

The Landmark Trust

STOCKWELL FARM, OLD RADNOR

Stockwell Farm is an example of a once common building in which people and animals lived together under one roof - a broad definition within which there are of course many variations: the animals can live on the ground floor with the family above, or they can live side by side on one floor. The latter sort are found in a number of areas in the British Isles but most commonly in Yorkshire, Wales and Devon, and are called, somewhat loosely, the Long-house. But there is considerable debate and disagreement among historians of vernacular buildings as to what distinguishes a true Long-house (that such a thing exists is conceded) from many similar buildings. More strictly these buildings should all be called house-and-byre homesteads, indicating simply that they had the living quarters for the family at one end and a byre for the animals at the other. Usually, though not necessarily, one continuous roof covered both parts.

Stockwell Farm has been described as a Long-house but it does not in fact conform in at least one major respect to what are now usually regarded as the main characteristics. I.C. Peate, who first formulated the term "Long-house" in his book *The Welsh House* threw the net wide and said that the only essential feature was that of internal access to the cow house. On the other hand, Peter Smith, author of *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* considers a far more important distinguishing feature to be that the house was actually entered through the byre, along a feeding walk which acted as a division between men and animals, "for" he writes on one occasion "if we allow any house with internal access to the byre to be described as a Long-house, much confusion will arise, and many fundamentally dissimilar types of plan will be placed in the same category".

If we follow Iorwerth Peate, Stockwell Farm is a long house, since at one stage the door between house and byre was there - although it was later blocked up. Common also to the Long-house are the steps up from byre to kitchen level, a means of preventing the accumulated manure of the cows from spreading into the upper end or "pen uchaf". But if we follow Peter Smith, it is not a long house, since the living quarters always had their own entrance, quite separate from that leading into the byre.

Vernacular buildings such as this are extremely difficult to date, since the same methods of construction and plan types continued to be used until surprisingly late dates. However, from the fact that Stockwell Farm was not built with a chimney, and that the timbers of the original roof, one of which can be seen in the bedroom, look medieval, we can surmise that it was built in the late Middle Ages or, more probably, the 16th or even the early 17th century. At this time the living end would simply have consisted of a single ground floor room, with a loft above for sleeping. The floor of the kitchen was of stone flags, as it still is. The floor of the byre was of cobbles.

Later, perhaps about 1700, a parlour or sitting room was added onto the western end, with a bedroom above; also the south west bedroom and the stairs. The pale oak floor beams can be seen in the sitting room. The addition was built of stone up to the first floor, to match the earlier part of the house; above that it was timber-frame and plaster.

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Sometime around 1830 the gable end of the newer part was re-faced quite grandly with dressed stone. The windows were given stone arches. The fireplace in the sitting room was probably put in then. It was possibly at about this date that it was no longer considered healthy to have the animals living immediately next to the house, and access between the two was blocked off. Whether cows were still kept in the byre, or whether it became a barn at this point, we don't know.

Landmark did as little as possible to the house. Inside, all the partitions were left the same as before, only a bathroom being fitted into the smallest bedroom, and the kitchen into the larder. The door leading into the byre was unblocked. The floors are all original, stone flags in the kitchen, cobbles in the animals' quarters, good oak boards in two bedrooms and pine boards in the east bedroom. It is in this bedroom that the fine oak beams of the oldest part of the farm are visible.

On the front of the house, the white wash which had distinguished the farmhouse from the farm buildings was removed, so that the whole range should be the same. A new dormer window was added to light the east bedroom, above the front door. This was later found to leak, and so in 1984 it was replaced with one to match that on the back of the house, facing the hill, which dates from the 19th century.

Landmark took on and restored the Harp Inn in the village at the same time as Stockwell Farm. It was let commercially until Landmark sold it in 1984.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Stockwell Farm sleeps up to 6 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.