

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*Nantclwyd House, Castle Street
Rhuthun, Clwyd*

SUMMARY REPORT

April 1991

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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Nantclwyd House, Castle Street, Rhuthun (SJ 1235 5818)

Nantclwyd House was originally constructed as a cruck-framed hall house, probably in the early 15th century. During its 500 year history the building has undergone substantial changes in plan, including the addition of a front wing and porch, and a range of rooms to the rear. Today the only surviving evidence for the original hall house is a cruck visible in the north elevation.

As part of the restoration process the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust were invited by Clwyd County Council to excavate and record the area beneath the floor in the south parlour, together with a small area at the front of the house. It was hoped that the excavations would reveal earlier floor layers and internal wall divisions which might help to elucidate the earlier building phases of the house and any earlier phases of activity. The excavations were carried out over a two week period during March 1991.

The wooden flooring had already been removed, revealing only a thin layer of rubble sealing the archaeological deposits. Once this had been removed it became apparent that earlier floor levels had already been removed, the ground level having been cut down inside the building into the soft underlying red sandstone bedrock. It is assumed that this took place when the wooden floor was inserted, since the series of brick sleeper walls constructed to support the floor rested directly on the surface of the bedrock. One of the stone sleeper walls (context 15) lay on a low plinth where the bedrock had been removed to a greater depth on either side. The section exposed beneath the north wall revealed that up to 30cm of bedrock had been removed.

Where sections of the existing wall footings were exposed, they were seen to consist of large blocks of limestone measuring up to 60 x 40 cm across. Although the east wall fronting onto Castle Street had been largely rebuilt, it was possible to identify the earlier footings which may have formed the plinth for the original hall-house. It was evident that these footings followed a slightly different alignment to that of the existing wall (not indicated on the accompanying drawing), being set further to the west at the southern end. The lower, unmortared, wall footings which mark the former division of the south parlour into two rooms (context 11) was of similar construction, being set within a construction trench 85 cm wide and 35 cm deep below the surface of the natural (context 12). The construction trench for the wall was considerably wider than the surviving wall. Where sectioned, it was evident that the facing on the eastern, inside face had survived, but it seems likely that the walling on the outer face had been largely robbed away.

There were only two areas where traces of earlier flooring survived. In the south-east corner, beneath a layer of mortar (context 24), a layer of compacted, reddish-brown sandy loam up to 10cm thick (context 43) survived to the east of the existing fireplace. The layer contained a significant quantity of charcoal and daub, suggesting that it may have been derived from destruction material. The layer had been cut by context 44 and possibly context 66, which were either small pits or postholes. Beneath this, an earlier surface was composed of compacted reddish-brown sand with a high proportion of small rounded stones (context 70). Both of these layers had been cut by the construction trench for the east wall (context 110). Only two features pre-dated layer 70, an irregular shallow pit (context 71) and a pit lying partly beneath the existing fireplace (context 73).

At the north end of the east wall evidence for two flooring layers survived as a thin skim of

soil against the footings, being seen in section where they had been cut through when the wooden floor was inserted. The upper layer (context 29) was up to 14 cm thick, composed of firm yellowish-brown sandy clay with small stones and mortar flecks. Beneath this, a layer of compacted reddish-brown sandy loam up to 9 cm thick (context 30) lay directly on the bedrock. It is possible that the original entrance was in this position, and it is interesting to note that the construction trench for the east wall does not cut through the floor layers at this point. It is likely that these floor layers belonged to the earliest phases of the building, although the only dating evidence recovered was a single sherd of late 16th or early 17th century Ewloe ware in context 43.

Although most of the stratigraphy had been removed, several features of archaeological interest were identified cutting into the red sandstone bedrock. A large rectangular pit about 1.52m long and 0.95m wide (context 2), was revealed at the west end of the south parlour, lying beneath the sleeper wall for the wooden floor. The pit contained a quantity of domestic refuse including animal bone and oyster shells, as well as several sherds of Ewloe ware cooking pot typical of the 15th or 16th centuries. From its contents it seems likely that it had been dug as a rubbish pit to the rear of the house, before the construction of the south parlour. Two further pits remain undated: context 20 pre-dated the construction of the wall footings (context 11), and contained a quantity of clay lumps which may have been derived from a floor surface through which it had been cut; context 60 lay partly beneath sleeper wall 15, thus pre-dating that phase of construction. At the south end of the excavation an irregular slot (context 35) of unknown date or function lay to the west of the fireplace, adjacent to a shallow circular pit or posthole (context 33). Evidence for an earlier stone-built fireplace was provided by context 37, which gave the appearance of a construction trench with large limestone blocks still set within it.

Perhaps the most significant discovery was an east-west alignment of postholes (contexts 40, 46, 49, 52, 54, 68, 107), one of which (context 54) showed evidence of a post about 20cm in diameter. All the postholes were cut into the sandstone with fairly vertical sides, the deepest surviving to 35 cm below the present surface of the natural. From their form it would seem likely that these originally held posts belonging to a timber structure pre-dating the 15th century hall-house.

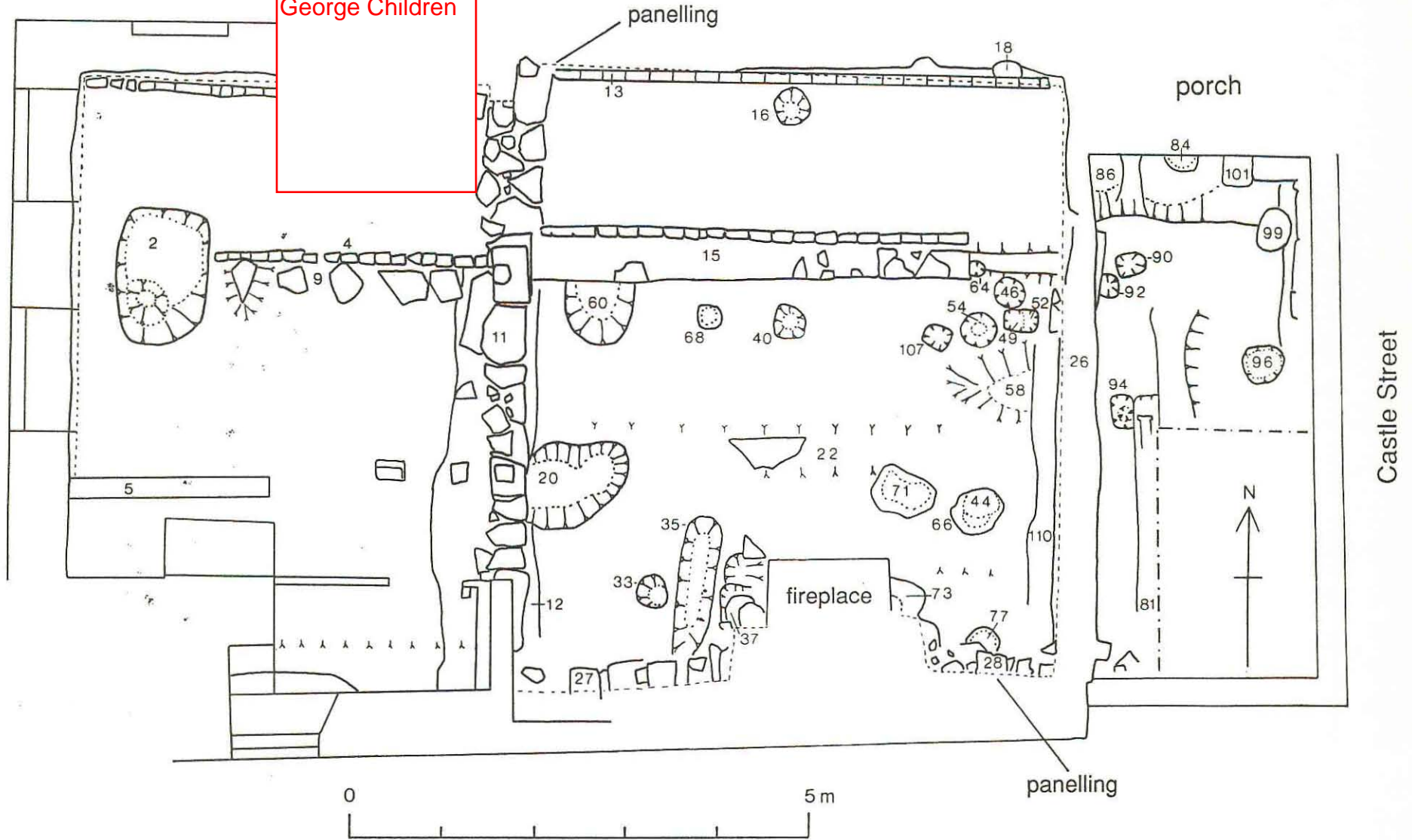
Excavations at the front of the house consisted of a trench 0.70m wide against the exterior of the east wall, and an adjoining area about 3 x 1.75m to the south of the porch. Part of the area had been disturbed by a modern drain, context 81. Removal of about 15 cm of overburden revealed a layer of roofing shale (context 79) which extended beneath the wall footings of the east wall. At the south end, the footings lay above soil layer 80, which contained daub and charcoal, with no evidence for a construction trench along the length of the wall examined. A number of features were recorded, some of which cut through context 79, but none being necessarily early in date.

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30 April 1991

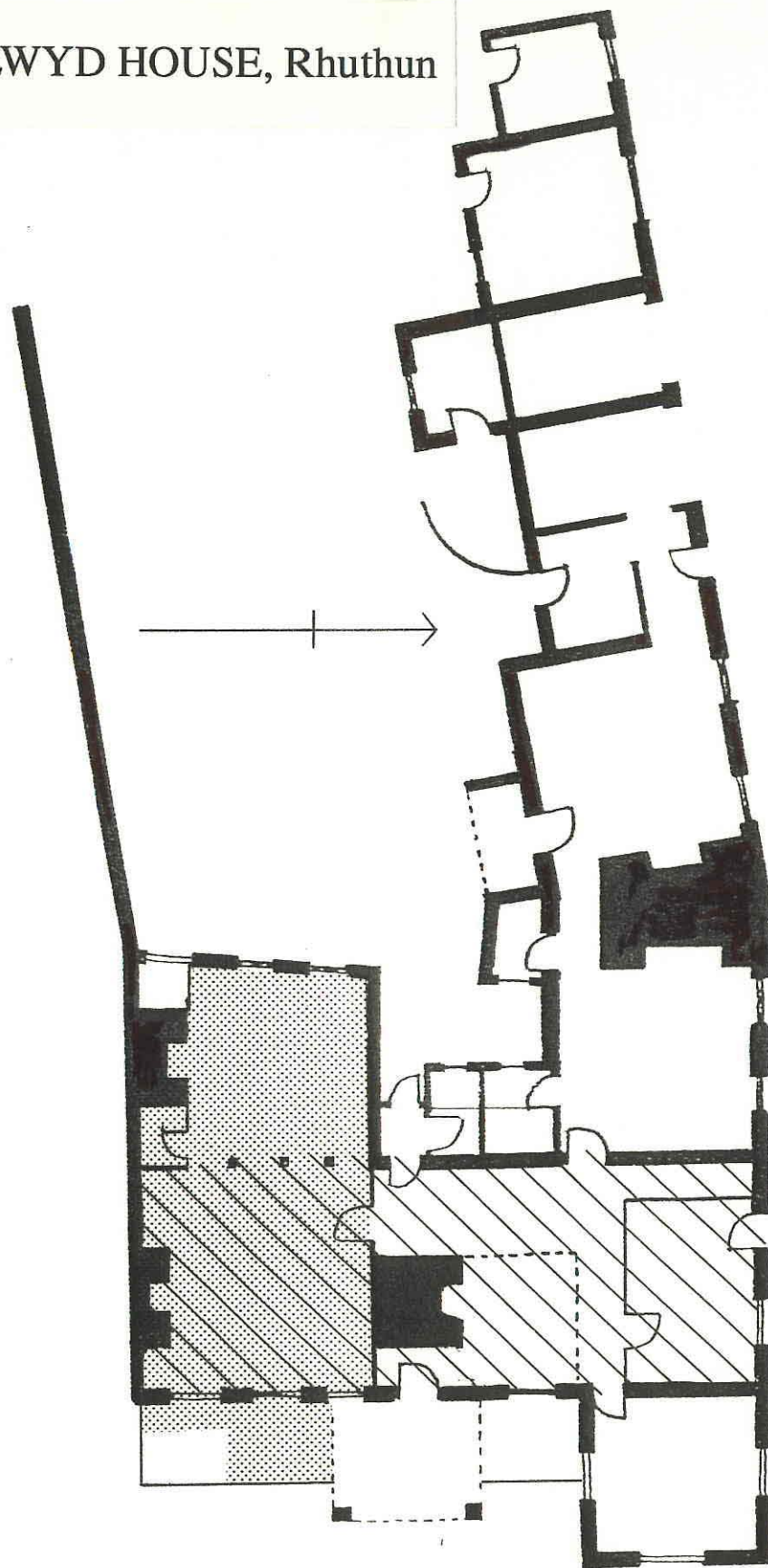
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NANTCLWYD HOUSE: plan of excavations

George Children



NANTCLWYD HOUSE, Rhuthun



Castle Street



cruck-framed hall-house



area of excavation

0

5

10

15

20m