

# 15 THE SQUARE, BLANCHLAND

AN HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

NOVEMBER 2019



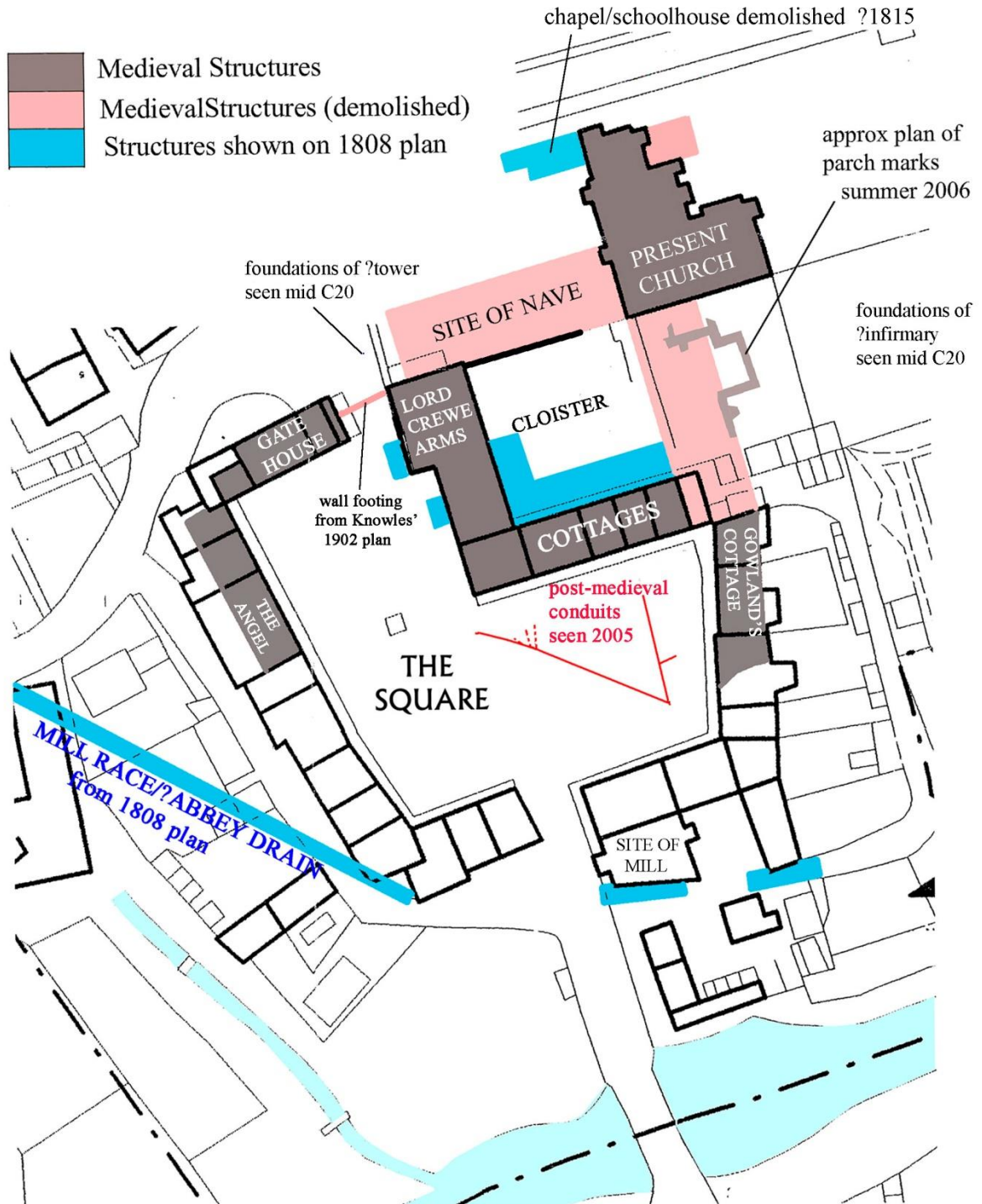
The house from the west

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Fig.1 Blanchland: Key Plan of Monastic Site



Key Plan from 2012 report 'Blanchland. The Abbey that became a Village'

(P F Ryder)

## **No 15 The Square, Blanchland**

The Square in Blanchland is an L-plan area thought to represent the Outer Court of the medieval Premonstratensian Abbey. No.15, also known as 'Gowland's Cottage', is set at the north end of the east side of the Square, which is roughly coincident with the line of the east range of the monastery. It is listed (Grade II) as 'House, formerly monastic building. C15 remodelled mid-C18'.

### **Description**

The building is constructed of roughly-coursed stone of a variety of types, with cut dressings and a roof of graduated stone slates that has a rounded stone ridge. There are three plain stacks (one at each end) with thin flagstone bands.

The two-storeyed building originally consisted of a pair of houses, and this division is reflected in the manner in which its two-storeyed front elevation divides into two parts. The northern is of two short bays (with a doorway in the south bay) and the southern of two much wider ones (with a doorway set left of centre between them)

The actual north-west corner of the building is concealed by a short attached wall, set diagonally, linking it to the range on the north of the Square. Close to this is a ragged straight joint (A1) that divides the angle quoins and a rough column of large roughly-squared stones (A2), beyond which the wall is of much more thinly coursed smaller stones, and seems contemporary with the present openings of this part of the house, although there is a single course of larger stones immediately below the upper windows. The openings – the vertical-panelled doorway (A3) and three windows (A4-6) (all with modern paired plate-glass sashes) have cut stone surrounds, utilising both horizontal and tall upright tooled-and-margined blocks.

South of the doorway the walling changes to roughly-coursed larger blocks for c 2 m (except for a few courses of much thinner stone at mid-height), as far as a ragged vertical break (A7) before the windows of the northern bay of the southern section. The lower of these (A8) has a chamfered surround and has been of three lights, although the mullions have gone, and the thin sill is clearly a more recent replacement. Each light has had two vertical iron bars, the



sockets for which remain. The other three windows – a narrower one (A9) above the former mullioned opening and a vertical pair (A12 and A14) close to the south end of the wall – are all very like those further north. The door (A10) is of the common Blanchland vertical-panelled type but with three narrow glazed slits, and is set in an old three-centred arch with a broad hollow chamfer, with graffiti on the large blocks of the south jamb – only ‘TB’ on the central block is now readable. To the south of the doorway is another ragged full-height break (A11) with even more thinly-coursed fabric beyond; on the line of the break at mid-height is a single large square block, with a longer one directly above it. Directly above the lintel of the lower window (A12) in the southern bay is what looks like a former window sill (A13) (perhaps re-used) and beyond the windows is a ragged vertical break (A15), with the southernmost 0.50 m or so of walling being of larger quoin-like blocks.



*The rear (east) elevation looking north,  
with the Abbey Church in the background*

The rear (east) elevation has a less regular arrangement of openings, and also less obvious variation in its fabric, although it too has some quite complex features. Most of the walling is of roughly-coursed and roughly-squared stone. At its south end the wall face cuts back diagonally to join the adjacent property (the rear wall of which is set slightly further to the west) except for the uppermost metre or so below the eaves (B1), which overhangs the cut-back section. There appear to be proper quoins to both sections of the corner; a possible explanation is that the building was constructed (or rebuilt) linking to an earlier and slightly lower east-west wall.

Close to the south end of the wall are a pair of ground-floor windows, a six-pane casement (B2) and a broader six-pane sash (in an opening that was clearly originally a doorway) (B3) which have cut lintels and sills; to the north of the latter is a smaller blocked window, square-headed, in an older chamfered surround (B4).

At first-floor level above the six-pane sash is a shortened nine-pane sash in an old opening (B5) that has chamfered jambs and a more recent square-edged lintel; the sill is interesting, as it either re-uses the head of a former two-light mullioned window (the chamfers and mullion stub remaining on its lower edge) or, less likely, that it is the transom of a larger window, of which no evidence for the lower half survives.

North again is the present back door of the house, in an opening (B6) that looks a relatively recent insertion, and a little beyond at mid-height in the wall what look like the remains of a narrow slit window, although little more than the sill survives (B7). Beyond this is a ragged full-height break (B8), with beyond it, at the same mid-height level as the sill of the slit, what looks like the south end of the slot; and one block of the jamb of a larger window (B9). Above it is a shortened six-pane sash of no great age (B10), and just beyond it on the ground floor an old twelve-pane sash in a former doorway, with a cut lintel (B11).

Further north again, the division between the two parts of the house is marked by a straight joint (B12), with substantial alternating angle quoins to the south, in the upper part of the wall only – below it the masonry seems to course through. The implication would seem to be that at one time the northern

section was of only one storey and the southern of two. Close to the joint are a vertical pair of windows, a four-pane sash in yet another former doorway (B13), and above it another in an old chamfered opening that has lost a central mullion (B14). Just beyond is another ground floor window, a four-pane sash in a clearly inserted opening, with immediately north of it some large blocks that look as if they may relate to the north jamb of an earlier blocked opening. Finally there is a ragged straight joint c 0.60 m from the north-east angle of the building, rising only to first floor level, above which there are alternating quoins and associated masonry that appears to course through with the wall further south.

The north end wall of the building is set a markedly skew angle, and has been raised upon the lower courses of an earlier one which now form an offset (C1); the two phases are congruent at the north-east corner, but the present north-west corner lies c 0.50 m south of the original. Two courses of the earlier walling are exposed, of large square blocks. The only other feature in the gable end is a blocked window set centrally at attic level (C2), its sill at around the level of the side-wall eaves, with roughly-shaped (but not chamfered) blocks as its jambs and a decaying timber lintel. It would appear to pre-date the stack that tops the gable.

### **The Interior.**

The internal walls of the house are plastered, with little in the way of historic features currently exposed. The doors are mostly of a traditional four-panel type, but may not be of any great age; there is one possibly-older two-panel door to the understair cupboard.

The front door opens through a wall 0.75 m thick into a small lobby with a door on north and south, into the lounge and the kitchen/dining room respectively., with the stair rising straight ahead. The lobby has a ceiling of narrow sawn north-south joists, like those of the kitchen/dining room painted over.

The kitchen/dining room has a modern board floor and projecting stack in the centre of the south wall, with a modern recess for a boiler, and a cupboard to the east with a modern door and shelves. The ceiling is of sawn upright-section joists carrying narrow east west boards; the only older timber is a heavy and roughly-chamfered east-west beam than spans the recess on the

west of the stack, and is boxed-in within the cupboard. At the east end of the north wall is a door into a second lobby inside the back door, which has on the west the two-panel door into the understair cupboard, which has an old stone flagged floor.

The Lounge has a modern board floor, but an interesting ceiling of either late medieval or early post-medieval date. There are two big east-west beams, one roughly central and the other set close to the north wall, which have chamfers that end in neat broach stops, except for the west end of the central beam, where the chamfers runs into the wall. The upright-section joists all have very neat chamfers with similar but smaller stops. Set centrally on the north of the room is a small fireplace with a tooled ashlar surround, probably of early-19<sup>th</sup> century date, with a smaller 20<sup>th</sup>-century one of ?artificial stone set inside it. There is a slight batter to the internal face of the east wall, but that of the front (west) wall seems straight.



*The Lounge ceiling looking north-east*

At the east end of the north wall is a recess with a doorway, and two steps up, into the lower northern room (Study); this section has somewhat thinner (0.60 m) walls. Here there is a marked batter to the internal face of the east wall. The room has a chimney breast against the centre of its north wall, with a pair

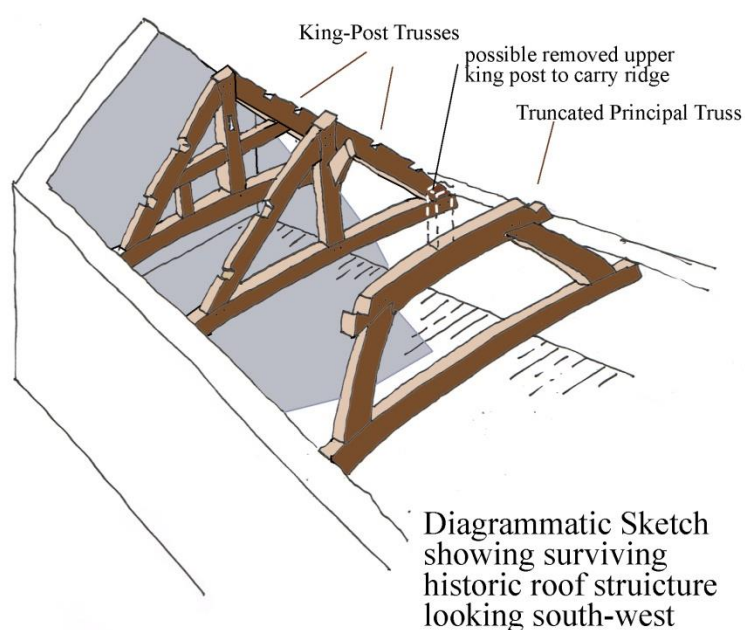
of cupboards with four-panel doors to the east. The external doorway on the west of the room here is sealed over, and only faintly visible through the plaster. The ceiling is of east-west sawn upright-section joists, of no great age, and the floor is concealed by carpet.

Returning to the entrance lobby, the stair rises between walls to first floor level, where there is a simple balustrade on either side with stick balusters, perhaps of later 19<sup>th</sup> century date.

On the first floor the house follows the same basic three-room plan as on the ground floor, except that the central and southern rooms have been further sub-divided, perhaps fairly recently, by partitions set a little east-of-centre, with a stair head and bathroom to the east of their respective bedrooms.

These rooms have under-drawn ceiling at a level a little above the tie-beams of the roof trusses, but as the roof is one of the more significant historic features of the building, these will be described separately.

The southern bedroom has an old round-arched cast-iron fireplace, of 19<sup>th</sup> century character, on the south. The northern room has had a fireplace on the north (flush with the wall; there is no stack projection at this level); its simple stone surround can be traced through the plaster, and there are traces of a cupboard on its east side.





### The Roof Structure.

The roof structure of the southern part of the house was originally of four bays, although a modern truss has been inserted in the northern bay. The first floor rooms now have ceilings set c 0.30 m above the tops of the tie-beams of the three old trusses.



*The roof looking south-west, showing the two king-post trusses;  
note nails in nearer truss, associated with lath infill.*

The southern two trusses are of king-post form, with a relatively slender king-post slightly jowelled at the head. The southern truss has been closed, and has a horizontal rail at mid-height, interrupted by the post, with a short post beneath its eastern end. There is a mortice in the north face of the post for a brace to the ridge (all the longitudinal timbers are relatively recent replacements), and cuts in the backs of the principals for two levels of purlins.

The second truss is simpler, and here a short length of the curved brace to the ridge survives; many small nails and fragments of laths show that this truss has

been closed as well. The north face of its tie beam has two levels of cuts and sockets for former ceiling joists.

The third truss is very interesting. It has originally been of truncated principal form, with short principals carrying a collar, in the ends of which are notches for purlins. If there was a support for the ridge there must have been a short upper king-post, now gone. At some later date an additional pair of full-length principals have been added on the south face of the originals, to support the ridge.

A full-height cross wall divides the roof spaces of the two parts of the building; the roof of the northern section is of two bays, with a simple principal rafter truss that seems of no great age, although older than the renewed longitudinal timbers.

### **Discussion**

As with the other buildings around The Square, no.15 seems to demonstrate at least three phases of work, which are hard to disentangle. First there are the monastic buildings of the medieval Abbey, then reconstruction associated with the post-medieval Radcliffe Manor House, and thirdly the major improvement and remodelling of the village which took place at the hands of the Crewe Trustees, probably early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

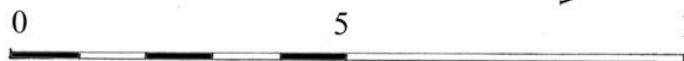
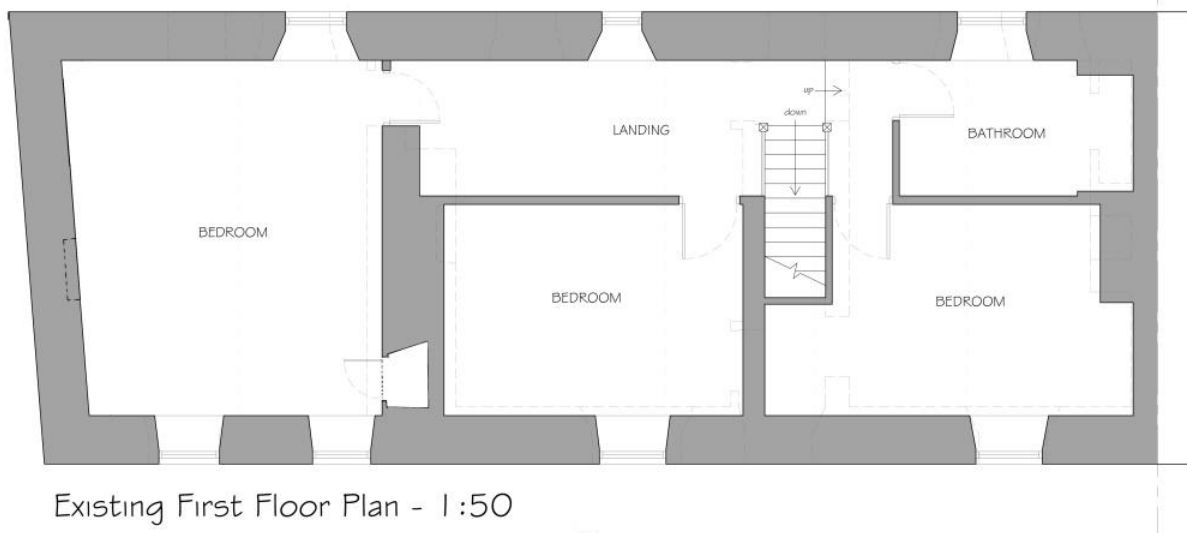
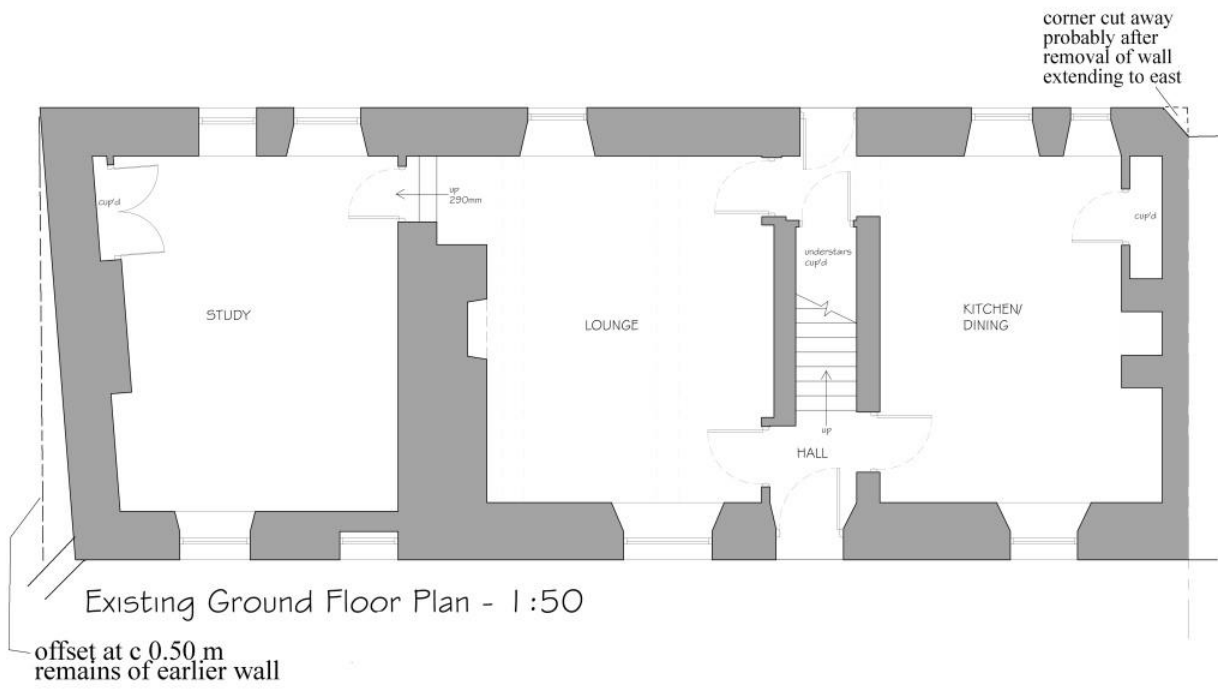
In plan, the building could be, or at least stands on the site, of a continuation of the range on the east side of the medieval cloister. This would usually contain the canon' dormitory (above an undercroft) and have at its south end the necessarium or rere dorter (toilet block). It is however set on a rather different alignment to the northern section of the range.

One feature in favour of it representing the dorter is the odd way in which the its south end seems to have adjoined a lower building extending at right angles to the east, which would be the conventional position for a rere dorter. However the other early features of the building do not really correlate with it being a monastic dormitory. The ground-floor room has a high-status ceiling, and the extant roof trusses vary in form, which one would not expect over a communal building. Also there is evidence that at one stage the southern part of the house was a two-storeyed structure whilst the north was only a single

storey, whereas if this was the dormitory one would expect it to have all been part of a long two-storeyed range.

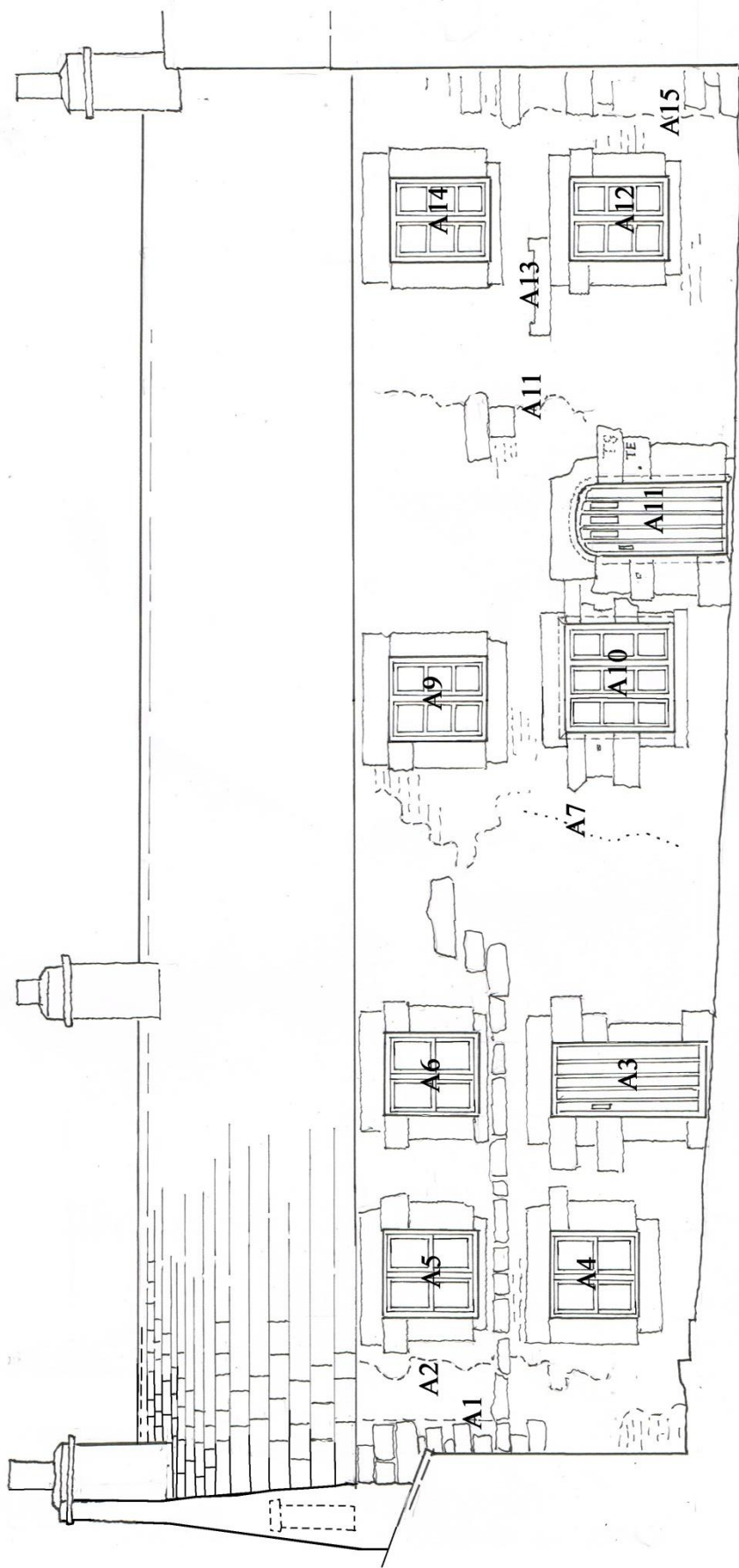
It is difficult to reconstruct the structural history of the property as there has been some much rebuilding or at least re-facing, of which the west elevation in particular bears extensive witness; it is a surprise to find what appears to be the medieval roof still surviving. A tentative interpretation might be that the southern part of the house may have always been an outer court building, quite likely the residence of some monastic official, and perhaps of later medieval date (15<sup>th</sup> century?) and that the northern part is a 17<sup>th</sup> century addition, although incorporating some lower courses of a medieval structure. To a c1820 remodelling belong many of the openings with their neatly-cut parallel-tooled lintels and sills. There has been considerable alteration and modernisation in more recent years, including the replacement of many of the roof timbers. These works have been functional, without the intention of conserving or exposing any historic features. Much of interest doubtless remains concealed by the plaster of the internal wall faces. The roof structure is of some importance, and merits a full drawn survey if it becomes properly accessible.

**Peter F Ryder    November 2019**



BLANCHLAND  
15 THE SQUARE  
Supplied Floor Plans



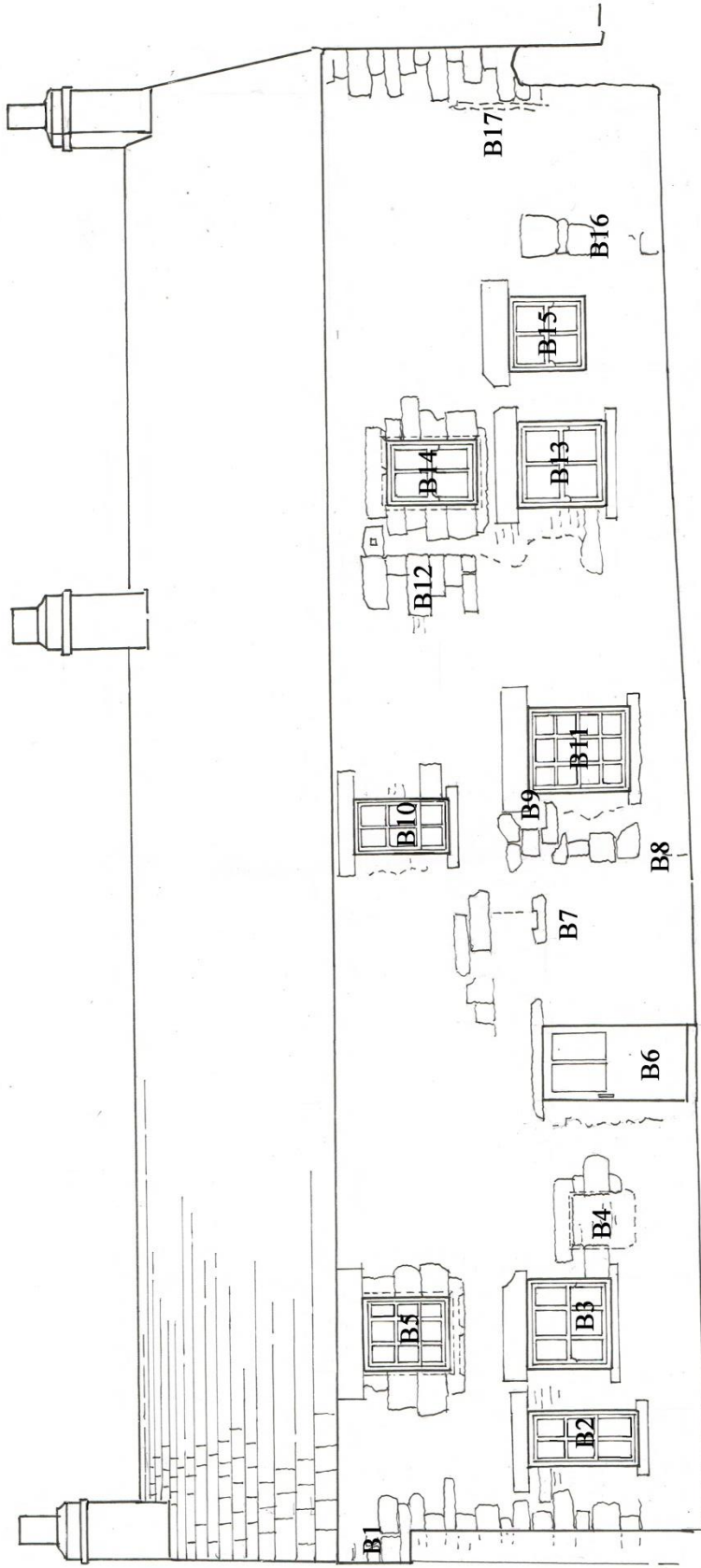


15 The Square. Blanchland  
West Elevation

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0 5 metres

For key see text



# 15 The Square. Blanchland

East Elevation

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For key see text.