A Brief Report on Pen y Bryn and Aber, Gwynedd

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Cover Photograph, Pen y Bryn from the north

Figure 2, The Location of Aber in relation to Great Britain

Conversion Factors

The conventions used throughout these books are feet and inches as I believe these to be of greater value in defining castle features. For conversion to the metric scale the following formula should be used. Divide the imperial figure by 3.05, ie. 1 foot is .305 of a metre. Dates in brackets referring to a person usually refer to the period when they held office or were of age and rarely to their date of birth.

Contents

Glossary

Bailiff	An officer who manages an estate for another
Cantref	Welsh administrative land unit, commonly of 3 or 4 commotes
Commote	Welsh administrative land unit, commonly equated to a Hundred
Demesne	Land held by a lord in his own hand
Dendrochronology	A method of dating based on the analysis of patterns of tree-rings
Escheat	Land that reverts to its previous holder
Fenestration	The design and disposition of exterior openings in a building
Hundred	English administrative land unit subject to royal justice
Knight's Fee	Land held by service of providing a knight in time of war
League	Distance of usually three, but occasionally one mile
Llys	A court complex at the centre of a commote
Llysoedd	The plural of llys
Marcher Lordship	Land held in chief of the king, but separate of royal justice
Maerdref	An estate of the princes run on manorial lines
Pipe Roll	Exchequer account of the Shires
Quoin	A large corner stone making a corner in a building
Scarp	Steeply sloping ground like the face of a ditch
Snecker Stones	Larger stones in a coursed wall that cover two courses or more
Suit	Attendance due at a court house of the lord
Uchelwyr	Leading Welshmen
Vicus	A Roman town
Vill	Norman Hamlet originally equivalent to a manor or later parish
Voussoir	A wedge-shaped stone building block used in constructing an arch

Introduction

There is no doubt that the thirteenth century princes of Gwynedd had a residence at Aber. The question is where was that residence and what shape did it take? The purpose of this paper is to look at the recorded history and geography of the area, as well as past reports on the subject, and to hopefully discover where the site of Aber llys was. This was the court and home of the thirteenth century Welsh princes, and therefore the remains of the palace that Leland saw in the late 1530's and, rightly or wrongly, attached to the name of Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (1172-1240).

A llys was the administrative centre of a commote and contained a certain number of buildings to achieve set purposes. Few of these structures have been identified in Wales, and naturally even fewer have been excavated. The best excavated example is found at Rhosyr on Anglesey. This site had been ignored until 1992, after which a series of excavations uncovered a portion of it. It is not the purpose of this paper to define a llys, but contradicting claims concerning the positioning and purpose of Aber llys necessitates the examination of this topic and the production of an overview of princely llysoedd in North Wales. This is a murky subject on which the definitive word is a long way off being written.

In November 1282 Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffydd entertained Archbishop Peckham at Garth Celyn as appears in the copy of the prince's correspondence kept in the archives at Lambeth palace. This event in itself is crucial in explaining the history of Aber and pin-pointing the position of the royal palace then known as Garth Celyn. After this date historical mentions of the manor of Aber literally abound and from these it is possible to corroborate the inference of where these structures once stood. These conclusions are not reached through hearsay or guesswork, but through the solid foundations of widespread research and logical deductions from archaeological remains. What needs to follow this report is the meticulous examination of the historical evidence and scientific investigations at several sites.

It is quite clear that after the execution of Prince Dafydd ap Gruffydd in October 1283 Garth Celyn remained as a residence of the English princes of Wales even though the manor was farmed out to various tenants from the early fourteenth century. However it still retained sufficient importance for the manor, with its multitude of appurtenances, to be granted out to Queen Anne at the end of the century. Its continued upkeep was still worthy of consideration well into the fifteenth century, but by 1530 it had fallen into ruin. It was still in this ruinous state when, probably in the latter part of the sixteenth century, it was rebuilt by the Thomas family, who claimed descent from Elystan Glodrydd, a tenth century Welsh king of mid Wales.

The site of the house now known as Pen y Bryn remained Crown property until 1551/3 when it was acquired by the Thomas family. Much of the workmanship that can be seen in the house today must have been carried out by this family. However the Thomas

family work is not the subject of this report, but any structure that appears to underlie and influence the design of their house is. There are several inconclusive and contradictory examinations of the house in print from the last century. The fact that so many people can have such differing opinions of a building means that the subject must be approached with an open mind which is not distorted by unprovable past theories. It is often the case that differing appreciations of the evidence can be due to misconception of the source material or a failure to understand the entire picture. Therefore I have taken it upon myself to delve further afield than just the environs of Aber to try to bring some light on this murky field.

The failure of these earlier reports to address the true nature of the site have almost entirely been due to an understandable misapprehension of what they are studying or not having had time to amass the total available information to come to a valid conclusion. As Professor R.R. Davies once said to me, to understand a building you must take into account its history.

I hope to start on this process in the following admittedly short report, which is all that could be managed with the time allowed. This report commences with an evaluation of the current primary evidence available for study and is not meant to be definitive in any manner, as such cannot be stated until the full facts have been examined. However the history related below in these few evaluation lines shows that much is still to be deciphered. After this the earliest details of the house at Pen y Bryn are evaluated before looking at the excavation site at Aber motte and bailey castle and finally llysoedd and castle sites in North Wales in general. Finally a tentative conclusion is reached and the path for further beneficial study outlined.

Table of Historical Events at Aber between 1100 and 1710

Year	Lord of Aber	Event
1121-37	Gruffydd ap Cynan	Building of palaces in Gwynedd and Anglesey
Nov 1170	Owain Gwynedd	holder of Arllechwedd was buried at Bangor
1171-3	Iorwerth ab Owain	was holding Arllechwedd
1173	Dafydd ab Owain	took Anglesey and maybe Arllechwedd
1188	Rhodri ab Owain	was holding Arllechwedd
1192	Gruffydd ap Cynan	was holding Arllechwedd
1194	Gruffydd ap Cynan	battle of the River Conwy
1200	Llywelyn ab Iorwerth	Gruffydd ap Cynan died at Aberconwy
1203	Llywelyn ab Iorwerth	Dafydd ab Owain killed at Aber?
2 Feb 1237	Llywelyn ab Iorwerth	Joan dies at Llywelyn's 'llys in Aber'
1240	Dafydd ap Llywelyn	Llywelyn dies at Aberconwy
25 Feb 1246	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Prince Dafydd dies at Aber
1247	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Division of Gwynedd with Llywelyn granted Arllechwedd
bef. 15 May 1265	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Llywelyn's private chapel interdicted
26 Mar 1274	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Letter from Aber
16 Dec 1276	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Letter from Aber
Nov 1282	Llywelyn ap Gruffydd	Entertained Peckham at Aber Garth Celyn
9 Jul 1283	Edward I	At Aber
26 Aug 1283	Edward I	At Aber
30 Mar 1284	Edward I	At Aber?
23-30 Aug 1284	Edward I	At Aber
8 Nov 1284	Edward I	£2 for damages paid to Vicar Goronwy of Aber church
1284	Edward I	Survey of Aber

c.1287	Edward I	Henry Somur of Conway to have the escheat of Aber for 5 years at 10s yearly, plus an increase of 8 marks.
1290	Edward I	royal court of Aber in action, value of manor £5 per annum
1301	Edward I	sheriff's account
1303	Prince Edward	sheriff's account
1303-4	Prince Edward	repairs to Long House (*Tir Hir*)
1308-10	Edward II	Tewdwr ap Goronwy ab Ednyfed lord in Aber for 14s pa.
1309	Edward II	Royal chapel of Aber
27 May 1316	Edward II	Commitment to John Sapy during pleasure at rent of Aber.
23 Feb 1318	Edward II	Commitment for 10 years of manor of Aber with mills
14 Nov 1318	Edmund Diniethon	Commitment to Hugh Foston at request of Edmund Diniethon
15 Sep 1323	John Ellerker	Hugh F has died, his executor, John E is now to hold Aber etc.
20 Dec 1326	John ap David Overton	Commitment during pleasure of town of Aber and bailiwick of the stallions of North Wales
20 Jan 1331	John Houseum	Granted custody of Aber for 7 years
21 Dec 1332	Edward III	Grant of Aber for life to Walter Manny
12 Mar 1338	Edward III	Extent of Aber, value £38 1d per annum.
Bef 1372	Thomas Delves & Henry Cotton	Jointly bought Aber from Manny, but claim disputed after 1372
15 Jan 1372	Edward III	Walter Manny dies
16 Aug 1382	Queen Anne	Conway with its commotes and cantrefs and the manor of Aber
13 Sep 1409	Sir William Newport	Queen Anne died in childbirth in France

30 Jul 1417	John du Pont	Grant to on condition that he maintains the houses, buildings, woods, enclosures and gardens without waste
28 Apr 1437	Henry VI	Grant to John Fray on above terms
1484	Richard III	Granted to Rhys Vychan
1485	Henry VII	Given to Sheriff William ap Gruffydd of Caernarfon (bef.1465-1500+) for life, after he fought at Bosworth[*1].
1530-40	Henry VIII	Leland saw the remains of a castle or palace
1553	William Thomas	Buys lease of manor from earl of Pembroke
1606	William Thomas	Coed Helen built
1607	William Thomas	Aber manor worth £800 pa.
1645-52+		Thomas lands sequestrated
1652		Church Street, Caernarfon, built/refurnished
1705+	Jane Thomas	Widow of John Thomas living at Aber in dower and had east range (E) refurnished?

[*1] Sheriff William was the alleged builder of Cochwillan as will appear below.

A Description of the Pen y Bryn House

After looking in a extremely abbreviated form at what history shows us of Aber, it is necessary to make a brief survey of the remains of the main structure at Pen y Bryn. This quickly shows that many different styles and personalities lie behind the current house. Not surprisingly the oldest features lie at the base of the current building. These features will now be examined commencing with this brief description of the components of the house called Pen y Bryn since the late sixteenth century[*2].

The present house

The house currently known as Pen y Bryn is an amalgamation of at least six separate building phases. For convenience the house will be broken up into six constituent parts enumerated thus:

T, the tower, known locally as Llywelyn's tower, at the western end of the building.
H, the main house adjoining the tower (T)
E, the eastern range adjoining the house (H)
S, the southern range adjoining the house (H)
B, the basement under the house (H)
P, the porch adjoining the house (H).

The remains of the earliest visible building at the site would appear to lie mostly buried in the basement (B). The uneven levels between the house (H) and east (E) and south (S) ranges suggest that little clearance or levelling was carried out at the site before building work commenced. An alternative scenario is that the ground level has varied considerably over the time between building phases. Both these features are typical of medieval construction styles.

[*2] An undated bill of complaint speaks of a tenement and lands called *Pen-y-bryne* in Bodsilin in Aber, PRO. C.66/1796, No.6.

The Basement (B)

When appraising the remains of former structures it is always best to start at the bottom and work up on the assumption that the earliest structures will be at the bottom of the pile rather than at the top. Obeying this rule the examination of the site will begin with the basement (B, Fig.3). This would appear to have been part of a long building or series of buildings, probably stretching from the present four storey tower (T) to some place east of the end of the current east range (E) although it appears unlikely that the eastern range (E) formed part of the original plan. The remains of this long building now form the partial basement (B) of the main house (H) and are entered from a flight of eight irregular, probably sixteenth to eighteenth century rubble stone steps capped with slate tops (Fig.4). These steps are poorly laid and curve slightly. Quite possibly they were inserted when the reused wooden stairway down from the house at the east end of the basement was abandoned and blocked (Fig.5).

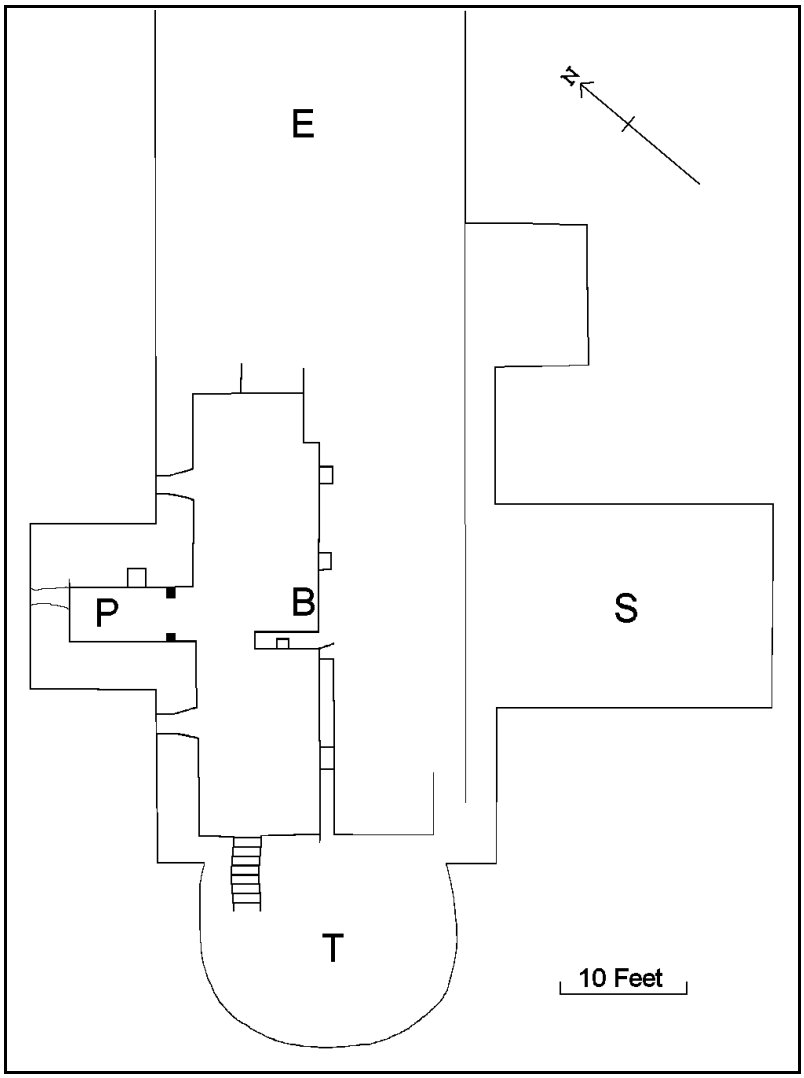

Figure 3, The basement (B) of Pen y Bryn. The main house (H) lies directly above.

The chamber entered from the tower (T) is rectangular being about sixteen feet east to west by nine feet north to south with walls averaging about 2½ feet thick. This chamber is undoubtedly a subdivision of the original whole, being about a quarter of its original size. Unfortunately as this chamber floor is approximately five feet beneath current external ground level not a great deal can be said about its original form. There is no discernable join between this room and the tower to the west, although the point of the change of the angle of the stone steps down into the room (Fig.4) may well mark the division between the walls of the tower and those of the cellar.

Adjoining the north-west basement to the east is a second chamber of similar width, but with an increased length of some seventeen feet. This is entered from the western basement via three timbers which have been knocked together in the form of a doorway (Fig.6). This doorway strangely supports three ancient projecting pivot hinges, two to the south and one to the north. The northern pivot is towards the top of the upright and the wood beneath shows that there was never a second lower pivot like the one that exists on the southern timber. The conclusion from this is that both timbers are reused, although why the northern timber only holds one pivot is surprising. In conclusion this doorway appears to have no real antiquity in its current form.

The eastern basement also differs from the western one in having an eighteen inch thickening in the south-east corner of the chamber (Fig.5). Why the crosswall is thickened here cannot currently be fathomed. It is possible that this is connected with the ruined wooden staircase that comes down from the floor above at this point. This appears to have been reset at some point and could just be the shaky stairs referred to in August 1874 when (Edward) Tracy Turnerelli[*3] recorded his visit to the cellar, although the current stairs down to the cellar from the tower (T) seem more likely from the description.

> She... led me to the steps of a vast cellar or dungeon under the tower, telling me to inspect it if I wished, which I hastened to do - I beg pardon, I did not hasten, for the steps down to it were so slimy, damp, and shaky, that any over haste would have been accompanied with serious bodily harm, so needs was to be slow and cautious.

The south-eastern corner of the basement retains several features destroyed elsewhere by the reflooring of the room above in the 1970's. Along the eastern section of the south face of the north wall of the basement about five feet above current ground level is a clear offset about a brick wide (Fig.7). This would seem to have been where the second or third phase floor was laid. The bulk of this offset appears to have been obliterated by the twentieth century floor laid in the rest of the basement (Fig.5). This offset is on the same level as a passageway that runs east from the basement into the east range (E). A short flight of wooden steps have been added above this to allow access up from the current floor of the east range (E) to the 1970's floor of the house (H), which itself appears to be situated on the site of a predecessor. This early floor would therefore have lain at the height of the passageway in from the east range (E) and neatly sits two feet above the rebuilding line that cuts through the base of the two cellar windows. This feature will be discussed at length later.

The two chambers of the basement underlie the northern half of the house (H) above and there is no doubt that these two chambers are part of a larger whole that stretches under the southern half of the house (H). If these four suspected rooms did form a whole the

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[*3] http://www.search.windowsonwarwickshire.org.uk/engine/search/default_hndlr.asp

original building at this level would appear to have been externally about 36 feet east to west by twenty feet north to south. This is virtually identical to the size of the first house suggested at Cochwillan which is described in more detail in a later chapter.

The buried southern half of the basement (B) is divided from the open northern side by a narrow, roughly fourteen inch thick retaining wall which has been cut into the western wall of the cellar. This is slightly surprising as a later wall is usually left butting against the older wall. Quite possibly this practice was reversed here as the dividing wall was also used as a retaining wall for the rubble infill dumped into the southern half of the cellar. Cutting into the older wall would therefore have given this crosswall extra strength for the load pressing on it from the south. The crosswall is pierced by four niches roughly six feet apart and some four feet above current ground level with each about a foot deep. A fifth, smaller niche, is set in the north-south dividing wall between the two surviving cellars to east and west. This north-south running wall would appear to be later than the main crosswall as it appears to be sitting upon the current packed clay floor which probably dates to between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. All of the niches have a mortared stone rear wall about a foot into the wall, apart from the slightly deeper westernmost niche which simply opens out into the rubble fill of the southern cellar (Fig.8). The main four niches would appear to be ventilation gaps left in the east-west dividing wall when the southern two cellars of the basement were infilled probably when the current house (H) was constructed, although it is odd that they are mainly blocked and not open like the westernmost one. In March 2011 a central heating problem caused the flooring of the hall to be raised near the south range (S) entrance it was clearly apparent that the southern half of the hall (H) basement (B) was totally filled with infill which consisted of loose clay and rubble boulders (Fig.9). It would therefore seem that this filled basement ran under the present hall (H), but did not proceed under the eastern range (E) whose floor level appears set at a different level.

In the external north wall of the basement (B) are three apertures consisting of an opening holding a wooden doorway flanked by two small ‘windows’. The doorway leads into the basement of the current porch (P) and is obviously of some antiquity, having a sixteenth century look, but it is almost certainly reset and is possibly contemporaneous with the current cobbled flooring in the basement before it (Fig.10). The doorway was most likely placed here when the current basement floor level was constructed, although the wooden flooring above the doorway was only laid in the 1970's. Certainly the current floor level, which probably postdates any sixteenth or seventeenth century floor, has no relevance to the current basement, although it might be set near the site of any earlier floor level. The two windows, or strictly the remains of the two window apertures, are much more interesting.

The western window is barely more than a niche in the northern wall which has been much rebuilt. Little of this feature appears to be original, although it is likely that it remains in the site of a former light. The base of the aperture consists of a flat slate which does not quite reach to the current light, while a single quoin remains at the bottom left of the interior

(Fig.11). Both these features might be original. Externally the window is made up of only four quoins making a roughly rectangular light (Fig.12). This is probably a sixteenth century reconstruction as can be judged from its rough and ready style. Internally the aperture is capped by a wooden lintel which again tells against the current sides of the structure having any great age.

The eastern window is not an exact twin of its western counterpart. Indeed its design would suggest that much more remained of this light when it was rebuilt. The aperture has another thin stone base and two quoins on either side making up the base of the aperture. These could well be original medieval work (Fig.13). Above the two quoins the aperture has obviously been rebuilt and the walling is capped again by a wooden lintel which seems more nineteenth century than sixteenth. Externally the light is similar to the western one, being made up of four weathered, but originally well cut pieces of freestone which again show obvious signs of reuse. However, externally the wall at the lower level of the light can be seen to consist of large sandstone boulders (Fig.14). These are not seen elsewhere at the site and would appear to relate to an early build. Sandstone boulders are also found in the build of the chancel of Penmon priory (Fig.15).

Internally in the eastern half of the basement (B) the break between the original probably medieval build and the apparent sixteenth century rebuild above is plainly obvious. It runs as a straight line from the eastern corner of the chamber through the upper section of the eastern embrasure and on to the doorway into the porch basement. It is also apparent at this point that the upper sections of this stone doorway have been rebuilt with larger stones than the older sides below (Fig.13). The division between older and newer work continues on the west side of the doorway, but is less obvious.

It can therefore be seen that both lights have been remade and almost certainly cut down in size. It would also appear that both are set in the sites of original window apertures and that when the masonry above these was rebuilt these features were reused and reconstructed in their current form. Quite possibly similar features are still present in the south wall of the cellar, which is almost certainly now buried just inside the south wall of the current house (H). The line of this wall would be on a similar alignment to the south wall of the east range (E). Only excavation could prove this point beyond doubt.

The central wooden doorway of sixteenth century design (Fig.10), was quite possibly positioned in the nineteenth or twentieth century as it appears a non functional and unnecessary feature. The cobbling at this point ends in the doorway with a shallow ‘gutter’ where there are continual drainage problems. This suggests that there has been an entrance here into the basement of the ‘porch’ (P) since the cobbles were laid. This entrance may be as old as the original wall, but, if medieval, the original ground level would quite likely have been at least a foot lower. Similarly the lights are in roughly the correct position to align with a similar lower internal ground level. This suggests that the original medieval ground level was about six feet under the current drive some two feet below the level reached by the 1993

excavators (Fig.16). Unfortunately the wall facing around the western window was not exposed at all (Fig.17).

It is interesting to note that the early investigators of Alderney Roman fort also failed to excavate to the wall footings and also erroneously claimed that the Roman structure was only sixteenth century. This should all too clearly ring warning bells when negative claims are made with only evidence from comparatively minor surface investigations which have not penetrated to the footings of the building in question and have not reached natural ground level. As excavations have already occurred at this point in front of Pen y Bryn there should be little problem in digging down to the base of the structure.

Figure 4, The steps down from the tower (T) into the basement (B). Notice the curve of the steps.

Figure 5, The eastern portion of the basement (B) with the remains of the old wooden stairs. Notice the wall thickening to the right of the stairs. The beams of the 1970's floor make up the current ceiling of the cellar.

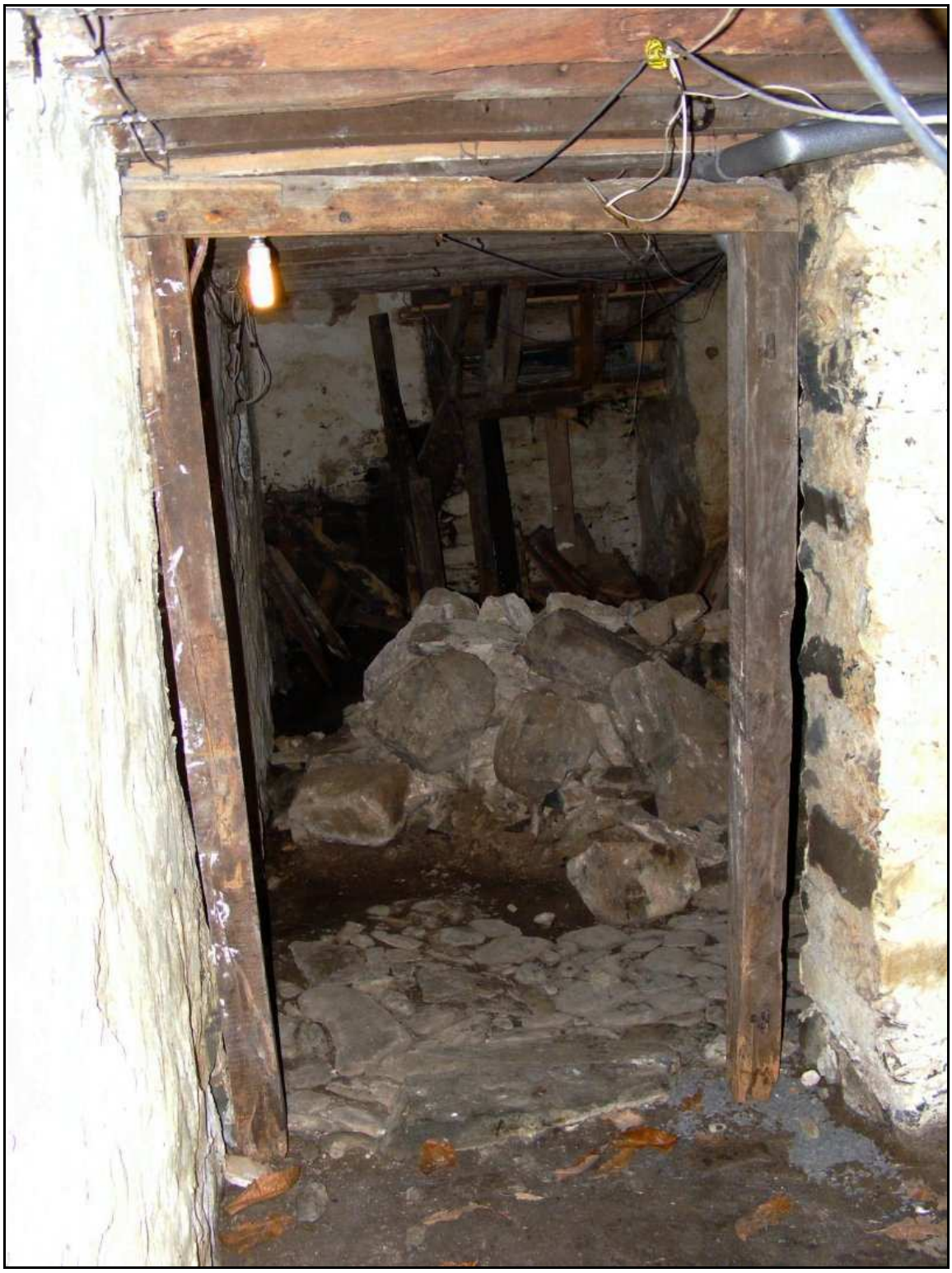

Figure 6, The ramshackle doorway between the two cellar rooms of the basement showing three iron hinges. The old stairway down from the house (H) is in the background. Note too the mass of boulders filling the chamber floor.

Figure 7, The floor offset in the basement (B) seen from the ground floor level of the house in the old stair well.

Figure 8, The westernmost niche in the cellar wall in the basement (B) showing the rubble filled packing in the adjacent chamber.

Figure 9, The shallow excavation into the rubble fill in the south-western portion of the basement (B) from the southern range (S) door. The retaining wall and the north-western cellar can be seen under the joists in the background.

Figure 10, The doorway from the basement (B) into the basement of the porch (P). This has a sixteenth century 'feel' to it, the arched header, if not the jambs could be this old. Note the angle of the right hand jamb and the two hinge pivots, the lower one missing. No door could have hung here with the jamb at its current angle. Most likely the whole thing was reset in the 1970's when the floor above was laid.

Figure 11, The western window embrasure in the basement (B).

Figure 12, The western basement (B) window.

Figure 13, The remains of the embrasure of the eastern basement (B) window. Notice the two lower quoins and base of the structure and more modern lintel above. Notice the break line between builds running above the two side quoins.

Figure 14, The eastern basement window. Notice the superior sandstone blocks beneath the light to the east. This would appear to be part of the original building.

Figure 15, Penmon priory from the north-west.

Figure 16, The 1993 excavation north of the east basement window showing the sandstone blocks to the left by the pipe.

Figure 17, The 1993 excavation in front of the western window.

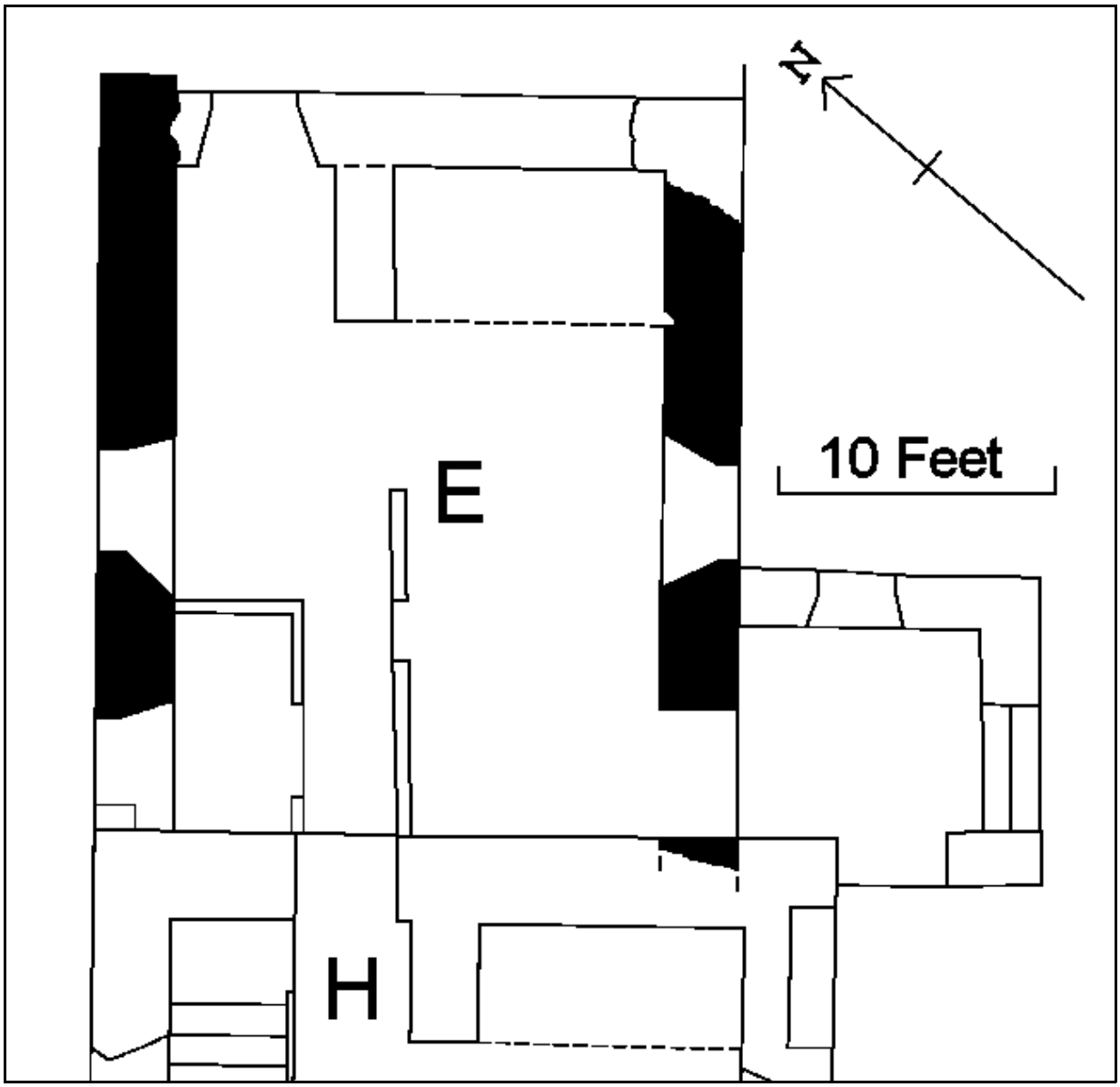

Figure 18, The east range (E) with the early building phase shown infilled in black.

The East Range (E)

If the basement (B) appears quite straight forward in its development, the same cannot be said of the adjoining east range (E). This currently forms a chamber externally 25 feet long by twenty feet north to south with walls 2½ feet thick (Fig.18). This range (E) has certainly been curtailed to the east and possibly also to the west where the house (H) now stands. To the south-west the external face of the south wall of the range (E) quite clearly penetrates into the east wall of the house (H). Obviously there was once an aperture here of some description that was converted into a door to the later rectangular structure currently used as a tool shed. Internally the wall rests on two wooden lintels which may be a few hundred years old. Externally there is a fine slate voussoir similar to the ones over the other four apertures of this room (Fig.19). This can be seen to penetrate the house (H) wall which would suggest that the house (H) postdates the east range (E).

Unfortunately the join in the north wall between the east range (E) and the house (H) is much less clear than the south wall at any level. What is readily apparent in the north face of Pen y Bryn is that the building style of the house (H) and the east range (E) are quite different (Fig.20). The house (H) wall consists of large, flat slabs, while the east range (E) consists of much smaller, less regular rubblework. Unfortunately there is no clearly visible join between the two due to the remortaring of the site, plus the fact that the two western windows of the east range (E) run parallel with much of the length of the junction. However between the two windows an apparently uneven join can be made out (Fig.21). This is totally masked by the concrete surround of the upper first floor window. The similar surround of the smaller lower window also masks the join lower down. However, this lower window is still topped by the damaged remains of a slate voussoir. Interestingly the springers of the western side appear to have been relaid at a steeper angle when the house (H) wall was built against this section. It says something for the quality of the Colt Hoare sketch of c.1810 that this feature can clearly be seen (Fig.22). It should also be noted that no window is shown here at this time, but a doorway at external ground level. It should also be noted that the eastern basement (B) light is also clearly visible directly underneath the house (H) window and that this appears to be a larger opening than it is now.

In the east range (E) the first floor light above the blocked doorway, which is now a twelve pane Victorian window, can be seen to have replaced a 24 pane Georgian or Tudor window which was there when Colt Hoare saw the building. The c.1810 rendition clearly shows that modern reconstruction has taken place on this side of the building. Not surprisingly the conversion of the lower doorway into a window can still be traced in the masonry (Fig.23). It is unfortunate that the 1815 painting of the house shows little more than the outline of the four current windows of the east range (Fig.24).

At ground floor level there is a second slate voussoir adjacent to the first one and again this has been cut through by the insertion of a later, probably Victorian window (Fig.20). The two current ground floor windows are both of different sizes and design, and

judging by their positions under the voussoirs, both have been inserted in place of earlier doors or windows of unknown age and quite possibly at different times.

Internally the two embrasures of the northern ground floor windows are different as is hardly surprising considering that one has previously been a doorway. That to the west appears to use the east end of the house (H) wall as one side, while the east side angles in following the medieval fashion. The larger eastern window is set in a standard medieval type aperture. The eastern side of the opening is set at a much sharper angle than the western side and it seems likely that one or both sides have been rebuilt. Similarly both modern windows on this side are topped by wooden lintels, while the wall plaster recently uncovered is of a style reckoned to be eighteenth century (Fig.25). A similar style can be seen in the slight plaster remains in the upper storey of the south range (S).

On the opposite wall of the range (E) the southern window aperture is similar to the northern one, although greater damage to the surrounding plaster work shows clearly that the wooden lintel overlies a medieval design opening (Fig.26). This line of rebuilding is reminiscent of that already looked at in the basement (B). It is also clear that the base of the embrasure has been packed with rubble to make a flat surface for the current sill. The original aperture was deeply splayed at the base, and probably also at the top, although this area has been relaid. Externally, where the current ground level is at least four feet higher than the interior, this window also has a slate voussoir (Fig.27). The aperture, which is filled with a wooden nineteenth century style window, does not have concrete surrounds like the other two modern windows in the north wall. The mortar around the window base has much shell-filled material in its make up, unlike that found in the rest of the wall which consists of a reddy-brown mortar containing little lime. Quite possibly this window was not replaced at the same time as the windows to the north as this was on the sheltered side. This might also explain the lack of a concrete surround around the window. Internally the sides of the window aperture would appear to be original masonry on which the rest of the east range is supported. This suggestion is strengthened by the mortar in the wall running up to the full height of the building consisting of a red clayey material which now has little lime left in it. This could possibly be the oldest mortar remaining on site, although it should always be remembered that walls are always prone to be remortared and the reddy mortar could simply be an isolated survival. It should also be noted that stone walls tend to decay quickly if the mortar is not of a good quality or is not regularly replaced. The collapsed remnants of Prysor (Fig.28) or Carndochan (Fig.29) castles are a good reminder of this, as too are the remains of the Bishop's Palace at Gogarth (Fig.30)

Externally at the south-east end of the east range (E) the masonry style changes dramatically from small irregular boulders to great stones, one as big as five feet by eighteen inches by a foot (Fig.31). These stones mark the current end of the building and quite clearly show that the east wall of the east range (E) is a later insertion (Fig.32). Slightly smaller stones, and generally lying further down the wall, exist at the north-east corner (Fig.33). It

would appear from the slightly projecting segments of the remains that the north and south walls originally continued to the east, but how far is not ascertainable without excavation. The east wall lying between the earlier north and south walls would appear to lie on different foundations. At the back of the fireplace, where they have been partially uncovered, they can be seen to be merely a line of water rounded stones (Fig.34). That this is the foundation could be easily confirmed by further clearance in this already much disturbed area.

Internally the fireplace in the south-east corner of the east range (E) would appear to be a tertiary feature. This can be seen as the wooden top of the fireplace has been hacked into the older south wall of the building (Fig.35). Similarly the north-eastern wall of the fireplace forms a butt joint against the second or third phase east wall of the range (Fig.34). Higher up the wall the rebuilding work can be seen to occur in the roof level, with the much decayed south wall of the structure still retaining the reddy-brown clayey mortar as noticed in the ground floor of the building.

When the tertiary features are removed from the plan of the east range (R) we are left with a rectangular room twenty feet across and over 25 feet long east to west, as we are uncertain where the original east and west walls once stood. This room had two windows to the north and at least one to the south (Fig.18). There may have been a second window to the south where the entrance to the current tool shed lies. This single storey lean-to structure butts against both the eastern range (E) and the main house (H). It therefore postdates both structures and is not of relevance to this study of the earliest phases of the building, except for the fact that the entrance into it may mark the site of a matching window or door to that found opposite in the north wall. This leaves us with a medieval structure with an uncertain junction with the remains of the basement (B) to the west. It is also clear that what appears to be the earliest levels of the east range (E) have different floor levels to the basement (B) next to it.

The current floor of the east range (E) would appear to have changed little from the original level judging by the position of the four surviving apertures to north and south. It may therefore be suggested that the west end of the east range floor was roughly where it is now and that this ran into the later house (H) as will be seen in the next chapter. The line of the north to south wall that divided the east range from the house (H) wall is now very difficult to ascertain due to later building works and modifications. The north front of both buildings shows that two separate walls have been well meshed together along the western side of the two modern east range windows (Figs.20&21). At a lower level the difference in masonry styles is more difficult to detect and it may be that this was originally one wall that ran right the way along this front of the building. If that was the case it might suggest that both buildings were originally totally independent of each other as they had different floor levels at an early date. This question will be looked at further once the build of the current house (H) has been examined.

Figure 19, The voussoir in the external south wall of the east range (E) from the tool shed. Notice how it penetrates the wall of the house (H) to the upper left.

Figure 20, The east range (E) to the left, divided from the house (H) to the right between the drain pipe and the central windows. Notice the two ground floor voussoirs.

Figure 21, The clear junction between the irregular rubble of the east range (E) to the left, and the more coursed masonry of the house (H) to the right, occurring between the drainpipe and the window edges.

Figure 22, The Colt Hoare drawing of Pen y Bryn made around 1810. This important picture will be referred to repeatedly in the text.

Figure 23, The converted doorway in the centre still showing the different masonry style at the base where the door has been blocked in.

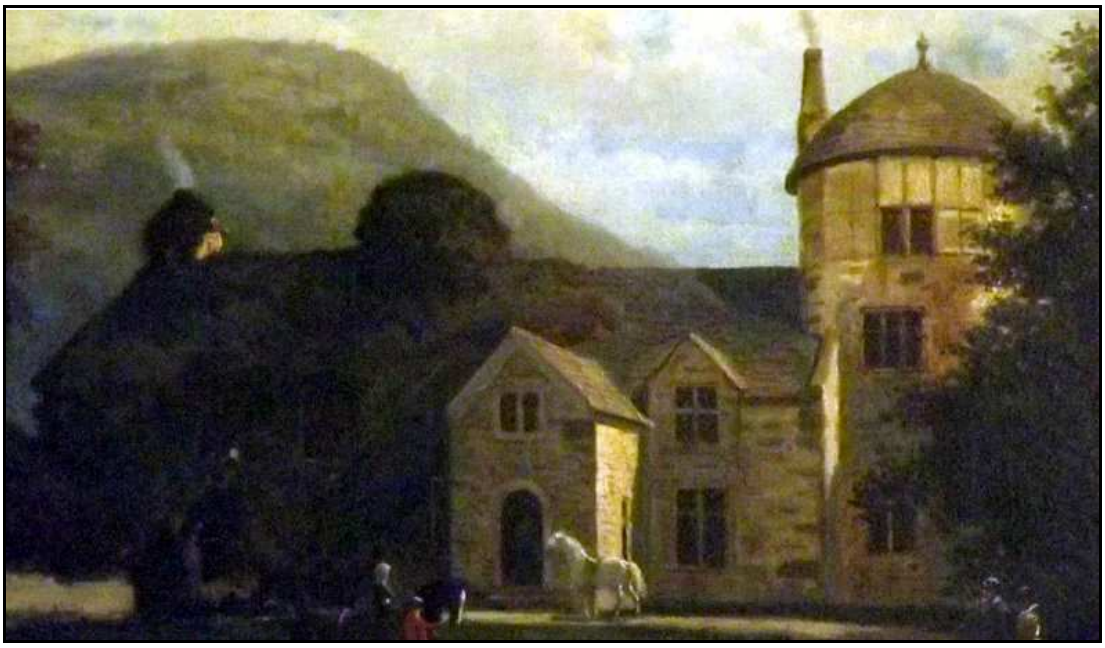

Figure 24, Pen y Bryn as it appeared in an oil painting with the legend, ‘Pen y Bryn, Aber, N. Wales. JWL to THS, 1815'.

Figure 25, The north-eastern window embrasure of the east range (E).

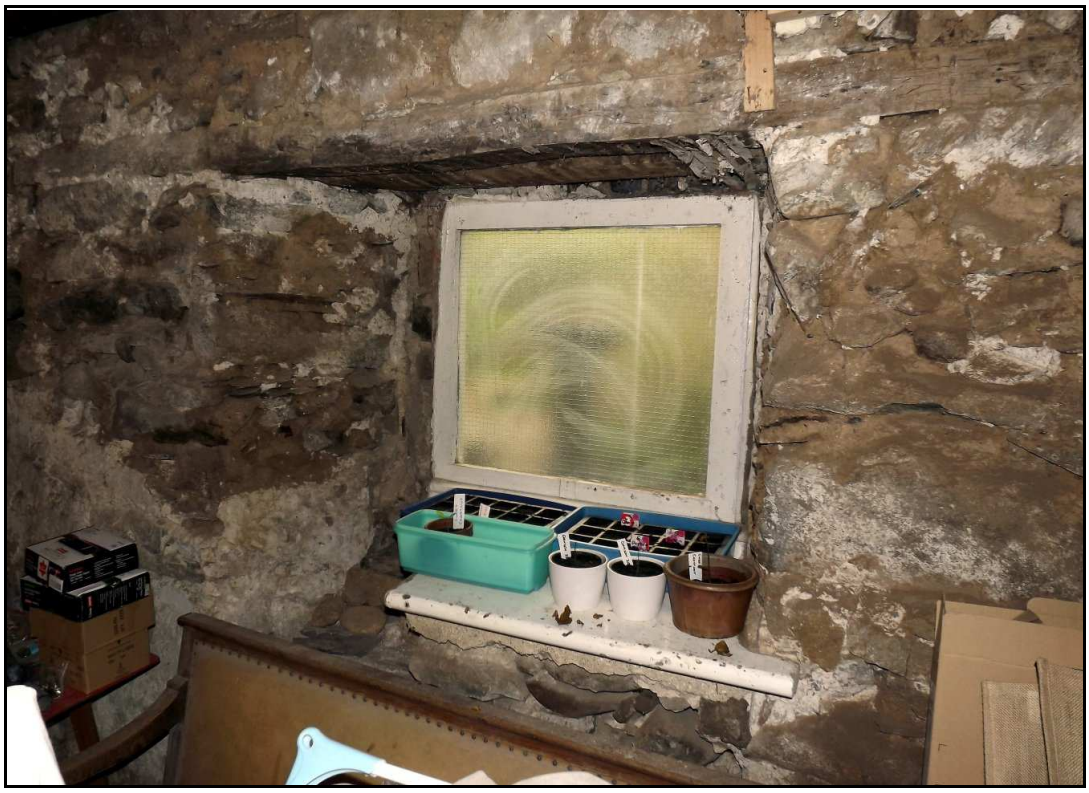

Figure 26, The south-eastern window embrasure in the east range (E). The current sill quite clearly lies upon a later infilling of the original splay.

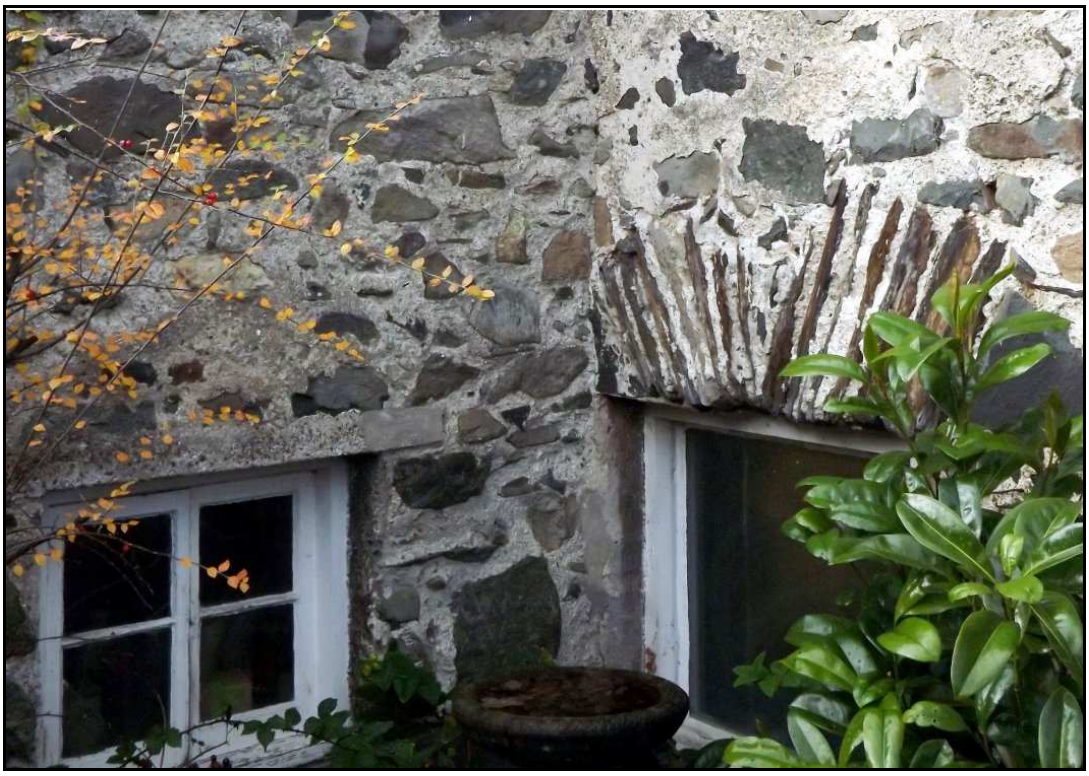

Figure 27, The south-eastern voussoir in the east range (E) next to the more modern tool shed.

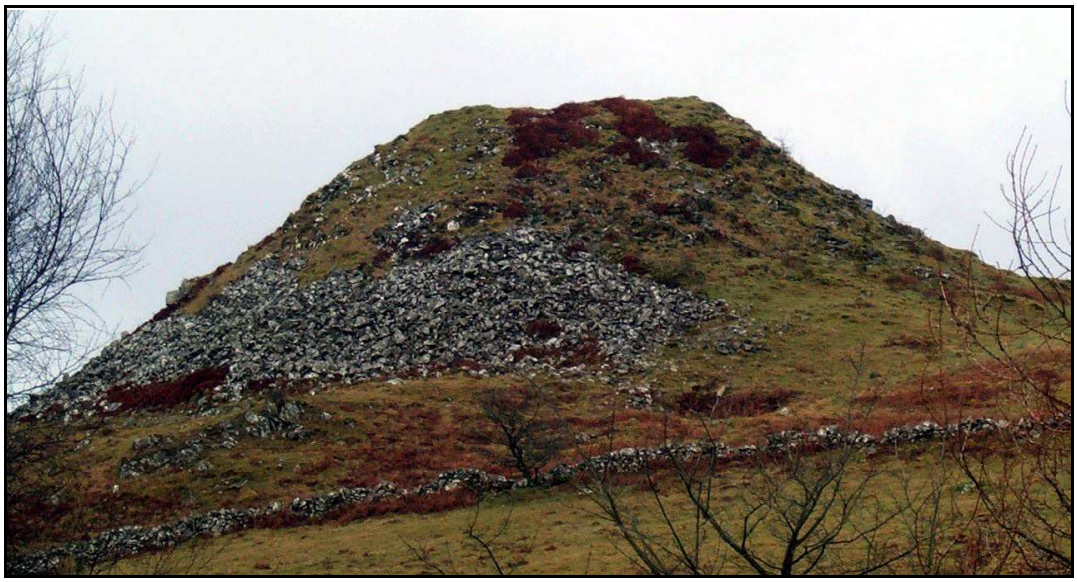

Figure 28, The 'motte' at Castell Prysor. This is not in fact a motte, but the collapsed remnants of a tower which points out dramatically the problems of not remortaring on a regular basis when using uncoursed masonry.

Figure 29, Castell Carndochan from the east. Again see what remains of the castle stone strewn over the hillside after a catastrophic failure of the walls once the mortar rotted away.

Figure 30, The collapsed remnants of Gogarth hall to the right. The lack of rubble on the site could either be due to the 1950's excavations or the reuse of materials from the collapsing walls.

Figure 31, The southern face of the eastern range. Notice how the highly irregular east end of the wall contains many large blocks totally absent in the rest of the wall.

Figure 32, The southern corner of the east wall of the eastern range (E). Notice the large quoin stones and the different masonry style of the east wall.

Figure 33, The eastern end of the east range (E).

Figure 34, The north-east corner of the fireplace showing the replacement east wall of the east range (E) resting on a row of water washed sandstone boulders to the bottom right. The chimney north wall to the left can be seen to make butt joint with the older east wall.

Figure 35, The lintel of the fireplace (bottom left) with chimney wall above, hacked into the older south wall of the east range (E) to the right.

The House (H)

The main house (H) has been built upon the site of an earlier structure fossilised in the basement (B). However it was not built totally upon the old foundations with certainly the south wall being built slightly to the south of the original wall (Fig.36). Similarly the line of the east wall is not certain, although it would seem to underlie the present wall dividing it from the east range (E). The west wall would appear to start on medieval foundations as has been examined in the basement (B).

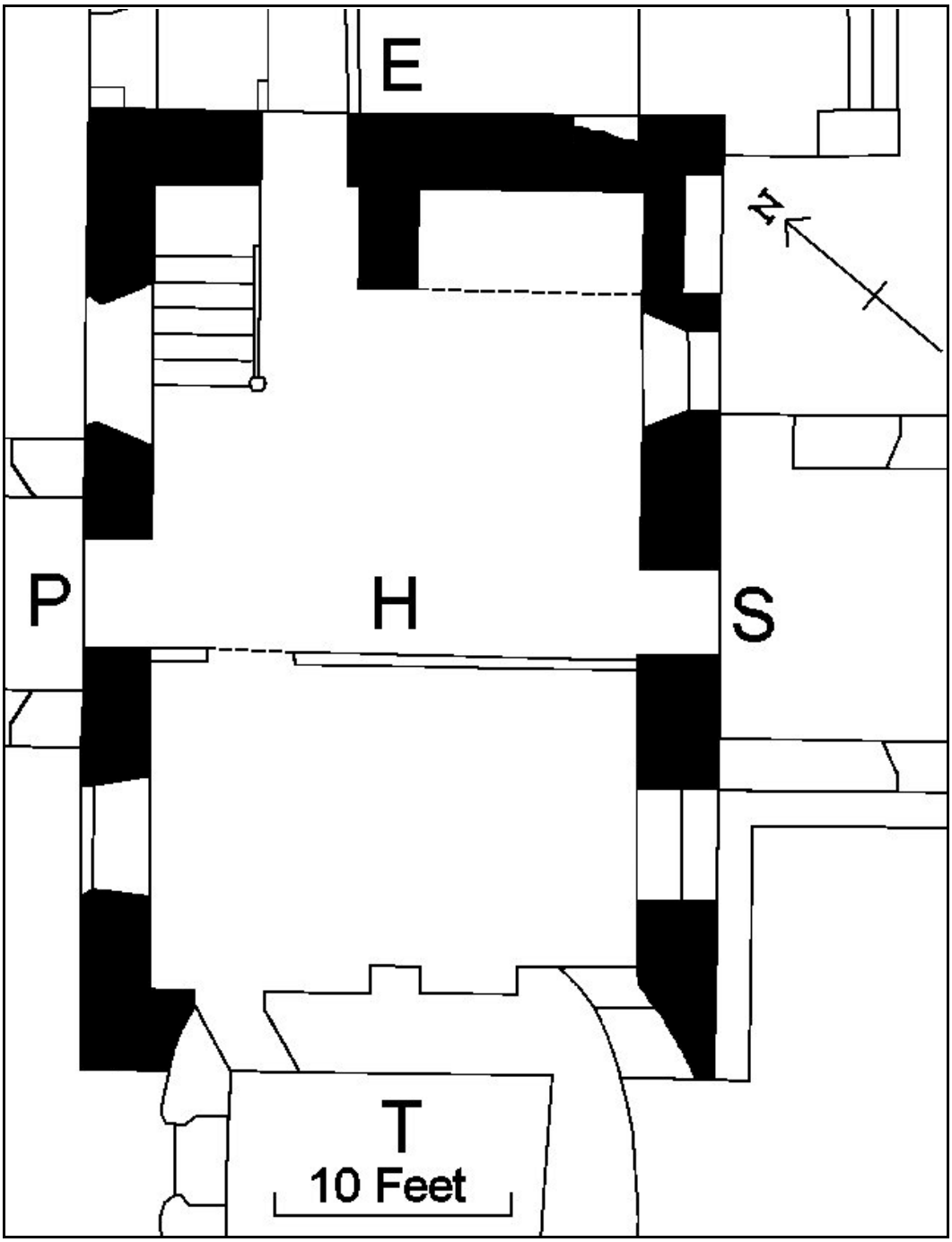

Figure 36, The main house (H) occupying the central position in Pen y Bryn.

As there is no perceptible change in external masonry style, the north wall of the house (H) would appear to be of one build from the current ground level upwards, although the basement (B) from current ground level downwards would appear to belong to the earliest phase of the site and contain much more sandstone in large blocks than are found elsewhere. An excavation at the base of the wall footings would be most instructive in this matter.

The west wall of the house (H) is obscured by the tower (T) which makes up over half of this length of wall. The north-western corner of the house would appear to be all of one build with reasonably large sized quoins (Fig.37). These are also displayed in the Colt Hoare picture (Fig.22). The south-western corner initially appears similar to its northern counterpart, but much rebuilding work has gone on here (Fig.38). At the base of the house between the corner quoins and the tower (T) is a different, smaller stoned, rubble walling that appears to be a curving passageway for a door which has been blocked at some time. Externally the site of the doorway can be made out where the smaller stones revert to the larger slabs of the main build some six feet up the wall. Internally the end of this passageway has not been totally blocked and currently contains a wooden display cabinet, crudely fitted within the space and obviously made to fit this blocked, narrow passageway (Fig.39). Quite possibly this doorway was a servants' route around the tower to the two or three storey house that lay north-west of the tower and was demolished between 1810 and 1815 as can be seen in the pictures of those dates (Figs.22&24). The foundations of this large building were uncovered in 1993 (Fig.40).

Presumably the east wall of the house (H) is buried in the modifications that have taken place against the east range (E) and little can be said of this other than it seems to overlie the earlier wall of the basement (B) and that this marks what appears to be the division between the older east range (E) and the house (H). It seems possible, however, that there was no east wall, except to the south, the northern section never being built as it was originally intended to hold the current staircase. The south wall of the house would seem to be a new foundation, built just south of the original line of the earlier wall suspected buried in the basement (B).

The upper walls of the house (H) add little or no discernable detail to the early structure on the site. However the blocked window on the landing at the top of the first flight of stairs obviously predates the four main windows of the ground floor (that to the south-west being blocked). This strongly suggests that the current ground floor level is at least a tertiary phase in the use of the house, viz. Phase 1 the basement (B): Phase 2 the blocked window at the top of the stairs: Phase 3 the current layout of the house with current fenestration and floors. The positioning of this earlier window so close to the very thin brick east wall of the house (H) may suggest that the original stone wall that divided the east range from the house was taken down at this point if it ever existed. Presumably the main fireplace in the house was added at the same time as the rest of the east house wall, dating from an earlier period, was demolished, if it existed. The Colt Hoare sketch of c.1810 shows the phase 2 window

still in existence, but blocked by a shutter (Fig.22). Its size is quite different from all the other windows on the north face of Pen y Bryn.

Figure 37, The north-western corner of the house (H), showing its regular build and few quoins.

Figure 38, The south-western corner of the house (H) where an apparent doorway has been walled up. Notice the later still sloping plinth under the downpipe next to the drain. The tower (T) is to the left and the south range (S) to the right. The lintel of the blocked doorway is the green schist-like stone that stretches right across the wall.

Figure 39, The blocking wall in the passageway in the south-west corner of the house (H) to the left. The tower (T) wall is to the bottom right and the back of the fitted cupboard to the top right.

Figure 40, The foundations of the demolished building north west of the tower (T).

The South Range (S)

The south range was apparently built a single floor higher than the remains in the basement (B). This range appears similar to the eastern range (E) and this implies that both ranges are later than the basement (B) which is set well beneath current ground level (Fig.41). The current south range (S) has also been truncated to the north by the building of the new house (H) on the ruins of the basement (B). No doubt originally this range joined directly onto the postulated basement south wall.

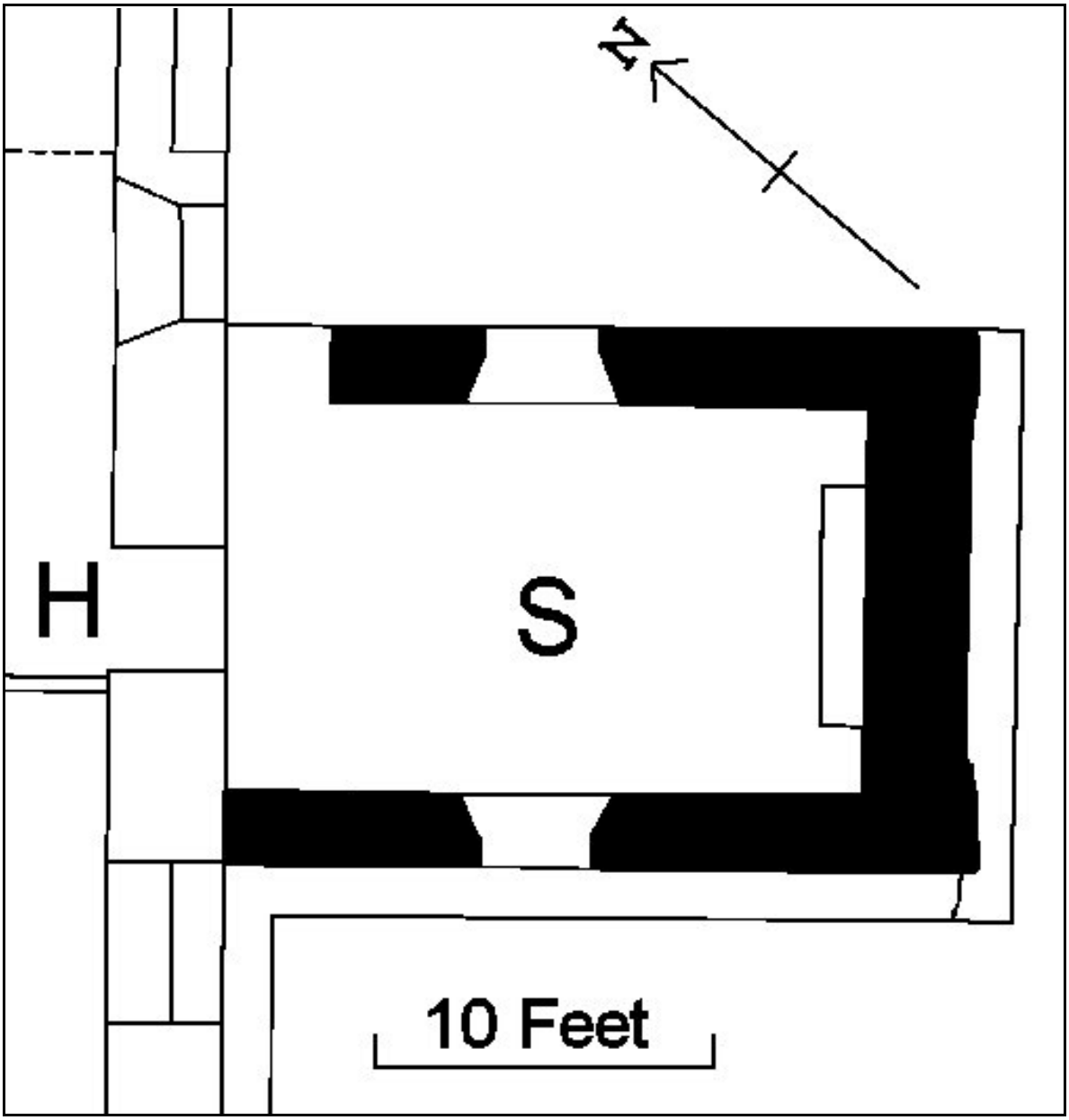

Figure 41, The south range (S).

The current south range (S) seems to be almost complete and forms two rooms, one on top of the other (Fig.42). They are approximately seventeen feet north to south by eleven feet east to west internally. Quite probably some three feet has been cut off the length of the rooms by the extension of the newer house (H) towards the south. Interestingly the three surviving walls of the structure appear of slightly differing thicknesses. The west wall appears slightly thicker than the east wall although both are pretty much about 2½ feet thick. In contrast the south wall varies between four and 2½ feet thick, but much of this is due to the insertion of a now blocked chimney on this front. The base of the wall to the south and west sides of the range have had an added shallow sloping plinth about three feet high. This is continued around the south-west corner of the house (H) showing that this addition dates to after the building of the house (H) and is therefore is possibly some of the last masonry works added to Pen y Bryn. The purpose of the plinth is obscure as there seems to be no slumping on this side of the structure. Possibly it was built in an attempt to hold water back from this side of the house.

Despite the confusion of the plinth it does not hide the fact that the south range (S) once projected further south than it currently does. To both east and west clear traces of the projecting side walls can still be made out (Fig.43). The destroyed southern room was apparently stone floored at first floor level and the impression of this can still be clearly made out. What this arched room was is impossible to say with certainty. Certainly it must have been no more than six feet across, due to the nearness of the hillside (Fig.44). However it seems logical to accept this as a garderobe for the adjoining upper floor room, until further evidence becomes available. This 'garderobe' was accessed via a doorway towards the west side of the south wall (Fig.45). This has subsequently been blocked, no doubt after the removal or collapse of the suggested garderobe and before or contemporaneously with the adding of the subsequently blocked chimney at this end of the house.

The two ground floor lights to east and west in the south range (S) are relatively small and square. Both have a slate lintel above them and although they are set within splayed embrasures it seems likely that both are later insertions. Certainly there is a distinctive amount of rubble packed around both windows (Fig.46). The east wall of the range is probably the most interesting. Towards its southern end are distinct traces of the remains of a rectangular window which appears to have been demolished and built up in antiquity (Fig.47). All that now remains is a stone sill and two adjoining well carved quoins which appear to form the sides of the window. Whether these are *in situ* or reused is a moot point.

This in turn brings us to the style of masonry used in the range (S). The bulk of the east wall consists of small flat, reasonably well laid, rounded stones apart from where the suggested blocked window lies (Fig.42). Here the wall is most irregular and large blocks occur in this third of the wall. It would therefore seem that this third of the wall is some form of rebuild and the smaller, better laid stonework to the north is the older, original work. This

would again suggest that the apparent window is in fact merely reused stonework, although it may at one point have been intended to place a window here during the rebuilding.

The western wall of the range (S) is built with similar small, well laid slabs, but here there are more larger stones although they could not really be described as snecker stones (Fig.48). Again the larger quoin stones at the south-western corner of the building look as if they have been added to the structure, possibly when the suggested garderobe to the south was demolished. Unfortunately the south wall to first floor level has been totally obscured by the later plinth which rises right to the scar of the first floor stone surface on this side.

The first floor room of the south range (S) is the only part of the apparent medieval building to survive to this level. That it is of the same age as the ground floor of the range can be seen by the similarity of the masonry style of its walls to the ground floor. It can also rapidly be established that the wall tops were raised by two feet, possibly when the present house (H) was built. This can be judged by the fact that the masonry style changes to larger, irregularly laid stones when gutter height of the current house (H) is reached. The raising of the south range means that the roof now overhangs and penetrates into the house (H) roof by some 2½ feet (Figs.42&48). A study of the south wall shows that the original roof peak was in the same position as the current one. The raising of the side walls was undertaken to lessen the steepness of the pitch of the roof and give more head room to east and west. No doubt a new roof was made at the same time. Dendrochronology here would not date the construction of the stone building, merely the last date the roof was rebuilt. Such is obviously true throughout Pen y Bryn. The south wall would appear to have been completely rebuilt before the raising of the side walls and the lessening of the roof pitch (Fig.49). This is suggested as its stonework is better laid and has more larger stones in it than the early work in the east and west walls. Possibly this was done when the chimney was added.

Set towards the southern end of the west wall is what may be the only surviving medieval style window still *in situ* (Fig.48). This is a small Romanesque arched window which still shows the indentations where bars were fitted within it (Fig.50). The exterior was once exquisitely carved and although the carved lintel stone is right at the top of the original wall before the roof was raised, there appears to be no reason to dismiss it as a later reproduction. Quite possibly this was the original window style throughout the southern range. Internally the window was blocked at some point and was only opened out again in the 1990's when the current concrete surround was added to help glaze the opening. The arch in the west wall at Penmon priory is in a similar style, but is less ornate (Fig.51).

To summarise, the south range (S) would appear to have been built after the basement (B) had been in use for some period of time and on a much higher ground level. This building originally consisted of a large ground floor room to the north, with a much smaller room with an arched basement to the south. This was probably a garderobe. On the first floor was a room, probably a solar, which had its own garderobe to the south. This still retains the single window and a stone cupboard in the northen end of the west wall (Fig.52). The cupboard has

much in common with that found in the early twelfth century hall at Grosmont castle, Gwent[*4].

It is a pity that there are no early sketches of this side of the building.

Figure 42, The south range (S) from the east.

[*4] Remfry, P.M., *Grosmont Castle and the of Fitz Osbern, Ballon, Fitz Count, Burgh, Braose and Plantagenet of Grosmont* [Malvern, 2008].

Figure 43, The southern end of the south range (S), showing the line of the projecting first floor floor level and the large, replaced corner quoins above. The top of the added sloping plinth can be made out at the bottom of the picture.

Figure 44, Pen y Bryn from the west showing the sloping nature of the site and the hillside close to the south range (S) to the right.

Figure 45, The south wall of the south range (S) from the hillside. Notice the ghost of the blocked south door into the possible first floor garderobe.

Figure 46, The eastern window of the south range (S) showing its slate lintel and much rubble packing underneath and on either side which consists of smaller pieces of stone than the rest of the wall. The modern door to the north has a concrete lintel.

Figure 47, The site of what may possibly be a blocked window in the southern end of the eastern wall of the south range (S).

Figure 48, The south range (S) from the west.

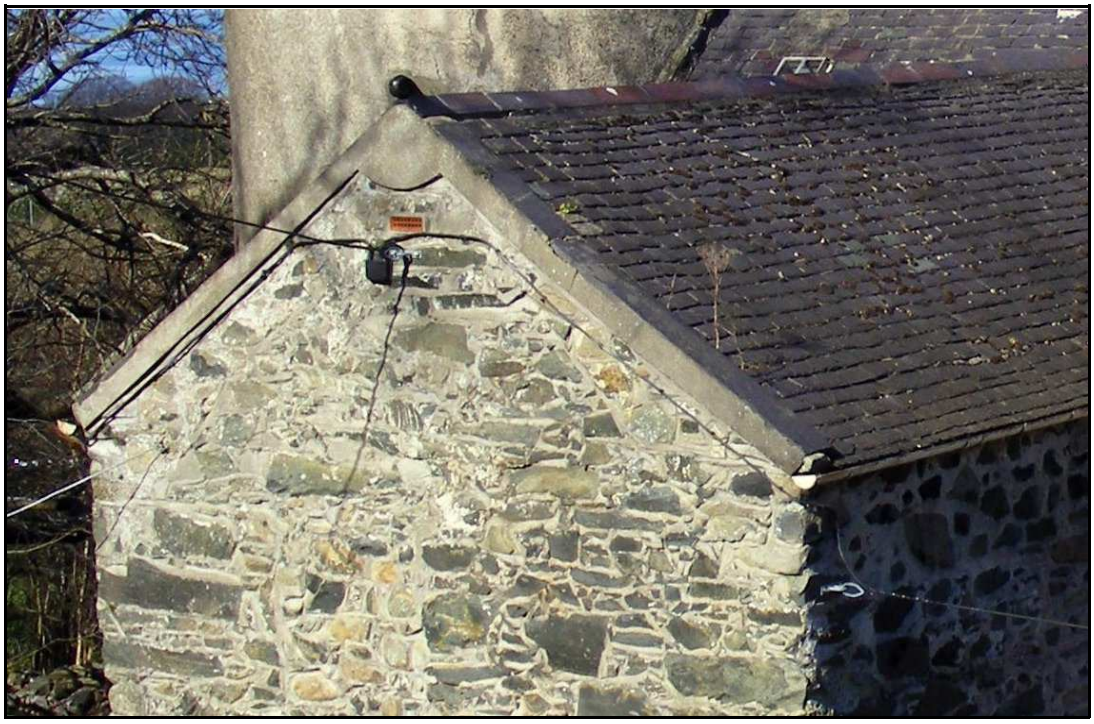

Figure 49, The top of the south wall of the south range (S) showing the steepness of the earlier pitch.

Figure 50, The arched window in the west wall of the upper storey of the south range (S). Note the decoration.

Figure 51, An arched window at Penmon priory.

Figure 52, The interior western wall of the first floor of the south range (S) showing the stone cupboard with window embrasure beyond.

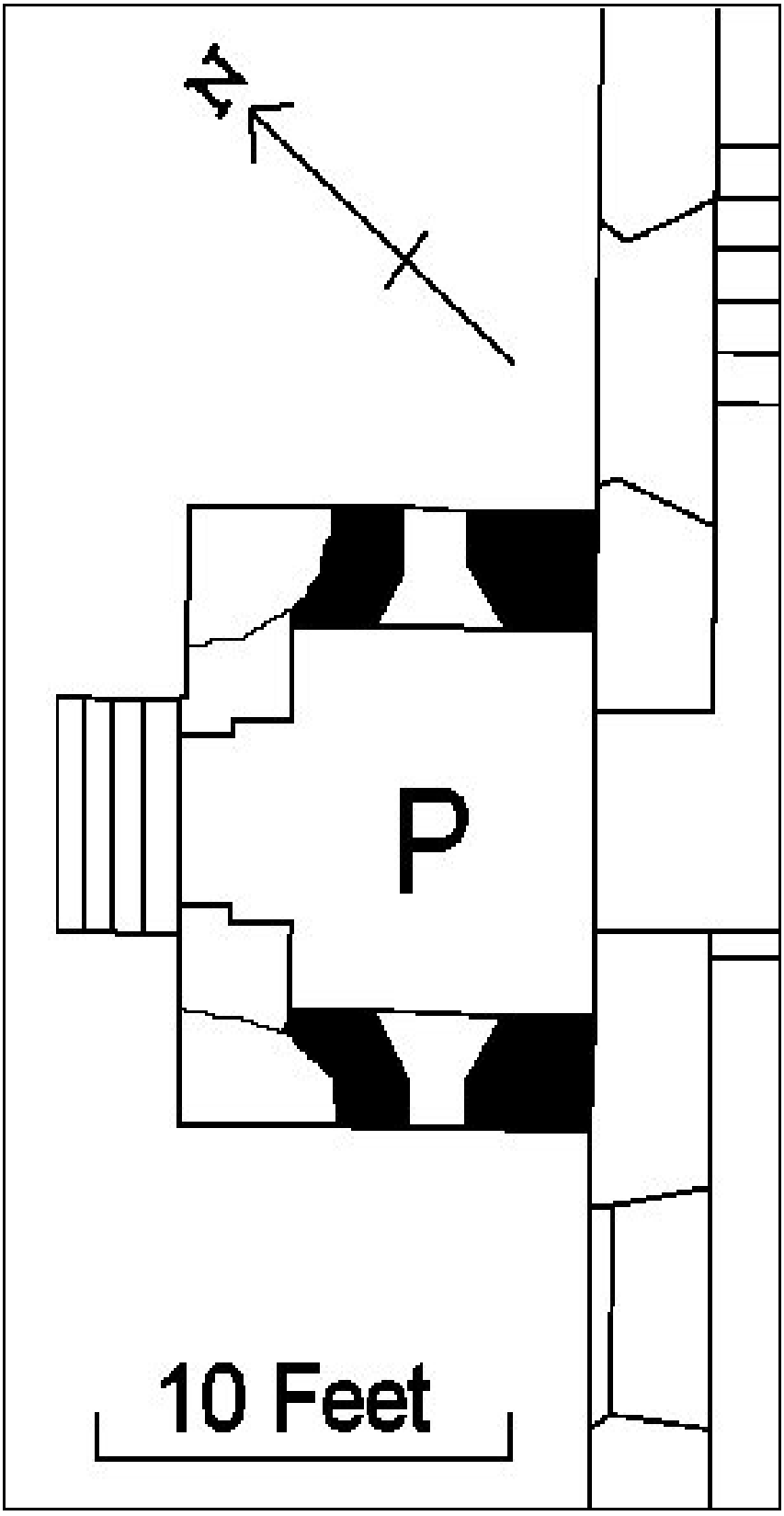

Figure 53, The porch (P) on ground floor level.

The Porch (P)

The current porch of Pen y Bryn does not mesh with the current house (H) and appears to make a butt joint against it (Fig.53). This would normally mean that the porch (P) postdates the house (H). However, as has been noted with several walls at Pen y Bryn, this is not always the case and again there is good reason to suggest that the rectangular structure now being used as a porch is older than the house (H) it currently butts against.

The porch (P) currently forms a rectangle 8½ feet north to south (not including the house wall) by twelve feet wide externally, with walls a little over two feet thick on its three remaining sides. Looking at the east and west walls the structure appears to stand to its full height of three storeys, which now consist of basement, entrance porch and bathroom. In the Colt Hoare sketch of c.1810 the building is quite clearly dissimilar to the porch (P) which stands here today (Fig.22). Then it consisted of apparently three storeys plus the basement. At ground floor level were small rectangular windows clearly seen to east and north and we can assume also west. There was then another floor, or landing, halfway between the lowest north window and the window of the current bathroom which was slightly larger than the two windows below. By 1815 these lower two windows had gone and been replaced by the current grand Georgian entrance (Fig.24). The second window, apparently half way between the ground and first floor, would strongly suggest that this was originally a rectangular stair turret which has been converted into a grand entrance towards the end of the Napoleonic wars.

Either before or after the insertion of the grand doorway it is quite clear that the northern two corners of the porch (P) to east and west had been rebuilt from the present ground level upwards. This work has been carried out with much larger quoins similar to those in the south range (S). The fracture lines of this are very obvious (Figs.54&55). The northern front at ground floor level now consists of a fine early nineteenth century doorway reached by a short flight of five steps (Fig.56). The doorway is capped by a short section of projecting string course which also appears to be nineteenth century. Its decorative end carvings show that it extends to its full original length (Fig.57). This could well mean that the doorway, string course and window above were all added to the northern front of the porch at some time in the early nineteenth century when the north face was replaced. This doorway was apparently not *in situ* in 1810 when the Colt Hoare picture was drawn, but was there in 1815 when a painting was made. However it should be noted that the string course above the upper window is of a different design from the one above the doorway and it is therefore possible that the upper window predates the doorway and was left *in situ* when the doorway was added and the lower portions of the north wall rebuilt to take it. The two side windows to east and west would appear to have been replaced and expanded when the doorway was inserted.

Underneath the grand entrance in the basement of the porch (P) the situation is complex for much of the porch base to east and west appear to have been infilled or built with much thicker walls. The wooden doorway mentioned above in the basement (B) is set in a

passageway leading into the porch basement which is a little under four feet wide (Fig.10). This passageway within the porch (P) is nine feet deep and ends in a wall 2½ thick and which supports the north wall of the porch with the main entrance above. The wall has been penetrated in the north-eastern corner and the small tunnel carved here passes through the wall and into a small chamber made entirely out of rubble (Fig.58). This would appear to be the underside of the five early nineteenth century steps up to the c.1815 entrance to the porch (P). The cross section through the porch wall shows that this portion of the structure once had a sloping plinth at the base which was uncovered during the 1993 excavation (Fig.59). This suggests that ground level was at least five feet beneath the current ground level to the immediate north of the house.

The small passageway under the porch (P) and entered from the basement (B) makes no sense whatsoever unless it is seen as part of a former building whose purpose is now lost. It is possible that the structure has been partially filled when the porch above was rebuilt, possible as the original foundation had subsided. Certainly the two side walls make a butt joint onto the north wall, which with its sloping plinth would appear to be original. Within the passageway to the east is another small niche no more than a foot deep (Fig.58). Its purpose is unknown, but the other niches are certainly built within later walls, so it is likely that this niche is also of a later date when the porch basement walls were thickened. The filling in of the basement could well have been done so that a floor of slate slabs could be fitted within the porch. It is not currently possible to clearly discern any different building phases apart due to the plastering and whitewashing at this level.

In the upper storey of the porch (P) the first floor level is about a foot lower than the first floor of the later house (H). This again suggests that the original porch (P) predated the current house and that the step had to be inserted to deal with the new floor levels. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that the structure seems to butt against the current house (H). It is unfortunate that the junction between the porch (P) and the basement (B) is now hidden. That the porch roof currently begins some eighteen inches beneath the roof line of the house again suggests that the two were of different builds (Fig.60). In many ways it is strange that more effort was not put into making all the floors level throughout the final phase house.

It would appear from this brief survey that the original ‘porch’ was a rectangular structure of similar dimensions to the current porch (P) and possibly carrying a wooden staircase. The rather similar structure at Penhyddryn, near Nefyn, in the Llyn was certainly used as a porch from conception and has a round headed doorway, in what would have been the east wall if it were transferred to Pen y Bryn, tight against the house in the porch north wall (Fig.61). The 1810 representation clearly shows that there was no door on the north or east sides of the Pen y Bryn porch. However that does not prove that there was not a similar door in the west face of the porch, yet this would seem unlikely when considering the small window possibly marking a landing on the stairway.

When investigations were carried on outside the porch (P) in 1993 a stone-cut cistern was discovered just west of the porch's west face. This suggests that the original purpose of the 'porch' may have been as a latrine turret which then fed the rock-cut cistern. A similar layout can be seen at the late twelfth or early thirteenth century 'chapel tower' at Castell Carreg Cennen. In either case this does leave a big question as to where the entrance was to Pen y Bryn house in its heyday, for the little door into the east range (E) hardly looks an imposing entrance, neither does the small blocked doorway or doorways into the house (H) at its south western extremes. Such a question is currently unanswerable.

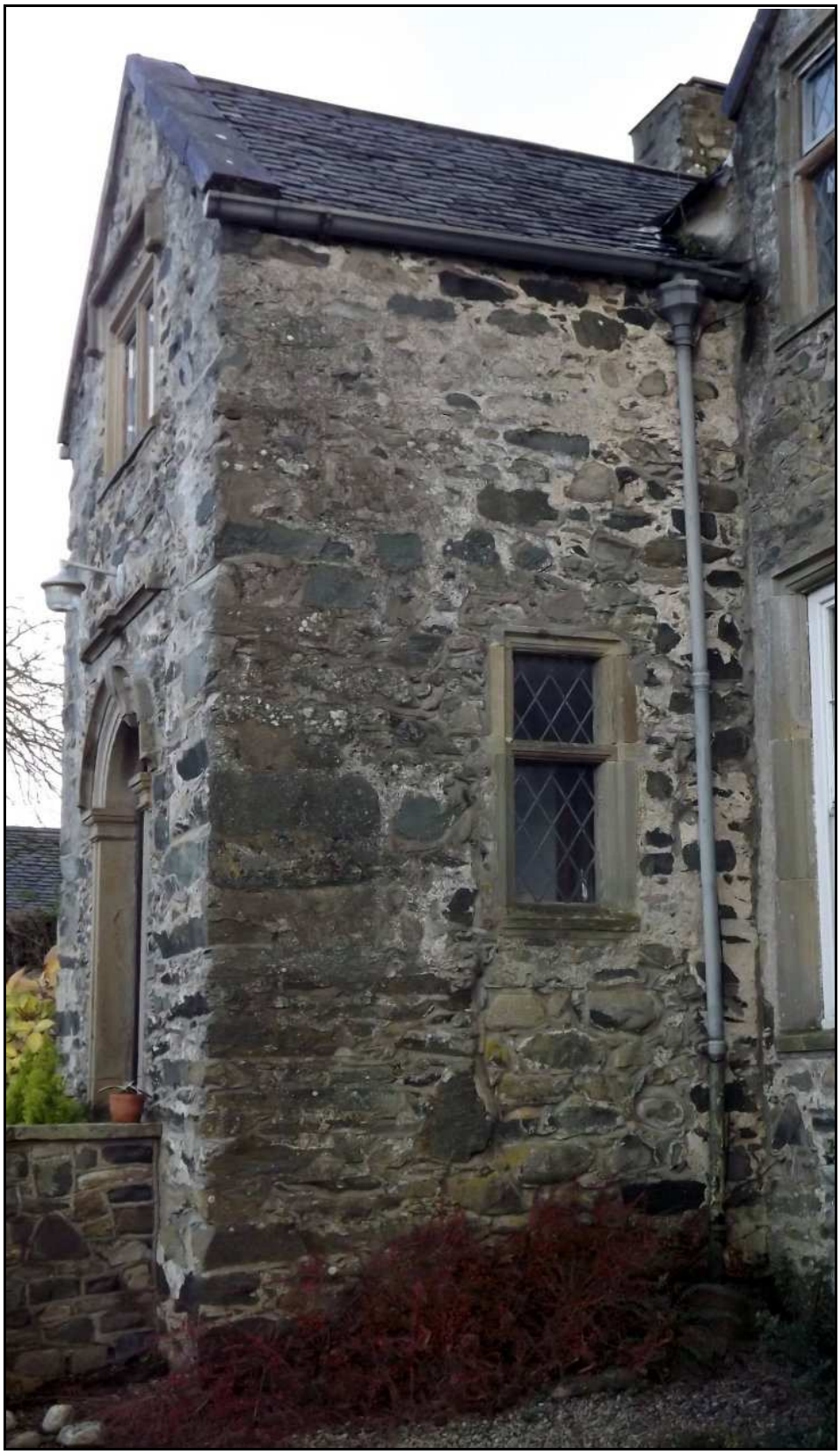

Figure 54, The porch (P) from the west. Notice the fracture line running down from the bottom left corner of the window and the small, apparently original quoins at the top corner of the structure. The change of masonry style from the newer front to the older back is also apparent.

Figure 55, The east side of the porch (P) showing the fracture line between the replaced corner of the building for the lower three-quarters of its height,

Figure 56, The entrance to the porch (P). Notice the change in masonry style between the phase 2 quoins and the tertiary insertion of the doorway and its string course above. The masonry above the window looks similar to that in the phase 1 side walls.

Figure 57, A close up of the figments around the north facing openings in the porch (P).

Figure 58, The breach in the north wall of the porch basement. Notice how both side walls make a butt joint against the older north wall. The niche is just visible top right.

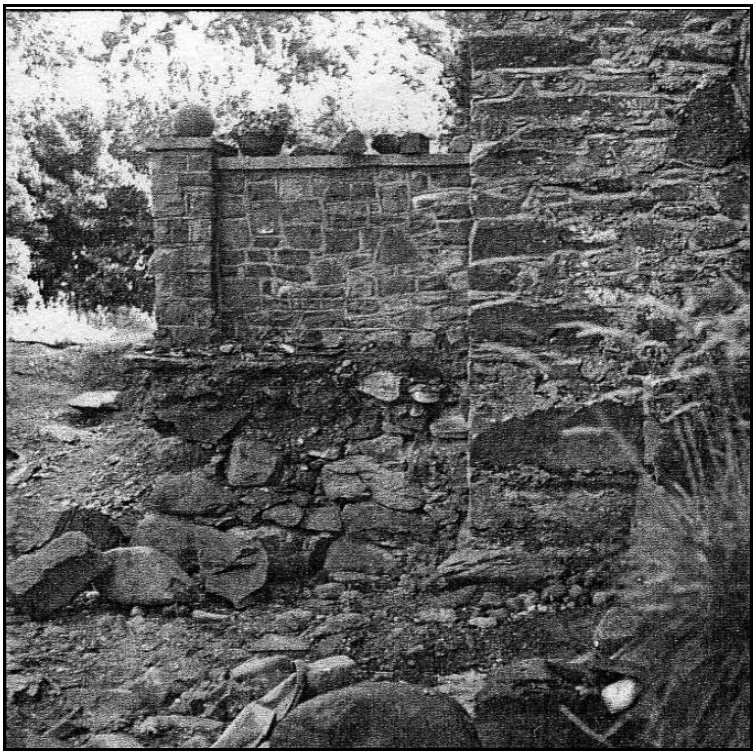

Figure 59, The rubble pile upon which the steps up to the porch entrance are based. The top of the sloping plinth of the porch is just visible under the porch corner.

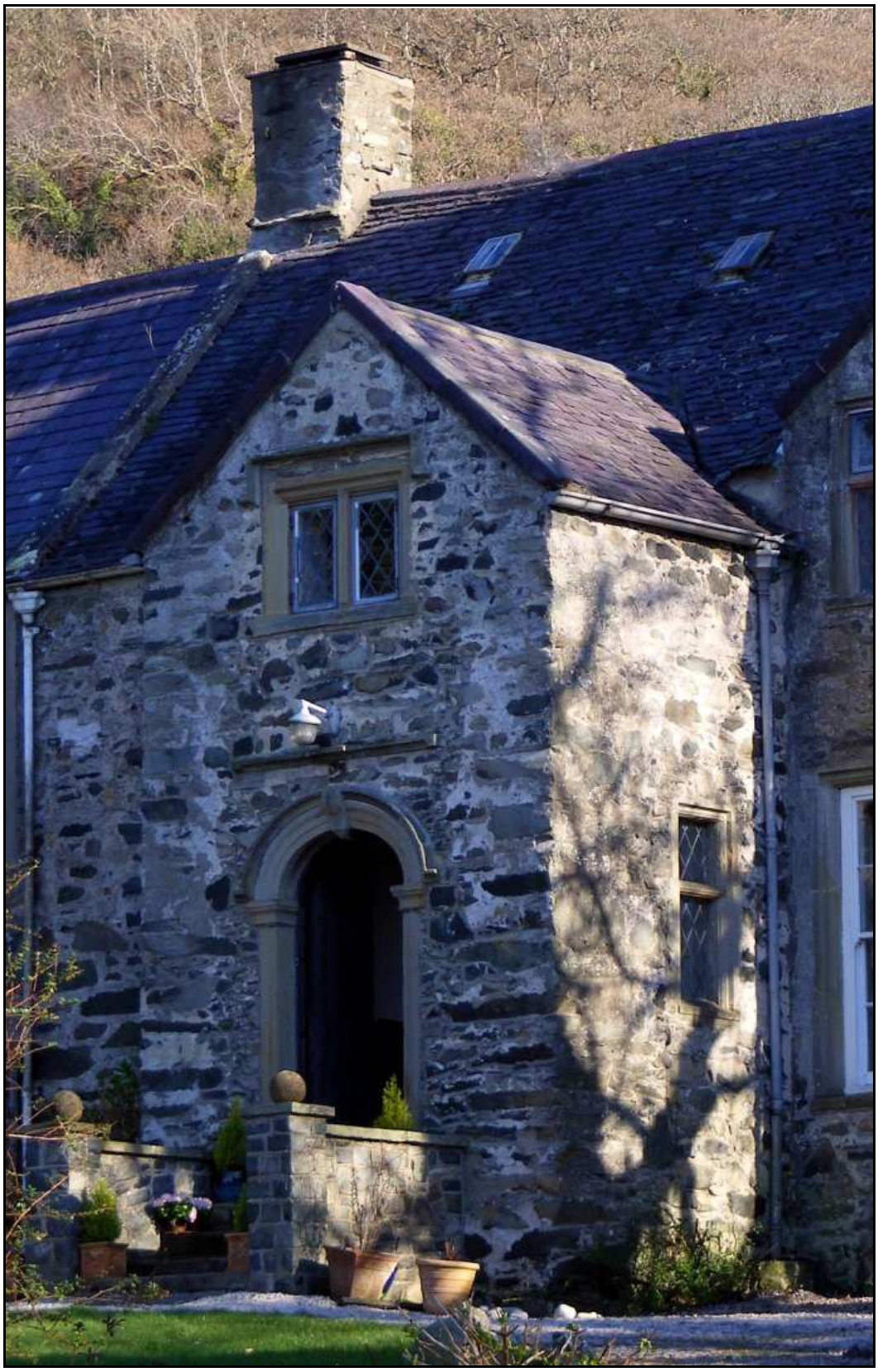

Figure 60, The porch (P) showing the different roof lines between this building and the main house (H).

Figure 61, The porch at Penhyddryn near Nefyn.

The Tower (T)

The tower attached to the house (H) is probably the most enigmatic structure remaining on the site today (Fig.62). Traditionally it is known as Llywelyn's tower, though currently it is impossible to say which if any Prince Llywelyn this applied to (Fig.63). All that can realistically be done is to minutely examine the remains of the tower and then suggest a possible chronology. As ever this is easier said than done.

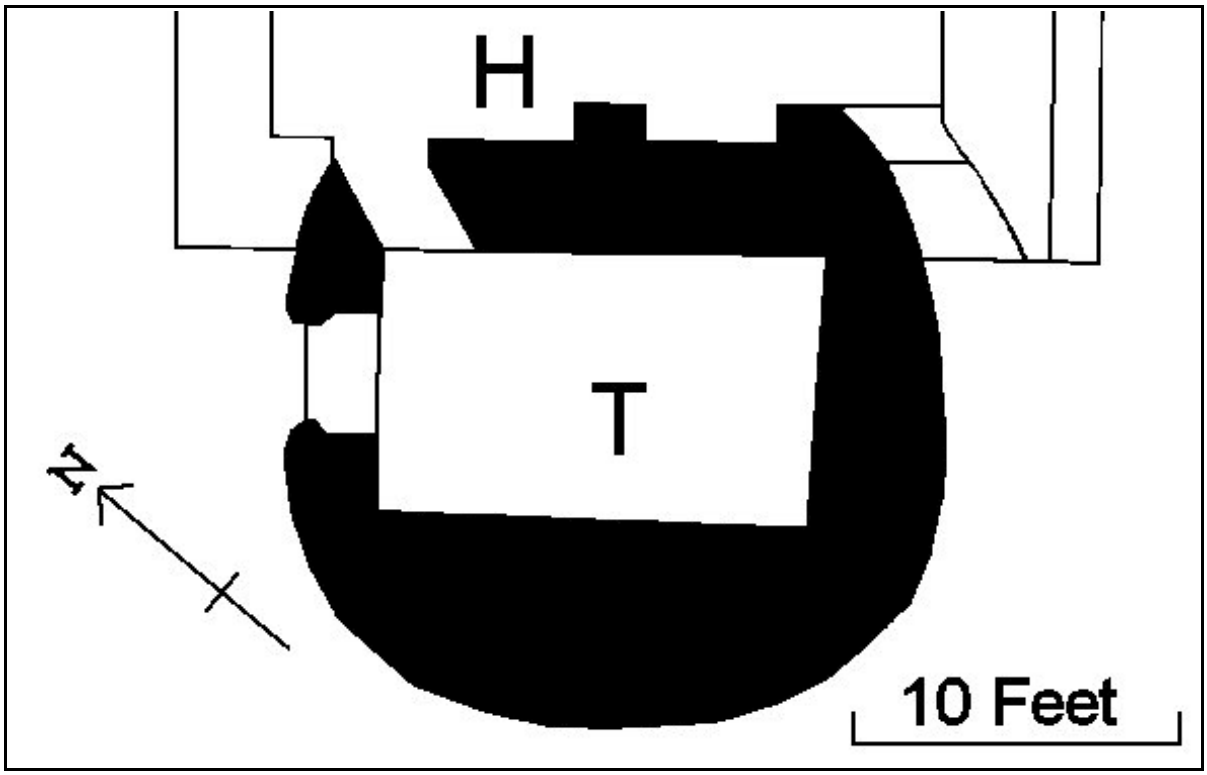

Figure 62, Ground floor plan of the Llywelyn's tower (T) at Pen y Bryn.

It is uncertain how deep the foundations of the tower go into the earth, or indeed if there even are any foundations, although the 1993 excavators seem to have dug down some four feet without reaching the base of the tower (Fig.64). It seems likely that the tower has a basement on the same level as the basement (B) as the stone steps down under the house (H) seem to pass through the masonry of this structure down to within a couple of feet of the current floor level of the basement (B). In other words the medieval ground seems to be about five feet beneath the current surface. There is nothing that can be usefully said about this portion of the tower except that it is about seventeen feet in external diameter. By comparison the solid half round turret at Degannwy castle is about the same size (Fig.65) as too are the wall towers of Whittington castle barbican which can be dated to between 1226 and 1240 (Fig.66)[*5].

[*5] Remfry, P.M., *Whittington Castle and the families of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, Peverel, Maminot, Powys and Fitz Warin* [Malvern, 2007].

The first storey which may be examined of the tower (T) at Pen y Bryn is the ground floor. This is entered through an unnecessarily slewed doorway. This awkward junction immediately asks questions about the join between the house (H) and the tower (T). As we have seen there is an extraneous piece of wall built into the south-western corner of the house (Figs.62&38). It is just possible that this is a piece of the original building wall and if it is it may suggest that this butts onto the tower. Alternatively it appears far more likely to be simply the blocking of an old passageway as has been examined in the chapter on the house (H) above. Further examination either at this spot or under the steps down from the tower (T) into the basement (B) may confirm this. Whatever the case the eastern section of the tower must have always been straight if it abutted onto the original structure. Certainly the current house (H) would seem to have been built on either side of a preexisting tower (T). As it seems probable that the tower is younger than the basement (B) and that it was built to fit alongside this structure, we are left with the conclusion that this was never planned as a round tower, but always as a boldly projecting D-shaped structure.

Unfortunately no surviving fenestration of the tower seems to predate the eighteenth century, whether they be doorways or lights. All that can be said with some degree of confidence is that the interior was most likely round or at least D-shaped. At second floor level, facing roughly southwards, is a flattening of the curve of the tower (Fig.67). This looks suspiciously like the site of a blocked window and may mark the only surviving trace of original fenestration[*6]. The only way to confirm this would likely be to strip the tower of its current two phase render. Beneath the render it can be seen that the exterior of the tower consists of an angular rubble with the larger stones packed with smaller fragments to make the wall (Fig.68). This is quite dissimilar to any other masonry on the site. Except for the lack of water-rounded boulders, it most resembles the make up of the south wall of the east range (R, Fig.31).

Internally the tower (T) has plainly been stripped out and a series of rectangular chambers established in the hollowed out walls. Additionally fireplaces have been inserted to east and west which would most certainly not have been there when the structure was commenced. The eastern fireplaces were set in the western wall of the house (H), while the western ones were in the west wall of the tower. The eastern fires therefore warmed the house (H), while the western ones warmed the new rectangular chambers in the tower (T). No original features of these fireplaces survive and the western first floor fireplace in the tower has been partially closed up with bricks that probably date to the nineteenth century. Beneath the bricks the original hearth can be made out about two feet beneath the current ground level. This again suggests that the original ground floor level in the tower (T) was at least a foot lower than at present. This clearly shows that the tower has been remodelled at least twice since its building.

[*6] A blocked window like this has recently been uncovered when the interior of the barbican gatetower was stripped at Whittington.

It should be noted that the squaring of the tower interior makes the walls only 2½ feet thick in places. On the first floor this thickness drops to beneath two feet in places. Quite plainly the tower has been hollowed out when the chimneys were added to make it habitable. The top floor of the tower (T) would appear to be seventeenth century and possibly contemporaneous with the rest of the house (H).

Figure 63, Llywelyn's tower (T) from the north.

Figure 64, A buried portion of the tower (T) when uncovered during the excavations of 1993.

Figure 65, The base of the projecting round tower surviving at Degannwy.

Figure 66, The two slightly larger towers in the 1223-28 barbican at Whittington castle.

Figure 67, The western face of the tower (T) showing a rectangular depression on the third floor. An original window here to overlook the town is a distinct possibility.

Figure 68, The base of the tower (T) showing the distinctively irregular make up of the masonry.

Summary

The above brief survey of the older parts of the house show the following facts. The initial structure of unknown purpose consisted of a rectangular block the remains of which can now be made out in the basement (B). This would appear to have been added to at later dates by the two ranges to east (E) and south (S), as well as by the tower (T) and porch (P), although it is possible that the porch was commenced at the same time as the buried structure in the basement (B). Finally the original structure was rebuilt as the current house utilising at least parts of the older structure.

What then can be implied as to the dating of these structures? I use the word implied as dating masonry structures is a most difficult subject. Walls were subject to being rebuilt and modified many times over. You could not date much of the accommodation of Windsor castle to the early years of the current century simply because all the woodwork has been replaced after a fire. Similarly the date of some of the timbers used in the roof of Pen y Bryn house can have no relevance to the date of the construction of the walls in the basement. Excavation and finds too are problematic, especially as the excavations undertaken in the 1990's did not uncover any important areas of the site. We are therefore left with falling back on the logical disentanglement of the history of the commote. This has been attempted in bare outline and much more thorough historical research is obviously necessary to uncloud the picture further. However what is clear is this.

We have no certain knowledge of llysoedd before the twelfth century when we have evidence that Gruffydd ap Cynan was responsible for building many. By implication the building in the basement of Pen y Bryn might possibly relate to this time. It is therefore possible that the buildings surrounding this basement were added by Gruffydd's successors down to the time of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (d.1282). This would have given the medieval structures here a building time span of some 160 years or so. However the documentary evidence also suggests that the palace of Llywelyn - using Leland's words - continued in use and habitation into the early fifteenth century. As it has yet to be proved that Llywelyn's palace was at Pen y Bryn, and another contender in the vill of Aber has been strongly put forward, it is therefore necessary to look at the wider historical scene before continuing further to a conclusion.

The Early Castles of Gwynedd

Looking at the early Norman history of North Wales we have the fact that Robert Rhuddlan in 1086 had been paying the king £40 per year for North Wales in the same manner as Rhys ap Tewdwr paid £40 for South Wales. Although this has been argued as 'a speculative grant' by the king, there can really be no doubt that such men would not pay such enormous sums for nothing but a vague promise. If we look at mottes commanding river crossings - the traditional early Norman form of castle - we find eleventh century Norman castles that we have historical evidence for at Rhuddlan, Degannwy (a reused Welsh hill site commanding the Afon Conwy and not a real motte at all), Aberlleiniog and Caernarfon. To this list can be added a second group for which we have no historical evidence, but where physical remains and geography make such identification likely. These are Aber (possibly referred to as Bangor in 1094), Nefyn?, Dolbenmaen, Dinas Emrys (again not a real motte), Dolwyddelan I and Pentre Isaf near Llangernyw. To this group can be added Tomen y Mur which is a high lying site, in this case being a reused Roman fort, that carries a motte at its summit. King Henry I (1100-35) was certainly here in 1114 and William II (1087-1100) may have visited in 1098. In short all of Gwynedd and the western Perfeddwlad were encompassed by Norman mottes which substantiate the historical evidence for Norman occupation as is seen at the time of the Domesday Book.

If we look at Welsh castles we find this list rapidly curtailed. There is evidence before 1200 of Welsh occupied Norman fortresses at Rhuddlan, Degannwy and possibly Caernarfon, while new Welsh fortresses had been built in the west at Cymer, Cynfal, Deudraeth and Garn Fadryn. Beyond this we are in the world of historical speculation. What we can state with certainty is that Aber motte and bailey castle bares no resemblance to the two Welsh built castles of Deudraeth and Garn Fadryn. Both these are masonry high-lying structures. The site at Caernarfon is apparently gone while both Rhuddlan (Twthill) and Degannwy have no certain remains from this period. It is a fair supposition that Rhuddlan never received stone components before its abandonment for the new Edwardian site in 1277. Cymer was a small motte on a promontory destroyed in 1116. The site has a stone built house upon it. Whether this lies on twelfth century castle foundations is impossible to say without excavation. Cynfal was a motte surrounded by a rock cut ditch and surmounted by a wooden tower that was burned down in 1147.

The main sites without indications of masonry defences in the supposed Welsh group of castles are Aberlleiniog, Nefyn and Rhuddlan (Twthill). However Aberlleiniog has a folly on its summit which may disguise or obliterate any early structure, Nefyn is an alleged motte which has not been excavated, but has been mutilated almost to the point of extinction and Rhuddlan could have had any masonry components grubbed up to service the new Edwardian castle. The pre-Edwardian castle of Caernarfon has been virtually obliterated with Leland stating that the old castle had fallen into the Seiont saltwater haven. The identification of its

site as being underneath the current Edwardian structure is debatable, especially when Flint, Rhuddlan, Conway, Beaumaris, Harlech and Aberystwyth were all built on virgin sites.

Of the masonry Norman castles Degannwy is so ruined that nothing can usefully be said apart from the round turret and wall to the north are reckoned without evidence to be Welsh, but could just as easily be Norman. Dolbenmaen motte looks as if it once supported a shell keep as too does Aber castle. Both have fragments of wall core protruding from the motte tops. Dolwyddelan I (Tomen castell) and Dinas Emrys both have rectangular towers on their summits and both most likely date to the tenure of Robert Rhuddlan and Earl Hugh of Chester in the period before 1094, although there is an unlikely chance that both are Welsh built post 1100. The motte at Tomen y Mur contains much good quality probably Roman stonework and it is highly possible that this once consisted of a Norman stone building that has collapsed. A similar 'motte' made of a collapsed tower exists at Prysor (Fig.28). The excavated rectangular tower at Dinas Emrys was previously thought to have been a motte. The motte at Pentre Isaf is heavily overgrown although there are some slight indications that stonework once crowned this feature.

The fragments of wall core projecting from the periphery of the summit of Aber motte towards the south and west makes it all but certain that there was originally a shell keep or round tower here. There is a tradition grown up that Normans did not build round towers. This is simply a theory, and unproven in scientific terms. The Romans had round towers as too did the Anglo Saxons and Normans. However it was certainly less usual for the Normans to build round towers, but that does not exclude them from constructing the masonry on the mottes at Aber and Dolbenmaen. Indeed it is far from certain that such structures were round and not small polygonal shell keeps of a common early kind. That the bailey of Aber is virtually obliterated may suggest that it has been demolished in antiquity. Certainly its position to the north is quite demonstrable where no housing has been built (Fig.69).

To sum up, there seems little doubt from the current evidence that Aber motte and bailey castle on the valley bottom started life as a Norman motte and bailey castle built in the decade before 1086. It was then destroyed during the uprising of 1094 when all the castles of Gwynedd succumbed, the fall of some of which are described in great detail in the History of Gruffydd ap Cynan. The castle then seems to have lain abandoned for a minimum of a hundred years. It is then claimed that a mansion was built next to the motte and that this was the palace of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (d.1240) mentioned by Leland. This claim will be examined later.

Comparison with other sites

There are several sites that bare some comparison with Pen y Bryn on several counts. Before examining these we must look at the castle site in the valley within the current village of Aber. Then we can look at other llys sites and finally at other later buildings in Gwynedd which may add some additional light to the matter in hand.

Aber Motte and Bailey Castle

As ever it is inherently difficult to precisely date any medieval structure without documentary evidence. This is as true for castles as for llysoedd sites. However this does not mean that such dating should not be attempted, merely that it should not be set in stone, especially while much of the evidence is yet to be evaluated.

At Aber we have a still partially ditched motte roughly 120 feet in diameter and a little over twenty feet high. The summit is approximately fifty feet in diameter and shows clear signs of once having supported either a small shell keep or large, probably round tower (Fig.70). The motte was almost certainly surrounded by a ditch as was common practice. This is most noticeable to the south, although the drop in height to the houses on the site of the bailey now its marks its position elsewhere. The motte appears to have been surrounded by an eye-shaped bailey approximately 550 feet north to south by 350 feet east to west at its maximum extent. This bailey itself would appear to have been divided roughly in half (Fig.71). The dividing ditch survives mostly to the south, while to the north it may be discernable in the aerial photograph (Fig.72). Most of the bailey defences to the north and west have been obliterated by later houses, but the distinct drop in height strongly suggests the line of the northern bailey. The bailey defences to the south and east have also been largely erased, possibly by ploughing, but more likely by the deliberate destruction of the rampart which was probably used to fill the ditch. Such complete slighting of the site should make us very careful of the suggestion that this was the hall complex of the later princes of Wales.

Within the northern bailey excavation has uncovered a structure which has been 'identified as the llys or princely court recorded here through the thirteenth century'[*7]. There are many problems with this identification and it would appear that this assertion has been made without adequate historical research or taking llys and castle sites in context.

The initial building was uncovered twice, once in 1993 and once in 2010. This structure was initially claimed to be approximately 37 feet east to west by 26 feet north to south internally with walls some 2½ feet thick. Projecting chambers, each about twenty feet by thirty feet, have been claimed by the excavators as additions built on both sides of this[*8]. It is therefore necessary to examine the remains to see if they justify such an interpretation.

[*7] Coflein, NPRN 95692

[*8] Ty'n y Mwd, Aber, Archaeological Excavation [GAT 1092], Interim Report No.86. No doubt these findings will be modified in view of the 2010 excavation.

The aerial photographs of the dig site and a short personal inspection would suggest the following development of the site. Firstly we have the construction of the first masonry building which is the structure approximately 37 feet by 26. Much more can be said of this than has appeared in the published reports. Firstly its south-western corner clearly penetrates the wall of the projecting southern 'wing', while its south-eastern junction is more problematic due to the denuded nature of the remains there. Indeed it appears possible that the actual junction was at the thickening of the wall just north of the junction. The northern section of the primary building has been almost totally obliterated with the north-eastern corner totally lost. The junction of the north-west corner with the claimed 'north wing' is not clear, but the better quality mortar in the 'wing' wall would suggest that it abuts onto the primary chamber wall. The rest of the so called 'north wing' appears to be illusory, but more will be said of this later.

Two entrances have been claimed into the 'hall house'. The first, to the east, is less than three feet wide and consists of a simple break in the wall without a doorstep. As this is covered by the claimed 'wing' to the south and a later wall which abuts to the north it probably was an entrance of a very poor kind. It would also appear to have been covered by an outbuilding or porch judging by the remains. This is hardly the great porchless ceremonial entrance which appears on the imaginative reconstruction of the surprisingly misnamed Ty'n y Mwd hall[*9]. The second 'entrance' to the west is even worse. This is simply a gash carved through the wall where the later apparently industrial complex was cut through the obviously abandoned primary building.

The building claimed as the southern 'wing' of the hall is 35 feet by 16 feet internally. The foundations of this chamber are mostly intact, although much of the east wall has gone. It appears to all be of one build except for a later external buttress added roughly half way down the southern wall. That the eastern wall of the 'hall' penetrates the northern wall would suggest that it post dates this structure. However it could just be a change in building plan that happened virtually contemporaneously with the building of the 'hall'. A 'bronze ring brooch... of thirteenth to fourteenth century date' was recovered 'from the interface of the old ground surface within the south wing of the building'. This would 'suggest' that the brooch was lost after the building was abandoned and before much soil built up. It is hardly satisfactory dating material.

The northern part of the excavation site shows at least four or five phases and has obviously had a more complex history than the two structures to the south. This is also the best preserved part of the masonry and the thickest, with the wall approaching six feet thick. In front of the northernmost wall was a ditch which was not fully explored by the excavators. This would appear to have been the ditch dividing the northern bailey from the southern one, which would make the northern wall of the excavated complex the curtain wall of the

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[*9] *The Work of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, 1994-95*, 14. Ty'n y Mwd is the name of a modern house north of the motte and is in no way connected with the structure uncovered south of the motte in 1993. Such modern misnaming of ancient sites is a practice best avoided.

southern bailey of the castle. This would appear to have been rebuilt with a new, narrower wall topping the remains of the earlier one, of which only the northern front can now be seen (Fig.73).

The northern 'wing' of the alleged palace seems more to have been drawn with the eye of faith rather than from evidence on the ground and if there is an eastern return wall it would appear to be west of the eastern wall of the primary chamber. In other words this is hardly a wing. Further east from the northern 'wing' are the remains of what appears to be a long narrow building which partially underlies the secondary 'curtain wall'. This structure, and the claimed north 'wing' were all said to have been built with lime mortar. The rest of the masonry uncovered was said to be clay or earth mortared walls. It is a simple fact that mortar rots and if it is not replaced it simply reverts to soil as can be seen in many excavated and non-excavated buildings. Nearby Pen y Bryn is a case in point as can be seen in this report.

To the west of the southern half of the main excavated structures just described is a large rectangular enclosure that has already been mentioned as its foundations have pierced and obliterated a portion of the west wall of the 'hall'. This structure has slightly thicker walls, that are not as well constructed as the walls of the south 'wing' (Fig.74). It is approximately 55 feet east to west by sixty feet north to south externally. Excavation shows that it contained at least six pits as well as burnt soil. As such it would appear to have been an industrial site which postdates the 'hall' to the east which has been claimed as Llywelyn's llys.

The official summary of the site is:

> Excavations took place in 1993, in the field adjacent to the motte of Pen y Mwd, in connection with a planning application. They identified the foundations of a large building in association with 13th and 14th century pottery and a decorated ring-brooch of the same date. The building was a rectangular stone structure which appears to have been divided internally into three sections with projecting wings at either end. However, the stone has been largely recycled elsewhere and so only the foundations remained, and the northern limit of the building had been incorporated into a later field wall. The building had clearly been modified during its period of use, and has been interpreted as a hall.

What we certainly have in the southern castle bailey are the remains of what is probably a series of structures quite unlike those excavated at Rhosyr and apparently unlike any of the remains found at other houses of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Indeed the only 'Caernarfonshire halls of the fourteenth century' which looked even remotely like the Aber bailey site was a debatable reconstruction plan of Penrhyn. Other sites will be looked at under their own chapters later. The current walls within the southern bailey of Aber castle stand no more than a course or two high and show no sign of mortar other than poor leached remains seen to the north (Fig.75). What we are left with would not appear to be a 'high

status building'. It appears more like the jumble of buildings that would be expected in a castle bailey. It should also be noted that these remains are inferior to the possibly thirteenth to eighteenth century hafod buildings uncovered by excavation in 1961[*10]. It is further quite clear that the poor quality of the remains is not solely due to stone robbing.

Apparently the pottery remains at Aber would suggest a thirteenth to fourteenth century usage for the buildings. Yet again the amount of pottery and coins found on such a small site is extraordinary, especially as royal sites were always well maintained and kept scrupulously clean. The fourteenth century details for the cleaning of Berkhamsted castle have survived and it would seem unlikely that other sites would have been allowed to become so unkempt. Thus we find in 1351 the porter of Berkhamsted castle was allowed all the litter found within the castle buildings whenever they were cleaned, which appeared to be a yearly business[*11]. Although masses of such minutia have not survived from most habitations, the cleanliness of royal sites when excavated shows that such agreements were widespread. Indeed even the baronial castle of Hen Domen at Montgomery was kept so clean during its two hundred odd years of occupation that the excavators were appalled by the lack of dateable evidence found. This therefore adds to the impression that Aber castle was not the royal house used by Edward I and II and their Welsh predecessors.

It is a shame that excavation did not take place on the motte which would have shown if the masonry of the keep was similar to that uncovered in the bailey. If it had been we may have been able to tell if the whole structure had been revamped after its destruction in 1094 when all the castles of Gwynedd were certainly destroyed. This might have told us a great deal about the site and the dates of its occupation. A small dig upon the motte may well still show us the life span of the motte and bailey castle.

It has been asserted that the foundations uncovered in Aber castle bailey can be related to the rebuildings carried out for Prince Edward in the early fourteenth century and that antiquarians often state that this was the site of the llys[*12]. Neither of these arguments stand up to serious consideration as will be discussed below. The best preserved part of the structure is to the north where one 'wall' has been overlain by several large river worn boulders. The whole could be little more than sleeper walls for a wooden structure. Certainly to describe the foundations as they appear as a mansion or royal hall seems rather grand and the reconstruction drawing of the castle in the early fourteenth century is positively misleading, especially when compared to the one drawn for Rhosyr. At Aber the petty east entrance into the primary building has lost its porch, while the low foundations which have the appearance of sleeper walls have been expanded into a two storey structure which positively dwarfs the motte and ignores the industrial compound to the rear as well as the wall and ditch between it and the motte.

[*10] Butler, L.A.S., 'A Long Hut Group in the Aber Valley', *Caernarvonshire Historical Society* XXIII [1962], 25-36.
[*11] *The Black Prince's Register, Part IV, 1351-65, England*, 11.
[*12] *The Work of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, 1994-95*, 14.

Finally it is worth noting that this castle motte and bailey stands immediately west of the fast running Afon Aber, just at the place where the river valley widens out into the coastal plain. It therefore controls the river crossing and is in a lowland position. It should again be emphasised that it is a well recognised general principal that Welsh castles tend to dominate the highlands and Norman castles the lowlands, although both sides on occasions used the others' fortresses. It can therefore be seen that this site is in accordance with other Norman sites, but as we shall see it does not meet with the criteria found for other llys sites.

Figure 69, Aber castle from the south-east. The probable line of the bailey ditch and rampart begins between the two trees and rises up to the motte behind the central tree. The recent excavations took place on the bailey roughly between the motte and the house centre-left.

Figure 70, The motte from the north showing the 2010 excavation in the bailey.

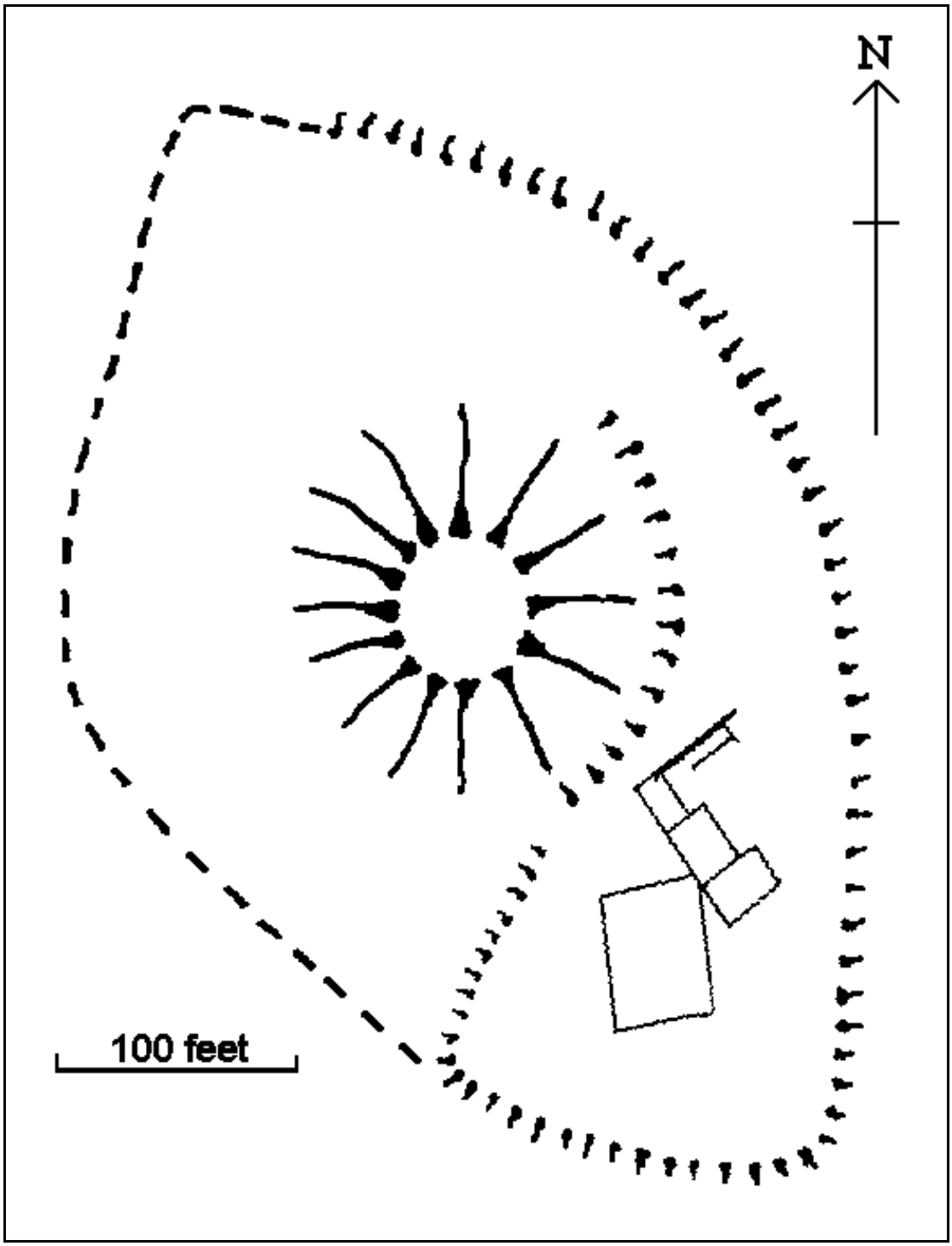

Figure 71, The ground plan of Aber castle showing the positioning of the structures uncovered by the recent excavations. The motte was almost certainly surrounded by a ditch while the line of the baileys are suggested by the hatching.

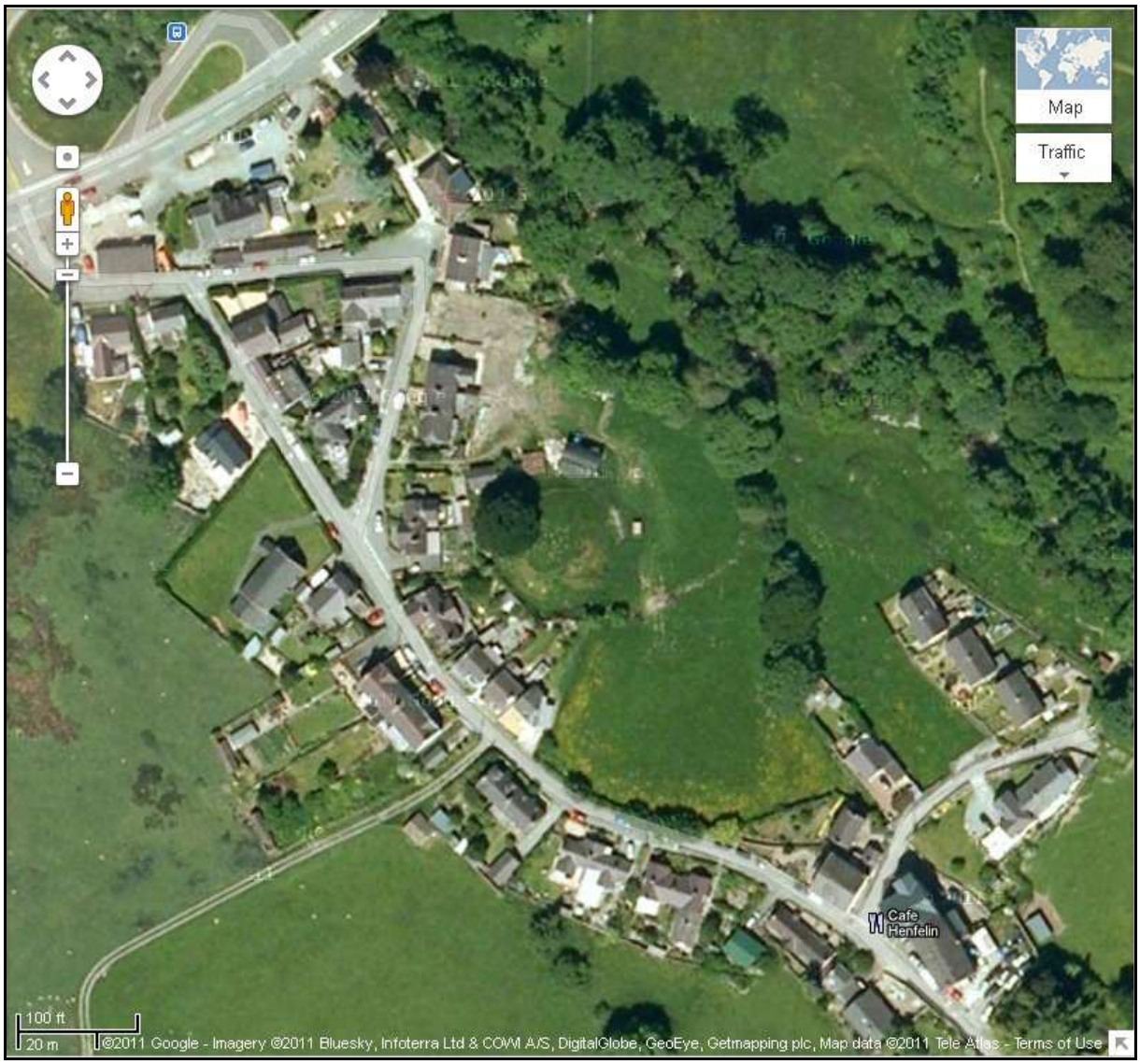

Figure 72, Aber motte and bailey from the air. The motte is in the centre and the line of the bailey is probably marked by the line of trees to the right of it.

Figure 73, The north 'curtain wall' from the motte top with the 'winged hall' beyond to the right.

Figure 74, The Aber excavation showing the industrial complex to the right behind the trees and the 'hall' to the left. The 'northern curtain' is just visible to the far left.

Figure 75, The poor remains of the mortar set in the ‘north curtain’ in Aber castle bailey with the cobbled floor of the ‘north wing’ beyond.

Llys sites in Gwynedd

More research has taken place on llys sites in Gwynedd than on pre-Edwardian castles[*13]. Yet we still have a far from clear view of what llys sites were actually used for and even if they had a standard layout. What little we do know is still shrouded in mystery and confusion. It is beyond the scope of this report to look at all the llys and potential llys sites in North Wales and draw conclusions from their settings and styles as to what were and what were not llysoedd. However what we may do is make a brief summary and then compare these criteria against what has been discovered at Aber.

Theoretically by the thirteenth century every commote should have had a llys or commotal centre, which suggests there were well over a hundred in Wales and the Marches. However it should be remembered that many commotes were simply fragments of earlier larger commotes, split, divided and otherwise mutilated to make sense of the ever changing political situation. It is also reasonably clear that some commotes never had a manorial centre. Certainly in 1308 it was recorded that there was no 'mansion house' in the commote of Ystumanner (*Estimanner*) until one was built by Llywelyn Fawr ap Maredudd (bef.1200-45+) the son of Cynan ab Owain Gwynedd (bef.1130-74). This was later taken over by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd 27 years before his death, in other words around 1255. Unfortunately at this point the inquest kaleidoscoped several generations into one, claiming that Llywelyn Fawr's heirs were four sons, who had been largely dispossessed by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (d.1282). This is certainly in error, for these men were the great grandsons of Llywelyn Fawr. However this blunder does not detract from the rest of the story and may just have been the miscopying of sons for descendants by a bored chancery official. The inquest more importantly recorded that the men of the commote were expected by Prince Llywelyn to repair the buildings and fences when he was intending to visit[*14].

In short this inquest, if it was correct and as it was written within living memory of the events it describes it is likely to have been, shows that the commotal system of North Wales was hardly a fixed entity. It should also be noted that the manor of Ystumanner with meadow and garden was probably separate from Pennal, which was also mentioned in the 1285 extent of Meirionydd[*15]. Here it was noted that Pennal also contained a functional castle, which is now most likely represented by the motte (SH.698003). Similarly the mill of Ystumanner and that of Pennal are both treated as entirely separate structures. The likelihood of Ystumanner and Pennal being the same is therefore extremely low. The actual position of Ystumanner and its manorial court and garden are currently therefore lost, although it is likely that they lie somewhere in the lowlands between Tywyn and Machynlleth. The llys does not appear to have lain on or near Pennal Roman fort (SH705001) where recent work has shown that this

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[*13] For instance, *Landscape and Settlement of Medieval Wales*, ed. Edwards, N. [1997], Johnstone, N., 'An Investigation into the Location of the Royal Courts of Thirteenth Century Gwynedd'. Johnstone, N., 'Llys and Maerdref: The Royal Courts of the Princes of Gwynedd', *Studia Celtica* XXXIV [2000], 167-210. *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed.Charles-Edwards, T.M., Owen, M.E. and Russell, P. [Cardiff, 2000].

[*14] *Calendar of Inquisitions, Miscellaneous, 1216-1307* [3 vols., 1916-37] II, 14, No.49.

[*15] Extent of Meirionydd, printed in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* [1867], 186, 187.

was quite a complex stone site with an attached vicus. It is possible that the two commotes of Meirionydd were only created by the division of the land between Llywelyn Fawr and Llywelyn Fychan in the period immediately after the death of their father in 1212, or more likely in 1241 on the expulsion of Prince Dafydd ap Llywelyn (d.1246) from the district. Therefore it is just as likely that Ystumanner lay within the bounds of Tywyn near to the old commotal centre at Talybont (SH.595039) as within Pennal.

During the Middle Ages the 'kingdom' of Gwynedd was very much an elastic entity and its boundaries were rarely static for more than a few years. Although there is today some strength in the argument that much later parish boundaries are related to earlier medieval boundaries, this can be no more than a rough guide. Boundaries in the Middle Ages changed just as much as they do today - the swopping of areas between private and royal landlords was just as common before 1534 as after. In the period of interest to this report the boundary of Gwynedd was extremely flexible with the land being divided into four or even five separate principalities not to mention occasionally successful settlements by the princes of Powys and Deheubarth in lands claimed by the kings of Gwynedd. In such circumstances boundaries had to be elastic. So instead of attempting to define the indefinable we will look briefly at four North Welsh examples of llysoedd.

Rhosyr

The best excavated llys site in Wales is Rhosyr (SH.419655) just outside the later borough of Newborough in Anglesey. Even here we have no contemporary evidence that actually states that Rhosyr was a llys. However later historical and circumstantial evidence strongly points to this conclusion.

The church at Rhosyr was one of the places attacked by the fleet of Henry II in 1157 and Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth was at *Rosver* on 10 April 1237[*16] just after the death of his wife at Aber llys on 2 February. In 1284 *Rossaur* was said to have been granted to Queen Eleanor by Edward I. In the extent of Anglesey the manor of *Roseyr* was noted as containing a garden worth an income of three shillings per annum, while the works of the smith was worth 5s 4d and the pleas and perquisites of court £2 per annum[*17]. By 1337, six years after the great innundation of sand, Rhosyr still contained a fenced manor house, chapel, steward's hall, garderobe and stable, all apparently set within the vill.[*18]

Despite this imperfect historical knowledge, Rhosyr is the only partially excavated obvious llys site and must be used as our current model for other more contentious sites until in depth research takes place at this site and a multitude of others. As only the south eastern quarter of the site of Rhosyr has been excavated we cannot be certain of the constituent parts of this llys (Fig.76). However we can say that there was a large building (A) some sixty feet by forty feet externally with well-built walls approximately three feet thick. There appears to be only one entrance to the north. This building (A) appears to have been extended by some form of aisle, covered passageway or portico to the south, west and possibly north. Internally towards the west in the inner chamber a hearth was uncovered, while internal buttresses were suggested during excavation in all the walls apart from the destroyed north wall. Two walls ran off the later west wall of the 'portico' at irregular angles. Another possibly later short wall continued northwards from the east wall. Perhaps this represented a lost northern aisle or portico to the structure, with its northern wall now represented solely by a drain. Quite possibly any such structure here was wooden built upon sleeper walls. A path ran directly to the east wall of the building A from the eastern 'hole in the wall' entrance to the llys enceinte. The purpose of the chamber A is obscure, but the hearth would suggest that it was residential at some point unless it was a granary. The possible portico puts me more in mind of a miniature principia or headquarters building. Perhaps this was some faint echo of ancient Rome.

The large building (A) was joined to the south by a short later wall to another rectangular chamber (B) some forty feet by 25. This had three crude apparently jambless entrances towards the east end and also had rounded external corners (Fig.77). The southern doorway led to a later dog-legged passageway that led towards the unexcavated south-eastern

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[*16] *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1226-1516* [6 vols., 1903-27] II, 459-60.
[*17] Seebohm, F., 'The Extent of Anglesey', printed in *The Tribal System in Wales* [London, 1904], Appendix 1, 17-8.
[*18] The history is briefly discussed in Carr, A.D., *Medieval Anglesey* [1982], 262 who quotes the Extent of Anglesey for the buildings extant at Rhosyr.

corner of the llys site. A further building (C) in the north-eastern corner of the llys perimeter has been uncovered (Fig.78). This is approximately the same size as building B, although it is slightly wider, but less long. This also has rounded corners at the south end. There is a curious small subdivision to the north which may be the base of a later garderobe.

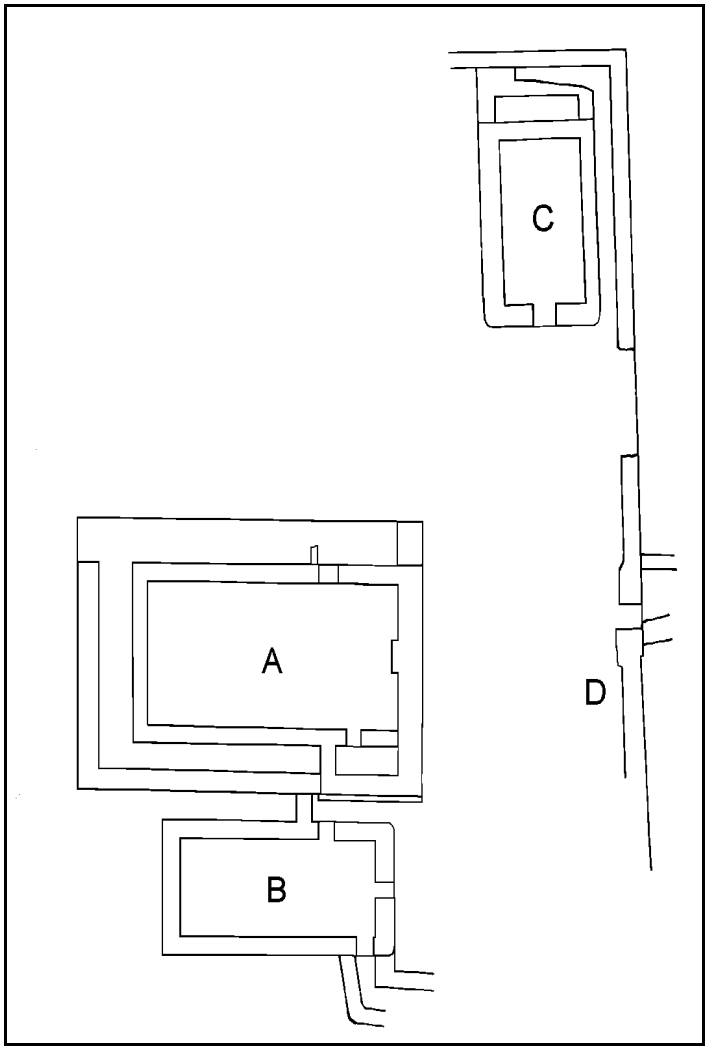

Figure 76, A ground plan of the buildings uncovered at Rhosyr. 74

The whole enclosure seems to have been contained within the apparent walled rectangle which was some 220 feet north to south by 250 east to west as uncovered by excavation. However as the road makes an obvious detour further south of the site it is quite possible that there was a further annexe on this side. The east gate has already been recognised and this seems to have merely been a narrow gateway set in a complex thickening of the perimeter wall (Fig.79). It should also be noted that the east gateway into the site appears partially blocked by a wide foundation projecting from the enceinte which does not appear on the official plans. A south gate, similar in size to the east gate, was briefly uncovered by excavation, but this had been blocked in antiquity. A flagged stone path ran from the east gateway into the interior of the llys. This is overlain by the building A, which strongly suggests that the path belonged to an earlier occupation phase. Similarly the blocking of the south and apparently at least half of the east gateway by a later wall indicates that the usage of the enclosure changed over the years. Presumably there were originally four gateways, one set in each of the enclosure walls, again rather like a Roman fort. Another small excavation immediately north of the west end of building A showed that the enclosure wall had been rebuilt at this point and turned at an angle of some 110 degrees into the enclosure. The older perimeter wall underlay this newer work. In short this llys site still has many secrets to reveal.

Internally within the enclosure is a small sub-rectangular building which may be a guard chamber (D). If it is such the style is more reminiscent of an Iron Age hill fort, than a Norman castle or Roman fort. South of chamber D was an area of 'specialised production' which may have been either industrial or domestic. Interestingly the excavation only produced coins of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, slag, pottery and a single spur[*19]. This itself is highly interesting, as the attack on the site in 1157 suggests that this llys site was one of those constructed by Gruffydd ap Cynan before 1137, quite possibly on a site which may have been occupied back in the Dark Ages. The lack of dateable evidence found here and at other North Welsh sites may well reflect the type of occupation - wooden utensils instead of pottery - that occurred at many sites.

The building style of the surviving walls suggests that several different builds took place over a wide period of time. The best surviving east wall of the building A shows a chaotic build in the few remaining courses. Although it has been suggested that the building A consisted of only stone footings for a timber structure, the remains are far more substantial than those uncovered in the castle bailey at Aber and are of a similar width to those still found at Pen y Bryn. The building B, which has survived better, seems to be better laid with flatter blocks utilised (Fig.77), while the building C, seems to have a more mixed construction with the use of occasional water rounded stones (Fig.78). The enceinte seems to consist mainly of roughly cut blocks and occasional larger stones. In short all these structures could well have been constructed at different times. The enceinte build (Fig.80) seems particularly similar to the east range (E) at Pen y Bryn (Fig.31), while none of the masonry style or design appears comparable with that uncovered in Aber castle bailey (Fig.75).

[*19] *Landscape and Settlement of Medieval Wales*, ed. Edwards, N. [1997], Johnstone, N., 'An Investigation into the Location of the Royal Courts of Thirteenth Century Gwynedd', 65-7.

Figure 77, The rounded north-eastern end of the building B at Rhosyr. The dog-legged passageway can be seen beyond.

Figure 78, The building C at Rhosyr with the perimeter wall in the foreground. The building A can be seen to the top left.

Figure 79, The rear of the east gateway at Rhosyr from the building D. Note the walling filling the entrance and the nearby church of St Peter in the background.

Figure 80, The perimeter wall at Rhosyr showing a somewhat similar building style to that of the east range at Pen y Bryn.

Llys Gwenllian and Dinorben

These two unexcavated llysoedd sites[*20] are in the Perfeddwlad, an area disputed between the kings of Gwynedd, the princes of Powys, the earls of Chester and latterly the kings of England. It is therefore clear that the origins of any commotal courts here might be confused.

The first court to be examined belonged to a princess of Wales and is to be found at Llys Gwenllian at Ystrad Owain (SJ.057644) just south of Denbigh. The site is named after Gwenllian, the daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, who died in November 1281. It is uncertain who the Owain in Ystrad Owain was, but it is quite possibly Owain Gwynedd. In the mid-thirteenth century the dower rights of Gwenllian were respected by Henry III, Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffydd and his brother Dafydd, and finally Edward I. On 5 May 1241 it was recorded that she held the lands of Aberwhyler (*Aberchwiler*, SJ.095693), Penpedow (*Penbedw*, SJ.165682), Ystrad Owain (*Estradmelened*) and the unidentified *Trewowr*[*21]

Llys Gwenllian seems to have been the commotal centre of Ceinmeirch under Llywelyn ab Iorwerth as he dated a document there on 1 May 1230[*22]. As Gwenllian had married William Lacy (d.1233) before 1222 it is to be presumed that the llys was doubling as Gwenllian's caput as well as the llys of Ceinmeirch, if there was any difference between the two. Therefore the status of the llys between 1222 and 1281 when Gwenllian died and her dower reverted to the Crown is uncertain. Indeed her death in November 1281 led to arguments about her tenure of the lands and who should inherit them. In short, although Llys Gwenllian has all the attributes of a llys it may not have technically been one whilst it was held as dower, although it might be argued that the lands of Gwenllian were held and organised like a commote. In other words this was similar to the fragmentation which was more common in South Welsh commotes and probably also in Anglesey. Possibly there was a secondary llys in the commote or the caput of Gwenllian and the llys of the princes of Wales were shared at this time.

In 1334 Ystrad Owain consisted of a manor containing the capital mesuage which in this case is the llys which extended to one acre and a rod and a half and 16 perches in which stood two granges, a cattle shed (*boveria*), a sheep house (*bercaria*) and a house for the household or retinue (*domus pro famulis*) and also another sheep house. The assizes of the houses and the court were worth only 1s 8d per annum, which suggests that the whole was rather neglected, as too does the next statement that there was neither dovecot nor garden there, but two enclosed crofts near the manor whose pasturing was worth only 6s 4d each acre there bringing in 1s 4d. Interestingly there was also a gatehouse at the manor house (*porte manerii*) where the road, probably from Denbigh, ran past (*Greneway*). When the

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[*20] There are interesting accounts of both places in *The Welsh King and his Court*, eds. Charles-Edwards, T.M., Owen, M.E. and Russell, P., [Cardiff, 2000], 'Llys and Maerdref', Jones, G.R.J., 304-8.
[*21] *Curia Regis Rolls, 1199-1242* [1922-79] XVI, no.1596.
[*22] *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283*, ed. Pryce, H. [Cardiff, 2005], 426-8.

surrounding lands were added to the value of the capital messuage the whole of the manor was worth £11 19s 9d per annum[*23].

Unfortunately Llys Gwenllian is now occupied by a farm and the site has therefore been much disturbed over the centuries. The remains of the llys appear to consist of a ditch with counterscarp which apparently covered a rectangular platform about 240 feet by 180, although the cutting of the ditch to north and probably south may have cut sixty feet off the width of the original llys. There also appears to have been a subsidiary ward, enclosure or barbican to the north-east which is about 150 feet long by sixty feet deep. An irregular, mutilated twenty feet high motte with an eighty foot basal diameter has also been built centrally astride the scarp to the south-west, although all is much denuded by the farm workings. Beyond this little can now be said with certainty about the site.

To the west of Denbigh was Dinorben (SH.969748) the commotal centre of Rhos Is Dulas. It was here at *Dinnorben* on 25 November 1209 that Prince Llywelyn of North Wales made a grant to Ystrad Marcella abbey[*24]. In 1334 the manor sited at *Dynorbyn Vaur* was described as a capital messuage with one good grange and another thoroughly ruined except for the great timbers (*grossum maeremium*), one granary, a cattle shed (*boveria*) and a decrepit house for hay and forage. All together it enclosed two acres and a perch. The assizes of the houses and court were worth five shillings per annum. There was also a ruinous pigeon house there that if repaired would be worth 6s 8d per annum. Lands, meadows, pasture and woods were also attached to the capital messuage as well as a garden. In total value the manor with the vill of *Dynorbyn* was reckoned to be worth £27 17s 1d per annum[*25]. It is interesting that no hall was recorded at the site, but one had existed as recently as 1305[*26]. Presumably the hall was therefore included amongst the houses (*domorum*) rather than it had disappeared. Once again this is a warning about taking medieval surveys as telling a complete picture. Unfortunately nothing useful can be currently said of the site or remains of the llys.

[*23] *Survey of the Honour of Denbigh, 1334*, eds. Vinogradoff, P., & Morgan, F. [London, 1914], 2-3.
[*24] *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283*, ed. Pryce, H. [Cardiff, 2005], 385-6.
[*25] *Survey of the Honour of Denbigh, 1334*, eds. Vinogradoff, P., & Morgan, F. [London, 1914], 230-3.
[*26] PRO. D.L. 29/1/2.

Aberffraw

The llys at Aberffraw has never been excavated and it is quite possible that previous researchers have been searching in the wrong place. The bay of Aberffraw, like that of Rhosyr, suffered from sanding up in the fourteenth century, an occurrence that also happened at Chester and Harlech, and shows that we should not use the current shoreline as an indication of historic conditions. If the sand is removed from the estuary of the Afon Ffraw we would be left with an inlet approximately two miles long and nearly a mile wide. As the church of Cadwaladr (d.664) stands on the eastern side of this estuary it is quite possible that the medieval llys also stood on this side of the river, probably near the site of Llangadwaladr. As such the current village of Aberffraw has likely migrated westwards after the storms of the fourteenth century to follow the moving river course. If this assumption is correct then the important llys at Aberffraw would have been in a very similar position to Rhosyr and next to or including the main church of the district. This would explain why the llys has been sought in vain within the current Aberffraw village. There is also no need to place the llys adjacent to St Beuno's church of Aberffraw (SH.353688), as there would have been a royal chapel within or adjacent to the llys. Such was certainly the case at Aber and it is possible that Cadwaladr's church at Llangadwaladr (SH.384693) began life as the llys chapel.

The historical importance of Aberffraw can only clearly be seen from approximately 1230 when Llywelyn ab Iorwerth adopted the title, prince of Aberffraw and lord of Snowdon. This suggests that tradition at that date endowed this llys site with great antiquity. However there is no evidence that Llywelyn ever visited the llys even if he used its name. Indeed more use seems to have been made of Aberffraw by his grandson, who was in residence at Aberffraw (*Aberfrau*) in January 1279. The next year Llywelyn fined Rhys ap Gruffydd £100 for the disobedience and contempt he had shown to the prince at Aberffraw on the Monday, 9 December 1280[*27]. This certainly shows that Llywelyn ap Gruffydd stayed at Aberffraw at least twice after he lost the bulk of his territories in 1277. King Edward visited Aberffraw and therefore probably the llys during his tours of Wales immediately after the conquest of 1283. This again emphasises the llys status of the vill at the end of the thirteenth century.

Unfortunately we know next to nothing of the buildings which once existed within the lost llys complex. In 1302 porters were still paying their farm in Aberffraw. This amounted to 13s 4d at Aberffraw which was the same amount raised at Penrhos in the north-east of the island[*28]. In February 1317 it was recorded that 198 pieces of assorted timber were brought to Caernarfon for works on the castle 'from the hall and other buildings of the late Prince Llywelyn at Aberffraw in Anglesey'. This has been taken as representing the destruction of the site. However later evidence seems to indicate that this was not the end for the llys, for as late as 1346 the Aberffraw portership was recorded at only 6d per annum for the Crown, the

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[*27] *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales*, ed. J.G. Edwards [Cardiff, 1940], 111-2; *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283*, ed. Pryce, H. [Cardiff, 2005], 602; *Littere Wallie, preserved in Liber A in the Public Record Office*, ed. J.G. Edwards [Cardiff, 1940], 31.

[*28] Seebohm, F., 'The Extent of Anglesey', printed in *The Tribal System in Wales* [London, 1904], 26.

same value as the Raglot[*29]. However the porters of Aberffraw llys were still responsible for prisoners being kept within the site and were fined if any might escape[*30]. This suggests that the prison was still functioning as too might have been other elements of the complex. This view is strengthened by the repairs carried out to the roof of the king's chamber in 1337[*31]. Something obviously survived the apparent recycling of some of the llys timbers in 1317.

The 1970's excavation reports suggest that the excavators had found a rectangular site with rounded corners about 230 feet square at SH.354689. This had produced a single radiocarbon date of 27-387AD. It was suggested that this site was later reused as a llys. This view has been challenged, while excavations at the traditional site of the llys at SH.353687 found only eighteenth century remains[*32]. It has lately been claimed that the llys site was actually north of the church under a 1950's housing estate. However I am reliably informed that John Hughes (d.2010), who witnessed the digging of the foundations of the buildings, confirmed that nothing archaeological was observed when they were constructed. In short insufficient work has been carried out on the site to make any definitive statements from the widely varying interpretations of the limited and contradictory excavations and finds of 1973, 1974 and 1979.

In total what we can see from these four llys sites in North Wales is that llysoedd seem to have a tendency to be rectangles about 250 feet square, possibly with slightly smaller rectangular annexes. With this in mind the complex in the southern bailey at Aber does not seem to fit the bill at all, being set in a smaller ellipsoid bailey to a Norman castle. However the remains at Pen y Bryn do form a similar site, showing a relatively flat piece ground making an apparent rectangle about 250 feet square (Fig.81). This has a further, smaller, rectangular area to the north of the main site, defined on part of its northern extreme by traces of a ditch at the top of a rise which were excavated in 1993. It is uncertain whether the current barn (G) which certainly contains reused materials is within or without the rectangular enclosure as more modern works consisting of entrance tracks have much disturbed this side of the rectangle. Without further examination of the top of the rise on which Pen y Bryn stands all that can be said is that this area better fits into what can be demonstrated as llys sites than the valley bottom site in the bailey of Aber castle (Figs.71&72).

[*29] Seebohm, F., 'The Extent of Anglesey', printed in *The Tribal System in Wales* [London, 1904]. 32.
[*30] Tribal System, Seebuoft, 13, quoting PRO, Crt Rolls, Bundle 215, No.18.
[*31] *The Welsh King and his Court*, eds. Charles-Edwards, T.M., Owen, M.E. and Russell, P., [Cardiff, 2000], 'Llys and Maerdref', Jones, G.R.J., 172.
[*32] White, R.B., Archaeologia Cambrensis 126 [1977], 140-5; *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* [1979], 319-42; *Landscape and Settlement in Medieval Wales*, ed. Edwards [1997], 41-69.

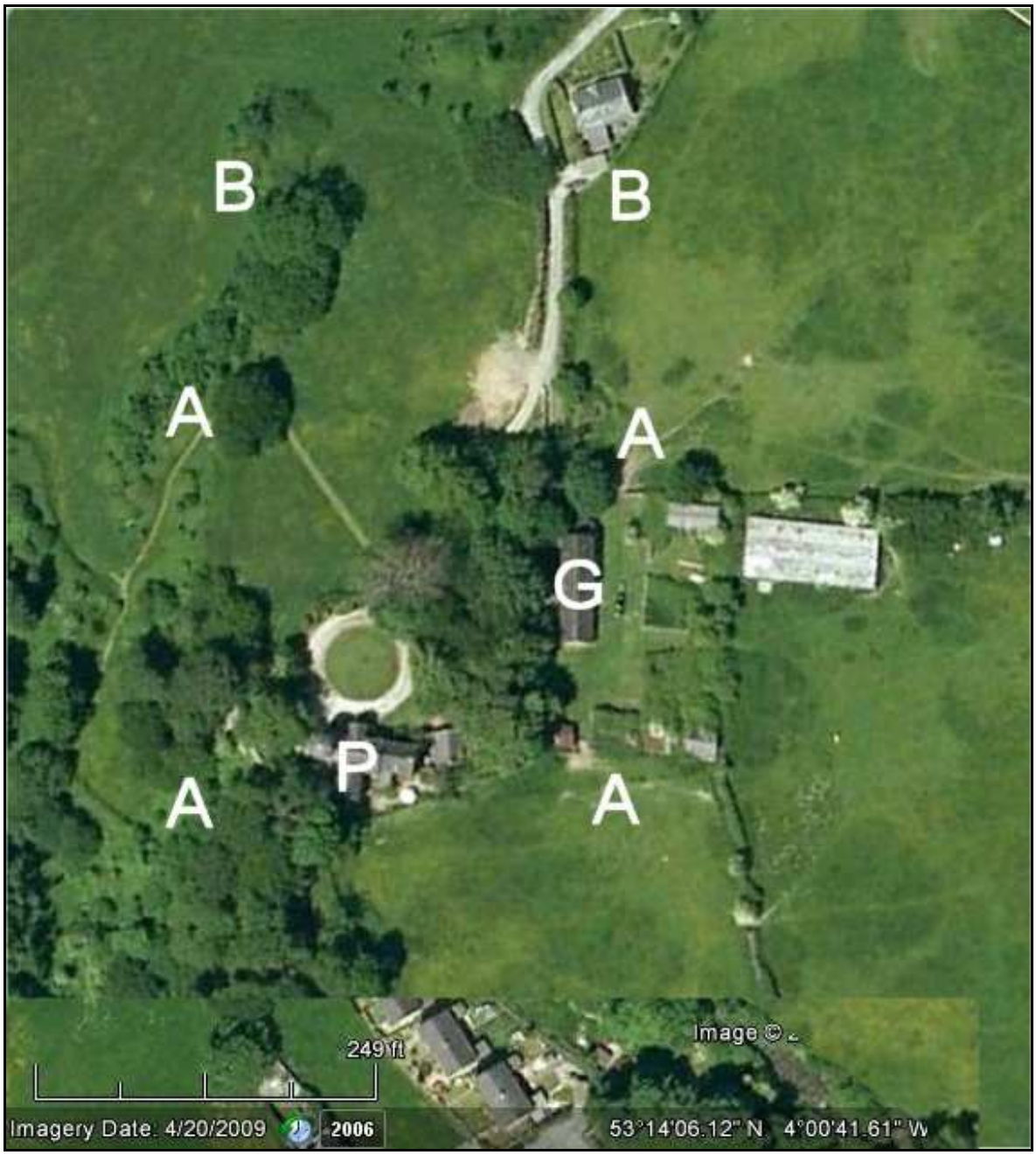

Figure 81, Pen y Bryn (P) showing the possible llys site with A marking the four possible extremes of the main 250 feet square site and B marking the exterior of the possible annexe. G is the barn which it has been suggested is on the site of a gatehouse. The Google Earth photograph has been rotated 35 degrees counterclockwise to align the structure for easier recognition, although the original scales have been retained.

Antiquarian References to Llywelyn's Palace at Aber

Leland, who was born around 1505, was incapacitated in 1547 and died in 1552, is the first 'modern' writer to mention a palace of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth at Aber. Unfortunately he never finished writing up his itinerary and all we have today are his notes which he never lived long enough to bring to fruition. These have been heavily damaged and much copied in the years since his death and must be analysed and used with much caution.

It is uncertain whether Leland visited Aber or not, although he himself claimed to King Henry VIII that he had visited all the places he discussed in his itineraries. Despite this we actually know very little of his movements or methods in making his itineraries. It appears from his work that he may have entered Wales from Chester and moved across to the Llyn before retiring to England via Montgomeryshire. As Aber is on the main road from Chester to Caernarfon it seems most likely that Leland rode by if he did not actually visit Aber between the years 1536 and 1539. It is well worth quoting his two comments on the palace in full.

> Arllechwedd Isaf (*Llechwed iha*) hundred goes up on the shore onto the River Gregyn (*Avon Gegyn*) beyond Penrhyn (*Penryne*) where Mr Grifith dwells. One of the notablest things in this commote is Abergwyngregyn (*Abereguynne Gregin*), where was a manor or little pile of the princes of Wales.[*33]

This is his first comment on Aber and it comes amidst the description of Caernarfonshire and the notable things within it. All this really tells us is that there was a manor house at Aber. The generally accepted meaning of pile is 'a large building or group of buildings' as in a stately pile. This description is expanded in Leland's second comment on the structure. This occurs in the last quarter of his description of the castles of Caernarfonshire.

> The Mwd (*Moode*), in the parish of Aber otherwise Llan Bodfan (*Boduan*), where Tussog Llywelyn ab Iorwerth Drwyndwn had a castle or palace on a hill by the church, whereof yet part stands.
> Sir Gul. Grifith has a fair house at Penrhyn (*Penryen*) a 2 mile on this side of Bangor.
> William ap William dwells at a place Cochwilan (*Gochichlan*) a mile this side of Penryne.
> Pwllheli (*Pollele*) Bay a poor market, now a late station of the best ships (*statio opt. Carinis*). The prince had a palace there, as yet appears.[*34]

The first sentence above has been much quoted and misquoted. In medieval Latin and this early form of English which is formed in a similar manner, it is quite clear that the sentence is in two distinct parts. Firstly we have the mound or motte which is in Aber parish which is

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[*33] Leland, John, *The Itinerary in Wales in or about the years 1536-9*, ed. L.T. Smith [1906] VI, 79.
[*34] Leland, John, *The Itinerary in Wales in or about the years 1536-9*, ed. L.T. Smith [1906] VI, 88.

served by the church of St Bodfan. Then comes the second part of the sentence which is obviously applied to the parish and not the motte and this states that part of a palace of Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth still stands 'on a hill by the church'.

The current church of St Bodfan stood slightly south of the new 1878 church. Its position can be marked out by the new gravestones within the old ones on what was possibly a class site. It would seem likely that the original dwellings of Aber were situated near to the church, and not where they cluster now, by the more modern turnpike road and mill. Quite possibly they once stretched from the church to the river where the mill stood judging by the leet which can still be traced south and east of the castle bailey. The castle motte most emphatically does not stand on a hill and the idea that Llywelyn's palace stood on the motte which Leland specifically describes firstly as the Mwd (*Moode*) and then it has been alleged secondly as a simple 'hill' simply does not ring true. The only noticeable hill to be seen within the immediate vicinity of St Bodfan is the hill on which Pen y Bryn stands. The Welsh words Pen y Bryn mean the head, top or promontory of the hill in English. However in November 1282 Llywelyn ap Gruffydd signed a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury at Garth Celyn. This place is universally reckoned to be the princely palace at Aber. The old field names around Pen y Bryn are consistent in containing the word Celyn and up river from Aber is hafod Celyn. A hafod was the summer dwelling or farm and was therefore obviously above the lower lying Garth Celyn. A Garth in Welsh is either a hill or an enclosure. In either case Celyn would seem to be a personal name which appears in North Welsh Dark Age genealogies. It is interesting that the hills of Garth in Glamorgan and Powys bear more than a passing resemblance to the shape of the hill on which the apparent enclosure around Pen y Bryn stands. Therefore it is most unlikely that the Norman castle bailey, whose ditches were apparently filled in well within the Middle Ages, was ever called a garth - Aber castle motte and bailey in 1282 being neither an enclosure nor set on a 'garth' shaped hill. However the site around Pen y Bryn does appear to be on a 'garth' and it might be argued that the rectangular shape detected on the hill top may be an enclosure.

The main misreading of the Leland source seems to originate in the 1954 Caernarfonshire Royal Commission which states that:

> one of the main residences of the princes of Gwynedd was at Aber. There is no evidence as to its actual site, but it is possible that it stood on or near the motte Pen y Mwd.

This unreferenced conclusion, which is obviously no more than an opinion, is then supported by a footnote which states:

> According to Leland, p.84, part of the building still stood in his time. He gives Llan Boduan as an alternative name for the motte. A similar motte in Monmouthshire has

> produced archaeological evidence for occupation early in the 13th century, *Arch Camb* 1936, 247.

From this well meaning, but unwarranted suggestion has grown up the myth of Tyn y Mwd, as the 'mansion' in the valley has recently been mischristened without any historical provenance. The motte referred to by RCAHM is Twyn y Cregen (SO.363096), a large, mostly natural mound fashioned probably by a Welsh lord into a castle. It is patently dissimilar to the Mwd at Aber and no conclusions can be safely drawn between the two dissimilar structures without a great deal of work which simply has not taken place.

Three Georgian travellers mention the palace or castle of Llywelyn at Aber and in this they are probably copying Leland. These works are plainly total guesswork and can have no value in defining medieval history. We shall simply take the first two of these as a sample. Pennant's work of 1778 reads:

> At the entrance of the glen, close to the village, is a very large artificial mount, flat at top, and near sixty feet in diameter... It was once the site of a castle belonging to Llywelyn the Great. Some foundations are yet to be seen round the summit, and in digging, traces of buildings have been discovered...[*35]

There then follows a fanciful account of the story of the death of William Braose in 1229 rather than 1230. This is the first statement ever that the motte was a castle of Llywelyn Fawr's and this 'fact' would seem to be nothing more than a guess based on a garbling of Leland's comments. His description of the diggings in the mound summit would indicate that traces of the keep had been uncovered, which is interesting in itself, but can be no reason to place the hall, chambers, stables, kitchens etc etc which made up a llys on the motte top. This is simply a guess made some 550 years after the events he proceeds to fabulously describe.

Nicholas Carlyle's 1811 comments on Aber are of a similar ilk and would appear to be another garbled reading of Leland. It is interesting that in the preceding 33 years the knowledge of the excavations within the motte have been forgotten.

> In the village is an artificial mound of earth about 15 feet high and about 15 yards in diameter, nearly circular; the interior of it has not been investigated, but it is supposed to contain the remains of some of the Welsh Princes, who had a palace at Aber. A small portion of old building is pointed out near this mound, as the only remaining vestige of the palace of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth Drwyndwn, the last prince who resided at Aber.

[*35] Pennant, T., *Tours in Wales* [3 vols, London, 1810] III, 105.

Carlyle was obviously of the opinion that the Mwd was a burial mound and not a castle motte. His ‘small portion of old building... pointed out near this mound’ could as easily be in the castle bailey as up at Pen y Bryn overlooking the mound (Fig.82). The last statement that Llywelyn ab Iorwerth was the last prince to reside there is again palpable nonsense.

Simply these statements and the myriad of Victorian descriptions that follow them and plagiarise them and each other in ever expanding or diminishing circles are historically worthless for events in the twelfth and thirteenth century. They are simply the works of interested bystanders trying to make sense of what little they know about Llywelyn’s palaces, castles and even Aber. What they did not have at their disposal is the massive advances in historical thinking and research that we are so lucky to possess. All that these works do tell us is that during Georgian and Victorian times there were ruins on the motte top and at Pen y Bryn and at a site called ‘Llywelyn’s kitchen’ which could be at either site or even that recently excavated within the castle bailey. What they may have thought they were five hundred years after the event and what they actually are, are two totally unrelated matters.

Before finishing this chapter it is worth reemphasizing the last lines of Leland’s comments on the castles of Caernarfonshire. Two of these ‘castles’ were Cochwillan and Penrhyn, which will be looked at later in comparison to Pen y Bryn, while it is a great shame that no trace of Prince Llywelyn’s otherwise unmentioned palace at Pwllheli has survived, though perhaps some trace of this is yet to be found.

Figure 82, The tower (T) and south range (S) of Pen y Bryn from the recently recovered excavation site on the bailey of Aber castle.

Other Houses of Medieval Date in North Wales

After examining castles and llysoedd it is well worth while to take a look at various hall buildings around North Wales. Before this is done it is first necessary to make some pertinent comments. If we accept that a house stood at Pen y Bryn from at least the sixteenth century, we should be able to find houses of a similar style in the vicinity and hopefully some of these can be closely dated. Unfortunately this does not appear to be true in the immediate neighbourhood, although two houses in the Llyn peninsula bare some resemblance. However, what Pen y Bryn does not appear similar to, is either house certainly built by the Thomas family when most current assessments assert that Pen y Bryn was built. In light of this it should be pointed out that our knowledge of Welsh houses from the thirteenth century onwards is considerably shaky. We do not very often know foundation dates, and even when we do, we do not know with certainty what was built then, or altered later. Dating masonry is a black art, not a science.

There are several houses that would seem to have been occupied before Pen y Bryn was built. Certainly from Leland's comments, whatever there was at Aber vill, Pen y Bryn was not an habitable house before 1540 at the very earliest. Interestingly there would appear to have been a family home at Pen y Bryn by 1586 when William Thomas left this to his widow by his will dated 1585. Below are extracts from the will concerning the manor of Aber.

> ...William Thomas Esquire of Caernarfon in the county of Caernarfon by reason I am employed in her Majesties service in Flanders..... [makes provision for his five sons and wife in the event of his death in service. He also makes provision of £300 a piece on the marriage of his four daughters].
> I give and begift to my wife Elin Thomas my manor of Aber with the appurtenances for term of her life to take and receive the rents, issues, profits and commodities thereof to the use and behalf of my said daughters until the said sum of £300 to ? of my said daughters be fully satisfied and paid at the times? before limited and if it happens my said wife to die before the said sum of three hundred pounds to ? of my said daughters be satisfied and paid then I give and begift the said manor of Aber with the appurtenances to my brother in law John Griffith esquire for term of fifty years until the rents, issues and profits of the said manor of Aber shall make xxx the full sum of £300 to every one of my said daughters in case the said sum of £1200 be not paid full? and reremed? in the life time of my said wife, further I give and begift all my mortgages, lands, tenements, takings? and leases for years whatsoever in the county of Caernarfon and Anglesey except only my manor of Cemaes (*Kemmes*) to my wife Ellen Thomas for term of her life and also I give and begift to my said wife the third part of my said manor of Cemaes (*Kemmes*)... [everything eventually to pass to his eldest son, William Thomas...]

It is quite obvious from this will that the manor of Aber was the Thomas' main seat. The conclusion from this is that William or his father Rhys (d.1577) had built his house at Pen y Bryn by the time the will was written. It is also obvious that Aber had great financial value to the family. As we know that Aber only came into Rhys Thomas' hands in 1551/3, the manor house must have been built between that date and the time of the will in 1585. It is virtually impossible that the house could have been built by the Crown unrecorded between 1437 and 1553, especially when the poor nature of the building compared with Gwydir is taken into account.

In light of this, we will now take a brief look at various houses that are claimed to be of a similar date to 'the palace of Llywelyn' and the house built or rebuilt by 1585. Much of the information on the following houses has been gleaned from the commendable efforts of the Royal Commission for Ancient Monuments.

The Bishop's Palace, Gogarth

This complex has after 1540 acquired the name of Gogarth abbey, but in reality it was a palace of the bishops of Bangor. It stands on the edge of the shallow sea cliff overlooking the entrance to the Menai Strait on the west side of Great Orme's head. The current remains lie buried up to a depth of at least four feet and maybe more (Fig.30).

Traditionally the palace was said to have been constructed after 1284 on the grounds that the lands were given to Bishop Anian of Bangor (d.1307) in that year. However this grant has subsequently been disproved as a confusion of Gogarth with Garthgogo and therefore we have no idea when the area came into the hands of the bishops or when the building was commenced. The Royal Commission made a plan of the palace remains in the 1950's and they gave it a date of circa 1300, placing their dating firmly on the erroneous tradition that the site could not have been contemplated before 1284. As we have seen this was unfounded and so we are left with a site of indeterminable date, possibly having been commenced before 1300, possibly after.

The excavations of 1955/56 found that the main hall was 66 feet long and 38 feet wide[*36] with a kind of bay to the south-east end by the entrance. It was constructed with walls approximately 2½ feet thick. The hall was originally of at least two storeys as was ascertained by the remains of a beam hole and the height of the gable at some twenty feet. The ruins apparently showed evidence of burning and this was taken to be attributable to the unrecorded destruction of the palace in the time of Owain Glyndwr (1359-c.1415). This is not impossible as Leland confirms that the ruins of the bishops of Bangor's palace at *Cogarth* on the River Conway shore were 'almost clean down'[*37]. The initial foundation date was suggested as circa 1280 judging from the finds made, which were principally three pennies of Edward I (1272-1307). Quite possibly the 'knowledge' that Bishop Anian did not acquire the district until 1284 coloured the excavation report. However chamfered jambs were found in the secondary buildings and these could date from any date from the reign of King John onwards. In short we have no certain timeline to attach to the building other than its likely destruction in the early fifteenth century and that coins had been lost there after 1272.

[*36] Hague, D.B., *Transaction of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* [1956],Vol. 17, 9-22. Coflein sizes the hall at 40 feet by 28 and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Regional HER, 36 feet by 23.

[*37] Leland, John, *The Itinerary in Wales in or about the years 1536-9*, ed. L.T. Smith [1906] VI, 89, 53.

Cochwillan

Historically it is thought that a house of some description may have stood at Cochwillan from the thirteenth century. However the estate was only partitioned from Penrhyn in the early fifteenth century. No reasonable reason has been put forward for the alleged building of the present house attributed without evidence to William ap Gruffydd (bef.1465-c.1500). His claim to being a builder was apparently made on the basis that he fought for Henry VII at Bosworth.

The current house suggests at least three different building phases and probably more. This can be ascertained from the different forms of masonry used (Fig.83). The first structure was possibly a hall about 37 feet by 21 with a large fireplace possibly added in the north wall. The walls were about three feet thick. This structure was apparently later rebuilt on the south front and then extended to east and west. Portions of the west wall are shown to date from this first build in the RCAHM report, but this is far from certain and the north-west corner appears more likely to be of a roughly sixteenth century date with its large cut stones which are quite different from the earlier rubble of the main walls.

The style of the timbering has suggested that the roof was made after 1400. This would suggest a date for the second build and therefore an earlier date for the first build. It is interesting that the dimensions of this hall and those of the first apparent phase at Pen y Bryn are similar.

Figure 83, Cochwillan from the north showing the multiple building phases and inserted fenestration.

Penrhyn Castle

The current Penrhyn castle is primarily a 'Norman style' building built after 1827. This engulfs a more modest structure designed in 1782 by Samuel Wyatt. This smaller building itself was based upon an earlier medieval building which is still partially fossilised within the current pile.

Historically this land was probably held by Goronwy ab Ednyfed (d.1268), a fact ascertained from the name of the area in 1352, Gavael Gron' ap Eden'[*38]. Such a reference only eighty years after the death of the Goronwy would seem to make a relatively secure attribution. However, as at Cochwillan and all the other sites, a reference such as this no more proves that a building was standing here in 1268 than it proves that this was the same house as engulfed by Wyatt in 1782 and that was first mentioned in 1413[*39]. All that we can be certain of is that there was a manor house here in 1782 and there is a likelihood that a habitation had stood in the area since the thirteenth century.

The medieval remains within Penrhyn castle consist of the basement of a rectangular wing that was once attached to a hall as is shown in the picture of 1782. The internal dimensions of this basement are eighteen feet north to south by 25 feet east to west. Other basements are probably buried under the rest of the structure, although only excavation could prove this. The walls are built of a similar rubble to some of the buildings at Rhosyr and the early work at Pen y Bryn east range, although this can add nothing conclusive to the dating of any structure. The barrel vaulted roof looks like it may be an addition of later date to the end walls. This vaulting has been compared with that found in the basement of the chapel at Beaumaris castle[*40]. This has been used to confirm the dating of Penrhyn as fourteenth century, however there is no evidence to say if one copied the other, let alone which was built first.

The west wall of the basement at Penrhyn has a thickening which contains a curving stair to the upper floor where it converts into a standard vice with a single blocked light to the west. This light is still extant on the picture of 1782. The entire structure has been dated as 'fourteenth century' on the strength of the fenestration as depicted in 1782 (Fig.84). This shows that the hall was lit by two windows with quatrefoil tracery to the west. These certainly have a fourteenth century look and have been equated to similar ones at Caernarfon castle. However there are also two trefoil windows which could be of similar date, or older or even younger as styles could always be retrospective. Windows and doors of course were the things most often replaced in buildings so such evidence is only of worth as the widest of guides due to the taste and pocket of those who commissioned them or their reuse. I well remember my old home which had a lovely Georgian window set in a twentieth century wall, while the original wall contained a modern 1970's iron window in its place. We must expect

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[*38] *Registrum vulgariter nuncupatum, 'The Record of Caernarvon'*, ed. Ellis, H. [London, 1838] 12-3.
[*39] UCNW, Bangor, Penrhyn, MS.1599.
[*40] *RCAHMW, Caernarvonshire Inventory*, 123-6. It is also similar to the vaulting found under the hall at Llawhaden castle in Pembrokeshire.

such changes in buildings occupied for hundred of years and therefore we should not be too dogmatic in our pronouncements on uncertain and debatable stylistic ‘evidence’.

It should finally be noted that the two quatrefoil windows are set in an aisle of the hall and that this also contains a pointed partially blocked doorway of apparently thirteenth to fourteenth century date, similar to the one leading from the stairs into the wing basement below, as well as a ‘thirteenth century’ trefoil window and a rectangular opening which could in style date back to the eleventh century. It should therefore be noted that it is quite likely that this aisle wall is more modern than the hall wall behind it, though of course they may have been contemporaneous. In short, at Penrhyn we have the remains of a rectangular wing basement and a stair turret of post 1100 and pre 1400 date. The solidity of the remains are in marked contrast to the ‘foundations’ uncovered in Aber castle bailey.

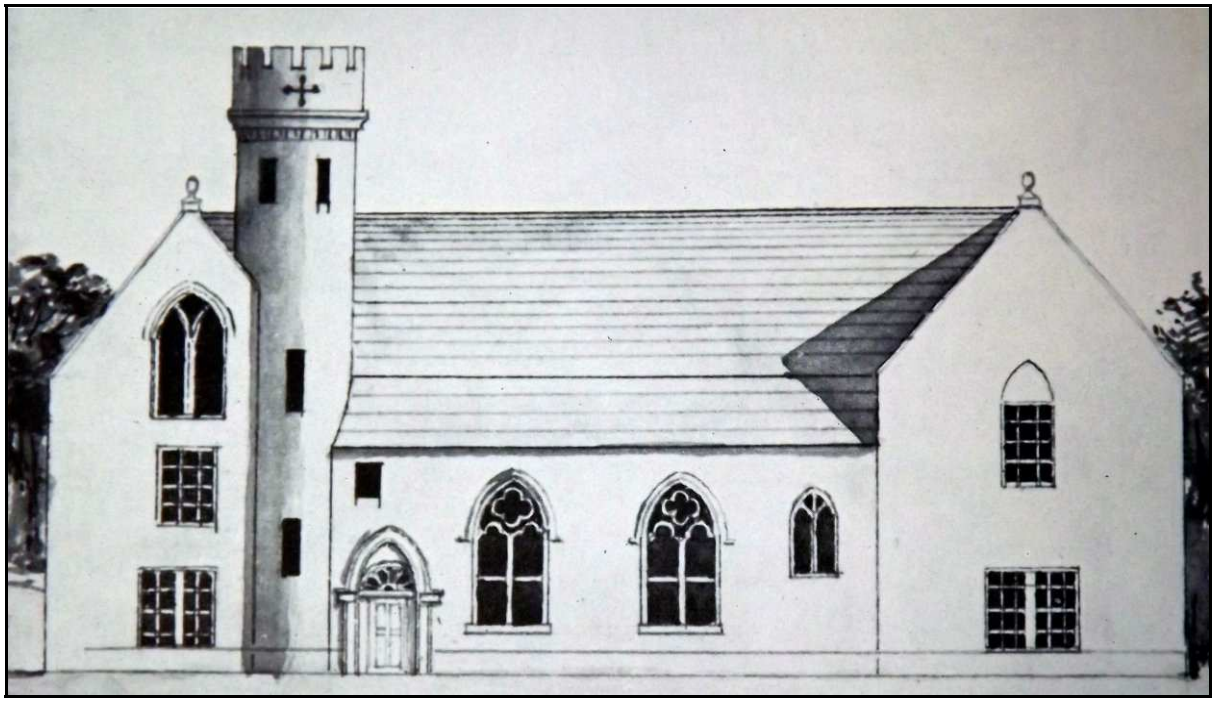

Figure 84, Penrhyn castle about 1782 from a sketch possibly by Moses Griffiths. Notice the distinct mix of styles of fenestration.

Gwydir Castle

The Gwyns of Gwydir have a long and distinguished ancestry judging from their unprovable bardic trees. They settled in the region of Gwydir about 1500 with Maredudd ab Ieuan (d.1524) and his son John Wynne (d.aft 1560) often being accredited with the building of the first Gwydir castle, although Sir John Wynn (d.1627) is quite clear in his history of his family that the first house had been built by his great grandfather, Maredudd ab Ieuan[*41]. The additions to the first 'tower block' of the early sixteenth century are not particularly relevant to the study of Pen y Bryn and in any case all the structures here have been much rebuilt after some devastating fires.

The early block is of four storeys and has an added northern stair turret and southern porch (Fig.85). This block has been much altered and rebuilt, but the eastern ground floor light in the south wall may be original (Fig.86). Certainly it once contained an iron grill for protection of the inhabitants from intruders. The south door may also be original. Certainly the construction of the building corners with quoins appears somewhat reminiscent of the rebuilt east end of the east range (E) at Pen y Bryn (Fig.32) although the masonry in general at Gwydir is far superior and better laid.

Taken together there is little in this structure that can be compared to Pen y Bryn. Considering that Gwydir predates the Thomas' acquisition of Aber by some fifty years and probably the building of the structures is about the same distance apart - Gwydir finished by 1524 and Aber by 1586 this is quite extraordinary.

There was a second house built by the Gwyn family and called Upper Gwydir. This was commenced in 1604 according to the inscription over the door, and again it bares little resemblance to Pen y Bryn although it is much more like Coed Helen as will be described below.

[*41] *History of the Gwydir Family by Sir John Wynn* [Ruthin, 1827], viii.

Figure 85, The early sixteenth century block at Gwydir from the north. Notice the ‘mid sixteenth century’ stair turret in the foreground which bares comparison to the porch (P) as it appeared in the Colt Hoare picture (Fig.22).

Figure 86, Gwydir from the south. The ‘early’ window is to the bottom right.

Coed Helen

Coed Helen is thought to be an early seventeenth century house judging from the tablet inscribed 1606 ‘W T & G’ set in the eastern gable (Fig.87). This undoubtedly stands for William Thomas (1572-1634) and Gaynor Griffiths (bef.1585-1634+). William was the son of the William Thomas who died at Zutphen in 1586. Coed Helen was largely remodelled in the nineteenth century and again much altered in the mid twentieth century.

It has been described as being made up of three parallel three storey gabled blocks. These were aligned north-east to south-west and were joined by short wings. This made a shape somewhat resembling a mirrored E-shaped plan. The OS map of 1888 appears to show lesser service wings on the southern side. There were walled gardens to the north-east of the house and a drive or lane wound round the small hill to the east to Caernarfon and the ferry[*42]. However it appears more to me as if the original house consisted of two parallel gables as seen in the photograph (Fig.88)

This was quite obviously a house of some pretensions and its building in 1606 no doubt announced the arrival of the Thomas family as one of great distinction. It therefore suggests that Pen y Bryn became of much less interest to the family after 1606 when their new house of Coed Helen would be much nearer the centre of power in Caernarfon, it being much bigger and much more comfortable for a family of growing pretensions.

Figure 87, The tablet on the southern wall of Coed Helen.

[*42] *RCAHMW Caernarvonshire Inventory* [1960] II, 158, No. 1124.

Figure 88, Coed Helen from the south showing the twin gabled blocks of the probably original build. The ground floor is currently buried under the patio in the foreground on this front.

William Thomas' Caernarfon Town House of 1652

With the royalist defeat in the Civil Wars of the 1640's the Thomas family were very hard hit, leaving William Thomas (bef.1601-54) virtually bankrupted. As a result of having his estates sequestrated and the protracted negotiations that followed, he seems to have built himself, or refurbished, a town house in Caernarfon in 1652. The tablet commemorating this building is to be seen above 2 Church Street (Fig.89). The building that this is set in also has another tablet set in it with the monogram RN (Richard Nanney?) and the date 1808.

The house, of which No. 2 Church Street is a part, is currently reckoned to be a late Georgian town house built of coursed and squared stone (Fig.90). It is three storeys high and has in places been heavily damaged by fire in the 1990's which has yet to be repaired. As the house is stone built it could truly be nineteenth century if the fenestration is to be believed. However the fact that twin tablets are attached to the building of such widely different dates should allow for a great deal of caution here. Certainly the entire building as it stands now how much more in common with Coed Helen than either do with Pen y Bryn. If the tablets built into both structures are to be believed 2 Church Street and Coed Helen might well have been built by father (d.1634) and son (d.1654).

Despite these comments the plaques here and at Coed Helen strongly suggest that no rebuilding was going on at Pen y Bryn between 1606 when the main Thomas family seat moved from there to Coed Helen and 1660 when the restoration of the monarchy brought some relief to the Thomas family. However Charles II was notoriously mean to his father's and even his own supporters and the Thomas family never really recovered from the financial damage of the 1640's. By 1666 the family would seem to have been back at Aber where Richard Thomas, the son and heir of William (d.1654) died.

Figure 89, The tablet set in the wall on 2 Church Street, Caernarfon, the home of William Thomas until his death in 1652.

Figure 90, 2 Church Street, Caernarfon, boarded up to the left, is merely a part of the much bigger house. The tablet is just visible above the doorway.

Penhyddgan, Nefyn

Penhyddgan (SH.302386) is a two storey house reckoned to date from the early 1600's. It consists of two storeys without a basement and has a boldly projecting stair turret cum porch which is rather reminiscent of the layout at Pen y Bryn as has already been mentioned in the chapter on the Porch above. Like the repaired east range (E) of Pen y Bryn the walls consist of roughly coursed boulders with large quoins squared at the angles (Fig.61). If the comparison between the two sites is correct it is possible that the rebuilding of the east end of the east range (E) and Penhddgan were built roughly contemporaneously. Judging from the fact that Pen y Bryn was apparently habitable in 1585, both might date to the period between 1550 and 1585.

Pen y Bryn, Edern

At Pen y Bryn (SH.278396), under two miles away, is a second house that has a remarkable similarity to its namesake at Aber. The Edern house is much smaller than its Aber counterpart, being only 25 feet long externally (Fig.91). That apart the style is very much like the main house (H) at Aber. Indeed, the 1624 dating of the roof timbers at Aber could well suggest that the late seventeenth century date attached to the Edern house many years ago is over fifty years too late. The tablet of 1790 set above the door at this Pen y Bryn is interesting and again suggests that this relates to a rebuilding, rather than the building itself.

Before all of the details related above are summed up it will be necessary to take a brief look at some of the more bizarre stories recently attached to the buildings at Pen y Bryn.

Figure 91, Pen y Bryn, Edern.

Windmills, Dovecots and Watchtowers

A theory repeatedly seen in print and on the internet is that the tower at Pen y Bryn was a windmill. This is bizarre in the extreme. Windmills are generally built where there is no access to water power. The water mill at Aber is well attested. The really bizarre thing is that the tower at Pen y Bryn is physically so unlike a windmill as to make one wonder why it has been proposed as one in the first place? Windmills by their very nature taper to take the stresses placed upon them. Pen y Bryn is a vertical tower. To sum up, windmills are only considered in areas where conditions are not favourable to water mills, ie. where the local watercourse would not have been sufficient to gain the correct head or volume of water. Further a windmill terraced into a hill like the tall, slender, vertical-sided, three storey tower at Pen y Bryn are both unknown and impractical. As a final point a tower utilised as a windmill is both unknown and impractical as it would be unable to stand the forces exerted by the blades on the horizontal blade shaft. In short, why this idea was put forward and why it has not been quickly dispelled is a mystery[*43].

Then we come to the idea that a forty feet high tower (T) was initially a sixteenth century dovecot. It is not really necessary to go through all the surviving dovecots in North Wales to suppress this idea, a glance at those surviving at Penmon across the water and that built as the pigeon house in 1597 at Gwydir should quickly do that.

Before finally leaving this peculiar subject it is worth mentioning Foel Fawr windmill. This has walls five feet thick at the base, which thin as they reach towards first floor level. The current remains show two entrances, one raised to the east and one at ground level to the south. The first floor is marked by an offset and a much thinner wall. Quite clearly there were no further levels to this tower which would appear to have been a late medieval windmill. As has happened with so many other towers of varying dimensions up and down the North Welsh coast this has been, like the tower (T) at Pen y Bryn, described as a 'watchtower' being built about 1600. These 'watchtowers' which stretch all along the Llyn coast have been dismissed, almost certainly correctly, as windmills, by Gerallt Nash, the senior curator at St Fagans who has studied this subject for the past thirty years[*44]. Beyond this it should also be noted that no one has ever come up with a sensible and realistic purpose for all these watchtowers which no one thought fit to record when they were alleged to have been built and used. It is perhaps worth leaving the last word on this subject to the laconic Hyde Hall who as long ago as 1810 noted about Foel Fawr, 'with the general supply of water in this part of the country, it is not so much surprising that a mill of this sort should be permitted to go to ruin, or that one should ever have been built'.

[*43] A good series of photographs of Welsh windmills can be seen at http://www.geograph.org.uk/article/Windmills/21. A glance at this instantly dispells any idea that Pen y Bryn was an aberrant windmill.

[*44] Nash, G.D., 'The windmills of Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire', *Melin* XXII [2006], 3-25; 'The Windmills of Pembrokeshire', *Melin* II [1986]: 32. Correspondence between Mr Nash and Mr Kimberley concerning windmills in Gwynedd.

The Repairs to the Palace of Aber, 1303-6

Much has been made of the repairs carried out at Aber for Prince Edward of Wales at the beginning of his principate. Considering the cherry picking made of this document it is therefore well worth while printing a translation of the document in full. This is made from a poor copy of PRO E.101/685/30 supplied by the then record office many years ago and compared with the translation done by 'J.H.H.' in 1958 with a few corrections made by me. Quite obviously this document and the host of similar ones identified in the history at the beginning of this report need to be examined and translated by an expert.

PRO E.101/685/30

An account of the executors of Sir William Sutton, late justiciar of North Wales, of moneys received and spent on the works of the manor of the lord prince at Aber, viz:

They respond for £30 received from the commonalty of the commotes of Arllechwedd Uchaf (*Archlawat Ughaf*) and Arllechwedd. Isaf for repairs of the hall/palace/royal court (*aula*) and chamber (*camera*) of the lord prince at Aber by the hands of the said William Sutton. Total £30

In preparing the garden (*grena*), hall/palace (*aula*) and chamber (*camera*) there by piece work eight shillings.

To masons supplying carriage of stone, setters, porters, and in carriage of sand by piece work by William Kirkby and Ithell of Bangor, masons, in 1303 (the third year of Prince Edward), £17 9s 3d. Total £17 17s 3d.

Also in 137½ (quarters?) of lime made at Wig (*Wikes*) next to Aber by Thomas Wykes, £2 6s 8d. ... And in carriage of the said lime from the kiln to Aber by piece work 6s 8d. Total £2 13s 4d.

Also in iron and steel bought for the smith of the same (?works) for mending the masons' tools and for the bars of stone windows, ? chisels, nails, hooks and hinges for the doors in gross, 11s 9d. Total 11s 9d.

Also in purveying and cutting timber in the wood for chests for the solar and garderobe and boards bought for doors by piece work 16s. And for carriage of the same from the wood to Aber by piece work 10s. Total £1 6s. Total of the expenses above £22 8s 4d.

Further expenses laid out on the works of the palace/hall and chamber of the lord prince at Aber in 1306 (the sixth year of Prince Edward), by the hands of Richard Hokenhall, namely:

In carriage of four boatloads of stone from the sea to Aber by piece work, at (several?) times four shillings. And for hiring two carts with two horses and two boys/grooms for carrying stones of freestone, lime and sand, for 57 working days 28s 6d. That is each taking 3d per day. Also for hiring a cart with a horse and boy for the same for thirteen days 3s 3d, taking per day as before. Total 35s 9d.

Also to William Kirkeby for breaking freestone at Porthaythe at times seven shillings. And to several men working on breaking stone in the mountains at times and in carriage 2s 5d, namely to W. Kyrk(eby), Thomas Wyk and Madog ap Wynath. Also to one boy who carried iron to the smith at times, 3d. Total 9s 9d.
Also to Thomas Wyk for 3,840 gallons (sixty quarters) of lime bought from him at (various?) times, 15s 1d.
Also for hiring the boat of Iorwerth ab Einion for carrying timber from Llanrwst (*Thlanrost*) to Aber by water on two occasions 14s. Total 14s.
Also for four lamps bought from W. Kirkby 6d. Total 6d.
Delivered to Richard Bedford mason for a task (contract) let to him by Sir W. Sutton £1 16s.
Also to William Kyrkeby setter for the same £1 2s 4d. Also to Richard Hokenhall carpenter for the same £1 6s 8d. Total £4 5s 1d.
Also for scaffolds and poles 8d. Total 8d. Total expenses this year £8 0s 10d.
Sum of total expenses and issues above £30 9s 2d.

The first thing to be noted is that there are two distinct work phases in this document, 1303 and 1306. The second is the immense scale of the work undertaken. In 1303 137½ quarters (8,800 gallons) of lime were used at the site for a cost of £2 6s 8d. This agrees with the costing of the 1306 supply of lime when 3,840 gallons (sixty quarters) of lime were brought for the works at 15s 1d. As sand was acquired on both occasions, this was almost certainly to go with the lime to make up mortar. As the usual mix for medieval mortar was three parts sand to one part lime we can quickly ascertain that 12,640 gallons of lime and 37,920 gallons of sand were used to make mortar. Combined this would have been 50,560 gallons plus whatever amount of water was added to make the mixture pliable for insertion into the spaces between the stones in the walls. Some of the lime may also have been used for limewashing the buildings or rendering them. In short it is rapidly apparent that the sheer scale of lime used at the building site at Aber was for a large structure or series of structures.

We can further see that large quantities of stone was broken in the quarries above Aber and that further stone was imported by boat. It is plainly visible that no stone in the castle bailey site is either imported or broken stone. All that remains here are the water rounded boulders taken, it would appear, primarily from the river. Indeed I believe it is fair to say that the quantities of working materials referred to in the above document could not apply to the Aber castle bailey site, even if a hall, chamber, solar and garderobe could be fitted into the site. This of course is also ignoring other buildings found at llysoedd like the fenced manor house, court, chapel, the steward's or raglot's hall, porter's gatehouse, garderobe, stable and granary to name just the obvious. There is also no trace of a regular enclosure around the site in Aber castle bailey which we could expect to be walled in a similar manner to Rhosyr. It is also questionable whether scaffolding would have been needed to repair such a low building as the structures in the bailey of the castle against something like the tower (T) at Pen y Bryn.

In short this document goes a long way towards indicating the site of the Aber llys of Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in the same manner that Tithe Map studies show that Garth Celyn lay on the promontory on which Pen y Bryn now occupies the head. Interestingly the entire parish of Aber could still be referred to as Aber Garthgelyn as late as 1725[*45].

Proposals for Further Study of the Llys site at Aber

First and foremost all the original documentary evidence for the site as found after this brief survey and supplied in the table at the start of this report should be examined, transcribed and translated for public consumption. Secondly minor scientific investigations could be undertaken at strategic points to ascertain what exactly is occupying the site identified as Garth Celyn underneath the current house of Pen y Bryn and in the immediate environs. Thirdly minor scientific investigations could take place around the bailey of Aber castle to ascertain the line of the defences and their scale and whether they have weathered away or been deliberately obliterated. A full scale excavation on the motte top could expose the masonry structure leading to a better understanding of the development of the castle. If this is a castle of Robert Rhuddlan which was destroyed in 1094 and then left abandoned, this is a very early tower keep, even if it was 'investigated' in the late eighteenth century. Aber keep could then be compared with the stonework exposed at Dinas Emrys and still visible at Dolwyddelan I. A series of further minor excavations at Dolbenmaen, Dolwyddelan I, Pentre Isaf and Prysor would then show dividends on the scale and style of Norman occupation of Gwynedd in the years between 1070 and 1094. There are many other scenarios that might apply to the motte tops at any one of these castle sites and it would prove fortuitous to ascertain what was happening at these fortresses after the Norman arrival in Wales and the Marches.

[*45] *Conway Parish Register in the Rural Deanery of Arllechwedd, Diocese of Bangor, Caernarvonshire, 1541 to 1793* [London, 1900], 201.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the judicial evaluation of the original evidence readily available and examined in this report shows that the balance of evidence lies firmly with the Pen y Bryn site being the 'palace' of Prince Llywelyn seen by Leland in the sixteenth century. Cursory examination of early evidence shows that there could have been some form of Roman presence at Aber (not discussed in this paper) and there is a strong possibility of occupation at or near Aber from this date onwards. The current remains within and under the house now called Pen y Bryn suggest a stone phase beginning in the early twelfth century with numerous additions continuing until perhaps the late thirteenth century. Numerous repairs followed and documentary evidence suggests that the buildings were kept in some form of repair right up to the reign of Henry VI (1422-71). By 1530 it was in ruins, but was repaired and rebuilt by the Thomas family between 1553 and 1586. This conclusion is bolstered by the work of the North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in February 2010. From the dendrochronological dates they took from the rafters and tiebeams in the main house, which they describe as 'a two storeyed house of Snowdonian type', they found that the conversion of the tower into a plaisance 'is broadly contemporary with the construction of the main house, built not later than 1624'. This conclusion was reached from a sample of ten timbers whose rings spanned the years 1403 to 1585. Interestingly three timbers returned a felling date of 1624 at the latest with five returning felling dates of after 1519. This is exactly what would be expected if the remains at Pen y Bryn were found roofless by the Thomas family after 1553 and altered repeatedly into the mid seventeenth century.

However it must be noted that these dates prove nothing, other than that these timbers formed part of a roof built after 1519 and before 1624. However what it does strongly suggest is that the current roof was in place before 1624 on the probably last building built on the site. As has been described above, this building would seem to be the house (H). This in turn reinforces the implication that the rest of the structure is much older as the structural analysis has put forward.

With all the current interest in llysoedd, now would obviously be a propitious time to see through a series of excavations and a full scale historical research on the home of the last princes of North Wales.

Paul Martin Remfry Ceidio, January 2012

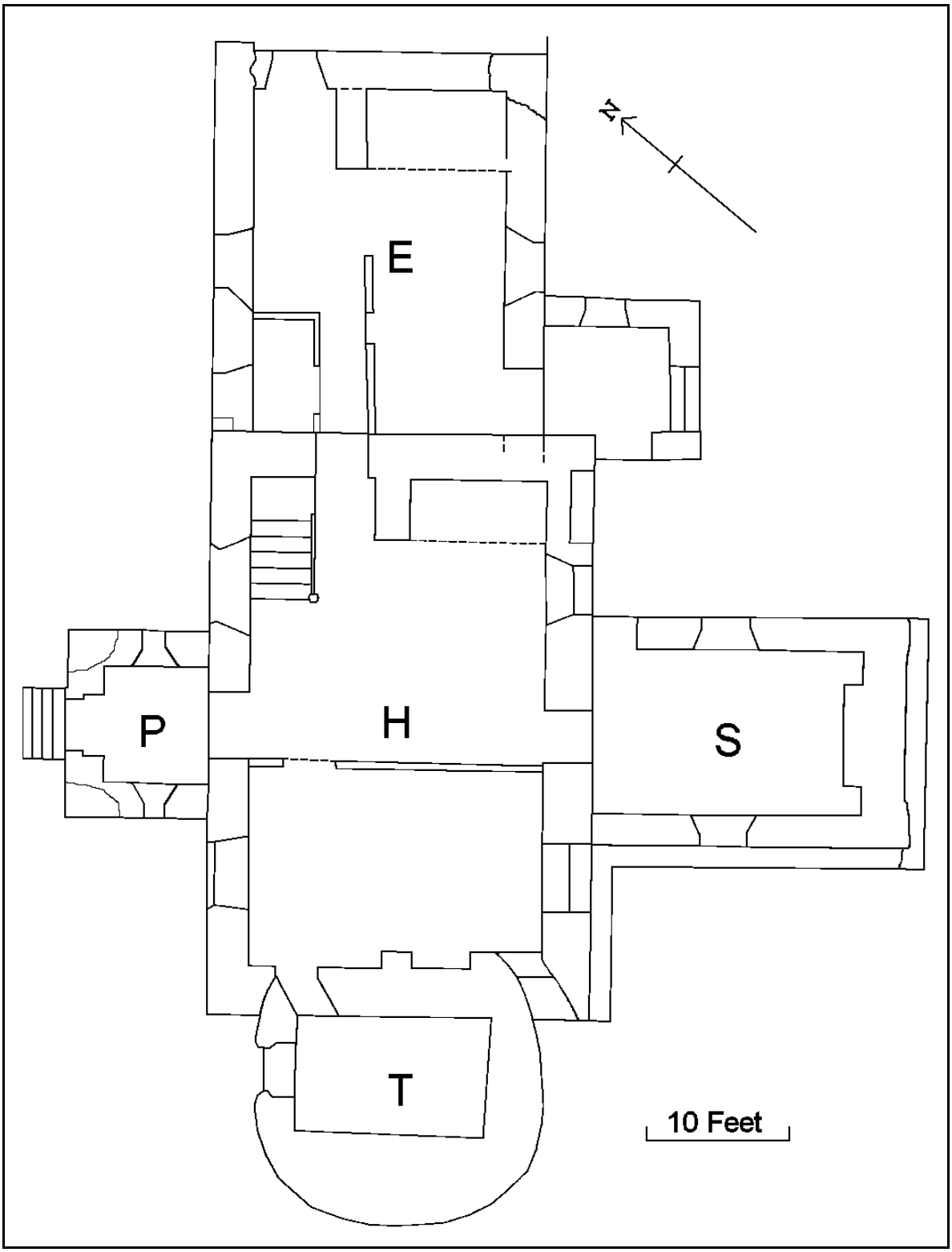

Figure 92, A Ground Floor Plan of Pen y Bryn after RCAHMW, showing the main constituent parts: the Hall (H), East Range (E), Porch (P), South Range (S) and Tower (T). The Basement (B) is under the Hall (H) and Porch (P).