
Woodbank Cottage Pontycysllte (ex-Denbighshire)

A Heritage Impact Assessment

May 2021
Mercian Heritage Series No.1734

**Woodbank Cottage
Pontcysyllte
Nr. Llangollen
Wrexham Maelor (ex-Denbighshire)
NGR: SJ 268 421**

**A
Heritage Impact Statement
on
Proposed Development**

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Planning Guidelines	5
3. Setting & Outline History	8
4. Description	12
5. Discussion	23
6. Heritage Statement	24
7. The Proposals	25
8. Heritage Impact Assessment	26
9. Conclusions	29

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Summary

Proposals have been made for alterations to the rear of Woodbank Cottage, a Grade II listed building in Pontcysyllte. Under the guidelines of Planning Policy Wales, this Consultancy was commissioned to produce an assessment of the impact on the listed building and on any other heritage assets adjacent to it. The report is not concerned with any other planning matters. It concludes that overall the scheme is well-considered and proportionate and will result in little or no harm to the significance of the listed buildings or any adjacent heritage assets.

1. Introduction

1.1 General

Proposals have been made for changes to the rear of Woodbank Cottage in Pontcysyllte, a Grade II listed building. This report has been commissioned, under the guidelines of *Planning Policy Wales* to assess the heritage impact of the proposals on the character, setting or significance of the listed building and any other designated or undesignated heritage assets adjacent to the site.

1.2 Report Format

The report format is straightforward. After this introductory section is an outline relevant planning guidance (Sections 2), followed by an outline history of the site (Section 3). Section 4 is an outline description of the various components of the site, Section 5 a discussion, and Section 6 a short heritage statement. Section 6 outlines the proposals, Section 8 is a heritage impact assessment of the proposals, and Section 9 is a short conclusion.

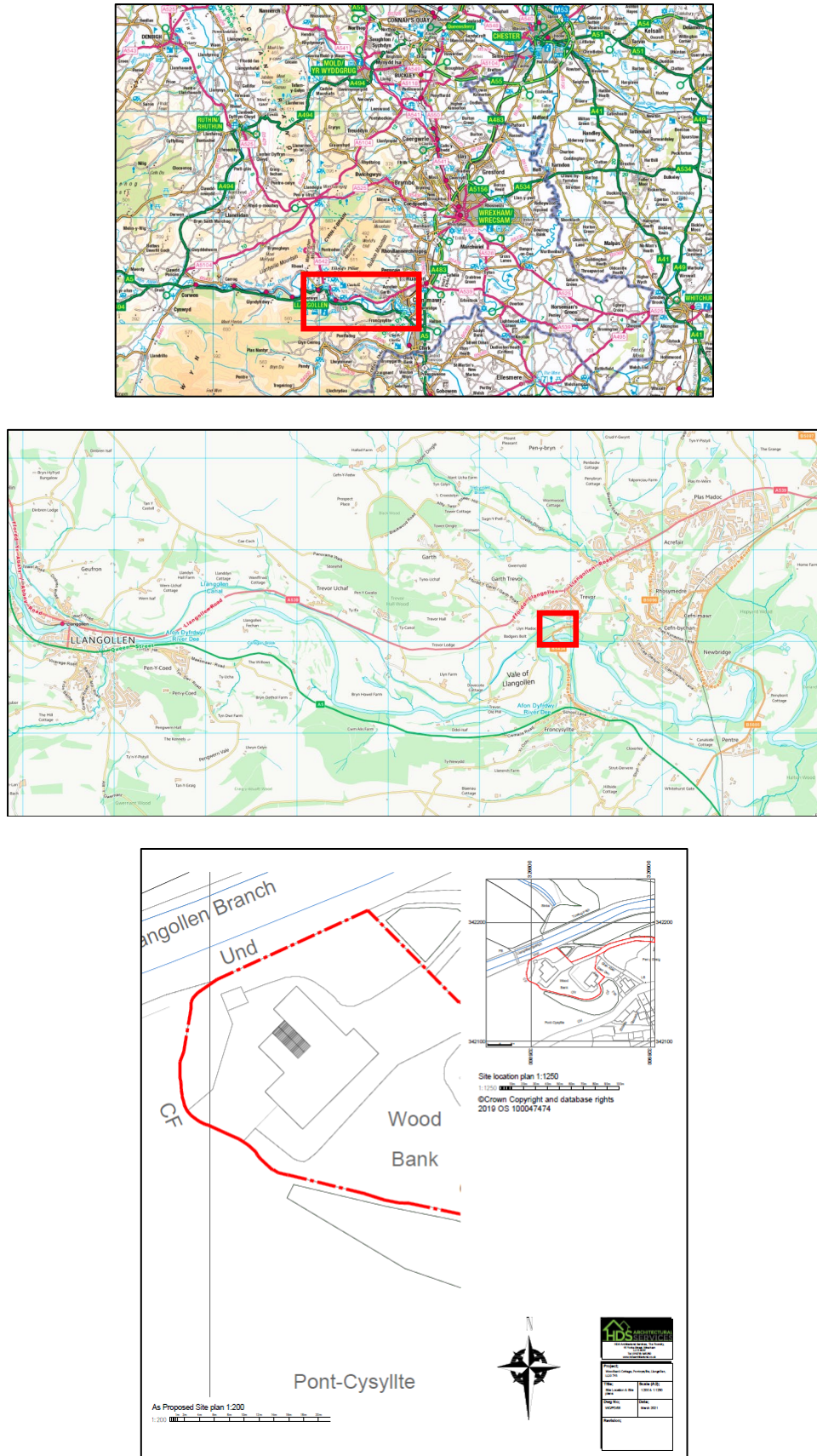


Fig.1: Location and site plan.
 (OS Open Data & HDS Architects)

2. General Planning Guidance

The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 received the Royal Assent in March 2016, with some of its provisions coming into force in May of the same year. The main planning laws are enshrined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990. Section 66 of the Act deals with the responsibilities of local planning authorities – the decision makers - when dealing with planning applications that could impact on heritage assets. The first part of Section 66 states:

*‘In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses’.*¹

The main planning guidance for Wales is now set out in *Planning Policy Wales*, originally issued in 2002 and now in its 10th iteration. Chapter 6 deals with the historic environment. It states in paragraph 6.1.5:

‘The planning system must take into account the Welsh Government’s objectives to protect, conserve, promote and enhance the historic environment as a resource for the general well-being of present and future generations. The historic environment is a finite, non-renewable and shared resource and a vital and integral part of the historical and cultural identity of Wales. It contributes to economic vitality and culture, civic pride, local distinctiveness and the quality of Welsh life’.

and in paragraph 6.1.13:

‘Applicants for listed building consent must be able to justify their proposals, show why the alteration or demolition of a listed building is desirable or necessary and consider the impact of any change upon its significance. This must be included in a heritage impact statement, which will be proportionate both to the significance of the building and to the degree of change proposed’.

Paragraph 6.1.10 states:

‘There should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation or enhancement of a listed building and its setting, which might extend beyond its curtilage. For any development proposal affecting a listed building or its setting, the primary material consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses’.

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 c.9 section 66 (1), 41

However, Paragraph 6.1.11 recognises that in many cases adaptive re-use will be the only option available in order to retain and preserve a heritage asset, stating:

‘For listed buildings, the aim should be to find the best way to protect and enhance their special qualities, retaining them in sustainable use. The continuation or reinstatement of the original use should generally be the first option, but not all original uses will now be viable or appropriate. The application of planning and listed building controls should recognise the need for flexibility where new uses have to be considered in order to secure a building’s survival or provide it with a sound economic future’.

Earlier versions of PPW re-introduced the concept of ‘Undesignated historic assets’ – adapted the English system’s ‘non-designated heritage assets’ first outlined in PPS5 and repeated in the NPPF. In the latest version (10) of PPW these are now referred to (in para 6.1.29) as ‘Historic assets of special local importance’:

‘planning authorities may develop lists of historic assets of special local interest, that do not have statutory protection, but that make an important contribution to local distinctiveness and have the potential to contribute to public knowledge’.

In relation to conservation areas, the PPW states that:

6.1.14: *‘There should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of conservation areas or their settings. Positive management of conservation areas is necessary if their character or appearance are to be preserved or enhanced and their heritage value is to be fully realised....’*

6.1.15 *‘There is a strong presumption against the granting of planning permission for developments, including advertisements, which damage the character or appearance of a conservation area or its setting to an unacceptable level. In exceptional cases, the presumption may be overridden in favour of development considered desirable on public interest grounds’.*

and

6.1.16 *‘Preservation or enhancement of a conservation area can be achieved by a development which either makes a positive contribution to an area’s character or appearance or leaves them unharmed. Mitigation measures can also be considered which could result in an overall neutral or positive impact of a proposed development in a conservation area’.*

The potential impact of any changes to heritage assets needs to be assessed during the development of the proposals for such changes; Cadw, the national heritage body in Wales, have produced guidance on the production of such heritage assessments – *Heritage Impact Assessments in Wales* (2017) – which outlines what information is required.

It:

‘should take into account sufficient information to enable both the significance of the asset and the impact of change to be understood. It should be proportionate both to the significance of the historic asset and to the degree of change proposed.’

An earlier Cadw guidance document, *Conservation Principles*, of 2011, provides a more succinct, pragmatic and useful summary of the issues of conservation and its core principle (para.1.1) recognises that:

‘Changes in the historic environment are inevitable. This can be the result of decay caused by natural processes, damage caused by wear and tear of use, and the need to respond to social, cultural, economic and technological changes’ (para.1.1).

Furthermore, it states that *‘conservation is the careful management of change’* (para.1.2).

3. Setting & Outline History

3.1 Pontcysyllte

Woodbank Cottage lies high up on the wooded north slope of the River Dee, just below the line of the former navigable feeder of the Ellesmere Canal system – all now rebranded from the later-20th century as the Llangollen Canal. To the south-east is the world-renown Pontcysyllte aqueduct carrying the canal over the valley.

Although now in the district of Wrexham Maelor, historically, the site is within the extensive rural parish of Llangollen, Denbighshire, latterly within the township of Trevor Issaf. Little is known about the early history of the house and its site, but the architectural evidence and its location suggest its origins predate the development of the local canals – though this does not necessarily contradict the tradition that the building was used as a drawing office by one of the canal's engineers – Thomas Telford – when the giant aqueduct was being built.

The Ellesmere Canal was a highly ambitious scheme formed in 1793 during the 'Canal Mania' of the late-18th century. It was planned as a link between the navigable River Severn and the lower tidal sections of the Rivers Dee and Mersey – with the hope that as well as supplying the local market for coal and fertilizers it would also help in the development of several pockets of local manufacturing as well as forming a key element in the growing national canal network.

It was too ambitious, especially given the terrain it crossed, and it never reached the River Severn, petering out in fields near Weston, a few miles short. The line had to cross the Rivers Cerriog and Dee on aqueducts of a size and height as yet unseen in Britain. The Dee was to be crossed at Pontcysyllte – in what has become one of the iconic images of the industrial revolution and the canal age.

Thomas Telford is usually still given the credit for this engineering masterpiece and, indeed, effectively claimed that it was his idea in his autobiography – which conveniently ignored the fact that he was not actually the chief engineer of the canal. That was William Jessop, who had been involved in the project since at least 1802, before Telford was appointed. Jessop was the more experienced of the two in iron production and use, being a partner in the Butterley Ironworks, whilst Telford was, by training, a mason. Telford was nevertheless largely responsible for the construction of the iron aqueduct at Longden on the Shrewsbury Canal, built to replace a masonry one damaged in floods in 1795, and was quickly converted to the benefits of iron in bridges of all sizes.

The original design for a masonry aqueduct at a lower level, accessed by locks on either side, for which much of the masonry had been quarried and worked, was abandoned and the present structure started in 1795. However, work soon halted in order to allow the aqueduct at Chirk, to the south, to be finished first; work only restarted at Pontcysyllte in 1800 and it was opened towards the end of November 1805.²

² Hadfield, C, 1966, *The Canals of the West Midlands*, 176

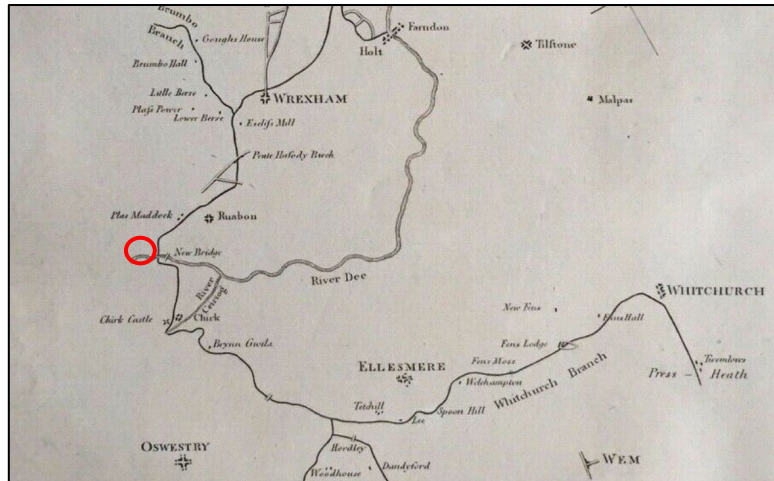


Fig.2: Extract from Stockdale's 1795 map of the proposed lines of the Ellesmere Canal.



Fig.3: Extract from the 1838 Llangollen tithe map.



Fig.4: Extract from the 1st edition of the 6'' Ordnance Survey map, surveyed 1872-3.

Despite the brilliance of their innovative engineering, and cost, both the Pontcysyllte and Chirk aqueducts were, in economic terms, white elephants. The main line of the Ellesmere Canal was never completed and came to a halt just 300m north of the aqueduct.

Today's pleasure boaters cross the aqueduct and can continue up the picturesque canal to beyond Llangollen, but that was never intended to be the terminus of the enterprise. Instead it was merely a feeder, providing water to the summit level of the main canal from the River Dee off a man-made weir – known for obvious reasons as the Horseshoe Weir. Whilst this had always been a necessary part of the overall scheme, the necessary Act authorising the feeder was not passed until 1804 and the work was not completed until 1808.³ It is not shown on Stockdale's 1795 map of the proposed canal network (*see* Fig.2).

The Ellesmere Canal, under its various owners over the following century, was never really profitable but did manage to stay open until the early-20th century – mostly due to the revenues from other portions of the system rather than the unofficially named Llangollen branch. By the 1930's most of the western section of the canal was derelict and it was officially closed in 1944.

The Llangollen branch remained open because of its importance as a feeder to the rest of the system and to commercial users of water. Proposals in the 1950's to transfer the canal to the Mid and South East Cheshire Water Board purely as a water supply were modified so that it remained in the ownership of the newly nationalised British Transport Commission who restored and maintained it and then were paid to supply the water to the Board. This coincided with a growing enthusiasm for pleasure boating on the canals and in 1968 the Llangollen branch was classed as a cruiseway – and has remained one of the most popular ever since.

3.2 Woodbank Cottage

The earliest detailed map of the area – excluding small scale ones related to the Ellesmere Canal – is the Llangollen tithe map of 1838 (*see* Fig.3). This shows the house in schematic form with a separate outbuilding to the rear, close to the canal feeder; to the south-east is a large maltings complex. All of these are part of the same plot – 510 – owned by the Ellesmere Canal Company.

The house is not named and the site is simply noted as 'House and Office Malt Kiln and Croft' and was leased by Thomas Butterson. In the 1841 census Butterson is listed as a maltster and was living at the house with his wife, Catherine, and two young female servants, Margaret and Caroline Roberts, possibly sisters.

By the 1850's it appears that Woodbank Cottage was the home of Edward Foulkes and the birth of their son was recorded in the Wrexham Advertiser of the 15th August 1857. Butterson seems to have retired to Canal Cottage, a little to the east, where he was living at the time of the 1861 census.

³ Hadfield, 1966, *op.cit.*, 178

By the 1880's the house was home to David Evans, who was closely involved with the local Methodists. Evans was a maltster too, so the nearby maltings was presumably still operational until at least the 1890's. In 1891 David Evans of Woodbank Cottage was 66; he was a widower and was looked after by his sister, Elizabeth Bates (55), described as the housekeeper, and his niece Elizabeth Jane Bates (18) described as a general servant and probably the elder Elizabeth's daughter.

By the later 1890's Woodbank was occupied by Paul Mowitz Mowis listed in the 1901 census as a 'sculptor and modeller' who had been born in Germany but was a British subject. He was then 42, living with his wife Christiana (41 and also German-born) and their two children, William (11) and Frederick (5), both born in Denbighshire; they were looked after by Anna Jones (16) a general servant. Mowis was still there until at last 1905.

Presumably by this time the maltings had ceased to operate, but the building is clearly shown on the detailed 2nd edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig.5). It appears to have been largely demolished by the 1950's.

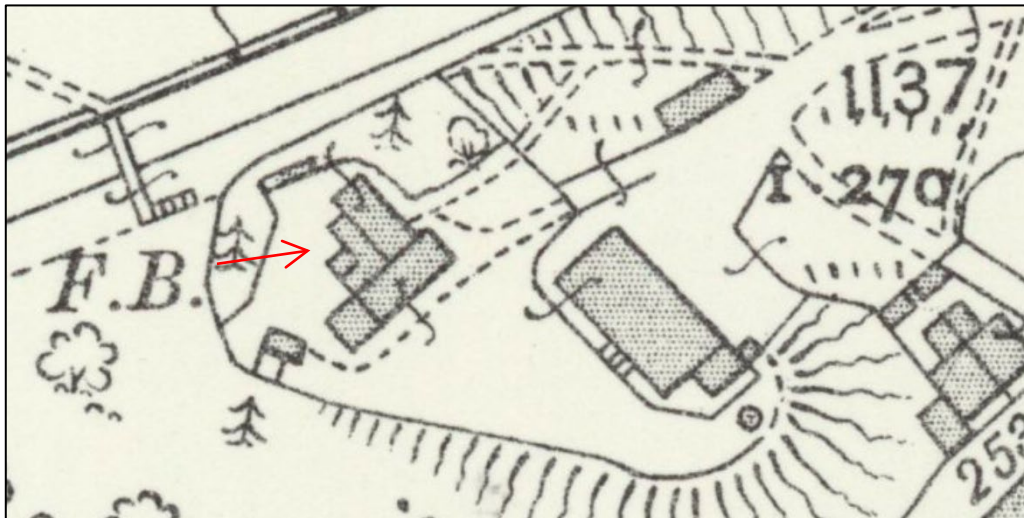
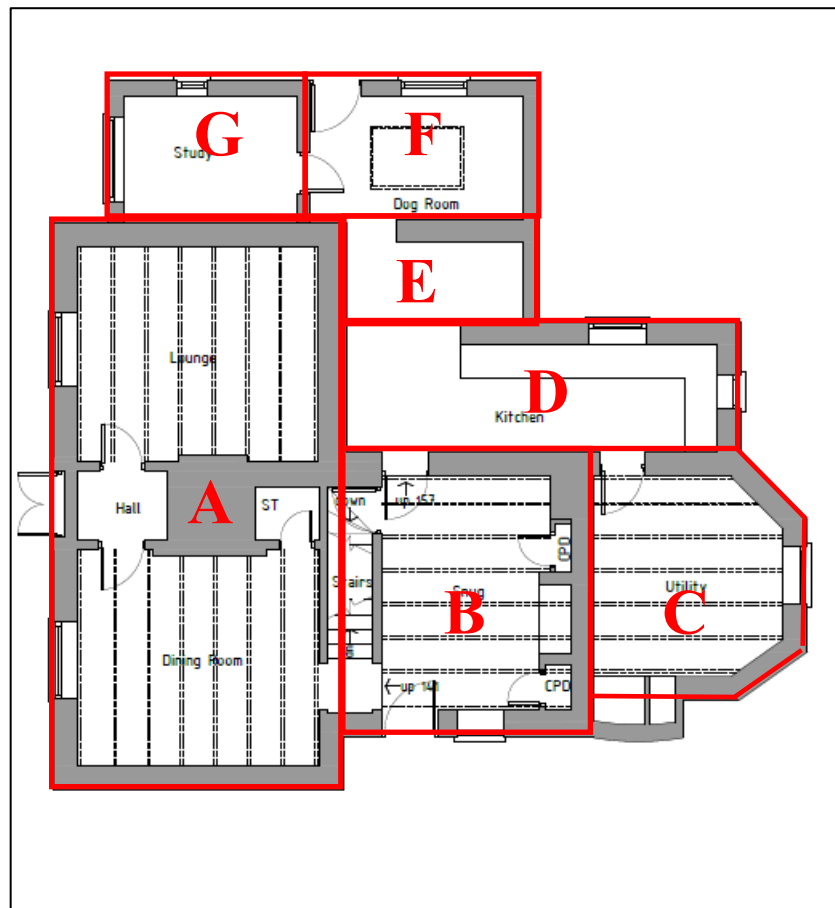


Fig.5: Detail from the 2nd edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, revised in 1909.

4. Description

Woodbank Cottage is made up of several components of different dates. To assist in the description, it has been broken down into its various parts; these have been identified alphabetically and assigned names – of no known historical provenance – and will be described in turn before an overview of the whole. The basic building components are identified on the figure below:



Building A: The Frontage Range
 Building B: The Middle Range
 Building C: The Rear Range
 Building D: The West Lean-to
 Building E: The Brick Lean-to
 Building F: The North-West Range
 Building G: The South-West Range

Fig.6: The building components of the ground-floor plan (north to right).



Pl.1: The approach to Woodbank Cottage from the east.



Pl.2: The south elevation of the Frontage Range (Building A).

4.1 Building A: The Frontage Range

4.1.1 The Exterior

The Frontage Range is the only overtly architect-designed and regular element of the dwelling. It is a rectangular three-bay block of two storeys facing south. It is built of fairly crude local rubblestone with worked rusticated quoins and stone surrounds to the windows.

The principal southern elevation has a central doorway with simple surround and a two-leaf panelled pair of narrow doors. To either side, but not above it, are windows on both floor levels.

These have flat heads and plain frames with shallow projecting sills. Three of the four contain horned balanced sashes of 4x2 pattern which are probably replacements to unhorned originals. The fourth – the first-floor window on the right-hand side – is a modern replica of what was there until recently. This has conservation double-glazed sashes of 3x2 pattern; the predecessor that was replaced was presumably itself a replacement for a sashed window of the same pattern as the others.

The rear elevation is abutted or abuts the Middle Range (Building B), the assumed end of the West Lean-to (Building D), and the Brick Lean-to (Building E). The external sections are of crude rubblestone.

Curiously, the worked quoins on the north-western corner stop a good metre beneath the eaves – the remaining section being of crude rubblestone instead. The eaves are slightly taller than those of the Middle Range. Internally, the masonry thins in the eastern half where the stairs are (*see below*).

The west gable end is of rubblestone, its ground-floor abutted by the South-West Range (Building G). The east gable end is of rubblestone and devoid of openings; the worked stone quoins at either corner of this elevation continue up to the eaves.

4.1.2 The Roof

The roof is shallow pitched with overhanging eaves with boarded soffits. It is covered in slate and has interlocking ceramic grey ridge-tiles that are clearly not original. Rising from the centre of the ridge is a brick chimney with simple detailing; it accommodates four pots indicating four flues.

4.1.3 The Interior

The interior consists of two rooms on each floor level separated by a stack and cross-wall. The front doorway leads into a small baffle entry against the flank of the centrally positioned stack; from this there are opposing doorways to the two ground-floor rooms. To the north of the stack is a store serving the eastern room.



Pl.3: The rear of the Frontage Range from the north-west with other ranges in front.



Pl.4: The east gable end of the Frontage Range.

Several of the doors within this part of the house could be primary; these are five panelled doors – a variation of a six panelled door in which the two top, or frieze, panels are combined to form one long horizontal panel. The simple chimney pieces in the ground-floor rooms could be primary, but the grates within them look to be of the later-19th century – as are the grates and chimney pieces on the first floor.

The joists of the first-floor are exposed in the ceilings of the rooms and there are no indications of the type of even simple cornices and primary skirting boards surviving within this part of the house.

The simple single-flight stairs are oddly located spanning the junction between this range and the Middle Range (Building B) – though set more in the latter section than the Frontage Range. The stairs are flanked by thin partition walls and begin at the eastern side where there is a small lobby between the two ranges and the foot of the stairs.

At first-floor level access to the two rooms is by way of a lobby at the northern end, at the head of the stairs and the southern end of the hallway on the west side of the Middle Range. The ceilings of the two rooms are partly within the roof space and thus have sloping lathe-and-plaster on three of their four sides rising to the flat central sections.



Pl.5: The western ground-floor room of the Frontage Range.

4.2 Building B: The Middle Range

4.2.1 The Exterior

The Middle Range is an almost square two-storey range between the slightly taller Frontage Range (Building A) to the south and the Rear Range (Building C) to the north; on the west side it is abutted by the Western Lean-to (Building D).

The west wall of the range is on the same alignment as that of the Rear Range, but there is a clear vertical construction break in the masonry between the two, visible above the Western Lean-to. On the east side the difference between these two ranges is more obvious – as the Rear Range is narrow and its east wall set back from that of the Middle Range.

The range is built of fairly cruse rubblestone with slightly larger but unworked quoins visible at the northern corners; the southern end butts oddly against the rear wall of the Frontage Range, as outlined above. On the east side there is a ground-floor doorway with fairly new door to the left with a window to the right – very plain with modern glazing. Above, but not vertically aligned, is a second renewed window.

On the west side, because of the abutting lean-to, only the top of the masonry is external; it is not clear if the existing ground-floor doorway – which is directly opposite that in the east wall – is a primary opening or not.

Within the still external section there are two small first-floor windows, one lighting the corridor and the other the lobby at the head of the stairs within. The originally exposed north gable end is topped by a brick chimney.

4.2.2 The Roof

The roof is plain gabled and covered in slate; it has overhanging eaves with boarded soffit matching those of the Frontage Range. At the southern end it runs into the rear slope of the roof of the Frontage Range, though the junction is slightly awkward because of the different eaves heights of the two ranges. The west slope profile is continued into that of the Rear Range to the north.

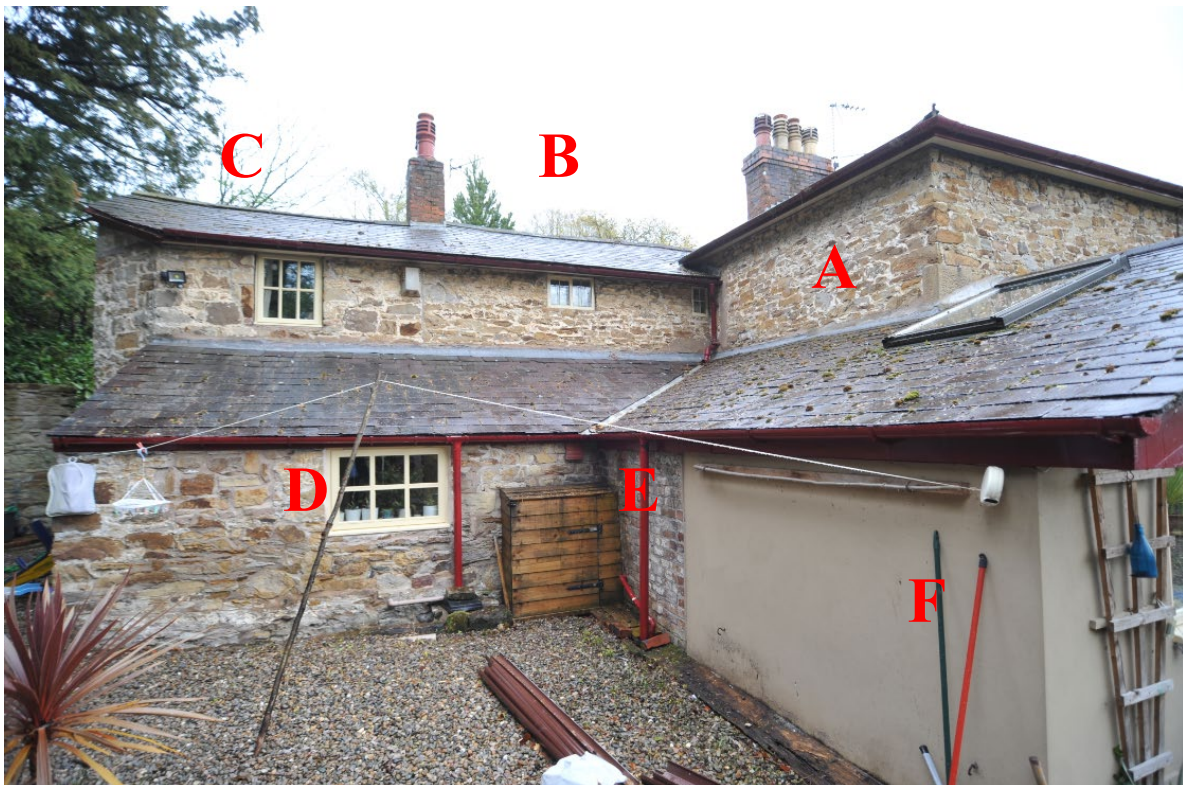
4.2.3 The Interior

The much altered and modernised interior has a single room on the ground floor with an inglenook fireplace in the north gable. This has opposing doorways in the southern end of the side walls and is lit by the single window in the east wall.

At the southern end the stairs are, as outlined above, mainly within this range and are accessed by way of a lobby in the south-eastern corner. The first floor has a corridor along the west side separated by a planked partition from a bathroom occupying the rest of this level. There are few fixtures or features of note; there is a quarry tile floor of uncertain date and some exposed timbers but nothing of any particular significance in heritage terms.



Pl.6: The east elevation of the Middle Range (Building B) with the Rear Range (C) beyond.



Pl.7: The house from the north-west, with the various components labelled.

4.3 Building C: The Rear Range

4.3.1 The Exterior

The Rear Range butts against the north gable of the slightly wider Middle Range (Building B) and is clearly a later addition. On the west side it is abutted, in turn, by the northern part of the Western Lean-to (Building D).

The range is built of fairly crude local rubblestone with no attempt at decoration. Its main feature are the canted corners of its northern end, which appear to have been built in this way for practical reasons rather than for effect – allowing reasonably free access past the building to the area below the canal bank and the various outbuildings – past and present.

In the north gable, flanked by the canted corners, is a modern window opening; however, this is set into the rubble infilling of a surprisingly tall former doorway. The simple cambered brick arched head of the opening and the jambs are fossilized in the masonry.

The only other opening is a first-floor window towards the northern end of the west wall; the glazing looks modern and the opening looks to have been inserted. There are the remains of a rounded bread oven in the angle between this gable end and the east wall of the Rear Range.

4.3.2 The Roof

The roof is fairly shallow pitched and plain slated, with overhanging eaves matching those of the Front and Middle ranges. As the building is narrower than the Middle Range, only the western slopes of the two coincide.

4.3.3 The Interior

The interior has a single room on each of the two floor levels. In the east wall of the ground floor is the fireplace and hearth of the bread oven. This has, within a elliptical or basket arched brick headed fireplace, traces of a small hearth, a solid hob, and the access to the bread oven.

The room is spanned by exposed joists but is otherwise devoid of any other historic features. The first-floor is now occupied by a bedroom.



Pl.8: The Rear Range (C) left, from the north with the West Lean-to (D), right.



Pl.9: The interior of the ground floor of the Rear Range, looking to the fireplace and hearth of the bread oven in the east wall.

4.4 Building D: The Western Lean-to

The Western Lean-to is a single-storey rubblestone structure built against the western side walls of the Middle and Rear ranges – and clearly later than both. It originally seems to have continued as far as the rear wall of the Frontage Range but the construction of the Brick Lean-to (Building E) and the removal of much of the west wall where these two meet, makes this less obvious from the outside. The only external opening is a modernised window in the west elevation and a smaller one in the north gable.

The roof is a simple slated lean-to has an intermediate ‘truss’ consisting solely of a single large principal rafter supporting a single chocked purlin. The interior is a single modernised space, presently the kitchen, with no fixtures or features of any heritage interest.

4.5 Building E: The Brick Lean-to

The Brick Lean-to is a short lean-to single-storey structure built up against the rear wall of the Frontage Range (Building A) and butting against the Western Lean-to (Building D) to the east – where a large opening has been cut through the intervening wall. At the western end it is abutted against, in turn, by the North-West Range (Building F).

The lean-to slated roof runs into those of the adjacent ranges and seems to have been renewed in the fairly recent past. It now forms an annexe to the kitchen within the Western Lean-to and is devoid of any fixtures or fittings of note.

4.6 Building F: The North-West Range

The North-West Range appears to be largely of fairly recent date. It is a single storey structure built against the west gable of the Brick Lean-to and the rear or north side of the South-West Range (Building G). It is faced in render under a lean-to roof. The interior is all modern

4.7 Building G: The South-West Range

The South-West Range is built against the west gable end of the Frontage Range and, in its present form, seems to have replaced a larger extension that is indicated on late-19th century mapping. In its present form it is a simple single-storey range under a plain-abled roof with a ridge stack. It is rendered, apart from re-set chamfered stone pilasters at the western corners – probably used from elsewhere on the building, perhaps a front porch. The windows and doorways are all fairly modern as is the interior.

4.8 The Rear Outbuildings

To the rear of the house are remains of former outhouses, of which a later brick-built structure is the most complete. Built into a rubblestone revetment wall on the side of the canal embankment is a similar design of brick-arched fireplace or recess as seen in the Rear Range.



Pl.10: The south elevation of the South-West Range (Building G).



Pl.11: The revetment wall and remains of outbuildings at the north end of the rear yard.

This has a rounded rear wall with at least one hearth set into it. To the left is a doorway into a recess beyond the face of the revetment. There is a clear scar of a shallow lean-to roof high in the wall indicating a structure projecting south from it – now demolished.

5. Discussion

The house is evidently made up of several components of different periods, but apart from the North-West Range and the present South-West Range (which seems to have replaced a once larger extension) most appear to have been built by the time the first detailed Ordnance Survey maps were surveyed in the early 1870's.

Superficially it would seem logical to assume that the Frontage Range was built first, in the early-19th century, perhaps with the Middle Range (Building B) as a rear wing - and with the other ranges added subsequently as additional accommodation was required. Yet there are several indications that this was not actually the case.

There are considerable differences between the quality of masonry and design of the Frontage Range and the adjacent Middle Range – which is also slightly lower. The Frontage Range has worked quoins, a regular symmetrical façade and a low-pitched hipped roof, whilst the Middle Range does not.

There are also oddities in the plan form of the Frontage Range and the manner in which the stairs are inconveniently positioned at the junction between it and the Middle Range, instead of being more logically positioned centrally to it and connected to a central hallway from which there could have been access to the Middle Range.

In fact, the plan form of the Frontage Range is, considering the quality of its façade, very odd for its date and status. Instead of the front door leading into a hallway or stairhall, it leads into a baffle or lobby entry against a central stack. Access from that lobby is thus only into rooms on either side, and the stairs can only be reached by crossing diagonally across the eastern room.

This type of baffle entry plan is much older than the façade would suggest, and one that would have more typical in the 17th century. There is no suggestion that the Frontage Range is older than the early-19th century and there are some very general similarities – in the symmetry of the façade and the low-pitched hipped roofs with overhanging eaves – with other buildings built by the Ellesmere Canal. Nevertheless, it is possible that the odd floor plan is a result of it being attached to an existing structure on the site – specifically the Middle Range – which compromised the design of the later addition.

The existence of an earlier structure on the site could also help to explain the unusual positioning of the house in the landscape, almost abutting the embankment of the feeder canal to the north. If a house was to be built *ab initio* it would have made more sense to have built it further away from the embankment rather than virtually abutting it.

However, the existence of a dwelling on the site before the feeder was begun in 1804 – and thus before any such embankment was built – would make more sense. Once the land was acquired by the canal company it could, for whatever reason, then upgrade the property and add the Frontage Range to it to provide better quality reception rooms and bedchambers.

Such a scenario could account for the various differences in construction and scale of the Frontage and Middle ranges, although more in depth investigations would be needed to properly understand the relationship between the two – especially in and around the staircase area at the junction between the two.

The rest of the basic development of the house is more straightforward. Clearly the Rear Range (Building C) was a later addition onto the rear gable of the Middle Range, and it is likely that its canted corners were designed to be practical rather than picturesque.

There is evidence for an outbuilding projecting from the revetment wall beneath the canal feeder, and the access around the Rear Range would have been even more limited than it is now – hence chamfering the corners to help resolve the issue. The Rear Range was probably a service area with the copper and bread oven on the ground floor – with a doorway in the gable end – and a bedroom above.

The Western Lean-to must have been added after the Rear Range was built and probably provided additional storage, which was then increased by the addition of the Brick Lean-to against the rear wall of the Frontage Range. There was, by the 1870's, a predecessor of the present South Western Range – but the present one appears to be of fairly recent date or a radical rebuild, and the North Western Range is later still.

If the Middle Range already existed by the late-18th century it was presumably a small farmhouse of some kind before it was extended by the addition of the Frontage Range. It is impossible to prove or disprove the tradition that the remodelled house was used as a drawing office by the canal company's engineers – including, presumably, Telford – when the great aqueduct was being built across the valley.

It was certainly owned by the canal company in 1838 – though leased – and it does command a good view of the aqueduct itself. Whatever the case it is clear that it would no longer have been needed by the canal company after the aqueduct and the feeder were finished and the whole canal scheme effectively fossilised by around 1808.

It would at least have been a source of income for the company and by the later-1830's, if not earlier, it was being used as the maltster's house for the adjacent maltings and seems to have continued to be so until the 1890's. Subsequently there have been alterations to the site, including the loss of some outbuildings and internal changes.

6. Heritage Statement

Despite the changes made to the building it is clearly worthy of its Grade II listed status. If it could be proven that it was the home of the engineers responsible for the construction of the Pontcysyllte aqueduct it would have an added degree of historical significance but without such proof its main significance is architectural.

That lies mainly in the simple but attractive design of the principal elevation of the early-19th century Frontage Range, even though as outlined above, this may not be the oldest part of the house. In the context of the area it represents what would have been aspirational contemporary architect design for a fairly modest building in an area of mainly vernacular rural housing.

7. The Proposals

Proposals have been made to refurbish the property and the rationalise its circulation pattern, especially on the ground floor. This will result in the replacement of the Western Lean-to (Building D) and the Brick Lean-to (Building E) with a slightly wider two-storey range in the angle between the rear of the Frontage Range and the western side of the Middle and Rear ranges (*see* figs.7 and 8). The internal changes will be minimal.

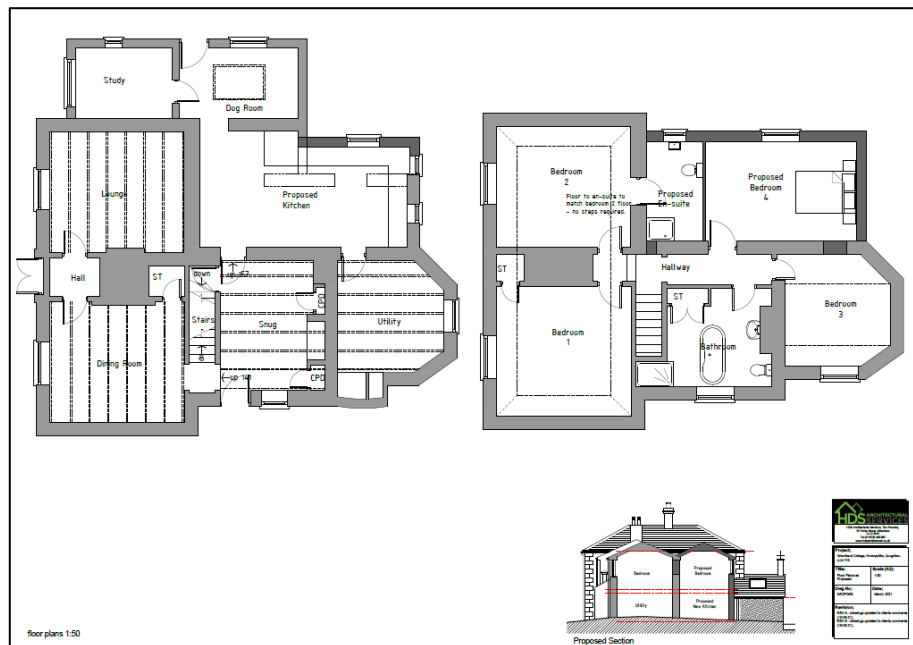


Fig.7: The proposed plans (HDS).

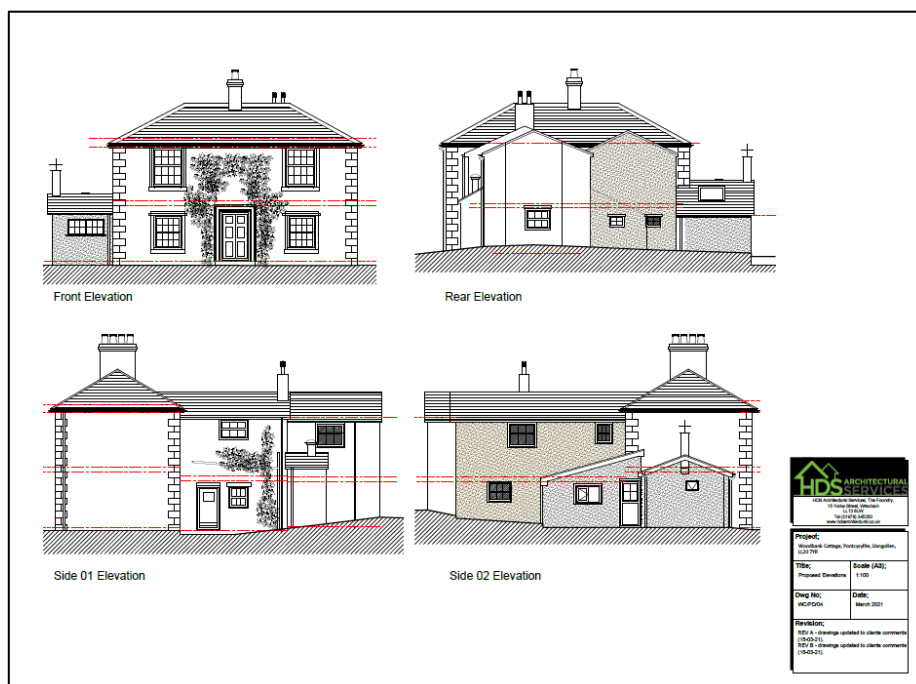


Fig.8: The proposed elevations (HDS).

8. Heritage Impact Assessment

8.1 Impact on the Listed Building

The only significant impact on the fabric of the listed building will be the loss of the Western Lean-to (Building D) and the Brick Lean-to (Building E). These were both later additions to the complex – probably dating to the mid-19th century - and have been remodelled internally. They are part of the building's evolution but are not considered to be of any great intrinsic architectural or historic merit.

The main impact on the building will be visual, in the replacement of the single-storey lean-tos to the rear of the property with the two storey range. As outlined above, the main significance of the building is in the architecture of the Frontage Range rather than in the rear elements. The proposals would not impact on the key elevations of the building and, because of the site, only be appreciated from the very limited views from the north-west – which are mainly from within the grounds.

The proposals are considered to be well-designed and proportionate, respecting the significant elements of the listed building. The proposed use of render is considered to be a more sensible approach than trying to replicate the crude rubblestone of the existing structures and is in keeping with the mixed material palette. Overall, it is considered that the proposals will result in a degree of change to the listed building, but that change would not equate to harm in heritage terms.

8.2 Impact on Adjacent Heritage Assets

Despite its position close to the canal feeder, the canal basin, the main line of the canal and the aqueduct, the house lies in secluded grounds and the only clear views of it from the public domain are from the south and the east.

In both of these views the proposed new build will not be visible and there would therefore be no appreciation of any change. It is also the case that the house does not contribute to the significance of the setting of any adjacent heritage asset – the most obvious and most significant one being the **Pontcysyllte aqueduct**.

The aqueduct is both a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Grade I listed building. It is clearly visible from the front of the house and the front of the house is visible from the aqueduct – but not the rear where the new build is to be located. Woodbank Cottage plays only a very minor part in the wider general setting of the aqueduct and doesn't contribute to its significance – which is essentially historical and architectural. The proposals will, therefore, have no impact on the monument.

Below the house is the much earlier crossing of the Dee, the original **Pont Cysyllte** or **Cysylltau Bridge**. The three-arched stone bridge is dated 1697 but was largely rebuilt in the 18th century. It is, like the aqueduct, both a scheduled ancient monument and a Grade I listed building. There are no reciprocal views between the bridge and Woodbank Cottage and it is obvious that the proposed changes will have no impact at all on this monument.



Pl.12: View south from the gardens of Woodbank Cottage to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.



Pl.13: The Pont Cysyllte or Cysylltau Bridge.

None of the other designated heritage assets or undesignated heritage assets within 1km of Woodbank Cottage have any reciprocal views with the proposed areas of change and the house plays no part in the significance of the settings of any such heritage assets. The proposals would, therefore, have no impact on them.

8.3 The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site & Conservation Area

Woodbank Cottage is outside the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal Conservation Area but is within the much larger Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site. In terms of the Conservation Area, the same issues regarding the impact of the proposals apply as those related to the impact – or lack of impact – on the aqueduct. The proposals would result in no harm to the setting of the Conservation Area.

Equally, in terms of the legislation relating to UNESCO World Heritage Sites it is clear that the criteria mean that the proposals could not result in any harm to the character or significance of the designated area.

The linking thread of the World Heritage Site is the line of the canal's water system from the Horseshoe Falls at Llantysilio to across the English boundary at Chirk. Despite the proximity of the rear of the grounds of Woodbank Cottage to the embanked feeder canal to the north, the differences in levels, the mature hedges and the tree belts all mean that there are no clear views from the canal to the property. The proposals for the house will, therefore, be virtually invisible from the canal.



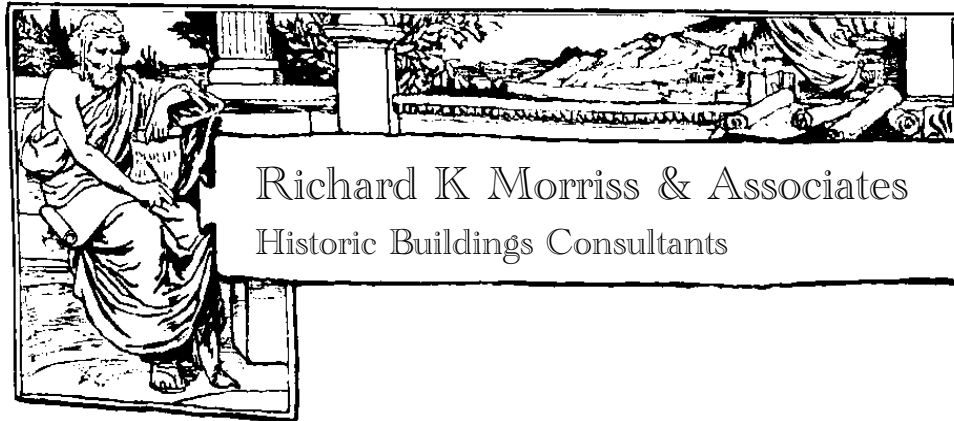
Pl.14: View of the Llangollen Canal feeder, looking west; the grounds of Woodbank Cottage are hidden below the hedgerow and tree belt on the left.

9. Conclusions

For the reasons outlined above the proposals for Woodbank Cottage are considered to be well-designed, sympathetic to the historic character of the building, and proportionate in their scale, massing and material palette. It is considered that any minor harm caused by the loss of later extensions to the rear of the property are outweighed by the advantages of the scheme in ensuring the long-term future of the building.

Listed buildings and their settings have always evolved over time as their occupant's aspirations evolve and such change forms part of their significance as heritage assets. This was clearly outlined in the recently superseded Welsh Office *Circular 61/96* which stated that:

'Many listed buildings can sustain a degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate continuing or new uses. Indeed, cumulative changes reflecting the history of use and ownership are themselves an aspect of the special interest of some buildings, and the merit of new alterations or additions, especially where they are generated within a secure and committed long-term ownership, should not be discounted'.



The Consultancy

Richard K Morriss founded this Consultancy in 1995 after previously working for English Heritage and the Ironbridge Institute of the University of Birmingham and spending eight years as Assistant Director of the Hereford Archaeology Unit. Although Shropshire-based the Consultancy works throughout the UK on a wide variety of historic buildings for clients that include the National Trust, the Landmark Trust, English Heritage, the Crown Estates, owners, architects, planning consultants and developers. It specialises in the archaeological and architectural analysis of historic buildings of all periods and planning advice related to them. It also undertakes heritage impact assessments, broader area appraisals and Conservation Management Plans.

Richard Morriss is a former Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and of the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, archaeological advisor to four cathedrals, occasional lecturer at Bristol and Birmingham universities, and author of many academic papers and of 20 books, mainly on architecture and archaeology, including The Archaeology of Buildings (Tempus 2000), The Archaeology of Railways (Tempus 1999); Roads: Archaeology & Architecture (Tempus 2006) and ten in the Buildings of series: Bath, Chester, Ludlow, Salisbury, Shrewsbury, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Winchester, Windsor, Worcester (Sutton 1993-1994). The latest work is an Historic England funded monograph on the Houses of Hereford (Oxbow 2018). He was a member of the project team responsible for the restoration of Astley Castle, Warwickshire, winner of the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize.



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