

DYDDIO HEN DAI CYMREIG

DATING OLD WELSH HOUSES

PROSIECT DENDROCRONOLEG
GOGLEDD ORLLEWIN CYMRU



NORTH WEST WALES
DENDROCHRONOLOGY PROJECT

North West Wales Dendrochronology Project
DATING OLD WELSH HOUSES

Bodwrdda, Aberdaron, Gwynedd

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD



in partnership with



Adam Voelcker
MA (Cantab) Dip Arch
Pant Glas Uchaf
Pant Glas
Garndolbenmaen
Gwynedd LL51 9DQ

North West Wales Dendrochronology Project

Bodwrdda, Aberdaron

Introduction

This report contains the results of a survey undertaken to complement the dating of timbers at Bodwrdda, as part of the North West Wales Dendrochronology Project. The survey was undertaken on 27 January and 2 February 2011 by Adam Voelcker. Documentary research will be undertaken by volunteers to accompany this survey, and separate reports will be issued describing the results of the documentary survey and of the dendrochronology sampling.

Site particulars

Site address

Bodwrdda, Aberdaron, Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 8BL

NGR

SH 21883272

NPRN

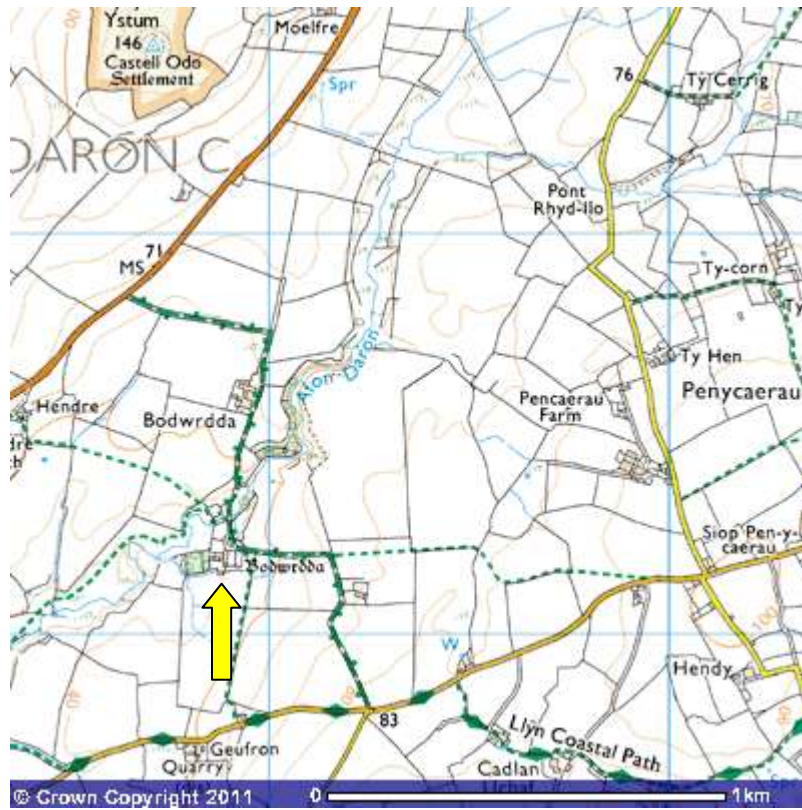
26063

Listing status

Grade II*

Methodology

The ground floor plan and cross-section AA are taken from the RCAHMW Inventory (Fig. 41). The attic and upper floor plans, and the long-section, have been derived from the RCAHMW drawings, but the present survey revealed discrepancies in the RCAHMW drawings (for instance, the west internal wall of the kitchen is a thick stone wall, not a thin partition). This and other changes have been made to the attached plans, but the drawings remain not entirely accurate and any historical interpretation should not rely on the drawings alone. The truss elevation and beam/joist details have been drawn by hand following measurements taken on site. Only one truss has been shown since they are all similar (T1 to T4).



Bodwrdda, Aberdaron

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE

The historical development of the house is unclear and it is obvious from the attached descriptions (from the Bodwrdda file at the RCAHMW, referred to by their catalogue numbers) that a number of experts have had differing views on the sequence of building. The listing description and the Pevsner entry are not referred to as these offer no original interpretations.

L Monroe (C425351) described the house as a stone block built in the first half of the fifteenth century, possibly with a north-west wing. He appeared not to differentiate between the western and eastern halves of the stone block. The remaining experts seem to agree that the original house was the western half of the main stone block, probably about 40 ft long internally to go by the four original trusses in the roof and the change in thickness of the south wall in line with truss T5. But whereas Peter Smith (C425345) and Colin Gresham (C425350) agreed that the original part was a fifteenth-century hall-house, with an open hall at the west and a solar at the east, C N Johns (C425346) thought the house must be later, probably early sixteenth century, and was built as a two-storey house with an upper hall. This is what the final published version in the Inventory states, though it does not dismiss the possibility that the house might have started as a single-storey building.

The final RCAHMW description states that the original house might have been extended eastwards when the brick wings were built in the early seventeenth century (all agree that the 1621 date must be treated with caution) in order to accommodate the wings. At the same time, the roof of the original house was raised about 3 ft and the trusses lifted. Gresham seemed to agree with this interpretation, though he disagreed with Radford's theory that the original house had been extended earlier (in the late sixteenth century, when the roof was raised and the floors inserted).

Peter Smith thought that the raising in height and the insertion of the upper floor had been carried out in the sixteenth century, then the original house was extended east and soon after the brick wings were added.

Any advance on these theories must be offered with caution, and I do not offer any - except to say that none of the above seem to have noticed the rather marked horizontal line at window-head level along the south elevation of the eastern extension. This suggests that this extension started lower, too, like the western half, and was then raised in height. If this line is significant and marks a later build above, it must surely suggest that the original house was extended eastwards at the lower height before both parts were raised and before the brick wings were added.

ROOF TRUSSES

For the purposes of this report, the trusses are numbered T1 to T8, with T1 to T5 in the main south (stone) block (T1 being at the west end), and T6 to T7 in the north west (brick) wing (T8 being at the north gable).

Ring-dating samples were taken in trusses T1 and T2.

Trusses T1 to T4 are of a similar type and age: of the typical arch-braced, collar-beam design, with plain raking struts, all of oak. The members are pegged together with oak dowels, the struts (less thick than the remainder) flush on the west face but set back on the east face. Carpenters' marks (small inscribed circles, about 40-50mm diam.) are just visible at the bottom of each strut (west side) and between the strut pegs in the collar, just on trusses T3 and T4. Other points to note are the scratch moulds on the west face of the struts to T1, and the cusped cut-outs in the underside of the principals of trusses T1 to T4, just above their bearings in the wall. The plain chamfer to the undersides of the truss continue into the cusps. The RCAHMW noted that these cusps occur in the trusses at Saethon (Llanfihangel Bachellaeth). Trusses T2 and T4 have rough partitions below, no doubt added later. In the lower part of the T2 partition are three panels of wattle and daub.

Truss T5 is much less substantial and plainer. It has no arched braces (and never did have) and its struts are missing. The quality and design of this truss suggest that the original house was only of five bays, and that the plainer type were used when the house was extended to the east.

Trusses T6 and T8 are located within the thickness of the partition and gable wall respectively, presumably to help distribute the point loads of the roof which the softish brickwork could not have done. For this reason, T7 has a wall-post below each of the principals' feet. The design of T7 is similar to that of T1 to T4, and the RCAHMW suggested this truss might have been a fifth original one, reused from the main block. However, although the design is similar, the scantling sizes are less and the number of pegs at each joint slightly differs, so this may in fact be a later truss, coeval with the brick wings and made to match the trusses in the main roof.

DATE INSCRIPTION

A note is attached here of a date inscription that the owners found carved into the oak bressummer above the lateral fireplace in the ground floor west room, when they were carrying out work in the fireplace. They photographed the date but unfortunately did not remove all the previous plaster before doing so, with the result that only two full figures were exposed ('53'), plus, just preceding the '5', the top corner of a third figure which looks like a '7' yet would be surprising if it was, since 1753 would not make sense for the date of the fireplace. It is hoped that the new plaster might be removed at some time in the future, and the entire date inscription uncovered and photographed, even if the plaster is reinstated afterwards.

References

Cadw listing description

Record No. 4209

RCAHMW Caernarvonshire Inventory

Vol. 3 (West). Entry no.1461 (pp. 3-5) (inspected 1955)
(see Appendix)

Sources of information at the NMRW, Aberystwyth

Cat. no. C425345 typed notes, probably by Peter Smith (no date, 1955?)

Cat. no. C425346 hand-written notes by C N Johns, 1961

Cat. no. C425350 typed notes by C Gresham (no date)

Cat. no. C425352 hand-written notes by L Monroe (no date)

(see Appendix)

Houses of the Welsh Countryside (Peter Smith)

included in text, in connection with the brick wings (p. 275)

included on maps 28 (Regional house type A), 34 (load-bearing facing brickwork before 1700), 37 (post-and-panel partitions), 43 (ornate open roof) and 49 (date inscription 1600-1649)

The Buildings of Wales: Gwynedd (Haslam, Orbach & Voelcker)

pp. 228-9



Plate 1 North elevation



Plate 2 South elevation



Plate 3 East gable



Plate 4 West gable



Plate 5 Truss T1, from west



Plate 6 Cusp at foot of Truss T1 (north end)



Plate 7 Truss T2 and partition, from west



Plate 8 Truss T4, from east



Plate 9 Truss T3, from west, showing pegged joint



Plate 10 Truss T3, showing carpenter's marks on west face



Plate 11 Truss T7, looking north (in north-west wing)



Plate 12 Truss T6, looking south, between north-west wing and original part



Plate 13 Post-and-panel partition at west end of ground floor



Plate 14 Ditto

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED ON CD

- 001 S elevation, W half
- 002 S elevation, W end
- 003 S elevation, W/centre
- 004 W gable
- 005 Truss T8 (north-west wing)
- 006 T7 (ditto)
- 007 T7 (ditto)
- 008 T6, from N (ditto)
- 009 T7, from N (ditto)
- 010 T6 in partition (ditto)
- 011 wall-plates to T1
- 012 ditto
- 013 T1 from W
- 014 T2 from W
- 015 T1 from E
- 016 T2 from E
- 017 ditto
- 018 T3 from E
- 019 ditto
- 020 T4 from E
- 021 ditto
- 022 T2 partition, from W
- 023 T2
- 024 cusp in north foot of T1
- 025 ditto
- 026 S elevation, centre
- 027 T1, showing scratch mouldings on raking struts
- 028 pegged joints in T3, S end/W face
- 029 T7, W face
- 030 carpenter's marks on W face of T3
- 031 ditto
- 032 partition in ground floor W room
- 033 ditto
- 034 ditto
- 035 N elevation
- 036 N elevation, from E
- 037 E gable
- 038 S elevation, complete
- 039 window detail, S elevation
- 040 ditto
- 041 N elevation
- 042 NW wing
- 043 blocked fireplace in ground floor W room
- 044 panelling in ground floor NW wing
- 045 ditto
- 046 stairs
- 047 ditto
- 048 T7, from S