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2

Edited by
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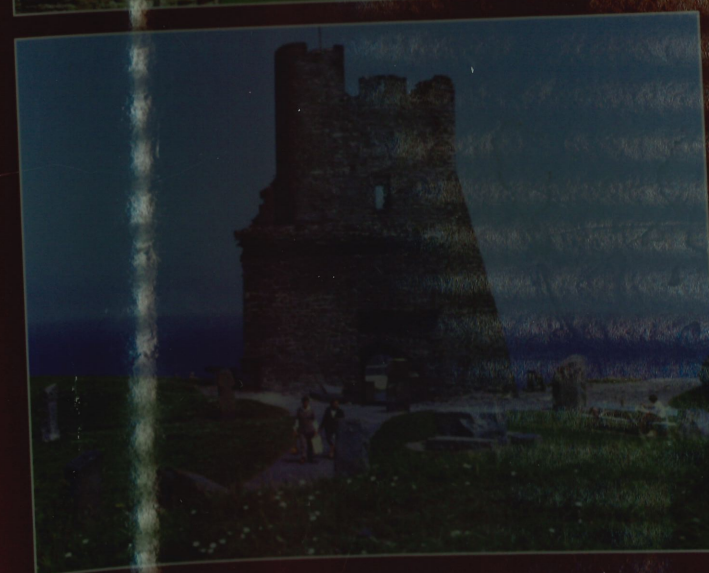
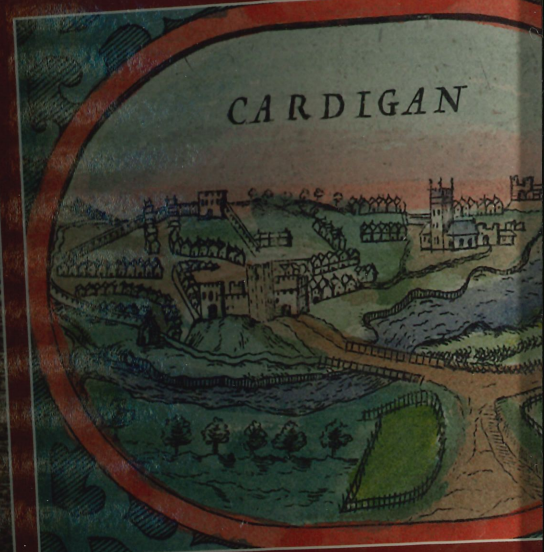
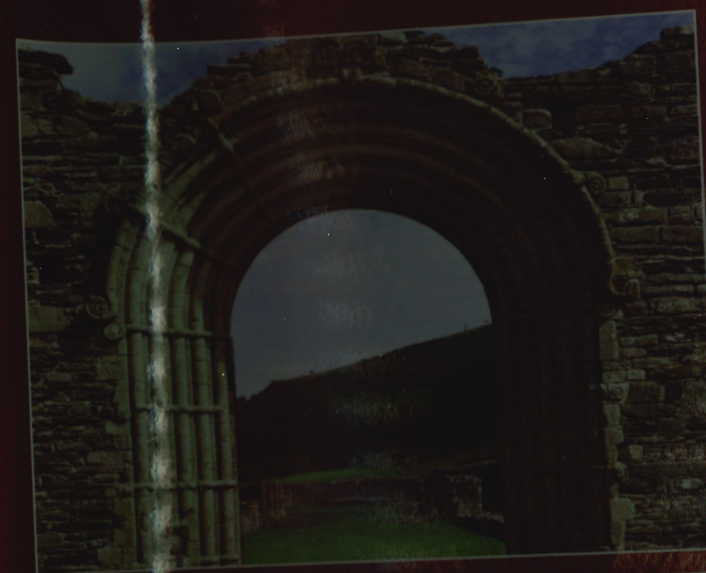


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Medieval and Early Modern Cardigan



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Some of these abandoned areas may only have been developed during post-medieval times, but not all. Thanks to the Domesday Book and other documents, Ian Jack was able to discuss these processes for the Welsh Marches in some detail, but for west Wales he could only suggest that the twelfth-century development of *gwely* and *gafael* were the result of increasing population, with consequent 'excessive morcellation through partible inheritance' and noting also 'expanded production'.³⁴ Production, like population, would have been affected by the frequent warfare, devastation, slaughter and resettlement chronicled by Rhygyfarch and by *Brut y Tywysogyon*. It is reasonable to suppose, though the evidence is rather weak, that the occurrence of personal names in the names of farms (e.g. Hendre-Rys, Llety-Ifan-hen, Dolfadog) indicated farm-establishment by individuals, but at what date? They may simply be the names of charismatic owners after the farm's formation, like the dramatically named 'Tyddyn y Gwragedd Moelion' ('farm of the bald women') mentioned in the commote of Creuddyn in 1566, but not now known.³⁵ The combination of *Hafod* with a personal name is discussed below.

Among the pre-1277 landowners known to us are the princes, who must originally have owned the bondlands of Ceredigion, and the religious institutions which had benefited from their generosity. Some lands must have been granted to loyal followers or court officials, but by far the largest amount was given to various branches of the Church. The best agricultural lands in the county, the barley-growing Llanrhystud flats, had been granted away by 1220. Land between the rivers Wyre and Peris went to the Knights of St John of the Hospital, including the church of Llansanffraid, and that between the Peris and the Cledan rivers went to the bishops of St David's (Morfa Esgob), while the lands of Morfa Mawr, south of the Cledan river, became a grange of Strata Florida. Elsewhere great swathes of land were granted away both by Norman interlopers such as Roger de Clare and by the Welsh princes. The Norman founder of Strata Florida in 1164 was almost immediately displaced by the Lord Rhys, who confirmed and extended the monastery's grants of land. Rhys also gave other Ceredigion lands to Strata Florida and to the nunnery at Llanllŷr, while the Knights of St John gained the uplands of Ystradmeurig and Ysbyty Ystwyth in addition to their coastal holding. Whitland owned the grange of Rhuddlan Deifi, apparently filched from Talley Abbey, as well as lands at Aber-porth. Cwm-hir in Radnorshire owned the grange of Nantyrarian, while Llanllŷr had a modest endowment in the Aeron valley. In addition to all this territory owned by various religious orders and by the bishop of St David's were the lands owned by individual churches. For example, Llanbadarn Fawr in its pre-Norman period apparently owned much land between the rivers Rheidol and the Clarach, though it may have been gradually stripped of these holdings in the difficult period of long-drawn-out conquest which left Llanbadarn Fawr as simply a parish church.³⁶

Rather than darkening counsel with further detail, it should help our understanding to try briefly to visualize the agricultural landscape in the medieval period, since it seems likely that its actual appearance may have changed less between 1100 and 1600 than did the arrangements by which it was owned, leased and managed. From mountains to sea much of the landscape was open ('champaign country'), unhedged and unwallled. However, in 1537 Morris ap Ieuan, a Strata Florida tenant, was expected to 'build, dig and maintain in good order a hedge and a ditch between his land and the

³⁴ Jack, 'Wales and the Marches', p. 270.

³⁵ NLW Crosswood Deeds I. 47.

³⁶ For princely grants to Ceredigion's religious houses, see *AWR*, passim.

demesne of the Abbey'.³⁷ There must have been a clear distinction between the strip fields and other intermingled lands (often where there was better soil) on the one hand, and the open grazing uplands, with their temporary patches of cultivation, on the other. These higher lands were a valuable resource for graziers. John Leland's description of the area c.1539 says: 'al the montaine ground . . . is almoste for wilde pastures and breeding grounde, in so much that everi man there about puttith on bestes as many as they wylle without paiyng of mony'.³⁸ Geraint Dyfnallt Owen argued that 'there does not appear to have been much attempt by the tenants [of the former monastic estates] to enclose their holdings'.³⁹ Crops would have been protected from grazing animals by various means: hurdles (sometimes referred to in seventeenth-century inventories) could be used as temporary fencing, sheep and cattle could be controlled by herdsfolk (or children), or individual cattle could be staked out and moved from day to day, as practised until recently in Poland.⁴⁰

Trees were not greatly in evidence. Great reliance is placed by historians on Leland's well-known description of the lands of Strata Florida as having lost their trees to poor woodland practices, to the activities of goats and the cutting down of woods to reduce the number of thieves.⁴¹ References in earlier documents to the 'forest of Crynnenith' (Crynfynydd) on the mountains east of Llanddewibrefi village should be taken as referring to hunting-grounds rather than large areas of trees; there would have been much pasturing and some cultivation. However, coppicing was an ancient practice, and it was probably used to exploit hanging oakwoods on valley slopes which were too steep to plough or graze effectively. This accounts for their survival in many valleys to the present day.

Where did the people who worked the land live? No scholarly study has yet been made of this subject. Nevertheless, we have seen already that some hamlets existed. Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn was surely a bond-village serving the Welsh lords of the commote of Creuddyn; other bond-communities of labourers and their families serving lay or ecclesiastical owners may be adduced for Llanbadarn Fawr, Ystradmeurig and/or Ysbyty Ystwyth, Llanddewibrefi, Tal-sarn (serving Llanllŷr), Pontrhydfendigaid (serving Strata Florida) and three hamlets at Llansanffraid/Llan-non. There must have been many others. The lands they tilled were intermingled strips and small closes (as revealed in the 1781 Crosswood map of Ysbyty Ystwyth), of the kind further described in the next paragraph.⁴² By the time of the tithe map sixty years later, lands within the parish had been completely reorganized.

The modern appearance of the agricultural landscape has changed drastically since the medieval period, with one exception. While the lands of the Knights of St John and the monks of Strata Florida and the nuns of Llanllŷr all passed to lay ownership in mid-sixteenth century, the history of the bishop's lands at Llan-non, Morfa Esgob, is unclear, but intriguing.⁴³ Originally the lands would

³⁷ G. D. Owen, 'Agrarian Conditions and Changes in West Wales during the Sixteenth Century with special reference to Monastic and Chantry Lands' (unpublished University of Wales PhD thesis, 1935), pp. 150-1.

³⁸ L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary in Wales of John Leland* (London, 1906), p. 119.

³⁹ Owen, 'Agrarian Conditions and Changes in West Wales', p. 429.

⁴⁰ Rees ap Rees of Penbryn left 'on wooden foule [fold] in the fild to keepe cattle in'. NLW SD 1635/104.

⁴¹ Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary in Wales of John Leland*, p. 118.

⁴² NLW Crosswood Maps, vol. 1, 36. Not only are five separate tenancies shown with intermingled lands, but mixed in also are properties of two other landowners.

⁴³ See G. R. J. Jones, 'Forms and Patterns of Medieval Settlements in Welsh Wales' in D. Hooke (ed.), *Medieval Villages: A Review of Current Work* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 165-7.

have been worked by bondmen who owned nothing themselves, but at some unknown period the land was alienated from the diocese.⁴⁴ Was it sheer diocesan incompetence which enabled it to become the property of numerous owners? Did the chaos of the Black Death give the opportunity to surviving bondmen or intruders to claim the strips for themselves, and that in so complex a fashion that later rationalization was impossible? Some predatory landlords were willing to attempt to build up a holding. For example, a map of 1825 shows that William Davies had acquired some 40 slangs of Morfa Esgob, but never more than three are contiguous.⁴⁵ There are today still dozens of owners, and though a single farmer may rent many of the strips from these owners, his rent payments are extremely complex. Elsewhere across the county such lands might be divided group from group by open rough grazing. Morfa Esgob is a landscape which, despite its bungalows, is frozen in time, the best example of its kind in Wales (Fig. 18).

Some fragmentary hints of early agricultural organization survive in place-names. For instance, the farm of Faerdre (demesne, steward's farm) is close to the medieval motte at Gwynionydd (SN 424 420). Rhandir Hen (SN 588 719), once an estate centre in Llangwryfon, is now a farm; three other *rhandir* farm-names survive in the parish. T. Jones Pierce defined *rhandir* as a hamlet or shareland which 'consisted of open field made up of irregular-shaped parcels of varying size and engirdled with a



Fig. 18: Lleiniau (slangs or strips) at Morfa Esgob (Llansanffraid), photographed in 2012 (DI2009_0217).

⁴⁴ This is drastically simplified. For the complexities, see *ibid.*

⁴⁵ NLW Lliardiadau Collection (unscheduled).

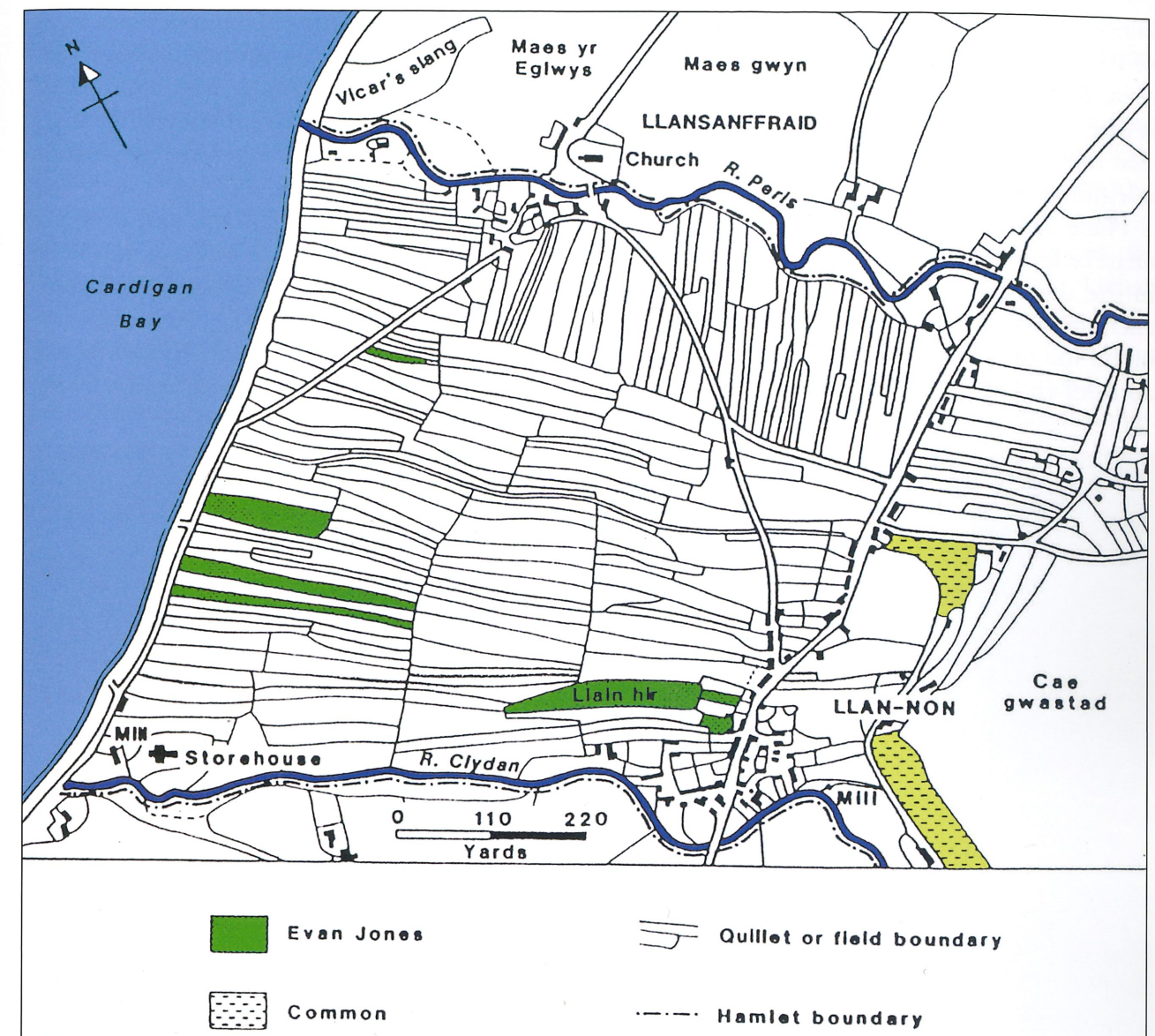


Fig. 19: Lleiniau at Morfa Esgob in 1841, redrawn from the tithe map with the scattered slangs of Evan Jones highlighted.

cluster of homesteads set in small enclosures'.⁴⁶ Faenor, still a significant place-name in the county, is not derived as one might suppose from 'manor' but rather an original Welsh term having a variety of meanings, including 'a territorial and administrative unit comprising a varying number of townships'.⁴⁷ The use of the Anglo-French loan-word *parc* to denote a field, once general across the county but now shrunk to the area south of New Quay, is interesting in the sense that the fields may have been formed

⁴⁶ Jones Pierce, 'Landlords in Wales', p. 359. For evidence of the former status of Rhandir Hen, see NLW SD 1624/134. For a discussion of the county's medieval *rhandiroedd*, see Dodgshon, 'Early Society and Economy', p. 48.

⁴⁷ GPC s.v.

later than the borrowing; the word occurs in the fourteenth-century *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (White Book of Rhydderch).⁴⁸ It has generally been replaced by the native *cae*, whose very root denotes a closed area. *Maes*, a common element in the county's place-names, suggests a larger, open field, but whether it was used to describe strip-fields like the two at Llandygwydd is not clear; nor is there any certainty that modern usage (e.g. Maesymeillion) represents an ancient field-structure, though the speculation is legitimate. As for the strips, they are known in plural as *lleiniau*, singular *llain*.

Place-names also remind us of the complex matter of transhumance. *Lluest*, *hendre* and *hafod* are all to be found as Ceredigion farm-names. *Lluest*, a term largely confined to mid-Wales, is translated in the documents as dairy- or summer-house, and seems originally to have meant a temporary encampment; it is sometimes equated with the Scottish shieling. A striking reference to a *lluest* occurs in the will of Hugh Morgan ap Rees, who refers to 'my mountain house called Lluest Hugh Morgan ap Rees yn Gwngi'.⁴⁹ This is the only example known to me of a place-name derived from a living,



Fig. 20: Royal Commission aerial reconnaissance in February 2012 revealed several earthworks of interest around Rhandir Hen, Llanilar. At SN 5887 7195 there is an embanked oval enclosure (perhaps a stock enclosure), measuring around 43m (141 ft) across, surviving in marginal land where several other slight earthworks are visible. To the south-west at SN 5879 7181, on drier ground, are the denuded earthworks of a circular enclosure joined to a rectangular enclosure, typical of a medieval deserted settlement (AP_2012_1506).

⁴⁸ Ibid. s.v.

⁴⁹ TNA 11/1658/383.

dateable individual, who presumably had himself built the 'mountain house'. Hafod Uchdryd is an interesting name. Uchdryd is an early Welsh borrowing, from English Oughtred, and had gone out of use by the sixteenth century, which suggests an early date for the establishment of this *hafod*.

The *hendre/hafod* paradigm is generally supposed to have reflected the practice of transhumance, by which stock was moved between the permanent *hendre* (old settlement) and the *hafod* (summer dwelling). Whatever may have been the truth in, say, the twelfth century, there is no doubt that by the sixteenth century those *hafodydd* for which evidence survives had become or were becoming permanent farms, as is clear from the Strata Florida leases. By the early sixteenth century at the latest, Hafod Uchdryd in the upper Ystwyth valley had already been divided into two farms, Uchaf and Isaf, under the monastic administration, and, when rented to Morgan Herbert in the mid-sixteenth century, the rent was doubled.⁵⁰ Frank Emery firmly believed that even the term *lluest* 'was used for small farms . . . occupied throughout the year, and used for stock-rearing as much as for butter- or cheese-making'.⁵¹ This conflicts with Leland's evidence; he refers to 'ii veri poore cotagis

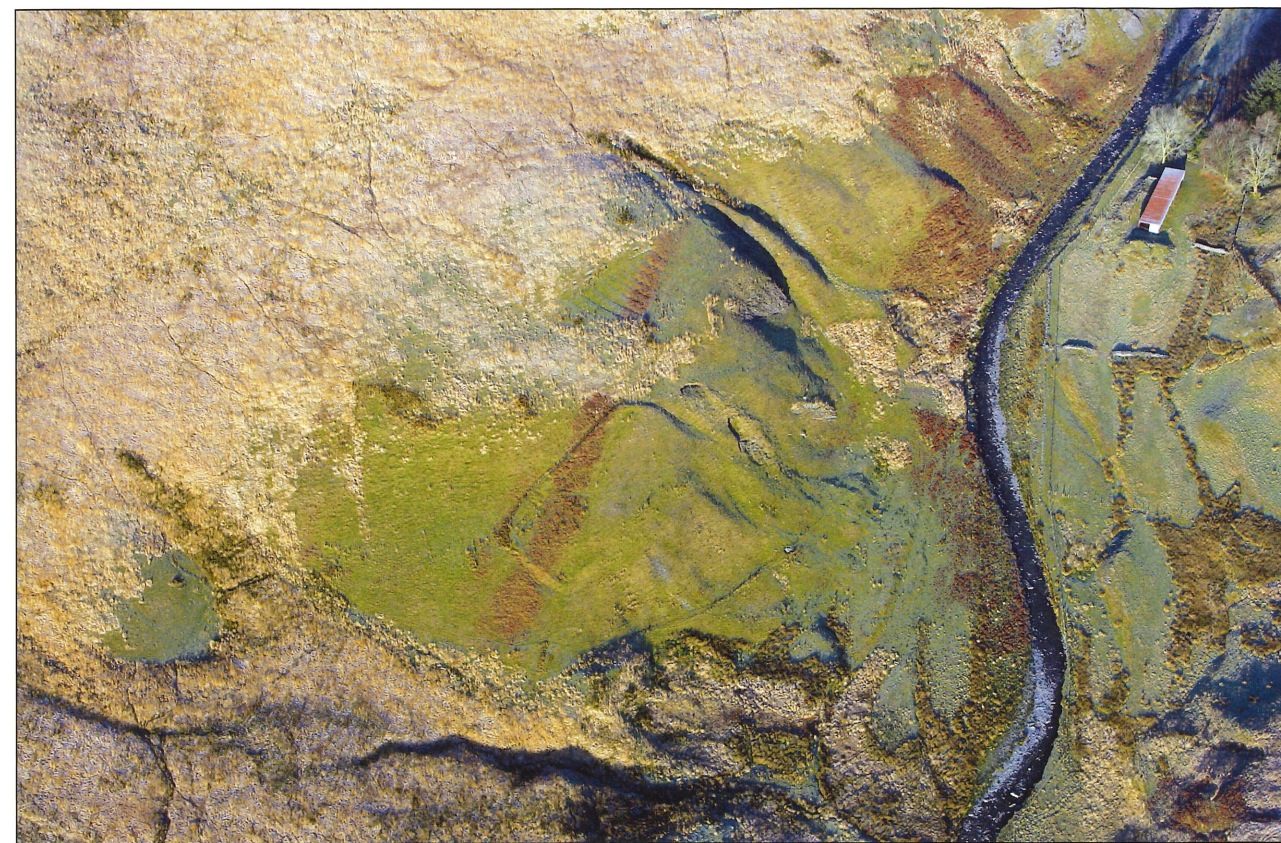


Fig. 21: Lluest Dolgwail (Pontarfynach): an area c.100m (328 ft) across, mostly resting above steep slopes down to the river Dilyw, showing cultivation features (plough-ridges and possible raised beds), centred on a banked enclosure that is lost in its descent towards the river (AP_2007_4829).

⁵⁰ NLW Crosswood Deeds I.5. See G. Morgan, 'Early Hafod Tenants and the Founding of the Estate', *Friends of Hafod Newsletter*, 6 (1991), 5–7.

⁵¹ F. Emery, 'The Farming Regions of Wales' in Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, IV, p. 138.