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# LLANSANNOR COURT

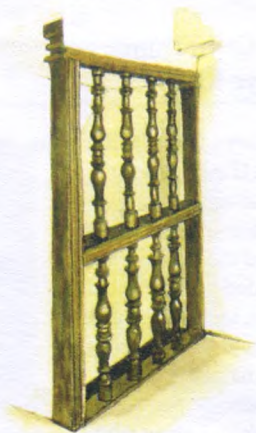


*Watercolour of Llansannor Court painted in 2000.*

## The Manor House

In the middle years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Richard Gwyn built a manor house that expressed his family's wealth and social position. The west wing is part of a 15th century house, including a first floor hall open to a roof supported on massive arch braced oak trusses, and a centrally placed stone staircase. The design of the Tudor house is formal with a central porch and pairs of stone mullioned arch headed windows. The hall is oak panelled with plaster ceilings that have finger moulding around bays divided by heavy oak beams. The panelling framed between fluted pilasters on the right of the entrance doorway was once the passageway screen of the hall. Above the hall is the family chamber with broad oak floorboards and stone doorways with Tudor arch heads.

By the mid 18th century the house had ceased to be a Gwyn family home. For over a hundred years it was occupied by tenants who farmed the Estate and allowed the house to fall into disrepair. At one time the first floor family chamber was used as a barn for the storage of grain. In the late 19th century the new owner,



*Turned oak balusters forming a staircase screen.*



*Oak panelling with fluted pilasters.*

Sir Joseph Spearman, reportedly spent over £3000 on renovation work. The north facade was built in a style that blended with the original building, a fine Burma teak staircase was installed, and a billiard room and

kitchen added. The interiors were adapted to meet the needs of a large Victorian family. The chamber was divided to create more bedrooms and a bathroom. These and later divisions are now removed and the house has been largely restored. Part medieval, part Elizabethan and part Victorian, Llansannor Court spans 500 years of architectural history.

### **The Gwyn Family – an eye for an heiress**

The Gwyn family had a major influence over life in Llansannor for several centuries. Llansannor Court Estate owned much of the land, provided a rector for the parish, and was landlord or employer to many of the inhabitants. The Gwyns were typical of the Welsh gentry who prospered in the period

of peace and stability that the Tudor monarchy sustained. They claimed descent from Stephen Bauzan, who held the manor of Llansannor from around 1250. Over several generations they showed a remarkable talent for marrying into money and using family connections. In the 15th century when Richard ap Howell Thomas married, his bride brought three rich farms in the Rhondda to add to the Gwyn's Llansannor Court Estate. Most advantageous of



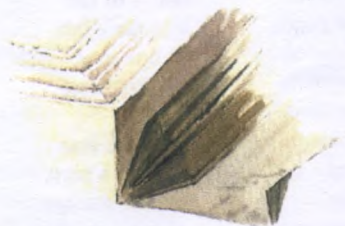
*Classical dressed stone fireplace.*

marriages in the 16th century was that of John Gwyn to Jane, sister of Sir Rice Mansel of Margam. Three generations served as High Sheriffs of Glamorgan, Richard in 1573, John in 1598 and Anthony in 1625.

In the mid 17th century an excellent match was made when Edward Gwyn

married Eleanor, a daughter of Sir Francis Popham of Littlecote, Wiltshire.

This gave the Gwyn family links to the English Court, providing valuable connections with some of the richest families in the country. Their son Francis, born



*Oak beam and finger moulded plasterwork.*

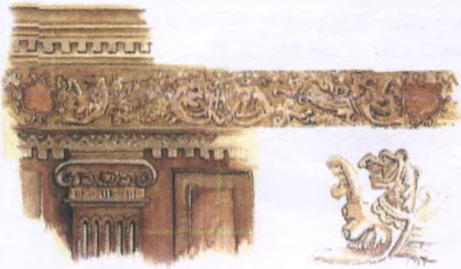
## FRANCIS GWYN – LLANSANNOR'S MOST FAMOUS SON

Francis Gwyn (1648 to 1734) was probably educated at Cowbridge Grammar School. After Oxford and the Middle Temple he was elected MP for Chippenham in 1673 with the help of his mother's family, the Pophams. He served in the House for 54 years, a High Tory, Anglican and Royalist. Francis held high office as Clerk of the Council (1679) and Under Secretary of State (1680) to Charles II. He was chosen as Secretary to the provisional government that preceded the arrival of William of Orange. He was Secretary at War (1713) to Queen Anne. Francis was a great fixer who worked to create the alliances that sustained a Tory party of which he was one

of the founding fathers. He lived at his town house at Scotland Yard and at Forde Abbey. Fond of gambling, racing and good company and, in his later years, an antiquarian and collector, Francis probably seldom visited his Welsh estate.

At a low point in his political career a South Wales squire penned a lampoon:

*There's Franke, who of late knew  
Secrets of state.  
Though now he's turned out of employment.  
Since that he finds time  
To ply women and wine.  
Which will prove a more lasting enjoyment!*



Carved Tudor frieze with strange animals.

in 1648, married his cousin Margaret Prideaux whose father had been Attorney General. His son Edward Prideaux Gwyn succeeded him. On Edward's death in 1736, his brother Francis Gwyn took over the Estate. Like his father, Francis was a Tory politician, and was MP for Wells. He died without issue in 1777. He left his property to his relative, John Fraunceis of Combe Florey on condition that he and his heirs took the name Gwyn. John Fraunceis died in 1789 and was succeeded by his son John Fraunceis Gwyn. In 1836 John Fraunceis Gwyn sold Llansannor Court and the Gwyn family connection with Llansannor was over.

## Victorian and modern times

Sir Joseph Bailey who purchased the Estate in 1836 was one of the new breed of industrialists. He died in 1859 and his daughter, Mary, who had married Alexander Young Spearman, inherited the Estate. She had two sons, but in 1860 she and her elder son died so that her second son Joseph, only three years old, became the owner of the Estate, which was held in trust until he reached the age of 21. By 1895, he and his family had left Llansannor Court and the Estate was sold in 1898 to Sir Thomas



Stone Doorways with Tudor arched heads.

Morel. It is unlikely that he ever lived at the Court, and the house narrowly escaped being sold at the turn of the century for use as a lunatic asylum. Soon after 1905, the



*Mullioned window with arch headed lights.*

house was bought by Major Herbert Watson who, with his wife and daughter Mabel, lived there for about 40 years. Mrs Watson

gave Christmas parties for children of the parish and fetes were held in the grounds. Mabel Watson was a great huntswoman. She learned to play the organ and became church organist, using an organ bought by her father. He painted her in oils, and the painting still hangs in the Court. She converted to Catholicism and attended another church, causing great distress to her father. Major Watson died in 1936 and was buried at sea, and the church cross at Llansannor was restored in his memory. Mrs Watson died in 1946 and Mabel a year later.

The Church in Wales purchased the Court in 1951 to divide it into flats for retired clergy. They found Llansannor too quiet and it was sold again, this time to Arthur Jones as a family home. He split off a Victorian kitchen, cottages and stables as a part of a property development in the grounds on the west side of the house. In 1979 he sold the Court to Michael Eddershaw who in the year 2000 was the fourth High Sheriff to live at Llansannor Court.



*Plaster frieze fragment with lion and pomegranate.*