

The Landmark Trust

BUSH COTTAGE

Dendrochronology, or tree ring dating, has shown that Bush Cottage was constructed in 1548. It sits on the landholding known as The Bush (variously the 'estate' or 'piece'), sheltered by a remnant of the ancient Forest of Wyre and facing south-east towards the Clee Hills among ancient field patterns. The Bush is in the township of Chorley, part of Stottesdon parish, and its very survival indicates that this was a sturdy yeoman's house of some quality. In 1792, The Bush was bought by William Childe of Kinlet Hall to the south-east and this means that the very early deeds survive as the Kinlet Collection in the Shropshire Archives.

From this documentary evidence, we discover that in the early 17th century The Bush belonged to one William Grennows of Bagginswood, a neighbouring farm. In 1660 it was 'late' in the occupation of one Humfrey Bennet, born in Stottesdon parish in 1592, so it seems very possible that the house predates 1660. At this time, it was part of a holding that included the adjoining Hole and Fiddle parcels of land, but Grennows sold off the Hole and Fiddle. Bush Cottage passed into the hands of Thomas Bayly and then in the next generation, its ownership was fragmented into two 3/8ths and 1/4th. It remained in the ownership of Bayly's descendants until acquired by Childe in 1792.

Bush Cottage's *occupiers* were a different story. They were clearly all tenant farmers and yeomen, farming a mixture of arable and pasture and bearing good parish names like Malphas, Perry and Pugh. The proximity of the woods for charcoal and availability of coal and iron deposits close to the surface, thanks to the local geology, mean that other employment was available and archaeological investigation has found the remains of early bloomeries, small scale slag heaps and blast furnaces nearby. In reality, the early leases mostly prohibit the tenants of Bush Cottage from exploiting either the woodland or the mineral deposits of the Bush Piece. Their ability to exploit both natural woodland and mineral resources were carefully limited in the leases, which permitted Bush Cottage residents ancient rights dating back as far as the Anglo Saxons – for example 'houseboote, gateboote, plowboote, wayneboote and cartboote, to be used on the premises, upon delivery, and necessary fireboote, stakeboote and hedgboote without delivery, making no waste or spoyle.' These –bootes gave tenants the right to take timber for the specified and limited purposes of repair, and only for use on the premises – to repair house, gates, ploughs, wains, carts, fire, fences and hedges.

In the 19th century, the service end of the cottage was extended and the bread oven and washing copper were added, with their own flue under a small outshot.

Life at Bush Cottage evolved only slowly through the centuries, and probably changed relatively little until the cottage was sold by the Kinlet estate to Mr Roland Wall in 1960. The Walls lived in the cottage only briefly, moving out because the roof leaked. After that, it was left empty and increasingly derelict. In 1999, campaigning charity SAVE Britain's Heritage put Bush Cottage on the front cover of their annual Buildings at Risk Register. Meanwhile, someone who enjoyed staying in Landmarks had bought the adjoining woodland (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) and was intrigued by the ruinous cottage. He bought it and proceeded to carry out an exemplary restoration with Treasures of Ludlow.

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The timber-framed cottage is sturdily built, and was always ceiled, with a rubblestone flue at one end. The brick infill panels probably replace earlier wattle and daub infill; in 1662 there is reference to setting the cottage 'in tenantable order' suggesting it may have become dilapidated at that date, although the bricks in the current panels are more likely to date from the 18th century (and were re-set during restoration).

The central beam in the parlour has been neatly chamfered and the chamfer stops suggest that the beam is in its original place (or if not that the building has been designed around this element). Triangular plugs show where it has been necessary to insert modern metal braces. The shutters are replicas of a single surviving original. There are carpenter's marks on the roof truss on the first floor, and at an early stage the tie beam was cut, necessitating early iron braces as reinforcement. Originally, all the timbers were limewashed. The first floor was possibly originally reached by a simple ladder, the stairs being a later addition.

The current kitchen seems to be a 19th-century rebuilding of an earlier, perhaps primary, service block. Earlier footings were found beneath the floor of the kitchen, and its central beam, no doubt re-used, was dendro-dated to 1548 like the rest of the main timber frame.

When taken on by its new owner in 1999, Bush Cottage was in a parlous state. There were holes in the roof and internal joinery was badly rotted as a consequence. The bread oven outshot had collapsed. Many of the rafter feet had rotted.

The cottage was reroofed and extensive if conservative repairs were carried out throughout, splicing new timber in where original rafters and framing had decayed beyond repair, putting in replacement stairs and dormer framing, replicating window ironwork from surviving examples, everything done in traditional materials and techniques. Wherever possible, timber and stone from the surrounding landscape was used, just as it was in the past. This was also the case for the small outbuilding, which is newly built but on the surviving footprint of an earlier structure, with a brick floor.

The bread oven, extending into a small outshot, was reconstructed. During these works, earlier footings were found beneath the earth floor, suggesting that the 19th-century extension replaced an earlier one (or even that an earlier building stood on the site).

The stairs and dormer window were so rotten that they were beyond repair and so had to be replaced. The staircase was replaced in like-for-like elm, not easy to source since Dutch Elm Disease. The door to the stairs survives from earlier times and looks 18th- (or even 17th-) century. The window furniture was reproduced from a single surviving casement.

In November 2011 and having lived in it himself for ten years, the owner offered Bush Cottage, listed Grade II, as a gift to the Landmark Trust. We had no hesitation in accepting: we found the cottage had been restored entirely to our own standards. We are enormously grateful, as will be all who stay here.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Bush Cottage sleeps up to 2 + 2 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.