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The Ugly House

Last updated: 05 January 2007

Do you think this house is ugly? **Dan James** from Llanllechid weighs up the evidence, trying to decide which part of its legend might be fact.



The history of the Ugly House (Ty Hyll) is very vague. Putting a guide book together about it was very difficult, but the legend says it was built back in the 15th century by two outlawed brothers, based on the old Welsh law of *ty unos* - a house of a single night. If you could build four walls and have smoke coming out of the chimney between sunset and sunrise, you got the freehold of the land.

Then you had the opportunity to stand on each corner, throw an axe as far as you could and take ownership of all that land too.

This is what's most commonly talked about, though if you look at the size of the house there's no way it could have been built in a day. But there was a strong custom of that being a law, so perhaps something smaller along those lines was built on this site before this structure.

It's thought the building that stands today was built when Thomas Telford was building the A5 from London to Holyhead in the 18th century. The navvies who built the road usually camped alongside it, but we're at the point where the road crosses the Lligwy river so they would have had to stay longer to build the bridge. They worked with stone and so may have had the wherewithal to use some of it to build this house, so they could avoid camping for a while. But there's no conclusive proof as the deeds don't go back that far.



The last known resident, Edward Riley, was here from 1928 until his death in the 1960s. He was caretaker to the outdoor education centre next door and did a lot of what you'd call amateur DIY to the house, which wasn't bad, but didn't really stand the test of time. After he died

it passed to his family, but they weren't local and it got used for various things, like an antiques shop, a café and tourist gift shop.

By the 1980s it was empty and falling to rack and ruin, until it was bought by the Snowdonia Society in 1988.



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	Sunday max 14°C min 8°C		Monday max 10°C min 7°C
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The Snowdonia Society was set up as a charity in 1967 by Esme and Peter Kirby, who ran it from the front room of Dyffryn Mymbyr, their farm, as featured in Thomas Firkbank's book, *I Bought Mountain*. But after beginning to employ staff, the society needed proper accommodation so they bought the Ugly House and lovingly restored it. Peter led the painstaking refurbishment, removing each roof slate, numbering them and replacing them all exactly as they were. Basically, the whole of the inside was overhauled by volunteers.

The outside wasn't changed and it's still known as the Ugly House, and this might be for many reasons. Firstly, perhaps because it was built by the outlaws, who were thought to be 'ugly', dark, sinister characters hiding out in the woods.

Or perhaps it's somehow a mis-spelling of 'Lligwy'.

Or, most likely, 'hyll' doesn't actually mean ugly in old Welsh, but something more like rugged - and that makes more sense, as it is a bit rugged, but not really ugly at all.

Dan James

your comments

David Boughey (Weston super Mare)

My mother Ivy Boughey was bequeathed the Ugly House after Ted Riley died in 1960. She was not a relative, but my parent had known him over many year whilst staying on family holidays at the Towers Guest House near the property. My mother tried to live in the house but preferred Teg Fan, the other property on the land. She eventually sold after three years due ill health. I am now 73 but spent many a happy holiday with Ted and Lillian.

Thu Jul 23 10:02:12 2009

Gordon Morris

"Legend has it" - most legends have a basis in fact. Certainly the idea was you had to build the house and have smoke going up the chimney quickly, but depending on who you ask and where, it's between sunrise and sunset. Others say it's as stated here. Anyway, what they used to do was to prepare the materials beforehand and build the chimney as fast as they could, but the rest of the house was just poles with an infill of either pre-made wattle panels or turves or a mixture of them. The roof was again, just turf to make a quick roof. The chimney was often a very rough, big, crude affair which was easy and quick to build and more or less formed a whole gable and incorporated a bake-oven. The huge chimney/gable formed the support for one end of the wall/roof poles. The other gable was made with a pre-made frame, like a cruck-frame. Later, when things had settled, the house was built properly with stone around the existing house, which was gradually removed, and a proper house finished off. Often, the original timber frame gable became a central dividing wall when the house was extended as the house was built properly. This can be seen to be so because the timber frame is within the stone walls showing that the stone was built around the frame, the outer timbers of the



figures raised in the region.

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frame not then forming part of the outer wall. Many houses exist with massive a chimney and the ground area of one is as big as a small room. I used to own such a house.

Mon Apr 20 15:05:19 2009

Brian Smith Milton Keynes

Back in the 80s we bought an ugly mug and a very decorative large teapot from the shop in the Ugly House. We still have them and wondered if they still sell these products.

Thu Aug 28 09:23:24 2008

Jack and Jill from Tasmania

Read about the fascinating history of Ty Hyll on the internet before our 2005 trip and were delighted to see it "in the flesh" at last. If ever there was a misnomer, this has to be it! The place is absolutely delightful!

Thu Feb 1 10:15:15 2007

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