

CWM MAETHLON, TYWYN
(Happy Valley)
A history of the valley and five of its houses



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CONTENTS

	Pages
INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1	
Overview	2
Economy of the Valley	3 – 5
Drovers	5
Transport Routes	5 – 7
Population and Health	7
Religion	7 – 9
PART 2	
The Research Project	10 – 11
PART 3	
Allt-Lwyd	12
Bryn Dinas	13 – 16
Dyffryn Gwyn	17 – 22
Tyddyn y Briddell	23 – 28
Dysyrnant	29 – 32

INTRODUCTION

This history of Cwm Maethlon, Tywyn¹ has been produced by three members of Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group (DOWHG) who are part of its Merioneth Branch – Jenny Carpenter, Gill Caves and John Townsend. We are also indebted to Dr. Martin Cherry for editing the text.

This booklet is intended to be a readable historical overview of Cwm Maethlon and some of its houses up to around 1920; it's not designed as an academic study or a full family history of the valley.

DOWHG is a charity whose focus is on celebrating Welsh heritage in north Wales through the study of traditional houses and the lives of the people who lived in them. To do this we research the history of pre-1700 buildings and publish our results on an 'open source' basis in a variety of forms – our website, talks and in this case a booklet.

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The authors wish to point out that text contains some informed guesswork. Readers may not agree with what is suggested and it is accepted that there may be other opinions based on the facts available.

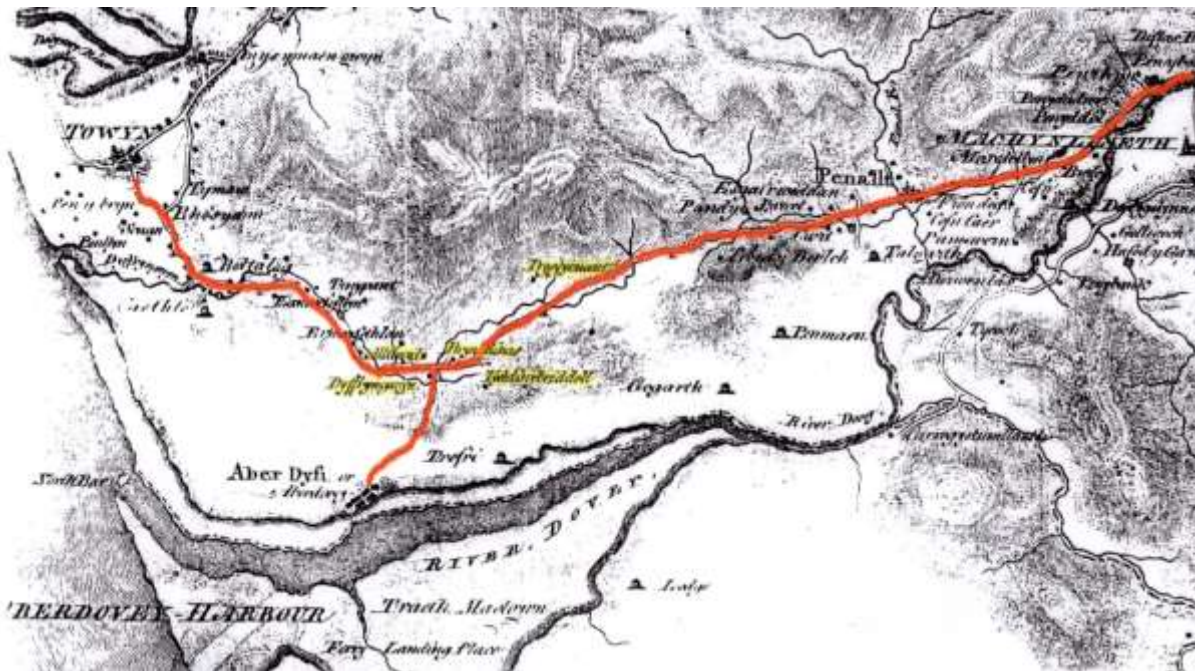
We would love to hear from anyone who has further information about Cwm Maethlon, – especially 20th century material – at: comments@discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk

Only a few footnote references have been used in this booklet - mainly to books consulted as they may be of interest to readers. Complete house histories with full referencing are available on our website.

We are grateful to the Snowdonia Partnership Fund for supporting the production of this booklet.



¹ Formally Towyn



John Evans 1795

THE ECONOMY OF THE VALLEY

Farmers were lucky that the early medieval ages had a mild climate favourable for the growing of crops, mainly wheat. The variety grown had a longer stem, which was easier to harvest, but smaller seed heads. One side effect of more wheat meant more beer could be made and there was an increase in the number of local hostelrys.

During the 16th century fishing was a very lucrative business. The rivers in the valley were very productive and in order to preserve the salmon and trout, salt was imported at first from Sussex and then salt pans were installed in the Dovey estuary. Herring fishing was also successful and the fish were likewise salted down. Caethle brook and Llyn y Berth were the best trout waters until the Melyn Llyn Pair mining company polluted the waters which had to be scientifically cleansed.

There were lead, and to a smaller extent, copper, mines at Llyn Pair, Myndd Bryn Dinas and Tyddyn y Briddell and the metal ore was shipped from Aberdyfi, which during the 18th and 19th centuries was a port and ship building centre of significance. 'Brief Glory: The Story of a Quest'⁴, describes the Port Books and other information on how the Customs operated in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1746 the owner of Dyffryn Gwyn and a colleague were 'Surveyors' who exercised supervision over all the other Port Officials – the 'Customer' who kept a record of all shipments, collections and receipts; the 'Controller' who kept the counter books of the Customer's entries; and the 'Searcher' who checked the actual shipments as a precaution against smuggling.

Before the coming of the National Grid, the valley was chosen to provide the locality with electricity by utilising waterpower from the Afon Dyffryn Gwyn, which today is little more than a brook. As a consequence it proved insufficient to meet demand, so oil-engine plants were later installed to augment the water power.

⁴ D.W. Morgan, The Brython Press, Liverpool, 1948

Oak bark was initially imported and used in the tanning process but later it was home grown resulting in a surplus that was then exported. Woodlands and coppicing were vital. Timber was used for building, farming vehicles, furniture, boats, sawdust and bark. Bryn Dinas and Tyddyn y Briddell had large areas of woodland, which were a very valuable and profitable commodity. There was a sawmill at the extreme west end of the valley.

Cottagers on their farms carefully husbanded all the resources available. This was a sustainable community but the work was arduous. Labourers would live close to their work. They would grow and gather as much as possible. Building materials would all be locally sourced using slate and clay. It meant that a small acreage of 30-40 acres could support a large family compared with today's consumerist society. Similarly, society was self-sufficient but neighbours could be relied upon for help in times of difficulty and crisis and Cwm Maethlon appears to be an especially tight knit community. The families would be large and often the older girls would be sent away to be servants in other households, sometimes of strangers but more usually to relations.

During the 1700s, uplands were considered more valuable than lowlands. Black sheep were the norm but not used so much for wool. The market was for runt meat bred on the higher ground which was fattened quickly and much prized by London. The lowland grounds used for cattle crops, etc. which did not bring in such a profitable income. Although sheep were the major stock, cattle and pigs were also kept. The cattle were mainly for domestic use although larger estates may have kept herds commercially.

Welsh farmers, along with their English and Irish counterparts, found it most important to neutralise acid soils to multiply crop and grass production – by as much as fourfold, according to some contemporary accounts. For hundreds of years until the mid-20th century, lime supported a vast and vital network of local industries - quarries to mine the limestone, carts and ships to transport it, and specialists to monitor the burning. There was a small 19th century example of a kiln at Pumwern just southeast of Pennal, in relative easy reach of the valley.

Cows were highly prized as they provided milk and could sustain the family with by-products such as butter and cheese. Each farm had its own special butter mark. Symbols would identify the type of farm (e.g. myrtle meant upland and water). Any surplus produce would be sold at the Machynlleth market. Some of the money would be used to buy items such as clothing and, as an example, the new desirable drink of tea - one pound (453.6 grams) of Bohea tea cost 2 shillings in 1752 (approximately equivalent to £43 in 2018).



The two main industries in the valley were farming and mining (lead and copper). Both suffered decline in the latter part of the 1800s. In the case of mining the reason was relatively simple: the mines started to become unprofitable, partly because it was harder to extract the lead and partly because the prices of metals were dropping, making the whole industry unprofitable.

In the case of agriculture the reasons for decline are more complex: from about 1870 to well into the 20th century there was a 'great depression' across England and Wales, caused in the main by:

- Very poor weather during this period, impacting on what farmers could produce
- The repeal in 1846 of the Corn Laws (measures enforced in the UK between 1815 and 1846 which imposed restrictions and tariffs on imported grain). The repeal caused the price of wheat and other cereal crops to fall sharply as cheap grain from the USA and Russia became available
- Technological innovations, such as refrigeration, made it possible to import food from far-away countries.
- Access to ships, railways and roads which revolutionised all forms of transportation and made movement away from rural Wales to cities, both in the UK and abroad, much easier, allowing people to find jobs
- Wealth starting to move away from the landed aristocracy to industrialists
- Rural ways of thinking were challenged. The Education Act 1880 made school attendance to the age of ten compulsory. In 1893 the school leaving age was raised to eleven, and in 1899 it was raised again to twelve. The population was thus becoming more educated
- The influence of Nonconformists who advocated social and political change.

Some, if not all of this impacted on the valley and there is no doubt its population and wealth were reduced substantially as it went into the 20th century This had the knock-on effect of reducing the cash available for the upkeep of many of the farms and houses, most of which were let to tenant farmers. Overall the status of these houses declined.

THE DROVERS

Sheep would be walked to their destination by the drovers, an exclusive group who during Tudor times had to be licensed, married, over 30 and own their own home. During the reign of the Stuarts they had to work under contract and were forbidden to declare themselves bankrupt to avoid fulfilling their contract. Any drover caught without a licence would be fined £5 and sent to prison. They were forbidden to work on a Sunday and had to speak and understand English. In 1800 a drover could earn 3 shillings a day and a 6 shilling bonus on arrival at his destination. They could become quite wealthy and consequently moved up the social scale. They would stay at designated hostelries who some claim could be identified from a distance by Scots Pine trees. Some believe that the number of trees denoted the quality of the hostelry; one tree for fair; 2 for better and 3 for good but there is no evidence to confirm this.

TRANSPORT ROUTES

There is considerable evidence of Bronze Age activity in the valley. The course of the Roman road, Sarn Helen between Dolgellau and Pennal is open to much discussion. Sarn Helen was a 160 mile route, which follows a meandering course through central Wales and connected Aberconwy in the north with Carmarthen in the west. The route suggested in 'The Roman Roads of Wales'⁵ runs to the east of Cadair Idris via Abergynolwyn and over the hills to

⁵ O'Dwyer, The Montgomeryshire Press, 1934

Pennal. A second route following roughly the present A487 via Corris has also been put forward. Neither of these routes would go through Cwm Maethlon although it is suggested that there is evidence of a loop road - probably constructed at a later period of the Roman occupation, to serve stations or camps nearer the coast. This loop road, after zig-zagging down Bryn Dinas Hill, would have dropped into the middle of Cwm Maethlon.

The 'History of Merioneth vol. I'⁶ questions the existence of routes to the east of Cadair Idris. The author suggests the route skirted the mountain to the west and then south above Llwyngwriol dropping down to Llanegryn, then Bryn-crug and along the Nant Braich-y-rhiw; which goes to the north of Bryn Dinas Hill and drops down at the east end of Cwm Maethlon.

Whatever the truth, it is probable that the Romans at least marched through all or part of Cwm Maethlon.

The Dovey River had a line of naval communication to the Thames and the Tiber with trading vessels arriving to supply the fort, where today a few ruins remain and a 15th century house stands with part of these ruins incorporated into the building.

Although there must have been a road through the valley from mediaeval times (if not Roman) connecting Tywyn in the east and Machynlleth in the west, there was no road eastward from Aberdyfi to Machynlleth until 1828. Before then to go to Aberdyfi from Machynlleth you turned south off the valley road at Dyffryn Gwyn and over the Tyddyn y Briddell Hills and down to Aberdyfi.

The Turnpike Trust was established in 1875 to run the road to Machynlleth through Cwm Maethlon as many roads had not been maintained or improved since the original Turnpike Acts, some of which went back to the 17th century. Trustees were appointed for each district with the power to take tolls and assign or mortgage the tolls as security for money borrowed. Trustees were authorised to erect, rebuild and keep in repair bridges and widen roads. The new tolls that were allowed were:

'For every horse or other beast drawing any coach chariot Landau Berlin chaise calash hearse or chair the sum of four pence;

For every horse or other beast drawing any waggon wain wheel car cart tumbril car drag or sledge three pence;

For every horse or other beast laden or unladen and not drawing one penny;

For every drove of oxen cows or neat cattle ten pence per score and so in proportion for a less number;

And for every drove of calves, hogs, sheep, lambs or goats five pence per score; and so in proportion for any less number.'

At first agricultural interests were catered for but this later changed with the expansion of the mining industry. There was a toll gate at the Tywyn end bordered by farmland and planted woodland. The toll house is still there, though much changed. The corresponding

⁶ Merioneth Historical and Record Society 1967

toll house at the east end has long since disappeared.

In 1860 the Machynlleth, Aberystwyth and Towyn⁷ Railway was mooted. It was intended to seek an Act of Parliament to ‘enable the Company to make and maintain the following Railways, with all proper and necessary stations; works, and other conveniences connected therewith, that is to say,- A Railway commencing by a junction in the parish of Machynlleth, with the authorised terminus there of the Newtown and Machynlleth Railway... passing thence from, in, through, or into the several parishes, townships, and places following, or some of them, that is to say, ... Pennal, Pennal-ucha, Pennal-issa, Towyn, *Cynfal-fawr*⁸, *Dysyrnant*, Cefnrhos-ucha, Cefnrhos-issa, *Cynfal-fach*, Trefrion, Faenol, Isyrafon, *Dauddyffryn*, in the County of Merioneth ...’ Clearly there may have been some plan for it to pass through Cwm Maethlon but it looks like the idea never got to the starting blocks! The railway went around the coast through Aberdyfi, not inland. The section between Aberdyfi and Llwyngwril was open in 1864. The section between Aberdyfi and Machynlleth was very difficult and required four short tunnels, some heavy shore line earthworks and stone retaining walls, not to mention a bridge over the Dyfi. The section was opened in 1867.

POPULATION AND HEALTH

In 1801 the agricultural population of Wales was 37% of the total population of the country. The health of the population was not always good. There were several instances of plague and ignorance of infection and cleanliness meant that epidemics like TB, influenza, smallpox, and childhood ailments such as measles could all be fatal. In these cases where a child sadly died a later child would often be given the same name.

In 1850 the General Board of Health put the number of fever cases and deaths as 27 in 1,000 for the Tywyn area and the report encouraged the installation of privies ‘a luxury few possess’. Nothing could be done without a well arranged system of drainage. The life expectancy for men was 47 years but as sanitation and water supplies improved this rose markedly.

Although death rates remained stubbornly high, it was the drift of the rural depopulation away to the industrial heartlands of Wales and England that made the most impact on Cwm Maethlon, as elsewhere in Wales, especially in the years following the 1870 ‘great depression’.

RELIGION

From the end of the 18th century the valley was predominately Nonconformist. ‘Hanes Achos Eglwys Maethlon 1785 – 1985’⁹ gives a vivid account of the start of the Methodist revival in the valley¹⁰:

‘Before the Methodist Revival in 1785 the area apparently was full of ungodliness and corruption, like all other areas. On the Sabbath residents of neighbouring areas and towns met to play football and other sports, and throughout the county there was cock-fighting

⁷ Now Tywyn

⁸ Those marked in italics are in or near Cwm Maethlon

⁹ A History of Maethlon Chapel 1785 – 1985, Mai Lewis, 1984, Written in Welsh

¹⁰ Most of the valley was quite distant from the two Anglican parish churches of the time (Tywyn and Pennal) – remoteness from a church was one of the reasons why Nonconformity took hold in places like this

amongst other harmful and cruel popular practices. All levels of the population, the gentleman as well as the poor, participate in these activities. They took place on a flat meadow in the Valley on Gwyddgwion farmland. Also the local farmers would regularly meet after the activities to discuss various parish issues. Here on this playing meadow everything was discussed on the Sabbath. This spot is still to this day referred to as 'weirglodd chwarae' (sport or playing meadow).

'The games and cockfights were not restricted to Maethlon Valley alone, they were taking place in the surrounding villages as well, and there were 'cock-pits' in the villages of Llwyngwriil and Corris¹¹. The most famous one was Abergynolwyn. The inhabitants of Llanegryn and Machynlleth would come together (at Abergynolwyn) to compete with each other. According to local legend the side of the mountain would be black with so many people gathering there on special days, e.g. Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Thursday.

'Another popular custom amongst the wealthy of the area was horse racing on flat land where the farm Morfa in Towyn used to be and also the coastal plains between Towyn and Aberdyfi. These were the main interests of the period.'

Two of the original Methodist pioneers were tenants from Dyffryn Gwyn, one of whom was forced away from the valley by the rich landowner, Edward Corbett of Ynysmaengwyn, even though he did not himself actually own Dyffryn Gwyn – but more on this later.

A chapel was built in the valley in 1810 on land leased from a local landowner at 10/- per annum and a school was begun for the local children of the valley. They were taught to read albeit only the catechism or 'religious formulary'. 30 children attended for up to 12 hours a week. This appears to be the only education the children had but it was still an advancement to be literate, especially for the girls.

There still exist copies of statements of the accounts of a charity called the 'William Jones' Charity for Maethlon Calvinistic Methodist Chapel' for 1922-1928. These accounts record a sum of £6 being paid annually by Annie Jones (widow of William Jones) and William Pugh (nephew of William Jones) into the Charity. This is the sole sum of donations being recorded to the charity. Annie Jones and William Pugh are recorded as the co-partners, owners and occupiers of Erwfaethlon Farm (another farm within Cwm Maethlon). During the period of the accounts 'Humphrey Morgan Vaughan of Dysyrnant, farmer' and 'Hugh Evans of Bryn Dinas farmer' are variously recorded as being Trustees/Administrators of the account or as being involved in the submission of the accounts to the Charity Commission. It seems therefore that families within the valley contributed their efforts towards improving the lot of the more unfortunate members of the community. The actual objects of the charity have not been found.

The chapel was also the social centre for the community and our research into the families occupying the selected houses shows how related and interconnected they were. In the first half of the 20th century, Humphrey Vaughan, Dysyrnant; Hugh Evans (Jr.), Bryn Dinas; Edward

¹¹ The remains of a cockpit can still be found in near Peniarth Uchaf, Brynrug

Roberts, Dyffryn Gwyn; Elinor Davies, Tyddyn y Briddell and Gwynant Davies, Dyffryn Gwyn were all active officials of the chapel.



A graveyard is attached to the chapel and it is surprising to find that many Aberdyfi people have been buried here, especially as the journey from Aberdyfi involved a long climb up the mountain behind the village and a steep descent on the valley side. It was, however, considered to be an honour to be buried there. A two-horse bier was used to carry the coffins along the mountain tracks and paths.

The chapel was supported by a Welsh doctor John Pughe 1814-1874, one of only 12 Welsh doctors of 850 fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons at the time. He practised in Barmouth before moving to Aberdyfi where he remained until his death.

He was the translator of *Meddygon Myddfai*¹² and author of 'Eben Fardd: ei nodion a'i hynodion.' He was prominent in the public life of Aberdyfi and district, being a justice of the peace and a patron of many charitable and religious causes. His religious leanings were towards the Plymouth Brethren, for whom he preached in the small church which he established at the Bath House, Aberdyfi (now the Literary Institute). When he died in April 1874 he was buried in the family vault at Cwm Maethlon Chapel.

Within the graveyard there is also a monument erected by the inhabitants of Aberdyfi in memory of William Radcliffe, the village schoolmaster who was drowned in the River Dyfi in 1867 at the age of twenty- three years.

The chapel is now a holiday home but the graveyard has many burials including some as recent as 2006 as even those who moved away wanted to be buried in this very special place.

¹² The Physicians of Myddfai were pioneers of modern medicine through herbalism in the 12th century. Over time the remedies and treatments of the Physicians came to be handed down in written form as well as orally. In the 14th century, some five hundred of these were incorporated into the renowned collection of poetry and prose known as The Red Book of Hergest (Llyfr Coch Hergest), one of the most important medieval manuscripts written in the Welsh language – it includes the Mabinogion

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

As said earlier names of houses and people are often spelt differently in records. We have used the modern spelling except where we quote directly from the original record.

Five houses in the middle of the valley were selected for study. These are Allt-lywd; Bryn Dinas; Dyffryn Gwyn; Tyddyn y Bridell and Dysyrnant. They were mainly independently owned, and were never swallowed up by the large estates of the Vaughans, Lewis's, Corbets, etc. to the west and those of the Prices, Edwards, Thrustons, etc. to the east. Only in the mid-19th century did they succumb - all bar Dysyrnant bought first by the Evans family and then by the Morris family of Machynlleth and called the Dyffryn Estate. The last of the Morris family to be involved with the Estate was Anne Morris who died in 1939 aged 101 years.

The Tithe Schedules of 1839-42¹³ show:

	Owner	Occupier	Acreage
Allt-lywd	Griffith Evans	Thomas Anwyl	139
Dyffryn Gwyn	Griffith Evans	Thomas Anwyl	197
Bryn Dinas	Griffith, Evan & John Evans	John Vaughan	242
Tyddyn y Bryddell	David Lewis	William Jones	190
Dysyrnant	John Jones	Richard Jones	108

Trying to find out about Evans's has been fruitless to date. However, by the 1850s the farms had been acquired by Lewis Morris who combined them with Tyddyn y Briddell as the 'Dyffryn Estate'. Lewis Morris was a Flannel Manufacturer in Maegwyn Street, Machynlleth. He was also the lessee of Bryneglwys Slate Quarry, Abergynolwyn. These properties appear to have been passed to his son, Lewis (Jr.), in about 1854 and then later to Anne the daughter of Lewis (Jr.). She and her sisters – often refer to as the 'Misses Morris' in documents - managed the properties well into the 20th century.

The Land Tax for 1910 shows:

	Owner	Occupier	Acreage
Allt-lywd	Part of Dyffryn Gwyn?		
Dyffryn Gwyn	Executors of Anne Morris	David Davies	361
Bryn Dinas	Executors of Anne Morris	Hugh Edwards	267
Tyddyn y Bryddell	Executors of Anne Morris	Evan Edwards	199
Dysyrnant	Griffith Tudor Jones	Dd. & Humphrey M Vaughan	268

The Tithe return for 1919 is reproduced below:

¹³ The first official national survey of the tithe (tax for support of the Church)

Machynlleth,
June 1919

Parish of Llanyn

Sir, Mason

We herewith send you particulars of Tithe Rent Charge due on the 1st day of July 1919, to Rev D. R. Lugh which please pay or remit to us at our Office, Machynlleth, on or before Wednesday the 10th day of July 1919

Please bring or send this Circular to be receipted.

Yours truly,
Gillart & Sons.
Messrs W. L. Morris & Herbert Morris Esq
Agents,
Norton House,
Machynlleth

No.	Tenant.	Tenement.	Apportionment.			Amount due.		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
		226 Same as 1 st Jan'y 1919				17	2	9
236	H. Evans	Bryndinae.	10	2		5	10	4
237	D. Evans.	Llyffwrdd.	1	10	1	4	13	2
238		All-twyd	8			4	7	4
241	Evans Edward.	Llyffwrdd.	4	11	1	2	13	11
						20	4	0

Received the above
Gillart & Sons
15 July 1919

© Powys Archives

Because these five houses were freely held it makes them harder to investigate because the records for small freehold properties survive less well than those for the larger estates.

At some time in the future it would be interesting to research houses to the west end of the valley – Bod Talog, Erw-porthor, and Erwfaethlon. Also Gwyddgwion and Duffryn-glyn-cŵl which skirt the south side of Foel Caethle and are linked to Cwm Maethlon by a road about a mile west of Dyffryn Gwyn.

ALLT-LWYD

The house is described on Coflein¹⁴ as a '17th century small 'A' type, single storey and attic, massive cut quoins. Stone mullions windows; derelict.' Although a smallish house it does appear to have been one of relatively high status as it has an impressive voussoir¹⁵ over the main door.

There are few records for this building, the earliest being the Crown Rental of 1592 (a form of tax) which show 'Allt Lwyd and Bryndinas occupied by Riceus ap Ieuan Thomas' and in the Rental for 1633 by 'Rice ap Ieuan in the tenure of the said Rice.'



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Sometime between 1633 and 1698 Allt-lwyd was acquired by the owners of Dyffryn Gwyn. In 1751 the owner of Dyffryn Gwyn is shown living in there. By 1842 Griffith Evans is the owners of Allt-lwyd.

From around 1800 the parish records¹⁶ show that the occupants were transitory and poor – mainly labourers and mariners and their families. This would tend to show the house had already fallen into a poor condition.

The censuses¹⁷ of 1841, 1851 and 1861 are a bit confusing as different house names appear but the trend of being occupied by the poor continues. In 1841 there is Allt-lwyd (showing 1 household living there) and a 'Rallt Lwyd' (1 household). In 1851 Allt-lwyd (3 households) and 'Allt Lwyd Fach' (1 household). In 1861 Allt-lwyd (1 household), 'Allt Lwyd Uchaf' (1 household) and 'Allt Lwyd Isaf' (1 household). From 1871 onwards there is no mention of Allt-lwyd or any of the above, so presumably it was unoccupied by then.

So why are there different buildings with Allt-lwyd in their name? There is evidence that Allt-lwyd was also called Allt-lwyd Isaf and that there was a small cottage located on the hillside above the house called Allt-lwyd Uchaf. The ruined remains of the cottage are still visible along with the track that connected them together. So it could be that they were just different names given to the Census Collector. In any event whatever the truth by 1871 nobody lived in Allt-lwyd and it continued to fall into dereliction.

¹⁴ The website of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW)

¹⁵ A wedge-shaped or tapered stone used to construct an arch

¹⁶ The Tywyn Parish Registers (Church records) cover all of Cwm Maethlon and start in 1663; unfortunately prior to around 1800 the registers did not record house names and many of the earlier pages are illegible.

¹⁷ A census of the population of the UK has been taken every 10 years since 1841 (with the exceptions of 1941). The contents are available up to 1911 and are a useful source for finding out who was living in a house, their relationships and occupations, etc.

BRYN DINAS



'The History of Merioneth, vol. II'¹⁸ describes Bryn Dinas as a 'three-unit, stone-walled, cruck-framed, hall-house consisting of a two-bay open hall between a single narrow inner room and a probably similar-sized outer room. However, nothing survives of the passage partition and the outer room, now a parlour and largely rebuilt, gives no indication of its original use.

'At the other end of the house the original dais partition has been replaced by a nineteenth-century 'in-and-out' partition which stands in front of the cruck couple'¹⁹. Possibly it was resited about a foot towards the hall to give more space to the inner room then converted into a dairy.

'The most remarkable feature of the house is the central arch-braced truss over the hall which is embellished by a simple boss. Later a stone fireplace backing on the passage with stair alongside was inserted to heat the hall while an end-wall fireplace was provided for the outer room. The ceiling, inserted over the hall with bar-stopped beams, is of above average quality, as are the associated farm buildings, which suggests that this small farmhouse retained its gentry status into the eighteenth century.'

The house was restored by the owners in 2015-16. The main objective of this work was to re-roof the property, along with stabilization of some areas of stonework, and renovation of the outside of the house. Bryn Dinas continues to fulfil its original function as a farmhouse. In March 2016 timbers in the house were sampled for dendrochronological dating²⁰. The report says: 'There is a single dated timber from the primary cruck phase of the building, giving a likely felling date range of 1511-41. Clearly there is a danger in dating a whole phase on the basis of a single timber, which may be a repair, or a stockpiled or re-used timber, but the result seems not unreasonable as a representative of this primary phase of building.



'The inserted floor to the east of the central chimney had one timber with complete sapwood but this had extremely narrow rings and the sapwood rings could not be measured with certainty. The number of rings was however determined to within 5 years, allowing a narrow

¹⁸ Published by Merioneth Historical and Record Society in 2001, see p. 450 and Fig 10.25.

¹⁹ a pair of curved timbers which support the roof of a building

²⁰ Dendrochronology is the scientific method of dating tree rings (also called growth rings) to the years they were formed by comparing them with known control samples. The results are fairly accurate in dating houses because green timber was usually used when building at this time. Green timber is relatively freshly cut, and has much higher moisture content by percentage than seasoned timber. It is used because as wood dries it becomes more difficult to work with the chisels and other hand tools available at that time. Dendro-dating is an extremely import process as written records on when a house was built do not usually exist

falling date range of 1581-86 to be determined, with a second timber having a likely felling date range encompassing this range.'

So, in short, we have here an open cruck-framed hall house built in the medieval tradition in the first half of the 16th century, modernised and made more comfortable by the insertion of a good-quality ceiling in the 1580s.

The Crown Rental of 1592 show Bryn Dinas and Allt-lwyd 'held freely' by Riceus ap Ieuan Thomas and in the Rental for 1663 by Rice ap Ieuan, possibly Riceus' grandson. In the 1754 there is evidence that Bryn Dinas was owned by Griffith Hugh Owen (confusingly also known as Griffith Pugh and Griffith Hugh) as there is a *'Release by Griffith Pugh of Bryndinas, co. Mer., gent., to Henry Arthur, Earl of Powis, of all claim to the wastes called Y Voel Goch and Y Voel Fraith and the lead mines there, part of the farm called Tuthen Y Bruddell'*²¹. So it would appear that Griffith Pugh (Hugh) also owned Tyddyn y Briddell at this time.



This period appears to have been one of prosperity for Griffith Owen, since a barn at Bryn Dinas bears the dates 1740 and 1762, along with the inscription 'GOS' (i.e. Griffith and Susanna Owen) in three locations.

Searching for information about the Owens families has been fairly fruitless as they are very common names in the locality. In addition this issue is made more complicated by the fact that Griffith Owen was also known as Griffith Pugh and Griffith Hugh.



From around 1798 Bryn Dinas was occupied by Lewis Vaughan and his family (yeoman farmers) for nearly 70 years – his daughter was involved in farming Rhownair through marriage and one of his grandsons farmed Dysyrnant then Tyddyn y Berllan, Abertrinant; a granddaughter married the farmer at Tynohir, Isygarreg, Montgomery, then moved to Fach Goch, a second through marriage farmed at Talybont, Llanegryn and a third granddaughter married into Duffrynglycul.

Two of Lewis Vaughan's grandsons who farmed Bryn Dinas until about 1865 married: William in about 1858 and had a son and daughter, but the family appear to have lived in Tywyn and not on the farm; and Lewis who married after he had retired and had moved to Aberdyfi - he had one daughter. The third grandson, David, also moved to Aberdyfi and lived with his brother, Lewis, and remained single. From about 1865 the farm was occupied by a number of tenant farmers until around the middle of the 1900s when it became owner occupied.

There are some interesting insights of life associated with Bryn Dinas:

²¹ National Library of Wales Document 21536. (Tuthen Y Bruddell is now Tyddyn y Briddell). The background to this document is dealt with by David E Bicks in his book 'Old Metal Mines of mid-Wales' 1978, The Pound House, ISBN 0 9502040 8 0

The Bryn Dinas Mine accounts of 1752 to 1793 are a fascinating document. They record the disbursements for the Bryn Dinas Lead Mine for 41 year in great detail. This includes how many men and women were employed, and their wages, the cost of getting their wages (8d) from Tywyn, wood used, amounts of explosive bought, cost of sharpening tools and so on. In addition, in the first few years some spare pages appear to have been used for the Bryn Dinas farm accounts. An entry, probably 1752, shows purchase of:

	£ s d
7½ lbs Souchong	2. 5. 0
7 lbs Congou	1. 8. 0
1 lb Bohea	2. 0
	3.17. 6
Irish Cloth	3.12. 6
Woolen cloth	2. 6. 1
	9.16. 1
Loaf sugar	3. 0. 6
Brown do.	1. 6.10
Soap	1. 5. 0
Hat Mrs Pugh	13. 0
Starch	3. 1
Sundr.	3.11. 1

This gives a wonderful insight into the provisions for Bryn Dinas – who would have thought they would be buying so much China tea! It is also a large amount of money!

In 1793 Griffith Owens (owner and occupier) died. In his Will he leaves to his son Hugh and to his daughters Margaret, Jane and Elizabeth the sum of 5/- each and the remainder to his wife, Susan. The Inventory attached to the Will Shows:

	£ s d
Wearing apparel horse & saddle	2.10. 0
Two Cowes	7. 0. 0
One Pig	15. 0
Cupboard	3. 0. 0
Clock	2. 0. 0
Three Beds	7.10. 0
Three Bords & Settle	2. 0. 0
Chesterdraw & Clothes Press	5. 0. 0
Four Chestes	4. 0. 0
Small house hold stuff	3.15. 0
Two beams of oak	2. 0. 0
	£39.10. 0

Lewis Vaughan (tenant) died in 1807 and in his Will he leaves to his daughter, Jane Humphrey (possibly an error as she was Jane Evans – her first son was Humphrey Evans - or it could be that she had taken her son's name as her surname because her husband had

died) £30. The Executors were his sons, William, Lewis and John (Vaughan) who 'shared and share alike' his estate. The attached Inventory states: *'An Inventory of goods, chattels and effects of the late Lewis Vaughan of Bryn Dinas, parish of Towyn: Implements of husbandry, horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, corn, and household furniture - £280.'*

In 1827 there is an Indenture between Humphrey Thomas of Escuan, Towyn, farmer, in the first part, David Jones of Towyn, farmer and John Vaughan of Bryn Dinas, farmer in the second part and 49 named people in the third part. Basically Humphrey Thomas had incurred debts of over £1,233 and it was David Jones and John Vaughan's job to deal with the collection and sale of Thomas's possessions and distribute the money raised to the creditors (the third part). John Vaughan was owed £64.10.0. In addition Thomas lost the tenancy of the farm as the Indenture required it to be returned to Athelston Corbet of Ynysmaengwyn, Tywyn by 25 March 1828 (he was one of the leading and most famous improving farmers in early 19th century in N Wales). What happened to Thomas after that? Did he become destitute?

As mentioned previously, by 1839/42 Bryn Dinas, Allt-Lwyd and Dyffryn Gwyn had been acquired by the Evans family (no information on them found to date) and by the mid-1850s by the Morris family who added Tyddyn y Briddell and called their holdings the 'Dyffryn Estate.'



The Will of William Vaughan of Court (Cwrt), Tywyn was proved in 1846. He was a bachelor. His sister, Jane Evans of Rhowier and another were executors. He left to his brother John Vaughan of Bryn Dinas £2, to nephews Lewis and Robert Vaughan (probably Richard) of Bryn Dinas and Humphrey and Lewis Evans of Rhowier, 'my share of the ship Blanche

[Blanche] value £10.' Blanche was a schooner built in 1840 by John Lewis of Aberdyfi (probably at Penhelig). She was 49 tons, 47' long x 16' beam x 9' depth of hold. The boat was named after original owner's daughter, Blanche Thruston of Talgarth, Pennal.

A letter from Hugh Evans, 'Bryn dinas, Towyn' to Miss Morris in 1920 is of interest. This letter is superficially about repairing the slates and ridge tiles and the problem with getting someone to do it and to find cement, but the main purpose appears to be about the notice to quit he has received and the problems with his crops ('no oats, potatoes or roots of any kind').

DYFFFRYN GWYN

Coflein says the house was visited in 2004 and concluded that *'Dyffryn-gwyn must have been one of the most important dwellings in Cwm Maethlon ... the historic development remains far from certain... It would appear that the house was built in 1640, by H.P.²² as inscribed over the north hall window, perhaps re-using some earlier foundations (partly visible under the east gable-end)) as a storeyed, direct-entry, end-chimney house, but with a highly unusual wide entrance-passage flanked by post-and-panel partitions.*

'The later insertion of a central stairway would have involved a remodelling of the upper floor.' Could all this have been the work of the Hughes' who added the small hitherto-overlooked inscription on the east gable wall - 15th December/?PICR? Hughes Hoc Fecit/Anno Domini 1772. Does the 'Hoc' refer to building work or merely the inscription itself?' This question is discussed later.



Some timbers in the house were subjected to dendrochronological dating in 2016. The report says: *'The best estimate of the ring numbers suggests a felling date range of 1607-17, although the trees may possibly have been standing dead for a few years before felling.'*

The Crown Rental of 1592 shows no reference to Dyffryn Gwyn. In 1629 a Bond shows a covenant from David John David of parish 'Towin', county Merioneth, gent, to Hugh Pryce of Dyffryn Gwyn, gent. The covenant was for 'a deed of fee simple'. Land owned in fee simple is owned completely, without any limitations or conditions. The name of the land is not given. This is the first mention of Dyffryn Gwyn but the valley was occasionally called Dyffryn Gwyn (the river running through the valley is called Afon Dyffryn Gwyn) as well as Cwm Maethlon so care has to be taken not to assume the purchase of the land was for the purpose of building the house. However, the date of the Bond, the dendro-dating results and the report on Coflein that the existing house was built by 1640, tends to show the house was built sometime between 1629 and 1640.

Hugh Price and his descendants appear to have owned Dyffryn Gwyn until around 1680 although one of the



²² probably Hugh Price

family links requires the use of patronymics²³ which cannot be fully evidenced at this time. Who Hugh Price was is lost in the annals of time. In 1633 the valley had three substantial landowners called Price: Sir James Price of Gogerddan, Cardiganshire who married Elizabeth Wynne of Ynysmaengwyn - both died in 1642 without a male heir; Henry Price of Escairwedden, Tywyn and Taltreuddyn, near Harlech, who was sheriff for the county (Merioneth) in 1630 and an Edward Price owning messuages²⁴, tenements and land at the west end of Cwm Maethlon around Caethle. Links to any of these three is but conjecture; however, there is no doubt that Hugh Price was a wealthy man.

In 1649 he buys a messuage called Pany y Carnedd in the Township of Kynvel, Towyn. The Township of Kynvel (Cynfal) appears to include most of Cwm Maethlon. There is a Pant y Carneddi located approximately a mile to the east of Dysyrnant. It is believed that the building, which is sited near to the road-side, was once a coaching inn. A more recent house was built between the ruins of the old Pant y Carneddi and the road, retaining the name; however, this house was burnt in the 1990s and is itself now a ruin.

In 1666 he leaves in his Will household and farm effects to the value of £113.3s. 0d, which was a considerable sum in those days – especially as then the value of houses and land were not included in Wills.

In 1672 his wife Elizabeth Price leaves in her Will £138 13s 4d. Her main beneficiary and Executor is her son Edward Hughes (patronymics?), there is also a bequest to 'Screeven' Hughes of £5; unfortunately his relationship with Elizabeth is not shown. This is important as a Scriven Hughes later becomes the owner of Dyffryn Gwyn.

In 1678 Hugh Edwards (patronymics again?) of 'Dyffryngwynn' is party to two documents in relation to aspects of the administration of the Will of William Vaughan of Caethle²⁵ who died in 1677.

In 1679 there is a conveyance from Screeven (Scriven) Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn, gent. to Edward Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn, gent. For a messuage and land called Pant y carneddi (same place as in 1649 transaction). So what is happening here? How has Screeven Hughes obtained the property? Why is he selling it back to Hugh Price's son? Are these two men related? Has Screeven Hughes acquired or purchased Dyffryn Gwyn? Are they both living there? Are the records referring to the valley, not the house? At present these questions are unanswered.

After the 1679 conveyance there is no further record of Edward Hughes or a Will in his name. However, in 1682 Hugh Edwards of Dyffryn Gwyn bequeath sums of money to his wife, Jane vrch Edwards ap Hughes, sons, daughters and grandchildren. Hugh John, his grandchild, son of John Edward, is name Executor. There is little doubt that his Will and the

²³ All the confusion and inconsistency which bedevils anyone researching their Welsh ancestors has its roots during the period when the Welsh were changing to the fixed English-style surname system. During this transitional period a Welsh person's last name may appear to be a fixed surname but he/she may still have been named in a patronymic manner (i.e. Edward Hughes's son is Hugh Edwards) . Often it seems that the owners of the names weren't too sure themselves, so Hugh Edwards might use either form!

²⁴ A messuage is a dwelling house with outbuildings and land assigned to its use

²⁵ The Vaughans of Caethle were a prominent and wealthy family who had lineage back to the Lords of Merioneth. For more information on Caethle and the Vaughans see 'Towyn on Sea – Merionethshire Vol. 1' by Sara Eade, 2016, pages 105-112.

Inventory attached refer to Dyffryn Gwyn as the Inventory (covering 3 pages) lists items in bedrooms and lofts of a substantial house – total value £123-00-00. There is no other house in Cwm Maethlon of this size (other than Caethle which belonged to the Vaughan family at this time). It is possible through patronymics that Hugh Edwards is Edward Hughes (son and Executor of Elizabeth vch Hughe of Dyffryn Gwyn's Will of 1672) or his son – but this is again is conjecture.

In any event after this Will there are no more records on this family as Scriven Hughes appears to have acquired Dyffryn Gwyn. We know more about Scriven Hughes (not least because it is an unusual first name). He was the son of Rees Hughes, Vicar of Wem and his wife Mary Scriven of Frodesley Hall, Shropshire. Her father was Sir Thomas Scriven (1584 - 1644), who distinguished himself in the army of King Charles I during the English Civil Wars, was knighted by the King on 29 September 1642. Sir Thomas was seriously wounded in an unsuccessful attack on Wem in October 1643, and he died on 21 January 1644.

An undated handwritten pedigree of Hughes and Rowlands families in the National Library of Wales shows the descent from Sir Thomas and confirms Mary marrying Rees and having a son Scrivan Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn 'baptised at Frodesley on 28 May 1647 and interred at Towyn.' Was Rees Hughes related to the family who originally built the house?

Scriven Hughes had a daughter, Catherine, who married John ap Rhinallt ap Hugh (or Pugh), of Erw Faethlon. One of her descendants was John Pughe of Bryn awel, Aberdyfi, who has been already mentioned in the 'Religion' section.

Scriven Hughes also had a son Edward Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn who in turn had a son Scriven Hughes (Jr.) of Dyffryn Gwyn, who married Ann Jones, daughter of ? Jones, Escau Fawr, Llanbryn-mair: they had 9 children, one of which was William Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn and later Bwlchgwyn, Arthog. William was born 16 February 1743, married Susanah daughter of Samuel Lloyd of Groves Arms Castle, Shropshire and died in 1814. William is the last of the Scriven Hughes family shown living at Dyffryn Gwyn but his Will shows him still to be the owner of both Dyffryn Gwyn and Alt-lwyd in 1815.

There is an interesting snippet from Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society²⁶: *'Colonel Richard Scriven, the eldest son of Sir Thomas Scriven, of Frodesley was born Aug. 26, 1625; took part under Sir John Owen in the Second Civil War, and led the forlorn hope at the battle of Bangor on June 5, 1648; on Oct. 30, 1648, compounded "for delinquency in arms in both wars" and was fined £100, and £4(?) for charges; in March, 1659-60, he was appointed a Royalist Commissioner for raising troops; at the Restoration he was made a D.L. for Shropshire, and Lieut. -Col. of the Militia, and was elected M.P. for Bishop's Castle in Sept. 16, 1679. He died at Dyffryn Gwyn, Co. Merioneth, Jan. 26, 1681-2, and was buried in Conover Church (Shropshire), his monument saying of him — fidelis fuit Principi, expers et fortis miles.'* Was he visiting his brother-in-law (Scriven Hughes Snr.), or living there with the family?

²⁶ *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* - Page 222 - The War Services of some Shropshire People: https://archive.org/stream/transactionsofsh42shro/transactionsofsh42shro_djvu.txt

Scriven Hughes (Snr.) was an attester in 1692 to the contents of the draft Vaughan's Estate Act: *'Draft which was designed to settle certain messuages, mills, lands and tenements in the county of Merioneth upon certain Trustees, to be sold or mortgaged towards 1691-2 the payment of the debts of William Vaughan and Jenkin Vaughan, Esqrs., deceased.'* These are the Vaughans of Caethle who had a very long running and very expensive legal battle with Vincent Corbet of Ynysmaengwyn which the Vaughan's eventually won, but by 1732 the trustees named in the Will of William Vaughan, had to sell the whole of the Caethle estate to pay off creditors – ironically, Madam Ann Owen, of Ynys, daughter and heiress of Vincent Corbet bought the estate.

Annexed to the draft is a consent to *'...the passing of the Bill, of John, Hugh, Griffith and Richard Vaughan, uncles of Margaret Vaughan, spinster, an infant daughter and heir of Jenkin Vaughan, being her next heirs, also of Anne Vaughan (who signs with her mark), her grandmother, under whose custody Margaret is, several of the sureties for Margaret's father and grandfather being now in prison for their debts, and their estates and families likely to be ruined, as will also the whole of Margaret's property, unless the Act pass'*. The Act was passed on 15 February 1692²⁷.

Scriven Hughes (Snr.) died in early 1698. His Will says he lives at Dyffryn Gwyn and the Inventory is for £47, considerably less than Hugh Edwards's Will of 1682. The Inventory summary says; *'The Inventory of ?? monies of Lowry Jones the relict of Scriven Hughes of Towyn...'*. There is no other record of Lowry. The Inventory lists far less livestock and farming implements or household furniture, articles, etc. than Hugh Edwards's Will.

Unfortunately there is a gap in the records from 1698 until 1746 where Scriven Hughes (Jr.) of Dufferungwin, gent, is a witness to Owen Lloyd 'surveyor of the port of Aberdovey' receiving a Sacrament Certificate. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the fear of a Catholic rebellion and takeover of the English Government occupied the minds of the Monarchy and Parliament. Parliament passed two acts: the Corporation Act (1661) and 'An Act for preventing Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants' (1673); the latter act became better known as the Test Act. As a result persons seeking to hold any public office, or civil or military position by appointment of the Crown, or received pay from the Crown were required to make an oath of loyalty to the Crown and Church of England, and to attend church to take part in the Anglican Communion.

In 1751 a Richard Parry of Ty'n-y-pwll was named in a release (a contractual agreement by which one individual assents to relinquish a claim or right under the law to another individual against whom such claim or right is enforceable). It is possible that the 'Ty'n y Pwll' is the house located approximately half a mile to the west of Dyffryn Gwyn. This house, built on land that now belongs to Erw Faethlon farm, ceased to be a dwelling some years ago, being used instead as a barn, and is now in a state of considerable dilapidation. His son Oliver Parry of Cefn Maes Mawr, Machynlleth is shown to be married to Anne, daughter of Scriven Hughes (Jr.), Gent, of 'Allt Llywd, Towyn'. This is interesting: Allt-lywd

²⁷ The Vaughan's Estate Act was a Personal Act of Parliament – these Acts evolved as a means of permitting individuals to obtain redress from a specific wrong, or to obtain a benefit that was not otherwise available through statute or the common law. The granting of divorces, the granting of citizenship foreigners, legal name changes, and changing the terms of a will, were often given effect through this means. In more recent years the use of Personal Acts has greatly decreased and no Personal Acts have been passed since 1987

was connected with Bryn Dinas in 1633, however it is definitely in the Hughes family by 1698 and it is mentioned in William Hughes's 1815 Will together with Dyffryn Gwyn, although William was living in Bwlchgwyn, Arthog by the time of his death. So why was Scriven Hughes (Jr.) living in Allt-lwyd instead of Dyffryn Gwyn? The answer could possibly be because the house had become unsafe?

The inscription already mentioned on the east gable wall – '15th December/?PICR? Hughes Hoc Fecit/Anno Domini 1772' is a bit of a mystery especially as the 'History of Merioneth II' says this is RICE Hughes. Scriven Hughes (Jr.) had died by 1771, so the owner was almost certainly his son, William Hughes. Scriven Hughes (Jr.) also had a son Rice but he was born in 1755. William did not have a son Rice. So who is this person? One theory is that the gable ends of the house were unstable and there is evidence of re-building. So it is possible that the inscription was made by the builder who, coincidentally, had the same surname as the owner. On the same gable wall, but higher up, is a further inscription, 'E.E. 1893 Mason' which tends to support this premise. It may well be that the house was becoming unsafe in 1751 and that is why Scriven Hughes (Jr.) was living in Allt-lwyd.

It would appear that William Hughes left Dyffryn Gwyn sometime after his father's death (1771) and by 1795 tenants were living in the property and farming the land. So began the slow decline of the house until the late 20th century. Interestingly William Hughes is mentioned in 'Brief Glory'²⁸ as the local Coastwatcher who compiled a 'List of Vessels arriving in and departing from the Dovey in the years 1791-4'. So the connection with the port of Aberdyfi was continued by Scriven Hughes (Jr.)'s son.

By 1850 the house and lands were owned by the Morris Family of Machynlleth.

'Hanes Achos Eglwys Maethlon 1785 – 1985' tells that:

'Some five years later, in 1790, we hear for the first time of two brothers, Daniel and Evan Jones of Dyffryngwyn, who held religious services in this area for the first time. The two brothers were very religious and they joined other first Nonconformists in the area. They gathered in Towyn to hold a religious meeting with the few believers who were there. Religious meetings were also held at Dyffryn Gwyn and it was from these small beginnings that the Methodists began in Maethlon.'

'Daniel and Evan Jones were farmers and men more intelligent than average, according to Edward Williams, Porthgwyn, the first pioneer of Methodism in Vale Dysynni. Both elders were elected at the monthly meeting in Aberdyfi, and they were responsible for establishing the Chapel in Maethlon.'

'The debt of the valley is incalculable for the brothers' versatility on vision, devotion, courage and above all else while resisting the tyrant of Ynysmaengwyn. During 1795 Daniel Jones and his wife were warned by Edward Corbett [Corbet], Squire, Ynysmaengwyn, to leave Dyffryngwyn because of their adherence to the Methodist religion. The choice was to abandon the religion or abandon the farm. They decided to say goodbye to Dyffryngwyn and

²⁸ See footnote 4

the two went to live in Tregaron area in 1806.'

In 1810 Daniel Jones of Dyffryngwyn, [tenant] farmer amongst others was party to a lease for 99 years of a parcel of land in a meadow known as Werglodd Tan y Bryn upon which the Methodist chapel had been built. The annual rent was 10s. Clearly he was back in Dyffryn Gwyn at this time.

There are a number of news stories and adverts in the local papers concerning Dyffryn Gwyn. The following are three of the most interesting:

1878 March 8 - Advert: GROWING TIMBER FOR SALE BY PRIVATE CONTRACT. THE following lots of excellent TIMBER and POLES, now growing on Dyffryn Gwyn Farm, in the Parish of Towyn, Merionethshire, about four miles from the Railway Station, are offered for Sale by Private Contract, as follows : 1,057 Larch Timber and Poles - 95 Ash 447 Oak , 14 Chestnut , 49 Alder, 65 Sycamore. The Tenant will show the lots. Application for further particulars to be made to Miss MORRIS, Mount Pleasant, Goginan, Aberystwyth.

1900 September 28 - The death took place on Tuesday, September 18th, at the age of seventy-three, of Mr Edward Charles Rowlands of 27, Sea View-terrace. Deceased was the son of the late Mr Rowland Rowlands and Mrs Anne Rowlands of Bwlchgwyn, and a nephew of the late Lieut.-Colonel Scriven Hughes, R. Hughes, and T. Hughes of Dyffryn Gwyn, and great grandson of the late Susanah Lloyd of Groves Arms Castle, Ludlow. The Hughes's family were the first to speculate on the lead mines in the Happy Valley. Mr Rowlands was beloved by all who knew him and leaves a widow and daughter to mourn their loss. His remains were buried in the Cemetery on Friday and the funeral was very largely attended.

1903 March 20 - The Medical Officer reported (to Towyn Urban District Council) that he had visited Dyffryngwyn, the front wall of which bulged considerably. The inside wall was one mass of dampness, the plaster being softened by the action of the water and crumbling away. The three bedrooms in the house were very damp. In one room he found green mould growing on the inside walls near the window. The dairy had been well white-washed and was in good condition, and the back-kitchen was new and good. The water for domestic purposes was obtained from a well, and the occupier informed him that it was of excellent quality. The condition of the house generally was such as to call for the immediate attention of the Sanitary Authority.

TYDDYN Y BRIDDELL

Again, not being part of a large estate makes research more difficult as records were either not kept or lost over time – hence large gaps are evident.

In the Coflein records, the only information they have dates to 1968. It shows that Tyddyn y Bridell was a: 'Type A storeyed home, probably early 18th century. Not entered. Requires photographing'.

There is no trace of Tyddyn y Briddell in the 1633 Crown Rental so the assessment on Coflein that this was a later house in the valley appears correct. It is likely that part of the current dwelling was built in 1741 by Griffith Owen (see the history of Bryn Dinas), as suggested by the inscription above the front door. This period appears to have been one of prosperity for Griffith Owen, since a barn at Bryn Dinas bears the dates 1740 and 1762, along with the inscription 'GOS' (i.e. Griffith and Susanna Owen) in three locations.



What references have been found can only give us a glimpse into those who owned and occupied the property but nevertheless they do give us some insights to life in days gone by.

As mentioned in the Bryn Dinas section Griffith Owen (alias Griffith Pugh/Hugh) appears to have owned Bryn Dinas and Tyddyn y Briddell in 1754.

There are four entries in the Parish Registers for baptisms between 1775 and 1778 which show house names:

- 13 Jan 1775 – Hugh son of Hugh Owen of Tyddyn-y-Bridell by Jane his wife
- 24 ? 1776 - Hugh son of Morgan Hugh of Tyddyn-y-Bridell by Jane his wife
- 8 April 1777 – Anne daughter of Robert Lewis of Tyddyn-y-Bridell by Margaret his wife
- 17 Sept 1778 – Jacob son of John Lewis Labourer of Tyddyn-y-Bridell by Gwyn his wife.

This is a confusing snapshot of the occupants. All it really tells us is that the house was inhabited at this time. However, local historian Sue Passmore records²⁹ 'William Lloyd of the Parish of Llanegryn, and Margaret Owen of the Parish of Tywyn were married [in Tywyn] on Feb; 2nd 1756. [No house names were given but Scriven Hughes (of Dyffryn Gwyn) was a witness.] Margaret was the daughter of Griffith Hugh Owen of 'Bryndinas in Cwm Dyffryn', a place known today as 'Happy Valley'. John Lloyd is described as the son of William Lloyd of Gwyddfryniau, [Llanegryn], Gent.' She also states that Margaret Pugh's brother, Hugh Owen, appeared in the Rolls of the Quarter Sessions in 1779. This is correct and in the Rolls he is

²⁹ Gwynedd Roots – the Journal of the Gwynedd Family History Society, 1998, pages 8-9

shown as living in Tyddyn y Briddell.

So, there is evidence that Hugh Owen was the owner of Tyddyn y Briddell at that time as only property owners served on the Grand Jury and there is circumstantial evidence that Hugh Owen was the son of Griffith Hugh Owen of Bryn Dinas and that therefore both farms remain the Owen family's possession at this time.

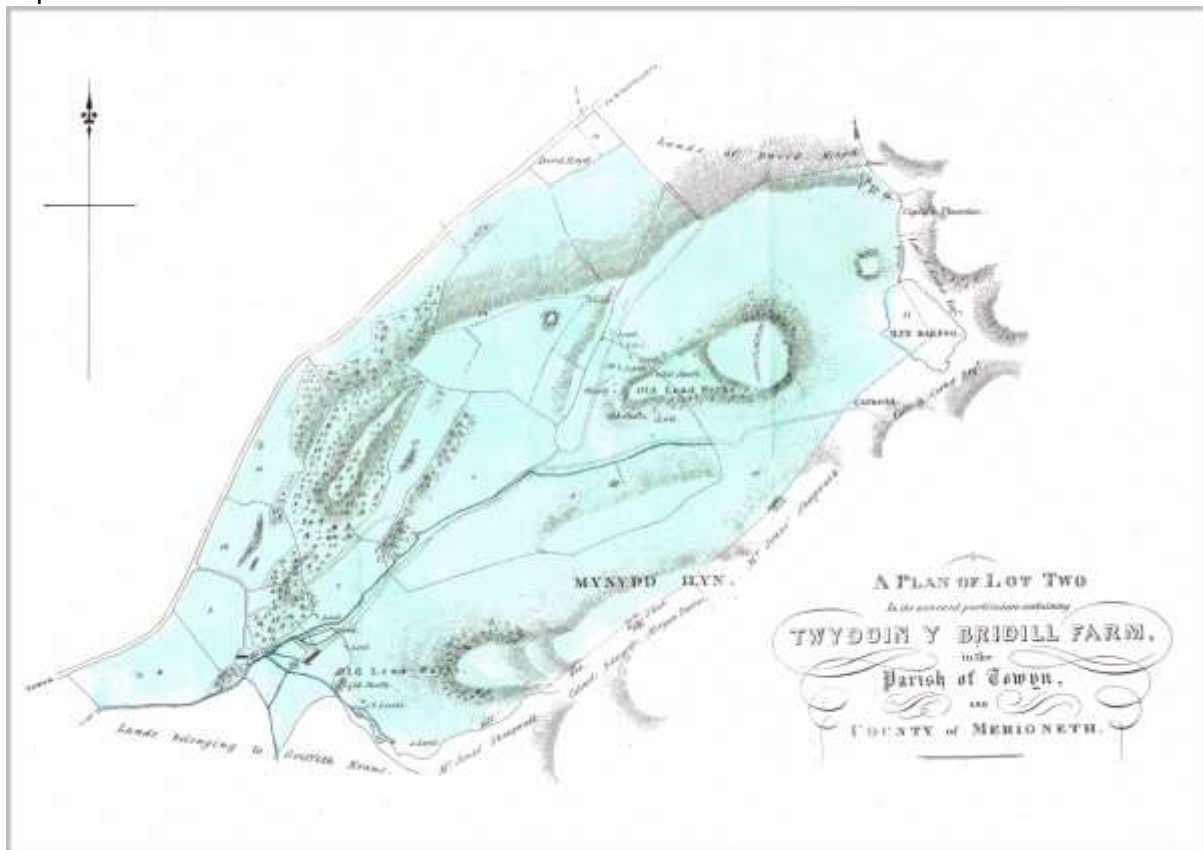
Again there appear to be no records until the early 1800s. In the Parish Registers there are two burial records:

1. John Jones of Tyddynbrethell, 7 April, 1815, aged 33
2. Ann Jones of Tyddynbrethell, 12 March 1829, aged 79.

At St Cadfan's Church, Tywyn, there are two head stones:

- *Mewn coff adwriaeth am Jane gwraig Robert Jones gynt o Dyddyn y Briddell, yr hon a/ymadawood a'r bywyd hwn/Gorphenaf 19eg 1820 yn y 75 ain flwyddyn o'l hoedran Hefyd Jane gwraig Edward Thomas cwrt plwyf Towyn Bu farw Mehefin 24 ain 1852 75 mlwydd oed. [In loving memory of Jane wife of Robert Jones formally of Tyddyn y Briddell who departed this life on July 19th 1820 in her 75 year. Also Edward Thomas of Towyn died June 24th 1852, 75 years old.]*
- In Memory of Hugh Jones of Tyddyn y Briddell in the Parish of Tywyn who departed this life March 21 1821 aged 34 years. Also of Mary Jones relict of the above who departed ... (no info)

The next detailed mention of Tyddyn y Briddell is to be found in sales particulars dated 15 September 1837.



The sale was widely advertised both in local newspapers and in the London Gazette. In the issue for 18 August 1837, the property is included within a wider sale of a number of 'Freehold estates in the several Counties of Merioneth, Montgomery, Cardigan and Carnarvon'. The notice says that the property (along with the other properties that are listed) are being sold as follows:

'To be peremptorily sold, pursuant to an Order of the High Court of Chancery, made in the cause of Jones versus Skinner, with the approbation of Sir Giffin Wilson Knt. one of the Masters of the said Court, part of the freehold estates of the late Humphrey Rowlands Jones Esq. Of Garthmill-hall, in the county of Montgomery, in several lots, at times and places following.'

Chancery Courts dealt largely with disputes over inheritance and wills, lands, trusts, debts, marriage settlements and other parts of the fabric of daily life and were known as 'equity courts' since they were authorised to apply the principles of equity, as opposed to law. A search to find out more information about the case of Jones versus Skinner, to perhaps reveal what precipitated the sale, has so far drawn a blank. It appears that the information may lie within a book housed in the National Archives at Kew³⁰. We have not had an opportunity to visit the National Archives to examine the book in question but what we have seen is a copy of the Will of Humphrey Rowland Jones who died in 1828. Humphrey Rowland Jones was also known as Humphrey Rowlands and Rowland Jones. The Will is difficult to read but what can be made out is as follows:

'I, Humphrey Rowlands Jones of Garthmill Hall in the County of Montgomery Esquire being of sound mind and memory do hereby declare this to be my last will and testament. First I give and bequeath unto my wife and the daughter of the said John Jones of Bosherton in the County of Pembroke all the furniture, plate, linen, China, glass and all singular the carriages, livestock, implements of husbandry and all other disposable property which shall be upon the premises at Garthmill Hall at the time of my demise. I also give and bequeath unto my said wife and unto David Jones of Trusfewelin, Thomas Owen of Dyffryn Esq, The Rev'd John Davis of Newtown and Mr Joseph Jones of Dolobran all in the said County of Montgomery or the survivors of them In Trust to be equally divided between the children which I now have or may have hereafter with my present wife all property to which I am possessed of which is not settled by either of my Marriage Settlements and all rents which shall be due from my Estates at the time of my demise or if observed that before the said division is made and as soon as convenient after my demise It is my request that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid out of the property so left in trust if my personal property not before mentioned should be insufficient to discharge the same.

Signed HR Jones 4th ... 1819

Witnesses Mr Jones of Trusfewelin; Richard Beedle, Wheelwright; Robert Jones, servant to HR Jones

On the 16th April 1828 ..?.. (with the will annexed of the Goods of this Humphrey Rowlands Jones late of Garthmill Hall in the County of Montgomery Esquire ..?...was granted to Thomas Owen out of the Residuary Legatees ... trust being first sworn by duly to act

³⁰ Catalogue reference C 101/2879

administer ... Executor.'

The only other information that has been found relating to the case of Jones versus Skinner is that the plaintiffs were 'Ann Jones, widow, and Thomas Jones, Ann Francis Parlow Jones, Rees Jones, Charlotte Jones, John Morgan, Edward Jones and Frances Elizabeth Jones by the said Ann Jones their mother and next friend'. The defendants are named as 'Charlotte Jane Skinner and David Jones, Thomas Owen, Joseph Jones, John Davies and Charles Jones, infant' who may have been tenants of the properties. No coverage of the case in newspapers of the day has been found so for the moment the mystery must remain.

Whilst neither the details of why the case went to the Chancery Court are known nor the occupant of the farm at the time of the sale, what the sales particulars do give us is a feel for the property by its description in the sales catalogue:

LOT II

'An excellent, compact, productive, and well-wooded FREEHOLD ESTATE, called 'TYDDYN-Y-BRIDDILL', in the Parish of TOWYN, in the County of Merioneth, comprising a Farm House, Out-buildings, &c. and upwards of 180 Acres, more or less, of Land, in the occupation of Mr (blank) at the annual rent of £35.'

The extent of the farm holdings is over 191 acres and the lot is subject to a quit rent of 1s 10d per annum and the Land Tax of 14s per annum. The particulars go on to describe the farm as having

'...a good sheepwalk, and upon it several Shafts have been sunk and Levels driven, and considerable quantities of Lead Ore procured.'

The particulars go on to say:

'The Timber Plantations on this Lot are thriving, and are to be taken at a valuation, to be produced, at the time of sale.'

We know from the Tithe Schedule that David Lewis is the owner sometime between 1839 and 1842 and therefore possibly the purchaser of the Lot. And we know that by the 1850s Lewis Morris owned Bryn Dinas, Allt -lwyd and Duffryn Gwyn (probably purchasing them from the Estate of Griffith Evans). So he may well have bought Tydden y Brindell from David Lewis in the interim period.

There are some other interesting insights of life associated with Tyddyn y Briddell:

The occupation of Tyddyn y Briddell as found in the census records of 1841 to 1911 shows some stability in the tenancies. The Jones family were still in occupation in 1841 but had moved on by 1851, and the Richards family took up the tenancy. The Humphrey family were there in 1861 but the son of the Richards family returned in 1871. The Edwards family farmed from 1881 into the 1890s; then another Edwards family (not related) were there to at least 1911.

The Humphrey family shown at Tyddyn y Briddell in 1861 appear to have had a hard time. Robert Humphrey, farmed Rhydgaled in Pennal from at least 1841 with Sarah, his wife; his daughter, Elizabeth (who appears to be a widow at 25); Elizabeth's son, Robert, and 5 servants. Robert senior died sometime before 1851 and Sarah, Elizabeth (who is now shown as a widow) and Robert junior carried on the farm. By 1861 they are at Tyddyn y Briddell with 1 servant. By 1871 Sarah is dead and Elizabeth is on her own at Llwynceilyn, Pennal: Robert appears to have disappeared off the radar. In 1881 Elizabeth is a pauper still living at Llwynceilyn. In 1885 she dies.

In the sales particulars of 1837 above there is a reference to the production of lead ore at Tyddyn y Bridell. In the 1978 published book³¹ it says that there were two independent groups of workings on the farm and the adjacent waste land (Voel Goch and Voel Fraith) and that in 1752 these were leased by Griffith Pugh of Bryn Dinas to John Scott and Henry Bowdler for a term of 21 years. It continues *'within a short time about 60 tons of lead ore had been raised in the Voel section. Lord Powys and his agent Henry Hennings then appropriated Voel under a grant from the Crown and Scott and Bowdler continued to work all or part of the Tyddyn y Bridell ground until 1762 under the name Bryn Dinas. It continued to be mined profitably until 1827 when there began a period of declining lead prices. After 1830 there are no records of production until 1851 when 14 tons of lead were returned.'*

Ten years later we are told that, *'The ladies who own the mine have exhausted their capital and are consequently unable to extend the level which had nearly reached the lode before their father's death.'* One hundred tons of ore were said to have been already raised, but none of it figured in official returns. It is not spelled out who 'the sisters' are but it can be assumed that these were the Morris sisters.

As mentioned earlier by 1875 many roads had not been maintained or improved so a new Act was passed to raise the necessary money. Trustees were appointed for each district with the power to take tolls and assign or mortgage the tolls as security for money borrowed. Trustees were authorised to erect, rebuild and keep in repair bridges and widen roads. Amongst the Trustees listed was Hugh Owen of Tyddyn y Bridell.

In 1878 Mr. Owen Williams, Inspector of Health, reported as follows:

'I served Mr. John Rowlands, of Tenby, with a notice, sent through the post and registered, on account of the state of his property in Vicarage-lane, Towyn. I also sent a notice, in the same manner, to Miss Anne Morris, of Goginan (a small village in Ceredigion), concerning defects in her farm, Tyddyn-y-briddell, Towyn.'

Obviously the owners (Morris family) were not keeping the farm in good order, possibly because the rents received by the Morris's during the agricultural depression caused them to cut back on maintenance.

In 1888 P.C. John Lewis charged Rees Edwards, Tyddyn y Briddell, with having kept two dogs without licences on the 11th May. P.C. John Lewis said that on Friday, the 11th May, he

³¹ The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales by David E Black (ISBN 0 950 2040 8 0) - pages 6 and 7

visited defendant's house, where he saw two dogs. He asked defendant's wife if she had licences for the dogs, and she replied, 'I do not know, perhaps my husband knows.' After he had gone a little way off, she turned round and said, 'To tell you the truth, we have no licences.' The Clerk stated that the charge was taken out on the 11th May, but on the 18th May the exemption licences were taken out. The Bench dismissed the case on payment of costs.

DYSYRNANT

As with many houses and places the spelling of the house name varies, and can cause confusion when searching records. Regarding where Dysrynant was in relation to the rest of



the valley, the Cassini map of 1833 shows Drys yr Nant north of the road, but another building, Dys yr Nant Uchaf on the south side of the road. It is believed that these two houses were also known as 'Dysrynant Fawr' (to the north, and the location of the present Dysrynant), and 'Dysrynant Fach' (to the south). 'Dysrynant Fach' was also known as 'Tyddyn Gwilym'. Indeed, 'Tyddyn Gwilym' is the name currently attached to that building. Tyddyn Gwilym was used for many years as a barn, but has since been returned to a dwelling.

The first mention of the house we have found is in the 1592 Crown Rentals – 'Tres y nant lands of John Vaughan Esq. of Caethle - in the tenure of Rowland Lewis'. It is also in the Crown Lands Rental of 1633, this time spelt 'Drys yr Nant' and the land is shown as belonging to 'John Vaughan in the tenure of Richard Lewis'.

The Vaughans were an influential land owning family in this area living in Caethle at the west end of Cwm Maethlon from at least Elizabethan times.



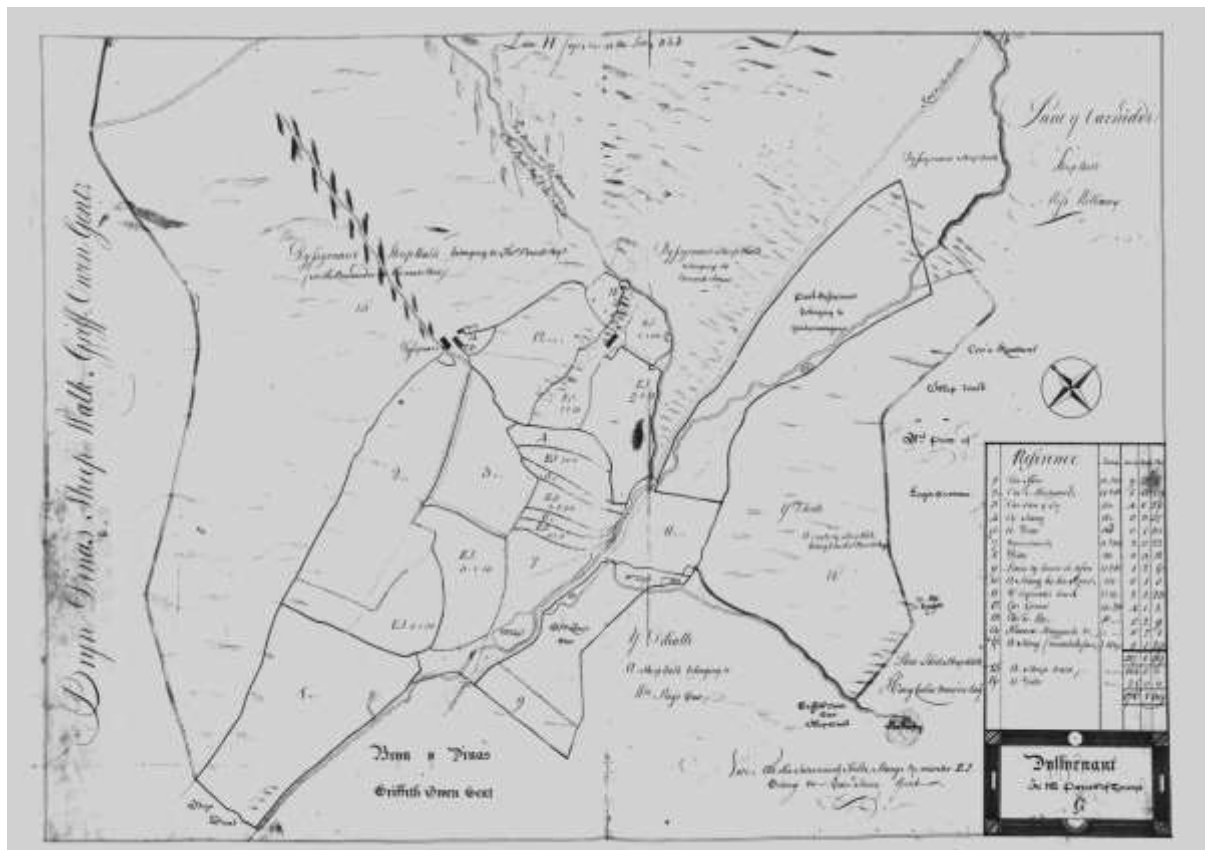
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In 1677 the then owner William Vaughan died. In his Will of 1678, 'Drys yr Nant' is as one of his properties. In 1694, William's youngest son, Hugh Vaughan of Caethle, leaves documents for the surrender and release, though further information has not been found.

Sometime after (around 1730) there was a dispute between the Vaughans and Vincent Corbet of Ynysmaengywn, another significant landowning family in the area. They had an expensive legal battle lasting over 15 years concerning land ownership. Although the Vaughans eventually won the dispute it bankrupted the family and they were forced to sell the whole of the Caethle estate to pay off the creditors. Ironically it was the widow of Vincent Corbet who was then in a position to purchase the estate which included to Dysrynant.

Caethle was obviously a house of considerable status in the 18th century and before. It became Caethle Farmhouse in the early 1800s - there do not appear to be any pictures or drawing of it in its heyday. There is no record of the house on Coflein. From the 1840 tithe

map compared with the OS 1888-1913 it appears that the whole area was redeveloped. The next that we know of the ownership is in 1760, where an Estate map shows Thomas Powell as owner- it is not clear whether he was also the occupier. However, he makes a most advantageous marriage to Elin Corbet of Ynysmaengwyn. At 26, he is young to manage the farm (Dysyrnant).



© National Library of Wales

By 1776 Hugh Rees is farming the estate. His wife and three children, two daughters and one son, live there. There is a Will made when he is sick 'but of sound mind memory and understanding.' £50 is left to each daughter while the remainder of his goods were shared between his wife and son. It seems unusual to only have three children but maybe the high mortality rate of children from infectious diseases caused only three to survive to adulthood.

In 1819, one Anne Woodward had been living at 'Dys yr Nant' and was buried at St. Cadfan's in Tywyn. We have a Will for an Anne Edward living at 'Drys yr Nant', made in 1815 and it is reasonable to assume this is the same person, as the Will shows she died in 1819. She leaves her children just one shilling each, except one daughter, Sarah Pryce, who inherited the remainder of her goods and chattels (dresses, bedlinen and £78.4.0 cash). The total amount came to £87.13.0.

In 1821 a labourer, John Davies, working at the farm had his son baptised at St Cadfan's. Sadly the next family living here lose their son aged 17 and several years later lose their daughter too.

The 1841 census shows Richard and Ann Jones occupying Dysrynant with their five children.

The Tithe schedule of about 1847 shows Richard Jones as the occupier but no owner is recorded.

By 1851 Richard Vaughan (David's brother) is the occupier of the farm, aged 26 with 50 acres of land to work, but by 1910 his son David has 278 acres. Richard's daughter, Elizabeth, marries Evan James Dyffrynglyncul (a house on the road from Cwm Maethlon going west which meets the Tywyn to Aberdyfi road) but sadly dies young. Evan later marries her younger sister, Jane, and they have a daughter, Catherine. Richard moves to Tyddyn y Berth but leaves his sons (John, David and Humphrey) to run Dysrynant between 1871 and 1881 – the exact dates are not known. In 1891 the sons are joint tenants; David and Humphrey remain until their deaths in 1932 and 1933 respectively. Both are buried in Cwm Maethlon Chapel.

In 1860 the Machynlleth, Aberystwyth and Towyn Railway applied to Parliament to create a line and one of the farms it would have passed through included Dysrynant. This route never materialised and the trains took a coastal route as mentioned earlier.

A dispute over sheep took place in 1885 between Richard Vaughan (Jr.) aged 24 and a neighbouring shepherd, John Morgan, accusing each other of assault. Witnesses were called to prove the good character of Morgan but the bench decided that Vaughan had proved his case and the charge against him was dismissed. Morgan was bound over to keep the peace for 12 months. One cannot help feeling that the truth is somewhere in between! Sheep trespassing onto neighbours land happened frequently, there must have been many disputes that never reached the courts and were settled in a more informal way!

The Land Tax for 1910 shows the occupiers of Dysrynant as David and Humphrey M Vaughan. The owner is Griffith Tudor Jones, Cefngwyr y grug, Aberhosan, Machynlleth. The 1911 census shows Griffith T Jones as a farmer, aged 58, at the same address. Interestingly his father (also called Griffith Tudor Jones) is shown in the 1871 census as aged 81 and a landed proprietor and farmer of 600 acres. So it is possible that Dysrynant had been in the Jones's family for many years.



By the middle of the 20th century John and Catherine Evans are established at Dysrynant. the Vaughans having moved to Pall Mall, Tywyn. The new owner, John Henry Evans, was a native of Abertrinant, near Abergynolwyn, and it was there that most of his sons were raised before moving to Dysrynant.

The Evans' had a large family of sons but the family was struck by dreadful tragedy. In May 1944, 3 of their children Charles 13, Christmas 11 and Idris aged 9 were counting cattle for their father. It is thought that they came upon an unexploded bomb, left behind by the army who used Dysrynant land for military drills. The

bomb exploded killing all three. An Inquest was held to discover if the army had committed any offence by leaving the bomb behind but the Coroner considered there was no case to answer. It was not publicised as it would be today and a memorial stone for the young lads was not put up to remember them until 2015 by Snowdonia National Park Authority.

Less than a year later (in April 1945) they lost a further son, John Henry towards the end of World War 2. John is buried in Becklingen War Cemetery in Germany. He was a member of the 4th battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (number 14759441). He was just 19 years old.

The farm was continued under a further son, Hefin, whilst another brother, Samuel, moved to Pennal and became a collector and authority in vintage farm machinery. He died recently. Dysrynant still remains in the possession of the Evans family.

