

# Cynwyd

## Scrapbook Two



Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group  
Denbighshire Branch

2016

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## Introduction

It is now two years since our Discovering Old Welsh Houses group (DOWH) published our very popular Cynwyd Scrapbook One.

Previously known as the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group, DOWH is a charity whose vision is “Celebrating Welsh heritage through the study of traditional houses and the lives of the people who lived in them.” Our work includes:

- Recording the architecture of old houses - particularly those built before 1700 - and dendro (tree ring) dating their timbers when appropriate
- Researching the history of each dwelling and the lives of its occupants
- Exploring local landscape, community, social and economic history

Our research is done by volunteers, under the guidance of experts from the archives, universities and learned societies of Wales. Our findings are made available on an “open access” basis to anyone interested, and are shared by:

- Publishing individual house histories on our website <http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/>
- Contributing to a variety of books and journals
- Discussing research with colleagues at local DOWH groups

The Cynwyd Scrapbooks are part of our Denbighshire DOWH group activities. We invited readers of our first book to get in touch and the response has been tremendous! Many local readers were amazed to find that records of their houses date back hundreds of years, and readers from many parts of Britain have contacted us with information or queries about their own heritage.

Membership of Discovering Old Welsh Houses supports the vital work of preserving our heritage and entitles you to the following:

- Guided visits to private historic houses in North and Mid Wales
- Our illustrated and bilingual quarterly newsletter
- Lectures, study tours and house history workshops
- Membership of your local DOWG group
- Support with researching the history of your own or other old houses

You can join at:

<http://www.discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/membership/index.b.html> or by contacting our Membership Secretary on 01824 704404, 07891 366581 or [zohenderson123@btinternet.com](mailto:zohenderson123@btinternet.com)

## Our own medieval hall house!

Plas Uchaf, also known historically as *Cymer*, is a magnificent cruck and aisle truss hall house lying on the road from Cynwyd to Pont Melin Rûg.



Plas Uchaf (image courtesy of Gareth Hughes)

Perhaps only an architectural historian might guess from outside that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Plas Uchaf was home to the *Barons of Cymer*<sup>1</sup> - descendants of one of the last native royal families of Wales!

It lay within an ancient “township” also called *Cymer* – a Welsh word meaning confluence or junction which in our case refers to the lands where the rivers Alwen and Dyfrdwy meet.<sup>2</sup>

Believed to be the oldest dwelling still standing in *Cymer* today, we know from dendrochronology (tree ring dating) that Plas Uchaf’s original timbers were felled in around 1435.

It was a very extravagant and high status building for this area at that time – not surprisingly given the powers<sup>3</sup> and wealth that the Barons possessed!

Originally the hall was heated by an open hearth, which was found by excavation of the floor during restoration but now is covered over. The smoke escaped through a *louvre* in the roof and the windows originally had no glass, but they did have shutters sliding in horizontal grooves still there today.



The illustration above, from Peter Smith's book *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*, shows how Plas Uchaf was originally constructed, with a box-framed aisle truss, cruck-framed central truss and hall open to the roof.

But home owners often wanted to follow the latest fashions, so in the 16<sup>th</sup> century a first floor was built into Plas Uchaf. Although this and the wooden wall panelling were stripped out and exported to America in the 1960s, we know what the Elizabethan ceiling looked like from the photograph on the following page, showing its elegant roll-moulded beams<sup>4</sup>.

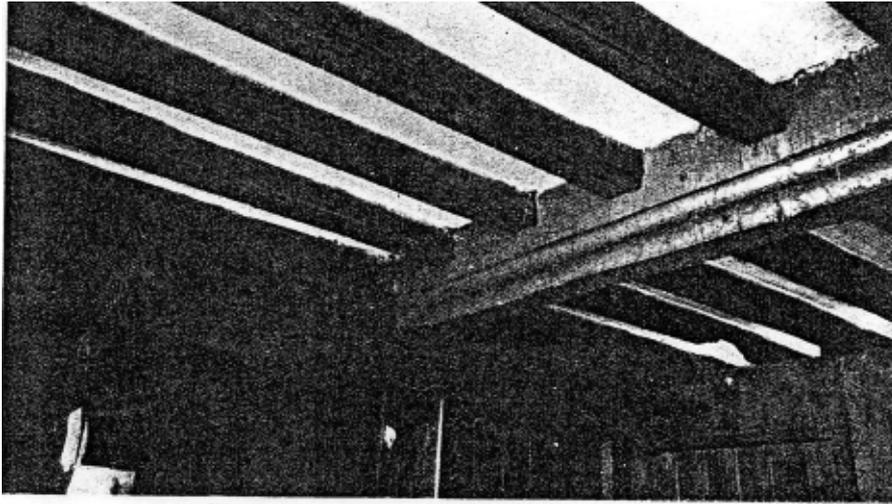


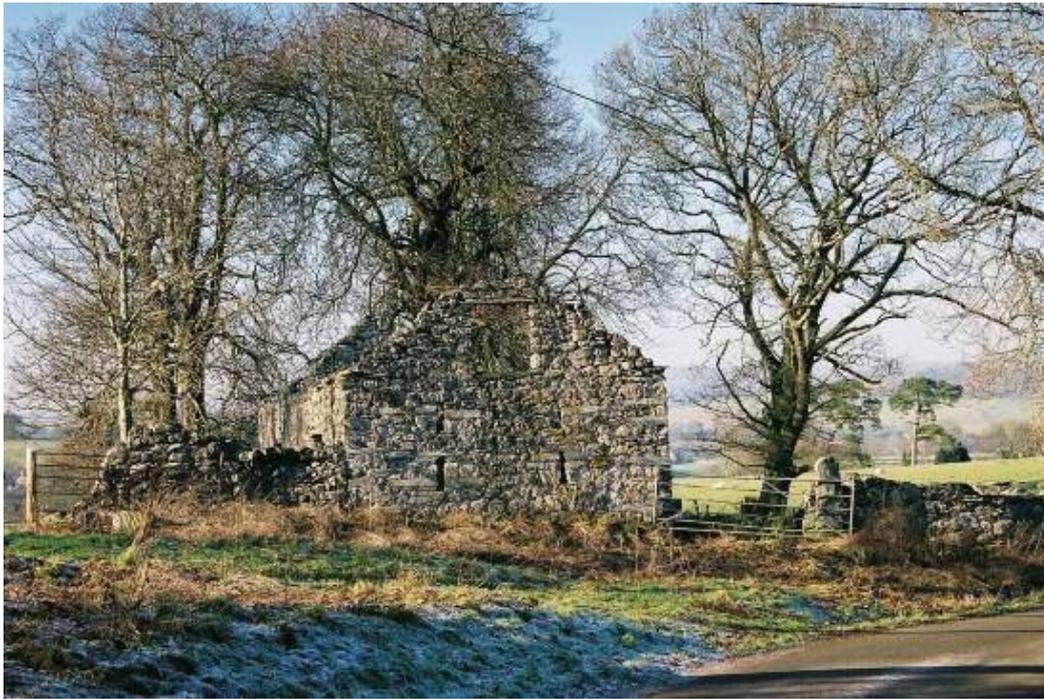
Fig. 4.—Plas Ucha, Beams of Inserted Floor.

With its added first floor and presumably at least one chimney to replace the central floor hearth, Plas Uchaf would have been very comfortable by the 17<sup>th</sup> century! My photograph below shows its inglenook fireplace in 2014, with joist holes above showing where a first floor was situated until the 1960s.



By no later than 1600 the Barons of Cymer had moved from the dwelling of Plas Uchaf to a more extensive site at *Gwerclas*<sup>5</sup>, but we know from the 1682 inventory of Humphrey Hughes of Gwerclas that they still owned or leased Plas Uchaf. Between then and 1741 we have no record of who lived there, but it could have been the Barons' extended family, servants, tenants or perhaps an estate manager for the barony?

Evidence that Plas Uchaf was once called Cymer comes from a 1766 Marriage Settlement of Hugh Hughes Lloyd of Gwerclas which mentions “all that ancient manor house lands and tenements with the appurtenances called *Kymmer* alias *Plas Ucha*”. Possibly Cymer became known as Plas Uchaf (“upper mansion house”) after the lower neighbouring *Plas* was named Plas Isaf?



Plas Uchaf outbuilding in 2006-7 -the gable top now sadly collapsed (Jenny Lees)

Humphrey`s 1682 inventory included a valuation of £2 for “*All mucke at Gwerckless and Cymer*”, so it seems that both Gwerclas and Plas Uchaf were working farms at this time – and that manure was valuable!

From 1741 Llangar Parish Records give us the names of Plas Ucha`s inhabitants who were baptised or buried by the church<sup>6</sup>. After the 1823 death of Richard Hughes Lloyd most of Gwerclas estate was purchased by Rhûg and the sale schedule included: “Plas Ucha Farm and a valuable Bed of Lime Stone, with five Kilns thereon”.

Census records beginning in 1841 show Plas Uchaf accommodating several separate households, whose “Heads” included agricultural labourers, shoemakers, tailors and blacksmiths. But by 1891 the census for Plas Uchaf lists only gardener Edward Roberts and his housekeeper sister Catherine, and in 1901 it is listed with no inhabitants and placed together with Plas Isaf.

However, when L. Monroe visited Plas Uchaf in 1933 it was said<sup>7</sup> to be a gamekeeper's house on the estate of Colonel Vaughan Wynn, and a Lieut. H.H.K. Rowe signed a 1933 tenancy document. The car below, pictured outside Plas Uchaf, has kindly been identified by Keith Mountain as "an early version of the Rover 10/25 Regal manufactured in Coventry between 1933 and 1938."



In 1938 and during WW2 Richard Wilson's family lived in Plas Uchaf. He revisited his former home in 1978 and says: <sup>7</sup>

"... Rats infested the top floor; in fact, my father who was a captain in the Home Guard at that time used to shoot the rats with his pistol – I remember them coming up holes in the wall! We did not fetch our water from a well, but from a stream at the bottom of the hill going down to the Bala road – my father put large drums outside and led a tap inside. He managed the local limestone quarry and later moved his employment to the milk factory on the Bala road."

June Lister, in her fascinating "*Life Story of May Parry Owen*", published by DOWH in our 2014 Cynwyd Scrapbook One, also tells us:

"I don't know how May met Jack Parry, but they were married and moved to Plas Uchaf .. At that time the roof leaked and it was alleged a footpath passed through the main hall".

And it was still rumoured locally that a footpath led through *Plas Uchaf* from front to back when I came to live at neighbouring Hafod y calch in 1977!

After being stripped of its Elizabethan beams and panelling in the 1960s, Plas Uchaf was left sadly derelict for ten years. But mercifully Peter Smith drew

attention to the building's historical significance and persuaded the council of Merionethshire to acquire Plas Uchaf. Eventually it was very extensively restored by The Landmark Trust, and is now let by that charity for holidays at:

<http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/search-and-book/properties/plas-uchaf-10560>



Image by Jenny Lees (2013)

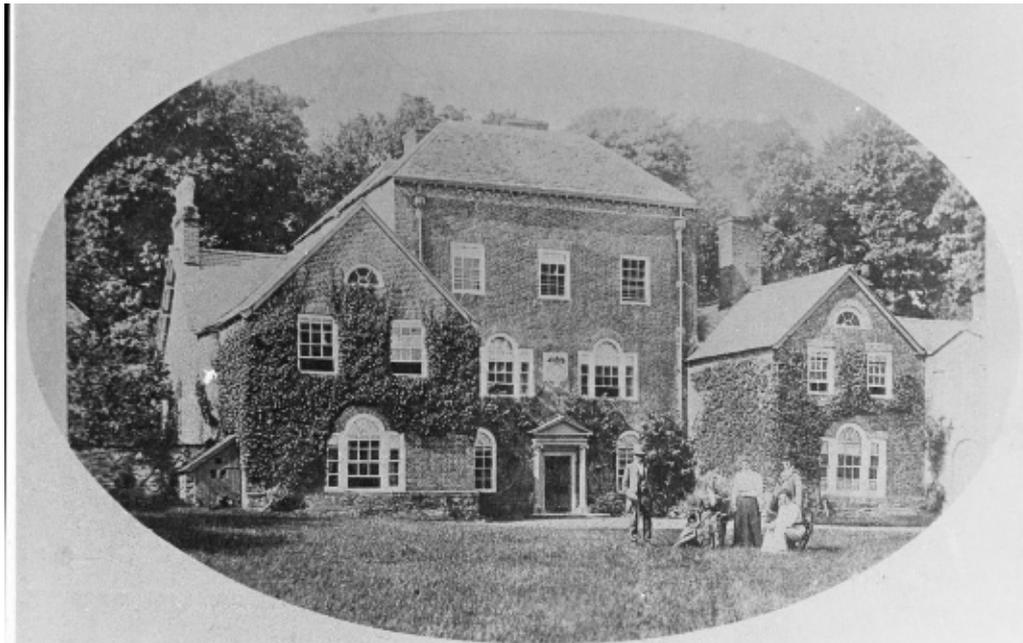
#### References

1. A.D. Carr, *The Barons of Edeyrnion, 1282-1485, Part 1*, Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society Vol.4 (1963) and Part 2 in the same journal, Vol.4 (1964).
2. For more about Cymer see Jenny Lees (2013) *Quest for Cymer Part One*, in the Clwyd Historian /Hanes Bro Clwyd, Winter 13-14, number 69, or from [leesjenny@gmail.com](mailto:leesjenny@gmail.com)
3. Trefor O. Jones (1975) *O Ferwyn I Fynyddlod*, p.21, Cymdeithas Llyfrau Meirion.
4. L. Monroe (1933) *Plas Ucha, Llangar, Merioneth*, Arch. Camb. p. 82.
5. Jenny Lees (2015) *History of Gwerclas*, in the Denbighshire section of the DOWH website: <http://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library-h/house-history.html>
6. For full details of all references see my house history *Plas Uchaf* on the DOWH website.
7. Information from The Landmark Trust's booklet *Plas Uchaf*, researched and written by Clayre Percy  
Jenny Lees

## Near Calamity at the Corwen Races!

### A true tale from Gwerclas

On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1766 Baron of Cymer Hugh Hughes Lloyd married twenty-nine year old Margaret Walmsley, heiress of *Bashall* estate in Yorkshire. They lived together in the present mansion of *Gwerclas*, built by Hugh in 1767 and shown in the image below<sup>1</sup> (believed to date from the late 1800s).



In the National Library of Wales there is a folder of original letters<sup>2</sup>, written in the 1770s by Margaret Lloyd to her close friend Elizabeth Baker, which give a fascinating picture of family life at *Gwerclas*. Elizabeth had moved from London to Dolgellau in 1770 as a partner in a Merioneth mining venture, and was befriended by the extravagant Hugh Vaughan of *Hengwrt* and *Nannau* whose relations were living at Rhûg.

The extract below provides a fascinating glimpse of Margaret`s social life in our part of North Wales. (I have maintained most of the original spelling but added modern punctuation). On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1772 Margaret confided in Elizabeth:

“How were we disappointed Mr [Hugh] Vaughan did not come to Corwen races. I hope he is perfectly recovered and will like to hear some particulars of our deviations upon the 13<sup>th</sup> ... let him suppose then Mr Lloyd of *Rhwadog* perfectly sober and conducting the whole with the utmost decency and civility.

A Ball was impossible as none of our party loved dancing, so a dinner was appointed at Corwen of 21 dishes & about as many Guests ... all the Vaughans in *Ederneon*, all the Lloyds that could be musterd - the Wallers, Miss Morris, all the Dolbins, a Mr Chamberlain and a Mr Williamson - strangers from Liverpool and Chester.

We dined at 2, set out about 3 for the race amidst a crowd of happy faces w<sup>h</sup> [which] entirely lined the road, the town, the course and the opposite Mountain and had a very good effect in point of prospect. The Starting Chair was calculated to hold many Gentlemen and Ladies who soon filled it viz. Mr Lloyd of *Rhwedig*, Mr R. Vaughan, Mr Lloyd of G [her husband], Miss Stodart, Miss Matty Owen, the little Dolbins, Lewis from Bala, many others.



Rhûg in around 1778 (from a 1781 edition of *A tour in Wales* by Thomas Pennant)

We drove our Carriages as near the Chair as possible for the convenience of seeing when a violent Crash was heard and down dropt the Chair and all its contents in one Moment! Never was Terror equal to poor Miss Vaughan`s and Mine we could see nothing. At last we re`d [received] the comfortable News that all were alive and none hurt except Mr Vaughan, who broke his hand bone in two places and drove immediately off the Course.

I offered Miss Vaughan being in my Coach to go directly to *Rug* with her, but that she opposed so we stayed to see the Cup carried off by Mr Lloyd - it had been irreparably damaged by the Fall. We came home before the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize was won by the same Gen<sup>t</sup>."

Margaret then apologised for her husband`s preoccupied behaviour! Even though they were close friends who confided each other, Margaret and Elizabeth signed their letters in a formal manner characteristic of that period:

“I do not know when Mr R. Vaughan will forgive Mr Lloyd for a most unreasonable application to him as soon as they were able to speak! Mr Lloyd of Gwerclas was reading the News [and] when the Chair fell he lost [it] among the crowd:

“Pray Mr Vaughan did you see the paper?” I leave you to imagine how he rec<sup>d</sup> [received] this enquiry and proceed to assure you I am with Esteem d<sup>r</sup>. [dear] Mad<sup>m</sup>. Y<sup>r</sup> Obliged and Humble Serv<sup>t</sup> [servant], M. Lloyd.”

We don't yet know where exactly these races were held, but local historian William Evans<sup>3</sup> has suggested the following:



Looking across the Dee to Dôl Wenith, with Caer Gerddi above (Jenny Lees)

“The Barons of Edeirnion would usually assemble in the Barony of Llangar, in *Cae`r Gerddi*, to feast and tipple when there were to be fierce horse races taking place on *Dôl Wenith*, Gwerclas. The *lawnt* in front of the barony was the “grandstand” and from there one could see the meadow and the reaches of Gwerclas as far as the river bank near to the “Crossing” today.”

**Notes:** 1. Gwerclas photograph kindly provided by Gwenda Williams (originals are in the possession of Alan White). 2. National Library of Wales, *Elizabeth Baker* 183 to 232. My original transcriptions are in my DOWH *History of Gwerclas* and I am indebted to my DOWH colleague Pam Buttrey for bringing these letters to my attention. 3. Conversation with William Evans quoted by Trefor O. Jones (1975, p15) in *O Ferwyn I Fynyddlod* (my translation from the original Welsh).  
Jenny Lees, April 2016

## Ty`n y Wern Gwnodl

In a 1766 Marriage Settlement<sup>1</sup> *Ty yn y Wern* formed part of the *Gwerclas* estate. At this time peat was burnt as fuel, and each homestead inherited the right of “cutting or digging Turf and Peate” on the moorlands of either *Berwyn* or *Mynyllod* (or occasionally from both). *Ty yn y Wern* was listed as follows:

“Messuage Tenement or Farm Ty yn y Wern Barn Stable Cowhouse and Garden. Lands Erwi Gwrinion y Byrdir Caer Birch y Wern Caer drws y Coppi Tir y pren Ucha Tir y pren issa and yr Erw. Turf and peate Mynyllod and Berwyn. Township Boteulog and pa. Gwyddelwern Was Ellis Humphreys now Edward Morris” (Almost no punctuation was included!)

By 1824 most of Gwerclas estate had been dispersed, and from about the 1870s *Ty`n y wern* was the home of the **Rees family**, whose history has been kindly shared by their descendant Gwenan Mair Roberts for the enjoyment of our readers.



Pictured above is *Ty`n y Wern* in about 1895 (Image courtesy of Gwenan). In the centre is Gwenan`s great grandfather **William Rees**, with his eldest daughter

**Lizzie** second left. (And maybe some of our readers will be able to identify the two other gentlemen in the photograph?).

William had been educated like his brothers at a school in Ruthin, and had married **Elizabeth Evans** (daughter of Robert William Evans from the *Blue Lion* in Cynwyd and Elizabeth Lloyd from Llangynhafal).

But Elizabeth sadly died in 1885 at the birth of their youngest child **Edward**, and the lady pictured beside William is his second wife Sarah (from *Ty'n Twll* near *Glanllyn*).



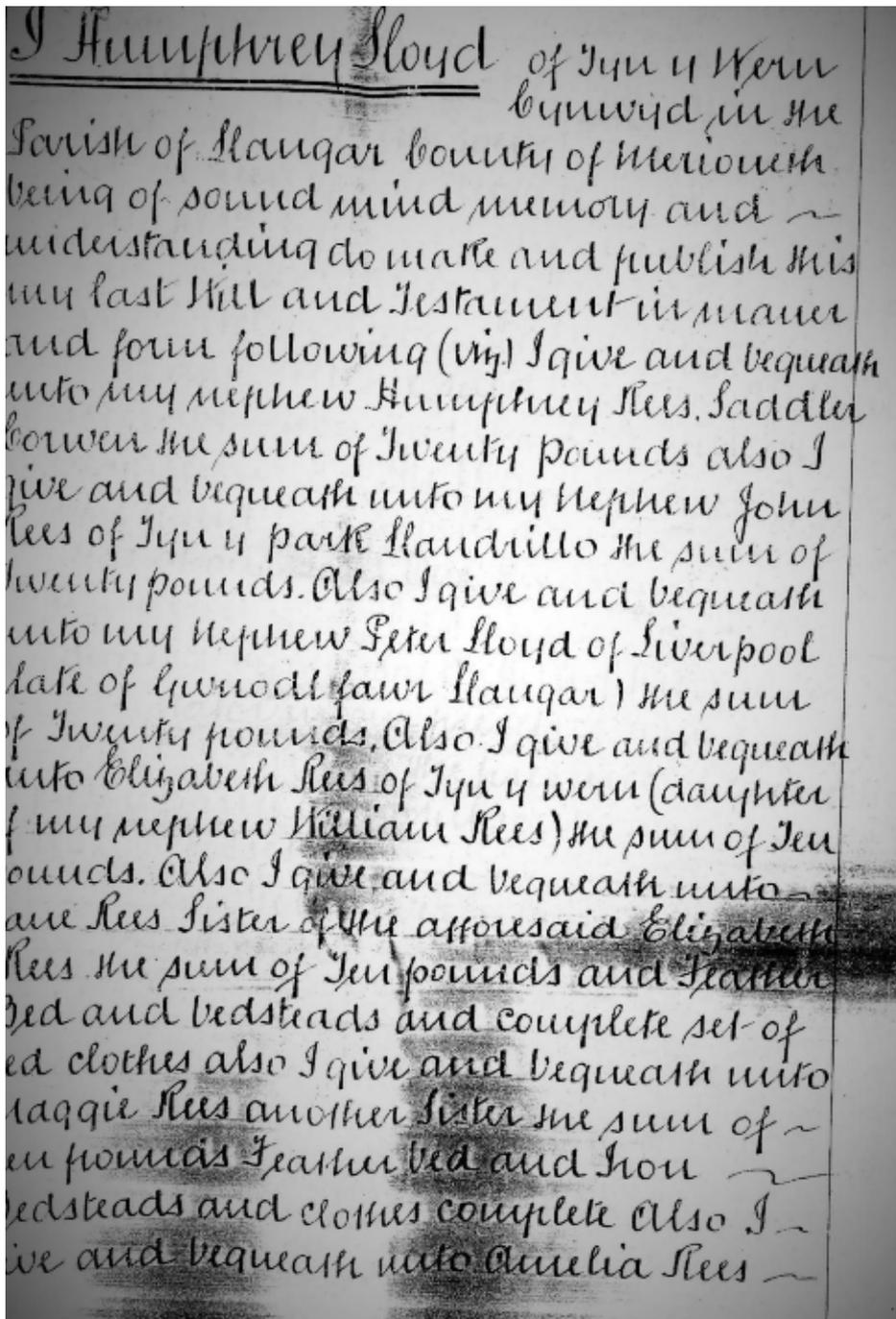
William Rees, Ty'n y wern (photograph courtesy of Gwenan Roberts)

Baby Edward was looked after by a family at *Cornel Rhedyn*, but only survived for eight months. Gwenan has been told that milk was provided for him from an aunt's farm at *Penlan Bach*.

Elizabeth and William Rees had four older children; first **Lizzie** then **Jane, Margaret and Amelia**, who are all recorded in an 1888 Llangar Parish list<sup>2</sup> of

nearly two hundred children aged 3 to 13. All four daughters received bequests in the 1900 Will of their father's uncle Humphrey Lloyd; the first page of which is reproduced below. (Humphrey had lived at *Gwnodl Fawr* but was recorded as *of Tyn y Wern* at the time of making his Will).

All the Rees girls attended school in Cynwyd before eventually going into service at different large houses. Margaret became Housekeeper with the aristocratic De L'Isle family at Penshurst Place in Kent, where she died in 1928.

A photograph of a handwritten will in cursive script. The text is written on a single page with a vertical line on the right side. The handwriting is dark ink on a light-colored paper. The will begins with the name 'Humphrey Lloyd' underlined, followed by 'of Tyn y Wern Cynwyd in the Parish of Llangar County of Merioneth'. The text continues with 'being of sound mind memory and understanding do make and publish this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following (viz) I give and bequeath unto my nephew Humphrey Rees, Saddlebowen the sum of Twenty pounds also I give and bequeath unto my nephew John Rees of Tyn y park Llandillo the sum of twenty pounds. Also I give and bequeath unto my nephew Peter Lloyd of Liverpool late of Gwnodl Fawr Llangar the sum of Twenty pounds. Also I give and bequeath unto Elizabeth Rees of Tyn y Wern (daughter of my nephew William Rees) the sum of Ten pounds. Also I give and bequeath unto Anne Rees sister of the afforsaid Elizabeth Rees the sum of Ten pounds and Feather bed and bedsteads and complete set of bed clothes also I give and bequeath unto Maggie Rees another sister the sum of Ten pounds Feather bed and Iron bedsteads and clothes complete Also I give and bequeath unto Amelia Rees ~'.

Margaret`s sister Jane, looking so elegant in Gwenan`s photograph below, was Gwenan`s grandmother. Jane first worked as a maid at Gwerclas<sup>3</sup> (where she was photographed in her uniform – see page 19 in this book), then later at the grand mansion of Wynnstay Hall<sup>4</sup> (now demolished).

In 1902 Jane married Humphrey Davies in a Cynwyd chapel and they moved to Wellington in Shropshire, where he worked as a blacksmith on the railways. But further family tragedies were to follow. Their first child, Frank, died as a baby, and in 1906 Humphrey died of tuberculosis, leaving Jane to return home to *Tyn y Wern* with their second son, William.



Times then were hard, so the family took in summer visitors to help make ends meet. Jane`s father William died in 1909, but happily Jane was married again to John Williams of *Ty Nant, Caletwr*, near Llandderfel. The family farmed *Tyn y*

*Wern* and Gwenan`s mother Elizabeth was born in 1914, followed by brother Francis in about 1917.

Jane died in about 1942, before Gwenan was born, but a member of Gwenan`s family can remember Jane being carried on a bier by horse and cart to the chapel in Cynwyd, before being laid to rest in the churchyard.

Her son Willam eventually settled at *Blaen Gwnodl Uchaf* (becoming father of Professor Robert Rees Davies (see article *Our Finest Medieval Historian* in this book) while Gwenan`s uncle Francis remained at *Tyn y Wern* until the 1990s.



*Tyn y Wern* in about 1910 – but who are they all? (Image courtesy of Gwenan Roberts)

Francis Williams became a well- known local character, driving in his tractor to shop in Cynwyd until he acquired a small white van. Visiting her uncle`s home as a child, Gwenan was fascinated by his shire horses working on the farm. She enjoyed feeding them in the stables and remembers when he purchased his first tractor - a grey Ferguson one!

Francis was very interested in nature, and knew the names of all the different species of apples, pears and plums that he cultivated. His water supply came from a well in his orchard, which tended to run dry in the summer months. Francis was the last member of the Rees family to live at *Tyn y Wern*, and after his death the farm became home to Endaf and Jane Owen, who live there today with their children Dafydd and Catrin.



Undated image of *Tyn y Wern*, thought to depict Francis as a teenager (courtesy of Gwenan)

1. 1766 Marriage Settlement of Hugh Hughes Lloyd of Gwerclas and his future wife Margaret Walmesley (DD/GA/652 at Ruthin archives).
2. Handwritten document belonging to Gwenan Roberts.
3. Jenny Lees (2015) *History of Gwerclas*, on DOWH website.
4. Information from an early postcard belonging to Gwenan's family J.L.

## Confidences of an Eighteenth Century Baroness: Part One

One of my most exciting discoveries while researching local history was the folder of original letters from Margaret Lloyd, Baroness of Cymer at *Gwerclas*, to her close friend Elizabeth Baker<sup>1</sup>. And I never cease to feel amazed that they were written in the 1770s by someone living “next door” to my own home!



The façade of the house at Gwerclas built by Hugh Hughes Lloyd in 1767

Margaret’s letters cover topics ranging from accounts of high society life to details of farming practices and schemes to help the poor. In my transcripts below I have kept Margaret’s eighteenth century wording, but added some modern punctuation and spelling to make them easier to read.

### High Society

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1775 Margaret told Elizabeth that Mr Vaughan had embellished her country house party table for a whole week:

“in the most princely Manner with every delicacy The Season could produce, giving life of Joy at the same time to a full Party of Mixed Company of friends that I sincerely love and I believe I am beloved by - every one of which lamented his departure”.

Two of these guests had left *Gwerclas* at five that morning - was the Simon mentioned below a coachman employed by the family?

“Simon is just returned from Conducting the Major and Mrs Peacock as far as *Llanrwst*, they have four light bays well run in the Chaise as far as that Town.”

That July Margaret wrote of her husband: “My Lord and Master sitting like an Indian King at the quadrille table has commanded me to write to you under Pain of his royal displeasure ... we dine at *Nantclwyd* tomorrow to meet Major Myddleton and his Lady”.

Despite the elegant entertainment at *Gwerclas*, Margaret presented herself modestly to Elizabeth as a “country” woman, and sometimes shared her dreams on paper. After her Aunt Turk’s son developed a prosperous career and went to live in the Strand, Margaret fantasised about herself and Elizabeth visiting “this delightful place London,” and enjoying a sumptuous ball such as that given by the French Ambassador.



1774 painting by Louis Rollard Trinquesse illustrating extravagant period costume

She described this as “the most expensive and elegant entertainment ever seen in this Kingdom,” and her quotes below from a letter she’d just received in February 1773 seem to bear this out!

“Part of the Supper came ready prepared from Paris. The whole inside of the Home was made to represent a Beautiful Garden; the Stairs by some Wonderful contrivance were made to look like a Gravel Walk and the ascent quite easy from the Street to the upper apartments. On each side ... set very thick with Rose trees and other sweet shrubs; the Production of a hothouse ... The Ball cost at least £2,000 and the Ambassador is likely to return home with an empty Purse.”

Apparently that sum of money in 1773 would be worth about £276,000 today!

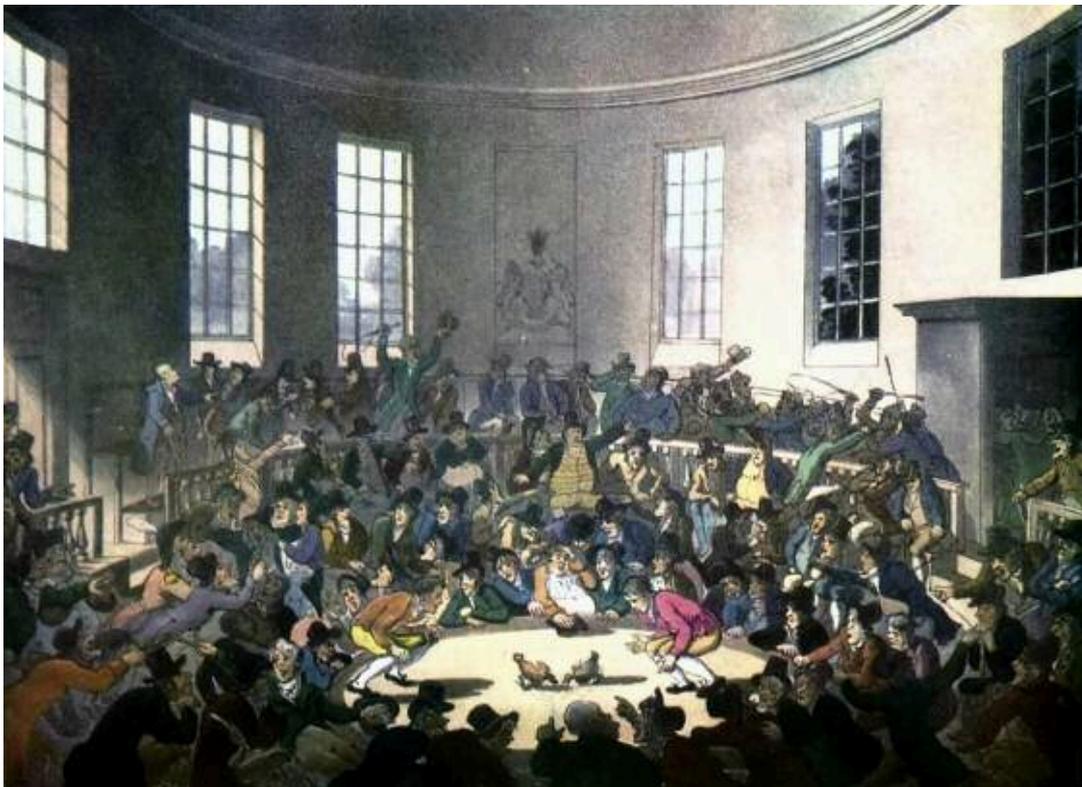


Servants were essential to Margaret’s life at *Gwerclas*. We don’t of course have any photographs dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the image above was kindly provided by Gwenan Roberts. Gwenan’s grandmother Jane Rees, who was born in about 1870, was a servant at *Gwerclas* and is photographed here in her

uniform - on the porch of the actual house built by Margaret's husband Hugh Hughes Lloyd.

However, Margaret did not aspire to excessive grandeur! When offered a servant who had been under-butler at *Peniarth*, she wrote that they would "be content with a plain honest young man ... possessing sobriety and common sense," and wanted "only a Waiter without the pompous name of Butler."

The article *Near Calamity at the Corwen Races* (in this book) gives a flavour of sporting life in that period, and in July 1775 Margaret also sent congratulations to Mr Vaughan on "so complete a victory ... in the bird fights." Could this have meant anything other than cock fighting? This sport is now of course considered very cruel, but it was both legal and popular among all social classes in Britain until around the mid-nineteenth century.



Cockfighting in London around 1808: depicted by Thomas Rowlandson and A.C. Pugin

But even life at *Gwerclas* could sometimes be dull! In September of 1775 Margaret talked of "The Season"; saying that parties were retiring to their winter habitation and that there were now: "Only 7 at dinner ... They have left us with nothing but rain and politics to amuse us."

And in October 1773 she wrote: "If I appear uncommonly dull impute it to the weather - it rains and I have just set off in a Chaise and Four ..."

## Helping my poor neighbours

Margaret was always very concerned to help those less fortunate than herself. On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1774 she confided:

“I shall be happy to be instrumental in promoting the welfare of a County wherein I have been so graciously received. My obligations are as great to the lowest rank as the highest and I respect them accordingly.”

Of particular concern to Margaret was a spinning scheme which she had devised in collaboration with Elizabeth Baker. On April 12<sup>th</sup> she wrote to Elizabeth, who was living at *Hengwrt* near Dolgellau:

“My difficulties are greatly lessened by Mr Lloyd’s [her husband’s] permission to act as I please in the Spinning scheme – it was ever my wish to employ the people and pay them ready money for their work without bothering my friends ....

I have his leave to prosecute my scheme in any way I best approve of and if I meet with success I hope my poor Neighbours will be greatly benefitted thereby.”



Above is a detail from a bedspread belonging to Gwenan Roberts and woven in Cynwyd. Its date of manufacture is not known, but apparently carding engines and spinning jennies were not introduced to Merioneth before around 1803, with mills being established in Cynwyd at *Princes Yard* in 1810 and *Tai Newyddion* in 1817.<sup>2</sup> Margaret’s scheme began in the 1770s, before such mills were established here. She arranged for spinning to be done locally and visited Chester in person to negotiate with weavers, writing to Elizabeth in May 1774 that her scheme was intended for poor children:

“who at six year old are set to spin Jersey or Cotton in England - and I have no Idea that so Heavy a Machine as a Wool wheel is fit to employ the tender arm of an infant.”

## **A very personal interest in farming**

In February 1773 Margaret wrote to Elizabeth:

“I tell you how large my expectations are respecting our Farm & Mill. The Latter is going to be much improved by the addition of a fine Flour Mill. My Little Family are Pregnant [I think she meant the pigs!] but my Ducks and fowl do not lay yet. I met with a Vast disappointment at first; the Boar was sick and confined to some [?] weeds.

I had another disappointment, but by no means equal to the first. I had two guinea fowls both of the same Sex, and upon complaining of this a friend assisted me with another. Whether this Mistake has formed a Trio or Triumvirate I know not; I apprehend the Latter as they have not laid any Eggs this 2 years!”



Red kite: from a photo by Arturo de Frias Marques

Interestingly, she also mentioned kites:

“There is two huge Kites which prevent my Pigeons from enjoying any Comfort abroad and there is a Number of Crows which are come to meet the Lambs.”

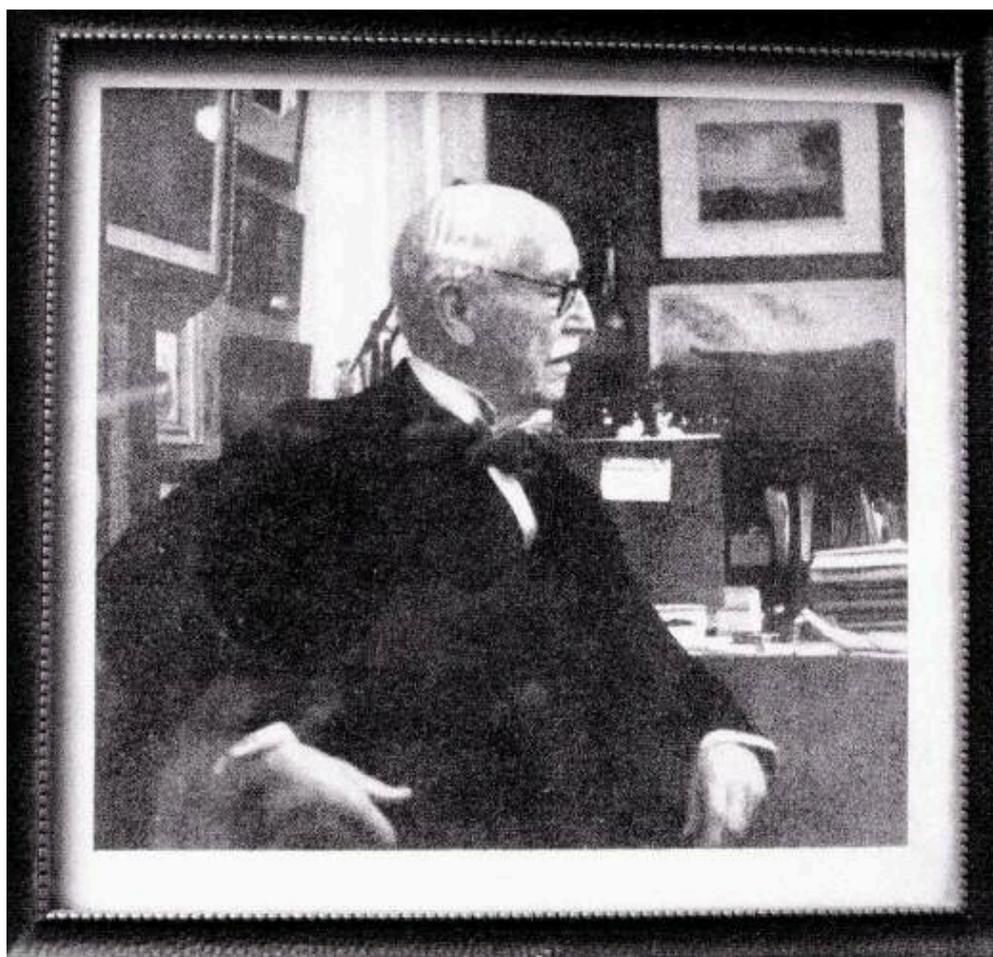
Although red kites became almost extinct in Britain at one point, they are now recovering - and soaring magnificently once again above the fields of Gwerclas!

## References

1.National Library of Wales, *Elizabeth Baker* 183 to 232 (I am indebted to my DOWH colleague Pam Buttrey for bringing these letters to my attention). 2.Referenced in Trefor O. Jones, *O Ferwyn I Fynyddlod*, 1975, p.108. Jenny Lees September 2016

## William Ferguson Irvine – an unsung hero

Probably many of those reading this will have heard of the tragic deaths on Everest in 1924 of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine - known to his family as Sandy. But far fewer people may realise that Sandy's father, William Ferguson Irvine, was a historian who left a treasure trove of information about our local area.



W.F Irvine in his study at *Bryn Llwyn* on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan.1959, his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday (courtesy of Jenny Irvine)

William moved from Birkenhead to *Bryn Llwyn*, just outside the village of Cynwyd, in around 1927, and lived there until his death in 1962. On coming to live at *Hafod y calch* I used to gaze at that elegant white house across the valley, but it was many more years before I discovered William's fascinating research.

Much of it is contained in the *William Ferguson Irvine Collection of Llangar and Edeirnion papers*.<sup>1</sup> This amazing kaleidoscope of often handwritten historical gems includes late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate maps for local properties including *Hafod y afr*, *Bryntirion* and *Hên Dû*; an article on the Royal visit to

Palé in 1889; a photograph of a Roman bust found at two demolished cottages in Corwen, and hundreds more individual items!

William was a meticulous scholar and his collection includes transcriptions from the Latin of items from early British Museum manuscripts. But he was also keen to share the fruits of his findings with the local community, and published many articles in the paper *Yr Adsain*. These include *The Smale Village of Corwen in 1480* and *Rug and its inhabitants 650 years ago*.



Bryn Llwyn viewed from Hafod y calch. Tynllwyn lies just above to the right and above the forestry is the *ffridd* of Berwyn mountain (Jenny Lees, May 2015)

One of William's 1942 *Yr Adsain* articles, *Llangar Parish Register 1720-48*, includes intriguing extracts from the register kept by the Rev. Edward Samuel, Rector of *Llangar*. As William commented, despite Rev. Samuel having been criticised by the Rural Dean, his personal comments:

“at least show that Mr Samuel took some interest in his parishioners, raising the record above the level of the ordinary parish register with its bare recitals of dates of births, deaths and marriages.”

Edward Samuel gives his opinion of the personalities of some of his parishioners; saying of Elisha Humffreys of *Siamber Wen*, buried on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1744 aged 77:

“I believe he was the Devoutest man in this Parish and I am sure the most Constant Communicant.”

And sometimes we hear of tragic deaths:

1736, July: Lewis Humffrey, weaver, of *Rhiwaedog*, “was drown`d in Dee near Crogen and found 9 days after swimming like a Cork towards Corwen Bridge”.

It would certainly be interesting to know what methods were employed by Thomas Evans, the County Coroner buried on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1742-3, who:

“was called Doctor and had some skill in Physick but particularly in restoring Madmen to their Senses; which he was generally successful in.”

William Irvine wrote elsewhere <sup>2</sup> of how the mentally ill were once treated, telling us that beside the old ruined homestead of *Tan-y-Graig* (above the road from Corwen to Cynwyd and not far from his home) stood:

“a desolate barn-like building with no windows, but, instead, open slits to let in the air high up just under the eaves. The doleful place called Bedlam was for nearly two hundred years the Lunatic Asylum for this district, where the poor, demented creatures who, in former days, were looked upon not only as unworthy of pity, but actually deserving of punishment, were imprisoned without light, almost without air.”

Edward Samuel`s son of the same name became Rector in 1748 and continued his father`s informative tradition; recording in 1750 that Mary Ellis of Cynwyd, daughter of “weaver, Poet and Antiquarian” Ellis Edward, died of smallpox. Sadly, we know from Llangar Parish Records that quite a number of other children died from smallpox during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Another of William`s articles, “*Corwen in 1730*”, reproduces the following extremely curious account (my emphasis added in bold type):

“The Rector and Vicar have Glebe land (the Rector`s Glebe is continuous in one land and let at 1-8s.00, the Vicar has small scattered quilllets); but neither has a house or the traces or marks of any building whatever. They are said to have a house each; **the Rector`s was carried off by the River Dee (or by the family of Rug;** the Rector`s share of the Tythes was for a long time in their hands and the house they **transplanted to Rug**) and the Vicar has only the dark witness of a Potato Garden now remaining.”

In 2000 I heard from a friend that there had been an exciting find at *Bryn Llwyn* of papers belonging to William Irvine, and 2001 I was excited to also discover the book<sup>3</sup> *Fearless on Everest: The Quest for Sandy Irvine*, by William`s great-granddaughter, Julie Summers. This gives a brilliant account not only of Sandy`s own life and the Everest expedition, but also of his family - providing impressions of William Irvine himself as a personality, not just a researcher.

Known as Willie to his family and friends, William was born in 1869. Although he worked in business prior to retirement, William had a longstanding interest

in local history. He published *Notes on the Parish Churches of Wirral* in 1901, and also a number of works on Wirral, Cheshire and Lancashire history before moving to *Bryn Llwyn* after Sandy died.

Later still, in early 2016, I was delighted to be introduced by a friend to Jenny and Julia, the daughters of Sandy's younger brother Alec Irvine. Jenny very kindly sent me a copy of a notebook which had been written specially for her as a child, in October 1969, by local historian William Evans. He lived at *Tyn berth* cottage and was apparently employed as a gardener at *Bryn Llwyn* even before William Irvine moved there in the 1920s, continuing employment after the family arrived.

William Evans's memories make fascinating reading, and I have reproduced actual excerpts from his notebook below, adding my own notes (in square brackets) that are based on subsequent research by my DOWH colleagues:



William Evans and his wife Anne Jane with their godson Elwyn (Image courtesy of Elwyn)

### THE HISTORY OF BRYNLLWYN by William Evans

“... In the olden days Tynllwyn was more or less a small farmhouse, the woodshed was the cowshed, and the floor of this shed is covered with flagstones. [*We now know from dendrodating that the house's oldest timbers*

were felled in winter 1537- 8<sup>4</sup>]. There was a lofft above, where they kept hay for the cattle. The remains of this is still to be seen, and the opening in the wall can be seen closed up on the outer wall facing the woods. In the early days the only water supply came from a well about a hundred yards from the front door of the Cottage, alongside the path in the wood, on the right hand side, just below the tank which is higher up, and which is now called the Slate tank. It was Mr Monckton that built it [*Charles Monckton bought Tynllwyn in 1918*<sup>4</sup>] and the overflow was feeding the well. No water was laid on in the Cottage until Mr Irvine bought it.

“It was Mr Monckton that built the new part to the Cottage, which they called the Sun Parlour, it was completed in the year 1919 .... I personally remember a great many families during the last 50 years.

“Tynllwyn was sold to Mr Dutton [*a wool draper*<sup>4</sup>] of Chester who built Brynllwyn [*the present house of this name*] in 1850. The hill on which it stands was called Grove Hill, and the House was called the Grove. Dr G. Collins was buried from here in 1862 and is buried in Cynwyd Churchyard. On the bank in front of the house there was a hut, and it is recorded that in the lofft of this hut, that Dr Collins died by committing suicide.

“In 1862 after the death of Dr Collins, a Miss Jones of Plas Isaf came here to live, and it was her who named the house Tynllwyn. Also residing at the house with Miss Jones was a Mr Taylor, or Captain Mascie Taylor and it is believed that he planted the woods behind Brynllwyn. [*Robert Mascie Taylor bought Tyn Llwyn in 1868 and was an Adjutant and Captain in the Royal Merioneth Militia before becoming a JP in 1866.*<sup>4</sup> *He is named in the 1871 census for Ty'n Llwyn, which does not mention Brynllwyn, so maybe Miss Jones lived at the “cottage”?*].

“... also there is a Water Tap and a drinking trough attached, for the horses, situated opposite the Old National School, which was built in 1864. Miss Jones was very kind and generous to the local people who lived here, and it was chiefly due to her, that this school was built, and also that Cynwyd Church was decorated. She gave the East Window, Captain Taylor also did a lot of work, especially the carved ledge around the church inside. Also Miss Jones opened Cocoa Rooms in the village, to provide for the children of the National School, and also paid the teacher's salary. In the summer she entertained the children of the village to tea at Brynllwyn, and sports were held in the Park.



Cynwyd's parish church, St John the Evangelist, in 1875

“After Miss Jones and Captain Taylor, Tynllwyn was bought by a gentleman called Mr Wayne and he changed the name from Tynllwyn to Brynllwyn.”  
[*Robert Sewallis Wayne, a Cambridge graduate and retired barrister, was living in Bryn Llwyn at the time of the 1901 census –the first time the property was recorded as Bryn Llwyn. Tyn Llwyn Cottage was recorded as empty in the 1891 census; it was sold by the Irvine family in 1977 and subsequently renovated by Mr & Mrs Crewe<sup>4</sup>.*]

“It was Mr Wayne who built the Lodge. He kept a Carriage and Pair and he built the Garage especially for the Carriage, which resembled an open Landau. He also kept three beautiful Bay Horses, with Mr Hill as coachman. He lived at the Lodge. Mr Wayne was Chaiman of the Magistrates Court in Corwen for many years, and when the courts were held, it was a treat to see the beautiful turn out with the Carriage and Pair. There were no cars in those days; the first car that went through Cynwyd was in 1903, it belonged to the late Sir H. B. Robertson of Pale Hall, Llanderfel, and all the school children with the teachers and Head Master assembled on the square to see it. [*FF was the registration for Merionethshire*].

“The woods behind Brynllwyn have several paths, and these were kept in perfect order in Mr Wayne's time. The old Coachman of the name John Evans, who was coachman to Miss Jones was employed by Mr Wayne to look after the paths and keep them in order, he was 90 years of age when he died, after being at Brynllwyn for many years. The resting seats, made of stones are still there.

These were for the ladies, and the visitors to rest, as some of the paths are rather steep. Above the back yard there is a bell of a similar type to a school bell. This was for calling the ladies and visitors down from the moors above the wood at meal times. This can be heard from a very long distance. It was there when Mr Wayne came to Brynllwyn.

“Mr and Mrs Wayne left Brynllwyn in 1912-13 and went to live to Bath, leaving it to his youngest daughter and son-in-law Mr & Mrs Charles Monckton, who were at that time living in Sussex. Mr Monckton was a Market Gardener on a rather big scale, with acres of land and several large greenhouses. When war broke out in 1914 his key men had to join the army, depriving him of his experienced men, and [*he*] had to sell the business to come and live at Brynllwyn, but before they came, the house was let to Mr & Mrs Crowe. Mr Crowe was a Fruit Merchant in Liverpool, and travelled each day backwards and forwards by train from Cynwyd. They had two sons. They kept a donkey and a small cart for their own transport, and every night Mrs Crowe went to meet her husband at 8 o’clock to bring him home in great style. Mrs Crowe was an actress.

“After they left, the house was let again, to a man called E. Bernard Jones and his wife and two children, but they were not there very long before they moved again to Manchester, and Mr & Mrs Monckton came here to live permanently. It was Mr Monckton that made the orchard behind the Lodge. During the 1914-1918 war, many of the farm hands had to join the army, and to replace them they brought German Prisoners for the farmers to hire them to do the work. In Cynwyd National School there were about 20 or more billeted here, to be hired out on a cheap scale, and it was these prisoners that cultivated and fenced out the orchard. Mr Monckton hired them for so many hours per day at 10d an hour with a Sergeant in charge. They dug out big boulders of stone, and trenched the land two feet deep, and [*the orchard*] was planted with fruit trees. Down the centre from top to bottom, there is a stone path, with flags of flat stones about 3 ft wide, also right across the middle a similar path is laid. The gate at the entrance to the orchard was made by one of the German Prisoners and is there still.

“Mr & Mrs Monckton went to live at the Cottage and let the house to Rev E. Garner and his wife and 3 children. They brought their own furniture, and they took over the big garden. They stayed for 6 months, but unfortunately they could not afford to carry on, and were in great arrears, so all the furniture went

on sale to recover the money, and all the family left for Prestatyn, it was a very sad affair. The last to live at the house, before it was sold to Mr Irvine, were Col & Mrs Johnson, who later went to live at Bala. They took the house and the big garden for nearly a year. There was no electricity, nor central heating at that time and no telephone, so they left before the winter as the house was so cold.

“It was in May 1924 when Col Johnson was at Brynllwyn, that a cloudburst occurred in the Berwyn Mountains, somewhere above Brynllwyn. It happened on a Sunday evening and by Monday morning all the front rooms of Brynllwyn were covered with water and mud about 3 inches thick. It came past the Cottage in [a] torrent and as the steps going to the backyard were quite opposite the back door, the water turned down the steps and in through the back door, along the passage, and into the front rooms. All the carpets were spoiled and it took some time to get the mess cleared. The same happened in the village of Cynwyd when the water came rushing down the village while people were in Chapel, and most of the houses were also flooded.

“I should have mentioned that before Col & Mrs Johnson took over Brynllwyn, Mr & Mrs Glazebrook [*from*] the Lydiate, Neston, Wirral, took it over for two months during the Grouse Shooting, from August to the end of September. They took over Rûg Moors, also Henfaes Moors from Col Vaughan Wynn of Rûg - so in 1925 Brynllwyn was sold to Mr Irvine”. [*The sale may actually have been in 1927*<sup>4</sup>]

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1. *William Ferguson Irvine Collection of Llangar and Edeirnion papers*, Meirionnydd Record Office (part of Gwynedd county archives at Dolgellau, Z/M/344/ 16-18).

2. Quoted in T.O.Jones (1975) p.145

3. *Fearless on Everest: The Quest for Sandy Irvine* (2000) by Julie Summers.

4. History of Tŷ YN Y LLWYN by Janice Dale and Pam Buttrey (2012)

<http://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library-h/house-history.html>

Jenny Lees, October 2016

(Personal recollections of William Evans, local historian, by Elwyn Ashford Jones, will be published in Cynwyd Scrapbook Three)

## Brave local pioneers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century!

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It is believed that by the 1770`s, before Methodist chapels were established in *Llandrillo*, *Cynwyd* and *Glanrafon*, worshippers used to meet on the hill of *Mynydd Mynyllod* <sup>1</sup>.

They are said to have met first <sup>2</sup> in a *caban un-nos* (hut built overnight), but this was overturned by three men from the parish with the excuse that the gathering disturbed the sheep! Prayers and preaching continued at *Gaerwen*, shown in my picture below in its very rural location on *Mynyllod*. The farmhouse now sadly lies in ruins, but its farm buildings remain.



The last part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Merioneth saw severe persecution of non-conformists by supporters of the traditional church. By around 1798 <sup>3</sup> Methodist meetings were being held in the house of Richard White of *Bodheulog Fawr*. But the parson of *Llangar* complained to the local squire about Richard`s religious activities, and when made to choose between keeping his tenancy and practising Methodism, Richard chose to follow his faith. <sup>1</sup>

Below is present day *Bodheulog*, quite high above the village of *Cynwyd* on the way to *Mynyllod* but some distance below *Gaerwen*. An older dwelling was

apparently situated on the plateau where the modern farm buildings lie, across the lane from the present house. (Image by Jenny Lees)



After losing his tenancy, Richard White moved to another farm in Corwen, thought to be the Harp<sup>2</sup>. He let out the public house attached to it except for a room where preaching took place,<sup>4</sup> and worked the land himself.

But religious retribution also occurred when Thomas Charles, the famous Welsh Calvinistic Methodist based in Bala, was invited to Corwen<sup>1</sup>. When he preached in the house of saddler Sion Cadwallader, persecutors threatened to pull Sion`s house down if Thomas did not come out! And when Thomas did emerge, his coat was torn off and a tooth knocked out as he was chased along the *Dolau Gleision* meadows!

After Richard White left Cynwyd, the Methodists continued to meet in *Ty Du* barn and various local houses until numbers swelled enough to support their first chapel. This was on part of a field called *Bryn Rhûg*, bought in 1807<sup>2</sup> from Thomas Jones of *Hafod Bleddyn*. Two further chapels followed and the fourth, *Eglwys Bethel Cynwyd*, has stood proudly in the village since 1896.



Statue of Thomas Charles (1755-1814) in Bala (Image by Jenny Lees)

T.O. Jones<sup>5</sup> in his invaluable book *O Ferwyn I Fynyllod* recounts a fascinating tale. A big race was to be held on a Sunday on *Ddôl Wenith* (a Gwerclas field), and John Williams<sup>6</sup> of *Llecheiddior* came to Corwen on the Saturday night expressly to preach against it - promising the wrath of God on people who dared to hold such events on God's day!

All the horses were ready in place, but as a crowd gathered to revel at the nearby tavern of *Stamp* before the races a terrible thunder storm broke. Lightning flashed through the chimney, nearly killing a number of the occupants, and everyone fled outside fearing the wrath of God was upon them. And apparently the race never took place that Sunday!

1. *The History of Methodism in Eastern Merioneth* in the *William Ferguson Irvine Collection* at Meirionnydd Record Office (Z/M/344).
2. *History of Eglwys Bethel Cynwyd* by Elwyn Puw Jones, in the chapel's centenary publication for 1896 -1996.
3. *Methodistiaeth Cymru* Vol.1.
4. From the memories of Richard White's grandson, John White of Tregairiog, quoted in *The History of Methodism in Eastern Merioneth*.
5. T. O. Jones (1975, p16) references the account of the storm as *Gwêl, Rhif 8*.
6. John Williams (1768 -1825) had emigrated to the USA by 1795:  
<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-WILL-JOH-1768.html>

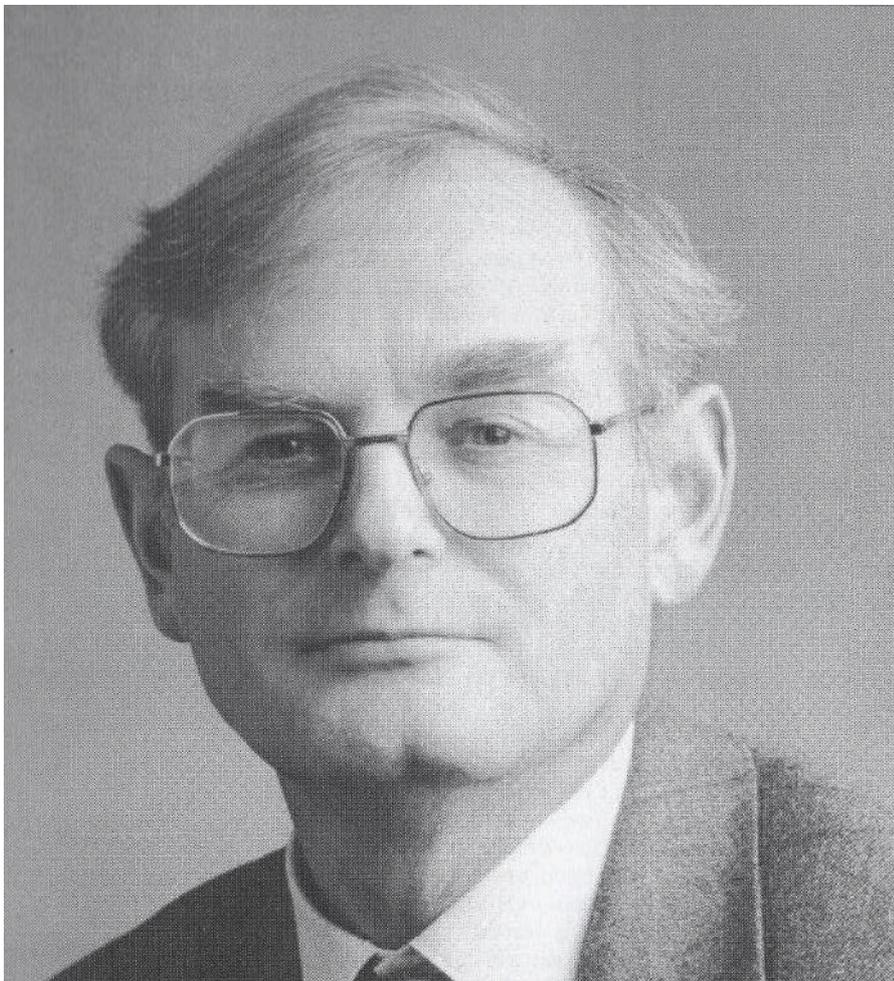
### **Acknowledgement**

I am extremely grateful to Elwyn Ashford Jones for his inspiration, information about the history of Methodism and help with translation from the Welsh documents.

Jenny Lees, August 2016

## **Our finest Medieval Historian – Professor Sir Rees Davies**

Robert Rees Davies, who wrote the introduction to Trefor O. Jones' 1975 book *O Ferwyn i Fynyllod*, was born in 1938 at *Glanddwynant, Caletwr* (near Llandderfel). He was the youngest of the four sons of William Edward Davies and his wife Sarah Margaret (née Williams), and lived from the age of three on the hill farm of *Blaengwnodl Uchaf*. Rees was educated in Cynwyd and Bala before gaining a First in History from University College London, followed by graduate study at Oxford. By 1976 Rees was Professor of History at Aberystwyth, and in 1995 he was made Chichele Professor of Medieval History at Oxford University<sup>1</sup>.



Rees sadly passed away on 16 May 2005 after making an invaluable contribution to both historical knowledge and society. He was knighted in 2005 and his obituary tells us he was:

“One of the foremost of the historians who, during the last half-century, transformed the scholarly study of medieval Britain ... His upbringing in a family and neighbourhood in which Welsh was the natural and often the only mode of expression endowed him with numerous qualities, not least a prodigious capacity for hard work, an acute sensitivity to the landscape and culture of a rural society and a profound awareness of the hardships endured by those who wrested a living from the soils and pastures of the Welsh uplands. Combined with a rigorous and perceptive intellect, a sophisticated and urbane command of English prose style and a piquant wit, these attributes would produce a scholar and teacher of outstanding calibre and extraordinary achievement.”<sup>2</sup>

Rees published extensively in both English and Welsh, with his works including *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (2000), and his ground-breaking *The Revolt of Owain Glyndwr* (1995).

In addition to his academic achievements, Rees served history with distinction in a multitude of other roles. These included being President of the Royal Historical Society 1992-96; President of the Association of History Teachers of Wales from 1994, and Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales from 1995. He was also a much loved member of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society, being its President for the ten years preceding his death.

Rees never forgot his home country. In the preface to *Owain Glyn Dwr: Trwy Ras Duw; Tywysog Cymru* (2002) he wrote that it was a privilege to be born and bred in Owain Glyn Dwr country, and that in a way the volume was a very small repayment for the rich inheritance he received while living in that community. Rees's widow Carys now lives in Aberystwyth, while his daughter Manon and son Prys both work in Cardiff. His family should be tremendously proud of a man who contributed so much of enduring value to our world!

1. Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society, 2005, Volume XIV, part IV (277-281). 2. The Independent newspaper, 23 May 2005, obituary by J. Beverley Smith and Llinos Beverley Smith.

Jenny Lees, October 2016

## Blue Lion Memories

My earliest memories of visiting Cynwyd's packed taverns, in around 1977, are of Welsh singing in splendid four part harmony. There was no doubt that the village pubs were then the hub of the community!

Thirty years or more later, on joining the committee of our local historical society, I was impressed by my colleague Stan Booth's inexhaustible fund of knowledge. I knew he'd been a schoolteacher, but was amazed to learn that he and his wife Betty had also once run the Blue Lion!



The *Llew Glas* or Blue Lion in Cynwyd (Image by Jenny Lees)

We know the names of at least twelve of Cynwyd's former taverns,<sup>1</sup> with only the *Blue Lion* and the *Prince of Wales* remaining as public houses today. The Lion is an elegant Grade 2 Listed building thought to be of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century origin.<sup>2</sup> Its windows to the right of the picture above have distinctive small diamond-paned glazing, while those to the left have metal-framed casements similar to those on the Victorian part of *Hafod y calch* (both buildings having been owned at one time by *Rhug* estate).

On the far left one can also see the cambered carriage arch of the Lion's former coach-house and stable range. Interestingly, the 1891 census for Llangar lists

the *Head* of the Blue Lion John W. Jones as *Publican and farmer*, and a 1914 tenancy agreement<sup>3</sup> with him is for *lands called Lion lands, Cynwyd*.

Stan Booth, born Richard Stanley, sadly passed away on the nineteenth of December last year at the age of 93, but this autumn Betty Booth kindly agreed to share with us her memories of their life at the historic village inn. Like many of the best ventures in life, Stan and Betty's acquisition of the Blue Lion was apparently a surprise - even to themselves! Stan had been teaching in Liverpool and Betty working in the jewellery business there, but in around 1961 the couple were spending time at the ancient dwelling of *Henfaes issa*, bordering the *ffridd* high above Cynwyd village.



A former resident, Elizabeth Rees, daughter of Robert William Evans from the *Blue Lion* and Elizabeth Lloyd from Llangynhafal. She married William Rees of *Tyn y Wern* but died in childbirth in 1885. (Image courtesy of Gwenan Roberts)

Until Stan installed water at *Henfaes*, he and Betty had to access a neighbouring supply in a field for all their requirements. One day, having put down a bar of soap that was being used for washing, they were surprised to find a cow

munching away at it! At that time the Blue Lion was run by a couple called Alf and Kitty, who subsequently emigrated to Australia. One evening, when Betty and Stan were relaxing at the pub, Alf invited them to stay for supper and asked if they could take on his dog. Somehow the evening resulted in the Booths acquiring not only a dog, but also a pub!

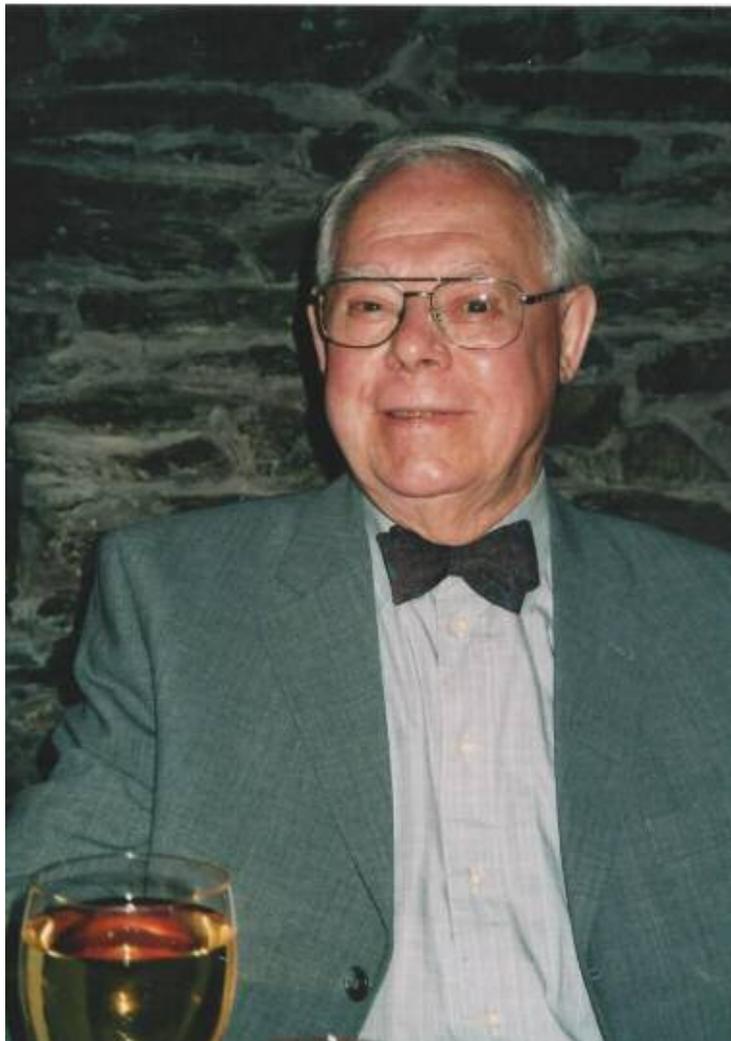
From medieval times, or even earlier, drovers have passed through Cynwyd. Indeed, by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century it was a place of considerable importance and had become the centre of the whole commote of Edeyrnion.<sup>4</sup> The village taverns provided accommodation and grazing for the drovers who took huge herds of beasts from Wales towards England, with one of their drove routes leading down from Mynydd Mynyllod<sup>5</sup>.



Cynwyd village viewed from lower slopes of the Berwyn (date uncertain)

When the Booths took over the Blue Lion there were still drovers of a kind – but now they shepherded trailers instead of livestock! Betty remembers the drivers from Scotland who used to collect trailers from Ifor Williams. Arriving at the Lion in the evening, they would set off again by three the next morning – breakfasting on sandwiches she'd left for them and leaving a supply of Scotch.

At times of crisis the pub became something of an emergency headquarters. In the great summer drought of 1976 fire services from all over North Wales, and then the Army, struggled for over six weeks to save the forest and houses above *Cynwyd* from a raging fire on the Berwyn. The army were camped in the Lion's car park, sleeping on the ground. Mrs Myfanwy Page - who at 97 Betty says is now the oldest person in the village - did a splendid job helping out the Booths - and extra beer had to be fetched all the way from *Rhuddlan* when the barrels began to run dry.



Stan Booth (Image courtesy of Betty Booth)

On another occasion, when a group of boys doing their Duke of Edinburgh Awards were lost on the Berwyn and darkness had fallen, Betty was asked by the police to stay open in order to answer any phone calls. Betty and Stan ran the pub for nine years, from around 1968 to 1977. At first Stan was still teaching during the daytime at Hope, so Betty learnt to tap the barrels and “held the fort”. Actually she still holds the fort at *Bryn Llwyn Lodge* - despite being

over ninety, Betty insisted on waiting on me with coffee and delicious cakes while she recounted these tales!

So it was no surprise to hear how well-respected a landlady Betty proved to be. Bad language was definitely not permitted! Dogs were – but only well behaved dogs that sat quietly beside their owners. Betty particularly remembers a King Charles Spaniel customer called Ludovic who appeared every evening with his owner Vivian - a banker from Wallasey she thinks.

Visitors to the Lion included Mr Charlie Pierce, whose wife Nell wrote plays and ran a drama group with which Stan Booth used to perform. I never met Nell, but one day after her death I was wandering past Charlie`s cottage with a small daughter in tow. He didn`t know me, but invited us in to show me his wife`s creations and insisted on giving us a violin for my daughter to play!

After leaving the Blue Lion, Stan Booth continued to serve his local community in a multitude of ways. He and Betty were committed members of Cynwyd`s parish church, St John the Evangelist. The couple were always very generous with both time and money, and in 2004 one of Stan`s gifts funded new church kneelers.<sup>6</sup> Stan also played crucial roles in Cymdeithas Hanes Edeyrnion (Edeyrnion Historical Society); the British Legion; Ysgol Isa (site of the 1864 National School) and our local horticultural shows. He is greatly missed!

1. *A Cynwyd Timeline* in *Cynwyd Scrapbook One* (2014) by Jenny Lees and June Lister
2. [http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wa-1343-the-blue-lion-hotel-cynwyd#.V-zuv\\_ArLIU](http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wa-1343-the-blue-lion-hotel-cynwyd#.V-zuv_ArLIU)
3. 1914, March 21st, TENANCY AGREEMENT for tenancy of lands called Lion lands, Cynwyd, at an annual rent of £32. 1. Hon. Mrs. C.H. Wynn. 2. John W. Jones of The Lion Inn, pa.[rish] Cynwyd. (Gwynedd Archives XD2/2368).
4. Beverley Smith, J. and Beverley Smith, Llinos (2001) *History of Merioneth Vol.2: The Middle Ages*.
5. *The Drovers` Roads of Wales* (1977) by Fay Godwin and Shirley Toulson, pp.125-28.
6. *Cynwyd 150 Anniversary* by Len Harrison (2006)  
<http://parish.churchinwales.org.uk/a147/history-en/cynwyd-150-anniversary/>

(Penned by Jenny Lees, for Betty Booth and in memory of Stan, October 2016)

## Norman`s Wartime Memories by Keith Mountain

Here are some memories of tales told to me by my late immediate neighbour Norman Evans of *Fron Heulog*. Known as "Norman the Sawman", he cut and distributed timber, with his wife Julia, from a site in Cynwyd village close to the bridge over the river *Trystion* and almost opposite the house in which he spent his childhood. During the War he would have been in his early teens.



Image courtesy of Julia Evans, showing her hooking a butt of timber at the couple`s saw mill

Opportunities for the villagers of rural North Wales to encounter the might of the Nazi Luftwaffe might appear remote, yet the drone of German night bombers trespassing above this region was by no means uncommon. Intensive and persistent raids on nearby Liverpool and the North Midlands caused massive damage to industry and the docks and reached their zenith in the May Blitz of 1941. It is not often recorded that several white flags were displayed from Merseyside windows during the intensity of that period.

The *Luftflotten* approached their bombing run from the south and departed to the west in the direction of Wales before setting course for their return. This track, however, took them perilously close to RAF fighter bases at Sealand, Hooton Park and north Shropshire, and several intruders were intercepted,

pursued and shot down as a result. Additionally, some bomber crews mistook the river Dee for the Mersey and drifted off course towards the same area.

Thus it was that Norman recalled a summer evening, towards dusk, playing with friends by the bridge near the railway station, when he saw an approaching German bomber, flying so low that he could see the pilot at the controls. It roared over the bridge in an attempt to outrun a Spitfire closing in on its tail. He watched in awe until both aircraft were lost to view.

On another occasion a German bomber, late at night, was heard flying over Cynwyd and seen to release incendiary bombs designed to set fires on their targets. The local Home Guard was called out and mustered outside the village shop, equipped with stirrup pumps, and prepared to order an evacuation of damaged property.

Fortunately however, the incendiaries had fallen and burned out along the west bank of the *Trystion* without causing loss or injury. Norman said that for years afterwards the burnt and corroded shards of the incendiary casings could be found at the point where they had fallen.



A wartime Vickers Wellington (Image courtesy of Keith Mountain)

Fate did not only befall enemy aircraft here. The intensely cold winter of 1944-45, which delayed resistance by the Allies to the German advance in the Ardennes, also afflicted more local British operations. In the bleak icy January of 1945 Norman remembered the sight of an RAF Vickers Wellington twin engined medium bomber flying low over *Bryn Ffynnon* and *Fron Heulog* with its Bristol Pegasus radial engines misfiring and smoking, causing the stricken aeroplane to lose altitude.

He heard it crash and, mounting his bicycle, pedalled off with other boys in the direction of Llandrillo. On reaching the scene of the impact in a field by a stream at *Hendwr* their curiosity turned to horror. The shattered remains of the

Wellington still contained the members of the Australian crew but each lay dead. Norman still remembered in particular going to the rear of the wrecked fuselage and seeing the tail gunner still strapped into position in his turret, with lifeless eyes wide open and staring in his direction.

It was a sight which he could never obliterate from his memory... a young crew so far from home and the War nearly over. He showed me the “Very Pistol” recovered from the scene, a sad relic from that unforgotten day. Live ammunition lay all around ... perhaps it lies there still?

During National Service in Egypt in about 1947-48 Norman was a despatch rider and driver to his CO. A few years before his death he decorated the exterior gable end of his cottage with a painted mural of a desert scene complete with camels and palm tree - perhaps a personal remembrance of past times?



The photograph above (courtesy of Julia Evans) is of Norman with a 1927 3 Litre Bentley, taken in my garage. Hereby hangs another strange tale - both of wartime remembrance and extraordinary coincidence.

A friend had (wisely) resolved to purchase a Vintage Bentley. The car was advertised for sale in Andreas in the Isle of Man. As my chum lives in Norfolk he had arranged to break his journey in Cynwyd, and had thoughtfully arranged tickets for us to fly to Douglas where we should be met by the vendor of the Bentley. Upon landing we made our rendezvous and embarked upon the journey to inspect the car. Naturally our host enquired of us from where we had travelled that day.

"From North Wales," I replied, "but you won't have heard of the village."  
"I might," he said, "whereabouts?"

"A little place in Denbighshire called Cynwyd ... but you won't have heard of it."

"Oh, I've heard of it" was his response, "I was evacuated there from Manchester as a child during the War ... and my baby brother is buried in the village churchyard!"

My amazed expression yielded further detail of yet more astonishing facts. It seems that not only had he been transported to the relative safety of Cynwyd but to the home of relatives who lived at *Fron Heulog* - Norman and Julia's home immediately next to mine - and that he was Julia's cousin!

He then related the tragic story concerning the fate of his four year old brother who had been evacuated with him. It seems that the child had eaten some poisonous berries found in the hedgerows and sadly died in *Fron Heulog*. The village funeral involved a horse drawn hearse kept in the old hearse house which still stands on *Ffordd y Rhaiadr*. The weight of the hearse on the steep hillside almost overcame the horse which was forced to descend at an alarming speed!

When I told Norman of this amazing encounter and astonishing coincidence he said that he and Julia had not made contact with their refugee relative for over fifty years.

There are two happy endings to this tale: the first is that I could provide each with the addresses which later facilitated a happy reunion at *Fron Heulog*. And the second? Why, ... my friend bought the Bentley!

Norman was a wonderful neighbour who showed many kindnesses and I am proud to have known him."

Keith Mountain October 2016

## **PONT DYFRDWY CYNWYD by Elwyn Ashford Jones**

Ar hyd y canrifoedd bu dyn yn ymdrechu i groesi'r afon Dyfrdwy mewn sawl man ond doedd hynny ddim yn hawdd a hithau'n afon mor lydan a'i cherrynt mor gryf ar brydiau. Anodd dweud ble yn union y codwyd y bont gyntaf. Yng Nghaerlleon Fawr, yr hen gaer Rufeinig, mae'n debyg, i gludo'r hen ffordd Rufeinig dros yr afon ac ymlaen drwy Barc Plas Eaton am y de. Yn sicr, roedd yma bont yn y Canol Oesoedd, - Hen Bont Caer fel y gelwid hi erystalwm neu Handbridge erbyn heddiw. Yn y Canol Oesoedd hefyd fe adeiladwyd pont rhwng Holt a Farndon a gwyddom i sicrwydd yr adeiladwyd Pont Llangollen yn 1345 gan John Trevor, Pengwern a oedd yn Esgob Llanelwy ar y pryd. Daeth Pont Llangollen yn un o Saith Rhyfeddod Cymru. Ond tybed a adeiladwyd pont mor gynnar a hyn rhwng Llangollen a'r Bala? Go brin ac felly hwyrach y gellir honi fod Pont Cynwyd ymysg y pontydd cyntaf i'w codi yn y rhannau uchaf o Afon Dyfrdwy

Adeiladwyd y bont hon yn 1612 a phedair blynedd yn ôl fe ddathlwyd pedwar can mlwyddiant ei bodolaeth. Tybia'r diweddar Trefor O. Jones, awdur 'O Ferwyn i Fynyllod', fod pont yma cyn hynny ond iddi gael ei sgubo ymaith gan lif mawr enwog 1610, - yr un llif a sgubodd ymaith Eglwys Llansanffraid Glyndyfrdwy (Carrog heddiw). Tybed ai dyddiad ail-adeiladu'r bont yw 1612? Eto ni allwn fod yn sicr o hynny.

Ar un o ganllawiau'r bont gwelir y dyddiad 1612 wedi ei gerfio'n ddigon amrwd ac uwch ei ben y llythrennau I. W. I. sy'n dynodi enwau John a Jane Wynn, Gwnodl sef hen fferm a adnabyddir heddiw fel Gwnodl Fawr. Mae'n ymddangos fod teulu'r Wynniaid, Gwnodl yn deulu o uchelwyr lleol ac yn hanu o deulu Roger ab John Wynn, Llandderfel. Yn 1572 priododd un o ferched Gwnodl ag aelod o deulu Barwn Coetmor a Gwydir a theulu Simon Thelwall, Plas yn Ward ger Rhuthun. Fe briododd John Wynn, perchennog Gwnodl, wedyn â Jane, merch Robert Wynn, Maesmor ger Maerdy/Dinmael. Ac mae'n bur debyg mai dyma'r John a Jane Wynn a fu'n gyfrifol am adeiladu'r bont.

Mae i'r bont bedwar bwa dros yr afon ac ar yr ochr ogleddol i'r bont ceir hefyd tri bwa bach. Amcan y rhain, mae'n debyg, oedd fel dihangfa ychwanegol i ddŵr yr afon yn ystod llifogydd. Anodd dweud a oedd yna dri bwa bach arall yr ochr ddeheuol i'r bont gan iddynt ddiflannu pan adeiladwyd y rheilffordd o Gorwen i'r Bala yn 1865-66. Fe godwyd lefel ochr ddeheuol i'r bont er mwyn i'r ffordd fod yn ddigon uchel i allu croesi dros bont newydd y rheilffordd. Yna, fe godwyd arglawdd uchel rhwng y ddwy bont ac yng ngodre'r arglawdd gwelir hen furddun a fu unwaith yn loches i anifeiliaid y fferm. Credir mai hen dŷ o'r enw Pig y Bont oedd hwn yn wreiddiol. Am ryw reswm ni chwalwyd y tŷ wrth godi'r arglawdd ond fe ddefnyddiwyd yr enw ar dŷ arall ynghanol pentref

Cynwyd. Pont gul ydyw gyda lle i un cerbyd yn unig groesi. O boptu ceir nifer o gilfachau trionglog a chofiaf er stalwm y byddai amryw yn defnyddio rhain fel manau priodol i bysgota yn yr afon islaw a byddai eraill yn sefyllian ynddynt ar nosweithiau braf o'r haf yn sgwrsio a rhyfeddu at y golygfeydd ysblennydd.

Yng ngwanwyn 1989, fe gaewyd y bont am tua 5 i 6 mis er mwyn ei chryfhau ar gyfer trafndiaeth yr unfed ganrif ar hugain. Fe wnaethpwyd gwaith arbennig arni gan Gwmni Brodyr Whitley ac fe ddefnyddiwyd mortar traddodiadol rhwng y cerrig er mwyn cadw cymeriad a dilysrwydd yr hen bont. Heddiw, mae'r bont wedi ei hadfer i'w llawn gogoniant ac yn parhau fel man croesi i bobl a thrafnidiaeth y fro fel y gwnaeth ar hyd y canrifoedd.

Cyn adeiladu'r bont, arferid croesi'r afon mewn cwch. Tua dau i dri canllath i fyny'r afon mae darn o dir comin ac yn ei ymyl olion hen furddun o'r enw Pen yr Erw. Hwn, yn ôl yr hanes, oedd hen dŷ'r cychwr ac wedi croesi'r afon byddai'r teithwyr yn dilyn yr hen ffordd sydd yn arwain heddiw trwy ganol ffatri Ifor Williams Trailers, yna trwy bentref Cynwyd a thros Y Berwyn. Er stalwm gelwid yr hen ffordd hon yn 'The Old Oswestry Road' ac mae'n debyg y byddai'n cyrraedd cyn belled a Swydd Amwythig.



The 1902 photograph (on previous page) shows the old boat house in the background, with the old station building in the foreground (Image courtesy of Elwyn Ashford Jones)

Cred rhai mai hen ffordd Rufeinig yn wreiddiol oedd hi o Gaerhun i Wroxeter y tu draw i'r Amwythig. Yn rhyfedd iawn, mewn cae nepell o'r bont mae olion hen dŷ o'r enw Pen Palmant. Os yw hyn oll yn wir, mae Pont Cynwyd heddiw yn sefyll ar groesfan hynafol iawn dros Afon Dyfrdwy.

Gweler isod ddau englyn i Bont Cynwyd. Mae'r englyn cyntaf gan Thomas Evans, Hendre Forfydd, Llansanffraid Glyndyfrdwy (Carrog). Fe'i cyfansoddwyd yn 1620 ac mae'n dynodi'n gelfydd iawn ddyddiad ei hadeiladu.

Mil chwechant gwarant gwirwyd - da oeswr  
Oed Iesu pan godwyd;  
A deuddeg ion union wyd,  
Pand tu ganoes pont Cynwyd.

Fe gyfansoddwyd yr ail englyn gan y bardd enwog Mathew Owen, Tŷ'n Llwyn, Llangar. Yn ôl yr hanes bu iddo syrthio i'r afon wrth iddo groesi mewn cwch (cafn) ar ôl noson o wleda yng Ngwerclas ac yntau o bosib wedi cael gormod o lawer i'w yfed!!

'Da'i ddim i gafnu yn y cyfnos, - i bant  
Os bydd pont yn agos;  
Af gefn dydd i gafn diddos,  
'Da'i i gafn neb ar gefn nos.

Elwyn A.Jones

[A full English translation of this article will appear in Cynwyd Scrapbook Three. The brief summary below has been kindly provided by Gwenan Roberts]

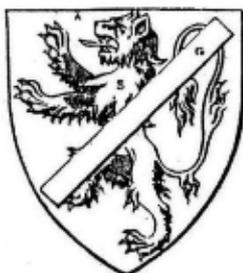
There were many attempts to cross the river Dee over the early centuries, but because of its width and its rapid currents it was a difficult task. Bridges were built downstream, for example at Llangollen in 1345 (one of the Seven Wonders of Wales), but in all probability Cynwyd bridge was the first in the upper part of the Dee. Built around 1612, possibly to replace a previous bridge swept away in the Great Flood of 1610, it has the initials I W I etched above the date. The initials probably stood for John and Jane Wynn, Gwnod (*Gwnodl Fawr* today).

It is a narrow stone bridge with only space for a single vehicle to cross at any one time, with numerous triangular nooks either side where people used to stand to fish in the river below. Further upstream, there appears to have been a Boat Keepers cottage where the Ferryman would have helped others to cross the wide river in earlier times.

## Plas Isaf – another Edeyrnion Dynasty: Part One

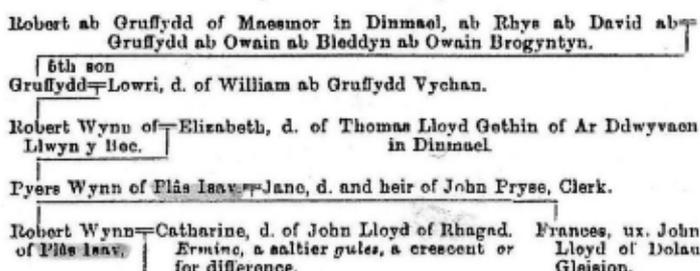
Between *Plas Uchaf* and the modern A5 (see map on back cover) lies the beautiful Grade 2 Listed farmhouse<sup>1</sup> and barn of *Plas Isaf*. We know from Llangar Parish Records<sup>2</sup> that in 1642-3 a **Robert Wynne Pyers** was “buried in church, Gent, *Plas Issa*.” Burial within the church itself, and the mention by name of the actual dwelling in this period, suggest that Robert was a gentleman of high status within the parish.

And the genealogy below from *Powys Fadog*<sup>3</sup> tells us that Robert Wynne Pyers was descended (via **Robert ap Gruffydd of Maesmor**) from one of the powerful small dynasties founded by the three sons of **Owain Brogontyn** - Owain being the illegitimate but recognised son of **Madog ap Maredudd**, the last Welsh Prince to rule the whole of ancient Powys,



PLAS ISAF IN EDEYRNION.

(Add. MS. 9864.)



So a dwelling at *Plas Isaf* must have existed not later than 1642. The oldest house no longer exists as such, though parts of it may still exist within today's building. But we do know from Hearth Tax records<sup>4</sup> that in 1662 *Plas Isa* paid for “fower” hearths in *Kymmer and Llangar* (only *Gwerclas* paid for more hearths in Llangar at that time).

It was occupied by the widow **Rebecca Wynne**, whose 1663 Will<sup>5</sup> bequeathed to her daughter **Margaret** all her “goods and Cattell and Chattell” with the

exception of “one bed and the furniture thereof, and one Shift and two silver spoons” to each of her two other daughters, **Elizabeth** and **Dorothy**. Cattle were an extremely important part of someone’s wealth at that time and **Margaret Wynne** married **Owen Eyton**, who was the eighth son of Sir Gerard Eyton of *Eyton*. In the 1690s Edward Llyud, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, mentioned *Plas Issaf* as one of the seats of the Llangar gentry, and named Rev. Mr Owen Eyton, Rector of Corwen, as the proprietor.<sup>6</sup>



Plas Isaf in 2014 (Image by Jenny Lees)

At this time individual church pews belonged to specific houses, rather than to particular people, and at some point Owen Eyton apparently “took over” a gentry pew in Llangar church belonging to *Hafod y calch*. This was originally owned by the Meyrick family of *Ucheldre* and then ownership of *Hafod* and the pew had passed to the Salesbury family of Rug, who apparently did not use it.<sup>7</sup>

However, when Owen Eyton needed to be buried in 1703, honesty temporarily prevailed! We know this because Owen’s son and executor John asked permission<sup>7</sup> from Roger Salesbury of Rug to “bury the Corps of my said father *Owen Eyton*” under the *Havod* seat!

But in 1729, when there were still only three or four pews in the whole church, with the rest of the seating being benches, pew disputes continued! The visiting

Rural Dean, Rev. John Wynne, referring to a pew under the *Llangar* pulpit, said: “... *till very lately, the rector`s wife and Mr Owens`s sat together,*” but that Mr. Robert Owens (of *Plas Isaf*) had suddenly altered the lock “*and thereby excluded the rector`s wife and daughters.*” Mr Owens had filed a bill in Chancery against the rector and “*the grand affair*” was to be “*brought to some issue*” at the coming assize! <sup>7</sup>



Llangar church viewed across the valley from Hafod y calch (Jenny Lees)

The Rural Dean`s report<sup>8</sup> was actually highly critical of many clergy and church buildings, and also criticised the high backs of the *Llangar* gentry pews. He claimed that the back of the *Gwerclas* pew was “*unreasonably high, reaching almost to the roof and making it impossible to inscribe on the wall any chosen, select sentences, or as much as the Creed or Ten Commandments*”.

Regarding the “*Plas Isaf*” pew (originally the *Havod* pew!), the rural dean also complained that this was:

“*a great obstruction ... Mr Owens, he frankly told me that the back of his pew should be taken down if I insisted on `t, and hop`d I would do the same by the family of Gwerclas ... and likewise cause the back of their bench to be demolish`d.*”



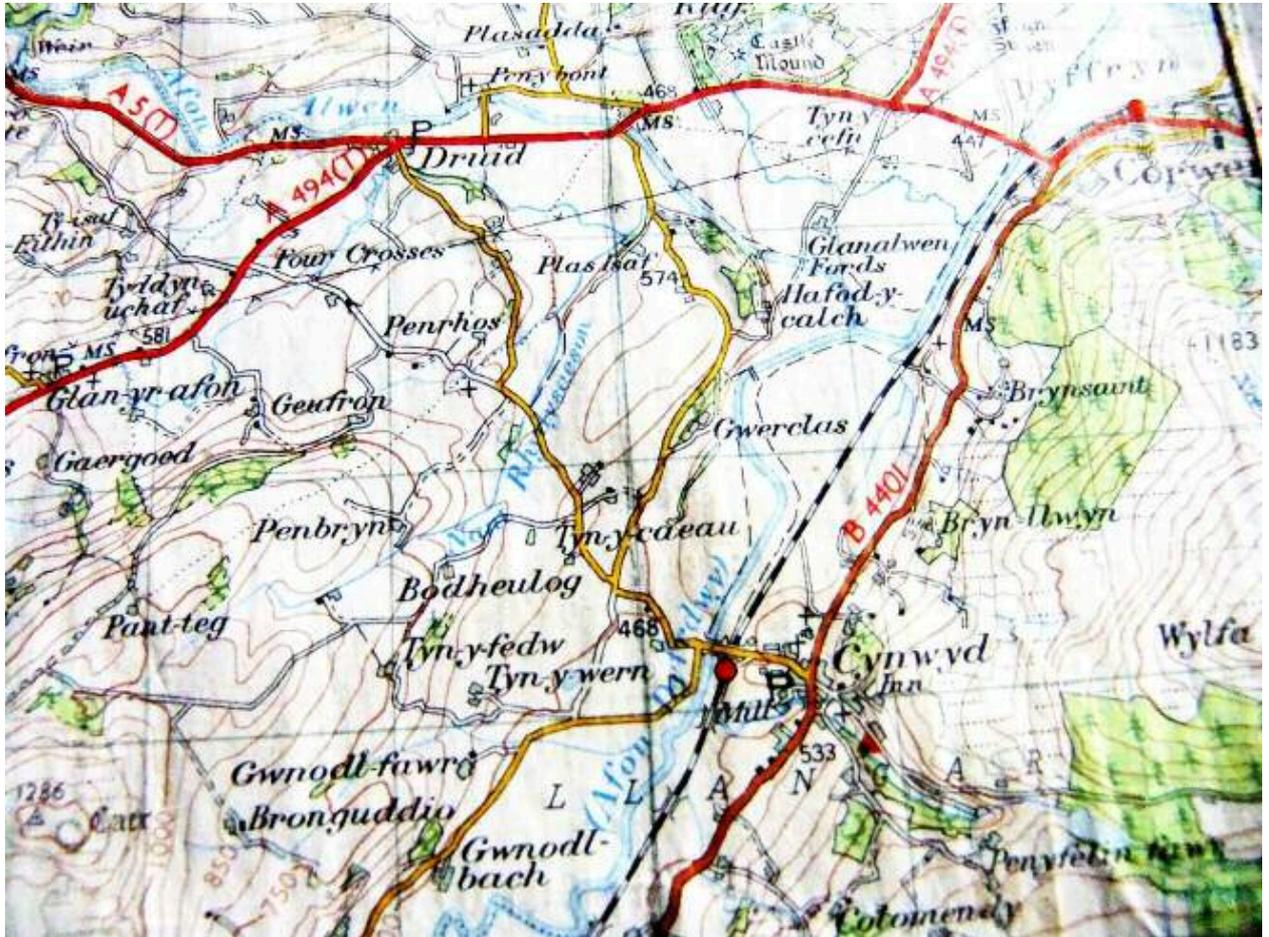
Converted historic barn at Plas Isaf (Image by Jenny Lees 2013)

*Plas Isaf* has a really fascinating history and there is very much more to tell besides the controversies over church pews! But space does not permit here, so its story will be continued next year in our Cynwyd Scrapbook Three.

1. <http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wa-703-plas-isaf-cynwyd#.WCCWBfmLTIU>
2. Llangar Parish Records, transcribed by Clwyd Family History Society in 1996
3. J.Y.W. Lloyd (1881) *The History of the Princes, the Lords Marcher, and the ancient Nobility of Powys Fadog*, Vol.6, p42.
4. Lay Subsidy Roll E 179: from William Irvine's notes on this for "Kymer and Llangar" (Gwynedd archives Z/M/344/ 16-18).
5. Will of Rebecca Wynne of "Plas issa in Llangar" (St Asaph Probate Records, SA/1663/78).
6. Edward Llwyd (1695) *Parochialia* (at Denbighshire Record Office).
7. D. Morgan Evans (2013) *Llangar -Church and community in the early eighteenth century, Part 4: HIERARCHY, LITURGY, FIXTURES AND FITTINGS*, Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society, Vol. XV1, part 4, pp.358 – 379.
8. Reverend John Wynne (1730) *A report of the Deanery of Penllyn and Edeirnion*, abstracted from the original MSS by G.M.Griffiths (1955) in *The Merioneth Miscellany*.

Jenny Lees, November 2016





# Cynwyd Scrapbook Two

2016