

Local Interest Group Visit to Bottle Dock and Penisarplwyf 25th July 2019

Present: Dainis and Wendy Ozols (WO), Joan Hughes, Shirley Meredith, Ann Dean, Jenny Francis, Joan Lloyd, Roy and Avryl Lloyd, Lisa Lloyd, John and Margaret Price, David Price (DP), Helen Barnett, Elwyn Jones (EJ), Andrew Simmonds (AS), Cherry and Victor Williams, Richard Thomas.

Apologies: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Neville Harley

WO began the evening by giving Maureen Lloyd's apologies and explaining that she was unwell and unable to attend. She said that, in ML's absence, she would talk about Bottle Dock and Penisarplwyf, using ML's notes. WO introduced Elwyn Jones (Penisarplwyf) and Andrew Simmonds (Pwllperran) whose land we would be visiting. She said that she would also be relying heavily on these two gentlemen to help her with her descriptions and explanations.

ML has done a great deal of research at Powys Archives and she has also interviewed a number of people whilst preparing for the visit. She would like to acknowledge the valuable help given to her by Elwyn Jones, Andrew Simmonds, Dilys Jones (Great House, Llandeilo Graban), Ken Price (ex Fronhowey), Desmond Price (Garth Cottages) and Brian Pugh (Cwrt-y-Cribin).



Bottle Dock

We began by walking down to Bottle Dock over EJ's land. This is located on the River Bachawy; the grid reference is SO 125439. Brian Pugh told ML the following poem:

*The Roaring Lion and the Ranting Cock,
Tis Devil's Den at Bottle Dock*

This is where ML's research began. Why was this place called Bottle Dock and what, exactly, was located there?

The Bachawy at this point forms the boundary between the parishes of Llandeilo Graban and Llanstephan, with Penisarplwyf (which actually means "the house at the end of the parish") in the former and Pwllperran in the latter.

On the Llandeilo Graban side, census data shows the following:

1841 – Lower Mill; 1851 – Little Mill and two cottages; 1861 – two cottages called Bottle Dock; 1871-1911 – only one house called Bottle Dock.

On the Llanstephan side, the census data records:

1841 – Building called the Roaring Cock; 1851 and 1861 – a building called Bottle Dock; 1871 – house called Bottle Dock, shown as unoccupied; 1881 – a house called Bank; 1891 – a house called Bottle Dock; 1901 and 1911 – a house called Bank.

In all of these census returns, not one of the occupants of the houses is recorded as being a miller, even though at least one of the buildings is called "Mill".

ML has found some old maps of Bottle Dock. The Tithe Map of 1839 shows a building on the Llanstephan side, surrounded by an enclosure, which is called Ranting Lion. The census data from the same time (1841) shows an Elizabeth Lewis living on that side of the Bachawy in a house called Roaring Cock. The Roaring Cock was probably a pub; AS told ML that there had been a pub at Bottle Dock. ML says that pubs are always associated with the devil so perhaps the poem should read:

The Ranting Lion and the Roaring Cock
'Tis Devil's Den at Bottle Dock

So, where does Bottle Dock get its name? Could it be a corruption of Roaring Cock or perhaps a reference to bottles and drinking in the past? DP suggested that bottles might have been thrown into the river and, after floating downstream, they may have come to rest at the dock. The mystery of the name is still not solved.

ML has found copies of three old maps, from 1817, 1839 and 1902, which all have some reference to Bottle Dock. On the 1817 map there appear to be three buildings. There is still evidence on the ground of the two cottages which were located here (which we all had an opportunity to look at). The third building is to the south of these and seems to be located right on the river, slightly downstream of the footbridge. It is not shown on the Tithe map, nor on the one dating from 1902. This was probably the mill and EJ has recently found some evidence, down by the river and in the right location, of some manmade features cut into the rockface above the river. This may well be where the mill was located. ML asked the question, "what sort of mill was it"? It is only about half a mile downstream from Cefnige Mill; this was a crown mill where everyone from the parishes of Llandeilo Graban, Llandewi Fach and Llanstephan had to take their grain for milling. Local rumour states that it was a paper mill. Desmond Price told ML that Len Williams (who used to live at Penisarplwyf) told him this. It would not be unusual for a mill to change its purpose. It is recorded that Frogmore Mill in Hertfordshire was a corn mill at the time of the Domesday Book (1086), then it was a fulling mill in 1289 and by 1774 it had become a paper mill. ML also postulated that it could have been a corn mill; someone may have seen an opportunity to undercut Cefnige as there were complaints that people were not taking their grain there as they were obliged to. Another explanation may be that Cefnige was out of action for a time for some reason and so someone built the Bottle Dock Mill to take advantage of this business opportunity.



One thing which is certain is that a number of tracks converge on Bottle Dock, at least six are shown on the current OS map, four of which cross the river at this point. There is a track upstream to Cefnige, another to Pwllperran, one leading to Llanstephan and another going directly uphill to Penisarplwyf. There was a bridge at Bottle Dock wide enough for a horse and trap. (AS recalls that there was a wider wooden bridge there before the current footbridge was built.) Two of the tracks are certainly wide enough for a horse and trap. The one leading down from just above Penisarplwyf between hedges crosses the bridge and goes up the hill on the other side of the stream, through Cwrt-y-Cribin's Bottle Dock field, eventually joining the road to the Begwns by the turning to Pwllperran. AS said that his Grandfather used the "road", with a horse and trap, to take his belongings from Llandefalle, where he lived, to Penisarplwyf, when he went to work there.

ML believes that it is possible that Bottle Dock was on a drovers' route from the Wye crossing at Erwood. If a route to Painscastle via Penisarplwyf and the Begwns was used, this could have reduced the journey by between one and two miles. The road from Erwood which comes up Sunnybank is relatively "new", so when the drovers crossed the Wye they would either have gone through the Pentrecaeau farms to Llandeilo Graban, where Church House seems to have been a drovers' pub, or they could have gone towards the Begwns and stopped at the Ranting Lion field at Bottle Dock. Is this further evidence that the Roaring Cock was a pub? (Ken Price, ex Fronhowey, said that his Grandfather could remember the Sunnybank road being built – could this have been early on in the C20th?)

Whatever the explanation, it is obvious that there was once a small settlement at Bottle Dock. DP told us that he had seen reference in Llandeilo Graban church records of a lower village, Pentre Isaf. EJ added that he had been told by his Mother, Dilys Jones (Great House), that one of the outside buildings up at Penisarplwyf was once used as a school. Perhaps this is more evidence for a small

settlement in this location. On the census returns quoted earlier, some of the occupants of the houses are listed as "scholar".

Members of the group had plenty of time to explore the Bottle Dock location and some went over the footbridge to look at the remains of the house, called Bank, and its enclosure. Roy Lloyd noted that he found an old damson and a plum tree within the enclosure, further evidence that this was a domestic residence. The enclosed area is still quite clear on the ground; it is not particularly big, more like a garden. AS believes that there are signs of a possible water channel coming down the hillside on this side of the river.

A little downstream of the footbridge, there is a waterfall, where a particularly resistant band of blue-grey rock outcrops and has resisted erosion by the river. Although the waterfall is not particularly high, EJ said that the pool beneath it is so deep that you can put a really long stick into it and still not reach the bottom. AS said that he had been told by Len Williams that this was known locally as Furnace Hole and that it is believed to be "bottomless". The waterfall is upstream of the probable mill location.



Penisarplwyf

After exploring Bottle Dock, we walked back up to Penisarplwyf. Firstly, we had a look at the barn which used to be a small school. EJ has been rebuilding the walls here but it was still possible to see some of the old lath and plaster on the walls at the rear.

Penisarplwyf is a Grade II* listed building; it was listed by CADW in September 1960, the year after it was bought by EJ's parents. The house has been dated to 1641 – there is a date above one of the interior doors. It is an L-plan house constructed of stone and was obviously built for a wealthy person, because of its size and the many “embellishments” to be found inside. The gable end on the south-east wing was rebuilt in 1885 and a date stone was incorporated into the new wall. The north and east walls of the house have the original C17th mullion windows, which are a real feature of the house.

Inside, the house is wonderful. EJ has very sympathetically renovated the building, keeping all of the very old and interesting features. CADW's description is that it has a “remarkably fine and largely intact C17th interior with much joinery detailing”. There are wooden panels in almost every room, mostly of post and panel construction, although the one between the pantry and dairy at the north end of the house is of “an unusual and apparently local style”, consisting of “large square-panel timber framing with panels infilled with boards slotted between thin chamfered muntins”. All of the door-heads in the house are rounded and most of the original doors survive. Upstairs in the loft is a door with carved decoration along its top; this was previously located at the foot of the stairs. Dilys Jones told ML that this door had been stolen in the past when there had been some “hippies” living at Penisarplwyf. Amazingly, the door was later found in Kent and returned to the house. The oak staircase going up to the first floor is original and it has a thin newel post rising all the way up to the third storey (in the attic). The sides of the staircase are “part infilled with crude boarding and part with stave type balustrading”.

EJ and his partner, Caroline, very kindly allowed us to look around the house and everyone agreed that it is a remarkable place. EJ has done a brilliant job in making it into a comfortable and modern home whilst retaining all of its historical interest, including the name of one of the builders carved into the wood in one of the bedrooms (William Bevan).

Caroline very kindly provided us with most welcome refreshments – much needed on this very sultry evening. EJ's mother, Dilys, had made some Welsh cakes and AS brought along his delicious home-made cider. Elwyn and Caroline had also put out some very interesting documents relating to the house and land for us to look at.

Our thanks go to the Price family of Penisarplwyf for their generous hospitality, not least for allowing us “free rein” to explore their wonderful home. Many thanks also go to Andrew Simmonds for his role in making this such a special evening for everyone. We had all had a most enjoyable and illuminating evening, made even more special by the glorious weather and spectacular views of the surrounding countryside as we walked up the hill from Bottle Dock.

WO would like to apologise to John Price, who had brought along some information which relates to Penisarplwyf. She completely forgot to ask him to speak during the visit and would like to make amends by including his contribution here.

“In 1827 Hannah Griffiths from Portway (Sister to Rev. John Griffiths) married John Morris, Shoemaker, Whitehall, Painscastle. They had two children, John Morris and Thomas Griffiths Morris. Sadly, in 1830, Hannah's husband John, brother-in-law Edward and son Thomas died within three months of each other. Hannah married widower John Morgans, from the Trowley, in 1831 and Hannah was step mother to his four children, John, Thomas, Elizabeth and James. James was a bailiff and he lived at Bottledock in 1881, (died 1883 aged 54) with his wife, Mary Ann, née Lloyd, from the Trowley. They married in 1855 and had six children who were all born at The Vron, Llanbedr, where James was recorded as a farmer of 50 acres. After James died, Mary Ann was still

living at Bottledock in 1891, then at 13 Harley Alms Houses, Church Street, Hay (1901 Census). In 1849 James' sister, Elizabeth Morgans, married William Price of Cwrt-y-Cribin, Llandeilo Graban (John Morris was a witness).

The above notes are based on research by Eva Morgan, Peterchurch, who was on the James Morgans line, and by John Price.

John Price has other connections to the area around Bottledock. His Father was born at Pwllperran, and his Grandfather and Great Grandfather were both born at The Lane. His Great Aunt married Richard Price of New Buildings. No doubt if the right questions had been asked of any of the above, they would have been able to explain why Bottledock was given its unusual name!"

Very many thanks to John for this additional information and for so kindly sharing it with us.