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Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig
Discovering Old Welsh Houses



RHYDYWERNEN

HOUSE HISTORY



Martin Cherry & Dinah Pickard
June 2015

DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES GROUP

RHYDYWERNEN

Llanfor, Merioneth, Gwynedd NGR SH 972 402

HOUSE HISTORY

House history summary

This cruck-framed open hall house, probably originally timber framed, was built with timber felled in the winter of 1530, making construction likely in 1531 or very shortly after. It is not known who built it. At some time the hall was floored over and a chimneystack inserted, backing on to the former cross passage: unfortunately the inserted floor beam that was sampled failed to date. The house and its setting is discussed below (Appendix). No early records seem to have survived and the first reference found is in *The History of the Welsh Independent Churches*: 'At about 1770, a man named Hugh Jones lived at Rhydywernen, and he was the owner of the place'. The 1841 census shows the occupier was Morgan Hughes and the tithe of 1847 gives the owner as Richard Williams, Esq. At some point, either Morgan Hughes or his descendants (the Jones and Griffiths families) bought Rhydywernen and, apart from a brief period around 1911, occupied it until they sold in 1983/4 to Marjorie Briggs who sold it in 1991/2 to Mr A James Jones, who still lives there.

[File note: there are a number of deeds relating to Rhydywernen in the safe-keeping of a firm of solicitors in Bala; access was not possible at the time this house history was compiled but we hope to consult them in due course.]

Chronology

c. 1770 Source: Gan T Rees and J Thomas, *History of the Independent Churches in Wales* (4 vols., Liverpool, 1871) I, pp. 504-7; supplemented (for Benjamin Evans) by the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-EVAN-BEN-1740.html>, accessed 13/06/2015).

The Rhydywernen chapel and graveyard are situated next to Rhydywernen. This source reports that in 1770, Hugh Jones owned and lived in Rhydywernen and invited Mr Benjamin Evans of Llanuwchllyn, a Methodist, who preached in the area, to use a building that formerly stored peat and this was used for worship for nearly 50 years. The *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* describes Evans as Independent (rather than Methodist) and at this time (he was ordained minister at Llanuwchllyn in 1769) strongly Calvinist.

HOUSE HISTORY The chapel became Congregational at some point and the present building was erected in 1828. In 1841, Mr John Thomas Griffith, a local man, became preacher but died 06 October 1849: his memorial plaque is in the chapel. His descendants owned Rhydywernen. It is possible that it was this Hugh Jones and his wife, Jane, that were parents of Elizabeth Jones, baptized in the chapel in November 1834 (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:X1YR-18B> accessed 12/06/2015)

1841 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Nantlleidiog, Llanfawr (HO 107/1430/13, district 13 p. 4)

Morgan Hughes	Head	50	Farmer	Born in county
Jane Hughes	Wife	55	-	Ditto
Hugh Hughes	Son	30	-	Ditto
John Hughes	Son	20	-	Ditto
Elizabeth Hughes	Daughter	20	-	Ditto
Gwen Hughes	Daughter	15	-	Ditto

Morgan Hughes was baptised 19 May 1782 in Maentwrog (see 1851 census); his father was Hugh Morgan (1732-1827) and his mother, Elizabeth. He married Jane William (1780-1875) on 02 February 1807 at Llandecwyn and they had eight children in Llandecwyn before moving to Rhydywernen sometime after 1815. Was he related to Hugh Jones?

It was through his granddaughter, Jane Roberts (1847-1933) (the daughter of his youngest child, Lowry or Laura Hughes, 1815-1905, who married Hugh Roberts, b. 1816, married 19 May 1843 in Llanfor) that the Hughes and Griffiths families were united when she married William Griffiths (1843-1884), the son of the Rev. John Thomas Griffiths. They had four daughters and one son.

1847 Source: Tithe schedule, 13 November 1847, pp. 42-3.

The landowner is recorded as Richard Williams, Esq; Rhydywernen was his only property in Llanfor parish. The occupier was Morgan Hughes. The property consisted of 41 acres and 18 perches; value £3 9s. 6d., payable to the rector.

1851 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Nantlleidiog, Llanfawr (HO 107/2510, district 21 p. 4)

Morgan Hughes	Head	68	Farmer	41 acres	Born Maentwrog
Jane Hughes	Wife	69	-	-	Born Llandecwyn
Hugh Hughes	Son	41	-	-	Ditto
William Hughes	Son	39	-	-	Ditto
Gwen Hughes	Daughter	36	-	-	Ditto
Catherine Evans	Servant	18	-	-	Ditto

1861 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Nantlleidiog, (RG 9/4316 district 20, p.20)

Morgan Hughes	Head	80	Farmer	40 acres	Born Maentwrog
Jane Hughes	Wife	81	-	-	Born Llanecwyn
Hugh Hughes	Son	55	-	-	Ditto
William Hughes	Son	51	-	-	Ditto
Jane Roberts	-	24	House servant	-	Llanfor

Morgan Hughes died 03 June 1863 and was buried on 06 June in Llanfor (the cemetery at the chapel was bought c. 1863).

1871 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Llanfor (RG 10/5687, district 20, p. 6)

Jane Hughes	Head, widow	91	Farmer	40 acres	Born Llandecwyn
Hugh Hughes	Son	62	-	-	Ditto

William Hughes	Son	59	-	-	Ditto
Jane Williams	Great-grand daughter	9	-	-	Llanfor
Mary Jones	Servant	28	-	-	Llanuchllyn

1881 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Nantlleidiog (RG 11/5543, p. 6)

Hugh Hughes	Head	70	Farmer	45 acres	Born Llandecwyn
Margaret Jones	House servant	27	-	-	Born Llanfor

Jane Hughes (nee Williams) died in 1875; Hugh Hughes died 1882.

1891 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Llanfor (RG 12/4640, district 19, p. 6)

John Jones	Head	46	Farmer	Born Llangwm, Denbighshire
Elizabeth Jones *	Wife	55	-	Born Llanfor
Elizabeth W Jones	Daughter	13	-	Born Llangwm
William Davies	Servant	15	Farm servant	Born Llanderfel

* Elizabeth Jones died 02 November 1906 and was buried at Rhydywernen and her husband, John Jones, dies 27 February 1925 (memorial inscriptions).

1901 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Llanfor (RG 13/5250, district 19, p. 6)

John Jones	Head	56	Farmer	Born Llangwm
Elizabeth Jones	Wife	64	-	Born Llanfor
Elizabeth W Griffiths	Daughter	23	-	Born Llangwm
John Griffiths	Son-in-law	26	-	Born Llanfor
Jane E Griffiths	Grand-daughter	3 mths	-	Ditto
Emily L Griffiths	Grand-daughter	10 mths	-	Ditto

This John Hugh Griffiths (1874-1957) was the son of William Griffiths (see under 1841) and Jane Roberts, the granddaughter of Morgan Hughes.

1911 Source: Census for Rhydywernen, Llanfor, Maerdy, Corwen (Llanfor, district 21, p. 13)

Ellis Rowlands	Head	32	Farmer	Born Llanfor
Maggie Rowlands	Wife	30	-	Born Llanycil
Lizzie Cy Roberts	Maid	15	House servant	Born Pennygroes
Henry Ivan	Servant	14	Cowman on farm	Born Llanycil
Margaret Ellis	Daughter	5	-	Born Llanfor

Rowlands		mths		
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Also, census for Cablyd, Llanfor, Sarnau, Llandderfel (district 21, p. 38)

John Griffiths*	Head	36	Farmer	Born Llanfor
Lizzie Griffiths**	Wife	33	-	Born Llangwm
Jane E Griffiths	Daughter	13	-	Born Llanfor
Emily L Griffiths	Daughter	10	-	Ditto
John W Griffiths	Son	8	-	Ditto
Grace M Griffiths	Daughter	4	-	Ditto
Ivor O Griffiths	Son	6 mths	-	Ditto
John Jones	Widower	66	-	Born Llangwm

* John and Lizzie had been married 14 years, 5 children born and five still living

** They married 1898 (Elizabeth Winifred, nee Jones)

1915-present Primary source is the electoral rolls supplemented by information on memorial inscriptions and oral evidence.

Electoral rolls are available for 1911, 1915, 1920 onwards: see District O (Sarnau, Llandderfel) for early years and District An (Sarnau, Llanfor/Llandderfel) for later years.

1915 William Evan Jones

1920 John Price Jones who **also occupied** Tynyffridd (1886-1971) married (in 1917) Jane Griffiths (1879-1962), the sister of John Hugh Griffiths (see 1901 census).

1921-1938 John Price Jones and Jane Jones were in occupation.

1939-1970 John Price Jones, Jane Jones, Megan Laura Jones (their daughter, 1918-2012). Magan Laura Jones married (in 1945) her cousin, Ivor Owen Griffiths (1910-1988), son of John Hugh Griffiths and Elizabeth Winifred Jones.

1971 John Price Jones, Ivor Owen Griffiths, John Ivor Griffiths, Megan Laura Griffiths and William Pierce Griffiths in occupation.

John Price Jones died 14 November 1971; his wife, Jane Jones (nee Griffiths), pre-deceased him 24 April 1962: both were buried at Rhydywernen (memorial inscriptions).

William Pierce Griffiths (b. 1948) and John Ivor Griffiths (b. 1951) were sons of Ivor Owen and Megan Laura Griffiths; a daughter, Jane Elizabeth, died in infancy, 1945.

1975 Ivor Owen Griffiths, Megan Laura Griffiths, William Pierce Griffiths and John Ivor Griffiths were in occupation. She died in 2012, aged 94, by which time she was no longer resident at Rhydywernen.

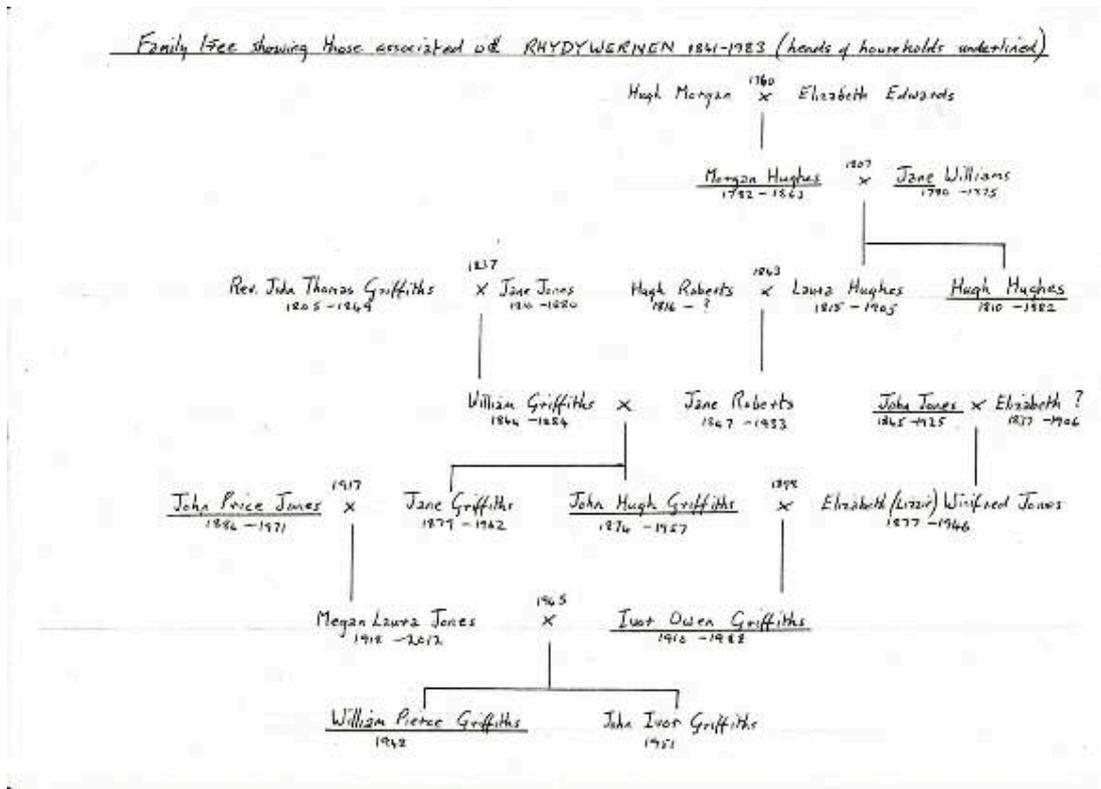
1983 William Pierce Griffiths and Margaret E Griffiths were in occupation.

William Pierce Griffiths married Margaret Eluned Thomas in 1976. They have a son and a daughter and moved into a newly-built farm house next door to Rhydywernen. At which point they sold Rhydywernen to Marjorie Briggs in 1983.

1984-1989 Marjorie Briggs and Jessie Lindley were in occupation.

1990-1991 Marjorie N Briggs was in occupation.

1992-present A James Jones is in occupation (not related to the local families; he is not a local person by origin).



Martin Cherry & Dinah Pickard

June 2015

RHYDYWERNEN

Llanfor, Merionedd, NGR SH 972 402

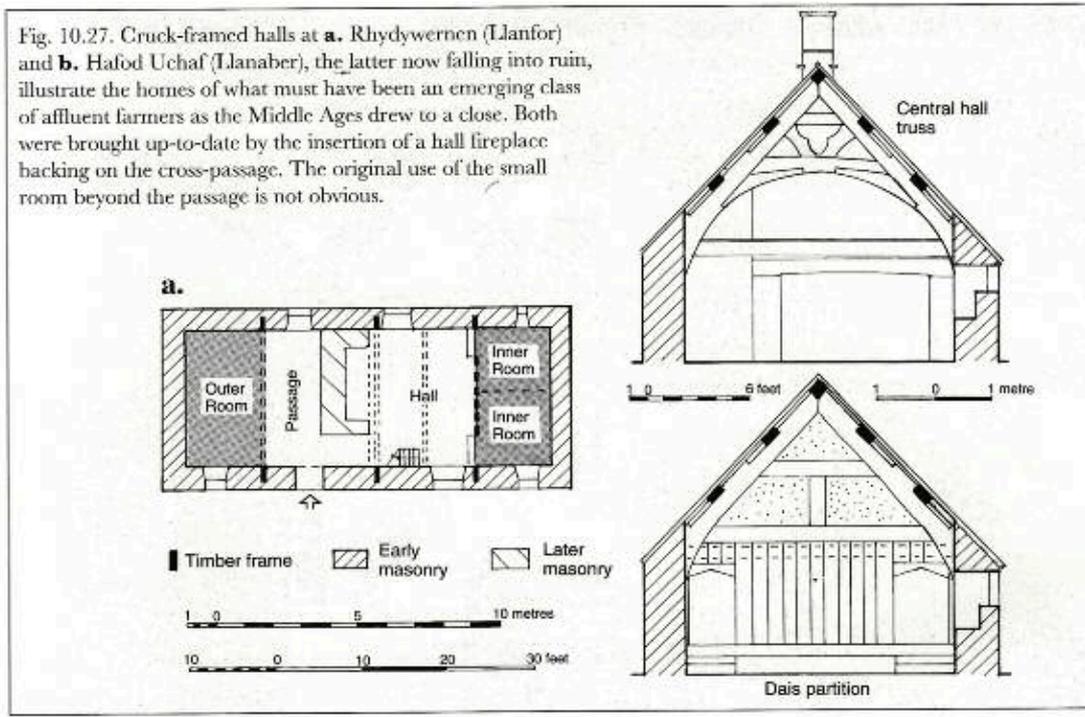
APPENDIX

The house

Rhydywernen is a classic cruck-framed open-hall house, sited down hill across and just above the 800 feet (244 metres) contour line. The hall is of two bays (one bay incorporating the cross passage). The house conforms to Peter Smith's type that comprised a hall with a small inner unit (two rooms) and a small outer unit. He notes that the function of the outer unit is problematic since it is too small to have formed a byre. The cruck blades extend well down into the stone wall. Smith suspected that the house originally had timber walls and was later clad in stone, probably when the hall floor was inserted with the hall fireplace backing on to the cross passage. The extruded masonry to the south of the hall strengthens this suggestion, since it seems to work around the frame in a way that would not have been necessary if it had been built in stone from the outset. It is possible that the outer unit was reduced in size when the house was modernized, so the possibility of its originally having had a byre cannot be excluded. The importance of livestock to the local farming economy would have made cattle accommodation essential, either in a byre or a self-contained unit elsewhere on the farmstead. The plank and muntin (post and panel) dais-end screen survives with two doorways into the inner rooms, and extends to the first floor, so this end was clearly storeyed from the beginning. The principal hall roof truss is embellished with cusped struts. There are some carefully scored herringbone pattern graffiti on the purlin adjacent to the principal hall truss (north, higher end bay).¹

Five primary phase roof timbers gave a felling date of winter 1530/1 that indicates a construction date of 1531 or very shortly thereafter. Unfortunately a beam from the inserted floor was sampled but could not be dated, so it is not known when the house was modernized. The ceiling beams are chamfered with run-out stops; the joists are also nicely chamfered and stopped. To the east (outer) end is a single-storeyed, two-unit, stone-built storage area, which that may have been raised on the footprint of a former byre.

¹ Peter Smith, 'Houses c. 1415 – c. 1642' in J Beverley Smith and Llinos Beverley Smith (eds.), *History of Merioneth* II, 428, 431, 442, 451, 485 (fig. 10.7, reproduced below)



Rhydywernen, Llanfor. Plan and sections from Peter Smith, 'Houses c. 1415 – c. 1642' in J Beverley Smith and Llinos Beverley Smith (eds.), *History of Merioneth II*, 485



Rhydywernen, Llanfor from the north. The later porch marks the entrance to the former cross passage, incorporated into one of the bays of the open hall. The inner rooms are to the right.

Setting

Rhydywernen lies towards the west (high) end of what is now called Cwm Main, but which appears on older maps as Merddwy. The valley runs west to east to join Afon Alwen, two miles west of Maerdy. The land is poor, the stream sluggish, much of the flat valley bottom marshy or covered in scrub (mainly willow), and still liable to flooding. The stream, Nant Lleidiog, gave its name to a medieval township. In the 1292-3 lay subsidy, there were 17 taxpayers in the township who are named but are not associated with specific places. Nine of these individuals paid more than 3s. 4d., and two more than 6s. 8d; the minimum payment was 1s. 3d.; the maximum 8s. 9d; the average was 3s. 6d.; and the sum total for the township was £3 2s. 7d. This places the township among the poorest in the commote of Penllyn, which was itself the poorest in Merioneth; the township of Nant Lleidiog comprised 3.5% of the commote's taxpayers, but 11% of those taxpayers who were assessed at less than £2. The townships of this part of Merioneth were largely made up of free *gafael*.² The local economy was most likely specializing in livestock by the early fourteenth century, if not before.

Very little documentation appears to survive for Cwm Main for the medieval and early modern period—the valley does not seem to have been dominated by any single large or even several intermediate sized estates. Three houses in the valley (in addition to Rhydywernen) have been documented by the RCAHMW. Two of them, Coed-y-Bedo (situated on the watershed between Cwm Main and really part of the neighbouring valley system to the west) and Gwern-y-Braichdwr (situated just where the valley begins to wide out to the east) were noted by Peter Smith as being ‘remarkably similar’ to each other. He suggests that they might have been open hall houses converted to lobby-entry plans in the early seventeenth century, but he is not dogmatic about this and notes evidence that might run counter to this interpretation. Both these houses were owned by celebrated bards: Bedo Aeddren (active around 1500) inherited Coed-y-Bedo, although it was not his principal residence; another, active at the end of the sixteenth century lived at Gwern-y-Braichdwr.³

The third recorded (but unpublished) house, Llwyn-onn, now ruined, is a high-quality stone-built end-chimney house, with moulded plinth, cornice and gable end coping. The RCAHMW, benefiting from the substantial timber work then surviving, considered it to be late seventeenth century, but incorporating parts of earlier roof trusses that may have come from an earlier house on the site.⁴

In addition to these recorded houses, Ty tan-y-ffordd is listed as a ‘sub-medieval 2-bay building, probably of the sixteenth century’ believed to contain a cruck-type truss (the interior was not inspected). A number of other houses are noted on *Coflein* as

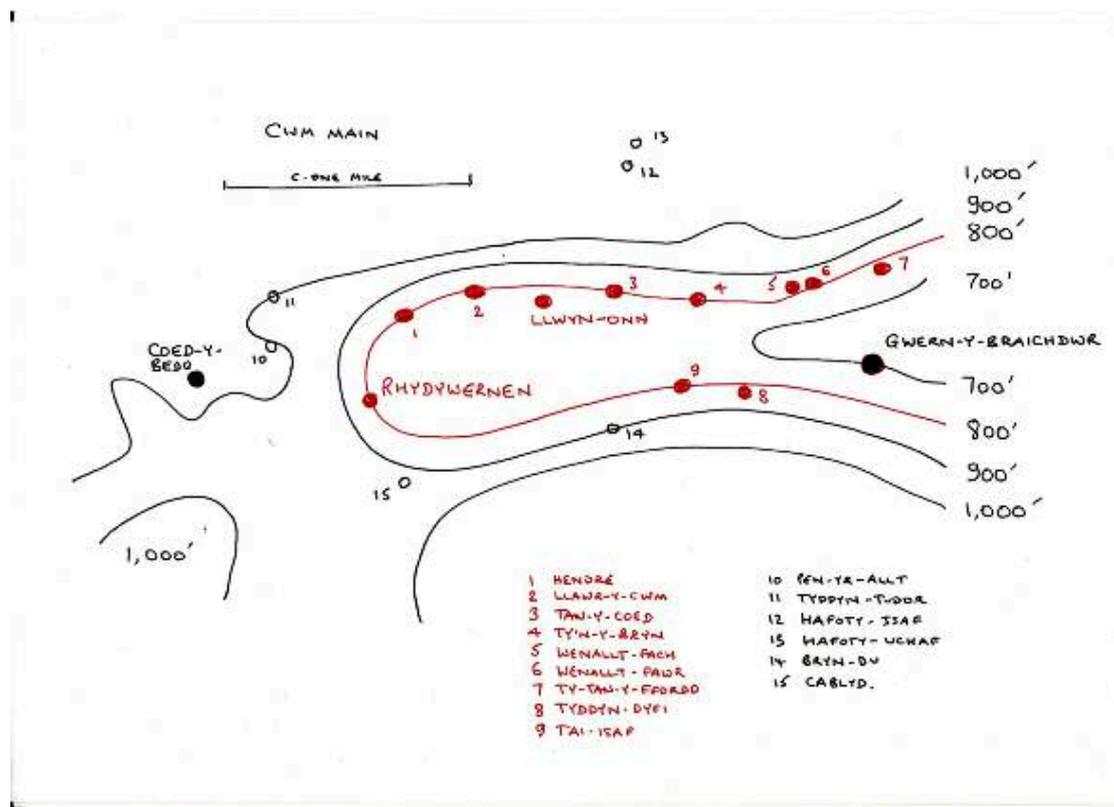
² K Williams-Jones (ed.), *The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll, 1292-3* (Cardiff, 1976), cxlii; Colin Thomas, ‘Rural Society, Settlement, Economy and Landscapes’ in Beverley Smith (op cit), 171

³ Smith, ‘Houses’, 456, 497 (Fig. 10.39), 498 (Fig. 10.40); on Bedo Aeddren, see <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-BEDO-AED-1500.html>; on the Gwern-y-Braichdwr connection, information provided by Alaw Edwards.

⁴ NMR site files

being 'post medieval', a code for being of interest but not inspected—but the date range is a catch-all and not reliable.

With the exception of Gwern-y-braichdwr, which is situated at a height of 700 feet (213 metres), all the (former) farmhouses are on or very close to the 800 feet (244 metres) contour, along a spring line; they follow a classic upland pattern—above the flood line and the summer pastures, just below the woods, with the rougher pastures and (presumably) common or shared lands on the hill tops. The rough schematic map below summarizes the situation. Both the sites and names suggest early origins for most of these farmsteads—whether some of them mark the sites of the homes of the 1292-3 tax payers cannot be confirmed—but a rapid external survey suggested that little ancient fabric remains where not already recorded.



Schematic map of Cwm Main showing farmsteads on or close to the 800 feet (244 metre) spring line.