

Pill Priory, Pembrokeshire - May 2011

We questioned CADW with regards to the probability on if Pill Priory was one of the oldest inhabitable buildings/dwellings/ruins in Wales and following was Dr Kate Roberts' (Senior Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Archaeology) reply:

You've set us an interesting question which has had everyone scratching their heads! Yes - you are probably one of the oldest - although we can't give a specific date to the section of the Abbey which is incorporated into your house.

I'm afraid our databases weren't up to the task of providing us with a list so we have resorted to human memory! We came up with a few examples of similarly ancient properties with sections dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries which are still occupied today.

- Newport Castle, Pembrokeshire - 13th century;
- Llanthony Priory, Vale of Ewyas in the Black Mountains – built between 1180 - 1230 (undercroft part of adjacent hotel - currently used as a bar)
- Fonmon Castle, Glamorgan - built by the St John family c1200 and occupied as a home since the 13th century;
- Penhow Castle, Gwent - which in its publicity used to claim to be the oldest still-occupied building in Wales - 12th century keep;
- Roche Castle - currently being renovated (although not continuously occupied).

I'm afraid we didn't have an expert on North Wales present so all these examples relate to the south. In essence, stone building of a scale that would survive as occupied buildings today didn't really commence in Wales until the late 11th early 12th century AD. Earlier buildings were either timber, and so didn't survive, or were built in a form which subsequently was not suitable for continued long term occupation (e.g. hermit's cells). The great Abbeys and castles of the Norman/medieval period were the first constructions capable of surviving for long periods in a useable form. So, you're a member of a very exclusive club!

