

The Evolution of the Cwmhir Abbey Estates Post-Monastic Land Ownership

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In the period which immediately followed the Dissolution there was significant interest in the large areas of land which were suddenly available for acquisition by new owners. Considerable areas of land had been held by the various monastic institutions around Britain, as well as the extensive Episcopal estates which had been held by the dioceses and enjoyed by the bishops.

The redistribution of this land was, to some extent, complicated by the views held by the potential new owners on the whole principal of the dissolution. There were supporters and opposers of the action. Many who were able to take advantage of the situation and in a position to proceed with purchases were already involved with aspects of monastic land management through owning leases of monastic land or acting as stewards of the monastic and episcopal estates (Betley, 1989). This meant that there were many who already had an intimate knowledge of their local monastic estates.

In order to manage the disposal of the large accumulations of monastic land the Court of Augmentations was set up in 1536 by Thomas Cromwell. Surviving records are preserved in the National Archives, recording cases of debt, riot and any matters concerning the premises under consideration. It also dealt with the arbitration of disagreements and other incidents which accompanied the transfer of property and goods following the dissolution.

As the Court of Augmentations set about the task of selling and distributing the land, it was natural to turn to those who already had a good local knowledge. Here there was consideration of the local politics of those who might have an interest in acquisition. Before the events of the Dissolution there were those in favour of reform and those who were against it. From its there followed those who assisted the project and those who hindered it. The former gained preferment. The latter were likely to lose status.

Against this background the local gentry and those with status in the area had to make a choice. To support the Crown was likely to reap rewards, to oppose likely to result in a diminution of status. In many counties the local gentry families were the enforcers for the Crown, surely in the hope of positioning themselves to receive royal patronage in the form of land and office, as the religious reforms accelerated throughout the 1530's and beyond.

It quickly became clear that tensions could arise between outsiders who were seeking to increase the size of their estates in a particular area and those who were

local and saw the threat of 'outsider influence'. Resistance to this resulted in local gentry trying to gain as much land as possible in order to keep newcomers at bay, although they were quite capable of making such moves themselves in other counties. William Fowler, who was to acquire much of the Cwmhir Abbey estates, held land in a least five counties.

The threat of 'outsider' influence became more obvious after the Dissolution. In the late 1530's and 1540's potentially profitable estates became available through gifts from the Crown, reward or purchase. Local gentry sought to block such moves and expected political offices and involvement in government at a national level in return (Lambe, 2023).

The assistance of the gentry in the execution of the suppression of the monasteries does not necessarily mean that religious reform was popular with the county elites. It could be argued that they were responding to the potential threat to the socio-economic status quo with an opportunity to protect their own interests. Some may have been enthusiastic supporters of reform, others were religious conservatives and not supporters of change. However, the advantages of acceptance of the new order were obvious.

One of the major results of the religious reforms of the 1530's was a shift in the balance of land ownership. In the previous decade the church and gentry held 33% of available land, the nobility between 1% and 7% and the Crown between 4% and 6%. After the dissolution the overwhelming majority of land was in royal hands, some 98% before being distributed by gift or sale to those in favour or going to the highest bidder. This was an age of massive corruption. Royal gifts of land were given to those at the centre of power, courtiers and councillors, then to resident members of the gentry in any given area. Non-residents were expected to pay the full market price for land. Former monastic land was most profitable when received as a gift. The purchase of such land at full market price simply signified existing wealth. This was how Fowler acquired the Cwmhir Estate.

As an example of how this worked out in practice, 40% of grantees of monastic land in the County of Somerset held court office; 10% of former monastic properties redistributed by the Crown were granted to those in administrative positions within the county (i.e. those with knowledge of suitable properties) or practising in law. Over half the grants were to 'gentlemen, yeomen or townsmen' with local interest, accounting for 18% of the available land. Of this group, 55% were involved in royal commissions, 30% being members of parliament or sheriffs. Most benefit went to those near the centre of power.

Despite its potential advantages, local gentry faced a serious dilemma. The release of monastic land created an opportunity for outside speculators to increase their property portfolios, as well as political influence at the expense of the local gentry. As a result of this, the acquisition of monastic land became imperative if they were to remain at the centre of power and influence. Members of local families were trusted with the administration of the Dissolution, some serving as

commissioners for the Valor Ecclesiasticus, the assessment of the monastic wealth of England, Wales and Ireland.

Whilst a considerable quantity of former monastic property was disposed of as gifts to the favoured members of the sixteenth century society, a central aim of the project, as conceived by Henry VIII's Mr. Fix-it, Thomas Cromwell, was to raise money to top up the depleted royal coffers. With such a flood of property coming to the market, some more attractive to potential buyers than others, it would take some time to complete the disposal. In fact some of the properties did not sell until the early 1600's, almost seventy years after the suppression of the smaller monastic houses.

The Crown was looking for a quick return financially and other ways of raising cash were used. A majority of the properties were tenanted and so this could be turned to advantage. If necessary new tenants were found. The monastic buildings were a rich source of building materials, as demonstrated by the five bays of the nave of Cwmhir which were sold to Llanidloes church for use in their project to extend the church around 1540.

William Fowler purchased the Manor of Gollon and Cefn Pawl in 1565; he seems a serial buyer of former monastic properties who was also very well-connected. He was provost of Shrewsbury and lived at Harnage Grange near Much Wenlock. Harnage had been a grange of Buildwas Abbey and purchased in a deal with Sir John Throckmorton of Coughton Court, Warwickshire.

Fowler was one of eight children. His father was Roger Fowler of Broomhill in the county of Norfolk. His mother was Isabel, sister of the powerful Roland Lee, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, member of the Council of the Marches who is thought to have officiated at Henry VIII's secret marriage to Anne Boleyn.

William Fowler and his siblings were orphaned at a very young age and were left in the care of their uncle, the bishop, who wanted to buy the Priory of St. Thomas near Stafford to accommodate them all. At first he was unsuccessful and appealed to Thomas Cromwell, with whom he was well acquainted. He wrote to Cromwell early in 1536:

"I pray you remember my suit for the Priory of St. Thomas, and if it shall stand the King's Highness shall have not only a certain sum of money but you also for your goodness. And if that will not be, then my trust is that for much as the demesne came from the mitre that I may have preferment of the house and demesne for one of my kinsfolk." (1536, Letter: Lee to Cromwell NRO).

The Bishop had clearly offered an inducement to Cromwell. By June Lee had received assurances that he would get the priory but in July it was exempted from the Act dissolving the lesser monasteries in return for a payment of £133 6s 8d, which the house promised to the Crown. This large payment clearly caused difficulty and the attempt to buy exemption faltered. Lee repeated his request and in October Prior Whytell and five canons, unable to pay the agreed sum, surrendered the priory and its possessions to the Crown. In those days of

corruption, a sweetener worked wonders! The Bishop had triumphed, securing the property (Houses of the Augustinian Canons: the Priory of St. Thomas, Stafford).

And so it was, the acquisition of monastic land as a reward for assistance with the Dissolution brought not only loyalty to the crown but a commitment to the reformed religion. Potential beneficiaries trimmed their sails, accepting change rather than going against the theological grain (Lambe, 2023). Flexibility was an essential attribute in order to progress in this new world. Compliance with royal demands was critical if advantage was to be gained. It was against this background that William Fowler built up his impressive property portfolio and climbed the tricky ladder that brought him to the heights of Chief Officer of Shrewsbury, where he administered the summary justice of the day and oversaw the considerable trade of the town. This, and his considerable estates, generated a substantial income which secured the position of his family but which was eventually to lead to their downfall.

The post-monastic estate was in the hands of the Fowler family for almost 260 years. The Grange of Gollon and Cefn Pawl was purchased by William Fowler in a deal which completed around 1565, almost thirty years after the Dissolution. The Fowlers, who had numerous other estates, were largely absentee landlords throughout the period of their ownership of the estate, although it would appear that younger members of the family were resident from time to time. John Fowler, a younger son, styled himself as 'of Brondrefawr' during his year of office as High Sheriff of Radnorshire. However, service as High Sheriff did not necessarily mean residence in the county, it meant wealth and the ownership of land. John Fowler was responsible for building a small church on the site of the present church at Cwmhir. This was to serve as a chapel of ease to distant Llanbister, in which large parish Cwmhir was located.

This early period of the post-monastic estate was interrupted by the English Civil War, 1642-1651, which spilled over into Wales. Both Royalists and Parliamentarians sought to raise militias in Radnorshire. Reports from the time suggest that they were frustrated by language problems because at that time the county was still largely Welsh speaking (Parker, 2000). The Fowlers were strong supporters of the Royalist cause and their base at Cwmhir became a target of the Parliamentarian forces. Their report to Sir Thomas Myddleton at Chirk is interesting.

'Having intelligence that the enemy had made them a garrison at Abbey Cwmhir, a very strong house, and built with stone of great thickness, and the walls and outworks all very strong, the house having been in former times an abbey of the papists...' The house was attacked and seriously damaged. This description is very interesting, describing location and structure. Was it a survivor of the abbey buildings? Was there ever a 'big-house' built in post-monastic times? In the early years of his ownership a letter from William Fowler describes his 'poor house at Abbey Cwmhir'. Did he build a new one? As part of the Sacred

Landscapes Project, the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust initiated a survey of the present Home Farm house, largely to assess if it had been part of the medieval monastic structures. The results dated the house to c1560, that is to say, post-monastic. The survey of the roof area indicated timbers which had suffered long exposure to the weather, confirming the damage inflicted by the Parliamentarians.

Few other buildings have survived from this time but most notably is Ty Faenor, known as Devannor., the manor. In fact it was built as a hunting lodge for the deer park. It dates from the period just after the end of the civil war, the third quarter of the seventeenth century, when active development of the estate was taking place. The deer park was extended when the lodge was built but the very presence of a monastic deer park is debatable. Strictly speaking, such things were frowned upon by the Cistercians and almost unknown in Wales. However, it is possible to trace the curvilinear boundaries typical of a medieval deer park, contrasting markedly with the angular boundaries proposed by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust for the post-medieval deer park created by the Fowlers, (Silvester, 2014).



The Abbey Farm House c.1560 Photograph: Julian Lovell

Brondrefawr was also rebuilt at this time. Recently seen photographs of the demolition of the house about thirty years ago suggest that the rebuild was the creation of a stone 'shell' around a medieval timber-framed house, with the addition of a stair-turret. This indicates that it was a survivor from monastic times. There are now no other known houses left from that period.

In the early years of the Fowler, possession farming would have proceeded without any revolutionary change. Pastoral farming on the hill land would have remained important and the most economic use of the land. The valley land was

cultivated for crops. Photogrammetry of the valley areas reveals a pattern of ridge and furrow ploughing, some within the area of the former abbey precinct confirming that it is post-monastic. The farmsteads remained small with a pattern of lobate field boundaries surviving from the medieval period. These enabled the tenant to grow subsistence crops, fodder crops for winter feed and an area of hill grazing. The outline of such a pattern can be seen in the upper Cwmhir valley.

All seemed to go well with the Fowlers until the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1704 the family was conferred a Baronetcy by Queen Anne and in 1706 the head of the family, Richard Fowler, married Sarah Sloane in the splendour of St. Paul's Cathedral, a long way from their Shropshire roots. Sarah was the daughter of William Sloane, euphemistically known as a 'commodities' trader operating out of Belfast and Southampton. His brother was better known; Sir Hans Sloane, physician to the monarch, owner of the Manor of Chelsea, founder of the Chelsea Physic Garden and the name that gave to London Sloane Square, Sloane Street, Hans Street and so on. The Fowlers were quickly changing their focus from rural estates to an altogether different existence as members of the burgeoning urban society of the capital. In recent times it has become apparent that much of the Sloane wealth came from plantations in the Caribbean and the brisk trade in slaves. They also had considerable investments in the South Sea Company, again synonymous with slave trading. At the time of her death in 1763, Sarah's Will included, in modern valuation £800,000, in South Sea shares. The South Sea Bubble, as it was known, crashed in 1720 but was rescued by Walpole and continued trading for more than another century, turning to different activities after the abolition of slavery.

By 1760 the Abbey Cwmhir Estate appeared to be in decline, at least in part as a result of family feuds over the ownership. When Richard Fowler and Sarah Sloane had married in 1704 the Cwmhir Estate had formed part of the marriage settlement which would give Sarah an income if she was widowed. Richard had died in 1730 and Sarah had remarried to Francis Annesley, First Lord Valencia. The property stayed with the estate although Sarah was able to enjoy the income. Her only surviving son had to defend a court case brought to claim the estate. Huge legal bills accumulated and in 1763 the Court of the Exchequer ordered the sale of the estate to cover the costs. In the event, buyers were thin on the ground and although some properties sold, notably to just two buyers, most remained unsold and the estate survived into the nineteenth century. The fortunes of the estate can be traced through the surviving sale documents of 1763, 1781, 1783, 1813, 1822 and 1828. It was not until the 1820's that a new breed of country estate owner arrived on the scene to begin the process of reassembling the Abbey Estate.

Almost 200 years after William Fowler had acquired the Manor of Gollon and Cefn Pawl, a holding of 19,000 acres, the first of a long series of changes in ownership began to take place as the huge post-monastic estate declined to be replaced by a succession of much smaller estates.

The arrival of Sarah Sloane, through her marriage to Richard Fowler, brought about a long series of family feuds over inheritance. The position of the Abbey Cwmhir Estate as part of the marriage settlement was key to this. Ultimately this led to the break up and sale of the estate.



The Grange of Gollon and Cefn Pawl, Upper Cwmhir. Photograph: Julian Lovell

Only a portion of the estate was sold. The purchasers were from Lincolnshire, Jonathan Field who lived in the Cathedral Close at Lincoln and Charles Gore whose country residence was Horkstow Hall, about seven miles from Lincoln. Both men went on to serve a term as High Sheriff of Radnorshire for which, as previously indicated, property ownership rather than residency was required. During his time as High Sheriff Gore styled himself as 'of Devannor' although there is no evidence that he ever lived there.

Gore's family were merchant traders through the port of Hamburg and had amassed considerable wealth. His grandfather was a founder-director of the Bank of England and served as a Mayor of the City of London. Charles Gore was very creative with interest in music and the design of boats and sailing. It was this that encouraged him to move with his family to Southampton. He became a close neighbour of the Sloane family from whom he heard about the sale of the Cwmhir estate. Gore was also related to Viscount Bateman of Shobdon who, although he lived out-county, was very active in Radnorshire affairs, possibly seeing Gore as a useful connection for his local political ambition.

Gore's ownership of property in Radnorshire lasted until 1790, when he sold up and moved to Germany. Much of his estate was acquired by John Price, a local self-made Radnorshire man, who was building up the Penybont estate.

A further very extensive sale was staged in 1781/3 but again the results were very poor. Only two buyers emerged and one of those was questionable. Joseph Hughes had the grand-sounding title of Secretary to the Imprests, a government position. The Court of the Imprests was responsible for auditing government finances and expenditure and a job there was generally regarded as 'a nice little earner'. Probity was not foremost in those days. He was also married to a member of the Fowler family. He purchased seventeen farmsteads, some of which were very small. Why is a mystery and they were quickly sold on, at least half going to the Penybont estate. Was this a purchase just to help the family out with their financial problems?

At the same time another twelve farmsteads were sold to a Dr. Benjamin Thomas of Kington who also at that time bought property in Llanbister. Little is known of the doctor. The farmsteads around Bwlch-y-sarnau were sold on his death in the 1830's, to become part of the Phillips estate, the last of the substantial private estates in the area.

In 1816 John Dickonson purchased ten properties from the Fowler estate which included Cwm Cynnydd, Bronrhydneadd, Llanerch-fraith and Cwm Bedw, all potentially good locations. In 1820, Dickonson's nephew, Timothy Holmes, acquired a moiety in the property which was sold to Thomas Wilson in 1824. The pair were in the legal profession and lived in Bury St. Edmunds, a long way from Cwmhir. They appear to have left little mark on the landscape and the object of their ownership is a mystery. There might be a link to an observation by Layton Cooke who surveyed their property on behalf of Thomas Wilson. He laments the recent felling of so many mature trees which he considered of great value in a well-run estate. Timber was in short supply following the Napoleonic wars, with a requirement to replace lost shipping in the European context and also in the struggle for superiority in the Caribbean. Could it be that Dickonson and Holmes made a quick profit by felling as many good trees as possible to turn a quick profit before reselling the land? Prices of timber, farmland and agricultural products were increasing rapidly at this time, reflecting the demands of an expanding population.

The Layton Cooke Report, (Cooke, 1822), was commissioned by Thomas Wilson to survey the properties he wanted to buy as part of his desire to build a substantial and high status country estate. Wilson was part of a new breed of rural estate owner and not the traditional country landowner. He was a successful London barrister, it seems a man of ambition, who wished to underline his new status with a place in the country. This paralleled another newcomer to the rural scene, the successful industrialist, as demonstrated in Radnorshire by James Watt. The Doldowlod Estate was concentrated in Llanyre and Llanwrthwl. They certainly brought new finance to the area and created the conditions which enabled farmers to respond to the needs of a growing population.

Layton Cooke was a well-known land agent and surveyor, and agricultural 'improver', who advised landed proprietors on all aspects of their estates,

especially in the county of Northamptonshire, a county of great estates to this day. The period 1750-1830 saw big changes in the farming landscape of Britain, led by an increasingly powerful landlord class, encouraged by their tenants and the emerging profession of land agents who took over the duties traditionally handled by family lawyers or the estate reeve of the larger estates, (Martins, 2004). The ending of life leases, replaced by seven-year agreements, allowed the landlord to reflect rising agricultural prosperity by raising the rents charged. It also created the option for either party to opt out at a review.

There was a growing interest in agricultural improvement, well advanced in the English counties but slow to start in Mid- and North-Wales. The price of grain and other agricultural products was rising as demand from the developing industrial towns grew. A greater understanding of the management of soils and the scientific interest enhanced production. The old system of fallowing declined in favour of planned rotation which included clovers, sainfoin and turnips which functioned as a cleaning and fodder crop.

The Layton Cooke Report, (Cooke, 1822) gives one of the most important windows onto the Cwmhir estate throughout its long history. It forms a thorough-going review of the state of farming in the area at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The main purpose was to provide a detailed analysis for Thomas Wilson to negotiate his purchases of 1824 and 1828. The report appears to paint a very downbeat picture of a very run-down, poorly managed and neglected estate, a picture which has been accepted for a long time. It must be emphasised that the report would be part of the bargaining which would go on as the buyer sought to gain the property at the most advantageous price. Should the report be accepted at face value? Recent investigation has shown that the estate might not have been quite so neglected as Cooke suggests. After all, it was not in the interests of the landlord to allow such neglect. It was in his interest to have successful and substantial tenants who were able to invest in their farms, thus enabling higher rents to be achieved.

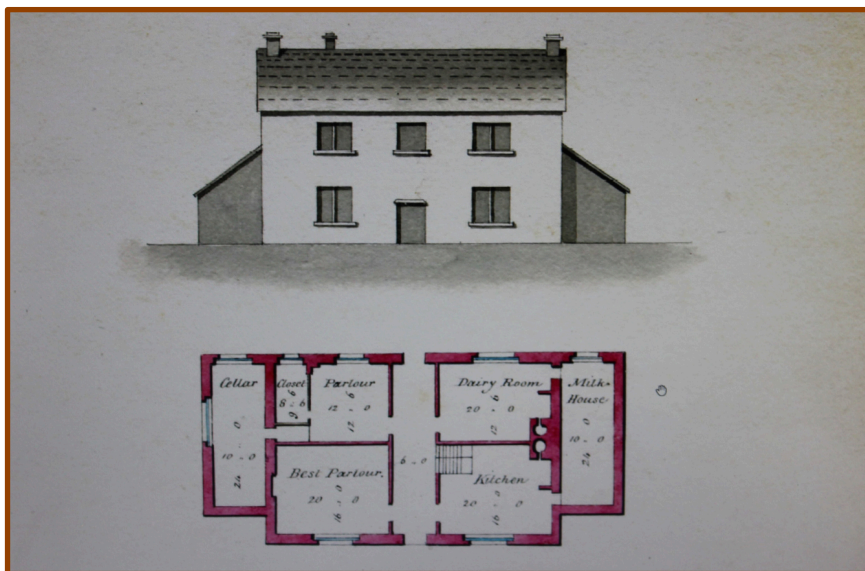
The recent survey of the Home (Abbey) Farmhouse suggests a history dating back to the seventeenth century with considerable rebuilding at later dates. Visually, different build periods can be detected. There is also evidence of considerable building work around 1806, in the period under consideration but at a time of suggested decline. At about the same time, Hendy, another substantial farm was completely rebuilt, surviving until recently. Both Devannor and Brondrefawr, dating from the mid-seventeenth Century were maintained enough to last into modern times although, sadly, only Devannor survives today.

The report records that the principal occupation of the farmers is the breeding of sheep and cattle. The corn which they grow is sufficient for their own consumption, but output could easily be increased. By improving the production of fodder crops the stock output could also be increased and Cooke suggests the growing of turnips, swedes and mangel wurzel. At the time, potatoes were grown as a subsistence crop for domestic consumption but again, output could be

improved. Good crops of wheat were reported, again with scope for improved output. However, the question has to be asked, did Layton Cooke really understand the upland climate?

Cooke's arrogant attitude towards the tenants is reflected in his judgement that the best, a minority in his view, should be retained whilst the rest replaced with occupants who would work harder at their task. To aid the process of improvement the landlord would undertake a programme of land drainage where necessary and the provision of irrigation. Improvement of the 'rosses' was seen as essential. The hill land contained extensive sheep walks, some running in common while others ascribed to a specific farmstead, as was the case in other parts of Britain. Cattle were not run in common. Some of the boundaries between the sheep runs were said to be vague and boundary disputes were not uncommon.

Cooke also produced some plans for the replacement of old or run-down farmsteads, offering a good standard of accommodation for the times. Later modifications to the farm buildings make it almost impossible to detect which of these new farmstead buildings has survived in any way.



Plan of a new farmhouse, c.1822: Layton Cooke Report

Thomas Wilson, who eventually bought the estate in two tranches in 1824 and 1828, was intent on creating, or perhaps recreating, a Gentry country estate. To this end he embarked on the forming 30 acres of romantic gardens, parkland and woodland walks extending through the deer park to reach the monk's fish pool more than a mile up the Clywedog valley. He 'cleared' the abbey ruin, using material from the abbey site to build up the ground in front of the site of his

proposed new house. Wilson records finding the abbey kitchen and a large oven but nothing of this remains. A tomb top, inscribed to Mabli, survives in the parish church but little else. A large pond/lake, fed by the Clywedog, was excavated to the south of the abbey ruin and a prospect mound constructed. The fish pool dam was raised to create a larger lake, a circular walk and shrubbery planted. The lake and the dam survived until a catastrophic burst in 1932, which caused flooding and the loss of three bridges further down the valley. By good fortune no lives were lost.

Wilson's dream of a country estate came to an abrupt end in 1833. He had become involved in a property deal with Lord Portman to build a new market in the ever-expanding early nineteenth century London. Bankruptcy threatened and the sale of all his assets took place in order to discharge his debts. He and his family emigrated to Australia where they started a new life in Adelaide. Wilson again took a positive approach and was elected as the second Mayor of Adelaide. He was able to build a large house in his adopted country which, perhaps appropriately, he called Cwm Hir. Meanwhile, his 3,500 acre estate was acquired in 1837 by Francis Aspinall Phillips, a member of a family of cotton mill owners in Stockport, mainly producing ribbon: new owner, new money.

As suggested earlier, the status of a successful industrialist was underlined by the acquisition of a rural estate. Mention has already been made of James Watt. The new wealth of the developing industrialists brought about a desire for social advancement as the newcomers moved from being tradesmen to employers, eventually to be regarded as gentry.

Shortly after the purchase of the Wilson estate properties, Francis Phillips was able to buy a number of farmsteads around Bwlch-y-sarnau formerly belonging to the by then deceased Dr. Benjamin Thomas of Kington. Already the estate was growing, eventually to reach about 6,500 acres at its peak. This represented the largest of the estates which succeeded the Fowlers, one which was to survive for 120 years.

It was a period of change in which the estate was pro-actively managed. Initially the Phillips family were not resident at Abbey Cwmhir, perhaps preferring the close association with others of their trade in Stockport where they owned another large house. Perhaps they considered the house built by Thomas Wilson about 1830 to be too small for their needs. This house was extended and rebuilt in the 1860's by which time the family appears to be in long-term residence.

The extensions to The Hall coincided with a period of renewal and building of the farms on the estate. A close working relationship developed with the local architect and estate manager/agent John Wilkes Poundley of Kerry in Montgomeryshire. This included The Hall, the school in the village, the first in Abbey Cwmhir and preceding the 1870 Education Act which provided for compulsory education, the new parish church and cottages within what was fast

becoming an estate village. Poundley's work is of a style and easy to spot, being characterised by large barge-boards and the use of decorative colour brickwork, with an air of the gothic revival style of the period.

A number of estate cottages were built, notably Llwy Cottage, Paddock, Piccadilly, Cwm Poethe, Cwm Du and Cwm Hir. A new farm was created at Llwyn-onn. New farmhouses on a much grander scale than anything envisaged by Layton Cooke began to appear about 1850. Five identical houses were very unusual in having all the windows in the gable ends of the building. Cwm Cynnydd, Fishpool, Esgairwy, Llwyn-onn and Fronrhydneuadd, with their associated buildings, were designed to appeal to the ambitious tenant who would manage the holding to a high standard. At the same time, the Abbey Farm, now known as the Home Farm, was rebuilt to the design of Poundley and Walker. The purpose was to provide a very efficient model farm which demonstrated the best of modern agricultural practice. The design centred on the handling of stock and the delivery of feed and fodder when the animals were indoors. Feed went directly to the bays where stock was housed, straw was stored and handled in the most efficient way and manure and effluent gathered for distribution on the fields, (Martins 2002, 2004)

The Home Farm was a place where machinery used on the farm was maintained and stored, stabling was provided for the horses and the sawmill was transferred from Tradesmen's Row. Motive power was initially provided by a horse-mill but later a Pelton Wheel was installed to power a series of overhead drive-belts. The Pelton wheel was later linked to an electricity generator. Accommodation for the coachman and stable lads was provided over the coach-house.



The Model Farm, Coach-house and Stables, c.1860 Photograph: Julian Lovell

This period represented a great advance on the farming system of the previous century and focused on good relationships between the landlord and the tenant. Both had to keep to their side of the bargain and on the whole it seems to have worked well.

Further reform came in the form of Parliamentary enclosure which was initiated in the 1860's. At this time most of the farms would have been cultivating small fields, many of them little changed over hundreds of years and too small to benefit from modern methods. The hill grazing which accompanied most of the old farmsteads was not efficiently used and capable of improvement. New larger rectangular fields were established and are easily spotted in the landscape. The downside, from the point of view of the tenantry was, following amalgamations', a smaller number of farms available and the associated redundancy which followed. Enclosure came late to Wales. Across the border, the English landscape had been changing for more than a hundred years.

Up to this point farming had been enjoying a boom following the Napoleonic wars and the growth of an urban based population in the developing industrial towns, the source of the Phillips wealth. However, after 1870 trouble struck and farming entered a long period of serious depression which lasted well into the twentieth century. One of the main causes of this was the sudden arrival of cheap sources of grain from the new colonies, notably Canada and Australia. The invention of refrigeration and canning meant that meat could be imported from New Zealand and particularly Argentina. Prices fell substantially and farming across Britain suffered. In the early twentieth century good farms on the Abbey Cwmhir Estate were without tenants, a situation to be seen on other estates in Radnorshire.

This period saw a serious rural depopulation as families moved away hoping to make a new life in the developing industrial areas of South Wales or emigration to the emerging countries like Canada and New Zealand. The population of many areas in mid-Wales fell by a half and has never recovered.

An interesting series of documents has survived, dating from the 1890's, detailing a claim made by the Phillips Estate for the repayment of Property Tax. The government of the day obviously recognised the serious depression in farming at the time and provided this subsidy as a small measure of relief. The claim was submitted by J.E. Poundley of Kerry acting as land agent to the Abbey Cwmhir Estate and representing the Trustees of the late George Henry Phillips. It provides an accurate extent of the estate in the closing years of the century, detailing the properties, tenants and rents.

Alas, the scheme made little difference with decline continuing into the twentieth century. In 1912 the holdings of the Penlanole Estate, former abbey lands in St. Harmon and Cwmhir, were put up for sale but only a handful of sales were achieved. The coming of war in 1914 did little to help the situation. Men returning from the war after 1918 came with different attitudes, less deferential, less subservient. In 1919 both the Abbey Cwmhir and Penybont Estates were on the market but again there was little interest. A small number of tenants were able to purchase their freeholds at bargain prices, but most farms remained unsold.

Depression continued until war broke out again in 1939. Some revival came

as agricultural production on the home front became vital to the nation's survival. Timber was also a requirement which the Abbey Cwmhir Estate was able to supply. But this only delayed the inevitable. The estate was for sale again in the mid-1950's. Sitting tenants had first call on their freeholds and some took the gamble of purchase. Much land remained unsold and was eventually acquired by the Forestry Commission, bringing to an end 400 years of the post-monastic estates.

Acknowledgement

The Sacred Landscapes Project is a collaborative investigation to compare and contrast the upland monasteries of Strata Florida and Cwmhir. Grant funding was provided by the Arts and Heritage Research Council.



| 1. The Evolution of the Abbey Cwmhir Estates: Gollon and Cafn Pawl South, 1763-1837 | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| Jonathan Field | Charles Gore | Joseph Hughes | Ben. Thomas | Dickonson & Holmes 1816 | Thos. Wilson |
| 1763 | 1763 | 1783 | 1883 | | 1824/28 |
| Eskairwy | Devannor | Tyn-y-coed | Brondrefach | Cwm Cynydd & Gwar Cae | Cwm Cynydd & Gwar Cae |
| Kerrig Bach | New Park | Cwm Grenglyn | Bailey Bog | Bron Rhyd Newydd | Bron rhyd Newydd |
| Bryn Camlo | Brondrefawr | Cwm Tulkey | Bailey Mawr | Cwm Scawen | Cwm Scawen |
| Cwm Castle-Pren | Bron-y-revel | Cwm Quarrel | Even Thomas's Land | Cwm Kearsley | Cwm Farsley |
| Pistyll-y-garnell | The Glog | Tyn-y-berth | Ms Bwlch-y-sarn | Cwm Ffwrn | Fishpool |
| Placedion | Llwyn Noyadd | Esgairfawr | Cwm Robin | Gelfach | Gilfach |
| | | | | Pen-y-llan | |
| Nantistabl | Cwybyr | Maes Gwyn | Tyn-y-rhyd | Fishpool | Cwm Ffwrn |
| Ty Nicholas | Glen Shaffre | Pen-y-garreg | Pen-y-lan | Groes | Pen-y-llan |
| Hefn Derris | Borth Lloyadd | Penbryncennau | Cwm du | Llanerch Ffraith | Groes, Llanerch Fraith |
| Ty Newydd | Blaen Cwm Hebog | Ffordd | Pen-y-banc | Cwm Bedw | Cwm Bedw |
| Bwlch-y-sarn | Avon Uche | Croft-yr-onen | Cwm Du Hendy | Dickonson's nephew Holmes acquired a moiety in 1820: | The last properties of the Fowler Estate Sold 1828 |
| Caenewydd | Bedd-Ugre Ganol | Morgan's Land | Cwm Bedia | Sold 1824 | |
| Blind Man's House | Bedd-Ugre Isaf | Cwm Towell | | | Abbey site |
| | | | | | Great Park |
| Bryn Rhyg | Croft-y-perthy | Llwyn Cwr | | | Cwm Hir |
| Mynydd Llys | Lanork Oley | Vrai Ueddal | | | Cefn-y-pawl |
| Nant-y-henfron | Cwm Clydd | Cook's House | | | Wenallt |
| Tyn-lidiart | Nant-y-pandy | Dol-y-hirion | | | Gelenin |
| | Cwm-yr-hebog | | | | Cwm Geifer |
| | Hac Ballok | | | Thos. Wilson | Esgair U & I |
| | | | | Blacksmith/Stepaside | Troed-rhiw-felin, Hen Cefn |
| | | | | Abbey Mill | Cwm Quarrel |
| | | | | Mt. Pleasant | Foel Fach |

| 2. The Evolution of the Abbey Cwmhir Estates: Gollon & Cefn Pawl, South, 1837-1959 | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Francis Phillips | | Henry Lingen | John C. Severn | | Edward Meredith |
| Abbey Cwmhir 1837 | | Penlanole 1839 | Penybont 1839 | | Cwmrychen 1839 |
| Abbey Cwmhir | Foel Fach | Ty Nicholas | Cwm-yr-hebog | Dolhelfa Ganol | Llwynbenglog |
| | | | | Severn Arms | |
| Mill piece | Cwm Rogue | Waun | Cwm Clyd | Bronreval | Babylon |
| Old Planatation | Llanerch Ffraith | Great Gate | Glanyrafon | Gellidwyll | Rhos-y-lan |
| Cefn Pawl | Cwm Cynydd | Prysgduon | Beddugre Isaf | Tack Bach | Cilboeth |
| Rhiw Gam | Cwm Farsley | Cynch Mawr (part) | Crof-y-perthi | Troedyrhiw | Cil Rhwad |
| Glog Wood | Fishpool | Flying Gate | Henfryn | Llwynnoyadd | Pwll |
| Troedrhiwfelin | Cwm Ddu | Rhosgoch | Cwmaitlin Meadows | | Fron |
| Cwm Hir | Bwlch-y-sarnau | Clawdd-du | Cottage & garden | | Rhosyfelin |
| Llanerchdirion | Pantglas | Sychnant Fawr | Devannor | | Bwlch Gwyn & Perthi |
| Cwm Bedw | Penllan | Sychnant Fach | Tyn-y-coed | | Dol Leiaf ? |
| Gelenyn | Bailey Bog | Cnych Mawr | Cwmgrenglyn | | Cwmyrhychen |
| Esgair Fach | Brondrefach | Llwybrain | Tyn-y-berth | | Pen Craig |
| Cwm Lluest | Mynydd Llys, Nant-y-henfron | | Brondrefawr | | Red Lion (Part) |
| Esgair Uchaf | Grain Hs. gard | | Upper Nanthir | | Pantydwr Shop |
| Fronrhydnewyd | Bryn Camlo | | Lower Nanthir | | |
| Cwmscawen | Cwm Faerdy & Castle | | Red Lion | | |
| Cwm Bedia | Esgairwy | | Bottom/Derw | | |
| Cwm Geifr | Newhouse | | Dolfrynog | | |
| Gwern Garn | Hendy | | Dolhelfa Isaf | | |
| Groes | Bailey Mawr | | Dolhelfa Uchaf | | |

| 3. The Evolution of the Abbey Cwmhir Estates: Gollon and Cefn Pawl North, 1763-1850 | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Charles Gore 1763 | Jonathan Field 1763 | Isabella Dundas Pen Ithon Estate 1840 | Haigh Pen Ithon Estate 1850 |
| Esgair Uchaf, Cwm Nantu | Eskairdrainllwyn | Blaen Penbwllyd | Blue Links |
| Esgair Isaf | Water Corn Mill, Llaith Ty | Bron Pebwllyd | Penbwllyd Ganol |
| Dole y Trynydd | Water Corn Mill, Crochran | Penbwllyd Canol | The Barnes |
| Gorse | Llaith Ty Uchaf | Penbwllyd Gron | Penygarreg |
| Chrochren | Gors Uchaf | Penbwllyd Hir | Old House |
| Chrochren | | Glan-y-afon | Glan-yr-afon |
| Corn Nant (Cwm Nant) | | Cabows Farm | Pen-y-garreg |
| Havodd Fach | | Hafod Fach | UpperChrochran |
| Esgair Fach | | Crochran Uchaf | Lower Crochran |
| Llwyn-y-dir | | Dolly-cwmfrwdd | Dolly-cwmfrwydd |
| Simon's Land | | Gors and Rhos | Rhos |
| Penbwllyd | | Esgair Uchaf | Gors |
| Dur | | Esgair Isaf | Gwndwn |
| Glan-yr-afon | | | Bedllwyidion |
| Penbwllyd | | | Dolygarn |
| Costogion Uchaf | | | Lower Esgair |
| Morris Davis's Land | | | Upper Esgair |
| Penbwllyd Uchaf | | | Upper Crochran |
| Eskair Nantu | | | Hafod Fach |
| Hefn Nantu | | | Simon's Land |
| Cwm Varch | | | Old Post Office |
| Vownog | | | Eskairdrainllwyn |
| Blaen Costogion | | | Upper Tyn-y-waun |
| Cwm Crave | | | Water Corn Mill, Llanbadarn Fynydd |
| Chrochran | | | Pen-y-cwm |
| | | | Llaithdu Issa |
| | | | Llaithdu Ganol |

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