

Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

Archaeology Above Ground – Investigating Old Buildings Andrew Westman

The purpose of employing archaeology, when applied to old buildings, is generally in association with developers seeking planning permission in connection with a Listed Building. In Wales there are around 30 thousand Listed Buildings – just 8% Grade 1/1* - the remaining Grade 2. Some are listed because of the nature of the building and others because of their association with historical events or individuals. All are listed to help preserve heritage for the future by CADW (the Welsh Government body) and this is implemented on the ground by local planning authorities.

Treleddydd Fawr: The cottage left to the National Trust by Mr. Glyn Griffiths, is a local example of where an archaeological survey was necessary in order to identify for conservation the important features for the future. Built of local fieldstones, packed with soil (used as mortar) the 2-storey cottage was rendered with a lime-wash to make it weather-proof. Based on the traditional long-house with a roof was supported with an A-frame, held together with wooden pegs and roof slates grouted with a lime cement to seal the gaps. A typical cat-slide roof, over the extension to the rear, house the original dairy, with floor slates over the original beaten-earth floor.



Bromley Hall, London: Much altered over time and not hinting, externally, at its origins the size and shape of bricks, used in its construction, provided an immediate clue (to the archaeologists!) as to its possible age. Tree ring analysis, used during the archaeological survey, established the Hall was constructed around 1485 and it was discovered by English Heritage/ Museum of London that it was once occupied by John Blount, an important figure in the court of Henry VIII, father of Elizabeth Blount, the King's mistress (who gave him a son). After the building was seized in the Reformation it was actually refurbished for personal use by Henry!

During the English Civil War the house was used as a gunpowder factory before being taken over for use as a calico printing works until it eventually became the residence of a wealthy City merchant. During the archaeological survey later panelling and floors were removed to reveal a carved hunting scene, 1490s beams, Tudor windows, three 15th and 16th century wall paintings and a staircase, as well an original Tudor arched oak doorframe and the remains of the cellars of a structure pre-dating Bromley Hall itself. The current owners are proposing to use the ground floor for a permanent exhibition on the hall, the manor and the Tudors.

Dalston Theatre: Combining the standing-building survey with historical records, architect's drawings and even news paper reports the story of the building is revealed through the archaeological study. The 'North London Colosseum and National Hippodrome' (1885–6) was a rectangular brick building with central arena, tiered seats, an internal gallery on all four sides, blind arches in the walls, and doors to stables. By 1897-8 architects used the existing brick shell and metal-truss

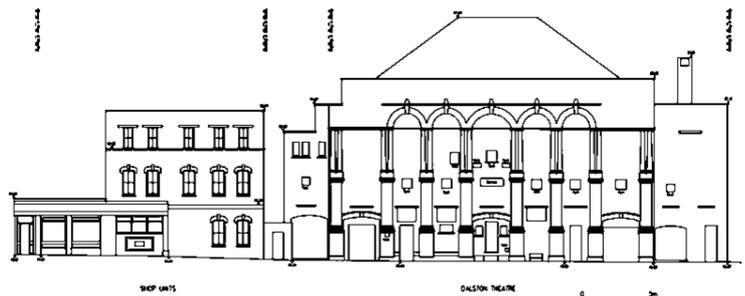


Fig 10 External elevation of Buildings 2 and 5 to the west on Roseberry Place (London)

roof, to create a stage, over a stage-cellar, and under a short fly-tower for the Dalston Theatre. Raked stalls replaced original seating, staircases were rebuilt, and the stables became bars and saloons. A film projection booth was added and by 1921 the theatre was the 'Dalston Picture House'. Steel girders supported a single upper tier of seats on a steel-reinforced concrete floor and a cinema-screen painted on its internal face - all lavishly decorated using classical Greek motifs. After the cinema was closed in 1960 the area of the stalls was used for storage and subsequently for car auctions until in 1980 the tea-room and rear stalls were converted into a very 'trendy' night-club, 'The Four Aces', later 'The Labyrinth', but from the mid-1990s the building had fallen into disuse – as fashions changed. Following the survey all the buildings were demolished, early in 2007, and the building remains only as the archaeological report!