

Y Fron, LLangefni
Archaeological Assessment



Report No. 433

January 2002

Prepared for

Menter Môn

by Dr D.Rh. Gwyn

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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FRON, LLANGFNI

1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been contracted to Menter Môn to undertake an assessment of the importance of the standing buildings, at Fron, Llangefni, the property of Dr Wyn Morgan.

2. ASSESSMENT BRIEF

An initial report was requested from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, based on desk-top study, assessing the history and significance of the buildings on the site.

3. SOURCE MATERIAL AND SITE VISIT

Analysis of documentation relating to the site was undertaken in the Sites and Monuments Record, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Anglesey archives at Llangefni, and the Department of Manuscripts, University of Wales, Bangor. The site was visited on 9 January 2002.

4. FINDINGS OF THE DESK-TOP STUDY

4.1 Location

The buildings are located at SH 4560 7526, in the community of Llangefni, Ynys Môn.

4.2 Historical and archaeological background¹

The earliest evidence of human society within the immediate area is represented by the discovery in 1829 of about thirty cist-graves and detached parts of graves containing fragments of human bones, found when a boundary hedge was being removed between Glan Hwfa farm and Fron. The precise location of these graves can not now be determined, but may be in the region of SH 4573 7531, immediately to the north-east of the buildings which form the subject of the present assessment. It is likely that these graves are early Christian in date.²

In the Medieval period, the study area formed part of the township of Nanhwrfa, within Rhosyr cantref and the commote of Menai.³ Nanhwrfa formed part of the estate of the Bishop and Chapter of Bangor, the greatest ecclesiastical landowners within Anglesey.⁴

There is evidence that until the eighteenth century the area of Glanhwfa formed part of the Carreglwyd estate,⁵ and that it was acquired before 1791 by the Bulkeley family of Baron Hill. In that year Viscount Bulkeley leased 'Nant Hwrfa' in the parish of Llangefni to one Hugh Hughes, yeoman.⁶ It is not clear what relation, if any, he bore to the Reverend Henry Hughes MA, rector of Llangefni, who in 1805 and 1809 exchanged lands with Bulkeley whereby the rector acquired the 1 acre 30 perches of 'Llain Glanhwrfa' and a total of 4 acres 22 perches of 'Glanhwfa'.⁷ However, since both these documents identify some of the land around the exchanges as belonging to the 'Revd. Mr Hughes', and since their effect was to rationalise both Bulkeley's and Hughes's land-holdings, the likelihood is that the rector had inherited the lease of Nant Hwfa (or Hwrfa) from a relative of the same name and that he also owned freehold property in the area (Appendix 1).

¹ This section has made extensive use of the essay *Y Fron, Llangefni*, by Siôn Gwilym, to whom acknowledgement is made.

² Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Sites and Monuments Record.

³ Melville Richards, 'Medieval Divisions', *Atlas of Anglesey* (Llangefni, 1972), pp. 31-9

⁴ A.D. Carr, 'Church and Monastic Lands', *Atlas of Anglesey* (Llangefni, 1972), pp. 43-4.

⁵ National Library of Wales, Carreglwyd papers.

⁶ University of Wales, Bangor, Baron Hill 3981.

⁷ University of Wales, Bangor, Baron Hill 4004, 4007.

The road which runs through the assessment area is the pre-Telford turnpike from Llangefni to Nant Newydd, replaced in 1827 by the present road from Creigle on the A5 to Llangefni.⁸

The house at y Fron was built in 1812 by the rector, an act commemorated by a plaque on the southern gable of the house, lettered 'H H 1812'.⁹ Hughes died in 1828, when his household furniture, items of husbandry and farming stock were offered for sale.¹⁰ In 1830 it became the home of the Reverend John Elias (1774-1841), the foremost Calvinistic Methodist Minister of his time, a celebrated preacher and an uncompromising upholder of the doctrine of Election, as well as of conservative political principles and anti-Catholicism.¹¹

The census of 1841 lists a full house at y Fron – not only John Elias himself and his second wife Anne, his brother Joseph, a weaver, but also other relations, servants and two surgeons, John Llooyd and Owen Hughes. However, the tithe redemption survey, carried out in the same year, identifies the occupier as William Williams (Appendix 2). The owner of the house and the surrounding fields is given as Henry Hughes, styled as 'esq'.¹² He was probably the son of the late rector, as a document of 1854 is an acquittance by one Robert Hughes to Hugh Hughes, to whom Robert Hughes has released all claims under a lease upon Glanhwfa granted by Viscount Bulkeley to a Hugh Hughes whose will was proved on 4 January 1829.¹³

In 1844 a Miss Roberts was using the house as a school for young ladies, with board and instruction at 22gs.¹⁴

The solicitor Samuel Dew (1814-1884), is noted as resident in the 1851 census, a prominent member of the Calvinistic Methodist connection and of the Liberal party. The census of 1861 is the first to list 'Fron Farm yard', suggesting that the farm buildings had been built within the previous ten years. The yard was inhabited by John Roberts, a labourer, born in Penrhoslligwy, his wife Anne, born in Amlwch, their three daughters and two sons. Unfortunately, the children's place and dates of birth, as given in the census, do not provide more information as to when they might have moved in. The eldest child was 11 years old in 1861, and like all her siblings, her place of birth is given as Llangefni, strongly suggesting that the couple had levied elsewhere in the parish at the time of the 1851 census. The buildings are not marked until the 1887 ordnance survey (Appendix 3)

Dew moved to Menai Bridge in 1879,¹⁵ and thereafter y Fron was home to Thomas 'Palestina' Lewis (1821-1897), who in 1840 founded a flourishing corn and flour business in Bangor, and who stepped into Richard Davies's shoes as Liberal M.P. for Anglesey in 1886 when his predecessor felt he could not support Gladstone's Irish policy. His nickname derived from his popular magic-lantern slide lecture on his travels in the Holy Land.

Later residents were the Reverend James Donne, a Calvinistic Methodist minister of Capel Dinas, and boarders at Llangefni Grammar School.¹⁶ In 1889 a Hannah Jones is recorded as resident, followed by the Reverend Owen Hughes, a Calvinistic Methodist minister who was pastor at the Talwrn chapel from 1890 to 1892.¹⁷

A number of other dwellings were erected along the Glanhwfa Road in the late nineteenth century – Bryn Arfon c. 1879, Glan Aber c. 1880 and Cefni House, later known as Bodhyfryd, c. 1879.¹⁸ Between 1900 and 1920 Bryn Gwynedd and Park Mount were constructed.¹⁹

⁸ R. and S. White, 'Digwyddiad wrth Dyrpeg Nant 1824', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* 1969-70, pp. 223-32.

⁹ Y Fron is unlikely to have been a retirement home, as has been suggested, in that incumbents were appointed for life.

¹⁰ University of Wales Sale Catalogue 2 (1828); no details of Hughes's effects are listed – interested purchasers were invited to contact John Evans, the Caernarfon lawyer, for further particulars.

¹¹ *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, entry for John Elias.

¹² Llangefni Record Office, tithe redemption survey, parish of Llangefni, 1841.

¹³ University of Wales, Bangor, Baron Hill 4062.

¹⁴ David A. Pretty, *Two Centuries of Anglesey Schooling*

¹⁵ Parch. R. Hughes, *Enwogion Môn 1850-1912* (Dolgellau, 1913), pp. 25-6.

¹⁶ *Postal Directory of Caernarvon and Anglesey*

¹⁷ Hugh Owen (ed.), *Braslun o Hanes M.C. Môn (1880-1935)* (Liverpool, 1923), p. 85, p. 375

¹⁸ Dates are as given in University of Wales Sale Catalogue of Bulkeley properties in Llangefni, 1910.

¹⁹ Ordnance survey 25" XVIII.3, 1887 survey, 1899 survey, 1920 survey.

Though y Fron remained in the Hughes family until 1912 when Sir Henry Lewis (Thomas 'Palesteina' Lewis's son) sold the property to William and Gladys Hughes Jones, who had been living at y Fron since 1895. Mrs Hughes Jones is remembered as an enthusiastic supporter of Megan Lloyd George, Liberal M.P. for Anglesey, when she was defeated by Cledwyn Hughes. Y Fron formed Megan Lloyd George's constituency base for as long as she represented Anglesey.

Between the first and second world war the Hughes Jones family ran a dairy and milk round from the farm.

The house y Fron was sold in 1959 to the present owners, Drs John and Mair Hughes. The remainder of the property was sold by the Hughes Jones family in August 2001.

5. DESCRIPTION OF BUILDINGS

The buildings comprise two ranges, around a triangular site and a free-standing mill with remains of a water-wheel. As noted in ⁴ above, they are not shown on any map before 1887, but the likelihood is that the greater part came into being between 1851 and 1861.

One range is orientated south-west to north-east, and comprises three structures. These are, firstly a pigsty, secondly a monopitch roof, stone built structure believed to have been used at some stage as a stable, but more recently as a dwelling, and thirdly a stone-built *beudy*.

The other is orientated west to east. At its westernmost end is a dilapidated and roofless structure which local tradition holds to have been at one stage a dwelling. There is a trace of a hearth in the west gable wall, but the building has clearly undergone many phases of rebuilding. It may contain older elements than the other structures in this range. Contiguous with it is a dilapidated and roofless structure, possibly also at one time a dwelling, with a catslide outshot extension on the south side. A window on the north longitudinal wall has a segmental arch profile with radial stone voussoirs.

Contiguous with it on the east side is a two-unit stone built structure, both units of which are accessed by a doorway in the north longitudinal wall. Each doorway is flanked by two windows, and both doorways and windows share a segmental arch profile. These structures have latterly been used as a dairy but it is possible that the more westerly was built as a barn. The slate roof is supported by queen-post trusses of machine-sawn timber. To the south of the eastern unit is a catslide outshot in which steel window frames have been inserted. The slate roof on the eastern unit has been renewed, whereas it is likely that the roof on the western unit is the original.

At the eastern end of the range is a stone-built structure in which there is a blocked cart-door in the northern longitudinal wall, which again makes use of the segmental arch profile. This appears to be of later date than the two unit structure.

The water-mill is orientated north-west to south east, and was formerly turned by water from a mill pond, now largely dry, immediately to the north-west. The water-wheel partly survives in a pit on the north-east-facing wall of the mill. It ran on an iron axle, which survives, and was made up of wooden arms, which have largely rotted away, and iron shrouds, which survive. Power was transferred from the mill by cast-iron rim-gearing which survive, attached to the shrouds on the south-west side.

The mill building is stone-built and slate roofed. It is built on two floors, the lower accessed by a flight of stone steps, the upper from ground level. There is now no machinery in this building.

On the north-east side of the wheel-pit is a small stone structure, partly roofed, in which there is evidence for an under-floor belt drive from the wheel axle. This structure houses a spindle on which there is a trace of a take-off for the belt-drive, a cast-iron flywheel and part of a dog-clutch. The structure itself has a small grate built into the wall, and it is likely that it housed a butter churn.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The farm buildings at Fron are typical of the small agricultural outbuildings erected around the middle of the nineteenth century in Anglesey. The period of their construction is confirmed by the appearance of 'Fron farm yard' in the 1861 census, suggesting that they were erected in the 1850s. Semi-decorative features such as the flattened arch doors and windows can be paralleled on other agricultural and even industrial buildings from the same period.

Whilst the buildings themselves are unremarkable within the context of the development of Anglesey's agricultural resources in the nineteenth century, they nevertheless constitute an attractive range of structures of a type that is becoming increasingly less common. Their comparative smallness reflect the fact that for much of the nineteenth century, y Fron was not owned or inhabited by agriculturalists but by business and professional families. Farming was secondary to their other interests, and there is an element of the 'gentleman farmer' to them. As such they, as does the Fron estate generally, illustrate a fundamental shift in power in Anglesey (and in Wales generally) in the course of the nineteenth century, from traditional landed forms of wealth, represented by the Bulkeleys of Baron Hill, to a Liberal and dissenting middle class, no longer rooted in the land, albeit prepared to engage in farming on a small scale.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

7.1 Manuscript sources

National Library of Wales

Carreglwyd papers

University of Wales, Bangor

Baron Hill 3981 (lease, 12 November 1791)
4004 (deed of exchange, 11 November 1805)
4007 (indenture of exchange, 13 November 1809)
4062 (acquittance, 18 November 1854)

Sale Catalogue 2 (effects of Rev. Mr Hughes, 1828)
1910 (Sale of Baron Hill properties near Llangefni)

Anglesey Archives, Llangefni

Llangefni tithe map, 1843
Llangefni tithe redemption schedule, 1841
WSM/335/35-41 (photographs of water-wheel)
WSM/343/12 (conveyance of land, 1873)
Census for Llangefni parish, 1841-1891

Private possession

Siôn Gwilym: *Y Fron, Llangefni* (unpublished essay)

7.2 Ordnance survey map sources

Anglesey 25" series XVIII 3, survey of 1887, 1899 and 1920

7.3 Published sources

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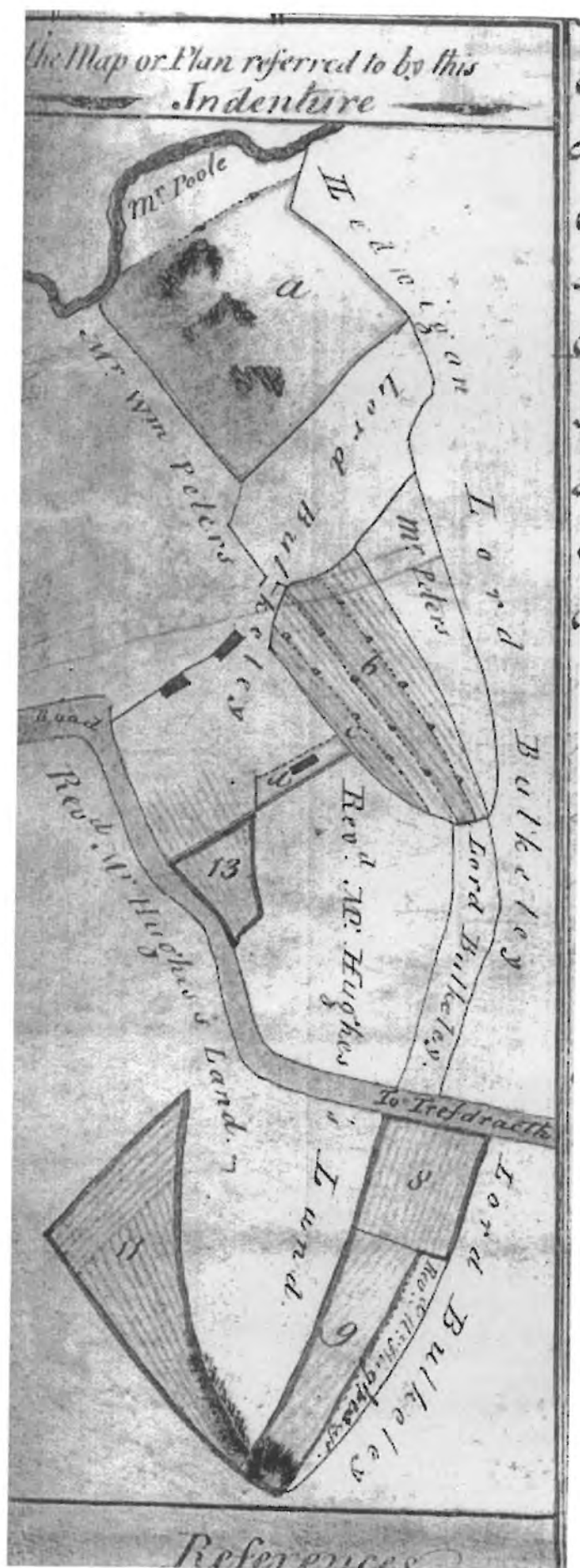
White, R and S: 'Digwyddiad wrth Dyrpeg Nant 1824', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* 1969-70, pp. 223-32.

8. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

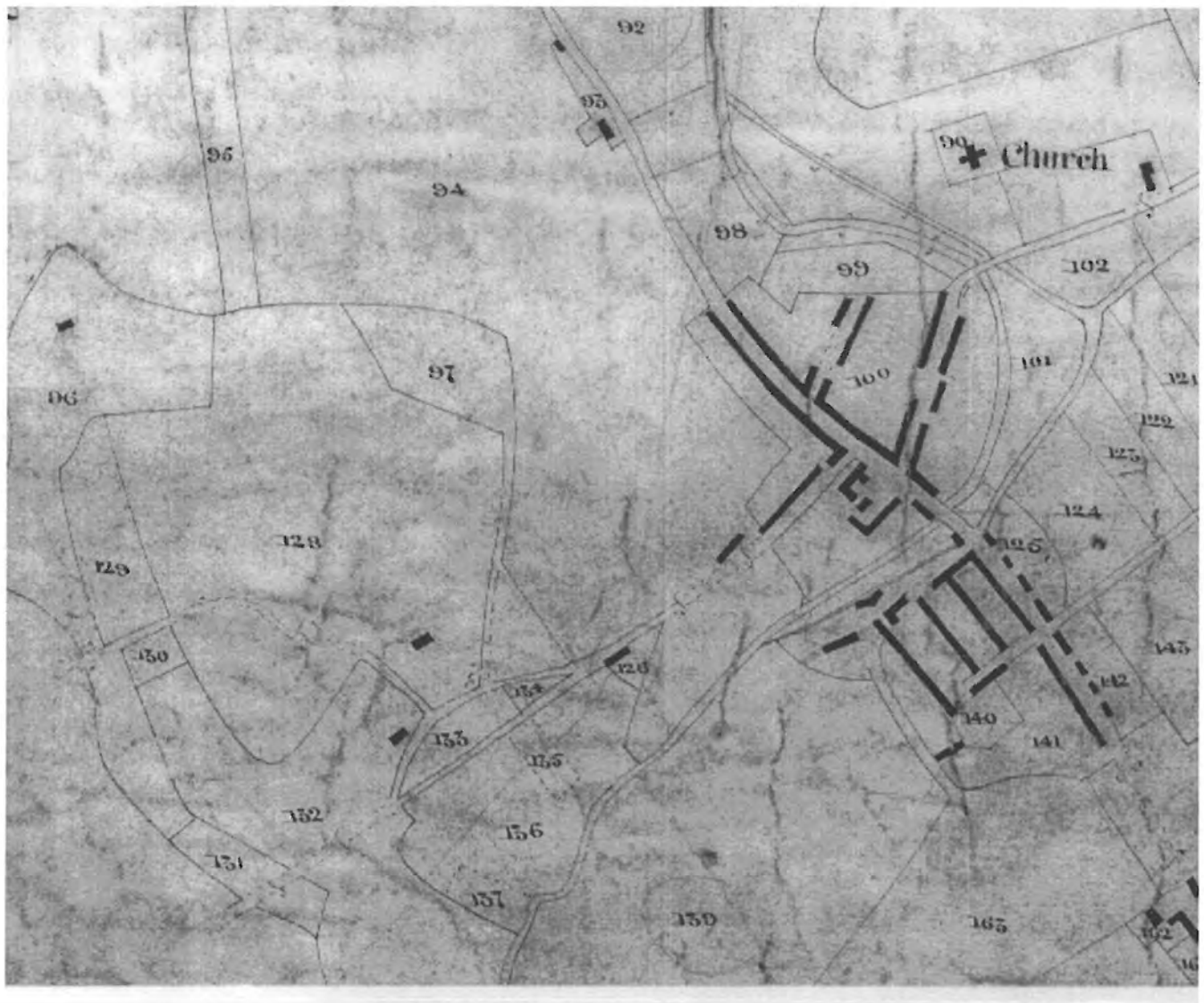
This project has assessed the importance of the standing buildings, at Fron, Llangefni. It has established that the buildings are attractive examples of once-common mid-nineteenth century Anglesey agricultural structures, and that they exemplify the growth of a professional middle class for whom farming was a secondary occupation.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Dr Wyn Morgan for discussion of the history of the estate, and to Drs John and Mair Hughes of y Fron for assistance. The trust also acknowledges the information gathered by Siôn Gwilym, and the assistance of the staff of the Anglesey archives and of the University of Wales, Bangor, Department of Manuscripts.



APPENDIX 2: Llangefni tithe map, 1841 (Fron is identified as tenement 128)



APPENDIX 3: 25" Ordnance Survey, 1900

