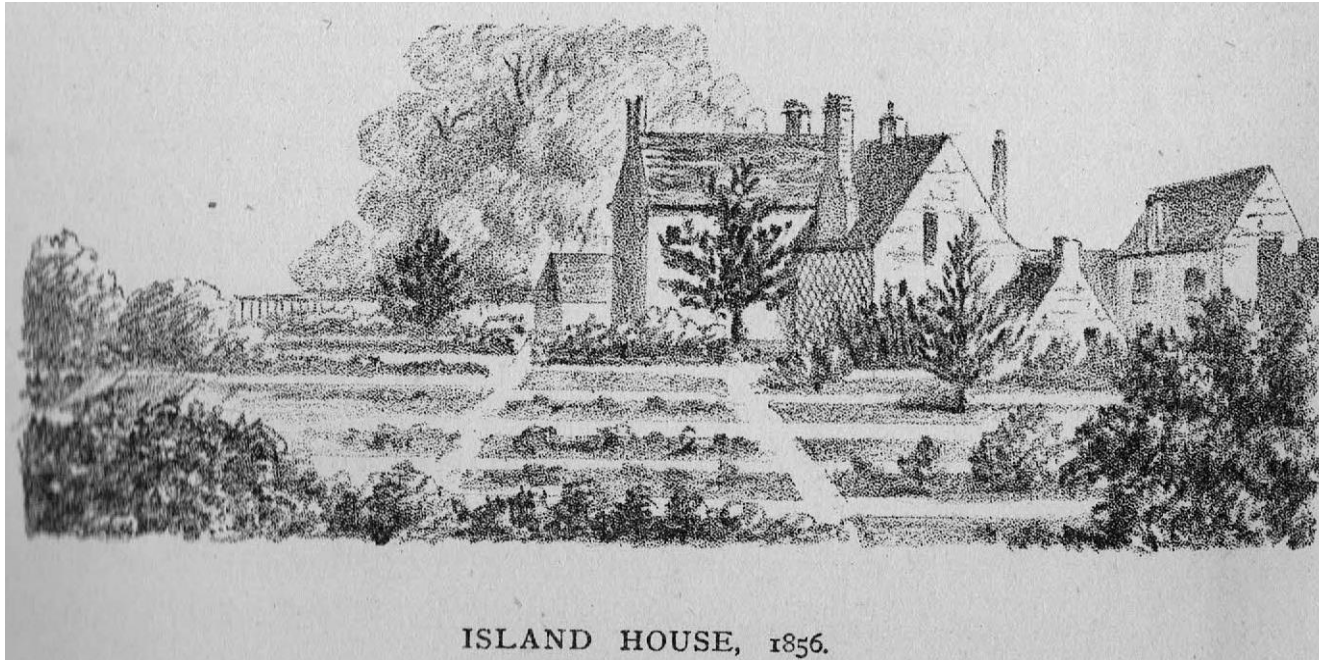


ISLAND HOUSE, LAUGHARNE

Sketch by Mary Curtis



Island House is the oldest known residence in Laugharne. Mary Curtis reported (c 1880) that Roman remains had been excavated in the garden and that part of the house 'was destroyed by accident by the cannon balls fired on the castle by Cromwell's soldiers ...one of the balls was preserved in the house up to 1823'. That would date it to well before 1644, and indeed its listing dates parts of it to Tudor times. It is said to have a priest's hole somewhere inside it.

Its high status as a building is reflected in the house being listed grade 2 and even its garden walls and garage building are also separately listed grade 2.*

We are still trying to research its history prior to 1700. In the mid eighteenth century William Skyrme of Llawhaden married Jane Abra Hughes of Laugharne, the sole daughter of John Hughes of Laugharne, so he perhaps was the owner then, possibly through his marriage to Johanna, daughter of Sir Edward Mansel of Trimsaran. Jane presumably inherited his wealth, since their later descendant and sole heir, Mary Abra Hughes Skyrme (born in 1813), owned a large part of Laugharne township and its surrounding fields. We can glimpse life for such wealthy Laugharnites from one account which tells of her ordering a chair to carry her up to The Globe's ballroom for an all-night ball. The 1871 census shows her in Island House, married to Frederick Wienholt and with a resident dressmaker, 2 domestic servants and a coachman/groom.

After Mary's death in 1885 the house saw a succession of occupants, but early in the 20th Century the grand-sounding Dame Amelia Euphemia Schneider, widow of General Sir John William Schneider, KGB of the Indian Army, moved in. She was succeeded by her son, Lt Col Claude Vyvian Congreve (the family confusingly changed their surname!) also of the Indian Army, who died here in 1923. His wife, Mary, lived on in Laugharne to 1959, outlasting their son, Lieut. John William Congreve, RNVR, who went missing, presumed drowned, when his ship HMS Tynedale, sank off the N. African coast in 1943.

The last occupant died in the 1990's leaving in the house all his possessions- furniture, books, clothing etc, which remain there today.

Today this large, 20-roomed house is in a sorry state, propped up by scaffolding to prevent its collapse (see the photos below). The County Council has agreed to apply a compulsory purchase order on it. We want to ensure that when it is eventually sold it will be carefully restored and made useful – ideally in a way which might benefit the community, as its central location – between the Castle and the ancient port of Laugharne, beside the walk leading to Dylan Thomas's Boathouse, the destination of many visitors to Laugharne.

Peter Stopp



