

The growth of Dwygyfylchi Parish (Penmaenmawr) in relation to improvements in communication

Before the final quarter of the 18th century the parish of Dwygyfylchi was a relatively poor rural parish of scattered farms and small holdings with a population of less than two hundred. We do know from the 'Church Visitation Returns' that there were thirty six families living here in 1749 giving us a population of about 180.

The principal landowners were the Coytmor family who had resided at Ty Mawr (later Plas Mawr). The name appears frequently in parish records. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century they fade from the scene with the last member living in the S.W of England and serving as a surgeon in the Royal Navy.

The parish was isolated. The headlands of Penmaen Bach and Penmaen Mawr were a series of obstacles for travellers along the North Wales coast forcing them to journey "along the sand when the tide was out" or to face strenuous climbs over the hills behind the two promontories. Surprisingly, Penmaen Mawr headland was well known to London society. Its precipitous slopes and the narrow insecure track around it made those contemplating a journey to Dublin via Chester and Holyhead trembled at the prospect.

But changes were on the way. In the eighteenth Century landowners, that is, the ruling classes began to realise that poor roads were obstructing improvements in agriculture and developments in industry. This became the time of Turnpike Trusts as groups of landowners combined to build new roads with government blessing and maintain them by raising tolls. In 1769 the Caernarvonshire Turnpike Trust was established to improve the roads between Llanrwst and Bangor via Conwy. They chose the Sychnant route to avoid Penmaen Bach. It involved cutting a narrow road down towards Dwygyfylchi which was rather too steep for horse drawn vehicles and constructing a narrow road on the edge of Penyclip, scooping the loose surface and protecting the traveller with a wall to prevent them falling into the sea. Neither attempts were satisfactory and in constant need of maintenance which was unsatisfactory.

Coach travel was uncomfortable and tiring for both man and beast. To alleviate the stress a village developed at the foot of the Sychnant Pass. There inns – Red Lion, Cross Keys and Horseshoe Tavern were built with a number of cottages to accommodate traders and servants. Here at Caelulo was the first nucleated settlement within the parish in modern times. At the western end of the parish a small settlement around two inns 'The Jolly Herring' and the 'Pickled Herring' and the foot of the short climb to Penyclip.

Within the parish there were further advancements. Two farmhouses were rebuilt along the new road. Both farms once aligned south to north with their backs to the westerly winds were now replaced by large houses facing the road and the north. This was a total break with tradition for the stormy coastal region and must have raised a few eyebrows.

The Coytmor family estate here was sold about this time to the Smith family of Burnhall, County Durham. They built Pendyffryn Hall thus replacing the Old Coytmor family seat at Ty Mawr. The Smiths who had strong military connections were influential in the development of the parish especially in the improvement of agriculture. (pop 1811 – 266) (pop 1821- 353)

With the unification of Britain and Ireland in 1800 there was a demand to improve roads through North Wales after Holyhead was chosen as the ferry port for Dublin. In the 1820s Telford began the construction of the route from Shrewsbury to Holyhead via Bangor. Those who lived in Chester and

the north east coast were vociferous in their demands for a coastal road as well. Telford was entrusted with the road which resulted on the building of the Conwy Suspension Bridge and a new road blasted around the lower precipitous edge of Penmaen Bach. He also made improvements to the 1772 Penyclip road at Penmaen Mawr. As a result little use was made of the Sychnant road after 1826/7 and the village of Capelulo declined. The 'Cross Keys' inn closed as did the 'Red Lio' with its licence being transferred to a new inn 'The Ship' built where Telford's road met the old Glanrafon track.

The Smith's of Pendyffryn considered the new coast road to be a considered the new coast road to be a very big advance and likely to improve tourism in North Wales. Already many from Merseyside were coming to N. Wales by steam powered paddle boats creating new resorts at Bangor, Caernarfon and Beaumaris. Penmaenmawr's shoreline was too shallow for loading and unloading such vessels. The Smith;s built three large country mansions to accommodate visitors at Plas Celyn, Plas Ucha and Plas Mawr with limited success.

Pebbles had been taken from the beach here to surface the streets in the rapidly expanding towns of Cheshire and Lancashire. Local men had also began roughly shaping blocks of scree from the slopes of Penmaen Mawr and Graiglwyd and selling them to visiting captains of trading vessels not wanting to return to Merseyside empty. Two enterprising businessmen of Runcorn recognised the value of the product and came here to inspect the source of the stone. Within a few months in 1835 quarrying began on the slopes of Penmaen Mawr with the sea rather than roads being used to transport the heavy product. Before long others began quarrying at Graiglwyd. Quarrying required men and they and their families needed accommodation. The second nucleated settlement in the parish developed below the quarries at Penmaenan with terraced cottages erected along Telford road which became the High Street of the new village. Shops, chapels and a school were added later as the village developed up the steep slope under the quarries.

And then came the railway after 1847. It had little impact upon the existing economy of the parish – quarrying was to rely on sea transport for another forty years. However, the railway which provided cheaper and quicker communication with the rest of Britain was to create here and in other parts of North Wales the new industry of tourism on a much larger scale than before. The Railway Station was opened here in 1849 on a very restricted area near the shore but on about the only place suitable. The rail line being so close to the shore development between it and the sea was very limited and prevented development such as found in Llanfairfechan and to a certain extent at Colwyn Bay. The station was named Penmaenmawr after the famous hill. It was thought that Dwygyfylchi was too difficult for visitors to pronounce. The resort of Penmaenmawr had been born.

The area about the station became the third settlement in the old parish. Visitors were slow to come at first but with the frequent visits of W.E. Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Prime Minister after 1855 trade picked up very quickly indeed. He and his family stayed at 'Plas Mariandir' (Bryn Hedd) built by a Chester doctor, who like other professional men and clergy began building large summer retreats especially above the station. Local quarrymen began to invest their savings in the construction of boarding houses which with the shops, chapels and an impressive Anglican Church established a community dedicated to the rich visitors of N.W. England and beyond. Expansion here was rapid up to the 1890s when it seemed that the new resorts had reached its acme as an attraction. Alongside this was the increasing development of the quarries and the construction of at least seven terraces of houses dedicated to quarrymen and their families. Much of this progress was due to the enterprises of the Darbishire family who brought the Pendyffryn Estate in the 1850s and were brought here by the railway. Since S.D. Darbishire was once solicitor to the Chester and Holyhead Railway Company.

By the mid 1890s Penmaenmawr had replaced Dwygyfylchi as the name of this new community be it a quarrying town or seaside resort. It became administered formally by the Penmaenmawr Urban District Council after 1895 with the old parish name of Dwygyfylchi being used to describe the undeveloped area around the parish church of St Gwynan's.