

Notes from Local Interests Group 23rd February 2017

Apologies were received from: Edwina Griffiths, Peter and Pauline Spode, Jenny Francis and Grace Davies.

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), John and Margaret Price, Avryl and Roy Lloyd, Wendy and Dainis Ozols (DO), Bill Johnson, Ros Coles, Claire Mitchell, Evelyn and John Bally, Gareth Jenkins, Sue Ievers, Richard Thomas, Geoff and Mollie Moore, Sylvia Illingsworth.

Maureen Lloyd welcomed everyone and explained that the aim of the meeting was to look at farming in the local area in WW2, and also to look at the background to agricultural policy, which had begun in WW1.

WarAg, its origins and its implications for Pendre Farm, Painscastle, in WW2.

Wendy Ozols (WO) explained that Roy and Avryl Lloyd had some documents relating to the impact that WW2 had had on Pendre Farm and how the land was used. She had used these, together with information gleaned from RL and AL, to put together her presentation. Since the policies adopted during WW2 had their origins in WW1, she had also done some research on this period too.

WO began by saying that, at the start of WW1, people's diets were not particularly good, being measured in terms of calorific rather than nutritional value. The staples were bread, meat, potatoes, eggs, bacon, butter, sugar, milk, cheese, jam and tea. 60% of all of our food was imported (in respect of sugar, this figure was 100% and much of this was imported from Germany!). (In 1914, it has been estimated that Germany was 90% self-sufficient in food.) The food supply routes became increasingly more treacherous after the war started. This meant that the UK was in a very vulnerable position when it came to food, a situation made worse by the targeting of British merchant ships by German U-boats from 1916.

The outbreak of WW1 should have prompted the UK Government to change its attitude towards food security, but it remained confident that the Royal Navy would be able to keep the shipping lanes open and there was a general belief that the war would be over by Christmas. On August 18th, 1914, the government had called on farmers to increase food production, but it was not until May 1915 that something concrete was done, when Lord Selborne was appointed President of the Board of Agriculture and a Committee to administer food production was set up. This led to the "Ploughing-up Campaign" – the aim being to turn pastures over to arable production. There were some problems involved with this - the shortage of horses, the lack of machinery and the fact that many young men had enlisted. Eventually, War Agricultural Executive Committees (WarAgs) were set up in every county and, as a result of strict policies, arable production had increased by 2.5 million acres by 1918. Nearly 9 million acres had been planted with grain and potatoes. The Ministry of Munitions had taken over responsibility for the production and distribution of agricultural machinery and, in 1917, the War Office released some men from the war to help with the Spring cultivation.

However, compulsory food rationing was not introduced until 1918, although the government had (unsuccessfully) asked people to reduce their food intake in February 1917. Rationing continued until 1920. So, it can be said that WW1 acted as a model for future food policies in the UK. Below is

a link to an excellent resource, put together by the NFU, that WO used extensively for her research. A most useful and interesting infographic is also available on this web page.

<https://www.nfuonline.com/about-us/history/farming-and-the-first-world-war/digital-edition-the-few-that-fed-the-many/>

WO then moved on to WW2. The WarAgs were re-formed in 1939, the government being keen to learn lessons from WW1 and to be prepared right from the start; there was a WarAg for every county. This time, they were given even more power over farmers and landowners. They were charged with: surveying rural land in their county; serving orders on farmers requiring work to be done; taking possession of land if it was necessary; and, deciding what crops should be grown and in which fields. The aim was to increase the production of foodstuffs. In fact, between 1939 and Spring 1940, total productive land in UK increased by 1.7 million acres.

WO then moved on to what impact this had had on Pendre Farm in Painscastle. She began by giving some background information about the farm and its ownership. Pendre has been in the same family since the early 1830s. The first two owners, father and son, were both called William Price. When the son died, the farm passed to his daughter, Elizabeth Price, and she married William Lloyd of Wernewydd, so Pendre was farmed by yet another William. His son, Allan, took over in 1941 and, following Allan's death, in 1999 the farm came to his son, Roy Lloyd. Roy now farms with his son James – meaning that the 6th generation of the same family is already actively farming the land (with the prospect of a 7th generation to come as Roy has three grand-children). The farm is 147 acres.

In the 1940-41 season, the quota allocated in the Orders for ploughing at Pendre was 36 acres, with no fewer than 5 acres of wheat and 1.5 acres of potatoes; no fewer than 22.75 acres had to be cereals for grain and/or beet and the rest planted with things chosen from a long list of mostly fodder crops. Five fields were included in the order and WarAg told William Lloyd what had to be planted in each of them. There were also dates by which ploughing and sowing had to be completed for named crops and these were enforced rigidly; for example, the land allocated for potatoes had to be ploughed and sown before 17th May 1941.

Twice a year, the farmer had to complete a "Returns" form. The one for June 1941 shows that Pendre had produced 5 acres each of wheat and barley, 18 acres of oats, 1.5 acres of main crop potatoes, 6 acres of turnips and swedes for fodder and half an acre of mangolds. There were also 13 acres of clover, 21 acres of permanent grass (for mowing) and 23 acres of rough grazing on the farm. In terms of livestock, altogether the farm had 43 cattle, 191 ewes (of varying ages), 10 rams (tups and lambs) and 36 "other" sheep and lambs. There were also 5 pigs in total and 202 poultry (chickens, ducks and geese). Many of these animals were kept for breeding.

Apart from William Lloyd and his wife, there was just one other male worker (over 21), and they had 7 horses in total on the farm, with another 19 ponies "on the hill". William also owned an engine with six horse power. He stated that he had been the owner-occupier for 37 years and that the estimated rental value of his farm was £130 pa.

For a post-war comparison, WO also showed us data for the 1946-47 agricultural year. There were now nine fields under the order, but the acreage was more or less the same (just over 37 acres); the amount of land to be put to wheat and potatoes had increased slightly. By this date, Allan had taken over from his father. The ploughing and sowing dates were now given separately, but were more or less the same as in 1940-41, with the exception of that for winter wheat which had changed from "before 15th February" in 1941 to "by 10th November" for 1946, which makes a bit more sense for this particular crop.

The livestock returns in 1947 were broadly the same as those for 1941, with the exception of poultry. Bill Johnson interjected at this point and said that early in the war, farmers had been encouraged to keep chickens to be sold as a source of protein, but later on they were considered a little too "greedy" in terms of grain consumption and so farmers reduced their flocks. In terms of crops, Pendre produced 6.5 acres of wheat, 3 acres of barley, 17 acres of oats, 2 acres of potatoes, 5 acres of turnips and swedes, 1.5 acres of mangolds and 4.5 acres of rape. There were 12 acres of grass for mowing, 14 acres of grass for grazing, 17 acres of permanent grass (mowing) and 63 acres of permanent grass (grazing). Allan also recorded 0.5 acre of cider apples and stated that the farm had 3 tons of hay, 2 tons of wheat and barley straw and 3 tons of oat straw in store. By now, there was more labour, with a boy and a girl added to the one male worker (over 21).

WarAg paid the farmer for his crops and one such payment showed an income of £20 for 2 acres of potatoes and £13 for 6.5 acres of wheat (figures from 1946). But, the farm was also charged £7.2s.7d for services. The sorts of services that WarAg charged for were: 12s/hour for disc harrowing; £1/day to hire a combine drill, with an additional 10s for delivery and collection; hire of potato spinner £1.10s.; reaping and binding at 16s/hour (although there was a deduction of 2s/hour if the farmer rode the binder); and, 7s. 6d. for baling twine. In 1949, there is a record of Allan Lloyd receiving a subsidy for 2 heifers at £3/head.

Rationing of food in WW2 started in January 1940 and continued, for some items, until 1954. Roy still has one or two of his mother's ration books and we looked at the last one, dated 1953-54. She was registered with Jack Davies in Hay for meat, and Pearks in Hay for fat, cheese, bacon and sugar. She had not registered with anyone for her egg ration, probably because they were producing enough eggs on the farm.

Altogether, this was a fascinating insight into how one local farm was influenced by the agricultural policies in WW2 and we all appreciated what hard work this must have been for the farmer and his very reduced workforce, especially since the rules were very rigidly enforced. However, the UK population must have been extremely appreciative of the efforts of the nation's farmers in keeping them fed throughout such a long period (14 years) of "hardship".

WarAg and the Ploughing up of the Begwns during WW2

This section was covered by Bill Johnson, who used to work as an agricultural adviser in an organisation which succeeded WarAg. He started work in Somerset, where he witnessed some hostility to WarAg from local people, especially those worst affected by dispossession. However, in his talk he intended to concentrate on the Begwns and how they were used during WW2.

By way of an introduction, Bill told us a little of the background to the policies employed in our local area. Whilst Britain was not, in general, prepared for WW2, the Ministry of Food definitely was and quickly introduced the "Dig for Victory" campaign, which led to the cultivation of areas hitherto not used for arable production, including the downlands in S England, parks in cities, people's gardens and places like the Begwns being dug up in order to increase agricultural production. "Pig Clubs" were started and the Women's Land Army was mobilised (as mentioned by WO, this had its origins in WW1). Right from the start, food was rationed but, in order for this to work, it was essential that food was available locally. So, WarAg told farmers what they had to grow and they also advised them on how best to grow their crops. In fact, it is considered that people were better fed during WW2 than they had been before or, indeed, probably have been since!

Maesllwch Castle was the local WarAg office (Radnorshire War Agricultural Executive Committee), the main HQ being in Llandrindod. It was also the base of the Land Army much to the delight of the local lads!

Bill showed us a photo of the Begwns which featured bracken, gorse and grass. He then told us of the old adage: "Under bracken there is gold, under gorse there is silver, and under heather there is destitution." The photo of the Begwns showed that there was considerable potential for productive agriculture as bracken dominates (with grass) and there is also gorse, but little heather. This made the area very good for potato production. The soils have a low pH since no lime had been applied for livestock grazing and, in any case, lime was scarce during the early part of the war as it was used for building. The pH was too low for cereal production, but potatoes can make excellent use of the nutrients accumulated from the years of livestock grazing and decaying bracken as they grow. He went on to tell us that potatoes were an excellent food crop to grow during WW2; they are high in fibre, good suppliers of energy and they contain many essential elements of nutrition, such as vitamins B1, B6 and C, niacin, calcium and potassium.

A large area of the Begwns was ploughed up and evidence can still be seen, for example the large concrete platforms to the far west of the ridge which were once covered in Anderson Shelters and used for the maintenance of the machinery used for potato production. These shelters are still being used by a farmer, but they were moved, after the war, to Church House Farm at Llanfaredd. The shelters were not used for the storage of potatoes as they were not suitable. In all, 300 acres of the Begwns were opened up to potato production and this provided sufficient work for the local young men, meaning that they could stay in the area and work on their family farms as well.

Bill went on to talk about the use of machinery. The Americans sent tractors to the UK during the war to help with agricultural production. However, the early models were not always suitable for use in places like the Begwns. For example, many tractors had a "tricycle" arrangement of wheels and would easily topple over on uneven ground or slopes. A more successful tractor was the Standard Fordson which was lower and four-wheeled. Later in the war, from 1945 onwards, D2 Caterpillars were used, and these were brought in by train to Glasbury.

Gradually, during the war, potato production on the Begwns ceased; it is not possible to sustain yields when growing the same crop year after year on the same land. By the end of WW2, the Begwns were mainly used for cattle production. The cattle were driven, en masse, down to the market in Hay and it was advisable to keep well away from the area when this was happening as it resembled a stampede.

Whilst WarAg was not always popular, the farming policies were very successful. They kept the population fed during the war and the prices of food products were fixed and standard all over the country, as were the prices given to the farmers for their output. In 1947, the Agriculture Act was passed. This stated that never again would farmers be under-rewarded for the crops and livestock they produced, in other words it guaranteed prices; it also gave farmers an assured market. This policy lasted until 1973 when the UK joined what was then the European Economic Community (EEC), the forerunner of the EU.

At this point, Geoff Moore commented that he had picked potatoes as a boy during the war, not locally, but in Leicestershire. He was paid a small amount of money for doing this.

Roy Lloyd said that he had not realised how strict the ploughing and sowing dates were for farmers under WarAg, and that this must have been difficult for them to achieve, especially when the weather was bad. Bill said that this is true, but that the policies had been "successfully strict".

Sue levers asked whether the cattle that had been kept on the Begwns would have been native breeds. Bill said that there was no importation of foreign breeds at that time and so the answer was yes.

John Bally asked whether there was anything in the "orders" about the keeping of bees as honey would have been a good source of sweetener. Bill was not sure about this but he has since found out from Marian Guthrie that honey was highly prized and its production was indeed under the control of WarAg. Ros Coles added that bees would have been kept and they probably would have been more productive because there was a greater variety of wildflowers around in those days and also there were fewer diseases, such as varroa.

ML thanked Bill for his very interesting and well-illustrated talk and said that we had all learned a good deal about farming in the local area during and after WW2. We are all extremely grateful to him for so generously giving of his time to come to talk to us.

The Battlefields of Wales, particularly Painscastle 1198.

Dainis Ozols (DO) said that he and ML had visited the National Library of Wales on 22nd February to attend the "soft launch" of a new web site dedicated to historic Welsh battlefields. The presentation had been given by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales), who had been tasked with the preparation of an Inventory of Historic Battlefields by the Welsh Government (in the form of CADW). DO explained that new legislation, known as the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, now requires the Welsh Government to keep a record for each local authority area in Wales of every conflict site considered to be of historic interest. The legislation would also enable these sites to be better protected in the future. The definition of these sites was quite broad and also included skirmishes and even downed warplanes, for example. Compared with the 46 designated battlefields in England and 17 in Scotland, DO said that RCAHMW had been tasked with researching over 700 sites, which was quite impressive.

Local residents had been aware of some archaeological activity in the vicinity of the possible site of the 1198 Battle of Painscastle back in 2012 and DO said that the work undertaken by private consultants and metal detectorists on behalf of RCAHMW had included a variety of methods, including LiDAR data analysis and geophysical resistivity surveys, as well as many site visits and extensive desk-based research. Apparently, RCAHMW had then followed this work up in 2013 with more intrusive methods, i.e. limited excavations by way of trenches, in the vicinity of Rhydlydan farm. Only Painscastle and Pilleth (Bryn Glas) had been surveyed to this extent. Many artefacts had been found and recorded, although only a very few of these could be positively traced back to the Early Medieval period. In fact, the work had revealed nothing that could positively confirm the location of the 1198 battle, although it was now thought that the most likely site for this was the area broadly covered by Rhydlydan and a little further to the East. This made sense in that the river was fordable here and the attacking English army would have been coming from the direction of Hay. DO said that there was no doubt that the battle had taken place, despite the lack of real physical evidence, as it had been recorded by several contemporary sources. The research had also taken account of the anecdotal evidence over the years from local people who had witnessed the recovery of bodies during excavation work for the fish pools at Rhydlydan and in the process of road widening works.

DO said that the web site was still in the course of preparation, but that there was already a lot of material to be found there, including the detailed archaeological reports from 2012 and 2013, as

well as background information about the 1196 and 1198 battles. Links were also provided to original source material where this existed in digital form. RCAHMW were also hoping that members of the public would add comments to the material and any remarks would be followed up. DO said that he hoped we might be able to commemorate the 1198 battle in some way, as it had been said that 3700 Welshmen had been killed in just one day. This might be something that the community could arrange in the future, possibly with Welsh Government assistance.

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields in Wales can be found at <http://battlefields.rcahmw.gov.uk>

It is worth looking at a note about the original sources of this historical information at <http://battlefields.rcahmw.gov.uk/about-welsh-battles/battlefield-sources/>

ML thanked all of the contributors and said that this had been a most successful evening. We finished off with refreshments, kindly made by Avryl Lloyd, and people had the opportunity to look at the paperwork relating to Pendre Farm that had been brought along by Roy Lloyd.