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Items for the attention of the Petition Committee:

- A. Letter in response to letter received by Petition Committee from the Heritage Minister.
- B. Article (Welsh version) addressing the issue.
- C. Article (English version) addressing the issue.
- D. Copy of Architect A. B Phipson's 1875 report on the Old Dolgellau Parliament House property.
- E. Part of Huw J. Owen article.

If possible, I would appreciate these items photocopied for the convenience of each member of the committee.

Many thanks



Siân Ifan

Item A



F.A.O. Petitions Committee, Welsh Government.

February 6, 2013

Re Petition requesting that the Welsh Government be instructed to purchase and renovate Plas Cwrt yn Dre aka Old Dolgellau Parliament House, on behalf of the Welsh nation.

Annwyl Committee Members,

Many thanks for your correspondence dated 6 November 2012 inviting me to express my views on the correspondence that you as a committee had received from the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage in regards to my petition. I must first of all apologize to the Cymric speakers amongst you that this letter is not bilingual. You will note that it is quite a lengthy letter and I work entirely on an unfunded voluntary basis with constant work awaiting my attention so, as much as I would prefer to, I just haven't got enough time to translate everything I do; however, I have produced, both a Welsh and English version of my article, and am sending you both copies. So, I do hope you will understand the predicament I'm in if I'm to get this to you in time for you to be able to take it into consideration. Diolch for your patience and understanding..

Having read this correspondence, I would, in the first instance, wish to challenge Cadw's statement in stating that there is "little evidence to support Plas Cwrt yn Dre's traditional association with Prince Owain Glyndŵr". I wrote an article on this issue early in 2012, Cadw and Sain Ffagan have received copies of this article along with other documents of supporting evidence for the case of the old Dolgellau Parliament House and I am now enclosing the same article and supporting evidence for your attention as a committee.

My article hopefully lays out the claim clearly but also, as can be seen in the report of the architect A. B. Phipson (item D) dated 1875, Mr Phipson clearly refers to the building as "Old Parliament House Dolgelley". Further, in his report, he clearly states that he believes the house to be... *"of the middle or later part of the fourteen century and consequently that the traditional connection with Glendwr may be correct"*

I will endeavor not go on to quote further from Mr Phipson's very interesting report as I have enclosed a copy for your attention but his professional conclusion was further endorsed by the scholar Hugh J Owen who wrote in an early edition of *"Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes Sir Feirionydd"* (item E)

What also must be taken into consideration of course is the strong local tradition of acknowledging Plas Cwrt yn Dre as Owain Glyndŵr's old Parliament House. Such traditions do not come out of "thin air" they have substance which have been passed down as general local knowledge throughout the generations. Initially, The property was substantial, consisting of a number of buildings and you have only to look at the plan of the Great Hall to see that this hall could have housed a Parliament of

Glyndŵr's most important officials and generals. Also, the name Plas Cwrt yn Dre is another clue, Plas, of course is Welsh for Palace or Mansion and Cwrt is Court meaning a place to hold Court so, undoubtedly, the property was a very important one in the middle of the town of Dolgellau.

Cadw, as always, chooses to dismiss such testament when it comes to any history associated with the native Cymric Princes – and especially so in regards to Prince Owain Glyndŵr, demanding ‘concrete proof’ but, as Mr Phipson states...”The building, independently of its historical association is valuable archaeologically as a relic of a bye-gone age” and let’s be reminded that he wrote this report in 1875!

When the building was removed from its Dolgellau site to Newtown in the 19th century, it took 32 railway wagons to transport it, so, this in itself indicates that a great deal of the original building and fittings must have been transported and reconstructed at Newtown. An up to date specialist examination of the property could determine its age and I would suggest that as Cadw’s obviously disinterested in conducting such an examination that the North Wales Dendrochronology Project might be approached if funding was made available.

How Llysgenhadaeth Glyndwr became involved: On understanding that the property had been placed on the market due to the Quakers being no longer able to maintain it, I travelled to Newtown to view the property and discuss the situation with the Quakers. I was very upset to witness its current state of disrepair, broken windows and tiles etc and immediately wrote to Cadw and Sain Ffagan’s Museum to inform them of the situation. Incredibly, neither was interested in saving what’s left of this important historical and unique property. I set up the petition out of total despair!

As outlined in my article, in the mid 19th century it had been the intention of a Dolgellau town based committee, who understood the importance and potential of the Old Parliament house, to raise money to purchase the property for the town and to renovate it to its original splendor as a museum and a tourist attraction. Even as it stood then, it was the main attraction in Dolgellau for artists and photographers as well as for the passing tourist; this again being solid testimony to the fact that its historical importance was recognized far and wide and undoubtedly, had Samuel Holland not distracted the fundraising for the Dr Williams School for girls project, the old Parliament House would have been the “Jewel in the Crown” for Dolgellau as, both, an educational and tourism asset today; a golden opportunity was missed then – but here we are today, with a Welsh Government and a Welsh Heritage Secretary and an office within that Welsh Government called Cadw that has been established to “keep” safe such “jewels” of our history on behalf of our nation. Likewise, we have a “Welsh National History Museum” that has, as its purpose, the same role in regards to such properties and we have a Welsh Tourism industry that is struggling to find a truly “unique niche” for Welsh Tourism and yet, not one of these bodies are prepared to recognize the importance of the Dolgellau Old Parliament House and save it from either being sold off on the open market or left to decay to the ground. Cadw’s ‘pathetic and supposed to be appeasing gesture of promoting its status on paper to a grade 11* building will not save its ultimate fate.

Whatever the reasons are behind Cadw and the present Heritage Minister’s reluctance to promote and educate in regards to any aspect of Prince Owain Glyndŵr associated history, we, as a nation claiming to be a confident nation in our own right, cannot – and should not censor our history. The whole of our history is an on-going development of the tapestry that is our nation and we cannot censor the Prince Owain Glyndŵr history out of that tapestry anymore than we can the Tonypany, Llanelli or Merthyr Riots histories.

I suggest that the most serious of consideration is given to purchasing Plas Cwrt yn Dre aka Old Dolgellau Parliament House for the nation – before the property is lost forever. I further suggest that it be both examined and accurately dated and then restored as a museum which would exhibit its “supposed” Owain Glyndŵr association as well as the Baron Owen and Quaker history. It should be remembered that ‘definite’ proof may one day come to light in regards to the Prince Owain Glyndŵr

history and by then, the property could be lost and it would be recorded in history as to how it was allowed to be lost. Note that it was It was 'instinct' and 'persistence' that revealed the truth in regards to Richard 111 at this very moment!

Siân Ifan

C.E.O. Llysgenhadaeth Glyndŵr.

Another National Treasure About To Be Lost Forever!

Most of those interested in the history of our nation and, especially, in the history of our greatest of national heroes, Owain Glyndŵr and his great war for Cymric Independence are well aware of the role that the town of Machynlleth had played in regards to that history but, I wonder how many are as aware of the fact that the town of Dolgellau had also played a similarly important role in the war?

It is well documented that the Prince and his Consul had dispatched at least one letter from Dolgellau to Charles VI of France on the 10th May 1404 seeking a treaty with that King so where exactly in Dolgellau was this letter and, possibly, others (such as one that was dispatched to Henry Dwn of Cydweli at around the same time) composed?

The letter/s would have been composed at a consul gathering in a building important enough for such gatherings and according to local tradition, the building in question is one which bears the name Plas Cwrt yn Dre but which has been known locally, down through the centuries, as "The Old Parliament House of Owain Glyndŵr.

Plas Cwrt yn Dre or "Owain Glyndŵr's Parliament House" was a substantial property of high status in its day, It housed a hall and a balcony which was accessed by steps placed on the outside of the building so could have been a very appropriate site for Prince Owain Glyndŵr to hold assemblies with his Consul and other allies. Granted, local tradition, in itself, cannot be taken as evidence of the property's authenticity as Owain Glyndŵr's Parliament House but if the surviving documented proof that the letter composed and dispatched to Charles VI on the 10th May 1404 was composed in Dolgellau is taken into consideration alongside the local tradition – which has survived centuries, then I would suggest that there is a strong enough case for acceptance of the authenticity of this property as being, at the least, one of the Assemblies of Prince Owain Glyndŵr where important political strategies such as treaties with France and other allies were debated and acted on.

The case for the property's authenticity as an Assembly/Parliament House used by the Glyndŵr regime is strengthened further in a report compiled by the architect A.B. Phipson who carried out a survey on the property in 1885. Interestingly, he refers to the building as "Old Parliament House Dolgellay" (and not Plas Cwrt yn Dre) in both the plans he drafted of the property and his accompanying report. It was also revealed in the report that substantial parts of the property dated from the 14th century. If that indeed was the case, and I'm sure that a professional architect such as Mr Phipson knew how to do his job and can be believed, the property was in existence well before the Owain Glyndŵr War of Independence had started so it was available to be made use of by the Prince.

In my view, the accumulating evidence in regards to the property in question should have been more than enough to ensure that it was treasured as a national treasure should be but to strengthen the case for such even further, it transpires that the property had continued to play a role in Welsh history well over a century after the mysterious disappearance of Prince Owain Glyndŵr. By the middle of the 16th century, it had become the home of Baron Lewis Owen who was an important figure in the English Parliament during this period. He was also Chancellor to the Treasury covering North Wales and represented Merionethshire in Parliament but was dramatically killed in an ambush by the Red Bandits of Mawddwy in 1555.

By the mid 18th century, the Old Parliament House, along with a number of other buildings that formed the property Plas Cwrt yn Dre was fast deteriorating from neglect and the whole lot was sold at auction to a Mr Edward Jones who also owned the Ship Hotel located directly opposite the property. Even in those days, it seems that this historical old building had become the main tourist attraction in Dolgellau and some influential local townspeople who had begun to realise its

importance - and potential, set up a committee with as its aim, to raise money to purchase and renovate the old Parliament as a museum for the town.

This committee commissioned A.B. Phipson to carry out a survey on the property and as well as confirm in his report that substantial parts of the property dated from the 14th century (as noted earlier) he also drew attention to certain fittings from that period that should be carefully preserved during restoration and quoted that the overall cost of the restoration would be between £150 - £200 – which was a small sum to raise to save such an important building, even in those days.

Had this committee achieved its aim, no doubt the Old Parliament House would have been saved in its wholeness and renovated to its former glory and would still be standing on its site in Dolgellau today as a magnificent memorial to the achievements of Owain Glyndŵr and as a strong symbol of his ambition for Cymru but, alas, that was not to be.

On the 5th November 1875, a public meeting was held to discuss the possibility of buying the property for the town. According to the local paper (Y Dydd) Mr Edward Jones came to this meeting and offered the property to the town for the price that he had paid for it at the auction or, he was prepared to rent the property to the town for five years for the reasonable sum of £21 per annum which would allow the town enough time to consider the purchase but, unbelievably, it was decided not to launch an appeal for funding to buy Plas Cwrt yn Dre because the then M.P. of Merioneth, Samuel Holland, had already launched another appeal in the town, to raise £1,000 towards the cost of establishing a private school for girls, Ysgol Dr Williams.

Dr Daniel Williams, a theologian from Wreccsam, had no association whatsoever with Dolgellau but on his death in 1716, he had left a substantial sum of money to be used for educational charity purposes in Cymru and, at this time, the Charity Trust involved was offering funding for the establishment and upkeep of a school in North Wales - on the condition that the town awarded the funding, could guarantee the sum of £1,000 towards the cost of building, along with 2 acres of land on a site that would be suitable for the school.

In all honesty, it would have made more sense to establish the school in Dr Williams' home town Wreccsam but Samuel Holland was hell bent on getting the school for Dolgellau. As a result of this and due to the fact that the other committee had not even taken up Mr Edward Jones's offer to have the property on a rental basis for five years, the opportunity to buy Plas Cwrt yn Dre for the town was lost forever and in the following year, the property was sold to a Mr Pryce-Jones (later to become Sir Pryce-Jones) of Newtown.

Plas Cwrt yn Dre was dismantled stone by stone and the hall, balcony and outside steps of the "Old Parliament House" were loaded into thirty two trucks and taken by rail to Newtown and restored in Dolerw Park on the Pryce-Jones Estate but. Apparently – and unfortunately, much of the character of this important historical treasure was lost in the restoration process but nevertheless, what's left of this important part of our history still remains standing and is crying out to the nation to save it for the nation.

During the last century, it has been occupied for use by the army in the 2nd world war and then by the Girl Guides in the 1950's and then, incredibly, it was given to the Quakers as a gift by Lady Sara Pryce-Jones in 1968. The Quakers have held meetings in the property regularly since 1986 but have now come to the decision that they can no longer afford its maintenance. During the last few years they have offered the property (for free!) to St Fagan's (in the first instance) and then to Cadw. Unbelievably, both these establishments (that are meant to be custodians of our national heritage) declined the offer! St Fagan's claim they cannot find the letter of offer and feel now that it's best to leave the property where it is and Cadw declined the offer on the grounds that there is no definite proof in regards to its historical associations! Indeed, when Cadw registered the building as a Grade 11 listed building in 1988, they stated haughtily on the registration document "*Incorrectly*

termed Owain Glyndŵr's Dolgellau Parliament House” and this without taking any notice whatsoever of the expertly carried out survey and associated report produced by the architect A.B. Phipson and without carrying out any tests of their own on the property and what about the historical association with Baron Lewis Owen? There's plenty of evidence in regards to him having resided in the property.

Following refusals by both St Fagan's and Cadw to take the property off their hands, the Quakers have now placed it for sale on the open market and are in the process of selling it for £55,000 to an English Quaker who lives in England. I do not know what this gentleman's intentions are for the property but whatever his plans, I still feel strongly that it should be bought for the nation. I have spoken to the Welsh Quakers and they understand and sympathise with this sentiment and have expressed that they would still consider selling it to the Nation if a body such as the Welsh Assembly or Cadw comes forward with a definite commitment to buy – and there still is a slim chance - as the buyer has asked Cadw to carry out a new assessment of the property as a listed building and the sale will not go through until Cadw has done so. This means that there's still a chance to save the old Dolgellau Parliament House for the nation so, I will appeal to all out there who cares about this important part of our history and who cares about the prospect of losing another of our national treasures to immediately write to all your MP's, AM's and MEP's drawing their attention to this issue and demanding that this property be purchased for the nation. £55,000 is not a great deal of money and if the property is purchased for the nation, it can be renovated to its former glory and can be opened to the public as a museum that would display the history of the building from the days of Owain Glyndŵr to the present.

I therefore appeal to one and all to immediately write to those aforementioned and others such as your local councillors that may be in a position to assist to save this unique part of our history. Remember, nobody campaigned to save Owain Glyndŵr's Prison House in Corwen and it has been lost for ever. Let's make sure history is not repeated and that the chance to save and renovate this historic treasure is not lost for ever this time. Let's ensure Owain Glyndŵr's Old Parliament House as a worthy Calennig to give to our nation at the launch of 2012.

Siân Ifan
Llysgenhadaeth/Embassy Glyndŵr

To the Committee for the Preservation of "The Old Parliament House" at Dolgelly.

Item D

GENTLEMEN,

I have made a careful examination of the building commonly known as the Old Parliament House, for the purpose of ascertaining its value as an historical memorial, its architectural and artistic merits and its present condition; also the best means for its preservation and its adaptability for a Museum or other useful purpose.

The historical interest of the building arises from its traditional connection with the name of Owen Glendwr, the correctness of which, in the absence of direct or documentary proof, can only be assumed if not at variance with the probable age of the building. Glendwr first appeared in arms against Henry IV., and caused himself to be proclaimed Prince of Wales, in the year 1400. He assembled the estates of Wales at Machynlleth in 1402, when he was formally crowned.

He appointed ambassadors to, and formed a league, with Charles VII. of France in 1404, which treaty was ratified at the camp before Lampeter in January, 1405. The appointment of Ambassadors is dated from Dolgelly, as given in Rymers "Foedera" *Dat apud Doleguelli decem die mensis Maii Mccc quarto; et principatus nostri quarto*; this was, I presume, the occasion of the Dolgelly Assembly or Parliament.

There is very little architectural moulding or ornament by which to judge accurately of the age of the building, which has undergone several alterations and mutilations; the most ornamental portion is the timber framing with the ogee headed door, and "linen pattern" panels at the end against the post office; this indicates a date not earlier than late in the fifteenth century, but it is so different in character and workmanship from all the other existing portions, that I believe the house itself is of earlier date, probably of the middle or later part of the fourteenth century, and consequently that the traditional connection with Glendwr may be correct.

The building, independently of its historical association, is valuable archæologically as a relic of a bye-gone age, as well as for the many features of architectural and artistic interest which it possesses, and is a very good specimen of a medieval mansion on a small scale; the accompanying measured Plans Nos. 1 and 2 will assist in explaining the following description of its arrangement. The Hall (the chief apartment in a medieval house) is to the right of the entrance passage, from which it is separated by the screen, and was formerly open to the roof, but is now subdivided and has had an upper floor inserted. In the screen are two original doorways, one of which is closed; over the entrance passage is a small room, formerly the minstrels' gallery, overlooking the Hall through the arch now filled up in the timber partition. To the left of the entrance is a room now sub-divided, having the cellar underneath, and a chamber, probably the Solar or private parlour over. At the end of the entrance passage is the wing containing the Kitchen, offices, and an upper story with three rooms. The original entrance to the Kitchen is at the end of the passage, the present doorway from same into court yard being modern. The internal stairs from the Hall are modern, but are in the original position. The outer steps and doorway from Court Yard to upper floor over Kitchen are modern, the head of the doorway shows the mortices for the timbers which have been removed. I am of opinion that these rooms originally communicated with the front portion of the building by a doorway corresponding with the Kitchen doorway underneath.

The most interesting portion of the building, architecturally, is the Kitchen wing with its very picturesque timber framing, curiously constructed upper floor with the diagonal tie beams and its ancient fire places.

The upper windows of the kitchen wing are very good but much mutilated, and the remaining shutters are worthy of note, the hinges being formed of pivots cut out of the solid wood of the shutter and inserted into sockets in the heads and sills. The door into the Solar chamber is constructed and hinged in a similar manner.

The other portions of the building of greatest interest are the timber arch of the gallery, and the linen panelled framing before mentioned at the end of the Hall; the chimney of the Hall contains some curious brickwork, which is ancient if not coeval with the original house.

The stone walls and chimney at the end of the kitchen wing are altogether modern, the angle posts and part of the original timber framing being now built in the masonry.

I have no doubt that the hall and other portions of the front part of the house were originally constructed of timber, as indicated by the excellent but mutilated framed gable at the end facing the proposed street; the stone front wall with the entrance archway is evidently of very late date, and the windows are entirely modern.

If it should be decided to preserve the building, the exterior should be put into a substantial state of repair. The outer stone work should be carefully repaired and pointed, that underneath the timber framing especially may require to be partially rebuilt. All deficient and decayed timbers should be reinstated, and the windows of the kitchen wing restored in their original character; the removal of the modern window from the framed gable and the restoration of the deficient timbers will involve a new window to the upper chamber, this should be made in character with the other old work and placed in the original position in the dormer roof, which will be seen after the removal of the adjoining cottage. The removal of this cottage will convert the party partition into an outer wall, which it may be necessary to complete in stone to match the front wall of the Hall.

The lath and plaster panels between the timbers should be repaired and restored where deficient.

The slating of the roof should be thoroughly examined and repaired to render the building water-tight. The framing of the upper story over the kitchen has been thrust outwards by the roof, and should be secured by an iron tie rod across the building.

In carrying out the above suggestions care should be taken that no existing old timbers are removed, unless so far decayed as to be useless.

The accompanying sketch No. 3, shows the appearance of the building when externally restored as suggested.

To restore the building internally and render it fit for inspection by visitors, I should recommend the following repairs and alterations:

The hall should be restored to its original form by removing the modern partitions, floor, and ceiling, the deficient foot of the principal, which has been cut away to allow for the modern back window, should be restored, and the window modified accordingly, and the roofing timbers generally of the hall and solar chamber repaired; the effect of the hall would then be as shown by sketch No. 4.

In the kitchen wing the loft floor should be removed from the roof, and the floor and roof strengthened by inserting a prop at each intersection of the floor beams, and between the beams and roof principals to prevent further sagging, also new flooring should be laid in these rooms and a communication opened with the front portion of the premises.

The modern internal partitions are shown on the plans without tint.

In addition to the above the interior generally should be thoroughly cleansed, the plastering repaired, the woodwork carefully scraped, and the deficient parts restored, and the old doors and other characteristic joiner's work carefully preserved where possible.

If it should be determined to utilize the building for the purpose of a local Museum it might be preferable to remove the ancient internal partitions from the kitchen wing, so as to convert each floor into one large room, and the living and bed rooms on ground floor might remain as at present for occupation as keeper's apartments.

The sheet of sketches No. 5, illustrates a few of the most interesting details, as a record in case the building should be destroyed.

It is difficult to form an estimate of the cost of carrying out these repairs and restorations, as it depends greatly upon the condition the old work is found in when uncovered, but I am of opinion that from £150 to £200 each for the external and internal restorations will be sufficient.

I am, Gentlemen,
Yours obediently,
A. B. PHIPSON,

Architect.

16, ANN STREET, BIRMINGHAM,
December 9th, 1875.

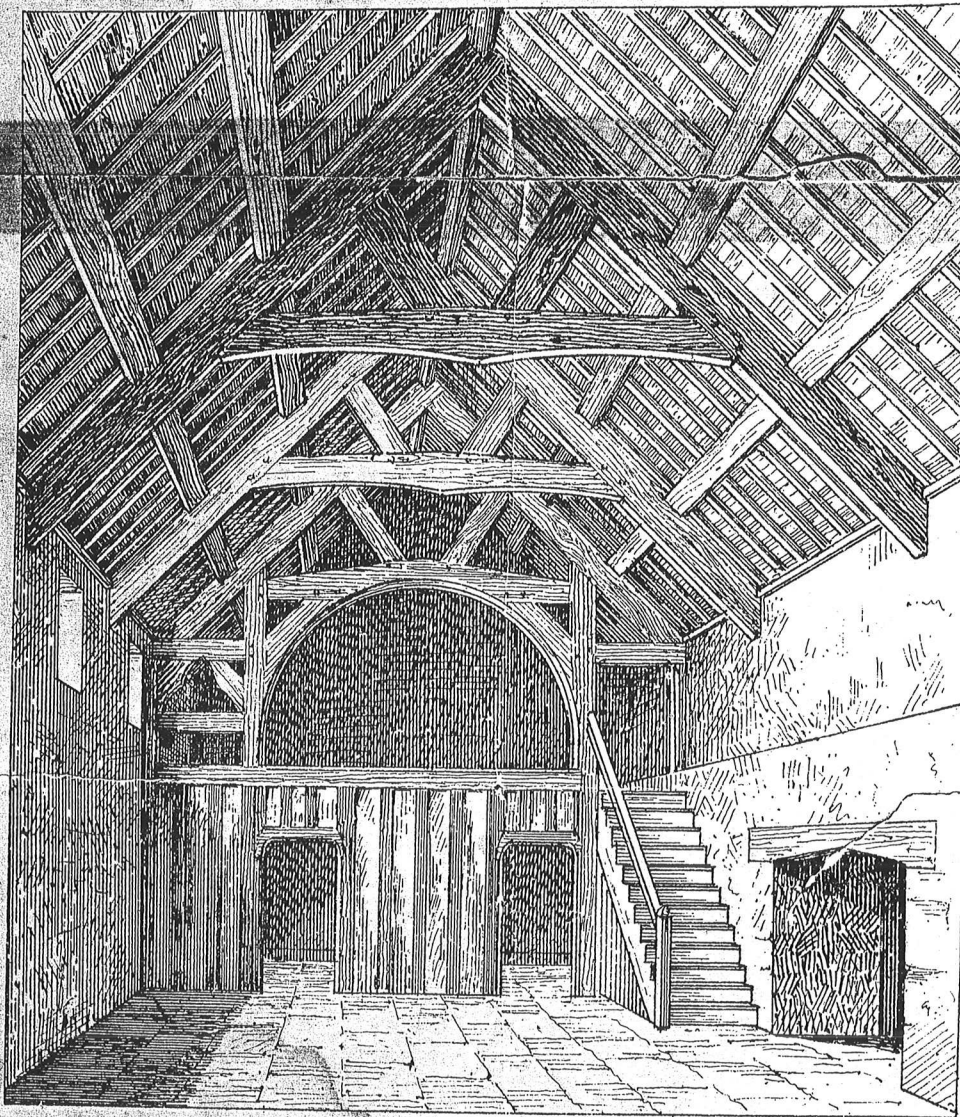


OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE DOLGELLY

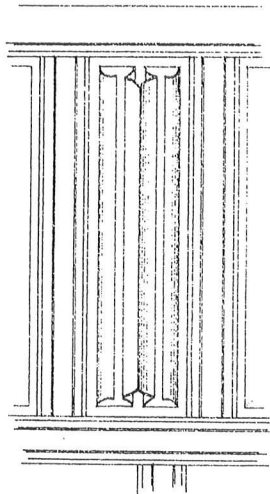


EXTERIOR VIEW.

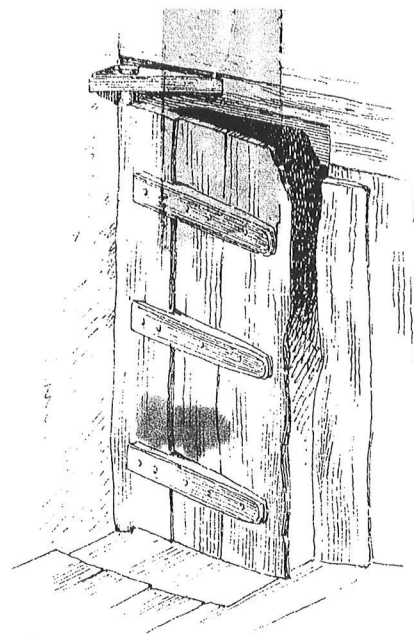
*A. Phipson Arch^t del.
Birmingham*



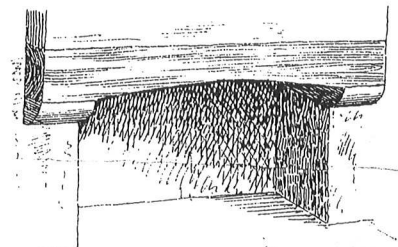
INTERIOR OF HALL



Linen panels in Hall

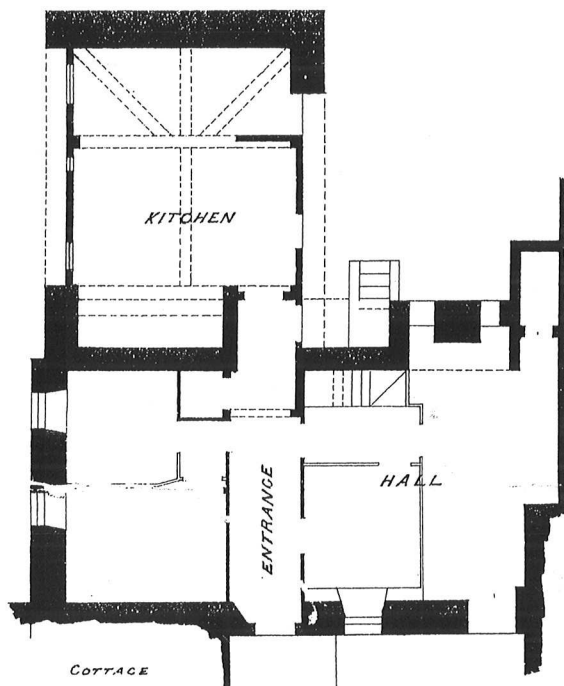


Door with wooden pivot hinges to Upper Chamber.



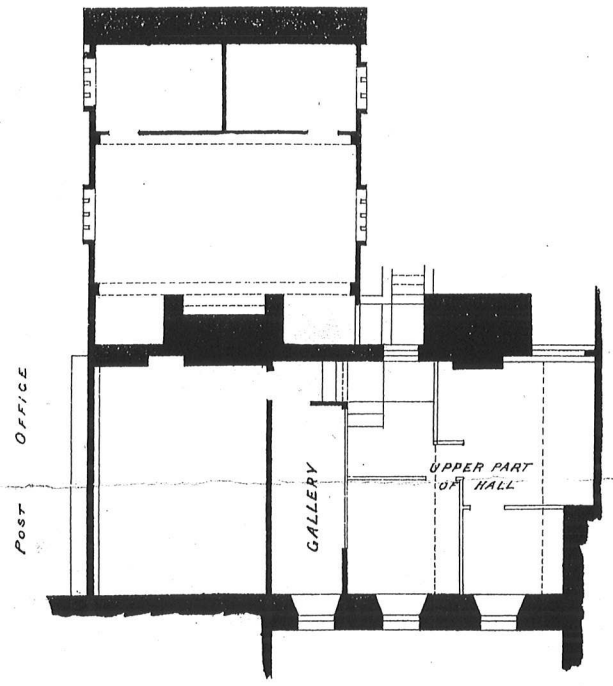
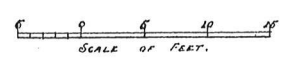
Fire place in room over kitchen

A.B. Phipps del.
Birmingham.



COTTAGE

GROUND PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

"Appertaining to the date of the building, one cannot refute lightly the opinion of Mr. Phipson, who, according to his report, "made a careful examination of the Building" and found that there is very little architectural moulding or ornament by which to judge accurately of the age of the building.

He is definite that the most ornamental portion indicates a date not earlier than late in the fifteenth century, he is equally definite in his statement "it is so different in character and in workmanship from all the other existing portions that I believe the house itself is of earlier date probably of the middle or later part of the fourteenth century and consequently that the traditional connection with Glendwr may be correct."

I would be inclined to favour the view of Mr. Phipson, who, after all, was obviously trained in his profession to give such an opinion, as against the opinion of Mr. E. Breese, who, because certain ornamental features are late fifteenth century, concludes that the whole structure is of the same period."

If, therefore, it is conceded that part of the building is of the 14th century, it is not unreasonable to associate it with Glyn Dŵr to the extent at any rate of his Appointment of the Ambassadors to France having been made in this particular building.

Apart from the argument with regard to the structure Mr. Breese also makes a point against the association of Glyn Dŵr with the building that out of a large number of writers who are named by him who visited Dolgelley in the 18th and 19th centuries only one makes any allusion to this house. Some of this is purely negative evidence and it is respectfully suggested that the fact that only one of the many writers named by Mr. Breese referred to this building is no evidence that it was not associated with Glyn Dŵr.

After consideration of all the facts and as there is no evidence to the contrary the writer is of the opinion that the Old Parliament House did have associations with the Welsh Patriot.

Whatever may have been the association of Glyn Dŵr with this old building it had association with another famous Welshman as it was the residence of Lewis Owen, better known as the Baron, by his being a Baron of the Exchequer of North Wales. He represented Merioneth in Parliament from 1547 to 1555 and in 1555 on his way back to Dolgelley from the Assizes at Shrewsbury on 11 October he was murdered near Dugoed, Mallwyd, by relatives of "Gwylliaid Cochion Mawddwy" (The Red Bandits of Mawddwy) out of revenge for having condemned to death members of their families.

Dolgelley,

HUGH J. OWEN