

= Plas Mawr =

Plas Mawr (English : Great Hall) is an Elizabethan townhouse in Conwy , North Wales , dating from the 16th century . The property was built by Robert Wynn , a member of the local gentry , following his marriage to his first wife , Dorothy Griffith . Plas Mawr occupied a plot of land off Conwy 's High Street and was constructed in three phases between 1576 and 1585 at a total cost of around £ 800 . Wynn was known for his hospitality , and the household was supported by Wynn 's local dairy herds , orchards and gardens . On his death he laid out complex instructions for dividing his estate ; the resulting law @-@ case took years to resolve , effectively preventing the redevelopment of the house and preserving it in its original condition .

After 1683 Plas Mawr passed into the hands of the Mostyn family and ceased to be used as a family home . It was rented out for various purposes during the 18th and 19th centuries , including for use as a school , cheap lodgings and finally as the headquarters of the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art . In the 20th century the house became increasingly well known for its preserved Elizabethan architecture , but the costs of maintenance grew considerably and its condition deteriorated . The Welsh heritage agency Cadw took over the management of the property in 1993 and carried out an extensive , 42 @-@ month @-@ long restoration project at a total cost of £ 3 @.@ 3 million . With many of its rooms redecorated to resemble their condition in 1665 , and replanted Renaissance gardens , it is now run as a tourist attraction .

Architecturally , Plas Mawr is almost unchanged from the 16th century , and the historian Rick Turner considers the house to be " the finest surviving town house of the Elizabethan era " . Plas Mawr shows a blend of continental Renaissance and local North Wales influences , with an innovative floor @-@ plan and architectural detailing . The house still retains much of its original plasterwork , which incorporates symbols , badges and heraldry , which the historian Peter Smith has described as " the most perfect and the most complete memorial to Elizabethan Wales . " The architecture of the house influenced other contemporary projects in North Wales , and was later copied during the 19th and 20th centuries in buildings around the town of Conwy , including the local police station and nearby hotel .

= = History = =

= = = 16th ? 17th centuries = = =

Plas Mawr was built in the town of Conwy between 1576 and 1585 by Robert Wynn . Robert came from a prosperous local family and entered the service of first Sir Walter Stonor and then Sir Philip Hoby , both administrators and senior officials to King Henry VIII . Robert fought and was injured at the Siege of Boulogne in 1544 , took part in military campaigns in Scotland and traveled extensively across Europe . He invested in land across North Wales and married his first wife , Dorothy Griffith , a member of the local gentry , in 1570 . Once married , Robert needed a suitable house and chose to settle in Conwy , a prosperous town that was known in the 16th century for its genteel society .

In 1570 , Robert paid Hugh Mershe £ 200 for an existing " mansion house " in Conwy , positioned in the middle of a burgage plot on what is now Crown Lane . More land to the north of this was purchased from a Richard Peake in 1576 for £ 40 , and work then began on the north wing of Plas Mawr , which was completed by the following year . Mershe 's former house was pulled down to allow the preparation of the foundations of the rest of the building , including the digging of fresh drains . Robert lived in the completed north wing until 1580 , when the central and south ranges were built , finishing the main part of Plas Mawr .

Robert went on to rent further land around the north of Plas Mawr . The land at the south end of the burgage , however , facing onto the High Street , belonged to a Robert Laythwood , who had a house there . Wynne purchased this in 1585 , probably for the relatively high price of £ 40 , and demolished it to enable the final phase of development , using the space to build a gatehouse that formed the new entrance to Plas Mawr . Further small pieces of land were bought on the north @-@

west side of the house and converted into an ornamental garden , bringing the total cost of the land to around £ 300 . The result was the grandest Elizabethan town house in Wales at the time .

These three phases of house construction ? 1576 ? 77 , 1580 and 1585 ? were probably overseen by several different senior craftsmen , possibly working to an original plan determined by a surveyor or mason working at the English royal court . Judging by the details of the roof design , a single master carpenter may have been used for all three parts of the build ; he probably worked elsewhere across the region during these years , including on 15 other houses and two churches . Both of the first two phases of work were probably conducted by the same team of plasterers , possibly from London , and they used as much as 100 @,@ 000 @-@ kilogram (220 @,@ 000 lb) of lime plaster on the rendering . Timber and slates were brought down the Conwy valley for the house , with grey Silurian grit rubble quarried from the hills near the town , and finer sandstone brought from nearby Deganwy . The total of the building work was probably around £ 500 .

Entertainment and hospitality were important to a gentleman 's 16th @-@ century social status and , according to his nephew , the antiquarian John Wynn , Robert Wynn kept a " worthy plentiful house " . The household was supported by milk from Wynn 's own dairy herds , and by food from the orchards , gardens and a fish trap that he owned around the town . The house had its own brewing , baking and dairy facilities , and further supplies were bought in from regional merchants .

Dorothy died in 1586 and Robert married Dorothy Dymock , with whom he had seven children at Plas Mawr . When Robert died in 1598 he left a complex will that led to legal disputes between the family and the executor , Sir Roger Mostyn . The legal case effectively halted any further development of the house , by now the most prominent in Conwy , until its resolution in 1630 . The property passed to Robert 's grandson , another Robert Wynn , in 1637 , and onto his daughter , Elin in 1683 . By 1665 , the house was equipped to a quality and style that would have put it only just behind the houses of the major gentry families in Caernarfonshire . Elin then married into the Wynne family , and made little use of the house , and it ultimately passed by marriage into the Mostyn family .

== = 18th ? 19th centuries == =

The Mostyns ' principal residence was Mostyn Hall in Flintshire and so the family rented out Plas Mawr to various tenants during the 18th and 19th centuries . In the 18th century the gatehouse was used as a courthouse and the main house as cheap housing . In the 19th century , parts of the house were converted into a school and space for other small businesses , as well as still being used for domestic accommodation : in 1881 , the house had 25 residents . Minor changes were made to Plas Mawr in the process , such as the installation of partition walls to subdivide the larger rooms , but it remained largely intact . The Mostyns offered the house for sale in 1870 , as part of a package of land including Bodysgallen Hall , but there were no offers .

By the 1880s , the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art became concerned about the condition of Plas Mawr , and in 1887 Lord Mostyn agreed to lease the building to the Academy for use as their headquarters . The architects Arthur and Herbert Baker were commissioned to survey the building , conduct repairs and remove some of the post @-@ 17th century alterations , and J. R. Furness then carried out conservation work on much of the plasterwork . The Victoria Gallery was built onto the north @-@ west side of the house to hold artistic exhibitions , and a weather vane was added to the top of the building to celebrate Queen Victoria 's Diamond Jubilee .

== = 20th ? 21st centuries == =

By the early 20th century , Plas Mawr 's historical significance was increasingly well understood , but the costs of maintaining the house grew considerably . By the middle of the century , the finer sandstone had corroded and the timber beams were deteriorating ; a 1956 survey described them as " much decayed " . The plaster ceilings were bowing and coming away from their timbers . The Academy of Art sought government and private assistance to undertake temporary and partial repairs , but these were insufficient and in 1993 it moved into new accommodation and the property

was passed into the control of the state , under the management of the Welsh heritage agency Cadw .

Cadw carried out a major restoration project on the house over the next 42 months , combining large scale conservation with detailed surveying and archaeological analysis . The 19th @-@ century Victoria Galley was demolished in 1995 , and the bare , external stonework was re @-@ rendered and lime washed . Large parts of the property were restored as they might have appeared in 1665 , assisted by the record of Robert Wynn the younger 's will , with the exception of the attic , which was restored to its probable 19th @-@ century appearance . The intention of this was to emphasize the colour and comfort of the original building , to prevent it appearing inauthentically bleak and austere . Other sections of the house were redeveloped to hold exhibition displays and other visitor facilities .

The restoration included installing original and replica interior furnishings , using wall hangings woven from Kidderminster stuff and Dornix . In what historical consultant Charles Kightly has praised as a " brave and successful " decision , much of the plasterwork was repainted , using reversible techniques , to resemble its 17th @-@ century condition . In total the project cost £ 3 @.@ 3 million , and won the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Building Conservation Award . Further work followed in 2006 to restore the gardens , again attempting to replicate the style prevalent in 1665 .

In the 21st century the house is operated as a tourist attraction by Cadw . The historian Rick Turner considers Plas Mawr to be " the finest surviving town house of the Elizabethan era " and it is protected under UK law as a Grade I listed building and as a scheduled monument .

= = Architecture = =

= = Influences = =

Architecturally , Plas Mawr is almost unchanged from the 16th century , making it a very rare survival from this period . The architectural style is a product of the broader Renaissance influences prevalent across Europe at the time . Robert Wynn spent time in Germany , and the style of Plas Mawr makes use of North German Gothic themes , particularly in its use of symmetry , the pedimented windows at the front of the house , faceted finials and crow @-@ stepped gables . These features were already popular in England when the house was built , and indeed Plas Mawr is very similar in design to Eastbury Manor House , the two possibly being based off the same architectural plan . Some of these features had already begun to spread into Wales ? crow @-@ stepped gables , for example , were already being used in Flintshire by the 1580s ? but others were ground breaking in Wales , such as the use of ovolo @-@ moulded and dormer windows . Nonetheless , Robert Wynn was only an emerging member of the gentry , and his house was not as large or as sophisticated as contemporary grander Renaissance properties built in larger rural settings .

Some of the house 's architecture also reflects the influences from contemporary buildings across North Wales , in particular Gwydir Castle , built by Robert Wynn 's father John . Plas Mawr lacks a fashionable long gallery , for example , which was popular in England at the time , and was already beginning to appear in Welsh houses . Instead , it has a rear turret , or belvedere , which is raised prominently above the height of the rest of the house , overlooking the town : this was a slightly antiquated feature , but was widely used in other Wynn family properties , including Bodysgallen Hall . The design of Plas Mawr influenced other buildings in North Wales at the time , including the redecoration of Gwydir Castle , Maenan Hall further up the Conwy valley , Plas Mawr in Caernarfon and Hen Blas in Beaumaris . It also later shaped the architecture of 19th- and 20th @-@ century buildings in Conwy itself , surviving examples of which include the town 's police station and the Castlebank Hotel .

= = Layout = =

Modern visitors typically enter the house from the High Street to the south , passing through the gatehouse , across the lower courtyard into the hall of the main building . Plas Mawr 's gatehouse was only the third such entrance building to be built in North Wales , despite gatehouses being an important part of English Elizabethan architecture , designed to show off the house and provide a suitably dignified entry for visitors . Few houses in towns had the physical space for a gatehouse like Plas Mawr 's . Originally , the gatehouse would have contained a suite of rooms for the steward of the house , Richard Wynn .

The main house forms an " H " -shape , with a north and a south wing joined in the middle , all facing onto an upper courtyard . The upper courtyard was key to the way that the main house functioned : it linked almost all the ground floor rooms in the house , as well as providing access to the cellars , and gave an impressive view of the turret towers . In the south wing was the hall and the buttery , with the red and white chambers above them . Probably when Plas Mawr was first built , and certainly by 1665 , the hall would have been used to meet ordinary visitors and for servants ' meals , rather than forming the main room of the house ; the wooden benches and table on display are original to the property . Traditionally , the service rooms in houses had been placed at the far end of the main hall , but Plas Mawr departed from this design . The service area , including the kitchen and pantry , was instead placed in the centre of the building , between the parlour and the hall ; this radical redesign was copied at nearby Hafod Lwyfog . The restored kitchen is equipped with a batterie de cuisine , with a combination of original and replica equipment .

Above these rooms was the great chamber , the main room which formed the ceremonial centre of the house . In the north wing was the brewhouse and the parlour , with two chambers above them , the latter possibly used by Dorothy Wynn as her bedroom . The private bedrooms for the family and guests were each equipped with a fireplace , an important status symbol in the period . The roof attics of the house contained a great deal of space for accommodating the household servants . The attic above the great chamber has a grand timber roof with arch @-@ braced collar trusses , joined using an unusual system called " double pegging " , which is only used in the Conwy valley during the late 16th century . It appears that the great chamber 's ceiling was originally supposed to be open , looking up to the timbers with the trusses visible , but a mistake in the construction of the walls meant that one side of the chamber no longer fitted smoothly with the timbers , creating an ugly appearance ; a plaster ceiling was then added to hide the error .

The gardens behind the house may originally have resembled the gardens at Bodysgallen Hall , which were laid out in the Renaissance style popular across Europe . The slope of the land results in Plas Mawr 's gardens forming the upper and lower terraces , and these have been replanted and restored in an attempt to show them as they might have appeared in 1665 . The summerhouse is based on a version shown in a contemporary painting of Llanerch 's gardens , and the flowerpots are modeled on those found in excavations at Tredegar House .

= = = Plasterwork = = =

Seven rooms still possess elements of their original plasterwork , which the historian Peter Smith has described as " the most perfect and the most complete memorial to Elizabethan Wales " , and their original wooden carved panels that line the walls . The plasterwork includes extensive heraldry , badges and symbols : in the upper north range alone , 22 different heraldic emblems are molded into the ceilings and walls . The gatehouse shows the royal arms , as do the great chamber and the parlour , probably because they were intended to host senior guests . The badges of numerous monarchs are included throughout the house , including those of Richard II , Richard III , Henry IV and Henry VII . The badges of other prominent nobles , such as Robert Dudley , are also featured in the house .

The plasterwork in the parlour displays the arms of Robert Wynn himself , and Robert Wynn 's bedchamber above the brewhouse shows the combined arms of the Wynn and Griffith families , which are generally given equal prominence throughout the house . Robert Wynn 's arms are most prominent in the hall and the bedchambers , where the royal arms are smaller and less prominent .

In the 16th century , Wynn 's heraldry would probably have been echoed in the furnishings of the house , including the fabrics , cups and silverware . The plasterwork also incorporates a number of classical themes , but these are not as well executed as the badges and other emblems : the historian Rick Turner describes them as " rather token additions " , and Smith considers this part of the decoration to be " naive " .