

Pentyrch History. Don Llewellyn. 1976

Pentyrch offers anyone interested in local history a challenging case for study. It is hoped that these brief notes will kindle an interest particularly among new residents in those aspects of the village's past which helped to shape the present community.

Although almost every Age of Man has left behind material evidence for our attention, the area remains largely neglected by both amateur and professional research. There are many 'tell-tale' features which suggest that the spade of the archaeologist will one day find rich diggings around our village. This terrain was perfectly placed for strategic defences and the Garth Mountain would always have lured wanderers. Climatic changes over the centuries may have altered the forest pattern and reduced our rivers to trickling streams but there are still many places which give us a mysterious sense of their great antiquity. Chiefly among these are the 'CROMLECH' at CAERYRFA; the tumulus on the Garth known locally as 'THE PIMPLE'; the site of an Iron-Age homestead at LLWYN DA- DDU; traces of the ANCIENT BRITISH WAY which proceeded from Radyr through Pentyrch to RHIWSAESON.

Axe-heads and various flints have been found in the district tracing human occupation back to the Middle and New Stone-Ages. Also ancient human and animal remains have been discovered in local caves. During the Bronze Age, humans lived, worked and probably fought here. There is said to have been a Roman Camp at Pentyrch and as they occupied the whole district it is highly likely that the Romans would have had need of the rich and easily accessible mineral deposits.

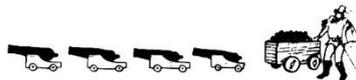
Most churches in Wales are dedicated to 5th and 6th century British Saints. Our man is CATWG or CADOC who was born around 600 A.D., the son of the Lord of GWYNLLWG. He was known as CATWG DDOETH, Catwg the Wise and Good and is said to have founded a bond village around a magic well in - Pentyrch known since as FFYNNON CATWG and established a church site nearby. The stream which runs from the well is still called NANT GWLADUS, perhaps after ST. GWLADUS the mother of CATWG.

The settling of the Normans in South Wales in 1091 was partly due to the treachery of IESTYN AB WRGANT one of whose palaces is said to have stood at Pentyrch. One of the places that can claim to have been involved in the great Norman share-out of Glamorgan lands is PANTYGORAD. It is worth noting that recent renovation work in this 'listed' building has revealed a beautiful Mediaeval staircase.

Some of the earliest documentary references to Pentyrch are contained in Bulls addressed by POPE HONORIUS to Bishop URBAN in 1128.

In 1314 Pentyrch is described as forming part of the DE CLARE lands and in 1461 the hamlet was paying a REEVE of £2.0.4d to Richard Neville, Lord of Glamorgan. A 1535 document called VALOR ECCLESIASTICUS described the character of crops and other revenues produced in the locality. Documents of this period relating to Church affairs within the Llandaff Diocese are fairly numerous.

The landowning Mathew family of Llandaff, Radyr and Pentyrch were very prominent over two centuries and were responsible for re-establishing the Iron Industry in the neighbourhood.



Edmund Mathew who owned the major Pentyrch Ironworks during the reign of Elizabeth 1st carried on a treasonable activity for over twenty years exporting cannon and general ordnance to the Spanish (who were not exactly friends of ours at the time) until a Privy Council Order put a stop to it in 1602. Peter Semayne a Cardiff merchant took over the lease and ignoring the embargo continued to smuggle out cannon balls to unfriendly foreign parts until he too was arrested some years later. The Works remained in ruins until the industry was revived around 1740 at the site where HEOL BERRY now stands at the foot of the Pentyrch Hill.

Under the successive ownership of Messrs. PRICE, LEWIS, REYNOLDS AND BLAKEMORE the Pentyrch furnaces thrived for over a century. A Quaker tradition among the later owners and the forward thinking of the workers led to the introduction of many benefits for all concerned; distress funds and sick relief schemes were pioneered there. A Benefit Club formed in 1786 was one of the earliest Friendly Societies in South Wales. An 'Oddfellows' group flourished there for many generations.

After 1837 under two generations of the BOOKER family the Works enjoyed mixed fortunes and, unable to meet the cost of a proposed conversion to the Bessemer Steel Process, saw the Liquidators move in to dampen the fires in 1879. The failure of the West of England and District Bank into whose coffers the Somerset BOOKERS had placed their money had not helped matters. The last furnace flame flickered out in 1885 thus ending a notable period in the history of Pentyrch. The smelters and puddlers, smiths and carpenters who trudged that long hill from the Works to the village for the last time were conscious of the end of an important era. The concern had been famous in its day, reaching its peak in association with the MELINGRIFFITH WORKS during the NAPOLEONIC Wars. The men themselves despite the last troublesome decades suffering low wages and hellish conditions of work had lost none of their ideals. It is recorded that they were the first generous contributors to the fund raised for the building of the old Royal Infirmary in Cardiff.

An interesting surviving product of the Pentyrch Ironworks is a large fire-grate dated 1743 which is now embedded in a boundary wall at CRAIG Y PARC having been removed from the old PORTABELLO INN, Taffs Well in 1914.

COAL

From the late 18th century onwards there were always pockets of activity around the base of the Garth Hill where coal was practically "picked away" from quite near the surface.

In MALKIN'S "The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of S. Wales" published in 1804 reference is made to a mine on the mountainside at Pentyrch which had been a smouldering fire for many years. It tells of the son of a Llantrisant clergyman who, whilst out in pursuit of game, fell into this "miniature volcano up to his middle and was much scorched"! Certainly one of the fields of CAERWEN on the slopes of the Garth is called CAE POETH — "HOT, or BURNING FIELD."

The COED Y BEDW drift mine commenced in 1827 and continued for half a century. In the LLAN pit disaster during the 1870s five hundred men and boys were trapped for several days with twelve losing their lives.

The SOUTH CAMBRIA Colliery Co. employed a fair number of local men at TY'NYCOED DRIFT for twenty years up to 1915.

Old workings which stretched from GWAELOD Y GARTH to CRAIG GWILYM have left several detectable air-shafts and trial-shafts. However, Nature has reclaimed the whole area long since, making it one of outstanding beauty. Pentyrch has never really lost its essentially rural character.

HOUSES

Although Pentyrch was widely spread out with scattered clusters of dwellings it was always closely knit in social terms. The inhabitants had a fierce sense of belonging to the "old parish". Families were identified with houses to such a degree that long after the cottages had vanished the associations lived on. Even today at least one family is better known by the name of an ancestor's cottage than by its registered name!

Thatched cottages were numerous in Pentyrch until the early part of this century. These have gone the same way as over a hundred terraced houses which were condemned as unfit for habitation just after the last war.

CEFN BYCHAN farmhouse is one of the oldest dwellings in the village with its 16th century interior. The existing structures at LLWYNDADDU, PENYGARN, CEFN COLSTIN and PENTWYN all have old interior features. Also, TY'NYCOED and BLAENBIELLI stand on ancient sites. The now derelict PENLLWYN and CAERWEN are reminders of a proud farming heritage which has taken some severe blows in recent times.

In 1825 there were over sixty active farms and smallholdings in the parish and in that year the inhabitants appealed to the Epiphany Quarter Sessions to review the level at which property values had been assessed to the Poor Rate. A meeting was held in the NAVIGATOR'S ARMS. The objections were examined by Mr. Evan David of Radyr and Mr. John Jenkin of St. Y Nill.

NAMES

There are several popular explanations of the meaning of PENTYRCH and in one old publication giving translations of place-names throughout Wales, much more space is devoted to it than any other village.

One theory is that it should correctly be PANT YR YCH — "Valley of the Oxen". Oddly enough CWM Y FUWCH ~ "Valley of the Cow" lies just below the older part of the village.

Some say it should be PENTWRCH, i.e. "Hog's head". TWRCH DAEAR is a mole and that creature is certainly active in the fields of the parish! The ancient Celtic custom of presenting "torques" (wreaths or garlands) at certain festivals is linked by some with our place name. The Welsh for torque is TORCH and an old plural form is TYRCH. PENTYRCH is accordingly claimed to refer to "the best of the torques".

Anglicised forms on old documents include PENTI RCH, PENTYRGHE, PENTYRGH and PENTERGHT. Saxton's map of 1578 calls it PENTERCHE.

FIELDS

The names of the fields of Pentyrch are colourful and some have associations with local characters long forgotten — CAE TWM TINCER, CAE WILL Y GOF, CAE MOSES LEWIS, CAE IEUAN BIN and CLAWDD SION.

Some are quaint

CAE'R CLOMENDY "The dovecote field".

DWYERW LLWYNYREOS "The two acres of Nightingale Grove".

CAE TWYNI GEIRWON "The field of rough hillocks".

PEBYLL Y BRAIN "The Crows Pavilions".

CAER WEN ARIAN "White Fortress".

COED RHIWCEILIOG "The cockerel's hill wood".

CRAIG FFYNNON GOG "The rock of the cuckoo's well (some say cook's well)

BRISTA EACH) "Little Bristol" — so called because at one time it was where large quantities of leather were stored having been brought across the channel from Bristol, to await collection by cobblers of the area

STREAMS

NANT Y CESAI R "The Hailstone Brook".

NANT CWMLLWYDREW "The Stream of Hoarfrost Valley".

NANT YR ARIAN "Silver Brook".

WELSH LANGUAGE

Welsh was the first language of the majority of the native adult population right up to the end of the first quarter of the 20th century. The local dialect is a form of GWENHWYSEG or GWENTIAN Welsh and is still spoken by a number of inhabitants.

Not so long ago a bench seat at the side of the road in CEFN BYCHAN was known as "THE BARDIC". The village men of words would gather there to compare their work. A favourite surviving satirical piece described the mock funeral of a much loved domestic pig. It is not certain as to whether this was inspired by the poetic tradition or by the freely admitted local weakness for ham and bacon!

Two sayings which reflected the notorious insularity of the Pentyrch menfolk became well-known throughout Wales. "BIT RHYDDOCH CHWI WYR PENTYRCH" and "RHWNG GWYR PENTYRCH A'I GILYDD".

Both suggest that these people were best left to their own devices and they neither needed nor welcomed interference from outside! These sayings were prevalent at fairs and markets when trouble was started by adventurous young bloods from the village.

"LET IT BE BETWEEN YOU, MEN OF PENTYRCH"!

EDUCATION

As in the rest of Wales, the Sunday Schools produced a degree of literacy and it is also noted that one of the GRUFFYDD JONES Circulating Schools operated in Pentyrch in 1738.

The school attached to the Ironworks was featured in the famous education report of 1848 where the monoglot Welsh fluency of the pupils was cruelly mistaken for illiteracy. "BRAD Y LLYFRAU GLEISION" — "The Treachery of the Blue Books".

The Village Board School which was held at the old ST. CATWG'S HALL came to an end in '1907 when it was superseded by the Council School built in that year.

There is a popular theory that in the thirteenth century LLWYNDADDU was an educational centre for priests. The farm, it is said, takes its name from DAFYDD DDU (BLACK DAVID) the anchorite who founded the seminary.

A notable educational success was the versatile JOHN JONES LLD who was born in Pentyrch in 1655 the son of Mathew Jones. He entered Jesus College, Oxford when he was 17 years of age. After taking degrees in the Arts he studied Law and was admitted Doctor of the Faculty in 1677. He practised "physic" at Windsor for some time and was made Chancellor of Llandaff in 1691. This man of exceptional learning and ingenuity published in 1683 a Latin treatise on intermittent fevers, and according to Plots Natural History of Oxfordshire, he invented a clock which moved by the air equally expressed out of bellows of a cylindrical form, which fell into folds in its descent. He died in 1709.



RELIGION

Apart from the Parish Church a strong religious tradition expressed itself through the various Nonconformist denominations.

PENUEL BAPTIST This was an extremely active place of worship capable of seating over 600. Built in 1838 and renovated in 1877 it had served the membership well into the 1960s before it finally closed down. The building is currently being used by a firm which constructs church organs. In its time many of the true "Giants" of the Welsh pulpit had preached there.

BRONLLWYN CONGREGATIONALIST (INDEPENDENT)

This chapel, pulled down in 1970, had served the local "ANNIBYNNWYR" faithfully since 1858. The site was acquired by the Parish Council and was taken up by the Village Hall Committee.

HOREB CALVANISTIC METHODIST now PRESBYTERIAN

HOREB was strong for a century and a half and was the last chapel to hold regular Welsh services. The wartime Community Singing evenings attended by many of the American soldiers stationed at Rhydlafer were memorable occasions. It continues in its new form to be a very active church.

THE MISSION This was established in the late 1890s to cater for the few English speakers who had come to live in the area, all other places of worship being totally Welsh. This Mission was built by a local benefactor named SCHROEDER who was a Norwegian Timber Importer. Four old cottages were converted to make the hall.

There were several other religious meeting houses in the village, some of the exact locations being lost now. A Wesleyan meeting house stood in TEMPERANCE RD., and both SOAR and BRISTA FACH had been places of worship in their time.

Unitarians were meeting regularly during the 1790s at Pentyrch and more than one gathering took place on the Garth Mountain attended by that great man of the day IOLO MORGANNWG.

ST. CATWG's The present Parish Church structure was erected in 1857 on a foundation that must be over 1400 years old. Some mediaeval features are still to be detected. Among the items of interest are a font likely to be 12th century and a stoup of similar age. There are carved heads of 19th Century Vicars and Church Wardens on the chancel walls and a beautiful East Window of stained glass which was added in 1906. There are two bells, one is pre 1535 and the other dated 1700. The lych-gate is a post war addition.

PUBLIC HOUSES

PENTYRCH has had its share of drinking houses and in former times they were frequented by some formidable imbibers including more than one clergyman with an insatiable taste for ale.

It is not clear why the main street in the middle of the village had to be called "Temperance Road".

THE KING'S ARMS is the oldest surviving ale-house. It has a pre-TUDOR section of the interior and the fireplaces are several hundred years old. Some beams have carved dates on them the oldest being 1605. Most of the exterior is thought to be no older than the early 18th century. In the 17th century it was known as CAE COLMAN.

THE LEWIS ARMS

The Lewis Arms has been a focal point for about a century and a half and together with the Lewis's Arms in Tongwynlais received its title from the Greenmeadow family of that name. It was a traditional place for the Meet of the Pentyrch Hunt under the patronage of the BUTES.

THE COLLI ERS ARMS stood on the breast of the Garth at the Gwaelod end and as its name implies drew its custom from those hardy workmen who toiled far beneath its cellars. Al- most disappeared now but still some traces of excellent stone- masonry are left visible. A cultural centre, this public house held its own eisteddfod!

THE ROCK AND CASTLE was situated opposite the church and is now an attractive cottage. This tavern was the favourite meeting place of the local poets and it features in several anecdotes which have become part of local folklore. Like the Colliers Arms it had its own poetry festivals.



The writer has not been able to ascertain the exact location of the NAVIGATORS ARMS. However, the CROSS INN certainly stood on the fork at the approach to the mountain and was a quite large thatched roof building with a substantial yard and stabling.

More than one large house was licensed to sell liquor including TY'NYWAUN and the tithe map of 1840 shows that BRO NANT was a tavern.



CUSTOMS AND FOLKLORE

The Christmas and New Year custom of the MARI LWYD persisted in Pentyrch until the 1940s. The horse's skull bedecked with ribbons and bells chilled many a spine and caused many a laugh too before the custom died out. The haunting tune of the MARI LWYD song and the intricate riddles of the verses are still recalled nostalgically by those who regret the passing of this age-old activity. The horse's head on display at the National Folk Museum at St. Fagans is the actual one that was last used in Pentyrch by the Davies (CAEWAL) family.

At church weddings, shots used to be fired from the wedding "cannon" (a rectangular block with powder holes) a product of the old Ironworks. A nasty accident brought this custom to its end. Children still tie up the gate to prevent the departure of the wedding group from the churchyard until the Best Man throws out a fistful of pennies to "purchase" their release.

"Ghost Funeral" processions and other apparitions which were reckoned to foretell an imminent death in the family of the beholder no longer terrorise HEOL GOCH. Children who misbehave are no longer threatened with a visitation from the "BWCI BO"; the "LADI WEN AR BEN Y PREN" and the "CEFFYL DWR" are just not talked about any more.

Not so long ago it was common for children to be heard talking of the local ghost figures, among them a box-hatted gentleman in tails who walked the mountain road on moonlit nights and the witch-like personage, MARI ANN CABBAGE who lived inside the Garth. A whole range of supernatural stories abound concerning lost souls; hunters in the night with their howling dogs; spirits searching endlessly for rainbows and crocks of gold. Cuckoos too, feature often in these tales.

Even now if you should get caught indoors with an open umbrella in one hand and a bunch of lilac in the other, you are as good as dead; particularly if you are standing on a table at the time!

Clearly though, the old superstition which required a person to have a pocketful of silver on the evening of a full moon must have been a key factor in the high mortality rate among the poorer classes.

Some local legends are as colourful in their imagery as the ancient Celtic folk tales. One story told by TWM CRYDD explains the origin of the name of LLWYNBRAIN farm and something else into the bargain. It translates thus:-

Llwynybrain — The Grove of Crows

One day a young lad was employed at the farm frightening the crows away from the growing corn when a number of birds perched on a single tree which stood in the middle of the field. The boy shot at the crows with a gun which had been loaded with an assortment of nails and tin-tacks. The unfortunate creatures were pinned to the branches and with a tremendous squawking and flapping of wings the tree was uprooted and taken with the flying birds up into the clouds. This strange ensemble landed in a field in Herefordshire and so frightened a group of brown cows standing nearby that their faces turned white. "This", said TWM, "was the beginning of the White-Faced Hereford breed!"

Tape recordings are available for study of a number of old Pentyrch inhabitants speaking in both languages. This collection has become a sound library of information about life in the village in times gone by. A very popular recording is a three hour chat between a few stalwarts of the old Pentyrch Rugby Club recalling the team's exploits during their 'Golden Era' at the beginning of the century.

A large collection of papers in the possession of the writer relating to the William Evans Shop (the now derelict store in the village centre) is another source of information. Dating from '1860 to 1898 these letters, bills, receipts, licences, etc. which had been kept meticulously by old William Evans, described graphically every

aspect of Victorian Life in Pentyrch. They show the parts played by the various "pillars of society" — the Vicar, the Schoolmaster, the Land Agent, the Postmaster and the Chapel Deacons; the immense disparity between the rich and the poor; the eating habits and the cultural life of the community. The rivalries, the intrigues, the prejudices come through from these papers and also a great deal of compassion and generosity. Space does not allow any further description of these papers but they are available for examination at any time.

The Pentyrch Story may not be one of illustrious events; it is more to do with the way in which it has retained its identity despite so many pressures. However, it has not escaped the occasional touch of greatness, neither has it been ignored by the famous. Whilst we may dismiss local claims that Pentyrch was a temporary sanctuary for famous fugitives including Charles 1st and Tyndale, we know for sure that in more recent times, Disraeli walked our leafy lanes as did Lindbergh who stayed more than once at HENDRESCUTHAN.

Perhaps the new community at Pentyrch can persuade the distant past to unlock more of its million secrets. The cannon balls and old coins which have been unearthed belong to comparatively recent times. Mysteries remain which are as old as the Garth itself. My advice though, to anyone who happens to meet a box-hatted gentleman on the Garth at night or hears the moaning of hounds near CAERWEN in the early hours would be — "go home at once, your pig is dead!"

D.R. LL

(Published in the Community Link 1977)

Recommended reading:

HISTORIC MELINGRIFFITH — CHAPPELL
WHITCHURCH, A GLAMORGAN PARISH — CHAPPELL
TRETHIANT PLWYF PENTYRCH, 1825
THE SCENERY, ANTIQUITIES AND BIOGRAPHY OF
SOUTH WALES — MALKIN 1804
EMINENT WELSHMEN — REV. ROBERT WILLIAMS 1852
HISTORICAL SURVEY OF PENTYRCH — PENTYRCH
YOUNG FARMERS CLUB 1952
STUART WILLIAMS GLAMORGAN HISTORIAN —
PENTYRCH SECTIONS BY BARRIE DAVIES
W.I. PENTYRCH SCRAPBOOK FOR 1965
W.I. HERITAGE YEAR SCRAPBOOK 1975
THE HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF GLAMORGANSHIRE
AND ITS FAMILIES — THOMAS NICHOLAS 1874
A BOOK OF GLAMORGANSHIRE ANTIQUITIES -1887
RE ISSUE OF SAME BY RICE MERRICK 1578
THE LIVING VILLAGE — PAUL JENNINGS 1968
CARDIFF, A HISTORY OF THE CITY - WILLIAM REES M.A. 1969.