



# DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



NODDWYR/PATRONS:

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

## CYLCHLYTHYR 56 Gwanwyn 2026

### EIN GWEFAN

<http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk>

Yw prif sianel gyfathrebu'r Grŵp - defnyddiwrch 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 56 Spring 2026

### 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.

## From the Chair - March 2026

Looking back at 'From the Chair' March 2025, I wrote about a piece of research I was doing about the township of Cilan in Llandrillo, well it is not much further forward as I 'parked it' when I was asked to look at a house in the village, Penrhos.

Penrhos is not an old house, in fact a 19th century converted chapel and one time school. Of course, all houses are built on land and the history of a piece of land can be just as interesting as a pre-1700 house which is what DOWH usually concentrates on.

The land on which Penrhos was built was part of a smallholding of just over 7 acres, but the ownership led me over the Berwyn mountains, I still have not been able to establish how Sinah Griffithes of Llanrhaiadr yn Mochnant came to own this and other land in Llandrillo.

And then following on from this, DOWH was contacted by a couple who had recently purchased a derelict house with a cruck, adjacent to Trawsfynydd lake – Tyn Twll, which Martin, Ellie and I visited. Martin has put a tentative date on it as from the third quarter of the 16th century. I am now looking at the history of this house, but as often happens, it has led me off on another tangent – looking at the gold mines of the Mawddach valley, as the owner of Tyn Twll was also the part owner of a farm adjacent to the mine at Gwynfynydd.

So, I would recommend researching a house history, it can take you down many interesting avenues. If you feel you would like to tackle a house history do join our 'Any Question' monthly sessions.

**Janice Dale, Chair**

## DOWH Denbighshire branch report for December 2025 to March 2026

Our last meeting of 2025 was kindly hosted at amazing *Brynberllan*,<sup>1</sup> Cynwyd (1552-3), whose owner provided delicious Christmas fare! A DOWH member introduced us to the traveller Hon. John Byng's fascinating *The Torrington Diaries*. For our ongoing history of Corwen's *Owain Glyndŵr Hotel* she has edited an extract from Volume Three - about Byng's July 1793 visit there. (A copy of Volume Three has been purchased for members).

January 2026 saw one of our regular research meetings at *Hafod y Calch*, Corwen. Several local members are gathering Parishes Project information - in parishes including Betws Gwerfil Goch, Bryneglwys, Derwen, Gwyddelwern, Glyndyfrdwy, Llansantffraid Glyndyfrdwy (Carrog) and Llandderfel. This can lead to further invitations for DOWH visits.



In February another delicious tea and house tour was provided at the beautifully preserved *The Old Post Office* (Llanasa) by its owner, whose fascinating and very comprehensive house history includes photos of its significant historic features.<sup>2</sup> (Although thought to be of C17th origin, its timber samples failed to dendrodate). Members of both Denbighshire and Flintshire branches enjoyed another chance to meet each other, and all welcomed news that an existing DOWH member is

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<sup>1</sup> History and dendro reports on <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page14.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page16.html>

happy take over as new Flintshire branch lead from this spring – building further on Wally and Margaret Barr's extremely impressive volume of existing research.

House histories are largely completed but awaiting architectural reports for *Cadwst*, Llandrillo; *Caenog*, Gwyddelwern; *Henblas*, Llandderfel, and *Henfaes Isaf*, Cynwyd, and still underway for *Bryn Brith*, Corwen; *Garth Lwyd*, Llandderfel; *Plas Isaf*, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd; *Pant y Llyn* and *Bryn Penllyn*, Llandrillo; *Lleweni*, Denbigh; *Llwyn Lleiaf*, Betws Gwerfil Goch; *Ty Helyg*, Bryneglwys; *Tyn y Celyn*, Bryneglwys and *Ty'n Llan*, Llantysilio.

Architectural visits in the New Year have been delayed by the weather, but will hopefully take place in March, and more group house visits to new houses are being arranged!

Jenny Lees, Denbighshire Branch Secretary

March 2026 - [leesjenny@gmail.com](mailto:leesjenny@gmail.com)

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### Anglesey Branch News

Following a very successful and delightful Social Afternoon Tea at Chateau Rhianfa last December, we have had our usual break over the winter months. We have been working on getting our membership records up to date and aligned with central records and we appreciate all the help we've had from Rosemary on this matter. We currently have over 50 people aligned to the DOWH Anglesey branch and growing! We generally achieve between 15 - 25 people attending each of our visits and we had some really excellent events right across the 2025 year.

We are currently busy planning our 2026 programme of visits for our members and the programme is shaping up very well:

The proposed Anglesey 2026 programme (Dates / venues subject to change.):

15th April - Cefn Coch (private house visit)

13th May - Brynddu (private house visit)

10th June - Neuadd (private house visit)

8th July - St Cybi's Church (guided visit to Grade 1 listed church in Holyhead)

16th September - tbc

14th October - tbc

16th December - Christmas Social - tbc

We are looking forward to getting started in April.

Clare & Brenda

DOWH Event Coordinators - Anglesey Branch

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### Imagining the 18<sup>th</sup> century life of our neighbours!

A really rewarding aspect of DOWH is making discoveries about people who once lived in the houses we research! One of the most exciting for me has been a folder of 1770s handwritten letters<sup>3</sup> from Margaret Lloyd, Baroness of Cymer at *Gwerclas*, to her friend Elizabeth Baker,<sup>4</sup> personal secretary to Hugh Vaughan of *Hengwrt* and later of *Nannau*. Living just across the fields from my own home of *Hafod y Calch*,<sup>5</sup> the Barons of Cymer, descendants of Welsh prince Madog ap Maredudd, had moved downhill by 1600 from their medieval hall house of *Plas Uchaf* to the mansion of *Gwerclas*. [Pictured below]



**The present façade of the house at Gwerclas, built by Hugh Hughes Lloyd in 1766**

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<sup>3</sup> I am greatly indebted to my DOWH colleague Pam Buttrey for bringing these letters to my attention.

<sup>4</sup> National Library of Wales, *Elizabeth Baker* 183 to 232, Elizabeth Baker Papers, 1740-1798 / NRA code GB 0210 ELIKER

<sup>5</sup> For my house history of *Hafod y calch*, see <https://www.discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page14.html>

Margaret's fascinating accounts of life at *Gwerclas* range from social engagements with North Wales gentry to details of farming practices and her schemes to help the poor - and also reveal some very personal thoughts, as they were confidential letters to a friend. My transcripts from the original handwritten letters, below and in other articles, keep Margaret's wording but with some added modern punctuation and spelling for clarity. Herself an heiress of English estates, Margaret Walmsley married Hugh Hughes Lloyd of *Gwerclas* in 1766, and like Elizabeth was English but living in a predominantly Welsh speaking area. She confided: "*If it were not for Mr Lloyd [her husband] I should lose all my English by never conversing in that language except with him and were I in England I might possibly meet with equal danger from the French*"- presumably referring to a prevalent English high society fashion for conversing in French? And in July 1775 her eldest son, presumably Richard Hughes Lloyd who was not yet seven, was instructing Margaret in "*the Welch language*."



**Arch at Gwerclas leading to cobbled yard and service wing (Jenny Lees)**

Hugh Vaughan is said to have been recklessly extravagant <sup>6</sup>, but was very generous to the household at *Gwerclas* and in June 1775 provided provisions for a *Gwerclas* house party for a whole week, "*in the most princely Manner with every delicacy The Season could produce.*" Names mentioned by Margaret may be relevant to our studies of North Wales gentry society at the time - in July 1775 the Hughes Lloyds were to dine at *Nantclwyd* <sup>7</sup> "*to meet Major Myddleton and his Lady,*" and Mrs Heaton was perhaps from *Plas Heaton*. <sup>8</sup> In July 1774 Margaret had also been staying at

<sup>6</sup> See Philip Nanney Williams (2016), *Nannau – A Rich Tapestry of Welsh History*, Llwyn Estates Publication.

<sup>7</sup> More research is needed to identify whether this was *Nantclwyd Hall* or *Nantclwyd y dre*, Ruthin.

<sup>8</sup> <https://archives.library.wales/index.php/heaton-family-of-plas-heaton>

the magnificent late 16th century mansion of *Cors y Gedol*, owned by Hugh Vaughan's uncle William Vaughan and pictured below.



**Gatehouse at *Cors y Gedol*, once home to William Vaughan (Jenny Lees 2013)**

Transport would have been arduous before Telford built what is now the A5, and after two guests had left *Gwerclas* at five in the morning, Margaret wrote: “*Simon is just returned from Conducting the Major and Mrs Peacock as far as Llanrwst, they have four light bays well run in the Chaise as far as that Town.*” (So was Simon a *Gwerclas* coachman?) There was apparently a close friendship between the *Gwerclas* Hughes Lloyds and Maria Charlotta Lloyd of *Rug* (1721-1780), as Maria was godmother to their son Robert (who tragically died aged 14 in 1784) and had made a bequest of £10 him in her will.<sup>9</sup> It has been observed <sup>10</sup> that this suggests a potentially significant connection between artist Parry's portraits of Robert's sister Sarah Margaretta Lloyd <sup>11</sup> [below] and of Maria Charlotta Lloyd,<sup>12</sup> –were both painted while Parry was in effect resident artist to Sir Watkin Williams Wynn at Wynnstay?

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<sup>9</sup> Maria left *Rug* to her cousin **Colonel Edward Williames Vaughan** (d.1807), second son of Sir Robert Howell Vaughan (1723–92) of *Nannau*.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication from Miles Wynn Cato.

<sup>11</sup> See Miles Wynn Cato (2008) *The Life and Works of William Parry A.R.A. (1743-1791)*, pp.57-9 and p.136. (This book was published before the sitter was identified as Sarah Margaretta Lloyd).

<sup>12</sup> Recently rediscovered by Miles Wynn Cato



**Sarah Margaretta Lloyd, born June 1767 and portrayed in 1770 by William Parry**

In a 10th June 1775 letter Margaret wrote: *“I am just going to pack up for Denbigh & we go on Monday. The old Gent. we intend paying our Compts. to has been arrived a Week and the Bells have never stopped ringing since his arrival.”* Could this have been the owner of *Lleweni*,<sup>13</sup> perceived as being higher in her social hierarchy? In contrast socially was the *“vast deal of Company at Ucheldre, 4 Equipages besides Numbers of Horse Gentry,”* to whom Margaret sent *“6 fat Chikins a Greene Goose and a qr. [quarter?] of Lamb.”* She explained: *“Tho I do not visit the family I wd. be a good Neighbour in everything else.”*



**Ucheldref, situated right beside a lane high above Corwen (Jenny Lees, 1980s)**

<sup>13</sup> A DOWH house history of *Lleweni* will be published soon.

On one occasion, quoting a February 1773 letter received from her Aunt Turk, Margaret fantasised about visiting London with Elizabeth and enjoying events such as the sumptuous ball costing at least £2,000 given by the French Ambassador at his residence, where *“Part of the Supper came ready prepared from Paris. The whole inside of the Home was made to represent a Beautiful Garden; the Stairs by some Wonderful contrivance were made to look like a Gravel Walk and the ascent quite easy from the Street to the upper apartments.”*

But offered by *Peniarth* a servant who had been an under-butler, Margaret advised: *“We did not aspire so high”;* they would be *‘content with a plain Honest Young Man ... possessing sobriety and common sense ... only a Waiter without the Pompious name of Butler.’*

*Gwerclas* servants were not always easy to manage! In December 1774 Margaret wrote of *“loosing 3 Servt Maids in a Washing week,”*, and on another occasion said: *“I have parted with my Cook as her failings were of so bad a Nature I could not keep her consistently with the Duty I owe to this Household – I am by no means suited with another. If I cannot get one before the approach of Summer that can send me up a Tollerable Diner & a Supper of neat Little Matters from a Written Bill of fare I am pretty Certain my Death Warrent is signed.”*

She took a very personal interest in farming matters, writing in February 1773: *“I tell you how large my expectations are respecting our Farm & Mill. The Latter is going to be much improved by the addition of a fine Flour Mill ... I had two guinea fowls both of the same Sex, and upon complaining of this a friend assisted me with another. Whether this Mistake has formed a Trio or Triumvirate I know not; I apprehend the Latter as they have not laid any Eggs this 2 years!”* Mentioning *Kites* - now recovering from near extinction and soaring magnificently above *Gwerclas*, she complained: *“There is two huge Kites which prevent my Pigeons from enjoying any Comfort abroad and there is a Number of Crows which are come to meet the Lambs.”* And in February 1774 Margaret sent Elizabeth a very detailed *‘Memorandum for cultivating the demesne and lands at Gwerclas, Given by Mr Eames,’* which appeared to contain very up to date farming advice at the time!

Margaret was also very concerned to help those less fortunate than herself, and with the required permission from her husband devised a *Spinning scheme*, in collaboration with Elizabeth, to benefit her *poor Neighbours*. This was before mills were established in Cynwyd at *Princes Yard* in about 1810, and Margaret commented on poor children *“who at six year old are set to spin Jersey or Cotton*

*in England - and I have no Idea that so Heavy a Machine as a Wool wheel is fit to employ the tender arm of an infant."* Arranging for spinning to be done locally, Margaret also visited Chester in person to negotiate with weavers, and her letters contain much correspondence with Elizabeth about the details of this scheme.

Regarding sporting life, in July 1775 Margaret sent congratulations to Mr Vaughan on "*so complete a victory ... in the bird fights,*" presumably meaning cock fighting - now considered very cruel, but both legal and popular among all social classes in Britain until around the mid -nineteenth century! And Margaret's 1772 account of a (luckily not fatal!) carriage accident at Corwen races makes amusing reading! <sup>14</sup> Accompanied by the Vaughans of *Rug* and Mr Lloyd of *Rhiwaedog* near Bala, as well as "*all the Vaughans in Ederneon, all the Lloyds that could be musterd, the Wallers, Mr and Miss Morris and all the Dolbins,*" Margaret claimed "*a Ball was impossible as none of our party loved dancing so a dinner was appointed at Corwen of 21 dishes & about as many Guests. We dined at 2, set out about 3 for the race amidst a crowd of happy faces wh<sup>h</sup> [which] entirely lined the road, the town, the course and the opposite Mountain and had a very good effect in point of prospect.*"

Space does not permit more mention here of the letters I have already transcribed, but Margaret's correspondence covers so many different areas of interest! Of current medical practice we learn that "*poor Aunt Turk was bled today by her son*"- apparently a doctor. On learning of Britain's involvement in the Anglo-French War, Margaret wrote in November 1778: "*I have just heard read a formal declarn. of Warr from the French Court ... & am enclined to believe we shall soon be stripd. of all we possess except our Virtues & Abilities.*"

In conclusion, I must explain that as Marcus Binney observed of *Gwerclas* in his 2007 book *The Perfect House -500 of the best buildings in Britain and Ireland*, virtually no alterations have been made to the property since becoming a tenanted farm on *Rug* estate in 1824. We are extremely fortunate that its current owners have preserved *Gwerclas* in a way making it easy to imagine life there in Margaret's time, and so lucky that someone preserved her letters!

Jenny Lees, March 2026

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<sup>14</sup> Transcription along with others is in Jenny Lees (2019) *House History of Gwerclas*, pp.47-52, <https://www.discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/page14.html>

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## AGM

This year's AGM will be held at Gwydir Castle again. For those who can't attend in person there will be the option to join us online. Make a note in your diaries – Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2026 at 2pm.

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## RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR UNDERSTANDING HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN NORTH WALES

As many members will know, the archaeological trusts for Wales, now a single body (Heneb), publish reviews from time to time about the state of knowledge of the historic environment and suggest research themes that might help develop policies and guidance to protect the country's built heritage more effectively; they can be found at <https://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/produced.html#content>.

These reviews, called 'research frameworks', are revised on an occasional basis to keep abreast of new published research and reports—one good reason for keeping DOWH's house histories and other material on open access through our website. The reports are divided into historic periods, the most relevant to DOWH being 'Medieval 1110-1539' and 'Post-Medieval Wales (1539-1750)' and which are currently being updated.

A few months ago, I was asked to identify where dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) had made the greatest impact on our understanding of standing buildings in Wales during the late-medieval and early modern periods (archaeologists tend to call early modern times 'post medieval' which I'm sure wouldn't please the Tudors!) and indicate the main unanswered questions emerging from this work.

I don't yet know if my recommendations will be taken on board but thought I would share them with you since they might help determine our own research priorities. I won't burden you with the details of that report, although some of the ideas have already been aired in this Newsletter (e.g., NL 54 and 55), but summarise the areas I think it most important to work at in a handful of bullet points.

For me the priority areas are:

- ❖ 15th-century houses in town and country (see NL54, 9-12)—the earliest surviving houses are 15th century and the timber construction and decorations are sophisticated. Why nothing

prior to 1400? Do these houses embody native Welsh traditions or are the ideas imported from the English counties? Looking more closely at these houses might tell us much about relations between English and Welsh families, certainly within the world of the uchelwyr and of merchants within the towns.

- ❖ The rebuilding of farmsteads in the 16th century and increasing agricultural specialisation.
  - ❖ The improvement and modernisation of houses and farmsteads in the 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries
- These two bullets introduce different aspects of the same subject—how, when and why did families upgrade or modernise their houses? ‘Improvement’ is a universal phenomenon, but it was carried out in different ways and at varying paces: some houses had ceilings and fireplaces inserted into their open halls in the early to mid-16th centuries while their neighbours remained content with what they had: were the drivers economic or cultural? Longhouses (where humans and livestock were accommodated under the same roof) were superseded in some places in the early Tudor decades, others survived into the 17th century. What is apparent is that the nature of the farmstead changed—the disposition of farm buildings away from the house is a discernible trend—but the chronology is far from clear: so many questions! So much evidence to look at!
- ❖ Church building and embellishment. Not one for us, you may feel, but it seems odd to look closely at houses without considering the churches: parishioners spent a great deal of their hard-earned resources on the parish church (renewing roofs, building rood screens, inserting stained-glass windows, fitting out new seating).

Having a research framework in place (Why are we doing this? What is the significance of what we’re finding?) is important when trying to raise funds for things like dendro-dating and historic building surveys. But the real key to building a fuller picture of historic communities and their buildings is to trawl through parishes, building by building, get into the record offices (and peoples’ attics or wherever they keep their deeds), and build up our precious archive of house histories.

**Martin Cherry, March 2026.**

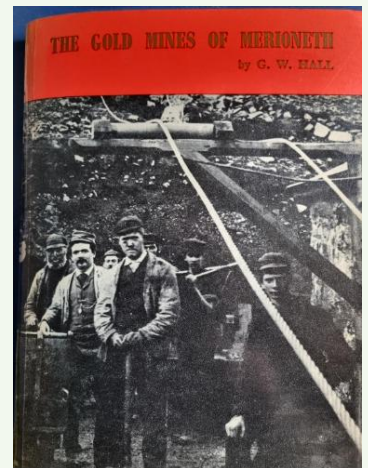
## On my bookshelf

If you are looking for somewhere to go and you like rummaging through second-hand books, try visiting Walter Lloyd Jones Saleroom in Barmouth.

One wet Saturday we headed there, with my intention of not spending a fortune on yet more books on the history of Wales. However, I was tempted by the locked bookcase and couldn't resist two more books. Both of these were rather musty smelling, but if you sprinkle baking powder between the pages and leave in a sealed container, it gets rid of most of the smell.

One book was volume 1 of The History of Merioneth [the first time I have found a copy that was a reasonable cost]. The second was the Gold Mines of Merioneth, these mines were centred in the 19th century in the Mawddach valley from Gwynfynydd to Bontddu. Though there was speculation of gold and other metals before this time.

A name of a farm that crops up in this book is Bedd Coedwr where gold was found and mined, and is a name that has cropped up whilst researching Tyn Twll at Trawsfynydd.



Tyn Twll and Bedd Coedwr came into the ownership of John Davies an inheritance of his father Gabriel Davies of Bala. A gold was rumoured of gold being found in the area so was Gabriel Davies buying property in the expectation of finding a fortune.

When John Davies died in 1841 without issue, his brother David took John's widow to court to get his hands on John's properties, no doubt speculating that he would become rich.

So I guess what I am getting at, is reading about different times in North Wales can lead to some interesting stories but gives us a clue to much earlier histories of old houses.

## Janice Dale, Chair

*Have you got a book that you'd like to tell people about? Did you find one somewhere unexpected like the Chair, or did you find something in a book that was relevant to an old house or its history? Let us know and your book could be on our 'bookshelf'.*

*Also, has anyone used AI to help with their research?*

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Zoom lecture - Wednesday 15 April 2026 at 7 pm

Dr Nigel Baker - *'On the outside looking in: multiple perspectives on medieval urban buildings with special reference to Shrewsbury'*

Dr Baker is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and a very entertaining speaker. He is a field archaeologist specialising in the study of historic towns, with a long-standing research interest in the development of historic towns, particularly in Shropshire and the Marches. Shrewsbury, like Chester and Oswestry, was a key market for Welsh goods and had a substantial Welsh population. Like Chester, it has a rich heritage of medieval and Tudor houses, but they are very different in character: why should that be? However well you know the town, you may be surprised by what you learn this evening.

### Zoom lecture - Wednesday 13 May 2026 at 7 pm

Miles Wynn Cato - *'William Parry (1743-1791) and his portraits for Welsh Houses'*

Miles is an independent art dealer of long standing and a national expert on pre-20th century Welsh painting. He is the author of several books including a major study of William Parry, the most significant Welsh portrait painter of the 18th century.

William Parry occupies a unique position in Welsh art history. He is the only pre-19th century Welsh painter who enjoyed widespread & lasting patronage in his own country. This talk will look at the Welsh families who patronised him from the late 1760s until his death and the country houses where the portraits he painted were hung. It is a story of paintings lost and found as well as the vicissitudes of the gentry houses of North Wales.

### Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2026 at 2pm

Discovering Old Welsh Houses AGM at Gwydir Castle, Llanrwst

