

Notes from Local Interest Group 27th April, 2017

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy and Dainis Ozols, Sue Farmer, Richard Thomas (RT), Mollie and Geoff Moore (GM), Pauline and Peter Spode, Richard Martin, Val and Mike Head, Lesley and John Cooper, Avryl and Roy Lloyd (RL), Grace Davies, Jenny Francis.

Apologies: John and Margaret Price, Christine Rose.

ML welcomed everyone and introduced the first speaker for the evening, Richard Thomas.

The History of Upper Llandewi House & Farm

Richard started by telling us that he has been living locally for nearly 6 years and that, right from the start, he was interested in the history of his house. He was keen to renovate it, whilst conserving its important and interesting features. The house is located to the west of the Begwns. Richard and his partner, Sarah, also purchased a small acreage of land surrounding the house and buildings. Richard has also done some research on the farm in its entirety. The house and most of the farm is in Llandewi Fach parish, and some of the land is in Llanstephan parish. He told us that he had used many sources for his information but that he must acknowledge the invaluable help that he received from Joyce Lloyd, who was brought up in the house and who still lives locally. She lived in Upper Llandewi until the 1950s when she got married. (At this point, RL said that he had been at the wedding – he was a young boy at the time.) He also acknowledged the major input on the history of the house that was received from Richard Suggett, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments Wales (RCAHMW).

Upper Llandewi is thought to have been built between 1550 and 1560 and is grade 2 listed. It is described by CADW as a “former cruck house” and “a good representative example of a typical vernacular Radnorshire farmhouse with internal structural features”. It has been much altered over the years, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. As noted in the Listing document, the house is built of rubble stone (now mostly lime-washed), and it has later dormer windows and a brick built chimney stack from the same period. Richard showed us a photo of the internal stone staircase, beside the fireplace, as well as some salting slabs in the former dairy in order to illustrate some of the features detailed when listed.

Richard continued by showing us a plan of the farm yard in 1900 and said that it was like this until the 1980s. The house and outbuildings were laid out parallel to one another. (According to Richard Suggett, this is typical of a medieval settlement.) The house had a chaff house attached at one end and a stable with granary above attached at the other. Across the yard was a stable for cart horses, with a pig run and pig cote (sty) attached. A second outbuilding housed cows on the ground floor with hay loft above, with a hay barn attached. The whole yard was surrounded by a stone wall.

In 2011, Richard and Sarah applied for listed building consent to enable them to make improvements to the house and Richard Suggett, came to do a survey. He wrote a very detailed report on the house and outbuildings and was particularly pleased to see that the layout was very similar to how it would have been 500 years ago. He said that the original house would have had five crucks and there is evidence of these in the house today. He described it as a single-bayed peasant hall house, which in his book, ‘Houses and History in the March of Wales, Radnorshire 1400-1800’, he describes peasant hall houses as “a gentry house in miniature”, and a typical homestead of the primarily pastoral agriculturalists that were living in this part of Wales in the 16th century. This type of peasant hall was very common at the time, but there are few good surviving examples and so Upper

Llandewi is important. These houses are the precursors of late 16th/early 17th century longhouses of the distinctive hearth-passage plan, and this is what Upper Llandewi became.

According to Richard Suggett, the house has gone through many stages, which may be summarised as:

1. 1550-1560 – early stages with 5 crucks and 4 bays. This medieval footprint remains today. The house was timber-framed.
2. 1600-1650 – it became a hearth-passage house (the ovolo moulding helped with this dating – c.1620). The house became storeyed and a fireplace was added. Richard showed us a photo of the enormous lintel above the fireplace. The central chimney was probably put in at this time.
3. 18th and 19th centuries – modernisation, including raising of the roof and dormers, introduction of a first floor chamber fireplace, construction of a back kitchen fireplace and bread oven and a corn drying kiln, amongst other additions.

Joyce Lloyd has been able to shed light on more recent history:

1. 1950s – improvements were made to be finished for Joyce Lloyd's wedding in 1955. A bathroom and kitchen were added and the house was re-plastered. A Rayburn was installed and the stable was converted to a wash house. The front kitchen window and bathroom dormer were both added at this time.
2. 1960s – the house was re-roofed with tiles replacing the slates on the front and stone tiles on the back. Joyce was able to show Richard a copy of the invoice for this work.
3. 1980s-90s – there has been little change to the house itself, but the chaff house has been converted into a garage, the cow house has been removed and the yard has been concreted over. The pig sheds and runs have also been removed. (There was some discussion here about the function of a chaff house. This housed a machine, now located at Joyce Lloyd's home, which cut up the straw and chaff so that it could be used as fodder for the horses.)

Richard told us that Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) had carried out a fireplace survey in 2013 and identified five stages of construction, dating from the 17th century up until the mid-20th century. They found a small bread oven to one side of the fireplace and the remains of a cast iron cauldron crane. There was also evidence of the width of the enclosed fireplace having been reduced in order to install a "classical Victorian cast iron range and flues". This survey had to be done in order to gain permission to take the fireplace back to its "original" state and Richard showed us a photo showing the completed work.

The house had a barley drying kiln which was located in what was the back kitchen. Joyce remembers that this was used to dry malting barley for beer. The only evidence for this is the raised ceiling levels in the kitchen and Richard has no idea what it would have looked like. (ML mentioned that there were some old kiln tiles at Lower Llandewi that would probably be very similar to those used here.)

The haybarn/upper barn is described as a "combination range" and was used as a threshing barn. This type of building was probably built in the late 18th century and Richard Suggett has dated the one at Upper Llandewi to around 1800. The layout would have been byre below with "tollert" for hay above. Joyce has said that the farm grew wheat, barley and oats, which were cut with a binder and then threshed on the barn floor. The lower barn or stable has a high ceiling on the ground floor to accommodate horses rearing and this barn was probably built later than the upper barn, probably

in the late 1800s. The floor is made of cobbles. Richard T. has seen evidence of this barn on a map of 1910, but not on the map of 1843.

There are ownership/ tenancy details in the deeds going back to 1687 but Richard has not been able to decipher these yet. What is thought though is the house came into the ownership of Walter de Winton in 1856, the owner of Measllwch estate. It appears to have been sold to the Llanstephan Estate in 1916.

Then, in 1927, the house and land were bought by the Parry family. William Parry (the younger) was the tenant and his father William Parry (the elder) and his nephew Danzey Parry jointly purchased it from Sir Lawrence Richard Phillips of Llanstephan House in Boughrood. It consisted of 146 acres, 2 roods and 30 perches. The farm remained in the Parry family and, in the early 1990s, it was inherited by Gwyn James from the estate of Danzey Parry.

Work on the census data shows that the house and land have been occupied by just three related families between 1841 and when Richard and Sarah bought it in 2011. These are: the Jones family (1841-1891), the Parrys (1891-1985) and the James family (1985-2011); the Jones and Parry families were related – Ann Jones married William Parry (the elder) some time before 1891. Joyce Lloyd has been able to give Richard a great deal of detail about her family and has also shown him old photographs of her relatives. Hers is a very complicated family tree which Richard is still trying to properly decipher.

Richard has also studied the tithe maps of 1843/44 which show that most of the field sizes and boundaries are pretty much the same to this day. The only major change has been in the land use; once the land was mainly arable and now it is almost completely pastoral. There is an orchard on the farm, which was not evident on either the tithe map or the OS map of 1887, but which was there on the 1905 OS map. Joyce remembers there being cider apples at the back of the orchard, with an eating variety called Tom Putt in the middle and more eaters in front. The cider was made on the farm and the barrels were kept in a cellar with bars on the window. Richard has replanted the orchard (in 2011) with a mixture of cider, eating and cooking apples, along with pears, plums and damsons.

Upper Llandewi as owned by the Parrys also included two small previously separate holdings, Cwm Howell and Pentwyn (or Pen Wyd). Even by the 1881 census, there were no recorded residents at Cwm Howell and all that is left of Pentwyn is a derelict stone wall.

Richard concluded his talk by saying that he still has quite a bit of work to do in terms of research. He has not found much information relating to the time before the early 1800s and he still needs to follow up names mentioned in the deeds. He is also interested in looking at estate maps and manorial records, as well as parish registers. In addition, he would like to investigate the effects of the WarAg on the farm.

ML thanked Richard for his incredibly detailed, well-illustrated and interesting talk, in particular praising him for being so meticulous in his research and his preparation of such an informative presentation for our meeting.

ML went on to introduce our second speaker for the evening, Geoff Moore.

RAC Light Car Trials, 1924

Geoff Moore introduced this topic by telling us that the trials had been set up by the RAC in order to get the British car industry properly organised. At the time, there were more than twenty different car manufacturers in the UK, not all of which were likely to be very successful in producing a properly commercial "light car". The RAC realised that the future of driving was probably with small cars for the commercial market and this is why they undertook the testing of the vehicles in the trials. Each manufacturer (together with some foreign ones – eg the Derby which was a French car) was invited to submit one car and driver. The car entered had to be of exactly the same specification as that on offer for sale to the public. The trials were to be based in Llandrindod Wells and would consist of about 1000 miles of road driving. (The word road should be loosely interpreted here as, at the time, not all of the roads in this part of Wales were properly surfaced and many in the photos that Geoff showed us looked like nothing more than dirt tracks.)

Each car in the trial had to carry an observer (weighing no more than 170lbs, including an overcoat); the driver could be no more than 150lbs. Passengers could be carried, although it was stated that women could "add to the inconvenience"!!

This was an extremely important event at the time and it attracted a good deal of media coverage, including newspapers and motoring magazines. Because of this, the event was recorded by professional photographers at certain points along the route and GM, his wife Mollie, and also Peter Spode and Dainis Ozols have tried to recreate the routes, taking modern photos that can be compared with the ones taken in 1924.

In May 1924, the cars gathered in Llandrindod to be inspected prior to the trials; most of them were open-topped vehicles. They were weighed with and without their drivers and observers and generally inspected to ensure that they were as per specifications. All of the entrants stayed at the Metropole Hotel in the town. GM showed us a photo of one car, a Trojan which was made by Leyland, outside Tom Norton's Garage in the town.

On the first day of the trials, the cars set off from Llandrindod and took the following route: Llandrindod – Rhayader – Llanidloes – Bwlch y Groes – Bala – Gibbet Hill – Newtown – Llandrindod. GM showed us some photos from 1924 including one of a Rhode at Llanidloes, a Palladium (which was an extremely expensive car with a top speed of 59mph) and an Austin 7. One photo, taken at Staylittie, showed a very rough stretch of road, which must have been quite uncomfortable to negotiate. Alongside the 1924 photos, GM put up ones taken earlier this year when he, Peter Spode and Dainis Ozols went out to recreate this part of the trials route. Bwlch y Groes (one of the highest roads in Wales) was a particular challenge for the cars in 1924 because it is a long and relatively steep climb, with many bends making it impossible to build up any speed. Not all of the cars made it up this hill and so did not "pass" the trial. A photo of a car coming up this hill made the front cover of *Light Car and Cyclecar* magazine. In the afternoon, the next main challenge was Gibbet Hill, but all of the cars managed this hurdle. From here, the cars passed through Newtown and made their way back to Llandrindod via Crossgates.

The second day there was a different route: Llandrindod – Beulah – Llangammarch Wells – Llandovery – Senni Hill – Brecon – Builth Wells – Pan Hill – Brecon – Erwood – Sunnybank – Painscastle – Rhosgoch – Newchurch – Walton – Llandrindod. GM had recreated this route with the help of Mollie and, once again, he had modern photos to put alongside those taken on trials day. Early on there was a challenge in the form of a large and quite deep ford at Beulah and many of the cars struggled to get through this. In fact, one (a Wolseley) broke down and got stuck in the ford,

although the driver did eventually make it out of the water and so avoided disqualification. GM showed us lots of pictures of the cars coming up Sunnybank, another quite major challenge because of the hairpin bends. In Rhosgoch, there was another ford to cross, but this one was not quite so much of a challenge. GM showed us an interesting photo of The Twmp (just by Mill in the village); this is no longer standing having been demolished by Tom the Mill some years ago. (ML said that she was particularly pleased that GM had found this picture as she had not seen an old photo of the Twmp before.) There was also a ford at Gladestry with a footbridge alongside. All of the 1924 photos that GM showed us of places in the local area were recognisable even after such a long time.

After these two runs from Llandrindod, the cars were driven on to Hereford and eventually to Brooklands in Surrey (clocking up around 1000 miles in total). The best car in the trial was the Gwynne, which did an amazing (even by the standards of today) 46mpg! It was declared the car "most fit for service". The Trojan also received an award. Some cars from the trials did not last long on the market whilst others, like the Austin 7, continued to be sold for many years.

At the end of his talk, GM showed us a mascot (a dragon) that had been commissioned by Tom Norton (owner of the garage in Llandrindod Wells) in the 1920s. Apparently, Lloyd George had one. Not that many were made and so GM is very lucky to own one. To finish off this most interesting part of the evening, Roy Lloyd wheeled in a wheel from a 1920 Morris, which had belonged to his Grandfather. This had wooden spokes and was metal around the part where the tyre would have been fitted.

ML thanked GM for his most informative and detailed account of the RAC trials, which he had gone to considerable trouble to research. The photographs were most illuminating and it was very interesting to see old photos of our local area. It was a most interesting contribution to the evening.

The meeting ended with refreshments made by Avryl Lloyd and a chance for members to view some old photographs of Painscastle which ML has recently found.