

Historic Wales Report

Dataset	Cadw Listed Buildings
Title	Plas Berw with courtyard and walls
Type	Listed Building
Dataset UID	5500
Community	Llanfihangel Ysgeifiog

Location

In an isolated location, at the end of a single track lane, NW of the B4419, and c1.3km WSW of the Church of St Michael (new church) in Gaerwen.

Date Listed	1/30/1968
Last Amendment	10/20/1998
Grade	II*

History

Erected in 1615. Plas Berw was the home of the Holland family, one of the many families tracing their ancestry back to Llywarch ap Bran, Lord of Menai, whose descendants dominated the commote in the Middle Ages. The old house at Berw was built c1480 for Ithel ap Howel. Ithel had a son, Owain, who inherited most of his estate, and a daughter, Elinor, who inherited the house at Berw and married John Holland (household servant to Henry VI and later Sheriff of Anglesey) thereby founding the Holland family at Berw. The estate passed down through the family to their great-great-grandson Thomas Holland, MP and Sheriff of Anglesey, Captain of the Militia at Dindaethwy (and later knighted), for whom Plas Berw was built in 1615. The house has C19 additions to the W and S and the kitchen wing (to S) has now been internally divided from the main house to form a separate dwelling.

Reason for Listing

Included at II* as an exceptionally well-preserved early C17 gentry house, with high-quality detailing, and an innovative plan which represents a very early example of a house plan with an unheated entrance hall linked with a stair, giving access to each room on all floors.

History

Smith P, Houses of the Welsh Countryside, 1988, pp231, 235, fig 145, maps 28, 47, 49 & 53;
RCAHM Inventory, 1937, pp100-102;
Longley D, Excavations at Plas Berw, Archaeologia Cambrensis, 1991, pp102-118;
J W, Berw and the Hollands, Archaeologia Cambrensis, 1868, pp7-130.

Interior

A 3-unit house with W stair tower, the interior is now divided into two separate dwellings; the hall, parlour and W tower (with later additions) at the N end forming one dwelling, the kitchen and later S wing forming the second. Entrance leads into the central hall which contains a massive chamfered beam; at the N end is a shield shaped corbel bearing the initials O I H, of Owen Holland, nephew of Sir Thomas, and his wife Jane. The hallway contains reset C17 panelling, including some with an intertwining acanthus leaf pattern; set as a frieze at the top of the walls and also below the window seats. The doorway to the courtyard is large with a moulded surround and stressed keystone; other doors are

panelled. To the right (N) is the parlour, with a gritstone fireplace to the E end of the N wall; sides are formed by large gritstone piers supporting rounded corbels, each with chamfered inner angles, these support a massive gritstone bressumer. In the E wall is a C17 window surround, the window blocked when the lean-to extension was built; a round-headed arch with stressed, fluted, keystone. The arch is decorated with an inner running bead design and an outer egg and dart pattern, and is supported on fluted pilasters; floriate mouldings in the outer angles above the arch. The stair tower contains a reconstructed, oak dog-leg staircase; with clasping handrail and simple, turned balusters. The roof is said (by the Royal Commission) to be original, with re-used purlins; and some parts of the walls of the upper rooms have been exposed to show the original wattle and daub construction.

Exterior

C17 gentry house; 2-storey with attics, rectangular in plan with W stair turret. Extended by the addition of a 2-storey wing to the left (S) end (the kitchen wing), a lean-to extension to the rear (W) and a single-storey wing set at right angles to the rear, abutting the W stair turret. The principal elevation is to the E overlooking an enclosed courtyard (now a garden) with entrance through an arch in the N wall (the S wall incorporates part of the remains of the old house). Built of local rubble, predominantly gritstone, with sandstone dressings; angles with massive quoins and the principal (E) elevation with bevelled plinth below the ground floor windows. Roof of small slates with stone copings; stone gable stacks (brick gable stacks on additions to S and E). Principal elevation is a 5-window range of 3-light transomed and mullioned windows with leaded panes. Entrance is through a square-headed doorway offset to S end with plain stone lintel and chamfered jambs; above the entrance is a stone panel bearing the Holland coat of arms, the date 1615, the initials T. H. (Thomas Holland), and the motto: DEUS SOLA FORTITUDO MEA EST, and above each opening is a weathered, moulded, hoodmould. Set in the roof to the E, above the 1st, 3rd and 5th windows, are hipped dormers with small-paned, side-hung, casement windows. The N gable of the main part has a 12-pane first floor sash window and a 9-pane window in the attic, both with hoodmoulds. To the rear (W) of the main part is the lean-to extension, W stair turret (with pyramidal roof) and W wing. Fenestration is scattered; all have modern windows, both sash and casement, the W stair turret with original C17 surrounds (some with hoodmoulds), the additions with slate faced lintels and sills. The lean-to extension has a gabled dormer to the N side and entrance through a square-headed doorway to the S; between the windows is a re-set slate plaque bearing a date and initials: 1608 E. H. The W wing has a plinth along the N wall and a re-set doorway, with chamfered surround, in the S wall; the doorway is now blocked with rubble in the lower half, a modern window in the upper part. The S wing (kitchen) is a 2-storey, 2-window range; slate roof with brick gable stack and copings. There is a doorway to the N with a brick lintel and windows are small-paned casements; to the E, there are steps leading up to a plank door at the S end.

To the front (E) of the main house is an enclosed courtyard; the N wall is built of rubble with a roughly embattled parapet, stepped up over a segmental arch containing a gateway with chamfered jambs. Above the arch, on the N side of the wall, is a shield bearing a lion rampant and the initials T. E. The S wall of the courtyard incorporates parts of the remains of the old house; to the W end is the original segmental-headed doorway (to the screens); E of the doorway is the hall window, a rectangular frame, with hoodmould, containing the remains of 3 cinquefoil lights (now blocked); E of the hall window is the head and pointed pediment of an early C17 window (inserted by Thomas Holland whose initials appear in the tympanum).