



DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



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Dathlu Treftadaeth Cymru drwy astudio tai traddodiadol a bywydau'r bobl fu'n byw ynddynt.

Celebrating Welsh Heritage through the study of traditional houses and the lives of the people who lived in them.

CYLCHLYTHYR 53 Mehefin 2025

NEWSLETTER 53 June 2025

EIN GWEFAN

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yw prif sianel gyfathrebu'r Grŵp - defnyddiwch hi i weld mwy o fanylion am y digwyddiadau diweddar a'r rhai sydd i ddod, ac i edrych ar ein llyfrgell sy'n cynyddu'n gyson ac ar nodweddion eraill.

OUR WEBSITE

<http://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

Is the Groups main channel of communication please visit it to see details of recent and forthcoming events and to look at our growing library and other features.



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FROM THE CHAIR

By Janice Dale

We were out walking over Liberty Hall near Corwen, and stopped for a coffee break at the ruined shooting lodge [magnificent views over the Dee valley by the way] and thought how lucky I am to be able to combine my love of walking our hills and at the same time looking out for remains of houses. I was reminded of a paper that John Townsend and Martin Cherry have been putting together on the parish of Llanelltyd [watch out for it on the website soon] which refers to a number of ruins that need investigating. I am sure that, as our membership covers the width on North Wales, there will be many old ruins near you that have melted into the landscape and never been recorded – so perhaps next time you are out for a walk you might discover some of these. They can then be recorded in the Parish Project database.

The paper on Llanelltyd is a good example of how the parish project list of houses can lead to a greater understanding of how they fitted into the wider picture.

This will be the final NL that Margaret and Wally Barr have edited, and I would like to thank them for their work in putting together such an important document. We now need a new editor or editors, so if you are up to the challenge do please get in touch.

A NOTE ON THE DOWH WEBSITE

By Peter Masters, Website Manager

Our website is not just a repository for our reports; it is also a shop window available to the world to look into. Some just come in to browse out of curiosity, others are seeking information and or links to themselves, their families or general research.

The enquiries@ link brings these people to ask us for help. The lady who wanted some help in locating forebears thought to be connected to one of our reports and the tithes apportions. A gentleman from Sussex (formerly of Shropshire), who by coincidence lives in my old town all but a street away, was delighted to find the Plas Penmynydd files we had as he had a Tudor family connection and planned to visit. (Thank you Richard).

Others may want information regarding a location or a place, which can be passed on to the appropriate member/researcher - help with the Parry's of Twysog for example. We had an author looking for help: "I am writing my third historical novel, which involves the above property. I am wondering if your members have any information regarding its history, for which I would be very appreciative". And an American Civil War Society who are researching Caernarfon connections.

So our website provides a valuable link to seemingly unrelated people and events, which helps account for the high number of hits we get.

NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Report by Clare Latham and Brenda Simpson

Two Delightful Days Out: From Penmynydd to Plasglasgwm and Ty Mawr Wybrnant



Our Spring season of visits has got off to an excellent start with our April trip to Penmynydd. It was an afternoon brimming with history, charm, and a few surprises along the way! Our first stop was St Gredifael's Church. Tucked away down a peaceful lane, this ancient church holds a treasure trove of history, including its ties to Owain Tudur, grandfather of Henry VII. Standing inside, with sunlight filtering through the stained glass and the centuries of history contained within those stone walls, John, the Church Warden gave us a fascinating insight into the church and its Tudor connections. We saw the

amazing 14th century alabaster tombs which are in the added Tudor wing of the church with its Tudor window. Apparently, the hands are missing as alabaster was thought to have medicinal properties so they were slowly chipped away over time. The pews have unusual Fleur de Lys carvings as a tribute to the union between the Welsh Tudors and



French Royal Family with the marriage of Owain Tudur and Catherine of Valois who was the widow of King Henry V of England. This marriage established the Tudor claim to the English



throne. The churchyard was equally lovely, with its weathered gravestones and sweeping views over the Anglesey countryside—a perfect place to pause and soak it all in.



Just a short distance away are the Penmynydd Alms houses, a row of 17th-century stone cottages that were once homes for the poor. There are some beautifully preserved features and they look like they belong in a period drama, with their quaint charm and a story of community spirit from days gone by. They are overseen by a group of dedicated Trustees who generously hosted our visit and opened up the Alms houses for us to explore, which haven't been lived in since 2011. We then enjoyed refreshments and a talk in the Village Hall about the plans drawn up awaiting submission for planning approval to convert the current 5 houses



to 3 more up to date properties that can be once again rented out to local people with a focus on local people looking to get a foothold on the property ladder.



In May, we decided to venture further afield to Plasglasgwm in the heart of Penmachno, near Betws-y-Coed. This wonderful historic property is surrounded by woodland and sits right in the middle of the beautiful Machno Valley. It was once a traditional Welsh upland farm built in 1573, and today it offers a perfect blend of rustic charm and natural beauty. Our hosts, Tamsyn & Peter, had arranged a soup and cake lunch and it was the most beautiful day, so this was much enjoyed sitting in the sunshine. We were then given a tour around their beautifully restored gardens and of their private house which still has many of its original 16th century features. We could really feel the history in the old stone walls and enjoyed the beauty of the peaceful fields and valley



around. Since Plasglasgwm has been lovingly restored it now hosts art events, workshops, and weddings and has converted barn properties to rent. The gardens are open this summer through the National Garden Scheme. It's a hidden gem for sure!

As we were in the area, we couldn't resist visiting Ty Mawr Wybrnant, just a short drive away. This National Trust property was the birthplace of William Morgan, the man who was commissioned by Elizabeth 1st to translate the Bible into Welsh. We were given the history of this charming house by National Trust guide, Fflur. The stone-built house is simple yet full of character, and the surrounding woods and bubbling stream make it feel like stepping into a timeless valley. They let us have a preview of a new exhibition room being built to house their collection of Bibles from all over the world. After our tour, we lingered for a while on the little bridge over the stream just enjoying the peacefulness and soaking up the significance of this special place.



After these two super events, our planned June house visit has unfortunately had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, so rather than not have anything, we decided to discover 'not so old' Welsh gardens instead! We are meeting at Oriel Mon to have a look at the new exhibition, 'Anglesey People' before

visiting a garden in Llangefni which is being opened to groups through the National Garden Scheme. The garden is across 2.5 acres featuring a kitchen garden and an apiary so we



might be lucky with home grown produce being available to purchase.

We will definitely be having cake!



Our visits post June are still as planned:

16/07/25 Plas Penmynydd

Cefn Coch – a 17th century Hall type house, nr Llanfaethlu

15/10/25 Beaumaris house and visit to The Bull – tbc

On a personal note, we would like to thank Wally and Margaret for all their help, support and encouragement to us as new Branch Secretaries. We wish them all the very best for the future.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

Unfortunately illness has hampered branch planning, though it is hoped things will be moving on again shortly.

CONWY BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

A recent DOWH invitation to research the history of Corwen's *Owain Glyndŵr Hotel*, situated beside the church of *St Mael and St Sulien*, is producing a fascinating picture of life in this former market town, which is also the subject of an article in this Newsletter.

From our Parishes Project research we still have historical information on a considerable number of pre-1750 properties to add to the DOWH database, and DOWH members have also identified two specific areas for further research projects; areas in which few actual DOWH house histories have been researched, but are of considerable interest historically.

The first is a 'triangular' area extending between Corwen, Llangollen and Llandegla, also including parishes such as Bryneglwys, Llansantffraid Glyndyfrdwy (Carrog), Glyndyfrdwy, Rhewl and Llantysilio; the other is the 'Bala' area between Llandderfel and Llanuwchllyn.

Our May meeting was kindly hosted, with a delicious tea, by a local DOWH member at her beautiful Carrog home *Ty Beulah*, which was originally the first 'free' school in Wales during the week and served as a chapel at weekends. Here we focused upon identifying pre-1750 houses in the former parishes of Gwyddelwern, Llantysilio and Llansantffraid Glyndyfrdwy.

Our house history for *Hafod yr afr* (Cynwyd) is now online at https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20132_HH_Hafod%20yr%20Afr.pdf. House histories are largely completed for *Cadwst* (Llandrillo), *Caenog* (Gwyddelwern), *Henblas* (Llandderfel) and *Henfaes isaf* (Cynwyd), but still awaiting finalised architectural reports, and histories are also underway for *Plas isaf* (Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd), *Pant y Llyn* and *Bryn Penllyn* (both near Llandrillo); *Llwyn Lleiaf* (Betws Gwerfil Goch), *Bryn Brith* (Corwen), *Lleweni* (Denbigh) and *Owain Glyndŵr Hotel*. For drafts of research so far on these properties (not including details of current owners unless they want this), do contact me at leesjenny@gmail.com

Our next meeting will be at 2 pm on Thursday 19th June at *Hafod y calch*, Corwen, where we'll be continuing to catch up with and share our ongoing DOWH research. In addition, the whole further north of Denbighshire

and Flintshire is full of tempting but unvisited historic properties, so do let me know if you could either procure a DOWH visit to one of them or host a DOWH meeting at your own home (which does not need to be old), and I can make the arrangements!

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

Unfortunately, due to the sudden onset of health problems, we will not be able to take an active role in running the Flintshire branch for the foreseeable future. If, in our absence, you feel able to play an active role in organising events for the Flintshire branch do please let us know and we will be very happy to assist in whatever way we can. Please contact us through wallybarr@yahoo.co.uk or phone 01745 888622.

MERIONETH BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ARTICLE

By Janice Dale
Rûg Chapel

I am lucky to live just 10 minutes from this Grade 1 listed building, and when CADW advertised that they were opening for a special event – a talk by our Richard Suggett, I quickly booked a place.

This chapel built by William Salesbury in 1637 escaped the ravages of the civil war, and apart from changes in 1850 is very much as it was built.

Inside are fantastic carved animals adorning the walls and benches –all types of animals, dragons, serpents and other strange monsters.

The magnificent carved roof is painted with stars and a representation of clouds. There are panels with colourful floral designs and four cut-out wooden angels to guard the scene.

It was the private chapel of Colonel William Salesbury, affectionately known as ‘Hen Hosanau Gleision’ or Old Blue Stockings. Being the youngest son he outlived his two brothers to inherit the Rûg estate and once he had cleared all the debts that he also inherited he built the chapel. While others embraced simpler forms of worship, he prayed here in high church splendour.



Despite having been a regular visitor to the chapel [I organise the annual carol concert here in December every year] I learnt so much from Richard, and saw things I had previously not even noticed

So if you get the chance to visit, I thoroughly recommend it so keep an eye out on the CADW website.

ARTICLE

By Jenny Lees

The Owain Glyndŵr Hotel – A Community Revival!

The *Owain Glyndŵr Hotel* is a magnificent Grade II Listed former coaching inn in the centre of Corwen,¹ now in Denbighshire but previously in Merionethshire. Although the main part of the hotel was built in mid C18th,² a DOWH architectural visit suggested that the bressumer of a former fireplace and chamfered spine beam and joists were likely to date from C17th.



Local historian Dylan Ellis Jones (left) in front of the Owain Glyndŵr Hotel

But there could originally have been an even earlier building on the site, as the hotel lies 'sandwiched' between Corwen's main thoroughfare (now the A5) and the early medieval 'mother church' of *St Mael and St Sulien* - documented as early as 1222. We know something of the church's clerics, including *Parson of Corwen Sir Bened ap Gronw*, benefactor of the 15th century poet Guto'r Glyn who was also entrusted as a drover to sell Sir Bened's lambs in the Midlands.³ And although we don't yet know which inn was referred to, a

later C16th praise poem by Hywel Gethin described the innkeeper **Lleucu, daughter of Bleddyn** from Corwen, as being '*of noble descent*' as well as an admirable publican.⁴

Could the hotel's earlier parts, bordering the churchyard, have had a church related function? We know from *Llangar Churchwardens'Accounts*⁵ that two shillings were paid in 1714 when parishioners met to choose a new churchwarden at the nearby tavern of *Stamp*, so was the *Owain Glyndŵr* once an equally convenient hostelry? The earliest building could also have been a 'Church House', used to house festivals and church 'ales' after such events were considered no longer appropriate in the church itself, and following Oliver Cromwell's ban of such activities, church houses were often converted for other parish uses or rented to a former 'housekeeper' as an ordinary alehouse.⁶ Or did the building house other church personnel – as with farmhouse *Hafod yr afr*'s tenant John Lloyd, Sexton for nearby Llangar church and probably responsible for both bell ringing and grave digging.⁷ It is also interesting that the existing fireplace bressumer has several

¹ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/28606/>

² <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000658-owain-glyndwr-hotel-corwen>

³ J. Beverley Smith and Llinos Beverley Smith (2001) *History of Merioneth* Vol. 2, p.550.

⁴ Glenys Davies (1974) *Noddwyr Beirdd ym Meiron* (1974), p.40.

⁵ Transcribed by David Morgan Evans. (Denbighshire Record Office, DRO NTD/467).

⁶ See https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/con%20091_HH_QueensHistory2.pdf

⁷ https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20132_HH_Hafod%20yr%20Afr.pdf

deep burn marks, believed to be possibly deliberate marks intended to ward off evil forces, and to coincide with the mid C17th witch craze.

At some point the hotel had become named after the renowned Welsh hero Owain Glyndŵr, but it seems to have had at least one earlier (or initially contemporary) name - the *New Inn*. Was this because there were older inns in Corwen, or because an older building had been upgraded as an inn? A **1393** Act had made it compulsory for pubs and inns to have a sign (initially just pictorial) to identify them for the official *Ale Taster*, but it is uncertain when Owain Glyndŵr's name was



1805 image showing the earlier rear part of Owain Glyndŵr Hotel

first used for this establishment. In **1549** *Rug*'s Robert Salusbury bought the *Lordship of Glyndyfrdwy* lands where Owain Glyndŵr had reportedly declared himself Prince of Wales in **1400**, and Owen Salesbury of *Rug* was still referred to as 'Lord of Glyndyfrdwy' after his own **1694** death. So could Owain's name have been originally used on *Rug* property in Corwen on account of its cultural prestige?

We do know that, after a new mail coach route to Ireland had been established in the Dee Valley, reaching Corwen by **1777**⁸ and avoiding the dangerous *Conwy Ferry*, Owain's name was already in use when a **Corbett Harris** placed the following advertisement in **1786**:

'Travelling between LONDON and HOLYHEAD. CORBITT HARRIS begs Leave to acquaint the Nobility, Gentry, and Public in general, that he has taken and entered upon the INN at Corwen known by the sign of OWEN GLANDWR'S HEAD, and that he is fitting up the same in the most elegant Manner, which he hopes to be favored with their Protection and Support ...'

In **1790** the sale of part of an important local estate - probably *Maerdy Mawr* - was advertised as taking place there, then in **1824** **Francis Clarke** hosted the sale of *Gwerclas Estate*⁹ at the *Owen Glyndwr Hotel*, marrying **Ellen Evans**, 'only daughter of William Evans Esq. of Bodynliw', Betws Gwerfil Goch, in 1831. In the **1841** *Tithe Apportionment* Francis was *Occupier* of the 92-acre *Owen Glyndwr Inn and lands*, owned by **Griffith Howell Vaughan** of *Rug*, with fields on the lower slopes of Berwyn mountain that included areas of *ffridd* interspersed with small *Plantations*, as well as fields along the river Dee. Previous *Owen Glyndwr Hotel* holdings also included stables across the road, now the site of the hotel's car park, seen in the **1905** image below. (Courtesy of Dylan Ellis Jones).

⁸ M. S. Archer (1970) *The Welsh Post Towns*.

⁹ https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20110_HH_27_Gwerclas-2019.pdf



In previous centuries many inns were also working farms, and many of those running the *Owain Glyndŵr* were also farmers either before or after their hotel tenancies. In **1851 Francis Clarke** was *Farmer* of 200 acres at *Plas y Derwen*, Derwen, and was son of Francis and Sabina Clarke of *Plas Coch*, Llanychan. After his **1854** death his wife **Ellen Clarke** was *Hotel Keeper* at the Bell Hotel, Abergele by **1861**, with *Farmer* son **William**, and Ellen inherited her parental home of *Bodynlliw*,¹⁰ a house of considerable historic interest.

By the **1851** Census the *Owen Glyndŵr* was headed by **James Moltby**, *Farmer* and *Innkeeper* born in London at *Reeves Mews*, Westminster, with wife **Sarah** born in Ellesmere and *Servants* including *Cook*, *Housemaid*, *Dairy maid*, *Waitress*, *Kitchen maid*, *Gardner (Domestic)*, *House Servant* and *Dairy maid*. And in **1854** famous travel writer [George Borrow](#) arrived on foot at Corwen, writing in '*Wild Wales*' (1862):

“It was now about two o’clock, and feeling rather thirsty I went to an inn, very appropriately called the Owen Glendower, being the principal inn in the principal town of what once the domain of the great Owen. Here I stopped for about an hour refreshing myself and occasionally looking into a newspaper in what was an excellent article on the case of poor Lieutenant P.”



**Bodynlliw viewed from near Clegir uchaf
(Jenny Lees 2023)**

James Moltby still headed the *Owen Glyndwr* in the **1861** census, with wife **Sarah** and *Visitors* including a *County Court Judge*, two *Surveyors*, two *Merchants* and a *Coachman*, but by 1881, aged 75, was *Retired Farmer* at *The Terrace*, Corwen, with wife Sarah. From an **1870** advert we also know that new tenant **Mr Warne** had valued '*the whole of the Effects at the Owen Glyndwr Hotel, Corwen*' and put them up for sale at *Bridge-street, Corwen*:

¹⁰ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/28182>



'The Contents of Three Sitting Rooms, Hall, Stairs, Lobbies, Six Bed-rooms, Kitchen and Scullery, consisting of Superior Rose-wood and Mahogany Tables, Chairs, Sofas, and Couches, Sideboards, Wardrobes, Chest of Drawers, Handsome Bedsteads, Pier Glasses, Dressing Tables, Washstands, Toilet Services, Feather Beds, Carpets, Hearthrugs, &c'.

The 1871 Census for Owen Glyndwr Hotel listed **William Warne** with wife **Jane** and five children - his two *Stepdaughters* being *Barmaid* and *Assistant Barmaid*, and *Brother John Warne* and *Guest Edward*

The 1871 photo (John Thomas) shows the hotel before an Italianate portico was added

R. Coupe from Tenby listed as *Annuitants*. As niece **Mary Ellen Crosse** was *Barmaid in Railway Rooms*, the railway had arrived, and the hotel's *Servants* now additionally included a *Hotel Porter*, *Second Waitress* and *Laundress*.



William Warne, son of *Farmer William Warne*, had been *Gamekeeper* in Hampshire in **1852** when he married *widowed Jane Harmsworth* of 242 *Strand*, daughter of *Farmer George Cross*, at *St Clement Danes, Westminster*. He was then *Head Gamekeeper* at *Rug* in 1862 and 1869 before taking on the license for *Owen Glyndwr Hotel* in May **1870**.

So when, in **1873**, William's stepdaughter **Clara** married in *Corwen church* **Mr R. B. Rowson** of nearby *Bronygraig*, 'the firing of cannon, peeling of bells, and blasting of rocks, were employed to show the interest taken in the event by the inhabitants of Corwen.' Could those cannons have come from *Rug*? After

the wedding 'the party returned to the Owen Glyndwr Hotel, where they partook of an excellent breakfast ...Several arches were erected at the church porch, opposite the Union Workhouse and at Bronygraig'.

On 6th July **1875** the '*DISTINGUISHED VISITORS Lord Alexander Paget, Lord and Lady Cole, The Baron and Baroness Fachroeder, Captain Simpson, and their several servants*' stayed at the Owen Glyndwr,¹¹ but when the **Hon. Mr. Wynn of Rhug** sold all his Corwen house property, the old established *Owain Glyndwr Hotel* with stabling was sold for £3,200 to a **Mr J. A. Jones**, who had previously been *Farmer of Rhysgog Farm*, Llangollen. And in **1876**, the auction of the household furniture and effects of 'out-going tenant **Mr. Warne** appeared 'to have attracted a considerable number, from the elite to the humbler of the inhabitants of Corwen and its vicinity... the sale, which lasted two or three days turned out a very good one'.

By **1881** William Warne was farming 200 acres in Warwickshire, but in 1901 was *Hotel Proprietor-Pub* at Brightlingsea, Essex. Meanwhile in **1881**, the *Servants* of new *Owain Glyndwr* owner **John A. Jones** and wife **Elizabeth** now included an *Ostler* (employed to look after the horses of people staying there), but after John's death a **Mr John Roberts** was now *Hotel Keeper* by **1901** with wife Elizabeth. As in **1911** four of their older daughters were *Assisting in the Business*, one wonders



whether working there during that period enhanced marriage prospects, as in **1923** daughter **Dorothy Mary Roberts** married the *Bank Manager* son of *Retired Sea Captain* William Griffith, and in **1924** her older sister **Norah** married *Manufacturer* **Denis Grierson Fry**, of the renowned chocolate family!

The *Owain Glyndwr Hotel* remained at the centre of community life during C20th, with reports of numerous events hosted there including public meetings, property auctions, society meetings and wedding receptions – next to the church! It was once 'a haven for the fishing and shooting fraternity,' presided over by **Major Lesley Dow**, amusing memories of whom are in the article 'A Most Colourful Cynwyd Character' in *Cynwyd Scrapbook Three*.¹²

For the last quarter-century the *Owain Glyndwr* was owned by **Ifor Sion**, whose local family connections are mentioned in 'From Cynwyd to Cwm Cynllwyd - and beyond' (*Cynwyd Scrapbook Four*). Then recently it was purchased by and for the community as a *Community Benefit Society*,¹³ and now provides not only a restaurant, public bars, accommodation for visitors and spacious 'function' rooms for every possible sort of event, but also hosts an exciting programme of social and cultural activities. And exhibitions will of course continue to acknowledge the legacy of *Owain Glyndwr* in the area, as well as Corwen's pivotal role in 1789's first public Eisteddfod: <https://museum.wales/collections/eisteddfodau/gwyneddigion/>

¹¹ The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard.

¹² The Cynwyd book series is on <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page18.html>

¹³ <https://owainglyndwr.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Owain-Glyndwr-Corwen-Final-English.pdf>

The information in this article has been researched by myself, Pam Buttrey, Martin Cherry and Dylan Ellis Jones (key to securing this important historic building's future), and will form part of a fully referenced DOWH 'house' history on our website. Jenny Lees, 2025.

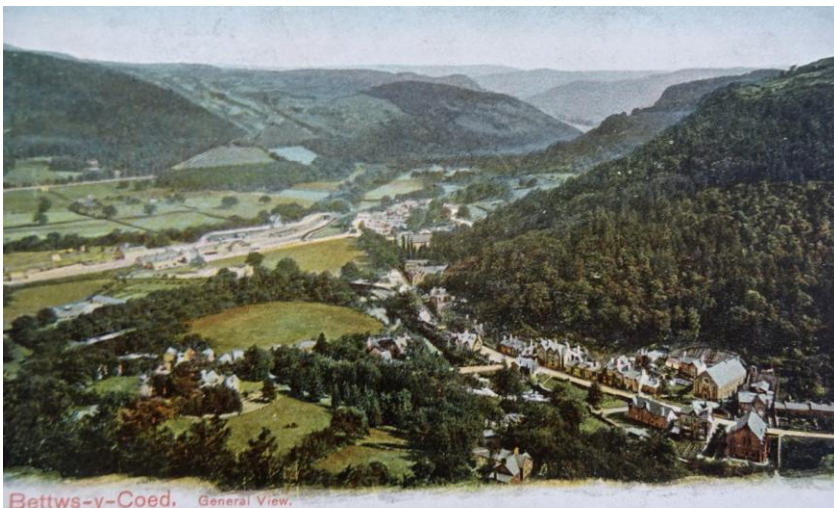
ARTICLE

By Tony Scharer

The Aristocrat and the Rogue – a tale of two English settlers in 19th century Betws y coed

It is so often the characters who lived in a house who remain in one's memory after historical research, and this is a summary of a talk given to the Conwy group in March 2025 about two English settlers in 19th century Betws-y-coed. Both are connected to interesting houses, but their stories are remarkably different, and take place against the rapid development of the village between 1820 and 1900.

In 1820, a young London lace-merchant, **David Price-Downes**, saw an opportunity to profit from the death of his uncle who lived in **Hendre Rhys Gethin**, the most famous of the few old houses in the village. His uncle, the Revd. David Price, was a descendant of the infamous Ellis Prys from Elizabethan times, and also owned several farms in Penmachno, including the historic house of Fedw Deg. The nephew had little difficulty persuading his mother and her sister to pass on their moiety of the estate, and he was soon living the life of a gentleman in Wales, married to the daughter of a local family from Hendre House near Llanrwst.



View of Betws-y-coed c.1870 showing the intrusion of the new railway. Plas Muriau is just visible above the road (top left)

He so impressed the gentry of Caernarfonshire that by 1836 he took his turn as High Sheriff of the county, and in the 1841 census his substantial household at Hendre Rhys Gethin comprised a governess for his three daughters, two menservants and three maids. But behind this facade he was mortgaging his inheritance for money to sustain his lifestyle. In today's equivalent he raised nearly £300,000 in mortgages alone, and documents in the Bangor University Archives reveal queries about his title to the land, and the inevitable foreclosures and sale of all the properties, so that by 1853 the family were living in near poverty on a small farm in Penmachno.

David Price-Downes did little for the village, and may even have demolished the historic old house at Hendre Rhys Gethin. In Penmachno he was vilified by the locals for his treatment of tenants, and his final ruin was celebrated by the ardently liberal Welsh writer, Ellis Pierce (Twm o'r Nant), who wrote in *Y Cymro* in 1900 that *"No one lost their inheritance more successfully, and it took just twenty years to complete the destruction"*. It was rumoured he'd escaped to Australia to avoid his creditors, *"and been buried as a beggar in a plain wooden box"*.

With hindsight, had David Price-Downes been able to hold on to his 98 acres of land along the Holyhead Road in Betws-y-coed into the 1860s, he might have saved himself financially, when demand for building plots grew as the village became popular with tourists and artists. But deception was possibly engrained in the Price family: his uncle had falsely claimed that the famous effigy of Gruffudd ap Dafydd Goch in Betws

old church was of a warrior who lived in his own farm at Fedw Deg – a claim that is now thought to be very doubtful. Whether Price-Jones was a rogue, or just trying to live beyond his means is open to question, but the next English arrival was certainly an aristocrat, and came exactly at the time when the village's popularity as a mecca for painters and tourists was taking off.

In 1860 **William Nathaniel Drury-Lowe** was a young cavalry officer, living with his young wife in Llandudno. He'd upset his family at Locko Park, near Derby, by marrying a ladies maid, - a social faux pas that was neither tolerated by his family nor by his fellow officers in the fashionable 17th Lancers. The family papers, held in Nottingham University archives have preserved his diary entry for 13 February 1860, when he recorded hiring a carriage to travel up the valley to Betws-y-coed. It was a cold day, with "*views of the hills covered with snow like frosted silver*", and he compliments the local horses on journey home where he was pulled by "*Welsh ponies that are capital up and down hill, and never seem to tire*".

The journey was to see a house for rent – *Myria*, not long built on the land of *Muriau Poethion farm* on the eastern bank of the Conwy for an artist, George Popkin. The house was unusual, built in the new gothic-alpine style with a steeply pitched roof and ornate barge-boards. It immediately appealed to Drury-Lowe, who saw a 'project' to improve the garden and grounds, as well as to take some painting lessons from nearby artists. Although short of money, he lived there for fifteen years. Sadly, the marriage did not last, but he was eventually reconciled with his father and was able to buy the house and adjoining land.

In 1863, he visited Florence, and met an Italian ceiling painter, Pietro Romoli, who was engaged to decorate some new ceilings at the family home in Derby. The next year, he managed to bring Romoli to Wales where they worked together to paint the drawing room ceiling at *Myria*. This painting was hidden for many years, and only finally uncovered in 1995 after a small sketch was found in the Nottingham Archives.

Plas *Muriau*, as the house was eventually named, was the first new house to be built on the Denbighshire side of the River Conwy, and other houses soon followed. The 1871 census recorded a new terrace of four houses, built on Drury-Lowe's land, adding to two earlier large houses. Amongst the local quarrymen, miners, and labourers, there were a number of English artists and tourists, but William Drury-Lowe kept a low profile locally, eventually serving as a magistrate as befitted his class, and regularly contributing to local charitable events.

Unlike the first owner of Plas *Muriau*, who left when steam trains threatened to disturb his peace, William used the railway to travel to and from his Derby estate – a journey that was much quicker at that time than today! On his father's death he returned home to become a successful landowner and industrialist, leaving his beloved Welsh house un-tenanted, and in the care of his faithful housekeeper until his death in 1906. His most enduring legacy is probably the woodland on the west-facing hillside that dominates Betws-y-coed. The mixture of old larch and pines that he planned with his father still survives among the later planting, and gives variety and colour to the landscape that was once rough pasture and poor glebe land for the parish of Garth Garmon.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2025-6

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

The programme for the autumn is nearly confirmed, but unfortunately not quite advanced enough to announce in this edition of the Newsletter. When finalised, members will be informed by email and also via the Chair's new occasional news bulletin so, **please keep an eye out for these and check your spam folder!** The

programme will also be updated regularly on our website <https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk> (look under 'Members').

It's always helpful to receive feedback about the lecture series—is the balance of speakers and subjects right for you? What else would you like to see covered? I tend to focus on Welsh subjects, but would you be happy to hear talks with a wider geographical spread? And I'm always pleased to receive tips about good speakers you would recommend I invite. Do get in touch: martincherry@btinternet.com

STOP PRESS!

2025 AGM

Since Covid DOWHG have embraced the use of zoom, including our AGM's, but this year we decided on a bold move and have a real in-person AGM, and thanks to some trustee IT skills we were able to make it a hybrid meeting with some members joining us via zoom.

And what a perfect venue we were able to have the use of – Gwydir Castle, a place that embodies what the group is about. Following a rapid AGM we were able to wander through the castle and grounds at our leisure. The owners of Gwydir were so welcoming and even the weather was perfect.

It was so good to take time and talk to members over tea and biscuits. I hope those who were at Gwydir enjoyed it as much as I did.

We are already having a conversation on repeating this format in 2026 – so hopefully will see you there

Janice Dale
Chair

