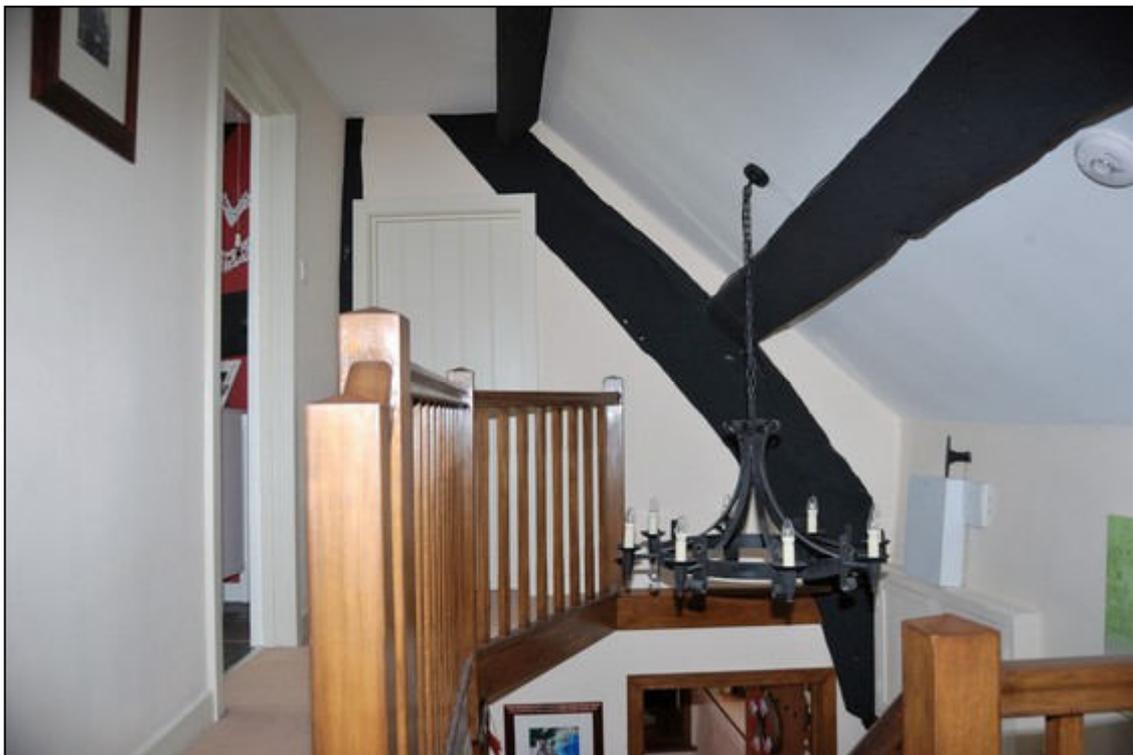


Plate 30: Truss 3 in the area of the landing



Plate 31: Truss 3 in the bathroom



Plate 32: Truss 4 in Bedroom 2



Plate 33: Truss 4 in Bedroom 3



Plate 34: Short stud between the tie beam of Truss 4 and the head rail of the partition