

# North West Wales Dendrochronology Project Pen-y-bryn, Abergwyngregyn, Gwynedd



**EAS Client Report 2010/02  
February 2010**

**Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd  
Unit 2 Glanypwll Workshops  
Ffordd Tanygrisiau  
Blaenau Ffestiniog  
Gwynedd  
LL41 3NW**



**Registered in England N° 286978**

A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

**North West Wales Dendrochronology Project  
Pen-y-bryn, Abergwyngregyn,  
Gwynedd**

**EAS Client Report 2010/02**

**Commissioned by  
Margaret Dunn  
For  
North West Wales Dendrochronology Project**

**February 2010**

**By  
I.P. Brooks and K. Laws**

**Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd  
Unit 2 Glanypwll Workshops  
Ffordd Tanygrisiau  
Blaenau Ffestiniog  
Gwynedd  
LL41 3NW**

**Registered in England N° 286978**

A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with  
The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

# Content

**Grid Reference**

**NPRN Number**

**Status**

**Introduction**

**Methodology**

**Survey Report**

**Dendrochronology Sampling**

**Conclusions**

**Acknowledgements**

**References**

**Appendix 1: Sources**

## **List of Figures**

**Figure 1: Location**

**Figure 2: Extract of the 1914 Ordnance Survey Caernarvonshire VII 7 Map**

**Figure 3: Plan of Ground Floor**

**Figure 4: Plan of Undercroft**

**Figure 5: Plan of First Floor**

**Figure 6: Plan of Second Floor**

**Figure 7: Plan of Third Floor**

**Figure 8: Tower and Central Range Trusses**

**Figure 9: North Eastern Range Trusses**

**Figure 10: Door in the Cellar/Undercroft.**

**Figure 11: Sketch Profiles Through the Main Ranges**

## **List of Plates**

**Plate 1: Front elevation**

**Plate 2: Front elevation of tower**

- Plate 3: The tower, looking north east**
- Plate 4: Central range, south west end, looking SE**
- Plate 5: Central range and porch, looking SE**
- Plate 6: Central range, north east end, looking SE**
- Plate 7: The porch looking NE**
- Plate 8: The porch, looking SW**
- Plate 9: Possible blocked opening in SW corner of central range, looking NE**
- Plate 10: Blocked opening in rear of central range, looking NW (blocked timber socket ringed)**
- Plate 11: Possible blocked opening at northern end of the rear wall of the central range, looking NW**
- Plate 12: North east range, looking SE**
- Plate 13: North east range, looking SW**
- Plate 14: North east range, looking NW**
- Plate 15: Voussoir head to rear window in the north eastern range, looking west**
- Plate 16: Voussoir head to doorway between north eastern range and north wing**
- Plate 17: Door in gable end of north eastern range, looking SW**
- Plate 18: South wing looking NE**
- Plate 19: South wing looking NW**
- Plate 20: South wing looking SW**
- Plate 21: Arch headed window in south wing, looking NE**
- Plate 22: Arch headed window in south wing, looking SW**
- Plate 24: North wing, looking SW**
- Plate 25: North wing looking NW**
- Plate 26: North wing, looking north**
- Plate 27: Curved outer wall of the tower in cupboard in central range, looking SW**
- Plate 28: Angled passage between south wing and central range on first floor, looking NW**
- Plate 29: Stone lines recess on first floor of tower, looking west**
- Plate 30: Stone lined recess on first floor of tower, looking down**
- Plate 31: Sooting in stone lined channel on first floor tower room, looking up**
- Plate 32: Segmented ring beam supporting the tower roof structure**
- Plate 33: Tower roof structure**
- Plate 34: Tower roof structure, looking up**
- Plate 35: Central range fireplace, looking SE**
- Plate 36: Staircase, looking north**
- Plate 37: Brick and timber wall in staircase, between ground and first floors**
- Plate 38: Brick and timber wall in staircase, second floor landing**

- Plate 39: Relationship between the foot of Truss 5 and the tie beam, looking north**
- Plate 40: Tie beam on first floor of central range**
- Plate 41: Foot of Truss 6, looking SW**
- Plate 42: Foot of Truss 5, looking NE**
- Plate 43: Truss 4, looking NE**
- Plate 44: Stone stairs between the cellar and the tower**
- Plate 45: Remains of staircase in cellar, looking NE**
- Plate 46: Niche in cellar wall**
- Plate 47: Niche in cellar wall**
- Plate 48: Niche in cellar wall**
- Plate 49: Niche in cellar wall**
- Plate 50: Niche in cellar wall**
- Plate 51: Door in cellar, looking NW**
- Plate 52: Cobbled floor in cellar**
- Plate 54: Truss 2, looking SW**
- Plate 55: Carpenters marks on Truss 2, looking SW**
- Plate 56: The roof structure for the south wing, looking SE**
- Plate 57: Heightening of the south western wall of the South Wing, looking SW**
- Plate 58: Niche in south western wall of the south wing, looking SW**

# North West Wales Dendrochronology Project

## Pen-y-bryn, Abergwyngregyn

SH 65824 72739

NPRN 32

**Status: Grade II\* Listed**

### ***Introduction***

This report details the recording of the house Pen-y-bryn, Abergwyngregyn undertaken to compliment both the dendrochronological sampling, undertaken by Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, and the documentary study undertaken by volunteers for the North Wales Dendrochronology Project. The fieldwork took place between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

### ***Methodology***

The ground floor plan produced by A.J Parkinson in 1989 for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales was used as the base for the study of this house. It was slightly modified to include modifications made after the survey. The first, second and third storey plans were made by direct measurement. The drawings of the timberwork were carried out by direct measurement at a scale of 1:20. Photographs were taken with a Nikon D80 digital SLR camera at a resolution of 10.2 mega pixels. Where practical all the photographs included a metric scale.

### ***Survey Report***

Pen-y-bryn lies approximately 235 m north west of the village of Abergwyngregyn, Gwynedd at a height of approximately 50 m OD. The house is aligned north east to south west and occupies a platform cut into the hillside. In this position it overlooks, not only the Afon Aber, but also the Menai Straits and its coastal plain (Figure 1). Pen-y-bryn is one of a complex of associated buildings including "Pen-y-bryn cottage" immediately to the north east and Pen-y-bryn barn to the north (Figure 2)

The house has a long history of study with initial photographic survey, by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, as early as 1949, although Parkinson revised earlier description and interpretations of the house between 1989 and 1993. The house was listed in 1952 and this was amended in 2000. The house is also described by Haslam *et al* (2009, 233). A summary of key descriptions is given in Appendix 1.

Pen-y-bryn consists of a main range aligned approximately north east to south west with a circular tower on its south western end (Figure 3). The range can be further divided into the north eastern range and central range based on changes in structure and roof line (Plates 1 and 2). There are two wings to the rear of the building; a larger southern wing and a smaller northern wing.

The tower (Plates 3 and 4) is a four storey structure, roughly circular in plan with a conical (slightly domed) slate roof. Two chimney stacks protrude from the roof. The north east chimney serves the fireplaces in the south west gable end of the central range. The south western chimney is no longer active, but is presumably associated with the brick flue recorded on the second floor of the tower (see later). The front face is slightly flattened, presumably with the addition of the windows on this side of the structure. Each of the windows is slightly different. Those on the ground and first floors have four paned windows with mullions and transoms, although of different designs. The second floor has a six paned window with mullions and a transom, whilst the third floor window is much larger with a twelve pane window wrapped around the front face of the tower. The ground, second and third floor windows are in sandstone, whilst the first floor window is in wood.

The central range (Plate 5, 6 and 7) is a two storey building under a slate roof with a stone coping on the north eastern end of the range. A single “gable end” chimney is at the north eastern end, whilst the fireplace in the south western end of the range is served by a chimney on the tower. There is a porch attached centrally to the front of the range (Plates 6, 8 and 9). This is a two storey structure with a slate roof and stone coping on the gable end. It is approached by a flight of four stone steps and has a pilastered round-headed entrance arch in sandstone. This feature and the windows in the gable end and flanks of the porch appear to be later additions, possibly converting an oriel or stair turret into the porch. The gable window is a two pane window with stone mullion under a flat hoodmould. The windows in the flanking walls are two pane windows with stone transoms. The ground floor windows of the central range to the front of the property have similar sized opening, although the south western window is a twelve pane, wooden sash window, whilst the north eastern window is a six pane window with stone mullions and a transom. The windows to the first floor on the front of the building are gabled dormers containing four pane, stone mullioned and transom windows. At ground level there are also two simple rectangular slot windows giving some light to the cellar or under-croft. To the rear of the tower the gable end of the central range is partly exposed. Although obscured by render it is possible that there is a blocked opening in this corner of the range (Plate 10). A second, clearer, blocked opening can be seen in the rear wall of the central range, adjacent to the south wall of the south wing (Plate 11). This appears to be a blocked doorway, although the base of this feature is obscured by a later revetment at the base of the wall at this point. Also near to this blocking is a rectangular hole, approximately 250 mm wide and 350 mm high, at a height of

approximately 2.5 m above the ground. It is filled with a block of slate and possibly marks the position of a socket for a timber structure keyed into the house wall at this point. Above the possible blocked doorway is a twelve paned, wooden sashed window with slate sill and lintel. Similar windows are in the north east, rear wall of the range as is a possible wide blocked opening adjacent to the southern wall of the northern wing (Plate 12)

The north eastern range (Plates 13, 14, 15) is a two storey construction with a slate roof with slate coping. There is a single chimney on the north eastern gable end. The ground floor windows are distinguished by having shallow segmental arched heads with long rubble voussoirs (Plates 16 and 17). The south western front window (behind the creeper on Plate 13) occupies an earlier opening which was probably a door. Together with the door linking this range to the northern wing, it is possible that these opposed doorways mark the position of a possible cross passage of an earlier structure. Only the front of the first floor has windows, these are twelve pane, wooden sash windows. There is, currently, a single door in the gable end (Plate 18) with a massive stone lintel.

The southern wing runs at right angles to the central range and is a two storey construction under a slate roof (Plates 19, 20, 21). There is no chimney on this wing, although there is a fireplace and chimney breast in the ground floor kitchen which should have a chimney on the gable end. There is slight evidence on the exterior walls that the walls have been heightened and it is possible that the chimney was lost at this point. The south west and south east faces of the wing also have a later revetment along their bases. The ground floor windows are relatively modern replacements. There is however, a small window with stone semicircular arched head and monolithic jambs (Plate 22). Whilst not clear from the outside, internally this appears to have been inserted at a later date (Plate 23). The first floor window in the north eastern wall is a wooden fifteen pane sash window. The gable end of the south wing has a blocked opening which appears to be a blocked doorway, its position, however, is problematical. The opening, set at first floor level, would appear to be into the chimney breast in the gable end of the south wing (Plate 20). There is also some suggestion that there was a structure below this opening, with a line of protruding stones in the gable end.

The northern wing is set at right angles to the north eastern range, is single storey, lean-to structure with a slate roof (Plate 24, 25, 26) and is clearly a late addition. Whilst the existing door way is in the south western wall there is a blocked opening in the south eastern wall of the wing. This doorway must predate the corner fireplace in this wing.

The relationships between the various elements which make up Pen-y-bryn can be seen at a limited number of key points within the house. The lower floors of the tower can be demonstrated to be earlier than the central range in a cupboard in the south west corner of the central range. Here the outer, curving, wall of the



tower can be seen (Plate 27) extending the line of the tower wall through the structure of the central range. The full curve of the tower wall, however, has been cut suggesting that it predates the construction of the central range. Also within this cupboard, the other lateral wall curves away from the line of the wall and the back wall appears to have straight joints. Linking this with the possible evidence for a blocking on the outside wall (see above) it seems likely that there was a doorway in this corner of the central range.

The relationship between the north eastern and central ranges is evident in the doorway between the north eastern range and the north wing. Here the door head (Plate 17) can be seen to extend into the gable wall of the central range suggesting that the north eastern range is earlier. It is assumed that the two wings are later than the main range of the house. The south wing, however, has a curious angled passage between its first floor room and the central range (Plate 28). Whilst this may be to allow one of the tie beams of the central range to rest on a wall rather than above a doorway, it hints at a more complex relationship. The northern wing is clearly a late addition.

Internally the tower has a single rectangular room on each floor, which for the first three floors are accessed from the central range. Only the top (third) floor is accessed from within the tower by a modern, wooden, straight, flight of stairs. On the first floor there is a stone lined recess in the south west wall (Plate 29) which can be seen to extend both above and below the current extent of the first floor (Plate 30). It is approximately 1.75 m wide and 0.59 m deep and has well dressed stones flanking the opening to a height of approximately 1.25 m. The stone lined recess contains a brick flue, presumably related to the south western chimney on the top of the tower. It is possible that the stone lined channel is an earlier, larger flue. There is considerable sooting in the channel (Plate 31), however, this may have escaped from the brick flue. The roof structure of the tower was replaced in 1993 ([http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw\\_eng.php?id=3651](http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw_eng.php?id=3651)), however some of the original timbers were re-used. Two trusses set roughly at right angles form the main structural timber. Each of these has a collar (Figure 8). Whilst the two collars are not jointed to each other the upper collar is trenched to allow the lower collar to pass unimpeded. The common rafters sit on a segmented ring beam (Plate 32) sitting on top of the stone wall of the tower. The head of the rafters (both principal and common) meet at an upright post which passes through the roof structure (Plate 33 and 34) and becomes the finial on top of the roof

On the ground floor the central range has a large fireplace with a wooden bressumer on what would be its north eastern gable wall (Plate 35). Adjacent to this is the main staircase with massive moulded and swept handrail, turned balusters to lower flight, and double-square newels with capping (Plate 36). Room for the staircase was provided by replacing the dividing wall between the Central and North Eastern ranges with a thin, timber and brick wall (Plate 37 and

38). This wall was constructed of a timber frame with rails and studs with some diagonal bracing filled with hand made brick of eighteenth century type. There are three tie beams visible on the first floor, the two outer of which have the feet of trusses 5 and 6 adjacent (Figure 5, Plate 39). The exposed tie beams have been roughened to take a plaster coat, however they were originally chamfered with straight stops (Plate 40). The trusses for this range are largely hidden as they are used as the dividing walls between the rooms on the second floor. The bases of the trusses are exposed in the attic space between the walls of the second floor rooms and the roof structures (Plates 41 and 42), unfortunately any collars or other reinforcement are hidden. Truss 4 survives only on the north western side of the chimney breast. A raking strut runs from the principal rafter to the chimney breast and two purlins are trenched into the principal rafter (Figure 8, Plate 43).

Below the front section of the central range is the cellar or undercroft (Figure 4). Access is via a flight of stone steps from beneath the tower (Plate 44). This relationship would suggest that the cellar predates the central range. There has been a link between the central range and the cellar with the remains of a dog-legged staircase (Plate 45) which would have exited in the space now occupied by the main staircase. There are a series of small niches cut into the cellar wall (Plates 46 – 50), one of which extends behind the dividing wall of the cellar (Plate 47) possibly suggesting this wall was from a secondary phase. To the north east of the dividing wall is an area of cobbling (Plate 52) which leads to a door frame and head of late sixteenth or early seventeenth century type (Alcock and Hall 1994, 20) (Figure 10, Plate 51). The door frame and head would appear to be of relatively high quality work, possibly suggesting that they have been moved from elsewhere in the house. The doorway leads to a short passage below the current porch; some work has broken through the end wall of the passage revealing the northern wall of the passage extending beyond its current extent.

The north eastern range has a large fireplace at the north eastern end (Plate 53) with a wooden bressumer and recesses on each side suggesting the possible locations of ovens. Truss 1 is disrupted by the chimney breast (Figure 9, Plate 52) with only a short length of principal rafter surviving on the north western side running between the eaves and the chimney breast. The purlins sit on the principal rafter and are supported by cleats both on this truss and Truss 2. Truss 2 is the most exposed truss in the house. It has a slightly curved collar with dove tailed lap joints linking it to the principal rafters (Figure 9.2, Plate 54). At the north eastern end of the collar is a clear carpenter's mark of "VIII" in chisel mark. There is also the same number in scratch marks slightly above the chisel marks in larger figures (Plate 55). Below the collar are two mortice holes in the principal rafters suggesting the position of a lower collar, now lost. The principal rafters are crossed, with a notched joint, to house the ridge purlin.

The south wing has a modern replacement roof structure (Plate 56) with a king post and racking struts. On the first floor the plaster has been removed from the south western wall, revealing the heightening of the wing observed on the outside wall (Plate 57). The removal of the plaster also revealed a niche cut into the wall (Plate 58).

The north wing was little more than a lean-to structure but contained the vent for a stove, or corner fireplace, in its south eastern corner.

### ***Dendrochronology Sampling***

A total of ten samples were taken, largely from principal rafters, although two tie beams and a purlin were also sampled. One of the samples was from the re-used timbers in the roof structure of the tower.

### ***Conclusions***

Pen-y-bryn clearly has a long and complex history which is not entirely clear. It is likely that the lower floors of the tower and the cellar are the earliest features of the house; however, any physical relationship between the north eastern wing and the tower has been lost by the insertion of the central range. It is clear, however that the central range is later than both the tower and the north eastern range. The north eastern range would appear to have had a cross passage and it was immediately to the south west of this feature that the central range was inserted. It is also possible that the fireplace and chimney in the north eastern range was added to an existing hall house.

It is likely that the south wing is later than the central range, although the first floor doorway between these two elements leaves some grounds for doubt as does the presence of the niche and the possibly re-used pointed window. The North Wing is clearly a late addition and is probably nineteenth century in date.

The main staircase appears to be a relatively late insertion as the access to the cellar also occupied the same space. It is possible that the current porch was originally an oriel or stair tower which has been modified.

### ***Acknowledgments***

The recording of this building was commissioned by Margaret Dunn for the North Wales Dendrochronology Project and she also organised access to the building. The forbearance of the owners during the recording of the house is gratefully acknowledged.

## **References**

Alcock, N.W. and Hall, L 1994 *Fixture and fittings in dated houses 1567 – 1763*. CBA Practical Handbook in Archaeology No.11.

Haslam, R., Orbach, J. and Voelcker, A. 2009 *The Buildings of Wales. Gwynedd. Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth*. Yale University Press. 264

Parkinson, A.J. 1989 Pen-y-bryn Additional notes. Detailed notes for the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales NA/CA/89/118 (i)

<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/32/details/PEN-Y-BRYN%2C+ABER/>

[http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw\\_eng.php?id=3651](http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw_eng.php?id=3651)



Plate 1: Front elevation



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 2: Rear elevation



Plate 3: Front elevation of tower



Plate 4: The tower, looking north east



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).



Plate 5: Central range, south west end, looking SE



Plate 6: Central range and porch, looking SE



Plate 7: Central range, north east end, looking SE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 8: The porch looking NE



Plate 9: The porch, looking SW



Plate 10: Possible blocked opening in SW corner of central range, looking NE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 11: Blocked opening in rear of central range, looking NW (blocked timber socket ringed)



Plate 12: Possible blocked opening at northern end of the rear wall of the central range, looking NW



Plate 13: North east range, looking SE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 14: North east range, looking SW



Plate 15: North east range, looking NW



Plate 16: Voussoir head to rear window in the north eastern range, looking west



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).



Plate 17: Voussoir head to doorway between north eastern range and north wing



Plate 18: Door in gable end of north eastern range, looking SW



Plate 19: South wing looking NE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 20: South wing looking NW



Plate 21: South wing looking SW



Plate 22: Arch headed window in south wing, looking NE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 23: Arch headed window in south wing, looking SW



Plate 24: North wing, looking SW



Plate 25: North wing looking NW



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 26: North wing, looking north



Plate 27: Curved outer wall of the tower in cupboard in central range, looking SW



Plate 28: Angled passage between south wing and central range on first floor, looking NW



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).



Plate 29: Stone lines recess on first floor of tower, looking west



Plate 30: Stone lined recess on first floor of tower, looking down



Plate 31: Sooting in stone lined channel on first floor tower room, looking up



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 32: Segmented ring beam supporting the tower roof structure



Plate 33: Tower roof structure

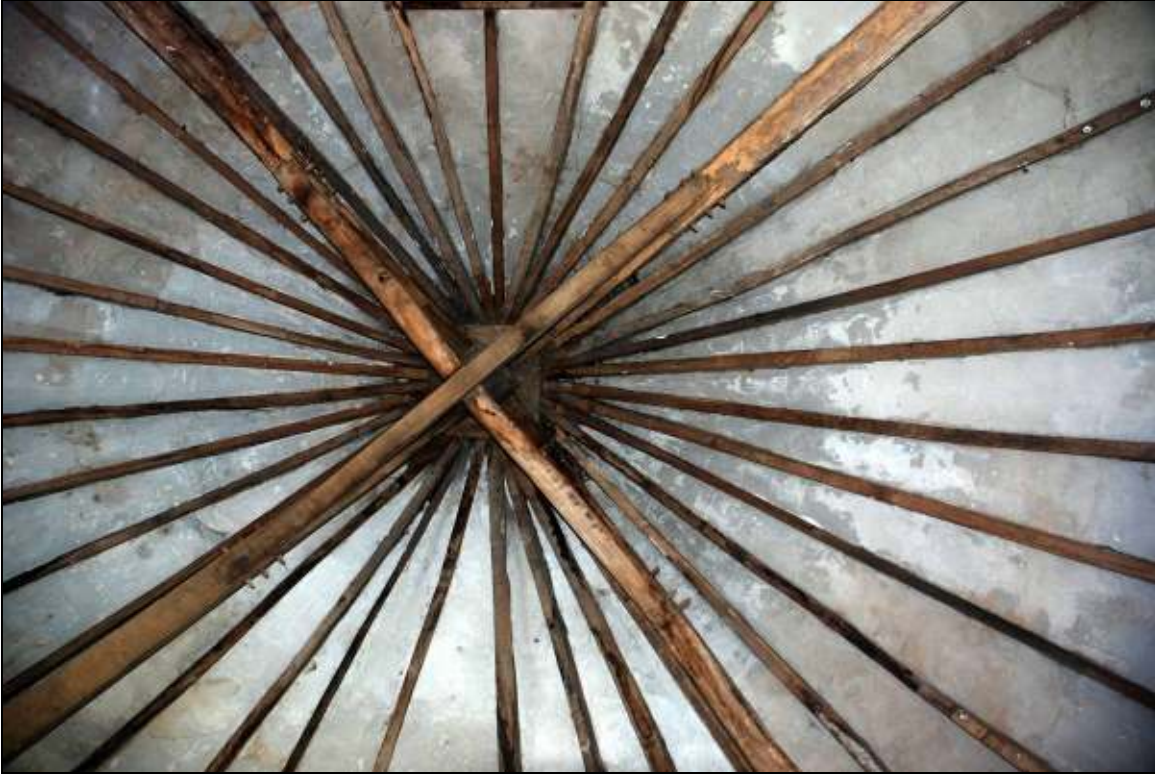


Plate 34: Tower roof structure, looking up



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 35: Central range fireplace, looking SE



Plate 36: Staircase, looking north



Plate 37: Brick and timber wall in staircase, between ground and first floors



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 38: Brick and timber wall in staircase, second floor landing



Plate 39: Relationship between the foot of Truss 5 and the tie beam, looking north



Plate 40: Tie beam on first floor of central range



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).



Plate 41: Foot of Truss 6, looking SW



Plate 42: Foot of Truss 5, looking NE



Plate 43: Truss 4, looking NE



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 44: Stone stairs between the cellar and the tower



Plate 45: Remains of staircase in cellar, looking NE



Plate 46: Niche in cellar wall



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 47: Niche in cellar wall



Plate 48: Niche in cellar wall



Plate 49: Niche in cellar wall



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 50: Niche in cellar wall



Plate 51: Door in cellar, looking NW



Plate 52: Cobbled floor in cellar



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).



Plate 53: Fireplace in north eastern range, looking NE



Plate 54: Truss 1, looking NE



Plate 54: Truss 2, looking SW



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 55: Carpenters marks on Truss 2, looking SW



Plate 56: The roof structure for the south wing, looking SE



Plate 57: Heightening of the south western wall of the south wing, looking SW



A report commissioned by The North West Wales Dendrochronology Project in partnership with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW).

Plate 58: Niche in south western wall of the south wing, looking SW

## **Appendix 1: Sources**

[http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw\\_eng.php?id=3651](http://jura.rcahms.gov.uk/cadw/cadw_eng.php?id=3651)

### **Pen-y-bryn**

Street Name and Number: ,

**Listed Building Reference:** 3651

**Grade:** II\*

**Date Listed:** 22/02/1952

**Date Amended:** 07/03/2000

**Co-ordinates:** 265824,372739

**Locality:** Abergwyngregyn

**Community:** Aber

**Council:** Gwynedd

**National Park:** Yes

### **Location**

Situated on rising ground above the A 55 on the north-east side of the Afon Aber to the east of the village.

### **History**

Pen-y-bryn was crown property until 1553 when it was purchased by the Thomas family, initially through the Earl of Pembroke, in an arrangement which was not regularised until 1610. Although the building has been the subject of varying interpretations, it appears that the substantial, roughly circular tower at the west end of the house is mostly medieval and the east wing is mid-C16. The main range of 3 regular bays was built c1600, probably to mark the formalisation of the Thomas family's ownership, and the top stage of the tower added in the late C17. Rear (south) range added in early C18 and small C19 block at back of east wing. Re-slating of the tower roof in 1993 showed that the structure may have been designed for a lead roof but that this was never put in place; the existing slates date from 1875 (date scratched on one slate and on the plaster torching).

### **Interior**

Inspection not permitted at time of Survey, but said to retain much of its early plan-form and several features of interest. Dog-leg oak staircase in north-east corner of main range has massive moulded and swept handrail, turned balusters to lower flight, and double-square newels with capping. The walls of the tower are square internally, probably as a result of the original walls having been cut back and refaced. First floor of early C18 extension has bolection moulded panelling with cornice.

### **Exterior**

Gentry house. Main 2-storey range, aligned roughly east-west and facing north, with a 4-storey circular tower on west and has flush, very slightly lower wing to east; cellars. Very roughly coursed rubblestone with buttered pointing to main

and east ranges, rendered to tower, comprising 2 layers, the original a plain clay and plaster render laid directly onto the stonework, overlain by a later roughcast render, which begins above present ground-floor level; slate roofs, graded to main range and tower, with coped verges to gable ends and pendant finial to conical roof of tower. Main range in 3 symmetrical bays has central 2-storey gabled porch (probably formed after 1810 from a former oriel or stair turret) approached by shallow straight flight of steps with low retaining walls; pilastered round-headed entrance arch with keystone and double nail-studded plank doors surmounted by 2-light mullion window with dripstone; narrow rectangular windows with transoms to returns. Gabled dormers with cross-windows breaking eaves on either side of porch with 3-light mullioned and transomed window on lower left and 12-paned sash in moulded stone surround to lower right; square integral end stack on left. Tower has ovolo-moulded cross-window in cavetto-moulded surround on ground floor, a smaller timber cross-window on first floor, a 3-light ovolo-moulded mullioned and transomed window on the second floor and on the fourth floor a large canted window made up of 3 cross-window units; all save the outer lights of the canted window with leaded latticed lights as in the main range; integral end stacks terminate in stone shafts on east and west of tower. East range has two 12-paned sashes on first floor and 12-paned sashes of considerably reduced proportions directly below; substantial integral end stack to left. South range has a small probably C16 arch-headed window and a blocked first-floor doorway in gable end.

### **Reason for Listing**

Included at II\* as a well-preserved early C17 gentry house with earlier origins. The unusual late medieval circular tower is a particularly distinctive feature of the house. Scheduled Ancient Monument (218).

### **References**

H Hughes & H L North, *The Old Churches of Snowdonia* (1984 edn.), pp154-5; RCAHMW, *Caernarvonshire*, 1 (1956), pp3-4 (4); P Smith, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* (1975), p438; Information from NMR, Aberystwyth, PRN 16707, including 1989 & 1993 field notes

**Description by A.J. Parkinson made in 1989 for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales (NA/CA/89/118(i))**

Re-examination of the house suggests that the Inventory interpretation may need revision.

Additional notes:

- 1 The dressings of the mullioned and transomed windows to the N appear to be of fine-grained sandstone. The eaves moulding of the central block is missing above the sash windows in the S elevation.
2. The tower windows vary slightly. The second floor windows have ovolo mouldings to the outside and chamfer to the inside, but on very wide mullions and transom, while in the third floor the moulding is similar but on much slenderer mullions, and the external ovolo moulding terminates as a curved run-out stop on the sill. The walling of the tower is of much smaller rubble than the house: it was always limewashed, and is partly slate-hung below the present pebble-dash render.
3. The W window of the N facade of the E wing was formerly a doorway: it has a shallow segmental arched head with long rubble voussoirs. The two openings in the S wall of the E wing (one a window, one a doorway) have similar heads. The attached lean-to structure converted into a small ?kitchen by the addition of a cross-corner fireplace) seems to have had an original doorway in the S wall, and. may therefore have been a porch.
4. The S wing is a problem. The masonry contains a high proportion of metamorphic—granite (ex inf. G. St. Paul), the walls are relatively thin, and the windows have slate sills and lintels. The roof level has been raised, and there is a blocked opening in the N gable at first floor level - possibly a doorway from the bank behind, or a blocked flue. In the W wall is a blocked. first floor window (its presence observed in Inv. account), which has a semicircular arched head and monolithic jambs, all of sandstone and with a rough and skimpy ovolo moulding which might have been cut *in situ*. (Could this have been moved from the facade and reset as a 'feature?').
5. The ground floor of the interior has had some of the modern partitions removed. The wide fireplace in the E gable of the E wing has a wooden bressummer, possibly recut, and minor flues contrived at each side suggesting that there might have been two ovens. The fireplace in the E room of the main block has had. an ornamental Victorian renaissance wooden surround added. The W room has a Victorian marble fireplace of classical design; the adjacent cupboard remains (the original splay being



- angled to the S), and the recess in the S wail (probably never a window) has a shallow arched head.
6. From the ground floor of the tower steps lead down to the cellar: a straight joint at the W face of the wall of the house suggests that the steps were built against the house gable. The awkward position of the steps in relation to the angled doorway from the house into the ground floor of the tower suggests that there may never have been direct communication from the house into the tower at this level (was the ground floor originally for storage?): the doorway may therefore be contemporary with the 18th-19th decoration of the W room. The cellar has old joists (one reused from a wattle-and-daub partition) and rough flag floors. There are slit vents to the N, the tops visible from the outside, and lamp recesses in the wall. The cellar under the porch has a Tudor-arched doorway (not just the head): there is no clear indication that it is reset, and a blocking in the N wall suggests that there may have been an original opening from the outside. This is further reinforced by a continuation of the cellar wall beyond the E wall of the porch.
  7. The stair (of c.1700) has been moved: joist-housings in the beams show that the first floor was formerly continuous, and the stair itself has indications of having been reconstructed.
  8. The trusses of the main block are encased in plaster. The truss over the S wing has a notched lapped collar, which looks earlier than the crude principal rafters: the through purlins are held on cleats.
  9. The interior of the tower has been altered. There may have been a flue in the ground floor room. There is a blocked fireplace in the second floor room, the hearthstone of which is below the present floor-level: the original lintel has been removed. It is also noticeable that N wall of the tower is thinner than the remainder.
  10. The panelling of the E wing (*pace* DBH) is almost certainly later than 1700 (although still early 18th C), since there are no bolection mouldings to the panels.

The development of the house must be considerably revised, possibly in the light of historical information as well as architectural. It is well known that Aber was the location of a favourite manor of the Welsh princes (T.Caerns, HS 1962, pp37-43), which subsequently became a Royal manor. In the early 14th C the 'Prince's manor at Aber' is mentioned in Chamberlain's Accounts for N. Wales (BBCS I, 272), and payments for maintaining 'the house called Y Ty Hir (ytehír)' are recorded (BBCS 7, 144) in 1303.

Subsequently it belonged to the Thomas family, from the 16th to 18th C: local history (see *Inv.* notes) suggests that the main house was built by William Thomas, High sheriff in 1607. By the mid 19th C it was part of the Bulkeley estate (Tithe Award).

Leland (*Itinerary*) visited the area (or at least reported upon it) in 1530. 11e says (fo.41) 'Abreguynne Gregin, wher was a maner or litle pile of the Princes of Wales...': then (under 'Castellea') '..The Moode, in the parochie of Aber..wher.. Tussog Lluelin uab Gerworde Trundan (= Twysog Llywelin vab Iorwerth Orwyndwn) had a castel or palace on a hills by the Chirché, wherof yet part stondith..' It is not clear from this whether he saw ruins on the motte, or whether he understood the castle mound to be where Pen-y-bryn stands.

Finally, there is a most important drawing by Colt Hoare (NLW, *Views in Wales*, Vol.9, no.25) dated 1810: it was noted in the *Inv.* but not fully analysed. It shows the N front of the house, somewhat different from the present, with another building close by. The extreme E end of the house is out of the picture: however both ground floor openings of the E wing are visible with Voussoir-arched heads, and a 24-pane sash over the door. There is no coping between the two parts of the roof. E of the first dormer is a rectangular stair-light at landing level, and above it a small hipped dormer with no window (?formerly lighting the stair at attic level). The E window of the main block is as now, with the slit light to the cellar below it: the dormer above has a higher roof-line (with a string course at eaves level) and the window is three lights wide with a transom. The W dormer (half hidden by the N wing) appears similar, but with a slightly lower roof-line. The N wing is clearly a stair-turret: there is a single-light window to the E wall, and three single-light openings in tier on the gable, the top one slightly larger than the others. The chimney on the W gable is drawn as if predating the E wall of the tower. The tower has a four-light window to the top floor and a three- light window to the second floor: the others are barely visible. In front of the house and at a slight angle to it stood a second house, a gable-chimney Snowdonian plan building with two-light mullioned windows to the ground floor, three narrow single-light windows to the first floor and a two- light mullioned window to the attic in the E gable. The E gable. has a tall upstand and a flat apex, possibly indicating reuse of an earlier wall. .Against the gable was a deep lean-to with a single-light window to the N under the roof, It might be 18th C, but the proportions of the windows are 'vernacular' rather than the generous sizes of those in the house. This building seems to have been demolished by 1849, since it is not shown on the Tithe Award Map.

The earliest phase of the house is still rather mysterious. Leland may have seen a ruin here: and if the 'barn' is indeed mediaeval, one would expect a house as well. The cellar and the tower (or part of it) may indicate its location and. rough size. Whatever structure was here, it may well have been in ruins by the later 16th century: it was then replaced by a Snowdonian-plan house with rubble-

vousoir openings, the E end of which remains as the E wing. In the early 17th C the main block was built (?to be associated with William Thomas' year as Sheriff), with a gabled stair-turret (presumably containing a tight well-stair) and mullioned and transomed windows. It is not clear whether the main entrance remained the old cross-passage of the E house or was at the S side. The tower was built or more probably rebuilt with a tier of mullioned and transomed windows to the N side. Another house was built close by, in vernacular style (perhaps c.1700). Major alterations took place in the early 18th C, with the upgrading of the chamber over the E wing (as a dower house for Jane Thomas, relict of John Thomas, who as living there in 1705?). This may have included the insertion of the present stair (which was in position by 1810), the opening of the doorway into the ground floor of the tower (and the consequent rearrangement of the access to the cellar), and the addition of the S wing as a kitchen to replace the former kitchen in the E wing. Finally, at some time between 1810 and 1849 the second house was demolished: the former stair-turret was turned into a porch and the present partitions put in sometime in the 19th century. At the same time the top window of the tower may have been widened by adding another pair of lights in wood

<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/32/details/PEN-Y-BRYN%2C+ABER/>

**NPRN**

32

**Map Reference**

SH67SE

**Grid Reference**

SH65827273

**Unitary (Local) Authority**

Gwynedd

**Old County**

Caernarfonshire

**Community**

Aber

**Type of Site**

HOUSE

**Broad Class**

Domestic

**Period**

Post Medieval

**Site Description**

Pen-y-Bryn is a multi period house. The central block and the northwestern porch are thought to date from around 1600. The tower may be a slightly later addition, and there were further additions in the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has two storeys, is rubble-built with roughly dressed quoins, and has a slate roof.

There is a tradition that the house was once the home of Prince Llewelyn.

**Haslam, R., Orbach, J. and Voelcker, A. 2009 *The Buildings of Wales. Gwynedd, Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth*. Yale University Press. 233**

PEN-Y-BRYN, ½ m. E. A puzzling site associated with the *llys* of Llywelyn the Great. A rectangular layout of enclosures to the E seems to relate to the existing house but does not suggest a medieval one, and excavation to the N proved inconclusive. From the C16 the home of the Thomas family; the small Barn of c. 1700 with queenpost roof among the enclosures to the NE may be the site of their first house and incorporate stonework from it. A small early Jacobean house replaced it. The range along the contour has mullion-and-transom windows of two and three lights, the upper two in dormer gablets. Porch placed symmetrically, its apparently *ex situ* sandstone doorway elliptical-headed and carved with classical pilasters. Attached to its E just later is a four-storey round tower with a conical roof, reached from the house by a dog-leg stair of c. 1700. Windows larger with each ascending floor. Viewing room at top with three mullion-and-transom windows together.