

Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig



Discovering Old Welsh Houses

CYNWYD

SCRAP BOOK 1



Discovering Old Welsh Houses

Denbighshire Branch

2014

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1. FOREWORD

Dating Old Welsh Houses Group

In google if you persevere and get past the dating websites, you will come across the above site, and I would like to think your curiosity will make you click on it, because if you do you will find a treasure trove of research on work carried out by the members of this group.

Since April 2012 the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group, a community heritage charity with around 100 members, has been investigating the development of pre 1700 Welsh houses by focusing on:

- * Building recording, archaeology and architecture

- * The study of the landscape, community, economic and social history of the period

- * House/family history & other research on a range of topics through lectures, events, visits & study tours

- * Widely publicising results online, through leaflets & a quarterly Newsletter

- * Branch-led activities in Anglesey & Caernarfonshire, Conwy, Denbighshire, & Merionethshire.

The Denbighshire branch, is encouraging our members to research their own houses, other houses which have been identified as 'old', [effectively meaning the history of the families who have lived in these houses, [and even to the family's pre and post occupation]. Also we are looking at land ownership, and we will also research any other area which broadly fits in with the aims of the group.

So some are currently in conjunction with the National Library of Wales on land ownership from the tithe maps, with members transcribing schedules for Llandrillo, Llangar, Corwen, and eventually Gwyddelwern, but focussing on Edeyrnion first, [but hoping to roll out this project to cover a wider area]. And the fun bit is colouring in copies of the tithe maps to show holdings and ownership. Other members are looking at the history their own houses, with one near Ruthin, one at Llangar, one in Cynwyd and another in Glyndyrfrdwy, one in Corwen.

We usually meet together once a month, either at Rhug or members houses to review progress, resolve problems or often just to generally chat – we are a pretty laid back bunch.

So if you fancy something different do look at our website,
www.discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk,

This publication is part of the Denbighshire Branch group activities. Though we have been concentrating on researching old houses in Denbighshire, we also came across other items of interest, which we felt needed a wider audience – hence this scrapbook. We would welcome your feedback on what we have produced

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those people who have contributed to this publication

Cover Picture – the 17th century bridge over the river Dee at Cynwyd

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October 2014

NOTE: 2017. The trustees decided that subsequently to this publication, to change the word 'Dating' to 'Discovering'

1. Mills and Houses of Cynwyd

In the 1800s, there were originally 13 mills in Cynwyd on the river Trystion. Around six of these had large water wheels. Most were small cottage industries run by one family, but one or two were larger 'factory' mills employing several people.

There was a mill called Pen y Felin further up the hill from Felin Uchaf. There is no record as to where it was located although there is a cottage called by the same name but away from the river. This may have been associated with a small mill.

The first known location for a mill is Felin Uchaf. Next to this mill and further down towards the village was a small corn mill, where the Water Board building is now.

Closer to the village was Yr Hen Felin, the glove factory, and on the opposite side of the river was Glan Aber, another smaller woollen mill. Below Glan Aber was Minafon, a corn mill.

Across the old bridge was a very small, family run corn mill, Ty Dwr, where the old mill race can still be seen.

Further on down again was a sawmill, where the offices were built for the Ifor



Felin Isaf

Williams factory. The next mill was also a sawmill called Pandybudr, meaning 'muddy fulling' place.

The last known mill on the river Trystion was a corn mill, Felin Isaf, owned by the miller Edward Jones. It is now owned by Ifor and Marian Williams.

Bridge House was used in the washing and dyeing of fleeces for the woollen factory.

The original Court House still stands next to the 1902 bridge across the river

The original Court House still stands next to the 1902 bridge across the river Trystion.

The old smithy is still in Cynwyd just down from the shop, now owned by Ifor Williams and the old Cocoa House, Pig y Bont, is still occupied.

Although one of the tithe barns was taken down for a road widening project in the 1990s, the small holding, Tyn y Berth, of which the tithe barn was part, still stands and is still used as a small holding. Until the Tithe War in 1891, a tenth of all produce from local industry or farming the land had to be paid as a tithe to the church. This generally disliked tax was changed to a 'tithe rent' until 1936 when all tithes were abolished and other forms of taxation introduced.

The main occupations in Cynwyd during the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds were fullers, spinners, weavers dress makers and tailors. Farmhands, servants and labourers mostly on the farms. In the village there would have been slaters, stonemasons, blacksmiths and coopers, wheelwrights and cobbler. The shop trades included bakers, a fishmonger and general store holding. Other employment included basket makers, straw makers and limers or lime makers.

PEN Y FELIN

Neither the exact location nor the use of this mill is known.

FELIN UCHAF



Felin Uchaf was originally a corn threshing mill. This produced bran for feeding livestock and for flour. It was a relatively large mill as the force from the 60 foot high waterfall created enough power to turn a large wheel. People from local farms brought their corn to be milled here.

There was originally a right of way all the way up from the village to Felin Uchaf, along the river

In the 1970-1980 there was hippy commune here. They created their own electricity by using the force of the water coming of the falls to turn several small turbines. In the later years Gwyn and Nan Jones have restored the house

but not all of the mill, although the mill race is now complete. It is now a small caravan site.

Nothing much is known about the small mill originally on the site of the water board building. It was probably a small family run corn mill.

YR HEN FELIN

This was built in 1840 as a woollen mill. Fleeces were purchased locally and treated and dyed before being carded, spun and woven into flannel at Yr Hen Felin. In 1851 records show there were six men and two boys employed full time at the mill. There may have been more children as young as five years old working up to twelve hours a day here, until the late 1800s, when legislation stopped young children working and restricted the working hours for older children.

All the workers here were paid in tokens, which had to be spent in the mill owners shop which was situated at the entrance to Princes Yard. This is now the dwelling know as Gwyndy Cottage.

The woven flannel and other manufactured goods - gloves, shawls etc, were sent by horse and cart (later the railway) to Barmouth, where it was taken by boat to other ports in Britain. Later the railways would have taken the cloth all over the UK as well as for export.

The fleeces were taken by donkey to Bridge House for cleaning and then brought back via Bron y Glyn, by horse and cart for dying and drying. The dying shed being a wooden building at the back of the mill. There was a right of way wide enough for donkeys, up the side of Porth y Dwr up through what was an orchard (now the garden of Ballina) along the wall of the pottery and on to Bron y Glyn. Horse and carts were too wide for this route but came up Waterfall Road to Bron y Glyn, then down a cart track which is now part of Bron y Glyn's garden, to the mill. From there the carts went out of Princes Yard past Gwyndy Cottage (the mill shop). This was operated in a one way system. The centre of Princes Yard was pasture for the horses.

The wool and flannel woven here was known as some of the finest to be made in North Wales.

In 1900 the mill was closed and it was sold for £600 and converted into a cheese factory. In 1932 it was given to the Youth Hostel Association and used as a hostel until 2004, when it was purchased Northampton Scouts turned into an outdoor activity centre and a scout hostel. Although it has not been a mill

for over a hundred years the main machinery workings are still in the bedrooms and sitting room of Yr Hen Felin. The roof is now taken off the wheel house but the mill race is still complete at the side of the mill, and the cellar where most of the mill workings were is still intact and occupied by several different species of bats. There are several cottages on Waterfall Road, which were built to house the workers in the local woollen and corn mills. The first four are now converted to two semi-detached cottages and the next six cottages have been converted and enlarged to make four semi-detached houses.

GLAN ABER

This was also originally built as a woollen mill, but later became a corn mill. In the late 1800 and early 1900 it was a private boarding school. The mill race is the only part still intact. Next to this woollen mill was a corn mill, now a holiday home.



Behind Glan Aber is the House called Bryn Trystion. This was the local Public Hall.

BRIDGE HOUSE

The 1871 census notes that the cellar of Bridge House was used to scour and clean the fleeces ready for the woollen mill. They were taken from Bridge House up to Bron y Glyn to be hung up and dried.

In the 1891 census, Bridge House was home to three stonemasons and two Calvinistic Ministers both named Evans.

There is still evidence in the cellars of this type of work being carried out there.

Bron y Glyn

This house was originally owned and built by the woollen mill owner for the manager of the woollen mill in Princes Yard. The family consisted of the manager, 36 year old woollen weaver Thomas Davies and his 34 year old wife Catherine, and in the 1881 census, a son Robert Evan, aged 2. Ten years later,

Thomas Davies was still manager, and his family had grown to Robert Evan now 12 and a daughter, Catherine, 6 years old.

These children would in all probability have attended the new non-denominational school, opened in 1889, on the hill above Waterfall Road. One of the young teachers from this school, David John Saer, was also living as a lodger at Bron y Glyn in the 1891 census.

By the 1901 census, Thomas Davies has died, leaving Catherine a widow, with another lodger, Robert Evans, a stonemason aged 48.

There are long metal poles out from the side wall of Bron y Glyn where the fleeces were hung to dry after dyeing.

The last lady to own the house before Mr and Mrs James, was the daughter of the last manager of the woollen mill. She used Bron y Glyn as a holiday home until her husband's retirement, when they moved here permanently. It was sold to Mr and Mrs James in 1985.

Fay O'Malley



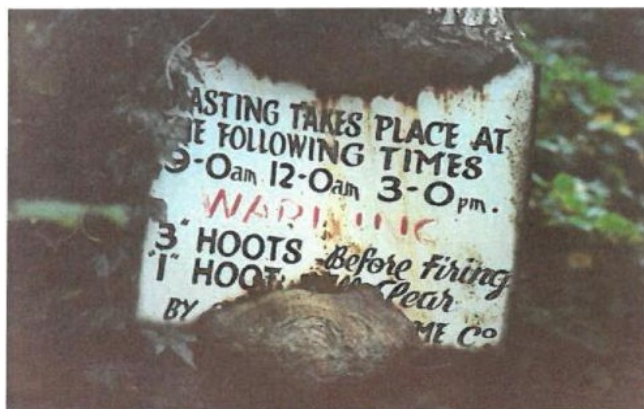
Cynwyd 1901 OS map

1. The Lime Quarry at Hafod y Calch

In 1695 Edward Lhuyd¹, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, wrote in his work *Parochilia: Limestones in abundance at Havod and Plas Uchaf in Keven Cymmer township*.

In the 1950's the geologist E. Neaverson discovered surface workings from a medieval quarry just to the south of the quarry beside *Hafod*, speculating that mortar from this quarry had been used for the medieval castle of Carndochan some 14 miles further southwest.² The area around *Hafod y calch* (*calch* meaning lime in Welsh) is a geologically important "outlier" of Carboniferous limestone, and a paper by J. Davies³ gives a very comprehensive analysis of the geology of the local area.

We know from the Llangar churchwardens' accounts⁴ that in 1712-13 a *Rice Pierce* of *Havod* was paid six shillings and six pence for 5 *hobbets* and a *halfe of lime*, and was paid separately for its transport *from Havod to Llangar*, across the River Dee.



The lime quarry expanded over the following two centuries and Samuel Lewis(1849)⁵ wrote: "Lime is used as a manure within a convenient distance of the Gwerclas and Havod rocks... the only places in Merioneth that produce white lime, and where about 50,000

bushels are burned annually." Lime was burned with peat and spread on the farmland. By the time of the 1871 Census the widowed Jane Jones of *Hafod* was listed as Lime Burner as well as Farmer of 120 acres, employing 14 Labourers and two boys - including the 12 year old *Crow Boy* David Evans!

Trefor Jones (1975)⁶ gives details of the quarry, telling us that there were nine sorts of limestone there, with some of very high quality, especially in *Gwely Tcheina* and the *Bar Du*.



Lime kilns near Hafod y calch (photo Jenny Lees)

The lime quarry was still worked until the late 1960`s. Gareth Hughes writes: "I was employed there twice during the 1960's, and again about 1974 on a different project for about two years. When I was there the rock having been broken into pieces for easy handling was put through a crushing plant, and the limestone dust filled into hoppers for loading onto

lorries below. I put the last load of limestone through the plant around about 1965. I returned there in 1968 -9 and besides Harry Jones the manager, who lived in *Copar Derw* near the road by *Hafod Quarry*, I was the sole employee. It closed as a quarry a short while after".

Now the pits of the quarries are full of trees, but the limestone is still of interest to geologists, and fossils there include corals that were once under the sea.

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- 3 Davies, Jeremy R, Riley,Nick J.and Wilson, David: *The Corwen Outlier and its implications for the mid-Mississippian palaeogeography of North Wales*, U.K. Geographical Journal 2013.
- 4 Llangar Churchwardens`accounts 1703-64: Transcript by David Morgan Evans (DRO NTD/467)
- 5 Samuel Lewis (1849): *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*.
- 6 Trefor O. Jones (1975, p101) *O Ferwyn I Fynyddllo*: Cymdeithas Lyfrau Meirion
- 7 Personal communication from G. Hughes.

Jenny Lees

1. Cryniarth Rescued for Posterity!

How sad it is to read the history of so many local dwellings now reduced to heaps of stone on the hillside. But John and Gwerfyl Greenhalgh's home is the exception – the dwelling place of an ancient Cynwyd lineage restored from near absolute ruin just as time was running out!



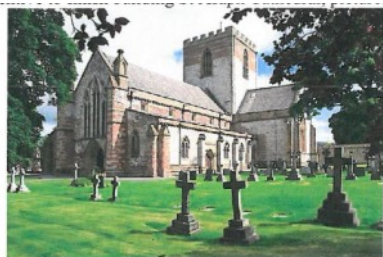
Cryniarth in 2002 – (photo courtesy of John Greenhalgh)

The house that the family saved, pictured, is thought to date from the 1700s - but there has been a dwelling called *Cryniarth* for nearly a millennium!

The early importance of Cryniarth was due to its aristocratic connections, as it was the home of Madog ap Elise whose father Elise (or Elisse) was the first Baron of Llangar. Like the neighbouring Barons of Cymer who lived at Plas Uchaf and Gwerclas, the Barons of Llangar were descendants of one of the last native royal families of Wales.

Madog ap Elise's elder brother inherited the barony, situated somewhere nearby in Llangar, while Madog himself received Cryniarth, near Rhyd y glafes. Madog became a person of some standing in Edeyrnion, attending the *Quo Warranto* hearings and paying homage to the Black Prince (Edward Plantagenet) in 1343.

Madog's son Llewelyn ap Madog, who died in 1375, was to become Bishop of Llanelwy (St Asaph). The Church in Wales website tells us that Llewelyn's bequest provided the incentive to finish building St Asaph Cathedral, pictured below.



Llewelyn also remembered his home village, bequeathing 80 shillings *`for the fabric and repair of the bridge at Kynwie`* which appears to have been an earlier bridge at the site of Cynwyd's present *Pont Trystion*. Llewelyn's sheep and household goods were divided among his nephews; he had seven sisters who all married into the *uchelwyr* (main land-owning) families of North Wales.

We next hear of Cryniarth in a *cywydd* by the famous 15th century poet Guto'r Glyn (, praising Ieuan ap Einion of Cryniarth, his wife Angharad (heiress of Hendwr) and their eight children. Ieuan is described as a heavenly lamb in peacetime but a ferocious lion when dealing with bandits:

*`Oen tangnefedd a heddwch
A llew traws i williad truch`*

Ieuan's eight children are compared to a vigorous orchard and to God's Angels in Glyndwr (Gyndyfrdwy):

*`Wyth enaid tylwth Einiawn
Angylion Duw yng Nglyn`*

One of these angels, Ieuan ap Einion's daughter Mali, married her relative Dafydd, 8th Baron of Cymer , who would have been living at the medieval hall house of Cymer (now Plas Uchaf - see the *`Mysteries of Cymer`* article in this book)



Detail from Memorandum Book of Humffrey Hughes of Gwerclas (1662-74)

From the poet Gutun Owain we learn that another of Ieuan and Angharad's offspring, Gutun's patron Dafydd ap Ieuan of Cryniarth and Hendwr, commissioned Gutun to request the gift of hunting dogs from his uncle, Hywel ap Rhys ap Dafydd of *Rug*.

But Dafydd ap Ieuan (known to be living 1440-68) was best known for his defence of Harlech Castle for the Lancastrians during the Wars of the Roses, and also served with English forces in France during the Hundred Years War.



Part of the name *Cryniarth* probably derives from the Welsh *garth*, meaning enclosure, and in 1884 the Cambrian Archaeological Association, visited the defended enclosure at Cryniarth shown on the map above. This enclosure, marked as *Camp* on the map, was believed to have been the site of the original residence of *Ieuan ap Einion*, and in the wood below was

found the site of an old cockpit (used for the now prohibited sport of cock fighting!)

At the end of the 17th century Cryniarth was listed in Edward Lhuyd's *Parochialia* as one of Llandrillo's principal houses, and although Cryniarth actually lies between Cynwyd and Llandrillo, subsequent St Asaph Probate Records for its inhabitants are to be found listed under the parish of Llandrillo.

During the 20th century Cryniarth was owned by a branch of Gwerfyl's family. Her mother Winifred, who still lives in Cynwyd today, also lived there for a short while, but by the end of that century it was the ruin pictured at the beginning of this article. And as they say, "the rest is history", for here is Cryniarth today!

Jenny Lees



Cryniarth today, showing the restored well. Photo courtesy John Greenhalgh

1. "THERE'S NO SENSE IN IT!"

Life story of May Parry Owen



May with Llinos Davies

Cyril `Public Speaker` said: "Jack Parry`s widow has got plenty of land for horses. Why don`t you go and ask her, she only lives over there!" He pointed to a farm over the river from *Ty`n y Celyn* where I had previously kept my horse. As *Ty`n y Celyn* was now sold, I had to find another place to keep Solo.

My friend Christine, who also had a horse and wanted extra grazing, said she would come with me. We set off to *Pen y Geulan*, knocked on the door, and an elderly lady dressed in a pinny, knitted hat and large Wellington boots answered. We explained what we wanted and offered £3 per horse per week. As I later found out was right out of character, Mrs Parry said

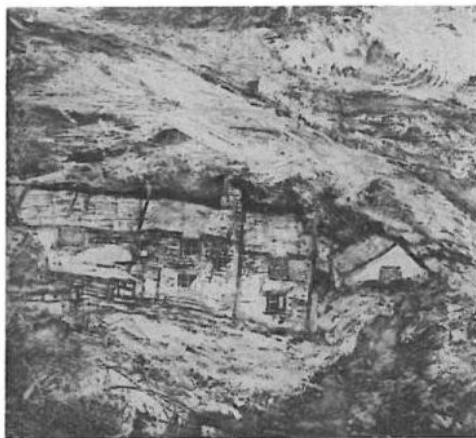
five pounds would be better! We agreed and went in for tea and cake to celebrate the deal - the first of many, many cups of tea and cakes I was to have with this lovely lady.

May, always "Mrs Parry" to me, had been born about two miles as the crow flies from where she now lived at *Pen y Geulan*. She was born on a farm called *Gelli Golen* and her parents were Mary and Edward Roberts. On the next farm was John Henry Jones at *Gelli Gai Folen*, whose wife was the cook at *Maesmor Hall, Maerdy* - a few miles up the A5 from Glan yr Afon, the nearest village to the home of May. Mrs Jones was very kind to the family next door and every Christmas made them a Christmas cake - a luxury they could not have afforded.

"Mind you", said May, "we never went without at Christmas - we always had an apple and an orange in our stockings" - how different from today`s children who require so much to keep them happy.

One of May`s jobs twice a year was to drive their sow over the hill to *Bryn Berllan* where Mr Owen`s boar served the sow. I cannot imagine how difficult

it would be for a young girl to drive a sow two or three miles but she did it without question. On her way she passed two or three farms; perhaps *Gaerwen*, now derelict (pictured below - from etching by Martin Henley courtesy of J. and S. Lees) lived in by John Hugh Jones or *Pen y Gelli* lived in by John and Jinny Jones and Howel Jones from Canada - although I don't know if he came back from Canada to live in Wales.



Pant Teg also had a path to *Moel Lladdfa* where Glyn lived. May could have gone on down the track through *Tyn-y-fedw* to *Gwnodl Fawr* where the Roberts lived, then on down the road past *Pen y Bont*, lived in by Mr and Mrs Willams and their daughter Hefina (a relation of Llinos Davies I gather).

How long May would have had to stay on at *Bryn Berllan* I cannot say, or perhaps she had

to return another day for the sow?

When the reservoir at *Vyrnwy* was being built May was sent to live with her mother's dearest friend in *Pen-y-bont Fawr* over the *Berwyns*. The friend was afraid of all the navvies that came to work on the reservoir and it was decided May stay for a year to keep her company. May's mother Mary would often visit her friend by walking two miles to *Llandrillo*, taking the train to *Llandderfel* and then walking over the *Berwyn* to *Pen-y-bont Fawr* - about ten or twelve miles and probably half a day's journey. I took May to see the house she stayed in a few years ago; it was the first time she had been back since her year's stay.



Doorway at Plas Uchaf (photo by Jeremy Lees)

I don't know how May met Jack Parry, but they were married and moved to *Plas Uchaf* (a cruck house now owned by the Landmark Trust). At that time the roof leaked and it was alleged a footpath passed through the main hall.

May worked at Gwerclas, the largest old house in the district. Between this house and Hafod-y-calch was a footbridge over the River Dee which was used to get to Llangar church and which May used to visit her relations at *Stamp* and *Hafod yr Afr*.

Jack was a wild character full of bright ideas, as was his father. His father used to pass *Plas Uchaf* on his tractor and get May to hang on for dear life as he drove her to *Pen y Geulan* or wherever he was going. I think she enjoyed the excitement to be honest! Jack drove a cattle truck so occasionally May went further afield; once to Birmingham and also to Liverpool. In Liverpool she had an uncle, Owen Owen, who would come to her father's farm to plait the horses for carnival time once a year.

May and Jack moved in with Jack's parents at *Pen y Geulan*. May said her mother in law always sat in the back kitchen by the fire. May loved children but was to have none herself. She never passed a child without stopping to talk and giving the child a coin.

The neighbours at *Pen y Geulan* were helpful to each other. Bob was the closest at *Blaen Gwnodl Isaf* and the Amblers at *Ty Isaf* - Mr Ambler taught May English, she said. They were an English sister and brother who came to live in Wales.

Jack's great friends lived at *Branas Uchaf*; two brothers I gather and they all enjoyed a night out in the pubs. She said they would get back the worse for wear in the early hours and she would get up and make them sandwiches. May herself never went to a pub until we went to the Blue Lion to watch some Llangollen Eisteddfod competitors outside the Post Office in the late 1990s

Whilst I was living in Porthmadog I saw less of May but she did visit me with her sisters in law, Catherine and Doreen, who were always very good at visiting May. When they arrived in my café and B&B May took them on a guided tour of the entire building; a lovely but amusing gesture as her own house was off limits except for the living room.

One year when the County Show was in Llandrillo I arrived at *Pen y Geulan* to take May with me. No, she wasn't going! "No sense in it," she said, "but come for tea after you have been." I did, and she was full of remorse that she did not come with me - "What a silly woman I am!" - she often said this. So the next

time I went to the show in Bala I took her and Jimmy McGuinness. I did not realise her heart was not too good; she sat on a bale of straw while I went to the main ring. When I got back she was surrounded by friends and well wishers; she seemed to know everyone and every child, who called her Aunt May.

When it was her 80th birthday I planned a party for her at Druid café. It was only open in the evenings for special bookings. We all sat at a long table with a log fire roaring; I think she really enjoyed the fuss in spite of her usual comment "There's no sense in it!"



We often at this time visited May's sister and brother in law in Old Colwyn. I would have lunch with them and then go off to the beach or town until it was time for tea and home. May was often lonely; I remember her saying "I hate going out for Christmas dinner because it is so awful coming home to an empty house." People loved visiting her - the china cups came out and tea and cake at any time of the day.

Apart from the numerous cats and several dogs May also had a collection of very old sheep. I saw her getting them in one day; they all followed her in a line with a cat at the rear. Some of the sheep were 15 years old. When the last cat died I got May a budgerigar. She did not like a bird in a cage and the budgie did not like being with her - it never peeped until I put it in the car to take it back to the person I got it from! It peeped all the way home and for the next few years of its life.

Every Friday Ogwen and Annie fetched May to go shopping in Corwen. If it was a nice day I would say "Oh, you can go in your shoes today." "But it might rain today," May would say - she loved her wellies and to get her to wear shoes was a constant battle; albeit a very good natured one.

1. 5. The Mysteries of Cymer

Upon moving in 1977 to the old farmhouse of Hafod-y-calch I became fascinated by local tales of the ancient Barons of Cymer. I learnt that they had once inhabited not only the medieval hall house of Plas Uchaf, but also the neighbouring mansion of Gwerclas – both Listed buildings within half a mile or so of Hafod and actually its nearest neighbours. The detail below, taken from a 19th century 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, shows the location of these three houses, all of which lay within an ancient “township” called *Cymer*.



The Welsh word *cymer* means a confluence or junction, and 'our *Cymer* is situated at the meeting place of the Rivers Alwen and Dyfrdwy (Dee), in the beautiful Vale of Edeyrnion. Just across the Dyfrdwy from Hafod and Gwerclas lies the ancient church of *Llangar*.

From Trefor O. Jones' invaluable 1975 book *O Ferwyn i Fynyddlod* ¹ I learnt that the Barons of Cymer were in fact descendants of one of the last native royal families of Wales.

This is because the last Welsh prince to rule the whole of the ancient kingdom of Powys, *Madog ap Maredudd* (died around 1160), had an illegitimate son by the daughter of *Maer Du of Rug* known as *Owain Brogontyn*. Under the old Welsh Laws illegitimacy did not prevent inheritance, so Owain was granted lands in Edeirnion and Dinmael (maybe living at Rug in around 1200). According to Welsh law at the time, Owain Brogontyn's lands did not go to the oldest son but were divided between his sons *Bleddyn*, *Gruffudd* and *Iorwerth*, then further sharing made *Gruffudd ap Iorwerth* (son of *Iorwerth*) Baron of *Cymer*, and his brother *Elise* Baron of neighbouring *Llangar*.

Exactly where the first Barons of Cymer lived is a mystery to which I shall return, but it is now believed that by the 1400s they were living at *Plas Uchaf*, previously known as *Plas o Kymmer* or *Cymer*. The rediscovery of this cruck-framed medieval hall house is an excellent example of how some of our finest historic building features can be discovered within later developments (Bryn Berllan in Cynwyd being another example). The picture over shows *Plas Uchaf* before restoration.

More than thirty years ago I was first amazed by the interior of Plas Uchaf - by then magnificently restored and let to holidaymakers by the Landmark Trust - when its guests were cut off by huge snowdrifts and had sought contact with the outside world at *Hafod*, tramping half a mile through the deep snow! Plas Uchaf appears to be the oldest dwelling still standing in



Cymer today and its roof trusses are particularly ornate - its timbers having a dendrochronology (tree ring dating) felling date of 1435. It is fun to imagine the Barons feasting in the great hall open to the roof - originally with a centrally placed hearth and a louvre in the roof allowing the smoke to escape.



Inside the roof of Plas Uchaf (Jenny Lees)

From the low hill just behind Plas Uchaf the Barons of Cymer would have had a commanding view of the Berwyn mountains and surrounding valleys, but by around 1600 they had moved to the more sheltered site of Gwerclas, close to the Afon Dyfrdwy and with more flat land for expansion.

The first house at Gwerclas is thought to have been built by the 11th Baron of Cymer, Hugh ap William. His sons adopted the English tradition of surnames,

becoming *Hughes of Gwerclas* instead of *ap Hugh*. Although their house was later largely replaced by the present 1767 house, we can get some idea of life there from the poems of the Welsh bards. Gwerclas was among the baronial courts that provided hospitality to the bards in exchange for entertainment and praise and older documents refer to it as *Gwerlleis* - like the Welsh word *llys*, meaning a court. The poem below was written by the bard Sion Phylip in around 1611; Gwerclas being referred to as *llys Wercllys* :

`O`r llysoedd ar holl oesi
 Dan y nef adwaenwn i
 Gwn y lle y dymunwn ymfod
 Yn llys Wercllys lles wirglod
 Llys a`i chaer yn disgleiriauw
 Llys y draul a`r llysiau draw
 Ni welir llys hysbys iach
 Tra fo nasiwn drefnusach`

The translation below is by Alaw Mai Edwards:

*Of all the courts I have known / under heaven, and all the life in them, / I know that
 the place where I wish to be / is in the court of Gwerclas, genuine the renown of its
 benefits, / A court whose fort glistens, / a court of expenditure with its vegetables
 yonder; / while there is a nation, it won't be possible to find / a flourishing and well-
 known court in better order.*



(Photo Jenny Lees)

The arms of Hughes of Gwerclas, pictured below, were added to the façade of the present house and can still be seen. They include rampant lions, wild boars and apparently the heads of three Englishmen killed at Oswestry! The latter alludes to earlier events when, in a 1282 uprising against oppressive royal government, the Baron of Cymer Gruffydd ap Iorwerth and his brother Elise were among those who raided Oswestry

We can get some idea of what the first house at Gwerclas was like by perusing the *Will and Inventory* of the first Humphrey Hughes, who died in 1682. Thanks to the National Library of Wales (*Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru*) at Aberystwyth, one can view this either at the library or online (www.llgc.org.uk), where images of the actual pages in old fashioned writing can be viewed and magnified!) From Humphrey`s Inventory we know that the rooms and their contents included *Ye Hall* with silver tableware and 4 *pieces of Gold*; *Ye Old Kitchen* with 2 *beds in ye Servants Chamber* ; *Ye Great Parlour* with an *old virginall case*; *Ye Kitchen Chamber* with *old hempen, Flaxen and winnowing sheets* and a *little trunkle bed* in *Ye School Chamber*.

In those days the possessions of a deceased person had to be assessed for Probate by at least one neighbour, rather than by just the heirs themselves, and I like the later, honest addition to the list by Humphrey's son Charles:

"Some linnen which were taken away by ye widow and relict of ye deceased ye value of which he knoweth not unlesse he could have a sight of them"

By the time of Humphrey Hughes' burial in 1682 there was apparently already a dwelling at neighbouring Hafod-y-calch, nestling into the hillside about half a mile along the Dee from Gwerclas. In the oldest documents the name is spelt *Havod*, as it was in the 1695 work *Parochialia* by Edward Lhuyd or *Llwyd*, who was Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. The Georgian east façade of Hafod y calch, viewed from near the confluence, can be seen to the right of my photograph below, but the original medieval house is now concealed inside the south facing Victorian façade on the left of the picture.



(Photo Jenny Lees)

The architectural historian Richard Suggett observed that: *"Hafod-y-calch has a marked downslope siting ... reflected in a series of changes of level internally. The downslope siting is unmistakably medieval in origin and characteristic of the late medieval cruck-framed upland farmhouse. The present range certainly occupies the*

footprint of the medieval house but the cruck-trusses have not survived."

My photograph of Hafod y calch's north aspect shows the downslope siting, with the one-seated Georgian *Ty Bach* in the foreground.



(Photo Jenny Lees)

One of the mysteries of Cymer is why Hafod appeared important so many hundreds of years ago. We know this because *Havod* is mentioned by name in

many ancient documents² and because *Havod* once had its own `gentry` pew in Llangar church.

Professor D. Morgan Evans³ has discovered a 1704 *`quitclaim`* document in which the son of *Owen Eyton of Plasissa*, late Rector of the parish of Corwen, asks permission for his father to be buried under the *Havod* pew of Llangar church!

From this we learn that in 1704 the *Havod* pew belonged to Roger Salesbury of Rug, inherited from his father William Salesbury and owned even before that by the Meyrick family of *Ucheldre*, near Corwen.

So something must have made Hafod an important acquisition for the land owning families of Edeyrnion by the 17th century or earlier. Maybe its ancient lime quarry (described elsewhere in this book), but perhaps we will eventually find something more exciting, like a marriage settlement or a dower house!

Returning to Gwerclas, 1767 was a very significant year for *Cymer* as Hugh Hughes Lloyd built the splendid present house recently described by Marcus Binney⁴ as his "*house of the year 2005with its tea caddy centre and matching gabled wings, it is an errant version of a Palladian villa.*" My photograph below shows a gazebo in Gwerclas grounds, which in 1841 had a schoolhouse on the first floor attended by nine children.



(Photo Jenny Lees)

The 18th to early 19th century also saw great changes to Hafod y calch, which acquired an extensive Georgian east "wing" with splendid views across the confluence to Llangar church and the Berwyn mountains. A small terrace on this side was supported by a massive twelve foot high retaining wall - well above the raging torrents that periodically spill out of the rivers far below!

We don't know who made the Georgian alterations, but in 1777 a *John Williams, Gentleman, malster*, died at Hafod in affluent circumstances. He left the *Title* to his *Estate*, (which included income from tithes for the Parish of Corwen) to William Jones of *Hafod*, husband of his niece Sarah.

In addition he left at least £800 each to a number of nieces and nephews, specifying for each niece that the money was to be used *“for her sole and separate use and Benefit and not be subject to the Debt or Engagement of her present or future Husband”* Pleasingly, he also left money to William and Sarah’s daughter *“Sarah the infant... for her Maintenance and Education.”* Looking east from Hafod he would have had a distant view of the landscape pictured below. (Photo Jenny Lees)



By 1824 there were substantial changes in the life of Cymer. The Hughes Lloyds of Gwerclas had been struggling to preserve their baronial inheritance and the family’s fortunes were completely drained by a series of court cases involving London criminals and an illegitimate heir! Consequently, the whole Gwerclas estate was sold, mostly to the estate of Rhug which exists today.

By the end of the 19th century Rug estate had also further extended Hafod y calch, making it into a very substantial Victorian farmhouse. It continued as a working farm until the late 1960s, when an arson attack on the outbuildings of three local farms severely damaged most of Hafod’s farm buildings.

However, I am happy to say that the farmlands of both Hafod and Gwerclas are still worked by the families who have farmed them for very many years. The houses with their gardens have changed hands and are privately owned, but are both Listed buildings that are being carefully preserved by their present owners. Hafod y calch has been pictured above, but the picture below shows the splendid mansion of Gwerclas today



Returning finally to the mystery of where the Barons of Cymer lived before the building of Plas Uchaf in the early 1400s, it was previously believed that they originally lived in a castle situated on a mound very near the present Gwerclas. However, archaeologists currently consider this mound to have been a

prehistoric construction rather than a medieval castle motte, so our explorations must continue!

In future articles, following further research, I hope to include the history of other houses in the *Cymer* area such as *Plas Isaf*, *Cae Mawr* and *Glan Alwen* (the latter sadly now demolished.). I also hope to gather information on Roman and Iron or Bronze age connections. Locally we now have a Corwen Archaeology Group as well as our Dating Old Welsh Houses Group and our Edeyrnion historical and heritage societies. But we also have you, our readers, so if anyone has any comments, corrections or further ideas to contribute, please do get in touch!

References

1 Trefor O. Jones (1975) *O Ferwyn i Fynyddlod* (sadly out of print at the time of writing)

2 Jenny Lees (2013) *History of Hafod y calch* on website www.discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk (House histories for Gwerclas and Plas Uchaf will also be published on this site when completed)

3 D. Morgan Evans, "Llangar -Church and community in the early eighteenth century, Part 4: HIERARCHY, LITURGY, FIXTURES AND FITTINGS". *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society* CYFROL XV1 2013 RHAN 1V p358 – 379

4 Marcus Binney (2007) *The Perfect House -500 of the best buildings in Britain and Ireland* Weidenfeld and Nicolson

(Detailed references to all the research included in this article can be found in *Quest for Cymer Part One* by Jenny Lees (in *Hanes Bro Clwyd* No.69: Winter13-14), or from Jenny Lees at leesjenny@gmail.com

Jenny Lees

1. 6. CYNWYD WAR MEMORIAL



Evan Edwards, Square
John Evans, Bridge House
Robert E Griffiths, Ty Mawr
Herbert J Hill, Brynllwyn Lodge
Thomas E Jones, Ty'n y Fedw
John Jones, Fron Heulog
Griffith T Jones, Hafod-yr-Afr
Robert S Jones, Hafod-yr-Afr
Evan Jones, Blyngwnodl Ucha
David Jones, Alwen Cottage
David Roberts, Ty'n y Siglen
David Roberts, Square
Owen Williams, Square
Hugh D Williams, Pant y Clai
Jane E Jones, Tan-yr-Allt

Private 4237 Evan EDWARDS, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (7th Bn.) Son of John & Margaret Evans, 3 The Square, Cynwyd. Cynwyd Memorial

[Cambrian News & Merioneth Standard 3rd December 1915] The following young men have joined the 18th Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers now at Kinmel Bay ... Evan R Edwards, Cynwyd

[Llangollen Advertiser 10th March 1916]. 3 Mar 1916, aged 20, in Shrewsbury Infirmary Son of John & Margaret Edwards, of 3, The Square, Cynwyd

[Burnt Records collection. Ancestry] Evan Edwards, aged 20 years and 8 months on enlistment, and is an Ironmongers Assistant. His height is given as 5' 8 ½", with a chest measurement of 34 ½" with an expansion on 1 ½". He gives his father, John Evans as his next of kin. He enlisted 10th December 1915, mobilised 24th January 1916 and died 3rd March 1916 of acute pneumonia, exhaustion and heart failure.

Private 23330 John EVANS, Royal Welsh Fusiliers(16th Bn.) Thiepval Memorial

11 Jul 1916, aged 22. Son of the late Edward & Margaret Evans, of Bridge House, Cynwyd

Private 54721 Robert Edward GRIFFITHS, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (10th Bn.) Berlin South Western Cemetary

28 Apr 1917, aged 20. Son of Thomas & Jane Griffiths, of Tŷ Mawr, Cynwyd

[Llangollen Advertiser 22 June 1917.] Died a prisoner. Griffiths Pte Robert Edward who died at a prisoners' camp in Germany, was a son of Mr & Mrs Griffiths, Cynwyd.

Adsain 12 June 1917] The following letter was received by Mr & Mrs Griffiths, Ty Mawr. Cynwyd, describing the funeral of their late son Private Robert Edward Griffiths, at an Internment Camp in Germany:

Dear Madam, I understand that you have already been notified by two of my comrades, Corpl Finney and Pte James of the great loss you have sustained, I will not therefore intrude further on your great sorrow, than to send you the enclosed photographs which I ordered to be taken for the express purpose of sending to you, these will show more clearly than any writing which I might send, the feelings of condolence and sympathy of all my comrades. We were to provide as near as possible a British Military Funeral, and no effort was spared to pay the last tribute of respect. The coffin, as you would wish it, was of the best material, and was covered with the Union Jack and seven very nice wreaths, one large one bearing a card from his sorrowing father, mother and sister, and one from each of our six sections, including his friends in the Hospital, we were also allowed the honour of bearing all the expenses. The burial service was conducted by Coy-Sergt Major Mears, 1st Bedfords, assisted by Corpl Lewis, 1st Life Guards. Eight

Welshmen who live in Wales represented your family as chief mourners. The body was carried shoulder high through the high road to the cemetery [set apart for Prisoners of war] by his comrades and British hands laid him in his resting place and covered the grave. These details will be a source of consolation to you and all the family, it only remains for me to add my expression of deepest sympathy, in which all the British join me and to conclude.

Yours sincerely, Coy Sergt-Major Croke. Royal Irish Regiment

Private 345702 Herbert "Bertie" John HILL, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (24th Bn.)

Gaze War Cemetery (Denbighshire Yeomanry).

19 May 1917, aged 25. Born in Much Wenlock.[or | Barmouth?] Son of Joseph and Elizabeth Hill, Brynllwyn Lodge, Llangar,

[Adsain 5 June 1917]] Pte Bertie Hill, husband of Mrs Hill, Bryntristion, Cynwyd was accidentally killed in Egypt. He was 26 years of age and eldest son of Mr & Mrs Hill, Brynllwyn Lodge. Previous to enlisting he was employed as motor driver by Mr H R Jones, Corwen and had also worked with a Chester motor firm and for Mr John Williams, Exchange Bakery, Corwen

Private 20378 Thomas Edward JONES, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (14th

Bn.)Merville Communal Cemetary

5 Jun 1916, aged 28. Son of David Jones, of Ty'n Fedw, Cynwy

John Jones, Fron Heulog

[Llangollen Advertiser 15th June 1917]. Pte John Jones whose home was at Cynwyd, was killed in action in France on May 12th after fifteen months active service. He was 22 years of age

Griffith T Jones, Hafod yr Afr

? 28 Oct 1917. 28268 1st Bn RWF ?

[Adsain 20th November 1917] Wedi ei Ladd - Drwg genym ddeall fod Pte Griffith Thomas Jones, RWF, mab Mr & Mrs Evan Jones , Hafod-yr-Afr, wedi ei ladd yn Ffrainc ar yr 28ain o Hydref. Nid oedd ond 25 mlwydd oed. Cyn ymuno a'r fyddin bu yn gwasanaethu yn Gwerclas a ffermydd ereill. Yr oedd i'r cyfaill liaws o ffrindiau, a chydymdeimlir a'r teulu oll yn eu trallod. Y mab arrall iddynt yn y fyddin sef Pte Robert Jones RWF, yr hwn a glwyfwyd yn mrwydr fawr a Somme.

[... killed in France on 28th October, he was only 25 years old. Before he joined, he was a farm worker at Gwerclas and neighbouring farms. He had lots of friends and we send our condolences to his family and everyone who knew him. Another brother ... fell in the big battle of the Somme]

Private 28269 Robert Samuel JONES, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (2nd Bn.)

Bagneux British Cemetery

20 Sep 1918, aged 21. Son of Evan & Martha Jones, of Brynffynon, Cynwyd

[Adsain 25th December 1917] Pte Robert Samuel Jones, Hafod yr Afr, is in a French hospital suffering from a septic knee, caused by coming in contact with some German barbed wire.

[Adsain 1st October 1918] Mr & Mrs Evan Jones, Hafod yr Afr, Llangar have received the sad news of the death of their son Private Robert Samuel Jones, RWF, who died of wounds received in action in France on September 20th. Deceased was 21 years of age, and had seen 2 ½ years of active service in France. About a year ago another brother was killed in France. Deep sympathy is expressed with the family in their bereavement. Both the above deceased soldiers joined the army on February 1st 1915. The following is a copy of a letter received from his chaplain:

'France Sept 22nd 1918

Dear Mrs Jones,

Your son who was seriously wounded has, I regret to say, passed hence. When he came to us he was very ill, and did not seem to understand anything we said to him. I don't think, therefore he suffered much, which is a comfort. May god support you in this your time of great trial. He gave his life for a very great cause and although this thought I know will not lessen the burden of your sorrow it may help you to bear it.

Any personal effects will reach you by the appointed channels, and the place and photograph of his grave may be had on application to Director of Graves Registration, Winchester House, St James Square London SW.

Yours in deep sympathy, Ralph Holme [chaplain

Private 2075 Evan JONES, Australian Infantry, A.I.F.(30th Bn.) Compton Chamberlayne Cemetery, Wiltshire

8 Dec 1916, aged 17. Son of Evan and Margaret Jones, of Blaengwnodl, Cynwyd

David JONES, Of Alwen Cottages, Cynwyd

Private 39741 David ROBERTS, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (2nd. Bn.) Tyne Cot Memorial

30 Oct 1917. Son of William & Elizabeth Roberts, of Ty'n y Siglen, Cynwyd

Adsain 30 October 1917] Daeth Pte David Roberts, Ty'siglan, adref o Ffrainc am ychydig seibiant. Y mae'n edrych yn dda, er dioddef ohono wythnosau'n ol oddiwrth 'gas poisoning'

[... home from France for a rest, he looks well but suffered some weeks ago from gas poisoning]

[Llangollen Advertiser 16th November 1917]. Pte Roberts of Ty'n Siglen, Cynwyd, has been killed in action in France last week. Deceased, who was about 34 years of age, was a fine robust soldier of a rather quiet disposition. Prior to enlistment he was employed by the Great Western Railway Co., and had been engaged at their warehouses at Corwen and Brymbo, where he was very popular amongst his fellow workmen. Pte Roberts was home on leave from the front three weeks ago.

David Roberts, of the Square, Cynwyd

Owen Williams, of the Square, Cynwyd

Private 40791 Hugh David WILLIAMS, Royal Welsh Fusiliers (13th Bn.) Vis en Artois Memorial

23 Aug 1918. Of Pant y Clai, Cynwyd. Resident of Wandsworth Common, London,

[Adsain 11th April 1916] Kinmel Park – Yr wythnos diwedaf gadawodd Hugh David Williams, mab hynaf Moses Williams, Pant-y-Clai, am Kinmel Park. Gwasanaethau fel ‘draper’ yn yr Army & Navy Stores yn Llundain, ers oddeutu 18 mlynedd. Ymunodd dan y group system a chafodd ei dransferio at y milwyr Cymreig yn Kinmel ynol ei ddymuniad, sef yn y 22nd Batt RWF, yr hon a adnabyddir fel y “Gwynedd” Battalion. Hwyl iddo !

[...last week, Hugh David Williams, eldest son of Moses Williams ... left for Kinmel Bay. He had been a draper at the Army & Navy Stores .. for 18 years. He was called up and transferred to the Welsh Guards at his request which is the 22nd Batt ... also known as the Gwynedd Battalion. Good luck!]

Jane E JONES, civilian ?. Of Tan yr Allt, Cynwd

Adsain 29th July 1919. War Memorial – Permission was granted at Llangar Parish Council to erect a war memorial on the council’s land at Cynwyd.

[sources: Clwyd FHS website; CWGC website; LIGC newspapers on line; Ancestry website]

Janice Dale

1. 7. Blaengwnodl Uchaf Memories

In 2001 Elfed Owen sent the present occupants of Blaengwnodl Uchaf this memoir written by his own mother, who is pictured on the left of the photograph below. She gives a wonderful picture of farm, village and school life in Cynwyd around a century ago.

"When it came to 1899 our family was now eight. Penbraich, the house that we lived in, was not big enough for all of us and the money my father owned was not enough to keep us. So we moved to a farm at Cynwyd. The farm was called Blaengwnodl Ucha – yet another hill farm which was about two and a half miles from the village of Cynwyd.



I should think that the farm had about 40 acres of land –some good land and other rough and uncultivated. The house consisted of four bedrooms which were quite roomy but were a little damp in places; a living room, a parlour, a dairy and two small back places where we used to keep the bread, milk, buttermilk etc. There was also a slate slab where we had our

washing bowl for our daily use and also enough room to keep and hang our working day clothes and boots.

There is an interesting ancient meaning to the name *Blaengwnodl*. When they were building a nearby church at Llangar they found that someone or something was damaging the church during the night. The builders then stayed up all night to watch the church and saw the culprit was a large deer using its antlers to do the damage. The builders then set up a hunting party to track down the deer to kill it. Blaengwnodl means the place where they obtained the dogs to kill the deer.

From the front door we could see all the Berwyn mountains and all the other farms on the other side of the valley. Running along the bottom of the valley was the Great Western Railway line which connected Chester to Barmouth. You could

change at Chester for other trains to South Wales and all places in England and Scotland. We could always tell the time when we saw the trains. Alongside the railway ran the winding river Dee which is famous for its salmon fishing and in those days there was otter hunting as well. Just think of that interesting view in front of you every day. At the time we took it all for granted and never appreciated the wonderful view but when we left home to live we realised how fortunate we were to be looking at those open spaces every day.



Farming was very poor at that time and only provided a source of income enough to buy food and to clad the family sparingly. Farmers were very proud of their animals, and caringly looked after them but there were a few exceptions as you find everywhere. My father always prepared a good garden and an orchard and my careful mother could always put all the products and garden contents to good use. It is after two world

wars and scarcity that we realised what good substantial food we had been having even with such a small amount of money and wages. People had to work or they would starve – people looked for jobs and did not choose. Few could afford good education and it cost a lot of money if you had the ability and wanted further education.

I remember well that day when we had to leave *Penbraich* and journey to our new home at *Blaengwnodl*. Our furniture and belongings had gone ahead in the morning so there was only father, mother, sister Gwen (4 years old), sister Jane (aged 2) and myself (aged 6) going for the last time down the narrow stony and ragged downhill road to the station. How we all we all felt I cannot remember – we girls did as we were told. How our parents felt I can only guess – moving into a new house with eight children, hoping we could make a better living; it was a case of going forward, hoping, working and having faith that we were doing all for the best in the circumstances.

When we arrived at the station I remember my father calling to the Station Master over the bridge and asking whether the 2 o'clock train had gone and he said it had, and there was not another one for three hours. The train would have taken us to Cynwyd which was the nearest station to where we were going to live and

then it would have been another two and a half mile walk. As we had missed the train we had a six and a half mile walk ahead of us, so we started walking. My parents carried Gwen and Jane every other – I was able to walk.

We eventually arrived at our destination later in the afternoon. We turned from the road into a narrow lane which led to a farm called Blaengwnodl Isa (*Isa* means lower in Welsh) – our new home was called *Blaengwnodl Ucha* (*Ucha* means upper in Welsh) – the farmer's wife called us in and gave us a cup of tea. I had not drunk tea before but we drank it gratefully as we were very thirsty. She told us to take a short cut across the fields and then we saw a glimpse of the home we were to live in for the next twenty years. As soon as we arrived at the house we started to explore from room to room, The furniture had arrived earlier.

There were four bedrooms, a living room, a parlour (they call it a lounge these days), two dairies with stone slabs, and a small room where we washed ourselves and kept cold water from the well. The water was used for cooking and drinking. We also kept our coats there for going out in cold at wet weather – our boots and shoes were kept in another part of the house. There was a fine view from the front door – all the Berwyn range of mountains on the other side of the valley, and we could see all the farms on that side from Cynwyd to Llandrillo. You can imagine what beautiful colours we could see with the changing of the seasons. The river Dee ran alongside the railway line from Chester to Barmouth. There was a junction at Bala for Ffestiniog. We could watch the trains every day – passenger trains, and goods trains which carried cattle and animals, timbers etc. to different places. We can remember some of the trains carrying Territorial soldiers to the military training camps at Trawsfynydd – they were called Territorial trains.



Blaengwnodl farm buildings today (photo Jenny Lees)

In the winter the river Dee used to overflow its banks and the farmers had to evacuate all the cattle and sheep to safety, Often it was a hazardous job – perhaps they would hear the storm getting worse in the night and then the farmers would have to go out and find the sheep to guide them to a safe place. They only had lanterns to help find the sheep here and there as they would

be huddled in groups under the hedges. The cause of the flooding was due to the strong winds blowing across Bala lake, but since those days there have been some alterations made where the lake joins the river Dee and so these days there is less flooding.

We could also see the main road on the other side of the river and railway. The traffic in those days was very much less than it is today. Now that the railway is closed everything is transported by road. These days there is a lot of holiday traffic and the roads are wider and better – big changes since 1900!

Back to the farm now – I don't remember very much about the first few weeks except that it was the month of May. My brother Jack would have been about 14 and he had left school to help my father – you could leave school at 13 in those days after taking the Labour examination. My brother Evan was 12 years old, and my brother Ellis was 10 and they had to help on the farm after school. Ellis, Evan and myself went to Cynwyd Board School. We started school at 8a. m and we took sandwiches and milk for our lunch which we ate at school or at a friend's house. I remember being very nervous and trying to get to terms with the lessons. I know I was slow at taking things in and the young teacher did not take too much notice of pupils who were slow. There is one instance I can remember when we were having a lesson in arithmetic and I was having great difficulty in understanding how to do "subtractions" and the woman teacher gave me a clout on the side of my face. I thought it was a very unfair way of treating a timid six year old pupil. Later on I did well in arithmetic.

There was quite a crowd of us who went to the school from the outlying farms; we were happy children and very friendly so that the journey home when we left home at 4pm did not seem far. We had to walk near the hedges or climb up the bank to let the horses and carts pass by as the roads were so narrow. We knew most of the people we met but we passed strangers quietly and were inquisitive to know who they were and what was their mission. The other children left us as they reached their homes and we were getting less in numbers until we reached the lane to our home. The lane was up a steep hill and we used to guess what we would get for our meal as we were very hungry by now. The smell of the hot meal was very welcome and we used to have a good tuck in.

We only used to have an open fire, a boiler to heat the water on one side and an oven on the other. The kettle was hung on a hook above the fire and the vegetables were boiled on the hob. Just imagine having to cook on this only fire, every day, for a family of ten or eleven!

Paraffin lamps and candles were used for lighting and lamps were used to go out to the buildings for feeding the cattle and to go about when it was dark, especially in the winter when the days were short with dark mornings and evenings. These lamps were also fitted to the horse lamps when it was dark.

Electricity was not available then. I can remember my mother making the candles from grease. I often think how dangerous it was to have all these open fires, paraffin lamps and candles but there seem to be more fire accidents these days with modern gas, electric and coal fires.

We must have had warm and woolly clothing to keep us warm in those very cold winters. Our boots were made of real leather – there was no room for light and fancy shoes to tread on those hard and rough roads. Cynwyd was only a small village but in those days it had two good shoe and boot shops which also did repairs; two woollen mills; two flour mills where the farmers took their oats barley and wheat to be ground into flour and cattle flour; an excellent stone-masons; a joiner`s shop; a smith (blacksmith) – all these occupations were in full work and run by excellent and skilled self-taught craftsmen. Nowadays all these village occupations have closed down and fallen into ruin leaving only rotten wood and piles of rubble in memorium.

Cynwyd in those days also had three grocers`shop, a butcher`s shop; a post office and two pubs. There were three chapels and one church which were very active and well-attended. It is very different now, but still they keep open and there is regular worship every Sunday and on some weekdays even with the very heavy expenditure that has to be met.

Back to the farm now, I remember mealtimes mostly and Saturday night when it was bathtime in front of the fire in a big tin tub. The water for the bath had to be carried from the stream that passed through the yard. The drinking water had to be carried from the well which was a good ten minutes walk up a steep hill – we had to carry this water in cans and buckets even when we were quite young especially at harvest time. It was difficult carrying this water downhill as the path and rough ground was very stony and slippery. The drinking water was kept in an earthenware pot covered with a slate.

We also had to help with all kinds of work in the house while the boys helped with the outside work – so that early in our lives we were all good at working and learning how to do things. It did not seem to do us any harm!

The boys did suffer with chest troubles which may have been to the damp house we lived in. This illness, called Asthma was also in my father`s family – it was a horrible illness. When the boys had an attack of Asthma they had to stay in bed for days and it was quite frightening to hear them gasping for breath. Often the Doctor had to be called – he lived in Corwen which was about six miles away so he had to come on horseback.

We had all the usual children`s illnesses and when we caught chickenpox or measles or whooping cough it was no good isolating us as we slept four to a bedroom in two double beds. The ones who had not caught the illness used to bring us food, drink and home made cures which my mother had prepared. It

was a miracle how my mother coped with all the washing, cooking and cleaning that was involved with our large family.

My brother Bob was born in 1900; my brother Tom in 1902; my sister Cit in 1904 and my sister Mary in 1906 – but she only lived for two days and my mother was very ill after her birth. My brother David was born in 1907 and he was a bonny and healthy child until he was nine months old when he developed the illness called Croup. My mother had not seen this illness before and he was choking early in the morning and making a lot of croaking noises. My mother sent for the doctor as soon as she could but he did not arrive until 3pm and it was too late to save our dear little brother. The neighbours had come in to give all the help they could by putting steam blankets in the room and steam kettles which they thought would help until the doctor came but it was to no avail. We had arrived home from school and we saw David breathing his last. It was a sad scene for us and my parents were deeply moved. These tragic deaths happened often in those days, but nowadays due to the big advances in medicine it is a rare event and we thank God for the progress that has been made.

David was buried in the Cynwyd churchyard on a Saturday afternoon. There was only enough room for my father with a neighbour to travel to Cynwyd in a horse and cab. The little coffin was laid in the cab and our neighbour was the driver. There was a short service in the house before they started and we were all seated around the white scrubbed table during the service. We then watched them through the window and in the yard outside as they went down the road to the main road. We did not ask many questions and we were very quiet and my mother was silent and her thoughts must have been so sad.

It was the first experience of a funeral in our family except Mary, who had died two years previously. We remember the midwife taking us upstairs to see the baby in a plain little coffin in white cotton wool with bits of blue and pink wool here and there. We did not cry but stayed quiet and wondered. It was afterwards that I learnt that if a baby was born and then died before it was christened, that they were buried behind the church after dark with nothing to mark the place where it was laid. This caused me to think why this should be because she had been alive for two days. I was at school then and at the very curious age of ten and during the school dinner hour I used to go on my own to where Mary had been buried. I can remember the exact spot even though it happened all those years ago. Thankfully nowadays this custom is not carried out.

Farming in those days was a very poor living as the produce was sold at a very low price and the wages were also low. But it was an existence, and to compensate for the hardship we always had good fresh food. The wheat flour was very good in the hot weather but if it was a wet harvest the bread would be damp and heavy – we had to eat it unless we had a bag of white flour at

hand. There was always a plentiful supply of potatoes and excellent quality turnips; all greenstuffs; plenty of apple and fruit trees; our own milk, butter, eggs, pork and cured bacon. A sheep was often killed and shared with our neighbours and they would do the same in return to us. We also had oatmeal flour which was a great favourite for making oatcakes. We had plenty of fowls which we killed when they were about two years old. Some of the farms had turkeys, geese and ducks which were mainly for Christmas sales and for ourselves. Many people kept bees and some kept goats.

Money was scarce at that time, but we were fortunate to have real good wholesome food. This applied to the farms, but the folks in the villages and other occupations did not enjoy this and as the wages were small it was far from a luxurious life. As they received so little money, new clothes were a luxury, but cloths and linen in those days were made from good lasting material especially Welsh cloth made in the mills. The boots and shoes we wore had to be strong and made from leather to withstand the walking we had to do on the rough road. The churches and chapels at this time in the early century were at their best and created a good foundation for life, but in later years their popularity dwindled with the consequent results we have today with many people leading aimless lives and unable to understand the meaning of life.

It must have been about the year 1909 when I left school because I had not passed the examination well enough to go to the County school at Bala, but it was only by a few marks. Only about eight pupils were allowed to go to the county school from each district, which would contain about ten or twelve of the surrounding villages. I was ninth so I just missed out and a chance of further education was lost. If I had passed it would have meant paying my train fare to and from Bala and walking two and a half miles each way from the station. I would have had to pay for my mid-day meal and school uniform and books – all of which would have been a very heavy burden on my parents. It was only my brother Bob who passed the exam, although my brother Tom could have gone to the County school but my father wanted help on the farm as my other brothers had gone out to work elsewhere. I was 13 when I left school and I had to stay at home to help my parents on the farm, so that my elder sister Sallie (who was six years older than me) could go out to service and earn a wage. She had not worked away from home before and she started work at a place called Maesmor Hall as a kitchen maid. Her wages were £12 a year – it was hard work, but she was used to that, and therefore she coped very well with the different type of cooking which was required in a wealthy gentleman's house. The cooking was quite a contrast to the plain cooking that she was used to at home. The food was more expensive and there was more variety especially as they had their own fishing and shooting rights. Other servants were also employed at Maesmor Hall to do work inside and outside the house.

It was a hard time for young people in Wales in those days. It was not surprising that the population of those days went abroad and over the border to seek work and a future. Many did well and never came back, and most of them learnt another language without much difficulty, despite only being able to speak Welsh when they left. Although they had not had the benefit of higher education they were quick to learn. It makes me wonder why these days we hear of so many children leaving school who are unable to read, write and spell properly, and getting involved in all sorts of vandalism, despite having all the advantages and opportunities of modern education, with grants etc.

The year 1909 was about the time that I was going to leave home as my sister was leaving school – she was 13 years old and had passed the ‘Labour Exam’ which allowed you to leave school at 13 instead of 14. I would have liked to have gone to Bala County School with the others but it was not to be. I also would have liked to go to Corwen to be taught millinery – hats were very popular at this time. It was my pleasure to find any old hat and trim them with old curtain material or old ribbons which I could hold of or even flowers from the fields and hedgerows. We then used to play “getting married” with all the ceremony that it involved. We had plenty of volunteers for the role of bridesmaids or parson or best man – a large family ensured this.

It is a great advantage to be a member of a large family especially in those days even if the money to keep us was unbelievably small. It was a school in itself to learn how to manage and make do for ourselves. It was an education to see how my father did his farm work during those hard times using all the simple implements that were available and when the horse and cart were so important to do most of the work. My father was an excellent self-taught butcher and there were many requests for his services but he only had time to help a few neighbours. It was a skilled job to be able to kill a pig or a sheep properly and then be able to cure the meat for it to be able to keep and not get too salty. After my father had killed a pig the ham and bacon was hung up and cured for winter use. The delicious taste and smell of the home-cured ham and bacon remains with me to this day.

As we had sheep as well, he used to kill one often – maybe one that had had an accident or was not developing as well as the other sheep. He would keep the best sheep to sell at the time the rent was due. My father sold the two legs, shoulders and best ends – the price was then 4s/6d a leg, shoulder 3s/6d and best end at 2s/6d – compare that with prices today! My mother was an expert in making use of every piece of meat left – she could make good soup with the two heads of sheep, then with the meat from the same she would chop it up with some rind of bacon bits, parsley, onion, turnip, carrots, chives, etc and that was another dinner, with a saucepan full of potatoes. There were never any leftovers – all cooked in an oven and open fire. There was plenty of wood about and it was our job to make sure that the hut outside was well stocked with firewood.

So you can see that life in those days was very different to what it is today but we derived a lot of happiness from the basic things of life. Perhaps we should go back to some of those basic ways of living – be less wasteful and grow more of our own food and be less dependent on drugs and medicine and imports from abroad. It is the balance of living that seems to get lost over the years.

In those days there was not so much talk of boredom as there is today and vandalism was unknown – maybe an occasional thief and a few drunks. It was a surprise when someone was sent to jail – you very rarely heard of the alarming criminal cases we get today. All the big changes seem to have occurred after the two world wars – everybody clamouring for the highly paid jobs even if they have not got the ability to do it. Hard work and doing a job well brings its own reward. You can relax if you are interested in your work and life has not been made for us to be bored. We ought to be willing to change our work to something else so that we can have new opportunities. There is always an advantage in gaining more knowledge, which is always there if we look for it, and grasp it when it comes along.

When I left home in 1909 I went to work on the farm of some friends of my parents.”

The memoirs above were kindly lent by Mr and Mrs Poole, who own Blaengwnodl Uchaf today. Their home is pictured below

Jenny Lees



photo by Jenny Lees

1. 9. Cynwyd and local newspaper reports relating to those in service 1914-1919

The following are reports in local newspapers on the young men looking for exemption from military service during the First World War and other incidents relating to Cynwyd and the war.

[Cambrian News & Merioneth Standard 3rd December 1915]The following young men have joined the 18th Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers now at Kinmel Bay ... Evan R Edwards, Cynwyd
[Adsain 11 April 1916] Eu Gwrthod- Dyna hanes dau o “patriots” yr ardal yr wythnos hon. Cyfeirio yr ydym at John Rhys Edwards, Bryn Tristion a John Jones, Tyn Fedw. Aethant i fynny yn eu ‘group’ ond cawsant eu gwrthod diolch fod rhai o hen ‘pals’ dyddorol yr ardal yn aros.

..history of 2 patriots from the area.... John Edwards & John Jones wanted promotion, but were refused, thankfully these pals are staying in the area ..

Wedi Gwella – Da iawn gennym weled Privates Hugh William Edwards a John Wm Williams, gartref yn ol ar ol bod yn gorwedd yn beryglus wael. Gyda’r 1/7th RWF yr oedd y ddau filwr uchod, ond cafodd afiechyd y de afael ynddynt hwythau fel llw eraill o’u cyd-filwr. Adferiad llwyr a buan iddynt yw dymuniad eu lluaus cyfeillion.

Good to see Hugh Edwards & John Williams home after being dangerously ill, they had the illness of the south, like so many of their fellows... hope they get better soon and best wishes to all their group

Conscripts – Er fod ieuengetyd Cynwyd wedi gwneyd eu rhan yn wir rhagorol mewn ymrestru, rhaidd yw cyfaddef fod yma ychydig o’r ‘stand backs’ yma yn aros fel yn mhobman, er mai bychan iawn yw eu nifer. Rhaidd yw cyfaddef fod y Local Tribunal wedi gwneyd perffaith tegwch a phawb yn yr ardal hon heblaw yu marn y “conscripts” eu hunain mae’n sicr. Gresyn fod rhyw ddau neu dri fel hyn yn tynnu i lawr wladgarwch teilwng yr ardal, pan y mae eu cyd-ieuengtid yn ymladd yn ffyrnig drostynt yn y ‘trenches’ – yn nawdd y peryglon; rhai wedi ei lladd, eraill wedi eu clwyfo, ac eraill wedi dioddef afiechydon difrif. Oes ganddynt gydymdeimlad ? “occu-

pation does not permit" meddai rhai "doesn't permit indeed, evidently they not possess an atom of sympathy

... even though the youth of Cynwyd have played their part,... there are a few stand backs here and a few other places. The local tribunal have been perfectly fair in the area, but not in the opinion of the conscripts themselves... shame that 2 or 3 are not doing their duty, when the others are fighting in the trenches, some have died, others suffering awful illnesses. Have they no compassion

[Llangollen Advertiser 10th November 1916] Refused – William Evans 22, waggoner, Brynteg, Cynwyd

Exemption to December 25th – Edward Thomas Hughes 22, cowman, Cynwyd. John Evan Hughes, carter, Cynwyd. J Richard Jones 25, Cynwyd. Edward Evan Edwards 27, Tyn y Celyn, Cynwyd.

[Llangollen Advertiser 17th November 1916]. Exemption to December 25th – Robert Lewis Griffiths 18, Pen y Bont, Cynwyd. Hugh Emlyn Jones 38 1/2, Cilwrych, Cynwyd

[Llangollen Advertiser 16th February 1917] John Evans. 26, B1 single, Wernrhyd, Cynwyd, waggoner to Mr H Evans appealed to further exemption. To be placed on substitution list

The Military Representative applied for a withdrawal of the certificate of Edward Thomas Hughes, 22 of Cae Mawr, Cynwyd, horse man. His father had been offered two substitutes, one refused to come and he refused the other. Certificate withdrawn.

[Llangollen Advertiser 23rd March October 1917] Refused Exemption – William Samuel Roberts, 18, farm servant Pen y Felin, Cynwyd, not to be called up before 30th April

[Cambrian News & Merioneth Standard 6th April 1917] Samuel Jones, Pen y Felin Fawr, Cynwyd appealed for further exemption for William Samuel Roberts, Farm servant. The son said his father was bedridden. He was married and had his own holding to attend. The decision of the local tribunal 30th April was confirmed.

[Llangollen Advertiser 21st September 1917] Conditional exemption – Griffith Williams, 18, Blaengwnodl Issa, Cynwyd. William Evans [39] miller and grocer, Central Stores, Cynwyd

[Cambrian News & Merioneth Standard 21st September 1917] Robert Roberts, Cynwyd, C2, 40 years of age appealed for exemption having been refused by the local tribunal. He has several brothers on active service and on munitions work. He looked after his widowed mother who is aged and feeble. It is the first time for him to appeal having been twice rejected previously. Exemption refused.

[Llangollen Advertiser 19th October 1917] Conditional exemption – Alun Price [33] miller, Fronheulog, Cynwyd

[Adsain 23 October 1917] Adref am dro – Daeth y Pte Llewelyn Roberts, Y Square a'r Pte Evan Rowland Edwards, Edeyrnion View, adref or Ffrainc am ychydig seibiant yr wythnos ddiweddaf. Yr oedd y ddau yn edrych yn dda, er cymaint yr aethant trwyddio yn y frwydyr fawr. Pob lwc iddynt

...home from France for a rest last week, both looked fine

[Adsain 30 October 1917] Daeth Pte David Roberts, Ty'siglan, adref o Ffrainc am ychydig seibiant. Y mae'n edrych yn dda, er dioddef ohono wythnosau'n ol oddiwrth 'gas poisoning'. Bu'r L/Cpl Ivor White Davies, Glantrystion, gartref dros ychydig ddyddiau; dychwelodd i'r camp yn Tidworth dydd Mercher diweddaf. Talodd Pte Edward Davies, Bronygraig, ymweliad a'i deu'n cyn ymadael ohon am Fesopotamia.

... David Roberts is home from France, he looks well even though he had gas poisoning a few weeks ago. Ivor Davies has been home for a few day, but last Wednesday went back to Tidworth. Edward Davies paid a visit before going to Mesopotamia

[Adsain 20 November 1917] Yn Wael – Y mae Pte Cornelius Jones, RWF, Tanllwyn, yn dioddef oddiwrth y frech goch mewn ysbytty yn Mesopotamia. Yn Gwnodle Fawr yr oedd cyn ymuno a'r fyddin. Adferiad buan iddo

.. Cornelius Jones has had chicken pox in hospital in Mesopotamis, he was at Gwnoddle Fawr previously. Hope he gets better soon

[Adsain 1 October 1918] Pte James Clack, Cefn Rug, Corwen, Killed in Action – Mrs Clack, Cefn Rug, received the sad news of the death of her husband, Pte James Clack of the Machine Gun Corps on Monday morning. Previous to joining the army, he was employed for several years at Rug Gardens and later at Plas Isa as gardener. He had been in France nearly three years. He was a very popular young man and a good sportsman. Pte Clack was a native of Devizes and his several brothers serving with the colours. One of his brothers perished while assisting the Russian Navy in the Baltic Sea early in the war. He was on a British submarine. Pte Clack leaves a widow and two little children to mourn his loss, with whom deep sympathy is expressed.

[Llangollen Advertiser 1st August 1919] Edeyrnion District Council – permission was granted to Llangar Parish Council to erect a war memorial in Cynwyd.

Janice Dale

1. 9. ABSENT Voters – Parish of Llangar 1918-1920

Name	Qualifying Premises handwritten comment	Ship, regiment, number, Rank, rating etc or recorded Address	Description of service,
202 CLACK James	Frondeg, Cynwyd		killed
203 DAVIES William	2 Mill St, Cynwyd	52964 Pte 2 Garr Northumberland Fusiliers	P.A.
204 DAVIES Edward	Organ, Cynwyd	70043 Pte 5 Res RWF Disembodied 21.3.19	P.A.
205 HILTON Horace	Plas Isa, Corwen	Major 13th Corps Troops MT Co ASC	
206 JONES Cornelius	Tanllwyn, Cynwyd	60806 Pte RWF Disembodied 16.4.19	P.A.
207 MORRIS John Elias	Brynheulog, Cynwyd	7057 a/Cpl APC	A8 Office Shrewsbury
208 ROBERTS Llewelyn	The Square, Cynwyd	54780 Pte 16 RWF	BEF
209 BODDEN David	Blaengwnodl Isaf, Cynwyd	1470 Pte 532 Agric Co	
210 EDWARDS David Thomas		503185 Pte RWF Bridge St, Cynwyd	103 Agric Labour Co
211 EDWARDS Hugh William		-do-	1290505 Pte REF
Depot HDL			237 T T's
212 EDWARDS Lewis Jones		-do-	33705 7 Batt machine gun corps
BEF			
213 EDWARDS Evan White	Post Office, Cynwyd	448918 Sapper L of C	
Co.RE	RE		

214 EDWARDS Evan Rowland Edeyrnion View,
Cynwyd 34931 Pte 17 RWF BEF Disembodied
22.2.19

215 EDWARDS Berwyn Edeyrnion View, 36162 Pte Border Regt Depot
HDL
Cynwyd 14.2.19

216 EDWARDS David Thomas Bridge House, 503185 Labour Corps
Cynwyd

217 EDWARDS Walter Mill St, Cynwyd 736171 Driver, 20 Bdge RFA
PA

218 EVANS Edward Brynteg, Cynwyd S4/061227 Sgt 14th L of C
Co ASC BEF

219 EVANS Jeremiah Brynteg, Cynwyd Pte 136873 Labour Corps
418 co HDL

220 EVANS William Brynteg, Cynwyd 61049 Pte 1/6 Res
8 RWF PA Disembodied 16.4.19

221 EVANS Robert Owen Bryn Aber, Cynwyd Asst Paymaster
Admiralty Office
Manchester

222 EVANS William Ffoulkes Bryn Aber, Cynwyd 81785 Pte 36th Gen Hosp
49 Stationery Hosp PA
RAMC trans Res 13.3.19

223 JONES Evan Norman Upper Mill, Cynwyd 84796 Gunner RGA
1 / 2 Lancs BEF

224 JONES Robert Evan Tanrallt, Cynwyd 48945 Pte SWB Depot
Brecon HDL

225 JONES Edward Humphreys
Dol Wiw, Cynwyd 645499 Pte Labour Corps

226 JONES Robert Dol Wiw, Cynwyd 28097 L Cpl RWF

227 JONES Peter	Copaderw, Hafod		
Lime Works60702	Pte 15 S Lancs Regt	HDL	Disembodied 14.3.19
228 JONES John	Oak House	546700 Pte 550 Agric Co	
	Labour Corps	HDL	
229 OWEN Aneurin	Isawel, Cynwyd	2905 Pte No 4 Western Co	Park
Hall, Oswestry			
	Non combatant Corps	Trans to Res 9.1.19	
230 PUGH John Evan	Blaengwnodl Isaf	203356 Pte 11 RWF	PA
Disembodied 8.5.19			
231 ROBERTS Griffith Owen	Fotty Meusydd		
Cynwyd	90143 Pte 3rd RWF	HDL	
233 ROBERTS William Samuel			
Porthydwr, Cynwyd	89742 Pte 3rd RWF	HDL	
233 ROBERTS William Owen	Tai Bethania,	44187 Pte 74th Coy, labour	
Cynwyd	Corps	BEF	
234 ROBERTS David	Glyn View, Cynwyd	Pte RWF 492522 546 Agric	
	Labour Corps		
235 ROBERTS Robert	Glyn View, Cynwyd	340927 Pte 532 Agric Co	HDL
236 ROBERTS Enoch	Glyn View, Cynwyd	48754 Pte 10[S] SWB	
Depot Brecon	HDL		
	Trans to Res 22.1.19		
237 ROBERTS Thomas	Fotty, Cynwyd	202823 Pte Welsh Regt	PA
238 ROBERTS David	Bryn Ffynnon, Cynwyd	41090 Pte 8 SWB	
239 ROBERTS Thomas Price	Railway Crossing,		
Cynwyd	202823 Pte Welsh Regt	PA	
240 ROWLANDS Edward A.	Glyn View, Cynwyd	548864 Sapper No 1	
	Signal Co	RE	
241 STURKEY Alfred Millward		279742 Pte 668 HS Emp	

Bryntirion, Cynwyd	Co labour Corps	HDL
242 STURKEY Richard Walter Bryntirion, Cynwyd	243581	RAF
243 THOMAS Hugh Tan Llwyn RE	230542	Sapper Gen PA
244 WILLIAMS Hugh David Pantyclai, Cynwyd	40791	Pte RWF Dead
245 WILLIAMS Ernest Pantyclai, Cynwyd	685803	Gunner 277th Bde RFA BEF
246 WILLIAMS Howell Davies Pantyclai, Cynwyd	953528 53621	Pte Middlesex Regt BEF
247 WILLIAMS John Thomas Henfaes Uchaf, Cynwyd	59701	Pte 17 RWF Discharged
248 WILLIAMS Robert William Glyn View, Cynwyd	24861	Pte 13 RWF BEF
249 WILLIAMS Robert Hafod	243387	Pte 3 RWF HDL
250 YAXLEY John Evan The Mount, Cynwyd	290604	1/7 RWF PA Disembodied 7.4.19

ABSENT Voters – Parish of Llangar 1919

Name	Qualifying Premises	Description of service,
	handwritten comment	
	Ship, regiment, number, Rank, rating etc or recorded Address	
203 DAVIES William	2 Mill St, Cynwyd Northumberland Fusiliers	52964 Pte 2 Garr
204 DAVIES Edward	Organ, Cynwyd	Bronygareg, Cynwyd
205 HILTON Horace	Plas Isa, Corwen Co ASC	Major 13th Corps Troops MT

206 JONES Cornelius Tanllwyn, Cynwyd Tynllwyn, Cynwyd

207 MORRIS John Elias Brynheulog, Cynwyd 7057 Cpl APC

208 ROBERTS Llewelyn The Square, Cynwyd 54780 Pte 16 RWF
Demob 4 The Square

209 BODDEN David Blaengwnodl Isaf,
Cynwyd 1470 Pte 532 Agric Co

210 EDWARDS David Thomas 583105 Pte,
Bridge St, Cynwyd 1038 Agric Labour Co

211 EDWARDS Hugh William -do- 1290505 Pte RWF Demob 4
The Square, Cynwyd

212 EDWARDS Lewis Jones -do- 33705 7 Batt machine gun corps

213 EDWARDS Evan White Post Office, Cynwyd 448918 Sapper L of C
Co.RETrans to Res:Post
Office Cynwyd

214 EDWARDS Evan Rowland Edeyrnion View, Edeyrnion View
Cynwyd

215 EDWARDS Berwyn Edeyrnion View,
Cynwyd Edeyrnion View

217 EDWARDS Walter Mill St, Cynwyd 736171 Driver, 20 Bdge RFA

218 EVANS Edward Brynteg, Cynwyd S4/061227 Sgt 14th L of C
Trans to Res, Brynteg,
Co ASC Cynwyd

219 EVANS Jeremiah Brynteg, Cynwyd Pte 136873 Labour Corps

220 EVANS William Brynteg, Cynwyd Brynteg, Cynwyd

221 EVANS Robert Owen Bryn Aber, Cynwyd Asst Paymaster Admiralty
Trans Office
Manchester

222 EVANS William Ffoulkes Bryn Aber, Cynwyd Bryn Aber,
Cynwyd

223 JONES Evan Norman Felin Ucha, Cynwyd 84796 Gunner RGA

224 JONES Robert Evan Tanrallt, Cynwyd 48945 Pte 2 SWB

225 JONES Edward Humphreys
Dol Wiw, Cynwyd 645499 Pte Labour Corps

226 JONES Robert Dol Wiw, Cynwyd 28097 Cpl RWF

227 JONES Peter Copaderw, Hafod
Lime Works 84 Raffles Rd, Birkenhead

228 JONES John Oak House 546700 Pte 550 Agric Co
Labour Corps

230 PUGH John Evan Tynycaeu, Corwen 203356 Pte 11 RWF

231 ROBERTS Griffith Owen Fotty Meusydd 90143 Pte 3rd RWF
Cynwyd 58130 Pte SWB

232 ROBERTS William Samuel
Porthydwr, Cynwyd 89742 Pte 3rd RWF

233 ROBERTS William Owen Tai Bethania, Cynwyd 44187 Pte 74th Coy,
labour
Corps

234 ROBERTS David Glyn View, Cynwyd Pte 492522 546 Agric
Labour Corps

235 ROBERTS Robert Glyn View, Cynwyd 340927 Pte 532 Agric Co
Labour Corps

237 ROBERTS Thomas Fotty, Cynwyd 202823 Pte Welsh Regt

238 ROBERTS David Factory Cottage 41090 Pte 8th SWB

240 ROWLANDS Edward A Glyn View, Cynwyd 548864 Sapper No 1
Signal Co RE

241 STURKEY Alfred Millward 279742 Pte 668 HS Emp
Bryntirion, Cynwyd Co labour Corps

242 STURKEY Richard Walter 243581 RAF
Bryntirion, Cynwyd

243 THOMAS Hugh Tan Llwyn, Cynwyd 230542 Sapper RE Trans to
Res Tanllwyn

26.8.19

245 WILLIAMS Ernest Pantyclai, Cynwyd 685803 Gunner 277th Bde R
Demob; Pantyclai

246 WILLIAMS Howell Davies 953528 53621
Pantyclai, Cynwyd G53528 Pte 6/8 Middlesex Regt

248 WILLIAMS Robert William
Glyn View, Cynwyd 24861 Pte 13 RWF

249 WILLIAMS Robert Hafod 243387 Pte 3 RWF

250 YAXLEY John Evan The Mount, Cynwyd The Mount,
Cynwyd

ABSENT Voters – Parish of Llangar 1920

Name	Qualifying Premises	Description of service,
	handwritten comment	
		Ship, regiment, number,
		Rank, rating etc or recorded
		Address

98 JONES Robert Evan Tanrallt, Cynwyd 101297 48945 Pt 2SWB

99 ROBERTS William Samuel
Porth y Dwr, Cynwyd Porth y Dwr

100 ROBERTS David Factory Cottage Brynffynnon

101 STURKEY Alfred Millward 279742 Pte 668 HS Emp
Bryntirion, Cynwyd Co labour Corps

102 242 STURKEY Richard Walter 243581 RAF Trsnfd Res
2/10/19
Bryntirion, Cynwyd

NB 98 JONES Robert Evan, still on the Absent Voters list for 1921

B.E.F. = Men serving with the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium. Men are marked as such because they are entitled to a postal vote, being in close proximity to the UK.

P.A. = Men serving in theatres other than France and Belgium, ie the Proxy Area, entitled to Proxy voting. (eg Salonika, Egypt, India, etc)

H.D.L = not precisely identified, but men with this note are all in the UK, so it's probably Home....something or other. We believe postal or normal voting was permitted in these cases.

Disembodied = discharged or demobilised from active service

How the lists were compiled.

The voters details for the 1918 election were initially supplied by the next of kin of the household of the soldier to local voter registration officers. Once this process was completed, the names of those in the army were sent to the Adjutant General's Department in the War Office, who arranged to send voting cards to soldiers serving in the UK and ballot papers to those in France, Flanders and Italy. Those serving further afield were allowed to vote by proxy.

The hurried and haphazard means of collecting the original information at home meant that some men were missed altogether, and at other times was inaccurate .

Janice Dale

1. 10. Colomendy Memeories

The following is a letter received by Jenny Farley at Colomendy, following a visit from Enid Owen: it was really surprising to find what you had accomplished with the old stable, although, the rest of the farm buildings were really my domain as I used to occasionally help out with the milking of the four cows and the heifers which were penned on the other side of the separator with the calf pen at the far comer— away from the draughts from the door which faced the stable block.

I used to sit on a small three legged stool and draw the milk into a milk pan called a cunnog and was all sieved into the milk tank which stood in a trough in the outside stream to cool my dad would take it down to the main road through Glascoed yard. The stable itself was entirely my dad's domain and he really looked after his two horses well. Standing at the top of your kitchen steps on Sunday I visualised how I was allowed to accompany my father to the stable for the last feed of the day — where they could digest the feed. A couple of buckets of water were always left in the stable in the winter to take the chill off it. A couple of thick sacks tied on with string were placed on the horses backs when it was very cold at night in the winter. All possible draughts were excluded by means of pushing straw into the crevices. The bottom of the outside door always in the winter had straw filled old sacks laid at the bottom making the stable very snug. I used to stand between where your windows are now to wait for my father to finish his jobs. Straw and hay was pushed through into the shed rack from the main bam into what I'd presume would be your upstairs today. In the main bam would also be the pumper for chopping turnips, swede etc to mix with animal straw feed which would be chopped in the machine opposite. This was worked about twice a week, powered by a moving strap connected to what we called the rotating power bar outside, moved by means of a horse tied to rotate around and round on the bar. At the back of the cowshed we had what we called cut lloi — calf shed — where in the winter bullocks were fed with buckets, behind that were the stone steps to the granary where the grain was stored and below the steps were the working dogs shed Directly opposite were the agriculture machine shed and beside there was the massive hay stack.

I have lovely memories of living at Colomendy brought up by lovely parents — no electricity, no tap water, no inside toilet, but we were happy as sand boys, my brother was 3 '1 years younger than me. We moved there to live from outside Bala when he was 7 years old. My mother was a school teacher at our old home, but she didn't do any teaching at Cynwyd just devoted herself to being a farmer's wife and doing the usual jobs — which before the collection of milk to the factory came — churning had to be done and selling the butter usually local. We also had chickens. sold the eggs and poultry sometimes, all this sideline went towards our keep including plenty of veg etc grown on the farm. A pig or two would be slaughtered and my dad occasionally would kill a fat lamb for our own use.

Some pieces of meat would be distributed to nearby farmers and they would do the same at their butchering time. Life was good and there was plenty of food. When the cattle were tuned out in the spring to fresh fodder — my mother would

contain the fresh milk and produce lovely Cheshire cheese with it, done the right way. This would keep for the whole summer, being used at harvest time etc.

My mother also baked our bread which was baked in the big oven heated by filling it with wood and when hot, the embers would be drawn out and the bread put in. I-Ialf way into the baking a large stoneware dish full of milk and rice etc would be put in to bake. My mum knew the temperature of the oven exactly by placing her hand on the cast iron handle. The walk to school and back was quite a way really, well to me with my short legs !

There is so much I would like to tell you of the history of my happy life at Colomendy, but as my typewriter is out of commission, my handwriting will suffice, hope you can just have a glance of my younger days at Colomendy.

At night my mother coached a lot of grammar school children for their exams.

The hollow tree in the yard brought me a lot of happy memories also.

There were always a pair of white doves in the pen above the cowshed door, we never had little ones, only plenty of eggs! I believe they were two females that had been around for years when they died, I can remember being very broken hearted. They were very tame but always fed with the poultry. All that was home produced as my dad grew com etc and the thrashing machine would come up once a year with a traction pulling, and neighbours would help out for the day. I always thought my mum worked hard for that day, preparing pies, cakes etc. It would be full roast dinner for lunch, that everybody looked forward to, our tea at 3.30pm. A lady from the village would come up to help my mum for the day. There would be about 12 men in all and my dad's younger brother, Bob, or as my dear old grandfather called him. Boy, he was a great favourite of my brother and was Llinos's Dad. My dad was the eldest of four boys I think, and Bob the youngest, hence the difference in Llinos and myself in age, but Llinos really reminds me of myself when I was young, slim and able to be agile as she is now. She really is a great girl and is prepared to help anyone anywhere. I wish she lived nearer me. I also wish you and I lived nearer — I could really tell you or relate several tales of my happy life up there. My dear mum died at 61 years, which was tragic, it was breast cancer and I felt worse as I was a trained nurse but being in Liverpool. I missed out and it was left to my friend another nurse who worked at Gobowen to inform me and although I got things going straight away, it was too late, a mastectomy was done immediately. Sadly my dear dad died at 65 years of a broken heart. Life can be so sad after such a hard life.

I do hope we shall have the pleasure of meeting again soon, I don't drive any more and have to rely on friends and family

1. 12. Who do you think they are ?

This photograph was found in the Cape] Bethel in Waterfall Road — can you recognise anyone?. June Lister would love to know more about it



It is the 1947 Nativity play

Back row - left to right

Gwenno Probert, Shirley Page, Margaret Owen, Jennifer Riscoe?, Nerys Jones, Rhianwen

Roberts, Maurice Tudor, Joan Williams, lola Owen, Gwenan Jones, Merial Jones

Front Row — left to right

Merfyn Jones, David Parrish, Paul Horan, Geraint Jones, David Tudor, Emrys Bodden, Huw

Williams, Berys Roberts, Robert Tudor

The infant teacher Ceri Edwards, was the author and producer of the play.

Llew Williams of Mona House in Corwen was the photographer

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June Lister & Elwyn Jones

1. 13. A Cynwyd Timeline

Earliest times

The dictionary *Y Geiriadur Mawr* translates the ancient word *cynwyd* as meaning *fierce*. Various interpretations of the name's origin include association with the early Celtic *Saint Cynwyd Cynwydion*, or with a 5th century prince called *Cynwyd ap Cynwydion*. Local folklore also suggests the meaning of 'a source of mischief'.

We do however know that *Cynwyd* sported brave warriors, and that it was a place of considerable importance by the Middle Ages, if not before. The famous court poet *Cynddelw* described a battle at Cynwyd in his elegy composed after the deaths in 1160 of *Madog ap Meredith, Prince of Powys*, and *Madog's son Llewelyn*:
*"When we were summoned to Cynwyd Gadfor Our counsel was offered Fine warriors each with broken shield ... Over the pasture land were we scattered"*¹



By the late 13th century *Cynwyd* had its own doctor and was described as one of the few places in Merioneth which resembled a town. It was by then the centre of the commote of *Edeyrnion*, having replaced the original centre which was probably ancient *Rug*.²

In 1292-3, when nearby *Corwen* had only 24 taxed tenants, 45 tenants of the township of *Cynwyd* were affluent enough to be taxed- contributing the largest sum of money in the commote. ³

The medieval church

Llangar Church of all Saints is mentioned in 13th century sources but there could have been an older church on the site. The legend *Llan Garw Gwyn* explains the church's distance from *Cynwyd* village in the following way: foundation stones

disappeared each night from an original site and the builders were mysteriously told to start again where a white stag (*carw gwyn*) had been seen. The stag while being hunted hid at *Bronguddio* (*cuddio* meaning to hide) and was killed at *Moel Lladdfa* (*lladd* meaning a killing or massacre).



A more likely explanation is that the church was near to the original site of the barony of *Cymer and Llangar*, as many of the homesteads known to exist in 1292-3 were in this area, and that *Moel Lladdfa* was associated with early battles, being

near to *Nant Rhyd y Saeson* (stream with ford of the Saxon or English).

The church may have been named after the 5th-6th century Saint *Cyngar*, though *gar* could also be a corruption of *caer*, referring to a nearby castle or citadel. The church has fascinating 15th century wall paintings and an ominously looming 17th century figure of *Death*. The church can now be visited by contacting *Cadw* and *W. Nigel Yates* has produced an excellent guide to this church.⁴

Dynasty of the Barons

In the 13th Century *Owain Brogontyn*'s son *Iorwerth* was Lord of *Cymer and Llangar*, then these lands were further divided between his sons *Elise*, Baron of *Llangar*, and *Grufudd*, Baron of *Cymer*.

These and the other *Edeyrnion* barons had considerable powers, including the right to hang convicted felonious tenants on their own gallows! A baronial court once existed at *Cynwyd* and was still remembered by people known to a John Davies in 1716, but no court records remain as they are said to have been burnt during an early 18th century quarrel between the Barons!

Their court is thought to have been at *Bryn yr Orsedd* -*gorsedd* can mean *law court* or *assembly* - possibly situated where *Bryn Eryr* (*The Eagles*) stands today. There was also a field originally belonging to *Bryn yr Orsedd* called *Cae Lllys*⁵ (*Court Field*)

Trefor. O Jones ⁶ gives a description by William Evans of how the Barons would assemble in the *Barony of Llangar*, thought to be at *Cae'r Gerddi*, to feast and tittle when there were fierce horse races taking place on *Ddol Wenith* (a *Gwerclas* field of over 17 acres). The *lawnt* in front of the barony - *lawnt* may then have meant *meadow* rather than a lawn - was the "grandstand" from where one could see the meadow and the reaches of *Gwerclas*.

A medieval hospice?

In a chapter on the intriguing history of *Rhydyglafes*, T. O. Jones ⁷ reproduced E.W. Edwards' letter about the *White* family's origins. It was said that the family of *John White*, *Bishop of Winchester* in the 16th C, acquired *Rhydyglafes* upon the dissolution of the monasteries, and that it was formerly a religious house for the sick, situated at a ford across the Dee. It could have been the original site of a hospice set up by one of the land-owning medieval abbeys, similar to the ancient one at *Ysbyty Ifan* set up by the Knights of St John.

The word *claf* means a sick person, and *clafes* a sick woman. There are rumours that *Edward III's* pregnant wife (C14th) rested there on her way to *Caernarfon*, but *clafres* can also mean a leprous woman and (horrifically!) leprosy was once prevalent in Wales. A *Rhyd-y-Clafwr* in Denbigh was once associated with the isolation of lepers.

Rhyd means *ford* and *Rhydyglafes* is near the probable crossing place of a Roman road that runs through *Pen Bwlch Llandrillo*. The area has also been inhabited for over 5,000 years, as south west of *Rhydyglafes* lies the Neolithic chambered burial cairn *Tan y coed*.

17th Century Cynwyd

Cynwyd's elegant Jacobean bridge over *Afon Dyfrdwy* was built in 1612 and *Cynwyd* residents met to celebrate its 400th anniversary. Before the bridge was built there were said to be stepping stones at *Rhydmaesgwastad* opposite *Penddol* (a *Bryberllan* field). Ferries crossed the river, and the bard *Mathew Owen* nearly drowned while punting across the flooded Dee on his way home from a *noson lawen* at *Gwerclas*. *Matthew's* home is thought to have been *Ty'n Llwyn Isaf*, called *Ty hen* in one deed; the foundations of which could still be seen in the field below *Bryn Llwyn Lodge* when *William Irvine* wrote about the bard in 1953.⁸

Between 1642 and 1660 the local Barons were kept busy with the Civil Wars. Baron of *Cymer Humphrey Hughes* was a *Commissioner of Array*, fighting at *Y Dalar Hir* near *Aber* as well as for the Royalists at *Rowton Moor*, and listed as of "*Querle*" (*Gwerclas*!)

American visitors from Pennsylvania are often surprised to discover our village, as they have their own town of *Bala Cynwyd*. British Quakers in the 1680's were being severely persecuted and many left Wales to settle in a tract of Pennsylvania originally called the 'Welsh Barony'.

Interestingly, the 1681 *Notitiae of the Parishes of the Diocese of St Asaph* for Llangar tell us: *There are no dissenters in the parish but all rightly fixed in their religion* - and it is further reported that none have been excommunicated!

18th Century Cynwyd

At this time peat was burnt as fuel. From the *Marriage Settlement* ⁹ of Hugh Hughes Lloyd of *Gwerclas* and his future wife Margaret we know that each of the numerous farmsteads within *Gwerclas* estate inherited the right of cutting or digging *Turf and Peate* on the moorlands of either *Berwyn* or *Mynyllod*.

Cynwyd's taverns over time have included *The Stamp*, *Yr Organ*, *Ty'n y gotel*, (*Berwynfa*, previously *The Gardener's Arms*), *The Otter*, *Cambrian Arms* (*Frondeg*), *Ty mawr*, *The Eagles* (*Bryn yr Eryr*), *Cross Keys* (*Bronnant*), *Royal Oak* (*Oak House*) and *Cynwyd Fechan*, with the *Blue Lion* and *Prince of Wales* remaining today.

Some of these date from the 19th century, but from medieval times onwards others would have provided accommodation and grazing for the drovers, who took huge herds of beasts from the west of Wales towards southern England.

The word *gotel* is mutated from *cotel*, meaning a narrow strip of land or paddock, and in 1766 the lands of *Ty yn y Twll* (by *Glanllyn* today) included *y Gottel wrth y Bont* (bridge), *y Gottel pen y palmant* (pavement) and *y Gottell y ffordd* (road). These would have been near to where one of the drove routes came down from *Mynydd Mynyllod*.

From the Churchwardens' Accounts for *Llangar Parish*¹⁰ we know that *The Stamp* received payment from the churchwardens, including 2 shillings for when the Parishioners met there in 1714 to choose a new Warden.

19th Century Cynwyd

There was once a tollgate just outside *Cynwyd* at *Croes y Stryd*, but 1839 -43 saw the 'Rebecca Riots' in which protesters dressed in women's clothes smashed the turnpikes. This eventually led to abolition of the extortionate road tolls that had plagued the lives of the farming community.

In 1854 parts of *Cynwyd* (the townships of *Cynwyd Fawr*, *Cynwyd Fechan*, *Bodheulog* and *Persethydd*), were transferred from *Gwyddelwern* parish to the parish of *Llangar*. A larger church nearer to the village was now needed and the *Church of St John the Evangelist* was built in Early English style.

By now religious tolerance had increased considerably and many of *Cynwyd*'s chapels were built in this century, including *Bethania* Baptist chapel, *Bethel* Calvinistic Methodist chapel (originally *Capel Mawr*) and *Carmel* Independent Chapel.

However, when Nonconformist parents were charged higher school fees than Established Church parents, over 60 Nonconformist children were expelled because their parents refused to pay. This was eventually resolved by the opening in October 1889 of the non-denominational *Cynwyd Board School*, of which the *Oswestry and Border Counties Advertiser* commented "You have triumphed in a good fight for local freedom".

In July 1866 the Great Western Railway reached *Cynwyd*, on a line running from *Ruabon* to *Barmouth*, but in 1964 it was closed by flood damage and in 1965 was axed for good by Beeching's railway cuts.

20th Century Cynwyd

Guests were once driven up to stay at *Liberty Hall*, a mountain shooting lodge built by Lord Newborough in the early 20th C. It proved too remote to be practical, but was used to look out for bombers on their way to Liverpool during World War II.

In the great summer drought of 1976 a fire on the *Berwyn* above *Cynwyd* burnt into the peat. Fire services from all over North Wales and then the Army struggled for at least six weeks to save the forest and dwellings below.

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- 5, 6 and 7: Trefor O. Jones (1975) *O Ferwyn i Fynyddlod*
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