



Discovering Old Welsh Houses Newsletters



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DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

Syr Simon Jenkins, FSA, FRSL; Dr Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

*Dathlu Treftadaeth Cymru drwy astudio tai traddodiadol
abywydau'r bobl fu'n byw ynddynt...*

CYLCHLYTHYR 33 Mehefin 2020

EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

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

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

NEWSLETTER 45 June 2023

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

Half way through the year already, and life gets more hectic. All my good intentions for catching up with my research projects hasn't happened, what with still working, the family and the distraction of gardening – the same things that, no doubt, affect you all, there never seems enough time in the day to fit everything in. I am still trying to research houses in the township of Faerdref here in Llandrillo, as well as Cadwst which is going to be included in the Edeyrnion Project, for which funding is now in place. I am looking forward to seeing if the timbers can be dated this time. Here in the Dee valley much of the oak was fast growing and couldn't be dated using dendrochronology, but hopefully the Cadwst timbers will give us a date using the new isotope method.

I am also looking at the history of Tai Teg in Derwen, and this is proving challenging, as there are three houses [though Coflein says there were four – no evidence of a fourth yet in my research]. Being a small parish everyone knew everyone and so all the vital records are so vague, and trying to fit families into a particular house is proving interesting. In past research, tithe schedules that I have looked at have been in the ownership of a few big landlords especially round here,



but Derwen has multiple owners – not part of the big estate pattern. I can only assume at some time that one of the big estates sold off so many of the farms in Derwen.

I know many of you are beavering away at your own research so I will be keeping an eye on the website to see any new additions. But in the meantime I hope you are all enjoying the summer.

A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW EDITORS by Wally and Margaret Barr

What do you enjoy in your DOWH Newsletter and what would you like to see changed? Is there anything you think we should add to the Newsletter or something we should remove? DOWH belongs to all of us and your views are important. If you would like to contact us do please email, we're at flintshire-branch2@discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you!

NEWS UPDATE FROM THE SECRETARY by Margaret Dunn

This is an interesting time of change and development for DOWH. Quite a number of people are about to retire, or have just done so, and this is not surprising as many have been working hard with DOWH since the early days even before the establishment of the name Discovering Old Welsh Houses with its constitution in 2012. Back then we were led by an Advisory Group originally with no separate county branches, mainly following the targets of supportive grant aiding bodies. It is difficult to recall and we would probably not have believed how much has been achieved with no paid staff. Or may be that it why - so many enthusiastic volunteers bringing so many skills and various expertise from across north Wales. It would not be right to highlight individuals from a closeknit team; but as years have gone by, some like me have, with age begun to slow down, or been overtaken somewhat by technology, whilst others have moved on to new fields & other interests.



In summary, as you will have read in the annual report, Ann Morgan retired in January & with Gill Jones will no longer be running the Conwy Branch, although both will continue their skillful house history research and Gill will remain a trustee. Sue Hurst, having continued running the Anglesey Branch for longer than she originally offered, is now standing down, and we are delighted that someone has just stepped forward. Peter Masters is retiring from running the Caernarfon Branch in order to concentrate on his IT, website and Zoom activities, having managed all of them combined for many years. Martin Cherry is stepping down from running the Merioneth Branch so that he can concentrate on his role as Research Co-ordinator. Terry Williams has been managing four editions of the Newsletter a year with great skill for several years, and his role will now be taken over by Wally and Margaret Barr, whom we warmly welcome. We thank them all for all they have undertaken over so many years and wish them well in whatever

they do in all the spare time that in theory they will now be able to enjoy. This does mean that at present the number involved in local activities & events may vary depending on how branches' and more general activities' develop & whether more members want to help organize such events. Since Covid 19 lockdowns local involvement has varied and numbers on house visits are only slowly increasing again. However, it is positive that increasing numbers are attending the monthly talks held on Zoom.

I am delighted to welcome Alison Montgomery as she develops her new role of being our secretary; and also Dr Frances Richardson, who has already played roles as speaker & house historian, as she too, with Alison, becomes a trustee. It is time for DOWH to be refreshed with the numerous developments such as the Parish Projects, the Database and the new projects such as the Edeyrnion Project. We hope that members will consider whether there may be aspects of DOWH activities where they may be able to take part in new ways to enable DOWH to go from strength to strength.

After this AGM I will not disappear all-together, but hope to again undertake house histories which have been set aside over recent years and to join in various activities. I have found it so exciting to work with such an

innovative group which is much valued across north Wales & I want to thank you for all the friendships formed and hard work successfully undertaken together with such good results.

FROM THE INCOMING SECRETARY by Alison Montgomery

My passion is rural vernacular buildings (especially farms) and I have a PhD in History and qualifications in heritage management and building conservation. In my current job I'm a historic buildings researcher for a large conservation architect and historic buildings consultancy and in previous posts I've worked for building preservation trusts, an archaeological unit and various community heritage projects.

I'm currently based in northwest England, where I'm a volunteer with the Chester Heritage Festival. I'm also the Hon Secretary of the Milestone Society (<https://www.milestonesociety.co.uk/>), which is interested in not just milestones but also toll houses, finger posts, boundary markers and more!

Megan Huggins

We are very sad to hear of the recent death of Megan Huggins, a long-standing member of the Group and a keen supporter of its activities in Merioneth. She worked hard in service of Merioneth historical studies not least as the membership secretary of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society.

NEWS AND ARTICLES FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Report by Sue Hurst

On Anglesey Terry Williams gave a well-received illustrated talk in March about the mainly lost old buildings of Anglesey for 10 people at the Archives in Llangefni. Because of a misleading article in the newspaper, suggesting it was an Open Day, the owner postponed the visit to Plas Bodafon in May. A visit to Llangadwaladr Church took place on May 23rd, led by Andrew Davidson chief archaeologist at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, for 8 people but unfortunately the church was locked, so it is hoped to re-visit on Tuesday September 12th along with Aberffraw church and possibly Trefdraeth. Tuesday May 30th sees a garden visit in Llanfachraeth courtesy of Jan and John. As well as a chance to enjoy the garden, and perhaps have a train ride, it will be an opportunity to discuss the future of the Anglesey branch since no-one has put themselves forward to be the new secretary. A further visit is planned to Plas Berw on Wednesday June 21st.

There will also be a special Discovering Old Welsh Houses Fundraiser at Plas Penmynydd, near Llangefni, Anglesey, on the B5420, on Saturday July 15th 2pm - 5pm.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Admission will be £10. The owner of Plas Penmynydd, Richard Cuthbertson, will give an introductory talk about the house at approximately 2.15 pm. This will be followed by a talk by Peter Fielding entitled "Deciphering a carved lintel dated 1546 AD" which refers to a date stone over the door and a connection with the Tudur/Tudor family. There will be no official tours of the house, but guests are welcome to explore the house at their leisure and also the grounds. Refreshments will be available in the kitchen area for the whole afternoon. Disabled parking is available close to the house but the main parking area will be in the field on the opposite side of the B5420 road to the access lane to Plas Penmynydd.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

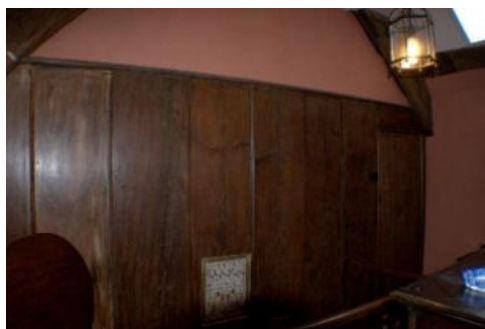
Report by Peter Masters

House visits included a visit to Rhos, Penrhyndeudraeth, in February. Our March visit was a repeat visit from last year to Hafod Ruffydd which was so popular it was oversubscribed, so a return visit had to be arranged. Not surprising when you see where it's located. Other house visits were to two Ty Mawr's.



Our April visit was to Ty Mawr, Criccieth, a substantial house of Snowdonian type presenting several features of mid/late sixteenth century date including voussoir-headed openings, and two tiers of cusped windbraces.

Tŷ Mawr may be of greatest significance as one of the very few sites in Wales definitely associated with an early modern practitioner of medicine: it was also known as 'Tu William feddig', the house of William the Doctor.



Our May Visit was to Ty Mawr No. 2 at Nantlle, a storeyed Snowdonia house with its ornate quatre foil Trusses and a rare Latrine shoot [Garderobe].

Forthcoming Branch events

We have a planned house visit in June to Ffridd Isaf, Rhyd Ddu, a return visit from a pre-covid event. The average visitor numbers were encouraging at around 14 per session. The online booking has been shown to be successful and a useful way of keeping track of people and events.



July 5th: Rearranged guided tour of the Caernarfonshire Archives, Caernarfon. Meet there at 1.30 p.m., at the entrance by Doc Victoria. Park & Pay area is opposite Y Galerï. Refreshments available. Max 15. Cost £3. Book by 28th June with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com.



July 27th Descriptions of Medieval Nantgywnant: Landscape History Pre-Sixteenth Century: A short guided walk & light refreshments. Cost £3. Discuss future plans. Book by 20th July with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com. Meet at Bryn Bedd, Nantgywnant near Beddgelert, LL55 5NL at 2.00 p.m. Directions will be sent on bookings.

Sept tbc: Ty'n Twr / Ty York, Bethesda. Medieval home of Bishop John Williams. To be confirmed

ARTICLE: The Old Houses of North Wales. By Peter Masters



Many of the houses we encounter in our quest to find houses with suitable timber for dating are exceptionally well-preserved, with many layers, going back to at least the 15th century and often provide evidence for a substantial 16th-century expansion, all illustrating ways of life and agricultural practices that have typified the houses of North Wales for centuries. Many of the houses have retained features that so often might have been ripped out with little or no record. The Elaborate carpentry in the roof trusses, the 17th-century timber-panel partition walls and remarkably well-preserved painted panels show how the owners aspired to the aesthetic tastes of polite society during this period.



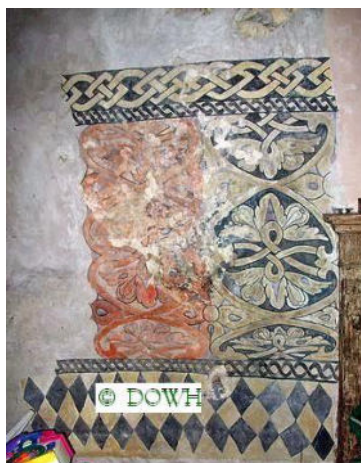
Trefoil Roof Truss

A well-worn groove in the flagstones between the kitchen and parlour demonstrates how long they have been in constant use. The often-adjointing barn demonstrates the farm's prosperity, and this sometimes reveals evidence of an older dwelling. These houses help illustrate how farming and agriculture developed in north Wales, and their fabric and detail have architectural and aesthetic significance. It also presents a challenge. Many of the houses have been in the same family, either tenanted or owner-occupied, for generations. The dilemma for us is that a sale can bring the threat of alterations which - however well-intentioned - risk incalculable harm to historical and archaeological interest.

We are not a reporting authority nor do we wish to be so, but a published Dendro report, Building record or illustrated House history may bring an unwanted interest in the property by Planning authorities, National or local, seeking to protect the historic environment. It is something of which we need to be mindful.



Medieval Stencilled/Painted Panels



' Wall painting mid 1500



In/Out Partition

P Masters
30/03/2023

CONWY BRANCH

Report by Gill Jones

I am standing down as Branch Secretary of the Conwy Branch after the AGM in June, but I will remain an active member of the Group. I have been the Branch Secretary since 2012 and I think it is about time I made room for someone else to take on this responsibility.

I joined the Group as a Conwy Branch member in 2011 and attended an introductory day at the Denbighshire Archives in Ruthin. At this point in time, a number of old houses in Penmachno had been identified as possibly being suitable for dendrodating. Consequently every member of the Branch was expected to take on the task of researching the history of at least one of them. I was actually given three – Plas yn Glasgwm, Blaen Glasgwm Uchaf and Coed y Ffynnon. I had previously done some family history research and so I had some idea of how to go about it. However, I was very grateful for the extra help that Frances Richardson gave me because I was not familiar with things like the wide variety of estate documents. After completing the history of these three houses, I was then able to assist other Conwy Branch members with three more – Dylasau Isaf, Dylasu Uchaf and Dugoed. After that I teamed up with Ann Morgan and together we have researched the histories of numerous other houses. Working with Ann made the process more enjoyable because we usually had lunch out on the days we visited the various Archives, and she has also been an excellent proof reader of my notes.

In April 2023, we had an interesting visit to Penmaenmawr Museum where we were given a short talk about the development of the settlements of Dwygyfylchi and Penmaenmawr and had a chance to look around the various displays. In May, Peter Masters is going to complement the visit we made in March to see the effigies of Gruffydd ap Dafydd Goch and Hywel Coetmor, with a zoom talk on the Knights of North Wales.

ARTICLE: Houses that have Disappeared from the Parish of Llanddulas. By Gill Jones

Many old houses in Wales have been demolished or allowed to become ruinous. The reasons are many and varied. In Llanddulas, almost twenty known individual houses have disappeared or are now in a ruinous state; and at least ten terraces of small stone-built workers' cottages have also been demolished. Should there, perhaps, be a database somewhere recording the names and locations of these former dwellings?

When William Lloyd was consecrated as Bishop of St.Asaph in 1680, he instructed his clergy to carry out a census of the population in his Diocese. This is known as the Parochial Notitiae for St.Asaph. It was carried

out between 1681-1686. The entry in 1686 for Llanddulas records that there were 21 households with 69 people, twenty of whom were children under the age of 18 years.



The two Glan yr Afon houses

A few years later in 1699, Edward Lhuyd recorded the village as consisting of a small rectory, five or six cottages, and a mill. One of these cottages - 'Ty yn Glan yr Avon bel' - is now just a pile of stones (SH908 777). In the 19th century there were two houses known as Glan yr Afon. One is said to have been a cowshed which was subsequently converted into a dwelling. The original house was inhabited until the 1950s and since then has been allowed to fall into ruin.

Llindir Farm (SH905 778) was not recorded by Edward Lhuyd but there is a lease dated 1681 and in 1707, it appeared in a list of properties for sale by Maurice Wynne to Robert Wynne (*of Voelas, his kinsman*). This house and the adjoining cottage were occupied until the 1950s and then allowed to become derelict.

They have since been demolished to make way for a modern housing development.

Pentre Gwyddel farmhouse (SH901 779) stood above the Llanddulas quarry and had a date of 1655 carved above a door. It had a large chimney, and on the outside of the eastern wall was a hemispherical projection which was situated at the back of the grate and formed a large oven. Edward Lhuyd recorded it as Y Pentre Gwydhyl owned by Mr. Jo. Owen. By 1901, the farm was recorded as uninhabited. It was demolished in 1938 when the limestone quarry was extended. Local folklore relates that this may have been the house where two skeletons were discovered under a flagstone during the demolition process.



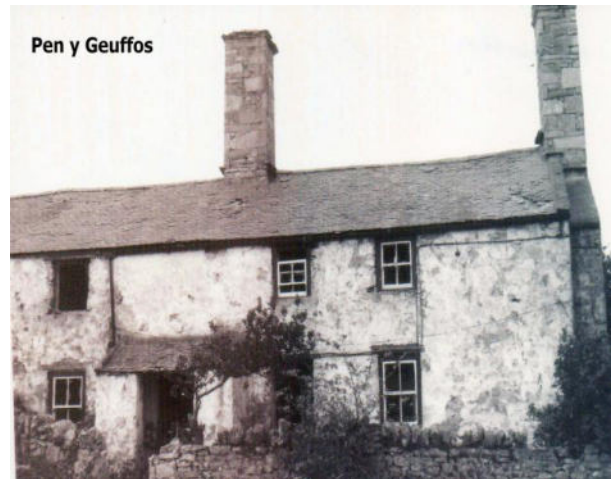
Llindir Cottage & Llindir Farm

Pen y Geuffos (SH903 771) was located just across the boundary with the parish of Llysfaen. The burial of Hugh Jones miller of 'Penygeuffos' was recorded in the parish registers in 1680. Edward Lhuyd recorded it in 1699 with the owner named as Mr. Dd. Williams. It was still occupied in 1911 but was eventually demolished when the quarry expanded its area of operation.



Two 18th century houses which have disappeared are Fynnon Goli (SH901 783) and Ty Croes (SH899 783). The first was recorded in a rental in 1707. Thomas Jones paid Mr. Wynne £2 per annum. In the 1843 Tithe Survey, Edwin Oldfield esq. was recorded as the occupier with 2 acres 3 roods 6 perches of land with £1 0s 6d due to be paid to the Rector. Ty Croes, was recorded in the parish registers in 1768 when Dorothy Williams d/o Pierce and Catherine (nee Hughes) was baptised. In the early 19th century, William Williams moved from Llindir Farm to Ty Croes. The Tithe survey of 1843 recorded it with 6 acres 3 roods 1 perch of land in the occupation of William Jones. Both houses were occupied until the 1970s when they were demolished to make way for the new A55 Expressway. Ty Croes Lodge still remains at the entrance to the old driveway.

In 1849, the London-Holyhead railway was constructed through the village. At least two buildings were lost – Cindwm (SH906 785), about which very little is known, and no photographs depicting it have so far been found. It was still inhabited in 1843 when the Tithe survey was carried out, and was owned at the time by Lloyd Hesketh Bamford Hesketh esq. of Gwrych and occupied by John Hughes who held just 1 acre and 16 perches of land for which he paid no tithes. The other building, Tai-yn-Glan-y-Mor, was somewhere near the sea and as its name suggests, may have consisted of more than one dwelling. It is recorded in a lease from 1681, when Evan Vaughan lived there and ownership passed from Maurice Wynne to Robert Wynne. In 1707, William ap Robert paid £2 a year in rent to live there.



St Cynbryd's churchyard in the village was surrounded by a cluster of houses called Tyn-y-fynwent and Tai-yr-eglwys which were occupied mainly by agricultural workers. They may have been recorded in the 1841 census under the collective name of Tai-yn-Llan and were probably demolished when the bridge over the River Dulas was rebuilt and the road was widened. Another cluster of cottages just outside the churchyard, known as The Square (SH908 781), sustained damage on the 20th December 1940 when German airmen dropped two landmines on the village on their way back from a raid on Liverpool. They were later demolished to make way for a new housing estate.

These are just some of the oldest known houses which have disappeared from the village. Of the others, which were mainly built in the 19th century, some were demolished to make way for new housing developments; others when the main road through the village was widened in the 1960s.

Gill Jones

Extra note from Gill

The George Owen 1602 survey for Anglesey, Carnarvonshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, and Merionethshire is now available on our website. Access it from the home page, then use the dropdown menu below the research button called 'research guides'. Or click on the following link.

<https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page38.html>



DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

Since Christmas, Denbighshire branch has assisted in procurement of grants from both Woodtiger Fund and VAG, to be used together with money from existing branch funds for our new DOWH Edeirion project. This focuses on recording and dating Edeirion houses and farm buildings that appear stylistically to date from early C15th to late C16th, and will also look at whether gentry and 'peasant elite' were using different

architectural forms to distinguish status during this important transitional period. Four suitable houses have now been identified for hopeful dating during June.

In March our joint meeting and tour arranged by Flintshire branch at *Nantclwyd y Dre*, Ruthin, with a presentation on the Ruthin and District Dendrochronology Project by Fiona Gale, was followed by a visit to historic *Berain*, Llanefydd, kindly hosted by the owners.

Our next DOWH 'field' visit will be on **Thursday 20th July** at 2pm to **Wynnstay House**, Well Street **Ruthin**, LL15 1AN; previously the already Grade II Listed Wynnstay Arms Hotel, <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000945-wynnstay-arms-hotel-ruthin/photos/271116#.ZDFfoHbMLIU> and now transformed by the amazing restoration programme of its current owners. Please book with me on leesjenny@gmail.com or 01490 412315 - I can send further information and liaise re transport if needed.

There will be **no Denbighshire branch meeting in August**, but by September we will be 'catching up' with carrying out and recording our DOWH Parishes Project research on pre-1750 dwellings!

DOWH house histories of *Bryn Brith* (Corwen); *Cadwst* (Llandrillo); *Caenog* (Gwyddelwern); *Hafod yr afr* (Llangar), and *Henblas* (Llandderfel), are among those now in progress. Our outreach in Edeirnion and Penllyn (Bala) areas has resulted in potential community material for a 5th DOWH 'Cynwyd' Scrapbook' to be published later in 2023.

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

In April the branch met at a mid-17th century gentry house, Colomendy, near Afonwen, where a talk was given on the history of the house. In May we met at Brithdir Mawr, Cilcain, a house dating from the fifteenth century or earlier. Our branch meeting, on June 19th, will meet in the evening at Llanasa church and then members will have the opportunity to go on to visit nearby Hendy Groes, a house dated to 1674 by DOWH. Please book through Wally Barr at flintshire-branch2@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk

There will be no branch meetings in July or August, though some members will no doubt visit Plas Penmynydd on Anglesey for the open afternoon on 15th July – further details are given on p.3. In November Margaret Barr will give a talk on researching house histories to Flintshire History Society.

ARTICLE: Why might people in the 17th and 18th centuries have been watching eagle-eyed when their neighbours were buried? By Margaret Barr



Caerwys church 1896 (Wikimedia Commons)

The short answer to this question is that they were looking to see what material was being used to cover the corpse.

I was looking through parish records of the early 18th century in Caerwys in an attempt to find something about tenants from Canol y Dre for the house history that Carys Biddle and I are researching. I began to get intrigued as I found references such as ...

Ann Roberts was bur^d. the 20 of April 1718} A certificate was brought for burying the s^d corps in woollen according to the Act in that behalf made.

Tho. son of Rich^d. Jones by Anne his wife was bur^d. 17th of Feb 1718} The Warden's Certificate of affidavit was brought for burying y^es^d. corps in woollen according to law. y^e 28 of Feb 1718.

This was all new to me so I looked for information on the internet. I discovered that there had been an Act passed in 1666 and a second, and rather more famous, in 1678 An Act for Burying in Woollen - repealing the first. The aim was to promote the English woollen industry, protecting it from foreign imports and new materials.

"No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any shift, sheet, or shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold, or silver, or in any stuff, or thing, other than what is made of sheep's wool only."

<https://historyhouse.co.uk › articles › buried in wool>

The shroud had to be of wool or the clothes that the corpse was buried in. An affidavit had to be provided within 8 days stating that the burial complied with the Act. Rather than involving officials of the parish as stated, more often than not, the affidavit would be sworn and certified by the priest at the same time as the burial of the person.

Anyone going against the Act would be fined £5. Half of the fine would be given to the poor of the parish and half to the informer – so this encouraged people to watch closely and inform on their neighbours.

It was not at all a popular thing as people often wanted to be buried in their finest clothes. Some people would rather pay the fine and they soon worked out that if someone in the family actually informed the authorities then the fine would be reduced by half (as the informer was paid!). The act was not repealed until 1814 but in fact the practice of woollen burials had died out and had been ignored for quite a while before that.

I wonder when it began and stopped in Caerwys. More research needs to be done.

Margaret Barr

MERIONETH BRANCH

Report by Martin Cherry

There were three house visits during the year, all of them well attended (upwards of twelve) and we are grateful to the owners for their hospitality and for allowing us freedom to roam.

In June 2022, we visited Llwyn Hwlcyn (Llanfair parish), listed but with a very perfunctory description that did not prepare us for what we saw – a very well preserved, high-status Snowdonia house, probably of the late sixteenth century, but with unusually narrow bays between the trusses, all very finely detailed and finished. There were many other distinctive features and we hope to go back and carry out a full building record. In the afternoon we drove down to the coast to look at the evocative medieval Llandanwg Church almost buried in the sand dunes and saved from ruin by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in the 1880s.

October 2022 saw us high in the hills above Llenelltyd: Blaen-y-cwm is a hitherto unrecorded cruck house occupying a farmstead on the very margins of cultivatable lands just below the rough moorland. As is so often the case, part of the old house was demolished to make way for a comfortable Victorian range which is all that can be seen as you approach the house from the valley – a great surprise. As with Llwyn Hwlcyn, a house history has been prepared, and in this case a full survey: we hope to have the houses assessed for tree-ring dating in due course.

Finally, in November, we visited Tyddyn Llidiart (Dyffryn Ardudwy), a house with farm buildings, which at the time of the tithe survey was the centre of a prosperous livestock farm of 65 acres. Looking deceptively straightforward from the outside, the house was more complicated and we hope to piece this together when we come to survey the house.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2023-4

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7pm

Edward Parry is a retired history teacher who has researched and published widely in the field of art and architecture in Wales. His excellent recent book, *The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales* is reviewed on the final page of this Newsletter.

Exploring North Wales with the Rev. John Parker, 1798-1860

The Rev. John Parker (1798-1860), artist and antiquary, produced an astonishing body of work over several decades and a large collection of paintings, drawings and journals that are held at the National Library of Wales. He was incumbent of two parishes either side of the Welsh border and made dramatic changes to both churches. He travelled widely in Great Britain but it was Snowdonia that he loved and he made a succession of visits to the area that are recorded in his journals and in hundreds of sketches and paintings.

This talk focuses on North Wales and examines his achievements as a landscape artist and also a recorder of the architecture and furnishings of many churches in the area, many of them subsequently drastically altered. His watercolours and pencil drawings are of immense cultural value and are also of great beauty.

Wednesday 8 November at 7 pm

Ross Cook is an archaeologist and experienced dendrochronologist who, working with the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, has done a lot of sampling and analysis for Discovering Old Welsh Houses. He runs his own archaeology and heritage consultancy out of Lampeter and is archaeologist for St David's Cathedral as well as to Christchurch Priory, Dorset.

Recording Ruthin - Investigating the historic buildings of a town and its countryside.

Those of you who know Ruthin (or heard Gareth Evans talking to us about the development of the town last February) will appreciate the rich legacy of medieval buildings in the town. Recent tree-ring dating in and around Ruthin, has revealed a large number of early buildings, many from the fifteenth century, that reflect its status, together with the wealth of the surrounding parishes. This talk will contain 'hot off the press' material!

Wednesday 6 December at 7 pm

Helen Williams-Ellis worked as a TV producer and director, overseeing programmes with a focus on Welsh subjects. She then did her doctorate on the life and image of the early modern gentlewoman Catrin of Berain. She is on the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates based at Bangor University. Her talk is entitled *Sex, Power, Marriage: Katheryn of Berain and her Four Husbands*. Katheryn of Berain was married four times. Why did she marry – whom did she marry – and how did she become known as the 'Mother of Wales'?

FEATURE ARTICLE: DIARY OF A RENOVATION

By Angie Sutton-Vane and Glyn Davies

The renovation of Plas yn Bwl House

In the Spring of 2018 we bought two Grade II* cottages called Nos 1 and 2 Plas-y-Bwl on the outskirts of Caergwrle. From the front the cottages sit prominently at the top of a cul de sac; at the back, however, they peter out into low extensions and ruinous walls nestling into the steep side of Hope Mountain. Despite being listed in 1962, by the 1980s a row of adjoining and derelict cottages had been demolished and the

surrounding land (including within the house curtilage) redeveloped into a small estate of houses. At around the same time the family who owned the cottages were given a council grant to rectify what were undoubtedly sub-standard living conditions. Sadly, during this process flagstone floors, hearths and ranges were removed, a new concrete floor with a plastic damp proof membrane was laid throughout both cottages, the space was divided up into a series of small rooms and lobbies with walls replastered in cement render.



Fig.8: Suggested phasing, based on the ground floor plan, north to bottom.



The image (above left) shows the Floor plan with periods of construction: Heritage Impact Assessment by Richard Morriss, 2020.

It took nearly 2 years to get listed building and planning consent but finally by 2022 the Heritage Impact Assessment and bat surveys had been done, an archaeologist had been appointed and we were able to start work in earnest: repairing the roof, stripping out the 1980s interventions and returning the cottages to one beautiful house.



what appears to be the remains of an arrow slit on the stunning medieval stone spiral staircase, and an inglenook fireplace hidden behind a 1970s hearth. But we still don't understand why the staircase abruptly stops mid-air beyond the first floor – was it repurposed from the (by then) ruined castle, was the house built on the remains of a chapel or was it built as a fortified tower house?

The house now has its own Instagram and FB pages at [welsh.house.rescue](https://www.instagram.com/welsh.house.rescue) where we plan to share the restoration story and discoveries.

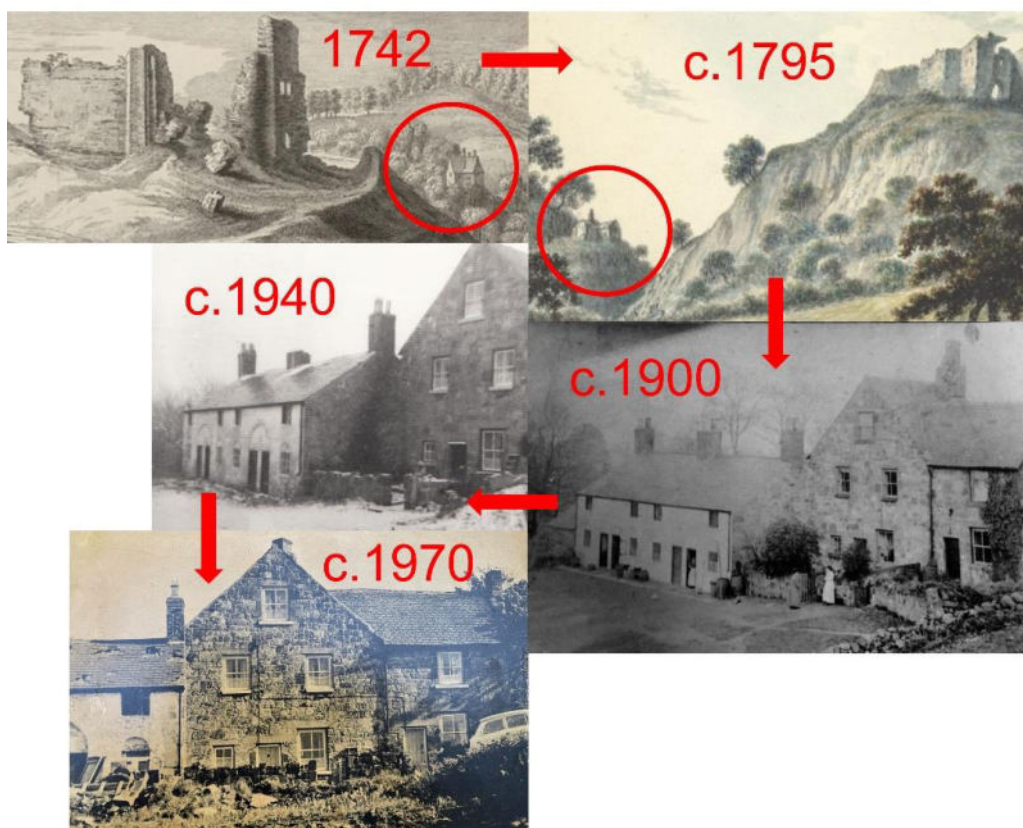
The house remains an enigma: we know from the listing that the Victorian frontage and additional row of cottages had been built on the remains of a late medieval residence belonging to the de Bolde family – Norman knights from Bold in Lancaster. The de Bolds had close connections to the powerful Stanley family who owned much of the land around Caergwre. We hope renovation work will unlock some of its secrets – we've already uncovered

Images of Plas yn Bwl (right)

The north west view of Caergwrely Castle, in the county of Flint by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, 1742, National Library of Wales

South aspect of Caergwrely Castle by John Ingleby, c.1795; intended as material for Thomas Pennant's *Tours in Wales*, National Library of Wales

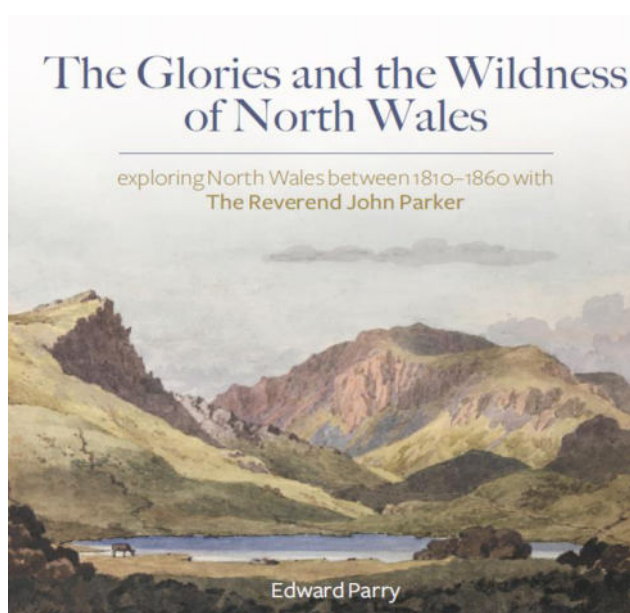
Old photographs of the cottages: Sources unknown – shared on Face Book.



Diary of a Renovation is a new feature and we hope to hear more from Angie and Glyn in future issues of the Newsletter.

STOP PRESS: NEW BOOK ON NORTH WALES

The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales By Edward Parry



Those of you who enjoyed Michael Freeman's talk to us in October of last year on tourists' descriptions and illustrations of Wales in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries will love this book: short, profusely illustrated and very nicely produced by Carreg Gwalch. Edward Parry is a retired history teacher who has researched and published widely in the field of art and architecture in Wales: he carries his learning lightly and this book will be a delight to both the general and the specialist reader.

John Parker (1798-1860) came from Shropshire gentry stock, which gave him easy access to houses throughout Wales and the March. He went to Oriel College, where the High-Church Oxford Movement originated, and as a young cleric was imbued with the spirit of the Gothic Revival: he restored and embellished his first church at Llanmwyrewig (Montgomeryshire) and after he moved to a new living at Llanblodwel (near Oswestry) in 1844 rebuilt

the church there: this, along with the associated school and schoolmaster's house are among the most idiosyncratic buildings of their day.

Parker's design for his own parish church of St Michael, Llanblodwel, near Oswestry (1846-56) is shown below (bottom right), built largely at his own expense – described in the Buildings of England as 'certainly fantastic...a demonstration of staunch individualism'. © Selwyn Ray (2022) taken from Historic England's National Heritage List.



The image (left) shows 'Dolgelly and Cader Idris', a watercolour sketch by Parker, from the book reviewed here. Where he picked up his artistic skills is uncertain – maybe from art masters at Eton or members of his own family – but painting, sketching and touring became his great passion right up until weeks before his death. Although he travelled widely, he became intoxicated with Snowdonia and he made many visits there: he thought the scenery superior to that of Switzerland – 'in general of a softer and more general kind, it is wild sweetness that prevails throughout'. His landscapes are both atmospheric and keenly observed (as the picture on the cover of the book confirms) and the views he made of buildings, such as the square at Dolgellau are important

records and, for churches, especially the exquisitely worked screens, are often the *only* record we have. Parker could sometimes be dismissive of things we value today – Gwydir he found dull but he would cheer up if he discovered even the smallest fragment of gothic craftsmanship as he did there ('excellent...very masterly' he purred).

Edward Parry's account is enlivened with much detail of the logistics of travel before and during the first decades of rail travel. Improvements in the standards of turnpikes and hotels were marked during the period, as was the technology of coach suspension – great if you could actually get on the coach – and timetables appear to have been assiduously adhered to (do you hear that Transport for Wales?). The streamlined express service from Oswestry to Capel Curig took five and a half hours: the bus service now, taking a less direct route, takes three and three-quarters: an improvement of sorts.



The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales (ISBN 978-1-84527-845-8) in paperback is available from bookshops at £16 or cheaper if you buy on-line. Michael Freeman's massive and fascinating website on early tourists in Wales can be accessed at <https://sublimewales.wordpress.com>. Parker's many journals of his visits, not only to Wales, but also through much of Great Britain and Ireland and the Continent, are deposited with the National Library of Wales, where they can be consulted, but, sadly, are not yet accessible digitally.

Note: Edward Parry, author of *The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales*, will be giving the DOWH Zoom talk on this subject on 11 October.

Martin Cherry





DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

Syr Simon Jenkins, FSA, FRSL; Dr Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

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

CYLCHLYTHYR 46 Medi 2023

EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

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.

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

NEWSLETTER 46 September 2023

OUR WEBSITE

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.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

How quickly the year rolls by. The highlight of this summer was the opportunity to revisit Plas Penmynydd on Ynys Mon. Richard Cuthbertson kindly invited the group to his historic house for a fund-raising event. Richard told us the history of the house and he had also arranged for Peter Field to tell us about his research and his deciphering of the intriguing carved inscription, upside down and apparently relocated, above a first-floor window.

Despite the awful weather on that afternoon fifty-eight people turned up. It was good to see so many there and I would like to thank Richard and members of the Anglesey group for arranging the refreshments and parking.

It was also an opportunity to say a big thank you to Peter Masters, who has stepped down as the Caernarfonshire organiser, and to Margaret Dunn, to whom we owe so much for being such a driving force behind the success of the Group. Although not present, the work of Gill Jones, Anne Morgan and Terry Williams, who have contributed so much to the group, was recognised.



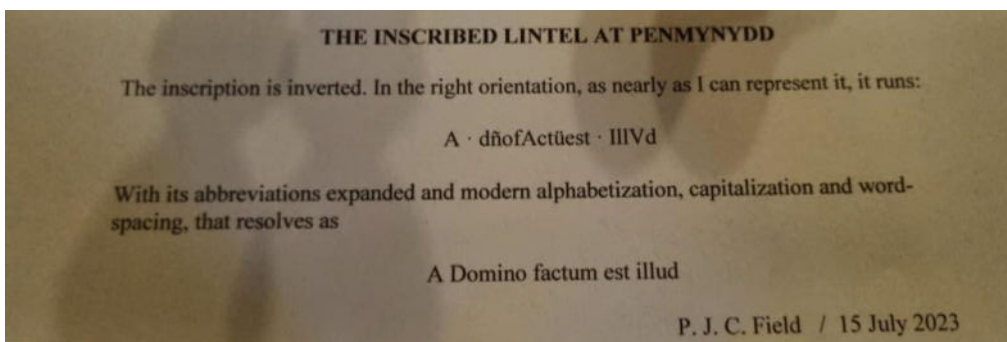
Richard Cuthbertson

TALK GIVEN BY PETER FIELD

Professor Peter Field, an expert in Arthurian legend, had a long and distinguished academic career at Bangor and other British universities. The inscription referred to by Janice Dale's on page 1, appears on the lintel above an upper room at Plas Penmynydd. Using his knowledge of medieval English, Peter has deciphered the inscription



Lintel showing the inscription



Lintel inscription translated

An excellent House History has been completed for Plas Penmynydd, and this states that the inscription:

... is located above an upstairs window on the front of the house. It has been placed upside down and so it has obviously been relocated. The date AD 1547 is clearly visible and also the words 'anno domini' but the rest of the inscription has yet to be deciphered. The far right-hand end also appears to be broken and so part of it must be missing.*

Could it perhaps be a reference to the death of Henry VIII on 28th January 1547 and the crowning of his son Edward VI on 20th February 1547?

(from Cuthbertson R, Jones G and Morgan A (2020) Plas Penmynydd House History, DOWH).



Professor Peter Field

* Though in view of Peter Field's work, perhaps this is no longer the case?

A HUGE THANK YOU from our outgoing Secretary Margaret Dunn:

Thank you to everyone in Discovering Old Welsh Houses for the generous Garden Centre token; I will really enjoy choosing shrubs for our mountain garden which I will hope to see grow in the future and remind me how DOWH has grown over the last two decades. Another huge thank you to Peter Masters in producing a masterpiece of MEMORIES by collating so many photographs of numerous aspects of our activities including house visits, branch meetings, study tours, committee meetings. Each will bring memories of exploring many parts of North Wales and discovering more about old houses, with the many very hardworking members finding the histories, building recordings and timber sampling. Some of you were able to look at this giant album when it was presented to me at the July Open Day at Plas Penmynydd and at branch meetings since then.



Margaret Dunn and her
Memories Album

FROM THE SECRETARY by Alison Montgomery

It's a pleasure to be able to open my first message as Secretary by thanking you all for the very warm welcome that I received at Plas Penmynydd. Congratulations to everyone for such a well-organized and attended event.

I'm writing this message on Bank Holiday Monday at the end of August, sitting listening to the rain and wondering if I can put the heating on yet (I have reluctantly decided that I can't!). Despite the weather, however, the start of the new school term is always welcome as the prompt to look to the year ahead, thinking about new opportunities and putting in place new plans. After the national events of 2020 and 2021, when we had no way of telling when (or if) life could return to normal, what a pleasure it is to be able to look to the future. And what better way to do this than by growing our county branches and getting out the news about the brilliant things that they're up to. If this is something that you might be able to help with, or if you could join a working group to help us think about how we can co-ordinate and publicize the events of the different branches, please do get in touch.

Using social media (especially Facebook) to share news of our events is something we're also thinking about. Many hands make light work, and if you might be able to help with this we'd love to hear from you.

Our county branches are at the very heart of DOWH and we are delighted that the Anglesey branch has a new Secretary, Arwyn Owen (Ash). If you could help Ash as a branch volunteer, please send him a quick message at anglesey-branch@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk. Big or small, your help will be very welcome.

NEWS AND ARTICLES FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Report by Sue Hurst

At Llangadwaladr church in May the ten attendees were only able to see the outside of the church with Andrew Davidson, chief archaeologist with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. A return visit is planned for September to see the inside of the church plus Aberffraw church and possibly Trefdraeth.

Also in May we held a garden meeting at the home of members Jan & John to discuss the future of the Anglesey branch. Jan & John kindly gave us refreshments and John ran the train through the extensive garden which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. The event was fortuitously attended by Arwyn Owen who is now the new secretary for the Anglesey branch for twelve months.

In June eleven members and guests had wonderful weather for the visit to Plas Berw at Pentre Berw. The garden looked wonderful and we were made very welcome and shown round the house by Mr. & Mrs. Benson. Later there were refreshments on the lawn, a super afternoon with much discussion.

Despite the awful weather in July over sixty people attended the fund-raising Open Afternoon at Plas Penmynydd. There were talks by the owner Richard Cuthbertson on the history of the house and by Peter Field on the inscription on the front of the house. People could then wander around the house and enjoy the refreshments provided.

Future events:-

- Sat. Aug. 19th Fund-raising event for the Welsh Air Ambulance at Jan & John's near Llanfachraeth, includes train rides, 12 pm – 12 am. Details from anglesey-branch@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk
- Tues. Sept. 12th 2 pm. Return to Llangadwaladr church to see the inside plus Aberffraw church and possibly Trefdraeth with Andrew Davidson chief archaeologist with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, cost £3.
- Tues. Oct. 10th 2pm. Visit to Brynddu, Llanfechell by kind permission of Mr & Mrs Robin Grove-White, light refreshments, cost £3. To be confirmed.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Margaret Dunn

In June around 12 members visited Ffridd Isaf, Rhyd Ddu, a Snowdonia-plan house with roof trusses felled in 1599-1600, a huge inglenook fireplace and a ladder staff. Later an attached nineteenth century house had been built downslope at right angles, and two large barns and a water wheel had been added. It was one of three farm holdings on land traceable back to a medieval upland holding belonging to the Welsh Princes called Llwynllinor. We had a long discussion on how it passed through Welsh gentry hands into modern estates.



Ffrith Isaf



Rhyd Galed

Our July meeting was held at Bryn Bedd on the south slopes of the Nantgwynant valley and we took a short walk looking across the hillsides at parts of the Welsh Princes' charter of circa 1200 giving land to the Cistercian Abbey of Aberconway; we identified boundaries from Colin Greshams's map demarcating its 1556 division by King Henry VII's Commissioners prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and further land division up to the 20th century. The walk included discussing the role of watersheds and river boundaries, visiting a still visible circa AD 1200 ford 'Rhyd Galed', a hard stone laid ford, the shire boundary between Caernarfon and Merioneth, and later power struggles to gain political clout in the two counties.

Over tea Peter Masters shared how he found a fresh Snowdonia house while looking for houses advertised for sale. Discussion indicated that there was little interest at present in undertaking house histories but that house visits would be popular. It was agreed to continue running the branch at least until the June 2024 AGM.

Caernarfonshire Branch Autumn meetings

September 14th: 2.00 p.m. National Trust-led tour of **Plas yn Rhiw house & gardens**, near Aberdaron. Cost: £ 6.65 for non-members / bring your membership card. Book by 6th September with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com / 01766 890550 for further details. Followed by buying refreshments in the Tea Room.

October: date tbc. 1.30 p.m. **Guided Tour of Gwynedd Archives**, close to Y Galeri, Caernarfon. An opportunity to see the range of facilities & types of documents available, with light refreshment in the Education Room. Cost: £4. Details to be circulated soon.

November 8th. 2.00 p.m. Illustrated talk by John Dilwyn Williams, well-known local historian, on "**Tanybryn, Llanllyfni – a case study**" at the Meeting Room, (not the main house). Craflwyn car park, outside Beddgelert towards Nantgwynant. Cost £4. Book by 31st October with Margaret at brynbedd1@gmail.com / 01766 890550 for further details.

December: Visit to an early house. Details to be circulated soon.

ARTICLE: Discovering Old Welsh Houses – Two Decades of Adventures. By Margaret Dunn

Unplanned Beginnings

In the 1980s I was awarded an M Phil on "Continuity and Change between 1782 and 1947" in the two parishes in Lleyr where I had had ancestors for at least seven generations. I had also researched many aspects of the archaeology and history of North Wales & was an active member of most regional & local organisations, lecturing, organising events and gaining a wide range of information, not knowing that these experiences would prove so useful during these last twenty years. When I was offered early retirement from being Principal of Plas Tan y Bwlch in the mid-1990s due to increasing arthritis, I started researching the location and history of the pre 1700 farmhouses of the



Gwastadanas (1508) by Falcon Hildred



Sampling Oak by Dr Dan Miles

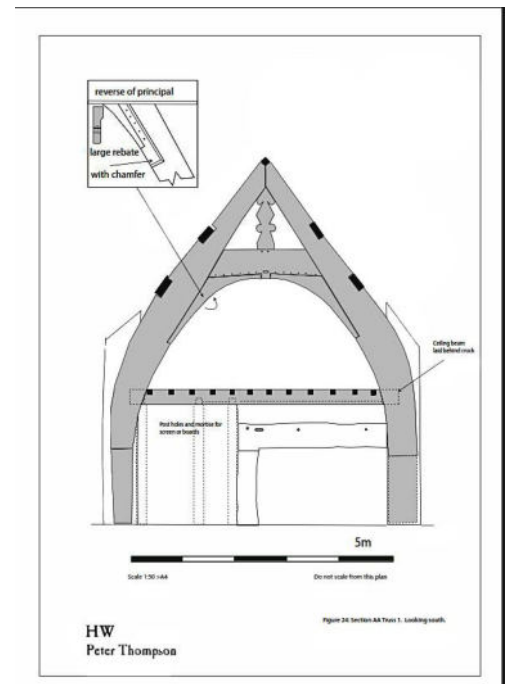
Beddgelert area where I was living. Sitting in the warm local archives, reading, researching and driving to see many unknown treasures gradually led a developing group of “House Detectives” working with the Beddgelert History Society and then excavating the ruins of Y Wenallt & Penarth Fawr (2000-2004). We also visited some 60 houses named in the RCHAMW Caernarfonshire inventory & began to prioritise early houses of historic interest, working closely with Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Eryri National Park & the RCAHMW using their 1950s inventories.

First Successes

The breakthrough came in 2004 when original oak in 4 farmhouses in Nantgwynant valley, Beddgelert, was sampled and two yielded timber felling dates. One, Gwastadannas, gave the date of 1508, the actual date of the earliest documentation from which the building, owners & tenants were already researched up to 2000. This excited a few of us enough to seek grants small and large and invite professional dendrochronologists to seek & sample suitable original timbers in an increasingly widespread area of north Wales. By the start of Covid over £252,000 had been raised.

Growth and Developments

Our name changes indicate the growth of areas covered by our activities: Pre 2004: part of Beddgelert Historical Society; 2004-2007 Snowdonia Dendrochronology Project; 2009-2012 North West Wales Dendrochronology Project. On 1 April 2012, the Dating Old Welsh Houses charity was registered; 2013-2015 Targeted Research; 2014-15 & 2015-16 two Conway Partnership phases; 2015-16 Filling the Gaps. On 1 January 2016 the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group became the Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group, as a more suitable name for our widening range of aims and activities. Professional building recording was grant aided for selected houses for which it was not already available. As more local, county and national organisations requested talks on our activities, (over 150 talks given pre Covid), increasing numbers joined and county archive-based induction days were held to assist volunteers start researching house histories. A large number of these and other reports can be read on the discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk website. Quarterly Newsletters enable members to share a wide range of articles.



**Building Recording
by Peter Thompson**



Induction into House History research

New Ideas Post Covid

Zoom talks were a great success during Covid lockdowns. Now, as branches again become more active, house history research is recommencing and some exciting new major dating projects are being established. Branches are developing in various ways. Recent changes in DOWH leadership make this an ideal time for everyone to contribute to an exciting future.



Introductory Talks



Mentoring owners in House History

A more detailed account of DOWH is given as part of the Trustees' Welcome Pack on the website. None of this would have been possible without the support and encouragement of numerous funders and the hard work of several hundred people who together have already identified fresh understanding and unexpected views of the growth of architectural developments across North Wales from the late 1400s. A huge THANK YOU to all involved!

Margaret Dunn. July 2023

CONWY BRANCH

At present the Conwy branch is searching for a secretary. If you would like to learn more about this opportunity to share and develop your interest and knowledge of the old buildings in this fascinating county, do please contact our Chairperson, Janice Dale at: chair@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk. We should point out that it's perfectly feasible to share the role of secretary with a colleague if that is your preference.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH Report by Jenny Lees



Wynnstay House

June 2023 saw four DOWH visits for dendrochronology and building assessment of Cadwst (Llandrillo), Caenog (Gwyddelwern), Hafod yr afr (Llangar), and Henblas (Llandderfel) - part of our DOWH Edeirnion project funded by generous grants from the Woodtiger Fund and VAG, together with money from existing Denbighshire branch funds. House histories of these properties are underway (for publication later this year), and results of dendro and/or isotope dating eagerly awaited!

Our branch 'field' visit in July was to Wynnstai House, Ruthin [pictured]; previously the Grade II Listed Wynnstai Arms Hotel. But the building is now completely transformed by the amazing restoration and conservation programme of its current owners, Andrew and Fiona Gale, who gave us a fascinating explanatory tour of their work as well as providing delicious homemade refreshments!

No Denbighshire branch meeting was held in August, being a major holiday period, but our next DOWH Denbighshire branch meeting will be at 2pm on Thursday 21st September at Hafod y calch, Corwen (LL21 0EW), when we will be 'catching up' with our DOWH Parishes Project research on pre-1750 dwellings.

All are welcome, but please let me know on leesjenny@gmail.com or 01490 412315 if you are planning to come. (A brief tour of the house is also available if you would like one:

https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20138_HH_26_Hafod-Y-Calch.pdf).



**The visit to Wynnstai House
(photograph courtesy of Heather Burnley)**

Several new DOWH house visits are also possible for the months October to December, but invitations will need to be circulated by our Membership Secretary, as their hosts cannot always plan too far ahead. Work is ongoing for DOWH Cynwyd Scrapbook Five, planned for November 2023.

Jenny Lees, Denbighshire Branch Secretary, August 2023.

ARTICLE: In search of our Cistercians in Edeirnion and Penllyn - by Jenny Lees

While researching the history of *Caenog*, Gwyddelwern [below] for our 2023 Edeirnion project, I was already familiar with our fascinating DOWH house history of *Efenechtyd* (a corruption of *Y Mynachty*, meaning monastic land or 'monks' holding or house'), which is situated on land once providing a vaccary and 'dairy house' for the Cistercians of *Valle Crucis* abbey near Llangollen.¹



Caenog, Gwyddelwern

But wondering also about a mysterious area of land in Gwyddelwern parish known as *Esgyngaenog*, once owned by the Cistercians of **Strata Marcella Abbey** (*Ystrad Marchell*) near Welshpool,² I found it had been granted to them in **1176** by **Maredudd ap Hwyl, Lord of Edeirnion**.³ I also discovered a suggestion⁴ that the name *Esgyngainog* (*Hescyn Gaenog*), with 'esgyn' meaning ascent, referred to the land of *Caenog* and the farm of *Highgate* above it, as the land of the two farms was thought to be '*comprised in the same grant, especially as a modus of 10s is due from both farms in lieu of tithe*'.



**Cwm Hesgin in the upland landscape
above Ciltalgarth**

So *Caenog* farm,⁵ looking southwards to *Caer Drewyn* hillfort and the *Berwyn* range, lies on previous *Strata Marcella* land. Originating in late C11th France, the Cistercians founded *Strata Marcella* in **1170**, then *Valle Crucis* in **1200** as its 'daughter-house'. Although abbeys themselves were usually in lowland situations providing riverine access, David Williams' brilliant book '*The Welsh Cistercians*' identifies many formerly Cistercian upland granges in *Edeirnion* and *Penllyn*. Those belonging to *Strata Marcella* included lands at *Cynllwyd* (c.SH 906262); *Coed y Mynach* (SH 866406, but now mostly submerged by *Llyn Celyn*); *Cwm-main* (SH 925467, actually in *Cwm Penanner*); *Cwm Hyfed* (SH 903297), and in the *Bala- Penllyn Grange* a vaccary at *Cwm Hesgin* (SH 882419), where a very isolated former farmhouse still stands. Other Cistercian

foundations also owned property in the area, with *Basingwerk Abbey*, despite being near Holywell, owning not only land at *Boch y Rhaidr* (near *Afon Tryweryn*) and *Gwern Hefin*, but also *Llyn Tegid* (Lake Bala)!

After the 1536-9 suppression and dissolution of the monasteries these lands would no longer have been in the hands of the Cistercians, having been appropriated by the Crown unless previously sold, but as we wander their pastures, many still dairy farms today, it is fascinating to imagine their past!

References

1. https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20103_HH_25_Efenechtyd.pdf
2. David Williams (2001) *The Welsh Cistercians*.
3. Huw Pryce, '*The Medieval Church*', in *History of Merioneth*, Vol. II: The Middle Ages', pp.273-4.
4. *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire: VI: County of Merioneth* (1921)
5. *Caenog* will be the subject of both a DOWH house history and an article in *Cynwyd Scrapbook Five*.

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

September 11th. Visit to the Tower, Mold. Fifteen people from Flintshire and other DOWH branches visited this Grade 1 house. Parts of the building date back to the mid-fifteenth century and the owner, John Wynne-Eyton, provided an entertaining and informative history of the house, where his family have lived for over 500 years

The earliest part of the building, a tremendous, fortified tower house, is believed to date back to circa 1440-50. This originally adjoined an open hall and the building has seen many structural changes over the centuries. One tale that stands out in the history of the Tower is the hanging of the former mayor of Chester in the 15th century. It is alleged that this man met his end in a kitchen in the house.



**The Tower on a much sunnier day than
our visit!**

Although the Tower remains a private house, it now acts as a wedding venue as well as offering Bed and Breakfast. Following a tour of the house we all sat down to splendid refreshments of home-made cakes, tea and coffee.



Our visit to the Tower



The dining room

October 24th, 2pm. Meeting and presentation at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden.

November, House visit; date and venue TBA.

November 25th. Talk on researching house histories to be given to Flintshire History Society.

December, Christmas meal with Denbighshire branch at The Faenol Fawr. Date TBA.

MERIONETH BRANCH

The Edeirion project continues in the old county of Merioneth, now Denbighshire (see article above). Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2023-4

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7pm

Edward Parry is a retired history teacher who has researched and published widely in the field of art and architecture in Wales. (His excellent recent book, *The Glories and the Wildness of North Wales* was reviewed in the June 2023 edition of this Newsletter).

Exploring North Wales with the Rev. John Parker, 1798-1860

The Rev. John Parker (1798-1860), artist and antiquary, produced an astonishing body of work over several decades and a large collection of paintings, drawings and journals that are held at the National Library of Wales. He was incumbent of two parishes either side of the Welsh border and made dramatic changes to both churches. He travelled widely in Great Britain but it was Snowdonia that he loved and he made a succession of visits to the area that are recorded in his journals and in hundreds of sketches and paintings.

This talk focuses on North Wales and examines his achievements as a landscape artist and also a recorder of the architecture and furnishings of many churches in the area, many of them subsequently drastically altered. His watercolours and pencil drawings are of immense cultural value and are also of great beauty.

Wednesday 8 November at 7 pm

Ross Cook is an archaeologist and experienced dendrochronologist who, working with the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, has done a lot of sampling and analysis for Discovering Old Welsh Houses. He runs his own archaeology and heritage consultancy out of Lampeter and is archaeologist for St David's Cathedral as well as to Christchurch Priory, Dorset.

Recording Ruthin - Investigating the historic buildings of a town and its countryside.

Those of you who know Ruthin (or heard Gareth Evans talking to us about the development of the town last February) will appreciate the rich legacy of medieval buildings in the town. Recent tree-ring dating in and around Ruthin, has revealed a large number of early buildings, many from the fifteenth century, that reflect its status, together with the wealth of the surrounding parishes. This talk will contain 'hot off the press' material!

Wednesday 6 December at 7 pm

Helen Williams-Ellis worked as a TV producer and director, overseeing programmes with a focus on Welsh subjects. She then did her doctorate on the life and image of the early modern gentlewoman Catrin of Berain. She is on the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates based at Bangor University. Her talk is entitled *Sex, Power, Marriage: Katheryn of Berain and her Four Husbands*. Katheryn of Berain was married four times. Why did she marry – whom did she marry – and how did she become known as the 'Mother of Wales'?

FEATURE ARTICLE: DIARY OF A RENOVATION

By Angie Sutton-Vane and Glyn Davies

The renovation of Plas yn Bwl House: Part Two



Views from back c.1962; attached cottages still there and visible to right.

Photos from c.1959 or 1962

The two cottages, Nos 1 and 2, had been lived in for several generations by the same family who first rented them and later bought outright keeping chickens, pigs and a cow at the back. Money was undoubtedly tight for them and photographs we believe taken at the time of the listing in 1962 show its state of dilapidation. The house was icy cold inside with chronic damp and leaking roofs and was in urgent need of some TLC. And yet, somehow, we managed to survive in it as it was from April 2018 until January 2023. Glyn remained working fulltime as a cabinet maker for Silverlining in Wrexham, I was in the final throws of my history PhD and then Covid struck in early 2020, so there was some choice and some misfortune in our delay. We survived by living upstairs to keep away from the worst of the damp and cold venturing down to stoke the wood burner, shower and cook. Layers of clothes, hats,

fingerless gloves became de rigueur, plus a sleeping cat as a lap warmer, and at night our electric blanket – the most wondrous invention – kept us cosy.

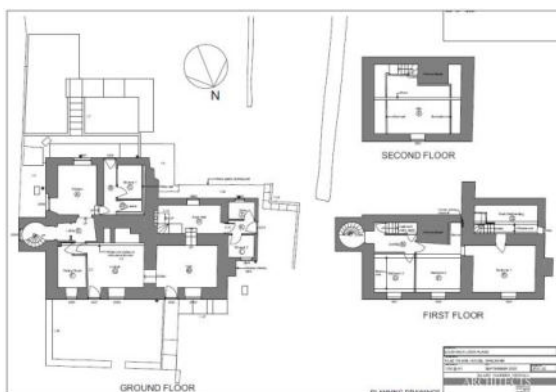
Our plan was always to return the two cottages to one house, not only to celebrate its medieval beginnings as a single manor, but also from a practical viewpoint to make it a house that was an asset for us and an appealing place to live for future generations. By mid-2020, despite lockdowns, we had chosen an architect experienced in working with listed buildings and following many many Zoom meetings and chilly meetings in

the garden we finally had very exciting plans drawn up, numerous method statements written covering all aspects of the work from cleaning stone and floorboards, to ratios and finishes of lime plaster etc, and our application was submitted in October 2020, with a bottle of bubbly popped in front of a blazing wood burner to celebrate. Having initially been told it would take twelve weeks from application to decision we were naïve in our excitement and completely unprepared for the long and harrowing eighteen-month wait, stress compounded by Storm Arwen.



Us looking cold / Jack Frost

On the night of the 26th / 27th November 2021 the storm hit the exposed house like a juggernaut, and we lay in a terrified all-night vigil listening to the roaring wind rippling the heavy Welsh slates in waves above our heads with the occasional crash as they hit the ground. When we ventured out in the morning to inspect the damage the slates on the poor roof were rucked up like fabric, numbers had been blown off, with some landed on our neighbours' brand-new Volvo. Not only did this necessitate some serious neighbourly diplomacy but it accentuated the urgency to begin work. And yet it was not for another five months that all consents and all discharges of a complex list of attached conditions were finally signed off and we could begin our voyage of discovery.



Floor plan as it was



Floor plan proposed

All photographs from c.1959 or 1962 are courtesy of North-East Wales Archives (PH/12/0042; PH/12/0043; PH/12/0044).

STOP PRESS ONLINE GLOSSARY

DOWH Treasurer, Rosemary Brotherton, reminds readers that an open-access online glossary of building terms, in particular timber-framed structures, is available on the Vernacular Architecture Group website. See:

<https://www.vernacularbuildingglossary.org.uk/>

This glossary is extensive and user-friendly – we are grateful to the VAG for this facility.





DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

Syr Simon Jenkins, FSA, FRSL; Dr Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

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

CYLCHLYTHYR 47 Rhagfyr

EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

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.

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

NEWSLETTER 47 December

OUR WEBSITE

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.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

The nights are drawing in and its definitely getting colder, and without the distraction of gardening, it is time to snuggle down in front of the fire and it's the ideal time to pick up on researching a house history or browsing the DOWHG website and reading some of the reports there. Talking of the website, is there anyone who would like to be involved in maintaining the website? Peter does a marvellous job of doing this at present, but we do need to be mindful on the subject of succession. Please do let me or Peter know if you are interested. We also need branch organisers, currently Conwy, Anglesey and Merioneth don't have one, so again if anyone would like to find out more of what is involved for this role, do please feel free to contact me.

Back in September I went to a talk given by Liz Milman entitled 'From Sheep to Sugar'. An odd title - it turned out to be about a project that had looked at the Welsh wool trade making cloth for sugar plantation slaves. Liz has contributed an article for this newsletter which explains more this (see page 3). This industry is largely under-researched, and talking to her I suggested that some of our members may have come across mention

of pandys involved in the production of cloth – if you have come across anything of interest do let me know, as there is more work to be done in this interesting area.

In October I gave a talk to the Llangollen Museum. I was pleasantly surprised at the number of people who turned up, there must have been at least 40 people there. I guess this is something that I may have to do more often now that people are prepared to go out and socialise again.

Finally, by the time this NL goes out it will be getting close to Christmas, so may I wish you a Happy Christmas and New Year.

FROM THE SECRETARY by Alison Montgomery

Are you a branch leader (or thinking about becoming one) who would like more opportunity to speak to other people in similar roles? Or a DOWHG member who would like to speak with others and find out what's happening in other branches? Or are you a member who would like to hear about other people's research, or share your own, or get advice?

Maybe you've found a resource, or discovered a work-around, that you think other people would be interested in? You have something that's a bit of a work in progress and you'd love to share it informally before delivering it outside the group? Or you've hit a roadblock...?

Or you're a beginner who'd love to start doing research but needs some advice on where to start?

We know how popular our online talks are, and they're not going anywhere! However, we wondered if there would be any interest in adding to these, with something slightly different (but still online). Our talks (and, for trustees and officers, our meetings) are great but they usually need to follow a set agenda and often have a tight schedule. So, would there be any interest if we added some other things too, things that give us the opportunity to meet other members across DOWH, share our own work, or even pick people's brains? Or even just have a chat over a cuppa?

We'd love to hear what you think. Is there any interest in DOWH having, for example:

- occasional informal online get-togethers with no set programme, where people can just log in with a cup of tea to have a chat, talking about what they're working on, or what they need help with, or unexpected things that they've discovered
- the chance for members to present their own research (including work in progress)
- a series of online "how tos", where individual members could explain how they went about a project, or how to deal with a particular source or online resource
- online "house history surgeries" – bring a problem and our resident expert (or the collective brain) will try to come up with a solution
- for volunteers and branch leaders (or anyone interested in getting involved), the chance to meet up with each other every so often online and put a face to the name
- something else entirely...

If this is something that you think could be of interest, we'd love to hear from you. You will **not** be expected to organise them, or even to come along.

Please throw some ideas at me! secretary@discoveringgoldwelshouses.co.uk (or have a chat with your branch leader)

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Alison

Links with Old Welsh Houses by Liz Millman

Over a short time in 1716, more than five and a half miles of a hand spun and handwoven cloth called 'Welsh Plains', was ordered by a London merchant to supply the Royal African Company, for them to prepare in the colours preferred by the West African market. Taken as part of the required goods on the Guineamen, the slave ships that regularly sailed to West Africa, this cloth was bartered and exchanged for human cargo, enslaved men and women, as well as children, who would be trafficked to the plantations of English and Welsh landowners to work in the most awful conditions.



Pandy Mill, Dolgellau

Imagining five and a half mile of cloth in lengths of 80 yards, about 120 pieces, is difficult. Where was it woven? Who collected and spun the woollen thread? Who were the weavers? Where was it woven? Where were the fulling processes needed carried out? Who led the packhorses across Wales to market?

These questions intrigued 'the Learning Links International CIC' team of community researchers.

Professor Chris Evans provided some answers in his excellent book 'Slave Wales: The Welsh and Atlantic Slavery' but acknowledged that a great deal more research was needed to understand how in Montgomeryshire in particular, acknowledged by travellers of the time, it was

recorded that many households were producing cloth 'for the poor Negroes in the West Indies.'

The Bangor based 'Learning Links International' team successfully approached the National Heritage Lottery Fund and in 2019 we were able to recruit community researchers, and together with support from Chris Evans and local groups of the Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers, we were able to explore more about the production and supply of this cloth. Time went quickly and although we were able to raise awareness about this unexpected Welsh export which supplied the growing slavery enterprises of Liverpool, our research left us with more questions that we started with!

How does this relate to readers with an interest in 'Discovering Old Welsh Houses? Around 1800, weavers started to be brought together to manage production in 'factories'. The Newtown Textile Museum is housed in one of the many well-lit, textile factories in the town. However, the increase in Welsh Plains production was undertaken in the years before this, it seems that weaving went on in the houses of the farming families, rented from the landowning families, or as is often suggested, in lean-to sheds. Neither of these would have been ideal for the weavers or their families.



Spinning

The project stalled in 2020 when Covid hit, but the NLHF report was written, the film telling the story was completed and the research notes were placed online – see www.welshplains.cymru – however Zoom gave an opportunity for discussions to carry on and the story was shared widely in press and on social media. The story was also picked up by creative artists, authors and others, but there is much more to do to really understand the importance of the production of woollen cloth across Wales before the heyday of the Welsh Woollen Mills and the production of the well-known tapestries and blankets.

We would be delighted to hear from anyone interested to explore this local history of cloth production in the small communities across Wales. This cloth was also used for local purposes, as well as Army uniforms. Welsh house, field and street names often give clues that link back to fulling mills or perhaps tenter fields. The Brethyn Online Research Groups meets on Zoom most months and has created interest from across the Atlantic, as Welsh Plains became a much sought-after cloth for clothing enslaved workers in the Southern States.

If you are interested to explore more – contact Liz Millman lizmillman@yahoo.co.uk

Liz Millman
Director: Learning Links International CIC
Secretary: North Wales Jamaica Society
Co-ordinator: Jamaica Wales Alliance
lizmillman@yahoo.co.uk

Note from the Chair -For a bit of background, I can suggest the following and if anyone can add any information about any Pandy or the cloth industry, do please get in touch.

Janice

Welsh Wool, Slavery, and the Built Environment
<https://rcahmw.gov.uk/welsh-wool-slavery-and-the-built-environment/>

Merioneth Woollen Industry 1750-1820. Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorian 1939
<https://journals.library.wales/view/1386666/1411229/192#?xywh=-1660%2C255%2C5733%2C2871>

NEWS AND ARTICLES FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH Report by Sue Hurst

In early October a group of 10 members and guests visited Brynddu, a 1690 house in Llanfechell, once the home of William Bulkeley the diarist and the centre of the Brynddu estate. Robin Grove-White, the owner, gave an introductory talk about the history of the house and then he and his wife Helen showed us around the house, both upstairs and down. There were many corridors and rooms upstairs, some of them having higher ceilings than the original main body of the house on the ground floor. We then visited the walled garden, which is still cultivated, and was probably built about the same time as the house, with Helen Grove-White as our guide. The afternoon finished with plentiful tea, coffee and cakes. Our thanks go to Robin and Helen for their time and hospitality.



Brynddu, Llanfechell

In early November a group of 15 members and guests visited Gronant, which lies off the A5025 between Llanfachraeth and Llanfaethlu. The oldest part of the house has been dated to the 1530s, but some people, including the owner Catherine Cunnah, think it is older. A Snowdonia style house, the only one on Anglesey, was built to the side of the original house and the two were joined together by a Georgian building. Catherine spoke about the house and then we were able to explore and see the wall paintings in the upstairs rooms. Catherine then took us on a tour of the outside of the buildings and again the afternoon finished with tea, coffee and cakes. Many thanks to Catherine for her time, hospitality and answering numerous questions posed by the visitors.

In December there will be a house history workshop at the Archives in Llangefni. The archivist, Amanda Sweet, will use Gronant as an example of the kind of documents and information available to those wishing to research their house history. At the time of writing only a couple of places are available.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

Margaret Dunn, current secretary of the Caernarfonshire branch, has recently been unwell. We know all our members will join us in sending her our best wishes for an early recovery and in wishing both Margaret and Ray a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

CONWY BRANCH **Report by Gill Jones**

Six Branch members attended a meeting on the 17th October. It was decided that future meetings would take place if and when any Branch member requests one or has an idea for a visit or topic to discuss. Otherwise we may arrange a meeting every three months to see if our situation is likely to change. In the meantime, some house history research is likely to continue.

ARTICLE by Ray Castle **News from Aberconwy House**

Aberconwy House (NT) in Conwy town was closed by Covid in 2000 and its furniture returned to St Fagans. The ground floor re-opened as a National Trust bookshop on the 21st October 2023. Opening hours are Thursday – Saturday 10 - 4. They are asking for donations of books and puzzles.

CADW plan to open a local history museum on the upper floor. We're hoping that the Conwy branch of DOWH may be able to get involved.

The other Conwy properties which were closed by Covid are the Telford suspension bridge which now remains open but without any charge because they have no staff locally to manage it. The other building is the Telford bridge toll house. This is boarded up and generally in a very sad state.

Other news ...

Bodlondeb was the HQ of Conwy County Borough Council but following the opening of their Colwyn Bay HQ and some of their employees still working from home, it is under utilised. Conwy CBC have been denying that they will sell the building, but it now appears that it is to be sold in the near future. Perhaps it will become a hotel?

Local cemeteries and the booklets published by Gwynedd Family History Association are a rich source of information for those writing social histories. St Agnes Cemetery in Conwy was given by Lady Erskine (of Bodlondeb) to St Marys Church in the mid 19th century when the main church graveyard became full. It has been neglected for the last 50 years or so and was until recently engulfed in brambles to the point of being inaccessible. In the last few years a local group of volunteers (known as 'The Friends of St Agnes Cemetery') has cleared the undergrowth and the grounds are slowly improving. There are graves of important locals within the cemetery together with several war graves. The middle graveyard was gifted to the church by Albert Wood (also of Bodlondeb) in the 1920's. The third section is owned and maintained by Conwy CBC.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

Following our June 2023 dendrochronology and building assessment of *Cadwst*, *Caenog*, *Hafod yr afr* and *Henblas*, DOWH members have been working together with our research lead Martin Cherry and the occupants of these properties on our DOWH house histories; these are now also informed by the exciting results so far of our assessments (see the research update under Stop Press, page 15) and will hopefully be ready for publication in early 2024.

DOWH's *Cynwyd Scrapbook Five* should be completed by the end of November, after which we can hopefully find time to catch up on our Parishes Project research for pre-1750 dwellings! Our September meeting at *Hafod y calch* Corwen to discuss research findings for this was very productive, and more such meetings will be arranged for the New Year.

October sadly saw the death of one of our oldest long-term Denbigh branch members, Bronwen Williams, formerly of *Cae Mawr*, Cynwyd, whom many members will remember joining us at Bryn *Berllan*, home of her daughter and DOWH researcher Anwen Lloyd - and bringing delicious home baked cakes to our meetings, a tradition now continued by Anwen!

Our pending visits will include one to *Cadwst*, Llandrillo, at 2pm on Thursday 7th December, but please contact me at leesjenny@gmail.com if interested, as numbers will be limited.

ARTICLE by Jenny Lees

From Strata Marcella to Caenog – with diversions on the way!

Our DOWH assessment of the present house of *Caenog* has not only dendrodated its oldest parts to **1550-52**, but also revealed what would have been a high-status property at the time, so now the search is on to find who could have built it! It lies within *Escyngainog*, a part of Gwyddelwern parish previously owned by the Cistercians of **Strata Marcella** abbey, and in **1525**, earlier than the 1536-9 suppression of the monasteries, the abbey had already made a lease of 99 years to **Robert ap Rhys ap Maredudd** of '*all messuages, lands, tenements etc. in the commotes of Penllyn and Edeirnion, called Tyr y Mynach and Hesdyn gainog*.'¹



Plas Iolyn, site of the home of Robert ap Rhys (Jenny Lees 2010)

Robert, third son of **Rhys Fawr** who supported Henry Tudor at the 1485 battle of Bosworth, became not only chancellor and vicar-general of the diocese of St Asaph, but also personal chaplain to Henry VIII's Cardinal Wolsey, acting as Wolsey's agent in North Wales. Acquiring great wealth through numerous '*benefices*', letters from Robert to Henry VIII suggest these included much land in Llanfor parish,² and Robert lived at *Plas Iolyn*, near Pentrefoelas, in what bards including Tudur Aled and Lewis Môn praised as enormous and hospitable luxury - commenting also on their host's knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Despite his pre-Reformation religious status, Robert had not only a wife, **Mared**, daughter of **Rhys** (or Rhydderch) **Llwyd** of *Gydros*, Llanfor (described as his 'concubine' by adversaries in a Chancery case!), but also twelve sons, one of whom founded the **Price** family of *Rhiwlas*, and four daughters! Although Robert could not have built *Caenog* himself as he had died by **1535**,³ it could have been financed by whoever had either inherited or purchased his 1525 lease. One possibility was his daughter **Catherine Llwyd**,⁴ said to have married **William Salesbury** or *Salusbury* (c. 1520 – c. 1584), the leading Welsh scholar of the Renaissance and principal translator of the 1567 Welsh New Testament.⁵

There may have been a connection with the Salesburys of *Rug* who did own *Caenog* land by **1653**, as William Salesbury was great-grandson of **Sir Thomas 'Hen' Salusbury** of *Lleweni*, from whom the *Rug* branch was also descended.⁶ (Robert ap Rhys's dominance was heavily

challenged by the Salusbury 'dynasty', but with little success before his death!) Although **William Salesbury** lived at Llanrwst, he was a proclaimed Protestant said to have had to spend most of Queen Mary's reign (**1553–1558**) in hiding. (Could any of this time have been at his father in law's former property of *Caenog*, with its unusually boarded roof?).

The above is just one strand of our search to find who might have been *Caenog*'s owners and/or tenants in **1550-52**! Other candidates include the family of '**William Wynn** of *Hescyn gaenog*', descended from 5th *Baron of Glyndyfrdwy* **Gruffydd Vychan**; ⁷ the *commote* of Glyndyfrdwy then included the parish of Gwyddelwern. Another possibility is the ancestors of **William Vaughan of Caenog**, as the C18th poet who composed his **1732** elegy said Willam was great-grandson of **William ap Hywel Fychan** of Llan-llyn [Glan llyn].



**Gyddros, above Cwm Pennaner
(Jenny Lees 2022)**

When our DOWH history of *Caenog* is published we may have untangled this complicated but exciting web of relationships between gentry, church, monasteries and English kings! But meanwhile, readers are very welcome to contact leesjenny@gmail.com with any comments, criticisms - or requests for full provisional drafts of our progress with the history so far!

References

1. J. Conway Davies, 'The records of the abbey of Ystrad Marchell', in Montgomery Collections, 51 (1949-1950), pp. 3-22.
2. <https://biography.wales/article/s-PRIC-RHI-1475>
3. Glanmor Williams, 'The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation', pp. 322-7.
4. <https://www.geni.com/people/Catherine-verch-Robert/600000000978669274?through=6000000002102454004>
5. <https://www.geni.com/people/William-Salusbury-Scholar/600000000978718368?through=600000000978669274>
6. <https://biography.wales/article/s-SALU-RUG-1525>
7. 'History of Powys Fadog', Vol VI, p.4.

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

In October nine of us met at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden, to hear a talk by Margaret Barr on House History research, especially that completed by DOWH members in Flintshire. Unfortunately, our planned November visit to a moated house near Nannerch, Plas Yw, had to be postponed because the surrounding area was completely waterlogged. We will now visit Plas Yw in the Springtime, always assuming the incessant rain has stopped by then ...

On December 14th the Flintshire and Denbighshire branches will meet together for a Christmas lunch at the Faenol Fawr in Bodelwyddan. We are to eat in the Tudor Room, which boasts a splendid oak-carved fire surround of the late 16th century. Any members or friends of members who would like to join us at the lunch are very welcome to book their place through Wally: wallybarr@yahoo.co.uk or phone 01745 888622.

REPORT by Gina Skyner
Talk to Flintshire Historical Society



Margaret Barr, Flintshire Branch Joint Secretary, gave a very successful talk to members of the Flintshire Historical Society on November 25th. at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Mold. The talk was entitled 'An Approach to Researching the History of Old Houses with special reference to Flintshire'.

Margaret took us through the various processes involved, using appropriate maps and photographs, with reference to a number of particular properties, all of which was thoroughly enjoyed by members. Margaret also spoke of the work of the Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group and provided pamphlets for the members to explore afterwards.

A number of interesting questions were answered, followed by refreshments.

Many members came to Margaret afterwards expressing thanks and congratulations on a very interesting talk.

Gina Skyner

**Talk to Flintshire Historical
Society**

ARTICLE by Margaret Barr
The Old Cottage Revisited

If you look at the British Listed Buildings website for Wales you will see that Monmouthshire has 2,428 listed buildings, the third highest in Wales after Powys at 5,497 and Gwynedd at 4,175. I want to take you to the Monmouthshire parish of Llantilio Crossenny. It is situated almost mid-way between Abergavenny and Monmouth on the B4233 road. In the hamlet of Treadam there is a beautiful cottage. It is a 2* listed building and these are the reasons given ...

'Rare and remarkably unaltered C16 cottage retaining original detail of very high quality, including original mullion windows and fine centre partition truss with well-preserved post and panel partition.' (britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300015761-the-old-cottage-llantilio-crossenny).

This is the cottage I lived in until I was 3½ years old, when we moved up to North Wales. Being so young I have limited recollections of my time there, but we always drive past if we are in the vicinity.

At the beginning of September 2023, we were staying in Monmouth with my brother and his partner. We went to Treadam on our way back from a day out and stopped and spoke to a neighbour. The owner of the cottage was out but we left our contact details as the neighbour said the



The Old Cottage
(sketch by Arthur Jacob; 1950)

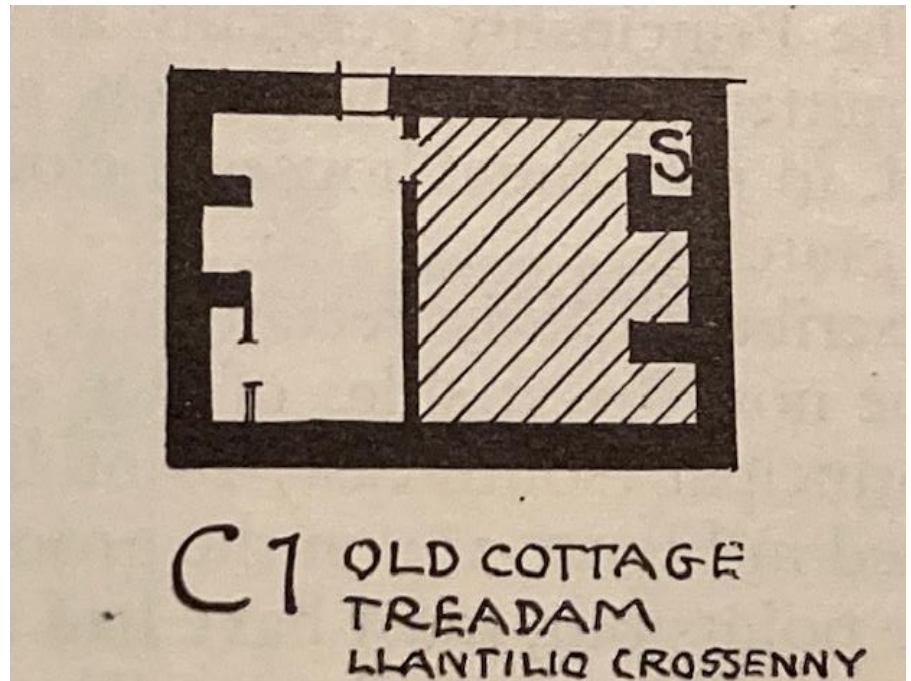
lady would be sorry to have missed us. That evening we had a phone call from the owner and arrangements were made for us to visit the old cottage the next morning.

It was a beautiful morning and we were made very welcome with coffee and biscuits. It was the first time my brother and I had been inside the cottage since 1957! But amazingly I did have memories that proved to be correct – for instance the small parlour and the room next to it separated by a post and panel partition. This larger room had been a kitchen in our time and my mother had cooked on the open fire. My father's recollection was:

"We had to fetch our drinking water from a well down the road. And for all other purposes we used rainwater, which we collected in a large tank".

Richards, LI (2008) *Richards' Rambles* (my father's autobiography).

They didn't have electricity either until just before they left for North Wales. Originally it was one building, as demonstrated in the plan shown here.



Plan of the Old Cottage
(From Fox, C and Lord Raglan (1953) *Monmouthshire Houses*
Part II. National Museum of Wales, Cardiff)

At a later stage it was divided into two dwellings which necessitated making another doorway and adding a staircase. The second staircase is no longer there and access to the upstairs is by the original stone stairs. In my parents' time they used the newer staircase and kept apples (from the orchard) over winter on the old stone staircase! Upstairs is an intriguing area by the gable window, which was added at a later date. It is not enclosed like a crog loft, but looks as though it could have been used for an additional sleeping space.

The visit was particularly poignant for my brother as he had been born in the bedroom upstairs in 1953 (whereas I had been born in Abergavenny hospital in 1954).

MERIONETH BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ARTICLE by Peter Masters

A Cautionary Tale

Whilst helping with an enquiry about some family history we came across an interesting conundrum. A forebear, Evan Evans, was believed to have held lands in Ffestiniog and a search of the Welsh tithe maps online: <https://places.library.wales/home> led to said Evan Evans renting a Field no. 40 in the parish of Maentwrog. Merioneth.

Map of Maentwrog parish in the County of Merioneth

19	Part of Llwynnig	14	2	0		
20	Part of Llanfryn	32	1	14		
21	Part of Llwynnig	7	2	21		
22	Part of Llanfryn	2	2	0		
23	Part of Llwynnig	5	2	32		
		0	3	21		
William Lloyd	29	Gwynn yr Ierch	12	3	26	1 5 0 = 100.1
Mendith Williams	33	Tyddyn y Merched	12	1	30	5 = 100.1
Evan Evans	40	Part of Dolymoch	20	0	25	10 = 100.1
John Owens and Ellis Jones	35	Gellidrywyll	5	1	12	2 6 = 100.1
John Morris	36	Llanfryn	12	3	7	5 6 = 100.1
	42	Part of Dol	40	2	27	
			3	2	9	
			44	0	36	1 14 = 100.1
	3	Part of Llanfryn	16	0	2	14 = 100.1
	9	Part of Dol	63	3	12	1 14 = 100.1
	10	Part of Dol	79	1	0	1 14 = 100.1

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Tithe Apportion for Ffestiniog, Merioneth 8th Feb 1843

Tyddyn y Merched is a farm to the east of Dol y Moch towards Ffestiniog, SH 69535 41194, which seems to have several tenants according to the tithe list but all are owned by No.12, W.J Banks?

So far so good but ... BUT ... This didn't sit right because other searches show something different!



Tithe map for Ffestiniog, Merioneth(1843) Field no.22

The Tithe Apportion for Ffestiniog, Merioneth 08 Feb 1843 shows the Landowners: 1. George Banks. 2. Rev Edward Banks [his father?], & the Right Honourable Earl of Falmouth, Field no.22. Dol y Moch occupier Evan Evans, 479 Acres 0 Rods 27 Poles val: £9.

The 1843 tithe list shows Evan Evans' plot as being in Ffestiniog Parish, whereas the other 1840 link takes you to the same [similar] entry on the website, but the Tithe sheet is labelled Maentwrog Parish.



Tithe map for Ffestiniog,
Merioneth (1843) Field no.40,
the toe of field no. 22

Is this a rare example of overlapping boundaries, or a change in Parish boundaries with different surveys a few years apart and with a change of ownership? How many other 'Double Entries' are there in the Tithe List? Clearly the Maentwrog-Ffestiog Tithes need to be treated with caution.

A point of interest for the eagle-eyed. The first entry gives the field size as 5 Acres whereas the second later entry states 495 Acres! This cannot be a transcription error, 4.95 instead of 5, because this is all pre-decimalisation and the handwritten entry shows a staggering increase in the size of the field by 490 Acres although the same map is used for both tithe assessments.

The map entries for the parishes have been orientated to make them readable.

But by judicious use of the computer, patience, screen grabs and stitching, the answer is revealed. There are two entries for the same holding, field no. 40 being the toe of the larger holding 22 but the other side of the river and hence a different Parish.

The moral here is, can you believe what you see; are your sources sound? And do not take anything for granted. Check, check and crosscheck whenever possible.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2023-4

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 6 December at 7 pm (note that this is the first Wednesday of the month)

Helen Williams-Ellis worked as a TV producer and director, overseeing programmes with a focus on Welsh subjects. She then did her doctorate on the life and image of the early modern gentlewoman Catrin of Berain. She is on the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates based at Bangor University.

Sex, Power, Marriage: Katheryn of Berain and her Four Husbands

Katheryn of Berain was married four times. Why did she marry – whom did she marry – and how did she become known as the 'Mother of Wales'?

Wednesday 10 January at 7 pm

Danny Mccaroll (FLSW) has formally retired from the Department of Geography, Swansea University, but remains a part of the research team. He was coordinator of the EU-funded 'Millennium Project', which reconstructed the climate of Europe over the last one thousand years.

Welsh Houses and the climate of the past

The main interests of the Swansea tree-ring team are in using the chemistry of oak timbers to date old houses, and then using the results to reconstruct the climate of the past. In this lecture, Professor McCarroll will discuss how past changes in climate may have impacted on the population of Wales and how those impacts are reflected in some old Welsh houses.

Wednesday 14 February at 7 pm

Scott Lloyd is Research Manager at the Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales and one of the key players in the prize-winning Deep Mapping Estate Archives Project.

More than just a map: The Ordnance Survey County survey large-scale mapping

The Ordnance Survey County survey was an enormous undertaking and the maps it produced are a valuable record of the nineteenth century landscape. But how did they gather the information that is shown on the maps, especially for boundaries and antiquities?

Wednesday 13 March at 7 pm

Judith Alfrey is Head of Heritage Regeneration and Conservation at Cadw and a trustee of the Vernacular Architecture Group.

From listing to local heritage: finding value in historic buildings

Listing often seems a top-down process, and in many ways it is. But every listed building is someone's local heritage. More and more, those responsible for designation are working with local communities to capture what local distinctiveness means to them.

Wednesday 10 April at 7pm

Martin Cherry DOWH trustee

After Glyndŵr: Building in an age of anarchy

Over the last decade or so, a substantial number of buildings in Wales have been securely tree-ring dated to the fifteenth century, several of them built during or within a few years of the Glyndŵr wars. Others – houses, courts, shops and churches – can be dated by analogy to around the same period. At a time of acute political uncertainty, who built them – and why? (The subject of the talk might be adapted if there are any exciting new research results to announce.)

Wednesday 8 May at 7 pm

Dr Jenny Day Research Fellow, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth

“The fair court of St Bernard”: the poets’ view of the Cistercian abbeys of Wales.

The medieval poets can tell us a lot about buildings and the life that went on in them. Dr Jenny Day is an expert in this field and working on a book on poetry relating to Valle Crucis Abbey. Her talk will look at the architecture at Valle Crucis and other houses, and about the broader material culture relating to burials, worship and feasting.

Wednesday 19 June at 7.15 pm after the AGM (note this is the third Wednesday of the month)

This lecture will follow Discovering Old Welsh Houses AGM scheduled for 6.15 pm.

Robin Grove-White is Professor Emeritus of Environment and Society at Lancaster University and Chair of the Advisory Board, Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, Bangor University.

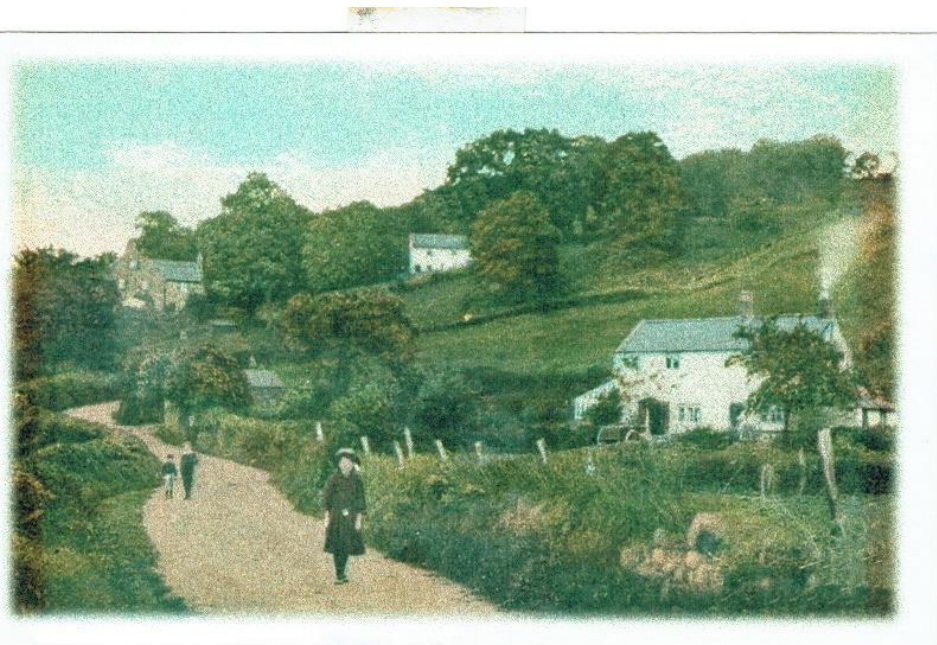
My Dad the Communist Landowner and Other Anglesey Tales (provisional title)

FEATURE ARTICLE: DIARY OF A RENOVATION

By Angie Sutton-Vane and Glyn Davies (angelasuttonvane@outlook.com)

The renovation of Plas yn Bwl House: Part Three

My first two entries concentrated on the long eighteen-month application process for listed building and planning consent but, of course, the history and occupants of Plas yn Bwl are an inextricable and parallel part of the story, so I've shared some of my early house history research attempts below.

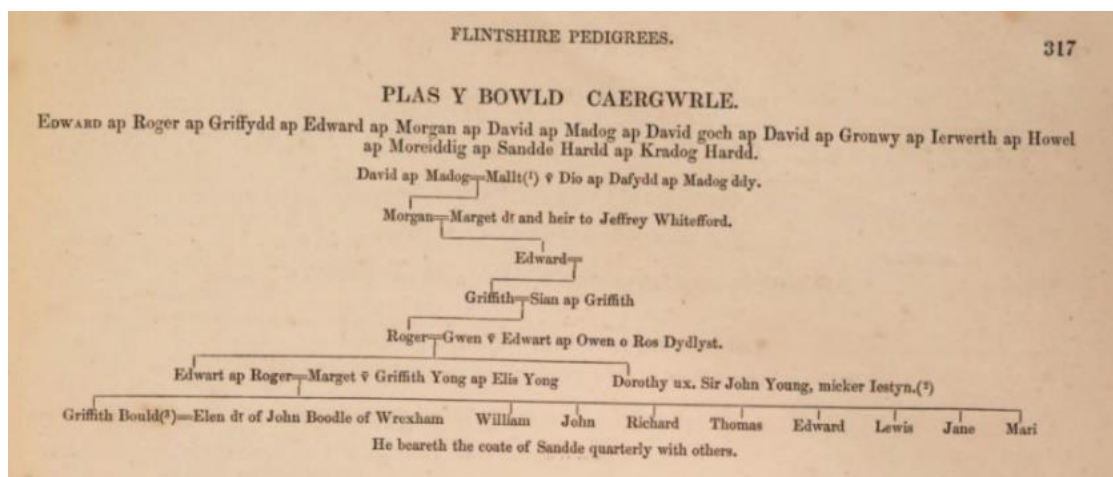


An early (recoloured) photograph of Bryn Yorkin Lane
Plas yn Bwl at the top left, c. early 1900s.
Source unknown – shared on FaceBook)

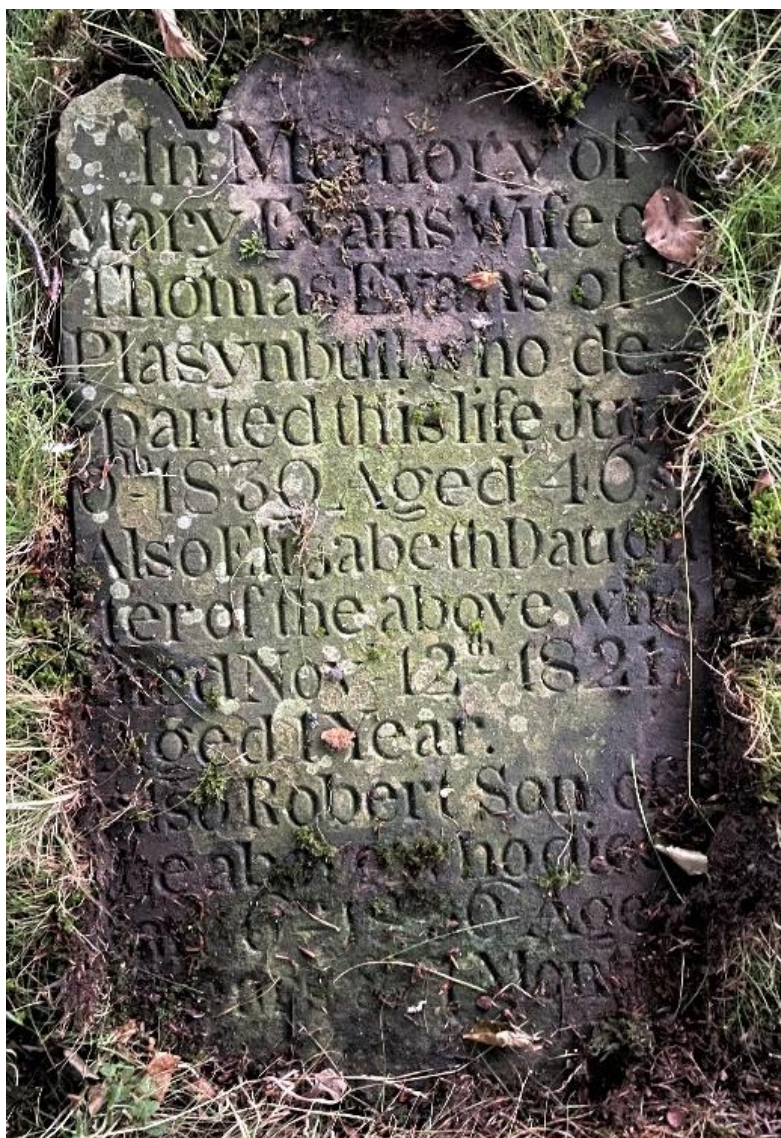
Following my historian's instinct of always starting with what I know to be true, I began with the British Listed Buildings website entry (link given at end of this article), and I was immediately mired in complexities. The entry doesn't attribute its research: I managed to trace some of the references to the early 15th century Boldes, for example, Sir Richard Bolde, who were believed to have built the house; I also ascertained that members of the Bolde family were undoubtedly in the region, active around Deeside, Chester and a number of castles during the 15th century with connections to the Earls of Derby – they were, in other words, very much a part of the Marcher Lordship circuit. But I haven't been able to expand on

the listing's particular reference to the Bolde's purchase of land to the west of Caergwrle Castle or indeed pin the medieval Boldes directly to the village or to the house.

Much later, by 1586 or 1613, an entry appearing in *Heraldic Visitations for Flintshire* reveals that, by then, the Griffiths (Brymbo line) were living at 'Plas y Bowld, Caergwrle', and it is apparent that, through marriage of the female line of the Boldes, the house had passed to them.



The pedigree for Plas y Bowld taken from p.317, Vol. II – *The three counties of North Wales; Heraldic Visitations*, c.1586 or 1613.



The second puzzle was the name Bolde versus Bwl – if the house was built and owned by the Boldes why was it called Bwl which is not Welsh for Bolde: the listing suggested the name of Bolde died out, becoming Bull but nor does bwl normally mean bull in Welsh, and I stand to be corrected here. Although it's quite possible the house name has simply mutated from Bowld (another spelling) to Bwl over the centuries, it became evident the listing was incorrect – the Bolde family did not die out but remained right up to the 19th century back in Lancashire and I've failed as yet to trace the referenced Bull family.

One final puzzle was an entry for the Boldes in the online database published by Family Search taken from the works by Peter Batrum which traces them back to Welsh origins with Sir Bruce Bold's father (c. 1170) being Iarddur ab Egri who descended from Morien "Mynog" ap March of Anglesey. This is a considerable and puzzling leap from the Boldes described by the listing as prosperous English settlers and as an ancient, pre-Norman conquest family from Lancashire.

Having learned from my above early explorations that in the quest for what is known it's better to start at the end and work backwards, I've put aside the medieval research for the time being and census information is certainly proving useful. I can say more later, but any comments or advice around medieval records gratefully received!

A gravestone in Hope church yard for Mary Evans, wife of Thomas Evans of "Plasynbull" who died in 1830. Also their daughter, Elizabeth, who died in 1821 aged one year and their son, Robert (Photo by Angie)

House entry on British Listed Buildings: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000029-plas-yn-bwl-hope>

STOP PRESS!

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE OXFORD DENDROCHRONOLOGY LAB

By Martin Cherry & Jenny Lees

Members may be aware that DOWH received generous grants from both the Woodtiger Fund and the Vernacular Architecture Group to tree-ring date a number of houses in the old commote of Edeirnion. We now have the results for two of these – the others did not date using conventional ring-width measurement



**Caenog, Gwyddelwern Denbighshire.
Farmhouse from the yard**

and will be sent off to Swansea University for oxygen-isotope analysis.

The results we have are exciting. One – Caenog, a farmhouse near Gwyddelwern (now Denbighshire) – has a precise date for the primary phase of 1550. In the Middle Ages its site belonged to Strata Marcella Abbey and was leased in 1525 for 99 years to Robert ap Rhys, vicar-general of the diocese of St Asaph and one of Cardinal Wolsey's henchmen in North-east Wales. He had died by 1535 and we are not yet sure to whom it passed, quite possibly to one of his daughters: albeit a clergyman he had twelve or more children!

Whoever it was, the house is of exceptionally high quality and possesses a very rare feature. It was originally timber-framed and floored throughout.

The photograph shows the roof over the chamber with its pronounced decorative pegs and clean-cut trefoil to the cusp of the truss and with rebated boarding between the rafters – an original feature.

Boarded roofs are occasionally found in churches but only very rarely in houses (they were quickly superseded by plaster ceilings as at Plas Mawr in Conwy, although there is no evidence of that here). Whoever built it was out to make an impression. Later phases, also of high quality, failed to date.



**Caenog
Roof over principal chamber with rebated boards between the
rafters, a very rare feature
Tree-ring dated to 1550**

The other house – Hafod yr Afr near Cynwyd also now in Denbighshire – is a cruck-framed open hall house with a rather wide date range that places it towards the middle of the sixteenth century (probably 1533-63). The roof timbers are very clean



– it may have been an open hall house heated by a proper fireplace (rather than an open hearth) but it is more likely that it was floored over almost as soon as it was built.

While open halls were being built into the seventeenth century, they were beginning to fall out of fashion from the middle of the sixteenth and there are other examples of owners sensing the changing fashion of the times and altering their plans while they were still building the house or very shortly afterwards. It seems that they couldn't be bothered to finish the cusping (the lower left-hand cusp is unfinished) – no point wasting time and money if it was going to be covered over!

Hafod yr Afr, Cynwyd

The open hall survives under the corrugated iron roof

There is more work to be done on the histories of these houses (and the house histories will go onto our website in due course). We will announce the dates of the other houses directly we get results from the Swansea laboratory. The tree-ring samples were extracted by Ross Cook and analysed by Martin Bridge of the Oxford Dendro Lab.



Hafod yr Afr, Cynwyd, Denbighshire
The principal hall truss tree-ring
dated to c.1533-63

Martin Cherry and Jenny Lees
November 2023

AND FINALLY ...

... AN OLD HOUSES WORD SEARCH!

Find all the listed words in the grid that relate to old houses, reading in straight lines, up, down, or diagonally, either backwards or forwards. No prizes – just for fun!

ARCH, BATTEN, BAY, BOX-FRAME, BRACE, BRESSUMER, CRUCK, DAIS, DAUB, DOOR, DOWH, HEARTH, MOAT, RAFTER, ROOF, ROOM, SOLAR, TENON, TIE BEAM, TRUSS.



We wish
a very MERRY
CHRISTMAS
to all our readers!





DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

Syr Simon Jenkins, FSA, FRSL; Dr Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

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

CYLCHLYTHYR 48 Mawrth 2024

EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

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.

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

NEWSLETTER 48 March 2024

OUR WEBSITE

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.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.



IN THIS SPRING ISSUE ...

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FROM THE CHAIR by Janice Dale

How quickly the year goes by, it hardly seems any time at all since I was wishing everyone a merry Christmas, and now spring at last seems to be here and a chance to get out and about, so before the gardens dry out, now is an excellent time to get out and look at a few old houses or get to know your home area in more depth – and for those who joined the last excellent zoom talk by Scott Lloyd on mapping and the Deep Mapping project, I hope this is an incentive to go out and explore. Scott has given us a list of websites where we can access old maps, so if you haven't looked at any of these sites, please do. I love a good map, and I have been lucky enough to have acquired a couple of papers from the 1909 'Literary and Musical Festival Llandrillo' on 'Lost Houses of the Area', [Llandrillo in Edeyrnion]. Being able to access old maps has enabled me to find out where most of the houses referred to were once upon a time. Though now mostly ruined, they still have a story to tell. I must also say a big thank you to Martin Cherry for putting together such a good programme of zoom meetings for us.

HOUSES MANAGEMENT DATABASE & THE PARISHES PROJECT

by Jane Parry-Evans

Members have been asking what the difference is between the Houses Management Database and the Parishes Project, and why DOWH needs both. I have therefore been asked to write this article for the Spring Newsletter which I hope will give some clarification.

When DOWH first formed and houses were being identified as possible candidates for dating, county lists of houses were created from suggestions by members, invitations from owners and from various other sources, such as Peter Smith's book, Houses of the Welsh Countryside. However, it was quickly realised that such a list would be difficult to keep updated and in 2018, it was agreed that DOWH needed a Houses Management Database which records only essential information about each house of interest, e.g. whether it has been visited, whether it has been dated, whether any reports exist, and any Cadw and Coflein reference numbers. This would, in effect, be a management tool rather than a research database.

Over several months, the earlier lists of houses were collated into a single database, were checked for location and their current status by Margaret, and any references added from Coflein and Cadw. At the time of writing, the Houses Management Database contains 1306 houses. Each is assigned a unique reference number, and the database can be queried to answer questions such as "How many houses have we visited so far?", "Which houses have been dated?" and "Which houses have been identified as worth another visit?"

To identify any interesting early houses that have been missed, a different and more systematic approach is required which involves looking, parish by parish, at all potential sources of information about pre-1700 houses. This approach formed the basis of what became referred to as the "Parishes Project". A Word template was created that was easy for branches to complete and volunteers were asked to check a variety of sources to find houses that had not previously been researched.

Inevitably, many houses will be identified in the Parishes Project that are already on the Houses Management Database. However more information can be held for each house on a Parish Word template, including images, which can then form the start of a house history. If a house is already on the Houses Management Database, then its unique reference number should be entered into the Parish Word Template so that there is cross-reference.

It is very important that houses found during the Parishes Project that are not already on the Houses Management database are added to it, so that we have an overview of how many houses have been located and can extract up to date lists of potential candidates for further research. To enable this, those members working on the Project can request read-only copies of the latest database version from myself and an empty Excel Template to enter any newly found houses. If preferred, I am also happy to attend Branch meetings, in person or by Zoom, to add new houses to the database during the meeting.

At present, the Parish Word Templates are saved locally at branch level and the Houses Management Database is saved on my personal computer. Ideally both the Database and completed Parish Templates should be saved in a central workspace that is accessible to members. However, this requires some investment to establish and, whilst other means suffice, the priority is to identify houses in the Parishes that have not yet been researched.

There are still Parishes to be investigated so, if you are interested in checking out potential sources of information about pre-1700 houses and entering information into the templates, please do get in touch! The email address is: housesdatabase@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk.

Llanerch-y-medd nestles in the heart of Anglesey and boasts a long history of habitation from pre-historic settlement to medieval Celtic Monastery. The town reached its zenith during the 18th century as a bustling market town. There are newly discovered prehistoric sites including a settlement near the village alongside two previously unrecorded prehistoric tombs nearby – a ring cairn near Mynydd Mwyn Mawr and a destroyed megalithic tomb atop the tallest landmass in Central Anglesey – the Foel to name but a few of the sites on offer as can be seen from the map.

This guided tour will be led by Ash Owen on 10th April 2024 with the rest of the season visits currently in planning.

Our branch thanks go to Sue Hurst for all her efforts in planning our schedule of visits over the past years. Brenda and Clare can be contacted via: Anglesey-branch@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

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

CONWY BRANCH

Branch members have decided that future meetings will take place if and when any branch member requests one or has an idea for a visit or topic to discuss. In the meantime, some house history research is likely to continue.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

Although numbers attending our winter house visits in the '*Berwyn foothills*' were curtailed by icy conditions, in December we enjoyed a tour and splendid tea at *Cadwst*, Llandrillo (below), kindly given by the owners - and isotope dating results are hopefully due soon!



Branch visit to Cadwst



Branch members at Cadwst

In January we also received a warm welcome and delicious tea at *Brynberllan*, Cynwyd (below), with the additional benefit of discussion by some of our DOWH architectural experts:

Martin Cherry writes:

"*Brynberllan* has been dendrodated: the roof timbers were felled during the winter of 1552-3 and it seems likely that the house was constructed in **1553**, or within a year or two after this date. There is an excellent building survey by Ric Tyler on the DOWH website:

https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/ABR/den%20027_ABR_19_Bryn%20Berllan.pdf.

We are finding more and more houses like this, dating from around the middle of the sixteenth century, which were two storeys from the beginning and quite compact, with two rooms to each floor. The house now has stone walls but was originally timber-framed: the photo shows that the end wall was once decorated with diagonal braces and the spaces in between were infilled with boards. It must have made quite a visual impact as you approached it from the road. But mysteries remain: because the rebuilding in stone removed much of the evidence about how the original house worked, it's difficult to be sure where either the fireplace or the stairs were situated: in other words we don't know for sure how they kept warm or how they got to bed! But as we're finding more and more houses of this type and date, with a little more study we should be able to resolve some of these quandaries. One thing is certain—no expense was spared in the use of timber beyond what was needed for structural stability!"



Branch visit to Brynberllan

DOWH Denbighshire branch *Cynwyd Scrapbook Five* was published in December 2023 and copies are selling well at £5 each (with additional cost for postage when required). As copies of *Cynwyd Scrapbook Four* sold out quickly, more copies of book five were ordered this time, so plenty are left -please contact me at leesjenny@gmail.com if you like a copy. (I can also bring copies to any North Wales meetings that I may attend, for potential distribution).

Our house histories of *Cadwst*, *Caenog*, *Hafod yr afr* and *Henblas*, following DOWH dendrochronology and building assessment in 2023, are still not quite completed - but only because we keep making more exciting discoveries about their early history! Following a Woodland Trust visit invitation from a local Edeirion contact, we have also almost finished a house history for *Llennyrch*, Talsarnau; previously dendrodated to **c.1542–69**:

https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/ODL/mer%20070%20_ODL%20_Llennyrch.pdf.

We are still awaiting results of isotope dating for *Henblas*, Llandderfel and *Henfaes isaf*, Cynwyd, as well as for *Cadwst* – it apparently involves a very complex process!

A further meeting at *Hafod y calch*, Corwen, is arranged at **2pm on Thursday 21st March** for anyone who would like to hear about or discuss research findings, and a house visit and meeting at *Plas Isaf*, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, is arranged for **2pm on Thursday 25th April**; please book with me on leesjenny@gmail.com or contact me for more details if you would like to come, as numbers may be limited.

Article by Jenny Lees

Eight hundred years of Llangar parish history. Part Two: 1660-1800

Part One of this article (1160 -1660) saw Baron of Cymer **Humffrey Hughes II** of Gwerclas fathering an amazing seventeen children with his first wife **Magdalen**, and fighting as a Royalist and Commissioner of Array during the Civil Wars.¹ *Gwerclas* prosperity continued, and by the time of **Hugh Hughes Lloyd's 1766**

¹ See also full references in my article 'A Quest for Cymer in Edeirion and its Barons: Part I: c.1200-c.1700' (2019) in *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society (JMHR)*.

marriage to English heiress **Margaret Walmesley**, their *Marriage Settlement* ² listed around forty *Gwerclas* estate properties in and around the village of Cynwyd -usefully for us giving occupants' names as well as the rights of each homestead to cut or dig '*Turf and Peate*' on the *Berwyn* or *Mynyllod* moorlands.



1767 façade of the present house of Gwerclas (Image courtesy of the owners)

By **1767 Hugh Hughes Lloyd** had built the present house of *Gwerclas*, to which Marcus Binney observed (in his 2007 book *The Perfect House -500 of the best buildings in Britain and Ireland*) virtually no alterations had been made since becoming a tenanted farm on *Rug* estate in **1824**. One of our most exciting archival finds has been the collection of original handwritten letters³ from **Margaret Lloyd** of *Gwerclas* to her close friend **Elizabeth Baker**, who resided between **1771** and **1778** at *Hengwrt* while acting as personal secretary to **Hugh Vaughan**, of *Hengwrt* and later *Nannau*. Hugh had relations at *Rug* and Margaret's letters provide a fascinating glimpse of **1770s** life - from social engagements with North Wales gentry to details of *Gwerclas* farming practices and **Margaret's** schemes to

help the poor. My partial transcriptions of her letters are in the articles *Near Calamity at the Corwen Races!* and *Confidences of an 18th Century Baroness* in **Cynwyd Scrapbook Two**, and *Confidences of an 18th Century Baroness: Part Two* and *Our Farming Heritage: Part One* in **Cynwyd Scrapbook Three**; readable online as 'Pageflip' books or downloadable from our DOWH Cynwyd book series at <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page18.html>

Hafod y calch, known historically as just *Hafod* or *Havod*, lies half a mile from *Gwerclas* within an important 'outlier' of Carboniferous limestone, in which surface workings of a medieval lime quarry have been found. With downslope siting thought to be *unmistakably medieval in origin*, for some time before 1703 *Havod* already possessed a gentry pew in Llangar church - originally owned by the **Meyrick** family of *Ucheldre* before ownership of *Havod* and the pew passed to **William** and then **Roger Salesbury** of *Rug*. We know this because Reverend **Owen Eyton** of neighbouring *Plas Isaf* had evidently appropriated *Havod's* pew, as in **1703** his son and executor **John** asked Roger Salesbury's permission to *bury the Corps of my said father Owen Eyton* under the *Havod* seat! ⁴

By C17th *Hafod* had become a 'lobby-entry' house with at least one inserted chimney, then by around 1800 an elegant Georgian east 'wing' was added before being made into a substantial Victorian farmhouse by 1900. The **1777** will of wealthy *Maltster* and *Gentleman John Williams* of *Hafod* had left at least £800 to each nephew and niece; rather pleasingly specifying for each niece that this was for '*her sole and separate use and Benefit during her Natural Life*', and not subject to the '*Debt or Engagement of her present or future Husband*'. ⁵



Hafod y calch Georgian east wing with pre C17th parts behind to the left

² Denbighshire Record Office DD/GA/652: (part of Galltfaenan MSS).

³ NLW, *Elizabeth Baker 183 to 232*; kindly drawn to my attention by DOWH colleague Pam Buttrey.

⁴ D. Morgan Evans, *Llangar -Church and community in the early eighteenth century, Part 4*, Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society, Vol. XV1, 2013, part 4, pp.358-379.

⁵ See https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/den%20138_HH_26_Hafod-Y-Calch.pdf

For each year from **1703** to **1764** the **Llangar Churchwardens' Accounts**⁶ contain not only the *Church Mise* payments due from named persons, but also fascinating details of the churchwardens' expenses! These included items such as 2s [shillings] spent at nearby *Stamp* (then a tavern) when parishioners met to choose new churchwardens; 1s for washing the surplice; expenses at the Court of Correction at Llandrillo, and constant repairs to the church.

Wardens changed every year, with even **Roger Salesbury** of *Rug* and **Hugh Hughes** of *Gwerclas* taking their turn, and in **1704 Hugh Hughes** was paying the highest contribution within Llangar parish of 13 shillings 4 pence, with the total *mise* being £2 12s 1½ d.

After the tragic **1924** death on Everest of his son Andrew, also known as Sandy, **William Irvine** moved to *Bryn Llwyn*, Llangar, and his meticulously researched *William Ferguson Irvine Collection of Llangar and Edeirion papers* contain invaluable information, including transcriptions from the Latin of items from early British Museum manuscripts. His articles in the paper *Yr Adsain* included in 1942 '*Llangar Parish Register 1720-48*', which has extracts from the register of **Rev. Edward Samuel**, Rector of Llangar. This sometimes tells of tragic events, as



Llangar church with Hafod y calch across the confluence (Courtesy of Gareth Hughes)



Bryn Llwyn viewed from Hafod y calch, Tynllwyn concealed above right (Jenny Lees)

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

Although an Edeirion baronial court was once held at Cynwyd, none of its records remain, as they are said⁷ to have been burnt by Baron **Hugh Hughes** of *Gwerclas* (died 1725) in a dispute with his neighbours – destroying any written evidence of ownership! But DOWH research shows that by **1580** and probably much earlier, some *Llangar* properties formed part of a very extensive 'property portfolio' owned by the Salesburys of *Rug*,⁸ who maybe built *Hafod yr afr*, Llangar; dendrodated by DOWH to mid C16th and with house history pending!

Space here does not permit discussing further Llangar houses existing in 1660-1800, but *Part On*⁹ describes those built before **1660**, and *Part Three* will describe

⁶ Llangar Churchwardens' Accounts (Denbighshire Record Office DRO NTD/467), transcribed by David Morgan Evans, Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

⁷ Gwallter Mechain, *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1846) p.608, referenced in A.D. Carr (1963) *The Barons of Edeyrnion, 1282-1485, Part 1*, JMHS, Vol.4 (1963), pp187-93.

⁸ Estate and family records of 'Salesbury of Rhug, co. Merioneth, and Bachymbyd and Pool Park, co. Denbigh, later the barons Bagot, 1243-1801', including records no.490 and 503.

⁹ <https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/news/Newsletter-No%20044-E.pdf>

developments from around **1800** to today. Full DOWH histories for Llangar are already published on <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page14.html> for *Brynberllan*, *Gwerclas*, *Hafod y calch*, *Plas uchaf*, *Ty Mawr* (near Druid) and *Ty'n llwyn*, with briefer information in the **Cynwyd Scrapbook** series on houses including *Cryniarth* (Book 1), *Ty'n y wern Gwnodl* and *Brynllyn* (Book 2), *Moel Lladdfa*, *Fronguddio*, *Siamber wen* and *Gwnodl fawr* (Book 3), *Henfaes Isaf*, *Y Ddwryd* (Druid) and *Penlan fawr* (Book 4), and *Plas Isaf* (Books 2 and 3). Books One to Four are all now online at: <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page18.html>, and printed copies of **Cynwyd Scrapbook Five** are also now available to purchase.

Although in the later Middle Ages Cynwyd is thought to have been the commotal centre of Edeirnion, by 1975 Trefor O. Jones' book *O Ferwyn I Fynyddlod* listed over four pages of 'ruins' in the Cynwyd area, with only a few since restored! It is due to owners' preservation of their historical features that the houses researched so far by DOWH still remain - and I'm quite sure that there are still more to be discovered!

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

In January the branch met at St Winefrides, Gwespyr. This house is one wing of larger building that first opened in 1857 as a local school. The building is in the scholastic gothic style¹⁰ and was funded by Sir Pyers Mostyn. It is composed of two large halls; the boys being taught in one and the girls in the other. The teachers lived in the two attached wings. Closed as a school in the 1930s the building now offers four separate domestic units. At the kind invitation of the neighbours to St Winefrides, branch members also had the opportunity to visit one of the adjoining halls.



Visit to Lletty, near Mostyn



Lletty, also known as The Honest Man

In February we met in the Lletty, originally a hotel built on the coast road in Mostyn in the late 17th century and once

known as 'The Honest Man'. This building has recently been renovated and is now open as a pub. The landlord, Nick, showed us the downstairs interior rooms which are open to the public and we had a glimpse of the corridor behind the bar where you could see evidence of the original outside wall. The building had been neglected for several years before Nick and Jen began their renovation of it. He told us some of the history of this fascinating building, which was owned by the 18th century naturalist, traveller, writer and antiquarian Thomas Pennant. We later enjoyed tea and biscuits provided by Nick and listened to the words of Pennant, who wrote about Lletty in 1796.¹¹

Our March meeting is to be held in The Old Post Office, Llanasa, on 20th, where we will be joined by Gill Jones, DOWH Conwy branch member, who will be sharing her knowledge of Church Houses. Our April meeting will be

¹⁰ According to Hubbard E (1986) *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*. Penguin Books Ltd., p.444.

¹¹ Pennant T (1796) *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell*, pp. 49-51.

at Brithdir Mawr, Cilcain, on Monday 22nd at 2pm and pending visits to old houses over the next few months will include Plas Yw, Nannerch; Henblas Hall, Tremeirchion, and Colomendy, Ysceifiog.

ARTICLE by Veronica Hay Colomendy, Ysceifiog

In this article we are describing a dovecote in Ysceifiog parish, near Caerwys, Flintshire. The house is called Colomendy. This is the Welsh name for a dovecote. Dovecote buildings are often free-standing structures, as in Erddig and Penmon, but less often the pigeon lofts are found in the upper floors of farm buildings¹², as is the case with Colomendy in Ysceifiog. The owner is of the opinion that the dovecote (which gives the house its name) was one of the early buildings of the farm and that the house was built sometime after. There is some evidence that the family may have occupied the row of buildings which house the dovecote at one end, prior to this. There was a date of 1659 inscribed on a beam in the threshing barn in the building that houses



**The Dovecote
(the external staircase is to the left)**

the dovecote. The main house has a date of 1663 on the tympanum on the west gable end. There are about 60 holes for the birds in this dovecote and the entrance to the holes is L-shaped which gives more space and protection to the birds.

In the middle ages only the elite were allowed to erect and maintain dovecotes and the rights to do so were strictly controlled by law. However, in Elizabethan times the laws were relaxed and this enabled the lesser aristocracy to build their own dovecotes. In fact they became a kind of status symbol - demonstrating that the owners had a significant amount of land. Peter Williams, who built Colomendy in Ysceifiog, a man proud of his lineage, would have been very keen to impress in this way.

According to William Twigg, Planning (Environmental) Section, Delyn Borough Council in 1976, dovecote owners would have to have a certain acreage of land or otherwise the birds would feed on the crops and stores of landowners nearby. In the early 1980s the present owners had no birds and were given three pigeons which bred profusely so that, in time, numbers rose to 70 or more. Problems arose when a neighbour alleged that the pigeons were feeding on barley that she had stored in a barn next door. Having consulted the council it was arranged for a man to deal with the problem with a rifle.

What was the function of the dovecotes? They provided a source of fresh meat during the winter months after the slaughter of the other animals in November (known as the blood month). Also the feathers of the birds were used in mattresses and the manure was used to put on gardens. As agricultural methods improved, animal meat could be available in the winter and, with the arrival of refrigeration, the need for dovecotes declined and the buildings were neglected.

We wonder how many other houses with the name Colomendy are known by DOWH members in North Wales?



Nesting boxes inside the dovecote

¹² Lloyd G (1965-6) *Flintshire Dovecotes*. Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society, 66 (22), pp.78-82.

MERIONETH BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2024

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 10 April at 7pm

Martin Cherry DOWH trustee

After Glyndŵr: Building in an age of anarchy

Over the last decade or so, a substantial number of buildings in Wales have been securely tree-ring dated to the fifteenth century, several of them built during or within a few years of the Glyndŵr wars. Others – houses, courts, shops and churches – can be dated by analogy to around the same period. At a time of acute political uncertainty, who built them – and why? (The subject of the talk might be adapted if there are any exciting new research results to announce.)

Wednesday 8 May at 7 pm

Dr Jenny Day Research Fellow, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth

“The fair court of St Bernard”: the poets’ view of the Cistercian abbeys of Wales.

The medieval poets can tell us a lot about buildings and the life that went on in them. Dr Jenny Day is an expert in this field and working on a book on poetry relating to Valle Crucis Abbey. Her talk will look at the architecture at Valle Crucis and other houses, and about the broader material culture relating to burials, worship and feasting.

Wednesday 19 June at 7.15 pm after the AGM (note this is the third Wednesday of the month)

This lecture will follow Discovering Old Welsh Houses AGM scheduled for 6.15 pm.

Robin Grove-White is Professor Emeritus of Environment and Society at Lancaster University and Chair of the Advisory Board, Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, Bangor University.

My Dad the Communist Landowner and Other Anglesey Tales (provisional title)

FEATURE ARTICLE: DIARY OF A RENOVATION

By Angie Sutton-Vane and Glyn Davies (angelasuttonvane@outlook.com)

The renovation of Plas yn Bwl House: Part Four

My last article puzzled over the origins of the name Plas y Bwl or Plas yn Bwl and I had some useful feedback so thank you. However, some further digging in records has revealed that certainly in the 1400s it was called Plas y Bowld or Bolde, reflecting the name of the original family of Lancashire knights who owned it and it remained as such for several centuries. The first reference to it as Plas y Bwl which I’ve found is in 1699



Repairs in reclaimed oak to the roof valley timbers



when Edward Lhwyd briefly describes it as “anciently a house of good note belonging to ye Bulls, at prest. it is Mr Young’s” so I wonder if it was a simple case of misunderstanding what he was told?

Returning to the house as it is now, and our work, we finally got our listed building and planning consents, with all conditions discharged, in June 2022, a wait of just under two years.

Our plan was that Glyn would undertake the majority of the work on a full-time basis as this was really the only way we could afford to complete it. Glyn joined the family building business working with his father

and brother in and around Aberystwyth and they carried out the restoration of local churches. He then moved onto working for the well-established conservation and restoration company of Herbert Read where he undertook restoration of carved wood, for example, the badly burned Staircase House in Stockport. With Glyn’s last job as a



Thick Welsh reclaimed slates arrive from South Wales complete with lichen



Finds in the roof – giant nails and oak pegs

cabinetmaker at Silverlining in Wrexham, and with my background in conservation, museum work and history we felt equipped with the necessary skills to take on the project.

Glyn began two huge projects in the spring of 2022. First, building a fully self-contained cabin in our adjoining paddock so that we could live away from the building site and yet be close by. Second to address the main roof with its wonderful humped ridge and heavy Welsh slates. Storm Arwen had accelerated early losses, breakages and slippage of slates and we suspected the large oak beams of one of the main roof valleys were in a poor state of repair. We would only know the full extent by erecting scaffolding and stripping back the slates and this revealed our worst suspicions with sections of the beams coming away in handfuls of wood dust. Our tight budget took a huge knock early on with prices of materials up by 50% following the double whammy of Covid and Brexit. Glyn spent weeks searching for suitable reclaimed oak timbers from salvage yards, and





The Topping-out Ceremony

heavy Welsh slates which are now as rare as hens' teeth and were eventually sourced from a demolished hospital in South Wales. With the house exposed to the elements we were, at least, blessed with a beautiful hot summer. The roofing work was complex and in places where the slates were level with the coping stones on the west gable careful construction of hidden lead flashings were required. Always a perfectionist, Glyn became a first-rate slate-cutter and lead-dresser and the finished work was beautiful. By October 2022 we were able to hold a very exclusive topping-out ceremony and by early 2023 were safely ensconced in our cosy new home.¹³

(Angie and Glyn have taken us all on an exhausting journey through their renovation of Plas yn Bwl, and we hope they can now enjoy a well-earned rest in their beautiful home! - Eds).

BOOKS ...BOOKS ... BOOKS ...BOOKS ...BOOKS ...BOOKS ...

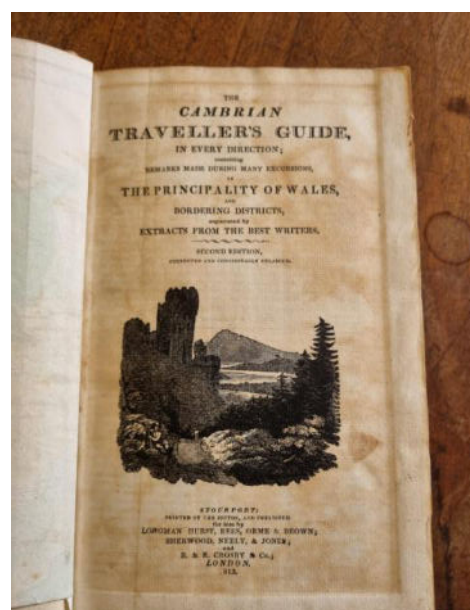


This is a new feature of the Newsletter. If you have any reviews, comments, thoughts or recommendations of books that you think might be of interest to our members, why not let us know?! We'll be happy to print your comments, letters or articles. Just email us at flintshire-branch2@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk

ARTICLE by Janice Dale On my bookshelf

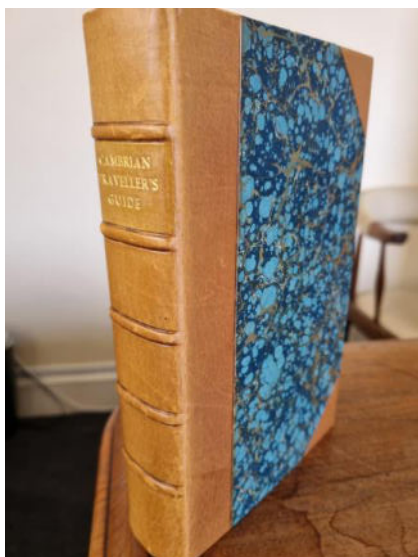
If you are ever up in Northumberland, do drop into Barter Books in Alnwick [<https://www.barterbooks.co.uk/>]. It's a place where you can spend hours trawling their second-hand books [they also have an in-house café with good food and coffee – need to keep up strength whilst wandering around the bookshelves].

It was here that I picked up '*The Cambrian Traveller's Guide, in every direction; containing remarks made during many excursions, in the principality of Wales and bordering districts, augmented by extracts from the best writers*', published in 1813. It has been rebound but includes an original map.



The Cambrian Traveller's Guide

¹³ Note from the editors: we had to look this up, though no doubt many of you avid building restorers already know. A Topping-out ceremony is traditionally a builders' rite held when the last beam is placed in situ on the top of a building during its construction.



The author recommends to the traveller: *to purchase a sure footed pony which you may relieve by walking at intervals. However, if walking becomes exceedingly painful when blisters upon the feet result from this exercise,...this inconvenience may be prevented by wearing strong pliant and easy shoes ... and soft flannel or woollen socks ... if blisters should arise ... bathe with equal quantities of vinegar and luke warm water, and apply a thin liniment of wax and oil with a little sugar of lead; some apply a compress of brandy with an equal quantity of vinegar of lead and anoint with oil.*

There are some delightful descriptions of places visited – on travelling towards Bala we came in sight of the river Treweryn .. *the mountains here assumed a less lofty character than those we had traced in the morning and the vale on our right increased in beauty and richness. The cottages had, however a more wild and uncomfortable appearance than those in Caernarvonshire and instead of being covered with slates and*

furnished with chimnies, they were ill thatched and the apertures for the smoke were very rude...

On visiting Llanelltyd the author comments ... *This place serves as port to Dolgelle and many small vessels are built here ...*

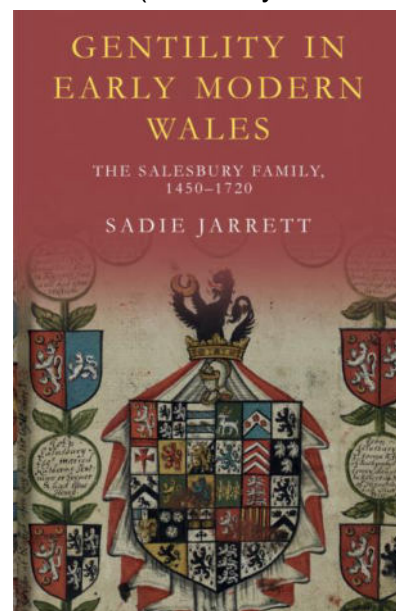
Dolgellau is described as *having irregular streets and the houses mostly ill built ...it's manufactory of Welsh flannels employs a great number of hands. The kind of woollen cloth called Gweu or Webs also occupies the inhabitants of this neighbourhood. Every little farmer makes webs and almost every cottage has his loom ...*

How things have changed, but books like this give an insight of life all those years ago.

BOOK REVIEW by Martin Cherry

Sadie Jarrett *Gentility in Early Modern Wales. The Salesbury Family* 1450-1720 (University of Wales Press, 2024). ISBN 978-1-83772-096-5; eISBN 978-1-83772-097-2. £24.99 (paperback). This book is also freely available on a Creative Commons licence from:
<https://www.uwp.co.uk/app/uploads/9781837720972.pdf>

It is great news that this eagerly awaited and important book has now seen the light of day. It is the first full-length published study of this significant family, taking the story from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and the author exploits a substantial and largely hitherto untapped body of documentary sources from many collections in Wales, London and California. The chronological range is particularly helpful since it allows an overview of the progress of one branch of a major gentry clan over the longue durée. The careful consolidation and acquisition of property (and power) from the late Middle Ages, through purchase and marriage, is chronicled (they inherited Rhug in the mid-sixteenth century) and we see their horizons expand by the seventeenth century to include Ireland and the wider Atlantic world. William Salesbury (1580-1660) could boast that a combination of trading and piracy in the North Atlantic provided the wherewithal for him to live later 'on that fortune he had by his owne industry'. But it was land and the income derived from rents and natural resources (which included minerals) that provided the bread and butter - and the traumas. Court cases over title to land could take a decade or more to resolve, even when the Chancellor was a friend of the family, and their glacial progress remind one of the worst excesses



described in Bleak House. Violence pervades the scene at almost every step, the family safeguarding their interests by mobilising armed men when necessary: many incidents appear to have been fuelled by alcohol and it is curious how many affrays took place in churchyards. Much emphasis is placed on the ability and wisdom of the paterfamilias: some took great care to ensure a smooth succession, seeking the support of trusted friends to oversee the estates if the heir was a minor; but things could go badly wrong - under the management of reckless 'Captain John', income by 1611 had fallen from £707 p.a. to £30! But there was a gentler side to the family saga. The household created a hospitable and secure base for family and retinue alike and the role of women was central, even though often hidden in the record: charity, mercy, welcome, creating a sense of well-being (making the great house 'a place where we are sheltered... a fine place to frequent') were female attributes critical to the effective working of the local polity: they, as much, perhaps more, than male bravado, 'prospered her shire'.

Sadie Jarrett is good in bringing women out of the documentary shadows as her other publications have demonstrated. And, although of Lancashire extraction, the family integrated into Welsh society both by marriage and culture: although bardic tradition declined during the period covered by this book, the family retained an 'intense interest' in Welsh language scholarship and (by around 1600) had a library of over 600 books at Rhug. And, of course, although not discussed at length here, the achievements of William Salesbury of Welsh Dictionary and New Testament fame, although he belonged to a cadet branch of the family, would have reflected gloriously on the wider clan.

Finally, it is worth noting that this book was greatly aided by a generous grant from Lord Newborough (owner of the Rhug estate) which funded the author's doctoral fees - and our Chair, Janice Dale, is singled out in the acknowledgements as a particular champion of the project. Also worth registering is the role of the participating libraries and publishing houses that sponsor the Creative Commons scheme that enable works such as this to be downloaded by anyone free of charge: that really is making access to knowledge for all a reality!

STOP PRESS!

Free to Collector

An old microfiche reader. In working order. About 17inches/43cms tall. Also Parish Register fiches for:- Denbigh 1683-1739 & 1739-1812; Capel Garmon 1696-1841; St.Asaph/Llanelwy 1593-1750 & 1750-1812; Llanrhaedr ym Mochnant 1678-1812; Henllan 1684-1812; Llanrhaeadr yng Nghinmeirch 1676-1812.

Contact: Gill Jones, Conwy Branch: gwylangj@icloud.com





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CYLCHLYTHYR 49 Mehefin 2024

NEWSLETTER 49 June 2024

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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

I am sitting writing this whilst in Northumberland on holiday, but was reminded of home in Wales when yesterday we were walking up in the Cheviots and passed the site of the Battle of Homildon Hill, just west of Wooler, now called Humbleton Hill. This battle was in 1402. The Scots were always quick to capitalise on political unrest, and of course this was just two years after Owain Glyndwr's revolt, which meant that Henry IV had to turn his attention and resources to Wales. This gave the Scots the opportunity for a concerted attack on England. The 10,000 Scottish army advanced as far as Newcastle, looting along the way, before turning back. Hampered by booty it was slow progress back to Scotland giving time for the English, some coming from Shrewsbury having previously been diverted to Wales and the Marches and the troubles there, to intercept the Scottish army. This battle has been described as the greatest victory for the longbow in battle and the Scottish forces were defeated.

Henry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland and son Henry Hotspur, sided with Henry IV, but with many Scottish leaders taken prisoner, Henry IV's internal and Welsh problems meant he was not keen for these Scottish lords to return home leaving them to fight against him again. King Henry refused to let the Scots be ransomed

and this act became one of the many grievances that the Percys had with the Crown, leading to the Percys giving their allegiance to Owain Glyndwr and rebelling against King Henry.

This snapshot of history made me think of the link between Wales and Northumberland. Wooler from North Wales by modern roads is some 250 miles, and today takes approximately 5 hours to drive. What must have it been like for those archers to walk that far and then undertake a battle.

NEWS AND ARTICLES FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Report by Clare Latham and Brenda Simpson

Our visit year got off to a flying albeit, wet, windy and very cold start in April with our guided tour of Llanerchymedd. 12 plucky members turned up in April for the visit led by our own Ash Owen who is currently doing a PhD into the geo-archaeological history of Anglesey. Llanerchymedd boasts a long history of habitation from pre-historic settlement to a medieval Celtic Monastery reaching its zenith in the 18th century as a bustling market town though the market square is now a rather disappointing mini-roundabout. We learnt



Church interior

about the town's reliance on the now disused railway line and the plethora of shoemakers that were once based there. Ash took us on a tour of the church where we saw evidence of a medieval window in the tower and the graveyard is the resting place of the County Whipper! Ash had brought a rucksack full of artefacts that he had found on digs in local fields over the years which we explored over a warming panad in the local café following our tour.

Sadly, our May visit to a converted farm building in Coedana had to be postponed due to bereavement. In preparation for the visit, we did some research at the splendid Anglesey Archives. Using Land Tax Reports, Tithe maps and the Bishops' Transcripts, we traced people living at the farm as far back as 1726 when a Robert Buckley was in residence. We will be able to see some of the original trusses and fireplace still in situ so we look forward to the rearrangement of that visit later in the year.

We have an interesting schedule of outings in development for the rest of the year including a private house in June. We have a guided visit to *Hafoty*, a Cadw listed Hall House outside Llanddona in July and the opportunity to explore the 'Mapping Anglesey' exhibition at

Oriel Mon in September with input from the exhibition's curator. We are planning a return visit to Anglesey Archives to round off our year in October.

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

Unfortunately illness continues to hamper branch planning, though it is hoped things will be moving on again shortly.

CONWY BRANCH

Branch members have decided that future meetings will take place if and when any branch member requests one or has an idea for a visit or topic to discuss. In the meantime, some house history research is likely to continue.

Article by Gill Jones Medieval Church Houses

Medieval church houses were the equivalent of church halls. Most date from the early 15th century. Their main purpose was to accommodate the festivals and church 'ales' (drinking parties) which raised money for the church. They were held under the guardianship of the churchwardens not the rector. The dates of the 'ales' were not generally fixed and so the churchwardens decided when they would be held and how the money would be spent. Examples are - Leet ales, Lamb ales, Clerk ales, Whitsun ales, Bride ales (wedding feasts). Surviving examples are common in the west country and some research has been carried out there, but very little has been done in Wales. The main source of information appears to be in Church Wardens' Accounts, but these are also rare in Wales for the early period.

Prior to their existence, festivities took place in the nave of the church. Medieval parishioners were perfectly comfortable using their churches both as secular meeting places as well as religious ones. After a while, Church authorities began to question whether it was appropriate for alcohol to be consumed on church premises; and about the same time, the open space in churches had started to fill with pews. The festivities were banished to the churchyards. Eventually parishes were encouraged to build 'church houses', although it wasn't compulsory. They often looked like farm buildings. They were always adjacent or close to the church. They typically had one long undivided room on the first floor – open to the roof which was accessed by an external flight of stairs. This was where the revels took place. The downstairs rooms were heated by a large fireplace and would have been used for brewing and baking.

For the Puritans such merry-making was unseemly. Under Oliver Cromwell it was banned. (There had been earlier attempts to suppress church ales in the reign of Edward, but they appeared again under Mary.) Redundant church houses were converted to other uses to benefit the parish, for example schools or almshouses. Some were rented to the former housekeepers, who continued to brew and sell ale, turning the buildings into ordinary alehouses.

A possible example of a Church House in North Wales is the former Queen's Hotel, Cerrigydrudion (For more information - see the house history on the DOWH website)



c.1875 Queen's Head



Queen's Hotel c.1900

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

In April we enjoyed an exciting tour and splendid tea at *Plas isaf*, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, kindly provided by its DOWH member owners who had told us of its ancient timbers!



Plas isaf, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd - lower-level part of house

The house was new to DOWH, but after a brief visit Martin Cherry writes:

“The present house is perhaps early 18th century, as its proportions and parlour details would fit well with this date. It is set along the contour, but incorporates and partly overlays an older house built on the downhill slope - difficult to date, but likely to be late C16th. Here one room with wide ceiling joists is connected by a doorway with re-used head (possibly C16th) to an end room with more slender joists; this was extended by a large stone fireplace with a possibly C17th adjacent spiral stair. As this range is timber-framed, the stone fireplace could have replaced an earlier timber one, and on initial inspection the early range could date from around 1580-1620, with the main house range dating from around 1690-1710.”

Even without the benefit of dendrochronology, this is very exciting and we are working on a house history which has already suggested some important North Wales owners! Our house histories of *Cadwst*, *Caenog*, *Hafod yr afr*, *Henblas* and *Henfaes isaf* are still not quite completed (we are awaiting isotope dating results for *Cadwst*, *Henblas* and *Henfaes isaf*), but our house history for *Llennyrch*, Talsarnau, previously dendrodated to c.1542–69, is now on:

<https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/ODL/mer%20070%20 ODL%20 Llennyrch.pdf>

In addition, during April and May some of our branch members greatly enjoyed attending Flintshire branch visits to both *Henblas Hall*, Tremeirchion, and *Brithdir Mawr*, Cilcain, and we have been joining with them to research house histories straddling our county boundaries.

TWO NEW DOWH HOUSE VISITS ARE NOW ARRANGED FOR JUNE:

7.30 pm on WEDNESDAY 12th JUNE: Our Denbighshire branch meeting and house visit to **LLEWENI HALL**, around 2 miles from Denbigh, kindly hosted by the owner: see

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300001060-lleweni-hall-including-stables-to-the-ne-denbigh>.

2pm on THURSDAY 20th JUNE: Two houses in the **Pennant valley** above **Llandrillo**, said to have records from the 17th century; **Pant y Llyn** and **Bryn Penllyn**.

Please book with me asap at leesjenny@gmail.com if you would like to come to either or both these visits, and I can send directions and more information about the houses.



Plas isaf, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd - upper level parlour

DOWH Denbighshire branch *Cynwyd Scrapbook Five* copies are continuing to sell well at £5 each (with additional cost for postage when required); please contact me if you like a copy.

Article by Jenny Lees (contact: leesjenny@gmail.com)

Into deepest Denbighshire – houses of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd

Our branch **Parishes Project** quest began with tracing houses listed by **Edward Llwyd** in *Parochialia* (1699), and we've now headed northwards from Edeirnion to the parish of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd! Of those still existing today, Edward Llwyd's *Houses of note*, listed together with **1699** owners' names, include **Cefn côch** (Mr Ambrose Thelwall, a minor); **Coed Talwrn** (previously *Koed y Talwrn*); **Eyarth** (Mr Thomas Wynne); ¹ **Eyarth ycha** (Mr Rhys Price); ² **Ffynogion** ('belongs lately to Capten Edw Pryce, now to Mr Newton of Kaethleyen Shropshire'); ³ **Garth Gynan** (belongs to Col Wms by his lady); ⁴ **Plas Einion** (Mr John Lloyd); ⁵ **Plas Newydd** (John Roberts of Havod y Bwch); ⁶ **Plas Uchaf** (Col. Williams), ⁷ and **Tŷ Brith** (owned by John Vaughan).



Tŷ Brith (Jenny Lees 2017)

None of the above houses yet have individual DOWH house histories, but **Garthgynan**, once home to **William Wynn**, son of Baronet **Sir John Wynn** of Gwydir, features in our DOWH history of *Gwernbraichdwr*,⁸ and DOWH members have visited *Plas Uchaf*, *Plas Newydd* and *Tŷ Brith* (once home to poet Simwnt Fychan, c.1530-1606).⁹ Our research so far has been mostly online, and we are still investigating whether more of Edward Llwyd's *Houses of note* still exist: for example **Krickor**, as a *Cricor Mawr* farmhouse and outbuildings appeared in 1912 *Llwyn Ynn Estate* sales particulars,¹⁰ and **Sinet ycha** and **isa** (belonging to Mr Purifoy in right of his wife

¹ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300020508-eyarth-hall-llanfair-dyffryn-clwyd#.Y5jfH3bP3IU>

² https://www.bangor.ac.uk/archives/Documents/NewsletterApril2019_002.pdf

³ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000821-ffynogion-ruthin#.Y5TdCHbP3IU>

⁴ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000778-garthgynan-llanfair-dyffryn-clwyd#.Y5omMHbP3IU>

⁵ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/27714>

⁶ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/27762/>

⁷ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300000717-plas-uchaf-llanfair-dyffryn-clwyd#.Y5PO-XbP3IV>

⁸ https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/mer%20059_HH_41_Gwernbraichdwr.pdf

⁹ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/35414/>

¹⁰ <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/archive/6011320/>

Mrs Jane Lloyd of Sinet isa) – do they still exist at or near Sinet Farm?

Some 1699 *Houses of note* may now be ruined or derelict; possibly including **Pwlh Kalhad** (Pwllcallod), belonging 'lately to ye Lloyds but now to My Lady Jeffreys of Acton';¹¹ **Bryn** (Mr Edward Price),¹² or **Bacheirig** (belonging to Mr Thomas Lloyd and described in a fascinating *Rhuthun Local History Broadsheet*).¹³



Llwyn Ynn Hall (Coflein)

Sadly, we do know that **Llwyn Ynn**, a magnificent mansion owned in 1699 by *D L Parry Esq*, was mostly demolished before 1985, although the service wing (to the right of the picture on the left) still appeared in a *Listed Buildings at Risk* report in November 2013.

In *Parochialia* Edward Llwyd also listed 'Other houses' – which of course are equally important to DOWH! These included **Berth**;¹⁴ **Ffynnogion Vechan**, (perhaps on the same site as Ffynogion); **Hendre** (possibly now *Nant yr Hendre?*); '**Kastell Lhys enw** [name] **tŷ Bychan**'; **Nammor**; **Llanbenwch**, and **Plas Bedw** (owned

in 1699 by *John Davies*). **Plas Isaf** was owned in 1699 by *Mr Roberts of Havod y Bwch*, who also owned **Plas Newydd**, and is briefly described in this DOWH newsletter's Denbighshire branch report.

As well as indicating houses existing by 1699 in numerous North Wales parishes, the owners' names collected by Edward Llwyd (the renowned antiquary and keeper of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum) provide invaluable clues when compiling DOWH house histories. Our research briefly summarised above in this article - eventually to be available on our DOWH database, is also available from myself as a 14-page WORD document containing further historical details, references and illustrations. (Not intended for publication, this research is designed as a 'work in progress' to which readers can add information or inform us of errors – and may also inspire you to help compile house histories and/or host DOWH visits!)



Plas Newydd (Jenny Lees 2017)

¹¹ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300021225-primary-house-at-pwll-callod-efenechtyd#.Y5caHnbP3IU>

¹² <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300016598-bryn-ucha-llanfair-dyffryn-clwyd#.Y4p1dXbP3IU>

¹³ <https://www.ruthinhistoryhanesrhuthun.org/broadsheet-36>

¹⁴ <https://historicplacenames.rcahmw.gov.uk/placenames/recordedname/c5d8a543-96e4-43b0-a169-1717291f22ec>

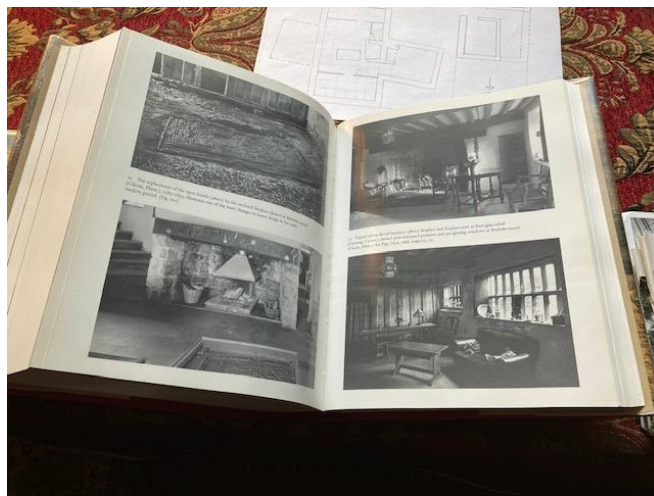
FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

In April the Flintshire branch visited Brithdir Mawr, Cilcain, a 17th century (though possibly earlier) open hall house possessing the rare features of a central hearth and pre-glazing windows



Visit to Brithdir Mawr



The central hearth and pre-glazing windows of Brithdir Mawr (from Smith P, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*, 1988. RCAHMMW)

The following month, 16 members visited Henblas Hall in Tremeirchion. There are indications that, like Brithdir Mawr, this seemingly early 17th century house may be considerably older. The owner is directly related to Thomas Pennant, the renowned 18th century Welsh naturalist, traveller, writer and antiquarian.



Members visiting Henblas Hall
(Jenny Lees, 2024)



Henblas Hall (Jenny Lees, 2024)



Later in May, branch members had a DOWH stand at the Heritage Day in the village of Llanasa, where around 100 visitors were able to see the work of the Group.

In June we are planning to visit C17th Colomendy, Ysceifiog, and future visits this year will include a moated house - Plas Yw, Nannerch - and a tour of C16th Pentre Farmhouse in the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park.

For further details of all visits and meetings please contact Wally or Margaret Barr:

flintshire-branch2@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk

MERIONETH BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2024-5

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Our zoom lecture series has been in place since 2021. Set up originally to keep communications going within the Group while covid kept us housebound, it proved to be a popular way to bring members together over such a wide area as North Wales so we've retained the format. The county-based branches remain the fora for face-to-face contact. The first three talks have been arranged and this will take us through to Christmas (details below). The remainder of the programme is being planned. The main aim is to achieve a decent variety of topics to suit most tastes as well as a reasonable geographical coverage across our area. If you have ideas about subjects or speakers, please do let me know. As branch activities fluctuate—some are in rude good health while others are 'resting' as actors say—it would be good to focus on local activities for one of the sessions, new discoveries and exciting places visited, and I hope to put one branch in focus each year.

On **Wednesday 9 October 2024**, Matt Osmont, Practice Director at Donald Insall Associates will kick the season off with a talk on the challenges of conservation—giving historic buildings a sustainable future—looking in detail at Plas Gwyn, a wonderful sixteenth-century gentry house on the Llŷn, and Porth Mawr, one of the gatehouses in the town walls of Caernarfon.

On **Wednesday 13 November 2024** Mary-Ann Constantine, Professor at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, will discuss the tours and writings of Thomas Pennant as part of her work on the 'curious travellers' who put North Wales on the map—at least for southerners, assuring them that it 'might be safely visited'—and providing a rich source for building and family historians.

And on **Wednesday 11 December 2024**, by popular acclaim, a return visit from Scott Lloyd, research manager for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. He spoke to us before about early nineteenth-century ordnance survey mapping and this time will focus on the varied pre-Ordnance Survey mapping that survives for North East Wales which can be helpful in researching the history of houses. The talk will also discuss some of the different issues surrounding their use and look at how they can be used in a digital age.

Look out for any changes in theme or title on our website. Confirmation will be sent to all members in good time and on the day before the lecture. Details on the 2025 programme will follow a little later.

BOOKS ...BOOKS ... BOOKS ...BOOKS ...BOOKS ...BOOKS ...



Note from the editors: This is a new feature of the Newsletter. If you have any reviews, comments, thoughts or recommendations of books that you think might be of interest to our members, why not let us know?! The books don't have to be professionally published and can be manuscripts, like the diary in Tim's article below, or simply extracts or parts of documents. We'll be happy to print your comments, letters or articles - just email us at:

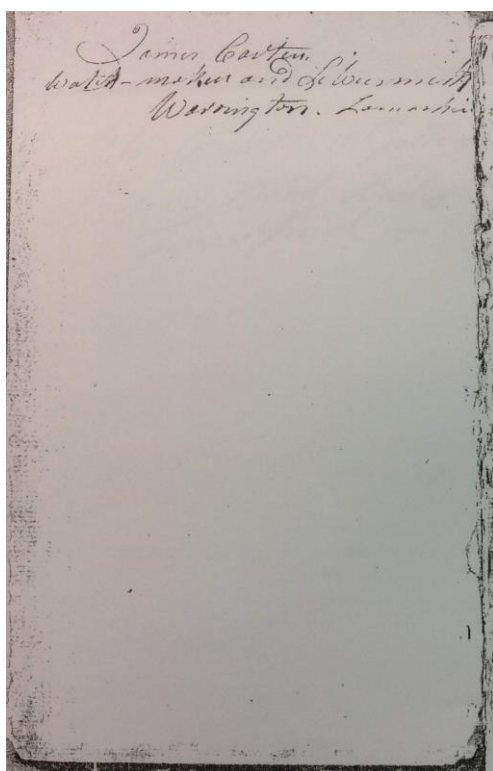
flintshire-branch2@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk

ARTICLE by Tim Biddle

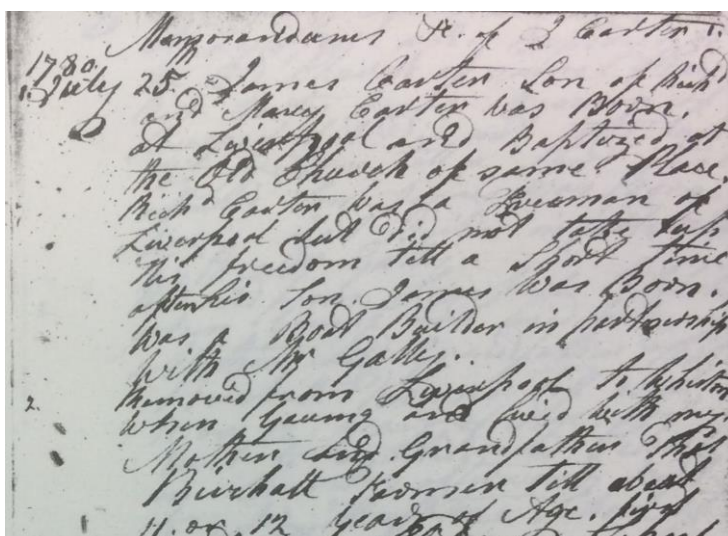
Watchmakers in the Warrington area

My 3 times great grandfather James Carter (1780 – 1848) was a watchmaker in Bridge Street, Warrington. In his surviving diary which he describes as a 'memorandum' the daily events of his life and work are recorded.

The opening page states: *James Carter son of Richard Carter and Mary Carter was born in Liverpool and Baptised at the Old Church of the same place. Richard Carter was a Freeman of Liverpool but did not take up this freedom till a short time after his son James was born, was a boat builder in partnership with Mr Galley.*



The Memorandum, page 1



The opening page of the diary

Removed from Liverpool to Whiston when young and lived with his mother and grandfather Thomas Birchall, farmer, 'till about 11 or 12 years of age, James, who appears to be an only child, makes no further reference to his father. After leaving school he went to live with his uncle George Birchall, a clockmaker in Bridge Street Warrington. He served a 7-year apprenticeship and eventually took over the business, valued at £240.

Transcription from the memorandum of a watchmaker's tool kit

An amount of Sundry tools belonging to me are in back shop

- 1 levering tool backing Cutter pinions*
- 1 Balance tool*
- 1 Pr of closers for riveting pinions*
- 1 Marking tool for followed holes*
- 1 tool for burnishing screws*
- 1 Pair Large*
- 1 Pair Large*
- 1 tool for freeing cutter wheels*
- 1 plate*
- 1? Cam for? Bailing from Pinion*
- 1 Block for slurry stone Dust*



Clock works

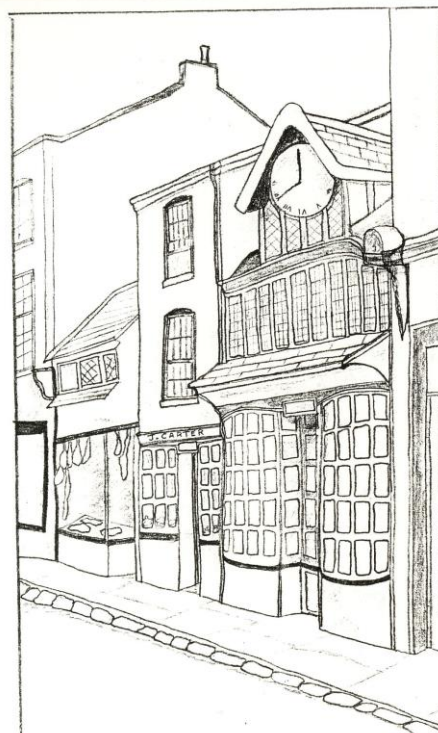


Carter clockface

The shop was surmounted by a large clock on the second floor of the building in the old medieval street which survived until redevelopment in 1907. Warrington was part of a local cycle of watchmaking although it never made watches itself. The town manufactured pins, pinions, pinion wire, files and tools. These were sent up the river Mersey to Prescott and the surrounding area where they were used to fashion watch parts. Prescott was the only place in the country where this specialist process occurred.



Carter's shops 1855



Sketch showing Carter's shops (artist unknown)

After the rough or 'in the grey' movements were assembled they were transferred 8 miles downstream to Liverpool. The Liverpool craftsmen completed the finishing, engraving, casing and so on creating a saleable product. The watches were finally returned to Warrington and given the name and serial number of the retailer who marketed the finished product.



Carter Clockface

It should be noted that in Warrington pins were made by child labour working in appalling conditions.

One of James Carter's Pocket watches is preserved in Warrington Museum which also displays one of his long case clocks. James married Margaret Simcock from Prescott. The Simcocks were well known craftspeople in the 'movement making process' in clockmaking.



A Carter Clock



Carter Long Case Clock

AND NOW A QUIZ ...

HOW WELL DID YOU READ YOUR NEWSLETTER?

1. In what northern hills has our chairperson been walking?
2. When was the Battle of Homildon Hill?
3. What is Ash researching for his PhD?
4. In the 17th century who banned the merry-making in Church Houses?
5. In what year was *Parochialia* first published?
6. What are the two rare features of Brithdir Mawr?
7. Who will be giving the Zoom talk on the challenges of conservation?
8. Whose great great great grandfather was a watchmaker?
9. Who might use a levering tool?
10. Can you send your news, views and book reviews to the DOWH Newsletter editors?

Good luck!



ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. The Cheviots; 2. 1402; 3. The Geo-archaeological History of Anglesey; 4. Oliver Cromwell and the puritans; 5. 1699; 6. A central hearth and pre-glazing windows; 7. Matt Osmont; 8. Tim Biddle; 9. A watchmaker; 10. Yes! Send them to us at flintshire-branch2@discoverinqoldwelshhouses.co.uk





DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

Syr Simon Jenkins, FSA, FRSL; Dr Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

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

CYLCHLYTHYR 50 Medi 2024

EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

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.

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

NEWSLETTER 50 September 2024

OUR WEBSITE

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.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

Janice sends her best wishes to all! She is away on holiday at present, admiring the alpine architecture of Chamonix -Mont-Blanc.



NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Report by Clare Latham and Brenda Simpson

Our June visit was to the gorgeous little medieval church at Penrhoslligwy with links to a local map maker, followed by Plas Bodafon, a beautiful private house with medieval origins. We had glorious weather to explore both church and house, both containing a wealth of history. Our generous host at Plas Bodafon had collected many photographs, documents and artifacts from previous owners over the centuries and following a tour of the house, we had the rare opportunity to sit in the sunshine in a beautiful garden and explore the collection with a cup of tea.



St Micheal's Church, Penrhoslligwy



Plas Bodafon



The Maccvdeceti Stone – translation given is 'of Maccudecceti, here he lies' – St Michael's Church, Penrhoslligwy

In July, we visited Hafoty, a gem of a hall house which is rarely open to the public but thanks to the Barons Hill Estate and Cadw, we got permission to open it for our group. We had a guide to bring the house to life for us – see 17thc sailing ships graffiti. And again, we had a sunny day so enjoyed a picnic in the garden afterwards.



C17th sailing ships graffiti - Hafoty

We went a little 'off period' in August with a guided walk of Llanddona following the artist Kyffin Williams' footsteps, looking at the old Welsh cottages he painted/drew in the village. We had resource packs that had copies of 10 of the paintings/drawings and we were able to stand in the exact spot that Kyffin stood when he painted these cottages.

These three visits neatly link to our visit to Oriel Mon on 11th September, where we will be having a talk from the Building and Collections Manager on both the current Mapping Anglesey exhibition and *A Place in His Heart* exhibition (a new curation of Kyffin's



Upper Floor, Hafoty

painting of East



Hafoty

Anglesey including the ones we saw in Llanddona but also a portrait of Henry Williams, the last tenant at Hafoty).

Our October visit will be to the Anglesey Archives where the lead Archivist is going to show us how to conduct a Parish Survey based on Penmynydd so we can carry out our own surveys of all parishes in Anglesey and see what historical gems we can uncover for potential future visits.

Note: There is a Cadw Open Doors event to access Hafoty 28-29th September 2024 – well worth a visit. See Cadw website for details: <https://cadw.gov.wales/open-doors-hafoty-medieval-house-0>

CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

Unfortunately illness continues to hamper branch planning, though it is hoped things will be moving on again shortly.

CONWY BRANCH

Branch members have decided that future meetings will take place if and when any branch member requests one or has an idea for a visit or topic to discuss. In the meantime, some house history research is likely to continue.

DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

Report by Jenny Lees

Branch house visits and meetings in June were kindly hosted at *Pant y Llyn*, above Llandrillo yn Edeirnion, and *Lleweni Hall*, near Denbigh – both historically significant properties that have been saved from dereliction by the dedicated restoration work of their owners!

Pant y Llyn lies at around 1000ft above sea level on the western slopes of Edeirnion's Cwm Pennant - looking across the valley to the *Berwyn* range as pictured below.



Looking across the valley to the Berwyn range

Pant y Llyn is listed in the 'Other Houses' section of Edward Llwyd's 1699 *Parochialia*¹ for Llandrillo parish, and with its marked downslope siting could have existed earlier.

No existing houses have yet been found in North Wales dating from before the 1400s, but it is of interest that although Cwm Pennant now has only an average number of farmsteads, in 1292-3 Pennant 'township' had 23 taxpayers paying a total of around £7 - greater than that due from any other townships in Llandrillo parish!² In addition to evidence of medieval cultivation around the valley floor, there are also relics of early medieval settlements and agriculture extending much higher

on the *Berwyn* range above *Cadwst* than today - these may have had to be abandoned after the climatic cooling and natural disasters of the 14th century. Although now mainly pasture, large areas of Cwm Pennant were once under 'arable' cultivation, and these strips would probably have once been '*Quillets*' - separate strips of land held by different people but contained within a 'common' field or *Maes*. This arrangement is

¹ Edward Llwyd (1699) *Parochialia*; at Denbighshire Record Office and now also online.

² Keith Williams-Jones (1976) *The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll 1292-3*.

thought to date back to an area of *medieval shareland* (open field arable) farming, extending over 12 acres south of *Cadwst* through the *townships* of both *Pennant* and *Garthian*.³

The Salusburys of *Lleweni* were amongst the most prominent North Wales families from C15th -17th, and the Salesburys of *Rug* (now *Rhug*) and *Bachymbyd* were a 'cadet' branch of the *Lleweni* Salusburys. By the late C18th *Lleweni* mansion reputedly had 100 rooms, and although mostly demolished in C19th and 20th, part of its magnificent c1770's part remains.⁴



Part of Lleweni former estate, showing Lleweni Hall to the centre

Our branch has begun work on DOWH house histories for *Lleweni* and *Pant y Llyn*, along with those for *Plas isaf*, *Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd*, and *Bryn Penllyn* - another Cwm Pennant house.

Following DOWH's dendrochronology and building assessment, histories for *Cadwst*, *Caenog*, *Hafod yr afr*, *Henblas* and *Henfaes isaf* are now largely completed, but we still await finalised building reports and the isotope dating results for *Cadwst*, *Henblas* and *Henfaes isaf*. Our house history of *Llennyrch*, Talsarnau, (dendrodated to c.1542–69) is now on:

https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/mer%20070_HH_%20Llennyrch.pdf

Further printed copies of *Cynwyd Scrapbook Five* are still available for sale at £5, and the book is now also online at <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page18.html> .

Our next Denbighshire branch meeting will be at *Hafod y calch*, Corwen on **Thursday 19th September at 2pm**; to include a talk by DOWH member Pam Buttrey on some fascinating former owners of *Cadwst*. Contact me at leesjenny@gmail.com if you would like to come. (Details of future house visits planned will be circulated by our Membership Secretary).

³ Robert J. Silvester (2000) 'Mediaeval upland cultivation on the Berwyns in North Wales'.

⁴ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300001060-lleweni-hall-including-stables-to-the-ne-denbigh>

FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

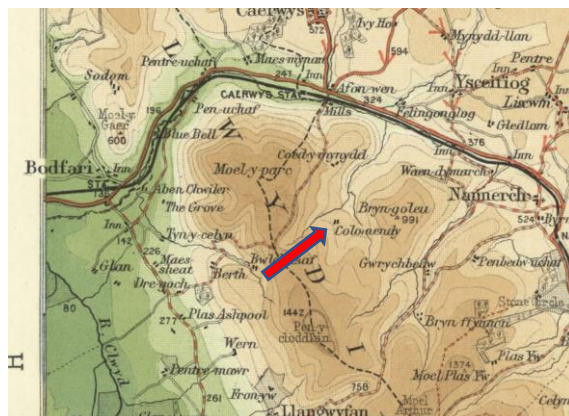
Report by Wally and Margaret Barr

In June branch members visited a mid-17th century house, Colomendy near Ysgeifiog, Mold. The meeting began with a Powerpoint talk on the history of Colomendy, given by members who have completed a history on the house. This can be seen at:

https://discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/flint%20010_HH_02%20Colomendy.pdf



Colomendy (c.1663)



Colomendy and area
(From Bartholomew's "Half Inch Maps" of England and Wales, 1902-1906)

July saw us visiting the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park, which occupies a hugely significant place in Welsh industrial history and retains many of the original foundations of early water-driven factories. The site also offers early 16th century Pentre Farmhouse, moved to Greenfield from Ysceifiog Parish in 1986.

Our August visit was to Plas Yw, Cilcain, a quite remarkable house with a moat on three sides. This moat could have its origins in Roman times although it may actually date from the medieval period. The house itself has an early wing and another wing added in the 18th century. Throughout the house there is no shortage of timber framing, including at least three ages of wattle and daub infill. Plas Yw is yet to be dendro-dated so for now the mysteries must remain.



Visit to the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park
(outside Pentre Farmhouse)

In September we will have a guided tour of Bodrhyddan Hall, Dyserth, a Grade 1 listed property and home to Lord Langford and his family for over 500 years.



Visit to Plas Yw, Cilcain



Three ages of wattle and daub in Plas Yw

MERIONETH BRANCH

Further plans for branch events are not available at present.

ARTICLES FROM AROUND AND ABOUT

A WORD OF CAUTION

By Peter Masters

We need to exercise caution when we research something especially now we have the help and benefit of AI. An uncorrected error gets repeated and then used in respected publications who have accepted the error as truth. This in turn gets picked up by the likes of Google and Wikipedia, so others looking for answers get directed by these search engines to those who's veracity is never doubted.

A case in point whilst researching a grade II house:

[<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wales#.XNPXMyjTV0t>]

I looked at the blurb which gave some "copied" information and it referred to the RCAHM site for its source. [<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/>] which in its turn used details from the excellent time maps of Wales web site [<https://places.library.wales/>].

It is stated that this large estate farm had 23 acres of land. This seemed a rather small amount of land holding. A visit to the tithe map site eventually found the house albeit in a different parish to that stated. And indeed the data says who owned it, who the tenant was and that it was 23 acres. However, looking at the map it seemed strange that the house seemed to be in an island of other land holdings, with its own fields detached from the house by a considerable distance. A closer inspection of the tithe assessment showed that the stated

23 acres was a subtotal and the next page was a continuation, and the actual holding was 95 acres. Which put the house right in the middle of the farm not on the margins.

The volunteer who had transcribed the information either stopped at the first entry, or the project concluded before it was finished. So, all and sundry took the stated 23 acres as correct and now it's set in virtual stone.

Thalia Jones	Head	Wife	79	Wife Farmer 79 Acres, 3 Cows
Owen Jones	Son	14	36	14 Son
David Jones	Son	12	43	12 Son
Mary Jones	Son	12	14	12 Son
Total of Males and Females..			14	14

Another case in point was some missing children. Whilst doing some family history I was mystified by the apparent disappearance of a child who was listed on one census [1861] and again on another [1881] but not on the in-between census? A misspelling of the surname eventually found them on the database but still not the missing child, but a careful look at the original entry showed they were at the bottom of the page and the enumerator had pencilled in their names in the margins below the box. Not on the continuation sheet. As this was overwriting some printed text it was partially illegible. The entry could not be deciphered either by the person or machine so was ignored.

So always check the original documentation don't take what the digital transcription says as gospel or believe implicitly in "trusted" sources.

HESTER LYNCH THRALE

By Peter Masters

History is a giant jigsaw puzzle but unlike a standard puzzle where we put the pieces together to recreate a single picture. with history you can build a whole new picture or pictures from the same pieces.

When we had moved to the Llyn Peninsula some years ago, we began exploring the area and learning it's history. I recall one of the things we discovered was that a local house, Brynodol at Tudweiliog, had been visited by Mrs Thrale & Dr Johnson in 1773/4 when they were doing a tour of North Wales. Quite why they should be doing so and the significance of this event was not made clear. We later learnt that Mrs Thrale was born at nearby Bodfel Hall. Several decades later part of my involvement with Discovering Old Welsh Houses is compiling a database of historically significant houses. One such house is intriguingly labelled Mrs Thrale's House [Brynbellia, Denbs].

So who was Mrs Thrale? She was born Hester Lynch Salusbury on 27 Jan 1741 at Bodfel Hall, on the Llyn peninsula in North Wales, (although only the gatehouse was ever built).



Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, née Salusbury; later Piozzi (c.1741-1821), a Welsh-born diarist, author and patron of the arts (By Unidentified painter - National Portrait Gallery: NPG 4942, Public Domain)

And as such, she was a member of one of the influential families in the Denbigh region. The family fortunes had waxed and waned with accumulating debts. Her father John of Bach Y Graig married a rich cousin's sister, but this did not save a profligate lifestyle nor did his being a co-founder and investor of Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada and he died indebted aged 55. An only child Hester subsequently inherited the Bachegraig estate [Bach-y-Graig].

Hester's marriage in 1763 to Henry Thrale, brewer and businessman of London and later M.P, gave her an opening to London society life. She was mother to 12 children. And through her father claimed descent from Katherine(Catrin) of Berain. Hester was a diarist and commentator, and she also became the long-time companion of Dr Samuel Johnson, for 20+ years. An episode of much curiosity & scandal as he was 32 years her senior.

In 1773 the Thrales, Henry, Hester, their eldest daughter 'Queeney' aged 10 [Hester Maria Elphinstone, Viscountess Keith] and Dr Johnson partook in a Tour of north Wales. It was during this visit to north Wales that she also travelled to her ancestral home on the Llyn peninsula.



Bodfel Hall, Llannor, Pwllheli

(Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

Following the death of her husband Henry in 1781. She promptly sold his business interests and married Gabriel Piozzi. Although companions for several years any hopes or desire for marriage by Dr Johnson were soon dashed when she took up with Piozzi, her children's music tutor and artist.

The couple then hoped to settle in north Wales at Lleweni but it passed out of their reach. to the 1st Viscount Combermere. So they built a new Villa, Bryn Bella in 1794 using bricks from the nearby family house of Bach-y-Graig, built by Richard Clough⁵ [Catrin's 2nd husband] in 1567? which had the oldest bricks in Wales. Bach-y-Graig also reputedly introduced the stepped Gable roof.

Hester Thrale/Piozzi died after a fall, aged 80 in 1821. She is commemorated on the family plaque in the church at Tremeirchion along with her adopted son Sir John Piozzi Salusbury . He was attaché to the Marquess of Anglesey, Henry William Paget of Plas Newydd, at Waterloo [1815].

(I recently acquired a large weighty tome of some 1000 plus pages of a Welsh edition c1860 of Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan. Frontispiece signed by Sarah Roberts, Bodfel Hall, 1863).

GRIFFITH OWEN, TY UNCORN, BLAENAU FFESTINIOG (1859-1918) **By Ann Morgan (assisted by Gill Jones)**

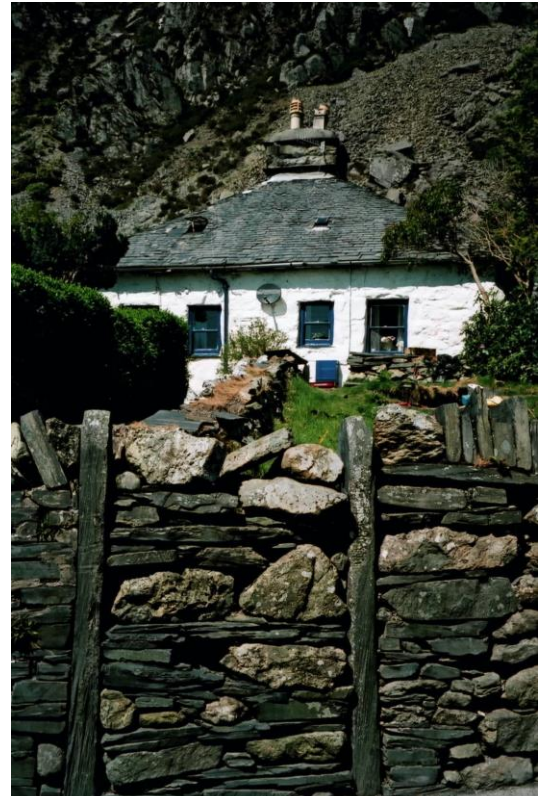
Griffith Owen, my great grandfather was born in Tai cynhaeaf, Llanelltyd, near Dolgellau in 1859. He was the fifth of six children born to Richard and Mary Owen. Richard was a gold miner and farmed the eight-acre small holding, Tai cynhaeaf. Some time after 1871 Griffith left home to look for work as a quarryman in

⁵ Richard Williams -Ellis, a relative of Clough Williams Ellis who also claims decent from Catrin, tells us that the stained-glass window from Brynbella now resides in Glasfryn, their Family home on the peninsula.

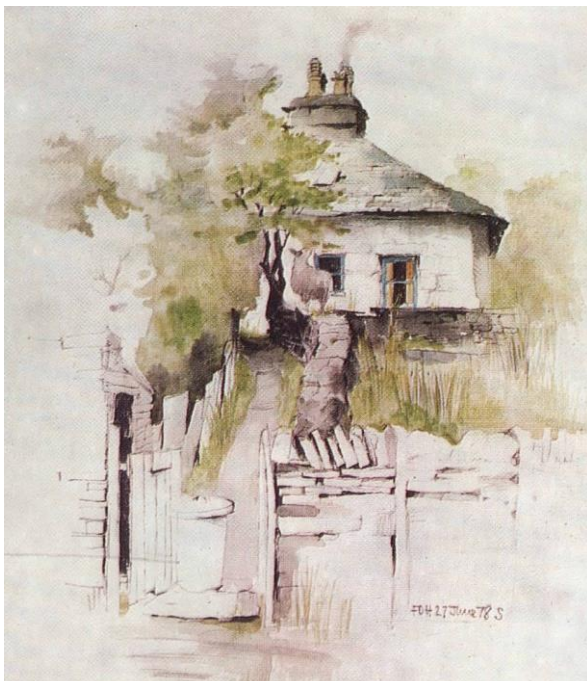
Blaenau Ffestiniog and he appears in the 1881 census as being 22 years old, married and living in Tŷ Uncorn, which means 'one' chimney house. A photograph of Griffith Owen taken about 1900 shows him standing in the front garden of Tŷ Uncorn among rows of potato plants in the left 'half' of the house.



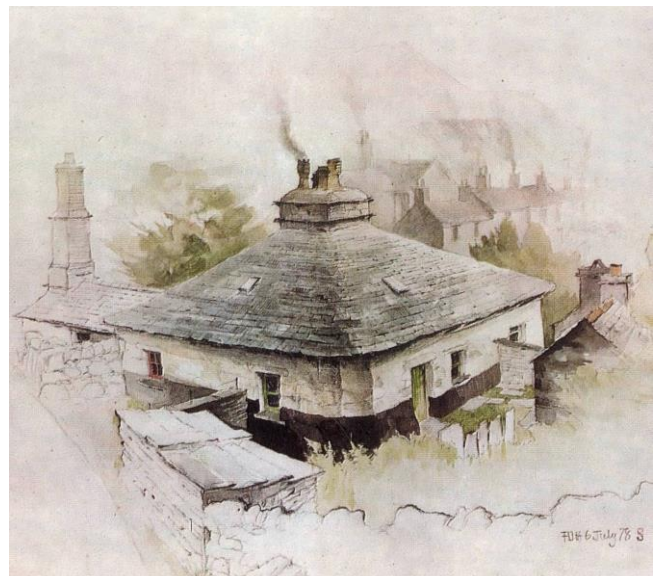
Griffith Owen at ŷ Uncorn 1900



Tŷ Uncorn – now listed as restored and inhabited 2009



Tŷ Uncorn (Falcon Hildred)



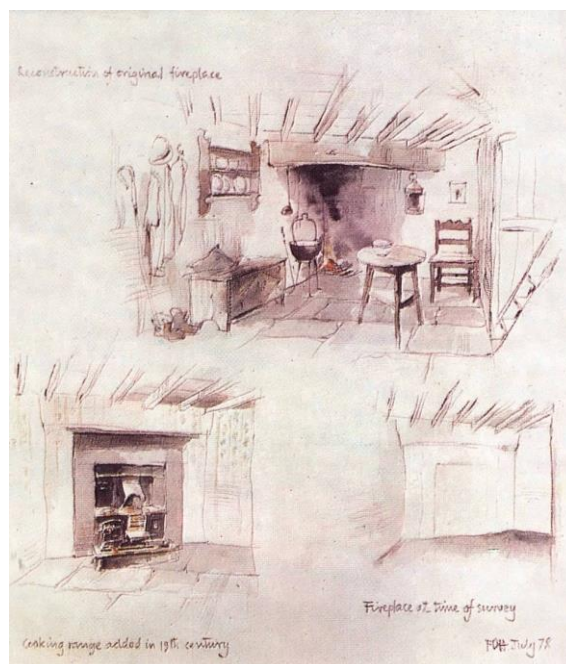
Tŷ Uncorn (Falcon Hildred)

The house looked very unusual and in the 1980s I began to research family history and the history of Tŷ Uncorn. The house was built by the Newborough Estate between 1810-1820 for the use of quarrymen as Lord Newborough had bought land and quarrying sites in the area of Blaenau Ffestiniog, known as Dolgarrog Ddu. The house is very close to the centre of the town. At that time the house was near the foot of an 'incline' reaching up to the quarry above - access to and from the quarry for both men and slates. Locally the quarry was known as 'chwarel' Lord (the Lord's quarry).

Originally two houses had been built but nothing remains of the second 'single chimney' house. Tŷ Uncorn is divided into four units with one central chimney; each 'quarter' had a front door and window. I think Griffith & Ellen must have occupied 2 quarters of the house giving them two ground floor rooms and two lofts. The garden was a good size for the time and the family would have benefitted from growing vegetables. Plum trees yielding small black plums are often found in old cottage gardens in North Wales.



**Tŷ Uncorn showing interior layout
(Falcon Hildred)**



Tŷ Uncorn interior (Falcon Hildred)

By the 1980s Tŷ Uncorn was a listed property and had been made suitable for occupation. Interest in the house has been shown by a local artist and historian, Falcon Hildred. He has kindly allowed me to include his very fine drawings of Tŷ Uncorn. The drawings show the structure of the house and the possible layout and use made of the accommodation.

My great grandfather died in 1918, but not at Tŷ Uncorn. He was at a house in The Square near the park. However, his photograph taken after his wife's death in 1903 shows him still at Tŷ Uncorn, so I think he may have remained at this address until shortly before his death. Other short reports about the house were produced by CADW and RCAHMW.

(Eds. We are most grateful to Falcon Hildred for kindly giving his permission to reproduce these images)

GWESPYR STONE – ‘NOTED FOR ITS EXCELLENCE’

By Irene Brightmer

If you have ever visited castles in north-east Wales it is certain that you will have seen Gwespyr Stone, even without realising. It has been used as a building stone for at least two thousand years and can be seen in notable buildings from different historic periods, as well as in the more recent local vernacular dwellings. It has also been known at times as Talacre Stone. Writing in 1778 it was Thomas Pennant, the traveller and writer from Downing Hall in Whitford parish, who remarked that Gwespyr freestone was ‘*noted for its excellence*’.

Geologically Gwespyr Stone is a sandstone, formed in the middle of the Carboniferous Age. It is at the top of the Namurian Series (formerly known as the ‘Millstone Grit’), which lies below the Coal Measures and above the limestone. For those who like to know ‘how old?’ it was formed around 320 million years ago, by a huge river bringing down sand and silt and depositing it into a delta in a shallow tropical sea. The deposit is about 300 feet thick. This is shallow, especially compared with the underlying Carboniferous Limestone which in places attains a thickness of almost 3,000 feet.

Fossils are very sparse, unlike the Carboniferous Limestone of nearby Gronant and Prestatyn hillside, which is rich in marine fossils. However, Gwespyr Stone contains small nodules and larger concretions of ironstone formed into roughly spherical inclusions of varying size. I have one from the stone in the garden, which is a near-perfect sphere close to tennis ball size, and heavy, of course. In one of the disused quarries in Gwespyr a playground has been constructed, and in the lower part is a designated RIGS, a ‘Regionally Important Geodiversity Site’ (something like an SSSI, but without the statutory protected status which the latter enjoys). The old quarry face shows the layers of the stone, since weathered, but its designation is due to the huge ironstone inclusion, more than a metre in diameter.

Gwespyr Stone has been quarried and used locally as well as further afield at least since Roman times. It is mostly greenish-grey, but of varying colour and texture; the lower beds are more greenish-grey and especially fine-grained, while the upper beds are more grey-brown and medium-grained. Discoloration from iron within the chemical composition is not unusual. The stone is easily cut and shaped, eminently suitable for ecclesiastical and monumental work.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries a superior fine-grained quality was exported worldwide as scythe-stone. The scythe-stone quarry was located in the village of Gwespyr down the hill on the left towards the coast; the site is now occupied by the well-concealed Seaview Caravan Park. The old quarry face is weathered and colonised by vegetation, so unfortunately it is now impossible to appreciate the quality of the stone. Another quarry was known for very durable stone suitable for steps, sills and kerbs.



The Old Quarries of Gwespyr
(Reproduced here with the kind permission
Flintshire Records Office, North East Wales
Archives)

The Roman bath house in Prestatyn, known since the 1930s, was constructed of Gwespyr Stone. In the Middle Ages Gwespyr Stone was used in castles such as Ewloe, Flint and Rhuddlan, usually alongside other local stone too. At Rhuddlan the western gatehouse is of Gwespyr Stone. And look closely at St Asaph Cathedral from the road and you will notice Gwespyr Stone interspersed with red sandstone and very light grey Carboniferous Limestone. St Winefride's Well (1512-25) in Holywell is of Gwespyr Stone. So too is

Basingwerk Abbey, founded in 1131, and owned by the Mostyn family of Talacre until 1923 when it was handed over to the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and now cared for by Cadw. It was said that there had been an intention to use Gwespyr Stone for the Houses of Parliament, but transport was too much of a problem. St George's Hall in Liverpool, opened in 1854, was also built of Gwespyr Stone, according to the 1919 sale particulars of the Talacre estate, but I have not yet been able to confirm this. An excavation in Ysceifiog (Flints) about 10 years ago discovered Gwespyr Stone on the site. It was in the garden of the approximately 100 year-old house of one of our own members (the late Hazel Formby). The excavation was exploring the site for details of an earlier house, already known to have existed. Perhaps we should be looking for similar archaeological evidence of the use of Gwespyr Stone in domestic settings elsewhere over the centuries?

Gwespyr village

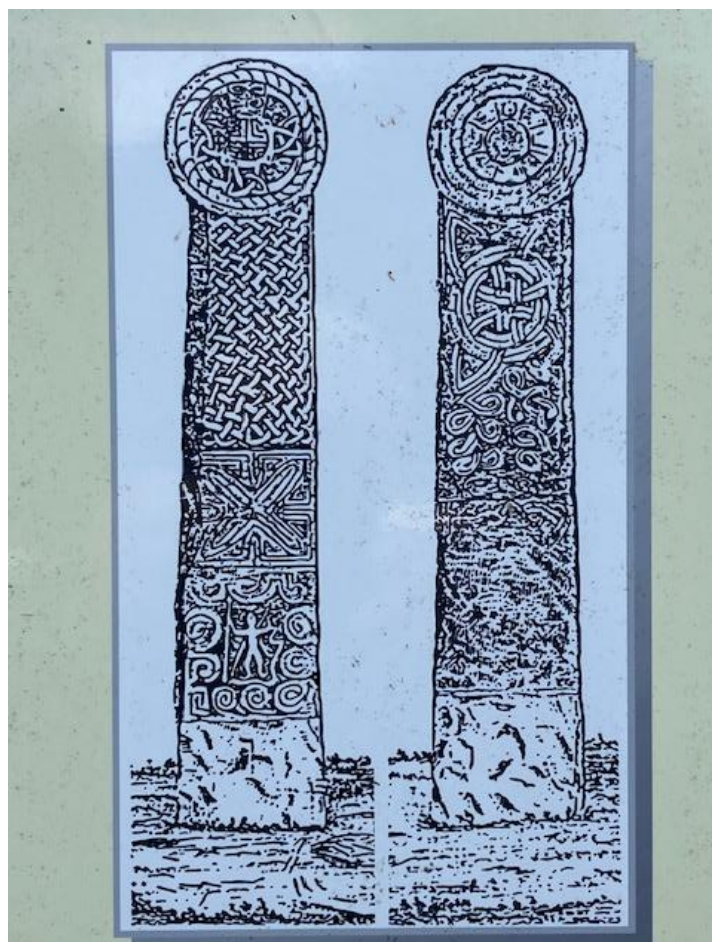


Maen Achwyfan, Whitford

Gwespyr has variously been recorded as 'Gwesber', Gwesbyr and 'Gwesbur' over the centuries. (Prestatyn is another local placename which is a Welsh form of its original Anglo-Saxon name, in this case 'Prestetone' meaning 'Priest's Town', which was its name in 1086.)

There is archaeological evidence of a Viking presence in the area pre-Domesday. At the bottom of Gwespyr hill a Viking burial was discovered in the 1930s. And not far away, in the neighbouring parish of Whitford, is the famous Viking cross known as Maen Achwyfan, now cared for by Cadw. Standing ten feet high in the middle of a field it is thought to date from the late 10th century and is of Gwespyr Stone.

Gwespyr is a village in northern Flintshire. It is half a mile inland and 300 feet high, at the northern tip of the Clwydian Range. It is one of several villages, along with Gronant and Llanasa itself, in the large and ancient parish of Llanasa. The name of the village of Gwespyr is a Welsh form of 'Wesberie', which is how the name appeared in the 1086 Domesday Survey. It is an Anglo-Saxon name and refers to the site's western position for the defence of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia. It provided an ideal lookout over the Irish Sea and the Dee estuary to warn against Viking attack from Ireland and the Isle of Man. The name



Inscriptions on each side of Maen Achwyfan

Most of the land in Gwespyr was owned for centuries by the Mostyn family of Talacre, the Roman Catholic branch of the ancient Mostyn family from nearby Mostyn. Their wealth was derived from farm rentals, lead mining, quarrying and coalmining. Members of the Talacre Mostyn family married into other R. C. families in Wales and England. They lived at Talacre Hall, now called Westbury Castle, until 1919 when they sold their North Wales estate due to crippling death duties after two family deaths in quick succession. The sale documents include maps and are held by the Flintshire Record Office in Hawarden. They are an important and valuable source of information. The family baronetcy dates from 1670 and survives today with the 15th Baronet who was born in 1975.

The present Talacre Hall is built of dressed Gwespyr Stone, of course! It was completed in 1829 and is a mock Tudor Gothic mansion designed by the Chester architect, Thomas Jones, replacing a large Jacobean house. But the Mostyn family has lived on the site since the 15th century. (Frances Mostyn of Talacre was the RC Archbishop of Wales from 1921 to 1939.)

All the houses and cottages in the old part of Gwespyr, now comprising the designated conservation area, are built entirely of local stone. The village is unique in this respect, since walls and cottages in neighbouring villages such as Llanasa and especially Gronant can be seen to include limestone as well as Gwespyr Stone. The latter is frequently used in limestone buildings for weight-bearing around windows and doors. The same is the case in old parish churches in many areas of Wales and England where limestone is the main building material, while sandstone supports door and window frames.



Bradford House (left) and neighbouring house with graded slates

Bradford House, my own cottage, is the middle and smallest of a group of three attached stone cottages on the hill in the centre of the Gwespyr Conservation Area. How, why and when it was so-named is a mystery: it is not a 'house' and there is no known connection with Bradford. This modest cottage was already called this by the time of the 1901 census, so I shall not change the name, however incongruous it seems now. The cottage had not been named in the 1891 census. Perhaps a member of the family living there moved to Bradford in the 1890s and local people began to refer to the cottage as 'the Bradford house'. The neighbouring cottage uphill was already called 'Quarry View' in the 1891 census, but was renamed 'West Winds' some time in the 20th century, perhaps because by then the quarry had closed.

All three cottages are built solidly of Gwespyr Stone, with very thick internal and external walls of coursed rubble, with Welsh slate roofs. Bradford House roof was replaced in the late 20th century with uniform slates, but note that West Winds uphill still has the original graded traditional slates.

The cottages probably date from the early 19th century and would originally have been occupied by the families of quarry workers. They are all now free of render, but old photos from early in the 20th century show all three covered in painted render, which may or may not have been original. The render was removed from the cottages at various times so the stone has since weathered differentially, which explains the overall variations in colour. The choice of different mortars also helps to explain the variations. Bradford House was the last to be stripped of render and the mortar used in re-pointing was a very light-coloured traditional lime mortar.

A notable feature of many old cottages in Gwespyr is the large slabs of Gwespyr Stone used to construct porches. These slabs are at least two metres by one metre, so that only two slabs were required for each porch, held together by iron brackets and bolts.

Similarly, the windowsills of Bradford House are constructed of huge single slabs of stone. But it had no porch until the late 20th century when the present rendered breeze block porch was added.

Outside the centre of the village to the west, in the direction of Prestatyn, is St Winefrides.



Stone Slab Porches in Gwespyr



St Winefrides, Gwespyr
(showing the Teachers' house and Girls' Schoolroom)

It was built in 1857 as a Roman Catholic school by Sir Piers Mostyn of Talacre Hall. It was constructed of ashlar in the 19th century in Scholastic Gothic style, and was closed in c.1933 and converted to residential use (and happens to be the home of our newsletter editors). It housed separate school rooms for boys and girls, and lodgings for teachers and nuns. Probably the most famous one-time pupil was the local playwright and actor, Emlyn Williams (1905-1987) who went on to make his name in London. Although both were built from Gwespyr Stone and within a few decades of one another, the appearance of the vernacular Bradford House of coursed rubble, and the architect-designed St Winefrides (by J. Spencer of Liverpool) of dressed stone could not be more different.

There is no quarrying in Gwespyr now, the last quarry closed in the 1980s. The only availability of the stone these days, either for repair or newbuild, is from reclamation. Old maps show the huge extent of quarrying in the village and the precise location of the individual quarries.

Nature has taken over in most cases, with scrubby woodland which is now home to a variety of plants, birds and other wildlife. Old quarry sites occupy the left-hand side of the road as you go down Gwespyr hill to the coast road (the A548); the one opposite Bradford House is now a children's playground. Lower down the hill the village hall perches on the edge of an old quarry and further down still, the site of the last working quarry became a recycling depot for metals, but that is now closed (2024).

Gwespyr may now be described as a dormitory/retirement settlement, home to workers who travel out of the village for employment and to people now retired from the local mines or coming from elsewhere, attracted to the coastal location. In the 20th century there were numerous shops and even a bakery. Large front windows in some of the cottages are reminders of their old functions as shops. Bradford House was one of those shops, and a 1950s photo shows a notice over the front door indicating that it had a licence for selling tobacco. At that time it also sold paraffin, which was stored in the garden. The glass pane in the original old door between what is now the front living room and the rear kitchen was inserted, so that approaching customers could be seen from the rear room.

There were two public houses in the village, one now closed, but the appropriately-named 'Mason's Arms' remains in business. It is a Georgian building but is rendered so its stone construction is hidden. But the former 'Talacre Arms' down the hill on the right is a large building of dressed stone like St Winefrides, showing the fine quality of Gwespyr Stone in all its glory.

THE TURBULENT SHORES OF NORTH WIRRAL

By Tim Biddle

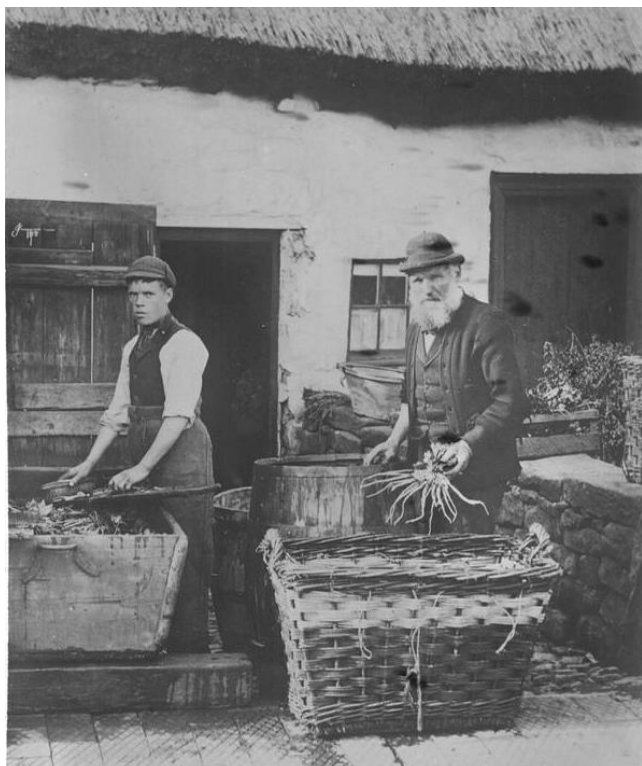
My Grandfather Walter Leslie Biddle was born in 1887 and his brother Henry Neville a year later. They lived with their parents Henry, a wool merchant, and his wife Emily in Wallasey. Their house overlooked Bidston Moss (now the site of a massive housing estate), a wetland area fed by the river Birket. In the distance Leasowe lighthouse rose behind the embankment, the sea defence against the stormy north Wirral coast. Between the river and the sea much of the land was intensively cultivated. Its horticultural produce fed the mouths of the rapidly expanding population of Liverpool whose numbers increased from 77,000 in 1801 to 376,000 by 1851. A quarter of its residents originated in Ireland and were casualties of the 1843 potato famine.

The photograph (overpage), taken about 1895, shows Henry Carlisle (1832–1907), a Wallasey market gardener, with his son Ernest (1871-1929) sorting and packing what appear to be skirrets, outside Carlisle Cottage (destroyed by a bomb in WW II), School Lane, Wallasey.

Skirrets originated in China but were grown in Europe during Roman times. They apparently have a sweetish aromatic flavour. The photo is from the Foulger collection of 1913, collated by Wallasey Historical Society and attributed to the photographer J. Hill.



HN left, WL right



Ernest and Henry Carlisle
(Reproduced with the kind permission of
Wallasey Historical Society)

Walter and Henry decided to establish their own market garden and moved west along the coast to Great Meols onto land very close to the sea which was subject to periodic flooding. Their day-to-day activities are detailed in their 'product diaries' commencing 1907. Along with the surviving financial accounts it has been possible to trace the progress of the firm WL & HN Biddle, later managed by my father W. Alan Biddle.

It is unclear how they acquired their horticultural skills but there are several references in Biddle's accounts to H. Joynson & Bros. The Joynson's market garden was established in Wallasey in the early nineteenth century. It is likely that Henry and Walter served some sort of apprenticeship with the firm which was managed by Henry Joynson.

Before the expansion of horticulture Wallasey was a hamlet, population of 274 in 1801. By 1911 it had increased to 9,279. Fishing and agriculture provided employment but there were occasional extra benefits thanks to incidents on the coast. In 1863 James Stonehouse writes in 'Recollections of Old Liverpool':
'Wirral at that time, and in the middle half of the last

century, was a desperate region, the inhabitants were nearly all wreckers and smugglers – they ostensibly carried on the trade and calling of fishermen, farm labourers and small farmers, but they were deeply saturated with the sin of covetousness, and many a fierce fire has been lighted on the Wirral shore on stormy nights to lure the good ship on the Burbo or Hoyle banks, there to beat and strain and throb until her timbers parted and her planks were floating in confusion on the stormy waves. On stormy days and nights, crowds have been seen hurrying to the shore with carts, barrows, horses, asses, or oxen even, which were made to draw timber, bales boxes or anything that the raging waters might have cast up. Many a half drowned sailor has had a knock on the scone.'



HN and WL, late 1930s

Even the clergy were complicit in these activities. Stonehouse continues: *'One would cry "now wait till I get down from my pulpit and doff my gown" and he would lead a stampede across the sandhills.'*



Meols' market gardens 1950's

The local paper the Weekly News dated January 1905 details the misfortune of the wreck of the Spanish steamer 'Ulloa':

'It was a chapter in the Wallasey story as wild as the great storm that caused it. It happened over a century ago. It brought vast crowds. It brought skirmishes with the forces of law and order. It was a massive public grab at harvest from the sea. A rich cargo came floating into town on the waves of the Mersey. A ship broke its back – and a town broke loose.'

It was in the early hours of December 30, 1904, that the 'Ulloa' from Barcelona, failed to pick up a Mersey Pilot and was swept in a fierce gale on to the treacherous Burbo Bank off New Brighton. From her holds fruit and wines floated shoreward. The calm life of Wallasey was shattered in much the same way as the gale had torn 'Ulloa' apart.

Dawn visitors to the sands at New Brighton and Leasowe found cases and boxes of oranges and lemons, and hundreds of casks of wine. Oranges, grapes and other luscious fruits have been, within the periphery of Wallasey, more abundant than was ever known before. They were piled in heaps from the Red Nose to Moreton. Contemporary reports described the washed-up cases of oranges, lemons, grapes and onions as 'uncountable'. They represented well over half the total cargo of the ship.'

Apparently even market gardeners benefited from the event.

'News of the wreck spread quickly. People came over from Liverpool and Birkenhead. They brought with them containers of every shape and size. According to local reports at the time 'some people walked, some hobbled, and others ran.' They brought handcarts and wheelbarrows, baskets and boxes. Some were filled by the local greengrocers and market gardeners.'



'Helping Themselves'

Less contentious was the practice of beachcombing. Henry Joynton's great granddaughter Jill recalls one night when her grandfather walked down Harrison drive with a hand cart to haul back a very heavy sea sodden bolster of a tapestry.



A section of the same tapestry
woven by Lee's Tapestry Works,
Birkenhead
which operated from 1908 to 1970

Jill added that it was cut into smaller sections which were distributed among the family and used variously as a cover for a piano stool, a draught excluder for a door and a tablecloth. Other items salvaged that night included a bottle of sherry saved for Jill's Dad's 21st birthday. In the event it proved undrinkable having been contaminated with sea water!

My family lived at Meols, and my brother Nev and I regularly patrolled the shore for treasures but much to our disappointment found very little apart from seashells.

ZOOM LECTURE SERIES 2024-5

From our Research Co-ordinator Martin Cherry

Wednesday 9 October 2024

Matt Osmont, Practice Director at Donald Insall Associates

Conservation and creativity: breathing new life into old buildings

A leading practitioner from a leading conservation practice, Matt will talk about the challenges of conservation—giving historic buildings a sustainable future—looking in detail at Plas Gwyn, a wonderful sixteenth-century gentry house on the Llŷn and Porth Mawr, one of the gatehouses in the town walls of Caernarfon.

Wednesday 13 November 2024

Mary-Ann Constantine, Professor at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies

Recovering Downing Hall: Exploring the world of Thomas Pennant (1726-1798)

Downing Hall, the Flintshire home of naturalist, antiquarian and travel writer Thomas Pennant, is now a heap of rubble, but it was once a busy hub for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. Pennant's correspondence network stretched from America to Siberia, but he was also a keen advocate of 'travels at home': his collaboration with artists such as Moses Griffith and John Ingleby has left us with a fascinating visual legacy of the buildings and landscapes of north Wales at the end of the C18th. In this talk, Professor Mary-Ann Constantine will share some findings from the Curious Travellers project, which has been editing Pennant's letters and his tours of Wales and Scotland, and exploring his specimen collections in the Natural History Museum, London.

Wednesday 11 December 2024

Scott Lloyd, research manager for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales

Mapping North Wales before the Ordnance Survey

By popular acclaim, a return visit from Scott Lloyd. He spoke to us before about early nineteenth-century ordnance survey mapping and this time will focus on the varied pre-Ordnance Survey mapping that survives for North-East Wales which can be helpful in researching the history of houses. The talk will also discuss some of the different issues surrounding their use and look at how they can be used in a digital age.

STOP PRESS!

A short notice from our webmaster Peter Masters

The house history of Plas Gwyn, the subject of our October Zoom talk, is now available online on our website. The house is our banner picture on the website.



Discovering Old Welsh Houses

Who we are

Discovering Old Welsh Houses studies and celebrates the traditional houses of North Wales built between the 14th and the mid 17thc and the lives of the people who lived in them. We have six active branches that hold meetings and arrange visits on a regular basis.

Further information including branch activities can be found under Events. Branch contacts can be found under Contact Us.

We are a voluntary organisation with both Welsh and English speaking members.

What we do

We hold meetings that encourage members to get together and exchange ideas and information.

We arrange visits to houses and other historic buildings that are not normally open to the public.

We give talks and presentations on a wide range of topics related to old houses, many of them on Zoom.

We encourage and help members to publish all aspects of the history of individual houses and communities, listing architectural and landscape features as well as documentary evidence (including poetry).

We also apply for grants to carry out specialist work such as house-raising and listing research.

We produce a quarterly [Newsletter](#).

Membership benefits include guided research, training in Land active use and other services.

Subscribers to our Facebook Pages and houses Database

Occasional guided visits to previously researched houses

(continues off the meeting)

Monthly Zoom talk by prominent speakers

A volunteers branch near you

Membership

We have over 200 members. [Click here](#) to see the benefits of becoming a member and how to apply.

Membership is £15 per for individuals and £20 per for two individuals living at the same address.

Life membership is available for £200.

Joint Life membership is available for £300.


A members research group


Members on a house visit

