



Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig Discovering Old Welsh Houses

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Discovering Old Welsh Houses studies and celebrates the traditional houses of North Wales and the lives of the people who lived in them.

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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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**TREE-RING DATING OF
Y PARC (PARK)
LLANFROTHERN
(MERIONETH)
GWYNEDD**



Parc (above © Leo Usherwood)

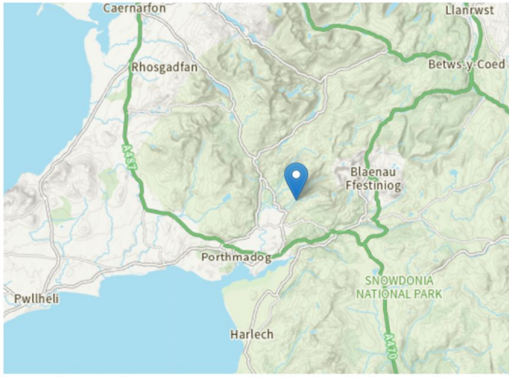
Tree-ring dating was commissioned by the Beddgelert Historical Society in association with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Cadw and Snowdonia National Park. The work was carried out in 2005-6 by the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, Mill Farm, Mapledurham, Oxfordshire RG4 7TX (Dr Dan Miles). Additional research by Margaret Dunn and Richard Suggett. Tree-ring dates were secured for two houses and the gatehouse on this site. For National Grid References, see 'Technical Data' below.

1 SUMMARY

Park (this version of the spelling was used throughout the 17th century) is the classic example of the 'unit system', defined by W. J. Hemp and A. C. Gresham ('Park, Llanfrothen and the unit system', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, **97** (1943), 98-112) as an arrangement on a single site of a number of roughly contemporary small houses, 'each complete in itself, in place of the single large house which might be expected to result from addition or rebuilding': these small houses were sited in close proximity, sometimes separate, sometimes touching at the corners, but normally with no internal access between them (at least when built). These unit systems date in the main from the 16th and 17th centuries.

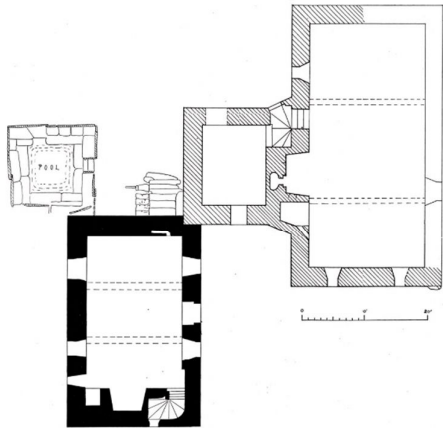
Park was the seat of a cadet branch of the Anwyls of Clennau. The earliest house, House 1 (using Hemp and Gresham's numbering), has been demolished: it may have been 16th century or possibly what was referred to in William Lewis Anwyl's will (dated 1641) as his 'house recently constructed' and described in a *cywydd* as being 'of immense construction' with gardens, orchards, parks and fair towers. The gatehouse (above right) may be part of this building phase (felling date winter 1617/8 making construction in **1618** likely, or within a year or two thereafter). A subsidiary house (House 3, felling date winter 1654/5, making construction in **1655** likely, or within a year or two thereafter) may have been built by Katherine (d. 1700), daughter of Sir John Owen of Clennau, and widow of William Lewis's son Robert (d. 1653): her initials with the date 1666 adorn what is known as the Beudy. House 4 (now the principal house on the site, above left) gave a long felling date range of summer 1660 to winter 1669/70 and the likely construction in 1670 or shortly thereafter is confirmed by a datestone of **1671**.

To summarise: Gatehouse (1618); House 3 (1655) set corner-to-corner with House 2 (ruined and possibly earlier); House 4 with 1671 date inscription (last tree-ring date 1669/70).

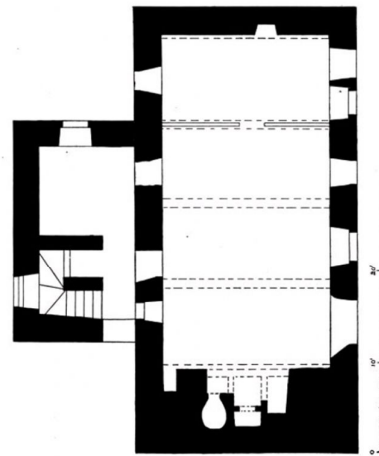


Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland

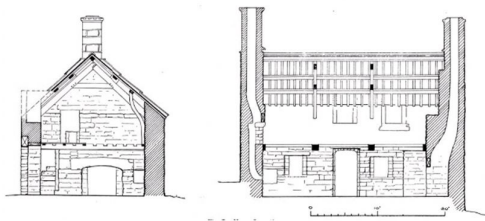
Key to arrows (map to right): gatehouse (black), House 2 (green), House 3 (magenta), House 4 (blue).



Ground plans of house 2 (solid shading) and 3 (1654/5) (hatched)

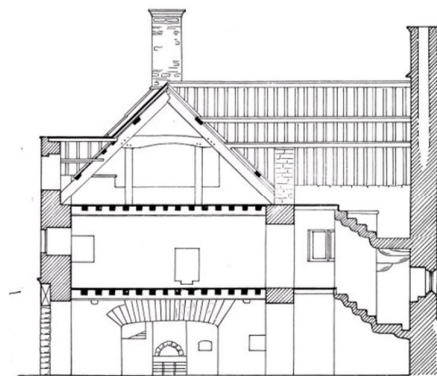


Ground plan of house 4 (date inscription 1671, felling date range 1660-70).

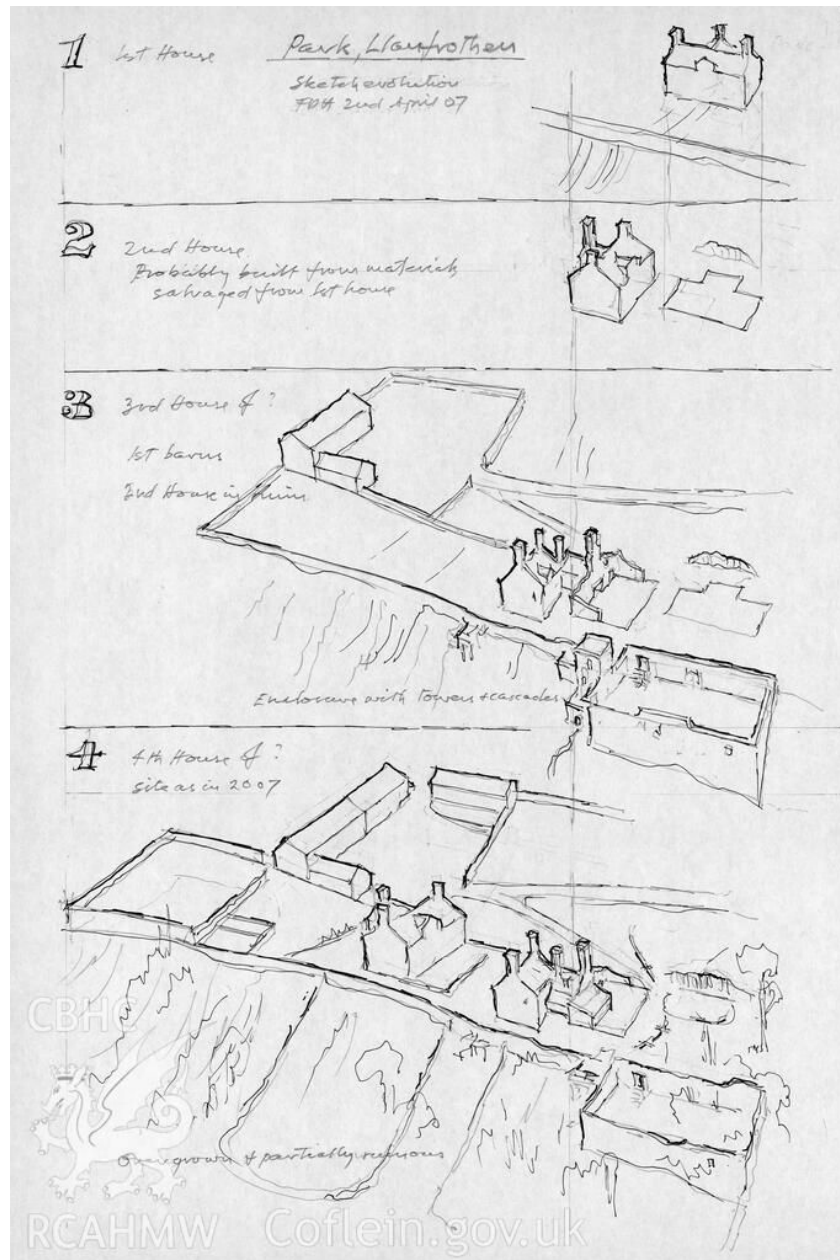


House 3 (sections)

Graphics from W. J. Hemp and A. C. Gresham, 'Park, Llanfrothen and the unit system', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 97 (1943), 98-112



Section of house 4.



Above: Falcon Hildred's proposed phasing <https://rcahmw.ibase.media/en/view-item?i=177417&WINID=1656273034694&fullPage=1> Crown Copyright: RCAHMW and © Discovering Old Welsh Houses.

The great barn and the cow-house were not sampled.

RCAHMW National Primary Reference Number (NPRN): 404989 (whole site <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/404989?term=404989>, from which it is easy to navigate to individual buildings).

2 TECHNICAL DATA

The following summary of technical data regarding Y Parc is taken from *Vernacular Architecture* 38 (2007), 136 (<https://doi.org/10.1179/174962906X158309>).

Key to abbreviations: Complete sapwood is indicated by 'C' and where the character of the final ring has been identified, the seasonal felling dates are given: winter C (October to February), spring $\frac{1}{4}$ C (March to May) and summer $\frac{1}{2}$ C (June to September); 'h/s' indicates the presence of the heartwood-sapwood boundary; 'NM' indicates rings counted but not measured. For 't', see next section, which discusses reference chronologies (site masters) – in general, the higher the 't' value the more secure the dating.

(a) Gatehouse (SH 628 440) *Felling dates*: **Winter 1617/18**

Principal rafters 1617(50C), 1614(53); Purlin 1588(h/s); Collar (0/1); Transverse beam (0/1).

(b) Subsidiary house (House 3) (SH 627 440) *Felling date*: **Winter 1654/5**

Transverse beams (0/1) 1654(36C); Lintel 1583;

(c). Principal house (House 4) (SH 627 439) *Felling dates*: **Summer 1660; Spring 1668; Winter 1669/70**

Collars 1669(52C), 1650(30), 1619(1); Principal rafters (4/5) 1667(58 $\frac{1}{4}$ C), 1644(23+21 NM), 1633(17), 1620(8+44 NM); Queen strut 1659(37 $\frac{1}{2}$ C); Purlin (0/1);

Site Master 1386-1669 BDGLRT22 ($t = 11.8$ WALES97; 11.2 BDGLRT8; 10.7 BDGLRT17)

3 BACKGROUND TO DENDROCHRONOLOGY (Daniel Miles)

The basis of dendrochronological dating is that trees of the same species, growing at the same time, in similar habitats, produce similar ring-width patterns. These patterns of varying ring-widths are unique to the period of growth. Each tree naturally has its own pattern superimposed on the basic 'signal', resulting from genetic variations in the response to external stimuli, the changing competitive regime between trees, damage, disease, management etc.

In much of Britain the major influence on the growth of a species like oak is, however, the weather conditions experienced from season to season. By taking several contemporaneous samples from a building or other timber structure, it is often possible to cross-match the ring-width patterns, and by averaging the values for the sequences, maximise the common signal between trees. The resulting 'site chronology' may then be compared with existing 'master' or 'reference' chronologies.

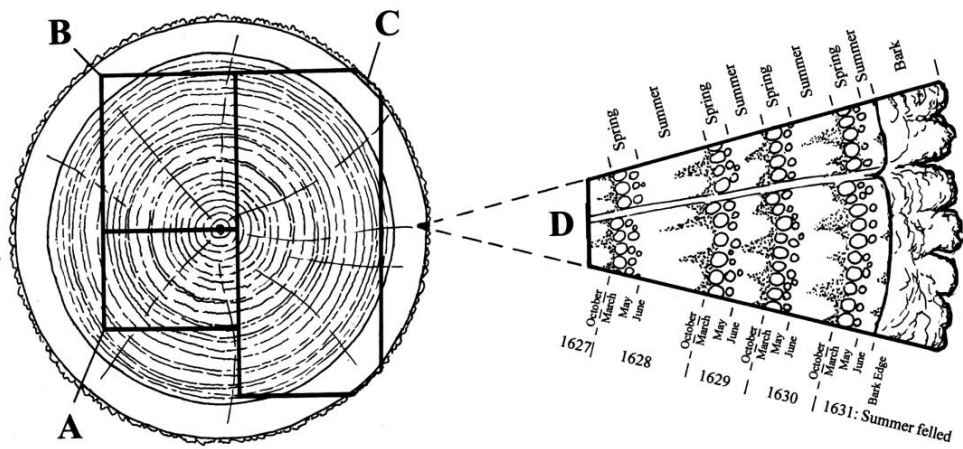
This process can be done by a trained dendrochronologist using plots of the ring-widths and comparing them visually, which also serves as a check on measuring procedures. It is essentially a statistical process, and therefore requires sufficiently long sequences for one to be confident in the results. There is no defined minimum length of a tree-ring series that can be confidently cross-matched, but as a working hypothesis most dendrochronologists use series longer than at least fifty years.

The dendrochronologist also uses objective statistical comparison techniques, these having the same constraints. The statistical comparison is based on programs by Baillie & Pilcher (1973, 1984) and uses the Student's t-test. The t-test compares the actual difference between two means in relation to the variation in the data, and is an established statistical technique for looking at the significance of matching between two datasets that has been adopted by dendrochronologists. The values of 't' which give an acceptable match have been the subject of some debate; originally values above 3.5 being regarded as acceptable (given at least 100 years of overlapping rings) but now 4.0 is often taken as the base value. It is possible for a random set of numbers to give an apparently acceptable statistical match against a single reference curve – although the visual analysis of plots of the two series usually shows the trained eye the reality of this match. When a series of ring-widths gives strong statistical matches in the same position against a number of independent chronologies the series becomes dated with an extremely high level of confidence.

One can develop long reference chronologies by cross-matching the innermost rings of modern timbers with the outermost rings of older timbers successively back in time, adding data from numerous sites. Data now exist covering many thousands of years and it is, in theory, possible to match a sequence of unknown date to this reference material. It follows from what has been stated above that the chances of matching a single sequence are not as great as for matching a tree-ring series derived from many individuals, since the process of aggregating individual series will remove variation unique to an individual tree, and reinforce the common signal resulting from widespread influences such as the weather. However, a single sequence can be successfully dated, particularly if it has a long ring sequence.

Growth characteristics vary over space and time, trees in south-eastern England generally growing comparatively quickly and with less year-to-year variation than in many other regions (Bridge, 1988). This means that even comparatively large timbers in this region often exhibit few annual rings and are less useful for dating by this technique.

When interpreting the information derived from the dating exercise it is important to take into account such factors as the presence or absence of sapwood on the sample(s), which indicates the outer margins of the tree. Where no sapwood is present it may not be possible to determine how much wood has been removed, and one can therefore only give a date after which the original tree must have been felled. Where the bark is still present on the timber, the year, and even the time of year of felling can be determined. In the case of incomplete sapwood, one can estimate the number of rings likely to have been on the timber by relating it to populations of living and historical timbers to give a statistically valid range of years within which the tree was felled. For this region the estimate used is that 95% of oaks will have a sapwood ring number in the range 11 – 41.



Section of tree with conversion methods showing three types of sapwood retention resulting in A terminus post quem, B a felling date range, and C a precise felling date. Enlarged area D shows the outermost rings of the sapwood with growing seasons.

Notes compiled by Martin Cherry, June 2022, from material generated by the North-west Wales Tree-ring Dating Project, the RCAHMQ and the Cadw list description as well as references cited above. The origins of this programme of dating lay with the Beddgelert Historical Society under the direction of Margaret Dunn (see the 'About Us' page.) This report should be read in conjunction with the other reports in this section.