

The Landmark Trust

PLAS UCHAF, NR. CORWEN, DENBIGHSHIRE

Built in the late fourteenth century, Plas Uchaf probably began as the seat of the barons of Cymmer, and was known as Plas o Kymmer. It was built as a hall house, open to the roof, with a main truss of elaborate and unusual design, which survives practically unaltered.

The original house was probably timber-framed, with wings flanking the main hall and entrances in the north and south sides leading directly to the screens passage. Peter Smith describes its original form as ' a commoner type of hall where there is only one aisle truss sited as a screen between hall and passage..... The construction is mixed, box-framed aisle truss and cruck-framed central truss, the disparate elements linked by the general use of a king-post to carry the ridge.' It would have been was a very grand house indeed; it was more ornate than most hall houses of the period and the craftsmanship was of the highest standard - very much a house of the aristocracy.

However, the form it presents today presents a radical reconstruction which took place in the sixteenth century, when the first floor was inserted with heavy moulded beams. The walls are now of stone rubble and the north and south entrances have four-centred arches and jambs typical of the sixteenth century. No trace of the west wing survives and the east part of the house was altered again in the seventeenth century.

In the late sixteenth century the barons of Cymmer moved to Gwerclas, a house nearby, and took the name of Hughes of Gwerclas; but Plas Uchaf remained in their possession and in 1707 it was listed by Edward Llwyd as being one of the houses of the gentry of Llangar. After that it embarked upon a steady decline that continued until 1972. By 1825, when the Gwerclas estate was sold, it seems to have been the farmhouse attached to the home farm.

It then became part of the Rûg estate belonging to Griffith Howel Vaughan. Between 1826 and 1885 it was first lived in by labourers and then by a tailor and his family. There is a tradition, locally, that at about this time the first floor room above the hall (that has now gone) was used as a religious meeting house. In 1913, it was described as a tenement, and in 1933, it was a gamekeeper's house. The last people to live in Plas Uchaf were the Owens, who were there in 1960 and who now farm a few miles to the south.

In the early 1960's Lord Newborough, the head of the family that had acquired Plas Uchaf in the early nineteenth century, sold the (then unlisted) house to Mr Lloyd Jones of Bala. The new owner sold the sixteenth century beams and panelling to America: in a way this was a pity, but it did also return Plas Uchaf to its original form: that of a medieval hall house, open to the roof. More unfortunately, having been virtually gutted, Plas Uchaf was left derelict for ten years.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

Peter Smith, then Secretary of the RCHMW realised that the whole house was in grave danger and in 1964 he and Ffrancon Lloyd published an article in the Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society, recording it fully and hoping that by drawing attention to its importance it might somehow be saved. There was an idea that parts of it might be removed to the Avoncroft Museum, but nothing materialised. Time went by and Plas Uchaf was rapidly turning into a ruin, but eventually Peter Smith acquired a valuable ally in Colonel A K Campbell of the Merioneth Legal Department. In the end Mr Lloyd Jones presented it to Merioneth County Council, who approached Landmark Trust. Landmark took a long lease it from the Council. The roof, which was part corrugated iron, part broken slates, was replaced with slates. The big slates on the floor of the hall passage are original, the others were bought in to match. Much the biggest job was repairing the timber, the oak for the repairs coming from Llangollen and other local sources.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Plas Uchaf sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.