



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.

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Darhanfog Hen
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Discovering Old
Welsh Houses

Pontrickett Ceiriog Ucha

Wrexham

Historic Buildings Record

Martin Cherry and Ross Cook

September 2019



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

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Pontrickett Ceiriog Ucha, Wrexham

Historic Building Record

Summary

This historic buildings record was undertaken on 10th September 2019, 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.

Pontrickett is a good example of a late-medieval, downward sloping, cruck-framed, open-hall farmhouse that underwent a large number of significant adaptations that were contained broadly within the footprint of the original building (Fig. 1). Although the house went through the normal process of modernisation – insertion of a ceiling into the hall and a stack into the cross passage (probably in the late 16th century) and a further upgrading of the parlour (probably in the 17th century) – the detailed sequence is in fact surprisingly complex, perhaps reflecting the fact that while the occupants were prosperous enough to make piecemeal improvements, they lacked the resources to carry out major new work. Modernisation also reversed the hierarchical disposition of rooms – what (in status terms) had originally been the low end became the high end.

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 the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

Pontrickett was identified by the Group as a potential candidate for dendrochronological (tree-ring) dating but after a visual inspection was deemed unsuitable.

The buildings address is Pontrickett, Ceiriog Ucha, Wrexham.

It was recorded by Martin Cherry and Ross Cook on 10th September 2019.

2 – Location and Context

Pontrickett is located on the lower run of a hillside to the south-eastern edge of the B4500, from which the property is accessed, and lies in the County Borough of Wrexham. The dwelling sits within the Ceiriog Valley, with the Ceiriog River passing the property to the east at a distance of some 135 metres. Pontrickett sits within a small farmyard, which comprises of barns, stables and various other outbuildings. The stables to the uphill of the house have been converted to a dwelling. The site is immediately bounded to all other sides is open pasture. The property is on a northwest-southeast alignment. The nearest church is St Garmon's in Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, some 3km to the south-west. The building is at an elevation of 252m above sea level, the postcode is LL20 7HT and is orientated on NGR **SJ 18576 34187**.



Location of Pontrickett. Contains Ordnance Survey OpenData © Crown copyright and database right 2019.



Location of Pontrickett, Ceiriog Ucha. Contains Ordnance Survey OpenData © Crown copyright and database right 2019.

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.

It is hoped in due course to carry out a full house history.

4 - Method

Measured Survey

The survey was undertaken by Ross Cook (ArchaeoDomus) by recording measurements taken with a Total Station with direct input to AutoCAD. This survey was then drawn to scale using AutoCAD 2013.

Apex detail was added to the drawing using photogrammetric modelling, whereby photographs were used to produce a metric, scalable model to draw elements of the truss within the roof-space.

Photographic

The photographic record was made using a compact camera.

Investigation

The visual investigation was undertaken with full permission of the owners. This requires all areas of the house to be visually inspected 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.

However, Pontrickett was assessed by the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory in February 2019 and was deemed unsuitable for sampling. This was a result of the timbers used in the construction having been very fast grown, which does not allow enough of a ring sequence to crossmatch and produce a confirmed date.

6 - Interpretation

The house is aligned south-east/north-west (hereafter abbreviated east/west). The absence of firm dates does not allow for a precise chronology but the overall phasing is retrievable. The original house conformed to the classic 4-unit peasant farmhouse plan comprising a one-bay hall, a one-bay cross-passage room, both originally open to the roof with a low partition in-between, with storeyed low (east) and high (west) ends. It was initially timber framed. An early-sixteenth century date is feasible. Two cruck trusses survive, reasonably intact, although the apex carpentry survives for only one of them (T1 Alcock type E). Truss 1 marks the division between hall and cross-passage room; it is smoke-blackened to both sides, with a low partition containing an internal doorway into the hall (now gone, evidenced by mortices and peg holes). The west face of cruck truss T2 is weathered and must have been exposed to the elements

for a considerable time, but the rebate for a doorway confirms the existence of an end unit that was subsequently demolished. The present storeyed storage area that exists here now (which, for two generations or more, has been known as 'the granary') appears to be eighteenth/nineteenth century.

A floor was inserted into the hall and a stack inserted into the cross-passage, creating a lobby-entrance plan, probably in the late sixteenth century. Subsequent events are difficult to reconstruct with confidence. At some point, perhaps at the same time as the stack and ceiling insertion (but see below), the low end was rebuilt as a timber-framed cross-wing. This intruded into the cross passage but, overall, remained within the original footprint of the cruck-framed house. This wing had two intercommunicating chambers. The ground-floor arrangements are now lost: heavy smoke-blackening within the roof space and to the wall framing of the northern chamber of this wing suggests that a fire caused damage severe enough to require significant modification, but not a total rebuild. The external structure, roof and first-floor partition were stabilised while a new parlour ceiling was inserted with cross-beams (chamfered with scroll stops) and—significantly—slip tenons, also chamfered and stopped. This created the elegant and spacious room we see now (Fig. 2). An external stone stack was added, probably later (see below and fig. 3).

The weathering to truss T2 and the rebuilding of the low end, importantly retaining a third of the earlier bay, is unusual and can perhaps be explained by a period of declining fortunes and partial dilapidation sometime in the later 16th or early 17th century.

The floor over the hall (bay 2) is constructed of undecorated timber and is certainly of a lower quality when compared to that of the parlour. The joists are supported by an axial beam, which interestingly does not run centrally through the bay. Instead the joists to the west of the room are some 50cm longer than those to the east. The only feature to which the axial beam bears any relationship is the 18th century bread oven and this suggests the possibility that the hall was floored at a late point in the property's development.

Without precise dating, much of this remains speculative. The biggest problem of interpretation concerns circulation within the house. A stair trimmer in the parlour (to the left of the fireplace) looks integral but occupies an improbable position for stairs. It is possible that the cross-passage stack remained in use for a time, heating both the hall and the parlour wing. In that case the external stone stack to the wing would be secondary to that phase and, if this is the case, it is likely that the entire house was clad in stone at this time. The lateral stack that now heats the hall looks nineteenth century but it may have earlier origins. Whether the original high (status)-end bay was demolished at the time of the construction of the parlour wing cannot be confirmed. It was later rebuilt for storage.

Listed Building Description (Listed grade II)

History. Originally a cruck-framed hall-house of 1 or 2 units, possibly with cross-passage to L side. A cross-wing was added to the L end in the C17, and a fireplace (with lateral stack), was inserted into the hall, possibly at the same time. A further one-and-a-half bays were added to the R later, including a granary over the R end bay, resulting in 3 bays to the main range.

Exterior. Long one-storey range with attics, with 2-storey cross-wing to L end. Constructed of white-washed rubble stone under slate roofs, with large plinth stones. Cross-wing has massive stepped projecting stack to front (E) of house; main range has tall lateral stone stack to L of centre, brick ridge stack further R. Small lean-to porch to L end of main range, with opening to N side and small window to front. Panelled door with small light inside porch. Butt joint to R of lateral stack, where one-and-a-half bays were added later. Two small 2-light wooden casement windows with timber lintels, to each side of stack. C20 boarded door to far R. Attic has 2 gabled dormer windows flanking lateral stack with C20 small-pane glazing. South side of cross-wing has C20 wooden window to ground floor; 2 windows to upper storey, that to L infilled, that to R with C20 glazing. W end of cross-wing was rebuilt in mid-C20, with large-pane window to each storey and datestone to gable. W (rear) side of main range has boarded door with small light to R of centre; 2 x 2-light wooden casement windows to its L, one with small panes. Small splayed light immediately R of doorway, and 2-light wooden casement further R, with possible butt joints under relating to an earlier entrance (this would have been opposite current front entrance suggesting a cross-passage arrangement). Gabled dormer window to attic, above door. N end of house is built into the hillside; gable has planked door leading into granary.

Interior. The main range consists of 3 units, with an entrance room to L, kitchen to centre and store-room to R. The bay divisions of the cruck-framed hall-house were in different positions, by approximately half a unit. In the entrance room, to the R of the doorway, is the base of one of the crucks. The ceiling has been altered, with a spine beam and rough joists. Opposite the entrance is a cloakroom, in front of which is a small enclosure with possible bench or base of an earlier staircase. To the R of the entrance room is the inserted fireplace (with lateral chimney), with bakeoven facing S and aligned with the partition to the kitchen. The kitchen has a ceiling with rough joists. The inserted fireplace in SE corner contains a rayburn; its N side is built against the remains of a cruck-framed partition, which has box-panels under the cruck blade. This was probably the original N end wall of the hall-house, and corresponds with a butt joint on the outside wall. There is a niche in the wall half a bay to the N of the cruck, beyond which is a store-room under a granary, the ceiling with plain beams and joists. Turning L from the front entrance is the C17 cross-wing which has 2 large chamfered spine-beams with ogee stops, and stop-chamfered joists. Large stone fireplace to E end with timber lintel. To the NW is a doorway leading to the staircase, rising over the cloakroom and not in its original position.

Reason for designation. Listed as a fine C17 farmhouse exhibiting good vernacular character and detail, its earlier origins as a cruck-framed hall-house of special interest.

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 Archaeological & Heritage Services.

Appendices



Fig. 1 – South elevation



Fig. 2 – North elevation



Fig. 3 – West elevation.



Fig. 4 – Parlour wing: ground-floor room, reconstructed after a fire, with slip tenoned joists. The chambers above this room were retained along with the principal rafter roof structure.



Fig. 5 – Wing partition framing at first floor.



Fig. 6 - Wing partition framing in attic.



Fig. 7 - The external stone stack added to the parlour wing that was otherwise rebuilt within the footprint of the original cruck-framed hall house.



Fig. 8 - As in 1952 © RCAHMW.



