

DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

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Dathlu Treftadaeth Cymru drwy astudio tai traddodiadol a bywydau'r bobl fu'n byw ynddynt.

CYLCHLYTHYR 46 Medi 2023

EIN GWEFAN

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yw prif sianel gyfathrebu'r Grŵp - defnyddiwch hi i weld mwy o fanylion am y digwyddiadau diweddar a'r rhai sydd i ddod, ac i edrych ar ein llyfrgell sy'n cynyddu'n gyson ac ar nodweddion eraill. Celebrating Welsh Heritage through the study of traditional houses and the lives of the people who lived in them.

NEWSLETTER 46 September 2023

OUR WEBSITE

http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk

Is the Groups main channel of communication please visit it to see details of recent and forthcoming events and to look at our growing library and other features.

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FROM THE CHAIR by Janice Dale

How quickly the year rolls by. The highlight of this summer was the opportunity to revisit Plas Penmynydd on Ynys Mon. Richard Cuthbertson kindly invited the group to his historic house for a fund-raising event. Richard told us the history of the house and he had also arranged for Peter Field to tell us about his research and his deciphering of the intriguing carved inscription, upside down and apparently relocated, above a first-floor window.

Despite the awful weather on that afternoon fifty-eight people turned up. It was good to see so many there and I would like to thank Richard and members of the Anglesey group for arranging the refreshments and parking.

It was also an opportunity to say a big thank you to Peter Masters, who has stepped down as the Caernarfonshire organiser, and to Margaret Dunn, to whom we owe so much for being such a driving force behind the success of the Group. Although not present, the work of Gill Jones, Anne Morgan and Terry Williams, who have contributed so much to the group, was recognised.



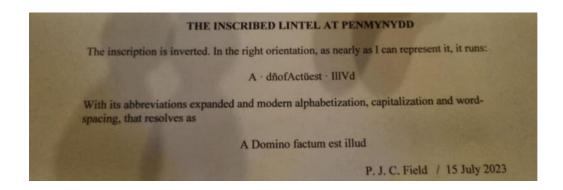
Richard Cuthbertson

TALK GIVEN BY PETER FIELD

Professor Peter Field, an expert in Arthurian legend, had a long and distinguished academic career at Bangor and other British universities. The inscription referred to by Janice Dale's on page 1, appears on the lintel above an upper room at Plas Penmynydd. Using his knowledge of medieval English, Peter has deciphered the inscription



Lintel showing the inscription



Lintel inscription translated

An excellent House History has been completed for Plas Penmynydd, and this states that the inscription:

... is located above an upstairs window on the front of the house. It has been placed upside down and so it has obviously been relocated. The date AD 1547 is clearly visible and also the words 'anno domini' but the rest of the inscription has yet to be deciphered.* The far right-hand end also appears to be broken and so part of it must be missing.

Could it perhaps be a reference to the death of Henry VIII on 28 th January 1547 and the crowning of his son Edward VI on 20th February 1547?

(from Cuthbertson R, Jones G and Morgan A (2020) Plas Penmynydd House History, DOWH).



Professor Peter Field

^{*} Though in view of Peter Field's work, perhaps this is no longer the case?

A HUGE THANK YOU from our outgoing Secretary Margaret Dunn:

Thank you to everyone in Discovering Old Welsh Houses for the generous Garden Centre token; I will really enjoy choosing shrubs for our mountain garden which I will hope to see grow in the future and remind me how DOWH has grown over the last two decades. Another huge thank you to Peter Masters in producing a masterpiece of MEMORIES by collating so many photographs of numerous aspects of our activities including house visits, branch meetings, study tours, committee meetings. Each will bring memories of exploring many parts of North Wales and discovering more about old houses, with the many very hardworking members finding the histories, building recordings and timber sampling. Some of you were able to look at this giant album when it was presented to me at the July Open Day at Plas Penmynydd and at branch meetings since then.





Margaret Dunn and her Memories Album

FROM THE SECRETARY by Alison Montgomery

It's a pleasure to be able to open my first message as Secretary by thanking you all for the very warm welcome that I received at Plas Penmynydd. Congratulations to everyone for such a well-organized and attended event.

I'm writing this message on Bank Holiday Monday at the end of August, sitting listening to the rain and wondering if I can put the heating on yet (I have reluctantly decided that I can't!). Despite the weather, however, the start of the new school term is always welcome as the prompt to look to the year ahead, thinking about new opportunities and putting in place new plans. After the national events of 2020 and 2021, when we had no way of telling when (or if) life could return to normal, what a pleasure it is to be able to look to the future. And what better way to do this than by growing our county branches and getting out the news about the brilliant things that they're up to. If this is something that you might be able to help with, or if you could join a working group to help us think about how we can co-ordinate and publicize the events of the different branches, please do get in touch.

Using social media (especially Facebook) to share news of our events is something we're also thinking about. Many hands make light work, and if you might be able to help with this we'd love to hear from you.

Our county branches are at the very heart of DOWH and we are delighted that the Anglesey branch has a new Secretary, Arwyn Owen (Ash). If you could help Ash as a branch volunteer, please send him a quick message at anglesey-branch@discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk. Big or small, your help will be very welcome.

NEWS AND ARTICLES FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH Report by Sue Hurst

At Llangadwaladr church in May the ten attendees were only able to see the outside of the church with Andrew Davidson, chief archaeologist with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. A return visit is planned for September to see the inside of the church plus Aberffraw church and possibly Trefdraeth.

Also in May we held a garden meeting at the home of members Jan & John to discuss the future of the Anglesey branch. Jan & John kindly gave us refreshments and John ran the train through the extensive garden which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. The event was fortuitously attended by Arwyn Owen who is now the new secretary for the Anglesey branch for twelve months.

In June eleven members and guests had wonderful weather for the visit to Plas Berw at Pentre Berw. The garden looked wonderful and we were made very welcome and shown round the house by Mr. & Mrs. Benson. Later there were refreshments on the lawn, a super afternoon with much discussion.

Despite the awful weather in July over sixty people attended the fund-raising Open Afternoon at Plas Penmynydd. There were talks by the owner Richard Cuthbertson on the history of the house and by Peter Field on the inscription on the front of the house. People could then wander around the house and enjoy the refreshments provided.

Future events:-

- Sat. Aug. 19th Fund-raising event for the Welsh Air Ambulance at Jan & John's near Llanfachraeth, includes train rides, 12 pm 12 am. Details from anglesey-branch@discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk
- Tues. Sept. 12th 2 pm. Return to Llangadwaladr church to see the inside plus Aberffraw church and possibly Trefdraeth with Andrew Davidson chief archaeologist with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, cost £3.
- Tues. Oct. 10th 2pm. Visit to Brynddu, Llanfechell by kind permission of Mr & Mrs Robin Grove-White, light refreshments, cost £3. To be confirmed.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH Report by Margaret Dunn

In June around 12 members visited Ffridd Isaf, Rhyd Ddu, a Snowdonia-plan house with roof trusses felled in 1599-1600, a huge inglenook fireplace and a ladder staff. Later an attached nineteenth century house had been built downslope at right angles, and two large barns and a water wheel had been added. It was one of three farm holdings on land traceable back to a medieval upland holding belonging to the Welsh Princes called Llwynllinor. We had a long discussion on how it passed through Welsh gentry hands into modern estates.



Ffrith Isaf



Rhyd Galed

Our July meeting was held at Bryn Bedd on the south slopes of the Nantgwynant valley and we took a short walk looking across the hillsides at parts of the Welsh Princes' charter of circa 1200 giving land to the Cistercian Abbey of Aberconway; we identified boundaries from Colin Greshams's map demarcating its 1556 division by King Henry VII's Commissioners prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and further land division up to the 20th century. The walk included discussing the role of watersheds and river boundaries, visiting a still visible circa AD 1200 ford 'Rhyd Galed', a hard stone laid ford, the shire boundary between Caernarfon and Merioneth, and later power struggles to gain political clout in the two counties.

Over tea Peter Masters shared how he found a fresh Snowdonia house while looking for houses advertised for sale. Discussion indicated that there was little interest at present in undertaking house histories but that house visits would be popular. It was agreed to continue running the branch at least until the June 2024 AGM.

Caernarfonshire Branch Autumn meetings

September 14th: 2.00 p.m. National Trust-led tour of **Plas yn Rhiw house & gardens**, near Aberdaron. Cost: £ 6.65 for non-members / bring your membership card. Book by 6th September with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com / 01766 890550 for further details. Followed by buying refreshments in the Tea Room.

October: date tbc. 1.30 p.m. **Guided Tour of Gwynedd Archives**, close to Y Galeri, Caernarfon. An opportunity to see the range of facilities & types of documents available, with light refreshment in the Education Room. Cost: £4. Details to be circulated soon.

November 8th. 2.00 p.m. Illustrated talk by John Dilwyn Williams, well-known local historian, on "**Tanybryn, Llanllyfni – a case study**" at the Meeting Room, (not the main house). Craflwyn car park, outside Beddgelert towards Nantgwynant. Cost £4. Book by 31st October with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com/01766 890550 for further details.

December: Visit to an early house. Details to be circulated soon.

ARTICLE: Discovering Old Welsh Houses – Two Decades of Adventures. By Margaret Dunn

Unplanned Beginnings

In the 1980s I was awarded an M Phil on "Continuity and Change between 1782 and 1947" in the two parishes in Lleyn where I had had ancestors for at least seven generations. I had also researched many aspects of the archaeology and history of North Wales & was an active member of most regional & local organisations, lecturing, organising events and gaining a wide range of information, not knowing that these experiences would prove so useful during these last twenty years. When I was offered early retirement from being Principal of Plas Tan y Bwlch in the mid-1990s due to increasing arthritis, I started researching the location and history of the pre 1700 farmhouses of the



Gwastadanas (1508) by Falcon Hildred



Sampling Oak by Dr Dan Miles

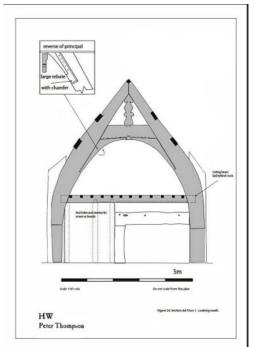
Beddgelert area where I was living. Sitting in the warm local archives, reading, researching and driving to see many unknown treasures gradually led a developing group of "House Detectives" working with the Beddgelert History Society and then excavating the ruins of Y Wenallt & Penarth Fawr (2000-2004). We also visited some 60 houses named in the RCHAMW Caernarfonshire inventory & began to prioritise early houses of historic interest, working closely with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Eryri National Park & the RCAHMW using their 1950s inventories.

First Successes

The breakthrough came in 2004 when original oak in 4 farmhouses in Nantgwynant valley, Beddgelert, was sampled and two yielded timber felling dates. One, Gwastadannas, gave the date of 1508, the actual date of the earliest documentation from which the building, owners & tenants were already researched up to 2000. This excited a few of us enough to seek grants small and large and invite professional dendrochronologists to seek & sample suitable original timbers in an increasingly widespread area of north Wales. By the start of Covid over £252,000 had been raised.

Growth and Developments

Our name changes indicate the growth of areas covered by our activities: Pre 2004: part of Beddgelert Historical Society; 2004-2007 Snowdonia Dendrochronology Project; 2009-2012 North West Wales Dendrochronology Project. On 1 April 2012, the Dating Old Welsh Houses charity was registered; 2013-2015 Targeted Research; 2014-15 & 2015-16 two Conway Partnership phases; 2015-16 Filling the Gaps. On 1 January 2016 the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group became the Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group, as a more suitable name for our widening range of aims and activities. Professional building recording was grant aided for selected houses for which it was not already available. As more local, county and national organisations requested talks on our activities, (over 150 talks given pre Covid), increasing numbers joined and county archive-based induction days were held to assist volunteers start researching house histories. A large number of these and other reports can be read on the discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk website. Quarterly Newsletters enable members to share a wide range of articles.



Building Recording by Peter Thompson



Induction into House History research

New Ideas Post Covid

Zoom talks were a great success during Covid lockdowns. Now, as branches again become more active, house history research is recommencing and some exciting new major dating projects are being established. Branches are developing in various ways. Recent changes in DOWH leadership make this an ideal time for everyone to contribute to an exciting future.





Introductory Talks

Mentoring owners in House History

A more detailed account of DOWH is given as part of the Trustees' Welcome Pack on the website. None of this would have been possible without the support and encouragement of numerous funders and the hard work of several hundred people who together have already identified fresh understanding and unexpected views of the growth of architectural developments across North Wales from the late 1400s. A huge THANK YOU to all involved!

Margaret Dunn. July 2023

CONWY BRANCH

At present the Conwy branch is searching for a secretary. If you would like to learn more about this opportunity to share and develop your interest and knowledge of the old buildings in this fascinating county, do please contact our Chairperson, Janice Dale at: chair@discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk. We should point out that it's perfectly feasible to share the role of secretary with a colleague if that is your preference.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH Report by Jenny Lees



Wynnstay House

June 2023 saw four DOWH visits for dendrochronology and building assessment of Cadwst (Llandrillo), Caenog (Gwyddelwern), Hafod yr afr (Llangar), and Henblas (Llandderfel) - part of our DOWH Edeirnion project funded by generous grants from the Woodtiger Fund and VAG, together with money from existing Denbighshire branch funds. House histories of these properties are underway (for publication later this year), and results of dendro and/or isotope dating eagerly awaited!

Our branch 'field' visit in July was to Wynnstay House, Ruthin [pictured]; previously the Grade II Listed Wynnstay Arms Hotel. But the building is now completely transformed by the amazing restoration and conservation programme of its current owners, Andrew and Fiona Gale, who gave us a fascinating explanatory tour of their work as well as providing delicious homemade refreshments!

No Denbighshire branch meeting was held in August, being a major holiday period, but our next DOWH Denbighshire branch meeting will be at 2pm on Thursday 21st September at Hafod y calch, Corwen (LL21 0EW), when we will be 'catching up' with our DOWH Parishes Project research on pre-1750 dwellings.

All are welcome, but please let me know on leesjenny@gmail.com or 01490 412315 if you are planning to come. (A brief tour of the house is also available if you would like one:



The visit to Wynnstay House (photograph courtesy of Heather Burnley)

https://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20138_HH_26_Hafod-Y-Calch.pdf).

Several new DOWH house visits are also possible for the months October to December, but invitations will need to be circulated by our Membership Secretary, as their hosts cannot always plan too far ahead. Work is ongoing for DOWH Cynwyd Scrapbook Five, planned for November 2023.

Jenny Lees, Denbighshire Branch Secretary, August 2023.

ARTICLE: In search of our Cistercians in Edeirnion and Penllyn - by Jenny Lees

While researching the history of *Caenog*, Gwyddelwern [below] for our 2023 Edeirnion project, I was already familiar with our fascinating DOWH house history of *Efenechtyd* (a corruption of *Y Mynachty*, meaning monastic land or 'monks' holding or house'), which is situated on land once providing a vaccary and 'dairy house' for the Cistercians of *Valle Crucis* abbey near Llangollen.¹



Caenog, Gwyddelwern

But wondering also about a mysterious area of land in Gwyddelwern parish known as *Esgyngaenog*, once owned by the Cistercians of **Strata Marcella Abbey** (*Ystrad Marchell*) near Welshpool,² I found it had been granted to them in **1176** by **Maredudd ap Hwyel, Lord of Edeirnion**.³ I also discovered a suggestion⁴ that the name *Esgyngainog* (*Hescyn Gaenog*), with 'esgyn' meaning ascent, referred to the land of *Caenog* and the farm of *Highgate* above it, as the land of the two farms was thought to be 'comprised in the same grant, especially as a modus of 10s is due from both farms in lieu of tithe'.



Cwm Hesgin in the upland landscape above Ciltalgarth

So Caenog farm,5 looking southwards to Caer Drewyn hillfort and the Berwyn range, lies on previous Strata Marcella land. Originating in late C11th France, the Cistercians founded Strata Marcella in 1170, then Valle Crucis in 1200 as its 'daughter-house'. Although abbeys themselves were usually in lowland situations providing riverine access. David Williams' brilliant book 'The Welsh Cistercians' identifies many formerly Cistercian upland granges in Edeirnion and Penllyn. Those belonging to Strata Marcella included lands at Cynllwyd (c.SH 906262); Coed y Mynach (SH 866406, but now mostly submerged by Llyn Celyn); Cwm-main (SH 925467, actually in Cwm Penanner); Cwm Hyfed (SH 903297), and in the Bala- Penllyn Grange a vaccary at Cwm Hesgin (SH 882419), where a very isolated former farmhouse still Other stands. Cistercian

foundations also owned property in the area, with *Basingwerk Abbey*, despite being near Holywell, owning not only land at *Boch y Rhaidr* (near *Afon Tryweryn*) and *Gwern Hefin*, but also *Llyn Tegid* (Lake Bala)!

After the 1536-9 suppression and dissolution of the monasteries these lands would no longer have been in the hands of the Cistercians, having been appropriated by the Crown unless previously sold, but as we wander their pastures, many still dairy farms today, it is fascinating to imagine their past!

References

- 1. https://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20103 HH 25 Efenechtyd.pdf
- 2. David Williams (2001) The Welsh Cistercians.
- 3. Huw Pryce, 'The Medieval Church', in History of Merioneth, Vol. II: The Middle Ages', pp.273-4.
- 4. An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire: VI: County of Merioneth' (1921)
- 5. Caenog will be the subject of both a DOWH house history and an article in Cynwyd Scrapbook Five.

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

September 11th. Visit to the Tower, Mold. Fifteen people from Flintshire and other DOWH branches visited this Grade 1 house. Parts of the building date back to the midfifteenth century and the owner, John Wynne-Eyton, provided an entertaining and informative history of the house, where his family have lived for over 500 years

The earliest part of the building, a tremendous, fortified tower house, is believed to date back to circa 1440-50. This originally adjoined an open hall and the building has seen many structural changes over the centuries. One tale that stands out in the history of the Tower is the hanging of the former mayor of Chester in the 15th century. It is alleged that this man met his end in a kitchen in the house.



The Tower on a much sunnier day than our visit!

Although the Tower remains a private house, it now acts as a wedding venue as well as offering Bed and Breakfast. Following a tour of the house we all sat down to splendid refreshments of home-made cakes, tea and coffee.







The dining room

October 24th, 2pm. Meeting and presentation at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden.

November, House visit; date and venue TBA.

November 25th. Talk on researching house histories to be given to Flintshire History Society.

December, Christmas meal with Denbighshire branch at The Faenol Fawr. Date TBA.

MERIONETH BRANCH

The Edeirnion project continues in the old county of Merioneth, now Denbighshire (see article above). Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2023-4

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7pm

Edward Parry is a retired history teacher who has researched and published widely in the field of art and architecture in Wales. (His excellent recent book, *The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales* was reviewed in the June 2023 edition of this Newsletter).

Exploring North Wales with the Rev. John Parker, 1798-1860

The Rev. John Parker (1798-1860), artist and antiquary, produced an astonishing body of work over several decades and a large collection of paintings, drawings and journals that are held at the National Library of Wales. He was incumbent of two parishes either side of the Welsh border and made dramatic changes to both churches. He travelled widely in Great Britain but it was Snowdonia that he loved and he made a succession of visits to the area that are recorded in his journals and in hundreds of sketches and paintings.

This talk focuses on North Wales and examines his achievements as a landscape artist and also a recorder of the architecture and furnishings of many churches in the area, many of them subsequently drastically altered. His watercolours and pencil drawings are of immense cultural value and are also of great beauty.

Wednesday 8 November at 7 pm

Ross Cook is an archaeologist and experienced dendrochronologist who, working with the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, has done a lot of sampling and analysis for Discovering Old Welsh Houses. He runs his own archaeology and heritage consultancy out of Lampeter and is archaeologist for St David's Cathedral as well as to Christchurch Priory, Dorset.

Recording Ruthin - Investigating the historic buildings of a town and its countryside.

Those of you who know Ruthin (or heard Gareth Evans talking to us about the development of the town last February) will appreciate the rich legacy of medieval buildings in the town. Recent tree-ring dating in and around Ruthin, has revealed a large number of early buildings, many from the fifteenth century, that reflect its status, together with the wealth of the surrounding parishes. This talk will contain 'hot off the press' material!

Wednesday 6 December at 7 pm

Helen Williams-Ellis worked as a TV producer and director, overseeing programmes with a focus on Welsh subjects. She then did her doctorate on the life and image of the early modern gentlewoman Catrin of Berain. She is on the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates based at Bangor University. Her talk is entitled *Sex, Power, Marriage: Katheryn of Berain and her Four Husbands.* Katheryn of Berain was married four times. Why did she marry – whom did she marry – and how did she become known as the 'Mother of Wales'?

FEATURE ARTICLE: DIARY OF A RENOVATION

By Angie Sutton-Vane and Glyn Davies

The renovation of Plas yn Bwl House: Part Two





Views from back c.1962; attached cottages still there and visible to right.

Photos from c.1959 or 1962

The two cottages, Nos 1 and 2, had been lived in for several generations by the same family who first rented them and later bought outright keeping chickens, pigs and a cow at the back. Money was undoubtedly tight for them and photographs we believe taken at the time of the listing in 1962 show its state of dilapidation. The house was icy cold inside with chronic damp and leaking roofs and was in urgent need of some TLC. And yet, somehow, we managed to survive in it as it was from April 2018 until January 2023. Glyn remained working fulltime as a cabinet maker for Silverlining in Wrexham, I was in the final throws of my history PhD and then Covid struck in early 2020, so there was some choice and some misfortune in our delay. We survived by living upstairs to keep away from the worst of the damp and cold venturing down to stoke the wood burner, shower and cook. Layers of clothes, hats,

fingerless gloves became de rigueur, plus a sleeping cat as a lap warmer, and at night our electric blanket – the most wondrous invention – kept us cosy.

Our plan was always to return the two cottages to one house, not only to celebrate its medieval beginnings as a single manor, but also from a practical viewpoint to make it a house that was an asset for us and an appealing place to live for future generations. By mid-2020, despite lockdowns, we had chosen an architect experienced in working with listed buildings and following many many Zoom meetings and chilly meetings in

the garden we finally had very exciting plans drawn up, numerous method statements written covering all aspects of the work from cleaning stone and floorboards, to ratios and finishes of lime plaster etc, and our application was submitted in October 2020, with a bottle of bubbly popped in front of a blazing wood burner to celebrate. Having initially been told it would take twelve weeks from application to decision we were naïve in our excitement and completely unprepared for the long and harrowing eighteen-month wait, stress compounded by Storm Arwen.



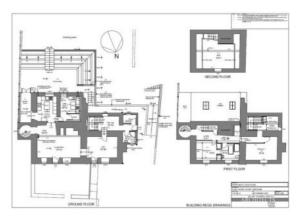
Us looking cold / Jack Frost

On the night of the 26th / 27th November 2021 the storm hit the exposed house like a juggernaut, and we lay in a terrified all-night vigil listening to

the roaring wind rippling the heavy Welsh slates in waves above our heads with the occasional crash as they hit the ground. When we ventured out in the morning to inspect the damage the slates on the poor roof were rucked up like fabric, numbers had been blown off, with some landed on our neighbours' brand-new Volvo. Not only did this necessitate some serious neighbourly diplomacy but it accentuated the urgency to begin work. And yet it was not for another five months that all consents and all discharges of a complex list of attached conditions were finally signed off and we could begin our voyage of discovery.



Floor plan as it was



Floor plan proposed

All photographs from c.1959 or 1962 are courtesy of North-East Wales Archives (PH/12/0042; PH/12/0043; PH/12/0044).

STOP PRESS

ONLINE GLOSSARY

DOWH Treasurer, Rosemary Brotherton, reminds readers that an open-access online glossary of building terms, in particular timber-framed structures, is available on the Vernacular Architecture Group website. See:

https://www.vernacularbuildingglossary.org.uk/

This glossary is extensive and user-friendly – we are grateful to the VAG for this facility.







