

# Colwyn Bay CIVIC SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2007

At home I have a large map of this corner of North Wales produced round about 1880. Colwyn Bay is shown as two roads, Station Road and Abergele/Conwy Road, (then know as London Road) and the most prominent house, beside Erskine House, was Emlyn on Abergele Road, which we know today as the clock house. All the farm houses however are shown and 127 years later most of them are still standing. Pwllcrochan Isaf, Rhiw fawr (which was on what we know as Rhiw Road) and Rhiw bach (on Coed Pella Road) have vanished. But much remains.

By 1815 many of the things which make life agreeable for humbler mortals had just arrived in their modern form: passable roads, tea, street lighting. Our Colwyn Bay farms had been built in this peaceful enclave during a time when vast armies, maintained by taxes deliberately designed to weigh mainly on the poor, roamed through Europe. It was a time of torpid and corrupt national churches, widespread popular superstition and powerful spiritual movements like Methodism. At the turn of the 18th century when our farms were established and Colwyn Bay was an agricultural land dotted only with farms, expectation of life was low. In most of Wales the great majority of men and women lived at subsistence levels, confined by narrow physical and intellectual horizons. If only the walls of these farms could speak to us to-day.

## OUR FARMING HERITAGE



Bryn Euryn Farm House

Prior to the middle of the 19th century, the home and land of Sir David and Lady Erskine, on which the town of Colwyn Bay has developed, was farm land. When Sir David and Lady Erskine stood at their front door of what is now Rydal Junior School at the top of Pwllcrochan Avenue, they looked across agricultural land, fields where cattle grazed, where crops grew, all the way to the sea shore. One hundred and fifty years later the farms have gone leaving only an echo of their existence. In the Daily Telegraph in August 2006 Robert Harris announced, "Nobody makes a living from farming a couple of hundred acres. The economy of scale and the lack of cheap labour making it uneconomical. The small working farm is agriculturally finished." Some of the buildings remain and have been sensibly utilised. In the February 2007 edition of this journal there is striking example in Hadden Court, and Brian Lingard's adaption of the old Bryn Euryn Farm buildings. The farm building are still there but now they are snug and hospitable dwellings. The pig-styes along the side of Craig View and their awful smell (which this writer well recalls) have long gone. Immediately on your left as you now step through the main farm entrance there used to be a large stone barn invariably full of hay; this space has now become two homes. The farm house itself is still



Bryn Euryn Farm



Bryn Euryn Farm House on the left

President: Graham Roberts

Chairman: Brian Pringle

Journal Editor: Graham Roberts



*Dolwyd Farm House*

intact on Tan-y-Bryn Road and is now someone's home and probably looks much as it must have done when it was first built.

Our local artists, as illustrated in the February 2006 edition of this Journal, have left evidence of our rural heritage. In 1900 Ben Hoyles painted the gathering of the harvest around Llandrillo-yn-Rhos Parish Church (on the spot now covered by Marlborough Drive); in 1930 Warren Williams painted the corn stooks in the fields now covered by the Bryn Eglwys Estate in Rhos-on-Sea; H. Watkinson's lovely 1900 view of the Bay of Colwyn has a prominent haystack on one side of the picture and in 1845 someone anonymously painted the farm activity surrounding Erskine House (Rydal Junior School).

Archaeologically there remains in Colwyn Bay much evidence of this farming activity.

As well as Bryn Euryn Farm there are other farm houses still standing which serve a useful purpose. Dolwyd Farmhouse is still intact and has been brought back to life by Brian and Rosmary Sutton. It still looks today almost exactly as it must have done a hundred and fifty years ago when the narrow lane which runs passed the farm gate was the main road from Chester to Conwy, and when these roads ran through a landscape where there were no signposts and distances were a matter of guesswork.

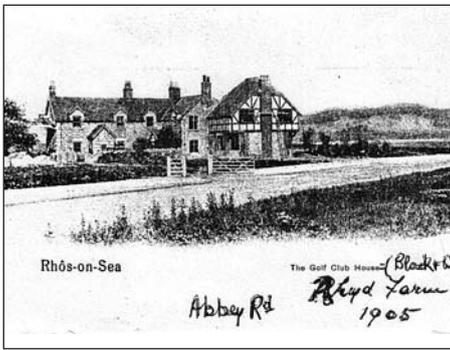
In the 1930s farmers were trying to make a living off 40 to 50 acres where today a 200 acre farm would not be enough. It was a tough time with old large estates being broken up and the sitting tenants having to buy their farms for fear of having nowhere else to live. In the 1950s the machines came, the first those little Ferguson tractors. The poet R.S Thomas was writing as these changes were taking place and wrote about them in his poem 'Cyddyfan On A Tractor'. This was just the beginning of a change that would



*Tyn-Rhewl*



*Plas Newydd*



Rhyd Farm

prove overwhelming. Dr John Davies noted in 'A History of Wales' that by 1971 there were more tractors on Welsh farms than there were Cynddylans to drive them. Mechanisation brought the end of the small farms (in 1945 there were 40,000 farms, in 1971 there were scarcely half that number.)

Just off Dinerth Road in Rhos-on-Sea, below the Bryn Euryn woods and looking out over the Afon Ganol to Pydew are the remnants of two farms, Tyn-rhewl (124 Dinerth Road) and Plas Newydd. The English translation of Tyn-Rhewl is 'court-yard of farm house below the tree line' and is therefore an accurate description of the situation of the farm buildings, (beside the footpath up Bryn Euryn) while Plas Newydd means 'new mansion' and no doubt in the 1800s looked imposing but now seems much reduced in stature. Both these buildings are now people's homes.

The Rhyd Farm buildings in Rhos-on-Sea have now gone but the name is memorialised in Rhyd Drive where the farm once stood.

The two farms in Mochdre were Tan-yr-allt Uchaf and Tan-yr allt Isaf. Both farm



Tan Yr Allt Isaf

steads are still there, but where once they stood in splendid isolation in the middle of their own extensive fields, now they are hemmed in amongst new born estates of houses. Tan-yr-allt uchaf (High Farm) house is now on the corner of Beechmere Rise and Hazlewood Close just off the Old Highway up the road from Ysgol Cwstennin. It is well maintained, solid, standing out in all its superiority amongst the newly built houses that now surround it. Tan-yr-allt Isaf is at the end of a driveway off Conwy Road in Mochdre (349 Conwy Road). A new driveway has been forced through from the end of the cul-de-sac, Oxwich Road and, there it also stands, still attractive, sturdy, huddled into

the curve of the hillside, white-washed and homely.

A little further up the Old Highway from Mochdre and Tan-yr-allt Uchaf, right on the bend of the road, next door to the Seren-y-Dyffryn Caravan site, is Pen-y-Binc Farm building. This was once a working farm and interestingly the farm house was designed just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, in 1938, by the subject of our October 2006 Journal, William John Bowen (Willie John). Over the years the house has been altered and it is now for sale. The original design incorporating the metal Crittal windows, can be seen in the 1972 sale brochure, as can the unique eaves and 'hat and coat' treatment. The

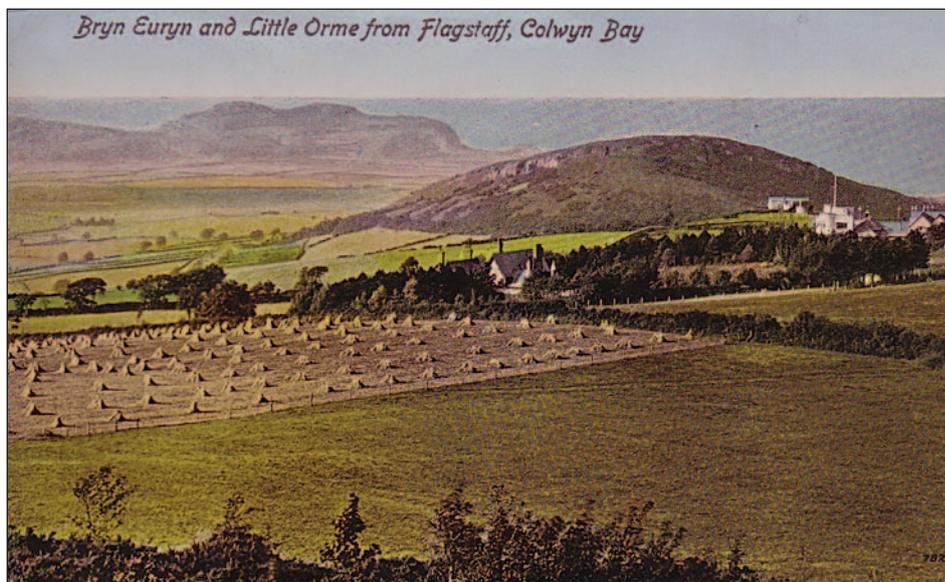


Tan Yr Allt Uchaf Today



Tan Yr Allt Uchaf C 1890

farmer, Francis Jones, had moved from Pen-y-Bont, Llangwstenin to Pen-y-Binc and he originally lived in the old long house which was converted into a milking parlour after Mr. Bowen's new house was built. The only day in the year on which he used the main lounge was Christmas Day; the limestone wall (now gone) was constructed at the same time as the house was built. The original gate was a wooden type painted green and the date 1938 was picked out in small pebbles on the pavement area in front of the main door, (this has now been cemented over), and the coal was kept in a bunker outside near the toilet! Mr. Francis would not allow tractors on the land and always used shire horses.



*Bryn Euryn and Little Orme from Flagstaff, Colwyn Bay*

*Fields of Pen y Binc Farm*



*Pen y Binc Farm*

Grianllyn Farm house, Mochdre, is still home to a family of hard working farmers; and English translation of the name would be Pebble Pool. The farm buildings stand on either side of the lane (Chapel Street) leading from Mochdre to Bryn-y-Maen and like any busy rural farm it looks somewhat dishevelled and chaotic, but perhaps not changed in its appearance

radically since the day it was built. It is a fine example of an unsophisticated building put together quietly 100s of years ago without the help of county planners, architects and quantity surveyors and certainly without the input of the health and safety executive, to the specific wishes of a local farmer who understood the needs of his dwelling. It is recorded by W. Bezant Lowe in his book *The Heart of Northern Wales* (published in 1912) that during the Civil War between the houses of York and Lancaster that Conwy Castle was the scene of much contention. At the time there were three sons of Grianllyn, Rhys, Robin and Hywel. Unfortunately Rhys travelled one evening to the banks of the Conwy River opposite the castle, to watch a fight and was killed by an arrow discharged from the castle by Llewelyn of Nannan. It is recorded that the next day Robin and Hywel and their followers crossed the river to avenge the death of their brother; they took the castle by

storm and beheaded the captain of the castle. There is therefore much colourful history embedded in the walls of Grianllyn Farm along this quiet Mochdre lane.

Two farm houses, not far from each other,



*Fron Farm*

are Fron Farm and Glyn Farm. As their names imply they are beside the Fron and Glyn Estate which has sprung up on the old farm fields. Fron Farm on Groes Road is now the home of a well respected Old Colwyn Garage proprietor and was once painted by Warren Williams for a former owner.

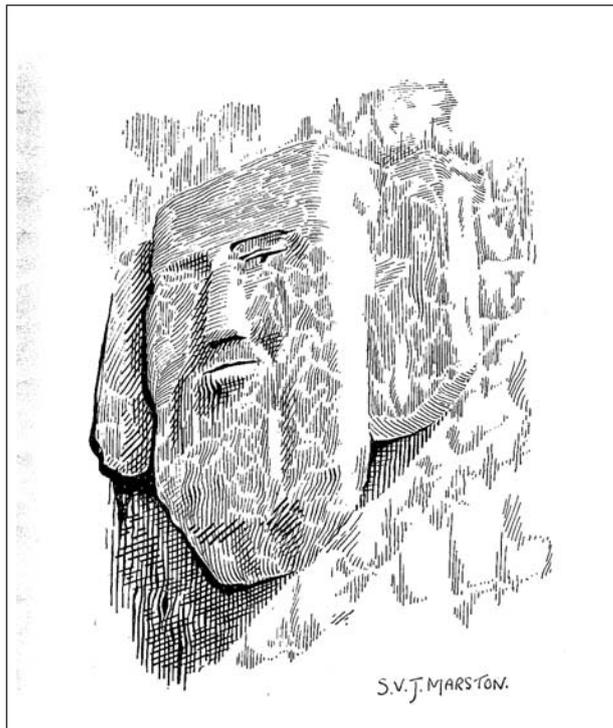
It is surprising how many of our more substantial farms, such as Glyn Farm, were the residences of the gentry. In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century this was certainly true of Plas Newydd in Llysfaen where a Vaughan was living. These men in all probability were descendants of Ednyfed Vychan, whose name, long before the 17<sup>th</sup> century was anglicised. Before the recent conversion of the Glyn farm, on the white-washed plaster of a discoloured wall of an outhouse was modelled a crude ring. The initials are doubtless those of John Vaughan, father, probably of Henry Vaughan recorded on the lych-gate of Llandrillo Church in 1677. In that churchyard also is a tombstone telling of the death in 1699 (in her 92<sup>nd</sup>



*Grianllyn Farm*

year) of Margaret Vaughan “wife to Henry Vaughan of Glyn”. Glyn Farm building appears to be one of our oldest inhabited houses. Norman Tucker in his book ‘Colwyn Bay Its Origin and Growth’ records Alderman D.O. Williams J.P. as

considering that the 1620 portion of the building was built on the site of a still older dwelling. Near the top of Glyn’s front door was a carved stone with a flat top. It is weathered and was coated with white-wash. It resembled the face of a man with drooping Moustache. So incongruous is it that one can not help wondering whether it was removed from another situation.



*Face of a man on Glyn Farm*

Glyn Farm has been transformed by Anwyl Construction into two delightful homes. For a while it was used by the builders as a storage depot and dumping ground, while they built the houses which now surround the old farm house on the old farm fields, alongside the roads which they have christened Valley Road, Eirias View, Foxhall Close and Dingle View. The farm house stands out beside its new estate, perfectly sighted, better proportioned and more Welsh.

I am also delighted to report that they have incorporated



*Groes Bach*

the John Vaughan initials and date and the carving of the odd looking man with the moustache into the wall on the front of the building for all to see anew.

These two farms are the central pair of a quartet of farm houses, all still in existence which straddle the back area of Colwyn, almost on a parallel line. The other two are Gwern Tyno Farm in the Nant-y-Glyn Valley and Parciau Farm House off Llanelian Road, overlooking the Colwyn Bay Football Ground. In their varying ways the buildings are indicative of our times; the owners of Gwern Tyno have plans to develop the farm buildings, Glyn Farm now looks cosmopolitan and posh, Fron Farm is a well maintained family home and Parciau Farm is let out



*Glyn Farm*



View from Golf House, Old Colwyn

Parciau Farm 1917 (top right)



Maes Cadwgan Farm.

Maes Cadwgan



Rhualt Farm

for accommodation while the surrounding fields are owned by the National Trust. There were two farms opposite the entrance to Eirias Park on either side of Groes Road, Groes bach and Groes fawr. Groes means 'cross' and illustrates the site on the cross roads; bach means 'small' and fawr means 'big'. Thus one farm was considered bigger than the other. Groes bach has recently been renovated after many years of neglect and now looks most impressive and should make a happy home. There is a photograph in Norman Tucker's book, 'Colwyn Bay Its Original and Growth' (page 59) of Groes fawr (The Big Cross) which shows a substantial working farm house and the smithy, across the road, which was run by Mr. Greenfield whose daughter, Mrs Cheadle, was an enthusiastic member of this society. Groes fawr is still there but has been altered and extended with new windows, chimneys and decorated with Tudorish overtones outside. As you stand at the entrance of Eirias Park and look across Abergele Road to Groes Road you can, for a moment, catch a whiff of former times with the two farm houses standing sentinel to an agricultural age gone by.

Another farm, now only a memory, was Rhualt Farm. The farm house stood on the corner of Llysfaen Road and Peulwys Road, on the site now occupied by number 18 Llysfaen Road and the bungalow called Moelwyn adjacent to it on Peulwys Road. The turnpike road was constructed in 1785 from Penmaen Bach (entrance to Plas Gwylim Quarry from Miners Lane) leading down to what was then know as Rhualt and now Llysfaen



Groes Fawr

Road and so on to the River Conwy. Rhualt Farm house was probably built originally as a hostel for travellers along this route. Dilys Thomas, the local authoritative historian was told that the farmer at Rhualt, David William Jones, lived at the farm from 1903 until his death on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1912. Mr. Jones' wife survived for another three years, dying on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1915 aged 76 years. They are buried together in Old Colwyn Cemetery. They had a daughter called Elizabeth (who married Robert Hunt) who had died, aged 29, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1910 and after her early death Mr. Jones immediately bought the grave next to the one in which his daughter had been buried. Elizabeth's husband, Robert Hunt

lived for another forty years after his wife's death and he was buried in her grave in August 1950. Once upon a time the farm's hayfields extended as far as Bethesda Wesleyan Chapel (N.B Journal November 1990) on the corner of Wellington and Abergele Roads where Mr. Jones kept a small herd of milking cows and delivered the milk to his customers in his horse drawn cart. He ladled the milk from a churn with a beaded cloth lid. The milk cost 1d a pint (now. 5p) but if the customer had no money to pay, he refused to leave milk! He sold vegetables from his allotments and flowers from his beautiful garden. David Jones was a faithful member of the first Bethel Chapel in Penmanrhos from 1881 until his death.



*Berth-y-Glyd Farm*

Over the years he built up a bank of goodwill for himself, as a deacon and as oldest member, he more or less ran the Chapel for many years. His son Tom came from Llanrwst when his father died to help his mother run the farm which he then continued to do until he sold it in the 1950s.

Smack in the middle of Old Colwyn was Maes Cadwgan Farm but it was pulled down long ago. It stood more or less where Princess Road is today. There is a popular story about the naming of the road; Princess Victoria, before she became Queen, is reputed to have stayed at the Ship Inn and drank a glass of milk at Maes Cadwgan Farm. The farm was provided with seaweed for use as manure and it was carried on the back of a donkey from the sea shore and up Beach Road.

Sadly the Berth-y-Glyd Farm and the farm house have also disappeared and Peulwys Estate (Swn-y-Don, Cae Glas, Mor Awel, Maenen, Peulwys Lane) has been created on the farm fields. The entrance to the farm house was more or less where the bus shelter now stands on Berth-y-Glyd Road, between Highlands Road and Ffordd-y-Llan. The land was owned by the Watkin Wynn family and when the Council bought the land, the farmer, Mr. Davies, bought a corner of the estate and built a good sized home there, which is where it still stands (Berth Glyd, 6 Berth-y-Glyd Road) and where his daughters Morfydd and Helena now live.

Further into Llysfen were four farms all distinguished by their exceptionally tall chimneys; Tyn-y-Coed, Isallt, Pen-y-Geuffos and Clobryn. Pen-y-Geuffos and

Clobryn have been demolished. Pen-y-Geuffos stood in fields behind the present Vicarage along a track beside the children's playground on Gadlas Road, while there are still remnants of Clobryn Farm House foundations in the fields to the right of Clobryn Road as you travel up the road from Abergele Road. The two sons of Clobryn Farm are still active; the Rev. David Andrew Jones is a minister in the Welsh Calvinistic Church in Cardiff and his brother, William Morus Jones, farms in Gwytherin. Tyn-y-Coed on Dolwen Road, opposite Ysgol Cynfryn is an example of a sturdy Welsh farmhouse built securely in the shade of an undulating landscape.

But on the periphery of the town many farmers struggle on, making a living from the land, maintaining the traditional work

originally accomplished by the men of Colwyn Bay. In Llysfaen, Peulwys Farm and Pentre Uchaf Farm and Ty Mawr (Big House) are still going strong. Hafodty Farm at the end of Hafodty Lane in Upper Colwyn Bay, just before you reach The View, is humming with activity and the farmer is working the surrounding fields. Cae Gwyn Farm is still operating on the old road from Mochdre to Glan Conwy corner. Dinerth Hall Farm is very much a working farm at the end of Dinerth Hall Road in Rhos-on-Sea, while the two farms above Mochdre and Dolwen, Bryn Dedwydd and Bryn cariwch can easily be

seen across the valley as you hurtle down the A470 from Llandudno to Glan Conwy Corner. All the buildings are still intact on Pant-y-Gloch Farm, (possibly named after the adjacent blue bell woods) in the Nant-y-Glyn Valley and some of the Glan-y-Don Farm buildings are still in place behind the Colwyn Bay Civic Centre. These farms are marked on the 1879 map of the area and it is a tribute to the enduring hard work of their owners that their endeavours continue into the 21st Century.

These farms were built and worked centuries ago, but the houses still, in

2007, acknowledge the days in which they had their being. Now tucked away amongst burgeoning estates and alongside busy roads, they maintain the sturdy echo and thick walled permanence of a quieter and less frantic age. They are evidence of days when work was hard and riches few, they also shout down the years of contentment and a lack of silly ambition. There is an old Welsh saying: "A chick born in hell, is in hell it will want to be". The Welsh folk born in these farm houses were nurtured in pleasant surroundings and were fortunate indeed. No hell for them.



*Tyn y Coed*

## A LINGARD ADDENDUM

Further to the article in the last issue of the Journal on Mr. Brian Lingard, Mr Lingard specifically asked that I mention

Ian Taylor and Leonard Froinetter who were two key senior architects who worked for long periods with him in the

Colwyn Bay Office. They were not mentioned in the article, but should have been.