



Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig Discovering Old Welsh Houses

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Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig **Discovering Old Welsh Houses**

Between 2005 and 2012 also known as The Snowdonia Dendrochronology Project, then the N W Wales Dendrochronology Project and then the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group.

RHOS, (Tŷ'n y Rhos)

Minffordd, Penrhyndeudraeth.

Gwynedd



House History

A Part History of the House & its Families

Author: Nan Griffiths,

11 February 2012

Revised 2013 & Republished 2025

Written in the language chosen by the volunteers and researchers & including information so far discovered

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Rhos, (Ty'n-y-rhos),

Minffordd, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd.

LL48 6HP.

Llanfrothen Parish, adjoining the Parish of Llanfihangel-y-traethau, Meirionnydd.

Summary

The village of Minffordd was founded in the 19th century when a number of houses were built along the new road that led from the direction of Penrhyndeudraeth to the Cob. But the lower part, known as Pentra, is centuries older. Before the building of the Cob in 1812 the travelers who wanted to reach Caernarfonshire had to cross the Traeth Mawr with its four miles of dangerous sand. There was more than one crossing across the Traeth but recent historians agree that the route from Minffordd was the safest as the sand was firmer and the water there was shallower.

The travelers needed food and drink and rest and there was good money to be made from providing for their needs. At the top of the hill that leads from the Square towards Pentra stood the Old Kitchen where food and drink could be obtained. It was also possible for the weary travelers to rest and quench their thirst at Minffordd's old farmhouse and tavern, which was on the edge of the path across the Traeth and which gave its name to the village. Sailors, guides, fishermen, boatmen and shipbuilders all made a good living from Traeth Mawr.

Very often the travelers would have to wait, sometimes many days, for the weather to improve before they could cross the Traeth. Rhos was an inn for travelers for centuries, but in the 15th century. and maybe before that, it was a wine house.

According to dendrochronological evidence the beams of the current building date from 1572. Behind the main building was a kitchen-and-croft cottage; only the inglenook has survived from that.

There is uncertainty regarding the ownership of Rhos over the centuries although some official records are available. After the opening of the Cob in 1812 there was no need for an inn for travelers and the tavern was converted into a small farm sometime before 1832. The owner, Edward Pryce Lloyd, had put his estate on the market in 1832 and three years later he managed to sell it and Rhos became part of the Deudraeth Castle estate. The cottage was demolished towards the end of the 19th century and a new building was erected in its place, and a gap was opened from the Old Kitchen to the Front Room.

A lot of land was part of the property, up to 26 acres at one stage in addition to the common land. There were many fruit trees around the house and hops climbed up the damson trees at the bottom of the garden and a row of beehives was kept to get honey and beeswax to polish the oak furniture and to make mead. The names of the fields according to the 1853 Sale map were: Weirglodd y Rhos, Bryn Gwyn, Dwnan, Buarth Newydd, Cae Mawr, Pen Barac, Gors.

Rhos was bought at the Deudraeth Castle sale in 1922 by the tenant, Mrs Ann Davies, my grandmother, and although the building was owned by industrial organizations for a while I managed to buy it in 1996. I, Nan, live there at the moment. It is known that at least ten generations of the same family have lived in Rhos.

Nan Griffiths. June 2013.

Chapter 1

In this part the location of the building is explained, some features concerning it, and an outline of the plan of other old houses from the same period in the area. Then each room and the occasional piece of furniture is discussed.

RHOS (Ty'n-y-rhos)

The Site

Rhos stands on a slight slope facing the south-west in the old part of the village of Minffordd. As might be expected from a busy old industrial site, some traces remain below the surface of the surrounding land. Our builder said he had found a stone quay about half way down the back garden (which faces the quarry) but by the time we arrived to see it it had been covered up. Under the soil in the garden near Glan Don there is a row of steps - leading from the barracks, probably to the ship building works on the water's edge. Recently, under the old oak, an iron ring was found which the boatman used to secure the boat in the sand. Auntie Maggie claimed that somewhere in the garden, above Y Graig, an iron ring had been soldered to anchor ships. There is a row of slate fencing (crawiau) at the bottom of the back garden. Old coins were found at the bottom of Rhos' garden, the earliest of which dates from 1585, money that fell into the water when paying the boatman or perhaps the guide.

Nearby there is a house called Y Graig which until fairly recently was a small one-storey cottage, where the boatman lived; he ran the ferry. Not far, above Ffordd Dan-glannau stands Lloc Meurig. "Lloc" means yard or pound, which is a place to keep animals. It is doubtful whether the drovers drove animals across the Traeth as it was so unstable and dangerous but it is possible that the travellers' horses were accommodated and exchanged there.

There is a spring (pistyll) across the road to Rhos, which is Pistyll y Swallow or Pistyll y Rhos, and a stream runs between the garden of Rhos and the garden of Glan Don and until recently there was a small slate bridge over it connecting the two houses. According to local historians the spring was named after a ship called The Swallow which was built in Rhos in the 18th century. But seeing the power of the water after heavy rain I wonder if it is a corruption of Pistyll Ewynnol (as in the case of the Swallow Falls in Betws y Coed). The spring and the stream are completely dry in the summer so the brewery must have gotten its water from a well and there are several of them around. Hops are still growing at the bottom of the orchard on the border with Graig, which proves that the sea did not come very close to the house.

Not far away, opposite the smallholding of Hen Gaeau ("Old fields"), there is a hill called Pen yr Orsedd, above a field called Bryn Gwyn. According to Sir Ifor Williams the meaning of "gorsedd" is "a central place where a court was held, an old sacred place or a burial ground". According to the legend, it was in Bryn Gwyn the Men of Llŷn were buried after they were chased from Llanfrothen and killed after they killed the priest in 14??

The inglenook and gable of the main room (the Old Kitchen) are built into the rock. It is quite likely that the building was whitewashed, as were all the buildings of the Tudor period, in order to weatherproof it from moisture and make it easy for sailors and travelers to see it from afar. Lime was imported up Traeth Mawr. The buildings may have had thatched roofs and earthen floors but evidence was found recently, when the Porthmadog bypass was opened, that slates were used for roofing in the area as far back as Roman times.

The local residents, and I, remember the Brewery opposite the house which was known as Plas Newydd Brewery. Apart from the pigsty, there are no longer any ruins around the house but it is clear that a large number of nearby buildings have been demolished with little left behind. The brewery, the haybarn, the stable, the old cottage, the barracks in Pentra and on the Tai Sets site, and the old Minffordd farmhouse have disappeared. A good number of stables would have been needed. Some traces remain but the best stones would have been reused, as the haybarn stones were used to rebuild the low wall around the house and garden in 2003. I wonder if there were small dwellings on the Graig site and Glan Don (built at the end of the 18th century) as pictures of houses on either side of the path across the Traeth can be seen on the map of the famous cartographer John Ogilby in 1675.

The old name was Ty'n-y-rhos. The meaning of rhos ("heath") in this connection is, not heathland, but land where the flow of a river has eroded a gap near its banks. Sir John Wynn of Gwydir refers to it as Ty'n-y-Rhos in the 16th century and again in the Porth yr Aur document in 1519 but by the Crown Tax record in 1623 it was simply "Rhos".

Ty'n-y-rhos c.1450 - 1835

Sir John Wynn of Gwydir refers to Ty'n-y-rhos as a wine house in 1462 but that was not the current building, because it is known from dendrochronology tests that the current stone house was built in 1572. In Sir John's time all houses in Wales were hall houses, namely houses without a chimney but with a fireplace in the middle of the floor with the smoke escaping through the roof. Solid oak would be the usual material with the crucks extending from the floor to the roof; no stone was used. So, the old house was probably demolished and a two-storey stone house erected in its place during the great building rush in the area in the 16th century. Unfortunately, there is doubt regarding the authenticity of the remains of the cruck that is in the Chamber (siambr). And if the suspicions are correct (namely that it is a piece of wood borrowed from another building) it seems that nothing of the "old house" remains. It would be very interesting to date the cruck to see if it could have once been part of the old house.

I used to believe that the old cottage that stood behind the main house was the original house. That cottage's inglenook and bressumer have survived in the boiler house. Unfortunately, neither that nor the cruck fragment in the Chamber can be dated with the techniques currently available. (Dendrochronology is often unable to date a tree that has grown rapidly but hopefully that can be done in the future through the radio carbon method.)

When the roof was raised around 1920 the old beams were kept and new ones placed above them. There are no traces of smoke on the old beams and therefore they were not part of the old Hall House before 1572.

The Unit Houses

Some hidden elements came to light when the old plaster was removed during the restoration of Rhos in 1996 which help to understand a bit about the history of the building. It was common in Snowdonia, especially in houses connected to the Gwydir family such as Parc, Llanfrothen and Plas Newydd, to build a separate building when the family needed to expand, rather than building an extension. Each house was complete and completely independent from each other and at the beginning of the construction period (16th and 17th cent.) there was no entrance between one house and the other. The two houses (or sometimes more than two) were often built at the same time but because the second house was inferior in construction it appeared to be more ancient. It is more than possible, bearing in mind that Rhos was the property of the Parc estate, that the old cottage and the main house were two separate buildings until they were connected and united later - perhaps at the end of the 19th century, when the narrow gap with its stairs leading from the Old Kitchen to the Front Room was opened. The two houses were rented separately and listed separately until the 1881 Census, one as Rhos Farm and the other as Rhos Cottage.

It is believed that it was customary for a widow to live in the second building - the inferior building - it was a dower house. If it was empty for a while it was used as a kitchen or bakehouse. Sometimes the old Hall House would be modified later by adding a fireplace and chimney at one end, on the design of a Snowdonia House. Traditionally a separate kitchen or oven was built for fire safety.

Wealth came to the area in the 16th century through the success of the nobles and the farmers raising cattle on the highlands and driving them to sell them to England, and there was a vogue in the area for house building - namely Snowdonian houses. By the 18th century, however the small houses and farms had been swallowed up by the large estates.

The House

The Old Kitchen

All the features of a Snowdonian House can be seen in Rhos. The main door opens directly to the Kitchen along a cross passage and there are the remains of an oak post-and-panel wall on the right (see the section on the "Chamber"). Opposite, on the gable, there is a large, very fine inglenook, built into the rock. Before the restoration there was a blackened brick wall in front of the opening, and on the right side there was an oven in the wall with a door with a brass handle; a small fireplace extended out into the room and above it was a hole where the smoke could be seen rising. There was a hob on the other side and there were very bad damp marks above it. Some time ago there was a fender and a set of steel or pewter fire irons on the hearth. It was decided to demolish the brick wall in order to try to correct the damp and put in an oil stove to heat the house - instead of the open fire. (The oven door had been stolen.) Behind the wall it was seen that there was another, earlier, oven, without a door to it, and that the wall behind, which is the gable of the house, rises directly from the rock. The construction of the chimney itself was fantastic - better than anything in St Fagans, according to the architect. Unfortunately, a cover had to be put to hide it in order to prevent the heat from escaping. Also, a large steel brace was put out of sight at the back in order to support the structure as there was a crack in the large beam which may have been there since shortly after the house was built.

The end of the 18th century was the period when brick ovens were incorporated, and it would be interesting to date the oven. The stones in the large chimney would all have been plastered, as is part of the remains of a large inglenook which is in the old cottage in the boiler house. There were small channels under the slate flags on the floor to take any water out of the house. When the plaster was removed in 1996, the remains of a large mullion window were seen where the window is today. On the wall opposite the main door is a wide door that leads to the Buttery with a substantial stone lintel above it, and it is likely that this was the old back door.

When the layers of thick, black pitch were removed from the beams it was found that they were not all oak. There were beams of soft wood in some places and it was realised that this was a sign of the changes that had taken place to the house. There has been a lot of speculation among the family over the years as to why one of the large beams (above the dresser) was hewn down but it was recently realised that the purpose was to make room for the ladder that led to the bedroom. Beams of soft wood were put in to correct the gap where the ladder had been when a new staircase was created in 1861. (Stone stairs near the fireplace are a later feature in a Snowdonian House – the ladder was first). The beams near the front door are also of soft wood, probably from when the new stairs were installed in 1861. (It was seen that someone had marked 1861 on the partition).

Recently, in 2016, folk historians began to take an interest in marks on beams (and which are sometimes on furniture too). These marks can be light grooves in a row, deeply incised, or burns.



Scientists have experimented by burning pieces of oak trees in a laboratory using tallow and rush candles and even a candle saved from the remains of the Mary Rose which sank in 1545 and it was seen that the burn marks were all made deliberately and could not have been made accidentally. There are several marks on the beams in Rhos and one large burn under the bressumer. It looks as if someone has accidentally held a lamp or candle underneath. It is not certain what the purpose of these features was but it is likely that they were some kind of protection against the Devil and witches and that they were made in a period of religious uncertainty in the 15th or 16th century. Although thousands of women were executed between 1560 and 1580 in Scotland and England, there were only 32 cases in Wales. It is thought that these marks were created to prevent witches from coming down the chimney and into the house. The doors and windows could be closed but the chimney could not be covered.

As suggested, it is possible that the narrow gap that leads up the four steps to the Front Room was not opened until the major rebuilding at the end of the 19th century. A piece of railway rail was used as a lintel for this gap. (The Cambrian Railway came to Minffordd in 1867 but the Ffestiniog Railway had opened in 1836.) When we restored the house a modern, steel beam was put in place of the rail

above the steps and the ceiling of the doorway was raised quite a bit but it is still very low for tall men. If you compare the opening to the Front Room with the one to the Buttery it can be seen that the opening to the Buttery is much wider and more ancient in appearance.



The Kitchen Furniture

We are fortunate that at least two old pieces of original furniture are still here in Rhos (although they were re-homed while Rhos was empty.) According to Richard Bebb, the expert on Welsh furniture, the two pieces of furniture below could have been made by a shipwright from local wood or even by a family member.

This was the period when shipbuilding was in vogue in Rhos. High quality dressers on a pattern similar to the small dresser were produced in the Conwy Valley in the 17th and 18th centuries but this was certainly made locally as transporting heavy furniture was very difficult.

There is a tradition in the family that the Hwntw Mawr was brought to Rhos after he was caught following the murder of a Penrhyn Isaf maid in 1812 and that he sat on the settle to drink his last pint before being taken to prison in Dolgellau and, shortly after, hanged there. That may be true because the tavern was the only gathering place in the area at that time.

The Dresser

Another piece of furniture of interest is the small dresser with the date 1768 on it and below it R 21. (It was probably one of Nansi Roberts' sons in the 19th century who cut the letters AR below). I have not managed to connect any family event, such as a marriage, to the date 1768. It is possible that it came from another household. It was Aunt Gwen's dresser and Mum inherited it because she was named Gwen Mai after her mother's aunt. It was in the old cottage that Gwen Ifans lived, and there the dresser stood. It is said that the family of David Williams, Castell Deudraeth, the landlord, took a tea set and furniture from here, including a small Two-piece Cupboard (*cwpwrdd deuddarn*). There was no room on the cart for the little dresser and it got to stay in Rhos. (One had to please the landlord!). Glyn has another dresser which is bigger, and that one is of light oak. Nain got rid of that one's shelves in order to convert it into a sideboard according to the fashion of the time!

The Chamber (Siambr)

Siambr is a loan word from the English *chamber*, meaning bedroom. A bed in a downstairs room was quite a common thing in the past. There is wood from three different sources among the beams here - it was common to reuse old wood - the cruck, the original beams, and new oak from Prenteg which was used to repair rotten beams.

History of Merioneth 11, page 429.



In a Snowdonian House, usually, the space on the other side of the passage between the two doors was divided into two small cold rooms to store food, one of which would be a buttery, and there stood a large oak chest to store oats. On other occasions it would be a fireless parlour to welcome visitors. In Rhos this room was called the *Siambr* (Chamber) and it has the remains of a cruck beam in it, and a small fireplace from the 19th century. Two grooves about a yard long can be seen in the large oak beam above the door where oak panels used to fit to create the original partition.

It is possible that the *Siambr* was one room - a parlour or a bedroom - as there was space between the two grooves to put in a door (before the current staircase was installed) and there is no indication that the room was divided into two. The partition was made from giant red pine trees from Canada (Redwood) - which was the hull of a sailing ship. (The experts doing the dendrochronology work were much more interested in the partition than in the old oak beams!). Porthmadog had by then developed into an important port and traded regularly with Newfoundland. People made use of materials that were available, as in the case of the piece of railway that was used as a lintel above the steps to the "Front Room". On the upper part of the partition there were orange boxes under the wallpaper and traces of colourful yellow and blue-green paint. In the 19th and the 20th centuries it was in the *Siambr* that the old women of the family lived - Gwen Ifans after the demolition of the cottage - and this is where my Grandmother lived in her old age, but she slept in the small room above the kitchen. She would go on her knees to say her prayers, on the cold floor, before going to bed.

The Buttery

Behind the Old Kitchen is a small kitchen known as the Buttery (*bwtri*). It is difficult to say when this extension was built. When it was re-roofed it was seen that oak pegs held the old slates in place and the "beam" that supported the roof was a whitewashed tree branch. It appears that there were external stone steps on the site before the Buttery was built and that they led to the bedroom above the Chamber as the stone lintel of the door to the bedroom is clearly visible from the outside. Perhaps it was more convenient to use the solid stairs outside to carry fuel to the bedroom than the ladder in the Kitchen. Visitors could come and go independently. (But see the section on the Bedroom above the Chamber/*Llofft ben shambar*.) Many traces of rebuilding could be seen under the plaster in the Buttery and the remains of a wide opening on the wall opposite the window. In 1996 the small window that Nain had closed up so that visitors could not peek when going to the new front door in the Front Room was opened. (See another theory under "The Bedroom"). The slate shelves that used to hold the milk and butter were converted into a useful shelf above the cupboards

The Pantry

This small room is also a bit of a mystery. It was a place to keep food cold in my childhood and there was a big hook in the ceiling to hang a side of pork. It is probable that food for the pigs used to be prepared in the small grate - and water could be boiled for washing. It had a small unglazed window looking out over Traeth Mawr. Fanny Edwards, who had family ties to Rhos, says: "Among the travellers who frequented the inn, a number of Queen Elizabeth's courtiers were seen at times, on their journey to Gwydir or back; and through a window in a part of the house which is now a ruin they watched the tide....". I wonder where she was referring to? The Pantry is the only room that overlooks

* An article on Penrhyndeudraeth in the Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society 1.3 (1951) 197. Discovering the Historic Houses of Snowdonia, Suggett & Dunn, p.47.

the boat wharf where the money from the Elizabethan era and the tool to secure a boat in sand were found. There was a wide stone lintel in the wall and it was decided to create a back door there instead of the small window. The beams (under the plasterboard) are old and worn which suggests they may be remains of the old cottage.

The Front Room

It was built around 1894 on the site of the old cottage whose large beam could be seen under the plaster. It can be seen in its entirety in the boiler house. The original Victorian grate had been stolen.

The Upper Room (Lloft)

The upper floor was completely open and not divided into rooms but by the 19th century the guests slept in cosy and private wainscot beds. Nain installed the partition to create the bedrooms. A row of solid iron hooks (*styffylau*) remains in one of the beams for travellers to hang clothes and belongings on. In accordance with the traditional pattern of a Snowdonian House, there was a substantial fireplace in the Bedroom above the Chamber. According to experts, this was private for the mistress of the house and could only be accessed through another room - or perhaps external stairs? The girl, when she married, was responsible for furnishing this room and providing the bed linen. It was used during the day as well as at night to sleep in. There are small round holes in more than one beam in the upper floor; this is where rods were placed to support the wattle that formed the walls of old houses. But as there are no similar ones on the lower floor, they are probably re-used wood, possibly from the same place.

After Nain bought Rhos in 1922 the roof was raised and the windows enlarged.

The Cottage (bwthyn)

Behind the Kitchen stood a half-loft (*crogloff*) cottage. Today the "Front Room" is on the site and two bedrooms above. The bressumer and the remains of the substantial inglenook have survived, and it is interesting to notice that the inglenook was plastered and whitewashed, but the chimney stack was knocked down within memory because it was dangerous. The only description of the layout of the house/houses is found in the inventory of Dafydd Ifan (1778) and the will of his wife Ann Llwyd (1779). It notes "ye upper chamber, ye lower chamber, all ye midi flower and ye loft." There is no description of the contents of the rooms unfortunately, only the value of their contents. It is possible that the midi flower (middle floor) was a one-storey cottage and the "loft" was an attic. The goods in the "lower chamber" and the "loft" were much more valuable than the rest.

The Brewery

Opposite the house stood a Brewery but it was demolished by the quarry in the 1960s. That was also a *crogloff* cottage with stone steps outside the loft, a substantial inglenook and a loft above the space where the cows stood. There was room for four cows. According to local tradition it was a brewery for Plas Newydd, and a registered path connects Plas Newydd and Rhos and because of that the planners of the Cambrian Railway had to build a bridge over it when the railway was built in 1866. A number of local historians mention a stone on the wall of the Brewery and on it a date and the words *Brewery y Rhos*, but it was stolen and no one remembers the date on it. Bob Owen points out that Cadwaladr Owen was a brewer in Plas Newydd around 1774, and that he completely depended on the industry.

The small beer had a short life and it would have to be prepared regularly. It is said that 12-20 gallons per week needed to be brewed for a family - not to mention the visitors. Plas Newydd was a large industrial unit in the 18th century, with a significant population to quench their thirst. As water before the era of sewerage was unhealthy small beer was the common drink of the peasants, and the people drank about eight pints, each, a day. The beer was made from barley and later the practice of adding hops to the beer was adopted. Brewing was a long and laborious process and it was the women

Bob Owen, *Diwydiannau Coll* (Lost Industries) p.109.

who usually did the brewing. The beer was kept in casks (butts) in the buttery. Gorse and bracken were burnt to make the fire to brew as they give a high heat quickly.

In 1552 the Act for Keepers of Alehouses was passed to ensure that "innkeepers" took out a licence, but no record has survived for Rhos and there is little information available about them.

On the same spot, opposite the house, stood a hay barn; that was also demolished by the quarry in 1998 and the stones were used to restore the low wall around the house and garden. There is a heap of stones on the spot where possibly the stable stood, which was essential to the business.

Opposite, to the side of the house, stands the pigsty, convenient for feeding the malt to the pigs. The trough for the pigs' food, hewn from a piece of slate, is in the garden under the old apple tree but unfortunately it had been broken in two when it was found.

There were a lot of shells in the soil at the back and recent archaeologists who are researching the old history of Traeth Mawr believe that these *shell middens* date from the end of the Bronze Age, but I guess that they are the remains of feeding the visitors.

Hops are still climbing up the old damson trees at the bottom of the orchard.

Wine

Wine, usually in casks, was part of a ship's mixed cargo which included coal, salt and wood. In 1663 taverns were allowed to sell wine and the places that only sold beer were called alehouses; an *inn* provided food, drink and accommodation. "Wines were being unloaded at Chester then into private creeks at night.... other wines were then being re-routed to creeks and ports on the North Wales coast to avoid taxes."

It is a mystery where the wine was kept for the wine house in Rhos as there is no sign of a cellar or cave nearby. Sometimes a hole in the floor was used to keep wine safe.

"By the mid-14th century, even the sparsely populated Cambrian coast could boast of inns that stocked foreign wines. Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl.1340-70) tells us that he frequented a public tavern where he was able to buy expensive vintages.

Other poets praised the wine too:

‘Harbors where ships come full
And bring a very good wine to have
To your perfect towns to travel’.

The ‘towns’ referred to were most likely Aberdaron, the boroughs of Cricieth and Nefyn, and the Glaslyn estuary for the Priory of Beddgelert.

Ieuan Dew of Arwystli (1540-1610) makes a similar observation. Earlier Rhys Goch Eryri (fl.1384-1448) had observed with satisfaction the advent of a wine ship destined for one of these north-western anchorages."

Dendrochronology Result:

"A Snowdonian house of 1572 but probably of earlier origin: a fragment of undatable cruck-blade is visible in the outer room." (Vernacular Architecture, Vol 28, 2007, List 193, Welsh Dendrochronology Project – phase II, p 137.)

KL: "Hafnau lle daw llongau'n llawnA dwyn gwin da iawn ei gael

I'th drefi berffaith drafael". See *Gweithiau Barddonol Morus Dwyfech*, Owen Owens, University of Wales MA dissertation, 1944. "To your towns, perfect voyages." may be a more accurate translation of the last line. Ken Lloyd Gruffudd, *Maritime Wales in the Middle Ages: 1039 – 1542*, Bridge Books (2016) 191-192, 196.

Chapter 2

Listed below are the official documents associated with Rhos in the 15th and 16th centuries, the report of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and the historical background of the period.

The Early Historical Background

Broadly these are the dates that are known for the early period of Rhos.

1462 "...Ty'n y rhos being a wine house standing in Penrhyndeudraeth."

John Gwynfor Jones (ed), *The History of the Gwydir Family and Memoirs by Sir John Wynn* (Gomer 1990) p. 39.

1519. Porth yr Aur Legal Document: Ieuan ap Einion ap Rees ap Madog Clwch of Llanfrothen transfers Ty'n y rhos to Richard Pencoyd clericus and Lewis ap Ieuan ap Dio. (The witnesses to the deed were all from the Gwydir family.) Bangor University Archives 3695.

1565. William ap Robert ap Ieuan ap Einion deputy of the Crown at Traeth Mawr. EA Lewis, *Havens and Creeks, Welsh Port Books. 1550-1603.* (1927) p. 310.

1572 Construction date of the "new" Rhos (see Dendrochronology Report 2012).

1623 Crown Rents in Ardudwy - Robert William the owner pays 1p. *Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes Meirionnydd*, 2009 p. 376. The name of Morris ap Eliza of the Clennau family is close to the name of Rhos in the list (his own land 1/8), see CA Gresham, *Eifionydd* p. 102-104, *History of Merioneth* p.665.

1662 Hearth Tax. It is noted that a certain William ap Robert had property with one hearth in Penrhyn. The house is not named and there were two hearths in Rhos, but the list is incomplete and perhaps ap Robert did not acknowledge one of the hearths in order to reduce the tax. CCHM 1953, p. 27.

1680 Start of family records. T Ceiri Griffiths, *Genealogy*, (Y Lolfa 2012) p.274. The family were not owners of the property but it is possible that they had been in Rhos for generations as the tenancy was passed from one generation to the next.

Further details can be found in House History Research, *Dendrochronology Report, Dating Old Welsh Houses* (2012).

See also the research on William ap Robert.

At the request of Elizabeth I an official report was prepared for her government in 1565: "Y Traeth Mawr being a haven, havinge no habitacion nor resorte. And there is likewise neither Shippe Vessel or Boote that belongeth to the same" (*Calendar of State Papers Domestic.*)

Recently through the activity of the Dating Old Welsh Houses Society and its use of dendrochronology it has been proven that a large number of substantial houses were built in the area in the 15th and 16th centuries. It is therefore difficult to believe that there was no "habitation" on the edge of the Traeth, or "shippe," because it is believed that trading took place from a very early period.

The Gwydir Family

The earliest record that mentions Rhos is that of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir in his work in praise of his family *The History of the Gwydir Family*, written sometime after 1580.

The author focuses on the turbulent period following the Wars of Owain Glyn Dŵr in the fifteenth century and the small predatory landowners who fought each other for land and wealth, when all the land between Conwy and Dyfi was, in his words, "wasted with fire and sword".

This is how Dan Jones describes the period in his wonderful book on the War of the Roses. "The middle to the late decades of the 15c. experienced sporadic periods of extreme violence, disorder, warfare and bloodshed, an unprecedented number of murders, betrayals, plots a dangerous and uncertain period of brutality, cruelty and violence".

At that time, in Wales, it was customary for gentlemen to put their children into foster care to complete their education. The rector of Llanfrothen fostered the child of Ieuan ap Robert, one of Sir John's contentious and powerful ancestors. In 1461 a dispute arose between Ieuan ap Robert and Hywel ap Rhys, and Mared, Hywel's wife, conspired to take revenge on Ieuan by murdering the rector. He arranged for a young woman to knock on the door of his home and beg for shelter. She was welcomed by the rector and everyone went to bed. In the middle of the night the girl started screaming and claiming that the rector had raped her, and rushed out of the house. This was an excuse for three of her brothers, who were hiding nearby, to take revenge and the rector was killed near Ogo'r Llychwin. The three brothers fled eastwards in search of sanctuary with Ieuan ap Robert in pursuit.

"As Ieuan ap Robert was on his way going thither passing by Tŷ-yn-Rhos,"(being a winehouse standing in Penrhyndeudraeth) Hywel ap Rhys's wife, being in the house, said to the people that were with her: "Yonder goes Ieuan ap Robert: "Hwyr y dial fo ar i dadmaeth", which is as much as to say..." that he would not be in haste to be revenged of the wrong done to his foster."

There is another story told locally about the murder of the rector of Llanfrothen. A group of men had come from Llŷn to Llanfrothen to look for wives. Naturally the men of Llanfrothen were angry and there was a wild argument between them near a farm which is still known today as The Field of the Men of Llŷn (Maes Gwŷr Llŷn). The rector was killed and it turned into a bloody battle, and the visitors were chased in the direction of Y Traeth Mawr. The tide prevented them from crossing and they were overtaken and killed near Tŷ'n y Rhos and buried at Pen yr Orsedd, in Bryn Gwyn field, nearby.

In his book, Sir John Wynn explains that it was the custom of all nobles of quality to keep a winehouse. Tudur Aled, Gutun Owain and their contemporaries in their poems name the wines of Rhône, Gascony and Burgundy. Wine was imported from France four times a year. In order for the venture to be practical it was necessary to import a shipload at a time and as the wine was transported in animal skin costrels it would sour quickly!The y (later it was transported in casks). So, what was left over after the needs of the mansion was sold in a winehouse.

Sir Wynn goes on to describe what exactly a winehouse was: "The fashion was in those days that the gentlemen and their retinues met commonly every day to shoot matches and to try masteries. There was no gentleman of worth in the country but had a wine-cellar of his own where wine was sold to his profit. Thither came his friends to meet him and there spent the day in shooting, wrestling, throwing the sledge and other acts of activity and drinking very moderately withal, naccording to the healthing and gluttonous manner of our days."

Dan Jones, *The Hollow Crown*, Faber and Faber, 2014
John Gwynfor Jones, ed., *The History of the Gwydir Family and Memoirs* by Sir John Wynn, (Gomer, 1990) 36, 39.
KL: These "Twenty-four Feats" are listed by John Davies of Mallwyd in his 1632 *Dictionarium Duplex*.
KL: Quotation in Lundy Braun, *Breathing Race into the Machine: the Surprising Career of the Spirometer*, 2014.

There was considerable carousal in the winehouse when young nobles came together to compete and practice sports such as sword-fighting, wrestling, shooting with a bow and arrow and even creating poetry - that is, the Twenty-Four-Feats. According to one contemporary writer the winehouses were "a source of wealth and disorder."

There is a little information about the taverns of the 14th -15th century in Dafydd ap Gwilym's famous poem "Trouble in a Tavern" where he describes one of the dirty, disorderly taverns of the time and he "buys roast and expensive wine" before going to sleep with his fellow travellers – three Englishmen among them – in one room. Dafydd himself does not use the word "tavern" but "accommodation" (llety). The lowest bardic class, Y Glêr, would entertain the lodgers with a staff, crwth or harp as accompaniment, but it is possible that Dafydd ap Gwilym also entertained people in a tavern.

Rhos is referred to in various official documents dated between 1519 – 1790, and one is detailed below. A dendrochronological examination was recently carried out on the house, and the beams were dated to 1572.

Despite the report of the court of Elizabeth 1 there is some evidence in the work of the poets that the Traeth Mawr wine trade was very important in the Middle Ages. Ships from Brittany came to the area carrying wine from Gascony and later from Spain and Portugal. Sometimes a gentleman would have an arrangement with a wine merchant or ship master to import a load of wine on his way to a major port such as Chester. He would sell what was left over from the needs of the mansion to the winehouse. Beddgelert Priory was a good customer for Ty'n-y-rhos and the poets Morus Dwyfach and Ieuan Tew Brydydd Hen talk about importing wine in the area.

Porth yr Aur Document, 12 May 1519

In Bangor University Archives there is a legal document transferring Ty-yn-y-rhos, together with a number of other nearby dwellings, to Richard Pencoyd and Lewis ap Ieuan in 1519.

"Release by Ieuan ap Einion ap Rees ap Madock Llwch (later of the Clough family) of Llanfrothen to Richard Pencoyd clericus and Lewis ap Ieuan ap Dio of Hendre Hoedlew, Tyddyn y Vicer, Henbant, Ty yn y Garth, Ty yn y rhos, Cae Merched Ieuan Fychan, Tai Newydd, some vigrates in Gelli Dywyll and Dol Llywelyn Goch (some being in Llanfihangel-y-traethau (Lltr.))"

The document adds:

A cleric of the name Richard Pencoyd was presented to a portion of the benefice of Aberdaron.

A portion of the above lands were once owned by Thomas ap Griffith ap David ap Llywelyn.

Porth-yr-aur, 3694, Bangor University.

The seller, Ieuan ap Einion, was an important and powerful man in the area (Brogyntyn Ms. 1.24 National Library of Wales) and there are references to him and his family in the same manuscript. There is also a reference to one of the buyers, Lewis ap Ieuan ap David (Dio), in a number of documents: (quitclaim 6 Jun 1587, Z/DV/302 Dolg. Arch.). In other documents he is referred to as a man from Llanaber. Z/DV/301, Z/DV/307, 21 Jan 1588, see also Z/DV/310 2 Feb 1603. (Within 20 years Rhos was owned by Robert William).

Richard Pencoyd

There is quite a bit of mystery about this man. All the houses named above were transferred to him and Lewis ap Ieuan ap Dio. It is a mystery how the Vicar of Aberdaron accumulated the wealth stated below.

Richard Pencoyd became vicar of Aberdaron on 14/September/1514. He resigned in 1536 or 1537. (I wonder if he was a recusant?) In addition to Ty'n y rhos he received an estate as a gift on 9 Feb.

See Arthur Ivor Price, *The Diocese of Bangor in the Sixteenth Century 1512-1646*. Melville Richards Database (MR)

1519, (Tan-y-bwlch /D/168), and another three days later (Tan-y-bwlch Z/DV/169 and Z/DV/269. Arch. Dolg.)

(There was a Rhys Pencoyd Rector of Ffestiniog in 1504, and Thomas Owen de Pencoyt a deacon in the parishes of Ffestiniog and Maentwrog in 1572.)

A number of the houses named in the 1519 document are still in existence and most are fairly close to Rhos. The old name of the nearby farm Tŷ Obry was Hendre Hoedliw; it is possible that Tŷ Fry was Tyddyn y Vicar as parsons lived there in the 18th century; there are the remains of Tŷ yn y Garth in the middle of the Garth Quarry, and Cae Merched (Ieuan Fychan) is a smallholding in Penrhyndeudraeth. It is possible that Henbant was the old name of Plas Newydd and there is a field called Maes Henbant on the grounds of Tŷ Obry. A certain Robert Wynne lived in Gelli Dywyll, Maentwrog in 1623 but by 1632 it had come into the hands of the Mostyn Estate.

The witnesses to the document were all connected to the Gwydir family:

Maredudd ap Ieuan ap Robert (son of Ieuan ap Robert from the 1462 story, and the man who founded the estate of the Wynns of Gwydir. He inherited lands in Clennenau and Penyfed).

John Wynn ap Maredudd ap Ieuan ap Robert. (He inherited his father's lands above in Llanfrothen and was the grandfather of Sir John Wynn. Most of these lands were on lease from the Crown following the abolition of the monasteries.)

Rees ap Ieuan ap Maredudd

John ap Wynn ap Maredudd

John ap Maredudd ap Matto

John Foxwist (an attorney from Cheshire who settled in Caernarfon)

The Historical Background in Wales

With the ascension of Henry VII to the throne of England, peace came to the countries after the period of disorder in the 15th century. Following the Act of Union of England and Wales in 1536 the economy revived, the population increased and the towns grew. There was a major change in the pattern of land ownership in Wales. Traditionally the land was owned by many of the owners of the free towns and the monasteries. After Henry VIII dissolved the church he claimed the lands of the monasteries. They were let on rent (Crown Rental) and some families, such as the Gwydir family, (see Document 1519 above) came to the fore and the lands were accumulated into the possession of a handful of powerful families. The large estates continued to grow until they dwindled in the 19th and the 20th centuries. As the families grew in power and status some of the former owners became their tenants. The rents were raised, and the possibility of gaining more land by "enclosing" the commons - and by drying up parts of Traeth Mawr - began to be explored. But on the whole, this was a period of peace and wealth accumulation after centuries of turmoil such as the Owain Glyn Dŵr Rebellion, the destruction of the Black Death and the struggle of the War of the Roses. It is surprising how many houses were built in Meirionnydd around the middle of the 1500s.¹

From 1535 onward, there were ten years of very wet weather, and from around 1560 Britain suffered what is known as the Little Ice Age, with wet summers and exceptionally cold winters causing illness and famine. This continued until around 1650. Although the wet weather was disastrous for the farmers of the lowlands, it did not affect the owners of the black cattle that grazed the high, poor land to the same extent. There was a thriving market for cattle exports to England and some of the tenants became richer than the landowners. It is therefore not surprising that major construction took place in Meirionnydd in this period and owners competed with each other. Rhos is one of a large number of houses built in the area in the 16th century. And of course, the weather did not interfere with the "harvest" (fish and seafood) of Traeth Mawr.

see *The History of Merioneth II, Houses 1415 – 1642*, Peter Smith.

Chapter 3

Owners of Rhos

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain concrete information about the period between the 1519 document and the Crown Rents in 1623. Noted in the Maes y Neuadd papers No. 244 is the "quitclaim Robert ap William, free tenant of Llanfrothen " but it is possible that this document relates to the old Minffordd farmhouse. It is recorded that William ap Robert ap Ieuan ap Einion, the grandson of Ieuan ap Einion from the 1519 document, was Crown Deputy in Traeth Mawr in 1565.

What is certain is that a man called Robert William was the owner of Rhos in 1623, because he is named in the list of Crown Rents in Ardudwy that year. He pays 1p. rent, and Rhos was his only property. It is quite likely that it was his son, William ap Robert, Penrhyndeudraeth who paid the Hearth Tax in 1662 on a house with one hearth, although Rhos is not specifically named. (Unfortunately, there are nearly two dozen men called William ap Robert or Robert ap William living in the area in this period between Penmorfa and Llanfrothen and there are records of them, including wills. I could not find a reference to Rhos in any one of them.) See the Appendix at the end.

We can therefore be fairly certain that the succession after 1519 was as follows: Ieuan ap Einion ap Rhys ap Madog Llwh, document (1519); William ap Robert ap Ieuan ap Einion, Deputy of Traeth Mawr (1565); Robert William, Crown Tax (1623); William ap Robert, Hearth Tax (1662). There is no further official record until the Land Tax of 1798 when it was owned by the Mostyn estate. Through all this history, and later in the case of the lodgers Griffith Wynne and John Jones in the 18th century, the shadow of the Gwydir family can be seen. (See Rhos, House History Research (2012) pg.5 - 6, for full details.) A certain John Jones, Llanfrothen (no. 9) paid 15/6 in the Mostyn Land Act list in 1768 but unfortunately the name of the property is not listed. (John Jones, Rhos, a gentleman had been dead since 1755.)

I have searched diligently but in vain through the estate papers of Brogyntyn, Clennenau, Llansteffan, Tan y Bwlch, Mostyn, Bryn-y-gwin and Parc in archives and in the National Library. So, I have concluded that Rhos was part of the Parc estate, although it is not specifically named in any will or marriage agreement.

Plas Newydd

I surmise that Rhos is part of Plas Newydd and was incorporated in the documents of the history of Plas Newydd. It was not big or valuable enough to deserve its own documents. According to local tradition Rhos was a winehouse (then a brewery) to Plas Newydd; there is talk of a tunnel connecting the two buildings, and there was definitely a path between the two places. There are references to Plas Newydd in Parc documents – it was a member of that family who built the mansion in 1677, namely Robert Anwyl (1654-1695), a century or so after the rebuilding of Rhos. The local belief was that the family spent the winters in Plas Newydd and the summers in Parc.

I researched the history of Gwydir's relations with Llanfrothen Parish in the 15th and 16th centuries in the National Library - names of tenants etc., but there was no mention of Ty'n y Rhos.

But there was some kind of connection between the resident Griffith Wynne and Gwydir, and also Catherine Rowland, the wife of John Jones gentleman was a daughter of Parc. There is a long and complicated story to the history of Parc and the family's financial troubles, and in 1746 the owner, Sir Thomas Pendergast, had to sell the "town and lands of Plas Newydd" to Sir Thomas Mostyn. (Z/DJ/201).

According to the testimony of local historian Ioan Brothen: "Parc was bought in 1748 by Williams Wynn, Y Wern, one of the Wyns of Peniarth. Parc was sold again to Sir Richard Price Lloyd the first of the lords of Mostyn. By the Land Tax of 1798 Sir Edward Pryce Lloyd was the owner of Plas Newydd and Rhos, and John Jones, mariner, was the resident. Both properties were put on the market in 1832. Parc passed into the hands of Hugh Revelrey, Brynygwin. David Williams, Castell

Deudraeth, bought Rhos and Plas Newydd in 1853 and they were part of the Castle Deudraeth estate until the Great Sale in 1922."

Ioan Brothen also says: "on a field called Maes yr Henbant, near the house (namely, Plas Newydd) there are the remains of an old rather extensive building where various ancient things were found". This is probably the "old" Plas.

Chapter 4

The history of the hustle and bustle of the "tavern" and the importance of Traeth Mawr to the support of Rhos and Pentref.

The Eighteenth Century

The Inn

In the Middle Ages it was common for farms and cottages to brew their own beer and sell it to travellers passing by. Water in that period was unhealthy and everyone drank beer or small beer. According to the local historian Griffith Williams who wrote in 1867, there had been taverns in Cae Ednyfed, Rhos, Bryn Turnor and the old Minffordd farmhouse - such was the demand. There is an entry in the Account Book of the Brondanw Estate in 1771: "Payed ye daughter of Rose for 6 Bottles of Brandy and 6 due to for oats 9/6". I wonder where the brandy came from and note that it was a girl who dealt with the business.

It must also be remembered that the number of travellers from England increased significantly towards the end of the 18th century because it was not possible for wealthy men to travel to the European continent on the "grand tour" due to the Napoleonic wars, and the discovery of Wales became popular. Around the same time the Government began to require all tavern-keepers to register and purchase a licence. The lists of taverns in Ardudwy can be seen in the records of the Quarter Sessions (Z/QS/M, 1791 – 1812). Often the name of the tavern is not specified, only the name of the tavern-keeper. It was seen that an Alehouse Recognizance was available for Rhos on 12 September 1785, and John Jones and William Jones paid £10 each and Owen Jones and William Jones (another?) also £10 each. It is said that this was a commitment (bond) to ensure good behaviour. Very few records have survived.

Rhos is referred to locally as a tavern but it was not a tavern in the usual sense. There is no Welsh word for an *inn*, where accommodation was offered as well as food and drink to travellers. Often if the weather was stormy or foggy people would have to wait for many days before being able to cross the Traeth. John Wesley is said to have stayed here many times, and there are frequent references in his diaries to his accommodation but he does not name it. There is also a family tradition that Howell Harris held a prayer meeting in the household, perhaps when he crossed the Traeth Mawr to go to Llŷn in 1748.

A tavern was a busy place, a social centre for the area. People would discuss business, play games, drink and celebrate weddings there, and sometimes a harpist or fiddler would entertain the people. Sometimes an interlude or, later, a sermon was held in the yard outside. These activities probably took place in Rhos as well. I wonder if Twm o'r Nant presented an interlude in the yard when he was working on the Cob in 1812?

Another mystery is when the doors of the "tavern" were finally closed. The Cob was opened in 1812, and then it was safer for travellers to cross that road and pay a toll than venture across the Traeth on horseback or on foot. The antiquary and lawyer Edward Breese from Porthmadog states in a letter around 1875: "Rhos was a public house up to 40 years ago." It is possible that the laws governing pubs and the sale of beer in 1828 and in 1831 had an influence. The Alehouse Act was passed in 1828 and the Beerhouse Act in 1831, and their purpose was to promote competition between the taverns. The temperance movement was also influential.

Although Rhos ceased to be an inn before 1832 it can be hypothesized that there was little change in the building over the centuries until 1861, when the partition of redwood trees from Canada replaced the original oak screen. The opening to the cottage may not have been broken through until after 1881 after the demolition of the old cottage and the construction of the new part of the Front Room on the site. If there were external stone steps, as is assumed, it is possible that this was when they were demolished and the Buttery built on the site,[#] but it is more likely that this was done in the

early 19th century when the tavern was converted into a farm and a buttery was needed for churning etc.

#Bangor University Archives.

Smuggling

In the 18th century when duties were raised on wine, smuggling became rampant. When the government needed more funding to pay for its wars (such as the US War in 1780) it raised duties on spirits and wine. Soon a tax was also raised on salt causing great hardship, because salt was essential to curing meat for the winter. The pillars of society, the vicar and the squire, often collaborated with the peasants and smuggling was not considered a crime - although things could turn very ugly at times. According to Bob Owen (Lost Industries p. 99) 13 smugglers went from Trwyn y Penrhyn to the Clwyd Valley in 1799 to sell liquor bought illegally from ships.

If there was no cave nearby sometimes a hole was made in the floor, the barrel was buried and covered with a slate. I wonder where "ye daughter of Rose" got her brandy to be sold to Blas Brondanw in 1771?

The hustle and bustle of Traeth Mawr

Between 1630 and 1700 the value of the wines imported from the Mediterranean countries tripled and by 1759 trading along the coast had increased significantly. Although the community was still self-sufficient, shops such as Siop Penmorfa began to be opened. According to the 1840 Tithe map there was a fulling mill near Lloc Meurig and it is likely that much of its production as well as woven woollen goods were exported. A great quantity of oak timber and oak bark was exported along Traeth Mawr to build warships in the Elizabethan Age, and lead was exported very early from Maes y Plwm, Llanfrothen. Wine and lime and coal were imported. So Traeth Mawr was a very busy place with tens of boats and small ships going back and forth along it. The work was seasonal and in the quiet periods the sailors would turn to farming. One man would be needed as a crew for every 3-5 tons of the size of the boat. The sailors would generally keep within sight of the land but some of the coastal shippers traded with Ireland. The technical Welsh maritime terms were forgotten because no one had recorded them.

The small ships sailed between April and autumn, especially the ships with an open deck and under 30 tons. There was plenty of fish and seafood available for the residents of the shores. People would cut peat on the Traeth, collect sedges to make rush candles and harvest sedge and wicker to weave into baskets and mats. Traeth Mawr supported the population and unlike other areas the inhabitants of the banks of the Traeth did not suffer from hunger or great poverty.

Diwydiannau Coll (lost Industries) page 109. See Brondanw Account Books 1710-24, 1774 – 1777. Page 131.

Nan Griffiths ed., *Minffordd: rhwng dau draeth*, (2012) pp. 29-30. *Cymru a'r Môr*, 2015

The life of the inhabitants

More history of the people, both family and visitors, is available in the 18th century than in previous years, and travelers from England visited North Wales and wrote books about their journeys. There are parish church records naming all the people who lived and worked in Rhos but the owner's name is a mystery. Only money, furniture etc. and boats are listed in the family's wills in the 18th century. (Apart from the will of Griffith Wynne, Rhos).

It is very likely that there was little change in the lives of the residents over the centuries. Towards the end of the 18th century there were cold, wet summers and poor harvests following the eruption of a volcano in Iceland, and as a result it is estimated that 20% of the British population died.

Seafood

According to the reports of local historians there was an abundance of fish and shell-fish in Traeth Mawr. The 18th century "travellers" refer to the miserable condition of the women who gathered cockles on the Traeth, but it must be remembered that these visitors were well-heeled aristocrats from England and were not used to the hardships of rural life. Penrhyn was known as "cockle town" and sacks of cockles were carried on the back of mules as far as Penmachno to be sold. It was cheap and nutritious food and available even in times of famine. There was a large quantity of cockleshells in the land around Rhos in 1998.

Shipbuilding

By 1745 an important shipbuilding industry had been established in Traeth Mawr. It is known that one sloop, two brigantines, a smack, a wherry and a cutter were built on the banks of Traeth Mawr between 1761 and 1825. It is recorded that Thomas Williams was a shipwright and lived in Rhos in 1798, he was the son of William Jones. According to the testimony of Evan David, an old boatman, three ships were built at Rhos. One, the Neptune, was 300 tons, and so big that it could not be moved into the water and dozens of workers were at work for a year opening a trench from the knoll at Rhos to Pant y Cra.

Shipbuilding was highly specialized work, with skills accumulated over centuries of experience. The ships were strong but easy to handle, built from local trees, mostly oak. The owner would order a ship and the carpenters would build a half size model which would later be destroyed. The shipwrights were excellent craftsmen and could turn their hand to creating furniture too. It didn't require much equipment, just a saw and steam.

There were 64 shareholdings for each ship, mostly bought by local people; women, craftsmen and shipmen bringing wealth to the area. The ships from Porthmadog would sail to Hamburg, Cadiz, Newfoundland, Casablanca, Greece, South Shields and Waterford, and transported all kinds of goods, especially slate. Between 1820 and 1914 Porthmadog ships were the best in the world.

Guiding

Crossing Traeth Mawr was dangerous and official records list the large number of people who drowned while trying to cross. One entry tells of a child drowned fishing and there is mention of someone getting into trouble driving a cart and three horses across the beach. There were deep pools and quick sand on the beach but the biggest danger was the tide, which rushed in quickly. The bodies were kept in the Glan Don stable until the Coroner arrived from Dolgellau. The local historian, Griffiths Williams, tells the story of Morris Roberts, a farmer from Penmorfa trying to cross the Traeth on horseback, with his maid behind him. The horse sank into a deep pool and the farmer drowned, but the maid and the horse were saved.

There is an interesting anecdote in a letter written by an English gentleman called Jackson who was visiting the area in September 1768. He escorted a lady across the Traeth to Penmorfa but stayed too long there. By the time he started back the guides were not willing to accompany him because the tide was coming in fast. Despite this, he insisted on taking the risk. He had a lot of trouble, and it was his strong horse that saved him. He landed near a cottage - and it was probably Rhos, as he noticed that

(See Bangor ms.484, pp. 89,93, (Rhos) and 355, 1778-1825).

a ship on blocks was being built nearby. *"At the door of the first house, near which there was a sloop upon the stocks, stood a decent-looking elderly woman."* An old woman had been watching him and he asked her in English if it would be safe for him to cross Traeth Bach to Talsarnau. She had a bit of English (probably because of visitors) and encouraged him on enthusiastically. He had great trouble crossing but he arrived safely and told his story to his friend, Mr. Wynne, the Squire. The next day the Squire came with him to the cottage and questioned the old woman in Welsh. She replied that she did not care at all about the fate of the visitor because he could not have crossed unharmed without the Devil looking after him, and therefore he would be perfectly safe. There was great laughter and a meal of bread and cheese was enjoyed. (This anecdote possibly confirms the common peoples' belief in evil spirits and their effort to keep them out of the house by cutting marks on beams.)

There was good money to be had from guiding people across the Traeth but some, such as John Wesley, were reluctant to pay. He says in his diary on 14 April 1749 *"What needs is there of guides over these sands I cannot conceive. This is the third time I have crossed without anyone"*. Mr Jackson was also quite contemptuous of the "guides" and complained that they overemphasized the dangers in order to get more money.

One traveler tells of a girl leaping on the back of a horse to lead them. There was a sign with a picture of a white horse hanging near Rhos and on it the words *"A guide to the Sands"* probably for the illiterate. I wonder if there were posts placed in the sand to mark the path across the dangerous Traeth? There is another story about an Englishman who was glad of the company of a monolingual Welshman when crossing.

Nineteenth Century Inhabitants of Rhos

Ellis Roberts

Ellis Roberts was baptized in Llanfrothen Church on 17/3/1802 as the son of Robert Pierce (born 1772) a farmer, and his wife Susanna. Susanna was one of the trolley women, transporting slate with trolley and horse down from the quarry to the boats on the Dwyrdd river, before the arrival of the little train railway.¹ Their home was Gelligwail (or Rhiw Goch?), Penrhyndeudraeth. He was the main "cowman" of Castell Deudraeth. There is a memorial card for him.

Ellis Roberts and Nansi Jones were married on 24 April 1827 and they came to live and raise a family in Rhos, and Sion Ifan and Sian and Gwen their daughter moved from Dolbelydr to the old cottage.

Ellis and Nansi Roberts suffered many bereavements during their lifetime. They had 9 children and only one, a daughter, survived them.

Robert 20/7/1827 Llfr² (It is assumed that he died young as there is no sign of him in the 1841 Census.

Margaret 1829 died 19/6/1865. My great grandmother.

William 3/7/1831 Llfr. In 1874, aged 42 he was mate on the Miss Thomas and his brother John was captain. In 1874 he was captain of the schooner Cynhaiarn and his brother Pierce was his mate. On 17/12/1874 he left his ship in Porthmadog due to illness. He died within two weeks and was buried in Treflys cemetery.

Jane 15/2/1832 Llfr. (Died aged 18 months)

John 29/5/1833

Owen 5/4/1835 Llfr

Jane 15/2/1837 Llfr.? He died at the age of one

Pierce 1838

Ellis 1839 - drowned in the Bay of Biscay.

Annie 1843.

There is a photo of her with her brother in Liverpool in 1866. On 20/1/1868 she married Captain Edward Jones, Gelli Grŵn. His father's name was also Edward Jones and he was a boatman on the Dwyrdd river but by 1841 he was a farmer.³ Edward Jones was buried in the cemetery of Holy Trinity Church, Penrhyndeudraeth. Edward Jones was captain of the Martha Percival with 26/64 shares in her in 1877.

Robert 1845/50?

In 1873 he sailed on the Edward Windus and became mate on the Shields. In 1874 he was a mate on the new ship The Fleetwing (19529). On 26/2/1875 his mother, Nansi Roberts, received a letter from a guesthouse housekeeper from Australia. Robert had sailed as mate in the Baltic Sea and then to Port Adelaide, Australia, a three-month voyage. In January 1875 his arm was broken and he stayed in lodgings for a month before dying of scarlet fever on 4/3/1835. The lady of the guesthouse was asking for money to pay for his burial but this was a fraud, according to Dafydd, as he would have had a good salary after months of sailing. The letter is available - one of the few documents preserved.

Owen 1853

see *Llafar Bro*.

I presume this is an abbreviation for Llanfrothen (parish).KL

See *Cymru a'r Môr* (1948), pp. 117-118.

Recent history

By 1891 Rhos was one house and David and Ann Davies (my grandfather and grandmother) and their children lived there. The great-grandfather and great-grandmother of Ann Davies, my grandmother, former residents of the main house, had both died: Ellis Roberts, her grandfather died in 1879 and Nansi his wife in 1886. William Ifans who also lived in the old cottage had died in 1886 but his sister Gwen Ifans did not die until 1891, and she was living in the Chamber by then, which complements the theory that the old cottage was originally a home for a widow or older members of the family, and then the Chamber.

Around 1969 Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Plant wanted to install a pylon in one of the fields near the house. Huw, my mother's brother, dealt with the matter, as the "head" of the family, and he was the County surveyor of Meirionnydd. Without consulting the rest of the family, he refused permission to erect the pylon and the Nuclear Power Plant had to buy the house and the land in order to be able to do so. It was agreed that his sister Maggie was allowed to live in Rhos rent-free for as long as she lived.

After she moved to an old people's home the place was left empty and then, after she died, it was sold and the furniture divided between the family. The place was left to fall into ruin. Around 19?? the property was put up for sale, neither Merfyn nor I had the means to buy it and it was sold to the quarry.

In the 1980s there was a rumor that the quarry, that is, the owner, was going to demolish the building in order to straighten the road that at that time led to the quarry. It was successfully listed by CADW and protected. After a great deal of imploring Wimpey, Rhos was bought back for the family in 1995. It was in a serious condition and had been empty for over twenty years. It took two years to repair and restore the building, keeping strictly to the same pattern of rooms. The only difference that can be seen from the outside is the windows with small panes, and a window was added in place of the old "front door" to match the other window. A new back door was also installed in place of the little window in the Pantry.

Addendum

Sadly, Nan Griffiths passed away in 2017 leaving this document, tracked down by her daughter Angharad, and translated by me from the Welsh original, incomplete.

Rhos has been sold twice since Nan's death; I bought it along with my partner Robert Kaminsky, in October 2021, and we have had the pleasure and privilege of living here since then.

Karen Liljenberg, June 2025.