

YSTRADOWEN

Portrait of a village

A brief history



(Historical notes compiled to accompany the exhibition  
held at Old Hall, Cowbridge, 17 - 22 June, 1983)





Coedy Fforest

Coedy Fforest

Mynydd y Fforest

YSTRADOWAIN

Morfa Ystradowain

1568-171

12

Ystradowain

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16

Welsh St. Donats



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF YSTRADOWEN.

This brief account is based upon my short chapter entitled "Aberthin and Ystradowen", published in Border Vale of Glamorgan (Stewart Williams 1976). It leaves many gaps to be filled and it is to be hoped that someone with ample time to do some detailed research will eventually write a full and comprehensive history of the parish using these notes as a rough guide.

In many ways the topography, soils and vegetation of the parish owes as much to the Ice Age as to anything. Indeed the scenery of the whole area, which some geologists still refer to as the "Ystradowen" section of the Vale of Glamorgan is hummocky in character and typical of an area of glacial deposition. The ill drained soils from the earliest times supported dense woodlands, known as the Old and New Forests in the direction of Llanharry and, of course, to the north east of the village of Ystradowen was, and still is, a large area of uncultivated moorland in the shape of Morfa Ystradowen. The peat from this bog, incidentally, was used to heat Talyfan Castle in medieval times. Like most Border Vale parishes Ystradowen has its fair share of open commons and here, on the freely drained soils, primitive man most likely made his settlements or at least pursued a normadic existence.

The most important pre-historic find was made about fifteen years ago by Mr. Howard Hopkins of Fforest Fawr of a Bronze axe head at Coed-y-trenches close to the Llanharry boundary. It was probably an import from Ireland from about 1500 B.C. While this is likely to have been a "stray" find, the people who used it probably lived mainly by stock raising and dwelt in lightly constructed huts in small clearings in the forests. It is interesting to note that another find at Windmill Farm - a mere stonethrow away - by Mr. Philip Vowles this year also relates to the Middle Bronze Age, and there are some odd references to a New Forest hoard by Sir Mortimer Wheeler indicating that the high downland to the north west of the parish attracted early man.

The present village of Ystradowen is a rather tentative straggling village of inns, farmhouses and cottages with private and council estates of recent origin. The church of St.Owain is a modern edifice, but it is certain that it is built on an earlier foundation. Whether the church is pre Norman is difficult to say, but the earliest references to it in a manuscript is a little later in 1291 when it was declared to be worth £4.



The village that grew up near the castle of Talyfan could never have been much more than a "hamlet". In the reign of Charles II. there were some Hearth Tax Returns made and these suggest there were only about thirty houses in the parish in 1670-80. There is no indication of a large "Ty Mawr" or Squire's house at that time similar to Trecastle, Llanharry or Llansannor Court, both of which had eight or more hearths. This suggests that Ash Hall, the biggest house in the parish was of a later date. A smaller house might have existed at Ash Hall at that time however.

Whether there was a Norman village or not, the Ystradowen locality was certainly a sort of "wild west" territory where the Welsh fought the Norman advance from the easily conquered Vale in a most determined manner. Samuel Lewis in his "A topographical Dictionary of Wales" (3rd edit 1845) refers to a battle taking place at Ystradowen in 1031, i.e., even before the Norman conquest, but it is likely that this is derived from a spurious document forged by Iolo Morganwg - possibly in an effort to explain the name Ystradowen for Lewis tells us that one of the protagonists was Owain ap Collwyn, a local Prince, whom Iolo imagined to have lived in a palace on the mound near the church. But Ystradowen could not have escaped the desperate struggle between Welsh and Norman and it is safe to assume that the mound near the church is indeed the site of a temporary motte built prior to the construction of the large stone castle at Talyfan. The site has been recently investigated and the interesting conclusion drawn by the archaeologists was that this is a rare example of an unfinished motte which was begun by scarping and ditching the highest end of a glacial moraine. Why it was incomplete is unclear; it is probably the only such one in Wales. We do know that the Quintin family probably built the stone castle at Talyfan, so they may have had their hand in this one as well.

Little is known about Castell Talyfan situated on a low ridge half a mile away from the abandoned motte. It was probably built by a member of the St. Quentin family and was the military centre of the large lordship of Talyfan that included the seven parishes immediately to the north of Cowbridge. The administrative centre of the lordship incidentally was Treerhyngyll - the town of the beadle. Most of the land around the castle was poor quality - good for pasture and rough grazing, but there were patches of demesne land at Prisk and Llanhari where early villages were soon established.

If little is known of the castle itself, quite a lot is known of the last of its turbulent owners namely RICHARD SYWARD or SIWARD. He was a baron of some



national importance during the reign of Henry 111 and when he began to extend his power in the intermediate tract of land between the Lord of Glamorgan's demesne in the Vale and the Welsh comotes, a bitter war resulted between himself and Howel ap Meredith of Miskin. This gave Richard de Clare, the Chief Lord the chance to intervene and when Siward blatantly refused to keep the truce, De Clare using the County Courts dispossessed Siward of his lordships of Talavan and Ruthin, seized the Welsh upland commotes of Miskin and Glynrhondda and ended for good the endemic warfare that had plagued the "Ystradowen" part of the Vale for decades. It is significant that very soon afterwards the boroughs of Cowbridge and Llantrisant were established by De Clare and Castell Talyfan fell into disuse.

We have made a few tentative remarks amount Ystradowen village or hamlet in medieval times earlier. We have, apart from the Hearth Tax Returns, to wait until 1763 for any notion of the numbers living in the parish. In the Visitation returns of that year we find that 36 families lived in the parish of Ystradowen compared with only 30 in Llansannor. The first census of 1801 verifies that number by agreeing exactly with the earlier figure, so there is little indication of growth in a century and a half.

From the Tithe Survey of 1848 we can gather that the land use of the parish was:

486 acres arable.  
615 acres meadow or pasture.  
95 acres woodland.  
223 acres commons and waste.  
21 acres buildings.  
22 acres roads.

The three pieces of common were New Forest, 159 acres, Mynydd y Glew 17½ acres and Morfa Ystradowen 45 acres.

The first two were enclosed under the Talyfan Enclosure Award of 1860.

The census enumerators returns of 1851 give a vivid picture of a small rural parish of the mid Victorian era, untroubled by industrialism, when the chief activity of the week was the trip to Cowbridge market by the local farmer on his carthorse, with his wife seated behind him carrying a large basket full of butter eggs, cheese and poultry. The farms themselves were very small, with the exception of LLWYNWYDOG (150 acres).



The census return for 1851 tells us that there was a large percentage of the population under 20 years of age - thus causing a demand for a local school to be built, that most of the population derived their livelihood from agriculture together with the usual country crafts - shoemaker, wheelwright, thatcher, weaver, sawyer etc., There was one victualler, a coal miner who walked 4 miles to Llanharry Meadow pit and two rail workers who were engaged in the construction of the South Wales Railway. The population had risen and the number of houses in the parish was now forty seven.

Ash Hall was now the principal house in the parish and was a hive of activity in the social life of the area. It had been built in the eighteenth century by the Deere family who had come from Roose. We learn with interest that Iolo Morganwg himself was influenced as a poet by one of the daughters of Ash Hall. She wrote quite a lot of English poetry and Iolo insisted, in a poem to her, that it was she who had made him into a poet. The alliance was short lived owing to Iolo's inferior social standing.

In the late nineteenth century Ash Hall belonged to Daniel Owen, who seems to have been a typical "self made" man of the Victorian Age. He came from Llanharan but soon emigrated to Australia where he made a fortune in the timber trade. When he returned to England he became a highly successful printer and paper manufacturer, and, on account of his great wealth, he was invited by Lescelles Carr to become a joint proprietor of "The Western Mail" to celebrate the event he threw a mammoth party at Ash Hall in April 1869. "After lunch some played croquet and tennis, others tripped it on the light fantastic toe, some improvised games of their own, while the sedate members sat beneath the trees. Cricket was played on a splendid level pasture adjoining the lawn and some capital fast races were run by both men and boys. In the evening after the speeches, young folk found "kiss in the ring" an attractive amusement and the party drove off amid cheers and expressions of good will on all sides, reaching Cardiff a little after midnight". Such were the balmy days of Victorian age for the well to do!

Daniel Owen was succeeded as squire of Ystradowen by his son Tudor, after whom the "Tudor Arms" was named. During the First World War the house was used as a Red Cross Hospital for sick and wounded soldiers, with Mrs. Owen acting as a highly successful matron. The first batch of Commonwealth soldiers arrived in May 1915.



The arrival of the Taff Vale Railway from Llantrisant to Cowbridge brought further prosperity to the village and the station was much used, especially on Pontypridd market days. With the help of remarkable porter John John, a veritable Samson in his strength, vegetables, poultry, eggs and rabbits were wheeled in their handtrucks on to the waiting train. The ever willing "Johnny Twice" would even go to the rescue of trains that failed on the Ystradown Moor incline.

In the present century, small though it still was, Ystradown boasted a thriving saw mill, its own cattle market, two inns, a village store, kept by Mrs. Sarah Gibbon and a smithy. The smithy was the rendezvous for all the youth of the district who, under the watchful eye of Tom Griffith, would blow the fire, turn the grindstone and wield the sledge. Tom would make hoops for all the children, who faced little or no traffic hazard on the main road, in an age untroubled, as yet, by the motor car. His quaint way of swearing endeared him as "The Uddy Man" and he was one of the last of the old characters.

After the 1939-45 war, with the closure of the railway station and a restricted bus service the social life of the village went into a decline until about 15 years ago when the Ystradown Friendly Society was formed at the White Lion to bring a little fun and entertainment into village life by organising carnivals, sports meetings and historical expeditions. Villages owed a great debt to the friendly patronage of Mrs. Anne Phillips at this time. It is to be hoped that with the influx of new inhabitants in the last few years Ystradown will once again enjoy a vigorous social life. This exhibition is a definite step in the right direction.

June 1983.

Dai Francis.



	1865	1875	1895	1914	1923	1926
POPULATION	248 (1861)	232 (1871)	215 (1891)	228 (1911)	259 (1921)	259 (1921)
AREA			1535 acres	1568 acres		
RATEABLE VALUE	£1100		£1652	£1673	£1690	£1654
TRANSPORT	Train to Llantrisant carrier's cart, weekly	Train to Pontypridd carrier's cart, weekly	Train to Aberthaw also	ditto	ditto	add motor bus service P'pridd to Cowbridge
POSTAL SERVICE			del. via C'bridge 8 am coll. Y Owen 8.10 am / Apr Audrey Aulrey esq W.H. Mat hias, esq J.P. Daniel Owen J.P.	del. via C'bridge 8 am coll. 3.30 pm weekdays Sir Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher, bart. Wm H Mat hias J.P. of Porth,	ditto (Ellesboro' Manor, Buckinghamshire) James Mat hias E T Owen, BA JP	
PRINCIPAL LANDOWNERS	Mrs Ficketts, of Dorton Hse., Bucks; Lady of the manor, & with the Spearman family owns the soil Rev David Jones & H C Gould were other worthies.					
RECTOR	Rev David Jones (lived in Ash Hall in 1852 - )	ditto	Rev John Rees BA of Lampeter College (from 1887)		Rev John Phillip Jones BA	
SEXTON			Morgan Williams	William Parsons	Herbert Franklen	
STATION-MASTER				Edmund William Jones	Edmund A. Schafer	ditto
BLACKSMITH	Jacob David	Jacob David	Thomas Griffiths	Thomas Griffiths		
WHEELWRIGHT	John Samuel	John Samuel				
BUILDER	Rees Williams					Arthur Jones
LIME BURNER & MERCHANT		David Jones				
SHOPKEEPER		Evan Matthews / Mary Treharne		Mrs Sarah Matthews	Sarah Gibbon	Sarah Gibbon
WHITE LION P.H.	David Davies	David Davies	Mrs Annie Harman	Patrick O'Connor	John Metford	Wm D. Yoemans
GRONDW ARMS		Edward Mordcai	Mrs Margaret Quick	Charles John (Tudor Arms)	Thomas Griffiths (Tudor Arms)	Arms P.H.)
COWKEEPER				Thomas Gibbon	Benjamin Rees Gibbon	
QUARRY OWNER						Humphrey Jones
TIMBER MERCHANT						John Roberts

Farms & Farmers.

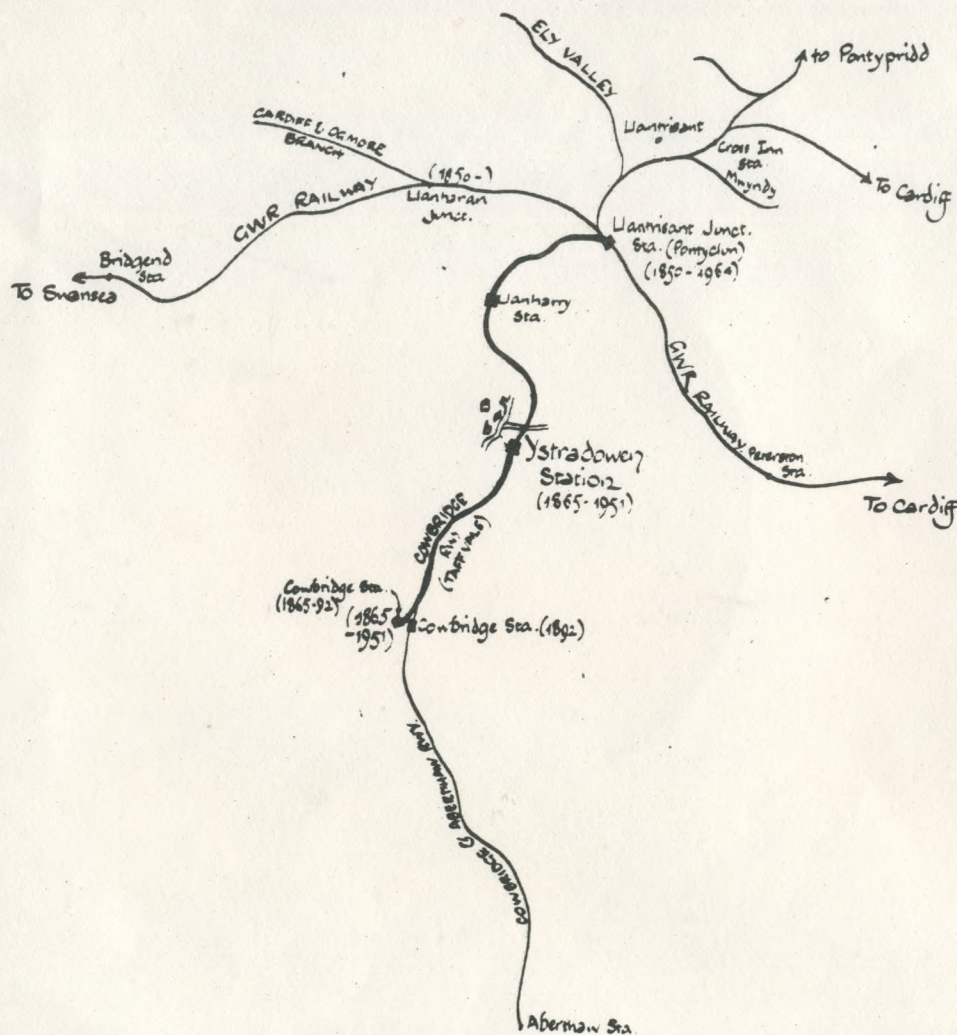
Main crops: wheat, barley & oats

(Note the addition of the letter "s" to some of the surnames around the 1880-90's - @: Matthew(s), William(s), Hopkins(s))

Farm	1865	1875	1895	1914	1923	1926
1 Ash Hall		Daniel Owen	(Daniel Owen)	(Edward Tudor Owen)		1
2 Brynddafad		Wm. Hopkin	Wm. Hopkins	Thos. Hopkins	Thos. Hopkins	Thos. Hopkins 2
3 Bryn y Foffon					Morgan Morgan	Morgan Morgan 3
4 Bulchngyn	? Enoch Morgan	Enoch Morgan	Enoch Morgan	Evan Morgan	Evan Morgan	John Phillips 4
5 Caean	? Miles Williams	Miles William	Miles Williams	Thos. Sant	Owen Sant	Owen Sant 5
6 Caercady		John William				6
7 Church Farm			David John (Mrs Mary Williams - Church Farm only refer to Welsh St Donato's)	Wm Radcliffe	Robt. Radcliffe	Robt. Radcliffe 7
8 Crofta	? Howell Harry	Howell Harry	Wm. J.C. Hunsley	Wm. Edmonds	Wm. Edmonds	Richd. Lewis 8
9 Fald			William John	Wm. John	Wm. John	Wm. John 9
10 Forest Fach			Mrs Jane Williams	Wm. Thomas	Wm. Thomas	Wm. Thomas 10
11 Forest Fawr		David Williams	Evan Williams	Evan Williams	Lewis Hopkins	Lewis Hopkins 11
12 Greenfield		Thomas Sant		David Thomas	David Thomas	Howell Thomas 12
13 Llwyn draen				Richd. Lewis	Wm. Edmonds	Wm. Edmonds 13
14 Llwyn ny daog	? Thomas Williams	Thomas Williams	Wm. Thomas (sic)	Morgan Radcliffe	Wm. Jarvis	Wm. Jarvis 14
15 Macndy		Jenkin Done	Wm. John	James Frederick	John Miles	David Thomas 15
16 New Forest		Daniel Owen		Morgan Matthews	Morgan Matthews	Wm. Edmonds 16
17 Prisk		Evan Morgan				17
18 Talyfan			Mrs Mary Sant	Mrs Ann Lewis	Thos. Rees Jenkins	Thos. Rees Jenkins 18
19 Tranches		John Williams				19
20 Tretnyngyll		Wm. John				20
21 Tynnen			Mrs Mary David & sons			21
22 Tynmawr	? Wm. Matthew	Wm. Matthew	Mrs Annie Matthews	Morgan Morgan	Oliver Morgan	Oliver Morgan 22
23 Uplands (The upper !!)				Wm. Radcliffe	John Rasser	John Rasser 23
24 Wern Fawr		Noah Thomas				24
Other year-downers farmers, or those whose farms are not identified	David Evans, John How, Wm. Thomas,	Jacob Davies, David Davies, David O. Davies				



# The Llantrisant - Cowbridge - Aberthaw Railway



Ystradowen - Portrait of a village

## THE RAILWAY

In 1850, as a result of opposition from local property owners in Cowbridge, the South Wales Railway was routed in a seemingly illogical curve well to the north of the town, with a station near Llantrisant at the village of Pontyclun. Later, realising the commercial folly of this decision, the town's mayor, the town clerk and bailiffs were among the promoters of the Cowbridge Railway, which was to link the town with Llantrisant and the South Wales (by then Great Western) Railway. Incorporated on 29 July, 1862 and opened for goods traffic in February, 1865 and for passenger service in September of the same year, the line was not at first a commercial success, many local people losing money as a result. In 1867 the Cowbridge Railway Company was taken over by the Taff Vale Railway Company, which had already (1863), through the establishment of the Llantrisant and Taff Vale Junction Company and the development of the old Llanwit Fadre tramroad, extended the line to link up with Pontypridd in the north-east, and the Ely Valley line toward the north-west.

Between Llantrisant and Cowbridge were two stations - at Llanharry, and at Ystradowen. The commencement of a passenger service from Llantrisant to Pontypridd in January, 1875 increased the popularity of the Cowbridge Railway, especially on market days. The Ystradowen porter, John John ("Johnny Twice") was famed for his great strength, not only in manhandling the crates of vegetables, poultry, eggs and rabbits onto the waiting train, but even (so local legend has it) in his willingness to give the train a little extra help up the Ystradowen incline. Daniel Owen exercised his influence as local 'squire' in arranging that a signal from Ash Hall would alert the Station Master to hold up the train until would-be passengers from Ash Hall had reached Ystradowen Station.

The line was extended south from Cowbridge to Aberthaw in 1892, with the original passenger terminus at Cowbridge becoming a goods depot, and a new station replacing the old one. (The main contractor, and later one of the principal landowners in Ystradowen, was W.H. Mathias, J.P., a great-grandfather of Prof. Richard Griffiths, guest speaker at the opening of the 'Ystradowen - Portrait of a village' exhibition. Mathias would have travelled daily by rail through Ystradowen from his home in Porth.)

Sadly, with the decline in freight and passenger traffic after the First World War, the engine sheds at Cowbridge were closed in 1924, the passenger service south of Cowbridge in 1930, and goods traffic in 1932. The Cowbridge to Llantrisant line, however, survived for almost twenty years more, having the somewhat dubious distinction of becoming the first route to have a diesel car service. Possibly the notoriously bad connection times with the main-line services had something to do with the decreasing use of the train as a means of transport from the village, and on 26 November, 1951 the last train from Cowbridge to Llantrisant passed through Ystradowen. The station, once known for the beauty of its trim and well-kept gardens soon became derelict and overgrown; the marshy ground reclaimed the once ordered footpaths, and the lines were taken up. Now little is left to mark the Cowbridge Railway, though its path through Ystradowen is perhaps the clearest remaining indication of a once busy and useful line.

Footnote: The mainline station at Llantrisant (Pontyclun) was closed in September, 1964; the station buildings and platforms were demolished in the following year.

Keith Griffin  
June 1963