

EAST DENSHAM FARMHOUSE, WOOLFARDISWORTHY: AN HISTORIC BUILDING EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Exeter Archaeology and presents the results of an historic building evaluation of the Grade II-listed East Densham Farmhouse, Woolfardisworthy (SS 8209 0938; listed building no. 433933). The work was commissioned by Mr R. Bower of Dunn Marino Associates in advance of a planning application for alterations to the building. The work was required by the Mid Devon District Council Conservation Officer, and was undertaken in accordance with a brief provided by the Devon County Historic Environment Service (Reed 2008).

This document presents a basic description of the building including its main architectural features, followed by a consideration of the proposed alterations, and the impact of these on the building. It also contains recommendations for further archaeological recording in mitigation of the proposed alterations. Phased floor plans are reproduced as accompanying figures (Figs 1 and 2). An OASIS entry (site id no. exeterar1-46996) has also been prepared.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The farmhouse is a T-shaped structure, constructed of stone and cob, with a main east-west orientated range and, attached to its west end, a north-south aligned cross wing retaining parts of a medieval roof. Also attached to the main range are a pantry lean-to on its north elevation and a porch on its east elevation. The former is possibly of early 19th-century date, whilst the latter is modern. Abutting the northwest corner of the cross wing is a small store, which represents the remains of a larger two-storey mid-19th-century barn. The main range formerly extended eastwards by a further room, and historic maps depict ranges (?of agricultural buildings) to the north and south of this demolished room.

The house underwent extensive alterations in the 1940s and particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which included replacement of the windows and extensive alterations to the roofs (Listed Building description). Most of the fixtures and fittings date to the latter period. Much of the fabric remains hidden behind render or paintwork of that date.

On the ground floor the layout of the main range comprises a central cross-passage flanked by rooms (the present kitchen and living room). A third room to the east of the kitchen was demolished, apparently in the 1970s. The walls of the cross passage have been widened and rebuilt, although an early, possible original, door and frame survive on its lower side, perhaps a fragment of a longer plank and muntin screen. The door has old graffiti and a broken 17th-century strap hinge. The door frame appears to be undecorated, but traces of a possible plain chamfer may survive on the rear face towards the present kitchen. The only historic architectural feature in the kitchen is a stone fireplace in the east elevation. This fireplace formerly contained a bread oven, apparently with its opening in the south side of the chimney stack rather than in the hearth, an unusual location for such a feature.

A lateral chimney stack is present in the living room apparently with a blocked-off bread oven. The oven door has been reset from the kitchen bread oven. The window opening west

of the fireplace retains an early (possibly late medieval) wooden lintel, with two rebates for vertical wooden mullions on its lower side, and on its outer face what appear to be two wide mortice sockets with rounded corners. The function of these sockets is unclear. The room is divided into three bays by two large beams with plain chamfers and stepped run-out stops. The present joists have been set/reset into earlier rebates in the beams.

The ground floor of the cross wing contains two rooms, although there is no access between them. The north room appears to be entirely constructed of stone. These observations may therefore indicate that the north room is an extension. In the south room there is a stone chimney stack, with later brick masonry inserted into the fireplace. The fireplace has a slightly arched wooden lintel with ovolo moulding suggesting a 16th- or 17th-century date. Above this lintel is a (possibly smoke-blackened) beam that displays a chamfer. The joists set into this beam have scars and nail holes relating to a former lath and plaster ceiling, now removed.

On the first floor the main range contains three bedrooms along the front of the house with a bathroom to the rear, all served by a corridor along the back of the building. The partitions of these rooms are all believed to be modern, and where exposed, modern plaster has been utilised in their construction. The layout is however typical of the first-floor arrangements in cross-passage houses. The only historic features are the chimney stacks rising from the ground floor, a timber in the east bedroom and archways in the corridor reflecting the positions of trusses in the roof above.

The roof of this range was replaced in the 1970s; however, some lap-jointed rafters and side purlins of an earlier 19th- or 20th-century roof have been incorporated (some almost certainly reset) within the present roof structure.

The first floor of the cross wing contains a master bedroom, dressing room, and en-suite bathroom, with the dressing room being entered from the corridor in the main range. The current layout is defined by existing structural features. The north side of the master bedroom is partially formed by the stack from the ground floor fireplace. The adjacent doorway is set within a possible late 19th-century lath and plaster partition, and has a contemporary door frame with ovolo moulding and a high stepped stop. The dressing room and en-suite bathroom are divided by the cob end wall of the early range, with the bathroom being located within the extension.

The master bedroom is open to the roof and retains its late 15th- or early 16th-century arched-braced roof with two bays divided by an off-central truss. These timbers are currently visible as far north as the fireplace – the end of the room – but must have continued throughout the range. Further parts of the original roof survive above the dressing room in a mutilated condition. The roof of the bathroom is a 1970s replacement of an earlier structure. The visible truss is supported by jointed cruck wall posts extending down at least as far as the floor of the bedroom. The wall posts and arch braces are morticed into the principal rafters above the curve of the cruck. The top of the arch braces are attached to a horizontal morticed and tenoned collar. There are two rows of trenched side purlins, the ends of which abut each other where they are pegged into the principal rafters; the ridge purlin is diagonally set between the apexes of the rafters. Between the side purlins are curved wind braces, with a pair of wind braces surviving adjacent to the principal rafters. Both the wind braces and the arch braces have plain chamfers. All the timbers are smoke blackened, although there is evidence that some of the timbers (at least the purlins either side of the truss) were at some stage ceiled

over. The south end of the roof is currently a straight gable, but internally, there is an unusual stepped hip, possibly reflecting a modern covering up of an earlier steeper hipped gable. The trusses are extremely elegant and well carpentered, suggesting a high-quality roof.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILDING

Documentary research (A.G. Collings *pers. comm.*) has demonstrated that East Densham can clearly be associated with an estate described in the Domesday Survey that passed into the hands of Montacute Priory in Somerset in the mid-12th century. The present building was probably constructed during ownership of the priory, probably in the late 15th or early 16th century. The building was a variant of the standard 3-room and cross passage design, with the parlour located in an additional range adjacent to the hall. This range was clearly (at least partly) of one storey, open to the roof, as evidenced by the presence of decorative wind braces, and the smoke blackened nature of the roof timbers indicating an open hearth.

The listing description states that the lower beam in the living room (former hall) was moved from the kitchen to replace ‘the internal jetty created by the insertion of a chamber over the passage in the open hall’. Although possible, this seems unlikely if the current passage reflects the position of the original passage, as the jetty would have been projected nearly a quarter of the way into the open hall. However, with the evidence from the cross wing, and the presence of the inserted chimney stacks, the hall and possibly other rooms in this range would have been open to the roof.

Later alterations to the building include the flooring over of the open ground floor rooms with the provision of stone fireplaces to replace open hearths. This probably took place in the 17th century, although possibly in a piecemeal fashion. The extension of the cross wing may also have taken place at this time. The lean-to extension to the north of the main range had been constructed by 1840. The Listed Building description reports that the kitchen was ‘completely rebuilt circa `1970’’. Much of the fabric of this room is obscured although there is some evidence in the north and east wall of some modern rebuilding or repairs.

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AND IMPACT ON THE HISTORIC BUILDING

The following alterations to the building are proposed, and are listed along with an appraisal of their impact on the historic fabric of the farmhouse.

- Repairs and alterations to roof in the cross wing.
Impact: Repairs may affect parts of the 15th- or 16th-century roof.
- Remove dressing room ceiling and form new vaulted roof.
Impact: Exact form of existing roof in this area is unknown but works will provide an opportunity to investigate this roof structure.
- Remove flat water tables on lateral chimney stack and build new sloping tables.
Impact: Some minimal alterations to historic fabric.
- Remove and replace side porches.
Impact: None, current structures are modern.
- Cut out masonry below sitting room window to form French door opening.
Impact: None, current window and masonry are modern. However, an historic timber survives above present window lintel.

- Remove all windows and fit new double-glazed windows.
Impact: None, current windows are modern.
- Removal of external rendering and recovering in lime.
Impact: None, but this may provide an opportunity to fully understand the fabric, fenestration and development of the building.
- Alterations to pantry including raising the roofline; removal of staircase from hall and replacement in pantry; removal of wall between hall and living room.
Impact: Limited impact on historic fabric, including creation of new doorway in the north elevation at first floor level.
- Removal of Aga cooker from kitchen to Pound House, and reinstatement.
- *Impact:* limited alterations to the historic fabric.

FURTHER RECORDING

In general, the above works will not have a significant effect on the historic fabric of the building. However, the works will provide an opportunity to more fully understand the building and its development. In particular, a record of the roof of the east range should be prepared, including of any elements currently hidden above the dressing room. Removal of the external render may expose evidence of earlier fenestration as well as structural features. The internal alterations may expose elements of pre-1970s fabric. Monitoring of these elements, in the form of a watching brief, should take place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the architect, Richard Bower, for the provision of information relating to the later 20th-century alterations to the building, and to the tenants for allowing access to the building. Thanks are also due to my colleague Richard Parker for discussing his earlier site visit and for commenting on the text.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Heritage Gateway website: <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>.

Reed, S. 2008. *Scheme of Works for Historic Building Evaluation, East Densham Farmhouse, Woolfardisworthy* (DCC HER ref: Arch/dc/md/13623).

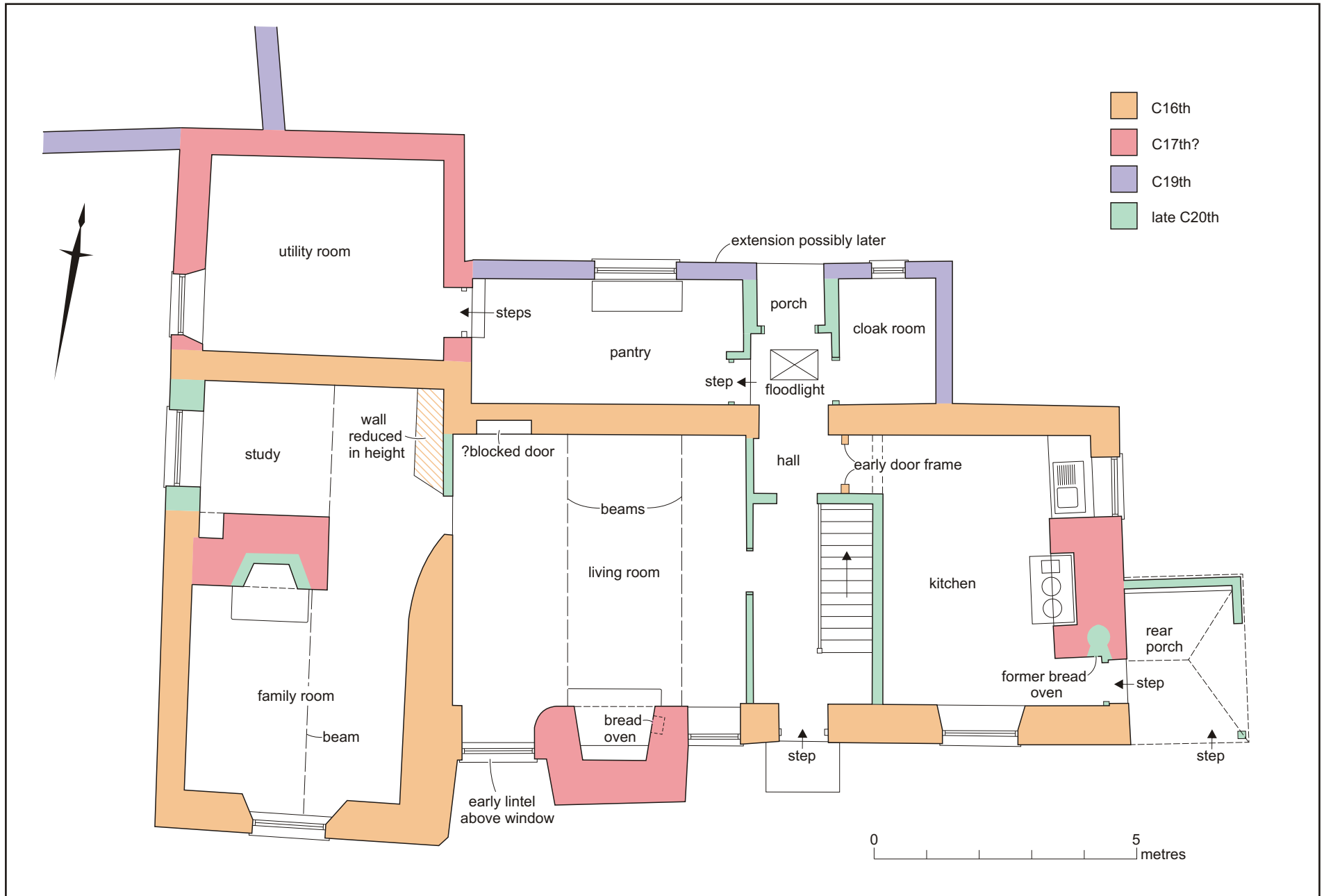


Fig. 1 East Densham Farmhouse, ground floor phase plan. Scale 1:100.

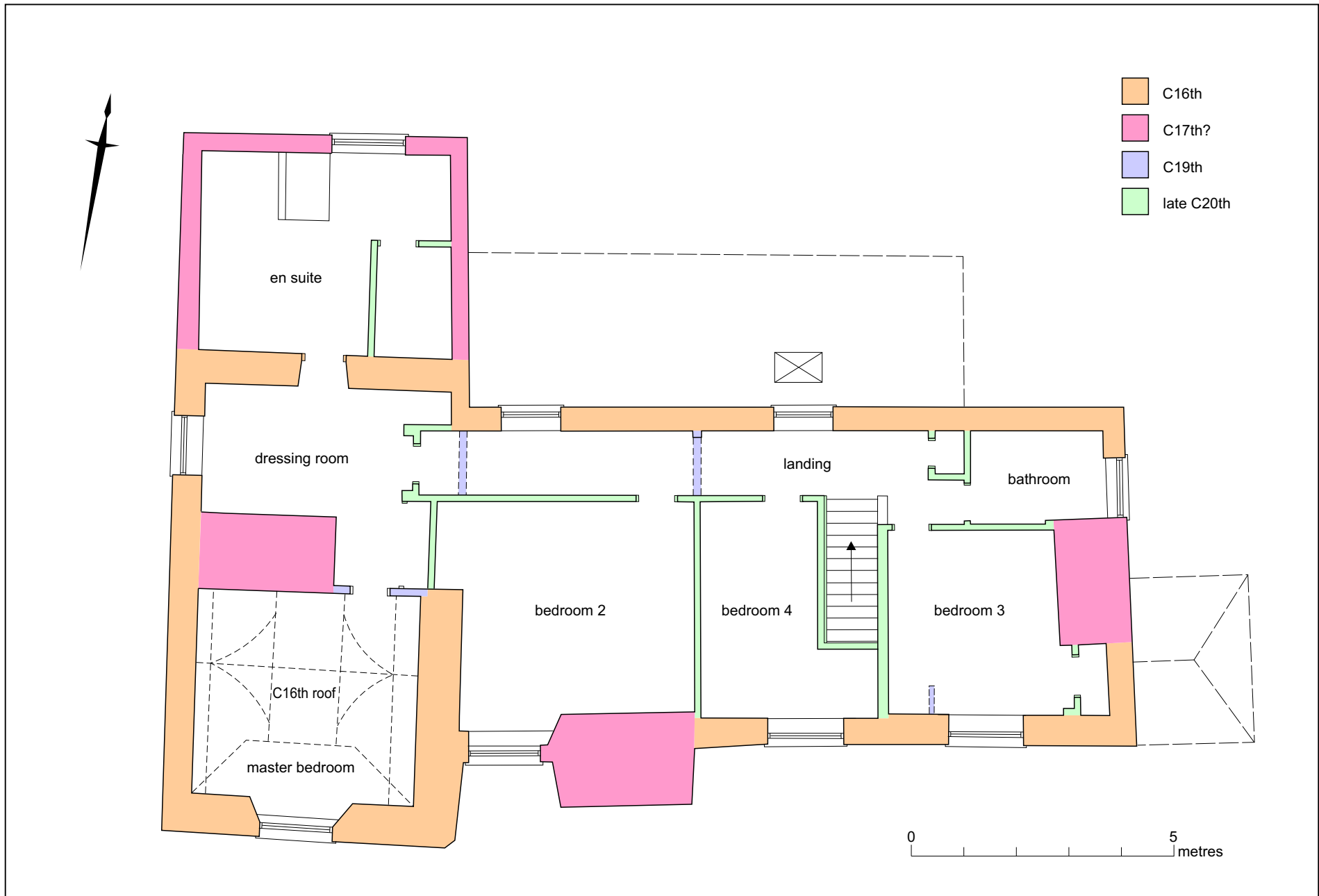


Fig. 2 East Densham Farmhouse, first floor phase plan. Scale 1:100.