

Penhwnllys Plas

16th/17th century sub-medieval house
Llaniestyn



GAT Project No. 000
prepared by
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for North West Wales Dendrochronology Project
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Penhwnllys Plas, Llaniestyn

Introduction and Summary

Penhwnllys Plas is a holding within the medieval freehold township of Penhwnllys. Penhwnllys is recorded at least as early as 1352 and, on the basis of a cluster of tenement names - Penhwnllys Uchaf, Penhwnllys Bach and later, Penhwnllys Mawr - it is probable that there had been a nucleus of settlement in this location for several centuries.

The present building, despite alterations and modification, is clearly a sub medieval, two unit, end-chimney house, characterised by Smith as Type A. The particular characteristics of this type of house is its compact design (two, rather than three units); the intention of inserting a first floor from scratch and the provision and position of closed fireplaces.

As much as the skilled carpentry trusses of an open hall impressed in a hall house, so, it is said, with the roof no longer visible in a two storey house, the heavy timber partitions of the entry passage performed a similar function of conspicuous display. Status in the design of windows (stone-moulded mullions and jambs) is an important feature at Penhwnllys Plas. which suggests a date of construction in the later 16th or perhaps, early 17th-century. The roof trusses are original.

This report is a record of the structural features at Penhwnllys Plas and is intended to complement dendrochronological dating as part of the North West Wales Dendrochronology Project. The survey was made between 16th March and 17th March 2010.

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Penhwnllys Plas, Llaniestyn

Location

Penhwnllys Plas, Llaniestyn Parish, Anglesey

Grid Reference 259705 380719

HER PRN 2603

NPRN 58477



Methodology

The survey was made with pencil on paper using calipers, hand tapes and hand held laser measuring tools. Laser plumb lines and levels were used to project horizontal and vertical baselines and rectilinear grids.

Report

context

Penhwnllys Plas stands on ground sloping to the south-east below the steeper slopes of the limestone ridge at Mariandyrys at 1.8 km north west of Llangoed and 1.65 km north east of St Iestyn's Parish Church at Llaniestyn. Springs debouch from the base of the limestone and several streams feed the waters of Afon y Brenhin and Afon Lleiniog, opening into the Straits. Two mills, Bryn y Felin and Felin fach took their power from these streams.

Two townships, Penhwnllys and Twrgarw lay close together in the middle ages. In 1352 there was one free gwely in Penhwnllys, called Gwely Tudur ap Madog. There are now four farms bearing the name Penhwnllys, in close proximity, indicating a consolidation of former fragmented holdings in the township, and giving an indication of its extent. To the south lies Twrgarw. This township once, also, had a single gwely by the name of Tudur ap Madog. The two townships shared the same mill, Melin Tudur, and it is likely that the progeny of Tudur once extended over both townships. Dafydd ap Rhys (grandson of Tudur ap Madog, the gwely founder) had land in both townships and Gwilym ap Gruffydd of Llaniestyn was his co-heir in Penhwnllys. This family stemmed from the patrimonial lord, Iarddur, in Llanddyfnan and Penhesgyn, one of the leading kindreds on Anglesey.



Penhwnllys Plas in the foreground, Penhwnllys Uchaf to the right, Penhwnllys Bach in the middle distance

Comparative sources

Penhwnllys Plas, in its surviving form, is a sub medieval two-unit house, two-storeyed and provided with gable-end fireplaces.

The typical well-to-do gentry house of the 15th and 16th centuries was arranged, on a longitudinal axis, in three units. Entry was made through opposing doors in the long sides, offset towards one or other end. The cross-passage so formed created a division between the hall, open to the roof, and store or service rooms at the back of the passage. In most instances the hall would be warmed by an open hearth. At the opposite dais end there might be private rooms. The rooms at each end were likely to be in two storeys.

By the end of the 15th century some halls in north-west Wales were provided with lateral fireplaces and externally projecting stacks - at Cochwillan and Plas Berw, for example, and Hafotty in the early 16th century. The convenience of enclosed fireplaces also led to the possibility of installing a first floor within the hall.

By the second half of the 16th century, certain well-to-do freeholders and gentry developed a more compact type of house clearly derived from later halls but with several modernising influences. A particular style of sub-medieval regional house, in North Wales, has been characterised by Peter Smith as the 'Snowdonia' house. The characteristics of these houses include two, not three, units at ground floor level, but nevertheless, retain the concept of the entry passage of opposed doors. The passage would be backed by a heavy timber muntin-and-plank partition, punctured by a door, or doors, into one or more end rooms occupied as a parlour and/or storeroom. The cross-passage would also give direct access into the main room on the ground floor or, in some instances, there might be a similar partition on the opposite side of the passage, with an opening, through which the main room could be entered.

Both rooms and the cross passage would be ceiled, with a floor above resting on joists and beams. In this type of house, the main room would invariably be provided with a fireplace at the gable end, with a flue within the thickness of the end wall. Typically, access to the first floor would be up steep, ladder style, steps or, perhaps, a wooden or stone winding stair in the space between the chimney breast and a side wall. A small window might light the stair.

At the opposite gable a chimney stack would service a fireplace in a first floor room and, perhaps, also, on the ground floor. The window openings on the ground floor could be an indication of the status of the rooms which they lit.

Smith has mapped over 120 houses in this category in North West Wales, in the counties of Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth. Within that total, however, only eight have been identified on Anglesey. Four of these examples are to be found in the commote of Dindaethwy. The principal concentrations are to be found in the Conwy Valley, in Ffestiniog and in Ardudwy, south of Harlech. In this respect Penhwnllys may be regarded as relatively rare on the island.

The survey

Description

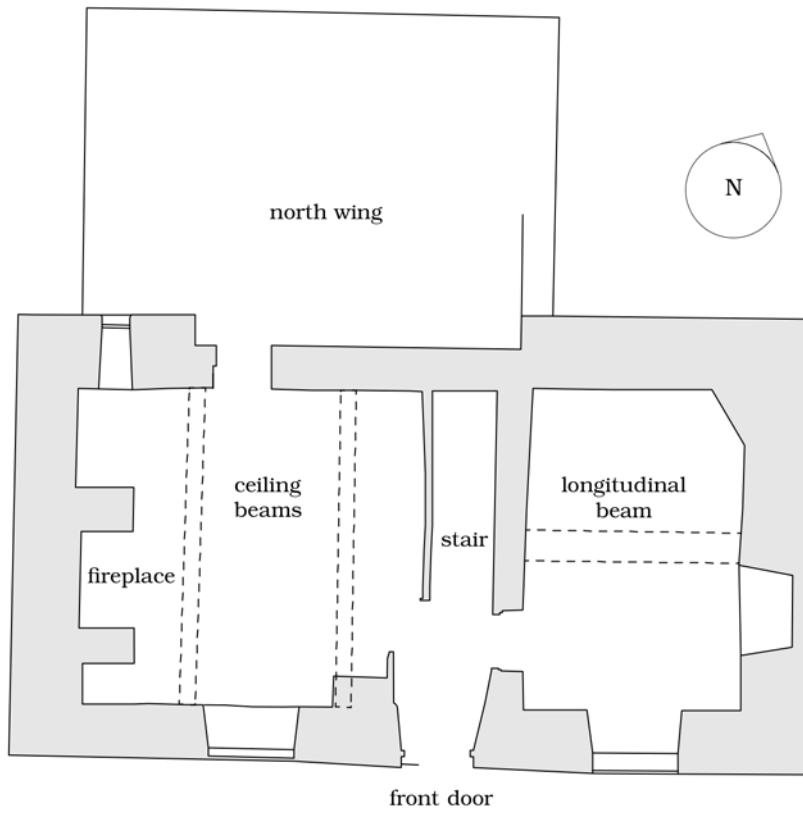
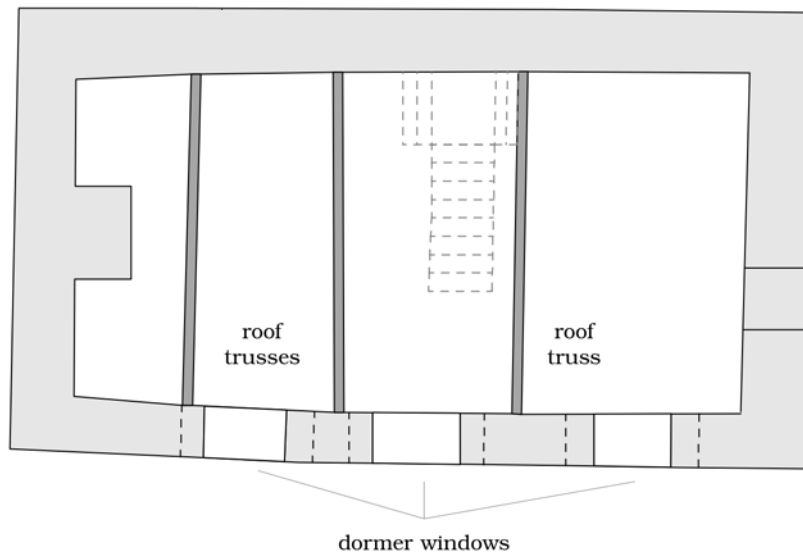
Penhwnllys Plas is a rectangular building, 10.5 m long, externally, and 6 m wide. The walls vary in thickness between 970 mm on the north side and 700 mm on the south side. The building is on one-and-a-half storeys with gabled dormers at the eaves on the south side. There is a single-storey wing with a slated pitched roof on the north side which is likely to be an early addition that has been altered considerably.

Alterations obscuring the original fabric during the modern period

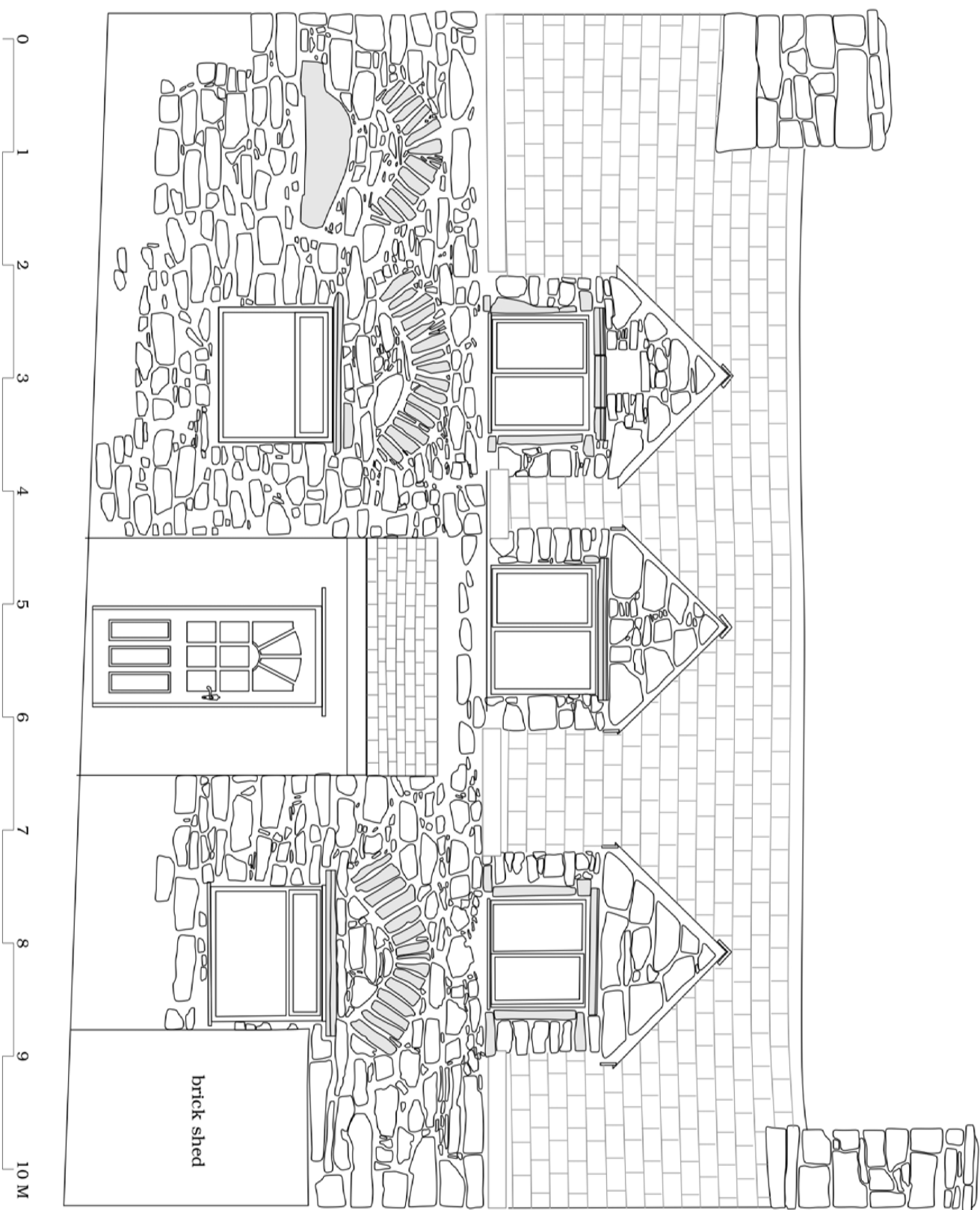
- In the modern period a single-storey lean to was added to the west gable of the house and the west wall of the north wing. The walls are of local uncoursed rubble with a corrugated roof.
- The front door is now obscured by the addition of a porch, and modern timber door. The walls are pebbledashed beneath a slate pent-roof.
- A brick shed, with a corrugated pent roof has been added against the south wall at the east end.
- There are several agricultural buildings on the east side of the house. A pent-roof shed, reaching from the eaves, stands in the angle between the north wall and the eastern side of the north wing. There is an animal house with a pitched roof, part slate, part corrugated attached to the east gable of the house. Other structures range across the north side.
- Internally, the north wing has been almost entirely revamped. The wing is accessed from the main house through a door on the north side, up two steps (245 mm height).
- The external door in the south wall enters into a very small lobby which gives direct access to a modern staircase to the first floor.
- In the 1930s the north wing carried a tall stone chimney stack on the north gable. This has now been replaced by a small, square, pebbledashed chimney.



Penhwnllys Plas from north-east showing north wing and accretion of agricultural buildings



Penhwnllys Plas ground and first floor plan
Scale: 1:100



Penhwnllys Plas south elevation

Scale: 1:50

Features

The Southern Elevation

- There are four openings on the south side ground floor. To the west there is a blocked opening, almost certainly a window, carrying a massive single stone lintel, chamfered on the flat underside.
- Adjacent, there is a large window which, until the 20th century, comprised three lights, moulded stone jambs and two moulded mullions beneath a hollow, cavetto style, moulding. The lintel below the moulding may have been removed.
- A very similar window is set between the door and the south east corner of the facade. Each of these windows on the ground floor are provided with a relieving arch of thin limestone slabs, voussoir style.
- The original door (950 mm wide) offset to the east, is obscured by the modern external porch. The doorway is splayed (1145 mm) internally.
- There are three gabled dormer windows on the first floor directly above the openings below. These are a stone built in limestone rubble with orange-brown gritstone forming the pitch of the gable. Parts of the jambs and lintels of the original windows have survived. They were shaped in sandstone and would seem to be identical to those on the ground floor. All of these window openings now carry modern wooden casements.

The east gable

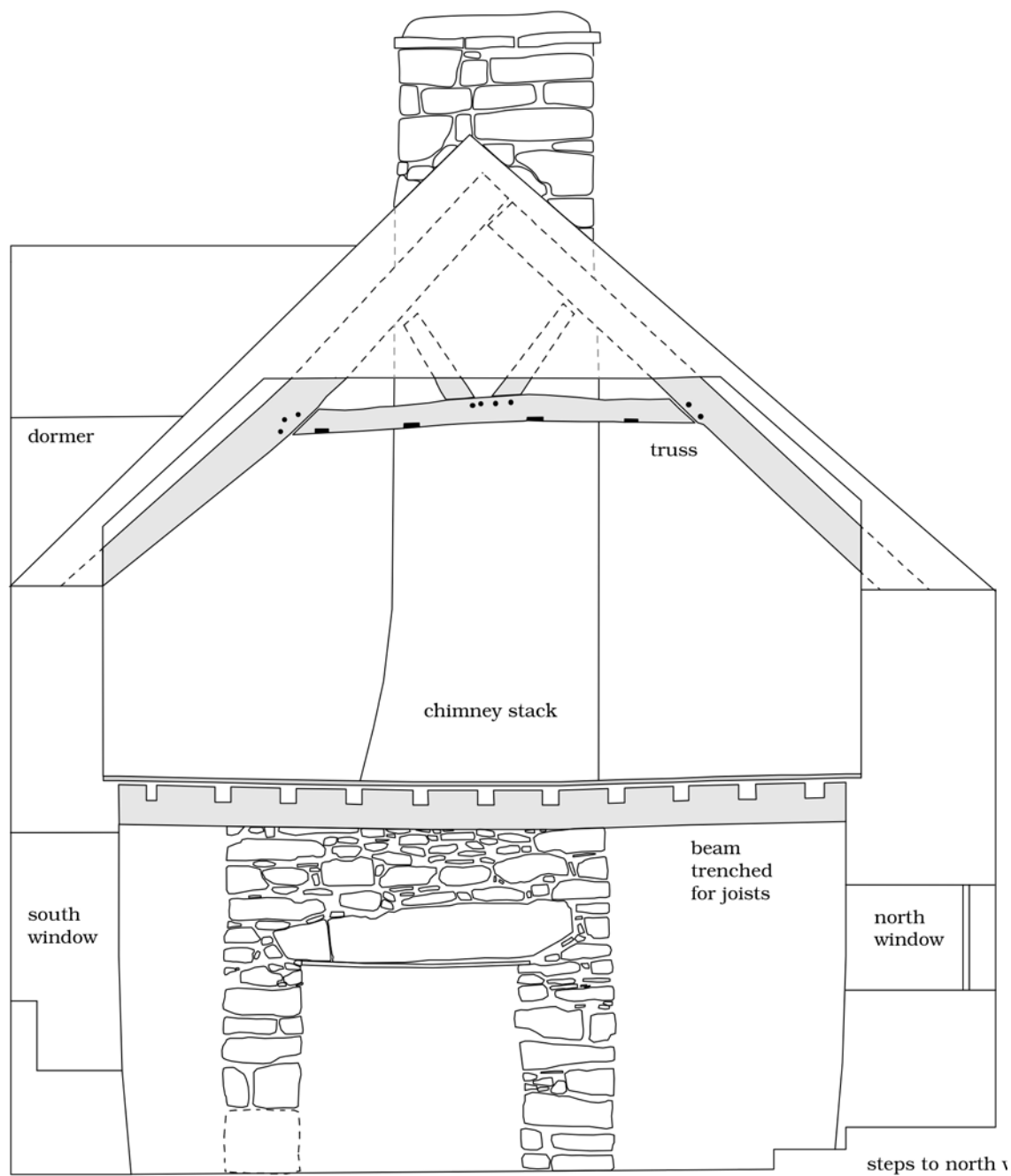
- There is a blocked window at ground floor level to the south side of the east gable. This, and another window, also blocked at first floor level have retained their original features, in similar style to those on the south facade. The ground floor window is in three lights. The first floor, in two lights.

Chimneys

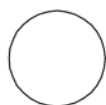
- There are two chimneys on the main house, one on each gable. They are stone built, set at the apex of the roof. The east chimney stack is contained within the thickness of the wall. The western stack projects internally from the west gable wall, on both floors, creating recesses between the chimney breast and the long walls. It is probable that one or other of the recesses on the ground floor accommodated a timber stair to the first floor. The blocked window on the south side, or the small window on the north side, towards the west end, could have lighted the stair. The fireplace on the ground floor was supported by a massive stone lintel.

The ground floor rooms and ceiling

- There are two lateral beams which span the 4.2 m of the main western room (4.2 m wide 4.64 m long). The beams are 202 mm/210 mm (variable) in width and 230 mm deep. The beams are chamfered with plain stops. They carry 11 joists in rows between the beams (1.82 m between the first, westernmost beam, and the second beam; 1.85 m from the second beam to the staircase wall). The joists are 100 mm (variable) in width and 84/90 mm in depth. The ceiling is 2.28 m above the floor in its slightly sagging central parts and 2.32 m at each side.
- At the east end there is a smaller room, 4.26 m wide and 2.85 m along its west east axis. The west wall of this room is now a relatively recent party wall between the eastern room and stair. It undoubtedly replaced either a lateral beam in this position or, a timber partition superimposed by a top rail, trenched for joists. From such a beam, or rail, a longitudinal beam sprang towards the east wall. The beam is now boxed and not visible and the ceiling is panelled with tongue and groove boards.
- A cupboard to the south of the east wall disguises an original window opening and its moulded stone details (as above)



0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 mm



Penhwnllys Plas cross section towards west
Scale: 1:40

A cross passage?

It is very likely that the present position of the staircase has superseded an original cross passage. One might expect a north door to have stood directly opposite the surviving south door. The passage would have defined the division between private rooms or storerooms to the east and the main room or ground floor 'hall' to the west. The position of the present division (the west wall of the east room) is commensurate with the spacing of the lateral beams in the main room and, as suggested above, a muntin-and-plank partition would probably have occupied that position. There might also have been a second partition, to the west, enclosing the passage, but this is perhaps, unlikely and entry to the main room was probably achieved directly from the passage. The possibility of identifying an opposing door has been lost as the north wall of the main room appears to have been rebuilt and reduced in width.

First floor

There are three trusses in the roof space, each one above the ceiling beams (or putative passage partition) on the ground floor. The trusses rest on top of the long walls. They are collar-beam types with raking struts from the collar to the upper parts of the principals and pegged at all joints. The principals are 200 mm wide (variable) and 130 mm thick. The collars and struts are about 145 mm wide. The base of the principals are 1 m to 1.14 m above the first floor at the walls. The underside of the collar is at 2.15 m above the centre of the floor boards. The upper part of the truss was not accessible as the first floor rooms were ceiled just above the collar. Sawn-off tenons in mortice holes at the base of the collar suggests that the ceiling at the east end was slightly lower at one time.

Details



First floor blocked original gable window



Middle dormer showing fragmentary jambs and cavetto moulding



window of main room, south side, with relieving arch



Lintel of blocked window, south side, west end, with relieving arch



Truss in upper east room



*Beam in main room, chamfer stop;
joists in beam sockets, chamfered
with run-out stops*

Appendices

RCAHMW, 1937

Cadw: Listed Buildings, 2005

RCAHMW

Llaniestyn Rural e(2). (Penhwnllys Plas, house (Pl. 112), 1m. N.E of the church, of two storeys, rectangular in plan, divided into two rooms on the ground floor by a partition. It was built probably in the 17th century and has modern restorations and additions. The front elevation has five original three-light rectangular windows, with chamfered jambs and mullions. The E.end has one blocked window of similar character.

Cadw Listed Buildings

Penhwnllys Plas

Grade II

259705 380719

5443

Listed, notwithstanding alterations, as a C17 farmhouse which retains many noteworthy features including some original mullioned windows and many interior features.

Two storey farmhouse with service wing to rear and single storey additions to either end. Built of roughly coursed rubble masonry; slate roof with gable dormers along main range and a flat roofed dormer in the service wing. Square gable stacks with capping, large stack to L; small rendered stack to service wing. Three window range with openings offset to R; modern doorway in rendered single pitch roofed porch. Windows are modern timber casements, the flanking ground floor windows have relieving arches over, 1st floor windows in gable dormers. At the R gable there are blocked windows which retain the original mullions.

Probably C17 with alterations and additions, including modern restorations. Recorded in the Tithe Apportionment of the parish, 1849, as a substantial holding of over 100 acres(4 hectares), owned by the Marquis of Anglesey and farmed by John Williams.

Community Llanddona [Llaniestyn parish]