

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING OF  
EAST RUCKHAM FARMHOUSE,  
CRUWYS MORCHARD, DEVON**

**Prepared for  
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## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. The site	1
2.1 Archaeological background	1
2.2 General description	1
3. Aims	1
4. Method	2
5. Results	2
5.1 The roof of the north range	2
5.2 The roof of the east range	3
5.3 Internal alterations – ground floor	3
5.4 Internal alterations – first floor	3
6. Discussion	4
7. Further archaeological recording	5
Acknowledgements	6
Sources consulted	6

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 Location of site.

Fig. 2 Phased plan of the ground floor.

Fig. 3 Phased plan of the first floor.

Fig. 4 Roof trusses of the north range.

Pl. 1 The eastern principal truss in the north range.

Pl. 2 The truss in the east range.

## 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

This report presents the results of archaeological recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in January and February 2009 at East Ruckham Farmhouse, Cruwys Morchard, Devon (SS 8786 1101; Fig. 1) during alterations to and internal reordering of the building. The work was commissioned by Structural Design & Calculation Ltd on behalf of the owner, Mr S. Clarke, and was required by Mid Devon District Council as a condition of the grant of listed building consent (08/01493/LBC). The farmhouse is a Grade II-listed building (no. 437866).

## 2. THE SITE (Figs 2 and 3)

### 2.1 Archaeological background

In July 2008 an historic building evaluation of the farmhouse was prepared by EA in advance of the proposed works (Passmore 2008). This document included a description of the building, an interpretation of its development, and an assessment of the proposed alterations along with mitigation proposals for archaeological recording. The development of the site as described in the evaluation report is summarised below in section 2.2, and is revisited in light of the new observations in section 6.

### 2.2 General description

East Ruckham Farmhouse is located within the parish of Cruwys Morchard in Mid Devon, some 1.1km to the south of the parish church. The farmhouse was historically associated with a rectangular group of farm buildings located to the west of the main house. Of these agricultural buildings only the threshing barn with engine house and the east range of the farmyard survive (the latter heavily altered), and recently converted into accommodation. These buildings are augmented by modern stables.

The two-storey farmhouse comprises two ranges – one north-south aligned (the east range), the other orientated east-west (the north range; Figs 2 and 3). Both ranges are constructed of cob, although this, along with most of the internal walls, is almost entirely obscured by external render and internal plaster and/or stud partitions. Some of these partitions were removed during the present works. All of the principal ground-floor rooms are served by fireplaces. The building was probably constructed in the late 16th or 17th century, with a two-storey north range housing the hall and parlour with accommodation above, and a semi-detached kitchen in the south range open to the roof. This room was subsequently floored over, perhaps as late as the 18th century. In the 18th century the building was extensively refurbished. A new room, probably a dairy, was added to the east end of the north range, and this range was refreshed with internal reordering of the layout of both the ground and first floors. During the second half of the 19th century a number of structures were attached to the east side of the east range, although these additions have subsequently been removed.

## 3. AIMS

The principal aims of the archaeological recording were as follows:

- To preserve by record that part of the historic fabric of the building likely to be affected by the proposed alterations; and
- To monitor all groundworks associated with the alterations in order to identify any surviving archaeological deposits and to preserve those deposits through record before the continuation of the works.

## 4. METHOD

The recording was undertaken in accordance with a method statement prepared by EA (Stead 2008), and comprised two main elements: recording of the roof of the north range, and monitoring and recording during removal of internal partitions and alterations to internal openings. A written record was made using EA watching brief record sheets accompanied by a drawn record at scales of 1:5, 1:20 and 1:50. This was accompanied by a photographic record made using black-and-white prints and in digital format. The only groundworks were for a new external boiler and these were undertaken without archaeological monitoring.

## 5. RESULTS (Figs 2-4; Pls 1 and 2)

### 5.1 **The roof of the north range** (Figs 3 and 4; Pl. 1)

The roof structure of the north range comprises three primary trusses with three intermediate trusses, and a hip truss at the west end. The intermediate trusses are of 19th-century date and given the long span between the principal trusses it seems highly likely that these replaced earlier intermediate trusses although there is no direct evidence for earlier trusses (some bays with large spans have however been recorded in farmhouse roof structures). The roof is in a poor condition and several phases of historic repair and additional supports to the trusses were recorded.

The principal trusses are half lap-jointed at their apexes where they support a diagonal ridge purlin, and have high-level half lap-jointed collars, all fixed with wooden pegs. There are two rows of trenched purlins on each side of the roof, butt jointed where they are attached to the principal rafters. A number of repairs to strengthen the roof have taken place in the 19th and 20th centuries. All three trusses have secondary applied collars just above the ceiling, whilst the western truss also has a third applied collar, with further bracing set between the two earlier collars.

All the principal rafters display evidence for partitions, i.e. they were 'closed', and the roof space formed part of first floor rooms or chambers. The roof space had been ceiled over by the 19th century when the intermediate trusses were added, and probably occurred when the house was 'Georgianised'. Below the collar of the western truss there are horizontal holes for sprung laths and traces of paint only on the eastern face of the rafters indicating that the west bay was ceiled over at a low level, below the hip of the roof, and that the next bay was open as high up as the collar. The central and eastern trusses have paint extending the full height of the trusses, on their western and eastern faces respectively. The collars of both trusses also incorporate mortice sockets for removed vertical posts. Above the collar on the eastern truss painted lath and plaster survives, laid onto wooden boards that are attached to the collar and rafters.

The intermediate trusses were added, probably in the late 19th century, to provide support to the earlier roof, particularly the sagging upper row of purlins. The principal rafters have lap-jointed apexes supporting yokes that hold the original ridge purlins. Each truss has a low-level bolted collar. The original purlins rest either on the rafters or on pieces of wood attached to the rafters.

The west end of the roof was formerly hipped and the two hip rafters survive, although the collar and the purlins between this truss and the first principal truss have been removed. The

east elevation is vertical and is constructed of cob. Stone masonry of the chimney stack from the ground floor fireplace (in the present kitchen) has been inserted through this cob. To the south of the chimney stack the cob incorporates a small window opening with a simple wooden frame with a pointed head.

### 5.2 **The roof of the east range (Pl. 2)**

Within the east range there is a single jointed-cruck truss composed of a pair of principal rafters with a pegged half lap-jointed collar, and two pairs of trenched purlins with scarf joints behind the truss. The collar has been additionally strengthened during the mid 20th century with the inclusion of a single iron screwed bolt to at either end. The replacement purlins are smaller than the primary purlins accommodating only three-quarters of the notched space within the principal rafter. There are primary and replacement common rafters, all scarf-jointed and pegged to each rafter. The principal rafters have additional sections of nailed timber attached to them raising the height of the roof structure to accommodate the present 20th century rafter arrangement.

### 5.3 **Internal alterations – ground floor (Fig. 2)**

The partition between the existing kitchen and dining room was removed. This partition was identified during the evaluation as part of the Georgian reordering of the house and its position did not reflect the earlier layout. The partition is constructed of 10 vertical studs set into a horizontal sill, and interrupted by two diagonal braces. The partition was originally faced on both sides with lath and plaster, and this material only survives at the south end of the partition to a maximum height of 1.20m. During the 20th century the gaps within the partition were infilled with drilled bricks, finished with cement render, to a height of 0.80m above the floor. These were covered with at least three layers of 20th-century wallpaper prior to the installation of the present kitchen units. The west side of the partition has been refaced with tongue and grooved panelling.

In the eastern extension to the north range observations of the ceiling were made. A single original east-west aligned joist survived, displaying scars of lath and plaster on its underside associated with its contemporary ceiling. All other joists are modern, as is the plasterboard ceiling along with its recycled historic cornice.

In the dining room the modern fireplace surround and lintel was removed to expose an earlier, larger fireplace. The remains of a brick surface survived in the hearth, truncated by a later stone slab surface. The lower sides of the fireplace have been lined with white-painted cement render, scored to create an impression of bricks. The bricks and render had been obscured by stone rubble, which was inserted when the present fireplace was installed. A massive lintel spans the fireplace and this is supported on wooden pads in the projecting jambs. These pads have been reused from sections of a doorframe that originated in a wooden screen. On one face the pads display a chamfer and a rebate for the door, whilst on the opposite face are small circular holes for sprung laths. The presence of these pads indicates that the fireplace was added, or more likely altered, after the screen's passage went out of use and the screen was dismantled, perhaps in the late 18th century.

### 5.4 **Internal alterations – first floor (Fig. 3)**

The partitions defining the central bedroom and the adjacent corridor on the north range were removed. Although observations were limited, a sequence of four phases of development and alterations were recorded. The earliest phase is the construction of the farmhouse, represented on the first floor by lime-rendered walls. The second phase represents the division of a room

(or rooms) from the landing above the stairs. It is likely this arrangement was similar to the present layout. The north elevation of the farmhouse was obscured by a new lath and plaster false wall to create a flat surface, and the same material was used for the partition between the landing and room/s to the east. Here two vertical doorposts were exposed, along with wooden framing above the door where lath and plaster survived. The joints of this partition are pegged.

The third phase represents the subdivision creating the present corridor and central bedroom with a lath and plaster partition. This partition comprises a series of vertical studs that were partially exposed, set into a sill at floor level and bisected by a diagonal brace. At the entrance to the corridor from the landing is a horizontal beam attached to which are four curved pieces of wood forming an arch, also covered with lath and plaster. Nails were used throughout this work. The final phase of alterations relates to modern redecorating and include the provision of a new plaster face to the corridor elevation of the partition, and wooden piers over the top of the stairs in the landing.

The opening in the north elevation of the east range was unblocked and the adjacent cupboard removed, exposing the original plastered cob walls hidden behind modern plasterboard and stud walls. In places two phases of plaster were visible, the inner layer with a light grey whitewash, and the outer layer painted white. The opening itself is splayed and was for a door. The doorframe is painted softwood with a simple curved moulding retaining its catch mechanism. Since this door opens from the first floor of the north range extension it is likely to date to, or after, the 18th century.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The farmhouse is a variant of the typical 3-room and cross-passage farmhouse, with the north range forming the main part of the building incorporating a hall, parlour cross passage and probably a third room on the ground floor. The kitchen was located in a semi-detached block (the east range), staggered from the main range to reduce the spread of fire.

The evaluation identified two types of roof trusses – a jointed cruck in the east range and A-frames in the north range – and the subsequent recording showed that these roofs were contemporary. This difference in the roof types is therefore not indicative of different phases of construction. The carpentry of the collars and lap joints of the collars and apexes of the principal rafters is very similar in both ranges and all are probably of late 16th- or early 17th-century date. The difference in roof types reflects the usage of the space in the rooms below. The north range incorporated a first floor from the outset (there is no evidence of smoke-blackened timbers), and the closed profile of the trusses indicates that these (probably four) rooms had high ceilings that were situated variously either at the base of the collars, at the apexes of the roof, or at a lower level at the base of the roof hip. With the provision of a first floor there is no requirement for a cruck roof structure. In the kitchen however, it is clear from the smoke-blackened roof that this room was initially open to the roof with an open fire, and was not floored over. The jointed-cruck roof structure is the traditional Devon way of spanning such an open room without the need for low level ties or collars. This combination of contemporary rooms within a house – open to the roof and floored-over providing first-floor accommodation – is not common in Devon, but examples are known. At *Pixie Cottage*, *Alphington*, for example, the service room was originally open to the roof, but the other two rooms were floor-over from the outset (Parker 1999, 1). The roof structure also comprised a mixture of jointed crucks for open trusses, and A-frames for the closed trusses (*ibid.*, 2-3).

The date of flooring of the kitchen, and the insertion of a fireplace and smoking chamber, has not been established. This event may have occurred as late as the Georgian reordering recorded elsewhere in the farmhouse (as put forward in the evaluation report) but if the ground-floor beam is *in situ* then it could have occurred in the 17th century.

As noted above, the layout of the north range reflects a Georgian reordering of the building, which does not respect the earlier layout. The south elevation was altered to form a near-symmetrical façade with a near-central door flanked by pairs of windows. This main door led to a hall that was probably formed from the earlier passage. On the ground floor the hall provides access to two reception rooms. The Georgian lath and plaster partition between the kitchen and hall was removed during the present works. On the first floor a series of bedrooms were entered via the landing and almost certainly a rear corridor. Again, where exposed, these were constructed of lath and plaster attached to wooden frame. When, or after, the dairy was added a new door was inserted at first-floor level into the north wall of the east range providing access between this range and a room over the dairy.

It was put forward in the evaluation that the present boot room in the east range may have been added when the adjacent fireplace was inserted. Although the present stairs in this room are modern, it is possible that the room was added to provide a second staircase to the first floor. The addition of this room and the dairy, along with the reordering of the north range, reflect a period of greater wealth by the owners, and that the farmhouse was occupied by more people than previously, with servants or agricultural labourers having accommodation situated on the first floor of the east range and above the dairy.

Limited later alterations, provisionally dated to the 19th century, have been identified, principally involving the creation of the present corridor and bedrooms on the first floor of the north range. The roof of this range was also strengthened at this period with the insertion of new intermediate trusses.

More recently, 20th-century alterations to the ground floor have included the moving of the kitchen from the east range into the north range, and the narrowing of the fireplace in the dining room. On the first floor, changes were made to the partitions dividing the main rooms, and the room above the dairy was turned into an on-suite bathroom. Associated with the latter, the door from the east range was blocked and a new door inserted (from the bedroom) through the chimney stack serving the ground ground-floor fireplace.

## 7. FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

One element of the proposed works that did not take place in 2009 was the re-rendering of the garden elevations of the building – namely the south elevation of the north range and the west elevation of the east range. It is understood this work may take place at a later, as yet unspecified, date. As previously proposed, archaeological recording of the stripped elevations should take place, since this will add greatly to the phasing and understanding of the building, particularly in relation to alterations of the openings and the extent of the possible extension and later rebuilding of the boot room.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## SOURCES CONSULTED

- Parker, R.W. 1999 *Archaeological Recording at Pixie Cottage, Alphington*, EA rep. no. **99.27**.
- Passmore, A.J. 2008 *East Ruckham Farmhouse, Cruwys Morchard: An historic building evaluation* (EA proj. no. 6577).
- Stead, P. M. 2008 *Written Statement of Investigation for Archaeological Recording at East Ruckham Farm, Cruwys Morchard, Devon* (EA Project number 6671).



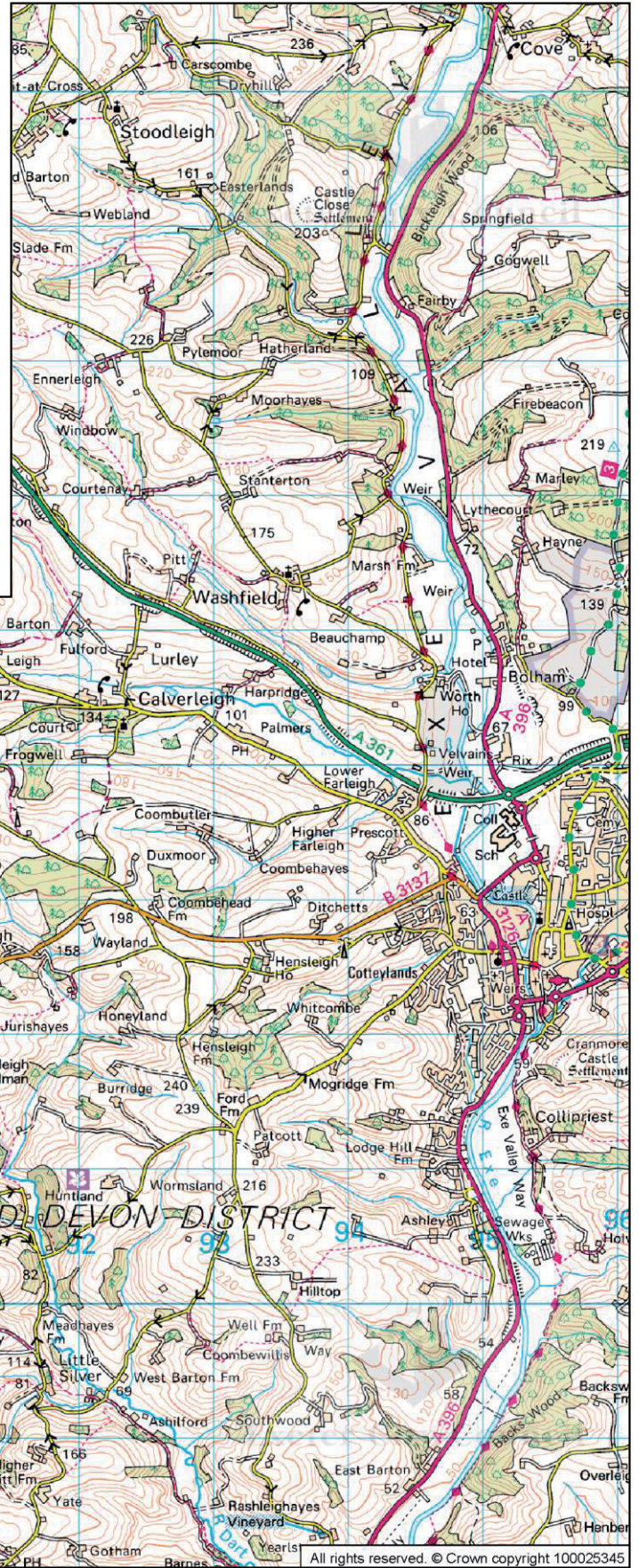
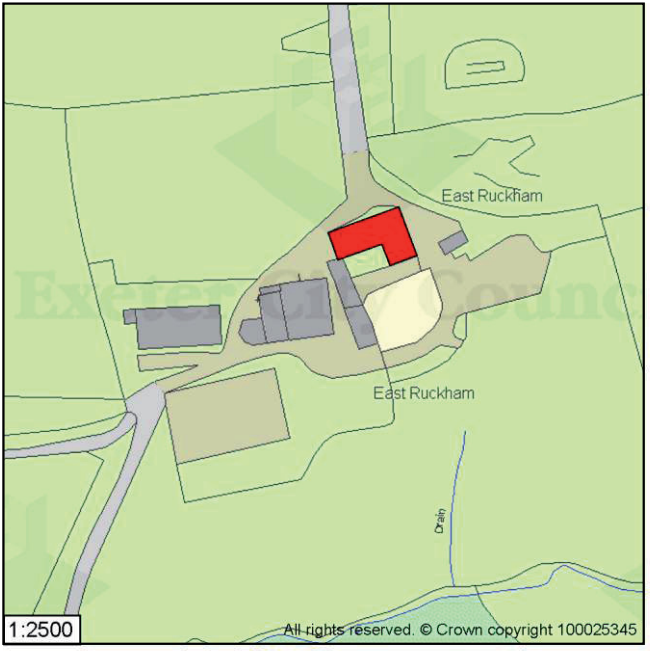


Fig. 1 Location of site.



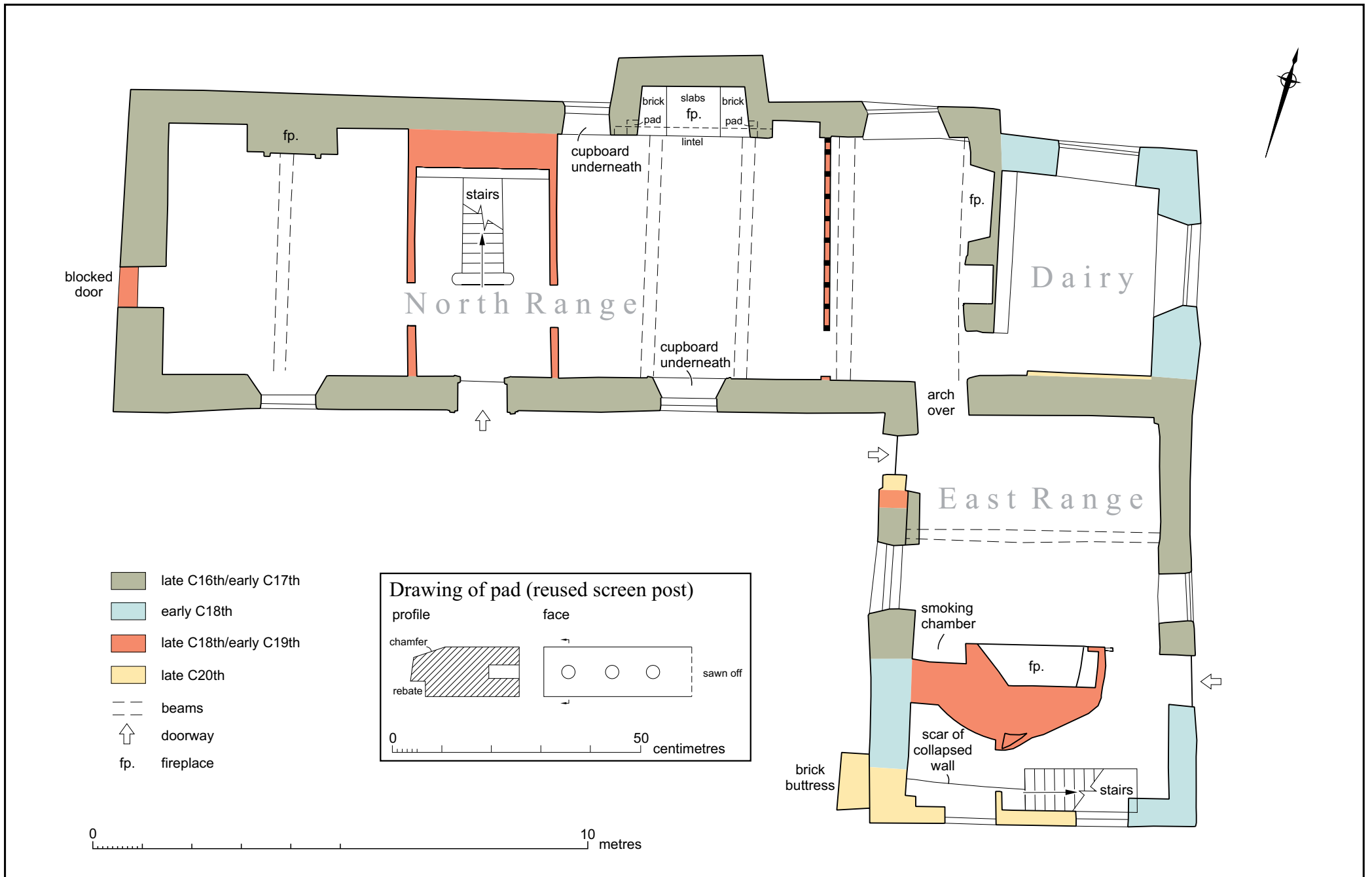


Fig. 2 Phased plan of the ground floor.

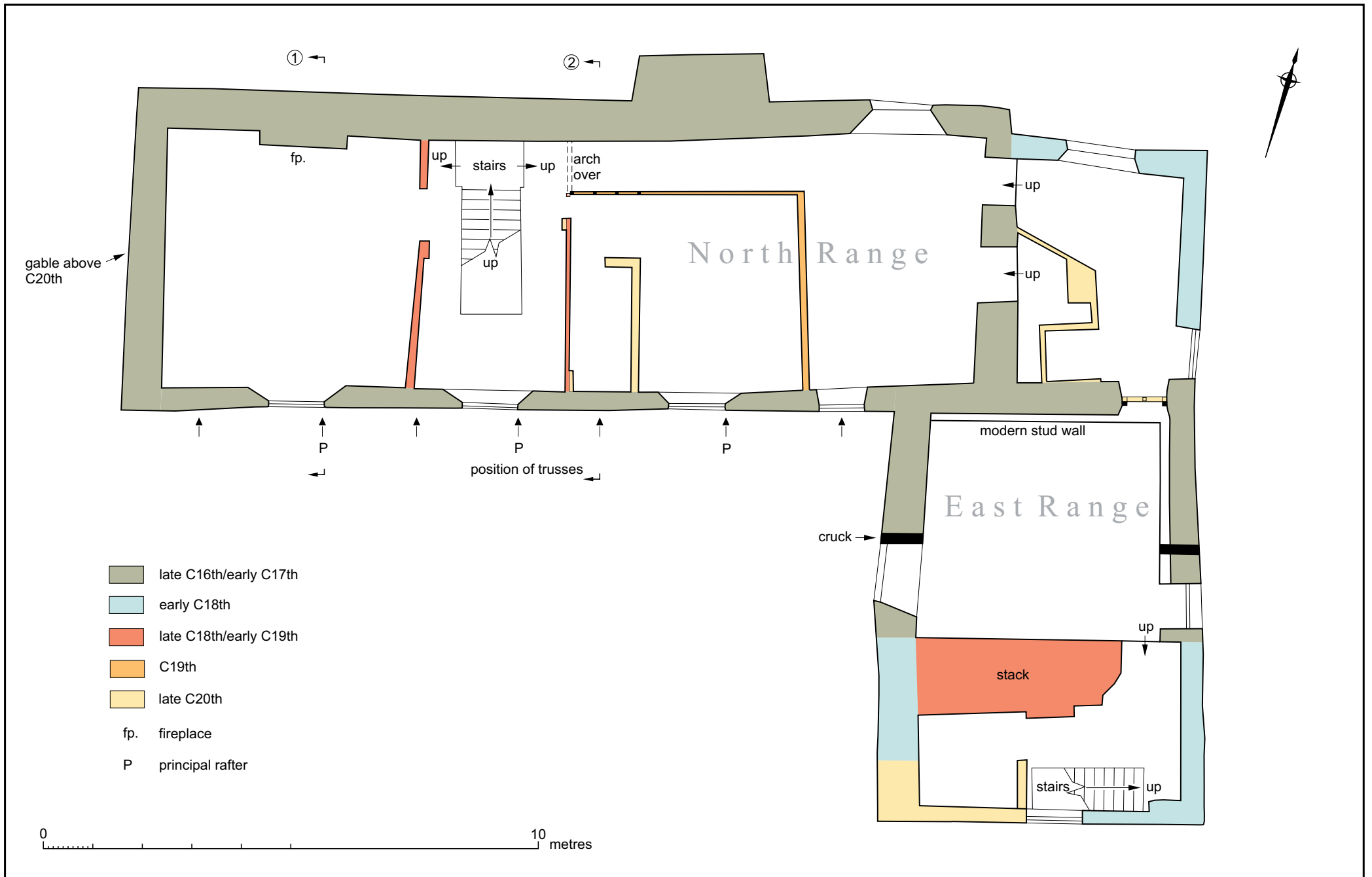


Fig. 3 Phased plan of the first floor.

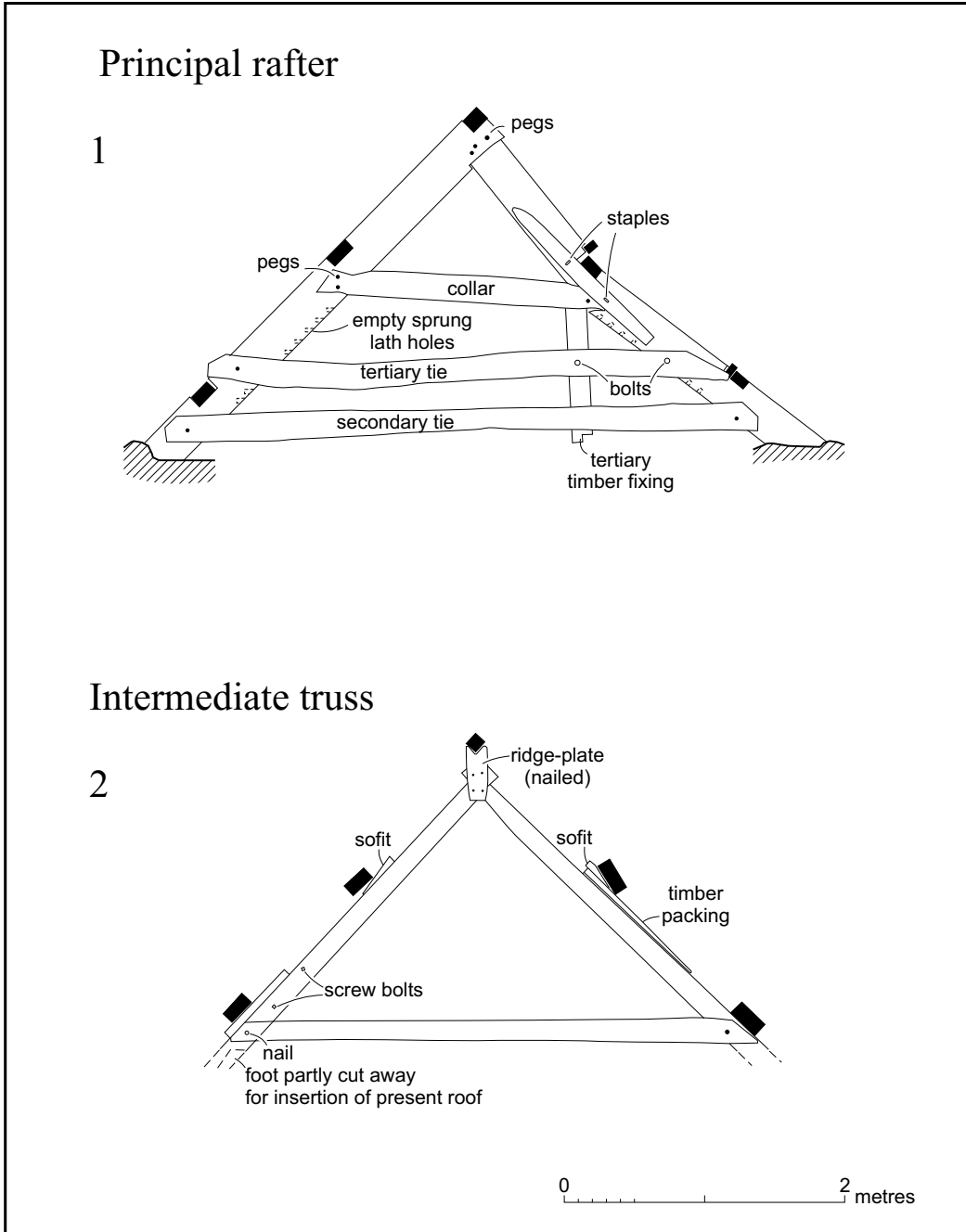


Fig. 4 Roof trusses of the north range.



Pl. 1 The eastern principal truss in the north range, looking east. 1m scale.



Pl. 2 The truss in the east range, looking north-east.