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# Ty Gwyn

Bryn Eglwys, Corwen,

Denbighshire, LL21 9NA

NRPN 35448      HWAR 17/03

## Architectural Record 2017

For Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group



## Final Report

February, 2017

*A report commissioned by  
The Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group in partnership with The  
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**Ty Gwyn**  
**Bryn Eglwys, Near Corwen**  
**Denbighshire, LL21 9NA**

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**Ty Gwyn  
Bryneglwys,  
Corwen, Denbighshire  
formerly Merionethshire  
NRPN 35448**

**Architectural Record**

**Summary**

*Ty Gwyn is situated about three quarters of a mile west of the village of Bryneglwys on the B5104 near Corwen. It sits on a southern facing slope above the Afon Morwynion and looks across to Mynydd Llantysilio. It is centred on SJ 13214711. The building is not listed but brief details are held on the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW). The building is not being dendrochronologically sampled at this stage. This report summarises the results of a record of the house made in January and February 2017 as part of the 'Discovering Old Welsh Houses' project which is undertaken in collaboration with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW).*

*Ty Gwyn is a multi-phase house that began life as an open hall house and comprised probably three or more bays and was most likely constructed during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Additions to the building include a three storey wing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and later enlargements in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This report concentrates on the original hall house. As it now exists, this part of Ty Gwyn is a simple, former hall house, with two extant bays, divided by three cruck trusses, one with fine arch bracing dating from the sixteenth century. A later alteration saw a fireplace inserted at the south east gable end and a floor added over the hall. It seems likely that a further bay existed to the south eastern end and this would make sense of the surviving structure where the hall has been truncated, either when the main fireplace was inserted or sometime after. The building has been constructed and altered in several phases, the stonework probably replacing earlier timber framing to all external walls and is now roofed in slate.*

*Internally, the former hall house retains its bi-partite plan form with two rooms on the ground floor and two further rooms on the first floor which were once open to the apex of the roof but are now ceiled. The ground floor is divided into a hall and what appears to have been an inner room or rooms. The hall, with a large inserted fireplace is faced by an impressive remnant of plank and muntin screen which is fitted under the tie beam of what is now a central truss but formerly formed a closed partition to the apex, sealing off the open hall. This screen is dressed with chamfers, is pegged into the cill beam and seems to travel upwards to a tie beam for the central truss. Only one door remains but there may have been two*

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*in the screen. The inserted fireplace probably coincided with the inserted floor over the hall. Upstairs the floor has been divided into several rooms and most detail has been obscured but the impressive arch-braced truss is observed in two rooms and the tops of all trusses are visible in the attic.*

*While the plan form of the hall has been reduced the placement of the chimney stack within the hall and the magnificence of the arch braced truss suggest a builder of some substance, of gentry pretensions and hopefully archival research will help further understand Ty Gwyn in the absence of dendrochronology.*

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1.1 Background to the project**

1.1.2 Ty Gwyn was recorded in January and February 2017 and was commissioned by Margaret Dunn and the Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group (DOWHG). The resulting report would be used in conjunction with other sampling of houses by the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory (ODL) of houses within the area referred to as North East Wales. On this occasion the opinion was that the timbers were not eminently suitable for tree-ring dating at this time but an evaluation of the fabric of the early house within this holding was important to improve our understanding of the buildings the DOWHG's research into houses in North East Wales was discovering. This work was undertaken in partnership with the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historic Monuments Wales (RCAHMW).

## **1.2 Site Location and Recording**

1.2.1 Ty Gwyn is situated about three quarters of a mile west of the village of Bryneglwys on the B5104 near Corwen. It sits on a southern facing slope above the Afon Morwynion and looks across to Mynydd . It is centred on SJ13214711. (fig 1,2)

1.2.2 Ty Gwyn is not entered on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. A brief note is held on the National Monuments Records of Wales NPRN 35448

1.2.3 This architectural record was requested to inform the Project about the architectural and historical development of the house located on the site. Dendrochronological sampling has not been undertaken at this stage.

### 1.3 Extent of Report

- 1.3.1 The report refers to the 'Design Brief for Historic Building Recording' of July 2016 and prepared by Margaret Dunn, the Project Director.
- 1.3.2 The following report gives the results of the building survey and has been prepared in accordance with English Heritage guidelines as published in Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice (EH 2016) and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers' Analysis & Recording for the Conservation and Control of Works to Historic Building (ALGAO, 1997).
- 1.3.3 Fieldwork was conducted over two days on January 2017. Report prepared upon research and survey correct in February 2016. Fieldwork was assisted by Martin Cherry.

### 1.4 References to buildings

- 1.4.1 Desktop research was based upon limited online references to previous work. A short descriptive note appears on the Coflein database

*Coflein: '3-storey main block with rendered walls, slate roof and brick stacks. Three bay front with door to third bay and two sashes to the 1st and 2nd bays at ground floor level, three similar sashes to the first floor, and two gabled dormers to the first and third bays. 2-storey wing of similar design to the right with one sash to the ground floor and one gabled dormer above' (Coflein accessed January 2017). Recent discovery of cruck and partition. B&W photo on-line (1952). Catalogue no. C404752*

The Tithe Apportionment Map of 1839 (Cynefin) records a holding of some 125 acres but no other details and no buildings are recorded for the Talybidwal township. Estate deeds survive for the period 1549 – 1910 DRO DD/DM/416 3 4. Not yet consulted.

## 2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objective of the historic building record, as per the agreed brief, was to produce a measured drawing, photographic record and a written record to be complemented by the dendrochronological survey. Volunteers will approach the task of forming a record of documentary references to Ty Gwyn into a house history which ultimately forms a documentary, architectural and scientifically dated record of the subject house.



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## 3 **METHODOLOGY**

### 3.1 **Documentary Research**

- 3.1.1 The brief requires that the individual buildings are assessed and analysed. The building recording is an activity independent of any documentary research into the history of the site. However, reference may be made to known sources where relevant.

### 3.2 **Historic Building Record**

- 3.2.1 The requirement was to provide the report based on an examination of both the exterior and interior of the building and the production of measured drawings, photographic and written data.

#### **The measured drawings.**

- 3.2.2 A measured plan of the site was produced for the ground and first floor at a scale of 1:50 reduced to A4 where necessary. Measurement was by Electronic Disto laser measurer, tape and telescopic measuring rod. A Ground floor plan to illustrate the newly exposed historic detail and form was produced at 1:125 and the Cross sections of the building at two trusses and partitions or screens were also prepared at 1:50 and 1:120. Reference was also made to archive material and plans.

#### **Photographic Record**

- 3.2.3 Images were captured on a Nikon D2X digital single-lens reflex camera giving 12mega pixel RAW files and JPEGs. A Fuji XE1 camera (16.4mp images) was also used. Photography was to the standard of a Level 3 survey defined by English Heritage (20016, 19). The record comprises exterior and interior images as follows

General images of elevations and features exterior and interior rooms

Detail images of architectural features of note exterior and interior both constructional and decorative where appropriate.

A scale divided into 500cm sections is used in a number of photographs. A smaller scale divided into 5cm sections was also used.

## **Written Record**

- 3.2.4 To complete the drawing and photographic records, a written description detailing features, use and changes to the building plus a brief discussion and this follows below.

## 4 **BUILDING RECORD - DESCRIPTION**

### 4.1 **Exterior**

#### 4.1.1 General

This description refers only to the original part of the structure as it stands.

Ty Gwyn is a multi-period house but the section under study here is a now a simple two-unit, storeyed house of rectangular plan that has been added to with a three story 18th century wing to the west and an additional wing added in the 19th century to the north east. The early phase would appear to date from sometime in the 16th century and deeds dating from 1549 relating to Ty Gwyn may point to this conclusion but are yet to be consulted.

Ty Gwyn occupies a south east to north west axis and is constructed of small section random rubble stone and rendered, probably late 19th or early 20th century, with later patching and roofed in slate on a steeper pitch than the rest of the additions, and would possibly have been thatched originally. At the present this part is a bi-partite house and was formerly an open hall. The external dimensions of the original structure surviving are 11.8m x 6.8m. The 18th century extension to left front is 8.6m x 6.4m and is of three storeys . This later wing has a further addition to rear adding a 4.8m x 6.8m addition. To the north east of the original house a further unit of 5.8 x 6m has been joined to the old house.

This report will concentrate on the older part of the building, the main 2 storey section. (Fig 3) and the historic fabric contained within.

4.1.2 The front presents the south-east gable end of the building. This was placed on a sharp downhill slope which defined its construction. The gable is of plain render over random stone and is bounded at the bottom by what appears to be a large plinth but is actually a modern shuttered concrete buttress to shore up deteriorating stone work at the wall constructed and within living memory. (pers. Con, owner Richard Davies) Modern, small, red brick chimney and oversailing verges with PVCU barge boards. Re-roofed in thin slates probably late 19th or 20th century. Much taller chimney seen in 1952 photograph but still of brick so the height of that chimney may have been reduced but roof construction is as we see it today. (Fig 4)

4.1.3 The south-western elevation is mainly obscured by the 18th century wing (fig 5) but there is one ground floor window and one with gabled dormer-head. Both windows have been replaced in PVCU. The 1952 image shows a four- light casement above and a box sash frame at first floor level. Entry to the house is now made through the wing extension to right. The original external wall continues within the building and now forms a part wall with the 18th century wing.

4.1.4 The north-eastern elevation (fig 6 ) reveals the full length of the early building and the additional units are clear. The ground level exhibits 3 windows of three different sizes, now installed and the first floor has three smaller windows of comparable size, all fitted windows with PVCU

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fenestration. While it would be tempting to attribute these openings to a certain period, an early period, at least in terms of placement the alterations made make this difficult as we cannot be certain were the original access was.

- 4.1.5 The rear northern gable is now subsumed into the fabric of the various extensions with a stairway to first floor and a door to the ground floor. It is the interior that reveals the nature of the development of the building.

## **4.2 Interior**

- 4.2.1 Entry to the early phase of the house is via the door (**Fig 23 Ground Floor Plan GF1**) into the 18th century wing and immediately to right a paneled door opens into what was the original hall. (Fig 7) As this room has been divested of its later accretions we are able examine it as it would have been before an earlier alteration, but not in its original condition but it does reveal some earlier stages of its development, perhaps prior to a later refurbishment. All the walls have been stripped bare, as have the ceilings, but a beautiful ceramic floor, said to be laid during WWII by POWs, survives and is going to be preserved. ( Fig 8)
- The wall to the left consists of a timber screen that comprises a doorway and 7 panels of a plank and muntin screen in good condition. (**Figs 9, 27 Screen**) The doorway has two posts, left 170mm and right 280mm wide with a door head tenoned and jointed into the posts. Bottom of door head shaped to form a four-centred arched doorway typical of the 16th to 17th centuries. Above the door head one short muntin divides two planks. Doorway was later blocked with two posts and lath and lime plaster added to rear face – i.e. facing into adjacent room. Continuing right, a further 3 muntins (260mm) hold 3 more planks on average 250-270mm wide visible. This section of the wall is jointed into a cill beam (220mm) on top of a 490mm high cill-wall of stone and brick. The right-hand end of this wall was removed and replaced with sawn posts to hold lath and lime plaster both sides and a new doorway with paneled door inserted. Steel beams have been inserted longitudinally and transversely so some structural deterioration must have occurred. This timber screen, including the later post and lath partition rise up behind the ceiling beam in the hall to locate into what was a ceiling or tie beam for a closed truss that is located here. It is important to note that the doorway passes through the partition at the same ground level as the hall with just a step up of just over 160mm. Initial impressions that the hall floor was much lower were due to the elevated position of the original door in the timber screen being 600mm of the ground. As the later door was sealed, entry to the adjacent room was from another entry. These initial impressions that the floor was elevated were revised but asks the question why the timber partition was on a high masonry cill and was this originally continued across the room, which would provide a considerable obstacle? The position of the door, some 600mm of the floor level is also curious. Was the floor lowered?

The wall opposite is comprised of stone with a large window directly opposite the door under a wide oak lintel. Reveals have been squared with brick in places. UPVC window. To its right is an

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opening, of door height, with a deep aperture and a step up of 400mm. This sits under another oak lintel of re-used oak. To the right, within this aperture, running the full height through to ceiling is the left hand blade of Truss 1 (fig 10 ). This cruck is truncated and now sits on either a replacement for a removed section or was a raised cruck originally. The matching blade on the other side is buried in mortar so this cannot be determined. To the right of the cruck blade is a window under a relatively thin lintel (65mm). Disturbed masonry.

The next wall to the right sees a large recess which has been created by the insertion of an impressive fireplace in the southern gable wall. (Fig 11) A large bressummer creates the fireplace opening. This has been reduced in dimension from the original and has no chamfers or stops, possibly removed. On top the masonry chimney breast a ceiling beam runs the width of the room transversely. It has a deep chamfer where it corresponds to the width of the chimney breast but to the left this beam is mortised on the soffit for what appears to be a section of plank and muntin screen (fig,12). It is difficult to translate this. The joists that this beam supports to the gable end have been replaced with later timbers and there is a chamber 2m square and lit by a window. To the right and left the ceiling beam and chimney masonry is located behind the cruck truss and the conclusion is that the chimney was inserted after the initial phase of the open hall.

The wall to right has little of feature but for the exposed right hand cruck blade. (Fig 13) A window to right. Although the wall is of stone the lintel is of deep section sawn timber on set edge. This suggests a later alteration. The door through which we entered is also made up of re-set stonework and various pieces of re-used timber, mostly oak. All display various notches, rebates and holes (fig 14) but the impression is that all the stonewalls have been repaired or remodeled or there is the possibility that the walls were originally timber framed and much of the original timber has been used in the remodeling.

The ceiling is impressive and shows some aspiration. The joists are supported in mortised sockets, on the left, as they are throughout, on a separate transverse beam (290mm x 180mm) and sits above and in front of the timber plank and muntin screen. This is located in front of the beam that supports the timber partition of the closed truss that rises from ground floor to roof apex. The joists (12) run longitudinally onto a central transverse beam (290mm x 270mm) and from this joists similarly cross to the ceiling beam over the fireplace. All joists are chamfered and stopped with simple step and hollow run out. The main beams have larger versions of these chamfers (70mm) and stops. (Fig 15)

- 4.2.2 The adjoining room **GF2** is completely plain and shows no historic fabric. The connecting door through the screen was concealed at the time of survey. It was related by the owners that the floor over this room had to be strengthened by using steel beams but was concealed again so we do not know what fabric existed or what was removed at this time.

As a summation of the ground floor we can assume that what exists is a basic open hall with an inner room. We can find no evidence of a cross passage but there would be a number of possibilities. Unfortunately, the surviving evidence does not help locate one with certainty.

We have to have an open truss of some status in the visible cruck blades in front of the fire and an interesting 'chamber' to the left of the fireplace. Clearly, the floor has been inserted over the hall.

- 4.3** The first floor is reached by a staircase built within the 18th century wing and enters the first floor over the position of the timber screen below. Two bedrooms occupy the space over the hall. A hugely impressive segment of cruck blade is open to view (Fig 16) with the left hand blade visible in the next room. Together they form the curve and apex of an arch-braced truss. (**Fig 24 Section AA Truss 1**) The brace is secured on its edge to the cruck blade by six pegs and on its top to the collar by eleven pegs. An extravagant or ostentatious use of carpentry. The right blade is imbedded in the masonry of the chimney below while the left blade stands free for part of its height. This allows us to examine the back of the truss and we find that the back has been further enhanced by more embellishment. For whatever reason a rebate has been removed from the face of the blade and arch next to the arch brace and a heavy chamfer applied, (Fig 17) suggesting that this side of the truss was meant to be on view rather than consigned to the low end of the building or, as now, buried within masonry as so often happened in this form of modification to an open hall when a chimney was inserted. This poses the question of plan form at this end of the building and if there might have been a further bay. The truss has been finished at the top of the arch, on the collar with a usual stub on the soffit, as if to accept a boss, but one does not now exist. There is also a horizontal mortise above this on the collar. This may have accepted a structural or decorative timber. (Fig 18) The complete truss has a 20mm chamfer running around the edge of the arch. Of interest, on the right cruck blade is the existence of a cupboard, with moulded door. The cupboard has been chiseled out of the cruck blade and must have been a labour of love. (fig 19)

On this floor there is only one further place to view historic fabric. This is to see a part of the right cruck blade, facing northwards, and dropping through the room at the other end of the building. (**Fig 26: Truss 3 Section CC**)

- 4.3.1** Entry to the attic, next to **Fig 25: Truss 2 Section BB**, reveals the apex of (**Fig 24: Truss1 Section AA**) at far end of roof. Trenched purlins are carried on the cruck blades and the apex has the space above the collar decorated with an interestingly shaped king strut (Fig 20). The post, triangular at its top serves to tie the two cruck blades together and is pegged. There is little, or no evidence of smoke blackening which one would expect if an open hearth was used. However, the rear of the truss which faces the masonry of the chimney is completely pale oak in colour, rather than the dark oak colour on the inner face.

The central truss, above the screen in the hall, appears to be comprised of a further cruck or A-frame as part of a larger frame but this could not be ascertained. It would be quite a normal arrangement. This truss separates the two existing bays of the early house. It is constructed with similar dimension timber and from the collar one remaining post drops down below but there are further mortises. Two large, vacant mortises in the soffits of the cruck or A frame blades would accommodate two struts or, more likely, a diagonal block to tie the blades together. There are

further mortises vacant in the soffit so there may be others out of sight but the conclusion is that a framed partition dropped to the tie beam above the screen. A rough groove on the top of the collar, which has had a large piece cut out of the centre, (Fig 21) is suggestive of staves for wattle and daub but there appears to be no corresponding holes so this is not conclusive. Blacked timbers in places but singeing appears to be from a fire rather than rising smoke.

The last truss reveals the top, above the collar. It has been modified. Crucks fastened by a central triangular block, now missing. Several vertical posts, both from below collar but also above may point to timber framed walling (Fig 22) if this was the extent of the building in this direction. Appears to be oak window framing fitted into apex. Reverse face is extremely clean oak, viewed from attic of extension, reminiscent of exterior of truss 1.

## 5 **Dendrochronology**

- 5.1.1 The use of dendrochronology did not feature as part of the appraisal or recording of this house as is usually the case but at the time of the assessments Ty Gwyn was thought to have a lower chance of success and therefore a lower priority. However, this did not preclude Ty Gwyn from future consideration for tree-ring dating and maybe when funds permit the situation can be reviewed.

## 6 **Discussion**

### 6.1.1 Discussion

- 6.1.1 The early development of Ty Gwyn seems to follow a well-trodden route from the construction of an open hall of two, or perhaps more bays to having a chimney and floor as part of the conversion that would improve the comfort and privacy of those who dwelled there. Sometimes the pattern is easy to follow and occasionally might prove more problematic. In this case certain factors are perfectly clear while anomalies and puzzles are also evident. In terms of plan form the house started life as a three-bay hall with the open arch-braced truss occupying a central feature open to admiration and respect. The 'high end' of the hall, by the timber screen may have had the customary bench fixed to it as there are regular, large peg holes. Behind this, beyond the screen, an inner room or rooms afford accommodation that could be more private. There is a problem here though. The original door in the timber screen to the left is more than half a metre off the ground but the later door, inserted to the right in the rebuilt part of the screen, passes through to the next room but the floor level is only 150mm higher.

The fireplace end of the hall poses the question of whether there was a further bay. This would seem likely given the proximity of the truss to the building end, which, prior to the insertion of the fireplace makes little sense. The decoration on the southern side of truss 1 lends support to this view. The lobby created by the insertion of the fireplace is intriguing as there was obviously some form of screen inserted, either at the time of the inserted floor or later. This may have

afforded a route to the next floor and containing a stair. From surviving evidence we cannot determine where access was taken to the next floor but this is conjectural.

- 6.1.2 In conclusion, Ty Gwyn seems likely to have started as an open hall with timber-framed walls – the northern gable, truss 3, does appear to have part of its wall comprised of close studded framing. The remaining walls all seem to have walls that have been rebuilt with a variety of re-used timber components to support this hypothesis. If the deeds of 1549 do lend support to a construction of around that date, the insertion of the floor would have come later when the chimney was inserted and the floor extended across the open hall. This would be a major improvement in the lives of the occupants. Hopefully this report will encourage Nia and Richard to learn a bit more about Ty Gwyn

## **8 Acknowledgments**

- 8.1 The project was commissioned by Mrs Margaret Dunn, Project Director of the Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group, to whom thanks are given for help and cooperation throughout. Thanks also to Nia and Richard Davies for allowing access to the property for the purposes of survey and much appreciated tea and biscuits.
- 8.2 DOWHG – North West Wales Project – acknowledges that this project would not have been possible without grants gratefully received from the Woodtiger Fund, the Marc Fitch Fund, the Vernacular Architecture Group and the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Fund.
- 8.2 Site recording and assessment were undertaken by Peter Thompson who also wrote and illustrated the current report. Most ably assisted by Martin Cherry.



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- <http://www.archaeologists.net>
- [www.coflein.gov.uk](http://www.coflein.gov.uk)
- <https://historicengland.org.uk>
- <http://datingoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library-h/reports.html>

*A report commissioned by The Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales*



Figure 1: Location of Ty Gwyn nr Bryn Eglwys



Figure 2: OS map of 1896. NL Scotland

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Figure 3: Ty Gwyn from SE.



Figure 4: 1952 image of Ty Gwyn. Coflein RCAHMW

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Figure 5: From SW and 18th C wing.



Figure 6: From the east.

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Figure 7: The hall in Ty Gwyn.



Figure 8: Ceramic tiled floor in hall.

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Figure 9: Remnant of plank & muntin screen.



Figure 10: Blocked doorway?

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Figure 11: Inserted fireplace in hall.



Figure 12: Ceiling beam over fireplace showing mortises in screen.

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Figure 13: Fireplace and cruck.



Figure 14: Re-used timber - rebated rails, holes and oddments.

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Figure 15: Main transverse beam with chamfers and stops.



Figure 16: Right blade of Truss 1. Arch-braced.



Figure 17: Left blade of cruck Truss 1. Additional decoration on 'rear' of arch braced cruck truss



Figure 18: Bottom of principal with stud and mortise.



Figure 19: Cupboard carved from cruck.

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Figure 20: Unusual decorated king strut on Truss 1

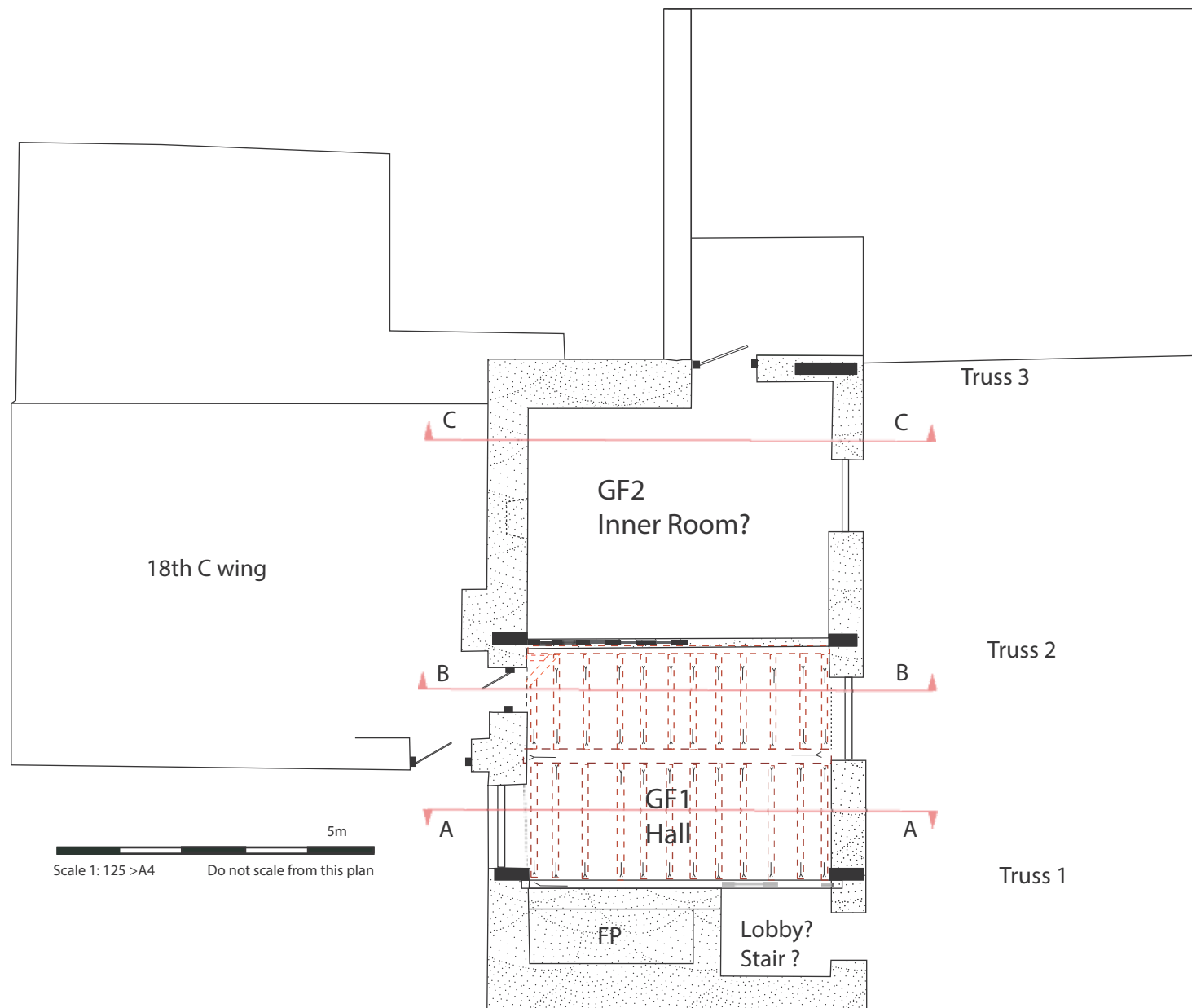


Figure 21: In Middle ground is Truss 2.

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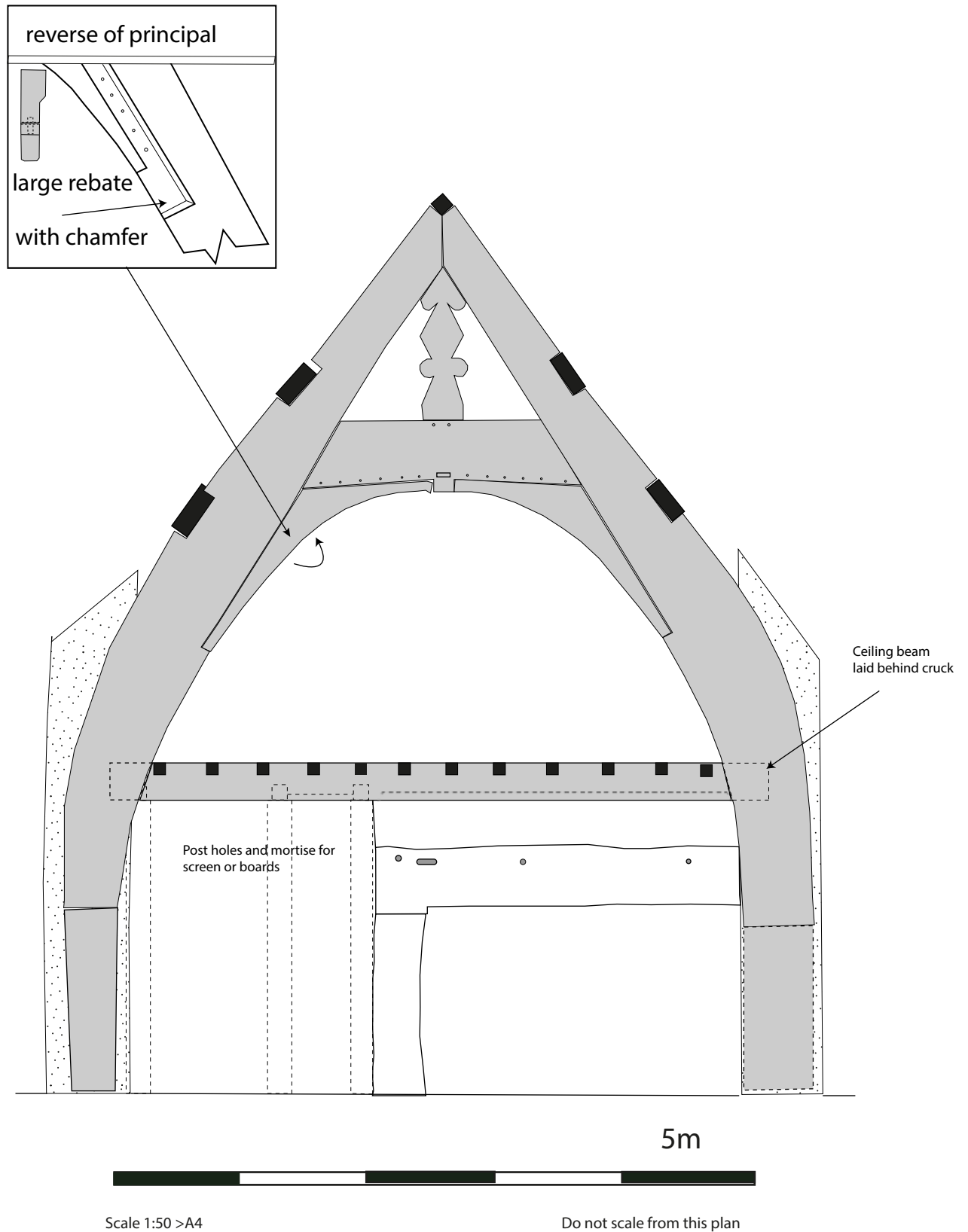
Figure 22: Truss 3. Central post at apex and several posts or studs drop from collar.

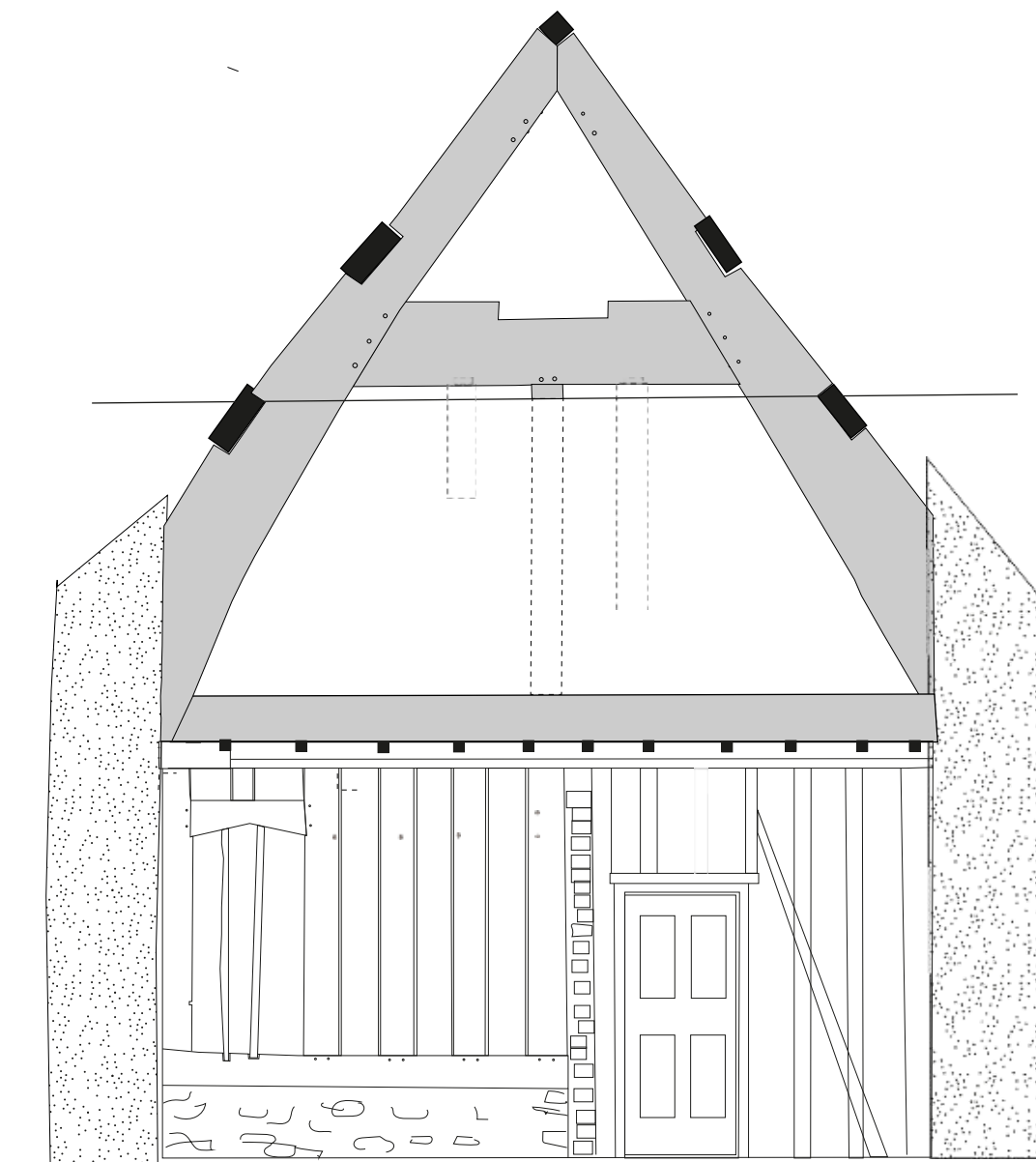


Scale 1: 125 >A4      5m  
Do not scale from this plan

Fig 23: Ground Floor Plan

Ty Gwyn, Bryneglwys, Corwen, Denbighshire, LL21 9NA





5m



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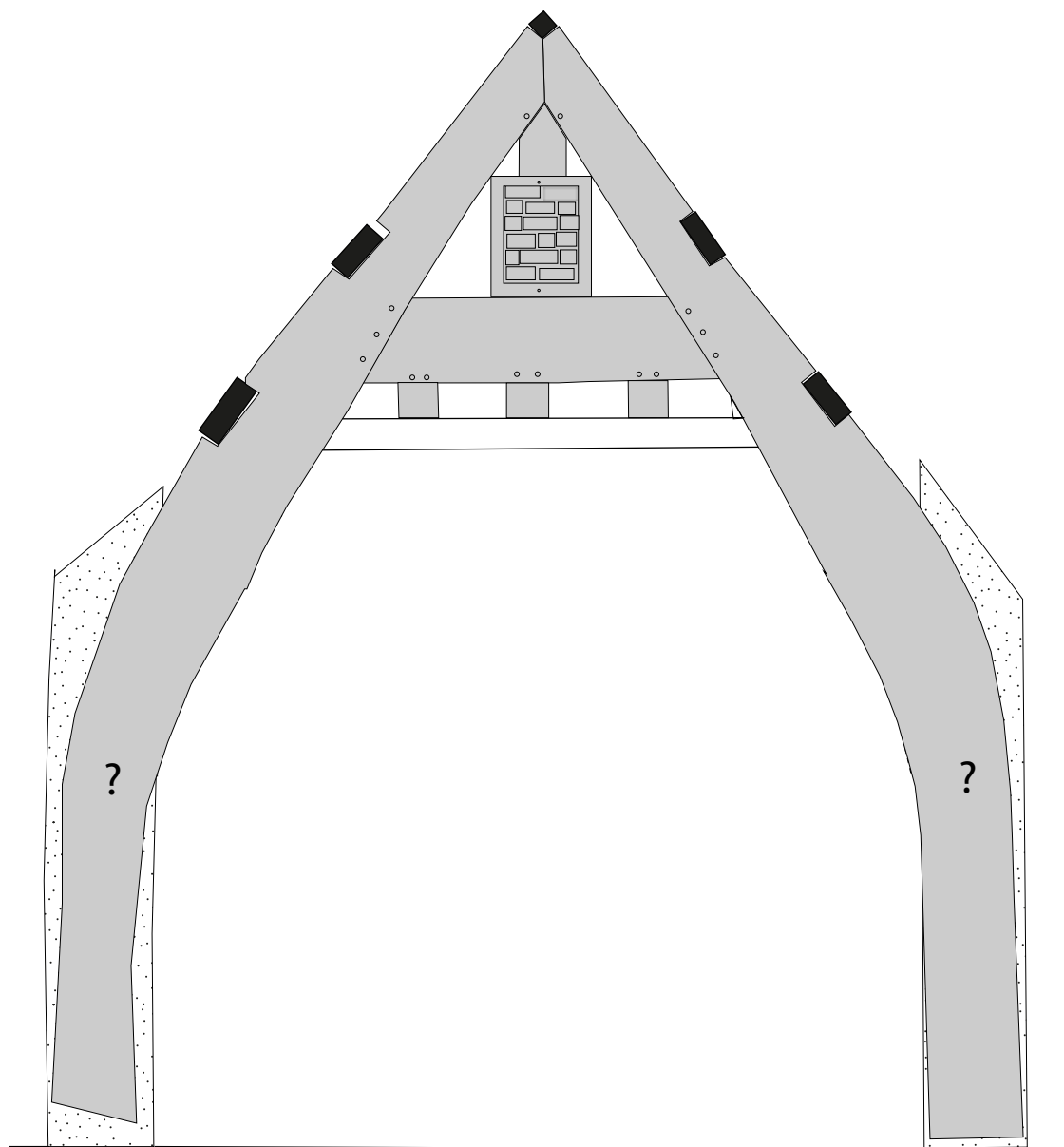
Do not scale from this plan

HW  
Peter Thompson

Figure 25: Section BB Truss 2. Looking north

Ty Gwyn, Bryneglwys, Denbighshire,





5m

Scale 1:50 >A4

Do not scale from this plan

