

sperre trusses of Lower Berse, Bersham, near Wrexham, and on the main king-post and collar beam truss at Hafotty in Anglesey. The latter house was considered by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments as likely to be fourteenth century a date suggested by Monroe for Plas-ucha.⁷

Whatever the precise date of this house it is clear that Plas-ucha belongs to the *incunabula* of the Welsh House. It was recently visited by the Ancient Monuments Board who recommended that the ancient timber fabric deserved preservation either *in situ* or elsewhere. It is to be hoped that if preservation *in situ* which would be preferable, should prove impossible, the timbers will be saved for re-erection in a museum, ideally the Welsh Folk Museum, in Cardiff. For very few houses of this age and type survive in Wales, and as the future of the only close and reasonably complete parallel Plas Cadwgan, does not look encouraging, Plas-ucha is not a structure lightly to be lost.

PLAS-UCHAF IN CYMMER

A HISTORICAL NOTE

by L. A. S. Butler

The early history of Plas uchaf is obscure and it is first recorded by a correspondent of Edward Lhwyd as being in the possession of Charles Hughes of Gwerclas. Subsequent tenurial details indicate that Plas uchaf was inseparably linked to Gwerclas. While the two houses of Gwerclas and Plas isaf held mountain pasture high on the Berwyn range and while each of these two houses owed labour services in the repair of Llangar churchyard wall and were called upon for tithes, there is no trace that Plas uchaf had any share in parochial duties or tenurial rights. Gwallter Mechain records in

⁷ Mr. J. T. Smith has kindly looked at our drawings of Plas-Ucha and expressed the view that both masonry and joinery details are not inconsistent with a late fourteenth-century date on analogy with comparable English material.



FIG. 10. Truss 2



FIG. 11. View of North bay B-1, 1-C showing lower. Note windbrace survivors showing former existence of truss B



FIG. 12. Truss D. From Service Room



FIG. 13. General view showing louver truss, truss G, truss 2, and trusses D and E

1846 that the Hughes family moved from their house of Cymmer to the adjacent Gwerclas in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Hugh ap William ap Gruffydd Vychan (died 1600) is the first to be styled "of Gwerclas". There is some slight architectural evidence at the rear of Gwerclas to suggest that the house had an Elizabethan origin.

Before this date the family were barons of Cymmer living in *Plas o Kymmer*. The family was descended from Iorwerth, third son of Owain Brogyntyn and the senior branch held the lordship of Cymmer, which remained until the nineteenth century strictly defined as that part of the parish of Llangar lying west of the River Dee at its confluence (*cymmer*) with the Alwen. By the marriage of Ieuan ap Llywelyn Ddu to Margaret, the heiress of the related family of Crogen and Branau uchaf, the patrimony was doubled in size. Ieuan died in 1392 and his son Rhys married an heiress of a cadet branch of the Nannau family. It is not recorded whether Rhys sympathised with Owain Glyndwr, the lord of nearby Glyndyfrdwy, or whether his house suffered in the English raid of 1403 which devastated Edeirnion. At any rate in 1415 Rhys was serving as Rhaglaw of Abertanat, and was able to give his younger son Cymmer and his elder son Crogen and Branau uchaf. This marks one peak in the family fortunes. Subsequent generations were frequently visited by the heralds and bards on their *cwrs clera*, and after the move to Gwerclas the family provided the county with High Sheriffs in 1618 and 1660.

Half a mile north of Gwerclas stands Plas isaf, formerly held by a branch stemming from the family of Maesmor in nearby, Dinmael. The first to be known by the title "of Plas isaf" was Piers Wynn early in the seventeenth century; his father Robert is described as "of Llwyn-y-bi o vewn tre gymer". Robert's grandfather, also Robert, acquired Tyddyn-y-gors and y Plas bychan in the township of Keven Kymer in 1532. It is not certain that Plas bychan, Llwyn -y-bi and Plas isaf are all alternative names for the same house. Yet there is scarcely enough land available in Cymmer to support three different houses within the present holding of Plas isaf. The intrusion of the Maesmor branch into this township may have been directly connected with the marriage

of the first Robert to Lowri, daughter of William ap Gruffydd Vychan of Cymmer.

Cefn Cymmer was the ridge of high land rising to just over 600 feet above sea level; at the south-west is the farm now called Cae-mawr (and formerly known as Cefn Cymmer); at the north-east end of the ridge stands Plas uchaf; sheltering below its eastern flank is Gwerclas. The house called *Plas o Kymmer* should therefore be sought along this ridge or close to it and to the confluence from which it took its name. It should be sufficiently close to Plas isaf for the distinction in location and degree to be obvious. Ideally it should show by its architecture an origin in the thirteenth century, greater elaboration or possibly a total rebuilding early in the fifteenth century and finally a lack of attention after its desertion by the main branch of the family shortly before 1600. The only house which fulfils these requirements within this township is Plas uchaf. There is, then, a reasonable certainty that this was Cymmer, the seat of the barons of Cymmer and the ancestral home of the family of Hughes of Gwerclas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We should like to put on Record the help we have received in our examination of Plas-ucha from Mr. Bernard Mason formerly of the National Buildings Record, Mr. M. Bevan-Evans and Miss Thelma Sykes, and Miss C. M. Vernon. We would particularly like to thank Mr. H. Brooksby, who discovered the early windows under the plaster, a decisive link in the chain of evidence. We are also indebted to Dr. L. A. S. Butler who has pointed out that at least two of the trusses, (C and (2)) have consecutively numbered assembly marks, further proof if any were needed, that the roof is of a single build. He has kindly searched the records for a landed family of a status consonant with the house, and given us the short historical note above.