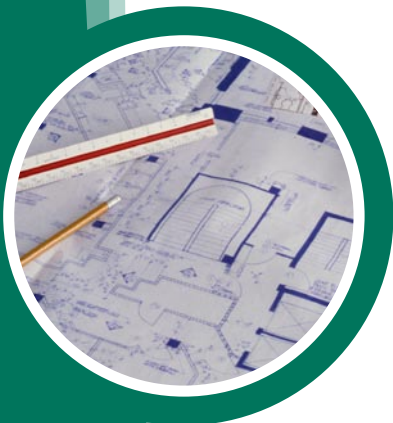


TRADITIONAL FARM BUILDINGS IN GWYNEDD

Conservation and Conversion.
Principles of Good Practice.



Farm buildings form an important element in the country landscape. The farmhouses and their outbuildings have evolved over the centuries to reflect the pattern of agriculture practiced in the area.

Gwynedd has a rich heritage of farms and outbuildings, ranging from the small holding of 10 to 20 acres up to 'model' or estate farms of hundreds of acres.

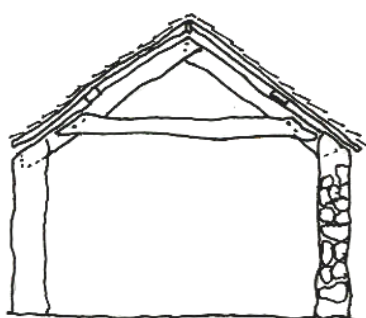
Farm buildings tell us how people in past generations used the land, how they farmed and what they grew as crops, what and how many animals they kept and also the way the farm functioned as a productive unit.

Traditional or historic farm buildings, their layout, positioning and forms of construction are part of the built heritage of Gwynedd and as such **a large number are listed buildings**.

MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

The principal building material in Gwynedd is stone and this is what we find being used for the majority of farm buildings. There are exceptions to this, namely C19 'designed' farmsteads belonging to large estates, where bricks may have been used as well as stone.

The poorer holding would use field stones or stones from riverbeds or the sea shore to construct the outbuildings, whereas larger farms used dressed and squared stone to achieve a finer appearance.



- *Steep pitch may indicate previous thatch roof*
- *Simple 'A' frame truss or a collar truss*
- *Walls in undressed field stone, generally about 600mm thick, held together with clay or soil mixed with lime. Face would be pointed in lime mortar.*
- *Rammed earth floor.*
- *Simple, rustic doors.*
- *Few window openings.*
- *No guttering.*

Roofs were invariably of slates, since there was an abundant local supply and these would be supported by simple 'A' frame trusses, purlins and rafters. Earlier examples would have pegged trusses, the wood often left un-squared, merely split and used complete with the bark still on it. The purlins similarly would be left un-worked and even, in a few examples, the rafters themselves.

A number of farm buildings were originally thatched, slate replacing the thatch at a later date when quarrying began in Gwynedd in the early C19.

TYPES OF FARM BUILDINGS AND LAYOUTS

Farms or small holdings in Gwynedd were predominantly the mixed type of farm where both arable farming and livestock rearing were carried out. This of course depended on the size of the holding and its geographical location.

Poor, mountainous land could only be used for sheep, whereas lowland holdings could practice both types of farming.

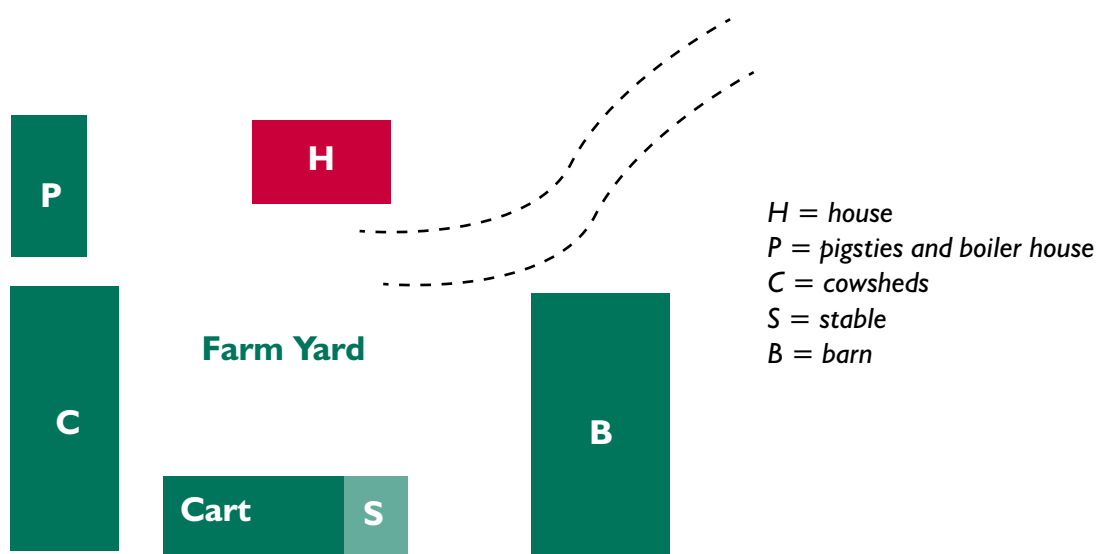
The earliest and most well-known type of farmstead was the longhouse, a type not covered by this guidance note.

The farm buildings commonly found around a C19 farm house included:

- Pigsties - and possibly a boiler house for cooking pig swill
- Cowshed - for milking and keeping cows in over winter.
- Calf shed - for rearing calves.
- Stable for the horse - perhaps with loft over
- Cartshed - perhaps with storehouse above, reached by a set of outside stairs
- Barn - probably the biggest and most important outbuilding on the farm

In layout, the centre of the farmstead was the house or cottage, around which the other buildings were distributed. The layout evolved as more buildings were added to the farm over time.

The general pattern tended to group the outbuildings around the house in a loose compound or square formation, forming a farmyard. Some buildings, such as the barn, may be away from the farmyard. This was because the barn took up a lot of space and it had a barn yard adjacent to it for threshing.



CURRENT SITUATION

Recent years have seen an increased threat to traditional farm buildings from diversification of farming and changes in agriculture generally.

The traditional outbuildings were designed for specific purposes and were difficult to adapt. This has led to the abandonment of the farm outbuildings in favour of new-build sheds, covered areas and stacking yards.

Since a large number of agricultural buildings are listed, their maintenance becomes onerous for the owner. Planning policy restricts new-build in the countryside; therefore the only viable option for redundant farm buildings is conversion to another use.

It is obvious that not all farm buildings can be successfully converted to 'bijou' country retreats; there are only so many barns in existence!

Other possible uses for redundant farm buildings include:

- Community use
- Other agriculture use
- Craft workshops
- Farm shop
- Business units
- Light industrial
- Professional practice units
- Recreation use
- Restaurant
- Tourist accommodation



Abandoned upland farm complete with water wheel

However, the subject of this guidance note is primarily the conversion of redundant farm buildings to accommodation, although the basic principles will apply to any conversion.

PRINCIPLES OF CONVERSION

The golden rule is '***work with the building, not against it***'.

This means - adapt the proposed new use to the building, rather than changing or extending the building to suit the new use.

1. **The change of use must be acceptable**; in terms of impact on the surroundings and must be sensitive to the rights of adjacent property owners.
2. **All designs must be sensitive to the character of the building**; its surroundings and its association with other buildings.
3. **Take away as little as possible from the building**; unless of necessity and the character of the building is not harmed in any way.
4. **Retain the agricultural character**; it must be possible to see what the building was originally used for. The whole purpose of converting the building is to save its structure as a symbol of what it once was – a part of the agricultural heritage of Gwynedd.
5. **Light and openings**; traditional farm buildings had few openings for light, good light was not usually necessary except for cowsheds. In conversions to domestic use it becomes a challenge to have adequate day lighting without destroying the character of the building. In general, new window openings should be avoided if at all possible; maximum use must be made of existing openings. Even rooflights may be inappropriate in a building that did not originally have any. Using glazed doors instead of solid ones impacts on the character of the building.

In barns the biggest challenge is how to treat the main door opening, which is usually large with solid double doors; it is usually the only source of light into the interior but to glaze it destroys the character of the barn and would not be acceptable.

6. **Incorporate any existing features into the conversion**; hoist doors, pitching eyes, owl holes, ventilation slits should all be retained and used.
7. **Services**; in general farm buildings did not have any services, except possibly electricity. The introduction of central heating and the method of providing thermal insulation need to be carefully considered. For example, a barn open to the roof should not be given a ceiling. Boiler flues need careful detailing to be inconspicuous; a chimney is not acceptable on an agricultural building. Underfloor heating may be more acceptable than a conventional radiator system.

8. **Interior;** buildings originally designed to be open structures, such as barns, must remain largely open to retain the sense of space. Other ranges of buildings may have natural divisions which can be exploited. Original features relating to the former use of the building should again be retained as much as possible
9. **Extensions;** these should not normally be necessary unless the structure is small; often it is an indication of over ambition and not working with the building!

Extensions must be appropriately designed and specified to reflect the agricultural nature of the setting.

10. **Exterior;** the materials used on the external side of the structure must reflect the setting and the agricultural nature of the building itself. Materials must be robust and suitably designed to reflect this, for example doors must be simple boarded types with basic furniture. The external walls of agricultural buildings were left as bare stone; only outbuildings nearest the house were possibly whitewashed. Repointing of farm buildings is all that is necessary, using a lime mortar.

Woodwork was either left bare or painted in a robust colour, dark red being probably the most common colour.

11. **Landscape;** it must always be remembered that farm buildings are an essential part of the rural setting; the introduction of suburban landscape features such as tarmac drives, paving, decking, patios, water features and non-native planting are all alien features and destroy the essential setting of a building. Walls and fences should be as found in the locality and hedges should be native species.

Care must be taken with the siting of garages, sheds and greenhouses, and even the clothes line.

A good conversion can be let down and ruined by inappropriate domestic features such as satellite dishes, aerials, lighting, extract vents and burglar alarms.

12. **Wildlife;** all redundant farm buildings may be home to various species such as owls and in particular bats. **All these are protected species by Law and it is a criminal act to disturb or destroy their habitat. It is essential therefore that wildlife surveys are undertaken prior to conversion, this is a planning requirement as well.**



Cefn y Coed Isaf, Eglwys bach, 1954

Source: ©RCAHMW

Finally, it is important to remember that a barn or a farm building will never be a modern house and it is fruitless to attempt to make the building fit the stereotype 'modern semi'. A sensitive conversion, well-detailed and well-built will retain the character of the original building, and be virtually undetectable from the original.

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