

Hen Felin - Dwygyfylchi

The Old Mill - 1860s, by local artist A F Perrin (see sketch 1)

The Old Mill, or Hen Felin, was a Corn Mill powered by the water drawn from Afon Gyrach, the stream which flows from Tal-y-Fan Mountain through the village of Dwygyfylchi on its way to the sea, about a mile away. It was at first the only corn mill in the Parish of Dwygyfylchi. All the grain from the farmers in the area was milled there until the New Mill was built further down the stream, near what is now Glyn Terrace.

The earliest record of the Old Mill can be seen in the Bishop's Transcripts of 1760, when Richard George was the Miller there. In 1766 the Mill and surrounding land were sold by Griffith Coytmor of St David's to Hugh Evans of Maenan. The land had been part of the Coytmor Estate, the major landowners in Dwygyfylchi in the 17th and 18th centuries. Robert Owen was recorded as the Miller there in 1774. However, there is mention in 1550 of a 'miller of Dwygyfylchi' in Caernarfon court records who stole three items of clothing. Following a 'hue-and-cry', the miller was apprehended at Llanrwst, taken to court, found guilty but escaped the death penalty because he was literate and was a lay person at his local chapel. He was branded on the hand instead. This record could evidence the existence of the Old Mill as earlier than 1550, as there is unlikely to be any other mill in the vicinity at that time.

Tyn-y-Felin was a separate small building near the Mill, situated at what is now the entrance of the current property, off the Old Mill Road. It must have been the original Miller's House as the Cottage alongside the Mill was built later, in the 1860's. As recently as 1985 the original footings of Tyn-y-Felin were discovered and were found to measure only 20 feet by 15 feet. There was also evidence at that time of a partition wall approximately 6 feet from the west gable wall (see photograph 2). By this date the Mill and attached cottage were derelict (see photograph 3).

With the publication of the Tithe Maps in 1847, together with the Apportionment Documents (see attached plan 4), more details of the Old Mill and its inhabitants became available. By this date the Mill and surrounding land, including the Glyn Estate, was owned by George Thomas Smith of Pendyffryn. John Roberts was the Miller at this time. He rented the Mill Yard and Orchards, together with Tyn-y-Felin and Gardens. The tenant of the pasture around both Tyn-y-Felin, and the Mill House, together with the Mill Pond, was David Thomas. He and his family worked the land as a small-holding.

In 1850 the Glyn Estate later passed from the Smith Family to the Darbyshire family. The Darbyshires already owned both the Craiglwyd and Penmaenmawr Quarries. We can see from the Parish Baptism Records that many fathers were employed in the Quarries from the 1840s onwards. The construction of the railways at around this time meant that setts could be transported quickly and efficiently to customers in the North West of England and beyond. The railways also brought holiday-makers to the area in larger and larger numbers.

The Baptism Records of Dwygyfylchi Parish reveal details of some of the families who lived and worked at the Mill in the mid nineteenth century. In 1851 Robert Roberts is recorded as the Miller, succeeded by David Owen from 1857 to 1859. The Mill did not appear to be operative from 1859 onwards.

The 1861 Census records Elias Owen, a gamekeeper, as tenant of the Mill House. The tenant of Tyn-y-Felin at this time was Richard Williams, a Quarry Worker, who lived there with his wife and six children !

The 1871 Census records Robert and Mary Jones and their son William living in the Mill House. Both men were sett makers at Penmaenmawr Quarry. Setts were precisely cut blocks of very hard granite that

became invaluable in paving the streets of North-West England and beyond. There is no Census record of the tenants of Tyn-y-Felin at this time. This building may have been abandoned by then. By 1881 Tyn-y-felin had disappeared from the Ordnance Survey Map. A painting of the Mill in June that year (see Copy 5) confirms that the Mill was no longer in use for milling corn.

On 22nd July 1881 the Darbyshire family sold off much of their Estate (see attached plan 6 for details of land to be auctioned) What was known by then as the Glyn Lands, including the Old Mill, were purchased by the McDonald family of Plas Ucha. Through the will of Mary McDonald the land passed to Henry Lennox Peel, a nephew, from Fareham, Hampshire. He sold the Estate in 1896 in 30 Lots. The yearly tenants of the Glyn Lands at this time were recorded as Robert Thomas and William Roberts.

Lot 2 (see copy of plans 7) included the Old Mill House, Outbuildings, Yard and Garden. It also included woodland and pasture, together with the Old Mill Pond. It was sold for £500.00.

The last tenants of the Mill House were the Roberts family. It was abandoned by 1954 and became derelict (see photo 8. Mrs. Muriel O'Leary (nee Roberts) now still living in Penmaenmawr (was the parish of Dwygyfylchi) and in her 80s, is one of two last surviving members of the Roberts family, with her twin sister, who lived at the Old Mill.

Muriel lived at the Old Mill from about 1940, when the Roberts family rented the property. She was one of a family of eight. In 1948 she moved to work in London, when she was 18 years old. Muriel mentioned that the winters were very cold and there was more community than nowadays with chapel and neighbours. As a young girl growing up she played all over the place, up the mountains and in the wooded valleys miles away from home. She said that the Old Mill property was a smallholding and no longer a working mill. Her father bred pigs for their neighbour (Y Glyn) and they had chickens, ducks, a cow for milk, and a large orchard with apples, plums, damsons, strawberries, raspberries and beans, and billberries from the mountain (Moel Lus, which means treeless billbery mountain). Everybody in the family was busy working on the smallholding, life was hard, but everybody was happy in a happy village.

She said that Hen Felin “...was quite solid. We didn't have hot water we only had cold and you had to go all the way around the back to the toilet, at night of course you used the commode. You just walked into the kitchen, it was a big kitchen, high ceilings. And there were only two bedrooms, one off the kitchen the other upstairs. The kitchen was lovely, the sash window came down to the floor with a window seat. It had a beautiful black marble fireplace but someone blocked it up or took it. We didn't have television or nothing.

There was a big barn, bigger than the house because it was a flour mill. It wasn't working but the loft was there. My father used to put everything in there. It had a good roof on it. It was quite dry. Put a bit of hay up there. It was quite a nice place to live really.

In 1948 they gave us a council house cos it had a bathroom and running water, cos we had to bath in a tin bath in front of the fire.

[Muriel was interviewed 22/06/2015 and the recording is available via the website....]