

CONSERVATION AND ADAPTATION OF RURAL DWELLINGS

Principles of Good Practice





Area = 15,550 hectares
Population = 6502 (2001)

INTRODUCTION

There is a distinct pattern of settlement – characteristic of the seaboard and mountains of north and west Wales – of tiny dwellings scattered on poor land. One of the most important areas for this being the Llyn peninsula.

Such landscapes were once much more widespread and they include some of the smallest dwelling types to survive anywhere in Wales.

These little houses are not ancient – few are earlier than the late eighteenth century and many are much more recent – but they were the homes of the humblest members of the rural society.

They were built using local materials and traditional regional techniques. They preserve evidence of the culture and everyday lives of the people of rural Llyn.

As part of a rich archive for Welsh social, economic and cultural history

they deserve careful preservation and sympathetic management.

They are threatened by the abandonment of marginal settlements, by neglect and by inappropriate modernisation.

Successful conservation of these dwellings has been difficult, hampered by their sometimes remote location, their small size and the fragility of their architectural character.

Most of these dwellings in Llyn have statutory protection through listing but sensitive planning and development control can help by encouraging good design and detailing.

This booklet is designed to explain and illustrate the special nature of these dwellings and to offer guidelines on good practice in restoring and adapting them for life in this century.

THE HISTORICAL DESIGN OF COTTAGES

- Most of the surviving cottages of the Llyn peninsula date from the early to mid 19th. Century, with very few predating this period.
- There are few remains of earth walled dwellings visible in the landscape, some being incorporated into later stone buildings.
- There are remnants of earlier stone dwellings built into some cottages but most show that they were built as new dwellings.

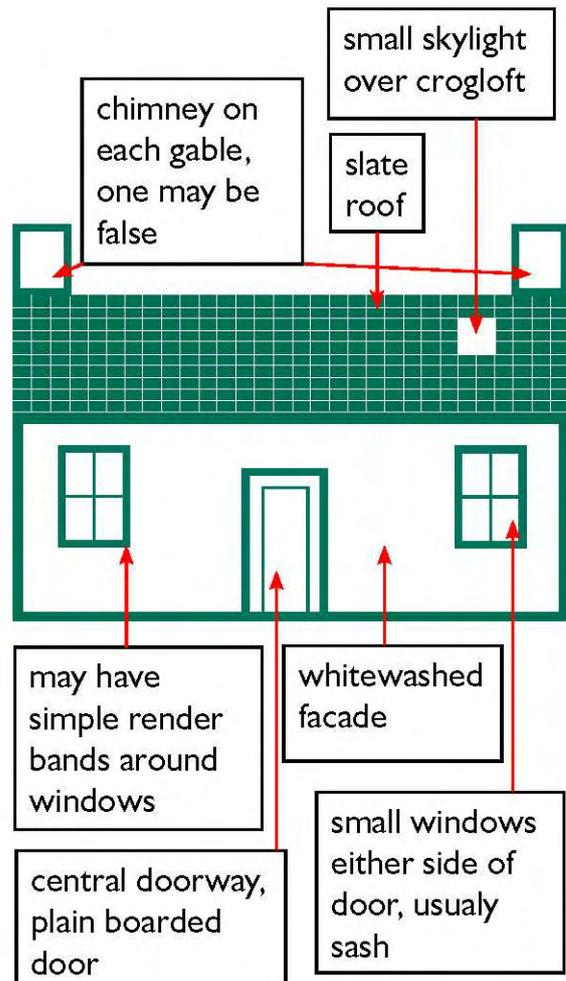
- Rural dwellings, of necessity, were built with materials that were readily available in the locality, such as stone, lime, clay, timber and slate. This does not mean that there was no importation of building materials. In the mid 19th. Century transportation, particularly the railway, enabled materials to be sourced from a considerable distance away.
- Cottages were small and lacked daylight – and these are the main problems encountered when planning modifications.
- The load bearing walls are the external walls, all internal division is done by timber wainscoting. Division may be simply into two halves separated by a passage or into three or four smaller rooms.

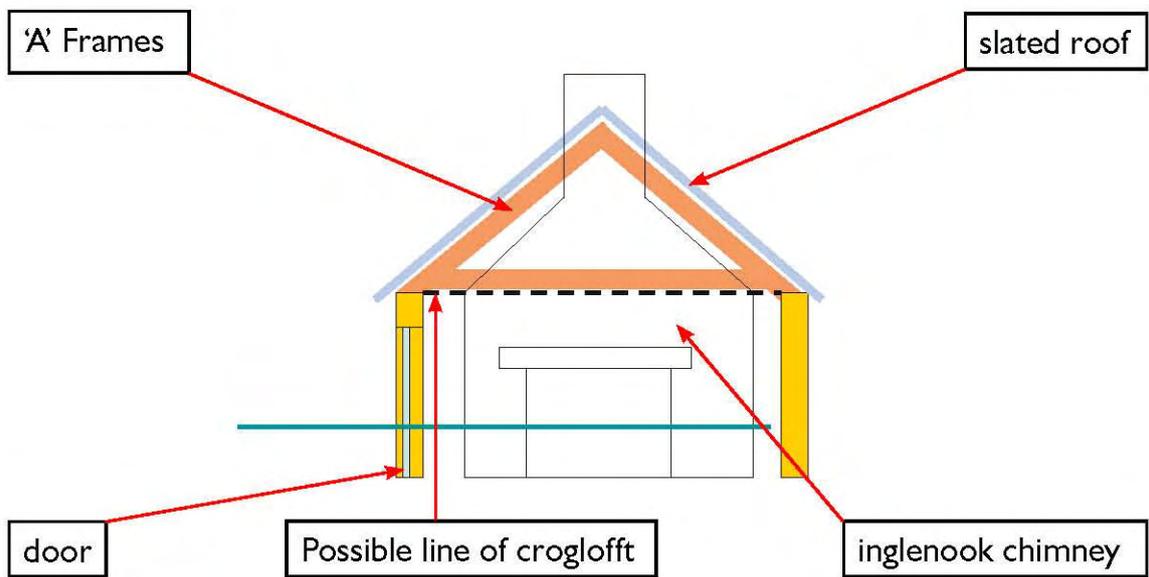
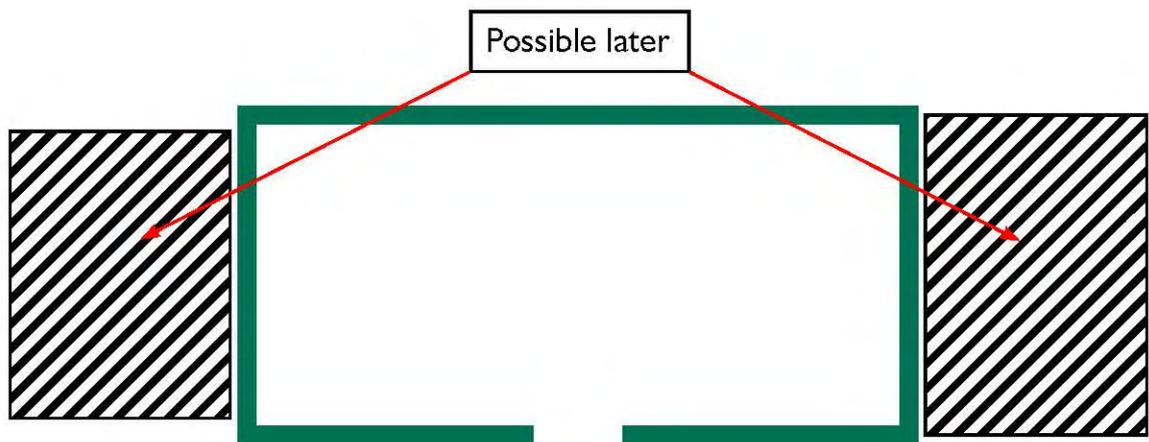
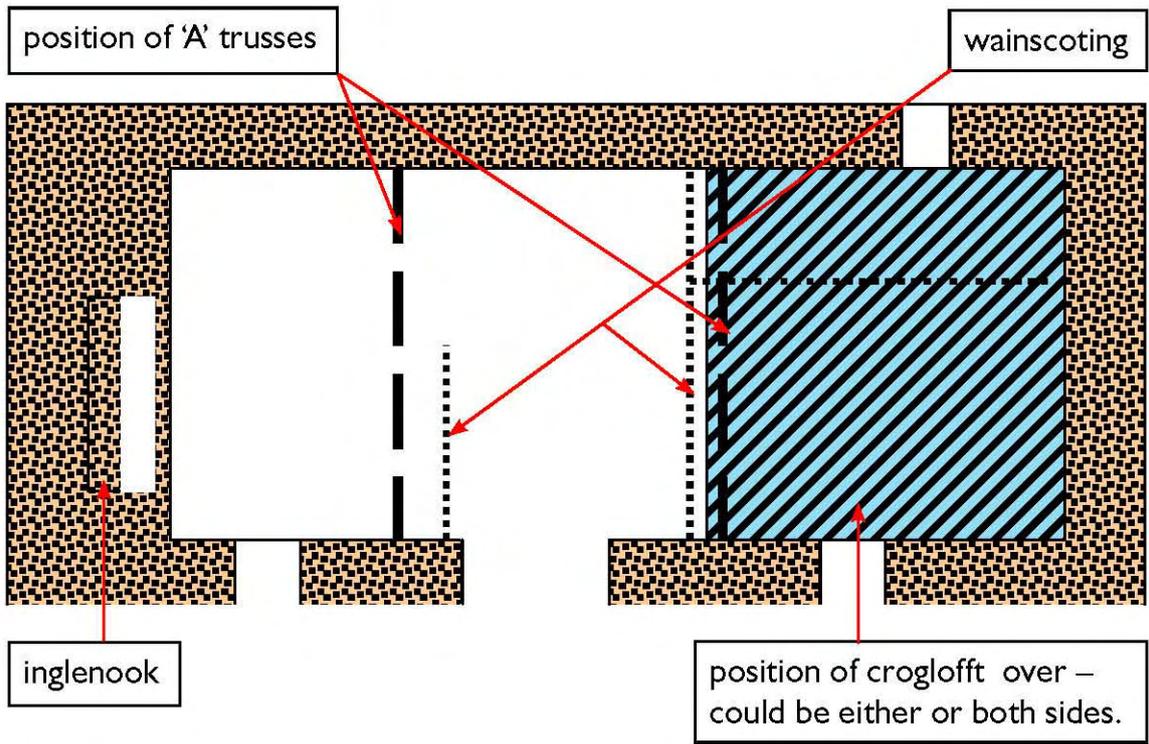
DESIGN AND LAYOUT

- Most cottages show strong similarities in the way they are set out. This suggests a common way of doing things, and accepted conventions of design.
- Floors may be rammed earth or a mix of lime and earth, later re-laid in concrete.

- This can be seen in the planning where similar dimensions, proportions and layout occur time and again. Often the cottage plan is a scaled down version of the larger houses in the locality.
- In most cottages the arrangement of the elevation reflects the organisation of the internal spaces.
- A squat, rectangular elevation with a central door and two flanking windows, all remarkably symmetrical and to proportion. Two chimneys, one on each gable wall.
- In plan, a rectangle with the inglenook chimney normally on the left gable wall. There may be another, smaller fireplace on the right gable but often the chimney is a fake – only there to maintain symmetry!

- There may or may not be a crogloft. If there is a crogloft this may be over half or the full area of the floor plan.





MATERIALS

Stone

- Field stone was freely available but still had to be hauled to the site and roughly dressed and squared, certainly on better-constructed cottages. Dressing made the construction far easier and enabled window and door jambs to be finished squarely.
- On other cottages field stone, boulders and rubble was used and dressed stone used only around the openings.
- All showed the skill of the mason in assembling the building,
- The stone walls were held together with a clay/lime mortar mix or even a soil/lime mix, small pieces of stone being pushed into the wider joints.

Lime

- Lime was one of the most important materials, used as a basis for mortar for the walls, plaster for the interior, render for the outside, torching for the roof and as whitewash for weatherproofing.

Slate

- Whereas the very early rude cottages may have been roofed in straw or bracken the later cottages were built with slate as a roofing material.
- Depending on the locality and the quality of slate available there was considerable variation in roofing techniques. These range from small random slate roofs to roofs covered with large, regular, fine slates.

- Some roofs show the slates bedded in mortar in lieu of torching the underside of the roof.
- Older roofs show slates hooked over the battens using timber pegs.
- When eventually the roof slates started slipping it became common practice repair the roof by applying grout to the whole surface to hold the slates in place for a few years longer. The grouting was re-applied over the years until the roof structure could no longer support the extra weight and the roof was replaced.
- Torching the underside of the roof was necessary to hold the slates in place, to stop them chattering and to make the cottage relatively draught proof – especially welcomed by anyone sleeping in the croglofft.

Timber

- Sawn timber is generally used in the majority of Lleyn cottages, with only a few examples remaining of roughly hewn timber logs and branches used as structural timbers.
- Timber was used structurally for lintels, joists, trusses, purlins and rafters.
- The roof trusses are simple 'A' frames in the main, these being simple to make and adequate for the spans and weight involved. Most cottages make do
- with only two trusses, positioned roughly a third of the way from the gable ends.

Lime wash

- External walls made of rubble or field stone and roughly bedded and jointed in a lime/dirt mix were not very good at preventing water penetration so it became fairly standard practice to use whitewash as protection to the walls. Whitewash is only a mix of lime putty and water with perhaps tallow or linseed oil added for better weathering properties. This had to be applied every year, usually to only the front of the cottage. The build up of lime over the years creates the lovely rounded, undulating effect characteristic of cottages. The accumulation of lime could easily end up being over 25 mm. thick.

CARING FOR THE LLEYN COTTAGE HERITAGE

- This section sets out to explain how best to preserve the sensitive character and historic value of these cottages while still adapting them to modern living requirements or even new uses.
- The survival of all buildings is best achieved through continued use. Conversely, the neglect and abandonment of a building is the quickest way to destroy it.
- Under the current planning legislation cottages, once abandoned and in a state of dereliction, cannot be brought back into use.
- The Lleyn peninsula has always been a poor rural area, sparsely populated and very reliant on quarrying and

agriculture. It is an area of small, scattered hamlets with outlying smallholdings and isolated cottages.

- Its remoteness and poor communication links has, paradoxically, made it a favourite area for tourism and second homes, exerting a lot of pressure on this already fragile environment.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

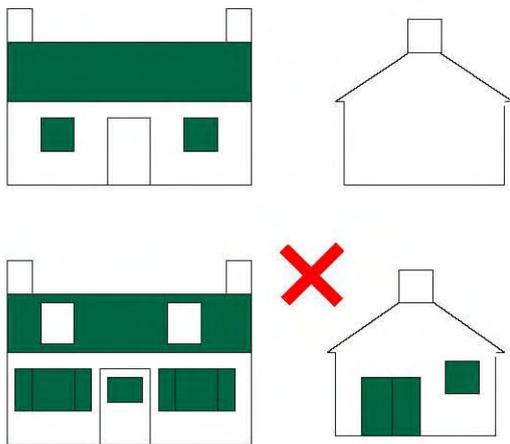
General

- Lleyn has a number of Conservation Areas, SSSI and a large Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- A large number of cottages on the Lleyn peninsula are Listed Buildings, any alteration external or internal may require Listed Building Consent.
- It is a criminal offence to carry out any work on a listed building without applying for Listed Building Consent.
- A proposed change of use will require planning permission and probably Building Control consent.
- Before undertaking any alterations ensure that the original is carefully recorded.
- It is always recommended that expert advice be sought for all projects, either from the Local Authority or from a qualified professional familiar with listed buildings and the planning laws.

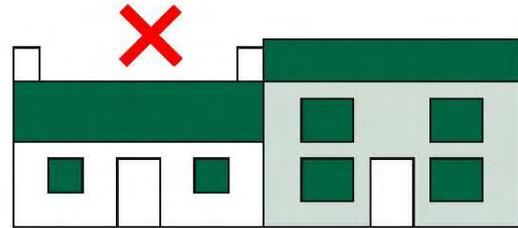
- Be honest and sensitive – do not attempt to disguise the building, let the cottage tell its own story.
- Remember – a cottage is meant to be small – it will not take kindly to excessive enlargement.

Externally

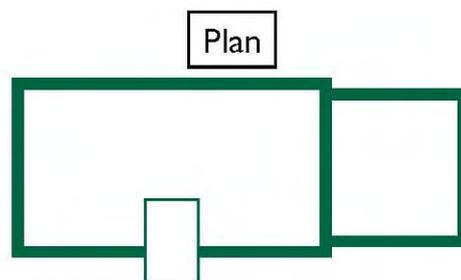
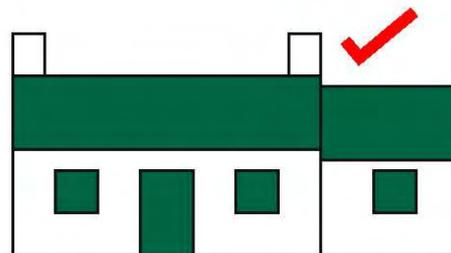
- Retain external character, respecting the aspect and orientation of the original.
- Keep the original pattern and scale of the openings and avoid the creation of new ones.
- Patio doors do not work on cottages!



- Keep within the original footprint of the building whenever possible, retaining original roof lines and adding as little as practicable.
- Where extensions are unavoidable respect the scale and integrity of the original building. Do not let the extension dominate.

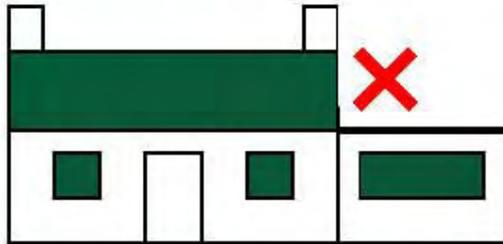


- As a guide extensions work best when they are no more than a third of the size of the original building.
- In most cases a linear extension will be more appropriate.
- Take advice about planning requirements on extensions in AONB.
- New extensions should be visible as such and not blended in to the original building.
- Roof lines should be lower and the walls stepped back from the line of the original.



- Preserve the evidence for the original purpose of outbuildings which are brought into domestic use.

- Openings are generally of small scale with a greater proportion of wall to window area.

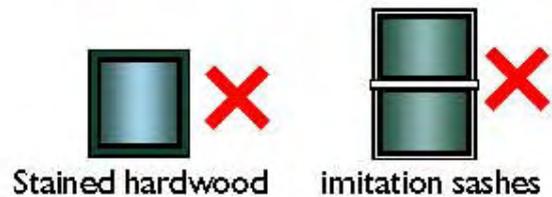


- Flat roof extensions do not work and will not generally be allowed.
- Respect the original method of construction by using the same materials, components and techniques. Use the same size and colour of slates. Roof pitches should be as the original.

- Windows are the eyes of the cottage, the most carefully restored or converted cottage can be ruined by the use of inappropriate windows.

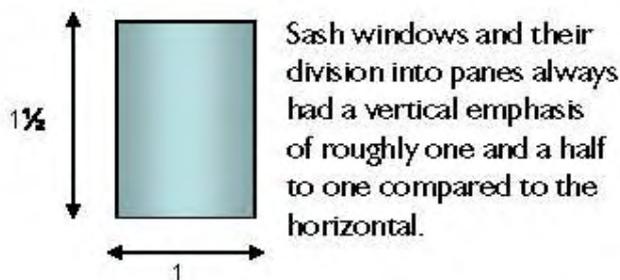
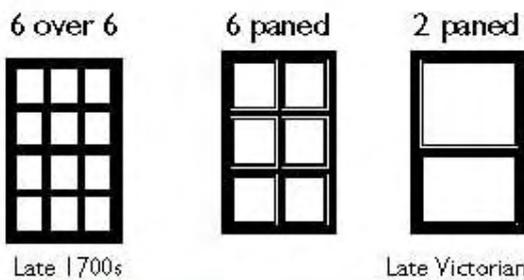
- Casement windows, uPVC windows, hardwood windows, tilting imitation sash windows are all wrong for cottages.

- The only acceptable window type is a double or single hung wooden boxed sash window unless there is evidence to show differently.

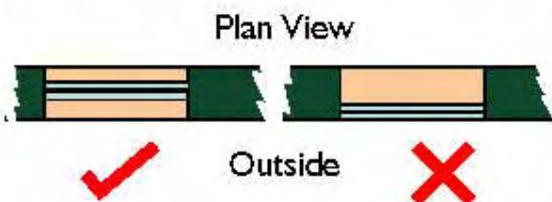


Windows

- Windows were generally small and commonly sash construction, although some had small casement style or even horizontal sliding sashes (Yorkshire lights). Generally the older the window the smaller and greater were the number of panes.

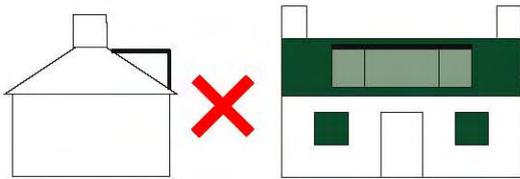


- Windows are always set back in the opening by about 100mm at least. They are never flush with the outside face of the wall.

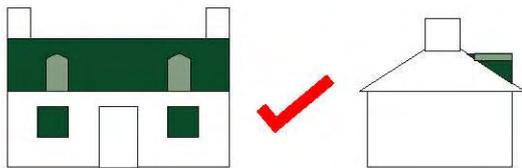


- Windows always had a painted finish, mostly white, but NEVER stained.
- Windows should be single glazed and without trickle vents.
- The appropriate type of sash for the age of the cottage is normally either two-paned or a four-paned sash.

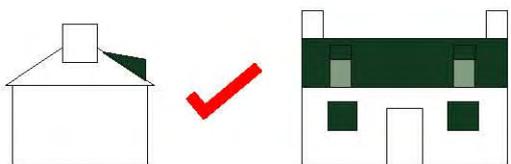
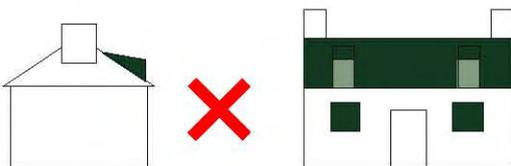
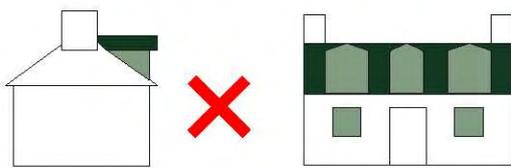
- If the original windows remain then they should be repaired or replaced with exact replicas.
- The insertion of dormer windows where none were present previously calls for very careful treatment to avoid destroying the character of the cottage.



Flat roof dormers do not work on a cottage or a croglofft cottage

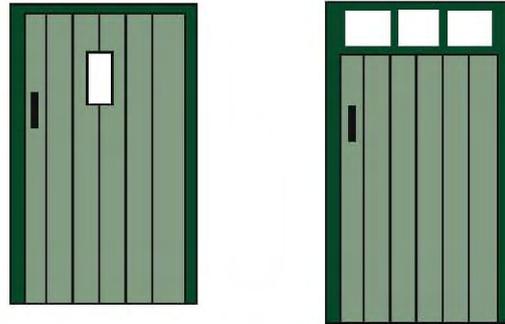


- Gable dormers or lean-to dormers must be small and to scale.



Doors

- Cottage doors were invariably of plain, simple construction, perhaps with a small glazed panel in the centre. This was omitted if there was a fanlight over.

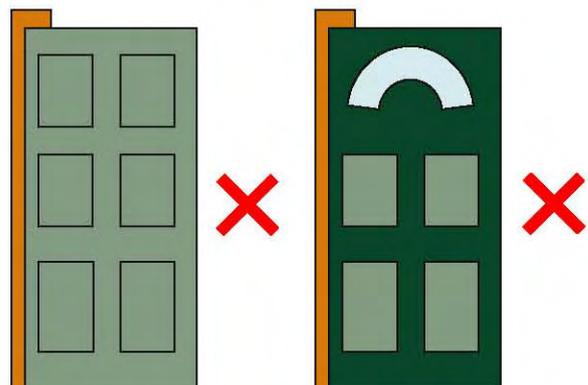


- Doors were of softwood and either ledged and braced or framed, ledged and braced in construction.

- They were invariably painted, not stained. The colour was commonly dark green, brownish-red or dark blue. White was not used.

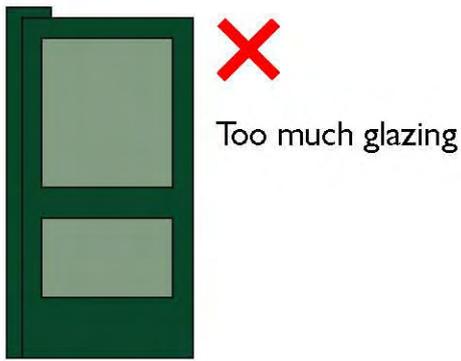
- Door furniture was a simple thumb latch or 'Suffolk' latch; door knockers, if fitted, were simple.

- Modern door designs, such as 'Carolina' type with an integral fanlight are not suitable or doors with a large amount of glazing. Neither are panelled doors of any description, nor anything in PVCu!



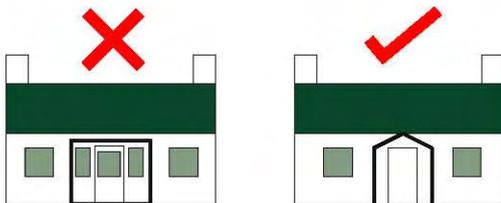
Panelled door

'Carolina' type



Porches

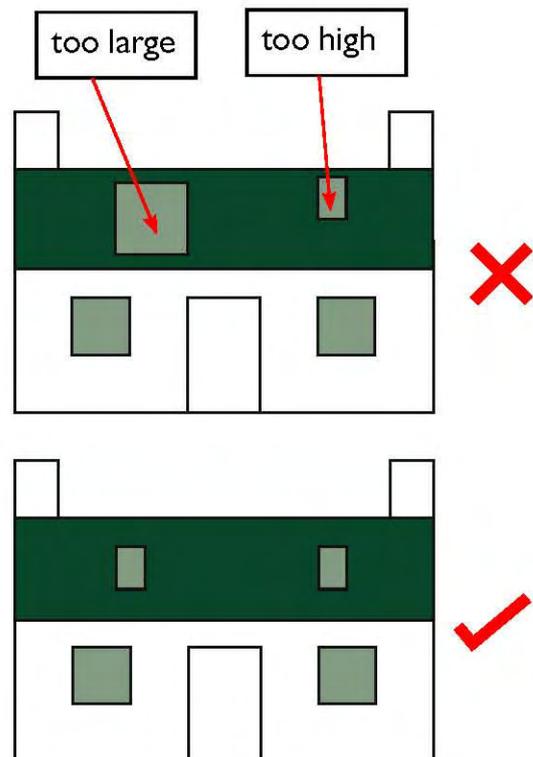
- If present they should be retained.
- If porches are to be added on then care must be taken that they do not become the dominant feature on the cottage. Listed Building Consent is required to attach anything on to a listed building.
- Planning permission is also required if the porch is higher than 3 metres or over 3 square metres in area or is nearer than 2 metres to a highway.
- Porches must be in scale with the building and of appropriate design and materials.
- Flat roofed enclosed porches are never acceptable.



Roof lights

- Large roof lights should be avoided, particularly standard 'Velux' types. If necessary at all, the roof lights should be small, to scale and be low profile so that they do not stand too high above the roofline.

- Most 'conservation' type lights, despite their name, tend to stand proud of the roof, but there are low profile roof lights available.
- Roof lights should be in the middle of the roof slope, avoid installing them too near the ridge or the eaves.



External walls

- The rubble walls of cottages were never meant to be exposed because of the random nature of the stones, usually picked from the field and used without dressing or squaring in any way. It is therefore not acceptable to just to re-point the stonework and leave it highly visible.
- The traditional weather coat was whitewash – a mixture of lime putty and water – which was painted on the stonework. This was done yearly since the whitewash tended to fade and wash off gradually. Over

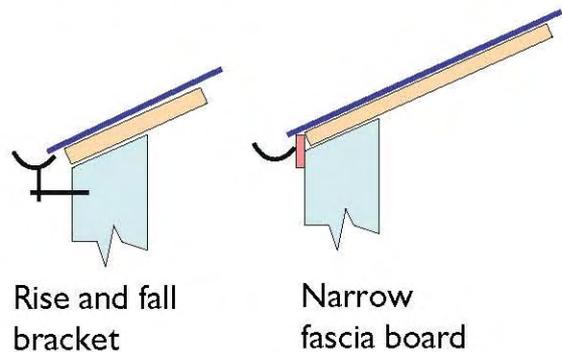
the years a thick skin of lime wash was formed over the stonework, softening the outlines of the stones. Colouring pigment was never used.

Roofs and rainwater goods

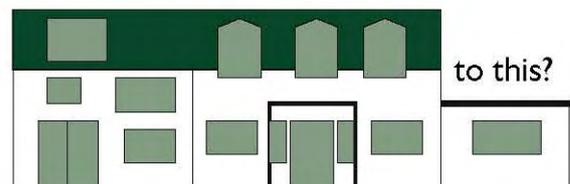
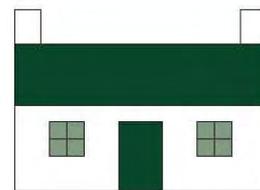
- Whilst very early cottages would have been roofed in straw thatch, slate quickly became the roofing material of choice. Slate was easily available locally and made for a more durable, watertight roof.
- Slate roofs can last 100 years or more so the original roof may well be still in place.
- Original slate roofs should be repaired not replaced, wherever possible, and with exactly matching slates. This means colour, thickness, type of cut, size and method of fixing.
- Re roofing should be with slates which are in scale with the roof, extremely large slates (over 20 x 10 inch) will appear incongruous.
- Old ridge tiles were butt jointed, not the new overlap type and were dark blue in colour.
- Roof vents should be avoided, breather membrane should be considered instead. If unavoidable, ridge vents are less intrusive than slate vents.
- Originally, there would not have been any guttering on a cottage, except perhaps a short length over the front door.
- Very commonly the runoff from the back of the cottage roof was carried

away by means of a narrow open drain at ground level.

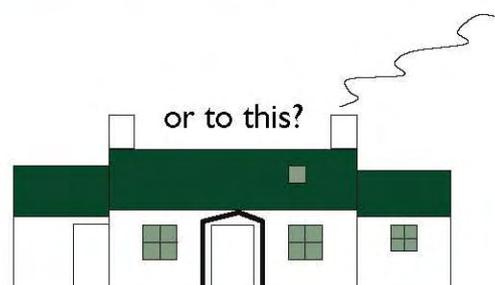
- The only acceptable material for guttering and down pipes is cast iron in a simple half round section, or ogee if there is a precedent. Fixing may be direct to the eaves by the use of a narrow fascia board or alternatively by use of rise and fall brackets spiked into the masonry.
- Cast aluminium may be considered as an alternative to cast iron in exceptional cases.



From this -



or to this?

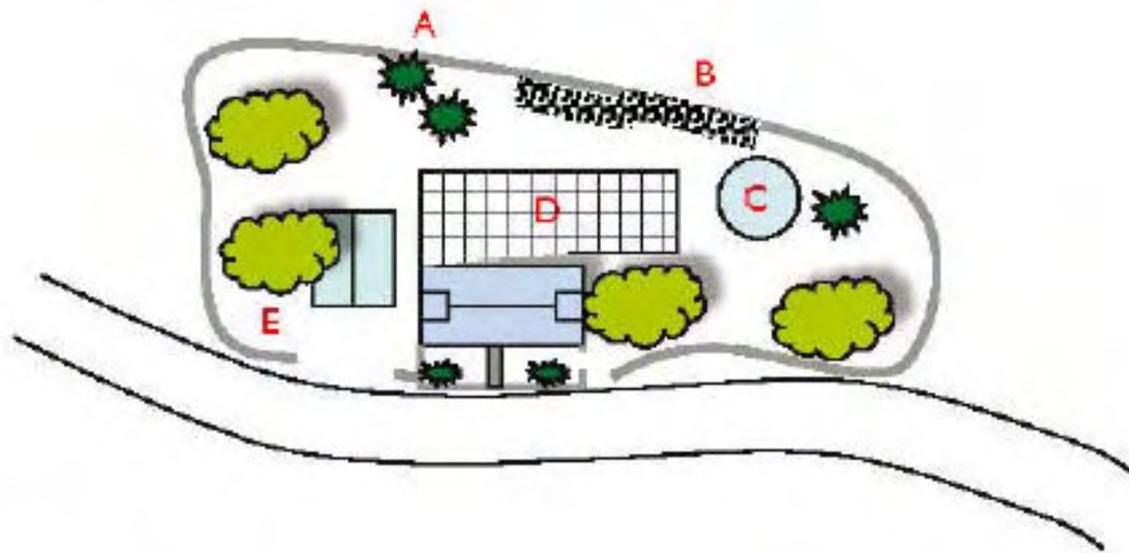


External works

Within the curtilage of the cottage there may be a small front garden, bounded by a drystone wall and a wrought iron or cast iron gate, but, more often than not the cottage was built very close to the road.

The cottage may have a little land around it, consisting of one or two small fields, invariably defined by drystone walls. These should be kept intact.

- A. ornamental plants/bushes
- B. inappropriate hedging
- C. ornamental features
- D. large areas of paving
- E. large free-standing structures



The surroundings of the cottage are as important as the building itself, it should be kept as original as much as possible.

Do not make it into a suburban garden and do not introduce non-native planting.

Planning Policies and national planning guidance

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 3.1.2 of Planning Policy Wales emphasise that applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless other material planning considerations state otherwise. You should read the policies of the Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance (available on the website) and national planning guidance, prior to submitting an application.

Furthermore, if you intend to submit an application we advise prospective applicants to use the pre-application advice service provided by the Planning Service. You need to comply with the requirements of the Guidance Note: Pre-application advice service (on this website) prior to arranging an appointment to meet a Planning Officer.

Examples of traditional rural dwellings in Gwynedd



