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# **ANALYSIS OF EGRYN ABBEY**

**THE MUCKLE PARTNERSHIP**

**2005**

**for the National Trust**



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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Summary

In 2004 The Muckle Partnership were commissioned to carry out an historic building survey of the house at Egryn and to analyse the historic phases of building and alterations with approximate dates.

## 1.2 The Brief

The brief was to survey the main house at the farmstead at Egryn and annotate the CAD plans/sections/elevation supplied to:

- Record all historic phases of building and alterations
- Record materials and changes

This report details all changes and should be used in conjunction with the annotated plans.

## 1.3 Methods

### Archive and background research

Background research included consulting the existing records of the house development in *Houses of the Welsh Countryside, P Smith and History of Merioneth – Vol II, JB and LB Smith*; also the notes made by the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments.

### Survey

The survey was carried out on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005. Notes were made of the main architectural features and recorded on the existing plans/sections/elevations.

### CAD Plan Annotation

CAD plans supplied by the National Trust have been annotated and the key phases shown using hatched polygons. All additional work has been put onto layer 'VBS' or 'VBS\*'. Drawings have been saved as AutoSketch V8 files.

### CAD Files

The files are: Qd590\_01.skf, Qd590\_02.skf, Qd590\_03.skf, Qd590\_04.skf.

## 1.4 Previous Work

A detailed measured survey of the house at Egryn was completed by Russell Geomatics Ltd. In July 2003, which form the base plans for this survey.

## 2.0 Historical Background

The settlement at Egryn has been misleadingly referred to as Egryn Abbey but was a monastic grange, belonging to the monks of Cymmer. As such it was never developed as an ecclesiastical as much as an economic centre, farm retreat and collection centre for the produce from surrounding estates to support the monks.

Griffith ap Llewelyn of Cors y Gedol founded at the site 'for the use of the poor and wayfarers' an institution known as the 'Oratory of the Poor Hospital of the Blessed Virgin', the first such hospital in Merioneth. In 1139 a special license was granted to allow mass to be celebrated there.

The old name for the house is Plas-yn-Egryn but it is titled 'Egrin' in the tithe apportionment of the parish, 1839, where it is recorded as an extensive holding of over 410 acres; owned by Edward Pugh Owen and occupied by Morgan Owen.

## 3.0 Summary Analysis by Location

### 3.1 General

The house at Egryn originally had the usual late Medieval three-unit plan of hall between twin small inner rooms (to E) and one or more outer rooms (to W). It is thought that the outer rooms at Egryn housed the chapel of the former monastic grange, which was demolished and replaced by the present W wing in the early-mid C19th. The remaining fabric of the original house then formed the rear kitchen and dairy.

The twin bowtel moulding on the aisle-post suggests that the house dates from c.1500 and dendro-dating suggests that it must be later than 1496.

In the C16th the house was re-modelled, with the addition of a lateral chimney to the rear (N). The ovolo-moulded dormer windows indicate that a floor must have been inserted over the hall by the mid C17th, although this was replaced by the present early-mid C19th ceiling (contemporary with the W wing).

Attached to the E end of the original house is an additional block, probably a lofted stable added in early C18th. There have been several stages of development of the house to the E end and also to the rear (N). At the E end of the original house is a chimney at the gable apex (which now serves the cooker/range) and a further squat chimney at the NE corner. This latter chimney appears to serve no purpose and there are joints in the stonework flanking this stack, however, its cruder construction suggests that it pre-dates the ridge stack and also the external stack serving the boilers in the E block. The E block was probably extended in the mid C19th (to serve as dairy and brewhouse) and further alterations took place in the early to mid C20th (particularly to the rear (N) wall). There may also have been some restoration to the fabric of the original house at this time.

There are two single storey lean-to additions along the rear (N) wall that probably date to late C19th or early C20th. The added lean-to in the angle of the W wing and the lateral chimney is probably also late C19th, and was further altered in C20th (much of the upper portion of the wall is constructed of brick).

### **3.2 Exterior**

#### **S Wall**

The principal elevation of the Medieval houses faces S; the extent of the original house runs from a point c. 0.6m W of the doorway to the joint in masonry to E of the easternmost window. The cyclopean doorway is original, and opened onto the cross passage of the original house. The ovolo moulded mullioned windows and dormers have sandstone frames and belong to a later stage of development (C16th – C17th). The ground floor window to R (E) of the doorway is of a different character (with less defined mullions) and may be original (with later label) and the dormer above the doorway appears to have been rebuilt when the W wing was erected in early-mid C19th. The block to the E end probably originated as a lofted stable in the early C18. With blocked doorway and C20th window above.

#### **E Wall**

The E wall may retain fabric of the early C18th lofted stables, most probably dates to later stages of development in C19th, with some alterations in C20th.

#### **N Wall**

Probably the most altered and therefore difficult to analyse. Most of the original fabric of the Medieval house is obscured by later additions, though the visible wall plate (to E of the Elizabethan stack) suggests that the easternmost end of the range still retains much Medieval masonry. The lateral stack was added in the mid C16th and the W wing erected in early-mid C19th. The other additions along the N wall were later C19th or C20th and the rear wall of the E block appears to have been altered and a large C20th window inserted at this time. The stack at the NE corner of the original house is less easy to date, particularly as it has no corresponding internal feature – it probably predates the C19th phases of construction and may have been added when the dormers were built in C16 – C17th.

#### **W Wall**

The W wall and wing were erected in early-mid C19th and retain all external features of that date. The half-glazed door into the lounge has a diamond paned overlight with coloured glass. Windows are slightly recess horned sashes with narrow glazing bars. The walls are constructed of coursed, slightly dressed, masonry and the openings have stone lintels; windows have slate sills. The roof eaves and verges are advanced. Probably re-roofed in mid-late C20th (as the rest of the range) with small slates and clay ridge tiles.

### **3.3 Interior**

#### **Ground Floor**

##### **Hall**

The cyclopean doorway in the S wall opens into the C19th hallway, which formed the cross passage of the original house. The partition walls were erected when the W

wing was built in the early-mid C19th and the hallway leads to the staircase to the rear. The floor is tiled with diagonally laid stone flags 14"x14" (36cm<sup>2</sup>) and 2cm deep.

### **Living room**

The doorway to R (E) leads into the living room (original hall), which retains the timbers of the aisle truss to W and the dais partition to E. The aisle truss retains the upright posts (within the stores) and the flanking cross member to S. The S aisle post has had most of the bowtel moulding removed (sawn off below the lowest shelf in the store). The northern cross member does not appear to be original, but may be a re-used timber from the original cross passage partition, that was removed when the W wing was erected in early-mid C19th (as are the door lintel and upright timber to S side of the doorway). The dais partition is complete (though without doors) but has had some C20th restoration.

At the NW corner of the living room is a C16th lateral fireplace. Above the fireplace is an exposed beam that was inserted in early-mid C19th and supports the cross beam of the ceiling. The joists of the ceiling are only visible in the S store and the passage leading to the bathroom/utility, but are assumed to date from the early-mid C19th.

There is a blocked window in the N wall to R (E) of the fireplace – no trace of this is visible from the interior and the exterior detail was not viewed at the time of the survey. This may be the Medieval window referred to in the RCAHM notes (probably blocked when the lean-to addition was built in late C19th – early C20th).

### **Kitchen**

The timbers in the kitchen are less easy to date and appear to be earlier (though some may have been replaced when the dais partition was restored in C20th). They may be original, or date to an earlier phase of the house's development (when the hall had the first ceiling inserted in C16th – C17th. Timbers in the soffit of the kitchen window appear to be of similar style and probably date to the time when the dormers were built (those in the living room are obscured by plaster).

### **Bathroom/utility**

This E block of the house appears to have gone through several stages of development. Probably first erected in the early C18th as a lofted stable, and retaining the cobbled floor of that earliest phase), extended to the rear in C19th and further alterations in C20th. The ceiling joists/timbers appear to date from C19th, but the window and doorway in the rear wall suggest late C19th or early C20th alterations; the doorway through from the kitchen was probably cut at this date and may have removed the feature for which the stack at that corner was built.

### **Reception room/parlour – W wing**

Built early-mid C19th. The floors are boarded and the walls retain moulded coving, deep skirtings and picture rails. The doors have moulded frames and the openings have panelled surrounds, soffits and shutters. Original fire surrounds, that to the lounge with flanking shelved recesses.

### **Stairs**

Clasping rail on stick balusters – early-mid C19th.

### **WC**

Erected at the E side of the half landing of the stairs in late C19th or C20th.

### **First floor**

The layout of the first floor is predominantly early-mid C19th, with some alterations in late C19th and C20th.

### **Bedroom 1**

Has a C20th tiled fire.

### **Bedroom 2**

Has original fire with flanking recesses (as for ground floor) but with doored recess to R (E).

Details as for ground floor rooms (windows without shutters).

### **Bedroom 3**

Appears to have a later doorway to E end – a partition wall may have been removed below the aisle truss, making a larger room out of two cupboard/storerooms. The base of the other truss can be seen (though the timber could not be examined as it was obscured by wallpaper).

In the small room opposite Bedroom 3 the upper portion of the aisle post is clearly visible, complete with bowtel moulding and cusped brace.

### **E Lounge**

Retains some fabric of the Medieval dais partition to N – (some may be retained within the plaster partition to S – not currently visible). The S doorway appears to be later than that to N (late C19th or early C20th).

### **Loft**

The trusses to the Medieval house appear to be original, as do the purlins and windbraces, though the aisle truss has been severely damaged and much of the S side has been removed (particularly at first floor level). Older rafters and ridge appear to have been retained in the roof space above the kitchen (at E end of the original house, beyond the dais partition). In some cases the older rafters have been coupled to more modern timbers, and the S purlin is cracked and is supported on another lateral beam which runs between the partition and the E wall.

The remaining (accessible) part of the original house appears to have been re-slatted in mid-late C20th (judging from the fabric below the slates) – as has the rest of the range. The rafters and ridge may date from the time of the early-mid C19th phase of construction, when the W wing was erected, though some timbers clearly date to the re-roofing of mid-late C20th.

The roof timbers above the W wing are consistent with the early-mid C19th construction.

### **Basement**

Stone steps lead down to a tiled floor (tiles as for the hallway of the house). Joists early-mid C19th but the cross beam appears to be an earlier timber re-used – probably one of the timbers of the partition of the cross passage that was removed when the W wing was erected in early-mid C19th.



## 4.0 Recommendations

At the time of the survey there were features that were either partially or totally obscured; the job made more problematic by the lack of lighting and the blocked windows at ground floor level. If at any time these features are made more visible (eg – by removing paint/plaster/plaster board) or should any construction work take place in the future it is advisable that a full record (using measured survey and photographs) be made.

Of particular interest are the parts of the roof space inaccessible at the time of survey and also the first floor partition wall that may retain some of the fabric of the Medieval dais partition. A clear analysis of the features of the rear (N) wall would be beneficial, particularly of the blocked window and NE corner stack.

This is a very important house, not only because of the original timberwork and early stonework, but also because of the rich history and development over 3-4 centuries. The current layout and features accurately reflect these historical processes and should be respected as a unique document of the past, and retained accordingly.

It is also recommended that a full analytic survey be undertaken of the associated buildings at the farmstead, particularly of the range directly S of the house which is thought to be the former refectory of the monastic grange. This would give a clearer picture of the development of the farmstead as a whole and would place the house in its proper historical context. Indeed, viewing the house in isolation is to give at best a limited interpretation of the available historical data, and the house should not be divorced from the immediate physical and built environment.

## 5.0 Published Sources

Smith JB & Smith LB, History of Merioneth Vol II – The Middle Ages, 2001, pp 466-7;  
Smith P, Houses of the Welsh Countryside, 1988, pp 38, 96-8, figs 53, 56, 64, maps 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 37, 43.

## 6.0 Unpublished Sources

Dolgellau Record Office, Llanaber Tithe map and schedule, 1839;  
Dolgellau Record Office, Z/M/481/43.

Fieldwork, analysis, C.A.D. annotations, phasing overlay and report  
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