

NORTH WEST WALES DENDROCHRONOLOGY PROJECT

DATING OLD HOUSES - CAERNARFONSHIRE

DYFFRYN MYMBYR,

CAPEL CURIG, GWYNEDD

Capel Curig parish (formerly Llandegai parish, Creweryon/Cororion township) NGR SH 695573

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Dendrochronology Summary

Seven of the ten timbers sampled were dated. Two timbers retained complete sapwood, but this became detached on coring, with the possible result of losing some rings. The felling date ranges for these two timbers are therefore given as 1553–55, and the other timbers have likely felling date ranges that would seem to be in agreement with these, making the most likely date of construction of this house **1553–55**.

Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory Report 2011/3

House history summary

The main part of Dyffryn Mymbyr land fell within the medieval township of Crewerion, and appears to have belonged to the free Griffiths gavel (kinship group). It was progressively bought out during the 1440s by the major local landowning family, the Griffiths of Penrhyn, after which it was leased to tenants. The 1550s gentry house that has been dendro dated is associated with Margaret Griffith, a sister of the Penrhyn estate owner, Sir Rhys Griffith. The farm was leased in turn by all her three husbands, and passed briefly to her first husband's illegitimate son, Thomas Mutton. The house may have been built by him, or more likely by Margaret and her second husband, Thomas Griffith. Her stepson, second and third husbands also leased land in Dinorwyg township west of the Nant du boundary of Dyffryn Mymbyr, which was eventually added to the farm. Ownership of Dyffryn Mymbyr passed to the Thelwalls of Plas y Ward when Sir Piers Griffith of Penrhyn was unable to redeem a mortgage, but the Thelwalls soon sold it on to the Free School Beaumaris. Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn bought the farm back into Penrhyn estate in the 1780s, where it remained till the sell-off of the estate in the 1920s. It was made famous by its next owner, Thomas Fairbank, in his book 'I Bought a Mountain', before passing to his wife, Esme Kirby, founder of the Snowdonia Society conservation group. The property is now owned by the National Trust.

Early beginnings

Before 1341

The area now covered by Dyffryn Mymbyr farm has been inhabited for at least two thousand years. An archaeological survey for the RCAHMW Uplands Archaeology Survey found no less than eleven hut circles and hut circle groups in the area. Medieval settlement was mainly concentrated around the site of the current house, but with one house towards the western Pen y Gwryd end of the valley.

Ref. - K. Laws and I. Brooks, *Dyffryn Mymbyr Historical and Archaeological Survey* (2005).

1341

Mortgage of a share of Dyffryn Mymbyr

Gruffud ap Kyn' ap Howell mortgaged ('tir prid') his part of a property called Dyffryn Mymbyr to Bleddyn ap Einon ap Llywarch and his heirs for an initial term of 4 years commencing at the feast of Sants Phillip and James [1st May] 1341, and subsequently for quadrennial periods, for a consideration of 10s. Guarantors to the mortgage were Gruff' ap Howein, the brothers Gruff' ap Einon and Ieuan ap Einon, Ior' ap Mad' and Dafydd his son, Dafydd ap Einon, Mad' and Kyff' his sons, Gruff' Goch ap Mad' Llwyd, and David ap Melir. This is an interesting reference to the difficulty of selling land under medieval Welsh law, where free land was held by a gavel or kinship group, so an individual had no right of alienation. 'Prid' was a renewable mortgage, which from the mid-fourteenth century was typically for four years but could be renewed; this could be equivalent to a grant or sale. The guarantors may have been other members of the gavel, whose permission was required before one of their members could alienate land.

Ref. - Bangor University & Welsh Library, Penrhyn Further Additional MS FA 1/181, 'Mortgage of Dyffryn Mymbyr' (1341).

1352

Record of Carnarvon

Dyffryn Mymbyr is within the medieval township of Creweryon, virtually the area covered by the later parish of Llandegai. The Record of Carnarvon – a survey of the new Welsh possessions of the English Crown in 1352, following the conquest of Gwynedd – records that the township was occupied by 10 free gavellae or kinship groups. One of these, Gavel Griffri (the Griffiths gavel), is thought to have occupied the mountainous land of the Glyderau, from Llyn Ogwen to Capel Curig and including Dyffryn Mymbyr farm. The heir of Gavel Griffri was Mad. ap Eign. ap Mad. ap Ph. Members of Gavel Griffri held their land directly from the Prince of Wales, paying 6s 8d a year, but were required to perform knight service, an obligation to go on horseback with the lord at their own cost for forty days and afterwards at the cost of the lord for all other services.

Ref. - Commissioners on the public records of the Kingdom, *Registrum vulgariter nuncupatum "The record of Caernarvon"* (London, 1837).

1445-8

Dyffryn Mymbyr becomes part of the Penrhyn estate

In 1445, Willy map Gruff Goch, a free tenant of the king in the township of Creweryon made a gift (sold) of all the lands and tenements formerly belonging to Ieuan ap Pleth' Iloit in Dyffryn Mymbyr in the township of Creweryon to William ap Griffith. William Griffith had inherited the Penrhyn estate from his father, Gwilym ap Griffith, who founded the estate which became the foremost private landed estate in north Wales during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. William Griffith's mother, Joan Stanley, was an heiress from the Stanley family of Hooton, Cheshire. Her money enabled Gwilym to build on the foundations of the Penrhyn estate by buying up considerable property, including other lands near Capel Curig. She insisted on the lands they had acquired being passed to their son William by primogeniture (that is, all lands passed to a single male heir, as opposed to the normal Welsh division between sons), thereby cutting out her husband's son by his first marriage, who inherited only his own mother's lands in Anglesey.

Ref. – BUAWL PFA/1/206 (1445).

Later transactions show that this first purchase was only part of the lands in Dyffryn Mymbyr, for in 1447, the four sons of David ap Griffith ap David ap Griffith - William, Griffith, Rhys and Madog - sold their lands in Dyffryn Mymbyr, which they had inherited from their father to William Griffith's mother, Joan Stanley.

Ref. – BUAWL Penrhyn MS 170, 'Dyffryn Mymbyr deed of sale' (1447).

In 1448, Weirvill verch Kan ap Morus, formerly the wife of David ap Gruffith ap David, free tenant of the king in the township of Creweryon, made a gift (sold) to Joan Stanley of a third part of the lands and tenements of Weirvill's late husband which had come to her by right of dower. Presumably Weirvill was the mother of the four brothers who had sold their share of Dyffryn Mymbyr to Joan the previous year. It looks as if this transaction brought the Crewerion portion of Dyffryn Mymbyr lands into the complete ownership of the Griffiths of Penrhyn.

Ref. - BUAWL PFA/1/208. (1448)

1447- 1530

Joan's holding in Dyffryn Mymbyr passed to her son William Griffiths. There were two more generations of Sir William Griffiths, till the estate was inherited by Edward Griffith in 1511. He died in 1540 on active service in Ireland, and according to the entail in his father's will, the estate passed to his younger brother, Rhys (Rees) Griffiths. *Unfortunately for Rhys, the husbands of Edward's three daughters contested the inheritance*; although Rhys won after a lawsuit that dragged on for 20 years, one of Edward's sons-in-law was still contesting the case through the Court of Wards at the time of Rhys's death, and the cost left the Penrhyn family financially straightened. Throughout this period, Dyffryn Mymbyr was let to tenants who were not generally named.

The Margaret Griffith connection

One of Rhys Griffith's eight sisters, Margaret Griffith, had a close connection with the neighbourhood of Capel Curig and the farm of Dyffryn Mymbyr.

(Note: Griffith's Pedigrees confuses her with her aunt Margaret Griffith, sister of Sir William Griffith of Penrhyn, but her monumental inscription in Ruthin, where she was buried in 1594 alongside her third husband, Symon Thelwall, confirms her as the daughter of Sir William Griffith.)

Her first husband, whom she married in 1540/41 was Piers (or Peter) Mutton (Mytton) Esq., of Rhuddlan, Flintshire, Serjeant-at-Arms to King Henry VIII. Piers Mutton had benefited from the dissolution of the monasteries by acquiring in 1540 the House of Black Friars in Rhuddlan, with its possessions. Margaret brought a dowry of £40 to the marriage: Piers promised a dower of 40 marks a year to provide for Margaret after his death for the rest of her life. He fulfilled this in 1544 by settling on Margaret Plâs Newydd, the house he had built on the Rhuddlan Priory land. Piers also agreed in the marriage articles that all his lands, tenements etc. in England and Wales would pass to any children he had with Margaret. However, they didn't have any children, and in his will, Piers left half his possessions to Margaret and the other half to his three illegitimate children, John and Thomas Mutton and Jane, wife of Randulphe Bylington the younger.

Refs. – J-Morris, Shropshire Genealogies, vol. 4 p. 2019; BUAWL Penrhyn MS 51, 'Marriage articles of Margaret Griffith', (1540-41); National Archive, 'Will of Pers Mutton', (1551).

In **1542**, Piers Mutton leased the tenement of Kelly yr manach (Gelli Mynach) in Capel Curig, together with the extensive pastures of Bwlch Olyne on the Glyderau, bordering Dyffryn Mymbyr.

Ref. – National Library of Wales Wynnstey box 93/27.

1548

In February 1548, Rhys Griffiths let tythyn **dyffryn mymbyr** to his brother-in-law Piers Mutton for the yearly rent of £4. This may have been the continuation of an earlier lease.

Ref. – NLW Wynnstey box 93/23.

1554

After Piers Mutton's death in 1551, Margaret Griffith married Thomas Gruffyth Esq., 'yeoman of the stirrup to the King's majesty'. In 1549, Thomas Gruffyth had leased Koyd y parke, one of the major properties on the Penrhyn estate, from Margaret's brother Rees Griffith, for a term of 6 years at an annual rent of 40s.

In 1554, Thomas Gruffyth and Thomas Mutton, Margaret's step-son by Piers Mutton, arranged a 19 year lease of lands adjoining Dyffryn Mymbyr to the west called Grayeneg yr lleffry, between the nant du and the 'brook of Mymbyr', which was then in the township of Dinorwyg (later the parish of Llanberis). An eighteenth-century map of Dyffryn Mymbyr shows Nant graianog as lying outside the mountain wall at the western end of the farm, up to the River Mymbyr flowing out of Llyn Cwmffynnon.

Refs. – BUAWL PFA/1/228, 'Lease of Koed y Parke, Creweryon' (1549); NLW Wynnstay box 93/20, lease of Grayeneg yr lleffry, Dinorwyg (1554); Anglesey Archives David Hughes MS WQSA/CHA/3/414 (1783).

1557

Building of Dyffryn Mymbyr

Margaret's stepson Thomas Mutton had inherited the remainder of a 21 year lease of Dyffryn Mymbyr as part of his share of Piers Mutton's estate, but in 1557 he sold it to Margaret's second husband, Thomas Gruffyth.

Ref. – NLW Wynnstay box 93/24 'Declaration by Thomas Mutton' (1557).

Given the dendro-chronology building date of 1553-5, there are two main possibilities for building a gentry type house in this remote part of Snowdonia at his time:

- Thomas Mutton built the house after inheriting the remainder of the 21 year lease. He also extended the land holding, by leasing the adjacent mountain holding at Nant du in partnership with his step-mother's second husband.
- Margaret and her second husband Thomas Gruffyth built the house and bought Thomas Mutton out of his lease. Although Margaret had a life interest in her first husband's house in Rhuddlan, it is possible that she preferred to live in Dyffryn Mymbyr, having married a local man. As Thomas Mutton had other property in Flintshire and Denbighshire, this appears the more likely explanation. Margaret's dower and share of Piers Mutton's estate should also have been ample to pay for the building of the house.

1565

By 1565, Margaret Griffith's second husband was also dead, and she had married Symon Thelwall Esq. of Plas y Ward, Ruthin, in Denbighshire. Symon Thelwall was Member of Parliament for Denbighshire in 1553, 1563 and 1571, a member of the Council of State of the Marches and Deputy Judge of the Court of the Marches.

(Griffith, *Pedigrees of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire Families*, p. 274; Lloyd, *History of the Princes, the Lords Marcher and the Ancient Nobility of Powys Fadog*, vol. 6 p. 378.)

Margaret had taken over the remainder of the Dyffryn Mymbyr lease on Thomas Gruffyth's death. In April 1565 however, Symon Thelwall and Margaret granted her brother Sir Rees Griffith a mortgage on Dyffryn Mymbyr. By this time, Sir Rees's financial affairs were considerably worsened, as the Penrhyn estate was burdened with paying a large number of portions to his brothers and sister, as well as the costs of the lawsuit with his brothers-in-law.

(Before 1571, interest on a mortgage was prohibited as usury and instead the lender would take possession of the property. Failure to repay the loan by the specified date led to permanent forfeiture of the property, so borrowers tried to avoid this danger by borrowing from a friend or relative.)

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Sir Rhys Griffith also leased Dyffryn Mymbyr to Thelwall as a fee farm in July 1565, at 50s a year.

Refs. – NLW Wynnstey box 93/24 'Obligation between Sir Rees Griffith and Symon Thelwall and his wife Margaret (1565)'; BUAWL Penrhyn MS 185, 'Lease of Dyffryn Mymbyr' (1565).

In August 1565, Symon Thelwall also leased from Griffith ap Ilin ap Glin and Morris ap John ap Hoell half of Craig y llysty for 13 years. This was described as 'set and lying between a place called y nant du and a place called y nant boethvoel ddwy and between the brook of Mymbyr and the highest place of cwm grayenog'. The consideration was 15 shillings with an annual payment of 3s 4d per annum to Griffith and Morris. This appears to be the second half of the nant du property leased by Thomas Gruffyth and Thomas Mutton in 1554. At the same time, Symon Thelwall appears to have given a mortgage on the first half of the nant du farm.

Ref. – NLW Wynnstey box 93/21, & bond of obligation (1565).

It is unlikely that Symon Thelwall and Margaret spent much time at Dyffryn Mymbyr however. They rebuilt Plas y Ward in Ruthin (including glazed windows, a luxury at this period) where they lived in some style, so they may have sub-let Dyffryn Mymbyr, though no records of this have been traced.

Ref. - R. Gwynant 'Some References in Welsh Poetry to Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century New and Rebuilt Houses in North East Wales', *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions* 22 (1973).

It is interesting to speculate at a possible link between Margaret Griffith and the building of Curig's Chapel (now St. Julitta's Church, Capel Curig). Around 1800, the Penrhyn quarry manager and antiquarian William Williams of Llandegai recorded a tradition that a gentlewoman of these parts been cured of a skin disease by bathing in Curig's holy spring on the farm of Kelli yr Manach, and in thanksgiving had built the chapel near the site. The chapel has not been precisely dated, but is thought to have been built between 1432 (when there was no reference to it the field names of Gelli farm) and the late 1530s. A link with the Penrhyn family was confirmed in a 1545 lease of Kelli to a certain Tudyr ap Grono, which contained a condition that Sir Rees Griffith, his heirs and assigns should continue to have access to Curig's Chapel which stood on the farm, and to perform the accustomed ceremonies there. In 1548, Sir Rees confirmed Piers Mutton in a ten year lease on the tenement of Chappel Curig at £3pa, ending in 1554; this suggests that the lease was already running. This lease seems to have lapsed with his death however, as there are no further references to this tenement in the Penrhyn records.

Refs - W. Williams, 'Caernarvonshire, extracts of Williams' manuscript 1814', in R. Fenton (ed.), *Tours in Wales, 1804-1813* (London, 1814), p.319; NLW Wynnstey box 93/25, 'Lease of Chappel Curig' (1548).

Was Margaret Griffith's strong attachment to the Capel Curig area and the farm of Dyffryn Mymbyr because she was the lady mentioned in the tradition? (There was certainly no other 'gentlewoman' associated with Capel Curig at this time.) Or was her involvement simply a question of her three husbands giving financial support to her straightened brother Rees Griffiths?

Ownership of Dyffryn Mymbyr passes to the Thelwalls

1609

The Griffiths of Penrhyn finances went from bad to worse during the late 16th and early 17th century, not helped by the piracy of Rees's son and heir Piers Griffith. In 1609 Piers was unable to redeem the mortgage on Dyffryn Mymbyr, and ownership passed to the Thelwall family. Piers Griffith, the last of the Griffiths of Penrhyn, eventually went bankrupt around 1620, and what was left of the Penrhyn estate after creditors had taken their share was subsequently bought by a distant relative, Bishop (later Archbishop) Williams.

History note by Frances Richardson

Ref. - Anglesey Archives David Hughes MS WQSA/CHA/1/260, 'List of evidence about lands called Dyffryn Mymbyr and appurtenances sold by Symon Thelwall Esq. & Edward his son', (1620).

1615

In 1615, Simon Thelwall Esq. of Plas y Ward, the grandson of the earlier Symon Thelwall, appears to have obtained complete ownership of the Nant du farm, by purchasing from William ap Robert of Llanberis his fourth share of the lands and mountain grounds called Crayrg y llefrey and nant du. This land was then annexed to Dyffryn Mymbyr farm and subsequently became part of Llandegai parish.

Ref. – NLW Wynnstay Box 93/22.

1621

David Hughes' Free School and Hospital, Beaumaris

In 1621, the Thelwall family sold Dyffryn Mymbyr to the trustees of the newly established Free School and Hospital (almshouses), Beaumaris. These were founded in 1603 by David Hughes, who had left his native Anglesey a poor boy and become a rich man in England. On his death in 1610, he had endowed the Free School and Hospital with the rent of his farms in Anglesey and with cash, and the trustees, who included the Bishop of Bangor, bought Dyffryn Mymbyr to provide an additional income. In 1630, Dyffryn Mymbyr was let at £44 a year – a considerable increase on the 50s fee farm rent paid by the Thelwalls.

Ref. - AA David Hughes MS WQSA/CHA/1/260.

1676

We start to get our first glimpse of the seventeenth century residents of Dyffryn Mymbyr in the 1670s, with the earliest surviving wills of some farm residents. Owen Richards, who died in 1676, possessed a horse, 9 cattle, 20 sheep and 2 goats and their kids. At first sight, this appears a very small stock for such a large farm, but as we shall see, he was probably sharing Dyffryn Mymbyr with two or three other farmers. His rather scanty household goods included:

a standing bed, with 2 sheets, 2 blankets and a bolster pillow
a table and frame,
one pan, an iron pot, 2 pewter dishes and candlesticks.

It does rather look as if Owen was not occupying the main house.

Ref. - NLW MS B1676/52 I, Inventory of Owen Richards, Dyffryn Mymbyr, Llandegai, (1676).

1677

Kadwaladr Owen, who died the following year, and was a grandfather, looks a more likely candidate as the principle Dyffryn Mymbyr farmer. He left goods worth £117, including 63 cattle, 11 horses, 100 sheep and goats; unfortunately his household goods worth £10 were not itemised.

NLW MS B1677/38 WI, 'Will and inventory of Kadwalder Owen, Dyffryn Mymbyr, Llandegai ', (1677).

1687-97

Kadwaladr Owen's eldest son, Owen Cadwalader, was one of 4 tenants listed in the 1687 Free School rental for Dyffryn Mymbyr; they paid an annual rent of £36 between them, but were about a year in arrears. The chief tenant was supposed to collect the rent, but he kept on making excuses about why he couldn't attend a meeting the trustees to explain the arrears.

Ref. – AA David Hughes MS WQSA/CHA/1/265, 1266, 1269, 1272, (1677-97).

1764

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There is then a gap in the records until the second half of the 18th century, when an undated petition to the Free School trustees from Richard Bulkeley, gent, (probably sent in the early 1760s) sought a reduction in rent, which had recently been increased. He complained of the loss of sheep during a hard winter - a recurring event on Dyffryn Mymbyr farm. Interestingly Richard Bulkeley mentioned that he did not live on the farm himself, but the two farmers who were resident there were ready to quit the tenancy if the rent were not reduced. So it looks as if some tenants used their share of the farm mainly as grazing for sheep. The appeal appears to have been successful, for the rent in 1764 was only £32.

Refs. - Anglesey Archives David Hughes MSS WQA/CHA/3/411, 'Petition of Richard Bulkeley to Lord Viscount Bulkeley', (nd, presumed mid-18c); WQA/CHA/3/609, 'Account of sundry tenements belonging to the Free School Beaumaris', (1764).

1783

The Free School trustees appear to have invested in improving the farm, for a map of 1783 shows a stone wall 'built by the ffeoffees' running the 7 mile circumference of the fields, which replaced an earlier earth bank separating the farm from Gelli Mynach and Capel Curig farm land on Bwlch Oleuni. This was probably one of the earliest examples of a mountain wall, designed to keep sheep out of the winter pastures and hay meadows – a crucial piece of infrastructure that allowed a significant increase in sheep numbers. The old farmhouse is shown on this map as part of a quadrangle; presumably the buildings on the other three sides were demolished when the new Dyffryn Mymbyr farmhouse was built in the nineteenth century.

Ref. – AA David Hughes MS WQSA/CHA/3/414, 'Survey of Dyffrynymbyr', (1783).

1784

How the farm was divided between four farmers was shown on a 1784 sketch map. The largest share was associated with the old farmhouse. Around a third of the land was attached to Corsadda, a small farmhouse (suggested 17th century by RCAWMW) and barn towards the western end of property. (This is shown on the 1840s OS map as Havodty – apparently by then only being used as shelter for farm workers looking after stock on their summer pastures.) The hay meadows above and below the current road were shared between three farmers. The out-farm in the valley below the modern road was shown (though it has been extended in the 19th and 20th centuries); perhaps the third farmer lived here. The fieldbarn and stack yard beside the old road from Llanrwst to Llanberis, which ran alongside the old house, was the only part of the farm used by the fourth farmer, presumably in conjunction with a share of the mountain sheepwalk. The rent in 1783 was £60, paid by Hugh Williams and partners, with Owen Williams paying £11. Information on Dyffryn Mymbyr tenants before the 1780s is patchy, as the farm is not included in land tax records for Llandegai: perhaps as a charity the Free School was exempt, or the trustees may have bought out the liability to tax. From parish records of baptisms, we find that the yeomen living at Dyffryn Mymbyr included Owen Williams (first mentioned in 1760), William Roberts (1763 -70) and Hugh Williams (1770).

Ref. - BUAWL Penrhyn Maps 191, 'Map of Dyffryn Mymbyr', (1784); AA David Lloyd WQSA/CHA/3/635, 'Free School renta', (1783).

1789

Dyffryn Mymbyr returns to the Penrhyn estate

In 1789, Richard Pennant, later Lord Penrhyn, completed the purchase of Dyffryn Mymbyr from the trustees of the Free School Beaumaris by exchanging it for equivalent value Penrhyn lands in Anglesey. This required an Act of Parliament. Pennant had inherited part of the Penrhyn estate, and had set about rebuilding the estate to its former glory by marriage and purchase, helped by profits from his Jamaica plantations and later by the revenues of the Penrhyn slate quarries. His eagerness to acquire Dyffryn Mymbyr may have been part of the rebuilding of the estate, though it was thought at the time that he also believed that the rich vein of slate being exploited in the Penrhyn quarries might

History note by Frances Richardson

extend to Dyffryn Mymbyr. Thankfully, for the famous view of the Snowdon horseshoe we enjoy today, trial workings near Capel Curig did not encourage further mineral exploitation in the valley.

Hugh and Owen Williams became the first new Penrhyn tenants. Hugh Williams also held the farm of Onnenebryd on the edge of the Carneddau in Llanbedr-y-Cennin, which was managed by a bailiff; a farm servant was sent from Onnenebryd to Dyffryn Mymbyr for two weeks in the summer to help with the hay harvest. There is some evidence of a continuing reciprocal arrangement between Dyffryn Mymbyr and Onnenebryd, perhaps with Onnenebryd sheep being sent to DM for summer grazing, and Dyffryn lambs being sent to Llanbedr for the winter.

Ref. - Gwynedd Archives MS XPE63/54, 'The examination of Edward Prichard, labourer, Caernant, Caerhun, in evidence respecting the settlement of the orphan children of Wm Roberts, deceased'. (1818).

By **1791**, the Penrhyn estate had increased Hugh Williams' rent to £81 5s and Owen Williams' to £18 15s.

Ref. – BUAWL Penrhyn Add. MS 2945, 'Rental estate in Llandegai, Llanllechid, Bangor & Conwy', (1791-93).

Hugh Williams died in 1798 and Owen in 1801. Owen, who held the smaller portion of the farm, appears to have downsized his farming operations as he grew older: he left only 2 cows, 1 horse and 114 sheep, but had £63 out on loan at interest to seven local farmers. His widow, Anne Evans, remained at Dyffryn Mymbyr, but it is a mystery how she was worth £900 (a staggering sum by local standards) when she died a couple of years later.

Ref. - NLW MS B1801/67 W,I 'Will and inventory of Owen Williams, Dyffryn Mymbyr', (1801); National Archives MS IR/26/287, 'Will of Anne Evans late of Dyffryn Mymbyr', (1803).

In **1802**, Dyffryn Mymbyr farm had been valued at £150pa, but apparently the Penrhyn estate did not find it easy to attract a tenant at this rent, for it remained 'on hand' for several years, farmed as part of the demesne by the estate.

Ref. - Penrhyn Add. MS 2946, 'Rental estate in Llandegai, Llanllechid, Bangor & Llanfair, with tithe rents', (1802).

By **1808**, the tenancy had been taken on by Edward Parry, for £126pa, and Samuel Worthington, at £200pa. Samuel Worthington was also part of a partnership renting the large Tal y Braich farm in the neighbouring valley of Nant y Benglog. Part of Dyffryn Mymbyr land had also been added to the former Capel Curig farm attached to the Capel Curig Inn (modern day Plas y Brenin), run by Mrs. Griffiths, the widow of the first landlord, Joseph Griffiths.

Ref. - Penrhyn Add. MS 2953, 'Rental estate in Llandegai, Llanllechid, Bangor & Llanfair, with tithe rents', (1808).

1820

The tenancy was next taken on by Robert Edwards from Llanllechid – this was apparently the first time for at least a couple of centuries that the farm was run by a single tenant. During the Napoleonic wars, high agricultural prices had encouraged landowners to significantly increase farm rents, but after the end of the wars in 1815, prices slumped and the Penrhyn estate was forced to reduce rents: in 1820 Robert Edwards was paying £230pa. He was succeeded around 1820 by his two sons, Hugh and Henry Roberts.

Ref. – BUAWL Penrhyn Add. MS 2954, 'Rental estate in Llandegai, Llanllechid, Bangor & Llanfair, with tithe rents', (1820).

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1841 census

In the 1841 census, Dyffryn Mymbyr was still occupied by the brothers Hugh and Henry Roberts; also resident there were Henry's eldest son Hugh, three male agricultural labourers and three female farm servants. Henry had married Catherine Owen of Gwytherin, Denbighshire, in 1838, but she was away from home at the census date. On the death in 1841 of Hugh, the elder brother, Henry carried on as sole tenant.

Also at 'Dyffryn', (possibly the out-farm in the valley) were an agricultural labourer Robert Roberts and his wife Mary, with two children and Mary's 78 year old mother Gwen Hughes. Dyffryn tollgate, which stood on the site of the later farm cottages on the main road, was occupied by two 'independent' women, Elinor Williams mother and daughter, and a labourer, Robert Williams.

There are no **tithe commutation records** for the upper part of Llandegai parish: as all the land belonged to the Penrhyn estate, the landowner arranged the tithe payment directly with the tithe owner (the Bishop of Bangor), and did not consider a survey necessary.

1851 census

In 1851, the residents of Dyffryn Mymbyr were:

- Henry Roberts, farmer, born 1799
- Catherine Roberts his wife, b. 1813
- Hugh Roberts, their son, scholar, b. 1839
- Elinor Roberts, their daughter, b.1841
- Elizabeth Roberts, d, b. 1843
- Robert Roberts, s. b 1845
- Grace Roberts, d. b.1847
- Edward Roberts, s. b. 1850.

There were also two resident male farm labourers, Thomas Williams, b. 1830, Owen Prichard, b. 1826, and two female servants, Ann Roberts, b.1826, and Elinor Owens, b. 1843, all from Caernarvon.

There were now two cottages on the farm, one still occupied by the farm labourer Robert Roberts and his wife Mary, with four children, and Mary's 88 year old mother, who was receiving poor law relief. The second cottage, Ty y Plas, which stood above the drive leading up to Dyffryn Mymbyr house, (of which only the foundations can still be seen) was occupied by farm labourer Hugh Hughes, his wife Elinor and their daughter Ann. The Toll Gate Dyffryn was occupied by a toll gate keeper, Robert Thomas, with his wife Ellinor and four children.

1861 census

In 1859, the Penrhyn estate increased the rent by £10 to £195pa. to cover the cost of new buildings: a new five bedroomed farmhouse, with an up-to date range of outbuildings including stable, tack-room, wash-house, privy and stores, all of which are still in tact today. The buildings in the valley out-farm were also extended and modernised. Censuses after this date do not list the old Dyffryn Mymbyr farmhouse as separately occupied, though it is likely that it was inhabited by the unmarried male farm servants.

After Henry Robert's death in 1859, his widow Catherine took over the farm: she now had eight children aged 0 to 18 and employed a governess to educate her younger children. The family rented from the Penrhyn estate a 'school' for 4s a year. This would have been the tiny Methodist chapel and Sunday school whose remains can be seen on the main road, opposite the Dyffryn farm cottages.

Also living in at the farm in 1861 were a dairy maid, a 12 year old general servant girl, a cowman and an agricultural labourer. Hugh Hughes, now described as a cowman, still lived at Ty y Plas with his

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wife and daughter, and another agricultural labourer, Robert Thomas lived with his family at the Turnpike cottage.

Ref. – P. Muckle, *Dyffryn Mymbyr Vernacular Buildings Survey*, National Trust (2005)

1871 census

By 1871, Catherine had three sons still at home, who presumably helped run the farm: 21 year old Edward, and 13 year old John; the eldest, Robert E Roberts, later managed the Royal Hotel Capel Curig with his wife Margaret. Three male farm labourers and a female servant were also resident.

Hugh Hughes was still at Ty y Plas, with his wife, daughter Ann, who was working as a seamstress, her miner husband William Jones and their three children. Robert Thomas, his wife and three children were still recorded as at 'Dyffryn'. One son, John Thomas, was a farm servant, another son, David, was a quarryman.

1881 census

By 1881, Catherine Roberts' son Edward had married and moved away to run the Stag Hotel and attached farm at Beaumaris and only her youngest son John remained at Dyffryn Mymbyr. It is clear that he did not feel independent, as he wrote in 1889 to a brother complaining at being unable to find anywhere to go, and asking his brother to let him know if he heard of a suitable farm or business going vacant. There were four resident male farm workers: a carter, two cowmen and a shepherd, as well as a female servant. Catherine died in 1890, by which time she had been in charge of the farm for 33 years.

At Ty y Plas, Hugh Hughes had died and his widow Ellen headed the household, living with her daughter, son-in-law William Jones, now working as a slate quarryman, and their four children. Robert Thomas the road labourer was still at the old tollhouse, with his daughter and grandson. It is interesting that no agricultural workers were now living at any of the cottages on the farm: this reflects the general late-nineteenth century trend towards a reduced number of farm workers, especially married men. The presence of two cowmen indicates that rearing store cattle was still an important part of the Dyffryn Mymbyr economy.

Ref. –Family papers, 'Letter of John Roberts', (14th November 1889).

1891 census

Catherine Robert's death coincided with a period of agricultural depression, and the Penrhyn estate was unable to find another tenant willing to take on such a large and challenging farm for over twenty years, with the farm remaining 'in hand'. In the meantime, it was kept ticking over by a Scottish shepherd, Thomas McGill and his wife Ann, who occupied Dyffryn Mymbyr with a baby daughter. John Davies, a cowman was boarding with them, and the agricultural labourer Robert Thomas was still living at Dyffryn Turnpike. William Jones the quarryman headed the household at Ty y Plas, with his wife Ann and elder daughter Mary; their son Hugh Jones worked as a shepherd and two younger children were at school. The reduced workforce meant that Penrhyn tenants and shepherds from Ysbytty Ifan were brought over to Dyffryn to help with the hay harvest and sheep shearing. It is likely that the old farmhouse was unoccupied at this period.

Ref. - Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmoputhshire, Minutes of Evidence Vol. 1*, minute15,481 (London, 1896).

1901 census

In 1901, Thomas and Ann McGill were still running the farm on behalf of the estate: they now had two nieces, Catherine McGill and Ann Jones living with them; a shepherd, William Jones was boarding with them. At Turnpike Dyffryn, Robert Thomas had died, but his grandson Owen Williams was

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working as a cowman. The cottage at Ty y Plas had apparently been abandoned, and William Jones, the quarryman who had previously lived there had moved into a second cottage at Turnpike Dyffryn (there are two cottages there today), with his wife Ann, quarryman son David Lloyd Jones, daughter Annie and a grandson.

1911 census

In 1911, Dyffryn Mymbyr was still being managed by a farm bailiff, John Griffith, a Caernarfonshire man, living with his wife Ellen, five children, a cowman, carter and maid servant. Only one of the Dyffryn cottages was occupied, by Ann Jones, daughter Annie and two grandchildren.

1912

The Penrhyn estate eventually found a new tenant for Dyffryn Mymbyr, William Thomas, in 1912; his annual rent was £150, 23% below the amount the farm had commanded in the 1850s.

1926

New owners

A major change occurred in 1926, when the Penrhyn estate sold off its Capel Curig properties, in part to meet death duties. When estates were sold, sitting tenants were given notice to quit, and were in great danger of losing their both home and livelihood if another farmer bought the farm. Although he was already getting on, the sitting tenant William Thomas therefore bought Dyffryn Mymbyr. Having no children, he invited a nephew from Bryn y Gefeiliau in the Llugwy valley to move to Dyffryn Mymbyr with a view to taking over the farm, but the nephew declined – clearly viewing this as too tough a proposition.

Ref. – Oral communication, Arwel Curig Williams, March 2007.

In 1931, William Thomas sold Dyffryn Mymbyr to Thomas Fairbank for £4,625 including stock, and retired to Llanrwst. In his book, 'I Bought a Mountain', Fairbank tells how he moved the farm workers out of the new farmhouse to the cottages: we must therefore presume that the old farmhouse remained unoccupied. Fairbank soon married Esme Cummings, but they separated in 1939, leaving Esme to run the farm during wartime, with a considerable burden of debt: at times she lived in the cattle byre with the house let to evacuees, whose rent paid the farm wages.

Thomas Fairbank passed Dyffryn Mymbyr to Esme in 1944 by a deed of family arrangement, and he conveyed ownership to Esme in 1947. Following a divorce with Fairbank, Esme married Peter Kirby, who had been commandant of the army training unit at the Royal Hotel Capel Curig (now Plas y Brenin) during the war. They managed the farm until 1984, when a manager was hired. Peter Kirby was a well known woodworker, and in the 1990s he renovated the old Dyffryn Mymbyr farmhouse.

Esme died in 1999, leaving Peter Kirby a lifetime interest in Dyffryn Mymbyr. On his death in 2003 the property passed to The National Trust, which has now renovated both the old and new farmhouses as holiday lets. They had great difficulty in preventing the old farmhouse from leaking – Dyffryn Mymbyr receives a lot of weather!

Researched by Frances Richardson
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