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Penlan Farm W/11/4051

Tir Gofal Farm Visit Historic Environment Report Call Out



Report No. 2004/19

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CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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Tir Gofal Farm Visit Historic Environment Report
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By
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Introduction

A farm visit was undertaken at the request of the Countryside Council for Wales to address specific management issues on this farm. The aim of this report is to make an assessment of these issues in order to provide management recommendations to be incorporated into the Tir Gofal Management Plan. This report is not intended to assess the structural condition or stability of any given site.

The Call Out Report responds to management concerns regarding specific sites, it does not provide management advice for all known sites on the farm, for these recommendations please refer to the Historic Environment Report 1 (He1).

General Description of Farm – Holding W/11/4051

The main holding of Penlan Farm lies at grid reference SN67936587, in the community of Ystrad Meurig. It was visited by Cambria Archaeology on February 11th, 2004.

The farm is about 1 mile west of Swyddffynnon, set at the intersection between two landscapes. To the east and south, the land rolls gently down to the wetlands of Cors Caron. To the north and west it climbs more steeply into a series of hills divided by pronounced valleys.

Penlan is one of a number of dispersed farms scattered throughout the lanes which surround the settlements of Ystrad Meurig and Swyddffynnon. Almost all of these farms (including Penlan) are depicted on the 1834 Ordnance Survey map, showing that the overall settlement pattern in the area has changed very little. Within Penlan, the field boundaries have also changed very little from those seen on the 1844 tithe map (Lledrod Parish).

The farmstead principally comprises a number of stone buildings arranged in a courtyard to the north of the farmhouse itself. The development of the farm is interesting – on the tithe map of 1844 Penlan is shown as a loose scatter of buildings. The farmhouse survives to the present day, and it is likely that the barn is also a survival from the early 19th century. However, given the lack of accuracy on the tithe map, it is not possible to say this for certain. By the time of the 1891 Ordnance Survey map the loose arrangement of buildings had been ‘tidied’ into a ‘U’ shape (see plate 1, below). Further buildings were added in the period between 1891 and 1906, finishing the fourth side of the courtyard.

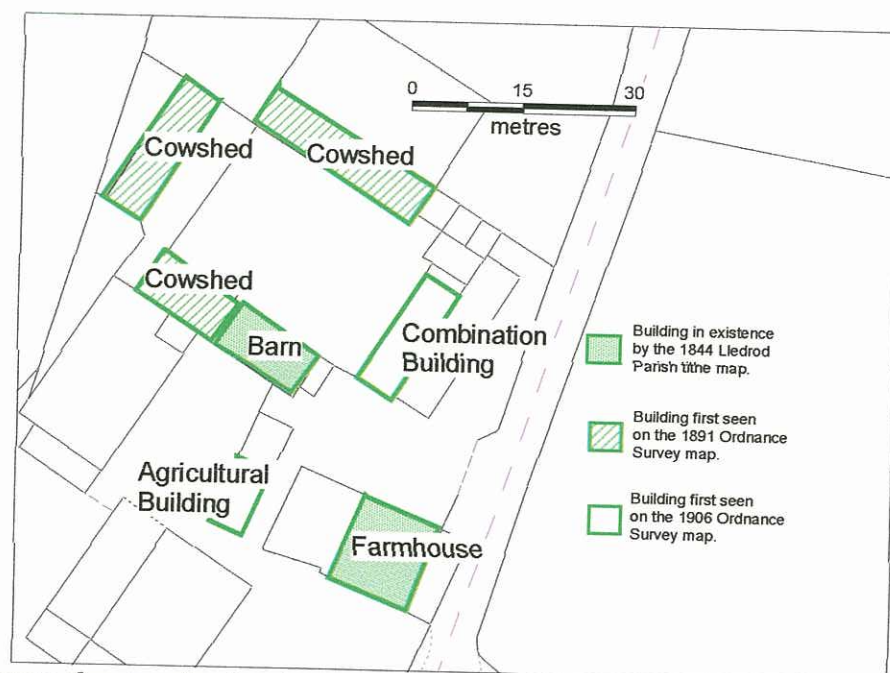


Plate 1: Diagram showing the development of the surviving buildings in the farmstead at Penlan.

This substantial re-building, and the deliberate separation of the house from the working farmyard, is a hallmark of agricultural improvement in the mid – late 19th century. It is typical of many farms in Wales – land improvement meant higher crop yields and more livestock and larger, purpose built farm buildings were needed to cope with the increased productivity.

Statement of Condition / Proposed Works

The landowner proposes to carry out works to two buildings through the Tir Gofal scheme. These buildings are the barn on the southwest side of the farmstead and the combination building on the southeast.

The barn

Dating to at least the first half of the 19th century, the barn is of stone, bound with lime mortar and with a slate roof. It faces into the farmyard and butts against a later cowshed at its north end. An internal door now connects the two buildings.

The stone is mostly roughly coursed rubble, but the quoins and the stones around the door and ventilation slits have been cut to irregularly sized, squared blocks. The northeast elevation, facing into the farmyard, is dominated by a full height double door at the north end. Opposite it, on the other side of the building, is a three-quarter size door with a simple stone arch above it. This pair of opposing doors would have provided a through draft to allow threshing to take place inside the barn. There are also three ventilation slits on each long side of the building, implying that whilst the north end of the barn was used for threshing, the south part was used for storing grain.

The roof is supported on timber 'A' frames resting on wooden pads set into the walls. The rafters are joined at the apex with wooden pegs. The collars, crossing between the rafters, are held in place with metal bolts.

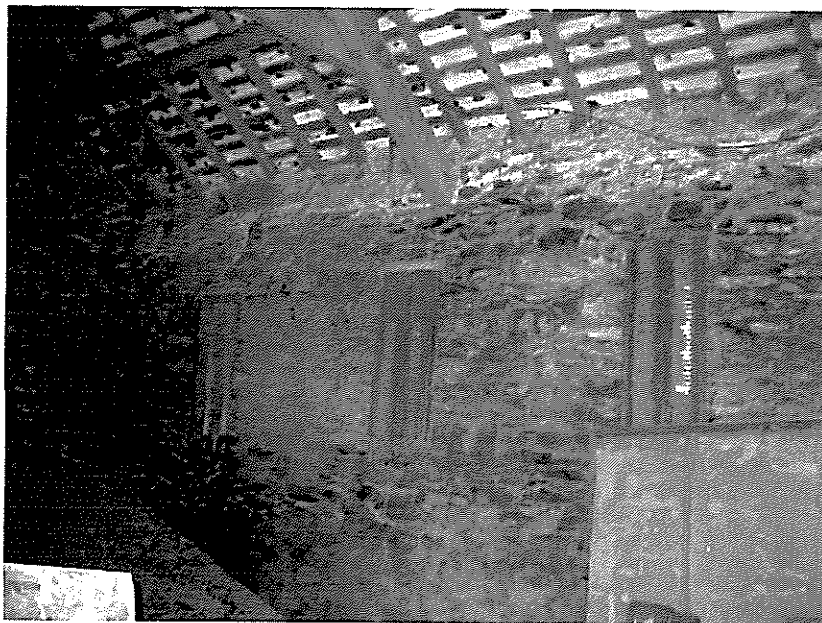


Plate 2 *Detail of the roof inside the barn. The principal rafter rests on a wooden pad and transfers the load of the roof through the walls. The collar is fastened into place with metal bolts. The metal shutters cover the ventilation slits.*

The barn generally is in good condition, and the roof timbers appear to be sound. There are a few areas of the roof where slates are either missing or have slipped out of place. The barn is in use as a feed-store, so it is imperative that the roof remains watertight.

The landowner proposes to re-roof the building through the Tir Gofal scheme.

Combination Farm Building

This building dates to somewhere between 1891 and 1906. It combines a granary, hayloft, stables and cartshed under one roof, and has clearly undergone several phases of modification.

A variety of materials are seen in this building – although the principal material is roughly coursed rubble stone, yellow brick arches above the stable doors are also seen, and the surviving dormer entrance is of red brick. More recently much of the south gable has been re-built in breeze-block.

The building faces west, into the courtyard. In the south gable is a double cartshed entrance, with stone pillars surviving. An iron girder has been inserted as a lintel, and the remainder of the gable has been re-built in breeze-blocks after it apparently collapsed some years ago. At the south end of the main (west) elevation is a flight of external steps that leads up to an opening into the granary. The dormer head above this entrance has been lost, and the area is covered with metal sheeting.



Plate 3 *The south end of the combination farm building. The metal sheeting marks the shape of a dormer head, now lost.*

In the middle of the building are two doorways which probably led into stables. These are picked out with yellow brick arches above them, and stone internal walls still divide the boxes. At the north end of the building is another external staircase which leads up to a slate slab landing projecting above a door (see plate 3). The original opening into the loft has been extended in red brick to form a dormer entrance.



Plate 4 *The staircase at the north end of the building. Note the slate-slab landing with a doorway underneath it, and the red brick dormer entrance into the hayloft.*

The building is lofted for its entire length, but an internal wall divided the loft into a small southern section, above the cartshed, and a northern section which runs for the rest of the length. It is likely that the end above the cartshed was a granary, whilst the rest of the loft served as a hayloft.

The roof is slated, and small metal skylights have been inserted at intervals along the length of the west side. The roof construction is similar to that of the barn, but the timbers are smaller, and more precisely cut and squared. All of the joints use metal bolts rather than wooden pegs.

The building is generally in good condition, and is in use for storage and animal housing. However patches of the roof are in poor condition, especially on the east side where a number of slates are missing. Some of the timbers in the granary, where the dormer was, also seem to be rotten.

The landowner proposes to re-roof the building through the Tir Gofal scheme.

Management Recommendations

Barn

Re-roofing of the barn is to be welcomed, as it will enable the building to remain in use and therefore will help to ensure its long-term future.

Since the roof is in a fair condition at present it should be possible to re-use a substantial amount of the existing slate. This will help to keep costs down, but it will also ensure that the appearance of the building is maintained. New slates should be sourced to match the existing ones as closely as possible.

The roof timbers appeared to be sound and should be left in place if at all possible. If any do need replacing, the construction methods used in the rest of the roof should be copied in the new timbers.

The building does not currently have any guttering, and it should not be introduced during the re-roofing works. The lack of guttering is not causing any problems at present, and provided that a sufficient roof overhang is maintained, it should not cause any problems in the future.

Combination Farm Building

Roofing works on this building are also to be welcomed. The roof is currently in fair condition, but work is needed at the south end to ensure that the building remains watertight. As with the barn, as much of the roof slate as possible should be re-used. At the south end, where the dormer head has been lost, some of the timbers are clearly rotten. Ideally, when the timbers are replaced, a new dormer would be constructed, matching the one at the north end of the building. If this is not possible, then the metal sheeting over the 'scar' should be removed, and should be replaced with new timbers and slates.

At present, the building has a number of metal framed skylights in the roof. When the work is carried out, these skylights should either be replaced with similar ones (small and metal framed) or they should be left out of the new roof altogether.

The building does not currently have any guttering, and it should not be introduced during the re-roofing works. The lack of guttering is not causing any problems at present, and provided that a sufficient roof overhang is maintained, it should not cause any problems in the future.

This building is characterised by the variety of materials and building techniques in its construction. Any future works should respect this character, and should ensure that repairs are carried out in materials appropriate to the specific section of the building being worked on.

General Description of Farm – Holding W/11/4051/a

The second holding of Penlan farm lies at grid reference SN74876929. The holding comprises an area of high but marshy ground surrounded by hills, and it contains evidence for past landscape use in several different forms.

The archaeological interest is centred around the ruined cottage of Gilfach y Rhew (PRN 7150) which is associated with a number of small enclosures or paddocks. The cottage is on the edge of the dry ground, and would have had easy access to the hills behind (south) for grazing and to the marsh in front (north) for peat-cutting. It also occupied one of the only parts of level dry ground, which would have allowed cultivation to take place.

A short distance to the west are two old levels, remains of a small lead mine (PRN 25998). A large number of trial mine workings were established in the uplands in the 19th century, but many of these proved unprofitable and quickly fell out of use. It is likely that this was the case here, although the levels may have been associated with Esgair Mwyn lead mine, just to the east.

“By the eighteenth century the uplands of Wales were home to substantial communities of hill farmers, shepherds, miners and peat-cutters, far removed from the silent landscapes that we are accustomed to today.” (Cadw:2002:11). This holding of Penlan farm provides a clear glimpse into the past landscape use of the uplands, and is therefore an area of considerable local importance.

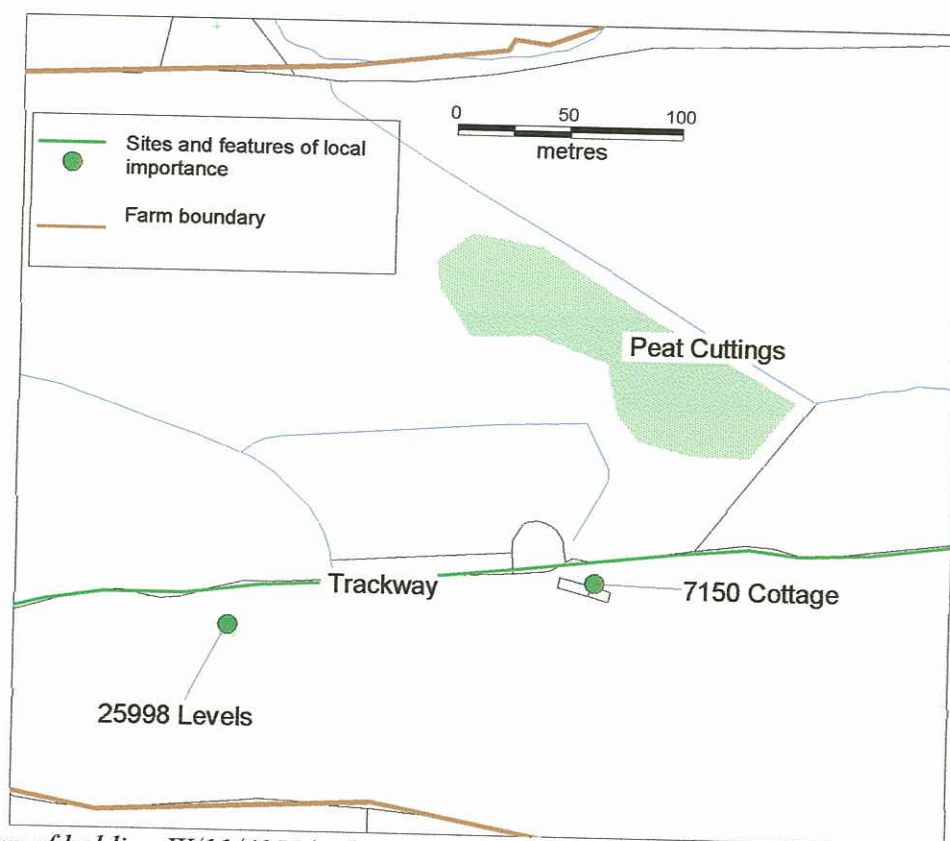


Plate 5 Map of holding W/11/4051/a showing the main sites of historic and archaeological interest.

Statement of Condition

Gilfach y Rhew cottage (PRN 7150)

This is a stable ruin, with three walls standing to around 1.2m. The building is roughly 20m x 5m but clearly divided into two sections which did not appear to have an interconnecting door. It was probably a cottage with attached animal housing.

The cottage is of stone, and is associated with at least two enclosures, picked out by field banks and grown-out hedges. The tithe apportionment (1944, Gwnnws parish) clearly shows the variety of landscape use around Gilfach y Rhew – the field south of the cottage was recorded as ‘pasture field’ whilst that to the west was ‘arable field’. To the north, in the area of peat cuttings, was a field named ‘moory meads’.

Trackway

A slightly sunken trackway which runs through the middle of the cottage and enclosures, and continued on to the east.

Peat Cuttings

An area of slight earthworks indicative of peat cutting. The features take the form of very shallow, irregular shaped pits and straight-sided, shallow trenches. There are also relict field boundaries in this area, seen as low, spread banks. The area is all covered in vegetation and although some parts have been disturbed by later drainage ditches, there is high potential for the survival of further features.

Levels (part of PRN 25998)

The remains of two levels survive as cuts into the hillside, with small spoil tips on the downslope sides. The earthworks are turfed over and appear to be in a stable condition.

All of these sites are all currently located in pasture fields, and the present management regime suits them well.

Management Recommendations

There are no specific threats to these sites at present, and the current management should be continued. In particular:

- i. The earthwork sites should be maintained under pasture. Trees, marking old hedgelines around Gilfach y Rhew cottage and along the trackway, should be retained since they make a strong contribution to the landscape character.
- ii. The cottage should be maintained as a stable, visible ruin. No stone or building material should be removed from the site, nor should any ground intrusive activities take place within the cottage or the enclosures.

The ideal management for this whole area is to keep it under permanent pasture with a regime of light grazing to ensure that scrub and undergrowth does not become a problem.

Since this area is of considerable historical importance, please discuss any proposed changes in land-use with Cambria Archaeology before they are carried out.

References

W/11/4051:

Ordnance Survey Old Series 1834, sheet 57

Ordnance Survey 1891 Cardiganshire XXI.NW

Ordnance Survey 1906 Cardiganshire XXI.NW

Tithe map 1844 Lledrod parish

W/11/4051/a:

Cadw:2002:Caring for Lost Farmsteads

Ordnance Survey 1891 Cardiganshire XVI.SE

Ordnance Survey 1906 Cardiganshire XVI.SE

Tithe map 1847? Gwnnws parish

Tithe apportionment 1844 Gwnnws parish

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This report has been checked and approved by Louise Austin on behalf of Cambria Archaeology,
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Position: Principal Archaeologist (Curatorial)

Signature Louise Austin Date 17/02/04

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