

BOLTON PERCY GATEHOUSE,
BOLTON PERCY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

INITIAL ARCHITECTURAL AND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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On behalf of

The Vivat Trust
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bolton Percy gatehouse lies to the west of the centre of Bolton Percy village, itself some 4km to the east of Tadcaster, in West Yorkshire (NGR SE 531 442). The gatehouse formerly defined the entrance to a courtyard rectorial holding, and was built in c.1500. It is a rare surviving example, both in the north of England and nationally, of a timber-framed gatehouse of this period. The gatehouse is a Grade II* Listed Building and a Scheduled Monument (although the SM legislation will take precedence), and it lies within the Bolton Percy village Conservation Area.
- 1.2 The surviving parts of the gatehouse underwent extensive and careful conservation during the early 1970s, but these are now beginning to deteriorate again, and further remedial works are required. The building is owned by the Bolton Percy Gatehouse Trust, who wish to lease it the Vivat Trust with the intention of converting it to holiday letting.
- 1.3 The following document was prepared by Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) following a site visit on the 26th February 2009. It provides an outline historical background and structural description of the gatehouse (drawing upon earlier works and observations made during the site visit), assesses the archaeological implications of the works currently proposed by the project architect Mr Peter Gaze Pace, and provides a series of appropriate recommendations. This report does not include the sourcing of records associated with any of the previous surveys or phases of repair.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Location and Setting

- 2.1 Bolton Percy village is located on a peninsula of land created by the junction of the rivers Ouse and Wharfe and, due to the lack of nearby modern river crossings, maintains a rural character (Pace 2008). The low lying landscape surrounding the village is characterised by pasture fields, low rises, small wooded areas and some marsh, and it has in general maintained a more enclosed character than the arable landscape between nearby Tadcaster and York. There are discrete areas of well preserved earthworks around the village, principally relating to former field systems and agricultural practices, while the layout of the village itself also provides information as to its historic development.
- 2.2 The gatehouse lies to the west of the centre of Bolton Percy village, some 30m to the south-west of All Saints Church (see figure 1). The access to the gatehouse is now provided by a partly metalled trackway which leaves the main north-south road through the village and runs north-west between the churchyard and a row of terraced houses. The juxtaposition of the track and the gatehouse suggest that this preserves the historic line of approach.
- 2.3 Although the other contemporary parts of the former courtyard rectorial holding no longer exist above ground, they are known to have comprised a medieval house, a large timber-framed barn and the other structures that might be expected in such a complex including a dovecote, stables and outbuildings (Michelmore 1980). The house was replaced by the existing Old Rectory at the very end of the 17th century, while the other contemporary buildings were demolished prior to the mid 19th century. However, it is probable that the overall layout of the complex could be deduced through documentary research, the survey of any surviving earthworks

and a geophysical survey, together with further study of the interior of the Old Rectory, which may preserve elements of the earlier house.

- 2.4 The position of the gatehouse has been encroached upon by vegetation, particularly by a large yew tree to the immediate south-east, which obscures much of the south front. To the north, there is a group of three smaller yew trees, and to north-west, a small area of dense scrub partly given over to aviaries housing owls and other birds of prey. The derelict west part of the gatehouse is partly hidden by the adjacent Crown Inn public house, part of which is dated to 1799. To the east, there is the open expanse of the churchyard, although this too has encroached upon the eastern end of the gatehouse, the raised ground level of the church is now set over 1.0m above the stone plinth of the building. The gatehouse itself is set at c.10m AOD.
- 2.5 Due to this encroachment, and changes in ground level, it is now difficult to appreciate the former striking appearance of the gatehouse as it was when first completed. Some idea of this original setting can be gained from early surviving photographs of the gatehouse, such as that reproduced by Harrison (2000, 132), which show the building when the existing yews were still relatively small. Interestingly, when this photograph was taken in c.1900, the timber-framing of the east gable was plastered over externally (see plate 1).

Historical Background

- 2.6 The parish of Bolton Percy once contained five other townships; Harrison suggests that the early English name of the settlement "Bodelton", meaning a dwelling house or enclosure with buildings within a village or estate, can signify a mother settlement with outlying settlements, and that the arrangement of the parish may reflect this (Harrison 2000, 6). The manor was held by the Percy family from soon after the Norman Conquest and a "house of a Robert de Percy" is referred to in an inquest of 1218 (Harrison 2000, 7). This may be the same manor house which received a licence to crenellate in 1293 granted to Robert de Percy III and which also applied to a house at Sutton on Derwent (Emery 1996, 335; Harrison 2000, 8). A stone hall erected upon "stakes" (piles) is noted in 1335 (Harrison 2000, 8). The exact location of the manor house is as yet uncertain but there is clear documentary evidence for the site of a hall adjacent to the north side of the churchyard in 1596, and also for the presence of a moated complex in the same area (Harrison 2000, 8).
- 2.7 However, the existing gatehouse does not relate to this complex, but rather to the rectorial holding to the west of the church. As has already been noted, this took the form of an enclosed courtyard complex, with the main entrance on the south side through the gatehouse. Although the gatehouse was traditionally thought to have been built in 1467 by Thomas Pearson, dendrochronological dating work undertaken on the roof timbers in 1975 produced a felling date of 1501 (VAG 2000), suggesting that it was built by a later rector such as Robert Wellington or Henry Trafford (Harrison 2000, 16; Emery 1996, 315). If this were to be the case, the gatehouse may have been an addition to an existing complex, rather than forming part of a wholly new development, as Pearson's will of 1490 suggests that a substantial rectory building was already present at this date, and as such is unlikely to have existed in isolation (Harrison 2000, 16) (but see below). This earlier house was replaced by the existing Old Rectory at the end of the 17th century.

- 2.8 Michelmores has noted that the scale and decoration of the gatehouse reflects the status and wealth of the rectors during the late medieval and early post-medieval periods, when they were usually senior ecclesiastics with additional duties in the diocese beyond the parish (Michelmores 1980). Harrison suggests that the form, size and decoration of the gatehouse may indicate that it also served other uses, for example vestry meetings, the home of a religious guild, living accommodation for priests, or a school. However, by the mid 18th century the first floor of the gatehouse was in use as a granary, and there was a stables and cowhouse on the ground floor. The remaining buildings of the complex, including a very substantial tithe barn, were demolished before the mid 19th century (Harrison 2000, 16-17; Ryder 1982, 143). The former presence of the tithe barn, and the appearance of the gatehouse, has led to some confusion between the two structures in the early 20th century, when the gatehouse was described as “the Tudor tithe-barn” (Jackson 1938, 17). By the late 1930s, the gatehouse was described as being “serviceable until recent times, but at present the roof and floors are insecure, and funds are urgently needed for its preservation”. Furthermore, the entrance was described as being bricked-up, with access only through the garden of the rectory (Jackson 1938, 17).

Previous Work

- 2.9 The initial stage of the restoration works to the gatehouse took place between 1972 to 1974, and concentrated on the three relatively well-preserved eastern bays. The two south-western bays, which appear to have only survived up to the level of the first floor, were partially dismantled by 1980 to await further works (Michelmores 1980).
- 2.10 Prior to these restoration works, David Michelmores produced a series of detailed scaled drawings of the building as it then survived. Unfortunately, it is understood that only two of these drawings are now extant (both longitudinal sections) and that other records made at the time may since have been lost (Peter Pace, *pers. comm.*). However, some details are preserved in the description given in a brief guide pamphlet produced by Michelmores in 1980 (Michelmores 1980), together with a reconstruction drawing (see plate 2). A roll of drawings made by the restoration architects, Brierley, Leckenby and Keighley of York, were deposited in the York City Archives, and these cover the external elevations (Peter Pace, *pers. comm.*). It is not certain to what extent these drawings are based on Michelmores’s surveys, and during the EDAS site visit it was noted that some elements, such as the form of the stonework to the building’s plinth, are not drawn correctly or accurately.
- 2.11 As part of the 1972-74 repairs, a small archaeological investigation was carried out in the ground floor chamber of the gatehouse by Bartlett and Michelmores, to try and determine the date of construction. The floor was seen to be composed of a depth of 12.7mm of plaster, laid over a layer of cobbles between 0.07m-0.10m in diameter, below which was a dark-brown sticky clay with limestone chippings. Beneath the former pedestrian passageway, beside the main carriageway, the layer of cobbles was bound with a light sandy layer subsoil from which two pieces of pottery, dated between AD 1400-1450, were recovered (Thorpe 1975, 6).
- 2.12 It appears that no further detailed survey work has been undertaken on the gatehouse or the surrounding area of the village since the early 1970s. The building features in a number of regional surveys of medieval structures in Yorkshire (e.g. Ryder 1982; Emery 1996). The holdings of the de Percy family of Bolton Percy, where relevant to properties and estates in West Yorkshire, have

been described in detail by Michelmore (1981, 415-6), while Harrison (2000) covers the medieval history of the township of Bolton Percy.

3 STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 3.1 The following structural history draws heavily on the previous account given by Michelmore in 1980, supplemented by other sources and by observations made by EDAS during their site visit. The gatehouse is actually set on a shallow north-east / south-west alignment, although for the purposes of this description, it is assumed to be aligned east-west.

Exterior

- 3.2 In its most basic form, the gatehouse comprises a timber-framed structure rising from a chamfered stone plinth, formerly of five bays to the ground floor, with two bays placed to either side of the central single-bay passage (see figure 2). The passage and the two bays to the east are well preserved, as is the impressive three-bay first floor chamber above them (see figure 3, and plates 3 and 4).
- 3.3 However, the two bays to the west now survive only to the height of the stone plinth, and this itself has been subject to some alteration. It appears that these bays survived up to the level of the first floor prior to the 1972-74 works but were dismantled at some point prior to 1980; there seems to have been a single two-bay space to the ground floor, and Michelmore makes reference to two single-bay chambers over. A number of timbers survive in the space defined by the stone plinth of the western two-bays today (see below), and it is assumed that these are those dismantled between 1972-74 and 1980. However, no further conservation work took place after 1974, and the timbers were apparently left uncovered, with the result that they are now in extremely poor condition.
- 3.4 As has been noted above, both parts of the gatehouse formerly rose from a chamfered stone plinth. To the surviving east part of the building, the plinth is built of both roughly coursed and squared stone and also some larger, better dressed pieces (see plate 5). The chamfer is set at a slightly higher level to the east gable than to the north and south elevations, and is crudely stepped outwards towards the base. Above the chamfered plinth, sill beams support the ground floor close studding, the studding being more closely spaced at the eastern end of the building. Elsewhere, to the external faces that were not as highly visible, such as the internal sides of the passage, use is made of two storey posts, mid rails and downward braces. At the south end of the passage, above the west side, one of the original harrs which held the upper pivot of one of the leaves of the large external gates still survives. There are also iron pintles set approximately half-way up the posts at both ends of the passage, which appear to be later introductions, but a wrought-iron eye set into the west side may be an early feature, perhaps used to secure a gate leaf here. An original doorway with foliate spandrels at the north end of the passage's west side gave access to the ground floor space to the west of the passage (see plate 6). The passage is floored with cobbles in some places, although a line of bricks running across it in plan may represent the blocking described in 1938. When the outer gates were closed, access through the gatehouse was via what appears to be a cross-passage on the west side of the east part. There is also a small high window to the east gable's ground floor, presumably in the same place as an original.

- 3.5 To the east part of the building (and also the west, according to Michelmore), the first floor was jettied on all sides, the eastern end being supported on dragon posts. There are covings beneath the jetty of the east gable, secured by brattished rails. The dragon posts are ornately carved and include a lion's head and the head of a man grimacing or gurning to the south-east post, and an acanthus leaf and two heads within a wimple or other textile to the north-east post. In addition, the projecting end of each first floor joist was originally decorated with a carved, nailed-on, plaque. Only three of these now survive, a king's head and an acanthus leaf to the south elevation, and a green man to the north elevation; the latter has been compared to examples formerly present in the York Guildhall but destroyed by bombing in 1942 (Marks 1972; surviving Guildhall examples illustrated by Morrell (1948, 93)). Michelmore also notes that each wall stud formerly coincided with a rosette carved on the jetty bressumer.
- 3.6 The first floor external sides of the east part of the building are similarly structured to the ground floor, with close studding and coving with brattished rails to the east gable; there was once similar coving to the eaves of the south and north elevations, but this is no longer present. There is a projecting window to the east gable, again a modern reconstruction of an older feature, with similar windows over the passage to the south and north elevations. Both slopes of the pitched roof are covered largely in pantiles, with slates to the lowest three courses.
- 3.7 The chamfered plinth of the former west part of the gatehouse is set at a slightly lower level than that to the east. The external walls of the plinth are generally less than 1.0m in height, although at the north-west corner, where the ground level falls away sharply, they stand to over 1.5m. The plinth along the north wall incorporates a number of re-used architectural fragments, including a fragment of a stone coffin lid with incised decoration (see plate 7). The stonework making up the north wall appears for the most part to be original, but the other three walls are less certain, incorporating both brickwork and a high proportion of rounded cobbles. The adjacent public house is built over the south-west corner of the chamfered plinth, and appears to overlie a sloping stone buttress to the plinth. It appears that the chamfered plinth defines a cellar beneath this part of the building, although the original point of access is not certain. There are doorways at the west end of the north wall and the north end of the west wall, but both of these appear later insertions. A much altered splayed window in the north wall can only be seen from the interior. Michelmore's survey drawings, and his reconstruction, show the timber-frame of the west part of the building to have been of very similar construction to the surviving east part. Only the east end of the frame, forming the west side of the passage, is now extant, together with a few projecting stubs of wall plates, although these are in part obscured by an unsightly 1970s metal fire-escape.
- 3.8 At the time of the EDAS site visit (26th February 2009), the interior of the west part of the gatehouse was choked with debris, principally stacked pantiles, stone and timbers, through which ash saplings are now growing. The timbers are in a tangled mass, rather than being neatly stacked, and so it is difficult to estimate their exact numbers. However, there appear to be about 25 timbers, of which less than ten are substantial pieces preserving some degree of structural information. The largest timbers are c.0.20m square and over 4.0m in length, possibly sill beams or wall plates, and there is at least one post. Unfortunately, all the timbers are extremely rotten and it is likely that some of the larger pieces will break if they are moved.

Interior

- 3.9 The only existing access to the extant east part of the building is through the rear (north) doorway in the north elevation. This leads into a small stair hall, with stairs inserted in the 1970s rising to the first floor. The door originally stood at one end of a cross-passage through the building, used either when the gates to the main passage were closed or for pedestrian rather than cart or horse entry. The internal timber-framing suggests that the passage was high, and that it may have had a screen or partition of some kind on the east side, separating it from the ground floor chamber to the east.
- 3.10 This ground floor chamber was a bay and a half in length internally, and displays evidence for a mezzanine floor level; Michelmores's 1980 description suggests that a similar feature once existed in the west part of the gatehouse. The presence of a mezzanine floor would explain why the window to the east wall is set at such a high level. Within the full bay at the east end of the chamber, the central area of ceiling joists run at right angles to the beam but the outer areas are angled. There appears to be no structural reason why this should be so, and so the ceiling form may have some other purpose relating to what took place in the space below.
- 3.11 The 1970s stairs lead up to the first floor chamber, although originally this may have been accessed via a doorway in the west wall formerly leading through into the first floor of the gatehouse's west part. The first floor chamber is an impressive space, of three bays and crossed by two trusses of post and tie-beam construction, with short principals, a collar purlin and side purlins (see plate 8); Michelmores likens the roof construction to surviving examples in York and Lincoln dating to between 1450 and 1550. The cambered tie-beams are moulded, as are the posts. The knee-braces between the posts and tie-beam retain carved decoration. To the east face of the east truss, the south brace has a thistle and the north brace three berries surrounded by leaves, while the west face has a flower and an acanthus leaf in the same positions. To the east face of the west truss, the south brace has three berries with foliage and the north brace a rose (see plate 9), while the west face has five berries with foliage and a thistle in the same positions. A small number of carpenters' marks were noted on the first floor timbers, and there are scarf joints of several different types visible in the wall plates (see plate 9).

Significance

- 3.12 The significance of Bolton Percy gatehouse as a rare surviving example of a timber-framed late medieval gatehouse, both regionally and nationally, has long been recognised. The ornate timberwork is also a rarity in a rural Yorkshire setting (Ryder 1982, 143), and bears comparison with surviving examples in important medieval urban centres such as York. In this regard, the suggestion that the first floor chamber might have been used by a religious guild is an interesting one. Certain elements of the structural framing might also be compared with surviving urban buildings; Michelmores likens the roof trusses to other examples in York and Lincoln, while the external walls bear some resemblance to the later 15th century St William's College in York (Morrell 1948, 44).
- 3.13 As well as informing any understanding of high status late medieval timber-framed structures within Yorkshire, the Bolton Percy gatehouse can also be compared to other surviving examples of timber-framed gatehouses nationally, such as those at Stokesay Castle in Shropshire or Lower Brockhampton House in Herefordshire, for example (Pace 2008, 3). It can provide evidence for both how a gatehouse to a complex of this type functioned, and also what other uses a gatehouse may have

fulfilled in addition to controlling access. One might also pursue the iconography of the carved decoration; for example, the gurning or grimacing man with the protruding tongue to one of the dragon posts may be a representation of a fool, but this gesture can also have religious connotations in connection to the Mocking of Christ (Jones 2002, 115).

4 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED REPAIRS

Proposed Conservation Works

- 4.1 Only those elements of the proposed conservation works which may have archaeological implications are commented on below. Prior to any conservation works taking place, it is recommended that contact is made with David Michelmore, to gain a more detailed idea of what recording work took place in the 1970s and to determine whether any of the original survey material is still available, or where it might have been deposited.

Clearance and retention of timbers from the west part of the gatehouse

- 4.2 It is proposed that the former western part of the building will be cleared out and the timbers currently therein are salvaged and secured to the west side of the building under a new oak staircase. However, as a result of the EDAS site visit, it is considered that these timbers are now in such a poor condition that salvage will not be possible. Nevertheless, they do merit some sort of more detailed inspection prior to being discarded, accompanied by minimal recording.
- 4.3 It is not possible to record the timbers in their current location. It is therefore recommended that they are carefully removed from the building footprint and laid out on the adjacent ground, so that they can be seen and recorded individually. The recording will probably take the form of 35mm colour photographs, together with dimensioned sketches and written descriptions where relevant. Based on what could be seen during the site visit, it is not envisaged that detailed scaled drawings of individual timbers will be required, although this may be revised when the timbers can be inspected more closely.
- 4.4 Once the west part of the gatehouse has been cleared, a 1:50 plan of the structure should be made at plinth level, accompanied by an appropriate written description and 35mm colour photographs. These various works could be undertaken with assistance from members of the South Ainstey Archaeological Society if necessary or appropriate.

Alterations to the building

- 4.5 It is proposed that the 1970s infill panels between the studs are removed and replaced with more sympathetic and efficient examples. However, until the full extent of the 1970s restoration work becomes clear, it is not certain if all the infill panels were replaced at this date. It is therefore possible that historic infill material might be exposed, and so a periodic watching brief should be maintained during the works to cover any such eventuality. If historic material is revealed or uncovered, some form of archaeological record, primarily photographic and descriptive, would be required.

Below-ground works

- 4.6 Internal: it is proposed that the 1970 quarry tile floor in the east part of the gatehouse is removed and replaced with a stone flag floor with underfloor heating. It is envisaged that the existing ground levels will be reduced by c.0.40m, and so these excavations may well expose archaeological deposits which contain significant information relating to the history and use of the building. It is therefore recommended that these works are subject to constant archaeological monitoring (a watching brief), with appropriate reporting on any findings. If necessary, the ground reducing works could be undertaken with assistance from members of the South Ainstey Archaeological Society, prior to the main period of internal works, subject to appropriate Health and Safety considerations.
- 4.7 External: It is proposed that a new French drain is excavated around the exterior of the east part of the gatehouse and the central passage, to catch water dripping from the eaves of the building. The drain will lead to a c.1m square soakaway positioned within the former west part. The footings for a new oak staircase on the west side of the building will also require more limited excavations. These groundworks may well expose significant structural information relating to the history and use of the building, and it is recommended that they are subject to an archaeological watching brief.

Dendrochronological survey

- 4.8 As noted above, dendrochronological dating work was undertaken some time ago on the roof timbers which produced a date of 1501 (VAG 2000). However, the original survey report has since been lost. It appears that only three samples were taken, all with very few rings, using chunks of wood apparently recovered from a 1975 refurbishment (Ian Tyers, Dendrochronological Consultancy Ltd., *pers. comm.*). As a result, the 1501 date cannot be supported using current data and quality criteria. It is therefore recommended that a new dendrochronological survey is commissioned, to provide a more accurate date for the timber framing.

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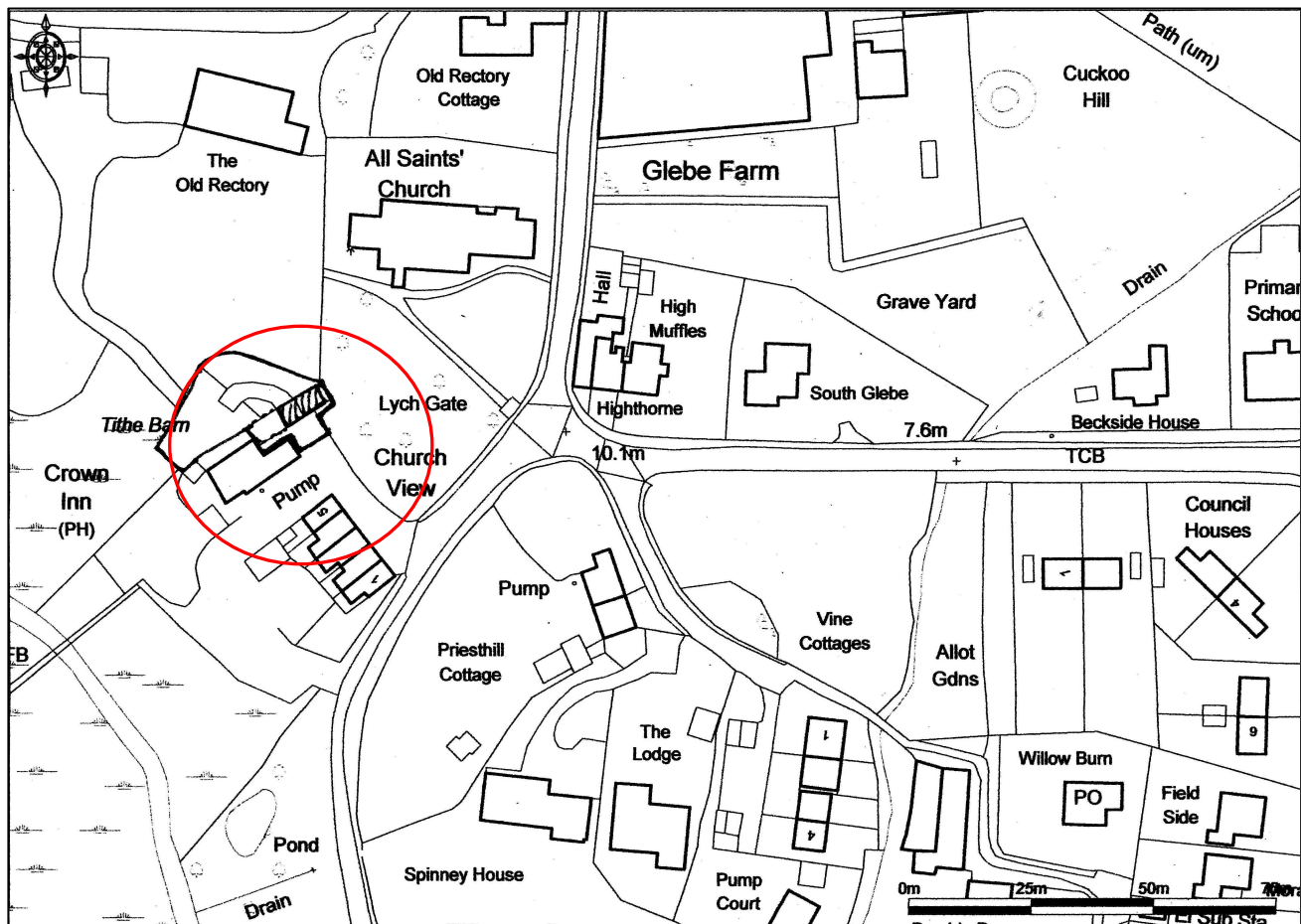
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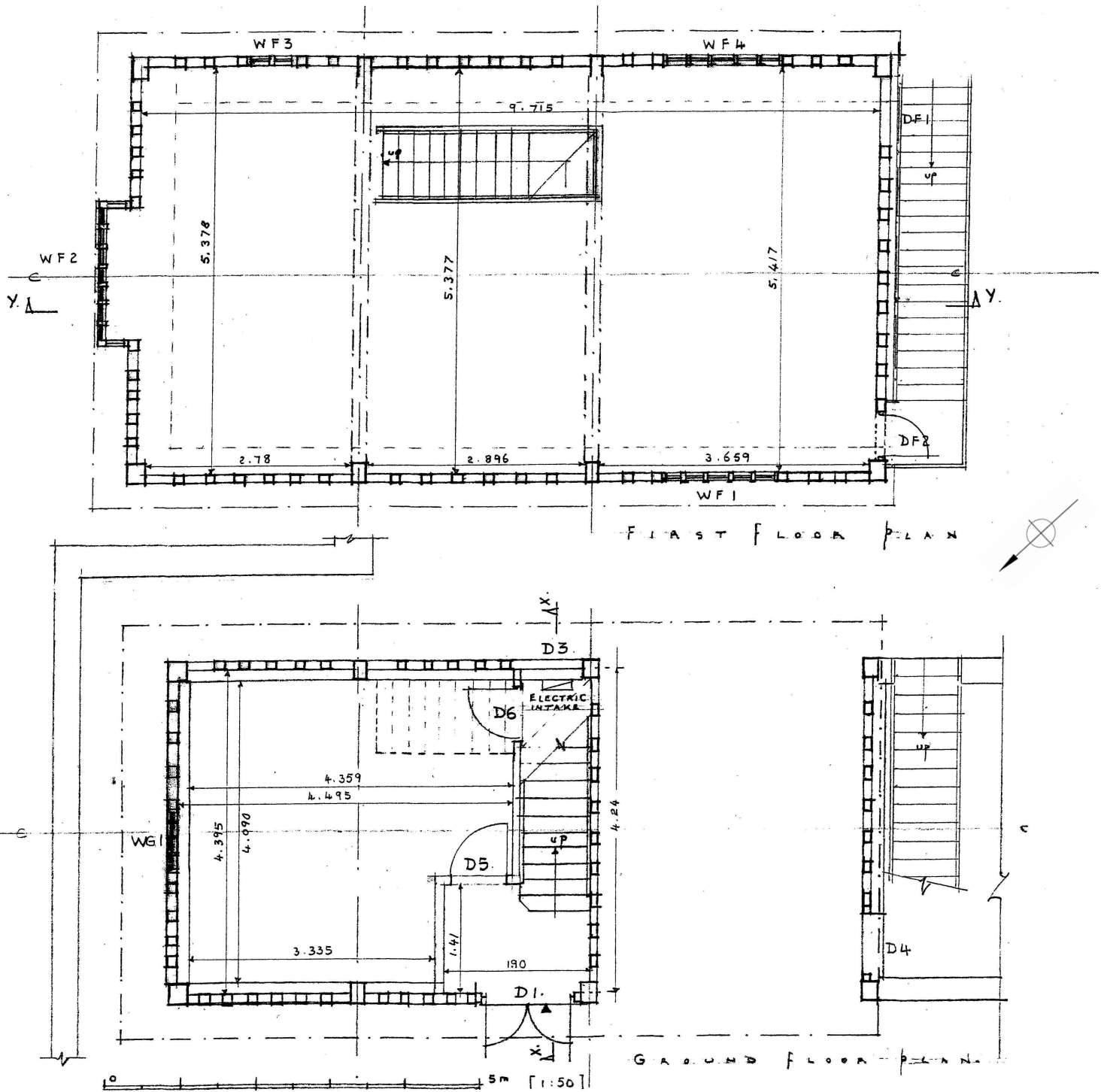
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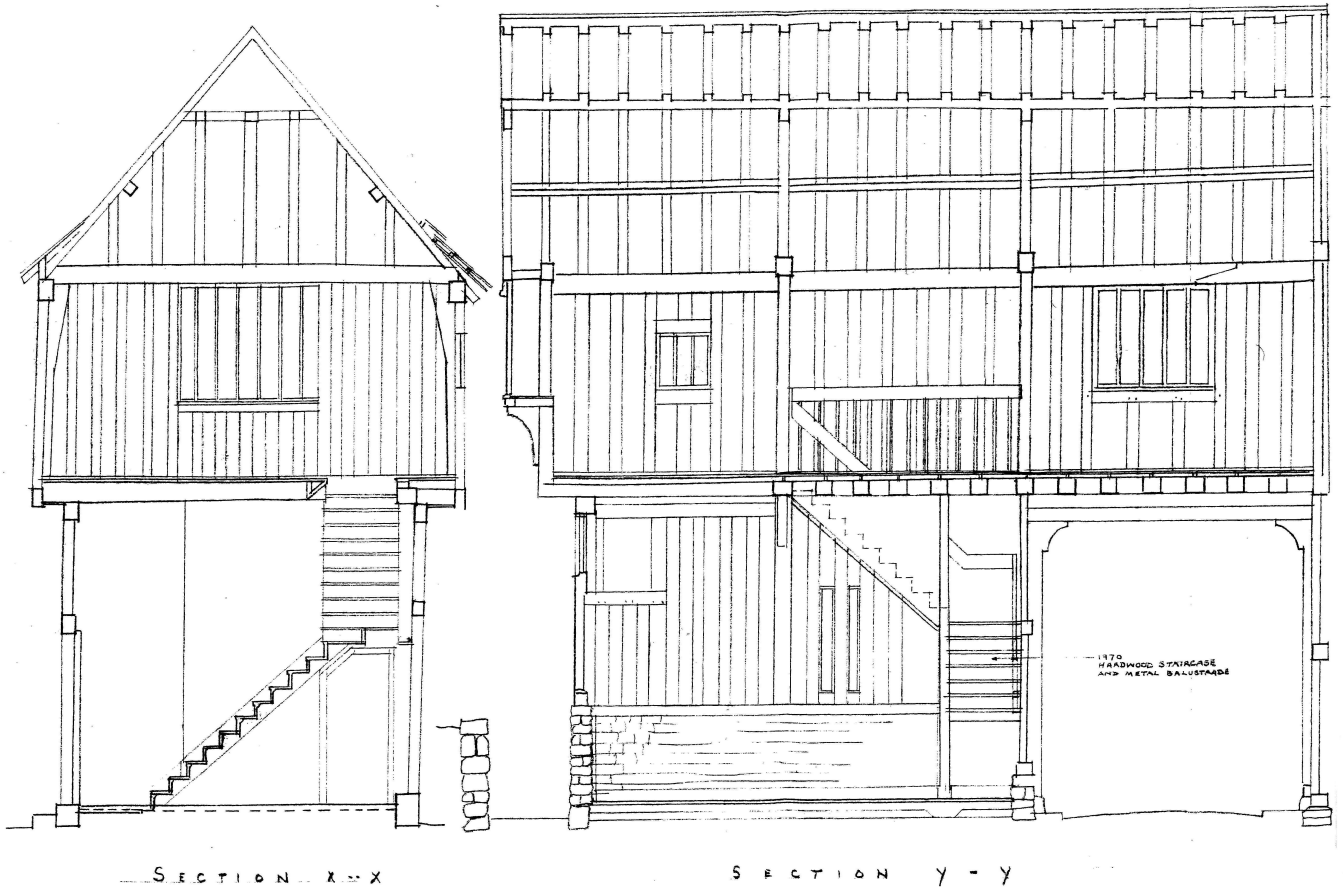
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PROJECT		BOLTON PERCY GATEHOUSE	
TITLE		LOCATION	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	MAY 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	1



Plans drawn by Peter Pace, June 2007,
reproduced with permission.

PROJECT		BOLTON PERCY GATEHOUSE	
TITLE		FLOOR PLANS AS EXISTING	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	MAY 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	2



Sections drawn by Peter Pace, June 2007,
reproduced with permission.

PROJECT		BOLTON PERCY GATEHOUSE	
TITLE		SECTIONS AS EXISTING	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	MAY 2009
EDAS		FIGURE	3

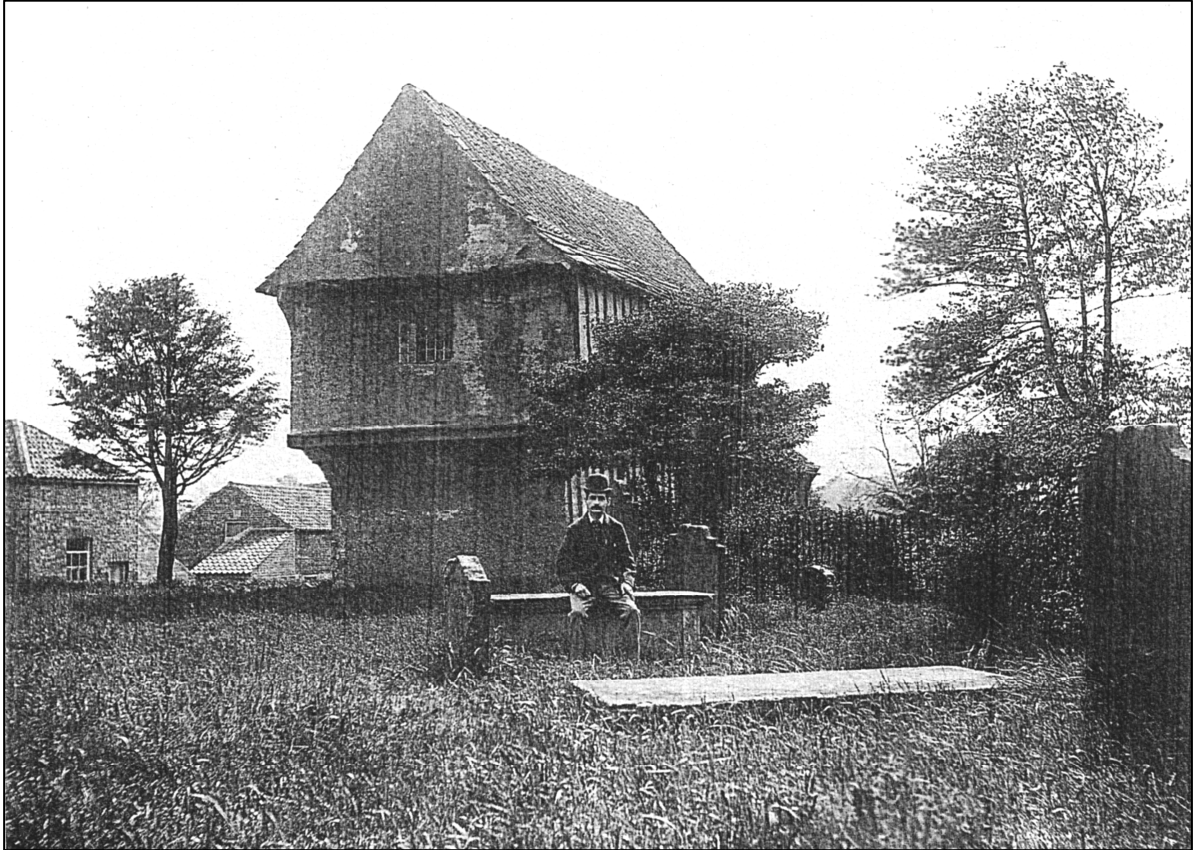


Plate 1: Bolton Percy Gatehouse, c.1900, looking south-west
(Source: Harrison 2000, 132).

THE GATEHOUSE, BOLTON PERCY
as built in 1467

isometric view from the north

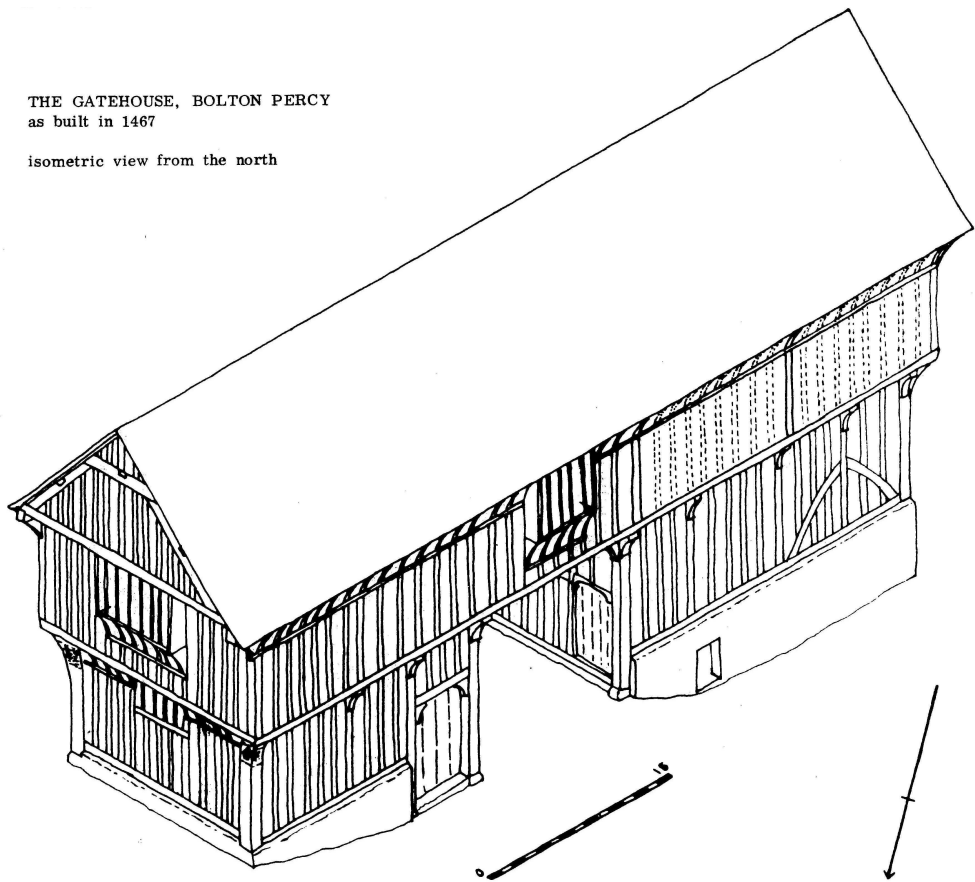


Plate 2: Michelmore's reconstruction drawing
(Source: Michelmore 1980).



Plate 3: Bolton Percy Gatehouse, north elevation, looking south-east.



Plate 4: Bolton Percy Gatehouse, south elevation, looking north-west.



Plate 5: Chamfered plinth, east end of gatehouse, looking NE.



Plate 6: Doorway at north end of west side of passage, looking west.



Plate 7: Reused coffin lid fragment on north plinth wall, west side of gatehouse.



Plate 8: West end of first floor of gatehouse, looking west.



Plate 9: North knee-brace, east face of west truss, looking west.