

## Notes from Local Interest Group November 24<sup>th</sup> 2022

**Present in Hall:** Maureen Lloyd (ML), John Price, Wendy Ozols, Janet Russell, Iris Lloyd, Bronwen Jenkins, Elsa Harflett, Doreen James, Mollie Moore, Carol Sheen, Maggie Warne, Grace Davies, Allison Joyce, Jenny Francis, Alison Duncan, Malc Gonnella, Sue Lawler, Tim Francis, Joan Lloyd, Joan Hughes, Celia Jones, Cath Pyke, Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Roy Lloyd, Richard Thomas

**On Zoom:** Dainis Ozols, Jennifer Lewis, Cherry & Victor Williams, Mike Head, Sue & Keith Hodgetts, Penny & Ifor Williams, Diana Lloyd, Margaret Price, Marilyn Price, Eva Morgan, Ann & Howard Dean, Sylvia Illingsworth, Patrick Russell.

**Apologies:** Sue Griffiths

ML welcomed everyone in the hall and on Zoom. She introduced our speaker for the evening, Janet Russell, who lives at Rhosgoch Mill, having renovated it from quite a dilapidated state a few years ago.

### Rhosgoch Mill

Janet began by saying that she had known the mill since she was a child as her Grandmother lived there and she and her cousins would stay with her in the summer. When she changed her job, she was looking for a house and, her uncle, Tom Powell, eventually agreed to sell her the mill. By the time she bought it, the mill was in a pretty dilapidated state and the first thing she had to do was to “make it safe”. When the work on renovation started, the workmen found a bundle of soggy papers which turned out to be the deeds. Janet has managed to dry these out and has now begun the painstaking task of transcribing them.

The first slide she showed us was of the 1844 tithe map which clearly shows the mill and the mill pond. The water supply came from the Dingle, where a weir raised the level of the water to give a direct source of water to the mill. This source led into the pond whose water powered the mill wheels. The water then was let out via the leat back into the Bachawy. From the deeds, and from some research done by ML, lots of names and variations of spelling have been found for the mill. Janet and ML have also discovered through their work that there were actually two mills at the site, a grist mill and a fulling mill. ML had been looking for the second Rhosgoch mill for some time and it only recently occurred to her and Janet that the two mills were in the same place.

Janet went on to show us some old photos of the mill, together with more recent ones. The mill is thought to have been in the same family, the Powells, for over 400 years, and it is mentioned by Francis Kilvert in his diaries. Members of the family have many good memories of being at the mill during their holidays. A family story from a previous generation tells how Great Grandfather (William Powell) would give his grandchildren lifts on the hoist which went up all three storeys in the mill. Then there was the pond, which the children were told not to go too close to as they would drown if they fell in. A pathway had been constructed around the pond to make walking there safer.

Janet showed us a photo of the mill taken in 1880 with her Great Grandfather, William Powell, standing outside (on the next page). There were five generations of miller in the family:

- 1782 – James Powell (miller and blacksmith)
- 1805 – John Powell, Thomas and William Powell
- 1871-1948 – William Powell JP
- 1901-1949 – William (Billy) Powell
- 1949-1960s – Tom Powell (with help from John)



*Rhos Goch Mill (with William Powell on the left)*

1880 ex Ancestry

Some of this information is from the census data and was found by Marilyn Price (née Powell). The deeds show no mention of the Powell family before James; he bought the mill from Henry Biddle. In 1788, Richard Biddle had paid £5 to the Crown to buy the mill. Prior to 1788, the Crown had owned the mill (as it did many mills in the country), and in this case ownership goes back at least to Henry VIII.

Both the corn grist mill (Hothnant) and the fulling mill (Melin Rhos) are mentioned in the deeds. A fulling mill is one where woollen cloth is processed. Initially, woollen cloth has a very open weave and so it has to be shrunk before it can be used; it could also be felted. These processes require water and pounding, and so need a mill wheel. The corn grist mill also requires water to turn the wheel to drive the millstones. It is not unusual to have two mills on one site, using the same water source, but it is unusual to find them in the same building. The water supply to the mill was not particularly powerful so a large pond was needed as a head of water. The two mills were obviously sharing the same water source and for many years they did this without any dispute.

Before the full renovation of the mill, Janet asked a mill expert (Alan Stoyal) to look at the evidence. The surviving mill machinery takes up one half of the back wall and so there was a theory that there might have been another set on the other side. The archaeological investigation discovered an additional wheel pit on that side. Additionally, they found an Elizabethan floor in the "house" part of the building. Thus it was possible to conclude that there had been two lots of mill machinery and two wheels. The archaeologists have now documented the mill as a "late medieval building rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century" (CPAT).

At this point, ML took over to tell us what she had discovered about the mill. She had found a document which was a transcript of findings from the Court of Augmentations from the 1550s; the

mill owners had gone to the Court in order to settle a dispute. Since this document is written in 16<sup>th</sup> century legal shorthand, she had to have it translated by an expert.

The first mention of the mill is in 1506, when James ap Meurig leased a fulling mill and the grist mill of Hothnant for 6s 8d; his lease lasted until 1531. James was the impoverished owner of Winforton Manor. A relative had lent him the money to buy the manor, but it is not certain whether he ever repaid that debt. Certainly Edward Hopton laid claim to Winforton saying that the mortgage had not been repaid thus prompting James' relative, Sir Gruffudd ap Rhys, to foreclose on his cousin and settle the property on Hopton. Litigation followed and after 12 years (in 1536) the case eventually found in favour of Meurig's sister and co-heiress, who resumed the family's ownership of the Winforton lands. James ap Meurig died intestate in 1522.

In 1540, David ap Howell ap David Las, was documented as owner of Rhosgoch mill when he was executed for murder. He left two thirds of his property to his brother, Hugh ap Howell, and one third to his wife, Margaret.

Then, in the 1550s, a claim was made to the Court of Augmentations by John Bassett that Hughe ap David had changed the water course, thus affecting the working of his mill. This is where the confusion about the location of the second mill came from. ML could not "find" the "missing" mill. It was not until very recently that she had her "eureka moment" when she realized that the mills were on the same site, but worked by different people. The existence of the second wheel pit cemented this idea for both ML and Janet.

The next mention of the mill that ML has found is in 1556 when Hugh ap Howell, with joint owner William Wytney, destroyed the wheels of the mills. In 1563, Thomas ap Howell and Thomas Vaughan took a lease from the Crown for 40 years and promised to build a new mill "at no cost to the Queen". By 1608, Hothnant mill and a fulling mill are shown, in a list of the King's Mills, as working and they are valued at 3s 4d. The mill was still a Crown mill in 1784 when the Biddle family took it over. It is probable that, whilst the mill was owned by the Crown, it was leased to someone and then worked by yet another person.

Many maps show "Rhosgoch Mills" rather than mill singular. Janet even has a sign with her Great Grandfather's name on it that calls it "Rhosgoch Mills". This seems to be fairly conclusive evidence that the two mills were on the same site.



Janet then showed us some photos of the mill, before and after her renovations. When she took it over, it was in a very bad state and not much of the structure was left intact. Unfortunately, there had not been enough stone tiles remaining to re-roof the building and so she bought some thick Welsh slate tiles to do the job. In any case, stone tiles would have been too heavy for the structure.



**The mill before renovations**



**..... and after renovation**

In response to a question, Janet said that she hoped at some stage to reinstate the pond. It badly needs dredging and she will have to have permission to reconnect the water supply. It is still possible to walk up the water courses and see the retaining walls, but a great deal of costly work will be needed in order to realise this dream.

ML thanked Janet for her very interesting talk. It was fascinating to learn about the “discovery” that she and Janet had made about the siting of the second mill. The photos of the mill in days gone by brought back memories for many of the locals in the audience. It is wonderful to see the building “rescued” from under the ivy cladding which had hidden it away for so many years. Everyone agreed that Janet has done a wonderful job in restoring the mill to its former glory. It is now a real asset to the village. She has worked wonders outside as well and there is now a very pretty garden.

The evening ended with refreshments – many thanks to Iris Lloyd for her help with these. Thanks are also due, as always, to John Price whose technological wizardry helps to bring our meetings to a much wider audience. We could not do this without his expertise.