

## HISTORY OF BRYNAMLWG

*The following history of Brynamlwg was written by Dr. Ron Walker in February 1991.*

About the year 1790 negotiations were under way for an exchange of lands in the Llanbadarn township of Isa'n Dre between the Penglais estate of Roderick Richardes and the Gogerddan estate. A map prepared to illustrate the exchange shows that Brynamlwg farmhouse had not yet been built and that the pattern of fields that eventually made up Brynamlwg was only gradually being established. Cefnllan farmhouse is shown on the map, but Brynamlwg is not. The upper part of the farm near the Cefnllan road was described as some 17 acres of 'open land' and had not been divided into fields. At the lower end, near Llanbadarn road, a pencilled rectangle indicated the position of what were to be the two lowest fields of the farm. Halfway up the slope, two of the fields shown on the 1845 tithe map can be made out, one of them a transfer from the Gogerddan estate. Elsewhere the field boundaries shown were going to be much modified and rationalised to produce the tidy chequerboard of later years. One roughly sketched in line did in fact become the southern boundary of Brynamlwg farm.

Our earliest piece of material evidence for the age of Brynamlwg farmhouse is the George III halfpenny, dated 1806, found during the removal of an old fireplace in the steward's house. The coin, one of a series minted by steam press at Birmingham by Matthew Boulton, is on exhibition in the bar. The fireplace obviously could not have been put in before 1806 and the state of the coin suggests a rather later date. In 1832 Brynamlwg appears on the map, based on the Ordnance Survey, prepared by Lieut. R K Dawson to illustrate the extension of the boundaries of the parliamentary borough of Aberystwyth. Brynamlwg is not named, but the buildings shown are the right shape and are in the right place. A series of rentals of the Penglais estate covering the years 1836 to 1844 survives in the Glanpaith MSS in the National Library of Wales (NLW) – thanks to the fact that John Parry of Aberystwyth was managing the properties of the impecunious Roderick Richardes and paying him an annual allowance of £200. The tenant of what was called Tyamlwg in the rentals was William Hughes, who also farmed nearby Cefnllan at a total rent of £87 a year in 1836, raised to £105 in 1837. According to the census of 1841 Hughes lived at Brynamlwg with his wife Mary and six children, aged one to thirteen, of whom only the six year old John was a son. There were two farm servants, one male and one female. In 1844 Hughes gave up his tenancy and Brynamlwg was offered to a Mr Marshall of the Belle Vue, Aberystwyth, at £60 a year. Marshall finally declined and Roderick Richardes declared to Parry that he was 'blind to his interest altogether... as by (taking Brynamlwg) he could have had one of the best and most compact farms in the vicinity'. Marshall was presumably the Charles Marshall who held part of the Penglais estate between Brynamlwg and Penglais Hill in 1845. By the following year a new tenant had been found.

The Llanbadarn Fawr tithe map and schedule of 1845 gives us our first detailed description of Brynamlwg farm. It consisted of nine fields running downhill from Cefnllan road almost to Llanbadarn road. Eight fields were described as 'arable' and the ninth, adjoining the farmhouse to the south, as 'arable and hay'. The acreages of the fields, ranging from about 2½ acres to about 4½ acres, are given but not, unfortunately the field names. Adding a rood and 33 perches for the farmhouse enclosure, the total acreage is given as 33 acres, 1 rood and 27 perches. The lands of Cefnllan farm lay on the opposite side of Cefnllan road and Brynamlwg was bounded to the south by Buildings farm, part of the

Gogerddan estate. The site of Buildings farmhouse is now occupied by the college maintenance depot. To the north, another part of the Penglais estate lay between Brynamlwg and Penglais hill. Few of the topographical features shown on the tithe map survive today. The notable exception is the small triangular wood immediately uphill of Theatr y Werin, together with a short length of hedge to the north. Part of this hedge, flanking a footpath to Cwrt Mawr, was rooted up a few years ago to allay the fears of students that it might be the lurking place of nocturnal assailants. Until recently, too, part of the northern boundary of Brynamlwg, opposite the Physical Science building, was marked by a line of tall ash trees, now all felled. Roderick Richardes' tenant in 1845, David Owens, was still in possession at the census of 1851, when he lived in the farmhouse with his wife Anne, five daughters and a son.

Material for the history of Brynamlwg in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century is rather sparse. For the 1861 census the enumerator's book for the township of Isa'n Dre is missing, and in 1871 the enumerator numbered each household in the township but did not give its address. Two farmers of 30 acres, Hugh Edwards and Richard Davies, are named, but we do not know which of them farmed Brynamlwg. A list of Cardiganshire landowners in 1871 shows that the Penglais estate, now held by Alexander Richardes, was still fairly extensive, 1,610 acres. In 1881 the tenant of Brynamlwg was a 43 year old widow, Elizabeth Griffiths, who had two sons, aged 12 and 10 and two daughters aged 7 and 3. She was assisted by a bailiff, John Morgan, and a male servant. A prominent Aberystwyth businessman, John James (of James' Stores and the famous James' Bar) is said to have farmed Brynamlwg at one period. The later 19<sup>th</sup> century OS maps show that from the field gate on Cefnllan road, just downhill of the farmhouse, a track led down westwards to a small quarry. The track has disappeared, but of course the quarry is still there, concealed by trees, above the north-west corner of the athletics track, near the Applied Mathematics hut. The 1904 revised edition of the 25" OS map of 1885 shows that the nine fields of 1845 had been reduced to six by the removal of hedges, and the total acreage was now recorded as 34.406 acres.

In the 'Domesday' of 1910, giving details of landed estates and their values, R C Richardes held the Penglais estate and Richard Hughes was the tenant of Brynamlwg, now recorded as 33 acres, 1 rood. The valuer, however, put the acreage at 34 acres, 1 rood, 25 perches. The gross annual value was put at £52-15-0 for lands and £5-10-0 for buildings. In October 1932 a pamphlet, 'The University College of Wales 1872 to 1932', was printed in connection with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the college's foundation. This contained a summary of recent events by the then Principal, H Stuart Jones. A Needs Committee, appointed by Council in March 1928, had reported back in December, presenting alternative plans for expansion. The college might either be extended into the Laura Place/New Street/Pier Street/King street block or it might acquire a new site. In February 1929 a sub-committee reported in favour of obtaining a new site near the NLW. Nothing could be done until money became available and no action followed. On October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1929, however, the Principal reported one of the best pieces of news ever received by the college. Mr Joseph Davies Bryan, then of Alexandria, Egypt, had purchased 85 acres of the Penglais estate, including Brynamlwg, and was vesting it in trustees who would invite the college to prepare a development plan. Council naturally decided that all future development should be on Penglais. The trustees might convey all or part of the estate to college; part might be conveyed to the NLW for extensions and land not in use might be used by the Plant Breeding Station or the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society. One important condition was that a development plan had to be approved within

five years. So, in July 1930, Council approved a recommendation that Mr H V Lanchester should be appointed architectural adviser and should prepare a scheme. By the end of the year Lanchester had prepared sketch plans for an impressive Neo-Classical College on the Hill of which an artist's impression was provided. It was undeniably attractive, though one notes the complete absence of car parks. The cost was finally estimated at £428,000 – building costs were decreasing at the time.

The college had already reaped considerable benefit under the will of Stuart, Lord Rendel. In 1915 Rendel's executors had conveyed to college his lands on Grogrythen and Caergog, except those already conveyed to the NLW in 1910. Initially the college proposed to apply the rent income from these lands to support the Rendel chair of English. One proviso was that if the NLW needed more land the college might sell or grant part of the estate to the library. A plan appended to the report of a joint college and library conference held at the NLW in December 1936 shows that the college transferred 18 acres of the Rendel lands and of the Penglais trust lands to the library. These included triangular sections of two of the Brynamlwg fields. A footpath from Penglais hill to Llanbadarn originally ran through the middle of the proposed Lanchester buildings and across the lands now acquired by the NLW, so a new footpath was established running from the milestone on Penglais hill to the lane leading from Cefnllan road to Buildings farm. This footpath remained in use until the Penbryn hostels were built. Two of the hostels were named Rendel and Davies Bryan.

Comparatively little was done on the Penglais campus in the later 1930's. The Lanchester plan was abandoned and the first buildings completed were the Rural Science building and the swimming baths, to the designs of Sir Percy Thomas. The former is obviously a close relation of the County Offices, Carmarthen. Uphill of the swimming baths, the athletics track was excavated on Brynamlwg land. Throughout World War II and for most of the 1940's no additions were made on the campus and an attractive herd of Welsh Blacks grazed peacefully in front of the Rural Science building. New building restarted in 1948 with the first stage of Pantycelyn. From 1956 the northern part of the campus rapidly filled up. The Sports Hall, the Sports Cage, the Students' Union and part of Great Hall were built on Brynamlwg land which also accommodated extensive car parks. Our newest hostel, Trefloyne, straddles the old boundary between Brynamlwg and the neighbouring part of the Penglais estate. It seems that before new building really got going tenants of the college continued to farm Brynamlwg. The late David Rice, a founder member of the UCW Sports and Social Club, lived in the farmhouse in the 1930's. More recently the Agricultural Department made use of the farmhouse and remaining fields.

In the early 1970's the recently formed UCW Staff Sports and Social Club, as yet homeless, was looking for club premises. The college authorities, who had already established Staff House in the wrong place in 1964, pressed the club to take premises in town. The club committee was determined, however, to find a home on the Penglais campus. Its eyes eventually lighted on Brynamlwg farmhouse, not at first sight an attractive proposition. The farmhouse proper was in fair repair and was occupied by members of the college staff down to 1973, the last tenant being the stage carpenter of Theatr y Werin. The adjoining building was divided up internally into concrete stalls which still held sheep or calves. The other main building was in a sad state, the woodwork was rotten and the floors of the upper rooms decidedly unsafe. On the north side of the building was a range of tumbledown brick pigsties. The ground floor of this building was stone built but the upper floor, which had evidently been added later, was of brick. The

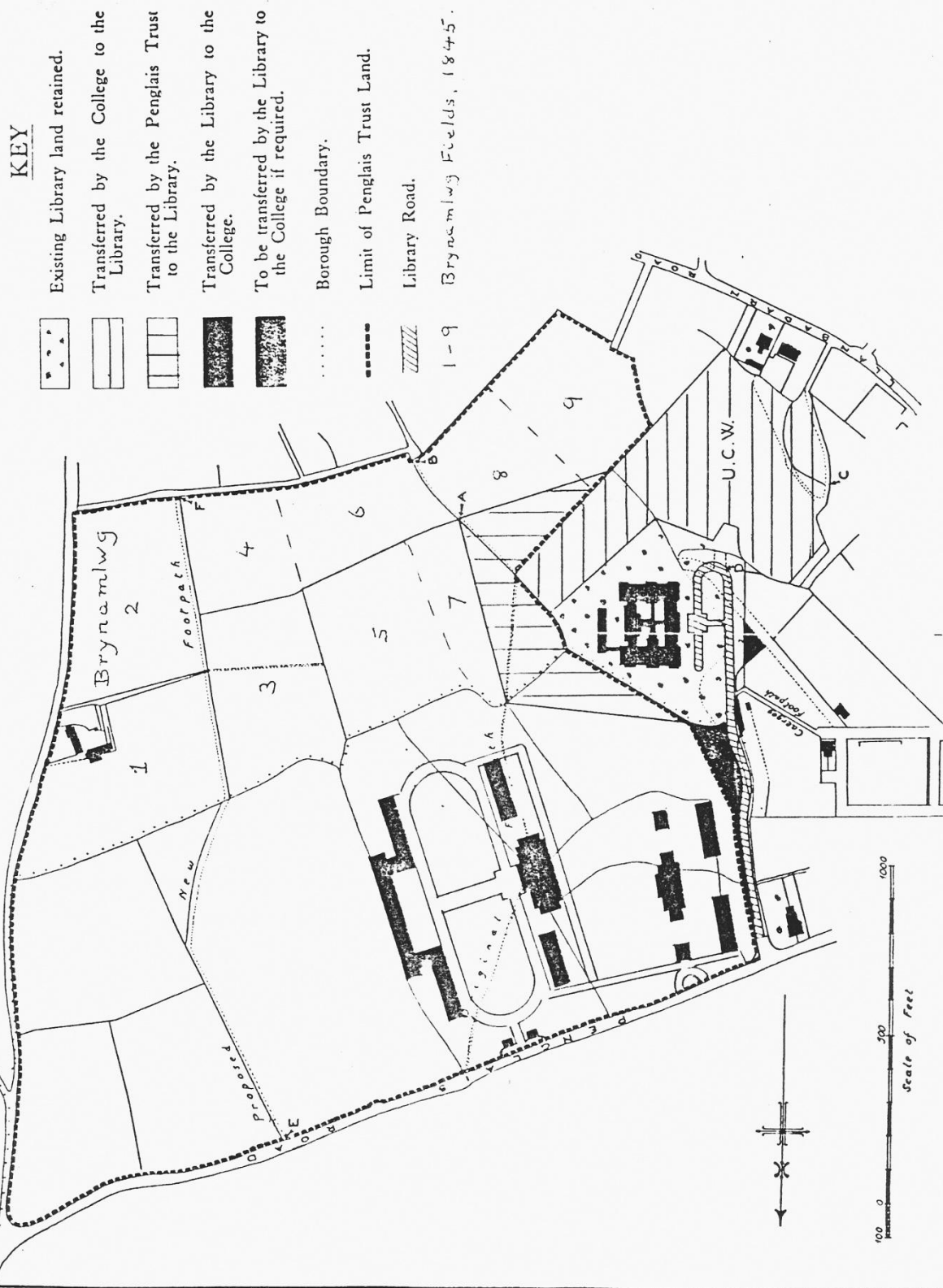
lower end of the farmyard was closed in by a ruinous Atcost Dutch barn and the yard itself was overgrown and encumbered by junk. It is perhaps not surprising that the buildings officer, Mr Douglas Corlett, thought that the best thing to do with Brynamlwg was to demolish it.

Fortunately, the excellent plans for the conversion of Brynamlwg into a clubhouse prepared for the committee by Sir Percy Thomas Partnership won the approval of the college authorities, who agreed to allocate £80,000 out of the Centenary Appeal Fund. Work on the conversion went on in 1973-4. The two buildings were joined by a new stone-built block which contained the vestibule and toilets; the kitchen and store rooms replaced the pigsties; practically all timber work was renewed and Welsh slate replaced corrugated asbestos on the roofs. Externally, good quality stonework was retained while brick areas were rendered and painted white. Altogether a magnificent job was done and it thoroughly merited the Prince of Wales Award which it received in 1975. The committee recently had plaques put up to indicate the former use of the various rooms, 'Ystabl', 'Ysgubor', 'Llaethdy' etc. It wisely refrained from labelling the kitchen 'Twlc'. Outside, the ruined barn was swept away and an attractive garden created. The well, reported never to have run dry, was given a stone well-head. The club opened for business in September 1974 and it was officially opened by Mrs Elizabeth Thomas of Trefloyne in April 1975. A water colour of the clubhouse by Mr John Vergette presented to Mrs Thomas on that occasion was donated by her to the club before her death and now hangs in the bar together with photographs of the farmhouse as it was before conversion. Since 1974 the approach to the club from the west has been much altered by the growth of trees and shrubs. As late as 1962 the West Coast Pilot advised mariners coming in to Aberystwyth that if they lined up the tower of Old College with Brynamlwg they would pass safely south of the shoal waters of the Patches. Today the buildings on the campus and the growth of trees would make it difficult to pick up this transit bearing, but the mariner would probably be safe if he lined up Old College tower and the bell tower on campus.










The accompanying plan is a copy of that produced in 1936 to illustrate the lands conveyed by UCW and the Penglais estate to NLW. The proposed Lanchester buildings are shown in block plan. The nine fields that formed Brynamlwg farm in 1845 have been numbered.

RFW 8/2/1991

# PENGLAIS AND GROGYTHAN LAND



## KEY

-  Existing Library land retained.
-  Transferred by the College to the Library.
-  Transferred by the Penglais Trust to the Library.
-  Transferred by the Library to the College.
-  To be transferred by the Library to the College if required.
-  Borough Boundary.
-  Limit of Penglais Trust Land.
-  Library Road.
-  1-9 Brynamlwg Fields, 1845.



Scale of Feet  
 0 500 1000