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NORTH WEST WALES DENDROCHRONOLOGY PROJECT

DATING OLD WELSH HOUSES

CAE CANOL MAWR

Parish: Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, (old County: Merioneth) (NGR SH 720 439)

House History Summary:

Research by :Anne Watt
(Assisted by Avis Reynolds and John Townsend)

Cae Canol Mawr is a stone and slate built cottage located on the thousand feet contour below the Manod mountain in Ffestiniog. Early records are sketchy with over 90 year between the dendrochronology dates and the first record, then another 40 years to the second and 153 years to the third. At some time before 1817 the property was acquired by the Tan y Bwlch estate and from 1817 was run as a tenant farm (size ranging from 23 acres in 1841 to 65 acres in 1910), first by the Roberts family and then by the Ephraim Family. In 1910 the farm was sold (to whom is unknown at present) and it continued as a tenant farm. In 1937 John Davies bought the farm. In 1947 he sold the house with one field and a stable and from then on it has passed through a number of owners, often being used as a holiday home. In some records Cae Canol Bach is recorded but it appears to have been only occasionally used as a dwelling. It lies about 65 yards to the south of Cae Canol Mawr (see map at Appendix A).

House History Detail:

1532 - Dendrochronology date.

1623 - Rent Roll for Ardudwy. Humffrey Pugh paid 10d for Cae Kanol¹ (suggesting he was owner).

1662 - Cae Canol taxed for two hearths. Name of owner illegible².

1798 – Merioneth Land Tax Assessment, Llan Ffestiniog³. William Oakley (see 1817 below) paid land tax but the properties are not identified.

1663 to 1816 - Despite extensive research (particularly the Tanybwllch Papers in Dolgellau Record Office and NLW, Aberystwyth) no information on Cae Canol Mawr has been found between these dates.

¹ Merioneth Historical and Records Society (MHRS) Journal Vol. 15, 2009, page 384

² MHRS Journal Vol. 2, 1953, page 27

³ Merioneth Land Tax Assessment, Llan Festiniog - DRO



1817 - February 7. 'Assignment: 1. William Gryffydd Oakeley, Pas Tanybwllch, Esq. son of the late William Oakeley¹ and Margaret Gryffyth. [to] 2. Griffith Howel Vaughan, Rûg², Esq. and Richard Watkins Price, Rhiwalas, Esq. Lease (part of Lease and Release) of messuages, tenements, and lands known as... Cae Canol... all the properties being in the parishes of Ffestiniog, Maentwrog, and Llandeckwyn³.'

Tan y Bwlch was first referred to in the will of Robert Evans in 1602. In the 18th century Catherine, heiress of the Evans family, married Robert Griffith of Bach y Saint near Cricieth, expanding the estate.

Their grandson, Robert Griffith, rebuilt and extended the house around 1748. His son, Evan Griffith was the last male of the Griffith family. The male line of the Evans and Griffith families had both come to an end in their turn and each time, the heiresses married into new wealth and land.

In 1789 Margaret Griffith, granddaughter and heiress of the Griffith family married a wealthy Englishman named William Oakeley from Staffordshire. William's arrival heralded prosperous times for the estate which had grown substantially through marriage settlement and inheritance.

William and Margaret's son, William Griffith Oakeley took over the running of the estate on the death of his father in 1811 and greatly expanded his slate quarries at Blaenau Ffestiniog (employing over 1600 men) and was involved in the creation of the Ffestiniog Railway, allowing slate to be transported quickly from the quarries.

William died childless in 1835 and the estate was managed by his wife, Louisa Jane Oakeley, until it passed to his cousin's son, William Edward Oakeley, in 1879. During his stewardship the Oakeleys slate empire began to collapse. By the time of his death in 1912 some of the estate – including Cae Canol - had been sold (see 1910)⁴.

1829 – 18 September. Marriage of Cadwalader Lewis and Gwen Roberts⁵. Gwen was the elder daughter of Robert Roberts and Catherine Davies. No address recorded. See next entry for relevance.

1829 – 18 December. Baptism of Robert, son of Cadwalader Lewis and Gwen Roberts, residence shown as Cae Canol⁶. As Gwen is the daughter of Robert and Catherine Roberts and it was customary for a woman to give birth to her first child at her mother's home it could be surmised that Robert Roberts was already in occupation of Cae Canol Mawr at this time.

1836 – 6 April. Tan y Bwlch Rents for ½ year ending Lady Day – Robert Roberts Cae Canol £3/2/6d - Paid⁷. Lady Day (6 April) was a traditional day on which year-long contracts between landowners and tenant farmers would begin and end (although there were regional variations). Farmers' time of 'entry' into new farms and onto new fields was often this day. As a result, farming families who were changing farms would travel from the old farm to the new one on Lady Day.

At Michaelmas (29 September) 1837 the Estate Rents show Robert Roberts paying £15/0/0d for Cae Canol.

¹ Will cannot be located

² Also of Hengwrt, Dolgellau

³ Z/DV/4, item 90, Tanybwllch Estate papers – Dolgellau Record Office (DRO)

⁴ Summary of 'Plas Tan y Bwlch History' on the Snowdonia National Park Authority's website at

⁵ <http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/a-sense-of-place/history-of-snowdonia/plas-tan-y-bwlch-history>

⁶ DRO Ffestiniog Patish Registers, Box 10, Vol. 4

⁷ DRO Ffestiniog Patish Registers, Box 10, Vol. 6

1836 – 1 May. Baptism of Lewis Owen, son of Gwen’s sister Margaret Owen and husband Owen Owen, a quarryman, residence shown as Cae Canol¹

1839 - Tithe maps schedule.

The owner of Cae Canol Mawr is Mrs Louisa Jane Oakeley and the occupier is Robert Roberts. Quantity of statute measure: 171 acres 3r 7p. Payable to Rector: 15s 0d². Robert Roberts is also shown renting the Sheepwalk: 147. 2r 27p. No rent. In the 1851 Census the farm acreage is shown as 23 acres. It is probable that the 171 acres includes the Sheepwalk (171–147 = 24).

1840s – In the 1840s behind Cae Canol Mawr in the foothills of the Manod slate mining started. *One of the routes used to take slates out from Graig Ddu was by carts from the top workings, down the track that flanks Manod Mawr. The slates produced at Dwr Oer were sent along the shore of Llyn y Manod. These two old roads meet at the lower end of Llyn y Manod, then made for the old farm of Cae Canol Mawr, and on past Y Tryfal, Teiliau Mawr and across the Afon Teigl towards the Valley road to Llan Ffestiniog. From there it went down to Cei Cemlyn and Cei Pen Trwyn y Garnedd on the Dwyryd below Maentwrog. From there the slate was boated out to waiting ships beyond what would become Porthmadog. This all changed in 1868 with the coming of the ‘Trên Bach y Llan’ - the Ffestiniog & Blaenau Railway between Blaenau and Llan Ffestiniog*³.

1841 - Census⁴ Cae Canol (Cae Canol Bach not shown)

Robert Roberts	55	Quarryman	Born in county
Catherine Davies	60	“	“
Margaret Evans	80	“	“
Jane Roberts	15	FS	“
Tudur Owen	15	MS	“
Robert Lewis	5	Quarryman	“

(Quarryman for Robert Lewis obviously an error. The next line has the occupation missing for the head of the family. Robert Lewis is possibly a grandson).

1845 - 12 July. A letter from Robert Roberts of Cae Canol (Robert Lewis as scribe); it gives news of friends and family, particularly in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and is sent with someone leaving for America. As well as farming, Robert Roberts had also worked in the Ffestiniog slate quarries but, now deaf, had retired from quarrying to carting coal. He also looked after his mother Margaret Evans. The letter reports, ‘Your mother is well. Robert Roberts your brother, as is the custom of the parish, cares for her in his own home.’ In his own letter of 3 years later, when there was less hardship, at least in the Ffestiniog area, Robert reports that his mother ‘is in fairly good health but not often able to leave the house but gets about a little. She dearly wishes to be remembered to the children.’⁵

1851 - Census⁶ Cae Canol (Cae Canol Bach shown inhabited)

Robert Roberts	HeadMar	65	Farmer of 23 acres employing no lab.	Ffestiniog
Catherine	“	Wife Mar	75	Llanllyfni
Anne Lewis	Maid unnm	16	Servant maid	Ffestiniog

*(In fact Anne Lewis was Robert and Catherine Roberts’ grand-daughter who later married John Ephraim and was named executor of her grandfather’s Will in 1859)*⁷

¹ DRO Z/DV/3/196

² DRO Ffestiniog Patish Registers, Box 10, Vol. 6

³ DRO Tithe Map, Ffestiniog, page 2

⁴ Criw Diddan Dŵr Oer by Emrys Evans – A Graig Ddu Quarryman of Manod, Ffestiniog. (Quoted with some small changes).

⁵ HO 107/1427/3 page 16 Ffestiniog District 4 page 8(Ancestry.co.uk)

⁶ Originals are in the possession of Robert Jones, Chesterville, Ontario, Canada

1855 – 8 February. Catherine Roberts of Cae Canol buried. Grave 295 at Ffestiniog.¹

1859 – 12 September. Robert Roberts of Cae Canol buried. Grave 295 at Ffestiniog.²

1861 - Census³ - Cae Canol (The first section below may be Cae Canol Bach, as Cae Canol is shown as two units)

David Jones	Head	Mar	51	Labour	Merioneth
Margaret Jones	wife	Mar	39	Wife	Merioneth
David Jones	Son	um	11	Scholar	Merioneth
Catherine Jones	Daur	um	7	Scholar	Merioneth
Richard Roberts	Border	um	32		Anglesey ??

//

John Ephraims	Head	Mar	40	Farmer	Merioneth
Anna Ephraims	Wife	Mar	27	Wife	Merioneth
Catherine Ephraims	Daur	um	3	Daughter	Merioneth
Evan Thomas	Serv	um	14	Carter	Merioneth
John Newland	Lodger	Mar	34	Quarryman	??

1871 - Census⁴ Cae Canol (Cae Canol Bach is not shown)

John Ephraims	Head	Mar	50	Farmer	Trawsfynydd Merioneth
Anne Ephraims	Wife	Mar	37		Ffestiniog Merioneth
Catherine Ephraims	Daur	unm	13		Ffestiniog Merioneth
Joseph Ephraims	Son	unm	3		Ffestiniog Merioneth
Catherine Roberts	Ser	unm	14	Domestic Servant	Ffestiniog Merioneth

1881 - Census⁵ Cae Canol (Cae Canol Bach shown inhabited)

Jno Ephraim	Head	Mar	69	Farmer	Merionethshire
Anne	“ wife	Mar	47		“
Catherine D.	“ dau	unm	23		“
Joseph	“ son	unm	13		“
Elizabeth G	“ dau	unm	7		

1891 - Census⁶ – Cae Canol Mawr (Cae Canol Bach shown inhabited)

John Ephraim	Head	Mar	72	Farmer	Trawsfynydd
Anne	“ Wife	Mar	56		Ffestiniog
Catherine	“ dau	S	33		“
Joseph	“ son	S	23	Quarryman slate	“
Elizabeth	“ dau	S	17		“

1897 – John Ephraim buried. Grave F025 at Ffestiniog.

⁷ HO 107/2512 folio 228 page 4 Ffestiniog District 2b page 4(Ancestry.co.uk)

¹ Will in possession of main author – Anne Watt

² DRO Ffestiniog Patish Records, Box 10, Vol. 5 and GFHS – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 029

³ DRO Ffestiniog Patish Records, Box 10, Vol. 5 and GFHS – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 029

⁴ RG9/4324 Ffestiniog Dist 3 pages 26/7 (Ancestry.co.uk)

⁵ RG10/5696 Ffestiniog District 3 page 12

⁶ RG11/5550 Ffestiniog District 3 page 24

1898 – 8 March. Murder on the Manod¹. Thomas Jones and Mary Burton were pedlars. They passed by Cae Canol Mawr hoping to get to Llanrwst via Penmachno. At about 10.30pm they got lost in the snow. A fight took place and Mary was left naked up on Manod Mawr by a building.

Thomas Jones came down the mountain at about 6am in order to get the police. He knocked on the door of Cae Canol Mawr and Ann Ephraim answered it. Thomas said that he had left his ‘wife’ on the mountain and could he leave his basket of goods in the house while he got the police from Llan Ffestiniog. Ann was suspicious and got her son, Joseph, to put the basket in the barn and sent a young servant boy by a different route to inform the police. Thomas went down the valley to Llan Ffestiniog Police Station.

On 12 July 1898 at Merionethshire assizes held at Dolgellau Thomas was found guilty of murder. He confessed to killing Mary during a drink-inflamed quarrel. He said Mary had insisted on taking the wrong path over the mountains and they had lost their way. He was transferred to Caernarfon Prison where he was hanged that August.

1901 - Census² - Cae Canol Mawr (Cae Canol Bach shown but uninhabited)

Ann Ephraim	Wife	Wid	66	Ffestiniog
Catherine	“	dau	S 43	“
Joseph	“	son	S 33	“
Lizzie W.	“	dau	S 27	“
William Lloyd	serv	S	15	Bala

1901 – Lizze Winnie Ephraim buried. Grave F025 at Ffestiniog.³

1905 – Ann Ephraim buried. Grave F025 at Ffestiniog.⁴

1906 - Catherine Ephraim buried. Grave F025 at Ffestiniog.⁵

1910 - Land Tax Merioneth for Cae Canol Mawr

Occupier: Joseph Ephraim

Owner: Wm. E. Oakeley Esq., Estate Office, Tanybwllch

1910 – 5 July. Oakeley Estate sale by auction at the Grosvenor Hotel, Chester. The ‘Sales Particulars⁶’ state:

Cae Canol Mawr is Lot 5, Area: 65.385 Acres. Rent: £30 per annum.

Tenant: Mr. JOSEPH EPHRAIM (whose family have been in occupation for many decades) on a Yearly (Lady-day) Tenancy.

CAE-CANOL-MAWR is one of those Eligible Medium-sized Holdings for which there is always keen competition, influenced by its easy accessibility to Market and Industrial Centres, being very convenient for Festiniog and Blaenau Festiniog, with Railway Services on the Great Western and the London and North-Western Lines, also the Narrow Gauge (0) Line. It is situate at the foot of Manod Mawr Mountain on the South side, commands fine uninterrupted views of Cardigan Bay and the Vale of Festiniog, and consists of Upland Pasture and Arable Land sloping with a warm aspect towards Cwm Teigl and watered by its stream, while the healthy enclosed Fridds provide abundant Rough Pasture.

¹ RG12/4645 Ffestiniog District 3 page 6

² Taken from ‘Murder on the Manod’ by Carey Jones, Wrexham, 1984

³ RG13/5257 Festiniog District 3 page 53

⁴ Gwynedd Family History Society – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 051

⁵ Gwynedd Family History Society – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 051

⁶ Gwynedd Family History Society – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 051

This FARM, in addition, enjoys the Right of a Sheepwalk of about 1433. 3r. 18p. on Manod Mountain and is therefore capable of carrying a good Flock of Sheep.

The HOUSE contains: Kitchen, Pantry, Chamber and Three Bed Rooms; also Out-kitchen and Chamber. The OUTBUILDINGS consist of Cow Shed of Seven Ties, with Calf Pen and Hay Shed, Lean-to Shed, Two Pigstyes.

There is also a COTTAGE, known as Cal Canol Bach, occupied by a sub-tenant.

It is subject to a Tithe- Rent-charge commuted at 15s., value 1910 i10s. 6d., and a Land Tax of £1.

ALL THE MINERALS will be included in the Sale and it is reputed that the vein of the famous Festiniog Slate underlies the land.

1911 - Census¹ Cae Canol Farm (Cae Canol Bach is shown inhabited)

Joseph Ephraim	Head	M	43	Farmer	Merioneth
Elizabeth M	“ Wife	M	44	“	“
Evan Richard	“ son		6	“	“
Elizabeth	“ dau		5	“	“
Winefred	“ dau		3	“	“
Llewelyn	“ son		2	“	“

1912 - Following the sale, the Ephraim family emigrated to Upper New York State where they already have relatives. Joseph Ephraim said had tried to book a passage on the Titanic but it was already full so they went on the SS Campania. They left Liverpool on 15 March 1912². The Titanic left Southampton on 10 April 1912 and sunk on 15 April 1912.

1912 to 1937 – the ownership of Cae Canol Mawr is unknown (see 1937 for further information).

Most of the following information came from Rhiannon Davies³ unless otherwise stated.

1912/13 - A Robert Davies, from Min Afon (nearby) went to live in Cae Canol Mawr as a tenant. There were three daughters. A Robert Roberts and wife from Celyn area later became tenants. There was one son, who died in a field while out hay-making.

1920 – Elizabeth Margaret Ephraim dies. See 1947 for more information.

1937 - Rhiannon’s father, John Davies, apparently rented Cae Canol Mawr and fields from Plas Tan y Bwlch Estate (this cannot be verified). It is possible that the property had been brought back into the Tanybwlch Estate by Hilda Inge – a great niece of William Edward Oakeley - after she inherited the Estate in 1919. John Davies was later given the chance to buy Cae Canol Mawr, which he did. The property was rented out to a tenant for a time: a Mr and Mrs John Richards (actual dates not known).

1947 - 20 June, Rhiannon’s father sold Cae Canol Mawr house, one field and a stable (part of Cae Canol Bach) to Antoinette Pratt Barlow. There was a booklet, written by Antoinette about purchasing and living at Cae Canol Mawr with a painting of the house on the front cover. The title of the booklet was 'Memories of Cae Canol Mawr. In the booklet it says that the property had been empty for about 10 years before purchase⁴. The asking price was £250 for house, field and barn.

Cae Canol Bach and one field, (nearby) was bought from her father by Antoinette as a stable for a horse and pasture but the horse never arrived. The house has been empty for some years. Antoinette married John Watney,

¹ Copy in possession of main author - Anne Watt

² Ffestiniog district 03 page 70/1

³ Ancestry.co.uk 1912: Arrivals Microfilm: Serial T715: Roll 1825: Page 47

⁴ Rhiannon Davies (as at May 2012) lives with her brother at Tryfal, a farm near Cae Canol Mawr. She has lived in the farm all her life and her father before her.

an author. There was one son called Marcus. It is thought that the owners did not spend a lot of time at the house.

1947/8 - An Emrys Jones of Min Afon brought electricity to the valley. It was apparently rather a feeble supply. There was an article in the local paper about this with the heading 'Emrys brings electricity to the valley'. Antoinette insisted on having the poles for the supply to Cae Canol Mawr from the direction of Manod so they would be lost against the mountain rather than having them all the way up the road. Antoinette had the slate stairs installed and a piece of slate about 7 feet long in the open fireplace. After finishing the work on the fireplace she placed the newspaper of the day in a bottle plastered into the wall,

1947 – Joseph Ephraim and his daughter, Elizabeth, came to back to Bala for a holiday. Joseph enjoyed singing so his friends organised an evening of song. Joseph died in his sleep that night. He was buried in Grave 113 at Ffestiniog which shows Joseph Ephraim (1869 – 1947) and also his wife Elizabeth Margaret Ephraim (1866 – 1920) interred in Uticca, NY, USA. 'Mae Duw yn lland bob Lle' (God is everywhere).¹

1976 - A Very hot summer. Hippies broke in and spent the summer in the house. The Rev. Richard Hughes and wife Ann, (from Rugby?) bought the house. They were only there occasionally. They were mostly in France. It was then sold to Tim Mostyn Owen. There was an article in the local paper that burglars had broken in and stolen valuable items when he was away.

1993 - Winifred Ephraim Hughes and Llewelyn Ephraim, the two youngest children of Joseph and Elizabeth Ephraim, were interviewed for the collection, 'North American Letters, Diaries and Oral Histories' (pub: Alexander Street Press) about their memories of their life in Wales and about their emigration. They were of course very young when they left Wales.

1996 - Tom and Audrey (surname unknown) lived at Cae Canol Mawr for a short while. They were a young couple with a baby. They went to live at Bwlch Iocyn. Rhiannon remembers this because they went to party there.

2003 - Cae Canol Mawr was put up for sale with a guide price of £145,000. The agents were Carter Jonas, property consultants, The Estate Office, Port Penrhyn, Bangor. Carol and Tom Lorenz from near Mold bought the property. They have sons Oli and William and one daughter. Carol is a free-lance doctor. The house has been used as a holiday house.

2012 - Cae Canol Mawr and Cae Canol Bach are both being renovated. A well has been dug. The water from the stream used to dry up.

Postscript

As can be seen Cae Canol Mawr was a small subsistence farm and its early history is sketchy. Further work could be undertaken to try and find out when the farm became part of the Tan y Bwlch estate. What is in the estate catalogues at DRO has been shown, but it is possible the farm was part of a dowry from the Llandecwyn or Hendremur estates. Evan Griffith (1688-1735) second wife was Jane Anwyl heiress to the Llandecwyn estate. Robert Griffith (1717-1750) married Ann Anwyl of Hendremur and their son, Evan Griffith, married Mary Anwyl of Hendremur². No marriage settlements have been found in the catalogue at the NLW. The Wills of Robert Griffith and Evan Griffith have not been found – Wales and Canterbury have been search with no result but not the Prerogative of York or other possible locations.

Anne Watt
(Assisted by Avis Reynolds and John Townsend)

¹ Information from Elin Angharad, Siop Yr Hen Bost, Blanaau Ffestiniog

² Gwynedd Family History Society – Monumental Inscriptions, Ffestiniog, 141