

# 155TH ANNUAL SUMMER MEETING IN THE CONWY VALLEY: JULY 7th TO 12th 2008

Fifty members attended the meeting which was based in the Royal Oak Hotel, Betws y Coed, a historic hotel which had been the headquarters of a well-known group of artists in the early 19th century, under the leadership of David Cox whose painted inn sign still survives and was used on the front of the Cambrians' Programme booklet, edited by Frances Llewellyn. In a summer notorious for its bad weather and in a well-watered valley, the party had surprisingly good weather, only getting seriously wet on Wednesday and Friday.

## MONDAY JULY 7th

Members had arrived during the morning and foregathered in the hotel after lunch to start a Pevsner-style perambulation of the town under the guidance of Adam Voelcker, one of the joint authors of the new Gwynedd *Buildings of Wales* volume, nearing publication.

The small village first became widely known for its picturesque qualities when Telford's road came through in 1816, but the advent of the railway in 1868 was the real impetus to the development of the tourist resort it is today. Members started their tour at the large railway station, now mainly used for shops, to reach the medieval church of St Michael's beside the river. Some then visited the Railway Museum and all walked back to the main road via the stable courtyard of the Royal Oak (now a Tourist Office with craft shops) and examined the 17th century Pont y Pair and the Willoughby D'Eresby estate developments in that area.

**St Micheal's Old Church** was described by Adam Voelcker and the President-elect, Prof Tony Carr spoke about the **effigy of Gruffydd ap Dafydd Goch**, an illegitimate great-grandson of Llywelyn the Great, recorded as the foreman of the jury providing details of local landholdings for the Black Prince in 1352. The effigy, probably carved in about 1385, shows him in armour and provides a lot of detail about the dress and armour of the period.

Mr Voelcker described the church, built in the 14th century but containing a 12th century font, and its subsequent transformations. It is now in the care of the St Michael's Trust. The simple medieval rectangle with the elegant tomb-recess and effigy was transformed in 1843 by Lord Willoughby D'Eresby, the owner of the Gwydir estate, who created a wide transept on the north side, modernised the windows and covered the roof structure with a barrel vault.

**St Mary's Church** replaced the small medieval structure in 1872-3. It is a large church of exceptional quality designed by Paley and Austin of Lancaster and built by a local contractor, Owen Gethin Jones who created many notable structures in the area. The style is Transitional between Romanesque and Early English, the decoration with a hint of Norman; everything fresh, unfussy and beautifully proportioned. The nave is aisled with a clerestory, with arcades of circular piers carrying bold pointed arches. The exterior is equally successful, with a monumental tower. All the fittings and windows are of equal quality and a good modern church hall has been cleverly added at the back corner, attached to the porch. Members had further occasions to admire the interior as all the evening lectures were held in the church, with the kind permission of the Vicar and the Parish Council.

After returning to the hotel members set off on foot or by car to the east end of the town to view the **Waterloo Bridge** from beneath the iron arches. Its design and technology were described by Dr Peter Jarvis. The design of the iron span is exceptional in that its structural integrity is created in the

decoration: lettering and national symbols. The lettering includes the names of the engineer, Telford, the founder, Hazeldine and the foreman, Stuttle. From below the bridge it was possible to see how the patriotic decoration was put together, the centres of the flowers separately cast, and also to see how the arch was discreetly strengthened in the 1970s by the concealed insertion of concrete ribs.

Another more distant visit took members to **Pentre Du**, a separate early 20th century quarry workers' settlement at the west end of the town. Mr Voelcker described the school, one of several 'open air' schools built in Caernarfonshire by the county architect, Rowland Lloyd Jones, with a long 'marching corridor' facing a run of folding windows which sent fresh air throughout the building on fine days. At this school the window arrangement was intact; at most others it has been altered.

In the evening, after dinner, the party repaired to the church for an **illustrated lecture** by Mrs Margaret Dunn on **Dating Snowdonia's Houses**, her programme of dendro-chronological dating of 15th -17th century buildings. This programme was beginning to put architectural dating in the region on a much firmer footing and the history of some major houses was undergoing re-consideration.

## **TUESDAY JULY 8th**

This day was devoted to sites on the western side of the Conwy Valley and the buses brought us into Conwy from the south, providing a splendid view of the Town Walls. The last building obscuring that view, the County School close to the Upper Gate, was recently removed, fulfilling a long-cherished dream of our Past-President, Dr Arnold Taylor just before his death.

### **Conwy Parish Church of St Mary**

Adam Voelcker described the church to members.

It was part of the Cistercian Abbey of Aberconwy founded by monks who moved from Strata Florida in 1186. At the time of the Edwardian conquest, the abbey was transferred to Maenan and the church took parochial status in the new borough

The earliest surviving remnants of the church are parts of the west wall, including the triple lancets, and possibly the lower parts of the east end of the chancel (c 1190-1220). The lost monastic buildings were likely to have been to the north.

After 1282, there was much re-building, and the tower was inserted into the west bay. In the early 14th century, the south transept was built - a fine piece of work whose quality contrasts with the remainder of the church, possibly because it was built by the international group of masons who came with Edward. Later still are the two porches, the top stage of the tower and the parish room north of the tower (formerly a chancel house). In 1872 Sir Gilbert Scott raised the nave roof by inserting clerestory walls.

The church contains fine features and fittings. Best of all is the chancel screen (c 1500) which may have come from Ludlow originally. Parts of the choir stalls are of the same date. The gritstone font is 15th century and the tiles set in the south wall of the chancel are 14th century or earlier.

### **Plas Mawr, Conwy**

Plas Mawr is generally considered the finest surviving Elizabethan town house in Britain. It was built by one of the Wynns of Gwydir – Robert (c.1520 – 1598), the third son of John Wynn ap Maredudd. He had a successful career in the service of the Stonors in England and became Ambassador to the court of the Emperor Charles V in the Low Countries, from which some of the architectural inspiration for Plas Mawr derives. The building of the house covers 10 years (1570-80). After Robert Wynn's death, his estate was divided between his large family, none of whom had the money to keep up Plas Mawr which gradually slid down the social scale. The house remained almost

unaltered for 400 years. It was eventually inherited by the Mostyn family who let it to the Royal Cambrian Academy of Arts about 1880, but they did not have the money for proper maintenance. In 1993 Lord Mostyn placed the building in the care of Cadw and a most extensive – and expensive – restoration scheme was begun. A very comprehensive interpretation programme is available in the house; videos showing the restoration work, audio tours and the furnishing and display of the rooms as they would have been a various periods, together with the establishment of a herb garden in the upper courtyard.

Members dispersed for lunch in the town and re-assembled at the Tollhouse to Telford's Bridge over the Conwy where Dr Peter Jarvis spoke about both Telford's suspension bridge and Robert Stephenson's tubular railway bridge.

### **Telford's Suspension Bridge (1822-26).**

The theory of both the suspension bridge and the arch was laid down by Robert Hooke in 1678 – 'as a chain hangs flexibly, so an arch stands rigidly'. Various methods of building a catenary were tried, but eventually the division lay between chains – as at Conwy – and cables spun from fibres of wire. The first iron chain bridge in Europe was at Glorywitz on the river Oder in 1734; the first in Britain at Winch near Middleton in Teesdale, about 1741, but the first large suspension bridge was Samuel Brown's bridge on the Tweed in 1820.

Conwy Bridge was part of the programme for road improvements in North Wales between 1815 and 1826. The ferry over the Conwy had long been notoriously bad and the bridge was welcomed. The bridge has a span of 327ft (100metres) and runs from the foot of the Castle across the river to Ynys twr y Castell whence the Cob, an embankment, runs a further 2000ft to the eastern shore; it has four chains on each side, each of five links (9ft) long. Above these is a wire cable added in 1904. The increasing weight of traffic by 1950 caused the foundations on Ynys twr y Castell to give way, so a new bridge was built alongside, opening in 1958. Conway Council was minded to demolish the bridge but the Cambrian Archaeological Association, notably our member Douglas Hague, expressed concern and after a considerable campaign the bridge was taken over by the National Trust in 1965; Conway Council handed over the Bridge Commissioners' funds as a dowry.

### **Robert Stephenson's Tubular Bridge (1845-48)**

The Chester and Holyhead Railway Company had its ceremonial First Sod cut against the north front of Conwy Town Wall in 1845, and lamentably caused the adjacent tower to crack as they dug beneath it. The company was deterred from further vandalism by their Act, which required them to keep intact the town wall and to build their bridge in a style as near as may be to the adjacent Conway Castle. Hence the arch by which the railway enters the town at the station, and the cumbersome Gothick towers at the ends of the railway bridge.

The bridge is of great engineering importance as (a) it is the first box girder bridge – a type of construction in advance of its time, which eventually became popular in the 1960s – and (b) it is the only surviving tubular bridge.

The box girders were built on temporary staging on the south side, by the mussel cleaning station, and floated out on six pontoons hauled by ropes and capstans into position in the towers. The span of the bridge was originally 424 ft (129 metres) but with the increasing weight of trains, caissons were placed beneath the bridge c.1893 to reduce the span to some 360ft (110 metres). Nowadays trains weighing 2,000 tons cross the bridge every working day.

### **The Roman Fort of Kanovium**

*Peter Jarvis*

The Antonine Itinerary includes Iter XI A Segontio Devam with intermediate stations at Conovium (the present site) and Varae (site not certainly identified).

The fort lies on the left bank of the tidal river and was no doubt designed to control the crossing. It has a square embanked enclosure with rounded corners, 430ft (131m) in each dimension;

There were two periods of construction:

1. A timber fort with an earthen rampart, perhaps founded by Agricola in A.D. 77-78. Excavations in 1926-9 dated this to the Flavian period.
2. At the beginning of the second century the rampart was refortified in stone; the internal buildings were also rebuilt in stone. The garrison was very much reduced by the middle of the 2nd century.

Below the fort on the east (river) side lie the humps and bumps of the bath house, excavated and published by Lysons in 1801 and some 300m north-east of the fort there is evidence for a jetty and a dock on the river's edge, but these are not proven to be Roman. The road from Kanovium to Segontium retains a remarkable number of milestones.

There is evidence for a civil settlement outside the north gate. This has been the subject of a programme of geophysical prospection in recent years. David Hopewell from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust met the party at the fort to show plans of his most recent survey work.

### **St. Mary's Church, Caerhûn**

Caerhûn is said to have been occupied by Rhûn ap Maelgwn Gwynedd (*fl.* c. 540 A.D.). The present church, built with the corner of the Roman fort, is reputed, from its dedication, to have been built by the Cistercians of Aberconwy or Maenan Abbey.

The nave is perhaps of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The chancel and south porch probably followed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The South Chapel was added in 1591 by Edward and Grace Williams. The little lych gate is probably of the early 18th century.

### **Gwydir Castle**

From Caerhun the party travelled down to Gwydir Castle where they were welcomed by the owner and restorer, Mr Peter Welford, who led them on a tour of the gardens and the house.

An ancient site, the first firmly recorded house at Gwydir was that of Hywel Coetmor. This passed by purchase at the end of the turbulent 15th century to Maredudd ap Ieuan ap Robert who established his power-base at Gwydir, which he seems to have rebuilt at the turn of the century. The hall range and adjacent storeyed solar tower belong to this primary phase, probably complete before Maredudd's death in 1525. To what extent this incorporated elements of the Coetmor house remains uncertain.

Following the Dissolution, building material from the Cistercian abbey of Maenan became available and elements from this source, dating from the late 13th century - late 15th century, were re-used in additions carried out c. 1540 by the first John Wynn (Maredudd's son who adopted the surname). The house was extended by the construction of an enclosed courtyard and gatehouse dated 1555, as well as timber-framed service, stables and lodgings ranges.

Sir John Wynn, the first Baronet (1553-1626) was one of the most powerful men of his generation in north Wales. He was highly cultivated, shrewd and ambitious and also a notable writer and antiquary. He greatly embellished the house towards the end of the century, with various largely cosmetic additions being attributed to the 1590s. In his updating of the pre-existing house, he employed a characteristic Flemish-inspired Renaissance style, quoted from the house of his uncle, Plas Mawr, Conwy, the main work of which was complete when Sir John inherited Gwydir in 1580.

His second son, Sir Richard, built the memorial chapel and the Pont Fawr at Llanrwst but, other than the famous dining room, did no major work at the house. He did however plant 12 cedars in the garden to commemorate the wedding of Charles I and Henrietta Maria to whom he was Treasurer. Four of the trees have survived. A Royalist house, Gwydir suffered in the Civil War, but more from refugee cavaliers than from parliamentary forces!

The Gwydir estates passed through marriage in 1678 to the first Duke of Ancaster, and

remained in the possession of the Willoughby D' Eresby family until 1921. The timber-framed additions were swept away *c.* 1820 following years of tennantry, and in 1828 Lord Willoughby D' Eresby ('the good Lord Willoughby') made some minor alterations (mainly to openings) and added a west (kitchen) wing. These alterations appear to have involved Sir Charles Barry, architect of the Houses of Parliament.

At the 1921 sale the historic contents of the house were dispersed, but some, notably the 1640s panelling, doorcase and fireplace from the dining room, have been restored after a fascinating pursuit by the present owners. In 1922 a fire gutted the Solar block and the house was uninhabitable and left abandoned until 1944 when it was bought by Arthur Clegg who began an enthusiastic but in some ways inappropriate campaign of restoration. The current campaign by the present owners is based on more careful analysis and is aiming to re-establish the historical and archaeological integrity of the house and gardens.

### **Gwydir Uchaf Chapel**

This free standing family chapel was built in 1673 by Sir Richard Wynn, the 4th baronet, beside the summer house which had been built by his grandfather, the first baronet, in 1604 on the steep slopes immediately above his main house. It survives, much altered, as the Forestry Commission offices.

The chapel is particularly important and unusual as an example of post-Reformation church building and liturgical arrangement, in this case with High Church leanings. On the outside the chapel is a simple rectangle; on the inside it is a single room, the pews placed against the walls, with a gallery for musicians at the back facing the altar and a high pulpit on the side wall.

The painted ceiling is the most astonishing element of the interior, inspired by Italian baroque but executed rather naively. The theme is divine self-revelation. At the base of each truss is a flat cut-out angel holding an appropriate Latin invocation.

A few yards behind the chapel on rising ground is a 'ziggurat', probably an ornamental mound from which guests might admire the gardens of the adjacent mansion.

The **Presidential Inauguration and Address** by the new President, Professor Anthony Carr, took place after dinner in the parish church. The address, 'What's in a name? Naming patterns in medieval Wales' is printed elsewhere in this volume. The address was followed by a Reception in the Royal Oak Hotel.

## **WEDNESDAY JULY 9th**

### **Dolwyddelan Castle**

The President, Prof Tony Carr spoke at the castle. He pointed out the motte below, Tomen Castell on the banks of the river, an earlier fortification which may have been the birthplace of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1173.

The site of the stone castle was of great strategic importance, controlling the crossing of the main east-west and north south routes into the heart of Gwynedd.

The square keep probably dates from about 1200 and the curtain wall and the north-west tower from the 13th century, possibly from the time of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (1246-1282). Llywelyn was definitely there in 1275 and 1278 and he was almost certainly there on many other occasions; according to a document drawn up not long after the conquest he kept much of his treasure there. After its capture by Edward I's army in the war of 1282-3 it was garrisoned for a short time but its location did not fit in with Edward's defensive plan for his new Welsh lands and it was abandoned some time after 1290.

At the end of the 15th century it came into the hands of Maredudd ab Ieuan, the founder of the Gwydir family and in the 19th century it was extensively restored by Lord Willoughby d' Eresby, its then owner.

### **St Gwyddelan's Church, Dolwyddelan**

The main part of the church was built around 1500 by Maredudd ap Ieuan who established the Wynn family in the valley; the earlier church had been a few hundred metres away. The south chapel was added by Robert Wynn of Plas Mawr, Conwy, much later in the same century.

The junction of the chapel with the nave is formed by a pair of semi-circular arches supported on a rough cylindrical pillar. There was much debate during the visit about the possible date of this pillar, whether it might be Roman, taken from the fort at Caerhun.

The present oak screen (with a lost rood loft) was originally further east closing the sanctuary in the traditional way. The building of the side chapel caused it to be moved westward. The 18th century balustrade, formerly the front of a west gallery, was put on top of the screen in about 1850.

Items of interest are the early 16th century brass plaques; a Jacobean mural monument to the Wynn family (injudiciously re-painted recently); the early medieval bronze hand-bell (replica); the carved dragon on the coving to the chancel ceiling; fragments of medieval glass (c.1500); the 18th century pews with slatted backs and scalloped entrances; the inscription on the front bench saying that it is reserved for the hard of hearing and the oak poor box, whose early lock had sadly been damaged just before our visit.

From Dolwyddelan the bus, provided by Llew Jones of Llanrwst, took the party to Ty Mawr Wybrnant by the forest roads. The crossing of the narrow bridge at the mouth of the valley was an example of extreme driving skills, as were some other journeys during the week in this land of narrow lanes and sharp bends.

### **Ty Mawr Wybrnant**

The long simple farmhouse in the upland valley of Wybrnant is typical of many in the region. It is difficult to be precise about its date of building.

Its importance lies in the fact that it is the reputed birthplace (?1540) of William Morgan, translator of the Bible. His progress from this remote valley to the University of Cambridge seems to have been facilitated by the Wynn family, via early education at Gwydir, to Cambridge and thence to ecclesiastical preferment during which he achieved his translation, finished in 1588. Since its publication his bible has been the bedrock to the survival of the language, especially the written language.

The National Trust now owns the building and has converted the barns as a custodian's house and an exhibition area, allowing the original farmhouse to be restored to its 16th / 17th century appearance. The Cambrians had a wonderful picnic, provided by the Contessa Café from Llanrwst, sheltering in the barn from torrential rain. Through the kindness of the custodian and Pat Hurley from Penmachno less swift-footed Cambrians were ferried up the hill to regain the bus for transport to Ysbytty Ifan.

### **Hospital of St John, Ysbytty Ifan**

Prof Tony Carr spoke about the history of the site from which all medieval structures have gone, except the very important series of grave stones and effigies at the back of the present church.

Towards the end of the twelfth century the land of Dolgynwal was granted to the Hospitallers or Knights of St John; they established a hospice here on what was then the main route from England into Gwynedd. It was a liberty exempt from the jurisdiction of the courts of the prince or, after 1284, of the crown which resulted in it becoming a sanctuary for outlaws. Much of the medieval church survived until 1858 when it was replaced by the present building by George Benmore opened in 1861.

Several mutilated memorials to the Plas Iolyn family who first came to prominence c 1450 as stewards of the Hospitallers' and of Aberconwy Abbey's lands in Hiraethog. The memorials include a heraldic slab to Cynwrig ap Llywarch (c 1334); fragments of a late 14th century foliated cross slab commemorating Maruret or Mererid ferch Hywel; three damaged effigies of early 16th century date are said to represent Rhys Fawr ap Maredudd, his wife Lowry and their son Robert, chaplain to Cardinal Wolsey.

**The village**, the highest in the Conwy valley belonged to the Penrhyn estate in the 19th century and is now part of the National Trust estate. A group of farmers' wives in the village have started a business in the 19th mill building, hiring wedding clothes and managing receptions. They provided a fine tea for the party who afterwards visited their shop in the mill.

### **Penmachno Stones**

Our Past-president, Jeremy Knight, spoke in currently disused church about the important group of inscribed stones gathered there from the neighbourhood.

Three of the five stones were found in the immediate vicinity of the church, the others came from various points on the Roman road which ran south to Tomen y Mur. The content of the inscriptions give a moving picture of a community of the 6th century anxious to retain some link with the firm political structures of Rome and the secure society which their ancestors had known before the withdrawal of the legions.

The Cantorix stone is a pillar stone with a vertical inscription in Roman capitals on two sides: CANTORI(X) HIC IACIT / [V]ENEDOTIS CIVE(S) FUT / [C]ONSOBRINO(S) MA[G]LI MAGISTRATI *Cantorix lies here. He was a citizen of Venedotia (and) cousin of Maglos the magistrate.* There are several points of political interest in the inscription, notably the reference to citizens and Venedos (the Celtic/British form of the Welsh Gwynedd) and to the office of magistrate.

The damaged stone from the Eagles Hotel close to the church also has political implications. The inscription has been split, but can be read as [ ] FILI AVITORI / IN TE(M)PO[RE] / IUSTI[NI] / CON[SULI(S)] (*The stone of ... son of Avitorius (set up) in the time of Justinus the Consul.* Justinus, consul in AD 540 in Constantinople is one of the last whose consular year was used as a record of date.

The very finely carved Carausius stone is of interest particularly for the very clear chi-rho symbol at the top. It records that Carausius was buried under a heap of stones.

The fifth stone, by the font, is a 7th-9th century grave cover marked only by a cross. It demonstrates the survival of the religious community here, probably a clas, as suggested by the very large enclosure that is now the graveyard. The church remained important, for the father of Llywelyn the Great is reputedly buried here, and there is also a fine 13th century gravestone in the church.

In the evening Professor J. Gwynfor Jones of Cardiff University and a native of the Conwy Valley gave the **Public Lecture**, attended by several members of local historical societies, on **The History of the Gwydir Family and Estate.**

### **THURSDAY, JULY 10th**

Although it was pouring with rain at breakfast-time, the sun was shining by 10.00am and it remained miraculously bright and dry for this day of outdoor visits.

The first visit was to the National Trust headquarters at Dinas on the A5. This xxx house had been Telford's base for the building of this awkward section of the A5 between Pentrevoelas and Betws y Coed where he was cutting a new shelf above a variety of less satisfactory roads. The route from

London to Ireland was of crucial importance throughout history and speed and convenience became even more pressing after the merging of the Irish and British Parliaments in 1800. Most existing routes had the disadvantage of involving the notorious Conwy ferry and several steep and dangerous inclines. In 1802 Richard Pennant's road from Bangor to Capel Curig and Pentrevoels opened up an inland route which became the official Holyhead Road engineered by Telford between 1811 and 1826. In 1819 Sir Henry Parnell ensured that it was the first road to be financed from national funds because of the poverty of the country through which it passed.

National Trust staff spoke to the party, outlining their strategy for the conservation and economic future of their large land holdings in the area which include historic sites such as Ty Mawr and a large number of upland farms, such as those at Ysbytty Ifan, whose viability they were anxious to protect and promote.

**Giler** *(by kind permission of Mr Warburton Lee)*

Our Past-President Tom Lloyd and Peter Welford spoke at Giler where the party was able to visit inside the gatehouse and examine the exterior of the main house, now let for holidays.

Giler was the home of the poet Rhys Wynn. The original house was built *c.* 1560 then a second house (in the unit system) was added to it, probably about 1600, forming a long northern front. The second, western, house has a cyclopean doorway in the south front where there is a lateral chimney and a later staircase wing.

The most notable feature of the house is the small gatehouse, dated 1623, which gave entrance to a north-facing court with surviving walled enclosure. 17th century farm buildings back onto the courtyard on either side. The gatehouse has an upper room accessed by an outside stair which contains a fireplace with heraldry and datestone.

**Plas Iolyn** *(by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Roberts)*

The family of Plas Iolyn first emerges *c.* 1450 when Maredudd ap Tudur was steward of the lands of Aberconwy Abbey in Hiraethog and those of the Hospitallers at Dolgynwal (Ysbytty Ifan). Maredudd's son Rhys is said to have been Henry Tudor's standard-bearer at Bosworth and his son Robert was a cleric and lawyer who became chaplain to Cardinal Wolsey. Despite being in Holy Orders he had a wife and children and several leading local families were descended from him. His son, Dr Elis Prys, was Commissioner General for the diocese of St Asaph, working for Thomas Cromwell to close the monasteries in north Wales and to root out superstition, but himself having a reputation for dealings with the devil (and 'one of the foremost of our knaves' in the opinion of Thomas Pennant). His son Thomas Prys had a chequered career as a soldier and buccaneer off the coast of Spain. He was also a prolific poet whose house was described with confusing hyperbole by other poets.

Sifting this evidence and the surviving family wills Dr Enid Pierce Roberts has concluded that there are likely to have been three main periods of building on the site: soon after 1485; sometime in the first quarter of the 16th century and 1560-72, corresponding with the three notable generations of owners. Thomas Prys who succeeded in 1594, was already in financial difficulties. He died in 1634, after which there is little mention of Plas Iolyn. The site is now a quite modest farmhouse but surrounded by hints of past grandeur.

The site is in open countryside on the slopes of Carn Brys but set on a small rocky eminence which gives it a commanding position. A square tower, two storeys high with a partially rock-cut cellar, is set on the northern edge of this rock. Next to it, and clearly later than it, is a strange long narrow barn whose date and role has been subject to much speculation. Below the rock is the present house whose date of origin is unknown but which has two later wings, the southern one possibly 18th century, the northern one built in 1908. Close by is the remains of another rectangular

building with a blocked fireplace which may be another house built on the unit system. An outhouse near the gate may be part of another small house, the southern half only recognisable as a hump in the ground (now covered by a wooden summer house). Across the yard to the north is a large high barn with queen-post trusses, one dated 1572 – the period of Elis Prys. Other small buildings below the long barn may incorporate earlier structures and there is a large range of 19th and 20th century barns.

This building complex suggests that there may have been a possibly 12th century defended site on the high rock with a square tower built over its north eastern corner. The tower has an added fireplace with a Cefn sandstone surround on the first floor which may date from the 16th century. The blocked first floor window is also surrounded with sandstone and a description of its unusual lintel in *Arch Camb* 1882 (p 115) suggests that the blocking may be late 19th century. The long 'barn' is clearly built against the tower and the chamfered corner overrides the ruined top of the tower, though this could be a re-build. By the later 16th century it would seem that occupation had come down off the rock and barns and houses were built around a yard to the north of it. The tower and the yard were surveyed by Bangor University students in 1989

Tom Lloyd spoke about the family history and Frances Llewellyn led the party around the site, describing the results of the Bangor survey which were commented upon by Tom Lloyd and by Peter Welford who were examining the site for the first time. It was agreed that the whole complex would repay more extensive study.

After lunch at the **White Lion in Cerrig y Drudion**, the drovers' inn where George Borrow stayed, the party drove up to the northern end of the **Brenig Reservoir** to visit the **Bronze Age cemetery** where Frances Lynch Llewellyn described some of the monuments excavated in 1973-4.

The head of the valley, now overlooking the top of the Brenig reservoir opened in 1976, contains a notable group of burial and ceremonial monuments which were in use for about 500 years, from 2000 – 1500 BC. At the very top of the valley is a small marker cairn which may have been the first monument to be built; below it on either side of the river are three round barrows built of turves and covering elaborate rings of stakes and hurdles. These all contained evidence of cremation burials, those on the west of the river were single burials, that on the east had had several deposits of bone dug into it over a longish period.

Beside this barrow is a large ring cairn surrounded initially by a circle of wooden posts. This monument, a low stone ring with a carefully maintained open centre, was not originally designed for burial, though at a late stage in its history burials were made within it. The original purpose involved the burial of masses of pure charcoal, sometimes at exactly the same place, in ceremonies separated by many decades, if not centuries. The significance of these ceremonies is unknown but this monument seems to have been in use throughout the active life of the cemetery.

The party did not visit the other Bronze Age monuments but did look at the group of *Hafodau* in a narrow side valley, occupied in the 15th and 16th centuries.

### **Hen Foelas** *(By kind permission of Mr David Wynne Finch)*

The final visit of the day was to Hen Foelas where Prof Tony Carr spoke about the very impressive motte which was probably the site of a castle built by Owain Gwynedd c.1164 to defend the route into Gwynedd at the time of Henry II's abortive invasion; the foundations of a square stone tower were excavated on the motte in 1882. The castle may have been demolished by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth c.1190 when the whole area was granted by him to the Cistercian abbey of Aberconwy, perhaps as part of a strategy to neutralise key border areas by granting them to monastic foundations.

Near the motte is a copy of a 13th century stone memorial, now in the National Museum of Wales, bearing the name Levelinus; this may have been erected by the monks of Aberconwy in honour of Llywelyn. The inscription, partly in Welsh and partly in Latin, has puzzled many scholars. Sir Ifor Williams, in *Arch Camb* 1940, provided the more pointful reading. He judges that the

purpose was to give a complimentary explanation or etymology of the Prince's name. The date must lie between 1190s when the land was granted to the abbey and 1230 when Llywelyn changed his title

Sir Ifor's reading is :- *Ed vidh (Yd fydd) LN (Levelin) di (dy) enw a levon[e]*

*Fortitvdi[n]e Brachii Mesure*

*Leveline pri[n]ceps Norhw[a]llie*

which he translates as:- Thy name Lewelin is from *llew* 'lion'

and from might of *elin* 'arm'.

O Levelinus Prince of North Wales!

The inscription proved very difficult to find on the stone and its interpretation provoked a good deal of debate which required recourse to the detail of Sir Ifor's article which luckily had been brought to the site.

The stone stands behind the remains of Old Voelas, the principal house of the Wynne family, hereditary stewards of the abbey lands, granted to them after the Dissolution by Henry VIII. The house survived until 1819 when it was demolished and the family moved to their present house, Voelas, though remnants of the gardens, an 18th-century walled vegetable garden and fine avenues of beech and lime, remain. A drawing of 1770 shows a complex of buildings just below the motte of which one section survives today with some re-used window tracery.

The Annual General Meeting, chaired by the President Professor Anthony Carr, took place in the evening. Canon Michael Coombs retired as General Secretary and was thanked very warmly for his work on behalf of the Association. Mrs Heather James was elected in his place.

## **FRIDAY JULY 11th**

### **Capel Garmon Burial Chamber**

Frances Lynch Llewellyn described this Neolithic Long Cairn built in a style more common in Breconshire than in north Wales, though tombs in Merioneth and Caernarfonshire show influences from this 'Cotswold Severn' style of building, an indication that, though regional autonomy in tomb building traditions is now judged the norm, some communities and their ideas did travel.

The monument is a modest long cairn with a deep narrow forecourt at the east end leading to a 'false portal'. The actual burial chamber is entered from the south side by a narrow passage leading to two large circular chambers, a T-shaped plan found also at Ty Isaf and Pipton in Breconshire. The edge of the cairn was defined by very fine dry-stone-walling, a particular hallmark of this type of tomb. Often the edge is retained by a double wall, not observed here, though one suspects that it is still concealed within the unusually well-preserved areas of cairn.

The chambers were first exposed in the 19th century and the site was excavated in 1926 by W.J.Hemp who found some surviving bone in pockets in the passageway with a few sherds of possible Ebbsfleet and Beaker pottery which suggested that burial use continued into the later Neolithic, though it did not date its actual building.

### **Hendre House**

Hendre House is a compact, elegant Regency country mansion placed at mid slope to command wonderful views up and down the valley. Unfortunately the heavens opened as we arrived and the distant views were blotted out! The house had been built on a virgin site in about 1810 by William Edwards but shortly afterwards it came into possession of the Blackwall family who lived there until the 1930s. A period of decline then began which was arrested in 1999 when it was bought by Michael Tree who instigated an extensive programme of restoration to both the house and the garden which is still on-going. Despite the restrictions of work inside, he generously offered the party hot tea and coffee which was especially welcome in view of the weather outside.

The house stands on a shelf on the valley side surrounded by a relatively small inner garden and more extensive parkland. The stable and farm buildings form an elegant group complementing the house. They are currently used as workshops by craftsmen restoring the house and members were invited to look over the work. Some intriguing and unusual structures such as special troughs to wash coach wheels survive in the yard.

The house, stable and park are all of one date, are typical of a small Regency estate and have seen very little significant change, apart from decay. However the walled kitchen garden at the north-west corner of the park may be considerably older than the rest. The land bought in 1810 included the walled garden of Plas Tirion, the late 16th century Wynn house just below, and it is likely that the kitchen garden is this earlier walled garden, perhaps containing rare archaeological evidence of the arrangement of a 16th -17th century garden.

A convivial lunch was taken at Amser Da, the restaurant belonging to the famous Llanrwst delicatessen Blas ar Fwyd, with Mr Tree as guest of honour. When the party emerged the weather had improved.

### **Church of St Grwst, Llanrwst**

Mr Peter Welford, who had not been able to join us for lunch, spoke to the party in the church at Llanrwst and in its attached Gwydir Chapel.

Much of Llanrwst church is a rebuild over the original 15th century one; the tower is early 19th century, and around 1882-84 the church was restored and the north aisle added, by Paley & Austin. The finest parts of the church are the rood-screen (c.1500), very similar to the one in Conwy church, and the Gwydir chapel.

This chapel was added by Sir Richard Wynn of Gwydir (Queen Henrietta Maria's Treasurer) in 1633-34 and was intended as a mausoleum for the family. The marble tablet on the east wall, by Nicholas Stone, records the building of the chapel and lists Wynn's "remarkable Pedigree".

The carved timber panelling around the walls is exquisite and contains some fine engraved brass plaques (originally set in the floor). They commemorate several members of the Wynn family, including the redoubtable Sir John. He and his wife are also commemorated in the polychromed alabaster monument on the south wall, together with Maredudd ap Ieuan who brought the family to the area.

The effigy of Hywel Coetmor, was originally in a niche in the main body of the church. He is recorded as one of the Captains at Agincourt (1415); he was the grandson of Gruffydd ap Dafydd Goch (great grandson of Llywelyn the Great) and he may have died around 1440.

The large stone coffin with quatrefoils along its sides is reputedly that of Llywelyn the Great (died 1240); originally buried in the abbey church at Conwy, his coffin was later brought to the new foundation at Maenan. It would originally have had a decorated lid like that of his wife Siwan in Beaumaris. The identification of this coffin is by no means secure since the style suggests a date earlier than 1240. However recent petrological analysis suggests that the stone of both coffins is the same and is likely to come from Gwespre near Talacre in Flintshire, quarries owned by the Cistercians.

### **The Jesus Hospital Almshouses** (now a Community Museum)

Almshouses for 12 men (the upper floors were originally separate dwellings reached by stairs at the back) were built by Sir John Wynn in 1610-12 and were continuously occupied as such until 1976. Empty for 25 years they began to deteriorate rapidly but in 2000 they were repaired and the Almshouse Museum Trust was formed. The museum provides an overview of the history of Llanrwst, a town notable for its craft industries, especially clock and harp making.

### **Y Bont Fawr, Llanrwst (1636)**

On leaving the church members foregathered near Llanrwst Bridge which was described and discussed by Dr Peter Jarvis.

Llanrwst Bridge stands at the head of navigation on the Conwy; high spring tides rise as far as the bridge, hence its high central archway, allowing craft through at all states of the tide. Its striking profile has been much admired and recorded and its design is frequently attributed to Inigo Jones, for which there is no evidence.

The contract for its building has recently (*Trans Caerns Hist Soc*, 66, 2005, 38-54) come to light in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral, a contract between Sir Richard Wynn and four Lancashire masons. Money was contributed from Caernarfonshire and Denbighshire and very specific dimensions were laid down. The stone used – a New Red Sandstone – very probably came from Lancashire with the masons.

At the bridge crown on each side is a commemorative stone dated 1636, the south having a Stuart coat of arms and C[arolus] R[ex] and the north having the Prince of Wales' feathers and C[arolus] P[rinceps].

The western arch seems to have been damaged soon after construction, possibly in the Civil War, and after much trouble it was rebuilt in 1702 with somewhat smaller stones.

### **SATURDAY JULY 12th**

A half-day excursion was made to Capel Curig, passing **Tŷ Hyll / The Ugly House** a conspicuous little cottage overlooking the bridge and Telford's coach road, now the headquarters of the Snowdonia Society and no longer claiming an unjustified medieval origin. The building is clearly one of Lord Willoughby d' Eresby's standard estate cottages given a rusticated texture to make it intriguing to travellers and increase its trade in lemonade and other refreshments. It is a monument of the early tourist boom in this notably picturesque region.

### **The Royal Hotel, Capel Curig**

Dr Alan Dyer spoke about the other local monument to early tourism, Richard Pennant's hotel built in 1800. Richard Pennant (1737-1808) gained full control of the Penrhyn estate in 1785 and embarked on a remarkable programme of entrepreneurial development, building a port at Bangor, expanding the slate quarries at Bethesda, creating a horse tramway between port and quarry and driving a new road from Bangor past the quarries and up the valley through the mountains to Capel Curig – all on his own land. Superior inns were built at Bangor and Capel Curig to exploit the booming trade in servicing travellers to Ireland and local tourists.

The Capel Curig Inn, later the Royal Hotel (closed 1955) and now Plas-y-Brenin (National outdoor pursuits centre), was built at the same time as the road, in 1800, but was deliberately positioned just off the route of the proposed Holyhead road so that it could afford the best view of the local scenery, with the 'sublime' sight of Snowdon seen over the 'picturesque' lakes and woods of the intervening valley. It was so popular with tourists that it survived the coming of the railway.

The inn buildings incorporated a farm and were rapidly expanded from the original, relatively small house designed by Wyatt, set along a strip beside the road. The present outdoor pursuits centre preserves all of the surviving structures of the original hotel, engulfed in more recent building.

### **St Julitta's Church**

This church originated as a chapel in the parish of Llandygai on land belonging to the Priory of Beddgelert. Originally dedicated to a 6th century Welsh bishop, the dedication was changed in the 11th century to the 4th century Turkish martyrs St Cyricus and his mother Julitta. When a new church was built in the village in 1883 to accommodate the number of visitors, the dedications were divided. Sadly both churches are now redundant and this one is kept open by a Trust, The Friends of St Julitta's, who use it for community events and exhibitions.

The main body of the church is late medieval, a double square in plan. In the 16th century a south chapel was added. The most notable feature of the interior is the surviving box pews and pulpit of early 19th century date. The church is surrounded by a graveyard which contains several interesting graves, including some wealthy guests of the Royal Hotel who died while on holiday.

### **Ysgubor y Glyn**

This long barn, now owned by the Ministry of Defence, was first noted by Colin Gresham in *Arch Camb* 1957. The walling may be 17th century in date but the 8 trusses which support the (recently renewed) roof include earlier components and have clearly been re-used. It is thought that the six crucks (with slightly different profiles) which form the west end came from three different buildings. Several different dates (the earliest 16th century) have been carved on them, suggesting much repair and re-building, a puzzle which generated considerable animated discussion. The two easternmost bays are of frame construction and may be 17th century in date.

The party returned to Betws y Coed in time for lunch and an unhurried return home.