Former Llay Hall Colliery Washery Sydallt

Heritage Statement



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for

Mr D Hitchmough

Wrexham Storage

June 2025

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1 Introduction

This heritage statement has been prepared in support of a forthcoming application for retrospective listed-building consent to carry out alterations to the former coal washery at Llay Hall Colliery, Sydallt, Wrexham. A retrospective application is necessary in respect of storage units which have been installed inside the building. The building is listed grade II (Cadw reference 15828). It is recorded in the National Monuments Record (400789) and the regional Historic Environment Record (36742).

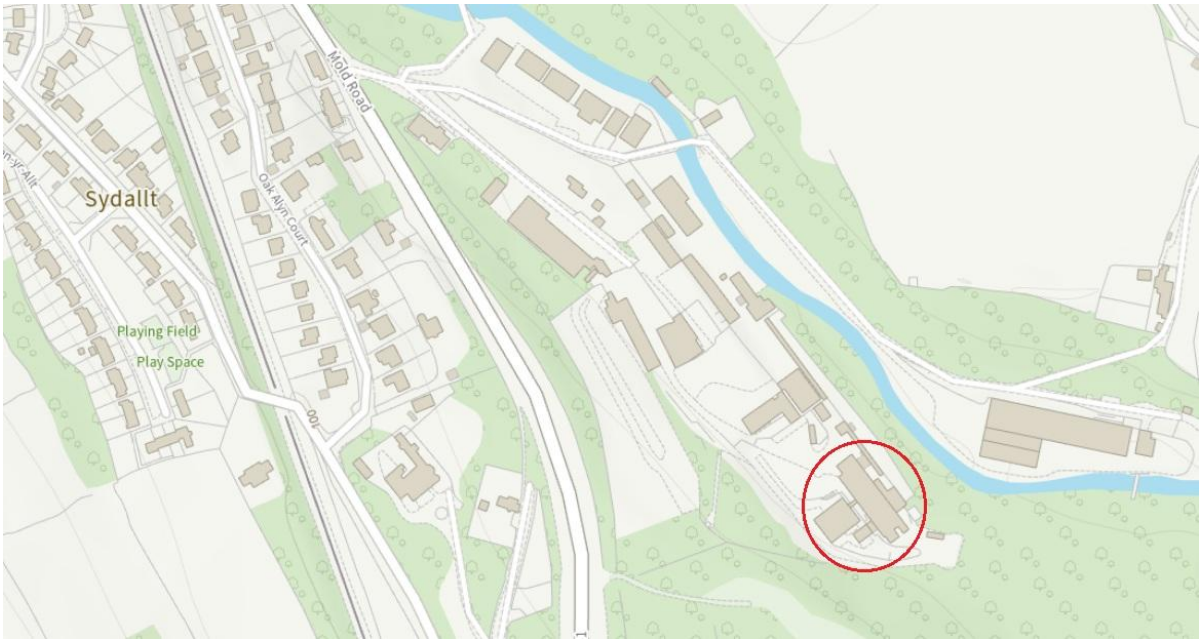


Figure 1. Location plan.

The building is part of Alyn Industrial Estate, occupying the level ground between the A541 to the west and River Alyn to the east, at SJ 3162 5506 (fig 1). It is one of the surviving buildings at the former Llay Hall Colliery, where there are three other listed buildings: the colliery chimney and flue, engine house and workshops.

The purpose of this Heritage Statement is to understand the historic asset and its vulnerabilities, and to assess the impact of the proposals on its significance.

The building was visited on 4 June 2025.

2 Policy and Guidance

The legislative framework for the protection and management of the historic environment is contained in The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023. It repealed but incorporates earlier legislation, specifically the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990, which covered both England and Wales.

The means by which the preservation of heritage assets and their settings is incorporated into the planning process is set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW), supplemented by

guidance contained in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24, which covers the historic environment. Paragraph 6.1.10 of PPW states, reiterating section 16(2) of the 1990 Act, that:

> 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.

Paragraph 6.1.11 emphasises that

> 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.

TAN 24 describes a heritage impact assessment as :

> a structured process that enables the significance of a designated asset to be taken into account when considering proposals for change. Heritage impact assessments should be proportionate both to the significance of the historic asset and to the degree of change proposed, and should include sufficient information to enable both the significance of the asset and the impact of change to be understood. The results of the heritage impact assessment should be summarised in a heritage impact statement.

Local Policy

The Wrexham Unitary Development Plan (1996-2011) is the most recent adopted local policy document. It amplifies the national guidelines. Policy EC9 covers developments that affect listed buildings:

> **Policy EC9** Alterations or additions to, and development or redevelopment within the curtilage of, buildings or structures listed as of special architectural or historic interest must respect the setting and character of the listed buildings or structures.

In Paragraph 5.11 emphasis is placed on 'sensitive repair and improvement, using traditional materials and techniques, and in establishing appropriate new uses for them in order to guarantee their future survival'.

Cadw Guidance

Cadw has also issued guidance on change to listed buildings (Cadw 2017c). It underscores the importance of understanding a building's significance before changes to it are considered.

Alteration to listed buildings is covered in Section 4.5 and advises that an applicant 'must be able to explain why the work is needed and provide sufficient information to explain the impact of your proposal on the significance of the building'.

3 Historical Background

Llay Hall Colliery was founded by Llay Hall Coal, Iron and Firebrick Company, which was formed in 1873. The pit opened in 1877. The main coal seam was discovered at 245 yards below the surface (and was therefore exploited earlier than nearby Llay Main, opened in 1921, where the seam was at 833 yards). By 1896 360 men were employed, producing house and steam coal. Fireclay was another product of the pit, and the colliery worked in conjunction with the Llay Hall Firebrick Works to the south-east of the colliery, on the opposite bank of the River Alun, but which was disused by 1914.

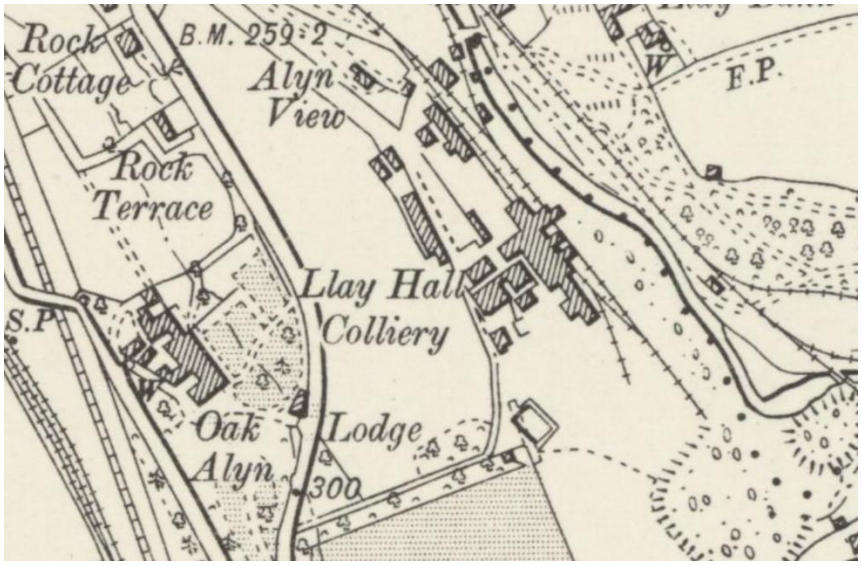


Figure 2. Ordnance Survey map, 1900.

Llay Hall Coal, Iron and Firebrick Company went into liquidation in 1885, and the pit was taken over and managed by E.S. Clarke, and from 1901 by his executors. Llay Hall Colliery Company owned and operated it from 1918. Output in 1905 was 145,000 tons, when 533 men were employed there (Jones 2008, 290). There was a serious explosion in January 1947. As a consequence the pit closed later that year, just after nationalisation.

The colliery is shown on the 1879 Ordnance Survey map soon after it opened, but shows only a small group of buildings and no evidence of a connecting railway. By 1900, after it had been taken over by E.S. Clarke, the colliery had expanded considerably (fig 2). A railway branch connected the colliery to the Wrexham, Mold and Connah's Quay Railway. The only

major addition after this date was the washery, although it does not appear on any of the Ordnance Survey maps until 1962, where it is shown at the south-east end of the former colliery site (see fig 3).

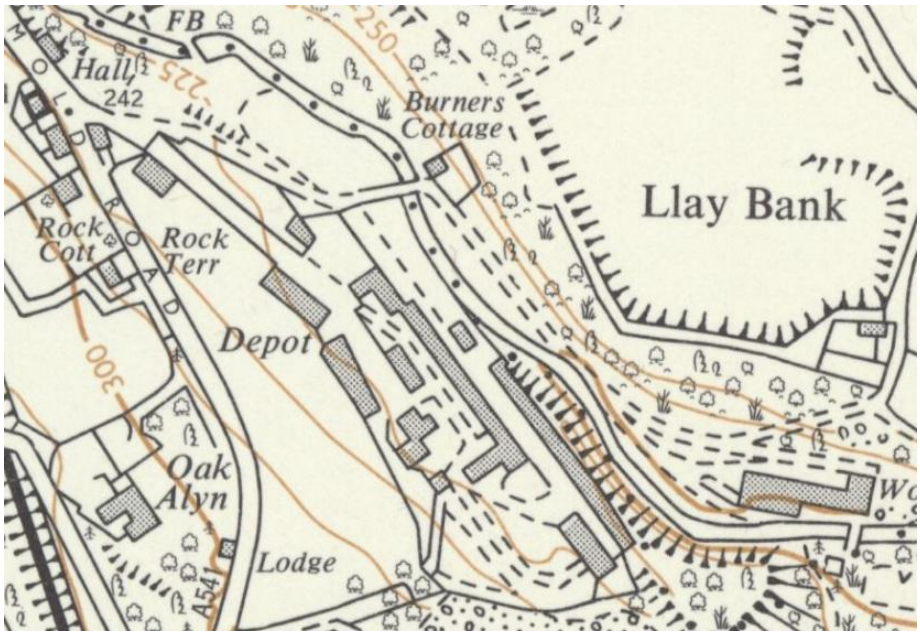


Figure 3. Ordnance Survey map, 1968.

The introduction of coal washing in the late nineteenth century was a direct consequence of mechanised coal cutting, more efficient but more wasteful than cutting by hand, in which a varying proportion of the material brought to the surface was shale that had to be separated from the coal. A wet process using jigs, sometimes supplemented by compressed air, was the most common method of separating the coal and shale. A steel structure was erected over railway tracks, to which the dirty coal was delivered to the top, passing down by means of gravity to coal wagons underneath.

According to the list description the washery was added c1920 and the building was re-purposed by the National Coal Board as a regional stores, following the closure of the pit in 1948 and the removal of its jigs and other machinery. Subsequent uses of the building include a warehouse and light engineering works.

4 Description

The former washery consist of two ranges at right angles, both of two storeys under shallow roofs of asbestos-cement sheets, but the range at the south-east end is higher. Walls are constructed around an original steel frame, with brick infill panels. Windows are metal-framed casements of the late-1940s or 1950s. The north-west gable end and the south-east front both have added corrugated-iron lean-tos (figs 4, 5). On the east side is a through-passage at ground level, originally for a railway, and ramp on which the dirty coal was fed into the washery at high level (fig 6). On the west side of the structure is a bridge to a detached range standing on higher ground on the west side. This is a post-war gabled

building clad in asbestos-cement sheets under a similar roof, but it is not shown on the 1968 Ordnance Survey map (fig 3).



Figure 4. Washery building viewed from the north-west side.



Figure 5. Washery building viewed from the south-east side.



Figure 6. Ramp and line of former railway through the east side of the Washery.

Inside the building the original steel frame is clearly visible, but additional steel uprights have been added to support the inserted first floor (fig 7). The roof is supported on light steel trusses (fig 8). The range on the south side has been partitioned to create offices. The range on the north side has some added blockwork partitions and inserted storage units constructed mainly of chipboard and plywood. Floors are concrete. Outside the original northern range, now enclosed within the added corrugated-iron lean-to, is a travelling crane. The detached post-war range, which has a roof supported by steel trusses, also contains storage units similar to those described above.



Figure 7. Interior view of steel framework, first floor.



Figure 8. Roof trusses.

5 Statement of Significance

The significance of heritage assets is measured against agreed heritage values, as set out in *Conservation Principles* published by Cadw (2011):

- **Evidential value**: This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, including its physical remains or historic fabric.
- **Historical value**: An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.
- **Aesthetic value**: This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset. This might include the form of an historic asset, its external appearance and how it lies within its setting.
- **Communal value**: This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects.

The washery building is the only coal washery structure to have been granted listed-building status in Wales, and is therefore a rarity for its evidential and historic value. The structure s one of a number of surviving buildings at the former Llay colliery. The others are:

- Former Llay Hall Colliery Chimney and Flue, grade II (Cadw ref 15830)
- Former Llay Hall Colliery Engine House, grade II (Cadw ref 15827)
- Former Llay Hall Colliery Workshops, grade II (Cade ref 15829)

The washery therefore derives evidential and historical value as part of a colliery group, a rare survival in post-industrial Wales, including in the North Wales coalfield. The remains constitute the shell of the washery structure, the interior of which contained tanks and chutes for the separation of coal from shale, which have all been removed, although the ramp by which the dirty coal was delivered to the building and the line of the railway that conveyed the coal in railway wagons, has survived. The interior of the building self-evidently has diminished historical and evidential value resulting from the removal of the jigs and other machinery, but the steel frame of the original structure is clearly visible here.

External fabric belongs to the mid-twentieth century, and is a typical of the period, which provides some of the aesthetic interest (and shared with the modern parts of the engine house complex) of the building.

6 Impact Assessment

Storage units have been inserted into the ground floor and the first floor of the northern range (figs 9-19). Most of these are constructed from chipboard or plywood, some of which abut the external walls of the building, or the internal steel supports.

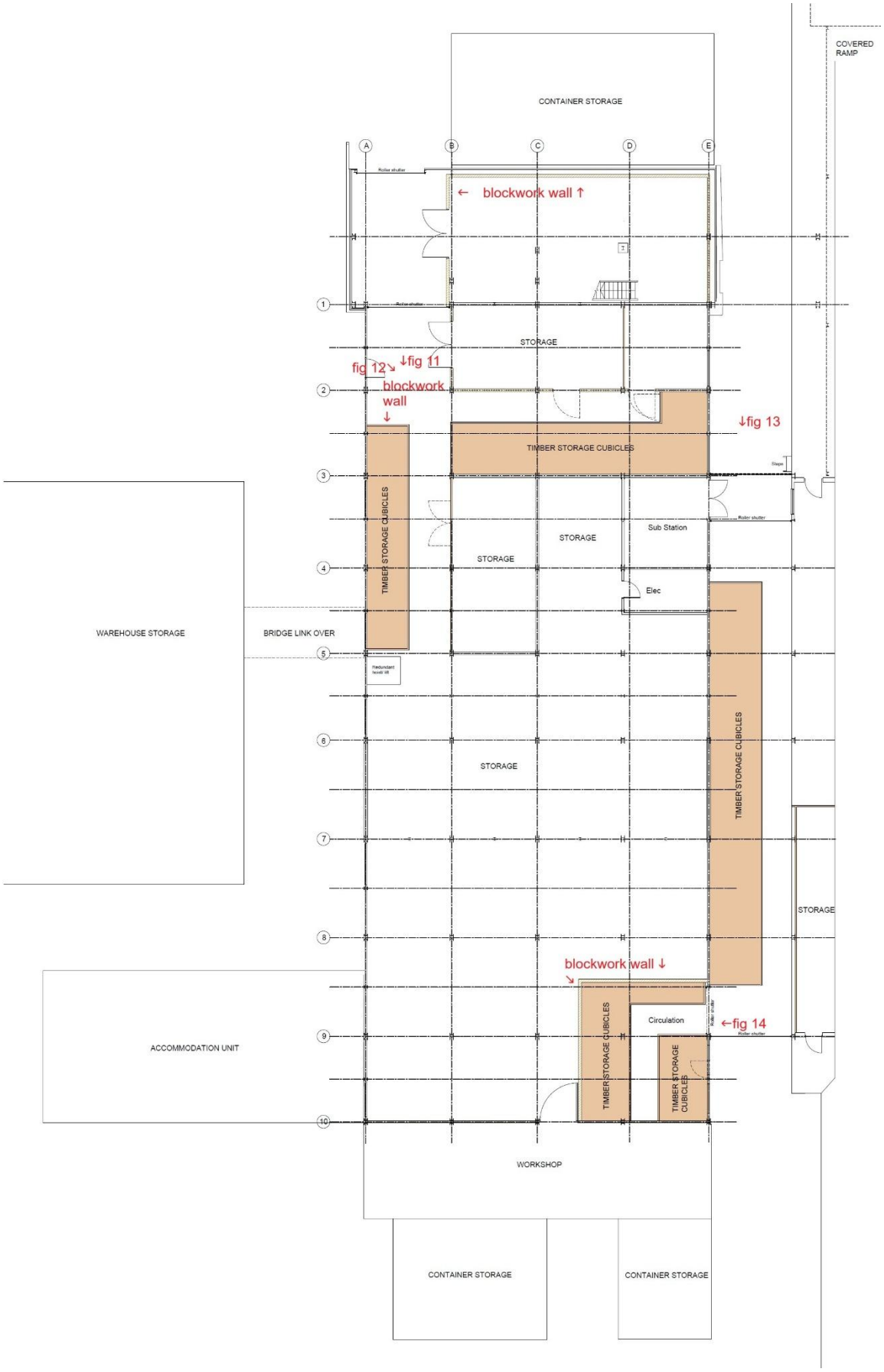
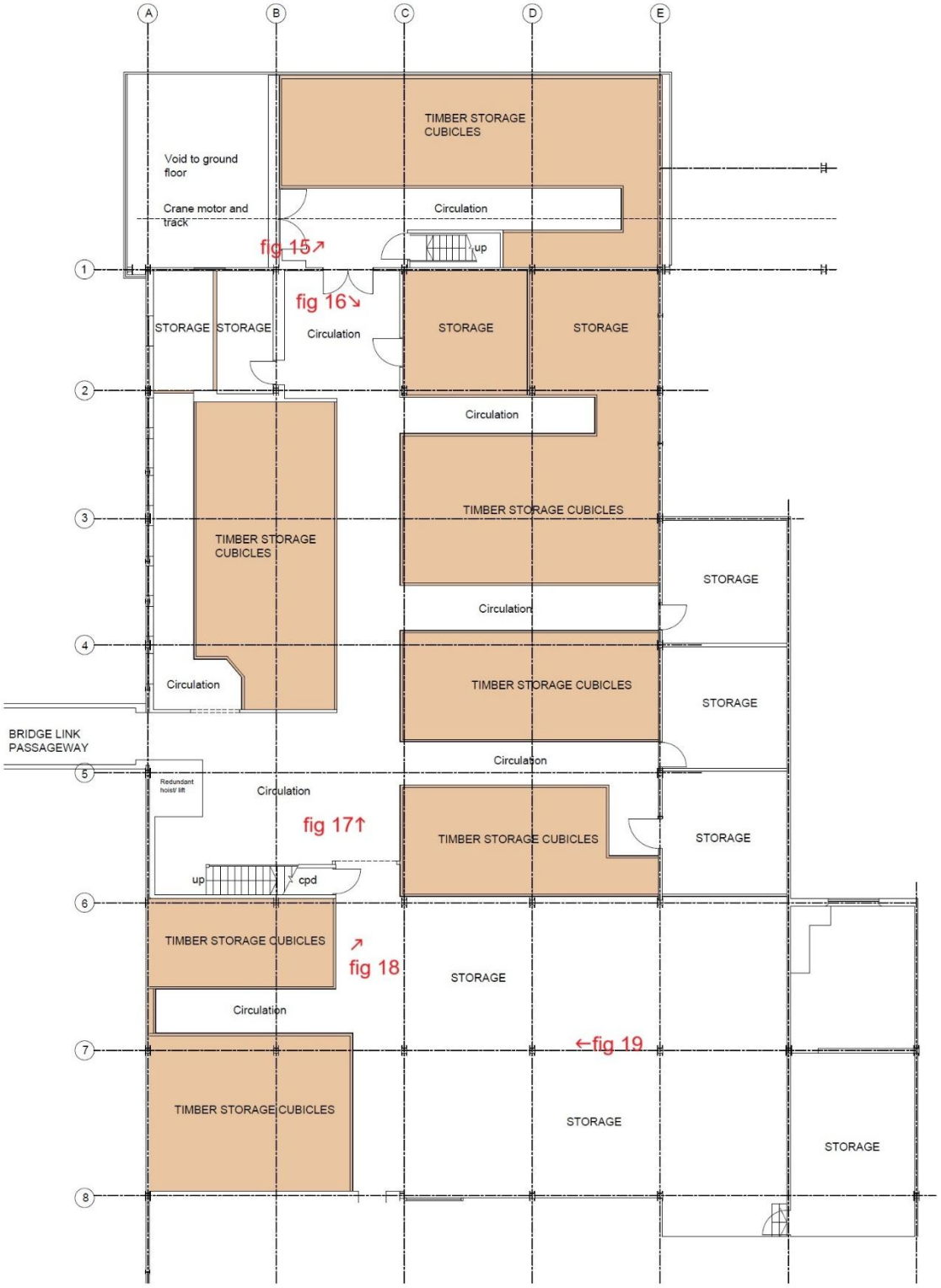


Figure 9. Ground floor plan.



PART FIRST FLOOR PLAN
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Figure 10. Partial first-floor plan.

On the ground floor two lengths of units are constructed against blockwork walls that abut the external walls of the building (figs 11, 20). It is unclear whether these walls were built to

provide storage units, since a similar blockwork wall is at the north end of the building, enclosing a workshop space that is not associated with storage (fig 21). It seems likely that the walls were constructed at an earlier date and have been incorporated into the storage units. They abut the external walls of the building and are therefore, at least in theory, reversible without affecting the exterior walls.

The plywood and chipboard units are themselves clearly reversible, and their construction has not affected the historical or evidential value of the interior, given that the structure was re-purposed after it ceased to be a washery and the original equipment was removed.

As these are interior features, the impact on the setting of the washery or other nearby heritage assets is not a material consideration. One line of storage units is positioned within the through-passage, formerly a railway line, at ground level (fig 13). Although technically it is visible from outside the building, in practice it is concealed from almost every angle except in a direct line of sight on either side of the building, where space is constricted on both sides (see fig 6).

In conclusion the impact of the storage units on the significance of the listed building is neutral, and there is no impact on the significance of other nearby heritage assets.



Figure 11. Ground-floor storage units.



Figure 12. Ground-floor storage units.



Figure 13. Ground-floor storage units.



Figure 14. Ground-floor storage units.



Figure 15. First-floor storage units.



Figure 16. *First-floor storage units.*



Figure 17. First-floor storage units.



Figure 18. First-floor storage units.



Figure 19. First-floor storage units.



Figure 20. Blockwork wall on the ground floor. (Storage units have been erected against the rear of this wall.)

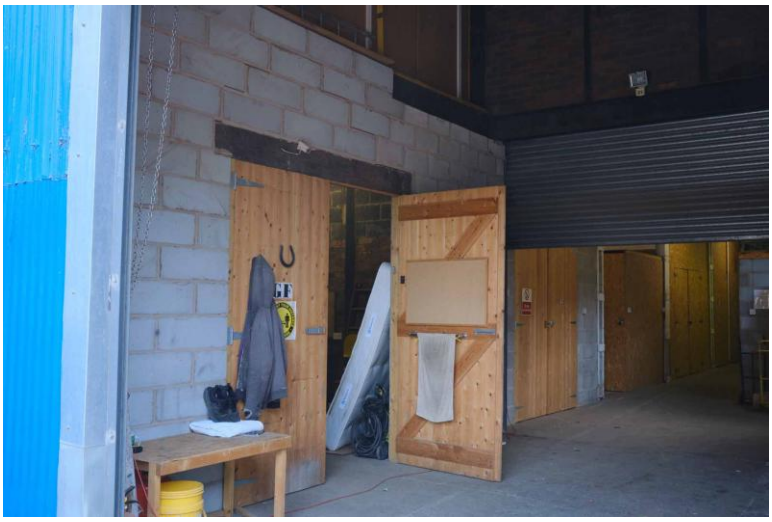


Figure 21. Blockwork wall on the ground floor.

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Appendix 1: Listed Building Description

Full Report for Listed Buildings

Cadw

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Summary Description of a Listed Buildings

Reference Number	Building Number	Grade	Status	Date of Designation	Date of Amendment
15828		II	Designated	26/09/1994	01/12/1995

Name of Property	Address
Former Llay Hall Colliery Washery Building	

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Town	Locality	Easting	Northing
Wrexham	Gwersyllt		Sydallt	331623	355062

Street Side	Location
	Located in the group of former Llay Hall Colliery buildings in use as an industrial estate east of Mold Road. The former washery is a large building converted to industrial workshops at the south-east end of the site.

Description

Broad Class	Period
Industrial	

History

Llay Hall Colliery operated from 1877 until 1948. It was sunk by the Llay Hall Coal, Iron and Fireclay Company and worked in association with a fire brick works on the opposite side of the River Alyn. It was nationalised in 1947 but closed shortly afterwards, following a serious underground explosion. The screens and washery building was built around 1920. It formerly contained equipment for sorting and washing coal, but was converted to a regional stores building by the National Coal Board c1948 and subsequently used as a mail-order warehouse and then a light engineering plant. Washery buildings were characteristic of the coal industry in the twentieth century. They were introduced in the 1880s and used at larger collieries from c1900, but did not become universal until after World War II.

Exterior

The building is of the typical and highly characteristic construction of early washeries, consisting of brick panels supported on a bolted and riveted steel frame exposed to the facade. The framed construction supported vibrating machinery and permitted flexible internal use. There are square-headed metal framed windows, some inserted during conversion. The building is of an irregular form, with rail and conveyor access, and varying numbers of storeys, built into sloping ground. The overall plan is an oblong aligned north-west to south-east. At the north-west end is a two-storey section with a gable facing the front. To the south-east is a four-storey block with two transverse gables, one larger and higher than the other. On the north-east side of this section, the building extends over a former rail line for hopper loading. A rare surviving section of covered conveyor route, with a concrete ramp and steel frame supporting a segmental roof, slopes to ground level at the northern corner of the building. Inside, the building has been divided into workshops, stores and offices.

Interior

Reason for designation

Listed as a rare washery building, thought to be one of only two pre-war examples of these distinctive and important colliery structures surviving in Wales. It has group value with other adjacent colliery buildings.