

LIG Notes 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Present: Maureen Lloyd, John Price, Dot Spens, Jenny Francis, Richard & Celia Price, Joan Lloyd, Anna & Simon Cooley, Barbara Gayther, Jenny & James Martin, Jennifer Lewis, Sylvia Bigglestone, Elsa Harflett, Babara Lloyd, Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Audrey Hamilton, Lynda Aliano, Judith Lloyd Thomas, Avryl & Roy Lloyd, Lisa Lloyd, Vivien & Stephen Thomas, Celia Jones, Joan Hughes, Malc Gonnella, Janet Russell, Mollie Moore, Sue & John Ievers, Rob Davies, Cherry & Victor Williams, Iris Lloyd, Kath Pyke, Helen Barnett, Grace Davies, Juliet & John Lewis, Gethin & Ruth Davies, Edwina Griffiths.

On Zoom: Margaret Price, Marilyn Price, Julian Ravest, Richard Thomas, Paul & Sue Buckingham, Ros Coles, Sue Lawler, Angela Swindell, Sylvia Illingsworth, Diana Lloyd, Athene English, Penny Williams

Apologies: Wendy & Dainis Ozols

Maureen began by welcoming everyone to the hall and on Zoom. This was the last meeting of the winter season, and she was delighted to introduce Stuart Fry talking on the Historic Landscapes of the Bachawy catchment. Fields, boundaries and trackways - what can they tell us about old Castell Paen?

Stuart explained his background. A student of upland Welsh agriculture, he has amassed several hundred items of farming history from hand tools to carts, harvesting to livestock management. He has an academic background in economic history and holds an M.A. in Historic Landscape Studies.

He began by saying he would set us some homework because there is very little recorded about the local landscape of the Bachawy. In the past there has been a concentration on the Normans building the castles and the Romans leaving coins for people to get excited about. Both of these were invaders, while his interest lies in the native people who have moulded our landscape over the generations and what clues they have left.

One of the biggest influences was the Act of Union of 1536 when Radnorshire as a county was formed. Gavelkind, which was the traditional Welsh system of sharing the inheritance between everyone, was gradually replaced by primogeniture, where the oldest son inherited, which often led to the younger son setting up higher up the hill, on the arosfa or sheep walk, while younger siblings perhaps emigrated to start a new life in a new country.

He quoted Della Hook, suggesting we read some of her books, such as 'Landscape: the Richest Historical record' and also W G Hoskins 'The making of the English Landscape'. He told us that much of what we see is older than we think. He talked about banks as being the basic structure to divide the land and we should look closely at them as they represented a big investment in time and money. Why were they built, to keep something in or out? WWII was another big change. Since then, agriculture has altered some of the land, so identifying what is ancient can sometimes be difficult. The agricultural schemes from the last 40 years, with ESA, Tir Cymen, Glastir, etc, have altered some of our landscape, many new hedgerows have been planted but they do not always have the historical integrity of our ancient hedgerows.

Stuart is very interested in the old Welsh systems; under the 'lordship' of a local king, the comotes were divided into trefs. The Bachawy valley is a hidden valley so probably there is much still to be discovered. He explained that to study the landscape takes in Geography (Geology, Geomorphology, Climate), Natural History (Botany, Silviculture, Ecology), Agricultural History

(Ages of Man, Land Politics, Settlement, Land Management) and Society (Kinship, Beliefs). He went on to say that different things happened at different times, going through the development of skills and cultures.

Settlements were based on water, food, shelter and safety. Before the Normans, the land was divided into the infield and the outfield. The Welsh names reflect this time. The outfield was Mynydd, Rhos or Waun. Mynydd, although now often thought to be mountain, was the common land for the people from the township. The in-bye, with names such as cae, maes, wyrlod, dol, waun, rhos and erw, reflected the different uses of each type of land. The in-bye was for crops, hay, corn, etc.



Stuart then spoke about field systems and how they would have originally been created from woodland or wildwood. It would have been extremely hard work trying to clear the area and then cultivate it. Any changes in field systems will be recorded in the maps. Regular fields are generally new, while smaller cellular fields are much older. He encouraged people to go and study the fields. Compare the fields near to the castle where the Norman three field strip system would have operated; one of the fields would have been fallow, others under crops, but not the wyrlod, because that was the hay field - it was still shared in strips but it was always a hay field. There is no change in the fields since the first OS maps of the nineteenth century, the tithe map, etc. The medieval three field system has been divided up while the older cellular fields remain much the same, other than where hedges have disappeared to make larger fields. He then went on to talk about old measurements of rood/rod, pole, perch and furlough, some of which were a variable size and some could be either length or area! A barleycorn is three inches and three miles equals a league. These imperial measurements had developed from the amount that a plough team could plough. Generally there would have been an eight ox team in the valley and the pole, which was the yardstick, was the goad used by the boy to drive the ox team when ploughing. From Hywel Dda a foot was only nine inches. Imagine the distance an eight ox team would take to turn at the end of the furrow; this is often reflected in the curved shape at the top of old fields, so providing a clue that the field had been a ploughed field. Fields were created to keep stock out so that crops could be grown. A single species hedge is probably fairly new, a hedge with either hawthorn or blackthorn probably dates from after 1750 when the estates had their own nurseries. Generally, if a hedge contains holly, elder or field maple it is usually old. Check the field boundaries to compare the old boundaries which were to keep stock out, and the more modern field divisions.

Most of the ditches and banks up on the hills probably date from before the Normans. The ditch was as important as the bank; they were built for cattle. Any flocks of sheep would be small and just for home consumption. There are signs of encroachment and abandonment on the local hills. Names are important. If a field is called Cae Bettyn that illustrates that the field would have grown oats where the stubble would have been ploughed with a breast plough and then piled up and burned. Looking at tracks and walls - ancient walls were not battered (ie later walls are wider at the bottom than at the top). Stones can be laid on a slope to help water to escape from a bank, rather than letting water build up behind the wall. The herringbone system was to stop the water escaping too quickly - it would stop the water gushing out from the wall and flooding the base. Orthostates were used to keep cattle in, but used with walling they then could keep in sheep. If the copes of a wall are regular dressed stones the wall probably dates from the time of the estates. The big orthostates are at the very least early medieval, very often pre-Roman. The big snows did a lot of damage to the walls, especially some of the enclosure walls which were not built so well. 1913, 1925, 1947 and 1963 were all bad years for snow. The name Wern is common in this valley, that is because it was all alder. The Lancashire clog makers would come and lease a patch and coppice the alders which would extend the life of alder trees by about 100 years. There are still wood pastures in the valley that are like what the wild wood would have looked before it was cleared. The whole valley would have been like that, except when you got near to the river where it was boggy with alder trees. The hill tracks coming down from the hill would have been for people to cart their peat back to their homes after cutting and stacking it. They cut off the turf and turned it over so that eventually it rotted down to become peat itself. There is no record of the names of Hafod, Hendre and Luest, which represent dairy, up in the hills in the summer. Throughout the talk, Stuart suggested several projects which we could take up and record in our local area, in order to enhance our understanding of the local topography and heritage. The power-point finished with a picture of a cow in a bridle and harnessed to a cart full of peat, ready to take it home to the holding; this was a photo taken after the war in the Elan Valley.



There were several questions and observations and Stuart urged us to read the bibliography at the end of these notes which would help to fill in any missing information. It was an inspiring talk, which should help us to understand our valley.

Bibliography for Historic Landscapes of the Bachawy:

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| Della Hooke    | Landscape: The richest historical record  |
| W.G. Hoskins   | The making of the English Landscape   |
| W.H. Howse     | Radnorshire   |
| Linnard        | Welsh woods and forests. History & utilization  |
| Oliver Rackham | The history of the countryside  |
| John Wright    | A natural history of the hedgerow   |
| DEFRA          | Hedgerow Survey Handbook (free from DEFRA and an excellent guide of how to survey and record hedgerows) |