

Local Interest Group Visit 31st May 2018

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Roy Lloyd (RL), Lisa Lloyd, Celia Price, Jude Hearn, Gareth Jenkins, Leslie & John Cooper, Joan Lloyd, Chris & Jeremy Rose, Richard Martin, Hannah Shaw (HS), Edward Shaw (ES), Alec Powell and Grace Davies & Sue Farmer (SF) joined us at Trewylod.

Apologies: Wendy and Dainis Ozols

The Old Roads of Painscastle

The walk started at The Rices, a track heading southwest from The Oaks road (SO 176461). There was some discussion about the name with ML suggesting it was probably The Rises, meaning an area of springs and water rising. This was the old road to Hay on Wye and Roy Lloyd's father remembered its being used. The Council maintained both the track and the bridge over the stream. Mr (Roly) Morris, the postman from the village (The Old Post Office, Dyffryn), used this track/road to deliver the mail on his horse. In fact, he was one of the last postmen in Powys to make deliveries on horseback; he retired in 1971. The GPO would bring the post to the village where it was sorted in the post office. His round was as follows: Bryn y Garth → Wern Newydd → up to the Begwns and Croesfeillog → Yr Allt → Vrondee → Bailey Bedw → The Wern → The Cwm → Upper, Middle and Lower Pentre, and then across the Bachawy to Glanyrafan → Llandeviron and up to Penbedw → Penllan → Llaneast → Trowley → The Lundies and back to the village. Obviously, the exact route that he took would depend on who had mail. Mr Morris was awarded the BEM for 52 years service to the Post Office at a ceremony in the Metropole, Llandrindod, on 28th September 1967. RL remembered him riding his rounds and, as he came down the hill road, he could be heard singing away. He sometimes rode his stallion and was concerned if the ponies on the hill were close by. The road (The Rices) used to be a stone track and this is still evident in places today, although most of it is now grassed over. It follows a well-maintained hedge for the most part.

Until WW2, many of the fields along the track were "scrubby", but they were improved as part of the WarAg. ML pointed out that it is evident that all of the farms surrounding this area are called Wern... (Wernfawr, Wernoog, Wern Newydd). Wern refers to a swampy, boggy area. At one point, an old wall is visible to the right of one of the fields along here. HS pointed out some plants that were of interest: Crested Dog's Tail, Smooth Meadow grass, Common Mouse Ear and Marsh Foxtail, which was a grey blue colour and likes areas which are damp and poached and hold standing water in the winter. She also pointed out Glaucous Sedge, which is also blue grey in colour but which has separate male and female flower heads. There is a Meadow Foxtail which grows on more fertile land. ES found an Amber snail; its body is so large it can hardly retreat back into its shell. These snails live in tall vegetation in damp areas. We saw Compact Rush which was not quite out, when it would have a little tightly packed brown 'button'. Yorkshire Fog is a grass easily identified with its purple striped pyjamas at its base. There was also lots of Oval Sedge, which hadn't opened up properly, and, disappointingly, not the very rare Flat Sedge which only grows in Wales on the Begwns and Henallt Common! There was the yellow Tormentil and huge quantities of Lousewort, as well as Devil's-Bit Scabious which flowers in August/September with big purple pompoms. Initially, the track is on land belonging to the Lloyds, Pendre, but it passes onto Bryn y Garth land in a field called The Springings. When this was bought, probably in the 1930s, it was covered in oak woodland. It was said that the felling of the timber paid for the farm. At the far end of this field, the track goes off to the left and out onto the minor road by Bryn y Garth barn. The old track then followed this minor road up to the crossroads just below Plas Warren and from there down the hill to Rhydspence. This is probably one of the minor drovers' routes along which cattle were moved from the Welsh farms to the markets in England. Some people speculate that it could have been a Roman road. We found Common Sorrel, Pignut, Marsh Bedstraw and one of the Hemp Nettles.

We left the old track and our walk took us through a gate and into the Betting Field just below Wern Newydd; this now belongs to Tyllwyd. HS pointed out some particularly large plants of Lesser Spearwort in the winter wet trackway. We discussed the difference in the fields we had walked through. Although there were similarities,

there were a lot of differences in the plants to be found. RL said they had mowed the Betting Field and used it for bedding. There have been a lot of different people living at Wern Newydd. Roy's grandfather lived there before marrying and moving to Pendre. Then George Herdman bought it and he sold it when his son Peter went to Great Lloyny. RL remembered one of the owners milking a lot of cows. It was a farm which changed hands often. After crossing a stream, we walked gradually uphill until we reached the "main" road from Painscastle down to Clyro. After turning towards Painscastle, we walked along the road for about 100m and then we went through a gate on the right and into Above the Common field, land belonging to the Prices at Trewyrlod. At the lower end of this field, there is an area which has been left (under Glastir and, before that, the ESA initiative) as rough reedy ground in order to attract ground breeding birds, such as curlew and lapwing, whose habitat has been disappearing rapidly over recent years.

From this field, we moved into The Common, which is not a common at all (but may have been at some time in the past - on the Tithe map it is called the Great Common). The Common used to be covered in rushes but it has been drained and improved and is now good pasture. An old track follows the left-hand side of this field and eventually becomes enclosed between an old hedgerow on one side and an old wall on the other; this section is known as The Narrows. Again, there is evidence of a stone base to the track. ML thinks that this might be another old drovers' road; it is relatively wide and has grass verges on either side. At the bottom of The Narrows, the track emerges into a field beside a stream; the field is known as Flat Field. The stream here has been moved to follow what was once the roadway and this is very obvious when you look at the sides. Two streams merge here to continue on down the valley. We crossed the stream and retired to Trewyrlod for cider and cake and a general review of the evening's walk.

There was some discussion about the name of the house called The Oaks. SF said that, although the present house is not very old, there has been a house there for quite a long time. ML said that as well as the track we had walked which links to Rhydspence, there is another ancient track which comes from Clyro to Frosty Corner (the right-hand bend on the Rhosgoch road before going uphill), and then goes through Lower Cwmgwannon to Upper Cwmgwannon and eventually emerges at the edge of the Begwns. The present road from the Begwns to Old Forest did not exist. A road did once go through Upper Penforest and Lower Penforest and then down towards the Cwm on the Clyro to Rhosgoch road, where there once was a mill. The other trackway went off to the right before Upper Penforest, along the track by The Stone and onwards towards Llowes. Much of this track has a hard surface and is still clearly visible. ML said that there is some debate about which way the English army reinforcements came from Clyro to help relieve the siege of the castle in 1198. Some people believe they would have come up the Cwmgwannon valley and that the Painscastle battle actually took place on Llowes Hall dingle on the Begwns, to where the Welsh army had retreated from the castle in order to ambush the English. However, the battle was a disaster for the Welsh with anything up to 3700 men killed, including many from Gwynedd as "Gwenwynwyn had gathered most of the princes of Wales under his banner". Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys, survived and became a very important leader of the area to the North of present day Radnorshire.

Many thanks to the Lloyd family, Pendre, the Lloyd family, Ty Llwyd, and the Price family, Trewyrlod, for allowing us to walk through their land, to Hannah Shaw for her botanical expertise and also to Celia & others who helped with the refreshments.

The next meeting will be a visit to Llanbwchllyn lake on Thursday June 28th, meeting at Painscastle Hall at 7pm to car share.