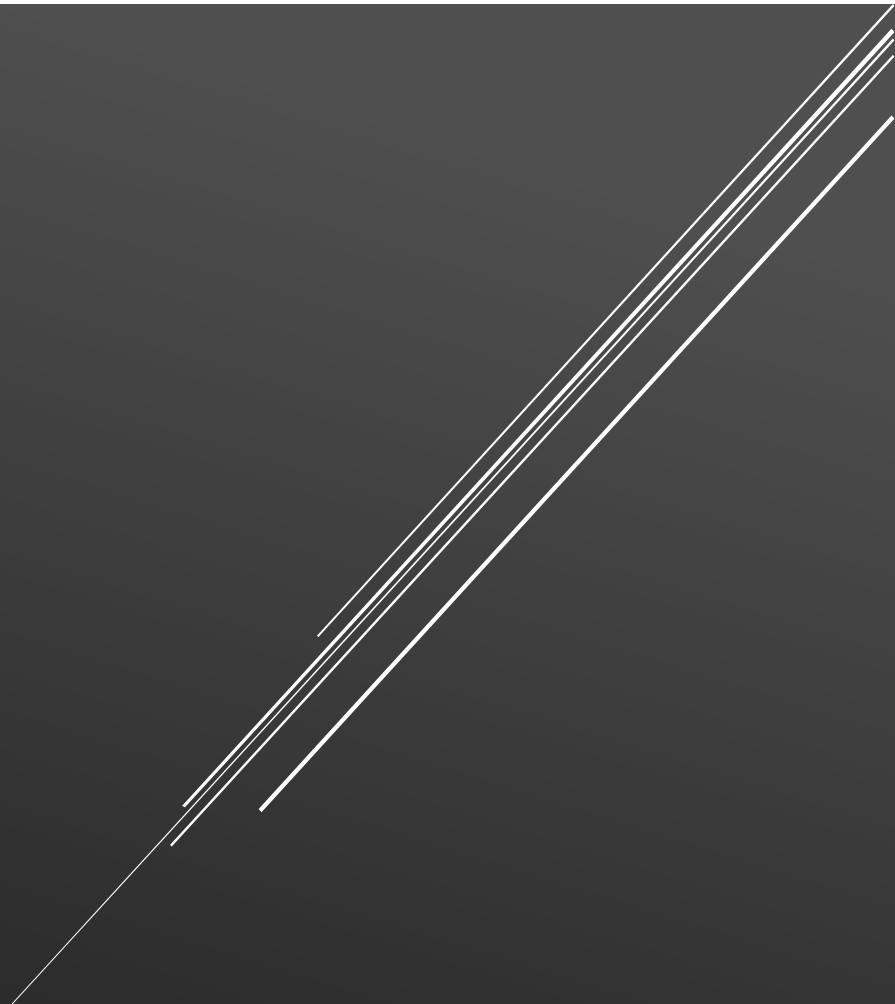




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Introduction

Within St Fagans National Museum of Welsh history stands a row of terraced houses known as Rhyd-Y-Car “This small terrace was built by Richard Crawshay around 1795 to provide housing for the workers in his iron-ore mine.”(AMGUEDDFA CYMRU) the row of houses was originally situated in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan before being relocated and opened at St Fagans in 1983. The row of six houses are furnished with gardens, in keeping with various periods of their history from 1805 on the left up to 1985 on the right. This essay will describe the differences between the six houses and the changes that were implemented between 1805 and 1985 and why these changes were necessary to have taken place, it will describe the economic changes which allowed the differences between the properties to have taken place.

Overview of changes (1805-1985)

Understanding how the Rhyd-Y-Car houses differ from one another is rather simple, the main changes that occurred between the two centuries are vast in context. Over the six time periods the Rhyd-Y-Car terrace clearly demonstrates improvements in the living standards.

The 1805 house is a very simple early-industrial home with little sanitation, very little furniture and a single room center around a fireplace for cooking and heating, it would have been built using basic locally sourced materials including timber framed windows, limewashed walls and a Welsh slate roof.

By 1855 there had been small improvements including more furniture that reflected a growing concern on comfort and the improved availability of manufactured goods. The house did still lack sanitation and had very small interior finish improvements.

The 1895 home shows a strong Victorian influence, an improved range cooker and a noticeable improvement in furniture compared to homes of an earlier period.

The 1925 home sees considerable improvements in health and hygiene. Improved wall finishes and floor finishes were apparent. The biggest improvement came in the form of electricity, by 1955, post-war improvements are clear, houses typically featured electricity, running water, concrete floors and more period modernised kitchens and bathrooms.

Finally, the 1985 home has many improvements such as fitted carpets, double glazed windows, electric heating with an increased concern for energy ecoefficiency.

Together these improvements clearly show how these working-class homes changed gradually from basic industrial dwellings to homes approaching modern domestic standards.

Windows & Doors

The windows and doors within Rhyd-Y-Car terrace houses show drastic development and improvements over time, these changes reflect the improvements within building technology, living standards and social expectations.

In the 1805 house the windows are small timber frames with limited glazing, glass would have been expensive at the time, so windows were designed to be as small as possible to try and reduce cost and potential heat loss, the downside to this would have been poorly lit interiors and limited ventilation, doors were simplistic, typically solid timber construction with very little detailing, these doors offered basic security and very little insulation from cold weather or draughts.

By 1855 the improvements can be seen in the size of the windows and the quality, the windows became slightly larger, this in turn allowed more natural light within the confines of the living space. The production of glass had improved drastically in turn making glass more affordable, the doors were still of timber construction but were more robust, this reflects better skills and craftsmanship and a thought for comfort and durability.

By 1895 sash windows had been introduced this improved ventilation and a significant ease of use. The windows would have allowed the occupants to regulate the temperate of the property more effectively. This would have helped to improve the conditions within the home, the doors would also have become more refined, the doors would have had some kind of panelled designs. This would have indicated a rise for a better appearance to the property.

In the 1925 and the 1955 homes the glazing would have been larger again with more modern materials being used for the windows. Stronger frames and seals would have been used to improve thermal properties within the home. The doors would have been built to much greater standards with modern fittings and materials being used.

By 1985 we would have seen double glazing which would have improved the warmth within the home and also blocked out the noise from outside the property. Although UPVc wasn't used at Rhyd-Yr-Car it was widely used within this time frame on many properties.

"In the 1980s, uPVC began to take over aluminium as it was a more resistant material and offered better versatility throughout the year." (Majestic Designs UK LTD)

Wall Coverings

In 1805 the wall coverings within Rhyd-Yr-Car would have been very basic, the walls would have been finished with a limewash finish this would have continued right up until 1925 where the introduction of wall papers is apparent from the visit, this showed a big change in social expectations and showed that people were looking for more comfortable living areas. Typically, the lime wash would have been applied directly to rough brick or stone during the early times of the properties, later on the limewash was sometimes tinted with naturally occurring pigments, the limewash was also hygienic offering antibacterial properties as stated from (EcoRight, 2022 , *"Limestone is a naturally occurring anti-bacterial material that comes in several types. These include calcite and dolomite. The term limestone can refer to any sedimentary rock that contains abundant amounts of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃), including marble and chalk."*

By 1925 wallpaper was widely used within the entire property typically featuring patterned designs typical with the early 20th century. Dado rail was commonly used in properties this allowed a space to display items of importance, these features demonstrate an importance for greater interior design and comfort as well as better building materials and techniques.

By 1955 homes represented post war modernisation. Wall coverings were simpler and more modern for the era. Painted plaster walls were introduced and were extremely common, oil based and emulsion-based paints were far easier to clean and maintain

In the 1985 home the internal walls used a gypsum finish on plasterboard which was typically painted with an emulsion finish, this allowed for a warmer environment with a much more comfortable finish. The exterior of the property was finished in a smooth sand and cement render. "Gypsum's wide range of applications throughout history, from agriculture to architecture, highlights its adaptability as a building material." (MADA GYPSUM)

Roof Coverings

The roof coverings between the years 1805 and 1925 seen very small changes, the primary material used was slate which typically would have been sourced in Wales due to the large slate mines within the North Wales region, the cheap cost of the welsh slate was beneficial to the working-class home builders as it was cheap and readily available.

By 1925 the house at Rhyd-Yr-Car terrace shows some improvements within the roof construction. Slate was still being used but with the introduction of a bitumen felt membrane this improved the roof to weathering and massively reduced draughts.

As we approach the 1985 home the roof coverings reflect much more modern building practices, although traditional Welsh slate was still being used many opted for a cheaper concrete based interlocking roof tile which was becoming more common due to their low cost, ease of installation and durability.

Eaves details & Rainwater Goods

Rainwater goods were simply not part of any of the house's construction until around 1895. Although rainwater goods are on display on all of the properties at the museum the vast majority of them would not have had sufficient rainwater goods or eaves, this in turn caused many issues such as driving rain & damp issues within the home, the guttering would have appeared in the form of cast iron guttering system which would have been introduced sometime between the 19th century and the early 20th century as living standards improved. The improvement of building materials seen the introduction of UPVC gutter systems during the 1960's and by the 1970's it had become the most popular material for new installations. The durability and affordability of uPVC systems was attractive compared to cast items.

The eaves used on the houses would primarily have been wooden items before the introduction of lighter, more durable uPVC products.

Floor Coverings

The floor coverings used in the Rhyd-Yr-Car terrace showed development over time, the developments reflect improvements in comfort, hygiene & building material advancements.

In the 1805 house up until the 1925 house the primary floor would have been very basic, the primary floor covering would have been natural stone flagstones & rough sawn timber boards for the upper floors, these materials would likely have been inexpensive and locally available, the downside would be that they provided very little insulation from damp and cold conditions, stone floors were difficult to keep clean and contributed to uncomfortable conditions.

By 1925 manufactured floor coverings would have been primarily used, with the introduction of plastic lino these items would have been used in kitchen and heavy traffic living spaces to aid with warmth and hygiene and the ability to improve cleanliness.

In the 1955 house the use of fitted carpets became popular and much more widely used especially within the bedroom and living room space, the introduction of carpets significantly improved the thermal aspect of the properties and added a sense of comfort and warmth, these changes clearly demonstrate changes within post-war expectations of better living standards.

By 1985 floor coverings would have been both chosen for performance and appearance, vinyl, laminate flooring and carpets would have been commonly used offering an ease of cleaning, durability and improved insulation when bridged with more modern subfloor constructions.

Internal joinery

The internal joinery within Rhyd-Yr-Car terrace showed clear development over the time periods displayed.

The 1805 house internal joinery was very limited. Partition doors were very basic, doors were very simple basic plank style construction with no individual design, the staircases were often narrow and steep and were primarily designed for access to the upper floor within the property as opposed to trying to improve comfort or safety.

By 1855 the internal joinery of the property showed small signs of improvement, panelled doors became standard features within the homes and internal partitions became more common, this provided a greater sense of privacy between occupants. The staircases had not improved much more to the previous years but with the introduction of handrails it improved comfort and safety using the stairs to the upper floors

1925 seen big improvements, we seen the introduction of skirting boards, door architraves became more decorative, built in cupboards were more distinguished features of the property which added a great sense of comfort for the occupants of the home, the joinery was of better quality with the improvements of tooling and workmanship.

In the 1955 house the introduction of mass-produced joinery became common, standardised doors with improved stairs and fitted cupboards drastically reduced construction costs. These features greatly improved functionality within the home and again reflected post war home standards aimed at providing a better living standard for its occupants and a property which was easier to maintain

By 1985 the internal joinery of the property was designed with both aesthetics and performance in mind, better fitting doors, modern staircases and mass produced fitted cupboards improved the usability of the property this contributed for improved sound insulation and privacy within the home for all occupants.

Overall, the improvements we see within the Rhyd-Yr-Car terrace houses show a consistent bettering over the time periods which fall in line with the advancements in building skills, materials and the better craftsmanship within the building phase of the properties.

All of my observations were taken mainly from our visit to St Fagans but also on the Rhyd-Y-Car virtual tour which can be accessed on “AMGUEDDFA CYMRU- virtual tour of Rhyd-Y-Car: Homes Through Time”

Conclusion

The Rhyd-Y-Car terrace is a great insight into the development and changes into working class homes within the South Wales homes, the improvements characterise themselves with many different changes in the performance, comfort and hygiene areas, the earlier homes are constructed with basic materials, however over time the advancements come in great forms which provide greater living accommodation, these changes reflect the ever changing advancements in building materials, craftsmanship and viability on being able to afford better living environments.

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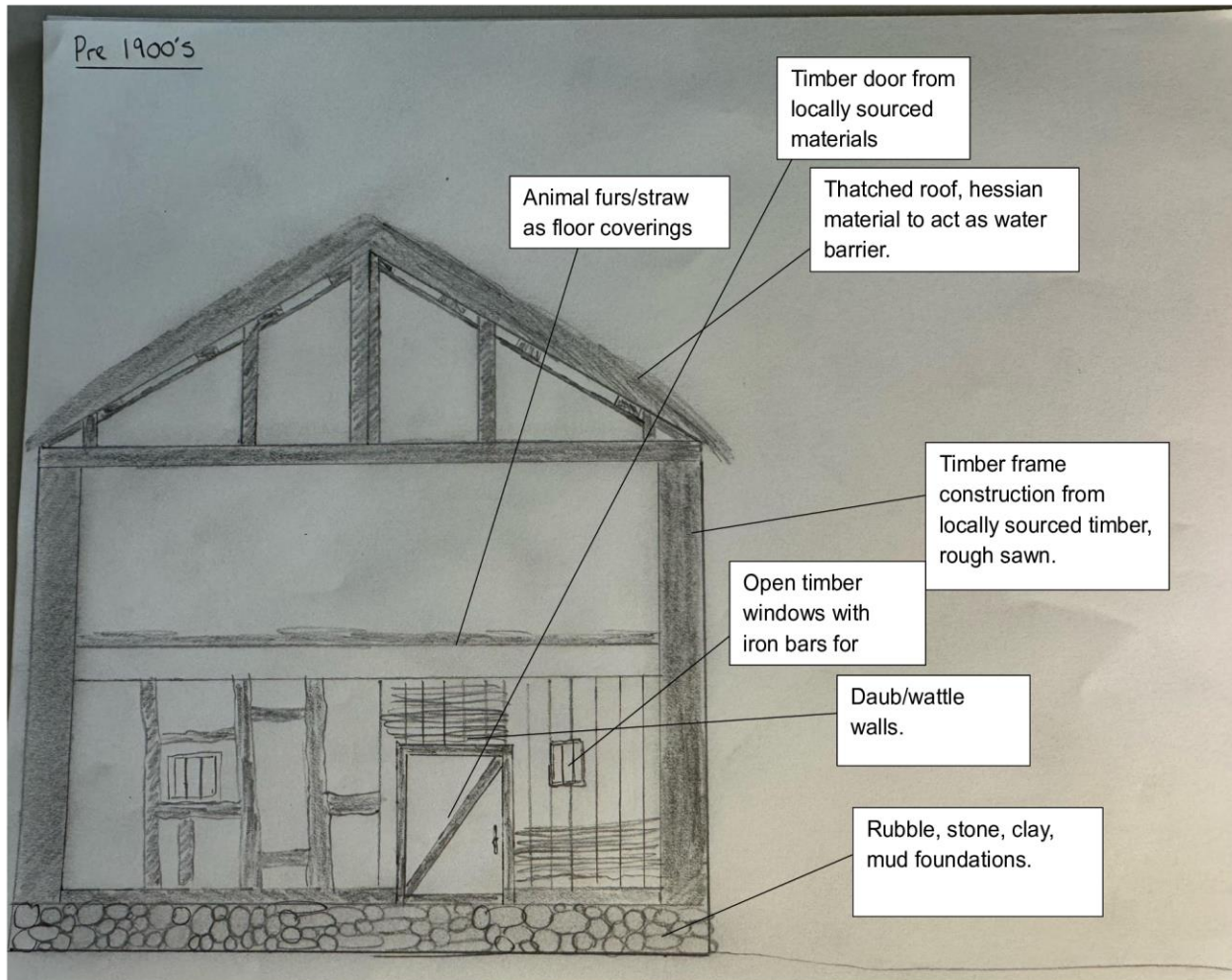
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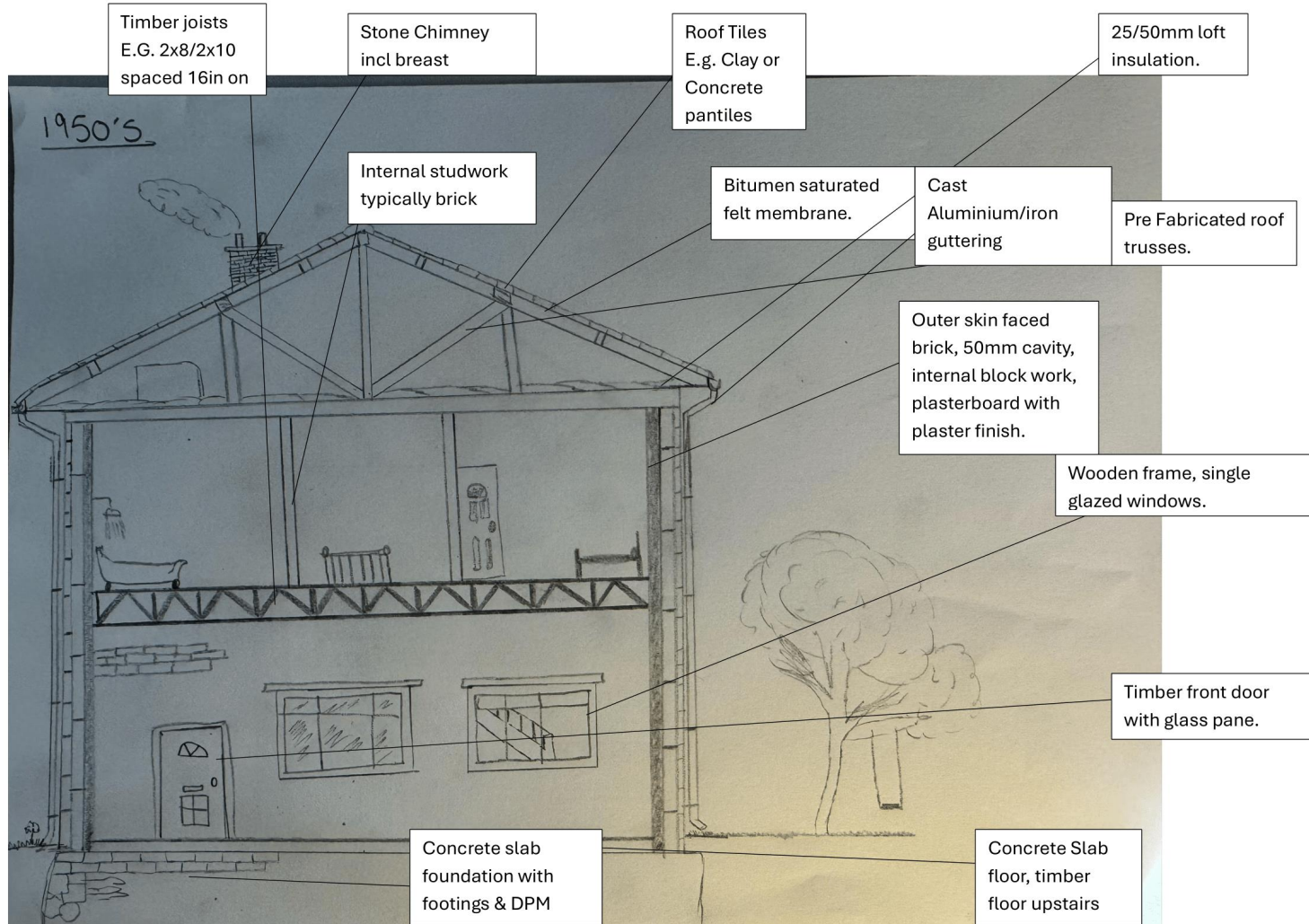
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Pre 1900's



Pre 1950's



Post 2000's

