

Cynefin

A school for the children living within the old parish of Dwygyfylchi (Now distinct areas of Dwygyfylchi, Penmaenmawr & Capelulo), was first founded in 1757. (1) It was through the perseverance and energy of a clergyman, Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire. This was part of a wider initiative throughout Wales to develop the literacy skills of adults and children so that they could read the bible. The school was established in St Gwynin's Church (now St Gwynan's), the parish church of Dwygyfylchi. In 1757 the parish church was of an ancient cruciform design, following the usual church style of that period.

Style of Cruciform Church

nave

transept

chancel

Although there is no longer any evidence of the old cruciform building, we do know that the church bell that hung in the this church from 1753, now hangs in St Gwynan's Church(2). The bell is inscribed with the date and the names of the two church wardens of that year, Humphrey Roberts and John Owen. There are also some memorial plaques still hanging on the walls of the present church from the mid 18C.

We learn from recordings in a parish magazine, that the school ran for three years in the cruciform church. In 1757 there were 36 pupils, in 1758, 30 pupils and in 1759 with 24 pupils. The school ceased to be held in the church in 1760 when it was demolished and rebuilt. It is likely that the new building was rather unprepossessing, being built in what is recorded as 'the dark ages of ecclesiastical architecture'.

Photo of St Gwinins 1760-1887.

The beautiful church of St Gwynans that we now have on this site was commissioned and rebuilt between 1887-1889, and despite restriction on space our current church is a much larger structure. The church was re-consecrated on the 27th September 1889. The architect who was commissioned to design the building was Mr E.M. Bruce-Vaughan of Caernarfon..

Picture of St. Gwynans 1889 to present.

Within the ground of St Gwynans church stood a Tithe barn until it was demolished to make way for the family burial vault of the Kneeshaws family of Graiglwyd Hall. Tithe barns were used for the storage of records, which were created between 1837 – 1850's as the result of one of the largest surveys into usage, ownership and occupation of land in England and Wales since the Domesday book. A school in the Tithe barn was opened and supported by the Darbighshire family, who came to the parish of Dwygyfylchi in the 1850's when the railway arrived in the area. Ivor Davies records in an extract from his Collected Works, that from their first association with the District, the Darbighshire's had children high in their regard. (3).

Samuel Duckenfield Darbighshire was a solicitor with the Chester and Holyhead Railway Company. Like many Manchester families of the time, they fell in love with North Wales. The family first stayed at Pwlycrochan Hall in Colwyn Bay (now Rydal school), before purchasing the Pendyffryn Estate in Dwygyfylchi from the Smith family.

Whilst living in Manchester, he, with others supported the education of the poor, providing rudimentary and technical education. Samuel Duckenfield Darbighshire was a Unitarian and strong supporter of liberal politics, his presence in Dwygyfylchi and POenmaenmawr attracted the attention of many notables of the time. Prime minister Gladstone was a regular visitor as were, Dean Lidell of Oxford (Alice's father) and the Rev. Gaskell, the husband of the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell.

In 1862 the Darbighshires, with the help of The British School's Society, built Glan y Rafon school as an elementary school for local people and as a meeting place for Unitarians. In the 1870's they bought Graig Llwyd quarry, which was successfully developed under their son Charles Henry Darbighshire. At its most productive the quarry provided employment to around 1.500 men. The Darbighshire's were also involved in the building of large houses in Penmaenmawr, providing accommodation to visitor to the area in the late 19th Century.

The land on which the the Glan y Rafon school was built is identified on the Tithe map for the area (439 & 440), as a house, yard and garden called GlanRafon. The

apportionment record identifies the owner as Catherine Jones (dob 1766), who came from the township of Isa Penisa. This Catherine Jones could be the one identified on the landowners register of the time, who owned **16 acres, 2 roods and 26 perches.(interpret)**

There are still signs of a school being on this site, with the gate and pathway along which children walked into school, as well as several iron gateposts.

Photo of path leading to school.

Adjacent to the school site there remains the Headmasters house (old school house). Residents of the village have recorded and spoken of attending meeting in the school long after the school was transferred to another site (4). The interior of the school is remembered as having long benches along the walls and a cast iron stove, that provided warmth.

Photo of school children, taken against the wall of the headmasters house. Circa 1900 Head teacher Mr Christmas Evans?

Map showing school?

Headmasters house?

In an 1884 log book of the Ysgol Glanrafon British School, it is recorded that 47 pupils were registered but because of stormy weather attendance that day was 27. Children are frequently absent from school because of bad weather, some had long distances to walk to the school, at other times attendance was depleted because of illness amongst the children. Mr and Mrs Darbighshire are recorded as frequent visitors to the school. Mr Darbighshire checking furnishing and the building structure and Mrs Darbighshire arriving with materials, to provide sewing lesson for the girls.

The log records that children's progress is much retarded because of a lack of necessary materials such as slates, ball frames (abacus) and colour sheets. Later in the month these materials were in place in the school, together with arithmetic papers for the upper classes. We also learn of the struggle children had in understanding the English when their family language was Welsh. It is recorded that the children were making little progress because of the language barrier.

In 1884, with the opening of Pencae school in Penmaenmawr, Glanrafon was taken over by the Parish Church authorities and the National Society, thus becoming Dwygyfylchi National school. This change from Unitarian to Anglican meant children from Anglican households did not have to walk the 2 miles to school in Penmaenmawr.

In 1899 the Glanrafon school is described as being in a bad state of repair and non conformist children were transferring to Pencae, because of rumours that the school had been condemned. The school did re-open and continue on the Glanrafon site until 1912, by which time the local church authorities had surrendered the school to the Caernarfonshire Education Committee. The school then became known as Dwygyfylchi County School. Once the school closed the building remained in use for such gatherings as the Home Guard, the Band of Hope, auctions and the Girl Guides. The building was eventually demolished during the 1990's.

Information about day schools within the Parish of Dwygyfylch from 1834 to the present 2010, has been published by the Penmaenmawr Historical Society. The booklet can be found for sale at the Penmaenmawr Museum.