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NOTES ON ABERAERON*

CONTRIBUTIONS have already been published on the history of Aberaeron. I refer to 'The Birth and Growth of Aberaeron' by the late J. M. Howell, which appeared in the old *Transactions of the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society* in 1926, and to my own 'Aberaeron Landmarks' in Volume I of CEREDIGION. In addition, 'Aberaeron: The Community and Seafaring, 1800—1900' by my son, David Lewis Jones, and *Penodau yn Hanes Aberaeron a'r Cylch* by the Reverend L. Haydn Lewis were published recently. Therefore, I hope to avoid as much as possible referring to these contributions and to endeavour to give you some new material.

Assertions have been made that the history of Aberaeron commences with the building of the pier walls of the harbour in 1807-8. This is not so, and it would be of interest to discover when the name Aberaeron was first recorded. In the fifteenth century Lewis Glyn Cothi sang a *cywydd* in praise of one Hopcyn ap Siôn in which the following couplet appears:

Bro Went Morgannwc oi bron
Bro Wyr ac Aberaeron.

Meyrick in his *History of Cardiganshire* states that Castell Cadwgan, an ancient fortification, was erected in 1148. Very little is known regarding this fortification, who built it, and for what purpose. It was situated on the seashore to the north of Aberaeron; the last remnants were washed away by the sea early in the last century. Incidentally, a traveller passing this way in 1803 mentioned that fragments of the castle were still visible. About the same time as the castle was built, Rhys ap Gruffydd, Prince of South Wales, built and endowed the Abbey of Strata Florida. In the Charter of 1184 it is stated that land was given by the sons of Cadwgan to the Abbey 'from the mouth of the Arth to Abermeilir (Llanrhystud) and the wears, and all the fishery on the shore, and in the sea, from the mouth of the Arth to the mouth of the Aeron, we offer to the said Monastery for ever'. This gave access to the sea for export and import *via* the creek of Llanddewi Aberarth, and also a plentiful supply of fish for the monks on their fasting days. Incidentally, Mynachdy and some of its lands were included in this grant.

In 1280, at Westminster, John de Knovill was granted the *gwestfa* of Llyswen entire with all its appurtenances within the commote of

*An address delivered to the Society at Aberaeron, 18 July 1970.

Anhuniog, to wit, the *rhandir* of Bodlawenarth and the two *rhandirs* of Henfynyw and Nannerchwedaf in fee simple to hold by the service of one knight at Lampeter Castle. Llyswen remains with us today, and is another name for Aberaeron. Here the ancient mill was situated, but it is not clear who held court at Llyswen. It consisted of four *rhandirs*, *rhandir* being an unit of land comprising 312 acres. A *gwestfa* was another unit for assessment, an area which provided sustenance to the king and his court. The commote of Anhuniog comprised nine *gwestfas*.

We now skip three hundred years to the reign of Elizabeth I. In 1565 a survey was made of the landing places and creeks on the coast of Cardiganshire. It mentions a creek or landing place at Aberaeron within the Lordship of Aberaeron, John Lloyd and Matthew ap Owen being co-heirs and owners of the same. The deputies sworn were Rhys ap Cantor and Lewis Gwyn ap Griffith Lewis, gent. These deputies were appointed and sworn to prevent smuggling; they were local people and conversant with local customs. Rhys ap Cantor was of Tyglyn, son of Thomas ap Rhys Cantor of Llanddewi Brefi, ancestor of the Foelallt family, and first cousin to Sir Rhys ap Thomas, K.G. (1449—1525). Rhys ap Cantor resided at Tyglyn in 1548 when he was involved in a dispute over Bwlchcastell, Cilcennin, and other lands of his late cousin Sir Rhys ap Griffith. When advanced in years he was proceeded against (1583) by Griffith Rice, Crown lessee, for making a false estate in Tyglyn Isaf and a hundred acres of land in the parish of Llanddewi Aberarth. The other deputy, Lewis Gwyn ap Griffith Lewis, gentleman, was of Cilforch (which remains with us today, a farm near Aberaeron). He was ancestor to the Gwynnes of Mynachdy. His grandson, Morgan Gwyn of Cilforch and Penyarreg, married Elizabeth, only daughter and heiress of Rhys Gwyn of Mynachdy. This united the Cilforch and Mynachdy Gwyns, incidentally two separate families, for the Cilforch Gwyns were descended from Gronw Goch, Lord of Llangathen, whilst the Mynachdy Gwyns had the blood of Llewelyn Gaplan ap Llewelyn Llwyd ap Griffith Vrychgoch, Lord of Aberaeron. These Gwyns later became Lords of the Manor of Llyswen (otherwise Aberaeron), whose limits I shall come to later. Morgan Gwyn, now of Cilforch and Mynachdy, died in 1679, his will being proved in 1682. He gave sixpence to the Cathedral Church of St. David. To Henfynyw Church he gave five shillings and a similar amount to Llanbadarn Trefeglwys Church. To the 'poor improvident of the Lordship of Aberaeron and Llanbadarn Trefeglwys' he bequeathed 1½ Teals of Pilcorn to be divided among them according to the discretion of his wife, Elizabeth. This document is interesting in that it mentions the Lordship of Aberaeron.

Fortunately, the Court Leet Records of the Manor of Llyswen,

although not complete, have been preserved. The first entry is dated 1693, and this entry must have been copied from a previous book which is lost. The entry is as follows : ' A true and perfect copy of all the chief rents due to the Lord of the said Manor and Lordship of Aberaeron, corrected and agreed upon by the Grand Inquest hereinafter named, sworn, and impanelled at the Leet Court. Before me, John Jones, gentleman, Steward of the same '. This is followed by the signatures of the jury, fifteen in number, followed by the names of holdings and their occupiers within the Manor. The last name is ' Jenkin Evan of Aberaeron ' and his rent was ' to provide "Scallops" to the end that the Lords Mill may be thatched as by custom '. This would be Felin Llyswen. The list comprises twenty-two holdings in the parish of Henfynyw and twelve holdings in the parish of Llanddewi Aberarth. Time will not allow me to discuss Courts Leet ; suffice it to say that they were very ancient institutions. It was a court of record, and its duty was not only to view the pledges (hence View of Frank-pledge) but to present by jury all crimes within its jurisdiction and punish the same. The steward of the court acted as judge, presiding in a judicial capacity, the ministerial acts being executed by the bailiff. Courts Leet in Cardiganshire were in operation at the beginning of this century but had been shorn of much of their former power. The Court Book of Aberaeron indicates that the records of eighty-one years are lost, as the next entry is dated 1774. From this date the records are complete to the late nineteenth century. Needless to say, this is a very important document and a valuable record. It is particularly rich in its references to Pwllcam, the harbour, and sea-faring generally. Reference is continually made to Llyswen Mill. In a document of 1745 I find the phrase ' Llyswen where corn had been ground time out of mind '.

One item in the Court Book I would like to dwell on, and that is, the limits of the Manor. The Court was careful from time to time to beat the boundary of the Manor. It was a great occasion ; a large gathering assembled with horns and bugles, the leader carrying a banner bearing the words, ' Na symud mo'r hen derfyn ' (Remove not the ancient landmark—Proverbs xxii, 28). A start was made on the beach below Drefach farm, then past a large stone on the farmyard and on to Banc Lletycrochan, where there was another large stone, past Ffynnon Boeth on Bryn land—another stone, then across the Aeron near Wigddu, on over Banc Hengeraint towards the river Quinten, this being the boundary between the parish of Henfynyw and Llanarth, past Cooper's Arms in Llwynycelyn, straight on for Capel Crist on Panteryrod land and finishing at Gilfach yr Halen beach. This was the extent of the Manor of Llyswen otherwise Aberaeron. In

1823 David Davies and fifty of his scholars joined in. He was a native of Newcastle Emlyn and the first schoolmaster of Ysgol Glan y Môr. The school, situated to the north of the harbour, was washed away by the sea about the middle of the nineteenth century. After beating the boundary the beaters sat down to a hearty meal at the expense of the Lord of the Manor.

Another interesting and important record which has survived is the minute book of the Aberaeron Benefit Society. Formed in 1785 it was operative well into the nineteenth century—its members being recruited from a wide area. The principal object of the Club was to sustain the members in illness or distress. Funds were obtained by levying an annual sum on each member. The Club generally met at Tŷ Sian Daniel, then a tavern, and on the site of the present Ianthé House. Daniel Jones, then a young man of twenty-one, acted as the first secretary, his wages being the princely sum of six shillings and sixpence *per annum*. This office he held for twenty-six years, being followed in 1823 by David Davies, schoolmaster, already mentioned, at thirty shillings *per annum*.

Some of the Petty Sessions records have been preserved ; the earliest, 1817-23, had lain in an attic at the Red Lion for many years until they were discovered by the occupier and sent for safe keeping to a national institution. This was as recently as 1960. The next two volumes (in the possession of a layman in London for many years) cover 1842-49, leaving a gap of twenty years, a serious loss. The Petty Sessions were held at the Feathers Inn (mine host Charles Mitchell) in 1817 and until the present County Hall was built in 1846. The two sitting magistrates were William Lewes of Llanerchaeron and the Reverend Alban Thomas Jones Gwynne of Tyglyn. On his death in 1819 Gwynne was followed by his son of the same name but known as Colonel Gwynne. He built the present Mynachdy in 1825. This Court had wide jurisdiction ; in fact, the Justices of the Peace had very wide powers, in and out of court, during this time and for the previous hundred years, and the office was held without exception by the squirearchy. The examination of paupers, orders for relief to paupers, confirmation of the appointment of overseers of the poor, and bastardy cases, besides many others, such as the trial of law breakers, came under their purview. I will cite a case of stealing that occurred at Aberaeron in 1820. James Drew and James Phillips went to the alehouse of Evan Evans for a drink at 7 p.m. and were there for an hour. After they left Evans went to the kitchen to check the time on his watch that hung on the dresser. It was missing. Evans hurried to the Feathers Inn to look for Phillips and Drew, but they had retired for the night. Evans went home to bed, got up at half past three

in the morning, and went to Mynachdy, where he secured a warrant and help from Col. Gwynne, a magistrate. Both hurried to Morfa Mawr and made their way towards Aberaeron, meeting Phillips and Drew opposite Cilgwgan, whom they searched, the silver watch being found on Drew. It was a water-tight case, for Evans had his name inscribed on the watch. Evan Evans, a native of Llanilar, kept the Ship Tavern, later known as 'Ship in Launch'. He married in 1816 Mary Parry, daughter of Parry the Exciseman. A carpenter by trade, in addition to the tavern he also kept a Post Office. In the records he is also described as a 'hobbler', which means that he acted as pilot of the port. In 1821 he acted as Petty Constable for the Manor of Llyswen. Evan Evans was probably amongst the first of the artisans who came to develop Aberaeron. Pier Cottage was his first place of abode.

Discussing taverns, there were thirteen licensed houses here in 1844, namely, Hope, Red Lion, Castle House, Rope and Anchor, Mynachdy Arms, Crown, Star, Lloyd Jack Arms, Plough, Butchers Arms, Ship in Launch, Cambrian, and Feathers Inn.

William Morris's map of Aberaeron, New Quay, Bay, Bar & Harbour of 1801, some eight years before the harbour was built, shows quite clearly the extent of Aberaeron during the opening years of the last century. Castell Cadwgan is shown as a half circle, the other half having presumably been washed away by the sea, and Sarn Cadwgan extending two miles out to sea, the depth at its extremity being six feet. This was a hazard to shipping. Aberaeron Isaf, a straw-thatched house on the site of the present Milford House, and Pengarreg Fawr, a sizeable farm, were in line, also the two lights in the Creek, these being guides for incoming boats. Two lime kilns, one on the north, the other on the south side of the mouth of the Aeron are shown. It is believed that other lime kilns were built after this date. One of these was in use during the eighties of the last century. Finally their stones were used for house-building on adjacent sites.

The road from Llanddewi Aberarth past the Feathers Inn proceeds towards Dolaeron (then known as Aberaeron Uchaf) over the bridge, then up Rhiwgoch hill. This was the main road to Cardigan, the present Aberaeron-Henfynyw road being built after the lower bridge was built in 1813. The present lower bridge, however, was built in 1881-82. Near the present Compton, where the turnpike gate was situated, there was a narrow road, with hedges on both sides, running along the present Albert Street, proceeding to the Aeron, and running along its bank to the present Mynachdy Arms, there taking a sharp bend around Pwll Cam and then direct to the beach. This road or lane served as an outlet from the Creek of Aberaeron as it also served the three habitations that stood nearby, viz., Aberaeron Isaf, on the

site of the present Milford House, Aberaeron Ganol, on the site of the present County Hall, and Tŷ Sian Daniel, a tavern, on the site of the present Ianthe House. All straw-thatched, they were ancient landmarks, the cattle and horses of the occupiers grazing in the fields nearby. The stocks were erected in front of Tŷ Sian Daniel in later years. Aberaeron Ucha, on the site of the present Dôlaeron, was a hostelry, and was reputed to be the best one between Aberystwyth and Cardigan. It was built by Lewis Gwynne of Mynachdy, Lord of the Manor, for the convenience of those travellers who constantly travelled to the Quarter and Great Sessions. When it was demolished in 1852 by George Wigley the date 1757 was found on an oak beam. In 1800 it was kept by Anna Maria Felix, a widow. It was closed to travellers *circa* 1815-16, the custom being taken up by the Feathers Inn, recently built by William Lewes of Llanerchaeron. In 1841 Dr. William Cust Gwynne, a son of Mynachdy, lived at Dôlaeron. In his will of 1883 he bequeathed his books and various manuscripts, besides £200, as a nucleus for the formation of a Public Free Library at Aberaeron. He died in the same year at Tenby. Opposite Dôlaeron stood 'Y Bont', a straw-thatched cottage, once a tavern; the last who kept it as such were Dafydd and Jenny Pugh. Jenkin Davies and his wife Nancy came here from Ystrad in 1833. Nancy was born in 1808, the daughter of Dafydd William, Drefach, a fisherman, and in her reminiscences she related how when a child she looked after the cattle of 'Modryb Nell' on the plain of Aberaeron; how her mother planted flax in the garden; and how the boys and girls gave a hand at the flax until it came to the spinning jenny to be made into yarn, and later how everyone, old and young, made the yarn into fishing nets. When eighteen Nancy left Aberaeron for Ystrad and became head maid at Lloyd Jack farm, where she met and married Jenkin Davies, a carpenter. Coming to live at Y Bont, Aberaeron, Nancy was never further from home than sixteen miles since childhood. She once saw a steam engine at Aberystwyth but she was not impressed! She was a home bird, would dye her wool, comb it with hand combs, and make it into yarn. She was proud to see her family clothed in home spun. She survived her husband by nine years, having lived at Y Bont for fifty-nine years. Two of her sons became prominent in Aberaeron, Thomas Compton Davies and John Davies, Ynys House. T. Compton Davies was one of the staunchest churchmen that ever stepped through the portals of the Established Church. He defended it on every occasion and was a constant thorn in the flesh of the Nonconformists. One-time postmaster, which was then held at Compton House, he was also a considerable antiquarian, and was fond of collecting and relating folklore. No doubt had he had a liberal education he would have gone far. Some

of the manuscripts which he collected are in the National Library of Wales.

Initially, there were some very ancient houses at Aberaeron, e.g., Dôlhalog, an entity of three houses, and Cwmmmins, or Common, where at one time stood ten cottages. In 1883 only two of these remained, and the last was Tŷ Mari Patrick, demolished in 1940. Llyswen and its many cottages, including Pentŵr, was an ancient landmark.

Pengarreg Fawr and Pengarreg Isaf were farmed, the former by John Atwood. Atwood, a merchant of Queen Square, Bristol, married in 1808 Margaret, the daughter of Alban Thomas Jones Gwynne of Tyglyn. An extensive farmer, in 1814 he was advertising several hundred quarters of barley for sale at Penygareg, and was prepared to ship it from the port of Aberaeron or deliver it free of charge at Lampeter, Llanybyther, or Aberystwyth. He was a pioneer in modern farming methods in his time. In 1827 he was concerned in the supply of an iron chest for the parish church of Henfynyw. This had to be brought by ship from Bristol.

An iron chest for the Church with a lock & 2 keys	£7	10	0
Hauling from the Foundry to the sloop ' Good Hope ' in Bristol		1	0
Paid Capt. David Rees freight		5	0
Turnpike			8
Hauling to the Church		1	0
Postage of letters		1	8
	£7	19	4

At the end of the eighteenth century Benjamin Evans held a lease of three lives on Pengarreg Isaf. In his will, dated 29 May 1800, he left 10s. 6d. yearly to the meeting-house at Ffoesyffin. He was the father of the Reverend David Evans, a well-known Calvinistic Methodist divine who died in 1825. He again was the father of another Benjamin Evans, one-time farmer of Llety Shôn, who moved to Aberaeron in 1842 to become a timber and slate merchant. He built the present Portland House in 1854. He is described by his contemporaries as a versatile man and one who took a leading part in every activity in the town. This can also be said of his grandson, the late J. M. Howell, a public man, and one who always had the interests of the town at heart.

William Green, born in 1782 at Aberystwyth, came to Aberaeron to build the pier walls of the harbour. In 1811 he married Mary Thomas from Cenarth who had also arrived here during harbour building time to keep a shop for the convenience of the workmen and others. Later

her three orphan nieces came. Judith Thomas married the Reverend William Evans, Independent minister, Anna married John Hugh Jones I, a prominent Calvinistic Methodist and draper, and Elizabeth married Thomas Green, son of the aforesaid William, who, however, died soon afterwards. She married secondly William James Rees, an assistant in her draper's shop, whose daughter Bridget married John Davies of London House. The husbands of the three orphan girls became powerful factors in the every-day and religious life of Aberaeron.

On completion of the harbour it was contemplated that a very brisk trade would develop in Aberaeron. Actually things moved slowly, for houses and storehouses had to be built. Six years after the harbour was completed John Atwood, acting on behalf of A. T. J. Gwynne, advertised in *The Carmarthen Journal*, stating that Aberaeron Harbour was a small but the only safe harbour on the Cardiganshire coast. He said the proprietor (Gwynne) was ready and willing to grant leases of three lives on a given spot of ground for erecting houses, etc. (on a very low ground rent). He said there was good stone near and lime burnt on the spot. We know that some took up this offer and that many of the houses on Quay Parade were built about this time. Indeed, Gwynne himself was not idle. He built a row of eight houses near the sea shore, their backs to the sea and with small gardens in front. He called them Mynachdy Row, which in later years became known as 'Bedlam Barracks', possibly because of the quaint characters that lived there. It is known that an insane sailor lived there in the forties. Gwynne also erected a school nearby. Both the houses and the school were demolished by the sea in the course of time. There was a time at the school when the children had to escape for their lives in boats. This was during high tides and storms. The school and the row of houses are clearly shown on the tithe map of 1841. After the lower bridge by Bradford House was completed in 1813, it was decided to close the old road from Compton to Pwllcam, as the new road from the top of Rock Street through the fields over the new bridge and ending at Pengarreg had been completed.

Trinity Chapel, a chapel of ease to Henfynyw, was erected in 1839 by private subscription at a total cost of £700. It stood on the site of the present Holy Trinity Church. There were sixty free and two hundred other sittings. An English service on Sunday at 11 a.m. would be attended by the following families,—Lord Kensington of Neuadd, the Longcrofts of Llanina, the Wigleys of Dôlaeron, the Jones's of Fronwen, the Boultsbees, the Britains, the Gwynnes, and the Atwoods, and many English-speaking people from Aberaeron.

In later times many of the children of the town walked from the National School to this Chapel of Ease under the guidance of Mrs. Wigley of Dôlaeron. A daughter of A. T. J. Gwynne, the records state that she was a Christian lady who sacrificed her life and fortune to help other people, especially the children, in whom she endeavoured to instil sound Christian teaching and discipline. Many of her pupils grew up to be responsible citizens, one of whom in 1913 was elected Mayor of Newcastle, New South Wales, for the third time. This was Richard Theophilus Jones, M.D., L.R.C.P., born in 1839, the son of John and Sarah Jones of Alban Square. His brother James Aberdeen Jones married Amelia, daughter of the Reverend William Evans of Peniel, whose grand-daughter is Mrs. Doris Evans Jones of Balmain. Mrs. Wigley is commemorated by a stained glass window in Holy Trinity Church.

The original Tabernacle and Peniel Chapels were erected in 1833. The Wesleyan cause was founded in 1842 in the coach house of Castle House by Mrs. Bone, a widow, a native of Ystrad, who had married a London milkman and had retired to Aberaeron. The contract for the Workhouse was undertaken by William Green for the sum of £1,200 in 1839. It is the present Hospital. In 1843 soldiers were billeted at the Workhouse during the Rebecca Riots, and a baby daughter was born to James and Honour McHarty, a private in the 76th Regiment of Infantry, and was baptised at Henfynyw Church in that year. There were in the eighteen sixties, seventies, and eighties literally hundreds of seamen and master mariners in Aberaeron. Today only three are actually on sea. Rees Jones of Drefach (1772—1852) was the most famous mariner and fisherman on the Cardigan coast. Drefach during Rees Jones's time consisted of five cottages, all occupied by fishermen who were all at the service of Rees Jones. Jones went out in his boat one Fair night (Nov. 13th) and brought in twelve maize of herrings, a total of 6,000. He was the forebear of many Aberaeron sea-faring families. His son John Jones (1816—1885) married Elizabeth, daughter of Jenkin Rees, master mariner, one-time publican of the Straw tavern, and Martha his wife. John Jones was master of the *Gwalia*, an Aberaeron-built ship. He died on board ship from a poisoned hand. Captain Timothy Davies, born at Graig, Ciliau Aeron, in 1842, married his daughter Martha. Davies was a very strict disciplinarian on board ship, and was well known on the West coast of America. He commanded the *West Lothian* and died in September 1917, aged 73. His son is David Timothy Davies of Gwalia House, Aberaeron. On his great-grandfather's memorial stone there is an interesting epitaph :

Y môr heli mawr a hwyliais—mynwent
 Yw'r man yr angorais,
 Ar frig ton yn llon clywid fy llais,
 Mewn man tawel yma y tewais.

(The great wide ocean I sailed, I am anchored in a cemetery. On the crest of the wave I sang with joy. In a quiet spot here I am silent.)

Thomas Lloyd (1817-64), known as Twmi Llwyd, a native of the south of the county, kept a navigation school in Water Street. Also known as Lloyd the Schoolmaster, he taught navigation, too, at Henfynyw School (by the entrance to the church, since demolished). Lloyd was very successful in teaching navigation to the mariners of his period and his schools became very well known. He married in 1845 Jane Caleb, daughter of Evan Caleb, farmer, Gwarffynnon (an elder in Tabernacle in the early days). Their son Evan Caleb Lloyd, master mariner, married Margaret, the daughter of Abraham and Grace Jones of Panteg, in 1880. In 1888 he and his ship, the *Friedeburg*, were lost with all hands in the South Atlantic. Grace, his daughter, married John Davies, master mariner, a native of Llanddewi Aberarth. Their sons and daughters are with us today.

In the 1880s there was a boisterous character called Dai Parcybeili—David Jenkins. Parcybeili was a small thatched cottage about a quarter of a mile to the south of Llanddewi Aberarth Church, and hidden from the world. It has long since been demolished. He acted as Town Crier, was also a fisherman, and in summer made a living by plying his boat for hire to visitors. There was keen competition between him and John Clock, another character who plied for hire. Parcybeili, as he was universally known in the three counties, had a bigger boat, and his ready wit and mirth drew the crowds. He is commemorated in verse by a local rhymester :

I gwch Parkybeili dewch bawb yn gytun,
 I'w cadw'n ddiogel mae'n ddigon o ddyn.
 Rhyw awr o lawenydd i'n ieuenctid yw hon,
 Pob un a'i gariad yn nofio y don,
 A phawb yn y cwch, cusaned ryw swch
 A hidied ddim blewyn am fochyn neu hwch.