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Hafod Lwyfog

Nant Gwynant Beddgelert,
Gwynedd

NGR SH 6526 5225



Figure 10. The house in 1953.

Building Report

Extract from the Thesis

A HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL,
and

DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Of a

SNOWDONIA HOUSE

Author: David Sables
2005

Written in the language chosen by the volunteers and researchers & including information so far discovered

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HAFOD LYWYFOG
A HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL AND
DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS OF A SNOWDONIA HOUSE

By David Sables

Abstract

During the summer and autumn of 2005 a study of Hafod Lwyfog a house in Snowdonia was made using historical records, architectural features and dendrochronological sampling

The aim of the study was to ascertain the earliest phase of construction of the building

After collation of all the above information unfortunately no indisputable dating evidence for the house's earliest phase of construction was found

However enough information was discovered that allowed a scenario of the structure's probable development to be put together, starting from an initial construction phase in the 1540s AD

Acknowledgement

This dissertation was initiated after being invited to assist in the sampling of several buildings in North Wales by Nigel Nayling; one of these buildings was Hafod Lwyfog I was fortunate not only that Nigel asked me to accompany him but that he allowed me to partake in the analysis of the samples and in further research into the building.

The dissertation has been a pleasure to write and has led me to a better understanding not only of the process of research but of some of the frustrations involved I feel privileged to have been the recipient of so much help with people being willing to go out of their way in order to help with my studies

I would like to thank the Royal Commission Aberystwyth for allowing me to use their photographs and facilities, Nigel Nayling for his patience and the vast amounts of information time and effort he provided towards this piece of work I would also like to thank Margaret Dunn for her unstinting help in explaining the history of the area and her support

I would also like to thank Dr Greg Stevenson for being a fountain of knowledge on the architectural details of vernacular housing I would also like to thank Dee and Louise Squire for their support and patience

Finally I would like to thank my family and friends for listening to me drone on about spiral stairwells and to Alison for being my inspiration and support

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David Sables 2005

N.B This Architectural Record Is an Extract from David Sables Combined Work

A HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL,
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DENROCHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A SNOWDONIA HOUSE.

Discovering old Welsh Houses

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Photographs

Photographs and plans by kind permission of the Royal Commission, Aberystwyth

Architecture

The dating of any building is usually undertaken by typological methodology. All buildings are subject to the fashion or style of the period, both stylistically and in the materials used. An example of this is the change in types of windows used through time, for instance, in the 15th century lancet windows were in vogue, but by the middle of the 13th century they had been replaced by the mullion window (Brunskill, 1997, A). During the 19th century, advances in science led to the availability of iron windows at an economic price, resulting in many buildings having cast iron windows inserted (Period, 2006). When there is no historical documentation to date a building, an understanding of these sequential changes in style enables a synopsis of the building's development to be formed (appendix 1). From this, deductions dating the phases of construction can be calculated. This chapter will discuss some of the synopses developed by historical and architectural authors on Welsh houses, with emphasis on the Hafod Lwyfog house.

It is suggested by Smith (1975, p175), that Hafod Lwyfog was a renaissance building with a central entrance and service room. The earliest surviving building of this style found in Wales is the Plas-Mawr house, which is thought to have been built between 1576 and 1585 AD (Cadw, 2006). This style rapidly became fashionable amongst the higher echelons of Welsh society. The renaissance house developed out of the medieval hall due to the insertion of fireplaces and an upper floor. The renaissance style saw a change of emphasis from internal decoration to an external portrayal of wealth and confidence (Smith, 1975). These renaissance houses tended to be built prominently across the slope of the hillside rather than being sited downwards in the shelter of the hill (Penoyre, 1978). This change in the axis of the renaissance style house enabled the owner to control the view that any visitor saw as they approached the building. The house had a symbolic aspect and the placing of it within the landscape has made it a force for social stability within the changing political and economic world. A visitor would now approach the front of the house with its important architectural features rather than the side or rear of the house as before. However, Hafod Lwyfog is not a typical renaissance house. The construction of Hafod Lwyfog appears to follow the slope of the hillside, which would suggest it was positioned to take advantage of as much sunlight as possible throughout the year, plus it uses the natural contours of the land to maximise the shelter it offers in the hostile Snowdonia environment. These features take precedence over the view offered to the visitor, who on approach would have seen the side of the house first and are typical of sub-medieval houses in this region.

This was a major difference in housing design from those built earlier in the medieval period. The renaissance house was now centered on a front to rear axis, with the entrance being moved to a central position. It would appear that Hafod Lwyfog, whilst having some of the aspects of the renaissance house, such as chimneys inserted into the gable ends and a central entrance and service room, it was not a typical renaissance house as it was not outwardly ostentatious and sits on a platform cut into the downward slope of the hillside. This divergence from the typical style could be a reflection of the owner who may have had a conservative outlook, preferring the traditional look of houses at that time, as other owners of houses that travelled more widely were more likely to bring in ideas they had seen from outside the principality (Penoyre, 1990). Therefore, it must be taken into account that Snowdonia was well away from the centre of court politics where a show of wealth may have been of use in maintaining or gaining status. The design of Hafod Lwyfog may also be a reflection of the climate in Snowdonia, where the need for shelter from more adverse weather would have taken precedence over the new styles of buildings. The owner may have opted for the new renaissance design because it offered good-sized rooms and the advantage of easy access to all parts of the house. This type of building was popular throughout Britain from the 1560s AD until the 1680s AD (Brunskill, 1997).

The changes in house building styles occurred as builders and owners embraced the classical styling imported from the Mediterranean (Smith, 1975). This was not an isolated event but was bound to the

flowering of western sciences and exploration, as the centre of political power moved from the Mediterranean area to the Atlantic seaboard (Aldcroft, 2003). This change is reflected in the design of housing throughout this period in Britain, as house design was re-thought. The outside of houses took on a more formal appearance and although less ostentatious in Snowdonia, this change in design did have an impact. Most of the decoration on the medieval house had been internal with an introspective feel about the design. The new houses had more rooms, an upstairs and a centralised system of moving around the house. The standard design of central passage with chimneys at each gable end allowed the house to have well-proportioned rooms. There was also a change in the demarcation of the rooms within the house, where the main reception rooms took precedence over the kitchen and service rooms (Smith 1975) (see appendix 2).

2.1 Building materials

Building materials often dictate the design of buildings in a way that is almost forgotten today in our era of standardised production of bricks and concrete blocks. In the past, the choice of building materials was dependent on many factors such as availability and local tradition. Wales has no single building tradition but it does have strong geographical trends. North Wales is one of the highland zones of Britain and because of this it has, over the centuries, developed its own unique style of building. The fact that the area is so isolated has led to the preservation of many old buildings, which in other areas have been destroyed, either intentionally or through neglect, because of the pressure to free land for a growing population or industrial development. This is particularly true of Snowdonia in the past (Peate, 1945). The isolation and inclement weather conditions (Snowdonia has a very high annual rainfall compared to the rest of the country with an annual average of 2,391mm (79in) and is second only to Fort William in Scotland) (Brockway, 2006) have shaped the type of farming that has taken place and consequently the type of buildings constructed.

Farm buildings were often squat or single storied, using the natural contours of the land to shelter from



Figure 3. The house in 2005.

the worst weather. The type and layout of houses were therefore constrained by the nature of building materials available. In Snowdonia there is an abundance of Pre-Cambrian igneous rock, which has eroded out of the surrounding mountains or been deposited by glacial action at the end of the last ice age. Consequently, there has

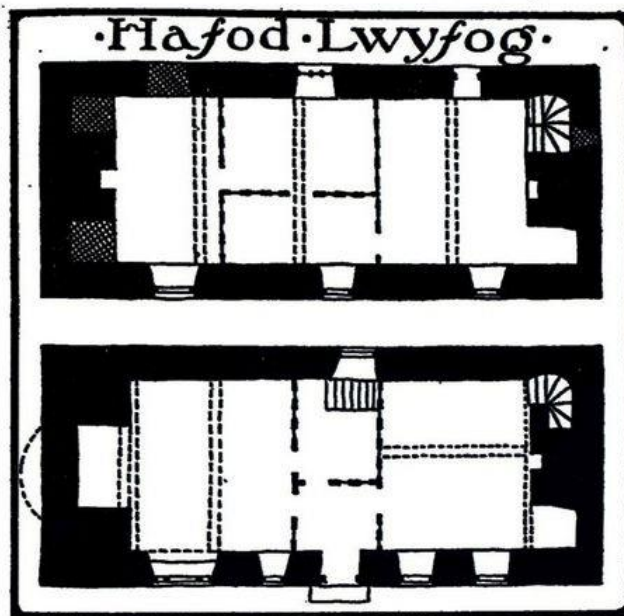
been no need to quarry in many areas of Snowdonia because of the abundance of stone lying around in the fields. Indeed, the profusion of loose stonewalls are a testimony to just how much material was present. So it was natural that this abundant source of rock was used for building.

However, there are certain drawbacks to using this material for building. These rocks are very difficult to cut and dress, therefore, walls were built with a foundation of large stones at the building's base with more manageable stones used in the upper courses of the building (G. Stevenson, pers comm, 2006). In Hafod Lwyfog these stones were laid without any continuous horizontal joints, with no

indication that the stone had been laid in courses. Rather the material had been laid as it came to hand. However the builders of the Hafod Lwyfog took great pains to square the edges of the buildings off. Today, the building is bare stone but there is evidence that in the recent past it was lime-washed in white, although in the more distant past it may have been painted a different colour (G. Stevenson, pers comm, 2006). This practice of covering buildings in lime mortar or rough dressings as well as to protect buildings from the weather gave them a more uniform finish and helped to identify the house within its landscape (G. Stevenson, pers comm., 2006).

2.2 Style

On initial investigation Hafod Lwyfog is a four-storey building that does not appear to have originally been a single storey house that was later altered by having its roofline lifted. This four-storey design resulted in the parkour becoming the main reception room of the house. Subsequently, the principle bedrooms were moved from the ground floor to the upper floor. This resulted in the two main bedrooms being ranked higher in status along with the main parlour. The owners or visitors would have occupied these bedrooms, while the service room and attic area would have been used by the servants. Evidence of this can be seen in the shield motif and bedroom fireplaces. The attic, which is now open plan, shows signs that in the past it had been portioned into separate areas, possibly for use as bedrooms. However, these rooms would have been quite cramped and dark as there is no evidence of windows in this area. If oil lamps, or indeed candles, were used in these areas over a long period of time, this would have led to a build-up of soot and could be one explanation for the staining on the roof trusses. However, this has been interpreted as an indication of timber reuse from a different building (M, Dunn, pers comm., 2006). The ground floor is now divided into two main rooms, the parlour and kitchen, and a small passage, which is all that remains of the service room. The ground storey floor is of large irregular flagstones, while the upper store shave oak boarding flooring. The first known attempt to document the house was undertaken by Hughes and North in 1908, and they



The Chamber-plan is shown above, the Ground-plan below.

described the house as consisting of four storeys, including a cellar or basement, ground floor, chamber floor and a loft. They suggested that the main beams and joists had a double bead decoration running along them, a window over the gable end (over the staircase) and another window at the opposite end of the house in the loft. By 1908, the oldest window that could be seen was one looking onto the landing. This was a three-quarter light with wooden mullions of a splayed form. It was speculated that the fact the pitch of the roof was very low indicates that the roof was originally designed for stone slates (Hughes 1908).

2.3 Parlour

The parlour has a ceiling supported by a quarter round axial ceiling beam on the west side with ogee stops with an inscription saying E L L E 1638. The joists have reed decoration on the sides and soffit and the fireplace has a timber Bressumer beam with quarter round mouldings and ogee stops. Above the

Bressumer is a plaster armorial shield, which in the past was decorated with three eagles (Hughes, 1908). The inscription on the axial beam has been taken as the construction date of the building by many people, however it could be suggested that this inscription was inserted many years after the house was built. Jenkins (1999, p281) agrees that the house is probably older than the inscription by maybe as much as 80 years. The reed decoration, shield and inscription all reinforce that the parlour was the most important room in the house, at least in status terms, where visitors would be entertained.

The Renaissance saw a revival of interest in heraldry and the coat of arms was often seen as a status symbol and can be found in many manor houses. Smith (1975) suggests that this is an expression of nostalgia, looking back to the time of the hundred years war when England vanquished France, which had been increasing in power at the time of the development of the renaissance style buildings. This type of decoration is relatively common in houses of high status in North Wales from this period. The coat of arms at Hafod Lwyfog consisted of three eagles and was positioned above the parlour fireplace; however, the eagles are now indecipherable but can clearly be seen on photographs from the 1950s. There are another two shields upstairs, one in each of bedroom one and two. These are also illegible, but unlike the parlour shield there is no photographic record of their original design.

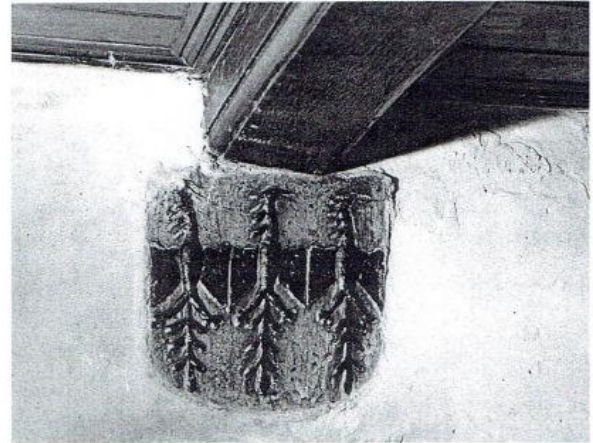


Figure 5. 1953 photograph of the coat of arms.

It could be that these coats of arms, like the inscription, were also inserted into the building after its construction. There were many reasons for forging heraldic devices, inscriptions and dates, for instance, a coat of arms may have been added to give a semblance of age and history to a relatively new building or to give the impression of a noble lineage for the owner. It is, however, probable that the date of 1638 on the axial beam is correct, as it correlates with historical data and architectural traditions of house building at that time. inscription of this date are not unusual as it follows a tradition which dates back to the early years of the reign of Elizabeth I. Smith (1975, p533) suggests these inscriptions were a form of emulation of the political magnets of the Borderlands and North Wales in this period, as very few buildings in the rest of Wales contain them. Smith (1975, p523) also suggests this type of heraldry is an indication that the owners were literate, otherwise the placing of a date would be simply a decorative item, and although this is not unknown, the effort invested in making the shields and inscription plus the absence of other types of decoration makes it unlikely.

2.4 Kitchen

The kitchen is situated on the ground floor at the southern end of the house. It is separated from the central service room and parlour by wooden partitions. The separation of the kitchen from the main living vicinity means that the preparation of food could be moved away from these formal areas, although certain schools of thought feel that food in larger houses had always been prepared in a smaller separate building that has rarely survived (Brunskill, 1997). The kitchen ceiling has a central transverse beam and a half beam against the south end wall with plain cut stops for the joists. The fireplace has a large cambered timber Bressumer beam and an external drip-sill moulding indicating it may have once held a bread oven. The beams and Bressumer have plain chamfered edges. The flooring is of large irregular flagstones.

2.5 Service Room

Hafod Lwyfog originally had a central unheated service room, which gave easy access to downstairs rooms but precluded the use of a central stairway (the present wooden stairs were later added and the service room altered). This room has a haphazard unplanned appearance but in fact follows the usual layout of a central service room prevalent in the early 16th century (Smith, 1975). The internal development of the service room was one of the main factors that dictated the sighting of the fireplaces, which are set into each of the gable ends; and while this is not energy efficient it does maximise the internal space and gives a balanced aspect to the exterior of the house.

2.6 Stairs

The house contains three staircases consisting of a central wooden dogleg stair, a stone spiral stair in the northern chimney jam and a wooden stair in the north-east corner of the house. The introduction of multi-storey houses led to the requirement of a means of reaching the upper storeys. In Hafod Lwyfog this was achieved through the construction of a stone spiral staircase set into the jam of the



Figure 6. The spiral staircase.

kitchen fireplace. The fireplace stair is at the northern end of the house with steps that cantilever out of the wall fabric. The stair went from the cellar to the first floor but did not enter the loft. Hughes (1908) suggested, after he visited the house in 1907, that there may have been two stairs built into the fireplaces but this would have been unusual as there are no records of

any building having more than one stone stair in the Snowdonia area. Hughes (1908) may have thought that the present wooden corner stair was a replacement for a previous spiral chimney stair, running from the ground floor to the first floor. The fireplace stair became popular in the early to middle 16th century and died out in the 17th century with the development of the double pile house Brunskill (2000). It is therefore probable that this stair was replaced and blocked up after the 17th century by one of a more modern design. The most impressive wooden stair is the central dogleg stair. The dogleg staircase became popular in smaller houses in the late 18th century (Brunskill, 2000). The dogleg staircase in Hafod Lwyfog has reed moulding to the handrail and stick and turned balusters. The turned balusters are similar to slender turned balusters but are of a naive style. This type of wooden stair and the styling of the balusters suggest that it was inserted into the service room area around the mid 18th century. The appearance of the stairs, which look ill matched with the panelling, also supports the hypothesis that they are a later insertion. The third and final stair is made of wood in a compact plain style.

2.7 Post and panel partitions

A Renaissance style house such as Hafod Lwyfog has no stone or brick built interior walls and so the interior space is partitioned off with wood paneling which is thought to be a remnant of the half-timber and half stone building design which contained interior timber framed partitions

almost black patina they look as if they have been altered to accommodate changes in other parts of

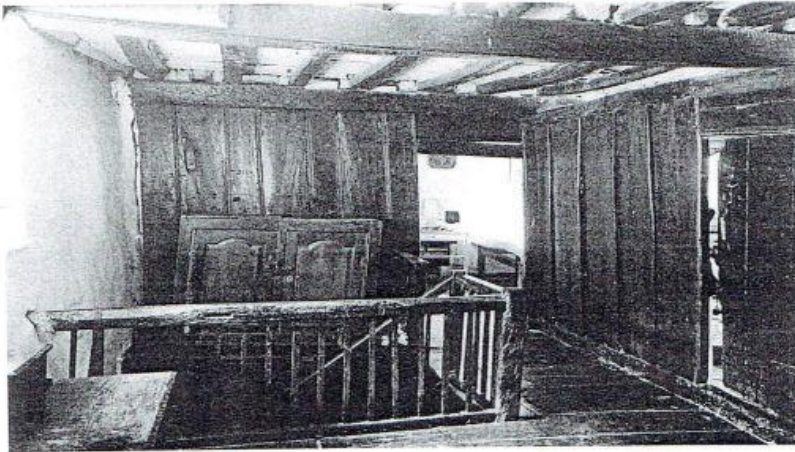


Figure 7. The first floor panelling.

the structure, in a way that is hard to fake. This, and the in and out boarding which is usually found in workers cottages rather than larger farm houses such as Hafod Lwyfog, suggest it is more likely they were made originally for the house but have been altered and moved around within it (see appendix 3).

2.8 Doors and Door Furniture

Hafod Lwyfog has eight internal and two external doors. The main entrance door to the house has a quarter round moulding on the lintel; this door leads into the lobby. All the interior doors are of a matched plank-type, which fits in with the design of the partition panelling. The door furniture of particular interest is the handmade iron keyhole escutcheon and wooden drop latches, with their integral vertical handles. The parlour door has hand-made iron concealed buck hinges in the shape of a fleur de Lyon. The first floor doorways have mouldings on both sides and separate door head lintels. All doors seem contemporary with the insertion of the panelling.



Figure 8. Parlour door furniture.

2.9 Windows

2.9.1 Ground Floor

Due to the house being cut into the hillside the only windows on the ground floor are on the east elevation (front facing). All windows date to the 19th century .

- The outer southern window is a wooden, side hung, three bay casement window.
- The centre bay window has four panes and each of the side bay windows has two.
- The inner southern window is a small vertical sliding sash window with two panes.
- The inner window on the northern aspect is a four-pane wooden side hung casement.
- The outer northern aspect window is a four pane wooden vertical sliding sash.

2.9.2 First Floor

The first floor west elevation (landing) window is a timber mullion; three light windows. This window has recesses set into the wall, which may originally have been for iron security bars (this appears to be the oldest window in the house and may once have been a door approached by means of an earth ramp and may date to the 18th century, all the other windows dating to the 19th).

- The inner first floor west elevation (landing) window is a wooden vertically sliding sash window.
- The east elevation first floor window has three windows, all of which are four pane vertically sliding sash windows.

The mixture of window styles makes it likely that the windows were replaced through time as and when it was required.

2.9.3 Discontinued windows

There are five visible blocked up windows. Four of the blocked up windows are on the first floor and the remaining one is on the ground floor. Two of these former windows are on the western and eastern aspects of the house and two are on northern and southern gable ends. On the northern gable end the first floor blocked up window has a corresponding locked up ground floor window with the remains of a grooved sandstone mullion for the insertion of glass. Stone mullion windows of this type were popular from 1400 AD until the 1590s (Brunskill, 1997). The alignment of the two windows and the remains of the mullion may be an indication that this was one window in the past and not two separate windows as seen today. It is unclear when these windows were blocked up.

2.10 Roof Trusses

The roofing is supported by four oak collar trusses. On examination the trusses show signs of smoke



Figure 9. Oak trusses.

damage and alteration. The oak collar trusses have two side purlins and may once have been upper crucks which were subsequently cut back and had their tie beams removed. This may have been done in order for the attic floor to be installed. The rafters are a modern replacement, which were put in during a late 20th century roof re-slating.

Collar trusses one and four have cranked chamfered collars with secondary ranking struts and mortises. There are four peg inserts in these supports, which may have been for an earlier collar or vertical studs (see appendix 4). Trusses two and three are chamfered and stopped at the cranked chamfered collars, and have cut back raking struts. These features have been interpreted as decoration. The struts have carpenter's marks and a line of small pegs, which may have been used as markers. It could be suggested that the trusses have been reused from a bay or hall house; if this is so then trusses two and three would have been the central supports because of the chamfered and stopped cranked collars. Trusses one and four are plainer and would have been positioned in the end bays.

2.10 Roof slates

Hafod Lwyfog has a modern roof with industrial slate tiles. The pitch of the roof is very low, indicating that it was designed originally for stone slates (Hughes, 1908). However, it would appear that the roof has been replaced at least twice in the past, as photographs taken in 1953 and 2000 show a change from rough slates to machine cut slate tiles.



Figure 10. The house in 1953.



Figure 3. The house in 2005.

2.12 Chimneys and Fireplaces

Hafod Lwyfog has two square endgable chimneys serving four fireplaces. The two downstairs fireplaces are the large inglenook form and the upstairs ones are smaller and more enclosed. The type of chimney a house has and the positioning of fireplaces within a building is one of the key points in dating a house. When chimneys were introduced they served not only as a means of removing smoke from within a building but also as status symbol. At the time of their building, the tall square chimneys at Hafod Lwyfog would have been a significant statement of wealth (i.e. the bigger the chimney the more fuel required and therefore the larger the surplus of capital available to the owner) (Grenville, 1997).

These large inglenook fireplaces first become fashionable in the early 16th century. However by 1953 photographs show that both inglenook fireplaces had been blocked up and a cast iron range had been installed in the kitchen and a stove in the parlour. Today, the stove has been removed from the parlour and has been replaced by a solid fuel open fireplace and the kitchen fireplace has been opened up and a wood burning stove insert. Photographs from this time also show that the chimneys have been capped with a triangle of slate.

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2.13 Cellar

Hafod Lwyfog has a cellar that runs under the parlour and can be entered either from the parlour spiral chimney stairwell or by an outside entrance at the front of the house. The cellar is smaller in length than the parlour but has similar transverse beams with a straight cut stop and plain chamfered joists. Today the cellar is used as a wood store.

2.14 Outbuildings

There are at least two outbuildings within close proximity to Hafod Lwyfog. They are outside the remit of this dissertation and will not be discussed.

2.15 Conclusion

A building is not a static entity. Buildings are constantly being adapted and improved to meet ever-changing needs of the occupants and owners. This is the reason architecture can be used as a means of dating a building. However, because these changes are not uniform between all buildings in time, architecture cannot give a definitive date; the best that can be said is, it is probably within a broad period of decades.

Conclusion

The house as seen today is of a renaissance design from the 16th century containing within it architectural features spanning a period from the late 15th century up until the 20th century. It was impossible to date the earliest phase of the building's construction by any single method. It was however possible to give a probable decade for the construction using a combination of all three dating methods. Using historical documentation, architectural features and dendrochronological results, a scenario of the building's development has been constructed.

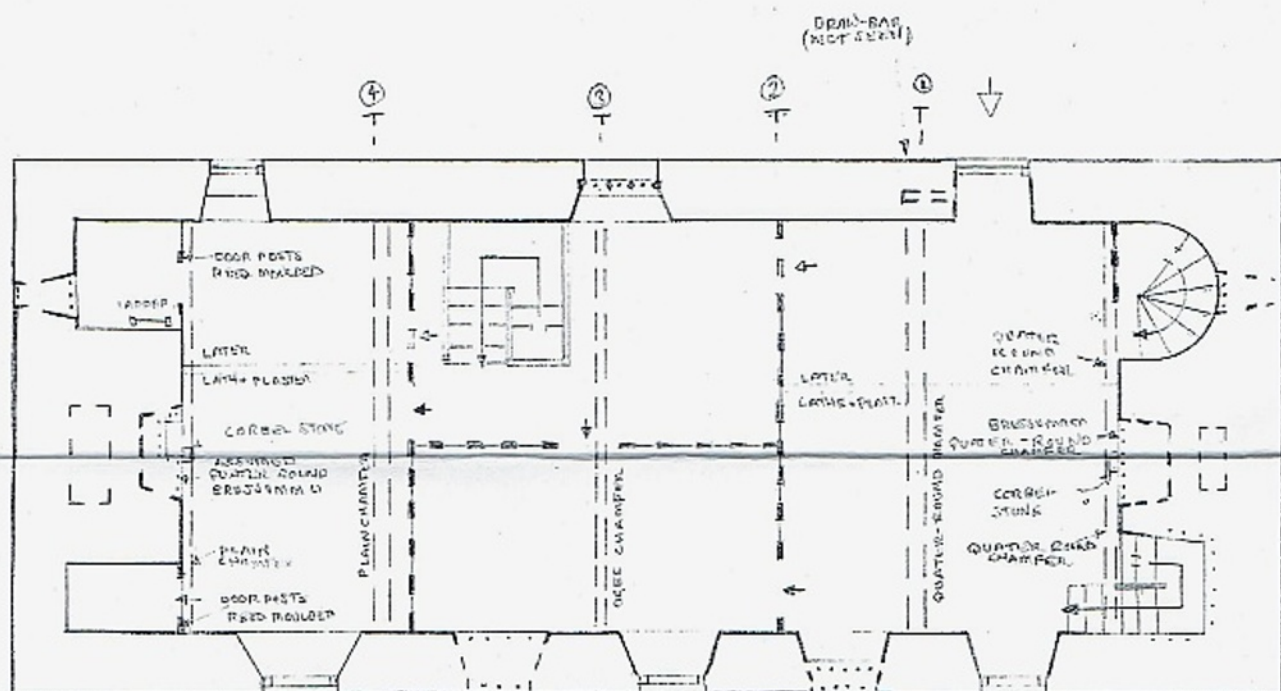
Historical documents such as the Ministers' Accounts of 1536, in which the name Bryn Gwynein was replaced with Hafod Lwyfog, indicate a change in the centre of administration within that locality. This change was probably to a house owned by Maredudd ap Ieuan ap Robert which was on the site now occupied by Hafod Lwyfog. Architectural features, such as the spiral staircase and the remains of the stone mullion window, both of a type popular in the late 15th early 16th century, suggests that the present Hafod Lwyfog was originally a hall type house with a large window in the north gable. Dendrochronological sampling indicates that the oak used in the trusses was felled in the 1540s. As in this period timber was worked soon after it was felled, it is therefore probable that the initial stage of building took place in the 1540s. In the 17th century Hafod Lwyfog underwent a substantial rebuild.

The roof level was raised, and the trusses were altered and a second wooden stairs added which enabled a substantial first floor and attic to be inserted. At the same time the post and panel partitions were installed.

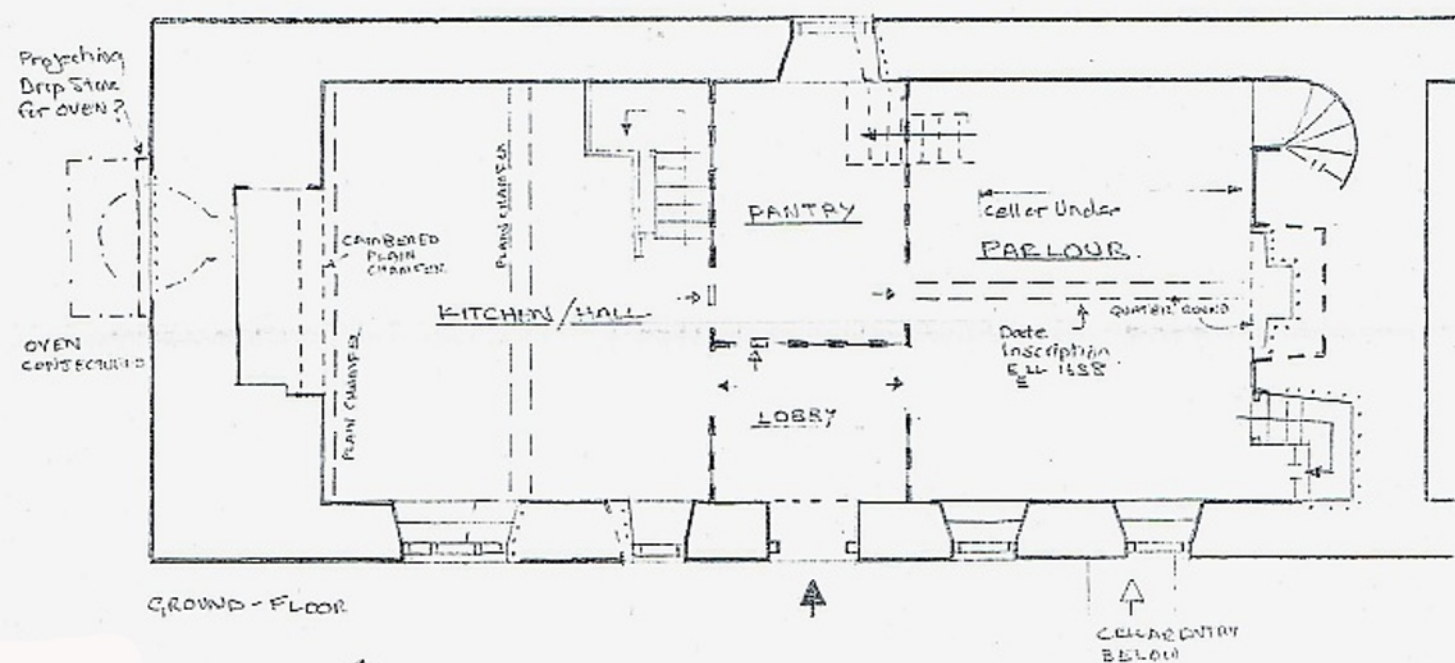
This event may have taken place around 1638, the date of the inscription on the parlour beam. In the late 18th century a grander dog leg stair was added.

Over the years the house has been changed piecemeal as windows and doors etc. needed to be repaired or replaced. By the beginning of the 19th century the house was, to all intents and purposes, as we see it today. There have been small changes, such as the slate roof and the insertion of different fireplaces and electricity, but these have not affected the overall feel of the building.

David Sable 2005



FIRST - FLOOR



GROUND - FLOOR

0 metres

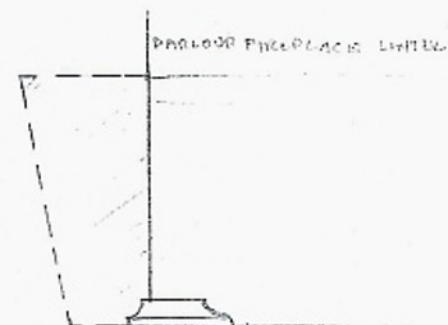
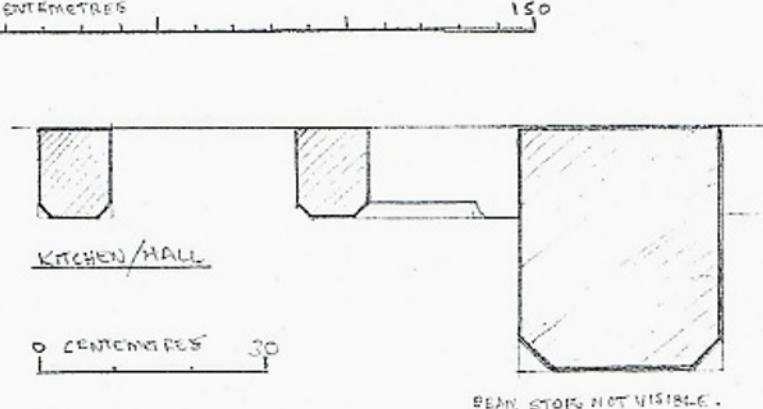
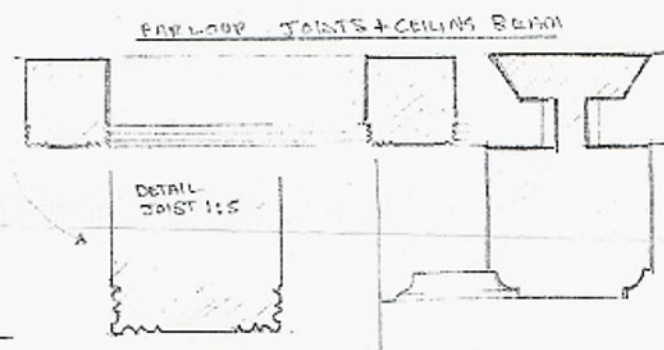
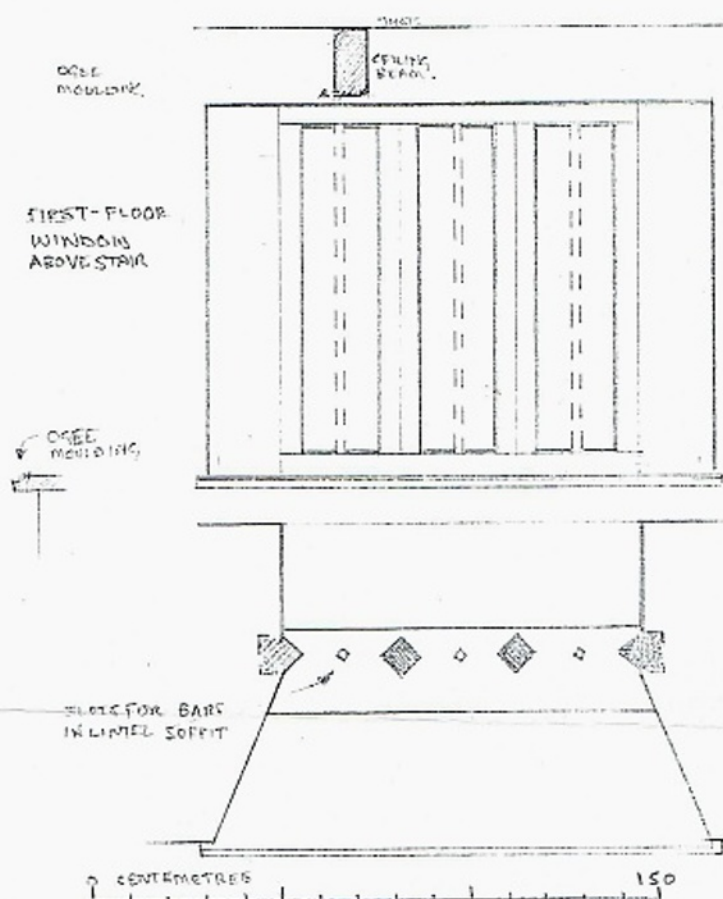
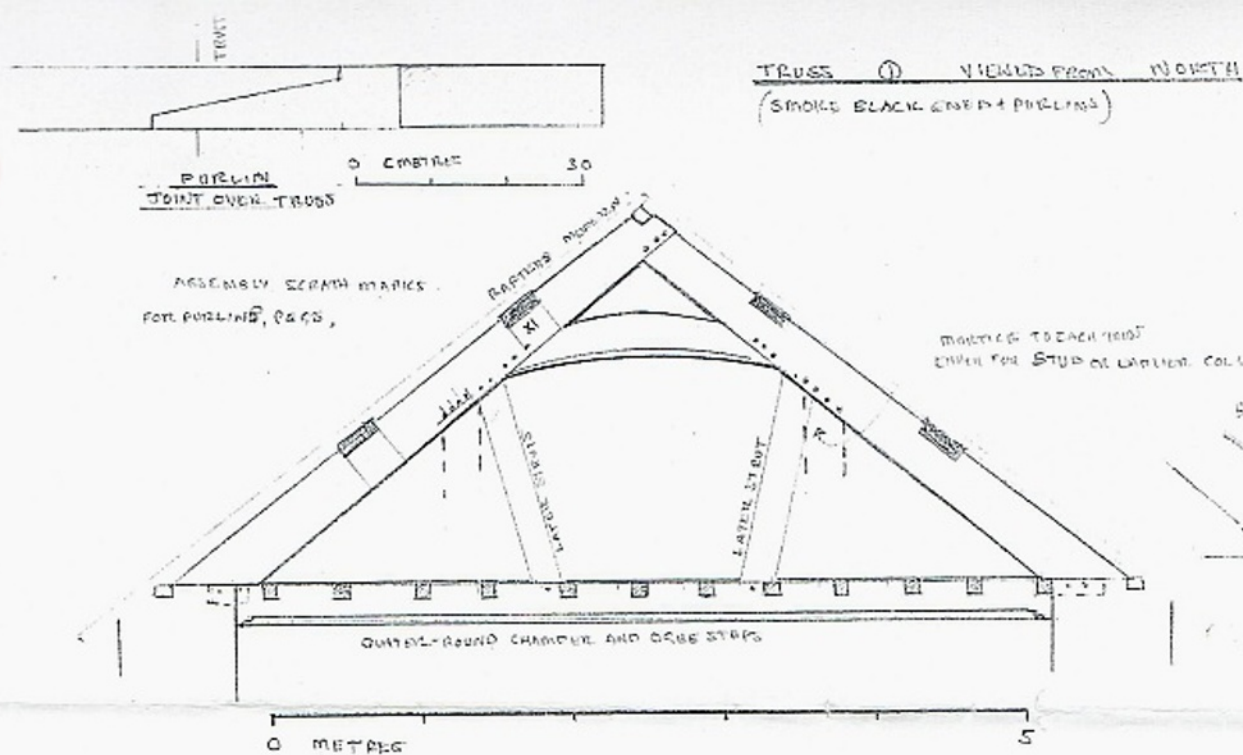
15

INSCRIPTION ON PARLOR CEILING-BEAM

NPNR 26578 © RCAHM

ALU VISITED SITE 10/05/00

DRAIN. C. AND SA 106/100



BEAM STOP NOT VISIBLE.