

Pensychnant

Pensychnant, which is now run as a conservation centre and nature reserve, was really created in its present form as the country home of Abraham Henthorn Stott. Stott and his sons were eminent architects of the Lancashire cotton mills, building about a fifth of the spindles in Oldham in the 1880's; a time when Oldham had an eighth of the spinning in the world. Clearly the amassed The story of their architectural practice is the subject of a treatise by Roger Holden, 'Stott & Sons: Architects of the Lancashire Cotton Mills'. It was an exploitative age when it was not what you knew, but who you knew, and through contacts with Jesse Ainsworth (aka 'Mad Jesse') who was a notable character and property owner in Manchester, and whose niece he married, Abraham Stott was apprenticed to Sir Samuel Morton Peto, builder of the Houses of Parliament. With the patronage of the Ainsworth's and their connections, Abraham Stott rose from being no more than a skilled tradesman – a stone mason – to be one of the foremost engineering architects in Britain.

Abraham Henthorn Stott purchased the 159acre Pensychnant Estate from Mr. Charles Chester of Colwyn in 1872 for the sum of £1,800. Charles Chester, who had only owned Pensychnant for 14 months, was a builder and probably a prospective property dealer. The North Wales Coast had newly been made accessible by the Chester and Holyhead Railway and it was a fashionable place for the new rich industrialists of Lancashire (Platts, who made the machines for the mills and who far eclipsed the Stotts in wealth, owned the Gorddinog Estate at Llanfairfechan). Roger Holden writes that the big house at Pensychnant was started in 1877 but in fact it is shown with its present floorplan on a map of 1873. The house took a few years to build, and despite Abraham Stott being an architect, it was not built to a unified plan, necessitating blocking of newly-built, fine mullioned bedroom windows in order to add a Billiards Room, and then the conversion of sash windows to a door to extend into the Conservatory. Abraham Stott who was known as an eccentric, built his house in the then modern Arts & Crafts style with curious juxtaposition of local and imported stone and engineering bricks, and very steep, tiled and slated roofs. It is unique! It had central heating from new which would have been exceptional in the 1870's, and as if to show off their wealth, the entrance hall had a prominent (but ugly) cast iron radiator; The House had a private, three-phase electricity supply in about 1923, whereas most upland houses in the parish would not have electricity until the 1950's or '60's; and it had a telephone in 1926.

Although there must have been remnants of ancient oak woodlands on the estate, Abraham Stott beautified his estate by planting many non-native trees, and shelterbelts of black and Scots pines, and larch, creating the landscape at the top of Sychnant which we celebrate today. Before this, watercolour paintings by Eliza Stott in 1881 show most of the estate to be treeless. And it was Abraham Stott who had the roadside walls built. It is said that the labourers were paid 4d per day to build the walls, and that Stott insisted on a good job. If one stone was not to his satisfaction he would have the whole day's work pulled down and the men would go unpaid. Such were the standards of Victorian Britain!

With Abraham Stott's wealth, power and arrogance, it is tempting to assume that the Pensychnant Estate is entirely a Victorian creation but in fact the Stott's merely modified it. The original, small end of Pensychnant was built in about 1690, though until the 1880's it was sometimes called Cadr Edward or Cadair Edward. Cadair Edward was a typical Welsh farmhouse of the end of the seventeenth century, but though it would seem humble by today's standards, at the time, a two-storey, stone built house with

outbuildings would have been a good house. The tithe map of 1840 shows that the estate was very similar to today, except that it then included Plas Dolydd and Sychnant Pass Hotel (Bryn Eithin) which the Stott family later sold off. Except for the middle of the estate, nearest the farmyard, most of the field boundaries are identical to those of today, but the field names 'Gorse Pella', 'Gorse Canol' and 'Gorse' suggest that much of the land was agriculturally poor. Conversely many fields which are now poor grazing or bracken, bore arable crops. Only Cae Fawnog, which is described as 'bogland' had no apparent use and no tithe value, which is mysterious.

In 1841 Pensychnant was farmed by William Edwards (aged 40), son of William Edwards (died 1919). Here he lived with his wife Elizabeth (30), sons William (7) and John (1), daughter Jane (6), Mother Jane (85), brother? John (35), and also Elizabeth Williams (40), Robert Hughes(15) and William Roberts (11). In 1840 the Pensychnant Estate was owned by Sir David Erskine (died 1841), who also owned Pendyffryn Hall, Bodlondeb and the Pwllcrochan Estate above Colwyn Bay and was related by marriage to the Wynns of Gwydir.

Then, in 1865 the Erskine Estates of Wales were sold in their entirety (1850 acre Bodlondeb Estates, 70 houses in Conwy and 1191 acre Pwllcrochan Estate) by Lady Dowager Jane Silence Erskine and her eldest son Sir Thomas Erskine. Pensychnant (159acres) was lot 122 of this grand sale, and sold to Joseph Lovegrove for £1,800 (Lovegrove sold to Charles Chester in 1871).

Jane Silence Williams of Pwllcrochan was daughter of Rev. Hugh Williams, vicar of St Mary's of Conwy. Rev Hugh Williams was heir to the fortune and estates of Owen Holland of Plas Issa, Conwy (on the site of the library). The Holland family of Lancashire were mentioned in the Domesday book and were granted Estates in Conwy, Bodlondeb and Marle by Edward I.