

Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru
Royal Commission
on the
Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales



Old Plas, Llantwit Major

County: Glamorgan

Community: Llantwit Major

NGR: SS 96606 69040

NPRN: 19521

SAM: GM137

Date of Survey: 16th January 2013

Surveyed by: Ross Cook

Report Author: Ross Cook

Illustrations: Ross Cook

© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW 2013

Comments or queries regarding the content of the report should be made to the author:

RCAHMW, Plas Crug, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1NJ

Tel: 01970 621200

World Wide Web: <http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk>



Table of Content

Summary	-	1
Objective	-	2
Acknowledgements	-	2
Methodology	-	2
▪ <i>Measured Survey</i>		
▪ <i>Drawn Record</i>		
▪ <i>Photographic Survey</i>		
▪ <i>Written Record</i>		
Historical Background	-	3
Site Description	-	5
▪ <i>Exterior</i>		
▪ <i>Interior</i>		
Interpretation	-	7
▪ <i>Period I</i>		
▪ <i>Period II</i>		
▪ <i>Period III</i>		
▪ <i>Period IV</i>		
▪ <i>Period V</i>		
▪ <i>Post 1729</i>		
Significance	-	15
Bibliography	-	15

Appendix 1 – Maps

Appendix 2 – Plans, Sections & Elevations



Royal Commission Photograph of Old Plas, Llantwit Major.
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

Old Plas, Llantwit Major, Glamorgan

Summary

Old Plas has a long history in Llantwit Major, with its earliest roots in a 15th century hall house, before becoming a grand E-plan mansion around 1598, eventually becoming unoccupied by the early 18th century. Despite becoming ruinous Old Plas remained a part of local myth in the form of ghost stories and murders. Its position on the edge of town and uphill has meant that it remained a dominant building long after its use subsided.

The Royal Commission have been invited by Anton Jones and Cadw to undertake a survey and analysis of Old Plas amidst a renovation project part funded by Cadw and Pride in Our Heritage. The project aims to consolidate the existing stonework and rebuild fallen stonework to make the building habitable once again.

Objective

The objective of the survey is to produce a digital metric survey to help record the ruinous structure of Old Plas prior to its full restoration by stonemason Anton Jones, so as to produce a plan detailing what is 'original' and what is restored. The current record held by the National Monuments Record for Wales was produced in 1974 when access to the site was impeded by vegetation growth. This new survey is also to provide a new interpretation of the site based on better access and new visual clues that have come to light that may highlight the structures changes.

Methodology

Historic Building Record – This comprised of an interior and exterior examination of Old Plas, with photographic, written and measured records being produced:

Measured Survey - A digital metric survey was undertaken by Ross Cook in January and July 2013 using a Leica TCR407 Power Total Station, TheoLT and AutoCAD. Digital survey data was captured at 1:1 in scale and saved in an AutoCAD DWG format.

Drawn Record - Plan and section were produced from the survey data using AutoCAD 2011, remaining at a scale of 1:1, but with recommended print scales of; Section 1:50 at A4; Plan 1:200 at A4. Both are saved in an AutoCAD DWG and DXF format for archiving, with .pdf being made available for Coflein. Photo interpretations were created using Adobe Illustrator CS3. Interpretation has been completed with support from Richard Suggett.

Photographic Survey – A photographic survey was completed by Iain Wright in December 2012, with further photographic recording on 15th January 2013 by Ross Cook. Equipment comprises of a series of high resolution digital exterior and interior photographs taken using a Canon Eos 450D 12.2MP SLR. Photographs includes both general and detailed. All photographs have been submitted for archived with the RCAHMMW, detailing view, angle and photographer.

Written Record – The written record has been produced to accompany the Drawn Record and Photographic Survey, to interpret the data and provide an understanding of Old Plas through its phases and development.

Historical Background

The ruin of Old Plas stands on the edge of Llantwit Major on a small hillock, giving the house a prominent position overlooking the town. The current house is an extensive reworking of several earlier phases that saw it develop over a one hundred year period from a large, but modest dwelling, into a large house of the lesser gentry. Historically Old Plas has also been known as The Old Place and Llantwit Castle, but for the purpose of this report Old Plas will be used.

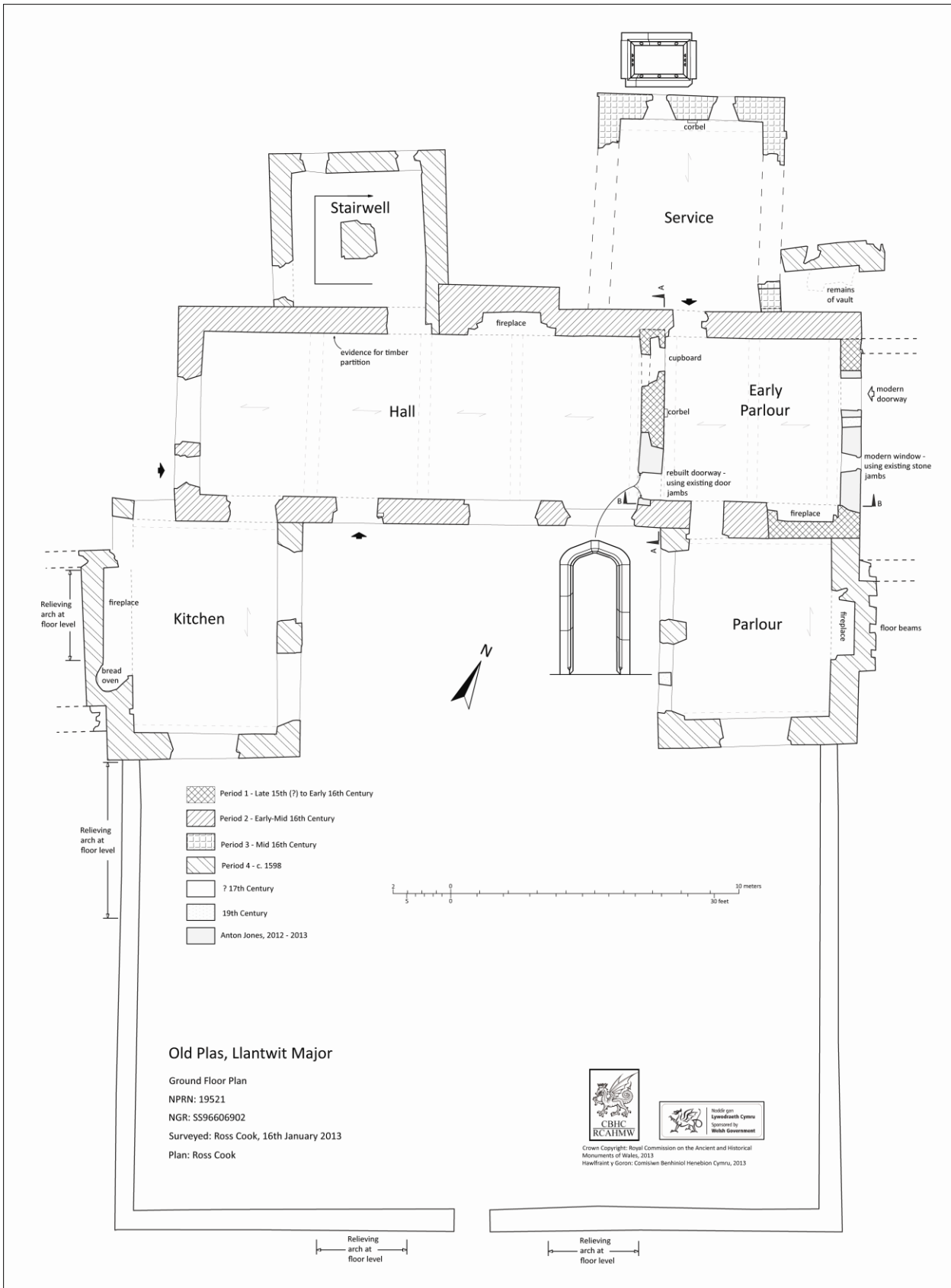
The earliest phase of house is considered to have been in existence by the 1530's when John Leland travelled Wales to produce his itinerary (RCAHMW 1984: 182) for Henry VIII and was possibly a hall house of late 15th to early 16th century in origin. At the time of Leland's Itinerary Edmund Van (Avan) (Smith 1964: v.3) was stated as being in residence within Llantwit and may have been responsible for the early development of Old Plas, possibly enlarging the hall, inserting a first floor above the hall whilst raising the existing floor level of the Solar and adding a service wing to the rear by the mid 16th century. Later in the same century the house is known to have passed to George Van (RCAHMW 1984: 182), grandson of Edmund, but it is not known whether George made any alterations. Upon George Van's move to the family seat at Marcross, Edmund Van, his son, is living at Old Plas and through a marriage dowry from Griffith Williams is known to have greatly altered the house c. 1598 (Stone 1996), which is described as 'a very sumptuous newe house' (Stradling in Rees 1932: 77). However, Stradling also notes the poor build quality and speed of the alterations, which is reflected in the masonry. Edmund's additions include the two large wings, a stairwell and raised wall heights to create a second floor to house a long gallery. The late 16th century reworking not only created a grander house, but also greatly reflects the fashion of the Elizabethan period by creating an e-plan house that incorporates a long gallery.

Spencer in her work *Annals of South Glamorgan* (1913) writes on Boverton Place, noting the 'solid oak treads of the beautiful old central staircase, resembling very much that of the Old Plas, Llantwit...', though it is not clear from where this information has been drawn.

Both wings include large chimney stacks, whilst the lateral stack to the rear of the hall was raised, a sign of status, which is reflected in Hearth Tax records of 1670 where John Avan, in residence by 1645, was taxed for seven hearths (Stone 1996). It may have been John who added ancillary buildings to both wings and the courtyard walls, but no records survive to substantiate this. Records of the house are vague from this point and it is only known that Dorothy Avan is resident after 1670 (Stone 1970) and by 1729, when Emanuel Bowen produced a map of 'Gentlemen's Seats' and 'Houses of Less Note and Farm Houses', Old Plas is not shown, suggesting that the house is unoccupied by this time.

It has been suggested, through the study of old estate maps that William Vann sold Old Plas to the Nicholl family of The Ham (Stone 1996), where it is believed the ornamental stone window and door jambs were taken. After its abandonment Old Plas became known as Llantwit Castle (Appendix 2-3), with a number of ghost stories attached and for almost three hundred years the house remained ruinous.

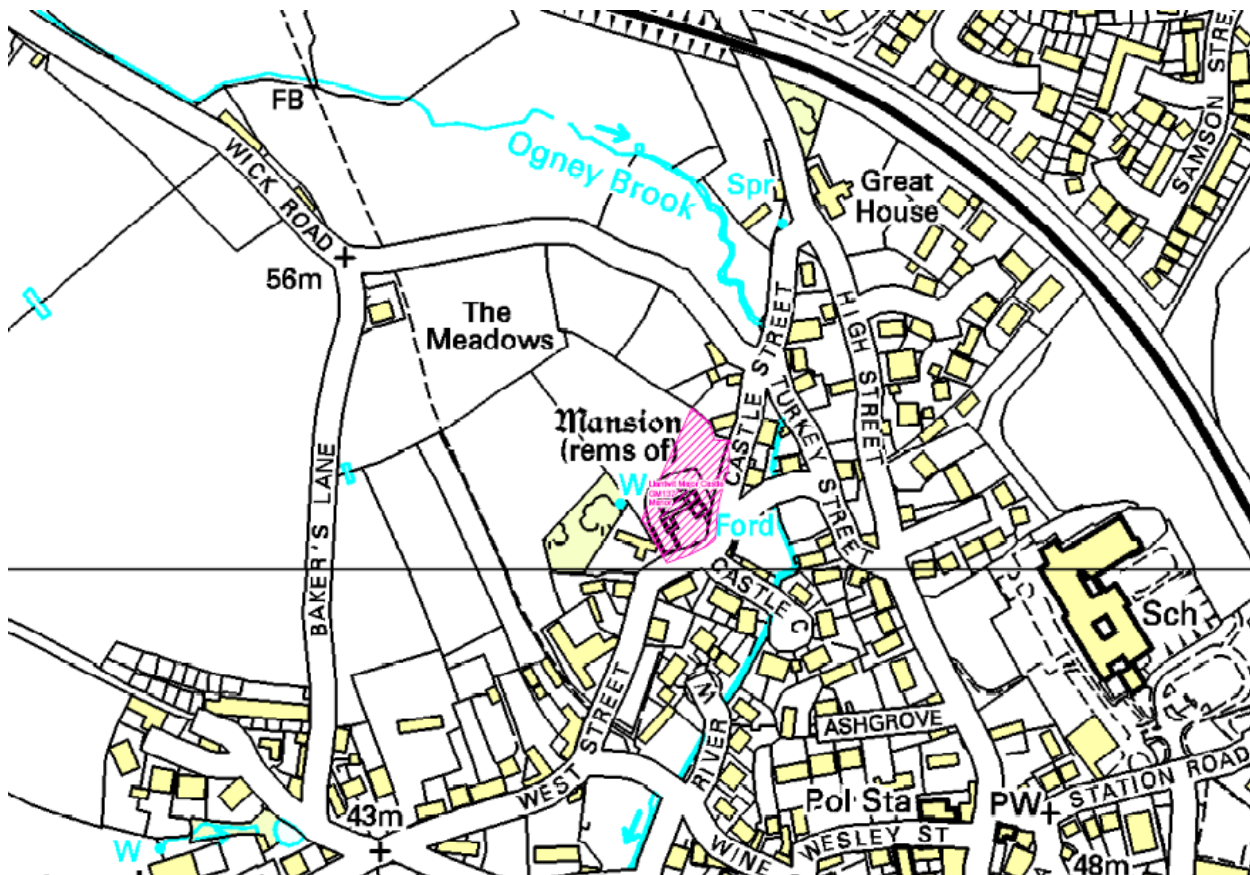
In 2011 Anton Jones, a local stonemason, bought Old Plas from the council and by 2012 a restoration project had started with funding from Cadw and Pride in Our Heritage. The restoration project aims to make the oldest part of the house habitable and consolidate the remaining stonework.



Royal Commission digital metric survey of Old Plas, Llantwit Major.
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

Site Description

Old Plas, of Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan (see Appendix 1), fronts onto Castle Street and lies near Ogney Brook, a tributary of the Afon Col-huw. The site measures approximately 49m x 40.5m and comprises a three storey Elizabethan e-plan house with courtyard and small walled garden/enclosure, with the house occupying a footprint of some 385.9 square meters. Ty Mawr, another house with origins possibly in the 14/15th century, lays just 200 meters north-east, and in the 1950s it was renovated from a roofless shell. Until 2012 the house had been a shell, overgrown with ivy and slowly deteriorating, a condition that it had been in for c. 300 years. The walls are constructed of uncoarsed limestone, which have been finished with lime plaster internally and coarse stucco for the external render, with smooth stucco quoins. The mortar varies with the earliest phase being of a brown clay-sand type, whilst the later periods are of a chalky or lime mortar.



Royal Commission GIS Map, Old Plas, Llantwit Major.
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

Exterior

From the main block of the building, that runs west to east, two large wings, a Kitchen and Parlour, project from the south facade at right angles to create an e-plan footprint. From the north elevation a stairwell and service wing project. The main (south) facade of the main block has two windows and a door at ground floor level, three windows at first floor, three small windows at second floor, with the eaves being supported by corbels, of which a number remain. The southern elevations for both the Kitchen and Parlour wings have a single window at each of the ground, first and second floor levels, with the third floor window being smaller than the lower floors. Looking across the front of

the main block the Kitchens east and Parlours west elevations each have two windows at ground and first floor level, but no wall remains of the third floor so the number of windows cannot be determined. The west elevation, which is made up of both the Kitchen wing and main block, has a larch chimneystack on the kitchen elevation with a small, later door to its north, and the main block has a single window at each floor level, whilst the ground floor also has a doorway to the south of the window. The north elevation, whilst windowless, has a large lateral chimney and two corbelled chimneys, one at first and second floor levels, the lower of which has been cut by the later Stairwell. A doorway towards the eastern end provides access between the service and early parlour. The north elevation of the stairwell has four windows, staggered in height to remain in line with the stair; the west has a single doorway at ground floor and a large window at first floor level, whilst the east elevation is without any feature. The north elevation of the service wing has two small windows at the ground floor level and a single at first floor, the east elevation is largely collapsed, but shows evidence of a first floor window. At the eastern end of the rear elevation a small vaulted structure remains, but the function of this is unclear. The east elevation, comprising of the Parlour wing and main block, has three windows, one to each floor level of the main block and a doorway to the north of the ground floor window; the parlour elevation is comprised of a large chimneystack.

Interior

The interior of the building is separated into six different units as a result of the different periods and alterations.

Main Block - split into two units at the ground and first floor levels between the Hall and Early Parlour, and the Great Chamber and Solar. The Hall has three windows (1 W, 2 S), three interior doorways to the Kitchen, Early Parlour and Stairwell, and three exterior doorways (1 W, 1 S) and a large fireplace in the hall. The Early Parlour has one window (E), three internal doorways to the Hall, Parlour and Service, a single external doorway (E) and a fireplace, which is awkwardly placed into a corner; this may suggest a different early plan, for which no evidence remains. . The first floor Great Chamber has four windows (1 W, 3 S), three doorways to the Solar, a Chamber and Stairwell and two fireplaces. The Solar has one window (E) and two doorways, to the Great Chamber and another Chamber. The second floor has four windows (1 W, 3 S, 1 E), three doors to two Attics and the Stairwell, and a fireplace.

Kitchen Wing – this has a bread oven and large fireplace, three windows and three doors at ground level; one into the Hall and two externally; three windows (1 S, 2 E), a door into the Great Chamber and a fireplace at the first floor, and at the second floor a window and door into the Long Gallery.

Parlour Wing - has three windows (1 S, 2 W), a door into the Early Parlour and a fireplace at ground floor level, three windows (1 S, 2 W), a door into the Solar and a fireplace at first floor level, and the second floor has one window and a doorway into the Long Gallery, with the west elevation completely collapsed.

Stairwell – internally the pillar of the stairs remains and has doors that provide access to each of the floors. Although no treads remain these were large deep treads, probably of oak.

Service – at ground floor level a doorway enters the wing from the Early Parlour and has 2 windows (N) at this level. The first floor level has two windows (1 N, 1 E) and a fireplace.

Vaulted Structure – a low vaulted structure that appears to have once been accessed from the service wing.

Interpretation

* This house has undergone a number of smaller alterations and changes through its history; the phasing given is to provide an understanding of its development. As a result of the many features and alteration it is a most difficult house to interpret.

Period I - The Early Parlour (7.69 x 6.1m) and the Solar above represent the earliest phase of construction, possibly dating from either the late 15th or early 16th century. This initial phase is likely to have had an open or floored hall extending from its western elevation in a similar position to the Hall that occupies the site today. The first floor level of this early period is c. 1m lower than the later alterations and are represented by two remaining corbels, a blocked fireplace and a blocked door, the latter two cut the later first floor level, see Fig. 1 & Fig. 2. The Section in Fig. 2, demonstrates the nature of the alterations that took place to raise the floor and roof level. A lateral chimney on the southern elevation of this first phase once served a ground floor fireplace only, whilst a chimney in the west elevation, which rises through the gable, served a single first floor fireplace in the Solar. The west elevation, which faces into the hall, appear to have a crow stepped gable to its north edge, with clear stepped lines in the stonework; however, this is not reflected on the south side of the gable and could be coincidental. Internally the angle of the pitch can be seen clearly. From the external side of east elevation, a small area of wall remains to show a building may have once extended from here as evidence shows a cut wall and a clear infill. Although no original door or window jambs have been found in situ, several have been recovered from the collapsed wall rubble between the Early Parlour and the Hall, and from the exterior east wall, which show the jambs were of local limestone. The doorways are four-centred and flattened 'Tudor' form and remain difficult to date precisely. In this internal wall evidence remains for two doors, which represent the dais end of the hall. In this early period no evidence for a stair remains, either internally or externally; it is plausible that a mural staircase projected beside the lateral chimney that serves the parlour, such as that at Flemingstone Court (RCAHMMW 1984: 139), which enclosed a newel or Winder staircase, but this remains speculative as no physical evidence remains.

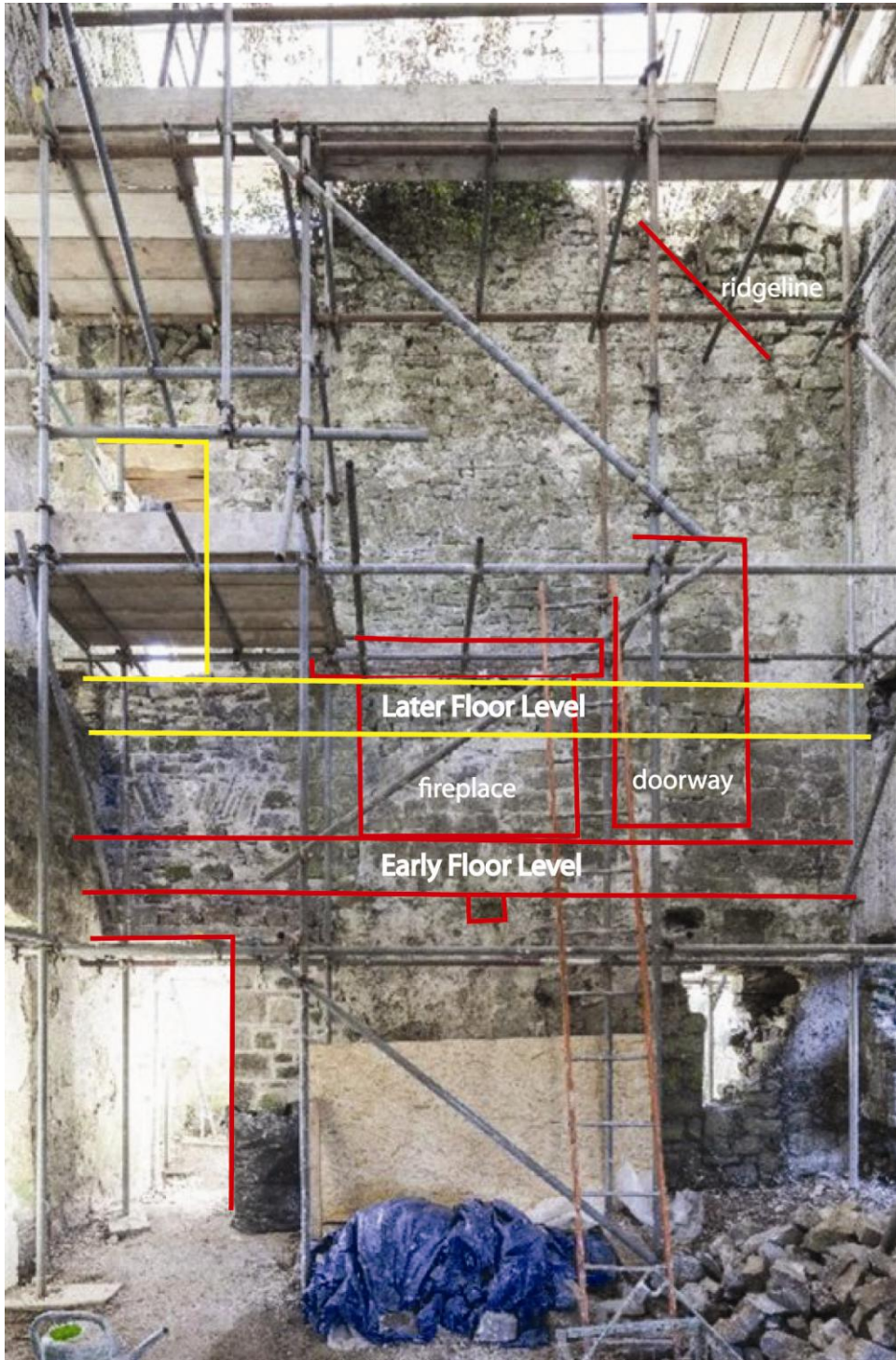
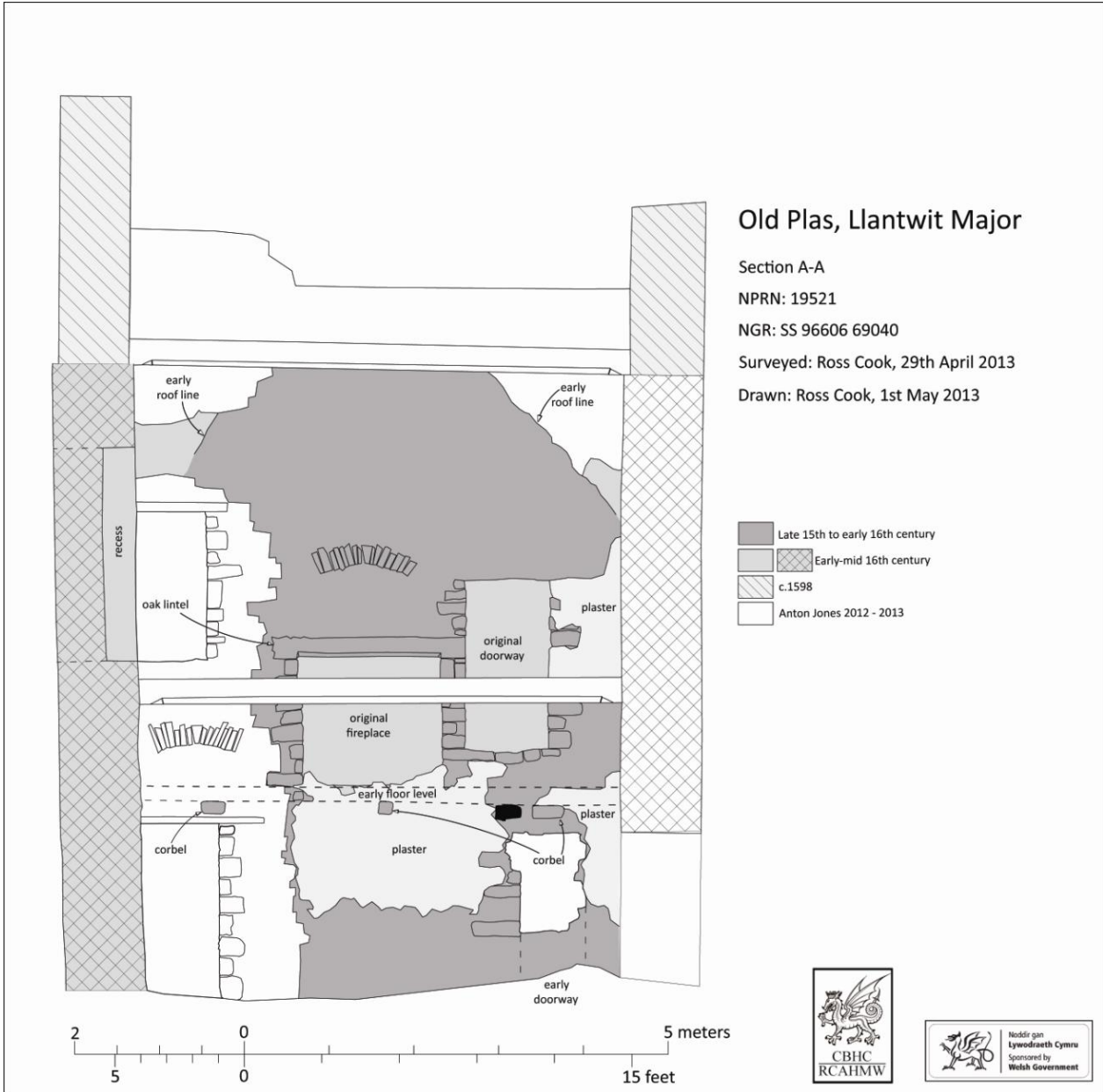


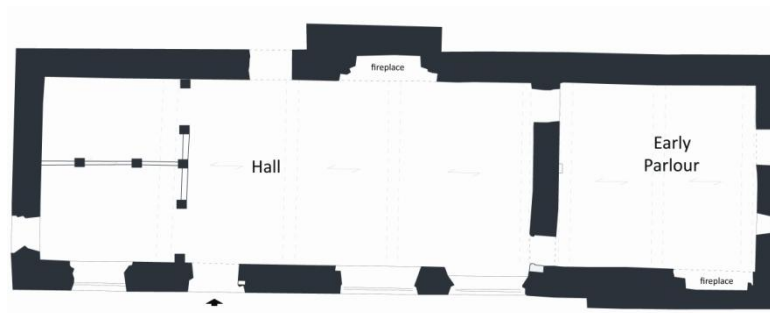
Fig. 2 – Parlour interior elevation towards Hall
Royal Commission Photograph Old Plas, Llantwit Major.
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)



Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2013
 Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Benhinol Henebion Cymru,



Period II

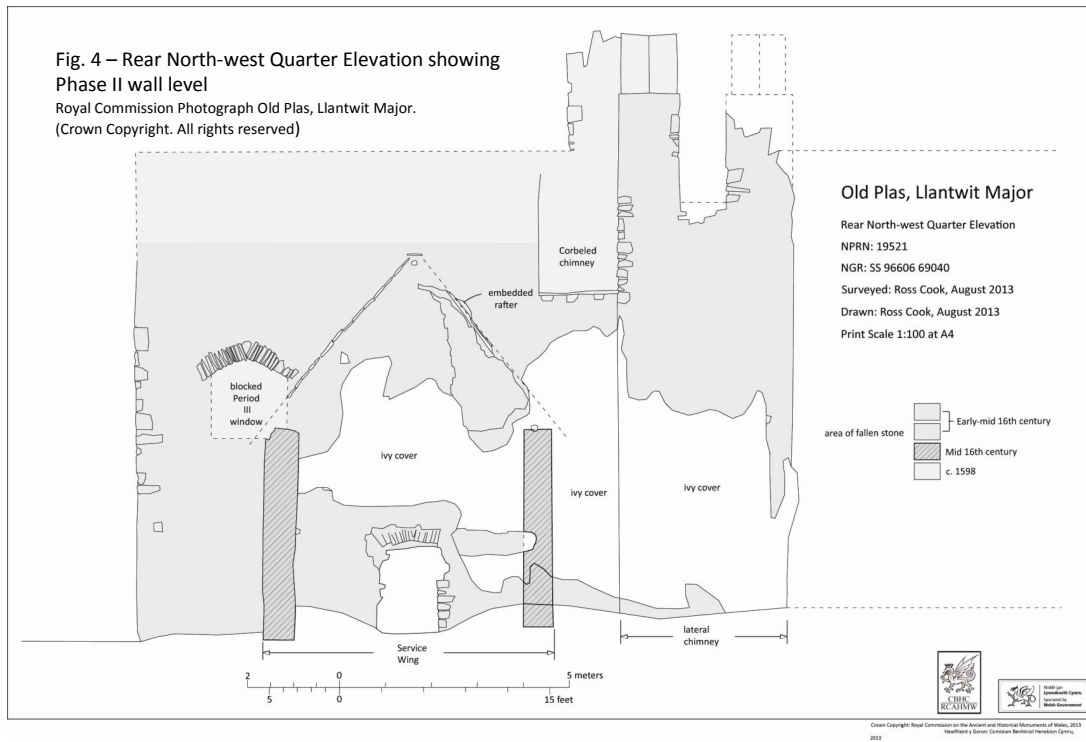


The second period of the early-mid 16th century saw the rebuilding of part or all of the rear lateral wall and most of the front lateral wall (23.66 x 6.64m); it was at this point that the Hall was expanded to the extents remaining today; with the height of the building being raised to the top of the first floor level (see fig. 4 below) enabling a floor to be inserted or raised over the hall to create a Great Chamber above. At this time the floor level of the Solar was altered to fit in with this redesign and a lateral chimney was erected to the rear of the building to provide fireplaces to the Hall and

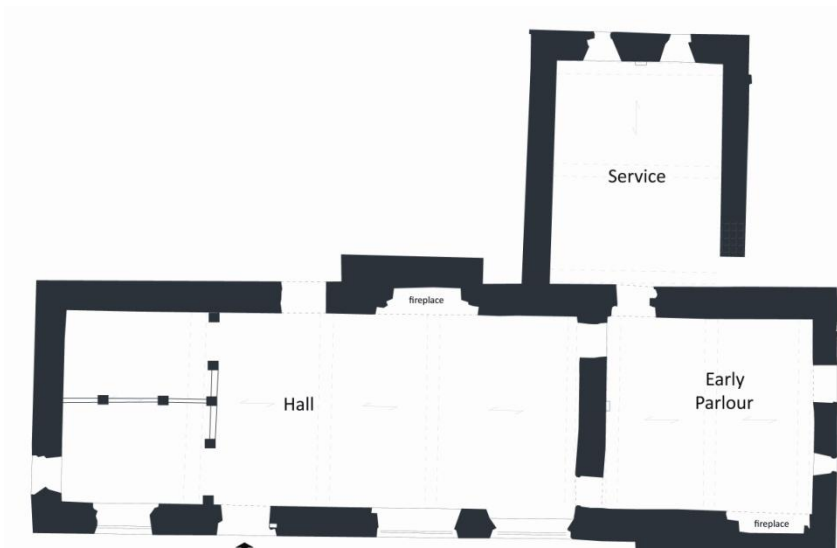
first floor, with a corbelled fireplace also being constructed towards the west end of the north elevation. It is probable that it was at this point the wall next to the lateral chimney of period one was rebuilt to be the same depth as the chimneybreast (Fig. 3) to include a large aedicule, which was probably used as a cupboard/storage area. Visible on the east elevation are four vertical joints, the two inner of which are a fill of a large window of period one, which has been replaced with a smaller window at the altered floor height; evidence for this window can also be seen internally by a small joint in the stonework that shows the former window splay. Sockets for the large oak beams that once supported the floor can be seen between the Hall and Great Chamber level, whilst at the west end of the Hall the line of a former timber partition can be seen, which would have created a bay at the low end of the hall. Within this period of alterations five windows, though more probably seven, of which two became doorways, were built into the front elevation along with a new front door.



The south-east residential wing of Oxwich Castle is contemporary with Old Plas and provides a good example of houses of the mid 16th century, with the reconstruction in the RCAHMW Glamorgan IV (fig. 7) demonstrating how Old Plas may have looked like during this period. N.B. the first floor fireplaces and chimney arrangements are the same.



Period III



The mid 16th century, added a service wing to the rear (6.37 x 7.4m), extending from the lateral wall to which it clearly abuts. The wing is of two low stories that rise into a pitched roof that joins the rear lateral wall of the Hall/Early Parlour, which has dripstones and end embedded rafter within it; this suggesting alterations to this small section of rear lateral wall. The north elevation has two windows at ground floor level and a single at the first, a single fireplace for which the flue rises through the gable. The east elevation, although mostly collapsed, has the remains of a window

reveal at first floor level and may have had a door at the ground floor. A single window has remaining stone jambs, which clearly shows it once had three mullions; the jambs may have been reused from an earlier building as it is broken around the edges, as if damaged when removed. The west elevation, although now collapsed entirely, was a solid wall without windows or doors. Unusually to the north-west corner the stones have not been dressed and remain extending from the wall, possibly left for an intended extension, and the east elevation has a protrusion of square cut blocks of c. 1m in height.

Period IV



This phase forms the additions undertaken by Edmund Vann, c. 1598, which transformed the house into what we see today. This included the addition of the three storey Kitchen (7.59 x 8.39m) and ParLOUR (6.89 x 7.66m) wings, Stairwell (6.11 x 5.45m) and second floor (23.73 x 7.41m). Clear butting of the wings demonstrates the later addition of these to Old Plas, see Fig. 5. The height of the front lateral wall was also raised within this period of construction to create a second floor and to take the building to the same eave height across the facade whilst the rear lateral wall being raised to a lower level. The added height of c. 1.5m created enough height for the addition of second floor Long Gallery and three new windows finished with false rendered quoins, within this the gables were raised to accommodate this new use. To provide warmth to the Long Gallery a corbelled fireplace was inserted, which is clearly visible protruding from the north elevation. The kitchen wing has a large chimney, which serves both a large fireplace and bread oven on the ground floor, and a single



Fig. 5 – Joint between Kitchen Wing & main block
 Royal Commission Photograph Old Plas, Llantwit Major.
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

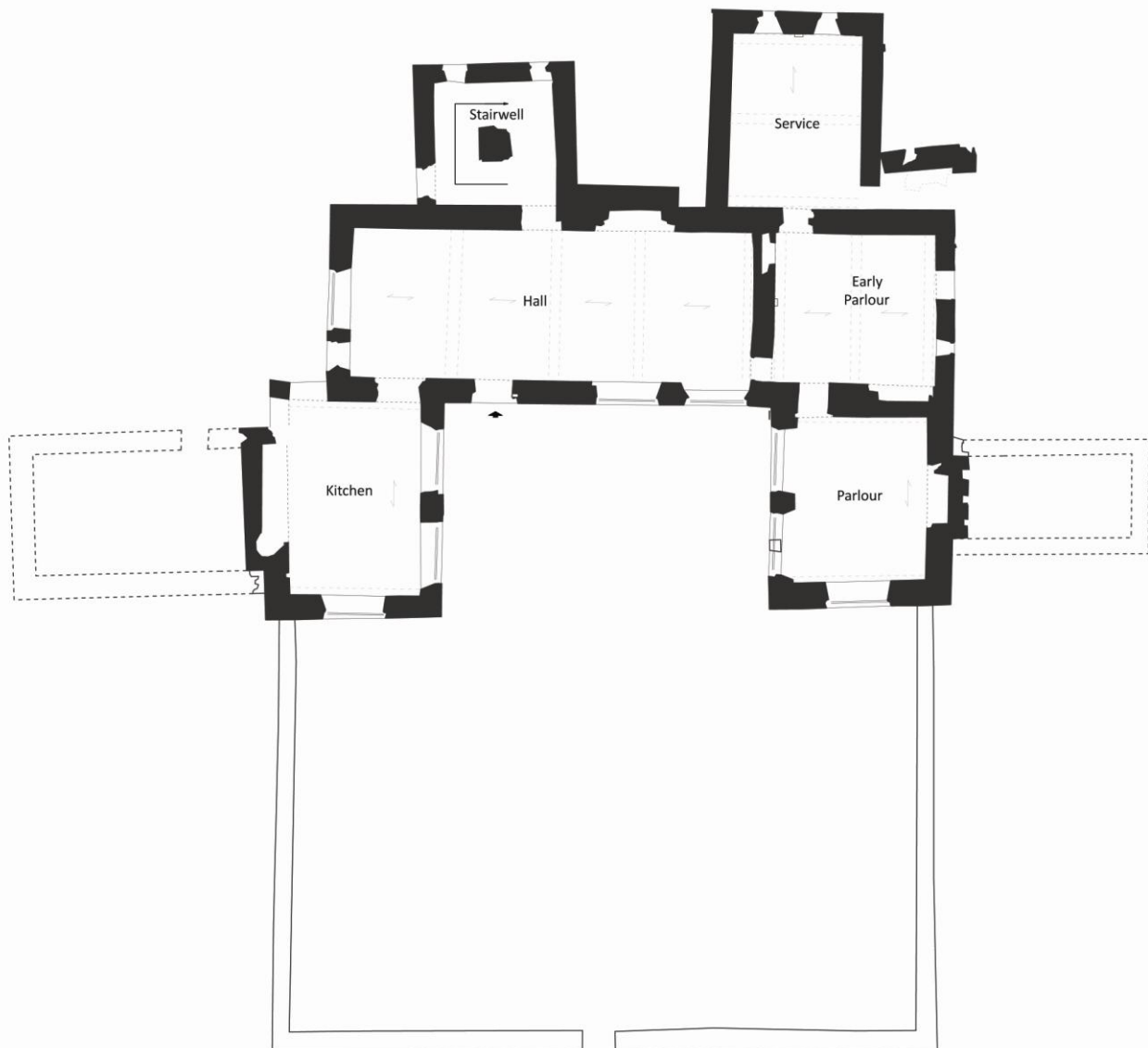
fireplace on the first floor. Unusually a large relieving arch has been constructed underneath the kitchen fireplace, which may be to bridge a fault in the bedrock or boggy ground. At the first floor level near to the north-east corner is a blocked doorway, though no evidence remains for its use. The Parlour wing demonstrates similar butting to the earlier structure and, as with the Kitchen wing; it has a large chimneystack to provide fireplaces for the ground and first floor rooms. Within the Parlour wing the early lateral chimney can be seen in the wall with a doorway directly above the stack; the wall at the second floor level between the Long Gallery and Attic is considerably narrower than that of the main facade, demonstrating its later origin as an internal wall. The pillar stairwell is of the same date as the increased height and front wings, built to provide access to each floor; this was once completed with an oak staircase of which nothing remains. Both the wings and stairwell were gabled, with

ridges returning at right angles to that of the Long Gallery. From debris found on the floor of the Parlour wing, we know that it was finished with decorative finger moulding, comparable to that found in Allt-y-Bela (NPRN: 36379), Monmouthshire, which has been dated to 1599 (Smith 1988: 236); tying in with the date of 1598 we know the alterations were completed by. The Stairwell can be compared to that at Llanbradach-fawr (NPRN: 19146) (RCAHMW 1984: 142-3), and whilst not only being similar in size and form, it has been dated to a similar time period of c. 1600. Although the window jambs are removed a single masonry jamb remains at second floor level in the gable and, whilst part of period four, this flat-headed sunk-chamfered style is in use from the late 16th century, with examples of similar masonry jambs found at Old Beaupre (NPRN: 19488) of 1586, (RCAHMW 1984: 52), and Great House (NPRN: 19287), Laleston, of the early 17th century (RCAHMW 1984: 89). The door jamb is likely to have been of four-centred with a dressed-stone head, but this is only speculative.

To the north-west corner is a vaulted structure abutted to the rear wing, which may have served as a passage/porch to a blocked doorway(?) seen in the remain wall of the wing. However, no clear evidence remains for its use, therefore its function remains speculative.

The roof was finished with slate and finished with green glazed ridge tiles, the remains of which have been found in pieces on site. The glaze and form are comparable to those of Sker House, Glamorgan, which have been dated to 1620-30 (RCAHMW 1984: 5).

Period V



Although little survives, period five dates from the 17th century. The ancillary buildings, extending from the wings, can be identified as post dating the alterations of 1598; this is made obvious by abutted walls and by the rough nature in which the sockets for both the purlins and beams have been created in the walls. The ancillary building from the west elevation of the Kitchen (? X 6.28m) was single storied and was incorporated neatly into the side of the chimney as dripstones have been inserted into the wall, with double purlins, possibly without a ridge as no socket has been created, the floor is likely to have been compacted earth. Whilst the ancillary from the Kitchen was incorporated carefully, the remains of the second, from the east of the ParLOUR wing, appears less well considered; the sockets for the ridge and double purlins are roughly created into the elevation, as are the sockets for the floor beams. Two of the sockets for the floor beams are level however, the third, to the rear, is raised by c. 20cm, showing that the floor would have been stepped, this is possibly to account for the small bank to the rear, but also so that there remained access under this floor level.

Post 1729 - After period five no further construction takes place and from c. 1729 the building has its jambs taken for reuse at Ham House. During the 18th and 19th century stone is robbed out for local construction, with pillars being constructed to support the walls of both the east gable and the Parlour wing to enable carts to be taken into the building. As from 2012 Anton Jones, a local stonemason, has been working to restore Old Plas, having received funding from a number of sources to rebuild the area around the original period of the house up to the top of the 1598 gable.

Significance

Whilst Old Place remains as a partial ruin it typifies the development of a house of the lesser gentry in Glamorgan. Its piecemeal construction not only demonstrates Old Plas' phasing, but also the increasing fortunes of the family that owned and built it, being a fine example of the development of greater houses from the open hall to the storied E-plan mansions of Elizabethan/Jacobean Wales. As a result of its condition we are able to see and assess the developments that took place over a two-hundred year period. The comparison with Oxwich Castle in the mid 16th century and later with Great House, Old Beaupre, Sker House and Llanbradach-fawr demonstrates how Old Plas fits into a regional context.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Anton Jones for remaining flexible with the survey and allowing access to the site and Richard Turner of Cadw for bringing it to our attention.

Bibliography and Sources

Bowen, E. 1729. *Map of South Wales: The Uplands and the Vale of Glamorgan*

RCAHMW, 1984. *Inventory of Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan, Vol. IV Part I: The Greater Houses*

Rees, W. 1932. The Storie of the Lower Burrows by John Stradling, in ed. *South Wales and Monmouth Record Society Publications, Vol. 3*

Smith, L. T. 1964. *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales, Vol. 3*

Smith, P. 1988. *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*

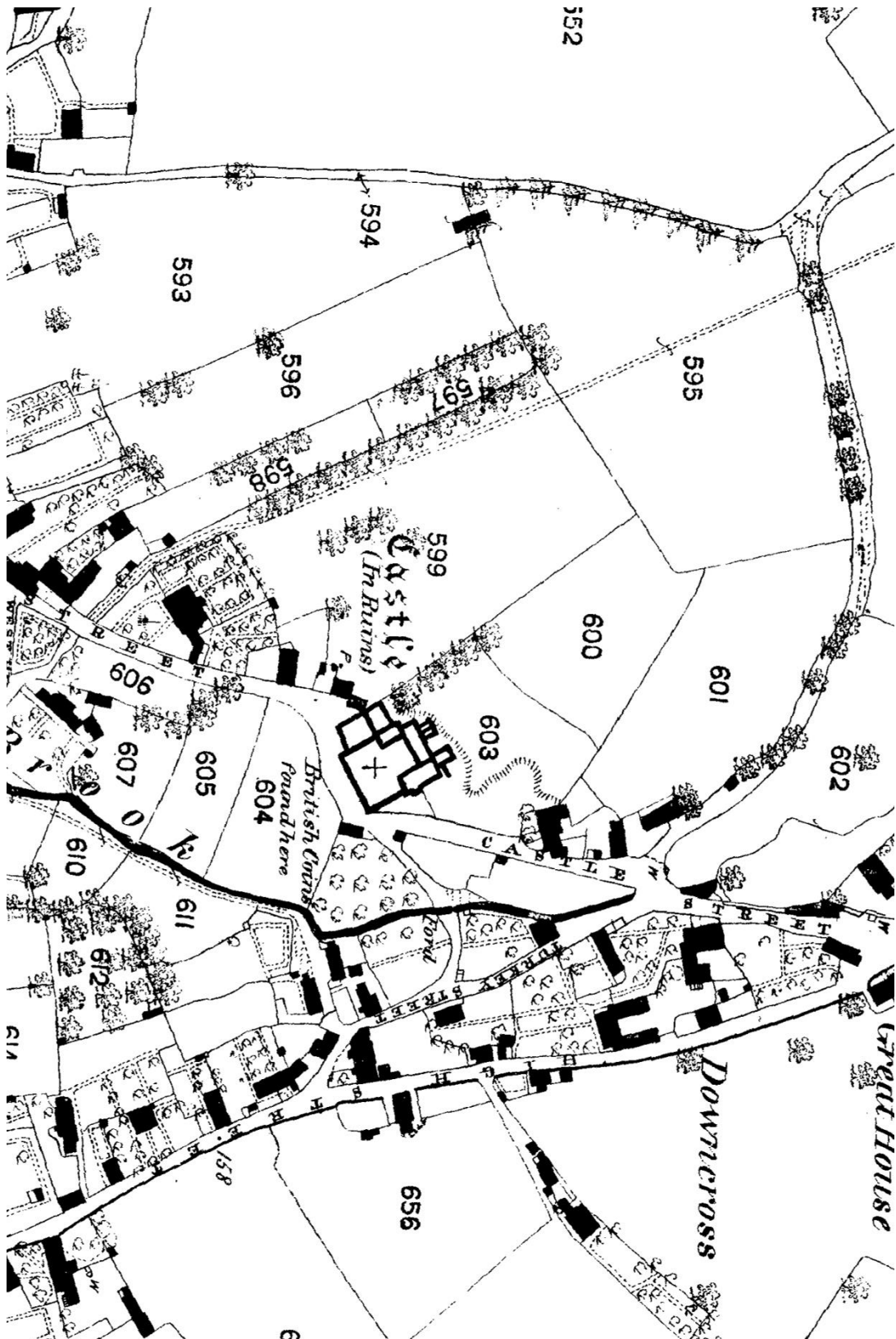
Spencer, M. R. 1913. *Annals of South Glamorgan: Historical, Legendary, and Descriptive Chapters on some leading places of interest*

Stone, R. 1996. *The Old Place: A Report on Historical and Archaeological Research*

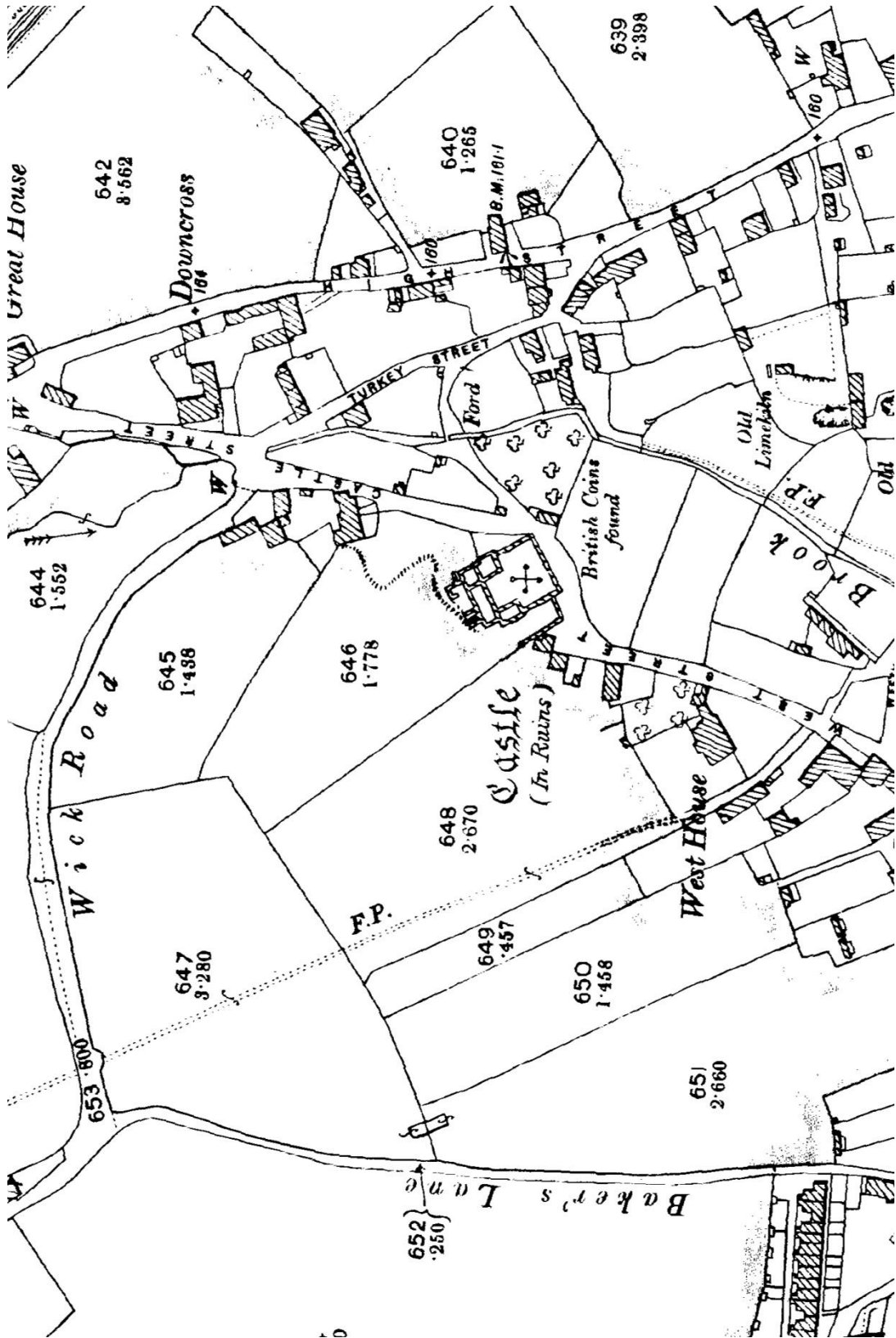
Appendix 1 – Maps



Llantwit Major, The Vale of Glamorgan
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

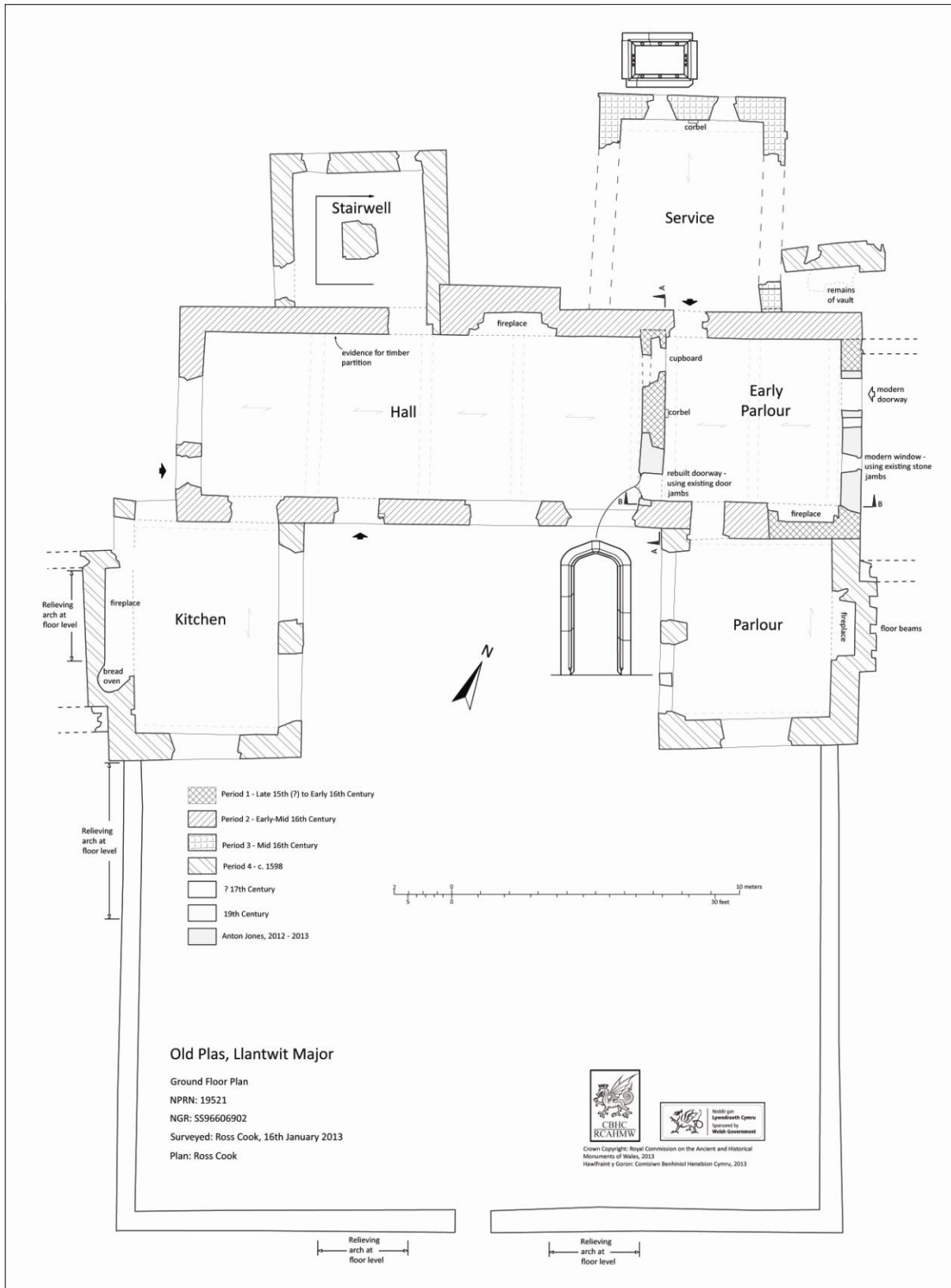


Ordnance Survey 1877 25inch to 1 Mile map
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

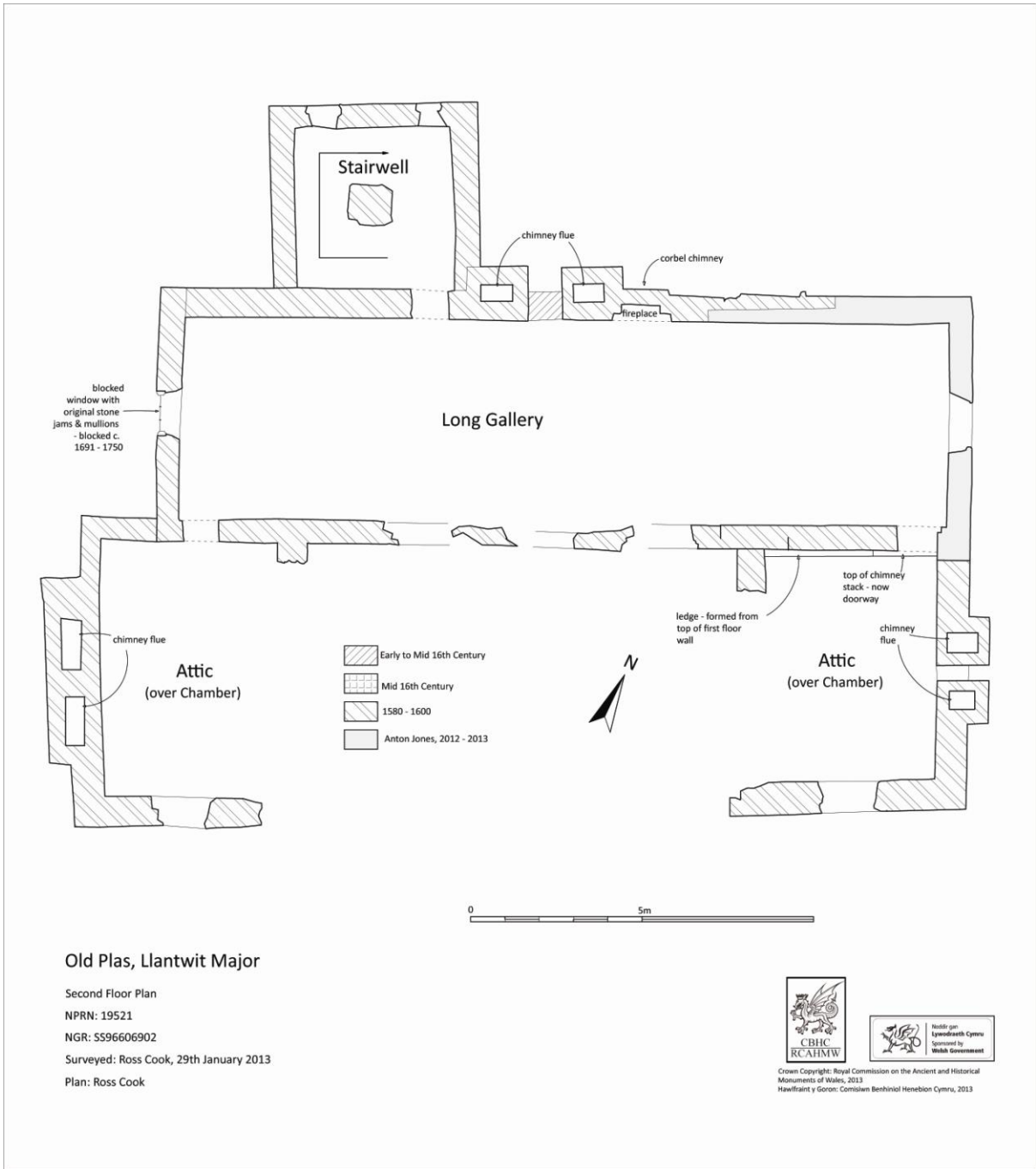


Ordnance Survey 1899 25inch to 1 Mile map
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

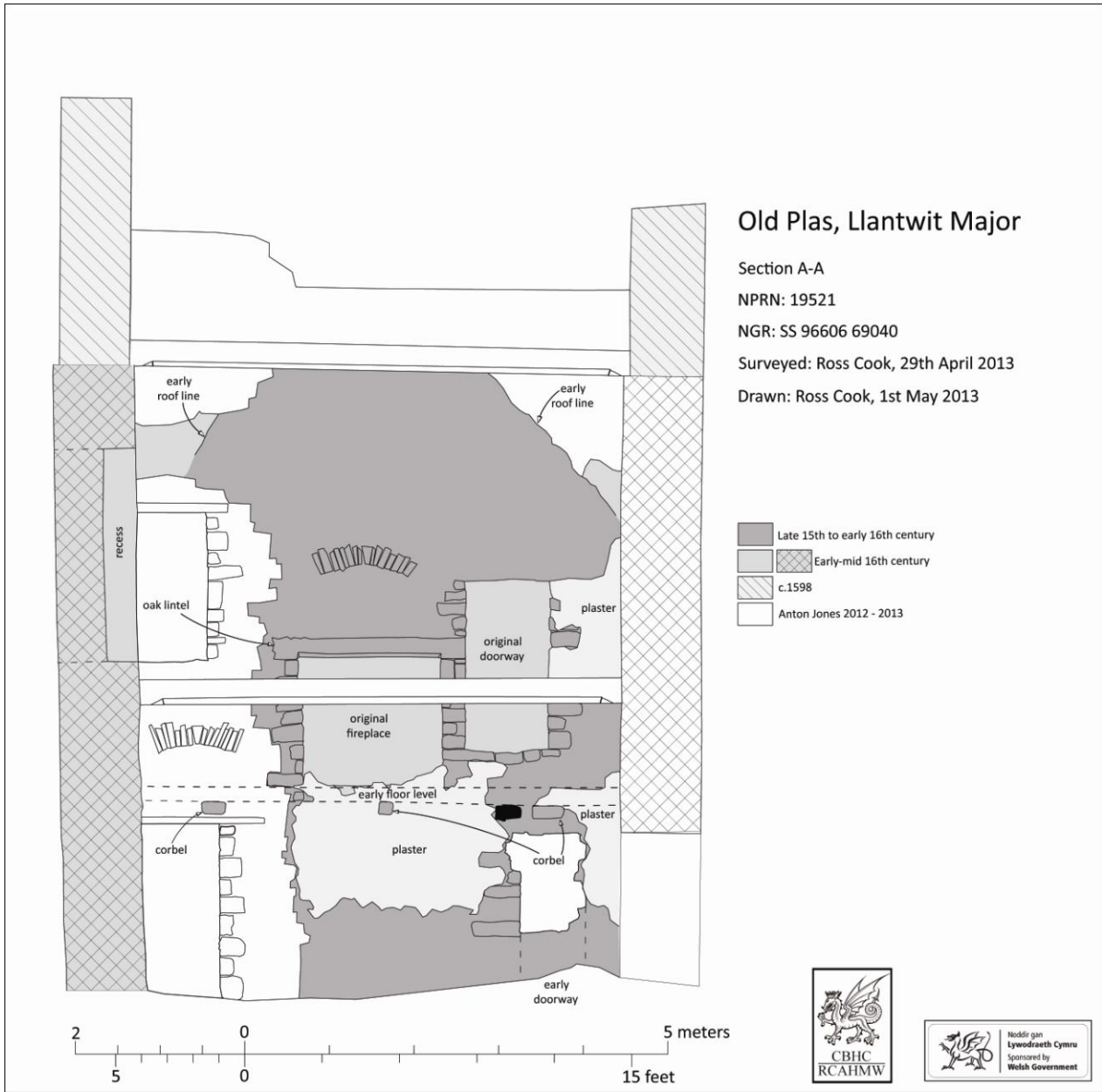
Appendix 2 – Plans, Sections & Elevation



Old Plas Ground Floor Plan
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

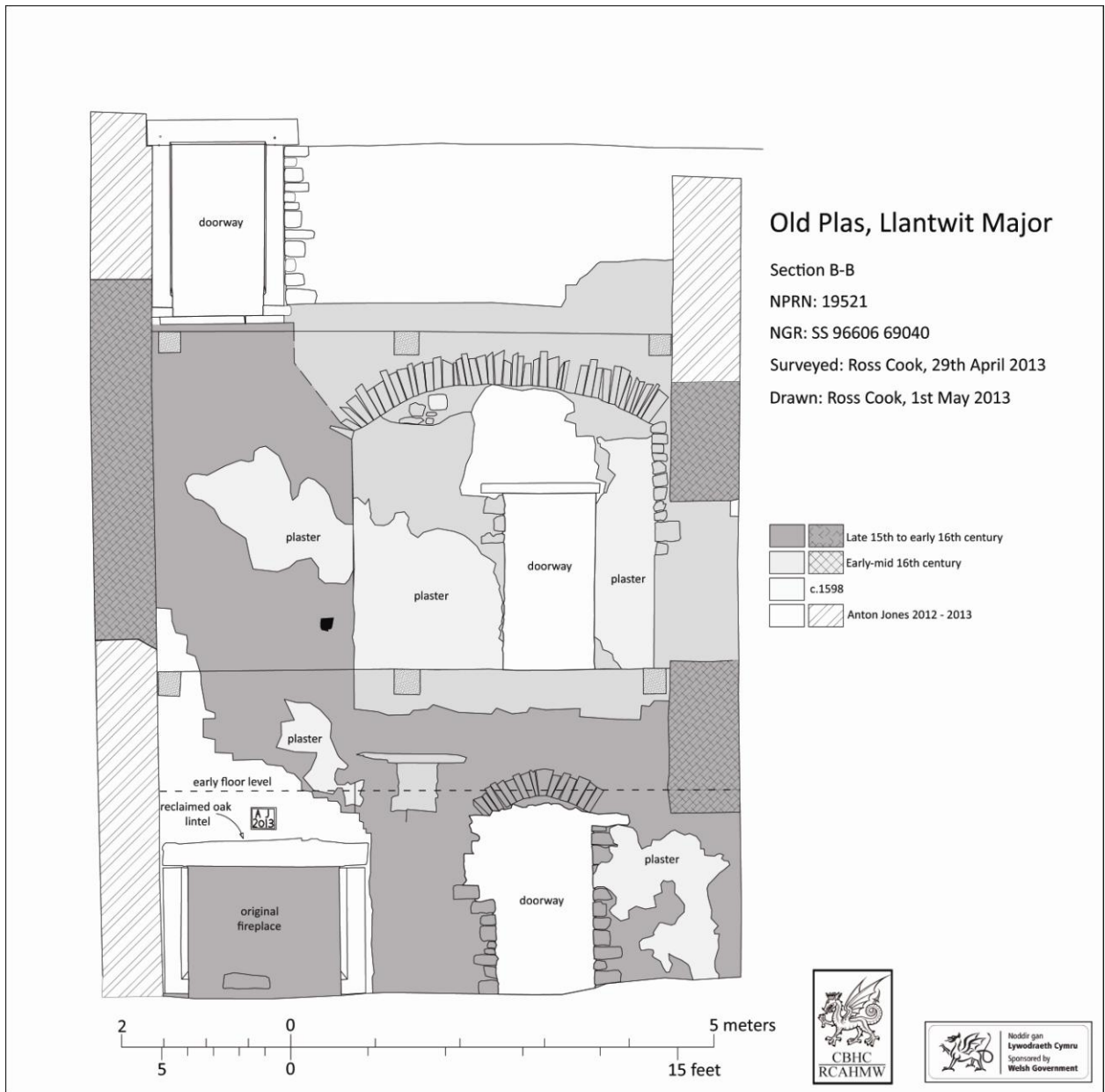


Old Plas Second Floor Plan
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)



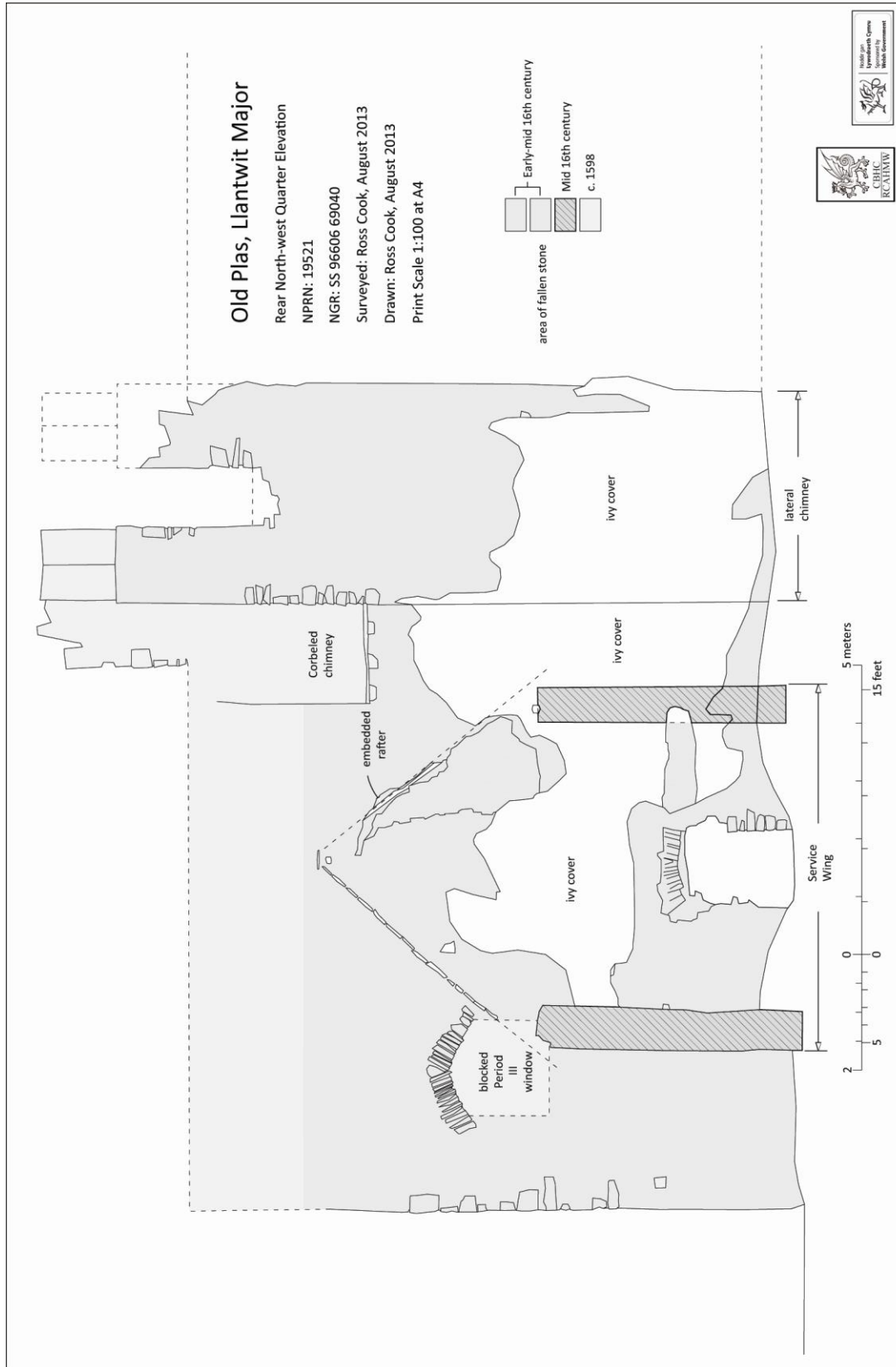
Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2013
 Hawffraint y Goron: Comisiwn Benihiniol Henebion Cymru,

Old Plas Section A-A
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)



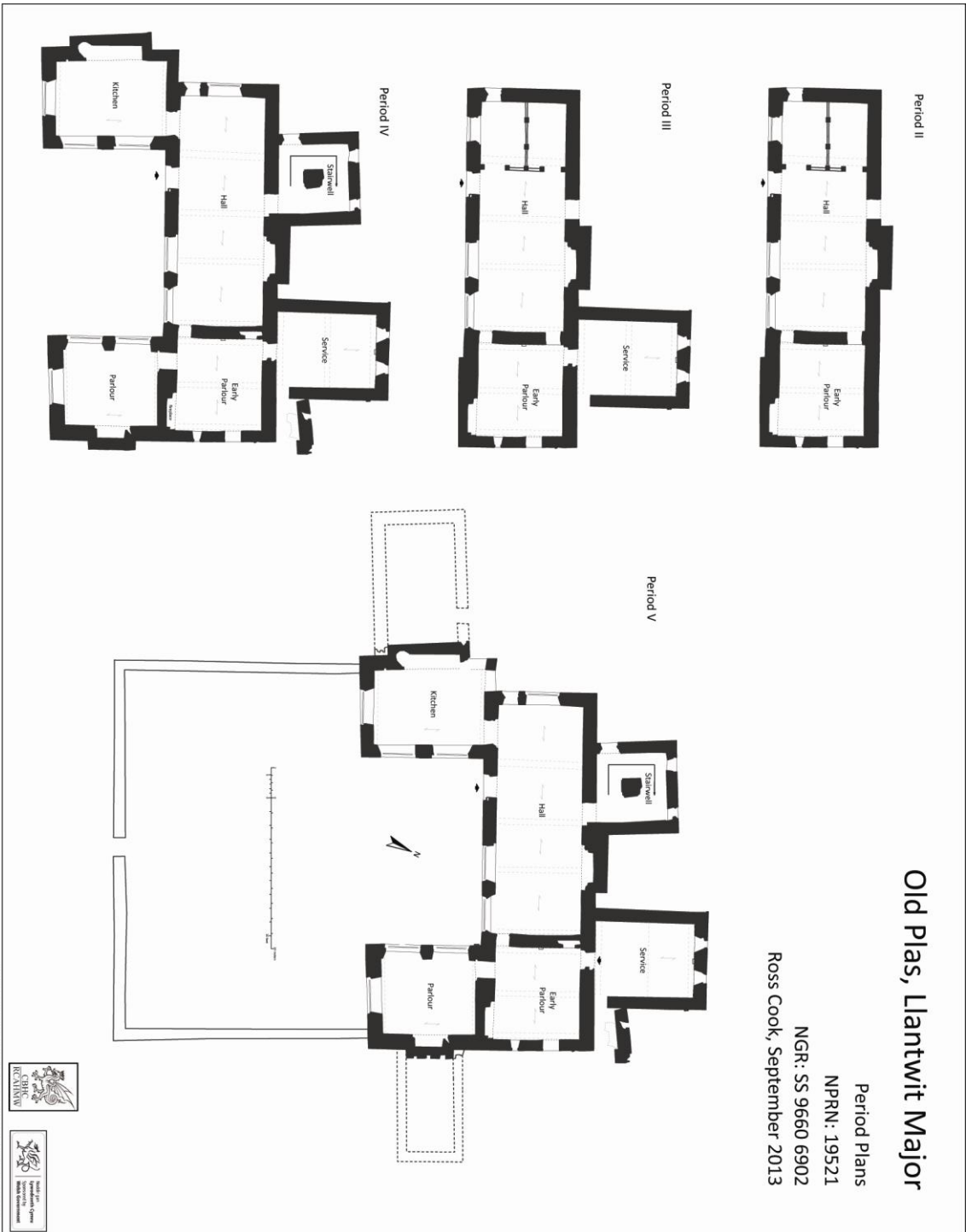
Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2013
 2013
 Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Benhinol Henebion Cymru,

Old Plas Section B-B
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

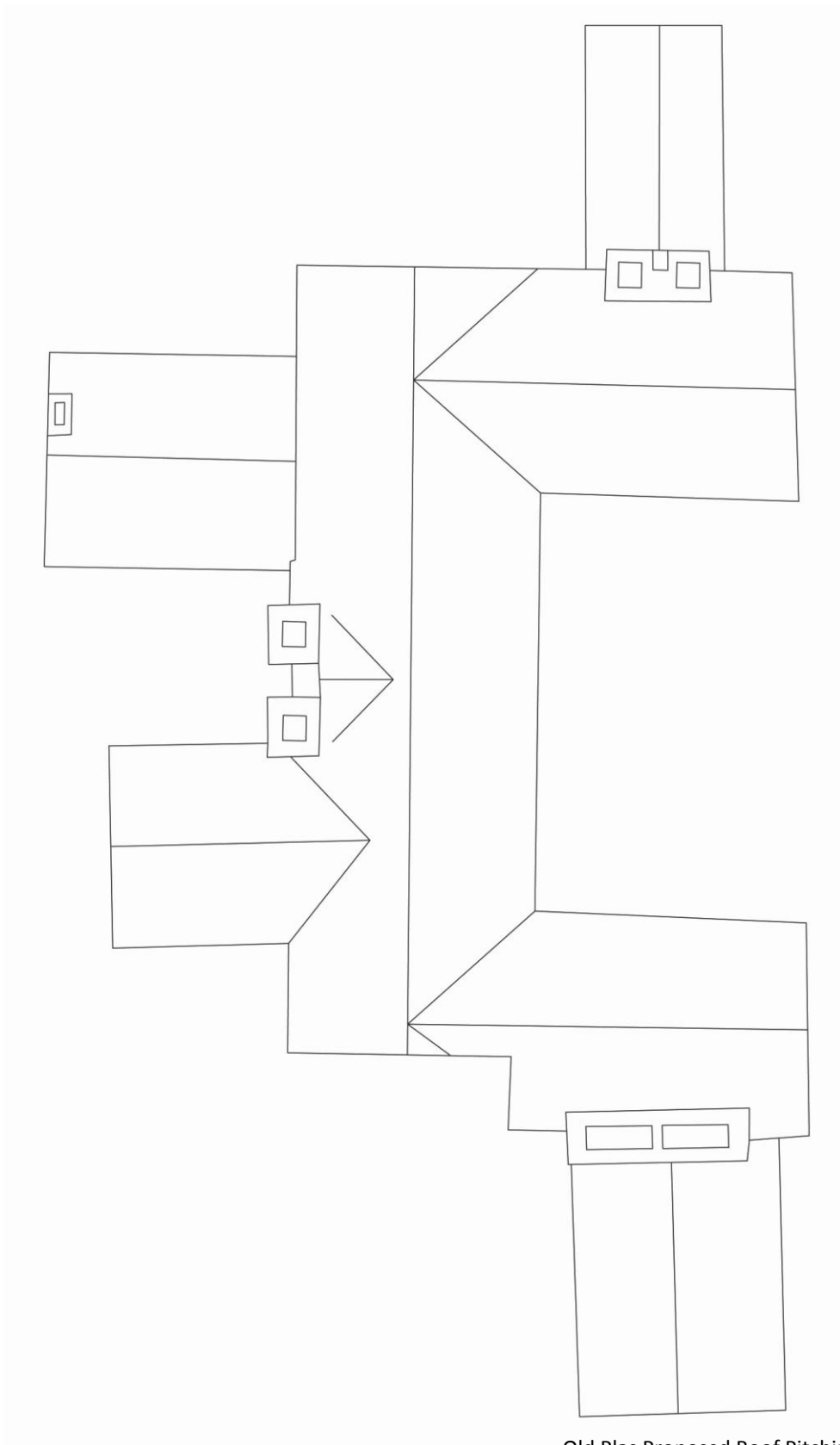


Crown Copyright. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2013
 Huwamant y Goleu. Comisiwn Bwrddur Hanesyddol Cymru, 2013

Old Plas North-west Quarter Elevation
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)



Old Plas Period Phasing Plans
 (Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)



Old Plas Proposed Roof Pitching
(Crown Copyright. All rights reserved)

