

## **This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990**

### **Listed Building: Report for Building**

<b>Authority :</b>	Pembrokeshire	<b>Record Number :</b>	87843
		<b>Date of Listing :</b>	08 Apr 2021
<b>Community :</b>	Cwm Gwaun	<b>Date of Amendment :</b>	
<b>Locality :</b>	Pontfaen	<b>Date Delisted :</b>	
		<b>Grid Ref :</b>	204731,23521 6
		<b>Grade :</b>	II
<b>Name :</b>	Ffald y Brenin Christian Retreat Centre		

**Street No, Name :**

**Street Side :**

#### **Location :**

Reached by a private track on the N side of a minor road between Pontfaen and Cilgwyn, approximately 2.4 kilometres NE of Pontfaen.

#### **History**

Sychbant Farm was purchased in 1984 by Peter and Phyllida Mould, with the aim of establishing a non-denominational Christian retreat centre. The conversion of the C19 farm range was undertaken 1985-8 by Christopher Day. Day raised part of the walls, added a chapel at the N end and remodelled the interior. Christopher Day was a pioneer of eco-architecture, aiming to move away from mass-produced styles and materials in order to build vernacular-style buildings sensitive to their surroundings and with hand-crafted details. Influenced by the ideas of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, he wanted to create environments that would nurture the soul and nourish the spirit. Trained in both architecture and sculpture, Day moved to Pembrokeshire in 1972, where he began his career as an architect. Most of his commissions in Wales were for private houses, but his larger projects were the Rudolf Steiner School in Maenclochog and the Ffald y Brenin Christian Retreat Centre. Here Day was able to fulfil his ambition 'to design projects which develop and enhance the spirit of place already there so that the new is not an imposition, but an organic development of the old'.

#### **Exterior**

A long range on a sloping site converted to a retreat centre of 1½ storeys, with a round chapel at the N end separated from the main building by a covered passage. Walls of the former farm building are of rubble stone, but they have been repaired and selectively heightened using mainly unquarried stones, to create an undulating roof line. The roof is covered with slates, with skylights and 3 cairn-like stacks built of field stones. To avoid abrupt steps in the roof line the different levels are joined by sloping sections. The chapel has a conical roof. Openings are under segmental brick arches, although most of the windows and doors have trapezoidal heads and the wooden casement windows have slate sills. On the E side there are 6 windows of

varying sizes to the R of an added porch in a faceted outshut, while to the L of the porch the wall is part slate hung and 2 ventilation strips from the former farm building remain either side of a half-glazed door. Three dormers have sloping courses at the apex to soften the effect of the sharp angle. On the W side, facing the former farmyard, are 2 half-glazed doors and 9 casement windows of varying sizes, one of which is within a blocked former doorway. There is a wide 'eyebrow' dormer and a further small attic window to its R under the eaves. At the downhill end are external stone steps wrapped around the SW angle, leading to a balcony that provides elevated views over the Gwaun Valley and half-glazed door to the attic storey. At the uphill end is the chapel, which has triple round-headed N windows (effectively the liturgical E end) and 2 windows each on the W and E sides. The solid wood door in the passage on the S side has curved strap hinges, probably re-used.

## Interior

The interior is sub-divided by partitions which have a deliberate roughly plastered, with a whitewashed finish, to soften the smooth surfaces and sharp angles. Three of the doors are original, have trapezoidal heads and retain thumb latches carved with a trumpet and harp motif. The other doors are replacements to meet fire-safety standards. The interior is divided into a lodge at the downhill end, with separate entrance and originally intended for the warden, guest accommodation, and chapel. A diagonal passage on the ground floor breaks up the otherwise rectangular units of the building, which has guest rooms and bathroom facilities on the ground floor. A straight closed-string stair, also set diagonally within the building, leads to the attic floor where there are communal rooms and more individual guest rooms. The communal room has a fireplace across the NE angle, which has a surround of rounded field stones. The chapel interior is plastered in a similar fashion to the remainder, below a shallow-domed whitewashed ceiling. The chapel has no furniture, but benches around the sides. In the centre is a large altar-like rock outcrop, which appears to rise up out of the otherwise irregular flagstone floor.

## Listed

Ffald y Brenin is an important work of late C20 eco-architecture by one of its chief exponents in Wales. It is especially notable for its use of found materials, harmony with natural forms, such as the outcrop in the chapel and the roughly coursed stonework, and as an organic development of an older building, all of which are characteristic of Day's work.

## References

None recorded

## Sources

Author	Date of Publication	Title	Volume
T Lloyd, J Orbach and R Scourfield	2004	The Buildings of Wales: Pembrokeshire	p366
		Christopher Day's cv, c2000, online at <a href="http://www.fantastic-machine.com/artandspirit/spirit-and-place/cd_cv.html">http://www.fantastic-machine.com/artandspirit/spirit-and-place/cd_cv.html</a>	
Christopher Day	2007	(my) Dying is Fun: a comedy of disabled misadventures	
Christopher Day	1990	Places of the Soul: Architecture and Environmental Design as a Healing Art	
Christopher Day	2002	Spirit & Place: healing our	

environment