



Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig

Discovering Old Welsh Houses

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Please note that these reports are being updated as part of an ongoing programme of revision. Older reports sometimes refer to the old names of the Group. Between 2005 and 2012 also known as The Snowdonia Dendrochronology Project, then the N W Wales Dendrochronology Project and then the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group.

New reports will be added from time to time. Keep an eye on our website for updates.



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Darganfod Hen
Dai Cymreig



Discovering Old
Welsh Houses

Hafod yr Afr Cynwyd

Denbighshire (formerly Merioneth)



Historic Buildings Record

Martin Cherry and Ross Cook

April 2024

Final Version



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This report has been compiled and completed by Discovering Old Welsh Houses.

Written in the language chosen by the volunteers and researchers undertaking the work.

PLEASE NOTE ALL THE HOUSES IN THIS PROJECT ARE PRIVATE AND THERE IS NO
ADMISSION TO ANY OF THE PROPERTIES

Discovering Old Welsh Houses is a registered charity with nearly 200 members across north Wales working alongside local organisations, communities & interested individuals to discover, record and research the histories of houses built before 1700 A.D.

Registered Charity No.1131782

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Vernacular Architecture Group



ArchaeoDomus
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Contents

Summary	-	1
Crynodeb	-	2
Introduction	-	3
Site Location	-	4
Aims	-	5
Method	-	5
Dendrochronology	-	6
Interpretation	-	7
Miscellanea	-	13
<i>Appendix I - Photographs and Plans</i>	-	<i>14</i>

Hafod yr Afr Cynwyd

Historic Building Record

Summary

This historic buildings record was undertaken in July 2023, by Martin Cherry and Ross Cook, members of Discovering Old Welsh Houses. This report forms a part of a larger project to identify, understand and date historic buildings in North Wales, and seeks to provide an interpretation and record of the building at the time of investigation.

The building has been visually investigated and recorded photographically, with a survey plan made to aid interpretation. Ross Cook (ArchaeoDomus) was commissioned by the Group to undertake the measured survey and drawn interpretation.

Hafod yr Afr is a timber framed, full cruck building tree-ring dated to the mid-16th century. The open hall was quickly modernised within a year or two by partial floor insertion. The byre was superseded by the present kitchen, probably associated with livestock being accommodated elsewhere on the farm. The higher-end rooms at the opposite end to the shippon/kitchen were rebuilt as a barn, probably in the 18th century. The rapid conversion of open halls into fully-floored houses in the mid-16th century seems to have been fairly common—there are several other examples identified in the vicinity.

Hafod yr Afr Cynwyd

Cofnod Adeilad Hanesyddol

Crynodeb

Cynhaliwyd y cofnod adeiladau hanesyddol hwn ym mis Gorffennaf 2023 gan Martin Cherry a Ross Cook, aelodau *Discovering Old Welsh Houses*. Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn rhan o brosiect mwy i nodi, deall a dyddio adeiladau hanesyddol yng Ngogledd Cymru, ac mae'n ceisio darparu dehongliad a chofnod o'r adeilad ar adeg yr ymchwiliad.

Ymchwiliwyd i'r adeilad yn weledol a'i gofnodi'n ffotograffig, gyda chynllun arolwg wedi'i wneud i gynorthwyo dehongli. Comisiynwyd Ross Cook (ArchaeoDomus) gan y Grŵp i ymgymryd â'r arolwg mesuredig a dehongli wedi'i lunio.

Mae Hafod yr Afr yn gylch coed adeiladu cruck llawn ffrâm bren sy'n dyddio o ganol yr 16eg ganrif. Cafodd y neuadd agored ei moderneiddio'n gyflym o fewn blwyddyn neu ddwy drwy fewnosod llawr rhannol. Cafodd y fwyell ei ddisodli gan y gegin bresennol, a gysylltir yn ôl pob tebyg â da byw yn cael ei letya mewn mannau eraill ar y fferm. Ailadeiladwyd yr ystafelloedd pen uwch ar y pen arall i'r shippon/cegin fel ysgubor, yn ôl pob tebyg yn y 18fed ganrif. Mae'n ymddangos bod troi neuaddau agored yn gyflym yn dai llawr llawn yng nghanol yr 16eg ganrif wedi bod yn eithaf cyffredin—mae sawl enghraifft arall wedi'u nodi yn y cyffiniau.

1 – Introduction

This report has been compiled as part of the Discovering Old Welsh Houses project to identify, interpret, date and understand the development of houses across North Wales. This report will be held by Discovering Old Welsh Houses and, in perpetuity, by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.



Hafod yr Afr was identified by the Group as a potential candidate for dendrochronological (tree-ring) dating. In total, eight samples were taken from five timbers in the house and barn. Of the five timbers, three, all from the earliest part of the house, cross-matched and were dated. This provided a felling date range of 1522-1552

The buildings address is Hafod yr Afr, Cynwyd, Edeirnion, Denbighshire.

It was recorded by Martin Cherry and Ross Cook in July 2023.

2 – Location and Context

Hafod yr Afr is located on the lower north-west slope of Bryn-llus, in the valley of the River Dee (Afon Dyfrdwy), which is some 350m north-west. The property is accessed by a small trackway off the B4401, which runs between Cynwyd, to the south-west, and Corwen, to the north-east. It lies within the Edeirnion area of what is now Denbighshire in North-East Wales, within the community of Cynwyd but was originally within the parish of Llangar in the county of Merioneth. The site is immediately bounded to all sides by open pasture. The property is on an east-west alignment and runs down the hillside. The nearest active Anglican (Church in Wales) church is St John the Evangelist in Cynwyd, some 1.5km to the south-west, but the ancient church of Llangar, now in the care of the National Churches Trust, lies not far below Hafod yr Afr. The building is at an elevation of 191.7m above sea level, the postcode is LL21 0HN and is centred on NGR **SJ 06673 42369**.

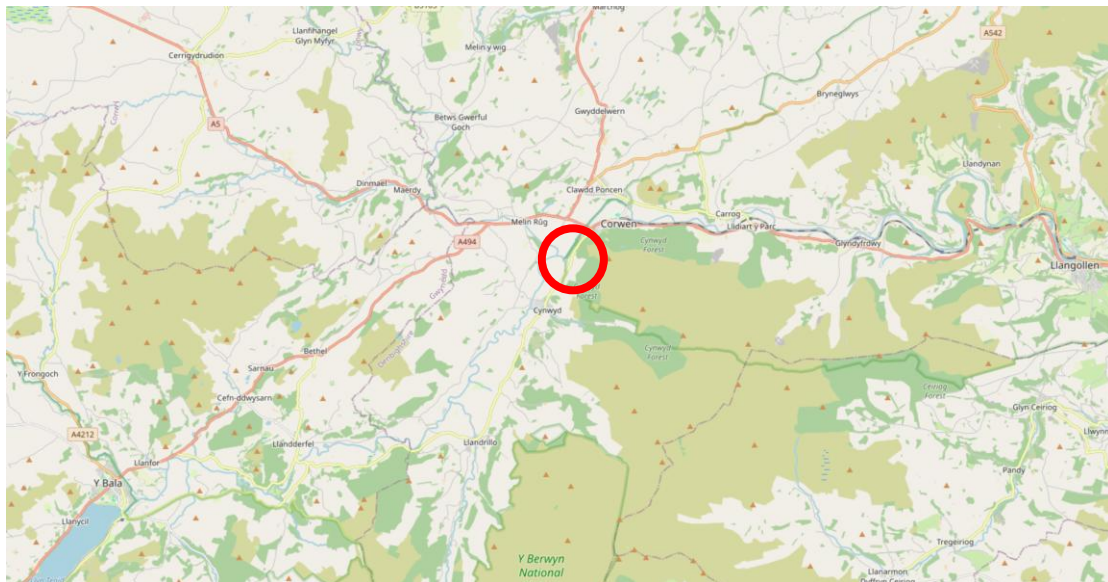


Fig. 2 – Location – Site.
OpenStreetMap 2024. All rights reserved.

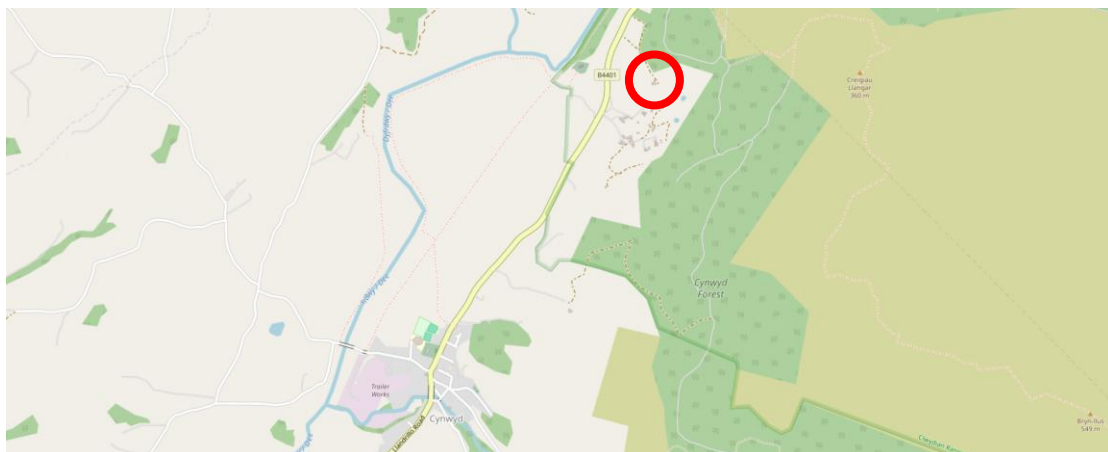


Fig. 1 – Location – Location of Hafod yr Afr.
OpenStreetMap 2024. All rights reserved.

3 – Aims

The aim of this Historic Buildings Record is to provide a written, drawn and photographic account of the focus building. This work forms one element of a larger research project to understand, date and record the historic buildings of North Wales.

A full history of the house has been compiled by Jenny Lees and is also accessible via the Discovering Old Welsh Houses website.

4 – Method

Measured Survey

The survey was undertaken using a LiDAR scanner to produce a metrically accurate 3D point cloud, from which the survey drawings were then produced in Rhino 7 (CAD).

Photographic

The photographic record was made using a compact camera.

Investigation

The visual investigation was undertaken with full permission of the owners who allowed us to visually inspect all areas of the house to ascertain the development and form of the building.

5 – Dendrochronology

Dendrochronology (obtaining the felling date of a tree by tree-ring dating) works by utilising the variation in width of the annual growth rings as influenced by climatic conditions common to a large area. It is these climate-induced variations in widths which allow calendar dates to be ascribed to undated timbers when compared with a firmly-dated sequence. If a tree-section is complete out to the bark edge then a precise date-of-felling can be determined. A narrow core is extracted from across the annual growth rings of the timber, with no detriment to its strength or stability.

Hafod yr Afr was assessed and sampled in June 2023 by Ross Cook and processed and dated by Martin Bridge of the Oxford Dendrochronological Laboratory. The report number is ODL 2023/24.

The report summarises:

*Two crucks from the primary phase have a combined likely felling date range of **1522–52**, while a beam in the service range has a heartwood/sapwood boundary date of 1522, suggesting a slightly later felling date range of **1533–1563**. However, there is no evidence that the house ever functioned as an open hall, being floored very rapidly with a large chimney at one end.*

6 – Interpretation

Situation – Hafod yr Afr occupies a partially levelled site, slightly sloping down from east to west at 629 ft (191.7 m) above sea level, overlooking the Dee. It lies within the historic parish of Llangar and Cantref of Penllyn in the commote of Edeirnion.

Place Name – The direct translation of Hafod yr Afr into English is Summer Dwelling of the Goat.

Highlights – Timber framed, full crucks, tree-ring dated to mid-16th century. Open hall quickly modernised within a year or two by partial floor insertion. Byre superseded by the present kitchen, probably associated with livestock being accommodated elsewhere on the farm. The higher-end rooms at the opposite end to the shippon/kitchen were rebuilt as a barn, probably in the 18th century. The *rapid* conversion of open halls into fully-floored houses in the mid-16th century seems to have been fairly common—there are several other examples identified in the vicinity. Was this driven by fashion or economics or a mix of the two?

Summary – Superscript numbers refer to sections below.

Originally the house was timber-framed.⁽¹⁾ Dendrochronology has established that it was built in the middle decades of the 16th century. The two surviving crucks were dated to 1522-52, while a beam in the outer room dated to 1533-63.⁽²⁾ Two full cruck frames survive, one dividing the open hall (T2 on plan), the other marking the division between the hall and what was probably the service end (T1 on plan).⁽²⁾ The hall was of 2 bays divided by an open truss with decorative cusping at the apex. This survives, but radical adaptation took place shortly after, or possibly even during, construction. The lower (open) bay of the hall to the west was floored over and, at ground-floor level, divided equally into two small rooms by an east-west partition.⁽³⁾ The upper bay of the hall was never floored, nor was it heated: it may have been used for storage. It may have been at this time that the walls were built or rebuilt in stone. This included the construction of a large chimney at the low end to provide heat to what became the hall/kitchen; the bressummer and the joists in the lower bay of the hall are both ornamented with chamfers and stepped hollow stops.⁽⁴⁾ This turned the domestic quarters into a conventional 2-unit storeyed house. An inventory attached to the will of Edward Nicholas, yeoman (1729) indicates four rooms—the kitchen, the buttery (the former lower end bay of the hall), with one little and one large chamber above.⁽⁵⁾ No tree-ring dating was possible for the later phases, nor for the present barn, but they do not look to be coeval: the kitchen and barn may be 18th century. A lean-to under a catslide roof was added to the north (the cold side) of the kitchen, perhaps a dairy—it is marked on the 1875 OS map. Several 20th-century improvements include re-roofing, the addition of gabled dormer windows and a small porch.

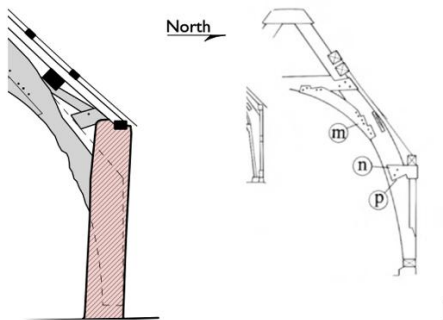
Discussing the evidence.

(1) It is common to find medieval houses in North-East Wales that were originally timber-framed, the walls later being rebuilt in stone. At Hafod yr Afr, the cruck trusses extend fully down to the ground (the feet of the north blades of both T1 and T2 are visible externally). The crucks would have been attached to the wall plate by 'cruck spurs' and, remarkably, one of these survives (although displaced)—see Fig 1. The re-casing of houses in stone, which often involved the flooring over of the open hall and the provision of enclosed fireplaces with chimneys, usually followed on considerably later. But here, the lower end of the hall was floored over almost as soon as the house was finished, perhaps even during its construction.



Fig 1 The original house was timber-framed. The cruck truss blades would have been secured to the wall plate by a spur, removed when the stone walls were built. Amazingly, although the wall plate has gone, one spur survives, out of kilter and no longer of much use.

Top: the cruck blade of T2 with the spur displaced. Bottom left, detail of cruck at Hafod yr Afr; bottom right, a spur in place (marked as 'p').



(2) Dating. Dendrochronology establishes that the primary construction phase (that is the cruck trusses) lies within the date range 1522-52 and the axial beam of the floor inserted into the lower bay of the hall very slightly later (within the range 1533-63)—an important detail discussed in (3) below. Samples were taken from the kitchen (bressummer and ceiling cross beam) but failed to date.

(3) The classic form of house in rural areas of North Wales in the fifteenth and much of the sixteenth centuries comprised a hall, open to the roof and heated by a central hearth that blackened the roof timbers over time. To one end of the hall was a storeyed section (private room above, parlour below) and, to the other, a service room for the storage and preparation of food and drink, in some cases this bay acted as a byre or shippon for cattle (making it a 'longhouse'). There were many variations on this theme. During the sixteenth century (sometimes later, rarely earlier) timber-framed houses containing an open hall were modernised, a process that usually involved rebuilding the walls in stone, inserting a floor into the hall to create an upper chamber and providing more efficient heating (fireplaces were introduced, sometimes timber but usually stone). These phases were often staggered over a period of several years and generally followed on a generation or more after the initial construction.

At Hafod yr Afr, however, modernisation—or at least its initial stage—was compressed into a very short period: a ceiling was inserted into the lower end of the hall shortly after or possibly during the initial construction of the house. The hall timbers were not blackened by a central hearth (although by this time, new open halls were usually heated by a fireplace with chimney or fire hood) and, as Peter Smith observed, the cusping to the open truss was left incomplete. He speculated that this might have been because the money ran out or the 'cusping sub-contractor' had fallen sick! That there was a change of plan is borne out by the dendrochronology. Although the tree-ring date results give us date *ranges* rather than dates specific to a year or so, they confirm that the flooring over of the lower end of the hall took place very soon after the first phase. As to why this should be remains uncertain: a decision not to complete the decoration would have been made at the setting-out stage (probably off-site) so it was planned rather than a spontaneous on-site decision. So, the original builder wanted an open hall with cusping and decorative long pegs but, as built, the truss was closed and the lower bay converted into two small rooms, divided by a partition (since removed but the mortices and peg holes can be seen on the underside of the (dated) axial ceiling beam). Did the property change hands? Whatever the case the new room has good-quality details, both the main beam and the joists being chamfered and stopped (step and run-out stops).

(4) The original house most likely conformed to the traditional 3-unit 'tripartite' arrangement of a hall flanked by a 'lower end' and a 'higher end'—the terms 'lower' (service rooms) and 'higher' (domestic/living spaces) indicating status —distinguished by different colours in Fig 2. Of this, only the 2-bay hall (green) survives. The lower end usually took the form of a service room or rooms, and was invariably positioned down-slope (so it was 'lower' in two senses, physically as well as socially).

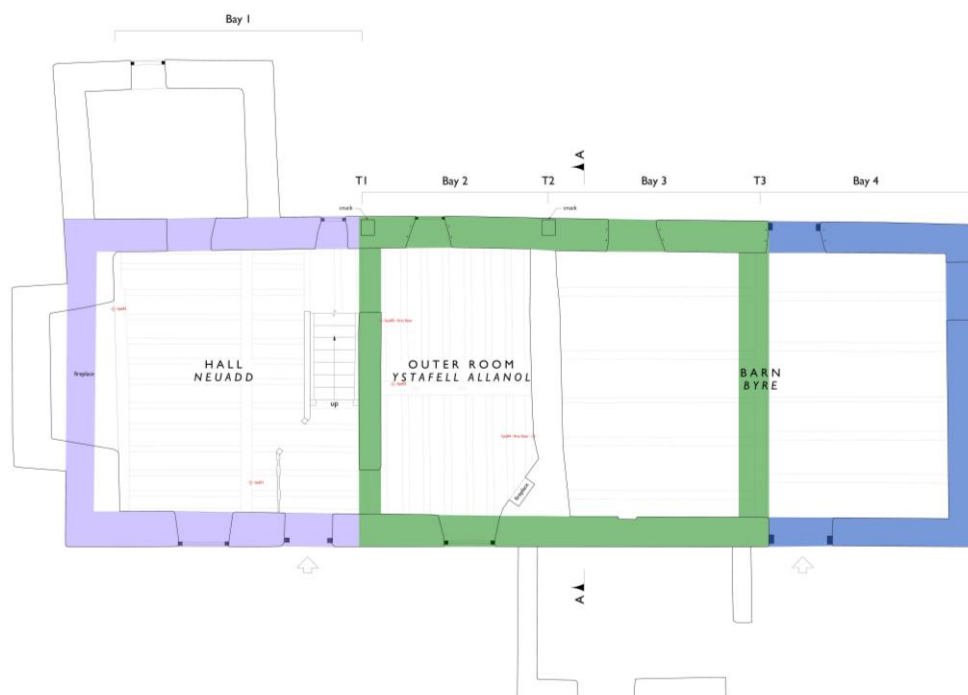


Fig 2. The outlines of the original house are conjectural. Key: green = 2-bay hall; blue = the 'higher end' (parlour with chamber over); mauve = the 'lower end' (service room or rooms).

A sequence of changes to the original house can be postulated. Shortly after construction the open cruck truss (T2) was closed up by a substantial stone wall including some massive slabs at ground level. The open bay to the E remained open, presumably used for storage. The W bay, as we have indicated, was floored over to create two small rooms (divided axially), possibly a pantry and buttery. The lower section of Truss T1 was infilled in stone—so any evidence for access into the low end has gone—the upper section being already closed with staves and plaster. There is no clear evidence of a 16th-century doorway at 1st-floor level suggesting that the former low end bay remained single-storey when it was changed to the hall. The floor over the hall appears to be somewhat later: the carpentry details are different in character to those of the buttery/pantry, much cruder, the joists not even chamfered. This floor probably coincides with the remodelling of the front elevation of the house in the 18th century. The joists at the W end now rest on a re-used transverse beam and may relate to an earlier floor arrangement: the present situation is rather cobbled together. As is often the case, the position of the stairs for this secondary phase is not clear.

(5) The change in function of the two ends of the house was a major upheaval and must, one assumes, reflect a change in the farming economy. By the time of the death of Edward Nicholas, a yeoman farmer, in 1729 we find a four-room house (kitchen

with all the accoutrements needful – pots, dishes and a griddle; a buttery also appropriately equipped with tubs and pots and two bedchambers, one (as is often the case) used for storage as well as beds and linen for sleeping in). The most valuable assets (in total) were the livestock—a small number of cows, oxen and heifers (in aggregate the most valuable) and 41 sheep—but no goats! During the 17th and early eighteenth centuries it became increasingly common for livestock to be placed in free-standing buildings away from the house. The tithe map (1838) shows two small buildings to the S of the house, quite possibly these included a byre, and towards the margins of the cultivated land adjacent to the *ffridd* another house with garden. Unfortunately, the tithe map does not extend further E—it is possible that the then tenant farmer (John Lloyd) had lands here, the returns for which do not survive. The inference to be drawn from this is that by the 18th century, there was adequate accommodation for livestock away from the house and that the present (18th century?) barn stored dry goods.

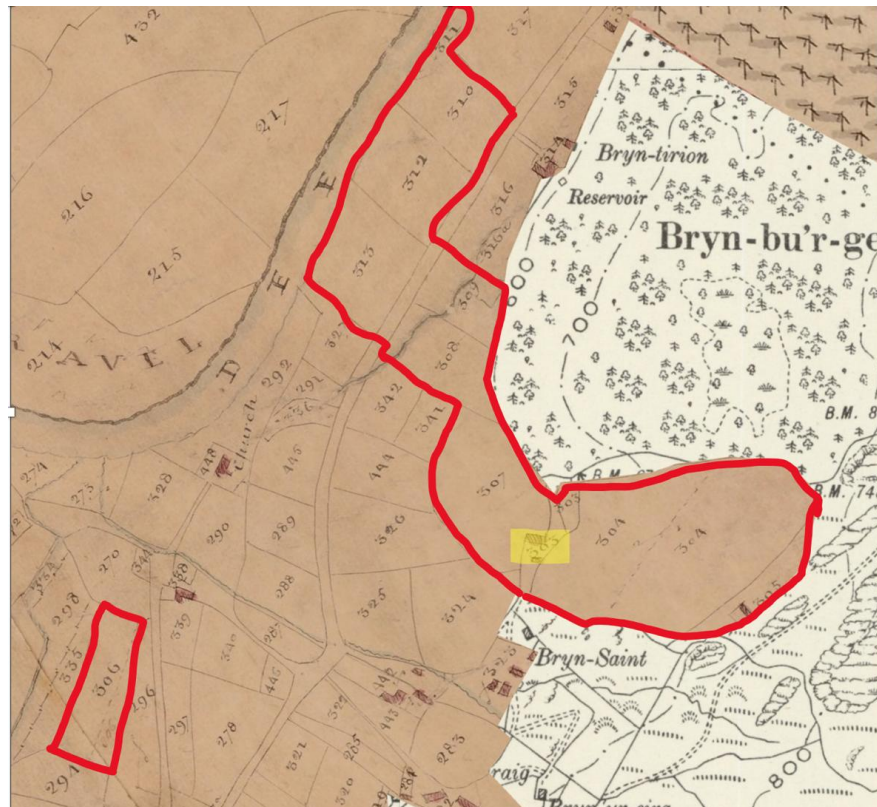


Fig 3 The tithable part of the estate of John Lloyd of Hafod yr Afr in 1838 outlined in red. The tithe apportionment gives the farm as 25.5 acres, possibly an under-estimate since it may have extended to east in to the *ffridd*, but there is no map or apportionment record for this area (unshaded on Fig 3). Most of his fields were contiguous with the exception of one outlier (appropriately called 'Dryll' meaning 'broken piece, fragment or limb')



Fig 4 OS six-inch to the mile 1888-1913 from the National Library of Scotland.

8 – Miscellanea

Insurance

Insurance is provided for the volunteers of the group by Towergate Insurance and for ArchaeoDomus by Wessex Insurance.

Health & Safety

All volunteers adhere to the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974.

Equipment

The project used equipment supplied by the group and ArchaeoDomus.

Appendices



Fig. 3 – South elevation



Fig. 4 – North elevation



Fig. 5 – West elevation.



Fig. 6 – Central cruck to hall; cusped trefoils survive, but note the lefthand missing cusp, which was never formed.



Fig. 7 – Hall/kitchen



Fig. 8 – Outer room

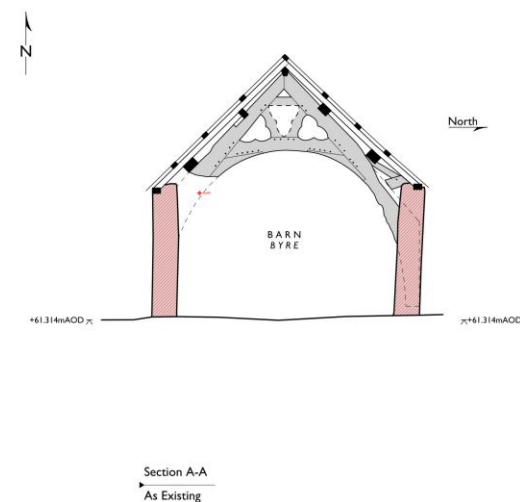
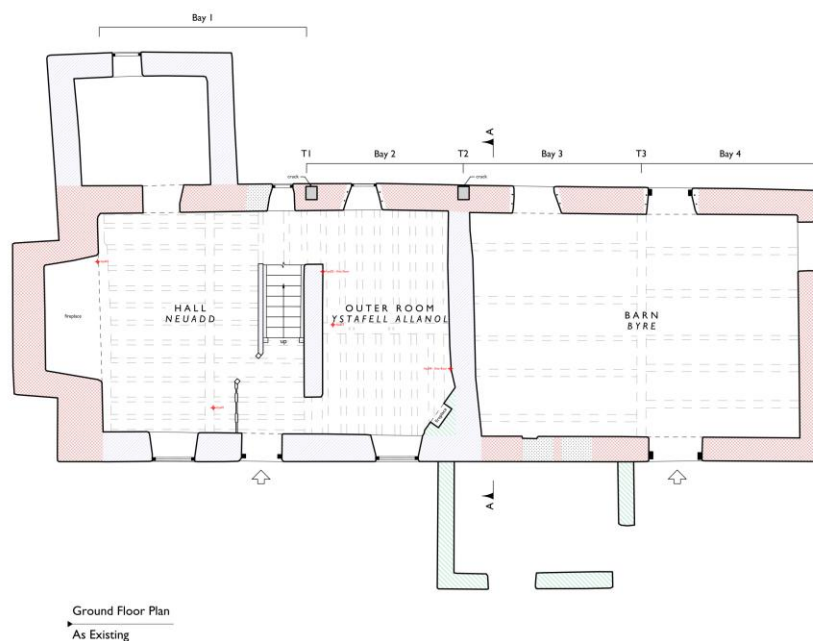


Fig. 9 – Chamfer and stop detail in outer room.



Fig. 10 – Truss in byre.






Hafod yr Afr, Cynwyd



Project Survey of Hafod yr Afri, Cynwryd		
Drawing Title Ground Floor Plan and Section A-A as Existing		
Surveyor Ross Cook	Drawn Ross Cook	Scale 1:100 @ A3
Drawing No. AD160-I	Revision 0	Date July 2023

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Notes
All heights are given over Ordnance
Survey Datum Newlyn.

-  Phase I - I522-52d
 Phase II - C17th
 Phase III - Late-C18th/Early-C19th
 Phase VI - C19th
 Fill



