

Cowbridge History Society
Castle Farm, St Georges-Super-Ely

Members' Visit Notes for 13th March 2018



Castle Farm, St George super Ely: the post medieval wing
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Castle Farm, St George-super-Ely

Notes for a visit by the Society

A 16th century MS entitled *A Breviat containing all the manors and Lordshippes of Glamorgan* asserts that

St Georges was given in the division of fitshamon to Sir John ffleminge knight in the yeare of our lord God 1092 where he builded a castle yet called the castle of Georges standinge on the very banke of the River of Ely. Yt hath free tenantes demeasnes and copy houldes for iii lives and Cardiffe ye mkette, and is distant from Cardiff iii miles. The Earle is patron and the valuacion is viii^{li} xiii^s ob. Quad.

However, inventing the history of our county goes back a long way further than Iolo Morganwg and we now realise that there is no truth in this statement which derives from Edward Stradling of St Donats (b. 1529) who fabricated the history of the conquest of Glamorgan in furtherance of the pretence that his family had taken part. The Flemings first appeared in Glamorgan as landowners little earlier than the 14th century and there was no manor of St George until a long time after 1092. It was a sub-infeudation of the manor of St Nicholas which probably took place early in the 14th century and the Flemings could well have been its first lords.

It was probably the early lords of St Nicholas who built the castle on this site, one of a chain of castles along the River Ely between St Fagans and Peterston which may have been intended as launching posts for further incursion into Welsh territory. The manor of St George is not co-terminous with the parish – few manors are, and it extends across the river into St Fagans to include the farm of Tregymog as well as westward into St Nicholas parish. The village is clustered around the castle and some half a mile distant from the church. The Tithe map suggests indications of a 'shrunken village'

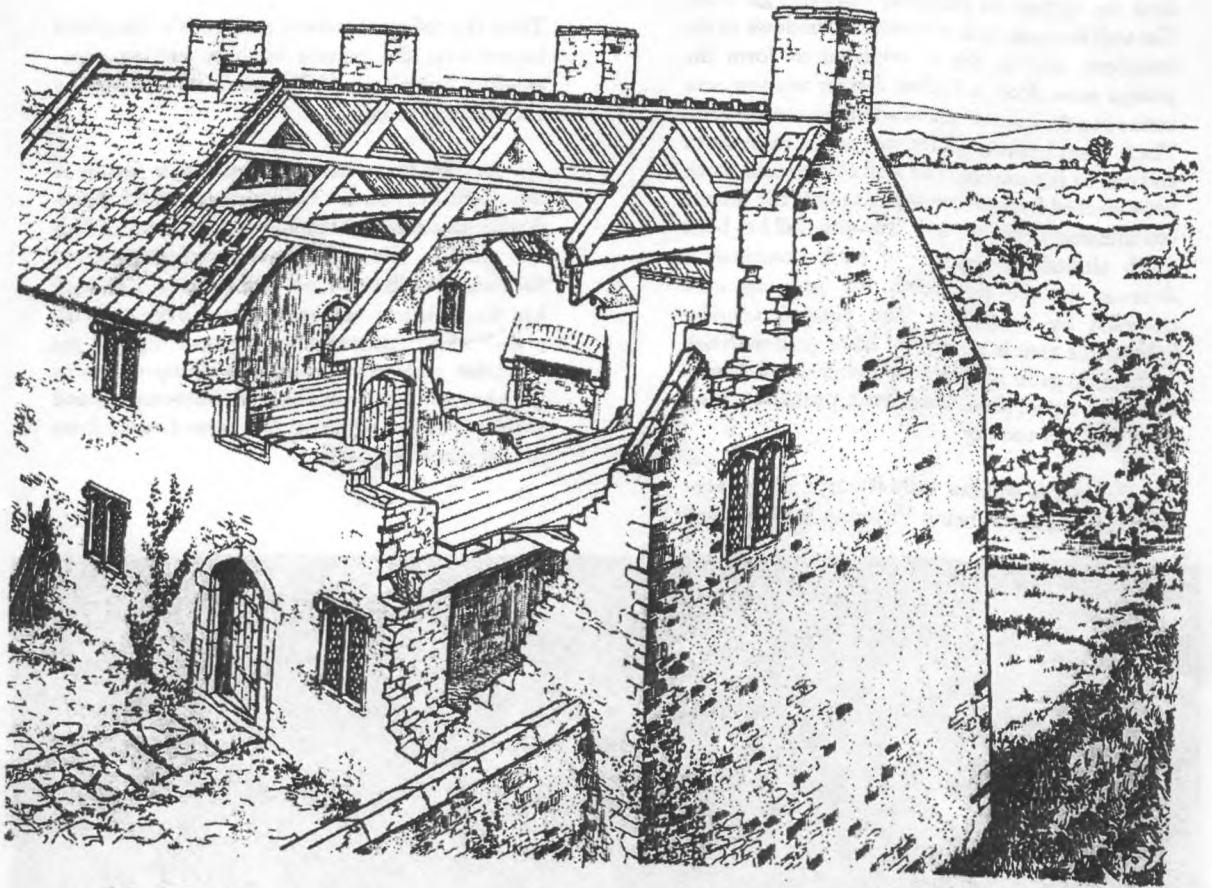
The Flemings first appear in the county at the beginning of the 14th century – the manner of their arrival is un-recorded but it can be assumed that it was by marriage. There were two branches of the family, the one holding Wenvoe and St George and the other which eventually settled at Flemingston. The latter survived for many generations while the latter ran out of heirs male within a century. Hard fact is in short supply and Clark's summary of the Wenvoe St George branch is as acceptable now as it was when written 130 years ago, saving, mainly, that Sir William's declared role in the execution of Llywelyn Bren is no longer the accepted wisdom. Clark wrote in his *Genealogies of Glamorgan* as follows:

The family seems to have split into two branches, Fleming of Wenvoe and Fleming of Flimston. The elder held St. George's, Wenvoe, Constantine Walls, and Llanmaes. William was their representative in the beginning of the 14th century, and appears as Lord of Wenvoe, standing at two knights' fees in the Despenser Survey. He is probably Sir William Fleming who was, 9 Edward II., custos of Llantrissant Castle, and bailiff of the forest of Miscin. He was also for some years Sheriff of the Signory, in which capacity he probably made himself obnoxious to the Despensers, and was executed at Cardiff, for having hanged Llewelyn Bren, which he did by the Black Tower in the Castle, 14 Edward II. Both Sir William and his victim were buried in the Friars' church at Cardiff, where their tombs remained until the dissolution. He was the last male of the elder line. His daughter and heiress married Edward Malefaunt of co. Pembroke, one of the minions of Edward II., and from them descended the Malefaunts of Wenvoe and St. George's, of whom Sir Thomas Malefaunt, Kt., Lord of Wenvoe and St. George's in Glamorgan and of Okeneton or Upton Castle and Pyle, co. Pembroke, died 8 May, 1438, and was buried at St. Bartholomew the Less, in London, as was his wife, Margaret, daughter of Thomas and Margaret Astley, and their son Henry Malefaunt. The heiress of a Sir Edmund Malefaunt married Sir John Butler of Dunraven, who held St. George's in her right, but probably only for her life, since the estates were held, *temp.* Henry VIII., by Edmund (or John) Malefaunt, who married Margaret, daughter of Sir Matthew Cradock, Kt., of Swansea, and died childless, on which Wenvoe, and probably other property, escheated to the Crown.

Henry VII granted St George to his uncle Jasper Tudor at whose death it once more escheated to the Crown and was granted by Henry VIII in 1549/50 to William Herbert who became the Earl of Pembroke from whom it descended to the lords Windsor.

In 1723/4 Abraham Barbour of St Andrews, Holborn purchased the manors of St George, Michaelston and Caerau from Viscount Windsor. Clearly Barbour was living in Glamorgan since he became High Sheriff in 1725 but it is unlikely that his residence would have been St George's Castle which must have been, for many years, a tenanted farmhouse. At his death in 1733 Abraham Barbour bequeathed the manors to Henry Llewellyn of Moorlanga in Peterston-super-Ely and Cardiff, an Attorney, from whom they descended to Henry's nephew John Llewellyn who built the house that preceded the present day Coedriglan. This John Llewellyn married Mary, sister of Edmund Traherne of Castella and Cardiff and on his death in 1786 the lands passed to his nephew Llewellyn Traherne who, in 1789

married Charlotte Edmondes and their son was the antiquary Revd John Montgomery Traherne from whom the property has descended to the present lord of the manor, Col. Rhodri Traherne.



Castle Farm; cutaway view from the N., restored © Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments (Wales)

The Royal Commission description of the building at the time of their inspector's visit is as follows:

Castle Farm stands to the S. of a steep bank sloping down to the R. Ely. It consists of a main block, probably 15th-century, to the E. of which is a small 18th-century annexe. It appears that the main block was built in an angle formed by the outer wall and cross-wall of the former castle, both walls once continuing beyond the quoins of the house they now contain. The N. end wall is very thick and clearly follows the line of the river bank. The N. W. corner of the house has been consolidated in a way that suggests that the N. wall formerly continued to the W. and that it was against this continuation that the marked batter of the W. wall formerly terminated.

The primary accommodation of the medieval house was on the first floor and consisted of a hall in three

bays open to the roof between a solar at the N. end, also open to the roof, and a chamber at the S. end which had a loft floor over. This principal floor stands over a basement comprising four rooms whose original purpose is uncertain.

The N. basement has a wide fireplace and now serves as a kitchen. Both the internal and external stairs are recent. The outside stair, although a common feature of houses of the first-floor-hall class, appears in this case to date from the conversion of the first floor into a granary. The stair gives access to the hall through a former window by means of a landing well above floor level. The original main entry and stair cannot be identified.

The outer walls are of Lias limestone with some Old Red Sandstone and the partitions (apart from the lost framed partition between hall and solar) are probably of the same materials. The roofs are

covered with modern slates. The W. wall has a marked batter. From it rise two tall square chimneys, that to the N. serving the hall fireplace, that to the S. serving a heated room in the basement. The hall chimney must be rebuilt as it does not appear on Homfray's drawing of 1828. The wall formerly had two narrow windows to the basement, that to the S. widened to form the present main door. A further former window now serves as a doorway at the head of the outside stair. The S. front has two gables, one to the main block and one to the annexe. The wall of the main block has a marked batter terminating against the former continuation of the W. wall. The end wall has been much altered. It appears to have contained a doorway to the basement, the opening now occupied by a window. The pointed window lighting the stair is assembled of re-used material. In the main gable is a three-light mullioned window of Sutton stone, plain, chamfered, probably dating from the 15th century.

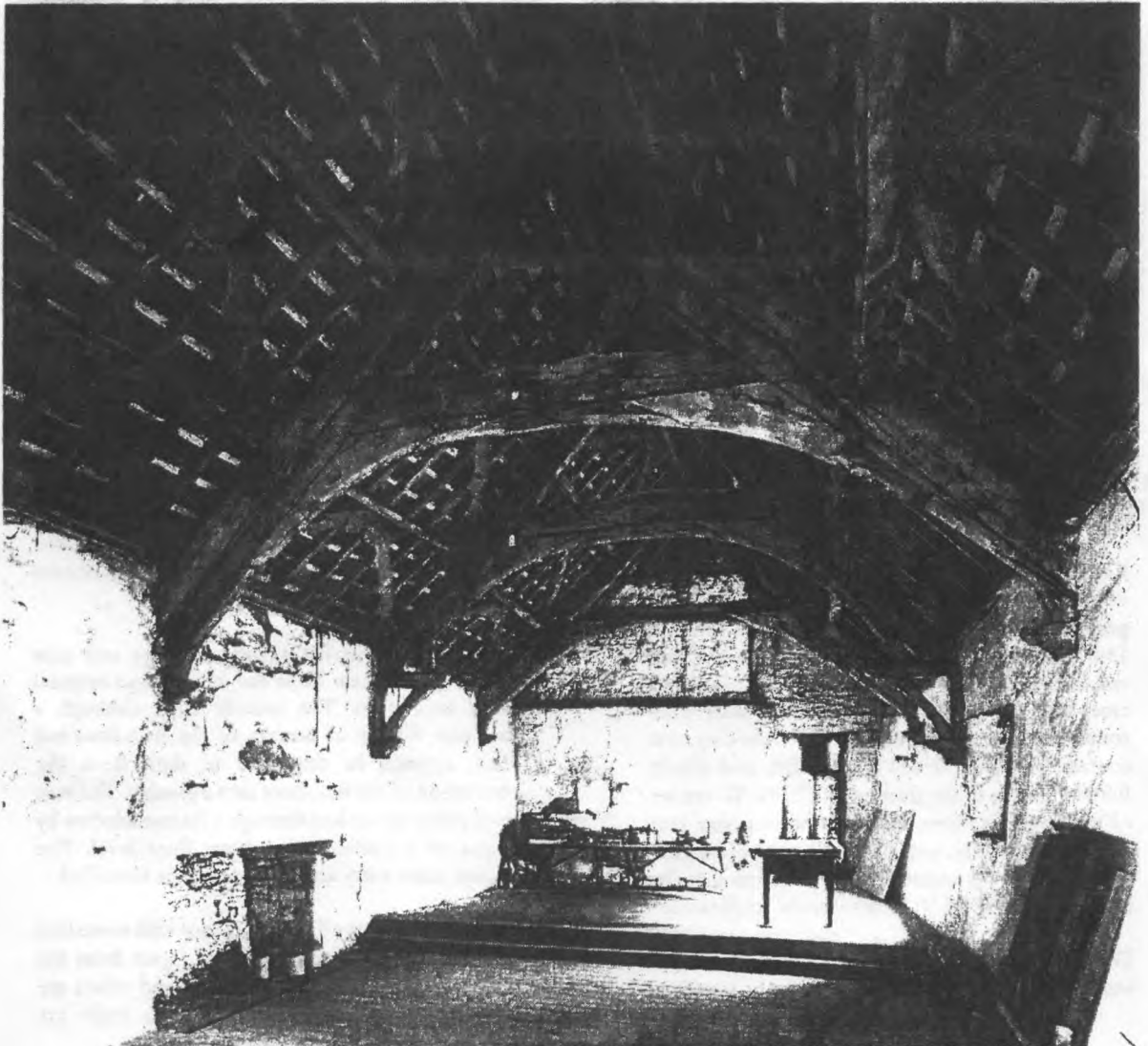
The E. front is without early features, the present mullioned windows being Victorian and probably

the work of the antiquarian Montgomery Traheme, who may also have been responsible for the traceried window in the N. wall.

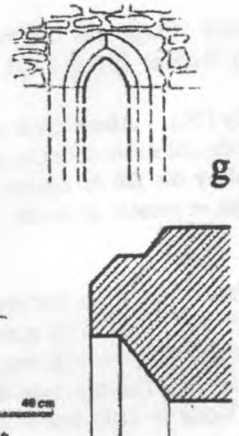
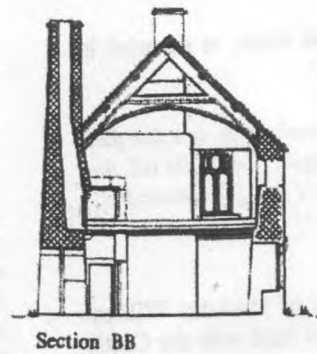
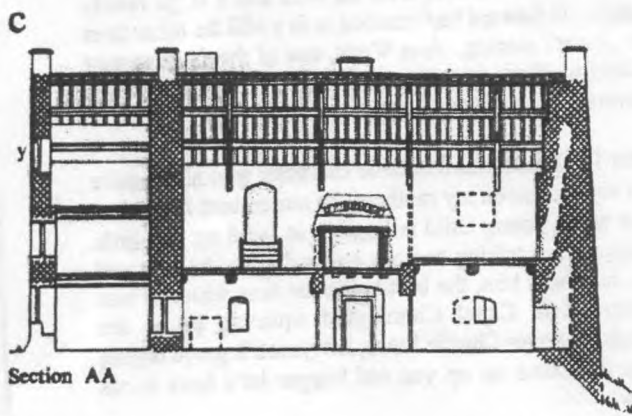
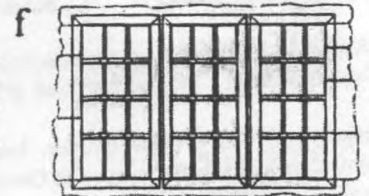
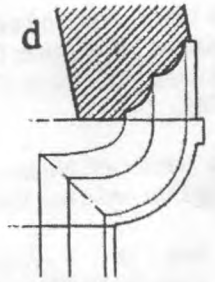
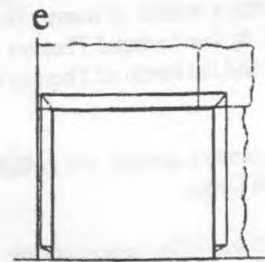
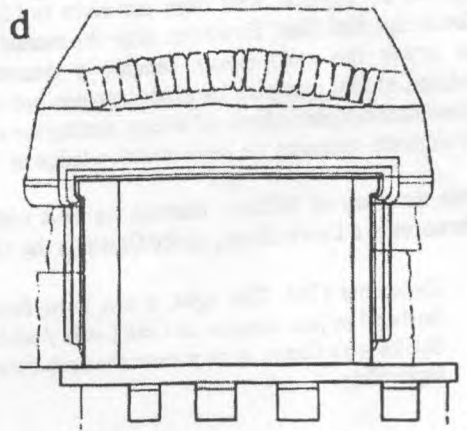
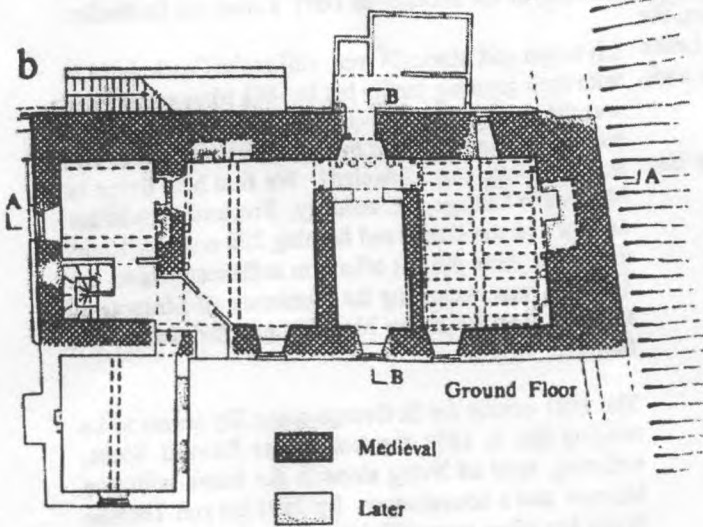
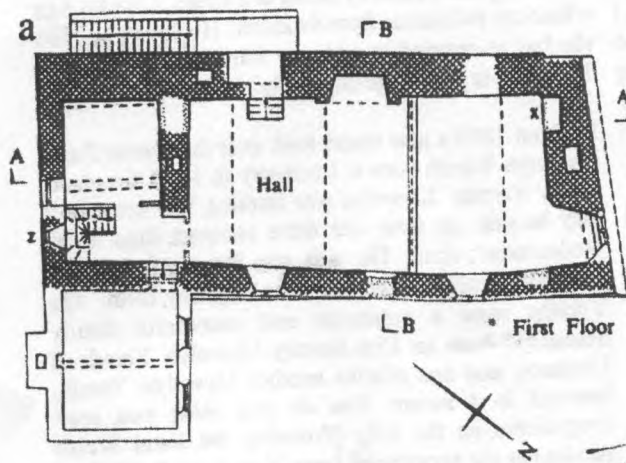
Internally the basement has few features of interest.

There is a ceiling of massive and crudely chamfered beams over the present kitchen, and an ogee-stopped beam to an inner room may indicate a 17th-century repair.

On the first floor the most remarkable feature is the corbelled hooded hall fireplace which has a double quarter-round moulding to the lintel, corbels and jambs. The solar has a plain-chamfered fireplace also likely to be 15th-century. The roof has five trusses, the two trusses over the hall arch-braced. Although the present braces are Victorian replacements they are clearly copies of 15th-century originals. The truss between hall and solar was originally closed and framed some form of half timbered partition.



The Hall © Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments (Wales)



82 Castle Farm (MH 16) is a first-floor hall-house possibly built against the walls of an earlier castle: *a* first floor; *b* ground floor; *c* long section and cross section through hall; *d* lateral fireplace, first floor; *e* end fireplace at X, N.W. wall, first floor; *f* window at Y, attic room, S.E. end wall; *g* stair light at Z, S.E. end wall, medieval but reset.

Just as Dr Gibbon built a mansion within the walls of St Fagans Castle in the 16th century, so, the Flemings, in the 14th /15th century had built their mansion within the walls of the ancient castle they had inherited at St George-super-Ely. The house they built for themselves was a first floor hall of a type we are familiar with from our visits to Llanmihangel j Cowbridge and Sker. However, after the manor escheated to the crown the castle/house became a tenanted dwelling perhaps, at first occupied by gentry tenants but ultimately by tenant farmers generations of whom, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we have no knowledge of whatsoever.

From the diary of William Thomas we have some scattered references to a Lewis family at the Castle in the 18th century.

December 1764 This night, a son born from her husband to Jane daughr. of Cate Lewis / widow of St.Georgis's Castle, at ye parson house in Peterston super Eley.

Cate Lewis seems to have been a widow of many years, the baptism of her daughter Cate by her husband Thomas Lewis is recorded in the PR in 1737 and the burial of Thomas Lewis in 1742.

From another of William Thomas's notices we gather that widow Cate had a son Thomas Lewis.

June 1766 7 Ann Anthony of St.Georges swore a base child to Thomas Lewis of / St.Georges Castle, and swore her parish in St.Georges fr. that she lived / in the parish and served the Church as a Sexton.

August 17 1766 Anthony, supposed son of Thomas Lewis and Ann Evan was baptized. [PR]

September 1766 A Base daughr. born about ye same days to Thomas Lewis of St.George's / Castle from Ann Anthony.

The whole village was excited when, as reported by William Thomas in July 1765 :

July 1765 About this 6 weeks past, as some piece of the old stable of St.Georgis / Castle did fall, they had by the fall 49 counters, and 19 counterfeit / rings, at present of no use. //

By the time of the Tithe Survey of 1844 one William Evans was the tenant of 59 acres held with the Castle Farm. He and Mary his wife were probably new to the farm, their son Thomas was baptized in 1845 and daughter Kesia in 1846 but William was buried on 9 December 1848 aged 35. In 1841 the couple had, as yet, no children but employed two living-in farm workers and one domestic servant. The inventory of his goods and effects amounted to £294:5s.

In 1851 widow Mary Evans was still at the Castle Farm with her son Thomas and daughter Kesia. She had a domestic servant living in together with Thomas Davies an ag.lab. and Samuel Davies a waggoner. She was enhancing her income by taking in a lodger, Charles Agg a Railway Policeman from Swindon. However, by 1861 she had re-married to widower John Rees a farmer of 140 acres in St George-super-Ely.

In about 1858 a new tenant took over the Castle Farm; Llywelyn Yorath born in Llanharry in 1824 the son of Henry Yorath. Llywelyn was farming 145 acres so it may be that the farm was more compact than in his predecessor's time. His wife was Margaret, formerly Margaret Griffiths from St Brides Major by birth. The Yoraths were a numerous and successful family descended from an 18th century Llywelyn Yorath of Llanharry and one relative another Llywelyn Yorath, featured in a recent *Who do you think you are?* Programme on the telly (Probably the local Welsh version) as the ancestor of Terry Yorath the footballer.

Llywelyn and Margaret were still at the Castle in 1871 with their growing family but in 1881 Margaret Yorath was the head of family yet described as married, not a widow. The acreage had by this time increased to 160 acres. Where was Llywelyn? We find him living in Maesmawr Cottage in Llanddettty, Breconshire with his 16 year old son Henry and farming 250 acres. Clearly the Castle Farm did not offer him sufficient scope. By 1881 he was occupying the farmhouse of Maesmawr and had been joined by Margaret and the rest of the family.

The 1881 census for St George-super Ely seems to be missing but in 1891 the tenant was Edward Watts, widower, aged 66 living alone in the house with one labourer and a housekeeper. By 1891 his son Thomas Watts has taken over with his wife and a large family while old Edward had returned to St y Nill the other farm they were renting. Ann Watts, one of the daughters of Thomas Watts was the mother of Thomas Llewellyn formerly one of our members.

Old Ted Watts was a notable character who made quite an impression on my mother who remembers him when she was a young child telling her to 'shut up you little bugger, I'm talking to your mother'. She had several stories about him, the best being the time when he was observed in Capel Churchyard squaring up to the headstone over Charlie Jones, Llwynioli's grave urging him to 'Come on up you old bugger let's have it out now'.

At this time Castle Farm, like, St y Nill, was among the more important farms of the area and although both would have been seriously decayed in their day, George Montgomery Traherne's antiquarian interest would no doubt have ensured the Castle to be much more habitable for a prosperous farmer's family than it had become in its latter days.

1844 Tithe Map
St George super Ely



Notice that the Castle farm in 1844 was not the sort of compact unit we are used to finding in Llantrisant and other upland areas but comprised fields scattered here and there, reflecting the long, slow evolution from the medieval open field system.

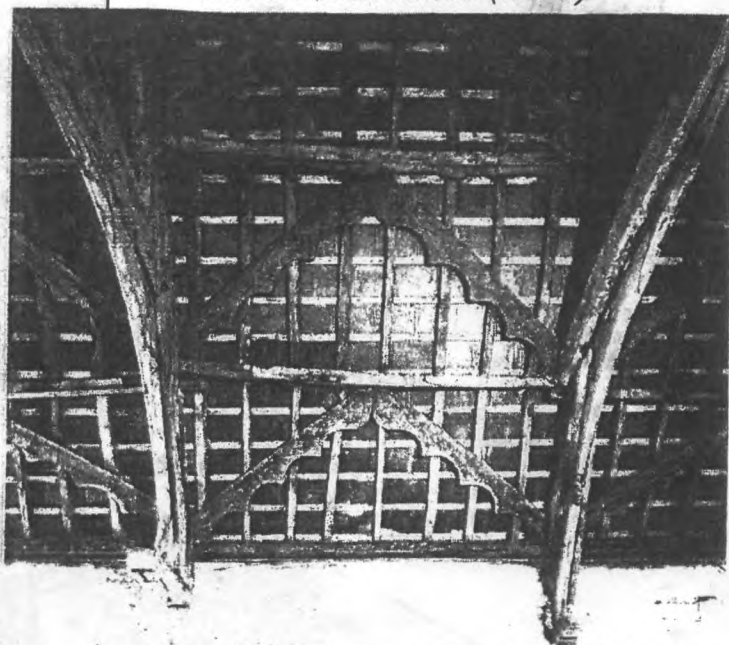
While we look at the tithe map it is worth noting the evidence for a shrunken village which has left the Church in an isolated position. The axis between Church and Castle where the village would naturally develop is largely empty but the fields 96, 97, 97a and 109 clearly suggest that they were formerly occupied by a number of house and garden sites. The parish of St George-super-Ely has, for many years, had two villages, one around the castle and one at the Drope plus a small settlement on the Downs. Perhaps the population has, over the centuries, tended to migrate towards the higher ground.

Inventory of the goods of William Evan
of Castle Farm who died in 1848

His wearing apparel	02 00 00
Household furniture	14 15 00
Dairy utensils	02 00 00
Provision in the house	01 10 00
Stock and crops	
25 sheep	20 00 00
6 yearling steers	15 00 00
6 two year old heifers	18 00 00
6 two year old steers	24 00 00
3 cows in calf	20 00 00
3 cows in calf	21 00 00
2 cows in calf	12 00 00
3 barren cows	12 00 00
9 calves	09 00 00
1 horse Beamish	07 00 00
1 mare Beamish	05 00 00
1 mare aged	05 00 00
1 yearling colt	06 00 00
4 store pigs	04 00 00
Wheat in the barn	05 00 00
“ in the rickyard	20 00 00
1 rick of barley	10 00 00
1 rick of hay	20 00 00
1 rick of oats	05 00 00
Wheat in the ground	18 00 00
Total	294 05 00

Hopkin Hopkins, Ty Newydd
Lewis Davies, St Georges.

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Arch-braced roofs were a common feature of high-status, medieval houses with halls open to the roof. Survivals are rare but include Castell y Mynach in Pentyrch, Carnllwyd in Llancarfan, Plas Llanmihangel and one, formerly at Bwlchwyn, near Tonyrefail, which is preserved in pieces at St Fagans. There is evidence that other houses of Welsh families including Radur Uchaf and Goetre Fawr in Radur were originally so roofed. Extrapolating from such examples it may be argued that they were as common in the Welsh upland and Border Vale area as in the Vale, evidence of a long native tradition of high quality carpentry.



Castle Farm © Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments (Wales)