

CPAT Report No 920

Nantclwyd House Gazebo and Garden, Ruthin

BUILDING RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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BUILDING RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF

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March 2007

Report for Donald Insall Associates, on behalf of Denbighshire County Council

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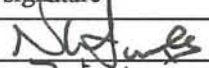
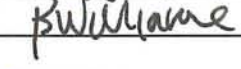


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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Nantclwyd House Gazebo and Garden: Building Recording and Watching Brief		
CPAT Project Name	Nantclwyd House		
CPAT Project No	1505	CPAT Report No	920
Confidential (yes/no)	No	draft/final	Final

Internal control

	name	signature	date
prepared by	N. W. Jones		18/03/2008
	B. V. Williams		18/03/2008
checked by	R.J. Silvester		18/03/2008
approved by	R.J. Silvester		18/03/2008

Revisions

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

Internal memo

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CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
- 3 THE GAZEBO
- 4 WATCHING BRIEF
- 5 CONCLUSIONS
- 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 7 REFERENCES

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Plan of Nantclwyd House gardens showing location of Gazebo and elements of the watching brief
- Fig. 2 Gazebo floor plans
- Fig. 3 Gazebo elevations
- Fig. 4 Gazebo roof structure
- Fig. 5 Remains of the possible carriage house and studio adjacent to the former brewery

PLATES

- Plate 1 Extract from the 1742 print of Ruthin Castle by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck
- Plate 2 Brick vaulting and chimney base. Photo CPAT 2520-002
- Plate 3 Ground-floor fireplace. Photo CPAT 2520-086
- Plate 4 First floor interior
- Plate 5 Eastern elevation of the first floor showing timber framing
- Plate 6 Gazebo roof structure
- Plate 7 Roof timbers and supporting structure for ceiling below
- Plate 8 cobble flooring in the possible carriage house to the east of the former brewery
- Plate 9 Basal remains of outbuildings to the east of the former brewery

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2008, the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Donald Insall Associates, on behalf of Denbighshire County Council, to undertake a programme of building survey and watching brief in connection with renovation work in the grounds of Nantclwyd House, in Ruthin. The building survey focused on an 18th-century gazebo, while the watching brief was conducted during the repair of a boundary wall and the installation of underground services within the garden.
- 1.2 A curatorial brief had been prepared by Denbighshire Archaeology Service, which specified the nature and extent of the archaeological works to be undertaken.
- 1.3 Nantclwyd House lies on the west side of Castle Street (SJ 1236158183), 100m north of the entrance to Ruthin Castle. The house occupies a street-frontage position, with the gardens extending to the rear.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The present house, a Grade I Listed Building, has developed over a period of more than 500 years. The earliest surviving structure is part of a 15th-century cruck-framed hall-house which occupied the southern part of the present street-frontage, and was built using timber felled in the winter of 1434-5. The interior of this section of the house was excavated by CPAT in 1991, revealing fragments of earlier floor layers and a series of postholes, assumed to belong to an earlier building that was founded on earth-fast posts (Brassil *et al.* 1993). A watching brief was also conducted by CPAT in 2006 during the restoration of the house (Silvester 2006).
- 2.2 The position of the hall-house, as well as the width of the inner garden to the rear, suggests that the present plot was originally divided into two burgage plots when the town was laid out in the 13th century, but these were later combined. This is supported by an entry in the records of the borough court of Ruthin in December 1435 which states that Gronw ap Madog and his wife Suzanne held two places or plots of ground in Castle Street, adjoining the Lord's Garden at the rear of Nantclwyd y dre, as Nantclwyd House was originally known. The date of this record coincides exactly with the date for the construction of the hall-house and provides strong evidence to suggest that the couple built Nantclwyd House on the combined plots (Williams & Kightly 2007, 6).
- 2.3 The garden, which has been designated Grade II in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in Clwyd (Cadw/ICOMOS 1995), occupies two areas to the rear of the house, as well as a small courtyard, and is surrounded by high stone walls (Grade II Listed) which probably date from the late 15th century. The inner garden occupies the area to the rear of the house, and is bounded by a substantial masonry wall. The outer garden, formerly known as the Lord's Garden, was purchased in 1691 by Eubule Thelwall, the then owner of Nantclwyd House, although he had previously rented the plot (Williams & Kightly 2007, 16). At the north-east corner of the Lord's Garden is a gazebo or summerhouse (Grade II Listed) which is undated, although evidence is provided by two prints of Ruthin from the first half of the 18th century. The earliest view is a drawing of the town by J Lewis which probably dates from the 1730s and shows Nantclwyd House without the gazebo. However, a 1742 print of Ruthin Castle by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck depicts the gazebo in some detail (Plate 1). This shows the Lord's Garden surrounded by a substantial boundary wall with a gate along the western side. Inside, the gazebo is clearly visible and a regular layout of paths is suggested, the southern perimeter possibly being lined by an avenue of small trees. It is therefore likely that the gazebo was constructed during the 1730s and may therefore be

associated with John Wynne and his wife Dorothy, who occupied Nantclwyd from 1733, undertaking several major additions to the house itself.

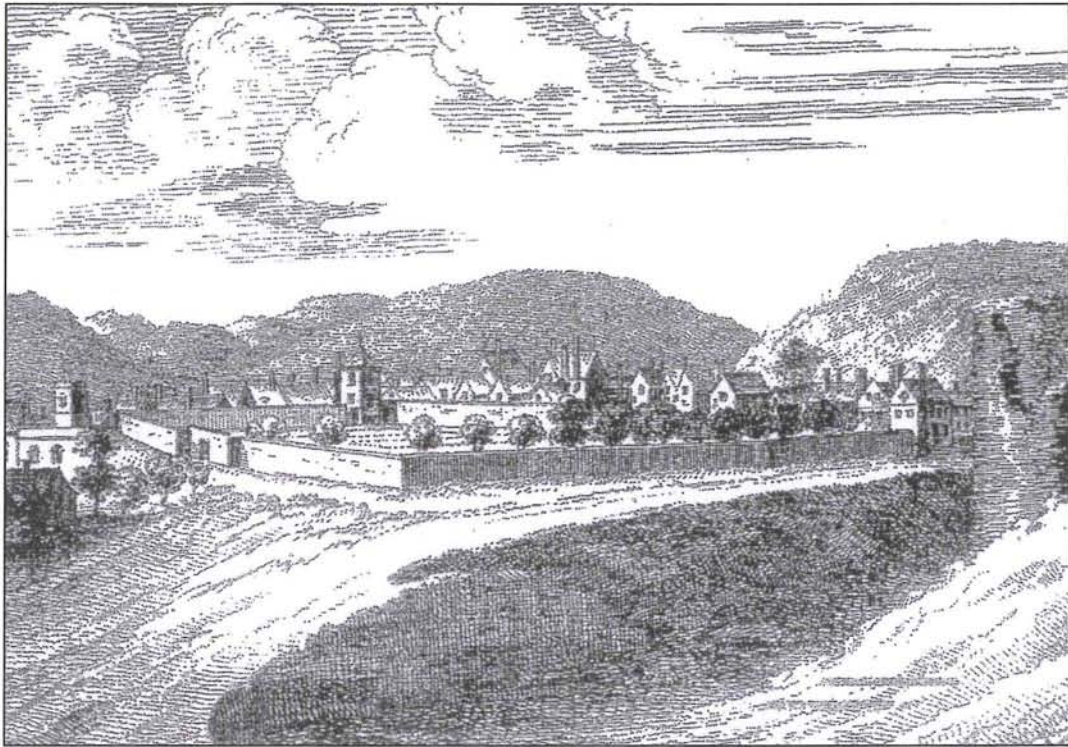


Plate 1 Extract from the 1742 print of Ruthin Castle by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck

3 THE GAZEBO

- 3.1 The gazebo, or summerhouse, was built immediately to the west of the original garden belonging to Nantclwyd House, in an area formerly known as the Lord's Garden. The gazebo was enclosed within the garden by the construction of a section of boundary wall, extending from the original north-west corner of the garden, around the north and west sides of the gazebo, connecting to the existing boundary wall surrounding the Lord's Garden. There was, however, no evidence to confirm the relationship of this wall with the gazebo. The wall has, over time, leaned northwards, necessitating the construction of a buttress at its western end. Short stretches of the west side of the original boundary wall alongside the gazebo were exposed during the restoration work revealing the presence of triangular coping stones along the top.
- 3.2 The gazebo was constructed as a two-storeyed structure (Figs 2-3), with an undercroft and ground floor built in limestone and a timber-framed first floor. Overall, the gazebo measures 3.3m east to west and 3.7m north to south, although the west wall extends a further 0.7m, as far as the boundary wall, in order to support the external chimney at the north-west corner, which serviced fireplaces in both the upper and lower rooms.
- 3.3 The area between the gazebo and the boundary walls to the north and east was levelled up to form a platform or terrace at the level of the upper room, surrounded by a brick parapet wall and accessed by steps leading up from the main garden.

Undercroft

- 3.4 The undercroft below the lower room is accessed through an inwardly splayed doorway, c.0.9m wide and 1.2m high (current height). The walling above the doorway was supported by a timber lintel. At the time of the survey the ground level was c. 1.05m below the floor level of the ground floor, the undercroft having been substantially infilled with rubble.



Plate 2 Brick vaulting and chimney base. Photo CPAT 2520-002

- 3.5 The undercroft also incorporates a void between the north wall of the gazebo and the boundary wall, within which the supporting structure for the chimney is visible. The void is roofed by brick vaulting (Plate 2), springing from an extension of the east wall of the gazebo. The brick flue from the first-floor fireplace is angled across to the main chimney and is supported by a series of timbers, some of which are set into the north boundary wall.
- 3.6 On the west side of the gazebo is a tapering passageway some 1.15 m wide at its entrance and c.0.8 m wide at its northern end. The passageway affords access to the undercroft and was roofed prior to the commencement of refurbishment works. The west wall of this structure features a blocked window and needs further investigation to determine whether or not it is essentially of one build. The structure, however, does not appear on the Bucks' print of 1742 and is perhaps therefore unlikely to be an original feature.

Ground Floor

- 3.7 The ground-floor room measures 2.3m east to west by 2.6m north to south, and the present floor to ceiling height is 2.2m. The room is accessed via a passage beneath the terrace which leads to a doorway in the eastern wall. The door frame is of pegged, mortice and tenon construction and has at some point been reset, and the southern jamb lost, to allow for the insertion of concrete below the timber frame. There are windows set into the west and south walls, of which the western window is a replacement.



Plate 3 Ground-floor fireplace. Photo CPAT 2520-086

- 3.8 There is a small brick fireplace set midway along the north wall, which appears to be contemporary with the external chimney (constructed of similar sized bricks), and original to the building (Plate 3). The hearth and surround would seem to have been reset on a cement base, with slightly thicker bricks, set on edge, for the hearth surround. The whole has been repointed with grey mortar.
- 3.9 The floor is formed by oak boards c. 210mm wide and 20mm thick, laid north to south on joists which are aligned east to west. These joists are supported by two large beams positioned up against the east and west walls respectively. The eastern beam is set into the north and south walls and the western beam is set into the south wall, but is supported at its northern end by a short east to west timber set into the wall on the southern side of the undercroft doorway. However, a number of small joist sockets are visible in the south wall, with a larger one in both the east and west walls (the north wall is obscured), perhaps suggesting an earlier floor configuration.
- 3.10 The ceiling was originally of lathe and plaster, indicated by nail holes in the ceiling joists, which are set east to west with additional supporting timbers in the north-west corner to support the fireplace on the upper floor.

First Floor

- 3.11 The upper room is of timber-frame construction and measures 2.9m east to west by 3.3m north to south internally, and 3.2m by 3.50m externally. The doorway is centrally located on the east side and windows are set centrally into the north, west and south walls. A brick fireplace is set in the north-east corner of the room (Plate 4), of similar style to the lower fireplace, although it is larger and has a more substantial brick surround. The hearth and its surround may have been reset.



Plate 4 First floor interior. Photo CPAT 2501-011

- 3.12 The basic framing structure consists of sill beams laid on a thin bed of pink mortar, with wall posts measuring c. 80mm by 140mm at each corner, and studding at around 0.35m intervals. Diagonal braces extended from the upper parts of the wall posts to the sill beams. Original timbers were tenoned and pegged into the sill beams and wall plates. Internally the walls are formed from lath and plaster attached to the timber frame.
- 3.13 The timbers in the east elevation (Plate 5) are largely original, except for the doorframe and the window to the south of the door which is a later insertion. On the south elevation the studs below and either side of the window sill, together with the associated sill beam have been renewed and the diagonal braces truncated. A length of the western sill beam below the window, together with associated studding has been renewed, truncating the southern diagonal brace. The studs below the window in the northern elevation have also been renewed. The chimney structure is attached to the west side of the elevation.



Plate 5 Eastern elevation of the first floor showing timber framing. Photo CPAT 2520-072

Gazebo Roof (Figs 3-4)

- 3.14 The pyramidal roof (Plate 6) is supported on a wall plate and comprises four principal rafters which rise from the corners to a central post at the apex, some 1.6m above the wall plate level. A cambered beam runs east to west across the centre, and is pegged into the wall plate at either end. The central king strut is tenoned and pegged into the beam, supporting the four principal rafters. At the time of the survey the rafters were separated from the top of the king strut and it is uncertain whether or not they were nailed in place. At the corners of the roof angle ties and dragon beams are pegged to the wall plates with the principal rafters tenoned and pegged into the dragon beams. The purlins are close to the apex and are nailed to the rafters. Common rafters rise from the wall plates, some of which are supported by the purlins, and are nailed to the principal rafters. Two rafters have been replaced on the north side and one each on the west and south sides. A number of later supports have been nailed to strengthen the structure where the original rafters have weakened. All of the rafters have sprockets, tapering upwards, nailed to their ends.



Plate 6 Gazebo roof structure. Photo CPAT 2520-028

- 3.15 At ceiling level four curving beams, notched at one end to the angle ties and nailed centrally to the main cambered beam, have nailed to them numbers of smaller beams extending from the wall plates. This provides the framework (Plate 7) to which the underlying laths are attached, running in quarters parallel to the wall plates, forming the quadripartite coved ceiling in the room below.



Plate 7 Roof timbers and supporting structure for ceiling below. Photo CPAT 2520-041

Chimney

- 3.16 The external chimney is constructed of bricks which measure around 230mm by 12mm and 6mm thick. The main stack is 0.8m square and extends 2m above the gazebo west wall, at which point it reduces in size to 0.5m by 0.6m, being offset on the west and south sides. The flue from the lower fireplace is on the east, while that from the upper fireplace is on the west.
- 3.17 The gap between the south face of the upper chimney and the gazebo timber-framed wall is taken up by a V-shaped stone gutter, 0.8m in length, which is probably a reused ridge tile.

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 A watching brief was maintained during a series of groundworks within the garden where the depth of disturbance was considered to be sufficient potentially to impact on deposits buried beneath the modern garden soil. In addition, a digital photographic record was made of the interior of the brick garden wall along the east side of the Lord's Garden, prior to repointing. Copies of the images were passed to Chester Masonry on CD and as printed hard copies to enable the recording of any nails or other fittings which might be revealed during the work.
- 4.2 In early December 2007 a watching brief was conducted during mechanical excavations to remove three small trees. Pit 1 was approximately 1m in diameter and excavated to a depth of 0.31m. The removal of the modern topsoil revealed a deposit of soft, reddish-brown, silty sand which contained mortar, sandstone fragments, oyster shells and clay pipe, probably associated with building or demolition rubble. Beneath this layer was an undisturbed cultivation soil.
- 4.3 Pit 2, along the southern boundary wall, measured 1.7m in diameter and 0.7m deep. The base of the trench exposed the sandstone bedrock, above which a number of deposits and features were noted, mostly being recorded in section. The earliest feature appeared to be a possible pit filled with a light reddish brown sandy silt with charcoal flecks. This had been cut by a wall, the only evidence for which was a robber trench 0.48m wide. A second, later pit was also identified, containing large quantities of building rubble and a number of artefacts which suggested an 18th- or 19th-century date.
- 4.4 Pit 3 was located against the low stone wall projecting from the rear of the brewery, at the west end of Nantelwyd House. The pit measured 1.8m by 1.3m and 0.7m deep. The sandstone bedrock was revealed in the base of the pit, above which was a 0.2m-thick layer of cultivation soil, sealed beneath a deposit containing 18th- and 19th-century finds. The pit revealed part of the outer face of the low wall, which had been constructed in two phases. The footings were around 0.5m below the present ground surface and consisted of three courses of limestone with lime mortar bonding. That part of the wall standing above ground was clearly of a later build, being of poorer quality masonry, with a different mortar. The walling belongs to a two-storey studio which adjoined another structure to the north (see 4.8), both of which were demolished in the 1990s (Morris 2002, 57).
- 4.5 The watching brief also monitored the machine excavation of a trench along the northern side of the garden to provide services to the gazebo. This was excavated in two phases, the latter stage being undertaken following the completion of restoration works to the gazebo. The trench was 0.45m wide and up to 0.7m deep, and for most of its length cut through a modern path and into cultivation soils beneath. Where the trench passed through a break in the garden perimeter wall substantial footings were uncovered, comprising four courses of

sandstone, rising 0.8m above the bedrock. This demonstrated that the boundary wall was originally continuous and the break of relatively modern date.

- 4.6 Monitoring of excavations along the alley on the north side of Nantclwyd House revealed evidence for cultivation soils containing late medieval pottery and butchered animal bones, possibly derived from kitchen waste. This was sealed beneath a thin layer of red sand into which a hard-standing of rounded river cobbles had been set. This extended along the length of the alley, and also along the western side of the brewery through a gap in the boundary wall (see 4.8). The cobbled surface had previously been identified during a watching brief in 2006 (Silvester 2006). A test pit was excavated in the alley adjacent to the end of the brewery, revealing the robbed-out remains of footings for a stone wall, aligned north to south, respecting the western wall of the brewery. The upper fill of a rubbish pit was also identified, on the west side of the robbed wall.
- 4.7 The western section of the trench, connecting to the gazebo, involved excavating beneath the boundary wall which separates the inner garden from the Lord's Garden. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.5m against the eastern face of the wall, revealing 0.8m of dressed stone below the present ground surface, standing on a rough foundation 0.7m high, which rested on the bedrock. This demonstrated that the ground level within the inner garden had been significantly raised over the centuries and may originally have sloped down towards the west. The substantial nature of the wall and footings resulted in the services being 'mole'd' through the wall. On the western side of the wall, and against the gazebo, the upper 0.5m of deposits consisted of demolition rubble containing hand-made brick similar to that used in the gazebo.



Plate 8 cobble flooring in the possible carriage house to the east of the former brewery.

Photo CPAT 2501-094

- 4.8 The monitoring of further groundworks adjacent to the former brewery revealed more detail of the foundations and cobbled surface uncovered during earlier works (see Fig. 5). The earliest walling (Phase A), which measured 0.5m wide and survived up to 0.9m in height at the east end, was constructed from a mixture of limestone and sandstone, bonded with a pink

lime mortar. The wall clearly predated the standing building of the former brewery and extended from it to the east for 4.1m before turning northwards at 90°. The surviving upper course of the wall was a slightly different build (Phase B), although possibly contemporary. Following the construction of the brewery the earlier walling was largely demolished and used in part to form a foundation for a slightly narrower wall (Phase C), possibly for an outbuilding. Within the building the remains of a cobbled floor were revealed, constructed of river cobbles, including at least one drain. The cobbled surface is contemporary with that revealed in the adjacent alley to the north and is assumed to be a relatively late addition, possibly dating from the early 19th century. It is possible that this may have been a carriage house, and was certainly later used as a garage, which was demolished as recently as the 1990s (Morris 2002, 57). It is interesting to note that the existing window in the west wall of the old brewery was originally a doorway.



Plate 9 Basal remains of outbuildings to the east of the former brewery.
Photo CPAT 2501-082

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The restoration works have afforded a valuable opportunity to record an important architectural feature in the gardens of Nantclwyd House. It seems likely that the gazebo was constructed by John Wynne and his wife Dorothy, who occupied Nantclwyd from 1733.
- 5.2 The gazebo was constructed as a two-storeyed structure, but with the addition of an undercroft. The ground floor and undercroft were built in limestone, while the first floor was timber-framed, accessed via steps leading onto a terrace. Perhaps the most interesting architectural feature of the gazebo is the timber-framing for the pyramidal roof, which includes supports for a quadripartite coved ceiling in the first-floor room below.
- 5.3 Internally, the two main rooms would have been well-appointed, with plastered walls and ceilings and each having a small brick fireplace served by an external chimney on the north-west corner of the building.
- 5.4 Although the survey has provided a detailed record of the majority of the gazebo, it was not possible to access fully the undercroft and adjacent passageway, which were partly infilled with debris.
- 5.5 A watching brief was maintained during a series of groundworks within the inner garden, the results from which have revealed information relating to a series of structures which formerly stood immediately to the west of the old brewery. The earliest structure predated the brewery and its foundations were reused in part for the construction of a later lean-to building with a cobbled floor which may have been a carriage house. Appended to this on the south side was a two-storey studio, both buildings having been demolished in the 1990s.

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Cartographic sources

- 1730s Drawing of Ruthin town by J Lewis, Denbighshire Record Office
- 1742 print of Ruthin Castle, Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, Denbighshire Record Office print 395
- 1780 plan of Nantclwyd House NLW 7322

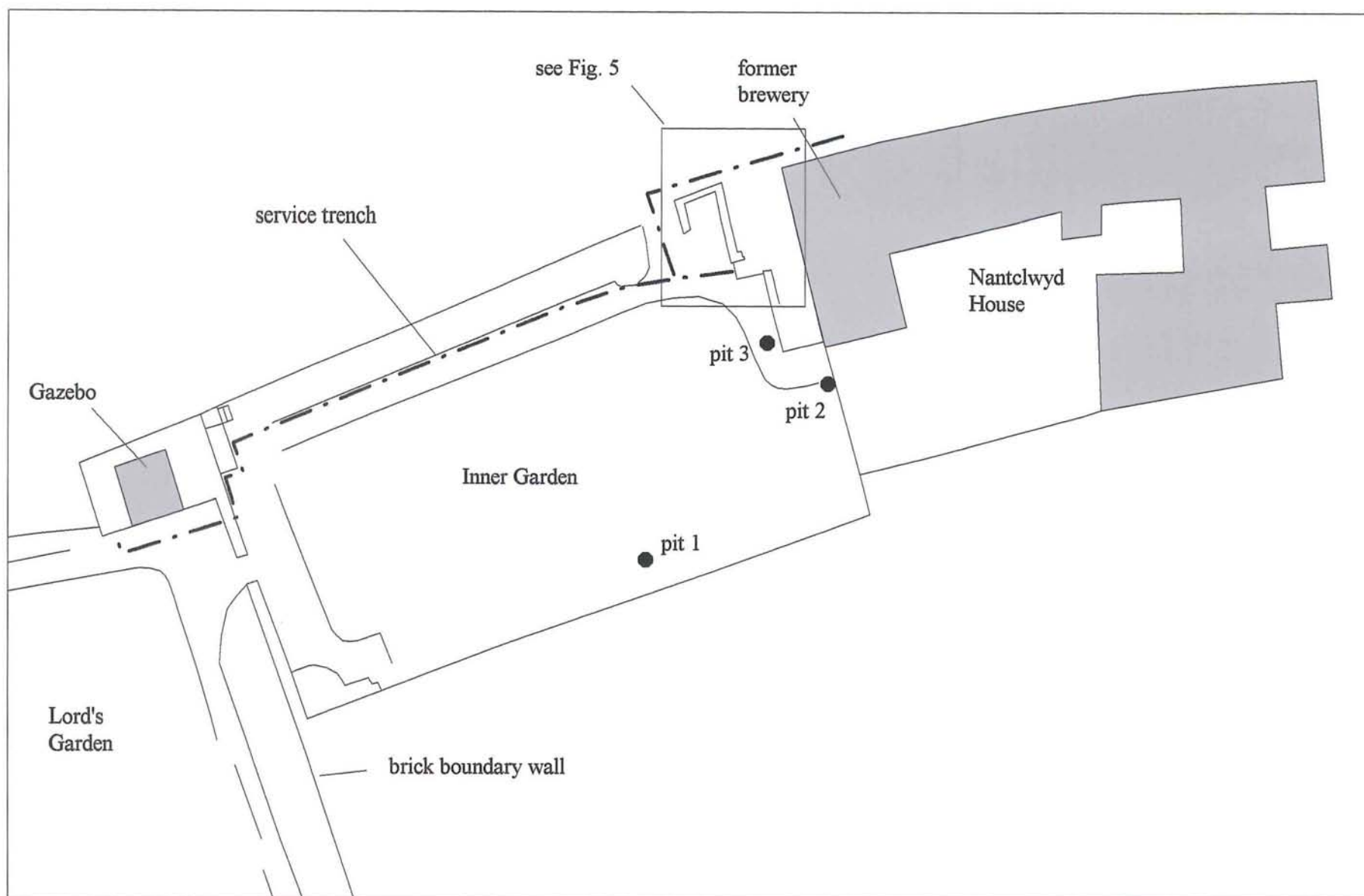


Fig. 1 Plan of Nantclwyd House and gardens showing location of Gazebo and watching brief

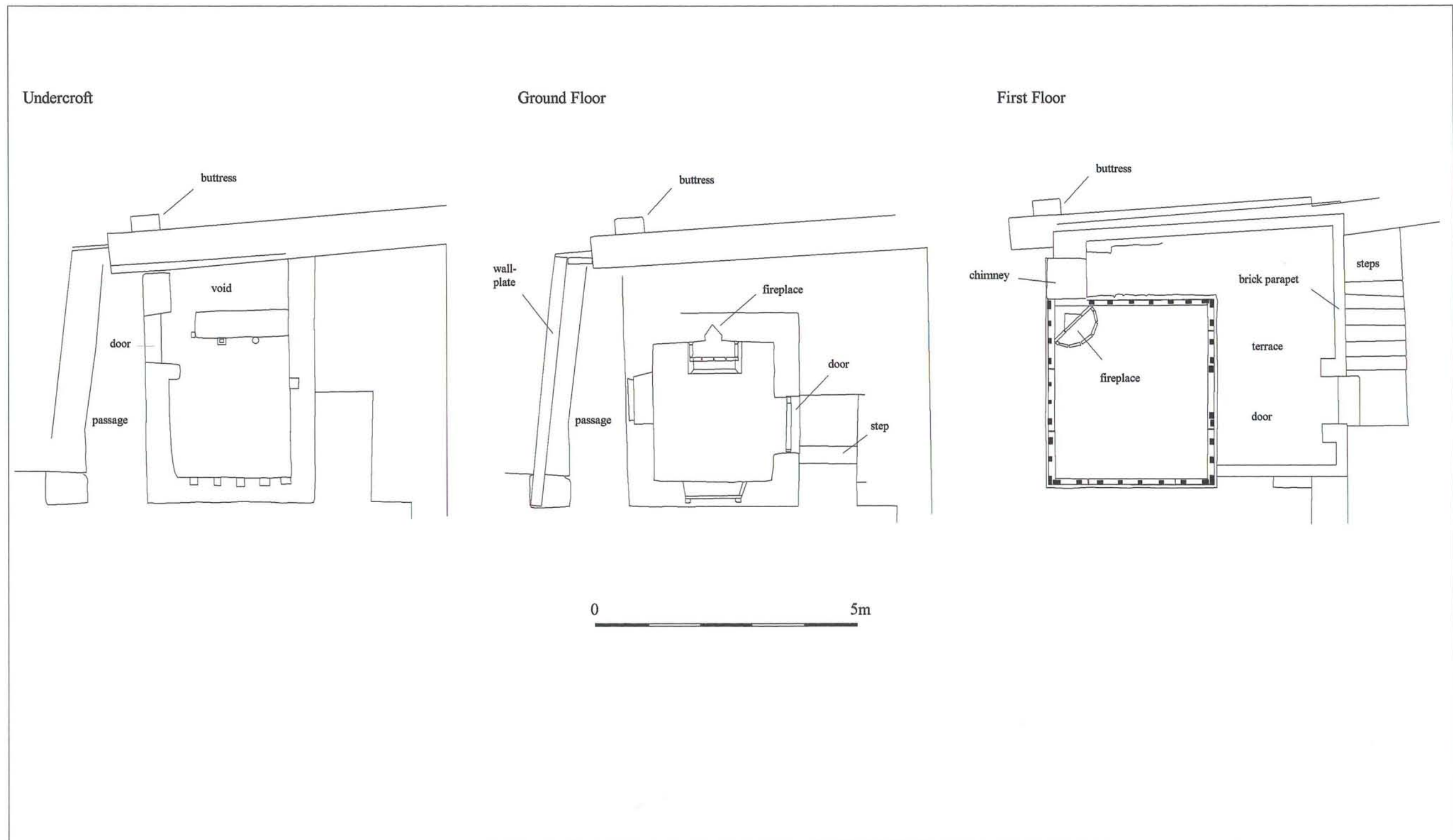


Fig. 2 Gazebo floor plans



Fig. 3 Gazebo elevations

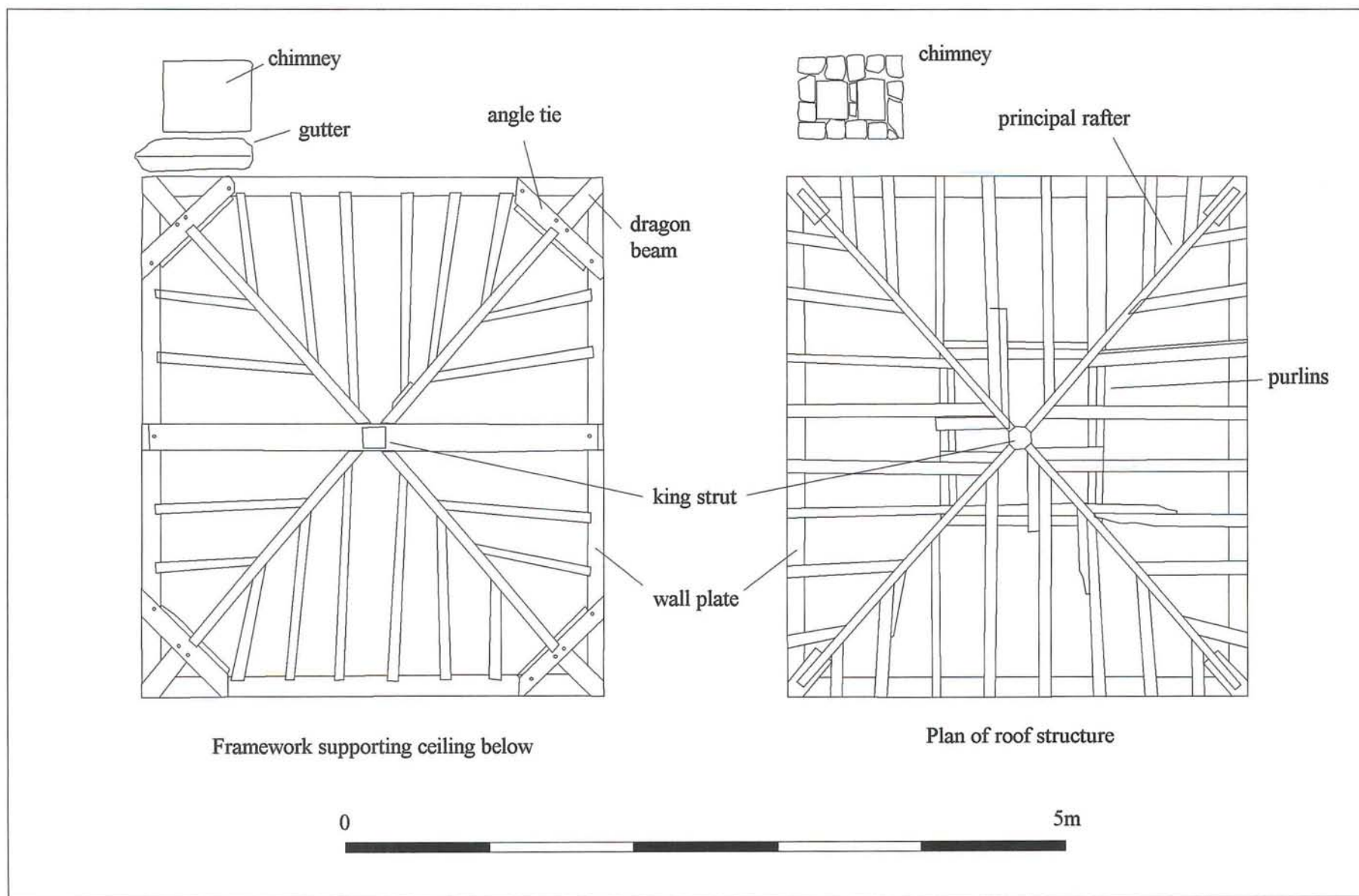


Fig. 4 Gazebo roof structure



Fig. 5 Remains of possible carriage house and studio adjacent to the former brewery



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