

# **Additional historic building recording at Oakwood, Wylam, December 2020**

**Historic Environment Research and Interpretation  
On behalf of Peter McGirr**



**Brick and stone built wine bins against the E. wall of the cellar**

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## 1. Project background

A return visit was made to Oakwood on 16 December 2020 to undertake additional recording of the basement cellar and a wallpaper fragment surviving on the first floor landing. This supplements an earlier round of recording and assessment made for a revised Heritage Statement<sup>1</sup> in support of an LBC application for the building in July 2020.

## 2. The basement cellar

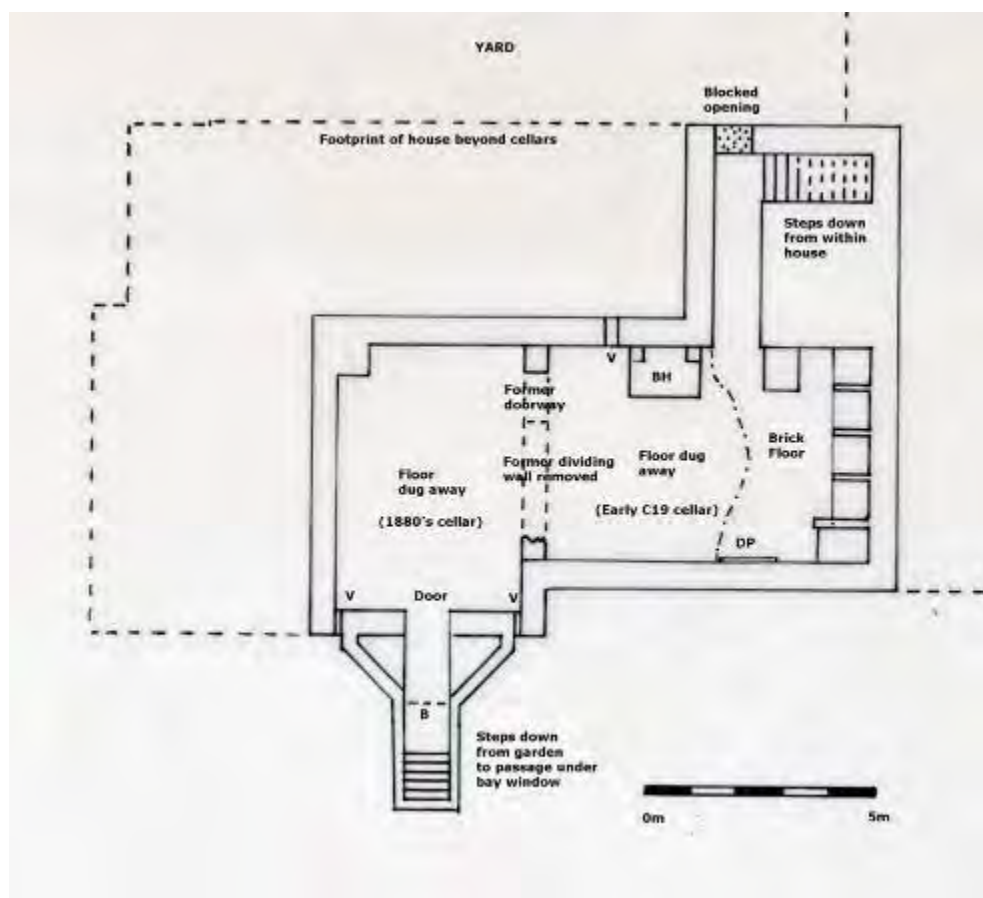
The cellar underlies the western end of the early nineteenth century south range and is presumably contemporary with this addition to the late eighteenth century farmhouse. A western addition to the cellar was made in the 1880s when the Cookson's added substantially to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Updated Heritage Statement for Oakwood Hall, Wylam*. Historic Environment Research and Interpretation, July 2020

house [See Milbank Existing Basement Plan, Drawing: 1923 AG(02)02, accompanying 2020 LBC application].

The revised Heritage Statement had identified surviving features in the basement. Clearing of previously excavated material and the provision of temporary lighting allowed an improved record of the features to be made. A review of earlier plans accompanying previous planning applications identified internal partitions within the cellar, removed by previous owners, who had also excavated the majority of the cellar floor to a depth of over 0.5m below the original level to gain additional headroom in the basement. Previous owner's works had also breached the structural wall between the two parts of the cellar, leaving the wall above and the floor joists of the Drawing Room unsupported.



**Fig. 1 Annotated basement outline showing location of cellars below house.**

Key:

- B – modern blocking of passage below bay window
- BH – brick hearth and corbels supporting GF fireplace
- DP – Cast Iron drain pipe set against cellar wall
- V - vents

*[Outline based on Milbank Existing Basement Plan, Drawing: 1923 AG(02)02]*

## 2.1 Access to the cellar

The cellar is accessed from the interior of the house via a flight of stone steps, descending beneath the main staircase, and a short lime rendered brick lined passage running south at right angles from their base. A brick blocked opening, high up in the north wall of the passage at the foot of the steps, gave access to the yard outside and may have provided access to bring goods directly into the cellar and perhaps some light or ventilation.



**Photo 1. Opening with modern blocking at N. end of passage. Base of steps to right**

Additional access was subsequently provided from the garden front via brick steps and a brick lined passage leading into the cellar below the bay of the 1880's extension. This would have facilitated delivery of large items such as beer barrels to the cellar space below the 1880's extension to the house. This passage had been blocked in the modern period, presumably once the household no longer required regular delivery of barrels. The blocking was subsequently re-opened, perhaps

when a previous owner needed to remove the material excavated from the cellar floor in the early 2000s.

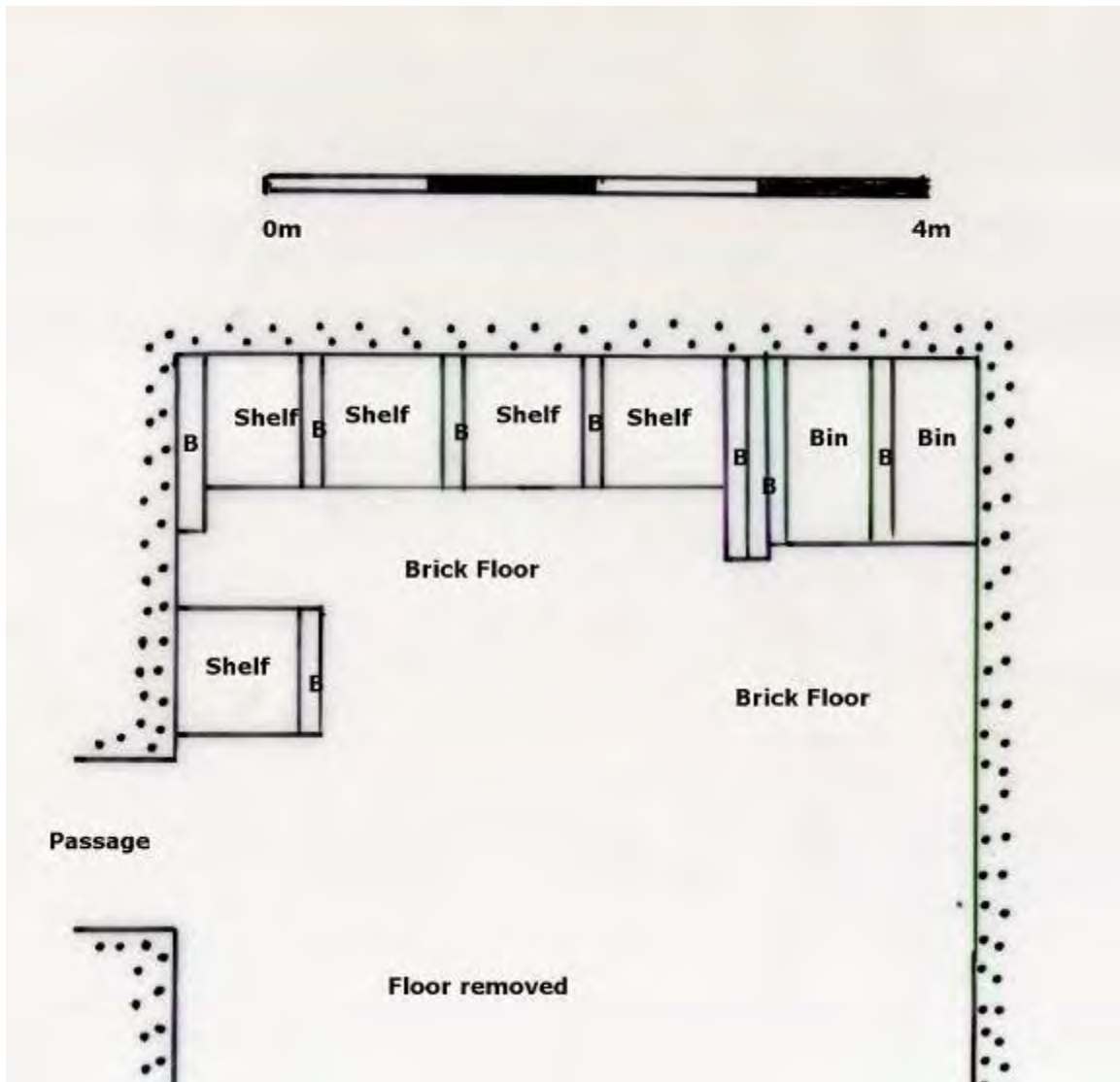


**Photo 2. Steps and brick lined passage below the bay on the S. front. Note mass concrete foundation to 1880's bay and modern blocking, subsequently re-opened, behind ranging rod**

## 2.2 Surviving features within the cellars

### 2.2.1 The early C19 cellar

The eastern cellar lies below the western end of the early nineteenth extension to the original house and appears to be contemporary with the addition of this south facing range. The walls are of rubble sandstone, although the access passage from within the house is brick lined and lime rendered. The cellar roof is formed by the joists (running N/S) and boards of the ground floor of the south range. The cellar walls have been lime rendered and whitewashed to seal the rubble stonework and improve visibility in low light levels.

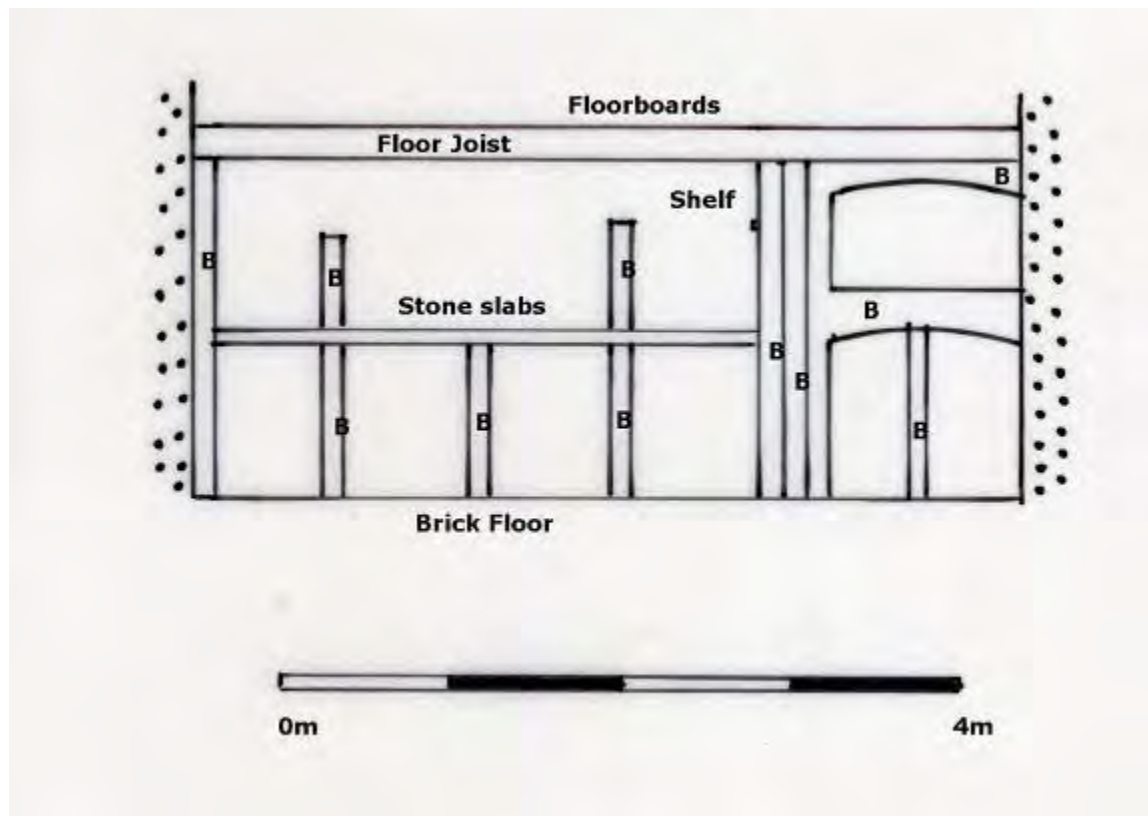


**Fig.2 Annotated plan of features at the eastern end of the cellar**

Key:

B – Brickwork

[stipple – rubble sandstone walls]



**Fig.3 Annotated elevation of wine bins built against east wall of cellar**

Key:

B – Brickwork

[stipple – rubble sandstone walls]

The principal features of interest within the eastern cellar are the brick and stone built wine bins built against the eastern wall of the cellar. These are secondary to the rubble built walls of the cellar but are presumably contemporary, providing storage for wine in bottles. A separate shelf built against the north wall just inside the doorway through a E/W partition across the cellar (removed in previous works) would have been convenient for gathering bottles from storage for use in the house above. The storage compartments are formed by slabs of sandstone set across brick built piers. The vertical divisions are carried up above the slabs and a surviving timber batten and “tide mark” on the rear wall indicate that an additional storage shelf ran across at least part of the space. At the southern end of the wine bins, arched bins, again in brick, provided additional storage [see Figs. 2 & 3 above].

Other features include a pair of substantial stone corbels projecting from the north wall to the west of the passage entrance. These support the fireplace and hearth in the room above [see photos below]. Two inserted openings adjacent may have provided draught

for the fireplace. A four inch diameter cast iron drain pipe has been inserted in the south wall but its function is not immediately obvious.



**Photo 3. Brick and stone wine bins built against east wall of cellar. Stone shelf in front of bins left middleground**



**Photo 4. Arched wine bins built in brick against southern wall. Note floor joists running N/S across cellar**





**Photo 5. Timber batten against far wall supporting former shelf across top of brick dividers. Note "tide mark" on back wall at level of former upper shelf**



**Photo 6. Stone shelf on brick pier against north wall. This would have been inside a former N/S running partition (scar visible at position of ranging rod)**



**Photo 7. Corbels and brick hearth for ground floor fireplace against north wall**



**Photo 8. Vent and shute cut into cellar wall to LHS of fireplace above**



**Photo 9. Fireplace and hearth in the room above**



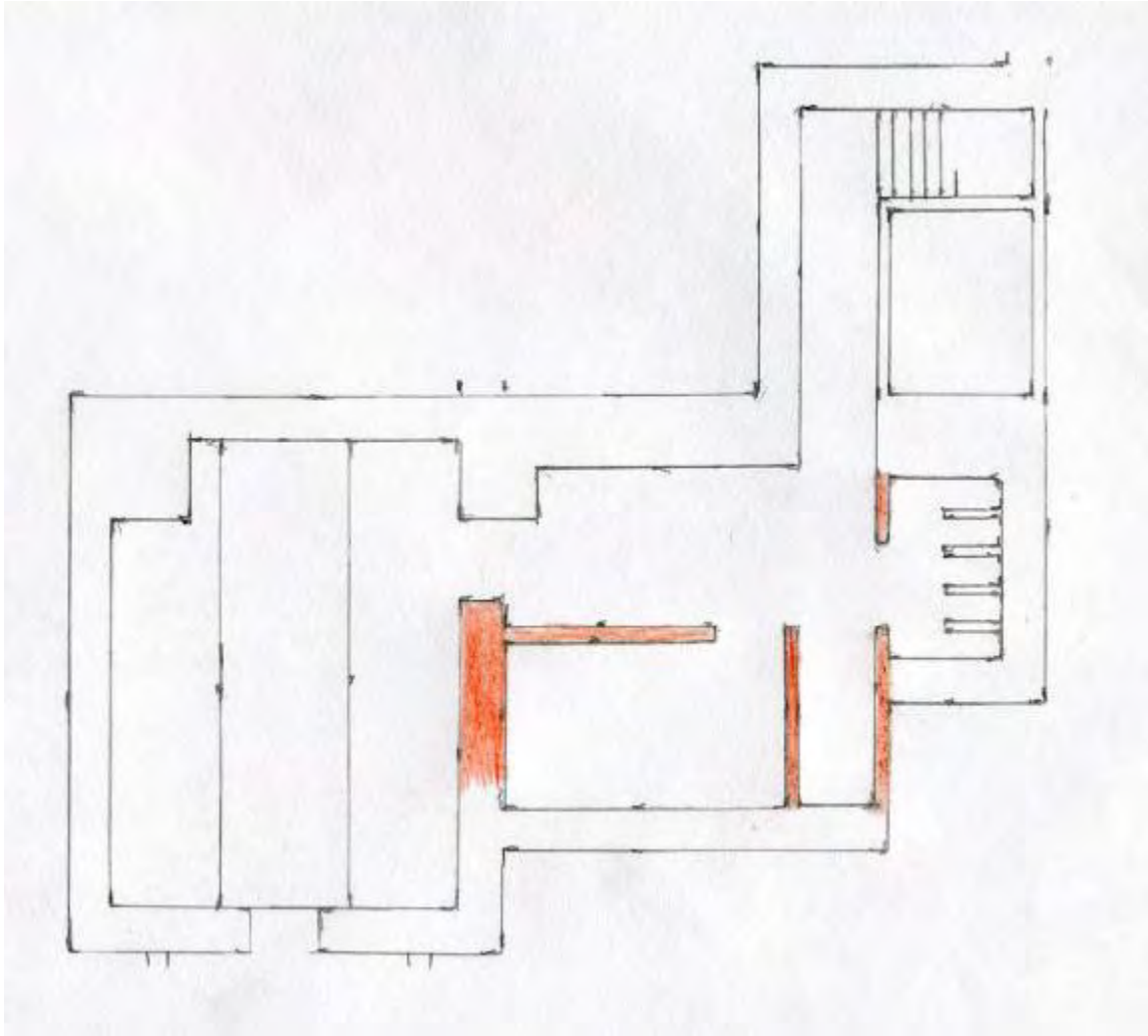
**Photo 10. Four inch cast iron drain pipe against south wall of cellar**



**Photo 11. Traces of former N/S partition against south wall**



**Photo 12. Stub of cross wall removed in previous works and recent collapse of unsupported south wall. 1880's cellar in background**



**Fig. 4 Tracing of early 2000s basement plan showing walls since removed by previous works to open up the eastern cellar [Not to scale]**

### 2.2.2 The 1880's cellar

The western cellar lies below part of the large Drawing Room, the addition made to the house during the Cookson's tenure, probably in the 1880's. The foundations here are of mass concrete, in contrast to the lack of foundation in the earlier cellar. The cellar roof is formed by the joists and boards of the ground floor room, which here run E/W in contrast to the earlier eastern cellar. A new access to the outside was made by a passage and steps leading out below the large bay window and would have allowed easier access for large items such as beer barrels. Early C21 plans show that a doorway connected the two cellars and the northern jamb remains in situ. The majority of the

former dividing wall has been removed during previous works, resulting in a lack of structural support for the fabric above. Victorian building practice is reflected in the provision of good under floor ventilation, with vents at high level in the cellar and above ground level outside, to either side of the bay window. A broken ceramic drain pipe at low level, adjacent to the door in the south wall, shows that drainage from the cellar was considered and appears to still be regulating the flood water level in the now excavated cellar floor.



**Photo 13. Door in south wall. Note substantial Victorian foundations here and drain pipe to L. of ranging rod. High level ventilation slots, top L and R**



**Photo 14. Pier in NW corner of cellar (providing support for large Drawing Room fireplace and associated stack). Note depth of mass concrete foundation**



**Photo 15. Surviving jamb of doorway broken through earlier wall (now largely removed). Note ventilation slot at high level to L. and "tide mark" indicating original floor level in both cellars**



**Photo 16. Ventilation grille to LHS of bay (adjacent to ranging rod)**

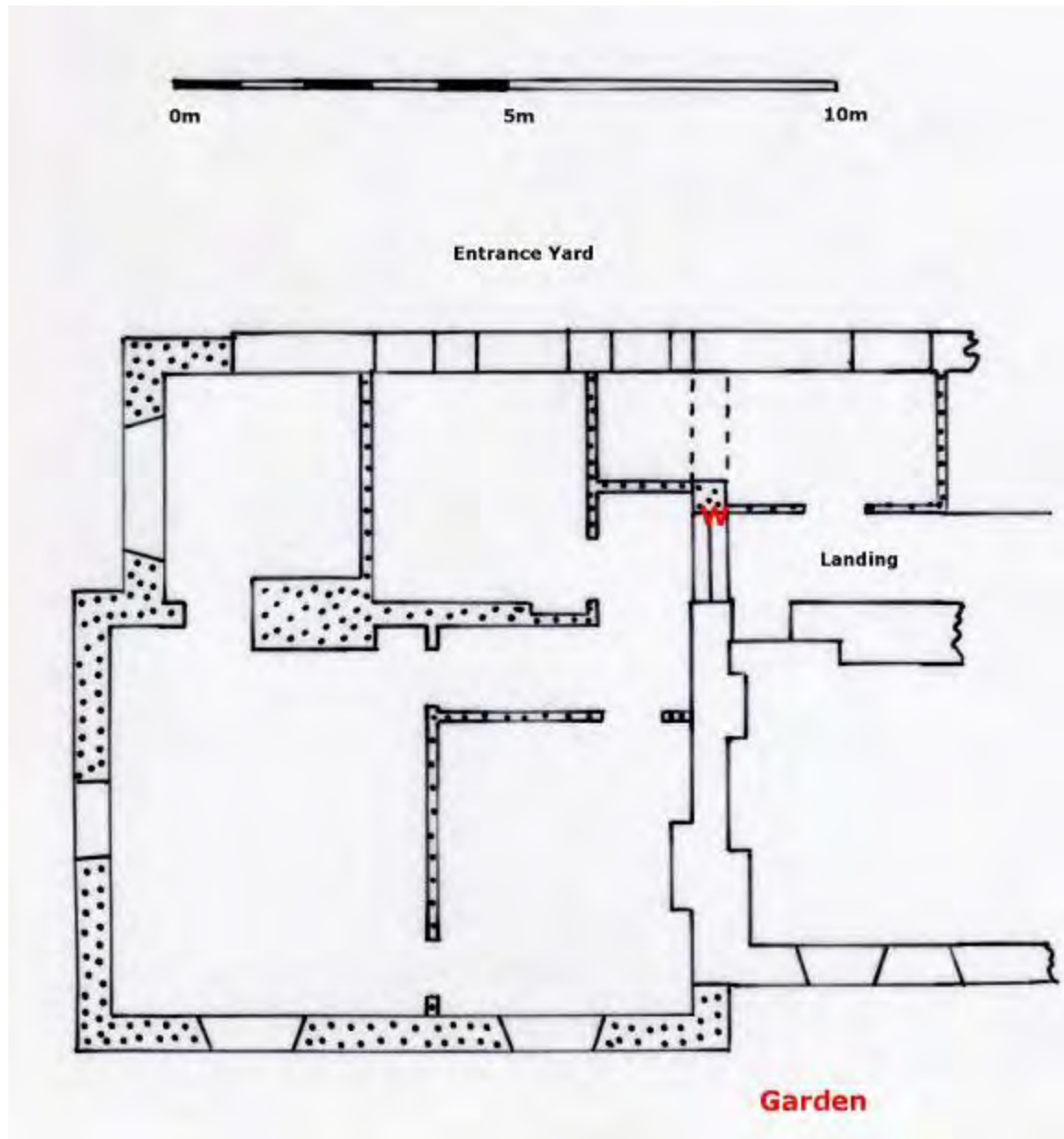


**Photo 17. E/W running floor joists above 1880's cellar, left unsupported by removal of supporting cross wall**



### 3. Wallpaper fragment surviving on the first floor landing

The Revised Heritage Statement had identified a surviving wallpaper fragment surviving behind later studwork on the north wall of the first floor landing.



**Fig.5 Annotated plan of western end of First Floor showing wallpaper location**

Key:

Red "W" marks location of surviving wallpaper.

Stipple – 1880's and later build

[Plan based on Milbank Existing First Floor Plan, Drawing 1923 AG(02)04]

### 3.1 Context

The wallpaper fragment is on a section of brick wall towards the western end of the first floor landing where the 1880's additions meet the earlier house and an opening was broken through the gable wall to give access to the additional first floor bedrooms. It lies to the side of a flight of three steps (originally two steps) which lead up to the 1880's/1930's bedroom floor levels, which are higher than the landing floor of the earlier house, reflecting the higher ceilings of the 1880's ground floor rooms below. The wall behind the wallpaper is of Victorian brick (rather than the rubble sandstone of the earlier wall, which survives above and below the 1880's opening) and forms a support pier for the timber lintels above the 1880's opening and later steelwork supporting the earlier stone wall and the roof at this point. The area was further modified in the 1930's improvements to form a bathroom off the landing and the studwork overlying the wallpaper appears to date from this period<sup>2</sup>. A modern timber propping arrangement to provide additional support at this point was not disturbed but restricted access to photograph the wallpaper fragment.



**Photo 18. General context of wallpaper survival behind later studwork and plasterboard, looking NE.**

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<sup>2</sup> Northumberland Archives, Blackett (Wylam) MSS, Proposed alterations to Oakwood by the architects Mauchlan & Weightman, March 1939. Although these are only sketch proposals they do show the intention to form a bathroom here, confirmed by more recent plans submitted with earlier planning applications for the house



**Photo 19. View looking west along landing. Wallpaper surviving behind studwork partition adjacent to ranging rod. Note timber props resting on second step and brick relieving arch over timber lintel above 1880's opening through earlier gable wall**



**Photo 20. Lower section of wallpaper**



**Photo 21. Upper section of wallpaper. Note remains of 1930's plasterboard adhering to later studwork overlying the wallpapered wall. Earlier studwork partitions (left of view) are traditional lath and plaster**

### 3.2 Identification of wallpaper

Comparison with published and online resources had not identified the wallpaper and enquires to The Wallpaper Society and the Whitworth Art Gallery at Manchester had not been successful. A further enquiry to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London was however successful, with a rapid response from Gill Saunders, Senior Curator (Prints), Word & Image Dept., V&A museum, who identified the fragment as a design by Morris & Co., "Myrtle", issued by Morris & Co. 1899, initially designed by Morris c.1875 <sup>3</sup>for needlework and later repurposed for wallpaper following Morris's death. This would fit with the period of extensive improvements undertaken at Oakwood during the long tenancy of the Cookson family. A Morris paper would have been the height of fashion at the period and reflects the quality of interior decoration which would have been employed during the Cookson's occupation of Oakwood.

The online collection of Brooklyn Museum includes a Wallpaper Sample Book by Morris & Co. and page 77 is Myrtle 358, with the colours given as *Greens Golds Blue Pink on white*:



**Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 2009 71.151.1\_page 077\_PS1.jpg**

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<sup>3</sup> V&A Museum Number: CIRC.26-1954; Image Number: 2006AN1130, [vandaimages.co./preview.asp?image=2006AN1130](http://vandaimages.co./preview.asp?image=2006AN1130)

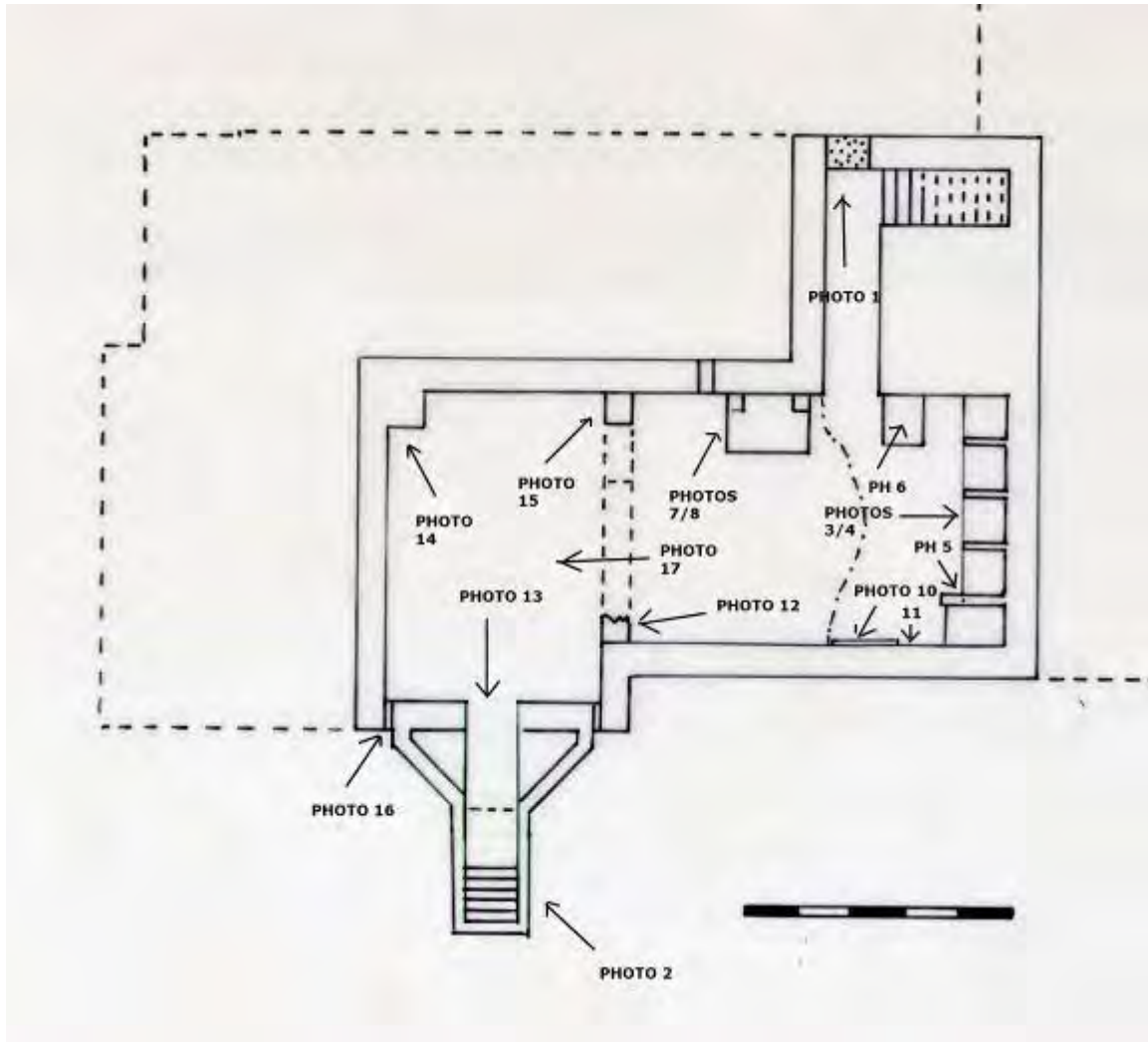


Fig. 6 Plan showing orientation of photos – Basement

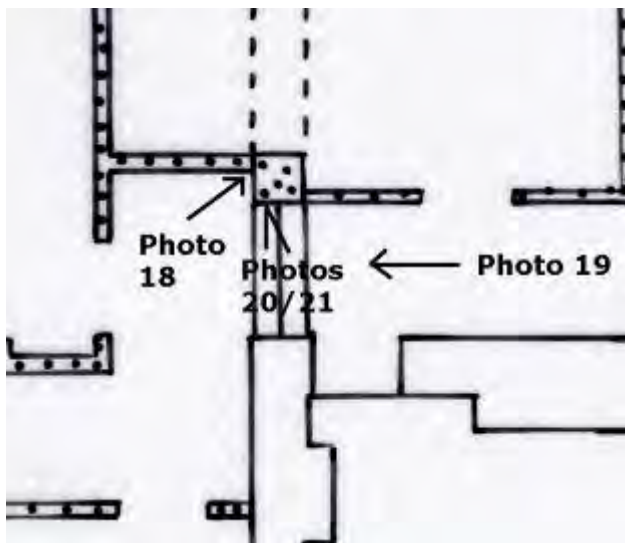


Fig. 7 Plan showing orientation of photos – First Floor landing